

©2020

Danielle Willard-Kyle

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

LIVING IN LIMINAL SPACES: JEWISH REFUGEES IN ITALIAN DISPLACED
PERSONS CAMPS, 1945-1951

By

DANIELLE WILLARD-KYLE

A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

Belinda Davis and Yael Zerubavel

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Living in Liminal Spaces: Jewish Refugees in Italian Displaced Persons Camps, 1945-
1951

by DANIELLE WILLARD-KYLE

Dissertation Directors:

Belinda Davis and Yael Zerubavel

This dissertation studies the questions of home-making and community-building by Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe and North Africa in transitional immigration camps in Italy after the Second World War. It recovers the stories of these long-silenced Jewish displaced persons (DPs) and reorients the field of postwar refugee studies to reconsider the importance of Italy. Between 1945 and 1951, at least 50,000 Jewish, non-Italian refugees made their way to Italy, most in hopes of permanently resettling in Palestine/Israel. Blockades and quotas for emigration entailed that the majority lived in at least one of the 35 Displaced Persons camps or 97 *hachsharot*, or agricultural training centers, for several years. These camps and centers were set up by the Allied Military forces, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and the Jewish Agency for Palestine; these groups were later joined by the Italian national government and the International Relief Organization. This dissertation argues that through their interactions with fellow DPs and aid workers, many Jewish DPs established homes in these temporary spaces that attempted to both re-create their former lives and to project what they hoped their future lives might look like.

This dissertation explores themes of rehabilitation and agency in everyday life during displacement and migration. Through its connections of family and humanitarian history, it specifically examines the history of childhood questioning the implementation of rehabilitation methods and recognition of youth agency. It examines the ways in which interactions between organization and individuals of all ages in the camps created new understandings of home, family, and identity, in light of wartime and postwar ruptures. It further connects these histories of displacement with the role of states and humanitarian groups in aiding or hindering refugees' creation of new homes and futures. This is particularly important in relation to their involvement with North African Jewish migrants who were denied refugee status. This study examines the ways this lack of status further complicated the already present problems in the DP camps resulting from a lack of adequate food or shelter. Finally, this study explores the memories of the DP camps to show how these remembrances have shifted over time from spaces of despair to places of rebirth.

*For Christopher,
for everything*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of numerous people. Throughout this process, my advisors, Belinda Davis and Yael Zerubavel, have remained constant sources of support, and I would like to thank them for their careful readings and substantive feedback. I would like to thank my committee members, Paul Hanebrink and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, for their helpful suggestions. Many additional faculty members at Rutgers University challenged me and equipped me with the tools necessary to complete this project and offered their continual support including Alastair Bellany, Jochen Helbeck, Nancy Sinkoff, Judith Surkis, Temma Kaplan, and Judy Gerson. The foundations for this project, particularly for chapter five, grew out of a European seminar taught by Samantha Kelly, and I remain grateful for her insightful comments on those early thoughts. Among my fellow graduate students at Rutgers I would like to thank Julia Buck, Yarden Avital, Catherine Naeve, Dustin Stalnaker, Anna Nath, Hannah Friedman, and Patrick Harris for their comments on early drafts of this work. Thank you to my professors at the Universities of Toronto and Oxford, including Zoë Waxman and Doris Bergen who supervised my M.A. theses. Thanks also to my undergraduate professors at Westmont College including Marianne Robins, who first encouraged me to pursue historical studies.

Several institutions and organizations provided financial support for this project including the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life at Rutgers University through the Steven Spielberg Endowment for Jewish Studies and the Memory of the Shoah Fellowship. The Association for Jewish Studies, through their dissertation completion fellowship, enabled me to finish the project; I am grateful to Avinoam Patt

who was my AJS mentor for the year. This dissertation was also made possible thanks to my tenure as the Ben and Zelda Cohen Fellow at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I would like to extend my gratitude to many individuals there who gave generously of their time and expertise including Betsy Anthony, Patricia Heberer Rice, Steve Feldman, Megan Lewis, Elliott Wren, Vincent Slatt, Jo-Ellyn Decker, and Suzanne Brown-Fleming from whom I first learned of the North African presence in the Italian DP camps. Further assistance was provided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives Regional Fellowship through the generosity of donors David and Ruth Musher. A special thank you to the JDC's Linda Levi and Isabelle Rohr who have continued to provide support for my work. In addition, I would like to thank the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research where I was a Center Graduate Research Fellow. Wolf Gruner, Martha Stroud, and Badema Pitic all made my time conducting research in Los Angeles a pleasure.

During my time in Italy, a number of people also provided essential support. My warmest thanks are extended to Sidney Zoltak who experienced both the Selvino and Cremona DP camps personally and graciously shared about his experiences with me. The archival staff at the *Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea* was tremendously helpful, especially Laura Brazzo who first pointed me to the Selvino children. A special thanks to Gisèle Lévy of the *Biblioteca Centro Bibliografico, Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane*, who was always eager to discuss the history of Libyan Jewry with me. Thanks to Roberta Aglio and Monica Feraboli of *La Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile di Cremona*, whose program “DP Camp IT82: Cremona. Arrivo e

partenza. Traiettorie, incroci, vite. Storia,” enabled me to visit Cremona, and to Angelo Garioni who gave me a tour of the former DP camp site. I am also very grateful to Marina Marzano and Alessandra Greco who opened the *Museo della Memoria e dell’Accoglienza in Santa Maria al Bagno* for me and gave me a thorough history of the region. And I am thankful for the hospitality of JJ and Tim Tenclay of the *Centro Diaconale, La Noce* and *Pellegrino della Terra* in Sicily during my trip to learn more about the current migrant crisis in Italy; this trip was made possible by the financial support of the Reformed Church of Highland Park, and in particular the Revs. Stephanie and Seth Kaper-Dale.

Many others have also played a supportive role throughout my time at Rutgers. In particular I would like to thank the Jager family for taking us under their wing during our time in New Jersey. Thank you to my mom, Jacki Willard, for being a constant source of support and always picking up the phone when I call, and to my dad, Dan Willard, for being nearly as invested in this project as I am and reading every word. I am grateful for our dog, Pemberley, who continually reminds me to step away from the project and take a walk. And a special thank you to Rowan, who was born at just the right time to push me to finish this project. Finally, my unending gratitude to my beloved husband, Chris, who has been with me through it all. Finishing this during a global pandemic created special challenges of time and space, but you gave me continual support and understanding, even when it was hard. You are all my world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| ABSTRACT..... | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| GLOSSARY..... | ix |
| ABBREVIATIONS..... | xi |
| LIST OF APPENDICES | xii |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER ONE “Their Present Wandering Towards Palestine”: Italy as the Pathway to Aliyah..... | 44 |
| CHAPTER TWO “Not Within the Mandate”: North African Jewish Refugees in the DP Camps..... | 83 |
| CHAPTER THREE “Does not follow a blueprint”: The Role of Culture in the DP Camps..... | 139 |
| CHAPTER FOUR “It is impossible to stand it any longer”: Deprivations, Frustrations, and Uncertainty in the DP Camps | 185 |
| CHAPTER FIVE “Orphans from another planet”: The Youth of Selvino | 238 |
| CHAPTER SIX “I Thought a New Life was Starting”: Memories of the DP Camps in Italy | 296 |
| CONCLUSION | 343 |
| APPENDICES | 360 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 361 |

GLOSSARY

Aliyah – Ascent. Implying to Jerusalem, meaning Jewish migration to Palestine/Israel.

Aliyah Bet – The clandestine immigration of Jews to British Mandatory Palestine.

Baderekh – On the Way. The camp newspaper produced by OJRI.

Brichah – Escape or Flight. The organized clandestine movement of Jews from Eastern Europe to British Mandatory Palestine.

Centri di permanenza temporanea – Centers of Temporary Permanence. The former name of the migrant detention centers in Italy.

Eretz Israel – The Land of Israel.

Hachshara (pl. *hachsharot*) – Agricultural training center in the Diaspora in preparation for *aliyah*.

Haganah – The pre-state Zionist military organization

Hara – The Jewish quarter, where the majority of Libyan Jews lived.

Halutzim – Pioneers. Jewish immigrants to Palestine.

In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur un kunst – In Progress: Monthly Journal of Literature and Art. The monthly literary periodical of the Union of Jewish Writers, Journalists, and Artists in Italy.

Italiani brava gente – The idea that Italians are good folks.

Italianità – The true nature of what it means to be Italian.

Nivenu – Our Words. The newspaper created by the youth in the Selvino *hachshara*.

Oleh (pl. *olim*) – Jewish immigrant(s) to Palestine/Israel.

Porta di Sion – Door to Zion. The term used to refer to Italy as the pathway for *aliyah*.

Quarta sponda – Fourth Shore. The term Italians used to describe Libya during the Fascist period.

Risorgimento – The unification of Italy in the nineteenth-century.

Sfollamento – Removal. The intended movement of all Jewish persons in Libya to concentration camps.

Sheyres Hapleyte (or She'erit Hapletah) – Surviving remnant. The term used to refer to Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Shlichim – Emissaries. Representatives from Palestine assigned to promote *aliyah* from the Diaspora.

Taubenindustrie – The securing of money and parcels from individuals or welfare agencies abroad under false pretenses.

Ventennio – The twenty-year reign of Mussolini in Italy.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| BMA | British Military Administration |
| DP | Displaced Persons |
| HIAS | Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society |
| IRO | International Refugee Organization |
| JDC | American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, alternatively called the “Joint” |
| OJRI | Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, alternatively called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Italy or the <i>Irgun ha-plitim be-Italia</i> , <i>Merkaz ha-Plitim</i> |
| ORT | Organization for Rehabilitation through Training, <i>Obschestvo Remeslenovo i zemledelcheskovo Trouda</i> , alternatively called The Society for Handicrafts and Agricultural Work |
| OSE | <i>Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants</i> , the Society for Assistance to Children |
| RSI | <i>Repubblica Sociale Italiana</i> , the Italian Social Republic, alternately called the Republic of Salò |
| SHAEF | Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force |
| UCII | <i>Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane</i> , Union of Italian Jewish Communities |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNRRA | United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration |
| WJC | World Jewish Congress |
| YIVO | <i>Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut</i> , Institute for Jewish Research |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix A | 352 |
| Map of Displaced Persons Camps in Italy | |

INTRODUCTION

“The degradation of the Jews of Europe has reached the turning point. Only great efforts can save those still strong, those still healthy from hopeless despair and demoralization. It is the moment between sunset and sunrise. The vitality and hope which has revealed itself amidst wantonness are not the last remnants of strength in the final, desperate struggle before annihilation. It is a new belief in the future of the Jewish people—a new faith in humanity.”¹
— Leon Bernstein, DP

With her brand-new swimsuit under her dress, twelve-year-old Gertrude “Gerti” Goetz slipped out the door of the room she shared with her parents. The corridor of the crumbling villa they had called home for the past month was empty as she rushed outside. She had one destination in mind: the beach. The clear blue waters of the Ionian Sea sparkled invitingly as she sat on the sand of the Italian seaside village of Santa Maria al Bagno. She watched as local fishermen hauled in their catch for the day to sell at the market. Youths around Gerti’s age called out to each other in Polish, Serbo-Croatian, and Italian, attempting to make themselves understood as they laughed and swam in the water. “We [are] free now,” she reminded herself, breathing deeply.²

Gerti and her family were Jewish refugees or displaced persons (DPs) living in the Santa Maria di Bagni camp in the southern heel of Italy. They had escaped Austria after the *Anschluss*, the state takeover by Nazi Germany, and had made their way to Italy, where they were subsequently interned by the Italian Fascists until the Allied occupation of the southern portion of the country in 1943. Freed by Allied soldiers, they were sent

¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Editor’s Note: One of the most moving and illuminating reports on the condition of displaced Jewish men, women and children in Italy was made at the Thirty- Second Annual Meeting of the Joint...” January 17, 1947.

² Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness: Growing up in War Torn Europe* (Xlibris Corporation, 2001), 93.

further south, where they could receive aid and shelter and wait for the war to end. They soon resettled temporarily among the many other refugees in the Lecce province, just south of Bari, where the Allies had created displaced persons (DP) camps. Scattered across several small towns, the refugees lived in one of the many villas the British and American armed forces had requisitioned from the Italians. These temporary homes, however, would not remain this idyllic. At the end of the war, the refugees were joined by Jewish concentration camp survivors and former partisan fighters, most of whom wanted to make their way to Mandatory Palestine but were stopped by the British blockade. This caused overcrowding, food shortages, and a lack of adequate shelter in the DP camps that popped up across the Italian countryside. The Jewish DPs were free, but now they were also stuck.

The immediate postwar period was, as one Jewish refugee put it, “the moment between sunset and sunrise,” the time between the bloodshed of the Holocaust and the birth of the new Jewish state, Israel.³ This was the time of the DP camps, a time when many Jewish refugees found themselves stuck in these liminal camp spaces, places in between memories of violence and hope for the future. When World War II ended in 1945, governmental leaders suddenly faced one of the many problems this war had caused: millions of refugees and displaced persons scattered far from home. From 1945 to 1951, refugees from cities as diverse as Vilna, Sarajevo, and Benghazi crossed paths in Italian DP camps as they attempted to craft futures for themselves. European and North African Jewish refugees alike often viewed Italy as the great byway to Palestine and these

³ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Editor’s Note: One of the most moving and illuminating reports on the condition of displaced Jewish men, women and children in Italy was made at the Thirty- Second Annual Meeting of the Joint...” January 17, 1947.

camps as mere rest stops along the way. Thus, they were often reluctant to create any kind of permanent “home” in them. But as the wait to immigrate to Palestine stretched into months and even years because of increased regulations, the refugees began to look for ways to improve their situation in what had become their indefinite everyday existence. In this spirit, they created schools and theater groups, produced newspapers and journals, and engaged in religious services and cultural activities. It is this transition from a temporary to a quasi-permanent home in which I am most interested.

How did refugees in postwar Italy create “homes” for themselves, and build community, in the midst of vertiginously navigating the past and future—and why did it matter? This dissertation argues that this temporary “home” within the DP camps became a space for rewriting life narratives in anticipation of creating a new future for oneself. This rebirth of Jewish life, however, encompassed tensions between the desire to hold on to the past while constructing an entirely new reality. This study demonstrates the ways in which interactions between organization and individual in the camps created new understandings of home, family, and identity, in light of wartime and also postwar ruptures.

This dissertation recovers the stories of long-silenced European and North African Jewish DPs in Italy after World War II, focusing especially on questions of agency and home. Through a series of case studies, I examine what options single adults, unaccompanied children, and families felt they had in order to build a future for themselves, and whether their sense of agency differed based on age, gender, and/or national origin. This personal agency is particularly important, because it highlights one of the clear differences between the European and North African refugees in Italy: only

the former were deemed eligible for official refugee or DP status. This dissertation explores, *inter alia*, this process of registration and decision making around personal classification for those attempting to gain status in the Italian DP camps. Humanitarian aid groups were often the primary, if unpredictable, source of support for all refugees in the DP camps, but this was especially true of the North African refugees who largely lacked other international connections. We also see here far less personal agency afforded to this vulnerable population who instead had to rely almost entirely on humanitarian aid groups to fight for their rights. As DPs negotiated a new kind of home in a liminal space, this lack of status gave many only limited room to maneuver. Did this distinction in status play out in discrete patterns of “home building”? This is one of a number of questions I pose across these populations. These and related questions illuminate the importance of the possibility of future-directed agency: control over how one identifies oneself directly connects to how one can imagine one’s own future.

How did refugees defy the representations of well-meaning government agents and humanitarian aid workers in the aftermath of the Holocaust? Much of our extant knowledge regarding the DP camps comes from the papers of aid organizations, and their reports color the way we understand refugee life. By integrating previously under-used Yiddish sources written by the refugees themselves, my work reshapes our understanding of both the perspectives of the refugees and of the aid workers and, further, how these worked together. These were often triangulated with those of various national and international government bodies, which laid down strictures reflecting both different interests and often dubious views of the populations they sought in principle to support. This is particularly important in the case of the North African Jewish refugees; here, the

British strove to downplay the persecution that the Jewish people continued to face in Libya, as their potential revolt threatened British interests in the region.

This dissertation connects histories of displacement with the role of states and especially NGOs and humanitarian groups in aiding or hindering refugees' creation of new homes and futures; it brings questions of international humanitarianism into spaces of national sovereignty. It intervenes in this literature to argue that their differing methods of rehabilitation often clashed in the camps, which could benefit refugees, but also created turmoil, especially for the youths in the camps. In addition, it brings to light the perhaps most singular feature of Italian DP camps: the presence of North African Jews within them. Here it investigates potential tensions brought about by religious and cultural differences as well as eligibility for humanitarian aid. It also foregrounds questions about material culture and materiality in the camps asking how a lack or an excess of stuff might bring together the refugee and the broader postwar community. Through its connections of family and humanitarian history, it specifically examines the history of childhood questioning the implementation of rehabilitation methods and recognition of youth agency. Moving forward, this dissertation also grapples with questions of memory, using theoretical tools to examine how refugees remember the past; broadly these reflections are much more positive about their experiences than their writings in the 1940s express, which leads us to question how and why these changes happen.

This study reorients the field of postwar refugee studies to consider the particularities of the Italian case, and the new understandings of refugee life and of refugees' relations with one another, with aid workers, and with a range of governmental

bodies that that case offers us. Much of the literature on DP camps has focused on German and Austrian camps, and Italy has been demarcated as a mere thoroughfare for Jews to get to Palestine. But, study of Italian DP camps demonstrates that this imagined trajectory was frequently slowed down and hindered by long waiting periods. Thus, relegating Italy to a simple way station occludes the culture-creating, home-making, and future-negotiating labor of the DPs. In examining the daily lives of those in Italian DP camps, I argue that many established homes in these temporary spaces that attempted to both re-create elements of their former lives and at the same time to project what they hoped their future lives might look like. Documents, both personal and organizational, such as diaries, memoirs, official identification documents, radio broadcasts from inside the camp, pamphlets, broadsheets, invitations, personal testimonies, and letters to and from DPs, help us discover the ways in which DPs negotiated a new kind of home in a liminal space.⁴ And this space was one that was rapidly changing. To make sense these issues, the reader must first learn the lay of the land.

⁴ Many of these sources were gathered in 1952, as representatives from the *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut* (or the Yiddish Scientific Institute, YIVO) traveled to Italy and gathered as many documents as possible from the DP camps and brought them back to New York. This cache of documents primarily written in Yiddish represents the largest collection of sources still remaining from refugees themselves during this period in Italy. Since the 1980s, there has been a boom in the writing of memoirs and the giving of oral testimonies by Holocaust survivors. Most of these center around wartime experiences, but many also include the immediate postwar period in their narratives. These documents and narratives are primarily in Italian, Yiddish, and English with some in French as well. These sources are found in several archives including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, the YIVO Archives, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, the *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea*, the *Archivio centrale dello stato*, *Unione delle Comunità ebraiche Italiane*, the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the Wiener Library, and the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies.

Setting the Stage: A History of Place

*The camps must be turned into kibbutzim, which have given the refugee the illusion, even if temporary, of home and a normal life. A camp, with all of its accomplishments, remains a camp, and has become the modern spark of terror in the heart and mind of the refugee...The refugee must not lose his faith in the hope of a new life.*⁵

At the end of the Second World War, the makeup of the Jewish population in Italy changed dramatically; over the course of the 1945 summer alone, between 13,000 and 15,000 non-Italian Jewish DPs entered the country from the north.⁶ The majority of foreign Jews came primarily from Eastern and Central Europe, fleeing the continued antisemitism of their home countries and the dismal conditions of the DP camps in Austria and Germany. Aided by the Jewish Agency *Brichah* (Hebrew for “escape” or “flight”), was the organized movement of Jews from Eastern Europe to Palestine.⁷ Started in July 1945 by surviving partisans in Vilna, *Brichah* helped thousands of Jewish DPs travel, often illegally, from Poland, through the US occupied zone of Germany, and then on to Palestine, typically using Italy as the European point of departure in their journey.

Italy’s own complicated history with antisemitism, especially during the Fascist period, offers insight into why Jewish refugees chose to travel to Italy in the first place. Italian policy toward the Jews during the war had varied depending on who was in control and when. The Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini’s 1938 racial decree stripped all Jews of civil rights and excluded them from public office and higher education. These laws were implemented unevenly at first, which encouraged many

⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Editor’s Note: One of the most moving and illuminating reports on the condition of displaced Jewish men, women and children in Italy was made at the Thirty- Second Annual Meeting of the Joint...” January 17, 1947.

⁶ Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy, 1945-1951* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011), 1.

⁷ Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*. (New York: Random House, 1970).

German and Austrian Jews who were trying to escape from the Nazis to enter Italy; but after Mussolini declared war, they were stuck. By early 1943 nearly all of these foreign Jews were interned in small towns or in one of the roughly 50 concentration camps in Italy, where they were often forced to work but were not deported.⁸ The antifascist coup of 1943, however, quickly changed things for both foreign and Italian Jews, as leaders ousted Mussolini and surrendered to the Allies.⁹ Left vulnerable to attack by an ill-timed surrender and an unprepared Allied force, northern and central Italy were swiftly overtaken by the Germans, who returned Mussolini to power and immediately began deportations of all Jews, foreign and Italian, the most famous of which was the raid in Rome.¹⁰ Despite this turn of events, by the end of the war Italy had the second-highest Jewish survival rate in all occupied Europe.

Mussolini's racial policies did not only apply in Italy, however, but also in its colony Libya. Libya came under Italian control in 1911 after Italy seized the region from the Ottomans.¹¹ Local resistance under Omar al-Mukhtar began in the 1920s but was

⁸ C.S. Capogreco, *I campi del duce. L'internamento civile nell'Italia Fascista (1940–1943)* (Turin 2004); see in particular the annex with a map and individual descriptions of the camps, 251–78.

⁹ For more information see Renzo De Felice's now classic work *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*. (Einaudi, 1961).

¹⁰ Nazi and fascist forces initiated the first large-scale deportation in Rome during the wee hours of the morning while much of the city slept. At 5:30 on the morning of October 16, 1943, Nazi and Fascist soldiers surrounded and entered the old Jewish ghetto and began a systematic hunt for all Jews in the city. In 1938, the fascist government conducted a census of all Jews in Italy by city and region. The results of this census showed a population of roughly 47,000 Jews in Italy. Rome's Jewish census list remained intact in October 1943, despite the overthrow of the Fascist government, which allowed soldiers to search the city door-to-door with great precision, easily rounding up the majority of the Roman Jewish population within a few hours. For more see, Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 5, 113; Alessia Faligligli, *Salvati Dai Conventi: L'Aiuto della Chiesa agli Ebrei di Roma Durante l'Occupazione Nazista*, [Attualità e storia, 47] (Cinisello Balsamo (Milano): San Paolo, 2005), 47. This was by far the largest raid at one time in Italy: 1,680 Jews were arrested and deported from Rome, while the next highest was Trieste with 546. See L. Fargion Picciotto, *Il Libro Della Memoria*, 26-29 for more information. For a firsthand account of this raid see Giacomo Debenedetti, *Ottobre 1943*, (Collana Confidenze, OET, Roma, 1945).

¹¹ The country we now know as "Libya" was not formally united until 1951. Variations of the word "Libia" had been used to describe the region for centuries. When the Italians united Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the region became known internationally and commonly as "Libya." In 1934, the name was officially adopted

eventually crushed following the execution of al-Mukhtar in 1931. Mussolini attempted a process of greater Italian settlement in Libya during the 1930s, as he intended to incorporate the colony into a “Greater Italy;” under Fascist control, the number of Italians who settled in Libya more than doubled, reaching nearly 120,000 on the eve of World War II.¹² Jews had lived in Libya for thousands of years, residing primarily in the province of Tripoli (where they comprised 19 percent of the population) and to a lesser degree in the provinces of Misurata and Benghazi. When Libya became an Italian colony, there were approximately 21,000 Jews in the country; by 1939, Libyan Jews numbered 30,387, just over 3 percent of the total population.¹³ Mussolini enacted unprecedented racial laws in Libya in September 1938 that applied to both Italy and Libya. These laws, among other things, expelled Jews from public schooling, forbade “mixed marriages,” and stripped them of their Italian citizenship.¹⁴ In 1942-3 the Allies pushed the Italians out of Libya and divided the country under British and French control. Libya finally gained its independence in 1951 under King Idris al-Sanusi.¹⁵

by the Italian government who then unified the two provinces into one single colony. The third province, Fezzan, was governed with Tripolitania until its French occupation during World War II. I will use the term “Libya” to describe the region throughout this chapter. Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State* (Routledge, 2014), 1. For more on the history of Italy in Libya see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia* (Roma: Laterza, 1986); For two other concise studies of the general history of Libya see John Wright, *A History of Libya*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) and Dirk J. Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹² In 1939, Italians comprised over 12 percent of the total population of Libya of over 893,000. “I censimenti nell’Italia unita I censimenti nell’Italia unita. Le fonti di stato della popolazione tra il XIX e il XXI secolo,” *Istituto Nazionale Di Statistica Società Italiana Di Demografia Storica Annali di Statistica*. v. 12, n. 2 (2012): 269.

¹³ The birthrate of Jews in Libya during the 1930s grew at an exponential rate, over 26 percent, whereas the Muslim population increased less than 15 percent. Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 145, 349 (ft. nt. 54).

¹⁴ Maurice M Roumani, *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 38.

¹⁵ Maurice Roumani explains that between 1949 and 1952 over 30,000 Libyan Jews fled to Israel. “The Final Exodus of the Libyan Jews in 1967” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 19:3-4 (Fall 2007).

Between 1948 and 1950, a small minority of Jewish refugees, estimated between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals, also traveled to Italy from North Africa, seeking asylum and passage to Palestine, which they could not reach directly until mid-1949. These were primarily Libyan Jews fleeing persecution in their homeland, particularly after the pogroms or riots of 1945 and 1948. The first pogrom in Tripoli in late 1945 claimed the lives of 130 Libyan Jews, but the assurances of the British Military Government in control of Libya at the time and the arrests of some of the instigators convinced many to remain in the country. However, after a second anti-Jewish riot occurred in summer 1948, the majority of Libyan Jews determined to leave the country and resettle in Israel; but they were unable to leave Libya legally, as the British refused to grant exit visas. Around ten percent of Libyan Jews made the difficult clandestine passage, often smuggled in fishing boats, across the Mediterranean to Italy and then on to Israel.¹⁶

Neither the East European nor the North African Jewish refugees were hoping to resettle in Italy permanently.¹⁷ However, before they could emigrate to Palestine or elsewhere, tens of thousands of refugees remained in Italy, unsure of their futures. After their arrival in the country, refugees could enter transit camps spread throughout the country and grouped largely in two categories: Displaced Persons camps and *hachsharot* (or agricultural training centers). In total, there were at least 35 DP Camps and 97 *hachsharot* in Italy from 1945 to 1951, although not all were active the entire time and

¹⁶ Maurice M. Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 28-38.

¹⁷ The Italian Jewish population that survived the war began the difficult process of reintegration and often sought restitution during this period. The majority had no interest in resettling in Palestine. Mario Toscano "Abrogation of Racial Laws and Reintegration of Jews in Italian Society," in David Bankier, *The Jews Are Coming Back*; Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare Se Stessi: Gli Ebrei Nell'italia PostFascista*, (Roma: Laterza, 2004); Ilaria Pavan, *Persecution, Indifference, and Amnesia* (Wallstein Verlag, 2008); Shira Klein, *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), see especially chapter 7, "Recovery and Revival: Postwar Italian Jewry and the JDC," and chapter 8, "The Myth of the Good Italian: Making Peace with Postwar Italy."

their sizes varied greatly.¹⁸ The DP camps were created by the Allied Forces in Germany, Austria, and Italy. These temporary accommodations were often former concentration and internment camps, as well as larger buildings such as army barracks, schools, houses, and even a film studio requisitioned by the Allies. The *hachsharot* were started primarily by the Jewish Agency through members of the Jewish Brigade for Palestine. These camps were Zionist training centers where Jews would learn the skills deemed necessary to live in Palestine, most notably farming and speaking Hebrew. A small percentage of the Jewish refugee population also lived “out of camps” in larger cities; these were primarily individuals with business or family connections to the Italian region who sought to emigrate somewhere other than Palestine. British and American Armed Forces were largely responsible for the initial setup of the camps in Italy. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and its successor the International Refugee Organization (IRO), were primarily tasked with registering, providing care and maintenance including food, clothing, shelter and financial resources, and repatriating and later resettling DPs. How well they did this, however, was highly variable.

Once in Italy, the primary offices to register for status and assistance were in Milan, Rome, and Bologna. From here, the refugees received housing assignments and food allotments, while they awaited legal papers that would permit them to leave for their desired or allowed destinations. Italian-born Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi, recalled the great confusion that occurred in the Via Unione office in Milan in 1945:¹⁹

¹⁸ The exact number of *hachsharot* in Italy is debated, but the latest numbers from Arturo Marzano’s research indicate that there were at least 97 active during the period between 1945 and 1951. Arturo Marzano, “Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah: The Hachsharot in Italy (1945–48),” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18 (January 14, 2019): 314–29.

¹⁹ Italian survivors returning home spent far less time waiting in these offices, as they rarely used them for assistance during their passage home. Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare Se Stessi*, see especially chapter 1.

The Assistance Office was teeming with refugees, Poles, Russians, Czechs, Hungarians; almost all spoke Yiddish; everyone needed everything, and the confusion was extreme. There were men, women and children camped in the corridors, families who had built shelters with plywood sheets or hanging blankets. Up and down the corridors, and behind the doors, women of all ages were busy, out of breath, sweaty, indefatigable. None of the aides understood Yiddish and few understood German; improvised performers melted away in an effort to establish order and discipline. The air was torrid, with hints of latrine and cooking. An arrow, and a sign written in Yiddish, indicated the counter where the newcomers were to head; they queued and waited patiently.²⁰

This confusion was dealt with by a host of voluntary agencies including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), who funded many of the operations in and out of the camps, and the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT) who set up various certification programs such as carpentry or electrical work in the camps. Overall these various groups from different backgrounds worked surprisingly well together in Italy. The Jewish Agency, after helping create several of the *hachsharot*, was largely left unfettered by the JDC and the IRO. The latter two groups were often able to support each other, for example the JDC provided extra rations and resources to IRO camps. But the JDC was only concerned with Jewish DPs, whereas the IRO was tasked with solving the refugee crisis at large. As the primary agency in charge of the region, the IRO was also responsible for meeting and negotiating with the Italian government, a process that was often heated given the international nature of the agency and the national priorities of the government.²¹ A democratically elected group of refugees, the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) governed the day-to-day events and morale of the camps.²² Recognizing the need for self-governance, a conference was set

²⁰ Primo Levi, *Se non ora, quando?* (Einaudi, 2015), 246

²¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 1676, Letter from AJDC, Paris to Robert Pilpel, March 17, 1950.

²² The Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) was created in late 1945 to be the voice of all Jewish DPs in Italy. It was alternatively called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Italy or the

up in Rome in November 1945 to select committee members from each region of Italy that housed Jewish refugees. They elected 140 delegates who were then tasked with the role of being mediators between relief agencies and refugees. The goal of this committee was to ameliorate life for Jewish refugees, and to this end they placed an emphasis on rehabilitation through education, job training, and renewed cultural activities.

In total, nearly 50,000 Jewish refugees entered Italy from the north and from the south between summer 1945 and the end of 1951.²³ These refugees were primarily from a variety of Eastern and Central European countries. For instance, in 1945, the birthplaces of the non-Italian Jewish refugee population of roughly 15,000 individuals broke down as follows: two-thirds from Poland, nearly 14% and 8% from Rumania and Czechoslovakia, respectively, with the remaining nearly 15% from various other countries. The sex and age breakdowns were also skewed: more than 60% of the population was male and less than 10% was under the age of 18.²⁴ These categories of national origin, sex, and age would remain fairly stable throughout the tenure of the DP camps, although there was an increase in the youngest members of the camp mirroring the “baby boom” that occurred in the German DP camps.²⁵ These total numbers dropped drastically after 1948 and the creation of the State of Israel, only boosted somewhat by the arrivals of the comparatively few migrants from North Africa. The final refugee camp housing Jewish DPs closed in 1951.

Irgun ha-plitim be-Italia, Merkaz ha-Plitim.

²³ Susannah Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 2.

²⁴ “Drafts of report about Jewish refugees in Italy: By Leon Garfunkel, President of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy.” February 1946; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 3, Reel 1.9, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

²⁵ Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

This dissertation will focus on Jewish DPs but also recognizes that there were also many internally displaced persons in Italy. These Italians were referred to as “national refugees,” meaning those who had been forced to migrate from their home because of war or the loss of national territory, particularly Venezia Giulia, but who were still within their home country. In some cases these national refugees also lived in the DP camps alongside, but often housed separately from, the Jewish DPs. The final two years of the war were a tumultuous time for those in the Italian state as they faced a civil war and occupation by two opposing forces. By the end of the war, thousands of Italians had been internally displaced. After the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty in which Italy lost several colonies and territories, it found itself with 3,000 national refugees from Venezia Giulia and 11,500 from its former African colonies. Italy’s role as a colonial power and the subsequent loss of nearly all of its African and Balkan territories in 1947 created a wave of panic and confusion in which Jews were a small but important contingent.²⁶

Throughout this dissertation, I will use the terms “refugee” and “displaced person” to refer to the non-Italian Jewish survivors living in the DP camps in Italy, for although today there are legal distinctions between the terms, in the postwar period, they were used interchangeably.²⁷

Postwar Moment: Displaced Persons and the Question of Definitions

²⁶ Silvia Salvatici, “Between National and International Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Italy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 529. For more on those from Venezia Giulia see Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*. (Princeton University Press, 2003); Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

²⁷ Eugene Kulischer coined the term “displaced person” in 1943. See, Eugene Kulischer, *The Displacement of Population in Europe* (Montreal: International Labour Office, 1943); Kulischer, *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes, 1917–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

Refugees were not only present in Italy, of course. Over the course of the war, roughly 55 million individuals across Europe and Northern Africa became refugees, forced to leave their homes.²⁸ The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in northwest Europe designed a plan to manage this refugee crisis that included temporary shelters in camps and assembly centers. These temporary accommodations were often former concentration and internment camps or larger buildings such as army barracks, schools, and individual houses requisitioned by SHAEF. Of these 55 million refugees, 7 million were categorized as Displaced Persons (DPs)—a designation the Allies employed to describe those who found themselves outside the prewar borders of their country of origin because of the war.²⁹ Of these 7 million DPs, 6 million were hastily repatriated to their countries of origin between May and September 1945.³⁰ Only around 1 million remained by the start of 1946. This last remaining million of “unrepatriables” consisted of stateless individuals or DPs who refused repatriation to their country of origin. Included in this number were 400,000–500,000 non-Jewish Poles and Ukrainians, 200,000 lost or orphaned children, and 200,000 residents of various Baltic and Central European states, 100,000–200,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors, many of whom had recently fled continued antisemitism in their countries of origin, all of whom refused voluntary repatriation on political, economic, racial, or religious grounds.³¹

²⁸ For more on numbers see Eugene Kulischer, *Europe on the Move*, 305.

²⁹ Defined by Malcolm Jarvis Proudfoot, *European Refugees: 1939-1952* (Faber & Faber, 1957), 115, 149.

³⁰ There were an additional 7 million under Soviet control and millions of displaced Germans that neither UNRRA nor the Soviets would help. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 29.

³¹ These numbers come from Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 132. For more on postwar displacement see Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 296-345 and Mark Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*, (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989).

The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and, after July 1947, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) were responsible for determining who belonged where in the postwar period. Established in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1943, UNRRA was, as its name suggests, a branch of the United Nations developed specifically to deal with the problems they imagined would be present at the end of the war.³² Its mission was primarily twofold: to provide economic assistance to struggling European countries and to assist and repatriate refugees and displaced persons. On November 9, 1943, representatives from 44 nations convened in Washington, D.C. to confirm the creation of the relief agency. Nearly half of the \$10 billion budget for UNRRA came from the U.S. Government, and its three Director-Generals were all Americans.³³ It operated under the authority of the SHAEF in Europe until SHAEF's disbandment in July 1945. Foremost in the mind of this international committee were the problems of migration and displaced persons, as the sheer number of those persecuted and forced out of their homes continued to rise.

After the war ended in 1945, UNRRA was primarily tasked with registering, providing care and maintenance including food, clothing, shelter and financial resources, and repatriating DPs. This latter point was of particular importance to the Soviet Union; they only agreed to join UNRRA following its agreement to prioritize the repatriation of

³² UNRRA did not become a part of the United Nations until 1945; the use of the phrase “united nations” in its title refers to the united Allied countries of WWII. For an early history of UNRRA see George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (New York, 1950). See also Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944-49* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jessica Reinisch, “‘Auntie UNRRA’ at the Crossroads,” *Past & Present* 218, no. suppl 8 (2013): 70–97.

³³ The first director-general was Herbert Lehman, former governor of New York, then Fiorello La Guardia, former mayor of New York City, and finally Major General Lowell Ward. For further information about funding see Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 28; Arie J. Kochavi, “Anglo-American Discord: Jewish Refugees and United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration Policy, 1945–1947,” *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 4 (1990): 529

displaced persons, that is, to return the DPs to their countries of origin, including former prisoners of war from the West to the East. By late 1945, UNRRA was responsible for 250 relief camps for DPs and oversaw the work of 23 separate voluntary welfare agencies.³⁴ These agencies, most notably the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT), and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) would take on more independence and greater autonomy after 1945. The Soviets' refusal to add resettlement, as opposed to solely repatriation, to the mandate of UNRRA along with a dwindling of financial resources for UNRRA forced the other Allied forces to consider creating a new organization to handle the DP problem. Approved in January by the United Nations, the IRO replaced the UNRRA, taking over its care of 643,000 DPs in July 1947.³⁵ In addition to caring for and keeping track of DPs, the IRO included resettlement to a new country under its mandate. The organization was now tasked with determining if the refugee had a case for emigration and resettlement rather than repatriation, something nearly all Jewish DPs desired. Again, the majority of the budget for the agency came from the United States; the Soviets never agreed to its creation, and thus all IRO services were confined to Western-held areas.³⁶

³⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 28.

³⁵ It began first with a Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization (PCIRO) and in 1948 the IRO. The IRO had a five-year mandate "reflecting the misplaced optimism that the refugee crisis produced by the war and its aftermath was exceptional and finite." It was, however, then succeeded by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1952 with its mandate coming from the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, which is now a permanent fixture. Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*, 12. For a history of the IRO see Louise W Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations : Its History and Work, 1946-1952* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

³⁶ Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 29.

UNRRA and IRO staffed the DP camps with social workers who assessed the refugees individually with questionnaires to determine their status as refugees or displaced persons under the UN mandate and their repatriation, or later resettlement, needs. Although their methodologies changed some over the years, their primary task was to determine an individual's eligibility for assistance and let this guide their classification.³⁷ UNRRA official policy defined a "displaced person" as "one who has been obliged to leave or has been deported from his country, or his home, or his place or origin or former residence." This displacement could be transnational or within the same country but, crucially, "the displacement in turn must be 'as a result of the war' and must have occurred on or after 1 September 1939."³⁸ UNRRA, however, would only offer assistance to DPs who first met the definition above and then met at least one of the following conditions, namely that they were:

- (1) United Nations Nationals displaced as a result of the war and found in Italy [or Germany or Austria].
- (2) United Nations Nationals found in Italy who are, or have previously been, prisoners of war, if designated by their governments for assistance....
- (3) Persons who have been obliged to leave their country or place of origin or former residence or who have been deported therefrom by action of the enemy, because of their race, religion or activities in favor of the United Nations and found in Italy...[or]
- (4) Stateless persons who have been driven from their previous places of settled residence as a result of the war (but not because of their race, religion, or activities in favor of the United Nations) and found in Italy.³⁹

³⁷ Gerard Daniel Cohen, "The politics of recognition" *Immigrants & minorities*, 24 no. 2 (2006), 135.

³⁸ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Italian Mission "Assistance to non-Italian Displaced Persons outside of camps," February 1945, Italy - Keeny Letters 1943-1949 Reel number, RG-67.053, UNRRA Selected Records AG-018-004: Bureau of Areas, 1943-1948. File S-1242-0000-0104, Scan 0176, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³⁹ UNRRA lists the following countries as United Nations Nationals: Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China Colombia Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, India, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mexico Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Union of South Africa, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom & Colonies, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Yugoslavia

They then further explained that “all persons of Jewish faith escaped, or deported, or obliged to move from their domiciles, are eligible for assistance under this plan providing that a displacement occurred on or after 1 September, 1939.”⁴⁰ Given that many DPs lacked any kind of official paperwork, such as passports, birth certificates, etc., UNRRA/IRO often had to base their determinations on the perceived “mother tongue” of the DP and corroborating statements from other DPs. This proved to be a largely ineffective strategy, as many DPs simply claimed to be from whatever country was receiving the highest rate of DP eligibility.⁴¹ In the end, a large number of ineligible individuals—German nationals, former Nazis, economic migrants—received UNRRA/IRO eligible status because of a combination of a lack of clear guidelines and good oversight.

Jewish refugees made up a small but politically important contingent of the “last million” displaced persons who refused repatriation discussed above.⁴² At the end of the summer of 1945, there were roughly 100,000–200,000 Jewish DPs in Germany, Austria, and Italy, but this number grew quickly following the antisemitic riots and pogroms that occurred especially in postwar Poland. By 1947, Jewish DPs still numbered roughly 250,000, and it is estimated that up to 330,000 passed through the German, Austrian, and Italian DP camps by 1951.⁴³ These Jewish individuals in DP camps referred to

⁴⁰ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Italian Mission “Assistance to non-Italian Displaced Persons outside of camps,” February 1945, Italy - Keeny Letters 1943-1949 Reel number, RG-67.053, UNRRA Selected Records AG-018-004: Bureau of Areas, 1943-1948. File S-1242-0000-0104, Scan 0176, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴¹ For more discussion of this see Gerard Daniel Cohen *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴² Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 132.

⁴³ These numbers of Jewish DPs in these three countries are imprecise as it was exceedingly difficult to keep track of all migrants, especially as many traveled clandestinely. For more on the methodologies of counting refugees see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 131-132, 316-317.

themselves as the *Sheyres Hapleyte*, the Yiddish term for the “surviving or saved remnant” referring to Holocaust survivors.⁴⁴ Initially, these European Jewish refugees were categorized along national lines, just like the other displaced persons in the camps. This led to many antisemitic incidents, as they were often living alongside former compatriots and potential Nazi collaborators.⁴⁵ Zeev Mankowitz, however, has shown that Jewish DPs used the idea of the *Sheyres Hapleyte* to form a collective (and later, national) identity for themselves, one that claimed an identity of “Jewish” as preeminent above national status.⁴⁶ This was for some a marked change from before the war clearly demonstrating yet another way the Holocaust reshaped Jewish identity.

This idea of a separate status was buoyed up by the publication of the Harrison Report. Inspired by the reports of poor conditions coming from the JDC, in July 1945, U.S. President Harry Truman sent Earl G. Harrison, former commissioner of immigration and then dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, to investigate the conditions of the DP camps in Germany and Austria. Harrison was appalled with the treatment of those in the DP camps, particularly the Jewish refugees, stating:

As matters now stand, we appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them. They are in concentration camps in large numbers under our military guard instead of S.S. troops. One is led to wonder whether the German people, seeing this, are not supposing that we are following or at least condoning Nazi policy.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Chiara Renzo notes that the term “*Sheyres Hapleyte*” (in Hebrew: *She’erit Hapletah*) is a Biblical expression used in Genesis 32:9, 1 Chronicles 4:43 and Jeremiah 31:1. Chiara Renzo, “‘Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet.’ The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-Understanding (1943-1948),” *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 12 (December 2017): 89–111. For more on the She’erith Hapleith in Germany, see: Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope. The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2-3; Judith Tydor Baumel, *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁴⁵ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 122.

⁴⁶ Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, see especially the Introduction.

⁴⁷ Earl G. Harrison, *The Plight of the Jews in Europe: A Report to President Truman*. Released by the White House September 29, 1945.

He demanded immediate improvements be made for all those in the camps. But, he believed that the military authorities must also recognize that one group had suffered in a more particularized form: “Jews as Jews (not as members of their nationality groups) have been more severely victimized than the non-Jewish members of the same or other nationalities...Refusal to recognize the Jews as such has the effect, in this situation, of closing one’s eyes to their former and more barbaric persecution, which has already made them a separate group with greater needs.”⁴⁸ Nazi persecution had already made them a needier population.

In light of this, he urged policy makers to reconsider the question of separate camps for Jews from other DPs stating

there are several reasons for this: (1) a great majority want it; (2) it is the only way in which administratively their special needs and problems can be met without charges of preferential treatment or (oddly enough) charges of ‘discrimination’ with respect to Jewish agencies now prepared and ready to give them assistance. In this connection, I wish to emphasize that it is not a case of singling out a particular group for special privileges. It is a matter of raising to a more normal level the position of a group which has been depressed to the lowest depths conceivable by years of organized and inhuman oppression. The measures necessary for their restitution do not come within any reasonable interpretation of privileged treatment and are required by considerations of justice and humanity.⁴⁹

Harrison argued that allowing Jewish victims to create their own national identity was practical and preferable; in this way, questions of *aliyah*, (“ascent” implying to Jerusalem, meaning Jewish migration to Palestine/Israel) could be seen as an issue of repatriation to the Jewish national home. He concluded that

the main solution, in many ways the only real solution, of the problem lies in the quick evacuation of all non-repatriable Jews in Germany and Austria who wish it to Palestine. In order to be effective this plan must not be long delayed. The

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

urgency of the situation should be recognized It is inhuman to ask people to continue to live for any length of time under their present conditions.⁵⁰

This report created a divide in UNRRA policy between the U.S. Government who supported the call to increase migration to Palestine, and the British Government who desired to maintain secure borders around its mandate.⁵¹

The British ultimately conceded, however, to UNRRA's authority around the question of categorization, and Jewish refugees were thus chiefly registered as "Jewish" first and given a "former nationality" or "stateless" second. The issue of separate camps, though, remained unresolved in Germany, with American and British zones of occupation applying their own policies. Of the one hundred and eighty-four Jewish DP camps in Germany one hundred and fifty were in the American Zone, twenty-three in the British Zone, and eleven in the French Zone; likewise, fifty-three of Austria's seventy-three DP camps were in the American Zone, with on twelve and eight in the British and French Zones, respectively.⁵² The issue also remained unsettled in Italy where camps were largely segregated but not wholly separate. The problem was less acute in Italy in part because of populations present: Jews were a small percentage of those receiving UNRRA assistance in Germany and Austria whereas in Italy, Jews made up 80-85% of UNRRA's care population. In December 1947, the IRO explained their policy in Italy:

We have never had any policy for or against mixing D.P.s in camps, but have tried to place homogenous groups together. We have generally segregated Jewish D.P.s, since this was the wish of the D.P.s and [the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy] and the AJDC....We are well aware of the feelings and concerns of all

⁵⁰ For more on the report see Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁵¹ For more on Allied DP politics see Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 13-31.

⁵² Angelika Königseder, Juliane Wetzel, and John Broadwin, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post- World War II Germany* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 215-255; Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 123.

special groups, and have consistently attempted to meet those needs within the limitations of our funds and possibilities.⁵³

IRO policy, like UNRRA's before it, shifted more toward segregation, especially as funding from the JDC was only directed at Jewish DPs.

The question of categorization became particularly important for a group of late-arriving migrants, those from North Africa. From 1948 through the beginning of 1949, debates raged in the IRO headquarters in Geneva over the status of individuals arriving in DP camps in Italy and in transit centers in France from North Africa. Israeli officials and many American aid workers fought for the recognition of these migrants as refugees and DPs in need of assistance based on prevalence and continued fear of persecution. British officials denied the existence of persecution in the regions of their mandate, especially Libya. Ultimately, IRO authorities sided with the British and deemed North African Jews ineligible for *formal* refugee status altogether, vastly limiting what this group could hope for. The second chapter of this study will address this issue more closely, but the presence of North African Jewish DPs in the camps demonstrates that often the ability to create a temporary home depended on one's status in the space.

One of the sharpest contrasts between European and North African Jews in the camps was their asylum status.⁵⁴ European Jews were labeled refugees and DPs by the IRO and thus were eligible for asylum benefits. North African Jews, in contrast, were nearly all denied refugee status. But it was not just Jews from North Africa who were

⁵³ Letter Subject: Mixed Camps, December 1, 1947, AJ/43/1036/31 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 6, RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵⁴ I was first made aware of these groups through the work of Suzanne Brown-Fleming. Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

denied status; North African Muslims and Christians seeking refuge in Europe were also turned away. Asylum seekers in these groups were often former soldiers who had been recruited into the Italian and French armies and simply discarded when the war ended. They eventually made their way across Europe or North Africa, landing in Italy after the war, and placed in DP camps. Here they were treated with suspicion and often belittled by their IRO interviewers who used pejorative language to deem them “primitive” and “childlike.” Although these groups merit a complete study of their own, they can provide useful counterparts to our study here as they demonstrate that one’s place of residence mattered more to the question of asylum than identifying features of nationality and religion.

The attitudes of many voluntary associations to North African DPs were strikingly different from their attitudes to Jewish refugees from Europe. Here the dissertation examines the IRO’s decision to define these individuals as “ineligible” and interrogate the comments left by social workers and IRO employees on their applications for assistance. In these cases, the petitioner is denied refugee or displaced person status from the IRO on the basis that they do not meet the criteria of geography (i.e. not from Europe) nor of crossing international borders (because they are moving from a protectorate to a country of citizenship, even though, as we will see in chapter two, this was not always the case). The IRO’s self-imposed mandate thus excluded North African Jewish DPs from receiving assistance; neither did the struggling Italian government step into help. The withholding of institutional aid ultimately led to cramped DP camps and spaces of poor physical rehabilitation. North African Jewish DPs did not wish to remain in Italy for any extended period of time and nearly all claimed to be fleeing persecution

and potential death threats. Despite having also suffered at the hands of Fascists, North African Jews were labeled “migrants” rather than “refugees,” demonstrating an under-examined but critical blind spot of the IRO.

Historiographies and Interventions

Most immediately, the dissertation re-orientes the historiography on Displaced Persons after World War II by placing Italy at its center: however temporarily, the Italian DP camps witnessed the creation of communities that learned to live in liminal space. Study of this early postwar period of Jewish resettlement (roughly 1945 to 1951) began even as the events themselves were unfolding.⁵⁵ Displaced Persons camps, however, did not become a subject of historical research in their own rights until the late 1980s. These first studies were often broad examinations of the “refugee problem” in the twentieth century that dedicated a chapter or two to the issue of post-World War II displaced persons.⁵⁶ These works often exclude the more personal dimensions of the refugee experience; questions of psychology and economy are put aside in favor of political analysis.⁵⁷ Others largely eschew the political differences, giving the impression that

⁵⁵ See, for example, Eugene Kulischer, *The Displacement of Population in Europe*; Kulischer, *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes, 1917–1947*; Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939–1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement* (Evanston: North-Western University Press, 1956); Joseph Schechtman, *European Population Transfers, 1939–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

⁵⁶ Among the first scholars to facilitate the resurgence of interest in the question of refugees and displaced persons were Michael Marrus and Mark Wyman. Read together, these works offer a basis for understanding the studying postwar DPs and refugees, and their challenges become a starting point for future scholars. Michael Robert Marrus, *The Unwanted*; Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons*.

⁵⁷ For instance, Michael Marrus’s broad study covers the migrations of Russian Jews in the late nineteenth century, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the floods of refugees following both world wars, and the movements of peoples after decolonization. Within this narrative, he allots roughly fifty pages to the period immediately following World War II. Here he describes the ways in which tensions between East and West, between countries that were formerly allies and now shared responsibility for many of these refugees, hindered the ability of international agencies to deal with this crisis. Marrus brings together sources that in the 1980s were not easily available from a variety of countries, which allows for comparisons to be made across time and conflicts. Michael Robert Marrus, *The Unwanted*.

DPs' experiences of suffering and commitment to anti-Communism were similar enough to create a collective identity for them within the camps; in this interpretation, however, one loses any sense of the national conflict that often plagued these camps.⁵⁸ This dissertation uses both personal and official documents to explore the stories of the refugees themselves. It nevertheless maintains the necessary distinctions among refugee groups, which are often crucial to understanding their differences in treatment as well as, their own self-perception, as fluid as this may sometimes have been, at least in their own characterization thereof. In the last decade, with the greater opening of archives and embargoes lifted, scholars have begun to reassess the history of the DP camp with studies that have focused on the question of gender, the role of NGOs, and the development of humanitarian rights, and the collection of early postwar testimony.⁵⁹ In these we see a real struggle among Jewish DPs to determine where to make their new homes, the tension heightened amidst the growing presence of Zionism, and the near complete condemnation of Germany by international Jewish agencies.⁶⁰ They demonstrate that the idea to use

⁵⁸ Mark Wyman's study devotes itself almost entirely to describing the DP experience setting aside much of the considerably complex political environment. Wyman's text is based on a series of his eighty interviews with former DPs and aid workers and seeks to demonstrate the return of culture to the DP populations in Germany through the addition of religious, social, and artistic events in the camps. And while his study gives more space to the DPs themselves than Marrus's, his concision causes him to collapse many crucial distinctions among the populations he studies. Mark Wyman, *DPs*.

⁵⁹ See for example Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake*; Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*; Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record*; Avinoam J Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009); Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (University of Michigan Press, 2011).

⁶⁰ See for example Michael Brenner's work which focuses on the two groups of Jews who found themselves in commingling in German DP camps after the war: German born Jews and Eastern European born Jews. Through testimony and archival documentation, Brenner traces the somewhat surprising story of the several thousand Jews from both groups who determined to stay in Germany, despite the animosity that often arose between the two groups and the antisemitism they faced from their non-Jewish German neighbors. We can contrast these interviews with those done by Lynn Rapaport who interviewed adult children of Holocaust survivors who were living in Germany in the 1980s and discovered that the majority of these children of survivors insisted they were not German, but rather Jews living in Germany. Zeev Mankowitz focuses instead on the majority of Jewish DPs who did leave Germany. He is most concerned with recovering the agency of the survivors in determining their futures in the moment, an agency that has

reproduction as retribution becomes prevalent in the DP camps as DPs themselves begin to feel an urgent need to replace murdered families.⁶¹

By examining the actions of Jews in DP camps within Italy, I am able to both bring together and advance the findings of studies from two continents and numerous historiographical trajectories. This scholarship includes Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe who were often Ashkenazi, traditional, and Zionist, North African Jewish refugees who were often Sephardic, traditional, and religious, and international aid workers, of whom many were British or American and Jewish. Despite the recent growth in the study of Displaced Persons generally, works dedicated to the history of Italian postwar camps have remained largely on the periphery to the history of German and Austrian camps. Foreign Jews in Italy and Italian DP camps have been integrated into works on broader topics,⁶² but at present only a few works are dedicated specifically to

been denied them he claims by earlier works that focused solely on the work of national governments and non-governmental agencies. Mankowitz states that he is attempting to build on the works of scholars who have neglected the survivors themselves. Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity, and Jewish-German Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Zeev Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory and Hope*.

⁶¹ This kind of bottom up approach is also important to Atina Grossmann whose work brings a new category of analysis to the study of the DP camps: gender. A scholar of gender and sexuality, Grossmann examines the “close encounters” among these three title groups in occupied Germany. Using a variety of sources from official reports to personal narratives such as diaries and letters, Grossmann is particularly interested in questions of German identity, guilt, and survival. Grossmann limits most of her study to the immediate period of the DP camps and thus includes both Jews who would eventually leave Germany and those who would stay, briefly touching on the stigma surrounding Jewish men who married German non-Jewish women. Given that most of the DP personal accounts included in broader histories like Brenner’s later interviews to this point are from men, Grossmann forces the reader to grapple with potential differences because of gender. In Grossmann’s account, women are agents requesting medical care or in-home help through official channels further entangling their own histories with that of the Germans outside the camps. Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, see especially chapter 5; For an earlier article on DP women see Judith Tydor Baumel, “DPs, Mothers and Pioneers: Women in the She’erit Hapletah,” *Jewish History* 11, no. 2 (September 1997): 99–110. For more on Jewish women in occupied Germany see Margarete Myers Feinstein, “Jewish Women Survivors in the Displaced Persons Camps of Occupied Germany: Transmitters of the Past, Caretakers of the Present, and Builders of the Future.” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, no. 4 (2006): 67.

⁶² See for example Arie J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*; Marco Paganoni, *Per Ricostruire e Ricostruirsi. Astorre Mayer e La Rinascita Ebraica Tra Italia e Israele: Astorre Mayer e La Rinascita Ebraica Tra Italia e Israele* (FrancoAngeli, 2010).

the Italian case, and they address primarily issues of Jewish escapees to Palestine and questions of governance and top-down procedure in the camps between Allied and Italian governments.⁶³ Viewed primarily as transitional space on the route to get elsewhere, Italian camps have not been examined with attention to either the work of rehabilitation or individual agency. And yet the variability of stays in Italian camps make them particularly important to investigate because of their especially diverse populations.

Unlike in the camps in Germany, refugees often traveled far to reach Italy with the express objective of simply traveling through the country to their desired location, Palestine. There is an important distinction here between the majority of those in German camps and those in Italian camps. There were Zionists in German camps who desired to make *aliyah*, but they knew that by entering the DP camps in Germany that they would have to wait for international governments to make a determination on their status and

⁶³ The one major monograph that offers a comprehensive picture of the Italian DP camps is Susannah Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy, 1945-1951*. There are a few articles dedicated to various aspects of the topic including Martina Ravagnan, "I campi Displaced Persons per profughi ebrei stranieri in Italia (1945-1950)," *Storia e Futuro* 30, no. 30 (November 2012); Arturo Marzano, "Jewish DPs in Post-War Italy: The Role of the Italian Jewry in a Multilateral Encounter (1945-1948), in *Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, Francesca Bregoli, Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, Guri Schwarz eds., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2018), 151-171; Arturo Marzano, "Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah: The Hachsharot in Italy (1945-48)," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18 (January 14, 2019): 314-29; Federica Di Padova, "Rinascere in Italia. Matrimoni e Nascite Nei Campi per Displaced Persons Ebrei 1943-1948," *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe. Rivista Telematica Di Studi Sulla Memoria Femminile* 36 (2018): 1-19; Chiara Renzo, "'Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet.' The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-Understanding (1943-1948)," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 12 (December 2017): 89-111. Several scholars have worked on individual camps. For those that focus on the southern region see Mario Mennonna, *Ebrei a Nardò: Campo profughi n. 34, Santa Maria al Bagno, 1944-1947*. (Galatina (Lecce): Congedo, 2008); V.A. Leuzzi and G. Esposito, eds., *Terra di frontiera. Profughi ed ex internati in Puglia. 1943-1954* (Bari: Progedit, 2000). And the Northern regions see Costantino Di Sante and Lorenzo Bertucelli, *Stranieri Indesiderabili: Il Campo Di Fossoli E I Centri Raccolta Profughi in Italia (1945-1970)* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2011); Alexis Herr, *The Holocaust and Compensated Compliance in Italy: Fossoli Di Carpi, 1942-1952* (Springer, 2016); Sara Vinçon, *Vite in transito: gli ebrei nel campo profughi di Grugliasco (1945-1949)* (S. Zamorani, 2009); Noa Steimatsky, "The Cinecittà Refugee Camp, 1944-50," in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, ed. John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 101-31; Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children: Journey to the Promised Land* (London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002); Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe: gli orfani della Shoah e la nascita di Israele* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2018).

resettlement. Those in Italian camps, including those who moved from German to Italian camps because they were tired of waiting, believed there would be little to no wait, as Italy was to be the final stopover. From the Italian coast there were numerous boats and ferries willing to make the illegal trip to Palestine while Italian officials often looked the other way or sometimes even aided these groups. Their intended speedy exit from Europe, however, was met with resistance in the form of the British forces who refused to allow the DPs to leave Italy, causing camps to overflow with people anxious to leave them. Many scholars have examined the European-wide postwar desire to make *aliyah* and have examined the routes of transit through Italy, but their analysis generally ignores the everyday experiences in the DP camps themselves.⁶⁴ My dissertation offers a corrective lens here by stepping back and examining what happens when they could not leave for Palestine as intended; it asks how and why communities were formed in these temporary spaces even before more permanent communities could be created in Israel.

Within these temporary communities “rehabilitation” was a primary focus of many aid organizations and refugees during the immediate postwar period. There is a growing literature on the history of NGOs and humanitarian aid organizations that addresses the methodologies and theories of various groups.⁶⁵ These studies bring to light the many striking differences of opinion among these organizations regarding how to

⁶⁴ See for example Mario Toscano, *La ‘Porta di Sion’. L’Italia e l’immigrazione clandestina ebraica in Palestina (1945– 1948)* (Bologna 1990); Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: the Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ Included here are work such as Gerard D. Cohen, *In War’s Wake*; Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian reason a moral history of the present times*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (University of California Press, 2002) Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

rehabilitate adults and especially youths.⁶⁶ The way psychologists and social workers understood the family vastly changed after World War II. The breakup of the family was not always considered a traumatic incident, but the vast numbers of orphans and lost children after the war led many to reconsider the question of family trauma. Tara Zahra has shown that it was in large part because of the DP camp experience that organizations including UNRRA, the IRO, and the JDC developed, for the first time, a psychoanalytic understanding of the trauma of a separation from family as equivalent to physical suffering.⁶⁷ For many people in the postwar period, but perhaps especially for Jews recovering from the Holocaust, children were vital to the continuation of the family and the community.

In addition to interrogating the histories of NGOs and rehabilitation efforts in the postwar period, this dissertation also connects questions of humanitarian work, agency, and children. Here, it asks what this new understanding around trauma and the family entailed in terms of concrete policy within the Italian camps. It questions whether this new understanding extended outside the Anglo-American sphere of social workers coming from these NGOs to those running the camps who were often Israeli soldiers or Jewish survivors themselves. My work demonstrates how this struggle played out in Italy, where we see some of the greatest clashes between individualist and collectivist

⁶⁶ Ruth Balint, "Children Left Behind: Family, Refugees and Immigration in Postwar Europe," *History Workshop Journal* 82, no. 1 (October 2016): 151–72; Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 73–95; Daniella Doron, *Jewish youth and identity in postwar France: rebuilding family and nation* (Indiana University Press, 2015); Avinoam Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland*; Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London, 2005); Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁶⁷ Tara Zahra, "Lost Children: Displacement, Family, and Nation in Postwar Europe*," *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 1 (March 2009): 47–51; Tara Zahra, "'The Psychological Marshall Plan': Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II," *Central European History*, 44, no. 1 (March 2011): 37–62.

models of rehabilitation. Individualist models of rehabilitation were largely supported by Anglo-American social workers who believed that returning a child to her own family or to a new nuclear family would prove to be the best policy for the child's healing and future, regardless of where that future was. Collectivist policies, advocated by continental social workers and many Jewish groups, argued that it was in the best interests of the child to allow them to remain in a larger group of other children their own age and of their own beliefs. These Zionist advocates were also among the most active in getting children across the Alps and into Italy, from where they assumed travel to Palestine would be easier, although this dissertation will demonstrate the ways in which this travel intersected with rehabilitation, which proved to be a far more challenging task. Most resettlement agencies and countries wanted children who might be molded and shaped into a new national image far more than they wanted adults who were likely to be set in their ways. Yet, I challenge the assertion that child DPs were simply pawns within a larger national or international struggle by discussing the actions of a variety of NGOs within the Italian camps, revealing the times when children chose their own paths and geographical destinations. The clash in Italy demonstrates both the importance of the nation (or proto-nation in the case of Israel pre-statehood) in these debates and also the ability of youths to reclaim their own sense of agency in these moments.

This dissertation also engages with the work of memory theorists to show the ways memory shifts over time. Study of these shifts in memory has been more frequently applied to the recollection of wartime trauma. Utilizing theories of *emplotment* and collective memory, this study demonstrates that DPs' remembrances of their time in the

DP camps are often reframed from spaces of deprivation to places for rebirth.⁶⁸ These changes align with the successive calls to remember and then to tell one's story as a witness. Though there was something of a "memory boom" among scholars in the 1970s, the need to remember one's story, both individual and collective was not new.⁶⁹ In his pioneering work, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi reminds his reader of the centrality of remembrance within the Jewish tradition—"Zakhor," or remember, is repeated nearly 200 times within this ancient text and its performance must be enacted through action, word, and text. He further argues that "the Hebrew Bible seems to have no hesitations in commanding memory. Its injunctions to remember are unconditional."⁷⁰ Yet, Yerushalmi also argues that this group act of remembrance, that is, collective memory, is necessarily selective in what it preserves. He writes that "certain memories live on; the rest are winnowed out, repressed, or simply discarded by a process of natural selection."⁷¹ This also aligns with a growing understanding of one of the primary purposes of testimony-giving: fulfilling the duty to tell. Dori Laub, for instance, argues that there is "in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and this to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by

⁶⁸ For extended discussions of plot structures see Hayden V. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Foundational work on the idea of "collective memory" can be found in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. 50-87.

⁶⁹ This "memory boom" was in large part connected to the rise and fall of different kinds of group memory. The focus for many scholars is on the aftermath of two bloody international conflicts resulting in a decline of nationalism and an increased skepticism. Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire: Les France* (Gallimard, 1984); James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993). Studies of the collective over the individual memory, public over personal remembrances and commemoration have become more prominent. Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps*; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Jeffrey K Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (Fordham University Press, 2016).

⁷⁰ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, 2011), 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life."⁷² Witnessing thus becomes a life-giving experience, one that has transformed "the witness into an apostle and prophet."⁷³ The prophet now has a duty to tell that stems from an original responsibility to remember.

Through its examination of DP remembrances, this study also connects their memories to debates around antisemitism in Italy. In so doing, this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which Jewish DPs adopted and perpetuated the myth of the "*italiani brava gente*," or the idea that Italians are "good folks." It argues that the ways Jewish DPs remember the Italians align with the priorities of early postwar antifascists who sought to demarcate Italian antisemitism as only coming from Fascism. But the study of antisemitism and Jews under Italian Fascism has a long history, one that began even as the regime was making its dying gasps.⁷⁴ In the 1950s the President of the *Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane* (Union of Italian Jewish Communities, UCII)

⁷² Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Ed. Cathy Caruth, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 63.

⁷³ Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 136.

⁷⁴ From the start, this study has been undertaken by individuals and organizations from diverse backgrounds and for a variety of reasons. Journalists, Giacomo Debenedetti and Eucardio Momigliano weighed in on the Jewish tragedy discussing the horrors of the Roman deportation and the racial laws. Giacomo Debenedetti, *16 ottobre 1943*, (OET, Roma, 1945) (published first in *Mercurio*, 1, n. 4, (dicembre 1944): 75–97); Eucardio Momigliano, *Storia tragica e grottesca del razzismo Fascista*, (Mondadori, Milano 1946). Outside of Italy, historian Cecil Roth added extensive studies on the persecution of Jews (1945 and 1949). Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, (Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1946). In the immediate postwar years, Italian Jews who had been deported began publishing their stories, albeit none with commercial success. See for example See Maria Eisenstein, *L'internata numero 6. Donne fra i reticolati del campo di concentramento*, (De Luigi, Roma 1944); Alberto Cavaliere, *I campi della morte in Germania nel racconto di una sopravvissuta*, (Sonzogno, Milano 1945); Silvia Lombroso, *Si può stampare. Pagine vissute 1938–1945*, (Dalmatia, Roma 1945); Frida Misul, *Fra gli artigli del mostro nazista. La più romanzesca delle realtà, il più realistico dei romanzi*, (Belforte, Livorno 1946); Luciano Morpurgo, *Caccia all'uomo! Vita, sofferenze e beffe. Pagine di diario 1938–1944*, (Dalmatia, Roma 1946); Giuliana Tedeschi, *Questo povero corpo*, (Milano 1946); Alba Valech Capozzi, *A.24029*, (Soc. An. Poligrafica, Siena 1946); Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, (De Silva, Torino 1947); Liana Millu, *Il fumo di Birkenau*, (Prora, Milano 1947).

asked young historian Renzo De Felice to write a history of the Jews in Fascist Italy.⁷⁵ De Felice had unrestricted access to Italian government documents spanning from the early twentieth century to the fall of Fascism and produced in 1961 a monumental and unprecedented work. He argued that the Jewish Question did not exist in Italy before the war because “the very roots of racism [were] conspicuously absent” from Italian history; therefore, “the anti-Semitic measures were not popular with the majority of the Italian people.”⁷⁶ Instead, he claimed, antisemitic ideas and laws were forced, albeit rather unsuccessfully as a whole, on the people, by the Fascist government. The assimilation of most Jews into society, made it difficult for people to distinguish between Jews and non-Jews.⁷⁷

For years, De Felice’s work represented one of the only scholarly voices on the topic.⁷⁸ His arguments concerning the absence of antisemitism in Italian society established a narrative for both future historians and also Italian public memory to follow.⁷⁹ Within this public memory, Italians’ solidarity with the Jews came to be understood in moral terms as they embraced a common sense of humanity with the

⁷⁵ Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*; For further analysis on the book’s creation and reception, see Michele Sarfatti, “La Storia della persecuzione antiebraica di Renzo De Felice: contesto, dimensione cronologica e fonti,” *Quale storia*, a. XXXII, n. 2 (dicembre 2004): 11–27.

⁷⁶ Renzo De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy: A History* (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 21, 296.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 469; De Felice here makes it explicit that it was the “wave of solidarity” Italians felt with the Jews that most deeply influenced their actions, particularly rescue, during the war.

⁷⁸ Joshua D. Zimmermann points out that while De Felice’s work was of immense importance to Italian intellectuals’ understanding of World War II and Fascism, it only became available for English readers in 2001. It does seem rather curious that a work, which all historians of Italian Jews and Fascism quote, remained out of reach for English-reading audiences for so long. Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ See for instance: Charles Delzell, *Mussolini’s Enemies: the Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961) for a discussion of resistance as motive; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961) in which he discusses the latency of Italian government in persecuting those who broke the racial laws as a secondary motive; for more contemporary works of agreement with De Felice see: Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (New York: Summit Books, 1991) and Ivo Herzer and Klaus Voigt and James Burgwyn, eds., *The Italian Refuge: Rescue of Jews During the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).

Jews.⁸⁰ In the late 1980s, historians started questioning the myth of the “good Italian” as a way to explain the relationship of Italians toward Jews during the war. Numerous publications argued either directly against the myth or called for a more nuanced understanding of the connections between Fascism and antisemitism.⁸¹ Understudied in works on antisemitism and Fascist Italy in the early years was any mention of Italy’s colonial aspirations or occupations. Several scholars have worked to fill this void.⁸² One clear counterexample for the narrative of “good Italians” was the brutal, bloody campaign in Ethiopia, where Italians killed over 700,000 Ethiopians in what was essentially an ego boost for Mussolini.⁸³ The colonial state then became a testing ground for racial theories

⁸⁰ Meir Michaelis, in his 1978 study *Mussolini and the Jews*, was among the first historians to extend De Felice’s argument in discussing the source of antisemitism. He argued that while Fascists promoted antisemitism, the sentiment remained entirely foreign to most Italians because they saw its origin as foreign. Antifascists, therefore, were not motivated simply by their opposition to antisemitism, but also by the knowledge that it was the Nazis who tried to impose this racist ideology upon them. The thought of Germany ruling Italian society angered many people who then used any opportunity to fight against laws they perceived as foreign. Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy, 1922-1945* (Clarendon Press, 1978).

⁸¹ For example David Bidussa, *Il Mito del Bravo Italiano* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1994); Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-1943*, 213; Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 52-74, 188-229; Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 12-13, 16; For more recent analysis of the myth see Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, Brava Gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 2005); Claudio Fogu, “Italiani Brava Gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer, “The Question of Fascist Italy’s War Crimes: The Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943–1948),” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9, no. 3 (2004);

⁸² For example Francesca Locatelli, “Migrating to the colonies and building the myth of ‘italiani brava gente’: the rise, demise, and legacy of Italian settler colonialism,” in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, eds., *Italian Mobilities* (Routledge, 2015), 133-151 See also Davide Rodogno, “Italiani Brava Gente? Fascist Italy’s Policy Toward the Jews in the Balkans, April 1941-July 1943,” *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2005): 213, 234-5; Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, *Italian colonialism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002); Dietmar Rothermund, ed., *Memories of Post-Imperial Nations: The Aftermath of Decolonization, 1945-2013* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia* (Roma: Laterza, 1986).

⁸³ Angelo Del Boca cites a document to the Conference of Prime Ministers from Ethiopia in 1945 detailing the Ethiopian war casualties: “760,300 natives dead; of them, battle deaths: 275,000, hunger among refugees: 300,000, patriots killed during occupation: 75,000, concentration camps: 35,000, Feb. 1937 massacre: 30,000, executions: 24,000, civilians killed by air force: 17,800.” Angelo Del Boca, *La guerra d’Etiopia l’ultima impresa del colonialismo* (Milano: Longanesi, 2010).

that ultimately influenced the antisemitism found in later stages of Italian Fascism.⁸⁴ The cover image of the popular newspaper *La Difesa della Razza*, for instance, featured three faces with a sword separating the “European” face from that of the “Jew” and the “African.”⁸⁵ The double-edged sword of racism and antisemitism created a dual burden for Jews in colonial Libya. Yet, despite the racism and antisemitism that occurred in Libya under the Italians, several thousand Libyan Jews still decided to use Italy as the byway to Israel.

In this way, the Italian case is also distinctive as it involved Displaced Persons from North Africa.⁸⁶ Including North African Jews in this study not only broadens the geographic backgrounds of those involved, which means different wartime experiences, but also allows for a questioning of what it means to be a *Jewish* refugee. Sephardic by heritage, these North African Jews brought with them different traditions and understandings of Judaism than their Ashkenazic kin from the north and west, differences that undoubtedly caused some tension and misunderstandings within the camps. Studying

⁸⁴ Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: From Equality to Persecution* (Madison, Wis: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 110-130.

⁸⁵ The newspaper *La Difesa della Razza* (*The Defense of the Race*) in particular used both artwork and “scientific” facts, such as the infamous *Manifesto degli Scienziati Razzisti* (*Manifesto of the Racial Scientists*), to convince its readers of the innate differences between Italians and the Jews. For full text of the *Manifesto* see Renzo De Felice, *Jews in Fascist Italy*, 264; written by university assistants, the document claimed to have scientific backing for the biological differences between Italians and Jews. It was first published on July 14, 1938, and within days over 180 scientists signed their approval on its accuracy and it was re-published in *La Difesa della Razza* with these signatures attached.

⁸⁶ The presence of North African DPs in Italy in the immediate postwar period is discussed in very few texts. Joseph Schechtman includes two pages on the migration of Jews from Libya to Israel, including via Italy, in his early study. Maurice Roumani focuses on socio-economic and political trends to understand the incredibly tumultuous years from the institution of the racial laws to the independence of Libya. Suzanne Brown-Fleming, in her study of the International Tracing Service, dedicates a portion of chapter five to migrants from North Africa, both Jewish and non-Jewish. She deftly demonstrates the interactions between these individuals and the IRO while also offering suggestions for further research on the topic. Joseph B. Schechtman, *On Wings of Eagles: The Plight, Exodus, and Homecoming of Oriental Jewry* (T. Yoseloff, 1961), 142; Maurice M Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*; Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), see especially chapter 5.

the years 1938 to 1952, Maurice Roumani has shown that despite the rapid changes the Libyan Jews faced in an increasingly deteriorating situation, they were able to maintain their culture and tradition in their new homes in Israel.⁸⁷ This dissertation argues that in Europe, however, these misunderstandings amongst Libyan refugees and especially aid workers ultimately meant that it was near impossible to maintain these traditions within the space of the DP camps in Italy. This study also examines the interactions between NGOs and North African migrants in Italy expanding and questioning earlier studies on humanitarian work in DP camps;⁸⁸ it finds, for instance, that far less time was spent pursuing cultural rehabilitation than in the Eastern European case, as the North African Jews and aid workers often had to struggle longer to ensure there was adequate food and shelter. Travel to and through Italy by Libyan Jews became much more common in the late 1950s through 1967 when Jews were all expelled from Libya, but there is very little record of this earlier migration within the historiographies of North Africa, Italy or Israel.⁸⁹ Renzo De Felice, for instance, whose text on Italian Jewry shaped so much of the scholarship on Jews under Fascism also dedicated a monograph to the Jews of Libya; yet,

⁸⁷ Maurice M Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, see especially chapter 5, “The Pain of Displacement: Resettlement, Absorption, Integration.”

⁸⁸ For studies on humanitarian groups and supranational organizations see Gerard D. Cohen, *In War's Wake*; J. Reinisch and E. White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944-49* (Springer, 2011). For works on Jewish voluntary agencies in the DP camps see Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Wayne State University Press, 1981); Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jewry on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 1989); Avinoam J. Patt and Michael. Berkowitz, *“We Are Here”: New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Avinoam Patt et al., eds., *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* (Wayne State University Press, 2019).

⁸⁹ For more on the flight from Libya see Jacques Roumani, Judith Roumani, and David Meghnagi, *Jewish Libya: Memory and Identity in Text and Image* (Syracuse University Press, 2018); Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*; Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives* (University of Chicago Press, 1990); Rachel Simon, *Change within Tradition among Jewish Women in Libya* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992). There are also several memoirs dedicated to the exodus including Raphael Luzon, *Libyan Twilight: Story of An Arab Jew* (Darf Publishers, 2017); David Gerbi, *Costruttori di pace: storia di un ebreo profugo dalla Libia* (Appunti di viaggio, 2003).

despite describing the journey from Libya to Israel, his focus remains on Libya, and his text makes no mention of the DP camps in Italy.⁹⁰ The impact of World War II on North Africa has been the topic of several works in recent years, but questions about refugees to or from the region have been left relatively unexplored.⁹¹

The question of agency that has flowed throughout these interventions is central to this dissertation. The ways in which individuals, particularly those in vulnerable positions, made choices in the postwar world was deeply connected to the rights they were afforded. In this way, agency is also fundamental to the discussion of human rights. Through its discussion of the IRO, my dissertation also engages in the question of postwar human rights. Human rights language evolved quickly in the aftermath of the war. Historians have credited the presence of millions of displaced persons (DPs) in the aftermath of the war, in particular the famous “last million” placed in Western and Soviet control, with triggering proclamations of international protections.⁹² These protections, however, were far from universal, as the case of the North African migrants demonstrates. As so often happened, the reality failed to live up to the rhetoric. Yet, the struggle to expand the scope of human rights by refugees and international organizations alike found a new beginning within the DP camps.

⁹⁰ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 228-229. He also argues that “many of those who succeeded in reaching Italy stayed there. About six hundred went on to Israel.” However, this appears to be a misreading of the sources he is citing. His primary source is Joseph Schechtman who writes that “Italy was, however, but a stopover on the way to Israel. About 2,500 Jews left Libya clandestinely via Tunisia and Italy from July 1948 to January 1949....For the entire year 1949, the number of such immigrants [who arrived in Israel via Italy] amounted to 2,107.” Joseph B. Schechtman, *On Wings of Eagles*, 141. For more on the question of numbers, see the discussion in chapter two of this dissertation.

⁹¹ See for example Judith Byfield et al., eds., *Africa and World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Michael M. Laskier, “Between Vichy Antisemitism and German Harassment: The Jews of North Africa during the Early 1940s,” *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 3 (1991): 343–69; P. Bernhard, “Behind the Battle Lines: Italian Atrocities and the Persecution of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews in North Africa during World War II,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 3 (December 1, 2012): 425–46.

⁹² See for example, Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 11.

A Roadmap

This dissertation is committed to using the words of refugees themselves, in conjunction with and read against the testimony of aid workers, as the primary lens through which to understand the DP camps. The individual story is crucial for an understanding of agency, as Tony Kushner writes that “as with all mass migrations, these journeys [of Jewish refugees after the war] were undertaken at a basic level by thousands upon thousands of *individuals*.”⁹³ The task then is to set these individuals within their larger economic, geographical, and temporal contexts to make sense of larger patterns of refugee movement. Several big questions guide the ultimate structure: what makes a place a home? Can one find a temporary permanence in liminal spaces?⁹⁴ How does the self-agency one is afforded influence one’s options for a different future? Many of the issues at stake here revolve around questions of space, that is geographies past, present, and future, and of agency. This study pays special attention to the ways in which space, both real and imagined, intersects with self-agency and how these in turn shape one’s identity. This study examines the ways actions taken by refugees and aid workers such as rehabilitation, protests, cultural activities, and memorialization intersect with issues of identity (re)formation including questions of legality, citizenship, age, memory, and the

⁹³ Emphasis added. Tony Kushner, *Journeys from the Abyss: The Holocaust and Forced Migration from the 1880s to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 28.

⁹⁴ The phrase “temporary permanence” comes from the former name of the migrant detention centers in Italy: *Centri di permanenza temporanea* (Centers of Temporary Permanence). When applied to the lives of migrants, Stephanie Home argues that the terms cancel each other out and thus create a sense of limbo or absolute suspension. It becomes “the shorthand for empire’s power over people through the control of mobility.” Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire’s Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy’s Crisis of Migration and Detention* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 6.

politics of naming. These themes are united in their investigation of the liminal, the waiting space full of expectation that defined the DP moment.

Structurally this dissertation is divided into six central chapters. The first two define the broader periods under study, discussing in turn, 1945–1948 with a focus on East European Jewish refugees and then 1948–1949 where it is centered on Jews from Libya. The subsequent four chapters integrate these European and North African stories, apart from chapter five which is a case study of one children’s home for European Jewish children. The first chapter, “‘Their Present Wandering Towards Palestine’: Italy as the Pathway to *Aliyah*, ” shows that the majority of Jewish refugees who made it to Italy were hoping to make new homes in Palestine. It tackles the big question of why Jewish refugees went to Italy in the first place and then examines what happened once they were stuck there. Through its discussion of the choices of one refugee, the chapter demonstrates the ways refugees fought for their own rights within the system of classification.

Following chronologically on this early discussion of the camps, the second chapter, “‘Not Within the Mandate’: North African Jewish Refugees in the DP Camps,” examines the interconnected issues of humanitarian work and personal agency in the lives of these North African Jewish refugees in Italy. This chapter explains why these North African Jewish refugees, primarily Jews from Libya, traveled to Italy despite (and even because of) its colonial history. It examines the two pogroms and threats of persecution in Libya that induced the vast majority of the country to flee. It explores the process of decision making by the IRO around personal classification for those Libyans attempting to gain status in the DP camps. Here we find individuals stuck with a hostile local

population, a largely neglectful British Military Administration occupying force, and an international organization that tied its own hands rather than complicate the waters of humanitarian and refugee crises; the result was a migrant population largely denied self-determination.

The third chapter, “‘Does Not Follow a Blueprint’: The Role of Culture in the Camps,” examines a key part of the process of rehabilitation in the DP camps: the development of culture. It explores the return of drama, art, education, sports, and literature to the lives of those in the camps. It argues that one area in which we see personal agency expressed by the DPs is in their decision to rebuild and reshape their new “homes” through a renewal of cultural activities, although this renewal was largely limited to the Eastern European Jewish population. The self-led cultural activities of the refugees, however, clearly demonstrate that, against the view of many aid workers at the time, many of the DPs were anything but passive in their own rehabilitation. At the same time, it also demonstrates hierarchies that developed among the refugee population, as some individuals and groups played an outsized role in the development of these activities, sometimes in a form other refugees seemed to find beneficial, sometimes not.

The fourth chapter, “‘It is impossible to stand it any longer’: Deprivations, Frustrations, and Uncertainty in the Camps,” looks at the question of stuff and what happens in communities where there is a lack of basic necessities and in which there is disagreement about what an adequate amount is. On the question of enough, we see great disagreement between refugees and aid workers who approach the question with different standards often based on vastly divergent wartime experiences. This chapter focuses on issues of agency and advocacy, where we again see a clear divergence between options

afforded to European and North African Jews. In part, it contrasts the European-populated DP camps in Bari and Cremona with the Resina and Salerno camps, which had been created for the North Africans. In Cremona the community was able to advocate for themselves, writing strongly worded letters and newspaper articles to and about the aid agencies responsible for their material lack, whereas in Resina and Salerno we find letters written from concerned citizens not in the camps on behalf of its North African population. The question of stuff also allows us to see how DP communities were connected with each other and with the local Italian population outside the camps. Hunger strikes by those in camps protesting the British refusal to allow ships to leave port for Palestine demonstrate that DPs saw their communities as broader than individual families or specific camp locations.

“‘Orphans from another planet’: The Youth of Selvino,” the fifth chapter, examines the main disagreements among aid agencies working on rehabilitation of youth in DP camps. It focuses on disputes over what type of environment was best for children to recover in and what types of rules should be put in place to ensure the best responses to past trauma. The Italian children’s home, Selvino, functions as a case study. In a late 1945 memo, NGO official Theodore Szejberg-Hatalgi described Selvino, as a “children’s paradise.” A year and a half later, however, he wrote that his original assessment had been “idealistic” and described the children’s behavior as “very unpleasant.” Located in the foothills of the Alps, Selvino became the rehabilitation center for hundreds of Jewish children, primarily foreign unaccompanied minors, in Northern Italy from 1945 to 1948. Heralded as a rousing success in the years that followed its closure, Selvino nevertheless struggled during its existence to please all the parties involved in its operation. This

chapter demonstrates how disputes over the question of Zionism enabled the youths to make their own choices about their futures.

The final chapter, “‘I Thought a New Life was Starting’: Memories of the DP Camps,” studies the ways survivor memories of the DP camps have changed over time. It draws on memoirs and interviews completed in the last thirty years to expand on some of the contradictions mentioned in the opening of this Introduction. While living in the DP camps in the 1940s, refugees and aid workers alike frequently stress the poor conditions of the camps; several decades later, however, survivor remembrances have been reframed. They align with a new collective narrative that typically emphasizes these spaces, and Italy more generally, as a place of rebirth. Through these case studies, this chapter explores this contrast in both personal and group memory.

Coming in an era of historic refugee crises, my work offers insights into the lives of dispossessed and displaced populations, of those trying to retain what they could of their pasts and create new futures. In the process, it reveals the power of agency and individual choice in the determination of future action, ultimately contributing to debates about the work of humanitarian workers and postwar refugee migration. But the issue of refugees continues to be of global concern; my work demonstrates not only the specifics of this postwar situation but also provides an in-depth examination of broader issues of mobility, permanence, and human rights that have relevance to contemporary work with refugees in camps in other situations.

CHAPTER ONE

“Their Present Wandering Towards Palestine”: Italy as the Pathway to Aliyah

“When one reads the answers and reflects about the tragedy of every individual and of all the refugees together, when one observes their present wandering towards Palestine in the perspective of history of Jews—then one must recognize that the grand vision of our philosophes, poets and leaders became a historical necessity before our eyes.”¹

—Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy

“The refugees who came to Italy drifted here because it is the shortest route to Palestine...It was for them a great disappointment when they came here, that the gates of Palestine are still closed to them.”²

—Leo Garfunkel, DP

Fifty-nine and balding, the short, bespectacled psychologist adjusted his suit and tie before exiting the car at the Tradate *hachshara* just outside Milan on August 31, 1946.³ Heading into the agricultural training camp, he dragged behind him sixty pounds of equipment including a “model 50 wire recorder, 200 spools of wire, and an assortment of converters and transformers,” which he immediately set up in a central room.⁴ Intrigued, some of the residents, primarily refugees who had survived the Holocaust and fled war-torn regions of Eastern and Central Europe, wandered over to inspect the

¹ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” page 20, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

² “Drafts of report about Jewish refugees in Italy: By Leon Garfunkel, President of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy.” February 1946; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 3, Reel 1.9, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. This report was later sent to the JDC. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 663, “Letter from Leon Garfunkel to the Honourable Anglo - American Commission of Inquiry on Palestine, Subject: Memorandum to Commission of Inquiry on Palestine - submitted by Leon Garfunkel Pres...” March 30, 19[4]6.

³ Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 55–58.

⁴ David P. Boder, “The Displaced People of Europe: Preliminary Notes on a Psychological and Anthropological Study,” (Chicago: Illinois Institute of Technology and the Psychological Museum, 1947), 2.

polished professor with his Russian accent and his strange contraption. Despite having been on the road making interviews for over a month, Dr. David P. Boder was eager to begin, aware he had a very limited window of time to spend in Europe. After joining the residents for a meal, Boder requested that they sing into his wire recorder and when they finished, he played it back for them. “The wonder of hearing their own voices recorded was boundless,” Boder later recalled, as many had never seen a recording device before.⁵ He then asked for a few volunteers who would be willing to be interviewed and recorded for preservation and later psychological study.

In 1946, Latvian-born psychologist David Boder traveled across the ocean from his home in the United States to Displaced Persons (DP) and refugee camps in France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany in order to talk to survivors of the Holocaust. His primary goals were two-fold: he desired to record survivors’ stories in their own words and to translate these stories into English to increase awareness of their plight in the United States. In total, Boder interviewed 130 refugees on a wire recorder, producing the first repository of oral testimony from the Holocaust.⁶ The interviews took place in nine languages, some of which Boder knew better than others.⁷ In addition to interviews, his

⁵ David P. Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949), xii.

⁶ David Boder was born “Aron Mendel” in 1886 in Libau (Liepaja), Latvia, which was then a part of Russia. He left his largely Jewish community to study psychology under Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig and later at Vladimir Bekhterev’s Psychoneurological Institute in St. Petersburg. Here he married Pauline Ivianski, and the two had a daughter, Elena, in 1907 before divorcing shortly after. Boder and his daughter fled the Russian Revolution, making their way to the United States after a six-year tenure in Mexico. Once in the U.S., Boder finished his education in psychology with an M.A. from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Northwestern. He worked as a psychologist at the Lewis Institute (now the Illinois Institute of Technology), founded a Psychology Museum, and joined the clinical staff at several hospitals. By 1939, he was too old to fight in World War II but developed a research plan at the end of the war that would change the course of his career. In July 1946, with a grant from the Psychological Museum in Chicago, Boder traveled to Europe, undertaking what he called the displaced persons (DP) interview project. Biographical details from IIT’s website (David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. <http://voices.iit.edu/>) and from Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ A polyglot, Boder was able to offer many his interviewees the chance to record their stories in the

wire recordings also contain songs and religious services from the various refugee centers he visited. After he returned to the United States, Boder transcribed about half of the interviews into English and published a few of them as a book entitled, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*.⁸

It was in this camp in northern Italy that the psychology professor from Chicago would learn that for most Jewish refugees, Italy was viewed as simply a way station on the path to Mandatory Palestine. “Why did you come to Italy?” Boder asked his interviewees. “Because from Italy we knew the [*aliyah*] goes to Palestine,” replied George Kaldore, a survivor of Birkenau and Auschwitz-Monowitz.⁹ The message of Zionists throughout Europe was clear to Kaldore. Nechama Epstein-Kozlowski, a newly-married survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, Międzyrzec Podlaski Ghetto, Majdanek, Auschwitz, Birkenau, Plaszow, Bergen-Belsen, Aschersleben, and Theresienstadt, also described the singular focus of her postwar travel:

From Poland I departed for [Czechoslovakia]. From [Czechoslovakia] I went to Germany. From Germany I came to Italy. And now I find myself here, and I say again, my struggle is for one thing only, and this one thing has remained for me: To come, together with my husband, to *Eretz Israel* and to build a Jewish Home together with all brothers and sisters. The end.¹⁰

language of their choice. Unfortunately, he did not know Polish, the native language of at least 39 of his total interviewees. However, for at least three interviews, Boder asks questions in Russian and his interviewees respond in Polish, so there was a possibility of communicating in Polish.

⁸ The remainder of his work, however, could not attract a publisher, and thus he self-published seventy of the interviews in a series called *Topical Autobiographies*. Half of the interviews were left with the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) before his death, and copies of all the wire recordings were discovered in the Library of Congress in 1999. Since then, IIT has placed nearly all of the audio files, transcriptions, and translations online on a website that makes them freely accessible to the public. David P Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*.

⁹ All the English translations of Boder interviews I have used in this chapter were recorded by Boder on audiotape and transcribed by the Voices of the Holocaust Project. George Kaldore, “Voices of the Holocaust.” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. August 31, 1946. https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17632

¹⁰ Nechama Epstein-Kozlowski, “Voices of the Holocaust.” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. August 31, 1946. https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17601

Both of these refugees make it clear that the received wisdom at the time was that going through Italy was the best way to make *aliyah* (Hebrew: “ascent,” meaning to Jerusalem), or the Jewish immigration to Palestine. As relatively recent arrivals to the Tradate camp, however, these interviewees could not know that many Jewish DPs would be stuck in Italy until after mid-1948.

This chapter looks at the path toward Palestine that many refugees in Italian DP camps took. It shows that the end goal for the vast majority of Jewish refugees was to leave Europe. Their primary desire was to resettle, rehabilitate, and indeed restart life in a completely new place. The first section of the chapter demonstrates that refugees primarily went to Italy with the express intention of leaving. Here it will explore the idea of Italy as the “*porta di sion*,” or the door to Zion, that is Palestine, and the ways this door was shut to many immigrants. The second section examines why these refugees chose Italy specifically as their point of transit. It argues that Italy’s complicated connections to antisemitism and Fascism combined with Italy’s desire to be seen in a more favorable light postwar made it an excellent gateway for Zionist groups to create pathways to emigrate. Through its examination of the paths open to refugees, the final section ultimately shows that emigration from Italy was, however, neither as easy nor as fast as many had believed it would be. This section uses the life of one highly mobile refugee as a case study for the ways DPs were able to change the information they gave about themselves in an effort to achieve their desired path through Italy. Although these efforts were not always successful in giving them a more immediate exit, they demonstrate the ways in which refugees were able to advocate for themselves through the

power systems in place by refusing to be repatriated and sometimes by creating new versions of their past.

Porta di Sion: The Journey to Italy

“You write you are rich [living in Argentina]; you know, however, that our father in Poland was rich, too. And now you know what the end was. I am going to Palestine.”¹¹

At the end of World War II, the demographics of the Jewish population in Italy changed dramatically; over the course of the 1945 summer alone, the roughly 7,000 so-called “old refugees”—the foreign Jews who had arrived in Italy before and during the war and were subsequently interned—were joined by between 13,000 and 15,000 non-Italian Jewish DPs who entered the country across the Austrian border.¹² These “new refugees” came primarily from Eastern and Central Europe, fleeing the antisemitism of their home countries that had continued even after their release from labor, concentration, and extermination camps and even, for some, the dismal conditions of the DP camps in Austria and Germany. This section demonstrates that their goal in arriving in Italy was not to make a new home in the country, but rather to use it as a transit point for a future elsewhere. This goal was frustrated by the efforts of those responsible for emigration in Italy, especially the British.

¹¹ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” page 20, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹² Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 1; Arie J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003), 238.

In late 1945, the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) designed a questionnaire to be given to all Jewish refugees in Italy.¹³ Comprised entirely of Jewish DPs, OJRI was the primary organization representing the voices of Jewish refugees in Italy. They sent out 12,000 copies and received 9,174 answers. The intent of the inquiry was to determine where the refugees came from, if they were willing to return there, and, if not, where they wanted to immigrate to. OJRI leaders then grouped the answers and presented the results in three tables alongside a selection of one hundred sample interviews. They found that only one person responded “yes” to repatriation to their home country and 98% of those polled wanted to emigrate to Palestine.¹⁴ The results of the enquiry confirmed the supposition of those in leadership that nearly all Jewish refugees wanted to emigrate to Palestine but demonstrated that this desire stemmed from a variety of reasons.¹⁵ The largest percentage (33%) stated they were Zionists who had “always dreamt about Palestine.”¹⁶ They were deeply committed to contributing to the construction of a Jewish state. The committee compiling the results, leaders of OJRI, saw no reason to distrust their stated motivations: “Speaking about emigration, those young Zionists give their answers with such a true enthusiasm, deep sincerity and clear

¹³ The Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) was created in late 1945 to be the voice of all Jewish DPs in Italy. It was alternatively called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Italy or the *Irgun ha-plitim be-Italia, Merkaz ha-Plitim*.

¹⁴ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” pages 3, 18, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁵ The majority of Jewish DPs in Germany also wanted to go to Palestine, although the percentage was not quite as high as in Italy. In 1946, roughly 85 percent of the over 130,000 Jewish refugees in Germany polled stated they would like to prefer to emigrate to Palestine. Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 37.

¹⁶ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” page 18, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

consciousness that one must believe them reading: ‘Palestine is my only aim. I should prefer to die if I knew that I shall not succeed in reaching this aim.’”¹⁷

Yet it was not only committed Zionists who traveled to Italy en route to Palestine in the mid-1940s. Among those polled, sixteen percent explicitly said they were not Zionist but still believed a “secure and productive life” for Jewish survivors was only possible in Palestine.¹⁸ Some, like Maria Fajngold originally from Poland, had no background with the movement, yet claimed Zionism was the only rational choice, as she stated: “I have been brought up without any Zionist or traditional education. It is not my heart which leads me to the Zionist ideals, but only the reasoning of a person who is on the brink of a precipice.”¹⁹ This group included individuals who had been indifferent to Zionism before the war as well as those who had actively fought against it. The compilers also noted that 1,315 respondents in the DP camps had relatives living in other countries outside of Palestine, but that only 140 of these refugees wanted to immigrate to those other countries to live with their relatives. For instance, Elimelech Bari, a 35-year-old Polish Jewish survivor, had a sister in Argentina, yet he wrote in response to the question of where he wanted to immigrate that he remained committed to Palestine. He stated: “my sister writes to me that she is very rich and that I may come to her [in Argentina]. I replied to her that my parents were also rich. And at last our neighbors, whom my parents lived so friendly with, buried my parents alive... We must go to our own country, there we

¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁹ Maria Fajngold, Interview number 187/177 in Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

shall fear no one.”²⁰ Fear of another Holocaust was a driving factor for many to leave Europe and, further, for many to go specifically to Palestine.

Another twenty percent reported a “simple fear of the surroundings” and said they wanted to “live among their own surroundings.”²¹ In these responses, they reported they were going “home,” nostalgically longing for a home they had never personally experienced.²² This kind of “restorative nostalgia,” as Svetlana Boym has termed it, “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition,” a return to origins story.²³ For many Jewish DPs in Italy, the drive to “rebuild the lost home” meant not only moving to Palestine but also participating in the invented traditions of the new settlement, learning Hebrew and gaining agricultural skills.²⁴ They would have likely agreed with Boym’s assessment that “displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. Never mind if it’s not your home; by the time you reach it, you will have already forgotten the difference.”²⁵ Moving to their new homeland felt like returning home they said, even though the vast majority of DPs had never been there. Palestine was to be the cure for their displacement and fear, and being in Italy made that homeland feel as if it were in their sights.

Getting to Italy, however, took some work. The Jewish Agency for Palestine, started in 1908, was the primary organization located in Palestine responsible for *aliyah*.²⁶ After the war, the Jewish Agency helped with the logistics of clandestine

²⁰ Elimelech Bari, Interview number 8887/564 in Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” page 20, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

²² For more on this idea see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2008).

²³ Ibid., xviii.

²⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁵ Ibid., 44.

²⁶ Hebrew: *HaSochnut HaYehudit L'Eretz Yisra'el*. Zionist in its inception, the Jewish Agency broadened

immigration, especially that which fell outside the British mandate. The British blockade and quota limitations meant that for refugees hoping to make *aliyah*, clandestine or illegal routes were often the only means to try to emigrate. Attempting to make their way out of Europe, the majority of Jewish DPs entered Italy through the mountain passes in the northeast border, especially the Brenner pass. Most received help from the Zionist organization *Brichah* (Hebrew for “escape” or “flight”), which created a network to facilitate the organized movement of Jews from Eastern Europe to Palestine.²⁷ Started in July 1945 by surviving partisans in Vilna, *Brichah* helped thousands of Jewish DPs travel, often without the necessary paperwork, from Poland, through the US occupied zones of Germany and Austria and then on to Palestine, often using Italy as a way point in their journey. The *Brichah* was a well-known operation amongst DPs. When asked how one would connect with *Brichah*, Jack Ahrens, a DP from Belarus simply said, “You just knew it, you just knew it, that’s all.”²⁸ Estimates vary widely, but more than 100,000 refugees escaped from the East to Palestine through *Brichah*.²⁹

Once refugees reached the Italian border, *Brichah* guides and Jewish Brigade soldiers, often working with Italian officials, helped facilitate their entry into the country.³⁰ The Jewish Brigade Group of the British Army, only formally established in

its donor and volunteer base in 1929 to include non-Zionists, particularly those interested in philanthropic rather than political Jewish representation. The Jewish Agency started as the Zionist Commission, later became the Palestine Zionist Executive, and then the Jewish Agency for Palestine as provided in the League of Nations’ Palestine Mandate. After the war, the Jewish Agency helped with the logistics of clandestine immigration, especially that which fell outside the British mandate.

²⁷ An alternate form of the word is *Berihah*. For more on its origins see Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970).

²⁸ Oral History Interview with Jack Ahrens (January 27, 1999), RG-50.549.02.0037, Tape 2, Side A, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

²⁹ Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (Yale University Press, 2015), 129-130.

³⁰ For more on the Italians and *Brichah* see Eva Pfanzelter, “Between Brenner and Bari: Jewish Refugees in Italy 1945 to 1948,” in *Escape through Austria: Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine*, ed.

September 1944, was a military unit under the command of Brigadier Ernest Benjamin.³¹ Consisting nearly entirely of Jews from Palestine, there were approximately 5,000 soldiers in the Brigade. They fought primarily in Italy, moving from the southern regions to the north, helping to liberate the country from Nazi-occupation. In May 1945, the Jewish Brigade finally made it to the northeastern portion of Italy, where they began to encounter Jewish refugees, survivors of the Holocaust who had been told Italy was the best path to Palestine. Stationed along the Italo-Austrian and Italo-Yugoslavian borders, the Brigade both assisted with the *Brichah* movement and helped set up camps for Jewish refugees in Italy. These groups made migration out of Europe a possible, albeit often illegal, option for many Jewish refugees, but this fact alone does not explain why they chose to travel on land through ex-enemy territory in order to leave.

Why Go Through Italy?

This section demonstrates that it was, at least in part, specifically because of Italy's complicated history of antisemitism before and under Fascism, its nebulous wartime experience, especially its uneven treatment of Jews prior to 1943, and its postwar connection to Britain that many Jews felt it was the country to travel to. It shows that foreign Jews and Italian Jews often felt very differently about Italy; for many foreign Jews, Italy was the country that saved them, whereas many Italian Jews felt betrayed by the country they no longer felt a part of. A desire to find a home in the postwar period,

Thomas Albrich and Ronald W Zweig (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), 83–104; Arie J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 235–256.

³¹ Before the formal establishment of the Brigade, Jewish battalions and regiments from Palestine fought alongside the British in Greece in 1941 and in Egypt and North Africa in 1942. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Jewish Brigade Group,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-brigade-group> Accessed on July 17, 2020.

however, led many within both the DP and Italian Jewish communities to rely on help from the Italians.

Italian Antisemitism: A Complicated Question

“Is the king Jewish?” [Leo] asked quickly.

To Leo, the king was an extraordinary person that thought and did all good things; and therefore, if his grandpa, grandma, daddy, and mama were Jewish, then it seemed to Leo that the king should also be Jewish. He was not happy when his mama told him that the king was not Jewish but Catholic, like many of those who spoke Italian; it didn’t feel right to Leo that the king did not think of God like his daddy or grandpa. But his mama also told him that God was the same to all people, and that people just thought about him in different ways. Then Leo was happy.³²

In 1909, *Leo e Lia. Storia di due bimbi italiani con una governante inglese* (*Leo and Lia: The Story of Two Italian children with their English Governess*) appeared on store bookshelves and quickly became a leading seller.³³ It was a collection of morality tales based on the experiences of Italian Jewish author Laura Orvieto and her children’s adventures with their English governess. The stories of Leo and Lia enjoyed popular success in Italy and abroad and were included on school reading lists across the country. And until 1929, they faced no problems with the Fascist censors.³⁴

³² Laura Orvieto, *Leo e Lia: storia di due bimbi italiani con una governante inglese*, (Florence: Bemporad, 1909). Written under the pseudonym Mrs.El.

³³ Caterina Del Vivo. “‘La storia del mondo è fatta di tante storie.’ Mondo classico e tradizione ebraica nella narrativa di Laura Orvieto” *Antologia Vieusseux* n. 43, (2009): 5-6.

³⁴ Her *Storie della storia del mondo* series of these books, which tell the history of the ancient world, was translated into multiple languages and has remained standard children’s reading in Italy to this day. Three in the series were written before 1929 and one after. The last, published in 1933, enjoyed very little commercial success. *Storie della storia del mondo. Greche e barbare*, (Firenze, Bemporad, 1911), *Storie della storia del mondo. Beppe racconta la guerra*, (Florence, Bemporad 1925), *Storie della storia del mondo. Il natale di Roma*, (Firenze, Bemporad, 1928), *Storie della storia del mondo. La forza di Roma*, (Firenze, Bemporad, 1933).

On February 11, 1929 the Catholic Church signed a Concordat with the State of Italy, accepting its nationhood for the first time.³⁵ The following day, Orvieto's editor, Enrico Bemporad, sent her a letter informing her of necessary changes to *Leo e Lia* for the reprint due out later that year.³⁶ Initially inserted in a three-line letter discussing the latest proofs of the book, Bemporad's second sentence almost casually stated that the chapter "Il re è ebreo?" ("Is the King Jewish?") must be "suppressed for various reasons."³⁷ In this chapter, young Leo, after spending a day at the synagogue with his father, asks his mother if the Italian king is Jewish. He has discovered that his father and his grandfather, two men he thinks highly of, are Jewish, and therefore believes all good men must be Jewish. His mother gently corrects him, stating that the king is good, but is not Jewish; but this pacification was not enough for the editor wary of newly instated censorship.³⁸

The "various reasons" Orvieto's editor gave for not publishing this chapter were spelled out in a later letter that claimed, "no elementary school library would buy your book. For no other reason than that in that chapter all the protagonists are Jewish, which could naturally be pleasing to the protagonists...but is not commercial."³⁹ Orvieto was

³⁵ For more on the Concordat in relation to Mussolini and the Fascist government, see Frank J. Coppa "Mussolini and the Concordat of 1929" in *Controversial Concordats: The Vatican's Relations with Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler*, ed. Frank J. Coppa (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 81-120.

³⁶ Caterina Del Vivo. "'La storia del mondo è fatta di tante storie.' Mondo classico e tradizione ebraica nella narrativa di Laura Orvieto" *Antologia Vieusseux* n. 43, (2009): 7.

³⁷ Enrico Bemporad, who had inherited the publishing house from his father and uncle, was both Jewish and a committed Fascist. He died in hiding in 1944. Lettera di «R. Bemporad & figlio editori» a L. Orvieto, Firenze 12 febbraio 1929, Archivio Contemporaneo del Gabinetto Vieusseux, (ACGV), *Fondo Orvieto* OR.5.1.9; Caterina Del Vivo, "'La storia del mondo è fatta di tante storie.' Mondo classico e tradizione ebraica nella narrativa di Laura Orvieto" *Antologia Vieusseux* n. 43, (2009): 7.

³⁸ Or.5.1.9: Corrispondenza a Laura Orvieto da parte della casa editrice Bemporad, relativa ai pagamenti dei diritti, agli aspetti redazionali, alle traduzioni delle sue opere ecc.; 1923-1934. ACGV. *Fondo Orvieto*.

³⁹ Lettera di «R. Bemporad & figlio editori» a L. Orvieto, Firenze 12 febbraio 1929, ACGV, *Fondo Orvieto* OR.5.1.9.

astounded; she wrote back that she would understand how two other chapters—those devoted to promoting a form of religious syncretism—would offend national religious sentiments, but said Judaism was not offensive to Christianity.⁴⁰ This view that understands Judaism and Christianity to be on friendly terms has long historical precedent; in post-emancipation Italy, relations between the two groups had encouraged assimilation, claiming, at least in theory and often in practice, equal rights for all. Bemporad's letters created an assault on this friendly agreement, one that prompted Orvieto to re-examine her understanding of Jewishness and what place it had in her writing life.

This reassessment of their place in society would have been familiar to many Jews in Italy as their situation changed dramatically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the beginning of the 1800s, all Jews lived in ghettos, enclosed from the predominantly Christian world around them.⁴¹ The Italian attitude of suspicion around Jews began to slowly change in the nineteenth-century as prominent city-states, such as Piedmont, emancipated their Jewish populations and welcomed them into the greater Italian society. Not all city-states desired Jewish emancipation, however, and thus the question during unification became what to do with the Jews.⁴² The closing of the final

⁴⁰ Caterina Del Vivo, “‘La storia del mondo è fatta di tante storie:’ mondo classico e tradizione ebraica nella narrativa di Laura Orvieto,” 7; C.I. Salviati, «*Sor Enrico*». *Ritratto di un grande editore, in Paggi e Bemporad editori per la scuola. Libri per leggere, scrivere e far di conto*, (Firenze: Giunti 2007), 44.

⁴¹ In sixteenth-century Venice, Christian rulers fearing the influence of the Jewish heretics enclosed the entire Jewish community in a walled off portion of the city. The word “ghetto” in Italian simply means “foundry” and the Jews were said to live in the “ghetto” because they lived in what used to be an old factory. The word did not obtain the negative connotations it has today until mid-seventeenth century as other ghettos were created across the region. See Steve Siporin, “A Map to the World’s First Ghetto” in *The Italian Jewish Experience*, ed. Thomas P. DiNapoli (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum, 2000), 1–10.

⁴² Cristina M. Bettin, *Italian Jews from Emancipation to the Racial Laws* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), see especially chapter 2 “Assimilation or Integration of the Jews in Italy.” See also Franco Della Peruta “Gli Ebrei nel Risorgimento fra Interdizioni ed Emancipazione” in Ed. C. Vivanti, *Storia d’Italia. Annali 11. Gli Ebrei in Italia 2. Dall’emancipazione a oggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997) 1161–1170.

Jewish ghetto in Rome in 1870 during the *Risorgimento*, or the unification of Italy, represented the newly unified government's decision to create one assimilated society. Many Jews heeded the call to integrate into Italian society, although some for work or family reasons, particularly in large cities such as Rome where work was often hard to find, continued to live in their communities in the old ghettos. This would prove disastrous under the Republic of Salò, the Nazi-Fascist regime in the northern half of Italy from 1943, because these large communities made it easier to round up any and all Jews quickly and thoroughly in a given city. The emancipation of Rome became a turning point in Italy's quest to become a more liberal and accepting state, and many Jews were loyal supporters of the new state.⁴³ While some may have genuinely desired national integration, Jews and many other social minorities feared what would happen if they chose not to assimilate. *Italianità*, the true nature of what it meant to be Italian, then became closely identified with a united culture. While the *Risorgimento* did not solve all problems regarding national identity, *italianità* offered many Jews a clearer way to fit into society.⁴⁴

In the early twentieth century, Jews were demographically overrepresented in politics and education.⁴⁵ They were a small percentage of the overall Italian population, about one-tenth of one percent, yet they held more positions of power than their size

⁴³ Derek Edward Dawson Beales and Eugenio F Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 93–94.

⁴⁴ Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna Clara Von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 8–9; here the authors point out that racism persisted in the South much more strongly than in the North, which Nelson Moe in his chapter, “‘This is Africa’: Ruling and Representing Southern Italy, 1860–61” (119–154), argues comes from the South's need to assert some power in light of the North's vision of the South as the country's “Africa” (120), by which they meant its inferior state.

⁴⁵ In 1938, the Fascist government conducted a census of all Jews in Italy by city and region. The results of this census showed a population of roughly 47,000 Jews in Italy. Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 5, 113.

would suggest. They also served in the battles for unification and in the First World War in higher percentages than the majority population. In general, Italian Jews were the most assimilated of all minority groups in Italy. Unlike many other Western European countries, Italy lacked a formal antisemitic political party during the late nineteenth century and before World War I had already had three Jewish prime ministers: Alessandro Fortis (1905–1906), Sidney Sonnino (1906, 1909–1910), and Luigi Luzzatti (1910–1911).⁴⁶

With the advent of Fascism, “being Italian” meant being Fascist. Jews were no exception, and from the early rise of Mussolini until 1938, many joined the Fascist party and quite a few held positions of leadership within the government; in the early 1930s, roughly one-third of the Jewish population in Italy were registered Fascists, the same numbers as the rest of the population.⁴⁷ Yet, the Jewish question over antisemitism within society continued to rage in Italy as print media captured the changing stance of the government during the 1930s. The newspaper *La Nostra Bandiera* (*Our Flag*), founded in 1934, presented Jewish loyalty to the state as “equal to [the loyalty of] all other citizens, especially in our duties toward the Fatherland.”⁴⁸ In 1936 the Fascist-authorized *Enciclopedia Italiana* defined race as follows: “There is no Italian race, therefore, but only an Italian people and an Italian nation. There is neither a Jewish race nor nation, but only a Jewish people; and, the most serious error of them all, there is no Aryan race, but

⁴⁶ Sonnino was born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother and was raised Anglican. F H. Adler, “Jew As Bourgeois, Jew As Enemy, Jew As Victim of Fascism,” *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 3 (2008): 311.

⁴⁷ Michele Sarfatti proves through some extensive archival work that “Jews joined the [Partito Nazionale Fascista] just like other Italians.” Michele Sarfatti, “Italy’s Fascist Jews: Insights on an Unusual Scenario,” *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n.11, October 2017.

⁴⁸ Ettore Ovazza, “An End to Ambiguity” as seen in Alexander Stille, “An Italian Jewish-Fascist Editor: Ettore Ovazza and *La Nostra Bandiera*” in *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American & International Journalism During the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, N.J.: Yeshiva Univ. Press in association with KTAV Pub. House, 2003), 321.

only an Aryan civilization and Aryan languages.”⁴⁹ This appeared to support the Jewish claim that they were equal and full citizens, since by living in Italy, they could be counted as part of the “Italian people” and “Italian nation.” It also, however, effectively erased any distinctive Jewishness in favor of a more generic, Eurocentric category.

However, by 1938, Fascist beliefs about national identity changed, and Mussolini passed the first in a series of racial laws, which limited Jewish access to education and work.⁵⁰ Mussolini’s own stance toward Jews and racial politics changed frequently during the 1930s, from supporting Zionists to adopting a pro-Arab, anti-Jewish position. These changes have provoked debates among scholars regarding the impetus for passing the racial laws in Italy. Many argue that the racial laws stem directly from Mussolini’s desire to be seen as equal to Hitler; it is also clear, however, that Mussolini’s disastrous and deadly campaigns in Ethiopia were a turning point in his racial ideology.⁵¹ The newspaper *La Difesa della Razza* (*The Defense of the Race*) in particular used both artwork and “scientific” facts, such as the infamous *Manifesto degli Scienziati Razzisti* (*Manifesto of the Racial Scientists*), to convince its readers of the innate differences between Italians and “others,” including African and Jewish populations.⁵² Seen by many

⁴⁹ Giacchino Sera, “Race,” *Enciclopedia Italiana*, vol. 27 (Rome: 1935) quoted in Joshua D. Zimmermann, ed. *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 152.

⁵⁰ For full text of the racial laws in Italy see Renzo De Felice, *Jews in Fascist Italy: A History*, (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 748–51.

⁵¹ For more on this debate see Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941–1943* (New York: Routledge, 1990) in contrast with Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German–Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy, 1922–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and on the war in Ethiopia see Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy: From Equality to Persecution* (Madison, Wis: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 110–115.

⁵² For full text of the *Manifesto degli Scienziati Razzisti* see Renzo De Felice, *Jews in Fascist Italy: A History*, 264; written by Mussolini university assistants, the document claimed to have scientific backing for the biological differences between Italians and Jews. It was first published on July 14, 1938, and within days over 180 scientists signed their approval on its accuracy and it was re-published in *La Difesa della Razza* with these signatures attached.

as the start of the public, official antisemitic campaign, the Manifesto defined Jews as an “unassimilable population composed of non-European racial elements,” whereas non-Jewish Italians were, according to Mussolini, “Aryans of the pure Mediterranean type.”⁵³ The Jews were thus a foreign and pathological other from which Italian culture must be cleansed; they were proclaimed a “backward” element within society that was keeping Italy from finding its place among the “modernized” nations.⁵⁴

Yet, although Italian policies were antisemitic, the practices were not as stringent as those of the Nazis. Starting in 1938, Mussolini passed a great number of racial measures that limited the freedom of the Jews; yet, until German occupation of the northern half of the country in September 1943, the Fascists did not deport any Jews from Italy to Germany or any other country, despite repeated appeals for their deportation by Hitler. In Italian-occupied areas of France and Greece, Italian soldiers also refused to hand over any Jews to the German army. The antifascist coup of 1943, however, quickly changed things for the Jews, as leaders ousted Mussolini on July 25, 1943 and replaced him with Pietro Badoglio as their new prime minister.⁵⁵ The capitulation of General Badoglio’s regime to the Allied forces on September 8, 1943, began what Luciano Morpurgo aptly titled his memoir the *Caccia all’uomo*, or the hunt for the Jews.⁵⁶ Left vulnerable to attack by an ill-timed surrender and an unprepared Allied force, northern and central Italy were swiftly overtaken and occupied by the Germans, who returned Mussolini to power in the puppet state the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (the Italian Social

⁵³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ For more on this idea of antisemitism as “anti-backwardness” see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 22–26 and especially chapter 5.

⁵⁵ For more information see Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*. (Einaudi, 1961); and in English Renzo De Felice, *Jews in Fascist Italy: A History*, (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 748

⁵⁶ Luciano Morpurgo, *Caccia all’Uomo! Vita Sofferenze e Beffe: Pagine di Diario 1938–1944* (Roma: Dalmatia, 1946).

Republic, alternately called the Republic of Salò, RSI) and immediately began deportations of all Jews, foreign and Italian.

Italy's Complex Wartime Relations with Foreign Jews

The initial uneven implementation of the racial laws, however, paradoxically encouraged many foreign Jews especially from Germany and Austria to make their way to Italy in the 1930s in hope of a relatively safe haven; Italy soon became a “*rifugio precario*” or a precarious refuge for thousands of non-Italian Jewish individuals and families which continued even after the start of the Italian racial laws.⁵⁷ Born in Austria, Gertrude (Kopfstein) Goetz and her family emigrated to Italy on a transit visa in 1939 with the expectation that they would continue on to the United States.⁵⁸ Goetz’s father had been arrested after *Kristallnacht*, the assault on Jewish lives and livelihoods on November 10, 1938. Ultimately, because the family held an affidavit for the United States, he was released from the Dachau concentration camp under condition that they leave the country. They arrived in an Italy crowded with foreigners all of whom were denied the right to work and thus depended on the local Jewish community and under the table employment; Goetz’s mother, for example, became a cleaning person for a wealthy Jewish family.⁵⁹ Unable to enter the United States despite their affidavit, Goetz’s family ultimately spent the entire war in Italy in a variety of spaces. For two years her father was imprisoned in Milan and later sent to the camp in Ferramonti di Tarsia, a fact she attributes to their ultimate survival as this move put them in the southern region of Italy

⁵⁷ Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario: gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945* (La Nuova Italia, 1996).

⁵⁸ Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness*.

⁵⁹ Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness*, 36–38.

and thus out of the German occupied RSI in the North. Finally able to leave Milan, the family was reunited in the central town of Castilenti where they lived under the watchful eye of police until clashes between the Allies and the Germans forced them to seek refuge in the nearby mountains.

The internment Goetz and her family faced in Italy was a common story. On June 20, 1943, five days after Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, the Italian Ministry of the Interior ordered the arrest and internment of all foreign Jews throughout the peninsula. By early 1943 nearly all of these foreign Jews were placed under house arrest in small villages under the custody of Italian police or interned in one of the 48 concentration camps in operation throughout Italy. These camps were created primarily in malaria-ridden areas in the South that had formerly been empty and in barracks and other large buildings rented from the Catholic Church in the North. In these camps foreign Jews were often forced to work without pay but were not deported.⁶⁰

Hearing of the Allied takeover of Italy in mid-1943 while working in Nice, France, Louis Goldman hurried to join the rest of his family in Saint-Martin-Vesubie in the Italian-occupied zone of southern France. Believing, correctly as they were soon to see, that the Germans were intent on overtaking the region, the Goldman family, along with about five hundred other Jewish refugees from all across Europe began the long arduous journey over the Alps into the promised land of Italy. However, instead of the Allied troops they expected to see, they were greeted by deserting Italian soldiers, running just as they themselves were from the Germans. Goldman recounts stories of Italian soldiers desperate to rid themselves of their fatigues, trading most of their food

⁶⁰ C.S. Capogreco, *I campi del duce. L'internamento civile nell'Italia Fascista (1940–1943)* (Turin 2004); see in particular the annex with a map and individual descriptions of the camps, 251–78.

and telltale army clothes for an equally desperate fleeing Jew's civilian outfit.⁶¹ After expecting a place of safety, some Jews, many of whom had been on the run for much of the war from places as remote as Poland or Holland, turned themselves in to the Germans, too discouraged to run any further. For those like the Goldmans, with at least minimal strength left, the hills and forests of northern Italy offered some degree of shelter. In some places, local partisan or resistance groups assisted the Jews for as long as they safely could; in Louis Goldman's case, he was able to connect with a family in one of the local villages, sending down the younger boys to capture any food they could. Only after a few weeks in the mountains were they able to find a newspaper that Mrs. Wallach, a fellow Jewish refugee and the only one in the group who spoke or read even minimal Italian, could translate. It was then that they discovered the Allied takeover was only complete up until Naples; the rest of the country remained in the hands of the RSI controlled by the Nazis.⁶²

The Goldman story was not unique. Between September 8 and 13, 1943, 1200–1300 Jews from France and 5,000–6,000 from Switzerland, many of whom had been traveling for months from other occupied territories, managed the trek over the Alps, flooding the Italian countryside and cities in desperate search for refuge.⁶³ Numbers remain a complicated question, but it appears that roughly 10,000 foreign Jews were interned in Italy throughout the course of the war.⁶⁴ Following the advent of the racial laws in 1938, thousands of Italian Jews chose to emigrate to other countries, especially

⁶¹ Louis Goldman, *Friends for Life: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor and His Rescuers* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 8–9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 11–16.

⁶³ L. Fargion Picciotto, *Il Libro Della Memoria: Gli Ebrei Deportati Dall'Italia (1943–1945)* (Milano: Mursia, 1991), 805.

⁶⁴ Anna Pizzuti, "Ebrei stranieri internati in Italia durante il periodo bellico," <http://www.annapizzuti.it/> Accessed July 17, 2020.

the Americas; many more Italian Jews, however, remained in Italy, some because they continued to view Italy as their homeland, and others because they simply could not leave. Research shows that approximately 30,000 to 35,000 Jews (6,500–7,000 of whom were foreign Jews) lived in Italy under the authority of the Allies in the south and the RSI in the north in 1943. By the end of the war, 8,869 Jews had been deported from Italy and its areas of control, and of these, 7,557 did not live to see liberation.⁶⁵

Postwar Connections to the British

Zvi Miller, a Jewish refugee from Romania, wanted to make *aliyah* more than anything but was forced because of the British blockade and quota to remain for longer than he wanted in Europe. While living in the Santa Maria di Bagni DP camp in the heel of Italy, in 1945-46, he spent a large portion of his time painting. The product of this painting were three large murals that covered the walls of a small house several meters from the sea. The first mural depicts a young woman with two children attempting to enter Palestine but being blocked by a British soldier. The second mural shows a map of Italy and Palestine; there is barbed wire all along the edge of Italy with the word “exile” written in Hebrew over Europe. The arrow from “exile” points to a bridge that extends from Southern Italy to “Eretz Yisroel,” a bridge that is full of individuals joyfully and triumphantly stepping into through a Star of David into Palestine. The final mural illustrates two Palestinian Jewish soldiers standing guard to a menorah inside a star of David. The moral of the story was clear here: British soldiers may have command now, but eventually Jewish refugees will prevail. One of the more interesting things about the

⁶⁵ L. Fargion Picciotto, *Il Libro Della Memoria*, 26, 805.

murals is that they portray the “villain” in their story as the British, not the Italian soldier, nor the former German enemy.

Italian national control was complicated in the postwar period. Following its capitulation in 1943, Italy fell under the control of the Allied Commission, which slowly worked to free the Nazi-occupied north. Following its complete liberation in April 1945 until the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, Italy formally remained under the auspices of the Anglo-American Allied Control Council. The council, largely dominated by the British, allowed a mixture of self-governance and international policy control in Italy.⁶⁶ In Italy, the British faced two primary issues with the Jewish DPs: first, their illegal entry into the country from the north or from across the sea from Yugoslavia, and second, their attempted departures by sea for Palestine.

The presence of Jewish DPs in Italy greatly complicated matters for the British. Jewish DPs were typically only passing through Italy on their way to Mandatory Palestine, but the British had closed off nearly all immigration to Palestine following the White Paper of May 1939, which remained in place until 1948. The White Paper was intended to convince the Arabs to support the British during the impending World War. It promised the creation of an Arab-majority Palestinian state within ten years. It also curtailed both Jewish immigration, limiting it to seventy-five thousand Jews over five years, and also Jewish landownership. The latter two limits remained in place, but no real

⁶⁶ In 1945, three political groups became prominent: the Christian Democrat Party (DC), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). And in 1946, following the general election, democracy won replacing the more traditional monarchy as the official form of government and the DC and the PSI were given joint control of the country with the PCI in a secondary role until elections could be held in 1948. The constituent election of 1946 led to a Christian Democrat victory only 15% higher than Socialist party and 17% above the Communist party, leading to a three party rule for nearly two years. For more see Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Sabina Donati, *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

steps were taken to create an independent Palestine. In the early years after the war, the British continued to maintain that the problem of the Jews from Europe and the Palestine Question were two distinct issues, the same policy they had had regarding Palestine since the 1930s.⁶⁷ Britain's priority was to safeguard its own economic and political interests in the Middle East and the Arab world. The manifold increase of Jews immigration to Palestine in the years following Hitler's rise to power in Germany—over 130,000 Jewish immigrants arrived from Europe in the first three years alone, representing an eighty percent increase in the Jewish population of Palestine—and the ensuing Arab revolts culminated in the British tightening restrictions on Jewish immigration to the region.⁶⁸ And this tightening continued in the postwar period, as the British continued to refuse to increase the number of Jewish immigrants allowed into Palestine. This meant that they also refused to reconsider their position on Palestine as a viable option for a new Jewish homeland, despite their role in producing the prevailing conflicting circumstances.

The British were particularly frustrated by the actions of the Italians regarding the illegal Jewish immigration. The Italians, however, found themselves, in the words of Jacob Markovizky, “between Scylla and Charybdis.”⁶⁹ This time, the ancient sea gods surrounding the Mediterranean peninsula were the British government and the ghost of Italy's own Fascist past. Attempting to curry favor in the international community for humanitarian actions, the Italians felt they could not close the northern borders, as it would appear to be an anti-Jewish policy.⁷⁰ Still under the control of the Allied Council,

⁶⁷ Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, for more on the White Paper see especially the Introduction.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7. Kochavi notes that only twenty-four thousand Jews were able to immigrate to Palestine between 1937 and 1938.

⁶⁹ Jacob Markovizky, “The Italian Government's Response to the Problem of Jewish Refugees 1945–1948*,” *Journal of Israeli History* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 23–39.

⁷⁰ Silvia Salvatici, *Senza casa e senza paese: profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra*, vol. 1 (Il mulino, 2008), 3; see also her article addressing this topic S. Salvatici, “Between National and International

Italian government authorities worked in tandem with the British, but mostly ignored the British call to tighten the borders against both illegal immigration and emigration. Italy did not shoulder the economic burden of the Jewish refugees while they were in the country, giving the Italian authorities little incentive to work harder to stop them from entering. They also recognized that the Jewish DPs largely entered solely with the intention of leaving, so they simultaneously extended little effort to stopping ships from leaving. Instead, they frequently turned a blind eye to the entry and exit of Jewish “infiltrates,” making Italy a preferred destination for those seeking to make *aliyah*.⁷¹

Without the Italian help, the British were unsuccessful in closing the borders for those entering the country, but by the end of 1945, they had blockaded the sea routes to Palestine. Despite this blockade, nearly 21,000 out of the 50,000 Jewish DPs housed in Italy arrived in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. The Italian section of *Mossad le Aliyah Bet*, the immigration branch of the pre-state Zionist military organization the *Haganah*, was the organization responsible for the clandestine departures for Palestine; between 1945 and 1948, under the direction of the *Mossad le Aliyah Bet*, fifty-six boats sailed from Europe to Palestine, thirty-four of them from Italy.⁷²

Zvi Miller’s murals depicted a typical path for Eastern and Central European Jews attempting to leave Europe for Palestine between 1945 and 1948. For those wanting to make *aliyah*, the time spent in Italy grew wearisome. The barbed wire that surrounded

Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Italy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 514–36.

⁷¹ Jacob Markovitzky, “The Italian Government’s Response to the Problem of Jewish Refugees 1945–1948,” 23, 25.

⁷² Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 6; Arie J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 235. M. Toscano, *La “Porta di Sion”. L’Italia e l’immigrazione clandestina ebraica in Palestina (1945–1948)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 7.

Italy in Miller's painting kept a great many confined as the possibility of crossing over the bridge to Palestine felt farther and farther away. Yet, even within these spaces, refugees were able to advocate for themselves, to bring back some measure of cultural activities and to protest against felt injustices, as will be discussed in detail in chapters three and four, respectively. Miller's very murals offer a glimpse of what this activity often entailed. This self-advocacy often began from the moment of registration, a process that granted identification and a path forward.

Changing One's Own Story: Benjamin Markowitz's Determination for Palestine

Refugee camps were spaces of classification, both official and unofficial.

International voluntary agencies and national governments conferred status—eligible, ineligible, protected, illegal—on migrants while the migrants often classified themselves, sometimes in opposition to other migrants and other times to declare themselves part of a group despite not having the paperwork to prove it. These schemas of classification were critical in the displaced persons camps after the Second World War.

Refugees often changed the information they gave about themselves in order to achieve the most favorable outcomes. Many refugees had learned that from the concentration camps that lying about one's age—old enough to work, young enough not to be a liability—could literally save one's life: this lesson was not forgotten in the DP camps. For example, when resettlement privileges were given to the young, men with beards and women who also appeared too mature to be under eighteen claimed they were. But it was not just ages that were changed; nationalities, names, and wartime experiences could all shift depending on the situation and the relative dangers or comforts the refugee

felt in their current situation. These kinds of factual inaccuracies, which we will explore below, make piecing together a narrative difficult for the historian, but there is much to be gained from examining both what is said and why that answer might have been given. As part of an interactive exchange, these interviews allowed the refugees to self-define, potentially changing their own pasts to create a new future. This section explores the negotiating process of classification and attempted agency by closely examining the life of one refugee whose forms tell a story similar to that of so many in the DP camps.

The form has yellowed and torn with age, some portions almost too faded to make out the words, but in June 1946, this United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) form was a lifeline for Benjamin Markowitz.⁷³ Markowitz, born in 1930, was sixteen years old when he sat in a room at his then home in a DP youth home in Selvino, Italy, filling out the UNRRA forms with a social worker. At the end of the war, UNRRA created these registration forms to document the process of registering for assistance.⁷⁴ Committed to a policy of individualism, an UNRRA representative interviewed each refugee separately and composed an Application for Assistance for each. The form was double-sided and folded down the middle widthwise before use; on it were 34 questions, some with multiple parts, that gave a complete background for the individual, ranging from citizenship to work and education history to future plans and desires. This form was the principal document used to determine the eligibility of the

⁷³ CM/1 Form for Benjamin Markowitz, 3.2.1.2/80425850/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁷⁴ These registration forms, currently housed at the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany, contain “detailed personal history and biographical information...completed by postwar refugees for the International Refugee Organization to qualify and receive support as a ‘Displaced Person.’” For more on the International Tracing Service, now called the Arolsen Archives, see Definitions from William C. Connelly, *Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations Found in the Archive of the International Tracing Service (ITS)*. (Washington, D.C: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Center, 2011).

applicant for refugee and/or displaced person status; it also impacted accessibility to various forms of aid including shelter, clothing, food, and assistance with repatriation. Over half the form was taken up by questions of work experience, training, and future goals. The forms asked for marital status (questions 8–10) and the age and sex of dependents (questions 11, 27), demonstrating a recognition that families may be moving together; they did not ask for the names of either spouses or children, which may indicate that tracking relatives was not a primary concern for UNRAA in the beginning, although it became a concern during the later stages.

The forms may have been intended for an adult audience, as perhaps UNRRA expected refugees to be single adults or families, not unaccompanied minors. And yet, their individualist ideology manifest as a commitment to interview each person, regardless of age, to determine their status for care and assistance. Scrawled in large block letters covering the space of two lines of text, “ORPHAN” is the clearest word on most unaccompanied minors’ applications. Its central location on the page, detached from any corresponding question, make this word a defining marker of their identity, at least in the mind of the welfare worker filling out the form. This word also demonstrates a glaring omission on the part of the creators of the UNRRA form, namely a space to mark parental fate. The children then were treated as adults, in that they received their own interviews, but the addition of “orphan” clearly marked them as children, indeed children without an adult guardian to make decisions on their behalf.

Markowitz’s form was very similar to that of other children in the *hachshara* children’s center he lived in called Selvino: an orphan, educated in primary school from 1936 to 1942, he claimed Hungarian nationality but had no documents, and while his

German was “passable,” perhaps picked up while an inmate in Birkenau or Buchenwald, he preferred to converse in Hungarian.⁷⁵ These four documents detail what we know of Markovitz’s life: the UNRRA questionnaire he filled out in Selvino on June 24, 1946, the blank questionnaire with his name, protocol number, and school class (3) filled in, his International Refugee Organization (IRO, successor to UNNRA) registration control book that he received in Milan on September 29, 1947, and the IRO questionnaire he filled out in Avigliana on December 19, 1947. He did not answer any questions on the questionnaire that was sent to Selvino.⁷⁶ His control book, a small booklet given to refugees to record their basic identifying features and to keep track of replacement items given to the holder, described some of the items Markovitz received in April 1948 including a jacket, undershirt, pair of stockings, and wool drawers and contains a photograph of the young Markovitz. The control book offers little more information, but it tells us that he was still under broader Milanese supervision in September 1947.⁷⁷ But by December 1947 he had moved southwest to the camp in Avigliana near Turin and again filled out a form with a social worker, this time the blue form of the IRO.⁷⁸ Although much of the information remained the same, when examined together, the two registration questionnaires contain several discrepancies and facts that may help us make sense of a larger, more common DP trajectory.

⁷⁵ The Youth Aliyah children’s home in Selvino was set up in 1945 in a former Fascist boarding school in the Alps northeast of Milan. The home is discussed in greater detail in chapter five of this dissertation.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Markowicz Response, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1934 (1934–1948)*, b. 44Q, f. 71 sf. “Selvino Classe I - II - III - IV- V – VI.”

⁷⁷ CM/1 Form for Benjamin Markowitz, 3.2.1.2/80425851/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

⁷⁸ CM/1 Form for Benjamin Markowitz, 3.2.1.2/80425849/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

The UNRRA and IRO Application for Assistance forms agree on this narrative of Benjamin Markowitz's life: he was born on March 8, 1930 in Berechowo (likely Berehove, then in Czechoslovakia), to a Jewish family that claimed Hungarian citizenship. He completed at least five years of primary school and was fluent in Hungarian. In 1943 he was arrested and deported to Birkenau where he was a forced laborer until he was transferred in 1944 to Buchenwald. After the arrival of liberating forces in Buchenwald,⁷⁹ Markowitz was taken to the newly converted UNRRA DP camp at Bergen-Belsen. From here he made his way, alone or as part of a Youth Aliyah group, to Selvino and ultimately to Avigliana where all records of him vanish. He is marked officially "AWOL" on October 10, 1948. Throughout Markowitz's journey in Italy his desire to emigrate to Palestine never wavered.

For an organization tasked with repatriation duties, UNRRA appeared not to have fully understood the situation of minorities within their camps. Question 20 on the form listed "impediments to repatriation" offering the following checkboxes beneath it: "home government; awaiting tracing of relatives; awaiting completion of studies; awaiting foreign exchange; uncertainty of economic condition; other." The final "other" naturally left open a wide variety of responses, but also makes it apparent that UNRRA did not

⁷⁹ April 11, 1945 continues to be celebrated to this day as the day of salvation for those in Buchenwald. One of the largest concentration camps, Buchenwald was created in 1937 roughly five miles northwest of Weimar to house male prisoners including criminals, political dissidents, Jews, and "asocials." The camp was designated as a forced labor camp, not an extermination camp, but figures indicate that at least 56,000 of 250,000 prisoners died in Buchenwald. The arrival of American forces in early April 1945 spurred the Germans to attempt to evacuate the camp, forcing nearly 28,000 prisoners further east in hopes of maintaining control. Nearly a third of these prisoners died or were killed on this evacuation march, but 21,000 individuals were able to evade Nazi orders and were liberated by US forces on April 11, 1945. When American troops entered the Buchenwald concentration camp they found something they never expected: approximately 1,000 Jewish children hidden within the camp. Danny Ben-Moshe, Andrew Wiseman, and Uri Mizrahi. *The Buchenwald Ball*. Eight Mile Plains, Qld: Distributed by Marcom Projects, 2006. Females were included only in late 1943 or early 1944. Francoise Ouzan, *How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives: France, the United States, and Israel* (Indiana University Press, 2018), 43-52;

fully recognize the complexity of the situation. As we have seen in the Introduction, Jewish refugees numbered roughly 100,000–200,000 of the total DP population in Europe of about a million right after the war.⁸⁰ Most of these Jewish refugees had fled their home countries for fear of continued persecution, and yet, racial threats are not listed as a potential hindrance to repatriation. President of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy and fellow DP himself, Leo Garfunkel strikingly expressed what he termed the “psychological factor” of why DPs refuse to return home:

For [the Jewish refugees] their former homes constitute mass grave-yards. All towns and villages, all fields and forests of those countries are sown with bodies of millions of Jews, who had been shot, strangled, burnt and tortured to death by Nazis before the eyes of those who miraculously succeed in saving their lives. Traces of Jewish blood are still to be seen almost on every wall, tree and stone. The last painful shrieks of fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of Jews still sound in the ears of those living. All will forever remain a living testimony of humiliation and slavery, of race hatred and national persecution which has no precedence in the history of mankind. It is, therefore, absolutely impossible for the Jewish refugees to live in ease in such surroundings and atmosphere, or, that a remnant who would wish to forget the nightmare of the last years, should find a suitable psychological equilibrium to start building a new life and a new home on those old ruins. Such places cannot be points of attraction to the Jewish refugee. One does not build a normal home on a cemetery: a cemetery can only be a place to shed tears and to pray for the souls of the murdered.⁸¹

Garfunkel also includes “national” and “political” factors in his report, claiming that the remaining number of Jews in these regions were so small that there were “no perspectives for any national creation or culture.” His main fear, however, is the attitude of the local population toward Jewish survivors where he argues that “for anyone with human sentiments the reasons must be obvious that such conditions [of continued persecution]

⁸⁰ Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 131-132, 316-317.

⁸¹ “Drafts of report about Jewish refugees in Italy: By Leon Garfunkel, President of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy.” February 1946; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 3, Reel 1.9, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

constitute an important motive for the survivors not to remain in those countries and for the refugees—not to return there.”⁸² The Jews who had made it to Italy from the “graveyards” of Central and Eastern Europe constituted a high percentage of the 50,000 Jewish refugees who ultimately went through Italy; they were highly unlikely to return to their countries of origin willingly because of continued violence, a reality that almost certainly led to the addition of resettlement duties to the mandate of UNRRA’s successor, the IRO.

When the IRO replaced UNRRA in 1947 and the Application for Assistance form remained largely similar but contained some crucial changes. For instance, on the 1947 IRO form, instead of a stock pre-written list of “impediments to repatriation,” the form now asked for an expansion on the reasons one left their home country and why they do not wish to return. It also asked what specific care or assistance was desired: repatriation, resettlement (including where), care and maintenance, and/or legal protection. Benjamin Markowitz desired “resettlement in Palestine” based on continued “racial persecution,” as did a majority of Jewish refugees seeking assistance in Italy and was thus able to answer this way on his IRO form. The 1947 IRO form also changed the question of “claimed nationality” to two questions: current “claimed citizenship” and “former citizenship, if any.” This change allowed those refugees who considered themselves stateless by either forced or voluntary relinquishment of their nationality, to remark on their place of origin. Former citizenship made them easier for concerned relatives to trace but also allowed them to claim a new, if currently undecided, future for themselves distinct from their ancestral home. The IRO form also added two sections regarding financial assistance, the first more general asking about all forms of financial resources within the family and the

⁸² Ibid.

second that asked about previous UNRRA and other agency support. Given the increase in organizational support (largely Zionist in 1947), the IRO form also contained a section asking for membership details with any organization. At the bottom of the form now appeared lines for the signatures of the applicant and the interviewer as well as space for the decision of the IRO.

It was after Markowitz's time in the children's home, Selvino, when he filled out his IRO form in 1947 that we begin to see discrepancies in his story. The first conflict is his place of birth. The UNRRA form, which he filled out upon arrival in Italy in June 1946, stated that he did all of his early schooling in Hungary and that he claimed Hungarian citizenship. Approximately a year later, on his IRO form, he stated that he did his schooling in Poland but still claimed Hungarian citizenship and listed his fluency in Hungarian, German, and Yiddish, notably not Polish. There are several possibilities for this change. The first is that the social worker transcribing Markowitz's questionnaire may have made a mistake. Given the vast number of questionnaires each social worker would have been responsible for, as each refugee was required to have one from every camp they stayed in, this would be understandable. The 1947 IRO form added a question regarding the "town, province, and country of birth," something oddly absent from the UNRRA form. It appears that in answer to the IRO question of both hometown and town of schooling, Markowitz stated Berechowo, a town that is today in Ukraine but before 1914 was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and after the empire's dissolution made part of Czechoslovakia, near the Hungarian border until it was retaken by Hungary in 1939.⁸³ The word "Poland" is darker than the rest of the words on the page. It is possible

⁸³ Five files in the Arolsen Archives contain the location "Berechowo" on them, including Markowitz's. On three of them, the citizenship (former or claimed) is listed as Czechoslovakia and the final one has no

that the IRO welfare worker appended it to the document at a later time after Markowitz had signed it.

Another answer may be that Markowitz was in fact Hungarian—both in nationality and in schooling—or at the very least his parents had felt they were Hungarian, and thus he gave that answer on his first UNRRA form. In the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, citizenship rights would have been determined *jus sanguinis*, that is, citizenship acquired by the nationality of one or both parents, regardless of one's own place of birth. It seems likely enough that Markowitz's parents had Hungarian citizenship. By 1947, however, he had still not made it to Palestine, his desired destination. At that point, maybe he himself added Poland to his background history. Perhaps he was influenced by those he was living with and wanted to claim to be a part of the same heritage. Polish-born DPs made up a majority of the Jewish DP population, so it is possible he changed his information to become part of this larger group; maybe he thought this would speed up his emigration, although there is no evidence that Polish Jews were accepted at higher rates for the limited number of spots in the Palestine quota. He could even have forgotten or rejected his actual birthplace as a manifestation of trauma. When filling out the IRO form in December 1947, he was living in the Avigliana camp. This camp, settled just outside Turin in the Piedmont region of

citizenship country listed. It appears that 'Berechowo' was a misspelling of 'Berehovo' or 'Beregovo' or 'Beregszasz' where the official language today is Hungarian. CM/1 Form for Benjamin Markowitz, 3.2.1.2/80425851/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); CM/1 Form for Eidel Goldberger, 3.2.1.1/79128297/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); CM/1 Form for Ewa Rosenbaum, 3.2.1.1/79681616/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); CM/1 Form for Jehoszua Weisman, 3.2.1.1/79910346/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); No citizenship listed: Personal File for Stefan Goldglanz, 1.1.27.2/2602696/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM);

Italy, was one of the homes of the *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* (Hebrew: The Young Guard) Youth Aliyah movement.⁸⁴

The Youth Aliyah movement was widespread across Europe and was aimed specifically at helping young Zionists emigrate to Palestine, particularly from East European countries. The Jewish Agency also helped support the Youth Aliyah program. Henrietta Szold of the Jewish Agency joined Recha Freier in 1943 to develop the Youth Aliyah. Targeting specifically young people, the program helped over 5,000 Jewish youths emigrate from Europe to Palestine before 1948.⁸⁵ Founded earlier around 1916, the *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* was a Zionist socialist youth movement from Galicia, Austria-Hungary that connected with the Youth Aliyah movement to transport many of its members to Palestine.⁸⁶ It is very possible, given his hometown and later pattern of movement, that Markowitz was a member of this *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* branch of the Youth Aliyah movement back in Hungary and traveled with them to Italy. When Markowitz was moved to Selvino, he was also moved to another branch of the Youth Aliyah movement, the *Gordonia* movement. Rejoining his original movement may have been one of the primary motivations for Markowitz leaving Selvino and moving to Avigliana. Although we do not know if the move from one to the other was his choice, we can speculate that given his continuing desire to relocate in Palestine, Markowitz may have viewed the move as strategic; Youth Aliyah movements had greater resources within

⁸⁴ The camp was settled with the help of Yehoshua Kremer, member of the Zionist youth movement Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir. Album in memory of Yehoshua Kremer, Ghetto Fighters House Archives, n. 236, http://www.infocenters.co.il/gfh/notebook_ext.asp?book=136664&lang=eng&site=gfh Accessed July 17, 2020.

⁸⁵ Dvora Hachohen, *Children of the Times: Youth Aliyah 1933–1938* (Hebrew), (Yad Ben Zvi, Yad Vashem, and Ben Gurion University, 2012).

⁸⁶ Avinoam J. Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Wayne State University Press, 2009), 111–113, 334.

the underground community that helped them move potential *halutzim* or pioneers to Palestine more rapidly.⁸⁷

Another discrepancy occurs on his 1947 IRO form where he specified his places of residency and employment for the previous ten years. Again, making changes to the UNRRA original form, the IRO added two separate questions (10–11) asking for both an employment history and a place of residence history for the previous ten years. Perhaps without realizing it, this allowed the IRO to collect new and potentially important data on Holocaust survivors; here survivors could explain their movements during the war, giving future historians further statistical evidence on numbers in the camps and trajectories during and after the war. However, in neither column did Markowitz list Selvino, the children's center he stayed in in 1946, making it appear as though he traveled straight from Bergen-Belsen DP camp to the camp in Avigliana. Having his UNRRA form and the Selvino questionnaire that contained his class number, we can be fairly certain he did live in Selvino for some time, but it appeared he did not want the IRO to know this. Perhaps he had been denied a visa to Palestine with Selvino leader Moshe Zeiri, or he may have been kicked out of Selvino, or he may have run away with friends as one recalled happening in his memoir.⁸⁸ He might have feared these actions would negatively impact his position for making *aliyah*. Or maybe the social worker did not find his stay in Selvino relevant to his application for care and maintenance in Avigliana.

⁸⁷ Avinoam J. Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland*, see especially chapter five “‘Between hope and disappointment’: Jewish displaced youths and aliyah.”

⁸⁸ For example, Jack Weiss remembers running away from Selvino with friends on the back of a pickup truck. Jack Weiss, *Memories, Dreams, Nightmares: Memoirs of a Holocaust Survivor* (University of Calgary Press, 2005), 209-211.

However, it seems possible to speculate generally that, among the various possible reasons for such discrepancies are strategic choices refugees made, including in the interest of hastening their departure to Palestine. In this way, Markowitz was able to maintain some measure of agency in his moves, even if the ultimate choice of Palestine remained out of reach for the time being. And this demonstration of agency through strategic choices remains evident across refugee populations in Italy, not simply among youths. This discrepancy does give evidence though for one of the many problems both UNRRA and the IRO faced beyond caring for the DPs in 1940s Italy, namely keeping track of their whereabouts. For example, on every form we still have from children in Selvino, the final place of residency is simply absent. The words “missing” or “AWOL” appear scrawled next to the name of the child along with a date. It appears that representatives from the UNRRA/IRO would be present on the property only a few times a year, as nearly all the children are labeled missing at the same time.

Markowitz appears to have been particularly difficult to keep track of. His UNRRA form is dated June 1946 and, on the back, there are scrawled notes stating he was present for the Avigliana census in July, August, and December 1947, but his control book is signed and dated in September 1947 in Milan. The IRO form was filled out in December 1947 and processed in February 1948, so he seems to have traveled across northern Italy between Milan, Selvino, and Avigliana. We also know that he was still in Italy (presumably in Avigliana) in April 1948 because according to his control book he received the following replacement items: Jacket/sweater, under shirt/under pants, pair of stockings, and wool drawers. Then things get a little confusing. He is labeled missing twice on his UNRRA form—on December 15, 1947 and February 18, 1948—then these

dates are scratched out and a final one added, October 10, 1948, along with the label “AWOL.” The two earlier dates indicate that Markowitz left Selvino, and then perhaps Avigliana, without the knowledge (or permission) of the IRO.

Looking at these cases where individuals intentionally mis-classify themselves reveals the expectations to which the DPs felt beholden to and demonstrates their ability to subvert this top-down system of classification for their own benefit. The archival record is not completely clear about what happened to Markowitz. It seems highly likely, given the high percentage of Jewish teenagers who made it to Palestine that Markowitz simply left with a Youth Aliyah group sometime in 1948. His gathering of additional supplies in April, as one does before a long journey to an unfamiliar land, supports this conclusion. As a legal adult in March 1948, Markowitz may have grown tired of waiting for the IRO to help him and decided to take control of his own future, a move many Jewish DPs made after the creation of the State of Israel. By 1949, fewer than 5,000 European Jewish refugees remained in Italy.

Conclusion

The 50,000 Jewish DPs who made their way through Italy between 1945 and 1951 had to first wade through the alphabet soup of international and voluntary agencies to see who was best suited to help their situation. The Allied forces, alongside UNRRA and a host of voluntary agencies, set up a system of classification that attempted to provide aid for individuals displaced by war who qualified for their help. The first half of the chapter explained how refugees migrated to Italy and what was waiting for them when they arrived. It showed that Italy was a desired destination because of its

complicated past with antisemitism and its postwar predicament of wanting to forget any connection to Fascism. Through its examination of the inner workings of the international and voluntary agencies in the camps, the final section demonstrated the impact and control these aid agencies had over the lives of the DPs. Yet, it also suggests that by focusing especially on issues of registration one can see some of the ways refugees were able to assert their own voices.

In 1949, the IRO had again revised the format of its Application for Assistance Care and Maintenance forms.⁸⁹ Many of the questions remained the same, while the physical document became longer and narrower. Now the form asked for “country of last habitual residence prior to displacement” along with country of citizenship, town, province, and country of birth, and added “ethnic or national group such as Ukrainian, Jewish, *Volksdeutsche* [that is, ethnic German from outside of Germany], etc.”⁹⁰ It also added a question pertaining to Nansen status and included the status of “unaccompanied child” to one’s identifying features.⁹¹ Perhaps the biggest change, however, was the inclusion of a separate questionnaire to be filled out in conjunction with the application for assistance. This questionnaire repeated much of the basic identifying questions as the application but offered significantly more space for the refugee to respond. It asked, “where do you consider your home?” allowing refugees to differentiate between country of citizenship and desired country of residence. In addition, it asked “when, why and how

⁸⁹ See for example CM/1 Form for Haim Zahut, 3.2.1.2/80482517-80482522/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁹⁰ “*Volksdeutsche*” in “Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations found in the archive of the International Tracing Service (ITS)” last updated July 14, 2015. Distributed by USHMM, 294.

⁹¹ The Nansen passport, created by Fridtjof Nansen, was introduced by the League of Nations in 1922 as a passport for stateless refugees. For more see Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), see especially chapter 3 “The Tragedy of Being Stateless: Fridtjof Nansen and the Results of Refugees.”

did you leave your home?” with space to relate some personal history below. These changes demonstrated a recognition of the still fluid refugee situation. The IRO had a five-year mandate “reflecting the misplaced optimism that the refugee crisis produced by the war and its aftermath was exceptional and finite.”⁹² Yet, the continued debates over classification and aid giving would continue throughout the duration of the IRO’s mandate, posing a particular problem for Jewish refugees from North Africa.

⁹² Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Cornell University Press, 2020).

CHAPTER TWO

“Not Within the Mandate”: North African Jewish Refugees in the DP Camps

To rescue these children [from Libya], to prepare them for Israel and to [place] them in settlements and institutions is a humanitarian, educational and pioneering task of the first order.”¹

—Youth Aliyah leader

“Many of them are escaping on boats and motor-vessels to Italy but this is always very difficult and perilous especially during the winter and this cannot be a decision or an official settlement of the problem.”²

—Lillo Arbib, Libyan Jewish representative

When 15-year-old Haim Zahut arrived on the southern shores of Italy in November 1948, he was sent to fill out a Care and Maintenance Application for Assistance Form with the International Refugee Organization (IRO) to determine his eligibility for care.³ His case file with the IRO tells us that Haim Zahut was born into a Jewish family in Benghazi, Libya in 1933. He completed his elementary school in Tripoli and was fluent in Italian, Hebrew, and Arabic. Zahut’s parents were still alive and living in Tripoli, but Zahut arrived in Italy as an unaccompanied minor. According to Zahut, his father had made an agreement with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

¹ “To all youth leaders and co-workers in Youth Aliyah. Talk given by Mr. Kol on April 11, 1949,” Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 776, as seen in Reel 8216, Scan 82160243, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

² Letter from Lillo Arbib to World Jewish Congress, New York, January 19, 1949, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1177, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³ His file includes two copies of a nearly identical application for assistance and one copy of the additional questionnaire the IRO included in their revised registration. The two applications, although written in two different hands, are signed by the same interviewer, a G. Motekaitis, and are practically identical; the one noticeable difference is that Zahut’s siblings’ names are spelled out on one form and on the other it simply lists “one brother and four sisters living with parents.” Given their similarities, we will treat these two copies as one single document in our analysis. CM/1 Form for Haim Zahut, 3.2.1.2/80482517-80482522/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

(JDC) to send him to Italy in the hopes that he would make it to Israel.

But in May 1949, the IRO denied Zahut refugee status claiming he was “not within the mandate.”⁴ He did not fit the United Nations status of “refugee” or “displaced person” as defined in the General Assembly Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on 16 February 1946.⁵ The IRO defined refugees as those who had been displaced as a direct result of actions by Nazi or Fascist regimes and quislings or collaborators, and those who feared persecution from the above mentioned groups.⁶ In his interview, Zahut adamantly refused to be repatriated. The IRO worker on his case reported Zahut’s reasoning: “[He] fears of racial persecution: Arabs are beating Jewish people [in Libya.] He was beaten many times too.” After being attacked for being Jewish, Zahut’s parents finally decided the time had come for him to leave and to make a new home in Israel, where they hoped he would be safe. But even the threat of continued violence and Zahut’s passionate pleas were not enough to get Zahut refugee status under the IRO: he would need documented evidence from his national government to make his claim valid, and this was not going to happen in a British-occupied Libya, despite what the JDC had hoped for the likes of Zahut. Although the international laws governing refugee status would change in 1969, this was not soon enough for Zahut.⁷

⁴ CM/1 Form for Haim Zahut, 3.2.1.2/80482517-80482522/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

⁵ “Refugees and Displaced Persons 62(I), General Assembly Resolutions,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. December 15, 1946. <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae69ef14.html>, Accessed July 19, 2020.

⁶ Summary of Annex I, Part II. For more on the IRO see an early history written just a few years after the IRO finished its mission: Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1956). For more recent studies, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War’s Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012), see especially chapter 3; Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (OUP Oxford, 2013).

⁷ In 1969, the Organization of African Unity adopted a new convention that broadened “the definition of a refugee and offers legal protection to a wider category of people in response to the growing refugee problem in the continent.” B. Rutinwa, “Relationship between the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969

Yet, somehow many Libyan Jews traveled to Italy en route to Israel in the late 1940s. Haim Zahut's story of persecution and racial discrimination paralleled those of many of the 36,000 other Jewish individuals who lived in Libya after the Holocaust. Like Zahut, nearly 30,000 Jewish Libyans left the country between 1948 and 1951. A small minority of around 3,000 to 5,000 traveled through the Italian Displaced Persons (DP) camps to reach Israel. Since the end of World War II in 1945, Jews from Eastern and Central Europe had viewed Italy as the byway to Israel; and although blockades and quotas had significantly prolonged their tenure in Italian DP camps, by 1949 many had made their way to the "promised land." Jewish refugees from North Africa, blockaded from a direct route to Israel or tired of waiting for exit visas, were now hoping to follow the same trajectory. This chapter focuses on these North African Jewish migrants and, in particular, those from Libya (who are known in the documents variously as "North Africans," "Libyans," "Tripolitarians," regardless of what Libyan city they came from). Fearing for their safety after the war and the ensuing pogroms in Libya, Libyan Jewish parents brought their children, or even sent them alone, across the Mediterranean to Italy, in the hopes that they too might be looked upon with compassion and helped on their way to Israel. But the attitudes of many aid organizations toward these North African Displaced Persons (DPs) were strikingly different from their attitudes toward Jewish DPs from Europe. The IRO officially labeled European Jews as refugees and DPs, thus making them eligible for asylum benefits. North African Jews, in contrast, were nearly all denied refugee and DP status. Like European Jews, these North African adults and

OAU Convention on Refugees." In *In Flight from Conflict and Violence: UNHCR's Consultations on Refugee Status and Other Forms of International Protection* Eds. V. Türk, A. Edwards, and C. Wouters, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 94-115.

children were uncertain as to how long they would be staying in Italy, but unlike European Jews, they did not have a stable position in the refugee camps. This lack of stability meant that Libyan refugees and aid workers had to work primarily to achieve the most basic physical trappings of a temporary home, including food and shelter, leaving little room to focus on other forms of rehabilitation. In addition, we also see here far less personal agency afforded to this vulnerable population than even to their counterparts from Central and Eastern Europe. This lack of agency also meant that they were at a significant disadvantage when it came to re-starting their lives in a temporary home space.

This chapter examines the interconnected issues of humanitarian work, classification, and personal agency, particularly in the lives of unaccompanied minors sent by their parents from Libya to Italy. It begins with a background history of Jewish Libya, focusing on the colonial period through the wartime years. In its discussion of the postwar years, the chapter explains why Libyan Jews chose to travel to Italy. It then explores the process of registration and decision making around personal classification for those Libyans attempting to gain status in the DP camps. In particular, it examines the IRO's decision to classify these individuals as "ineligible." It focuses on humanitarian aid groups and their work with the Italian DP camps as the primary, if unpredictable, source of external support for the North African refugees.

When the Waters of the Mediterranean Parted: Jewish Libya and the Trajectory of Escape

Lillo Arbib was profoundly proud of his Libyan Jewish heritage. Born in Tripoli in 1911, Arbib was a natural leader, first as chairman of the Jewish Student Association while in university at the Oriental Institute of Naples and later as president of the Jewish community of Tripoli. A few years before his death in 2003 in Bat Yam, Israel, Arbib was asked about his experiences in Libya:

Interviewer: Do you remember fondly the times of Libya?

Arbib: Without a doubt.

Interviewer: What in particular?

Arbib: It was a tranquil life, without problems.”⁸

This comment struck the interviewer as odd, especially given the turbulent history she knew of the country, so she pressed him further saying,

Interviewer: So, despite pogroms, despite Fascism, despite the British who were difficult, it was a tranquil life.

Arbib: [It was a] “life with respect.”⁹

As president of his community, Arbib had the respect of all parties in Libya, he recalled; and this respect meant that his community could carry on with their traditions. It would become a matter of debate, but many Libyan Jews felt that life under the Italians was better than anything before or after that period. Their treatment under the British who replaced the Italians, however, combined with the rising exclusionary nationalism of the non-Jewish Libyan population induced roughly eighty percent of the Jewish population to leave the country while under British control.

This section explores the period of Libyan Jewish history from the beginning of colonial rule by Italy in 1911 through Libya’s independence in 1951. It demonstrates that

⁸ Testimony of Lillo Arbib, January 1999. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC, <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonylillo.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁹ Testimony of Lillo Arbib, January 1999. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC, <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonylillo.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

initially Italian rule was good for many in the Jewish community, but the introduction of the racial laws between 1938 and 1940 brought great strife. Postwar relations between Jewish Libyans and their non-Jewish Libyan neighbors and between the Jews and the British Military Administration (BMA) were tense at best. This tension erupted into violence, which sparked the mass exodus of nearly the entire Jewish population to Israel. The section then examines the choice of a minority of those within the Libyan Jewish community to travel to Italy as an escape route to Israel following the 1948 riots. It shows how the interweaving of support from various organizations and agencies made the journey possible and ultimately enabled them to continue to Israel, despite their not acquiring the proper paperwork or refugee status.

Libya from Fascism to the British Military Administration (BMA)

The experiences of Jews in postwar Libya were inextricably linked to their time as colonial subjects of Italy. At the turn of the century, many Italians thought of Libya as the missing piece in their empire; they deemed Libya as Italy's *quarta sponda*, or "fourth shore," on the other side of the Mediterranean.¹⁰ North African Libya came under Italian control in 1911 after Italy seized the region from the Ottomans, following the Italian victory in the Italo-Turkish War.¹¹ Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti declared that

¹⁰ Claudio G. Segrè, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

¹¹ The country we now know as "Libya" was not formally united until 1951. Variations of the word "Libia" had been used to describe the region for centuries. When the Italians united Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the region became known internationally and commonly as "Libya." In 1934, the name was officially adopted by the Italian government who then unified the two provinces into one single colony. The third province, Fezzan, was governed with Tripolitania until its French occupation during World War II. I will use the term "Libya" to describe the region throughout this chapter. Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State* (Routledge, 2014), 1. For more on the history of Italy in Libya see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia* (Roma: Laterza, 1986); For two other concise studies of the general history of Libya see John Wright, *A History of Libya*. (New York: Columbia

reclaiming Libya, an important province of the ancient Roman empire, was a *fatalia storia*, that is, a move of “historic destiny.” Nationalist poet Giovanni Pascoli proclaimed a few weeks after the invasion that “The great proletarian nation has stirred...Just fifty years after its return to life, Italy, the great martyr among nations, has done its duty and contributed to the advancement and civilization of the peoples, and asserted its right not to be penned in and suffocated in its own waters.”¹² Italy united two of the three Libyan provinces—Cyrenaica and Tripolitania—into one political entity called Italian North Africa.¹³ Italian settlement in Libya during the 1920s and 1930s greatly increased, and under Fascist rule over 120,000 Italians moved to Libya, often displacing locals in the cities forcing them out to the countryside or into cramped city dwellings.¹⁴ Fierce local resistance initially prevented Italian control of the entire Libyan national region, but the resistance was eventually crushed.¹⁵ The Italians interned over eighty thousand civilians in concentration camps, used poison gas on local communities, and ultimately executed the resistance leader Omar al-Mukhtar in 1931. At least one-tenth of the Libyan population was killed during the Fascist takeover.¹⁶

Jews had lived in Libya for thousands of years. When it became an Italian colony,

University Press, 2010) and Dirk J. Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹² Giovanni Pascoli, “La grande proletaria si è mossa,” in *Prose di Giovanni Pascoli. Vol. 1: Pensieri di varia umanità* (Milan, 1952) 557-69, as seen in Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 381.

¹³ Rachel Simon, *Change Within Tradition Among Jewish Women in Libya* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 13-14.

¹⁴ In 1939, the population of Libya was over 893,000, and Italians made up 12 percent of the total. “I censimenti nell'Italia unita i censimenti nell'Italia unita. Le fonti di stato della popolazione tra il XIX e il XXI secolo,” *Istituto Nazionale Di Statistica Società Italiana Di Demografia Storica Annali di Statistica*. v. 12, n. 2 (2012): 269.

¹⁵ For more on this see Angelo Del Boca, *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya*, Italian and Italian American Studies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Dirk J. Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006);

¹⁶ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 125.

there were about 21,000 Jews in the country (4% of the total population of 550,000); by the time the racial laws were instituted in Libya, the Jewish population numbered 30,387.¹⁷ The majority of Jews lived in bigger cities, nearly all in the coastal northern regions; the largest city and capital, Tripoli, was home to just over half of all Jews in Libya, while nearby Benghazi had the second highest population. In Libyan cities generally, some Jews lived amongst the other Libyan Arabs, while others sequestered themselves in the *hara*, or the Jewish quarter, in each of these cities. Relationships between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors often centered around business and remained largely cordial throughout the colonial period despite some friction over the growing Italianization of many Libyan Jews.¹⁸ Until 1938, Jews in Libya held Libyan or Italian citizenship most commonly, but some families who had arrived in Libya from Egypt or Tunisia often held British or French citizenship.

In September 1938, Mussolini enacted unprecedented racial laws in Libya, following on those imposed in Italy. These laws, among other things, expelled Jews from public schooling, required Jews to register their businesses with the state, forbade mixed marriages between Jews and other Italian citizens, and stripped Jews of their Italian citizenship.¹⁹ They were not, however, fully enacted until after the death of the Fascist Governor of Libya, Italo Balbo in 1940.²⁰ This constituted a moment of transformation.

¹⁷ Maurice M. Roumani, *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 28.

¹⁸ Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), see especially chapter six and seven, “Jewish-Muslim Religious Rivalry in Tripolitania” and “The Anti-Jewish Riots of 1945: A Cultural Analysis.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰ Italo Balbo was a notoriously brutal blackshirt who became governor of Libya in 1934. His mission there was to “transform a barren, backward colonial territory into an extension of Italy.” And according to Segre, he “was certainly guilty of meddling in the life of the Libya Jewish community, of trying to force it to conform to the Italian colonial regime.” Yet, he opposed explicit antisemitism and only applied the racial

As a young Libyan Jewish man in the 1930s, Victor Magiar, remembered things getting worse after the war started: “The Jews soon were accused of speculation and of profiting from the war, of buying and selling all the time by chance to get a permanent increase in value, of concealing food supplies for sale [later] on the black market and of leading Allied air raids by sending light signals.”²¹ These laws increased tensions between Jews on the one hand and Italians and Arabs on the other in Libya. Vittoria Duani, who made *aliyah* early in the 1940s described the Italian occupation: “There were good times with the Italians. It’s unfortunate that they allied themselves with the Germans [Arabic curses]. The Italians...they left Benghazi a paradise.”²² The German-Italian alliance, however, soon wrought havoc on the lives of Jewish Libyans.

The racial laws combined with wartime bombardments and fighting caused many Libyan Jews during the war to reverse their previously high opinions of the Italians—although this feeling would change again in the postwar period, as we will see—and instead hope for a British victory in Libya. From their bases in Libya, the Italians attacked the British in Egypt, which brought the war to the Libyan territories. Germans arrived in Libya in 1941. Between December 1940 and January 1943, the Allies gained and then lost control of Libyan territories at least five times. When the British held the country, Libyan Jews showered them with enthusiastic support, since their control meant the end of the racial laws; but when the Italians regained control, Libyan Jews faced

laws in a small, rather than blanket way Claudio G. Segre, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (University of California Press, 1990), 292, 348.

²¹ Victor Magiar, *E venne la notte: ebrei in un paese arabo* (Casa Editrice Giuntina, 2003), 43 Quoted in Jens Hoppe, “The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945: An Italian Affair?,” in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, by Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford University Press, 2018), 58-59.

²² Vivienne Roumani-Denn, “Life Interrupted: Interviews with Jews of Libyan Origin” in *Jewish Libya: Memory and Identity in Text and Image* eds. Jacques Roumani, Judith Roumani, and David Meghnagi, (Syracuse University Press, 2018), 188.

harsher persecution and increasingly detrimental policies because of their “traitorous” actions. In January 1942, after the Italians recaptured control of Libyan territories, Mussolini ordered a campaign of *sfollamento*, or removal, of all Jewish persons to concentration camps.

From this point, Jewish Libyan wartime experience varied based both on their place of residency and also their citizenship. Jews from Cyrenaica including its main city of Benghazi holding Libyan citizenship were interned in concentration camps run by the Italians and Germans in Tripolitania. The most notorious of these camps was Giado (or Jado) located 150 miles south of Tripoli, where, at least 2,537 were interned, 562 of whom died because of poor living conditions and disease.²³ Young Jewish Libyan escapee, Benjamin Doron recalled that “One of my uncles, my father’s brother, named Benjamin Dadosh, was the second Jew to die in the Jado Camp. My uncles told me that people died there from starvation and disease. There wasn’t a family who didn’t have someone who had died in the camp.”²⁴ Tripolitanian Jews with Libyan citizenship, in contrast, were sent to labor camps such as those at Sidi Azaz and Buq Buq, where living conditions were only slightly better than Giado’s. Jews from Libya holding foreign passports, most notably those with French or British citizenship, were deported. In August 1942, 1,861 Libyan Jews with French, Tunisian, or Moroccan passports were sent

²³ Jens Hoppe, “The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945: An Italian Affair?,” in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, by Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford University Press, 2018), 50–75. See also Robert B. Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 43.

²⁴ “Interview with Benjamin Doron, Child Survivor from Libya,” *Yad Vashem Archive*, <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/interviews/doron.html>, Accessed July 19, 2020. Robert Satloff notes that “more died in this one Libyan internment camp in just six months than at all other North African labor camps combined.” Robert B Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006), 44.

to Tunisia where they remained in internment camps until Allied liberation in 1943.²⁵ It is estimated that 870 Libyan Jews holding British citizenship were deported in 1942 to Italy where they were interned.²⁶ Their fate then became similar to that of many Italian Jews: following German occupation of the northern two-thirds of Italy in 1943, many of these interned British-Libyan Jews were deported to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, the Vittel internment camp in France, or Innsbruck-Reichenau, an affiliate of Dachau, until the liberation of these camps. The Libyan Jews who were sent to Bergen-Belsen represented a unique contingent in the camp, as they maintained their group solidarity and their kosher practices; all of them survived the Holocaust.²⁷

The British ousted the Italians from their final stronghold in Tripoli on January 23, 1943, as Libya was fully occupied by the Allied forces; the two northern regions of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were placed under the British Military Administration (BMA) and the southern region of Fezzan was put under French control. It was under this control that Libyan Jews faced increased persecutions and, in 1945 and 1948, destructive and bloody pogroms. These pogroms, which will be discussed in more detail below, were largely motivated by anti-Zionist attitudes amongst the non-Jewish Libyan population sparked by events in Palestine. The violence carried out by the local Arab population that killed over 130 individuals and destroyed numerous businesses heightened tensions along

²⁵ Jens Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945: An Italian Affair?" 50–75.

²⁶ Some spent more than 20 months in the following places of internment: Civitella del Tronto in the province of Teramo (Abruzzo), Civitella della Chiana and Badia al Pino in the province of Arezzo (Tuscany), Bagno a Ripoli in the province of Florence (Tuscany), Pollenza in the province of Macerata (Marche), Camugnano and Bazzano in the province of Bologna (Emilia-Romagna). We don't have an exact record of the number of British Jews who were deported. Liliana Picciotto, "Gli Ebrei in Libia Sotto La Dominazione Italiana," in *Ebraismo e Rapporti Con Le Culture Del Mediterraneo Nei Secoli XVIII-XX* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2003), 96, 102.

²⁷ Maurice M Roumani, *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 32-33.

racial lines and created an untenable economic situation for the Jewish community so recently devastated by the racial laws and internment, not to mention wartime bombardments. The British were not instigators or participants in the pogroms; however, the BMA's slow responses and general lack of sympathy demonstrated a clear lack of concern for Jewish welfare to the Libyan Jewish community. The pogroms in Tripoli and the surrounding region, in particular the second set of riots that occurred in 1948, appear to have been a turning point for many Libyan Jews who then sought to make life elsewhere.

Yet until February 2, 1949, Jews were also not free to leave Libya. Roberto Arbib, former president of the Maccabbi Club in Tripoli, wrote to the *Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane* (Union of Italian Jewish Communities, UCII) in Rome that life in Libya was becoming unbearable under the BMA: "We are poorly treated by the British military government and by the Tripoli Arabs, yet at the same time neither one nor the other wants us to abandon the Libyan territory. The moral of the story is that 'they are holding us hostage' for an end that is not unknown to us."²⁸ Even as late as January 19, 1949, Lillo Arbib, president of the Jewish Community of Tripolitania during the 1948 riots, wrote that "Jews are still not allowed to have a passport and the emigration is still very difficult."²⁹ Advocating on behalf of Libyan Jews, the Italian president of the UCII stressed to the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Political Affairs in Italy that "an intervention by the Italian government with the British authorities is required so that

²⁸ Letter from Roberto Arbib to Colonello Vitale, September 9, 1948, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 258, f. 38

²⁹ Letter from Lillo Arbib to World Jewish Congress, New York, January 19, 1949, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1177, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

they allow Jews to leave Tripolitania.”³⁰ British authorities were reluctant to let Jews leave Libya because they knew most would resettle in Israel and they feared that Jewish migrants would upset the balance in Israel. They argued that “to allow Jews of military age to proceed to Palestine would be a breach of the Security Council’s truce resolution.”³¹ The U.N. Security Council resolutions regarding the question of Palestine had called for all persons and organizations to “refrain from bringing and from assisting and encouraging the entry into Palestine of armed bands and fighting personnel, groups and individuals;”³² the BMA worried that allowing the free exit of Jews from Libya to Israel would be disregarding this order. The BMA was finally convinced to allow Jews to leave Libya only after Great Britain *de facto* recognized the State of Israel on January 30, 1949.³³

Order may have been restored in Libya for a time after the pogroms, but over the course of the years 1948 to 1951, nearly 30,000 Libyan Jews immigrated to Israel indicating that Libya no longer felt safe for Jews.³⁴ The Italian Jewish Community reported in November 1948 that they were supportive of this move: “Our brethren do not intend to continue to live in the current dangerous conditions, and we are trying to do what we can to help them.”³⁵ Ultimately it would take the combined efforts of the Libyan,

³⁰ Letter from UCII President to Direzione generale affari politici ministero degli esteri, July 22, 1948, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 258, f. 38

³¹ “First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa),” n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, RG–43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³² United Nations Security Council, “46 (1948) Resolution of 17 April 1948 [S/723],” United Nations, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/46\(1948\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/46(1948)), Accessed July 20, 2020.

³³ For more on Britain’s relationship to Israel see W. Keith Pattison. “The Delayed British Recognition of Israel.” *Middle East Journal* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 424; Natan Aridan, *Britain, Israel and Anglo-Jewry: 1949-57* (London: Routledge, 2015).

³⁴ Maurice Roumani, “The Final Exodus of the Libyan Jews in 1967,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 19, no. 3–4 (2007): 77–100.

³⁵ Letter from UCII President to il Direttore Generale della P.S., November 25, 1948, *Archivio dell’Unione*

Italian, American, British, and Israeli Jewish communities to successfully migrate the great majority of the Libyan Jewish population to Israel. For ten to fifteen percent of this community, that journey meant traveling through Italy and attempting to receive international recognition for their plight.

Libyan Arrivals in Italy

Cloaked under a veil of secrecy, ignored by the international press, a strange, mysterious migration is taking place from one to another shore of the Mediterranean... This flow is continuing, unrelentingly. Small parties manage to cross the comparatively narrow, but often quite rough stretch of waters, in sailing boats and small motor launches. Larger groups use fishing trawlers, tugs and other crafts. This new brand of Displaced Persons are Jews who try to escape from the Anglo-Arab regime which for the last six years has prevailed in Lybia [sic]. They are looking for shelter in Italy, which most of them consider their mother country, or, those who are not Italian, in Israel.³⁶

Although this report from a legal advisor to the Italian Embassy in the United States accurately described the difficulty of the crossing, it was incorrect in its assumption that many considered Italy “their mother country” and wanted to stay there.³⁷ An American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) report from 1948 also stated that “towards the end of [September] a new element appeared [in the Italian DP camps], in that Jewish refugees from Tripoli were arriving on the shores of Italy in increasing

delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965), b. 258, f. 38

³⁶ “Memorandum Re: The Plight of the Jews in Libya,” Undated (early 1949), Box H219, File 2, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Reel 0220, File 2, Scan 0189, RG-67.014M, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³⁷ The report was written by Enrico L. Pavia. Pavia was an Italian Jewish lawyer from Genoa who emigrated to the United States following the advent of the racial laws in Italy in 1938. During World War II he was a consultant to the Board of Economic Welfare in Washington and later legal advisor to the Italian Embassy. He returned to Italy in the 1950s where he set up a successful international law firm. “Enrico L. Pavia, Lawyer, Is Dead; A Specialist in International Law,” *The New York Times*, Section B, page 4 (November 9, 1979), <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/11/09/archives/enrico-l-pavia-lawyer-is-dead-a-specialist-in-international-law.html>, Accessed July 19, 2020; “About: History,” *Pavia e Ansaldo Studio Legale*, n.d. <https://www.pavia-ansaldo.it/history/?lang=en>, Accessed July 19, 2020

numbers.”³⁸ They were attempting to get to Israel but seeing the most direct path still blocked by the British, looked to Italy as an alternate route to get to their desired destination. These were individuals, families, and small groups who paid smugglers to help them with this “mysterious migration” out of Libya. Obtaining legal exit permits from Libya in late 1948 for Jews wishing to emigrate was nearly impossible, despite the long line of applicants.³⁹ From late 1948 through mid-1949 larger groups of Libyan Jews, most frequently children accompanied by a few caretakers, arrived in Italy, most through the direct intervention of the JDC and the World Jewish Congress (WJC). Precise numbers are not available, but according to the records of the WJC and the JDC, it appears that between 3,000 and 5,000 Jewish individuals from Libya emigrated first to Italy and then on to Israel between 1947 and 1949. During the latter half of 1949 alone, at least 5,000 DPs from North Africa, which included DPs from both Libya and Egypt, made their way through the Italian DP camps; 70% of these ultimately emigrated to Israel from Italian ports while the remaining 30% were sent to Marseille for further medical recuperation before they could go on to Israel.⁴⁰

³⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, “Untitled Typewritten Document.” November 04, 1948.

³⁹ “While in Paris I was visited by Mr. Ruben Hassan, who I think is the representative, in Tripoli of the J.D.C., and he asked me to take up with the British Authorities the question of exit permits for Jews who desire to emigrate from Tripoli. The particular issue is that the British Military Authorities are stated to have refused all applications for these exit permits.” Letter from A.L. Easterman to Robert Marcus, December 9, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1157, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴⁰ The numbers cited here come from a variety of sources. Two specify that they are describing Libyan Jewish migrants (rather than broadly North African): JDC reports state that “As of September 30th 1949, persons assisted by AJDC in Italy were as follows... Tripolitarians (Resina Camp): 655.” This, however, does not tell us how many individuals from Libya had been assisted in total. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 625, “American Joint Distribution Committee,” November 23, 1949; Joseph Schechtman writes that “Italy was, however, but a stopover on the way to Israel. About 2,500 Jews left Libya clandestinely via Tunisia and Italy from July 1948 to January 1949.... For the entire year 1949, the number of such immigrants [who arrived in Israel via Italy] amounted to 2,107.” Joseph B. Schechtman, *On Wings of Eagles: The Plight, Exodus, and Homecoming of Oriental Jewry* (T. Yoseloff, 1961), 141. Additional reports discuss Jewish refugees from

In the immediate postwar period, Libyan Jews who had been deported to Bergen-Belsen often made their way home to Libya via train and then boat from Italy. In 1945, these North African Jewish survivors were given passage back to their home country via Italy, generally by the Allied Forces or UNRRA whose policies favored repatriation.⁴¹ These survivors did not stay in Italy long and arrived home to Libya before the horrific November 1945 pogrom in Tripoli, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Between 1945 and June 1948, records show that a very small number of Libyan Jewish individuals arrived in Italy hoping to make their way to Palestine. The Italian branch of the Zionist youth organization *HeHalutz* (or *HeChalutz*, “Pioneer”), for example, described the arrival of four Tripolitanian youths to Naples in August 1947 who were sent to the *hachshara* in Cevoli near Pisa and presumably on to Palestine.⁴²

We then see larger numbers arriving in Italy primarily beginning in 1948, especially after the second series of violent anti-Jewish riots in Tripoli in June. In a letter to the WJC, Fritz Becker of the UCII explained the two most frequent ways Jews emigrated from Libya: through what he called “clandestine expatriation” or by obtaining

North Africa more generally: Between July and September 1949, 2,393 DPs from North Africa departed Italy for Israel and 659 to Marseille for further treatment. A further breakdown of countries of origin is not available. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 625, “American Joint Distribution Committee,” November 23, 1949; 1120 DPs from Egypt emigrated to Israel and 748 to Marseille between October and December 1949 leaving 961 Egyptians still in the Brindisi Transit Camp. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 625, “Excerpts from the Quarterly Report on the Italian from Ram for the Fibroid October - December. 1949,” December 1, 1949.

⁴¹ For example, see CM/1 Forms for Mose Agiman, 3.2.1.4/ 80894416—80894452/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

⁴² Letter from Salomon Montiljo to Hechalutz “Hamskirut Hamerkazit, Cevoli, “Oggetto: Intervento in favore di 4 giovani ebrei provenienti da Tripoli e detenuti nel Carcere di Poggio Reale di Napoli,” September 5, 1947, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 43D, f. 39.

Letter from Raffaele Cantoni to American Joint Distribution Committee Italian Communities Bureau, October 15, 1947, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 43D, f. 39. For more about the *HeChalutz* see Sergio I. Minerbi, “L’esperienza di un Giovane Chalutz.” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 80, no. 2/3 (2014): 163-69;

“exit/entry permits through pretext.”⁴³ Using the resources of the JDC, the WJC, the UCII and the Jewish Agency, Libyan Jews emigrated to Israel via Italy smuggled on fishing boats without papers or sailed on larger boats after receiving false papers. These papers were drawn up under a variety of false pretenses such as claiming to be going on a business trip or continuing religious schooling or needing to receive medical care in Italy. Sixty-five Libyan youth aged 12 to 17, for instance, received papers from both the BMA and the Italian authorities in August 1948 to study at the rabbinical college in Rome.⁴⁴ But when the *Ministero dell’Africa Italiana* followed up on their arrival in October, he found that instead of enrolling in rabbinical school, the youths had been taken to a DP *hachshara* or training center in Genazzano just outside Rome where he felt they would be “subject to pressure to enlist to go to Palestine.”⁴⁵ Later reports from the local police proved this not to be the case; the youths had intended to travel to Italy as a path onward to Palestine from the beginning.⁴⁶

Upon arrival in Italy many Libyan Jews claimed partnership with the JDC or with the Jewish Agency, and some lied to the IRO, hoping to expedite their cases and receive eligibility for resettlement aid, as their intent was to leave the country as soon as possible. The case of Josef Tajar offers some insight into these early arrivals in 1948. Josef Tajar was born September 8, 1935 in Tripoli to Jewish parents. His parents who were still in

⁴³ Letter Subject: Jewish Exodus from Tripoli from the Unione Delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane to A.L. Easterman, December 31, 1948. Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1169, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴⁴ Letter from Il Presidente (Firm. Illegibile) to On.le Ministero dell’Africa Italiana Direzione Generale degli AA. Politici, August 19, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 14-2

⁴⁵ Letter “Oggetto: Studenti ebrei libici in Italia,” November 6, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 14-2.

⁴⁶ Letter “Oggetto: Studenti ebrei libici in Italia,” December 19, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 14-2.

Tripoli sent him to Italy “because of racial persecution and because they wanted to send him to Israel,” and claimed they had an agreement with the JDC to help him.⁴⁷ He arrived in a fishing boat with a small group of others in September 1948. But when the boat arrived in Naples, his group leader confiscated all of his identification documents and told him to tell the IRO he was from Bulgaria, not Tripoli. When interviewed nine days later by the IRO in the Genazzano *hachshara*, Tajar told them he was “Josef Tiar” from Sofia, Bulgaria and that he was simply trying to reconnect with his parents and siblings who were already in Israel. Originally believed, he is classified as “eligible” for resettlement and placed on the list for Israel with the Consulate in Rome. But then something went wrong with the plan: the IRO discovered he was actually from Libya, so he was taken off the list, marked “ineligible,” and transferred to the children’s center in Salerno where he would wait until at least April 1949.⁴⁸ For help in leaving Italy, as for aid within Italy, European Jews had rights and fit into categories that their North African counterparts did not.

These early arrivals themselves, children included, often claimed an understanding or informal agreement for aid from the JDC, but we see a shift in late 1948 particularly around the JDC’s involvement. In December 1948, James Rice, a JDC liaison officer in Geneva, wrote to the then second in command of JDC Europe, Moses Beckelman in Paris, about a new initiative. In the waning months of 1948, a group of one

⁴⁷ CM/1 Form for Josef Tajar, 3.2.1.2/80523446/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

⁴⁸ His form is marked “ineligible: Jew from North Africa.” CM/1 Form for Josef Tajar, 3.2.1.2/80523446/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). On April 11, Tajar was sent to Rome and then departed for Israel on May 2, 1949. Letter from David Golding to Lea K. Dickenson, June 22, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170233, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

hundred children had arrived “healthy and happy” in Italy from Tripoli.⁴⁹ The children, it seemed, were all prepared to make the journey to Israel and were asking for assistance. Rice’s letter makes it clear that the IRO both knew about the arrival of the children and were potentially prepared to look the other way regarding their legal status in Italy. Rice quotes both Marie D. Lane from the Care and Maintenance Department of IRO Geneva and Leah K. Dickinson of the IRO Welfare Office as being “unable to say” how the children arrived in Italy in the first place.⁵⁰ “Miss Dickinson had implied that perhaps they had walked accross [sic] the water. I told Mrs. Lane that since these were Jewish children, it was more likely that the waters of the Mediterranean had parted in the Biblical tradition of the Red Sea episode.”⁵¹ But, what’s more, Lane also claimed that “she was sure IRO would take reesponsibillty [sic] for these children as well as for a second group of one hundred if they should turn up mysteriously in Italy.”⁵² There was no reason, Lane said, to wait for or worry about a technical decision from IRO Geneva regarding the children’s eligibility for assistance. She felt certain that in Italy the IRO would be able to help the children, even if there should be a negative verdict on the question of eligibility for migrants from Tripoli; “in other words: ‘eligibility-shmeligibility.’”⁵³ It was clear that there were quite a few variables at play and negotiations were ongoing, but the two IRO officers were confident that their

⁴⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder Tripolitania: Tripoli 1948-1949, “Letter from James P. Rice to Mr. M. W. Beckelman, Subject: Project to Send Children from Tripolitania to Italy.” December 14, 1948.

⁵⁰ In 1943 Marie D. Lane was the Director of the Division of Youth Personnel in the National Youth Administration in the U.S. After the war she was the chief of the Welfare Division of the Health, Care and Maintenance Department of the IRO Geneva. Leah K. Dickinson worked in Japan with the War Relocation Authority and later was a welfare officer with the Italian Mission of UNRRA and the IRO.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

organization would help these individuals. Lane, however, was unfortunately overly optimistic about the ease with which the IRO would help Libyan Jews. The children were unfortunate casualties of this excessive optimism—at least in the short run.

But not all authorities worked against the interests of the children. Records also show that at least some Italian authorities were aware of these “illegal” arrivals. Another group of 120-130 Jewish Tripolitanian children arrived in Siracusa in November 1948. From Siracusa they were taken to *hachsharot* in Ostia and Nemi to prepare them for their eventual immigration to Israel. Before their arrival, Raffaele Cantoni, the president of the UCII wrote to the *questore*, or superintendent, of the region informing them of the arrival and departure of the children arriving from Tripolitania. Cantoni also wrote to the *Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza* to request their help with ensuring the safety of these children. In his letter, he also laid out the dangerous predicament of the Jews still in Libya faced and just how necessary it was for the Italian Jewish community and the Italian community at large to help them.⁵⁴ Follow up letters indicate many Italians from the mayor to the local *carabinieri* to the bishop of the region offered a “friendly welcome” to these Libyan refugees, which the Italian Jewish community said it would not forget.⁵⁵

The late months of 1948 through 1949 show a hodgepodge effort by the IRO, the

⁵⁴ Letter from UCII President to il Direttore Generale della P.S., November 25, 1948, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 258, f. 38

⁵⁵ Letter from UCII President to Salvatore Greci, December 28, 1948, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41; Letter from UCII President to the Bishop of Noto, December 28, 1948, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41; Letter from UCII President to the Mayor of Pachino, December 28, 1948, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41.

Jewish Agency, the JDC, the UCII, and the WJC to give housing, care, and maintenance to these Libyan DPs at *hachsharot* and camps spread throughout the Rome and Naples regions, despite the unwillingness of the IRO to give the North African Jews formal refugee status. Josef Tajar who had claimed to be from Bulgaria was one of many sent to Genazzano, a town in the greater Rome metropolitan area, where the JDC opened the Villa Clementi *hachshara* in the former hotel of local train engineer Antonio Clementi.⁵⁶ The Genazzano *hachshara* opened in June 1948 as a replacement for the older Monte Mario II *hachshara* that subsequently closed down.⁵⁷ It remained open until October 1949,⁵⁸ and the care was, reportedly, above adequate for North African camps.⁵⁹ In January 1949, a camp in Salerno was reconverted to house several hundred Libyan Jewish youth with the assistance of the Youth Aliyah; this was the only children's center for Libyan youth operated by the IRO.⁶⁰ Finally in the third quarter of 1949, a camp was "especially established" for North Africans, in Resina near Naples but "due to the large movements of North Africans into [Italy], it was found that facilities of the camp were not adequate," and individuals were again moved to another camp.⁶¹ The problems

⁵⁶ Letter "Oggetto: Studenti ebrei libici in Italia," December 19, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 14-2; "Profughi ebrei ricoverati nella Villa Clementi a Genazzano, August 25, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 7-4

⁵⁷ There were some problems in August 1948 as it looked like the JDC had not received proper clearance to open a *hachshara* in the Villa Clementi and residents were given 48 hours to leave. The IRO stepped in a they were able to negotiate new terms with the Italian government, which allowed the camp to remain open. "Centro profughi stranieri (hachshara) – Genazzano Villa Clementi – Via Garibaldi," August 21, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 7-4.

⁵⁸ "Campo profughi stranieri (I.R.O.) costituitosi in Genazzano," July 1, 1948, *Archivio centrale dello stato*, A16 Stranieri ed Ebrei Stranieri b. 21, fasc. 7, sub. fasc. 7-4.

⁵⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 625, "American Joint Distribution Committee," November 23, 1949.

⁶⁰ Louise W Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations : Its History and Work, 1946-1952* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 506.

⁶¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 625, "American Joint Distribution Committee," November 23, 1949.

surrounding Resina will be discussed further in chapter four, but without the IRO's help, there was often a lack of adequate food and seasonally appropriate shelter in these camps. The final camp for Jewish Libyans was in Brindisi, which was an improvement to Resina: "the location, surroundings and facilities of the camp are most impressive and compare very favorably with any of the DP camps in Italy."⁶² The atmosphere in the camps, however, was "one of extreme tenseness" as refugees felt uprooted and increasingly more insecure about their futures.⁶³ Throughout these movements, the IRO continually denied these Libyan Jewish immigrants official status as "refugees" or "displaced persons." This meant continually extended stays in Italy with little to no say over their own whereabouts.

"Eligibility-Schmeligibility": IRO Deliberations and Decisions

A problem has arisen due to large numbers of Jews leaving Arab countries, mainly in North Africa and arriving in France and Italy, or going direct[ly] to Israel. Many of these Jews are requesting IRO status and the Organisation's assistance in emigrating to Israel. The problem which arises is to determine the criteria to be adopted in determining whether these persons are within the mandate of the Organisation. The size of this movement is unknown but it is understood that about 25% of the total Israeli immigration is of Jews from Arab countries.⁶⁴

If North African Jewish migrants had arrived in Italy before 1948, perhaps things would have turned out differently. Perhaps they would have been able to fight for their eligibility; perhaps the IRO would have granted them status based solely on their experiences during the war, rather than largely ignoring their racial persecution. But the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa)," n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, AJ 43-457 File 57 Eligibility of Jews from North Africa, 1948-1949. RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944-1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

majority of them arrived after the founding of the State of Israel, which was to become key to their problems in Italy. As discussed at length in the Introduction, the Harrison Report written in 1945 forced the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and military leaders from the U.S. and France to reconsider their categorization policies of DPs in and outside the camps.⁶⁵ After the war, individuals were classified in the DP camps based on nationality, and the initial decision was made not to list Jews as a separate category. With the changeover of leadership from UNRRA to the IRO in 1947, and the ensuing withdrawal of the USSR from the “specialized agency,” determinations around classification of refugees became a marker of politics in the Cold War era.⁶⁶ Anti-Communism became an important factor in one’s application, although that alone was not enough to make one eligible, as the focus for the IRO remained on trying to determine who were legitimate refugees rather than collaborationists or “economic migrants.” This focus on Communists, however, meant that the small number of Jews arriving from North Africa up to this point were then able to more or less slip through largely unnoticed. The main problem for most of the North African Jews was that they were too late to take advantage of the policy that “all Jews receive refugee status regardless of experience” and they did not make a difference in the Cold War. They could not be used by either side as a bargaining chip and they did not add to the U.S. campaign to be seen as good guys in need of saving or bad guys in need of obliteration because their categorization did not fall on communist/capitalist lines.

⁶⁵ In July 1945, U.S. President Harry Truman sent Earl G. Harrison, former commissioner of immigration and then dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, to investigate the conditions of the DP camps in Germany and Austria. Harrison’s subsequent report detailed his concerns about the poor conditions and inspired change in treatment. Earl G. Harrison, *The Plight of the Jews in Europe: A Report to President Truman*. Released by the White House September 29, 1945.

⁶⁶ Gerard D. Cohen, *In War’s Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 35-36.

The founding of the state of Israel in 1948, however, became a turning point for regarding questions of eligibility for North Africa Jews as the IRO proclaimed its strong desire to not get involved in what they termed the “Arab problem.” As Daniel Cohen noted, “Because the IRO was sponsored by both pro and anti-Zionist contributors (the United States and the United Kingdom) its official line had to reconcile conflicting positions.”⁶⁷ The number of North African Jewish migrants in Italy was small enough that they could largely be overlooked in international policy, although crucial enough, evidently, that they could not be given status without fear of it impacting the IRO’s credibility in the rest of the Arab world.

By the end of 1948, the IRO knew they had to make some kind of formal policy regarding their responsibility for Jews going to Europe (mainly France and Italy) or directly to Israel from North Africa. These Jews were coming from the former Italian colony, Libya, and from the French colonies of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. It should also be noted that not all migrants from North Africa were Jewish; Muslims and Christians from North Africa also sought asylum in Italy.⁶⁸ These asylum seekers were often former soldiers who had been recruited into the Italian and French armies and simply discarded when the war ended. Unable or unwilling to return to their countries of origin, they eventually made their way across Europe or North Africa, landing in Italy after the war, and were also placed in DP camps. They were also not given refugee or DP

⁶⁷ “The IRO played an important part in this process, even if the length of its dual appraisal was short: by 1950, a newly created agency the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was specifically catering to Palestinian refugees, relieving the IRO, who ceased its European-centered operations in 1952, from any involvement in the Middle East. It nonetheless paved the ground for important qualitative differences in international perceptions of Jewish and Arab refugees.” Gerard Daniel Cohen, “The Politics of Recognition: Jewish Refugees in Relief Policies and Human Rights Debates, 1945–50,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 24, no. 2 (July 2006): 139.

⁶⁸ Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 199-203.

status. These groups provide useful counterparts here, as it appears that, in the case of North Africa, one's place of birth mattered more to the question of asylum than identifying features of nationality and religion. Embedded in the question surrounding their eligibility for IRO aid, were the thorny issues of the migrants' citizenship and their reason(s) for departure. Untangling the process of decision making by the IRO requires a bit of reading between drafts and proposals and final reviews before coming to the final decision of ineligibility.

A Question of Citizenship

The first question to be determined was whether or not these Jewish migrants now in France and/or Italy were "outside their country of citizenship or habitual residence." If they were within their country of citizenship, then they could petition for help from their own government and would be of no concern to the IRO.⁶⁹ Jews coming from Algeria had already received French citizenship in 1870, thanks to the Crémieux Decree, whereas Moroccan and Tunisian Jews were citizens of their respective countries holding French protected status.⁷⁰ Libyan Jews, on the other hand, were more varied in their citizenship; following their occupation of Libya in 1911, Italian authorities implemented a series of different statuses for the native Libyan population. Muslim Libyans were deemed "foreign subjects," whereas Jewish Libyans were simply "subjects," putting the Jews on the same civic level as Italian citizens. Muslims continued to be considered foreigners in

⁶⁹ For more on the IRO's constitutional concerns around citizenship see Louise W Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations : Its History and Work, 1946-1952* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

⁷⁰ For more on Algeria see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (University of Chicago Press, 2014); Ethan Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

their own home, but Jews, until 1938, could acquire Italian citizenship.⁷¹ This disparity, evident until at least the start of the war, created great friction between the two groups, as many Jews adopted and adapted many traditions, cultural and linguistic, from the Italian occupiers.

Italian culture and especially the language deeply influenced the Libyan Jewish population. Libyan Jewish men, for instance, spoke Italian at much higher rates than Libyan Arab men.⁷² Jewish Libyans also spoke a form of Judeo-Arabic that would have been understood by the non-Jewish Arab population but was often written in Hebrew characters.⁷³ Under Italian occupation, many Jews went to Hebrew schools taught by young Zionists from Palestine, but they were also required to attend Italian schools. Italian Jews, however, made a clear distinction between themselves and the Jews from Libya. In a 1943 annual report, the Italian Jewish Representative Committee with the World Jewish Congress described the Jewish community in Libya: “Libyan Jews are native orthodox Jews, with their own customs, laws and traditions, which are quite distinct from those of the native Arabs as well. Although extremely poor and, in certain respects, very backward in their way of life, they are not uneducated and are generally intelligent and efficient.”⁷⁴ In the postwar years, this notion of “backwardness” was used

⁷¹ “Italian-Libyan citizens. These are chiefly natives of Jewish faith. Under the Royal Decree Law of December 3, 1934, No. 2012 and the law of April 11, 1935, No. 675, concerning the organization of the Libyan colony, they were granted equality of rights with the other citizens of the Libyan colony. These rights included respect of the different creeds and of local traditions. Moreover, Jews were not to be the views or subjects that conflicted with their religion in governmental schools. (Royal Decree Law, December 3, 1934, Art. 59-42.)” See Sabina Donati, *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950*. (Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁷² Georges Bensoussan, *Jews in Arab Countries: The Great Uprooting* (Indiana University Press, 2019).

⁷³ Harvey E. Goldberg. “Language and Culture of the Jews of Tripolitania: A Preliminary View.” *Mediterranean Language Review* 1 (1983): 85-102.

⁷⁴ “War and Post War Problems Memorandum on the Jews in Italy and Libya,” July 20, 1943, Box C99, File 8, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in File C99 8, Scan 08123, RG-67.005, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

to demonstrate the Libyans' need for Italian oversight. Additionally, the issue of the non-Europeaness of the Libyan Jews in contrast to the "European education and mentality" of metropolitan Italian Jews would become a problem for Libyans seeking refuge in Italy.

Like their Italian brethren, many Libyan Jews had positive views toward Fascism and Mussolini before the war. Raul Fargion from Benghazi, for instance, was the administrative secretary of the local Fascist federation.⁷⁵ In 1937, Mussolini visited Tripoli, Benghazi, and Barce where he was warmly welcomed by the Jewish population. Major supporter of *Circolo Sion*, an early Zionist organization in Tripoli, Felice Nahum wrote a widely publicized review of the visit in which he congratulated his fellow country people on a successful event. The Jewish community in particular, Nahum thought, was an important ally for the Duce, and he for them. He ended his report by saying:

Even some persons close to the *Duce* believe that the welcome which the Jews of Tripoli gave him was one of the most important paid him in this triumphant visit to Italian Africa, a visit which will live in the memory of our people. Everyone had the feeling that not just a new era but a new history was dawning for these lands and all their inhabitants, without distinction of race or religion. The new age of work, peace, and development will take on an even faster and more intense pace, and the Jews of Libya will contribute with their intelligence and industry to the effort for civilization and progress and the affirmation of the Italian Empire in the Mediterranean and in the world.⁷⁶

Nahum's comments demonstrate the ways in which many in the Libyan Jewish community had aligned themselves with the Italian vision of empire, one that would transcend their present moment creating "not just a new era but a new history." This "new age" felt promising to the Libyan Jewish community. Having received better treatment under the Italians than they had under the Ottomans, Jewish Libyans had reason to hope

⁷⁵ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 354.

⁷⁶ Felice Nahum, *Israel*, March 25, 1931. Seen in Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 354.

for life in a country where they could live “without distinction of race or religion.”

Mussolini also reportedly embraced the Jewish community during this trip. An attendee of Mussolini’s speech in Tripoli claimed that Mussolini promised the same care toward Libyan Jews as he showed Italian Jews: “I am more than convinced of the loyalty and energetic industriousness of the Jewish people of Libya and Italy and I beg to assure them that they have no cause for concern and that Italy considers the Jews as being under her protection and that they will continue to receive the same treatment granted to all Italian citizens.”⁷⁷ Unfortunately for the Libyan Jewish community, this connection that Mussolini made between them and the Italian Jewish community would prove disastrous for them just a few years later as they received the same treatment as Italian Jews under the racial laws.

The implementation of the racial laws in 1938 stripped Italian citizenship from any Jews who had acquired it, both in Italy and Libya. Specifically, the Royal Decree-Law no. 70, implemented on January 9, 1939, made it impossible for Jews to become Italian citizens, while simultaneously creating a special provision for Italian citizenship for some Libyan Muslims. Apart from the issue of citizenship, from the outset the racial laws most directly affected foreign non-Italian Jews (or who had obtained Italian citizenship after 1919) who were expelled from Libya, and Italian Jews in Libya who faced the same consequences as their brethren in Italy. Put in place on October 9, 1942, law no. 1420 expanded the racial laws in Libya to apply to all Jews, Italian and Libyan.⁷⁸ The subsequent fall of the Fascist regime left many Jews from Libya confused about their

⁷⁷ Renzo De Felice notes that there isn’t a full report of the speech, but that a local Roberto Arbib reported this. Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 354-355.

⁷⁸ Maurice M Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 24-5.

citizenship in the postwar period; some claimed Turkish or Ottoman citizenship, hearkening back to their citizenship prior to Italian colonization,⁷⁹ others claimed Libyan citizenship,⁸⁰ while still others claimed their former Italian citizenship.⁸¹ Because Libya remained under the BMA until its acquisition of nationhood in 1951, there was no one to officially re-designate citizenship for those who had lost theirs.

In some cases, the BMA affirmed a citizenship claim, which led to unforeseen problems for those attempting to get to Israel. Davide Osvaldo Franco, for instance, proved an interesting case where his immigration status was affirmed on the basis of his father's Italian heritage.⁸² When the thirty-five year old Franco decided to leave Libya because of the 1948 pogrom, he applied for repatriation privileges to Italy, a country he had never seen but claimed a heritage through because his father had been born in Leghorn. After arriving in Milan at the end of June 1948, he applied to the IRO for resettlement assistance to Israel; he was denied assistance because he was deemed an Italian citizen living in his own country. The BMA's affirmation of his Italian citizenship claim meant he was no longer a refugee.

The general lack of national certainty in the immediate postwar period also meant that many claimed citizenship based on affinity or feeling. A report from the Central British Fund for Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation claimed that in 1949, a Jewish candidate standing for municipal elections in Tripoli must register as a "Jew" rather than a "Libyan" or "Italian," despite the fact that the Jews claimed that "before 1938 they felt

⁷⁹ See for example: CM/1 Form for Abraham Fadlun, 3.2.1.2/80363244_0_1/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁸⁰ See for example: CM/1 Form for Scialom Barba, 3.2.1.2/80313860_0_1/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁸¹ See for example: CM/1 Form for Lillo Adadi, 3.2.1.2/80305453_0_1/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁸² CM/1 Form for Davide Osvaldo Franco, 3.2.1.2/80368914/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

as Italians or Libyans.”⁸³ Libyan Jews also reported that “in the period of racial discrimination [under the Italians] they drew closer to the Arabs, the other ‘depressed’ class, but they were always conscious of national affinities with other groups rather than of racial dissimilarities.”⁸⁴ Sion Barda, for instance, claimed “former Italian citizenship” when asked by the IRO welfare worker in Trani but also told them that his “Libian passport issued by British Mil. Auth. was taken away by the Jewish Agency’s employee a certain Josef Senusi and [he] was told say that [he was] running from robbers.”⁸⁵ Gabriele Arbib also said he came to Italy with a Libyan passport, which was subsequently taken away by the same individual but he “was told to say that they are coming from Rodos; promising to give him back the passport but he did not receive it back yet.”⁸⁶ This lack of clarity over current citizenship coupled with the propensity of Libyan DPs who arrived illegally to “lose” any paperwork they might have had when they arrived in Italy became exceedingly frustrating for the IRO.

Prior to 1948, clarity about citizenship for Libyan Jews appeared less pressing for both the IRO and the Italian authorities. Migrants without identification documents would be stopped, as the arrest of four Tripolitanian youths in Naples in August 1947 demonstrated; however, once an authorized body such as the IRO or the JDC accepted responsibility for them, these individuals would be released.⁸⁷ In October 1947 there were

⁸³ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder LY.22, “Letter from Dr. Joseph Schwartz,” February 7, 1949.

⁸⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder LY.22, “Letter from Dr. Joseph Schwartz,” February 7, 1949.

⁸⁵ CM/1 Form for Sion Barda, 3.2.1.2/80314155_0_1/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁸⁶ CM/1 Form for Gabriele Arbib, 3.2.1.2/80309834_0_1/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

⁸⁷ Letter from Salamon Montiljo to Hechaluz “Hamskirut Hamerkazit, Cevoli, “Oggetto: Intervento in favore di 4 giovani ebrei provenienti da Tripoli e detenuti nel Carcere di Poggio Reale di Napoli,” September 5, 1947, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 43D, f. 39.

a few Libyan Jews living in a *hachshara*, San Marco, just outside Florence. They were there with appropriate travel papers.⁸⁸ The UCII stated: “they are perfectly legal and therefore there is no reason to argue with the authorities, instead they must go and report to the Town Hall not as foreigners, but as citizens of Tripoli who have the right to have from the Italian Government the treatment of all the citizens of Tripoli who live in Italy.”⁸⁹ This small group of Libyans had caught the attention of the local police because they were living in a *hachshara* that was assumed to be supporting clandestine illegal immigration to Palestine. But the police apparently accepted their reporting as “Tripolitanian citizens” and did not bother them further. The majority of these Libyan Jews, however, left *hachshara* San Marco within the following two months.⁹⁰ The IRO was also not concerned about determining the citizenship of these individuals, as they did not apply for IRO assistance; the archives show a few other cases like these of Libyan Jews traveling in Italy before mid-1948, but they seem to be few in number.

Libyan Jews who arrived in Europe after the founding of the state of Israel in May 1948, however, now had to undergo the scrutiny of citizenship questions. From an undated IRO draft report written sometime after March 12, 1949, the IRO claimed that “from a constitutional point of view most of these people [from North Africa] are outside

Letter from Raffaele Cantoni to American Joint Distribution Committee Italian Communities Bureau, October 15, 1947, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 43D, f. 39.

⁸⁸ Letter from Marcello Savaldi to Raffaele Cantoni, October 22, 1947, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 44C, f. 18

⁸⁹ Letter from Raffaele Cantoni to Marcello Savaldi, October 29, 1947, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 44C, f. 18

⁹⁰ Letter from Marcello Savaldi to Raffaele Cantoni, December 12, 1947, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 44C, f. 18

their countries of nationality and former habitual residence.”⁹¹ Thus, it appeared they were willing to see Libyan Jews as not Italian, therefore making them potentially able to receive assistance under the IRO mandate. But this also posed a problem that was much bigger than the small Libyan Jewish population. The draft went on to state that “the numbers of persons to be covered by a decision would not be immediately large, but the possibility cannot be excluded of increasing numbers becoming involved, whether in France, if French ‘protected persons’ were not reported as being in their country of nationality, or in Italy by infiltration from France or North Africa.”⁹² The IRO feared that they would be setting a dangerous precedent around decolonization. It seems that the IRO worried that if they began to help individuals repatriating from former colonies to the metropolises, they would be responsible for far greater numbers than they could handle.

A “Valid” Fear of Persecution?

But the North African migrants needed to meet more than just the criteria for citizenship in order to gain status as “refugees” or “DPs” eligible for IRO assistance. IRO explained that it was primarily a question of motivation:

The main question arises in these cases is in connection with the validity of their objections to returning to their countries of origin. The expressed objections stem from fear of persecution by the Arab populations, a fear which has greatly increased since the setting up of the State of Israel, lack of protection and the acute economic difficulties that exist for the Jewish minority. The usual reasons

⁹¹ This is from an IRO file, “Eligibility of Jews coming from North Africa,” in the office of the chief historian, Michael Hacking. This was part of the convention to determine the IRO’s definitions of “refugee.” There is no date on the file, but based on notes in the interior, it was likely sent after March 12, 1949. “First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa),” n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, AJ 43-457 File 57 Eligibility of Jews from North Africa, 1948-1949. RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁹² Ibid.

given for unwillingness to return to North Africa and other Arab countries are that there have been anti-Semitic developments in the various countries concerned since the war and that it is not unreasonable for people who have once been attacked to try and escape rather than to risk further outbreaks.⁹³

The question, it seems, was whether they were truly “refugees,” that is persons fleeing persecution, or simply “economic migrants” moving because it was financially beneficial for them; the IRO seemed initially to be thinking Libyan Jews might fall into the first category. Yet, the answer was not as straightforward as that according to the IRO and the British. Much of the rationale for leaving revolved around the pogroms that occurred in Libya in November 1945 and June 1948. The crucial issue was whether there was enough violence or threat of violence in the region to warrant the impending exodus.

Unfortunately, not everyone involved—the Libyan Jews, the Libyan Arabs, the Italians, the Americans, the French, and the British—agreed on an answer to this question.

The pogrom that occurred between November 4 and 6, 1945, was among the most violent riots against Jews in modern North African history.⁹⁴ The attacks took place in Tripoli and in the neighboring towns of Cussabet and Zliten. In total, 130 Jews and 5 Arabs were killed, while 251 Jews, 36 Arabs, and 2 Italians were hospitalized. Material damage was immense, costing over \$4,000,000 in repairs, as around 1,500 Jews lost their homes and businesses destroying their economy.⁹⁵ The riots started two days after anti-Zionist violence broke out in Egypt on the anniversary of Balfour Declaration Day, November 2, commemorating the day in 1917 in which the British declared support for a

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ For more on the history of the pogrom see Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 201-205.

⁹⁵ “74 Jews Killed, 183 Injured in Anti-Jewish Riots in Tripoli; Jewish Quarters Looted,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (November 8, 1945). “Short Survey on First Pogrom in Tripolitania,” June 15, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1116, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

“national home for the Jewish people” in Ottoman Palestine. Likely motivated by a similar anti-Zionist spirit, although there does not appear to have been a direct connection to Egypt, Arab Libyans looted and attacked the Jewish quarter of Tripoli that was then under British control. These attacks were timed and coordinated, indicating a planned strike. And it is notable that the word “pogrom” is used to describe these riots at the time by both local and international Jewish communities, as its usage linked this tragedy with those more commonly referenced elsewhere in the diaspora.

Many contemporary historians argue that the BMA did not do enough either to prevent the riots or to stop them once they started.⁹⁶ Early in the morning on November 5, 1945, the heads of the Jewish community reported the rioting to the BMA Headquarters of the Senior Civil Affairs Officer of the Province, Lieutenant-Colonel Oulton. Oulton finally arrived in his office several hours later and was “immediately informed of the gravity of the situation and urged to take steps at once to quell the disorders with the aid of British troops, since the civil police had revealed their inability to keep the situation under control.”⁹⁷ Despite now promising to give the situation his immediate attention, the British military authorities “remained neutral” and refused to intervene until nightfall on November 6.⁹⁸ The British then stopped the rioting, simply by prohibiting assemblies and

⁹⁶ Ibid., 204-209; Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), see especially chapter 7 “The Anti-Jewish Riots of 1945;” Maurice M Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 52-53.

⁹⁷ “Report entitled ‘Anti-Jewish Riots in Tripolitania,’” Collection 1019, pg 2, The Wiener Library. The archival note from The Wiener Library states: “The provenance of this report is unknown. Report entitled ‘Anti-Jewish Riots in Tripolitania’ including lists of names, statistics, press reports, official communiqués, notices and proclamations relating to the anti-Jewish pogroms in that region of Libya, from 4–7 November 1945. English Typescript 31 pages. According to Renzo de Felice this is the English language version of the Libyan report ‘i tumulti anti-ebraici in Tripolitania 4, 5, 6 e 7 Novembre 1945,’ issued by the Community of Libya on December 31 1945, entitled Anti-Jewish Riots in Tripolitania and located at the Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem (Ref. CZA/S/25/6457). The report is quoted extensively in the above work.”

⁹⁸ “World Jewish Congress Calls on British Tripoli Administration to Protect Jews,” June 16, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as

the carrying of weapons and by declaring a state of emergency, which allowed them to patrol the streets and search any individuals outside; without firing a weapon, the British had ended the pogrom by late Tuesday night. The ease with which they stopped the violence clearly demonstrates the immense power the British wielded in the region and begs the question why they did not step in sooner. In the aftermath of the pogrom, it was reported that “the British did, at that time, apparently something to do justice to the victims: at least the official final report of the Jewish community said that 2 death sentences were handed down, much looted property returned to the owners, other assets were sold at auction and the money used for indemnification.”⁹⁹ Events quieted down following the 1945 pogrom, and relations between the Jews and Muslims in the region remained tense but largely peaceable.

However, the riots caused cascading financial problems for the Jewish community, which soon found itself unable to care for the growing lower classes. Immediately after the riots, Zachino Habib, president of the *Comunità Israelitica della Tripolitania*, the Jewish Community of Tripolitania, wrote messages to anyone even remotely connected to Jews in Libya, asking for material aid, political support, and psychological assistance. His pleas to these organizations, including the JDC, the UCII, and the World Jewish Congress convinced members of these aid groups to send representatives to survey the situation and determine what they could do to help.¹⁰⁰ This

seen in Roll 019, File B20-1124, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁹⁹ “Short Survey on First Pogrom in Tripolitania,” June 15, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1116, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram from Maurice Perlzweig to A.L. Easterman, March 18, 1946, Box H219, File 10, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Reel 0220, File 10, Scan 1080, RG-67.014M, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC. Telegram from Maurice Perlzweig to Sydney Silverman, March 18, 1946, Box H219, File 10, MS-361,

help came in the form of financial assistance, but it appears to only have been enough money for a few months of aid, which was not enough to get the struggling community back on its feet. Here the tax records of the Jewish Community in Tripolitania can be instructive: in 1943, 2,700 individuals paid taxes, whereas by 1947, only 600 were able to pay.¹⁰¹ This dramatic drop, which was not at that time correlated to an increase in emigration, indicated that the majority of the community was relying on outside assistance even two years after the 1945 pogroms. The JDC report showed that “Their social and economic life had become an unbearable burden, more than 60 percent living on charity from abroad and with no prospects of ameliorating their conditions. There was no freedom of speech or religion and they were not free from want and felt, therefore, obliged to escape.”¹⁰² Economic precarity and rising racial tensions created a perfect storm for the Libyan Jewish community. Thus, finally, with the sense of so little prospect for improvement, many now began fleeing to Italy.

As hundreds of Jews had made the journey from Libya to Italy in hopes of gaining recognition as DPs and assistance in their migration to Israel, the IRO had to determine Libyan Jews’ primary motivation; that is, were they refugees or simply economic migrants? In early 1949, it looked like the IRO might decide in favor of the North African as refugees as their report stated:

It is normal for Jewish applicants for IRO assistance to be persons whose objection to repatriation are as mixed between the valid and invalid as those of the North Africans. That does not prevent the Organisation regarding them as within the mandate if an element of their objection can be considered as valid...It is

World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Reel 0220, File 10, Scan 1082, RG-67.014M, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁰¹ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 211.

¹⁰² “First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa),” n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, AJ 43-457 File 57 Eligibility of Jews from North Africa, 1948-1949. RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

recommended therefore that Jews from Arab countries be regarded as refugees within the mandate to the extent that they fulfill the constitutional criteria, in particular those applicable to being outside their countries of nationality and having valid objection to return.¹⁰³

Having mixed motivations for leaving appeared potentially valid, according to this early draft. This meant that both the economic disaster from the war and pogroms and also the fear of continued persecution would be acceptable objections to repatriation. This recommendation, however, would have to go to both the Americans and the British, as these were the two groups with the biggest influence on the IRO.

The American Jewish lobby was convinced that the Libyan Jews met the criteria of refugee as one with a reasonable fear of persecution. When the Libyan children arrived in Italy in December 1948, the situation regarding Libyan eligibility for status had seemed straightforward to the Americans in the JDC. Letters exchanged in the subsequent days, however, detailed a situation more convoluted and complex than JDC liaison officer to the IRO in Geneva James Rice implied in his first missive discussed above. By the end of December, the JDC was still awaiting a decision from the IRO about the eligibility of Tripolitanians for IRO assistance. Meyer Cohn, another JDC liaison officer with the IRO, now “seemed doubtful that the future group [of Tripolitanians] could be declared eligible due to the question as to whether these people are primarily fleeing persecution, or are simply on their way to Israel.”¹⁰⁴ Writing to Louis Horowitz, JDC officer in Rome, James Rice reminded him that he knew “where to place the emphasis” regarding the primary motivation for the Tripolitanians leaving their homeland¹⁰⁵; there was no doubt in Rice’s

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder Tripolitania: Tripoli 1948-1949, “Letter from James P. Rice to Mr. L. D. Horwitz, Subject: Tripolitania.” December 23, 1948.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

mind that Libyans were leaving simply to seek safety from continued persecutions. Thus, a corresponding report was written and published by the JDC at the end of December 1948 detailing at length the 1945 and 1948 pogroms in Libya and the current situation for Jews in the country:

It can hardly be said that a solution for this unfortunate Community can be found in the country of its origin. The need for emigration and resettlement for the Jews is obvious from the dark period of their sufferings and from the present miserable position in Tripolitania. There can also be no doubt that those of them who escaped from Tripolitania and arrive in other countries, are displaced persons of whom special care should be taken. It is also beyond doubt that the Tripolitanian Jews who have escaped should be given immediate assistance and the possibility of emigrating to other countries. Indeed it appears to A.J.D.C. that the fate of Tripolitanian Jews who succeed in reaching Italy must be considered within the same framework of the assistance extended by IRO to other DPs from whom they only differ by the mere facts that they have become displaced only at a later stage but by exactly the same causes rooted in war events. Their present plight therefore is nothing but the direct outcome of antisemitic and racial propaganda in an Axis ruled territory during the war. Under these circumstances A.J.D.C. is calling upon IRO to accept the Tripolitanian Jewish refugees as eligible for their care and maintenance and eventual resettlement in accordance with their responsibilities for all other refugees who are victims of racial and religious persecution.¹⁰⁶

This report made it clear that life remained critically dangerous for Jews in Libya, thus giving them good motivation to migrate elsewhere and to be eligible to receive aid in doing so. Two months later, however, James Rice received word that the British Foreign Office had written reports contradicting those of the JDC. These reports claimed “that the situation is under good control and that there is no reason for Jews to leave the country as far as internal conditions are concerned.”¹⁰⁷ This clearly presented a problem for the JDC’s case in support of the Tripolitaniens.

¹⁰⁶ This is from a report dated December 1948 detailed the history of Jews in Libya from Italian occupation to 1948. JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder Tripolitania: Tripoli 1948-1949, “The Plight of the Tripolitanian Jews” December 1, 1948.

¹⁰⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder Tripolitania: Tripoli 1948-1949, “Letter from Mr. J. Rice to Mr. M. Beckelman, Re: Tripolitaniens.” February 23, 1949.

The British, as indicated by the reports of their Foreign Office, remained unconvinced of the Libyan Jews' fear for their safety. The BMA, they argued, "had made careful investigations but could obtain no information that life for Jews in Arab countries was intolerable or that they had any serious grounds for complaint about their personal security."¹⁰⁸ It was clear from the BMA's perspective that the Libyans were simply taking advantage of the situation. They claimed, "the movement of Jewish persons from North Africa was not motivated by oppression or by fear for their personal security."¹⁰⁹ The Jewish emigration was economically motivated, the BMA believed.

The relationship between the Jews of Libya and the BMA was rocky, to put it mildly. When the British arrived in Libya, the Jewish community welcomed them as liberators. Feelings changed, however, following the pogrom. Many Libyan Jews believed that the British had, at worst, instigated the 1945 pogrom or, at best, failed to step in early enough to save lives when they easily could have. In his seminal work on the history of modern Jewish Libya, Renzo De Felice argued convincingly that there was "no concrete evidence supporting the contention that the British organized or instigated the pogroms."¹¹⁰ However, he went on to say that "accusations of inefficiency and ambiguity leveled against the BMA by Libyan Jews" in the aftermath of the pogrom were much more well-founded. The BMA had failed to use the resources it had in Libya to stop the violence, and the Jewish community knew this. The Jewish Community in Tripolitania's official report complained that "the British Military Administration did not anticipate the

¹⁰⁸ "First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa)," n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, AJ 43-457 File 57 Eligibility of Jews from North Africa, 1948-1949. RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944-1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 207.

disorders, and despite the desperate appeals of the leaders of the Jewish and Arab Communities did not adopt timely and adequate measures to suppress it.”¹¹¹ Ilda Mimun, who had been in her late teens during the 1945 pogrom also recalled the matter quite straightforwardly: “the British didn’t do anything because they [were] the bad ones.”¹¹² The slow action of the British in 1945 created a rift in the trust they had garnered with the local Jewish population after liberating the country from Nazi-Fascist forces, a rift that would only continue to grow.

One possible reason for this lack of response on the part of the BMA was the issue of the trusteeship of Libya. If the British could demonstrate that the Libyan population was not prepared for independence, they might be granted continued control over the region. In this way, the British response toward the Jewish community was also tied to the question of the future of Libya. As noted earlier, following its liberation in 1943, the three provinces of Libya were divided: Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were governed by the British Military Administration on a “care and maintenance” status, while the French held authority in Fezzan.¹¹³ Italy, however, still held legal sovereignty over the entire region. The Four Powers, that is, Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union, were responsible for determining what ultimately would happen with the country. The Four Powers agreed in 1947 that Italy needed to relinquish any claim to the country, but they remained divided over who should then take control. For the Jewish community in Libya, the issue of Libyan control was among the most pressing issues between 1945 and

¹¹¹ Ibid., 206.

¹¹² Ilda Mimun, Interview 36350, Segment 13, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

¹¹³ For more on this, see Dirk J. Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 36-40.

1949. Their primary desire was for emigration rights, as over 30,000 of the 36,000 total Jews living in Libya during these years wanted to make *aliyah*.¹¹⁴ With these plans stalled indefinitely as the British refused to issue exit visas, however, many turned their attention to who could help them most while they remained in Libya.

Some in the Libyan and the Italian Jewish communities used the horrific outcome of the 1945 pogrom as a means to advocate that the international community give back control of Libya to Italy. They argued against a continuance of the British trusteeship and the pursuit for independent statehood on the grounds that neither the Libyan Arabs nor the British had managed a peaceable Libya. Just days after the riots, Angiolo Treves, on behalf of the Italian Jewish colony in Tripoli, wrote to Luigi Antonini, an early antifascist who had fled to the United States where he became president of the Italian-American Labor Council. In a tersely worded telegram, Treves called on the group to recognize the Italian citizenship of the Jews in Libya and to “intervene [with the] state department [in] Washington and raise Italo-American opinion [about the] dangerous situation in the making in a territory accustomed [to] racial and religious equality.” He argued that the “present situation [is] symptomatic [of] what will ultimately happen should [the] scheme calling for [the] transformation [of] Tripolitania in[to an] Arab State [be a] success [so] this project must be energetically fought from now.”¹¹⁵ Alarmed, Antonini then wrote a telegram to President Truman, Secretary of State Byrnes, and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate and the House of Representatives, in which he

¹¹⁴ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 229.

¹¹⁵ Telegram sent by Mr. Angiolo Treves, on November 9th, to Luigi Antonini, President of the Italian-American Labor Council, Box H219, File 10, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Reel 0220, File 10, Scan 1077, RG-67.014M, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

condemned the riots. He argued that the “outrageous assault against the Jewish people in Tripolitania [was] the inevitable result of sordid power politics seeking to divide the world into spheres of influence and to destroy the Italian national domain and integrity.”¹¹⁶ Employing early Cold War rhetoric Antonini reminded his American audience of the fears of these “spheres of influence” creating a Soviet-backed Arab majority state. His argument followed the then common line of reasoning that because the Italian people “never accepted the vile philosophy of racialism and stubbornly resisted every Fascist attempt to foist these inhuman doctrines on their country” they would be in a better position to prevent these riots in the future and bring “humane principles” and freedom to the region.¹¹⁷

Many Italian Jews also agreed that Libya should be returned to Italy, at least in part because it would mean that Libyan Jews would be safe in Libya and would not have to travel to Italy. In October 1947, the UCII in Rome received telegram from the WJC informing them that they had “received report [that the] IRO [was] preparing [a] directive whereby Jews coming unauthorized to Italy [were] not eligible for admission [into] IRO camps if entred [sic] from country where [they were] adequately cared for STOP please check immediately and make intervention with IRO authorities [in] Rome [and] cable results.”¹¹⁸ The following day, the UCII confirmed the report of this telegram with the return of Jacob Trobe from an IRO meeting in Geneva. Trobe informed them that “these

¹¹⁶ Telegram sent by Mr. Antonini on November 12th to: President Truman, Secretary of State Byrnes and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate and the House of Representatives, Box H219, File 10, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Reel 0220, File 10, Scan 1077, RG-67.014M, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Telegram from Robert Marcus and Leon Kubowitzki to Rafaele Cantoni, October 24, 1947, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 93I, f. 27.

decisions [of the IRO] mean a true ‘*numerus clausus*’ for the DP’s [sic] in Italy and an absolute refusal to admit unauthorized refugees who would swell the number of those already admitted to this country.”¹¹⁹ The higher cost of caring for DPs in Italy, as compared to Germany and Austria, and the potential of clandestine immigration to Palestine were listed as the two primary reasons for halting this influx of DPs at the borders. And the concern seems at first focused on the northern border, but the end of the letter changes this: “Therefore, it would be of top importance that you launch a campaign in the US press these days, advocating an Italian trusteeship for Libya and that you send us clippings of the articles published.”¹²⁰ An Italian trusteeship of Libya, the UCII reasoned, would ensure the protection of Libyan Jews much more strongly than an independent Arab Libya.

But it was not just the safety of Libyan Jews that the Italians were concerned with. Fritz Becker pointed out: “Since the opinion prevails here [in Italy] that Tripolitania will again come under Italian administration, it is evident that the foreign ministry fears the emigration of such pro-Italian elements as the Jews are known to be.”¹²¹ The Italians themselves wanted control over Libya. As the Jews had long been supporters of the Italians, despite their actions during the war, the Italians feared they would lose crucial support for their bid for a trusteeship. The Jews wanted to support the Italians, and initially did, but by mid-1946 the fear of another pogrom induced the president of the

¹¹⁹ Letter from Fritz Becker to Leon Kubowitzki, October 24, 1947, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 931, f. 27.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Letter from Fritz Becker to AL Easterman, “Subject: Emigration from Tripoli,” 11 March 1949, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1180, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Libyan Jews to announce the community's support for an independent Libya. The British wanted to maintain a foothold in North Africa, and thus, sought to retain occupying control. However, on September 15, 1948, following a three-year deadlock and infighting among the Four Powers, the matter was turned over the United Nations General Assembly. A resolution guaranteeing Libyan independence by the end of 1951 was subsequently adopted on November 21, 1949.

Taking place during the negotiations over the fate of the country, the second round of pogroms in June 1948, only further cemented the Jewish community's mistrust of the BMA. Between June 12 and 13, 1948, a series of violent anti-Jewish riots broke out again in Tripoli. The riots started when a group of Tunisians, who were on their way to Israel to fight in the Arab-Israeli war, attempted to enter the Jewish quarter in Tripoli just before the end of the sabbath. This time, however, far fewer Jews were killed.¹²² Renzo de Felice described the Jewish resistance where "young men, girls, even children, organized by the *Haganah* and ready for anything, resisted them with stones, bombs, and Molotov cocktails."¹²³ This resistance pushed the rioters out of the Jewish quarter and into undefended areas in the city where violence, looting, and burning raged, destroying many Jewish homes and businesses and two synagogues and leaving at least 1,600 Jews

¹²² According to Maitre Elie Nataf, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Tunisia, "The news of these incidents immediately spread over the whole city, and thus the real fight began. The Arabs attacked en masse, but the Jews succeeded in repelling them, defending themselves with hand-grenades, revolvers, and a kind of grenade made out of boxes containing gelatin and a wick; this latter mechanism causing considerable damage. The Jews attacked, crying: 'long live the State of Israel' and 'Long Live the Haganah.' They succeeded in pushing the Arabs back. Then they advanced in the direction of the Arab section, rushing mainly through the Souk Etelat. On their way, they set fire to and looted the stores of the Moslems. They also burned their houses. They did just what the Arabs had done to them on November 6, 1945." Letter "Re: The anti-Jewish riots in Tripoli on June 12-13, 1948," July 13, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1130, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²³ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 224.

homeless. The BMA declared a state of emergency the following morning, much more quickly than they had in 1945, and things were largely tense, but peaceable by the afternoon. BMA official reports differ from the Jewish official tallies of the numbers dead and wounded: the BMA says thirteen Jews and three Arabs were killed and twenty-two Jews and thirteen Arabs were seriously injured, whereas the Jewish report states that fourteen Jews and thirty Arabs were killed and many in both populations seriously injured.

The actions of the Jews in June 1948 displayed the deep distrust many Libyan Jews had for the BMA, whom they felt had simply stood by during the 1945 pogrom. This time the Jewish community ensured they had access to weapons rather than relying on the local BMA police. And the BMA seemed to have recognized this growing anxiety and hesitancy, as they invited the president of the Jewish community of Tripoli Lillo Arbib to accompany the British officer in formally counting the dead.¹²⁴ Neither the BMA nor the Arab leaders, however, could convince the Libyan Jews to trust them; when the mufti, accompanied by the chief rabbi, entered the Jewish quarter the day after the pogroms he attempted to discuss peace and solidarity, but the people shouted “We want Italy, which has always protected the weak!”¹²⁵

International groups, at least international Jewish groups, such as the WJC also recognized the precarity of the situation for the Jews in Libya. As early as June 16, 1948, the WJC responded by calling on the BMA to protect the Jews in Libya. Dr. Robert Marcus, acting director of the political department of the WJC cabled both the U.S. State

¹²⁴ Testimony of Lillo Arbib, January 1999. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC, <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonylillo.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

¹²⁵ Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 225.

Department and the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Oliver Shewell Franks, asking for assistance and accountability. He wrote that “reports received from the Jewish community, show that, despite repeated assurances by local British authorities, serious rioting was directed against the Jewish population on June 12 and 13, when old men, women and children were attacked, considerable property damage was caused and two synagogues were destroyed.”¹²⁶ In a news release for the WJC, Marcus argued that it was the BMA’s responsibility to “make certain that future outbreaks will be avoided.”¹²⁷ There had already been the serious attacks in 1945 during which, according to Marcus, “British soldiers remained ‘neutral.’”¹²⁸ Despite the British Government’s minimal efforts to put things right after the 1945 pogrom, Marcus felt they had not done enough to prevent new attacks. Following the 1945 destruction, the British government, Marcus argued “was then on notice that the Jewish population was in danger of future attacks and that necessary measures should be taken to protect them. Apparently, these steps were never taken, as witnessed by the latest outbreaks.”¹²⁹ British Ambassador Franks responded to Marcus’s telegram the following day and stated that he had passed the message along to his government, and no further comment was given to Marcus. Joseph Palmer II, Acting Chief of the Division of African Affairs for the U.S. Department of State replied to Robert Marcus’s telegram stating: “It is the understanding of the Department that the British Military Administration of Tripolitania took prompt action to protect life, and property and that law and order have been restored in the area, which

¹²⁶ “World Jewish Congress Calls on British Tripoli Administration to Protect Jews,” June 16, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1124, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

should give reassurance on this matter.”¹³⁰ Released from blame by the Americans, the British had little motivation to recognize any continued persecution the Libyan Jews might have experienced.

Reports from North African Jews themselves, however, show a different side. They clearly state that “At no moment did the British intervene, either with their police or with their officers.”¹³¹ Writing a few months after the pogrom, in September 1948, Roberto Arbib claimed that because of the British, life in Libya was “becoming more difficult day by day and nearly impossible.”¹³² They needed assistance and they needed to leave. A local reporter describing the aftermath of the 1948 pogrom proclaimed that “The slogan of every Jew without exception is now ‘to go away,’ irrespective of destination. This is the only goal of every Jew here. They expect in advance to suffer hunger, to abandon their property and their friends, their native country—in order not to become a victim, not to be suddenly slaughtered or burned alive.”¹³³ The IRO explained that they must consider both “official” reports and also the “feelings” of those involved:

[T]he views of the Jews themselves, based as they are on past persecution and anti-Semitic activities cannot be overlooked, even if these activities were to some extent caused by reaction to the actions of other Jews in other places. Thus, the motives underlying the movement are partly the reaction from discrimination and the fear of anti-Jewish acts and partly the positive tendency towards Israel. Opinions will differ as to the weight to be given to the different motives, which will in any event be difficult in principle to disentangle in any particular case. The

¹³⁰ Letter from Joseph Palmer to Robert Marcus, June 28, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1128, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³¹ Letter “Re: The anti-Jewish riots in Tripoli on June 12-13, 1948,” July 13, 1948, Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1130, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³² Letter from Roberto Arbib to Colonnello Vitale, September 9, 1948, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 258, f. 38

¹³³ “En Tripolitaine. Après les désordres antijuifs des 12 et 13 Juin 1948. Situation actuelle,” *Les Cahiers de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, n. 26 (October 1948), 8-9. Seen originally in Schechtman, *On Wings of Eagle*, 141.

motives impelling Jews to leave Arab countries naturally result in a wish to migrate to Israel.¹³⁴

In the end, reports from Libyan Jews themselves who stated that they left because they were “afraid of persecution by Arabs and British” were not given as much weight as those official reports.¹³⁵ The British government strongly opposed the IRO helping these Jewish refugees. A desire to live in Israel, in a county where they might not face racial persecution, was seen as a separate motivator in their leaving. It was also a question of precedent, as another IRO report noted that Libyan Jews were “again in a state of fear. Their position is, in many respects, similar, however, to the position of the considerably greater number of Jews in other Arab and Moslem territory...a total of 610,000 [Jews].”¹³⁶ The Jewish populations in these countries (namely, Iran, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria) also wanted to leave for Israel because their positions had “materially worsened” the report continued, leaving aside the question of violence or persecution.¹³⁷ Unlike in the case of the European Jews, who also feared continued persecution in their countries of birth and also wanted to live in Israel, for the Libyans, the idea that they specifically wanted to move to Israel rather than simply leave Libya discounted any claim of persecution based fear; if they had been European instead of North African, perhaps things would have turned out differently for them.

¹³⁴ “First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa),” n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, AJ 43-457 File 57 Eligibility of Jews from North Africa, 1948-1949. RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³⁵ CM/1 Form for Lillo Adadi 3.2.1.2/80305452_0_1/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

¹³⁶ “Statistiques diverses IRO/SOR 5 a SOR 131,” n.d. [after June 30, 1949], AJ/43/1130/30 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 14, AJ 43-1130 Various statistics regarding Libya, Syria, and Palestine. Refugee name lists reclassified as ‘manifestly difficult cases,’ 15 Sep. 1949. RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Maybe if they had been European?

For a time, the IRO decided to regard Jews in Libya attempting to enter Italy as Italian citizens.¹³⁸ This move paradoxically strengthened the IRO's position against offering them refugee or displaced persons status and denying them care and maintenance and assistance. By claiming these Libyan Jews were simply moving from former colony to land of citizenship, the IRO could demarcate them as outside the mandate as national migrants and sidestep any responsibility. But this position did not actually confer Italian citizenship or Europeaness upon these Libyans. And without these things, Libyan Jews would not qualify for any assistance in Italy.

And the Libyan youth themselves recognized this disparity in treatment. On April 21, 1949, during the celebration of Passover, a group from the DP youth camp Salerno was told that they were to leave for the port city of Bari the following day and from there to take a ship to make *aliyah* within the week. After they rushed to pack and load up the truck, their trip was canceled with no explanation. British aid worker and group leader, Chava Frankel, wrote a report to express the feeling of the children in the camp to the camp director at the nearby Pagani DP camp and copied all the welfare agencies involved including the JDC, *Alijath Noar* in Rome, Palestinian Offices in Rome and Bari, *Hapoel Hamisrachi* in Rome, and the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad in London:

The tragedy and disappointment is undiscrivable [sic], especially as this group of children had been handled unfairly all the time from the beginning by the party concerned. They are nearly eight months in Italy, had to endure most difficult times in Genazzano [the *hachshara* where their stay in Italy was initially and unexpectedly extended because they could not get help from the IRO] and much more down here, which was only several times interrupted by the promised hope

¹³⁸ Joseph B. Schechtman, *On Wings of Eagles*, 141.

of early Alijah [sic], which had been crushed over and over again.¹³⁹

Frankel initially attributed this delay to “mismanagement and lack of understanding for the children’s plight.”¹⁴⁰ But in a follow-up letter to Youth Aliyah leader David Golding, she hypothesized further: not only were the children disappointed, but they also had a strong feeling about why they were being left out again. She wrote, “You will never be able to understand how the children feel here and how upset they are again, that there will be no alijah on Thursday. They are all crying, shouting and have great mistrust against all of us. *These answers is* [sic], *that they are not leaving because they are not Europeans.*”¹⁴¹

And this does, at least in part, seem to correspond to the thinking of the IRO in spring 1949. In a draft of resolutions in March 1949 the IRO wrote that

except for the repatriation of overseas Chinese, an operation of unusual lineage and one not strictly constitutional, and the financial assistance given to the relief of Arab refugees, the Organization has not so far helped any refugees of other than European origin...On the other hand, it has been suggested for example by the United Nations secretariat that the Organisation should be responsible for helping Arab refugees and the main reason for the Organisation not doing so has been usually regarded as financial rather than constitutional. Furthermore, the problem of Jewish refugees is essentially similar whatever their origin.¹⁴²

The IRO’s prime directive was to help Europeans. The draft writers continued stating that “It is most improbable the framers of the Constitution envisaged the Organisation taking part in refugee problems other than those concerning European, nor has there been any

¹³⁹ Letter from Ch. Frankel to Camp Director Pagani, Subject: Report about the children’s “departure,” April 22, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180350, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Italics mine. Ibid.

¹⁴² “First Draft. Subject: Report on Exodus of Jews from Arab Countries (Mainly North Africa),” n.d. AJ/43/457/57 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, RG–43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

serious governmental suggestion that the Organisation should assist non-European refugees.”¹⁴³ Yet, this draft concludes by recommending “that Jews from Arab countries be regarded as refugees within the mandate” largely on the basis of the previous help the IRO had given to European Jews.¹⁴⁴ The drafters argued that “The IRO from its inception has assisted in the [European Jewish] move [to Palestine] and there appears no clear reason of principle for adopting a new policy now” despite the individuals now coming from a different continent.¹⁴⁵ The IRO continued to grapple with these questions and recommendations for several months. As Daniel Cohen explains, the IRO was the first international body to evaluate the question of persecution in relation to its eligibility requirements; ultimately, however, they determined that North African and Arab refugees were migrants because of “war operations and did not fall within the wording ‘persecution or fear based on reasonable ground of persecution’ (the criteria used by the IRO to evaluate the claims of European DPs).”¹⁴⁶ The recommendations of these draft writers were ultimately overruled; non-Europeans were outside the scope of eligibility, it seemed.

By May 1949, any hopes of Tripolitanian Jews receiving assistance and eligibility status from the IRO were firmly and solidly dashed. All Application for Assistance Care and Maintenance forms were restamped: “Not within the mandate of IRO. Jew: ref. ex North Africa see Geneva Policy Cable 471 of 27 May 1949.”¹⁴⁷ The IRO’s official policy

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Gerard Daniel Cohen, “The Politics of Recognition: Jewish Refugees in Relief Policies and Human Rights Debates, 1945–50,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 24, no. 2 (July 2006): 139–40

¹⁴⁷ Cable Number 471 from IRO Refugee Geneva, May 27, 1949. Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170190, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

was now “to take no responsibility whatsoever” regarding assistance for North African Jews.¹⁴⁸ They argued that “Jewish minorities in North Africa are probably technically within the mandate,”—their policy cable even stated that these cases represented “*refugee* problems not envisaged by Governments as within scope IRO operations”¹⁴⁹—but so too were Arab refugees now fleeing persecution in Israel. Conferring eligibility on one of these groups, the IRO believed, would require giving eligibility to both, a move they were not prepared to make. The IRO felt they could not be responsible for adding cases which would increase their workload and, perhaps more importantly, would potentially upset the delicate balance between the powers involved. They also recognized that the British would certainly oppose any policy aimed at assisting Jews to travel from North Africa to Israel. Ultimately, they argued that “these problems are beyond their present scope of operations, because of budgetary limitations.”¹⁵⁰

Mid-1949 also brought about the end to the exit/entry permit problem that had vexed their early emigration. Nearly all of the leadership groups connected to Jews in Libya and Italy agreed that Libyan Jews needed to stop coming to Italy illegally as a means to getting to Israel. Exit visas were now legal and much easier to get for those in Libya. As of April 5, 1949, Jews were allowed to exit freely without quotas, although there were still some restrictions: “The British administration...put no obstacles in the

¹⁴⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder Tripolitania: Tripoli 1948-1949, “Letter from James P. Rice to Mr. Louis D. Horwitz, Subject: Tripolitanian Children.” May 24, 1949.

¹⁴⁹ Emphasis mine. Cable from Geneva to Rome Number 471, May 27, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170190, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

¹⁵⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder Tripolitania: Tripoli 1948-1949, “Letter from James P. Rice to Mr. Louis D. Horwitz, Subject: Tripolitanian Children.” May 24, 1949.

way of emigration, except in cases pertaining to the removal of property. Each family, he declared, was permitted to take £250 in liquid assets through normal channels of transfer. The rest was placed in blocked accounts and as usual, emigrants were not permitted to take any currency with them.”¹⁵¹ They argued that Jews wanting to immigrate to Israel should go directly there from Libya, completely bypassing Italy as a stopover.¹⁵² Eventually, despite the financial holds and cost, this became the best option for many in Libya.

Yet, these financial concerns and the continued fear of violence meant that Jews still could not easily and precipitously make *aliyah*. One exception to the view that Jews should bide their time in Libya while awaiting rights to emigrate to Israel was David Golding of the Youth Aliyah who argued as late as June 1949 that “Italy is by far a better place [than Tripoli] for a *Hachshara* for Tripolitanian youth.” In his letter to the JDC regarding their proposed creation of educational homes for Libyan Jewish children in Tripoli, Golding suggested a location change. He feared that within Libya “the state of security is object to sudden changes...with new political developments the situation of free exit and freedom for Zionist activities may also change” and therefore as many children as possible should be taken out of Libya immediately.¹⁵³ The Youth Aliyah had enough entry permits for Italy, and the JDC already had structures in place to help them

¹⁵¹ “Gravest apprehensions of Libya Jews,” World Jewish Affairs News and Feature Service News Bulletin No. 232, October 14, 1949, Box B93, Folder 5, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B93-0533, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁵² Meeting Notes, March 29, 1949, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 258, f. 38

¹⁵³ Letter from David Golding to Charles Passman, June 14, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scans 82170234–82170235, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

in Italy. The JDC declined and decided to assist the Libyan Jewish community in Libya, helping them to make *aliyah* directly from Tripoli instead of via Italy.

The IRO Geneva Policy Cable 471 specified, however, that the IRO would assist those refugees already living in IRO homes in Italy. It declared these migrants and unaccompanied children “as exception[s] on humanitarian grounds.”¹⁵⁴ But it cautioned that “this exception [is] not to be interpreted as precedent granting care and maintenance any other members this group. Cannot extend resettlement assistance [to] this or similar future group.”¹⁵⁵ This help was extended to a very small number—only those within the IRO camps, so not those in JDC camps—and the IRO would not reimburse any travel expenses.¹⁵⁶ The JDC stepped in to provide the funds necessary for resettlement in Israel with the logistical assistance of the Jewish Agency. In late 1949, the JDC reported that “Through the organized efforts of voluntary agency representatives we have been able to secure improvement in the civil status of refugees residing in camps and out of camps in Italy... [they continued] to press for rights of refugees in Italy similar to those accorded to any foreigner residing in the country.”¹⁵⁷ In the end it seems that the IRO agreed with the assessment made by the Libyan Jews, the Italians, and the JDC: these individuals met the definition of refugees, that is persons fleeing their home because of persecution.

Nevertheless, despite acknowledging that they met these criteria, the IRO extended little

¹⁵⁴ Cable from Geneva to Rome Number 471, May 27, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170190, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Letter to M.W. Beckelman from P. Jacobsen, August 30, 1949, AJ/43/398/DG5 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 3, RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁵⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 625, “American Joint Distribution Committee,” November 23, 1949.

practical help to Libyan Jews, explicitly noting that doing so could invite political pressure to help non-Jewish Arabs as well.

Conclusion

I am extremely pleased with the favourable result obtained by the WJC intervention with the British Foreign Office, which resulted in the permission to emigrate for the Jews of Lybia [sic]. I believe the WJC can pride itself with this result which represents the coronation of repeated and tenacious efforts....Let me, at this occasion, emphasize how successful the teamwork was of the three organizations directly concerned with the Tripoli problem. The WJC performed its task, obtaining by political intervention that the right of emigration for the Jews of Lybia [sic] was honoured in accordance with the Charter of the UN, the JDC is taking care of the material needs, and OSE is looking after the health of the Jews about to emigrate.¹⁵⁸

In his report to the United Nations, Raffaele Cantoni, head of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities spoke with high praise for the work of these outside organizations to solve the problem of Libyan migration. But what of the Tripolitanian children already in Italy? According to James Rice of the JDC, the IRO had decided to grant all North African Jews in Italy an informal exception. Thus, their papers would be stamped “ineligible” for refugee/DP status and aid, but they would continue to be granted housing and some food aid (supplemented by the JDC) until the JDC and the Jewish Agency were able to get them to Israel. Travel manifests attached to a 1951 report from the IRO to the International Tracing Service indicate that nearly all, if not all of the Libyan children had made it to Israel. As IRO historian, Louise Holborn, described it: “Arab children were not within the mandate; the question of the eligibility of Jewish children from Tripolitania

¹⁵⁸ The OSE is the *Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE, or the Society for Assistance to Children), a French-based Jewish humanitarian organization that focused on medical issues in the postwar period. Letter Raffaele Cantoni to Members of the Executive Subject: Emigration from Tripoli Box B20, Folder 11, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 019, File B20-1186, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

was dealt with.”¹⁵⁹ By examining how the North African Jews were “dealt with” in chapters three and four, we will see far less personal agency afforded to the Libyan refugees than was given to their Eastern European counterparts. In regard to the question of their eligibility for aid, Libyan Jewish groups in Tripoli sent missives and requests to the IRO, but these were often passed over in favor of reports from “more official” agencies, particularly the BMA. Not allowed to create something like the Organization for Jewish Refugees in Italy that represented European Jews in the DP camps, Libyan Jews were unable to offer their own representation in the camps and instead had to rely primarily on humanitarian aid groups to fight for them. Thus, it was the efforts of the humanitarian aid groups to circumvent the system of international refugee classification both ensured the safety of these North African Jews and constituted one of the first attempts to challenge the immediate postwar definition of “refugee” and “displaced person.”

¹⁵⁹ Louise W Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization*, 504.

CHAPTER THREE

“Does not follow a blueprint”: The Role of Culture in the DP Camps

“We want the world, but first of all ourselves, to see, that we are here, that we are a community—because we value culture.”¹
—Eliezer Yerushalmi and Berl Kahn, DPs

“The educational and cultural phase of Jewish refugee life in Italy does not follow a blueprint, rather it runs parallel to the haphazard lines of development of refugee life in general. It is an outgrowth of a combination of facts, unrelated to each other, stemming from the chaos which followed the piecemeal liberation of the country. Centers of refugee life sprang up here and there....Almost immediately educational activities, of one kind or another, originated.”²
—JDC Report

Eliezer Yerushalmi’s novel about refugees in post-World War II Italy begins with a man who has completely lost hope.³ This man wanders the streets of Rome looking for a new home but finds every door shut. He is jealous of these apartments, these homes. Nothing in his life seems to be moving forward. He is stuck waiting. In many ways, Yerushalmi’s novel was autobiographical, as he too spent the early years after the war looking for a home as a refugee in Italy. Unlike his novel’s protagonist, however, Yerushalmi remained hopeful of finding a new home in Palestine for himself in the future. During his time in Italy, however, Yerushalmi had found a space for himself in the Displaced Persons (DP) camps.

As a delegate at the 1948 *Alveltlekher Yidisher Kultur Kongres* (World Jewish Culture Congress), Eliezer Yerushalmi saw New York for the first time. He had been sent

¹ E. Yerushalmi and B. Kahn “Fun der redaktsye,” *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur un kunst* n. 1 (March 1947), 2. Wiener Holocaust Library, P1131/11

² JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder, 634, “Report Education Department July 19, 1946,” July 19, 1946.

³ “Man iz im mekane di dira, a novele fun plitim in Italye,” Accession Number: 2012.489.8, Eliezer Yerushalmi papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

by the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) as the representative for the *Fareyn fun yidishe literatn, zhurnalistn un kinstler in Italye* (Union of Jewish Writers, Journalists, and Artists in Italy).⁴ A prolific writer, documentarian, and teacher, Yerushalmi was well-suited to the task. Born in Belorussia in 1900, Yerushalmi spent his early years studying literature and serving in a variety of educational roles. During the war, he worked in a school in the Siauliai Ghetto in Lithuania, where he wrote a ghetto diary and helped preserve *Judenrat* (the Nazi-required local Jewish council) materials, including a variety of official documents as well as personal reports of events in the ghetto.⁵ He escaped from the ghetto, and in 1945 moved to Italy with the *Brichah* (“escape” or “flight;” the organized clandestine movement of Jews from Eastern Europe to Palestine) movement, where he remained until making *aliyah* (“ascent,” the emigration of Jews to Israel) in early 1949. During his tenure in Italy, he served as the head of the Cultural Department of the newly formed refugee organization OJRI, alternatively called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Italy or the *Irgun ha-plitim be-Italia, Merkaz ha-Plitim*.

Finding their anticipated exit route from Italy to Palestine blocked by the British as early as 1945, the Jewish refugees or Displaced Persons (DPs) began to form their own organizational structure that would manage their community’s now prolonged tenure in Italy. In its effort to raise the spirits of the DPs burdened by war and loss, the self-established committee, OJRI, also wanted to “raise the cultural standard of the

⁴ The Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) was created in late 1945 to be the voice of all Jewish DPs in Italy. It was alternatively called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Italy or the *Irgun ha-plitim be-Italia, Merkaz ha-Plitim*.

⁵ This archive was confiscated by the Soviets and has never been returned. “Dr. Eliezer Yerushalmi Collection: Documentation from the Siauliai Ghetto,” Yad Vashem Archives, P.4.

refugees.”⁶ To this end, they facilitated the creation and growth of a host of cultural groups and activities. The cultural department of OJRI, in particular, was responsible for both reviving and creating Jewish culture in the camps. Yet part of their job was to figure out what exactly this culture looked like within the very temporary space of their new but not yet quite “home.” A new Jewish culture was being created in the Italian DP camps. This culture was, in many ways, a hodgepodge of distinct cultural trends. It brought into conversation elements of a common Jewish past in Eastern Europe with their present life in Italy and their hopes of a future in Palestine/Israel. Events from art shows to theater productions to writing contests to film screenings to lectures explored what it now meant to be a Jewish refugee in Italy. Some of these were distinctly focused on reviving a cultural past left behind or taken away in Eastern Europe. Purim plays, for example, reconnected the DPs with their traditional practices as costumes and sets were modeled after those found in the prewar *shtetl* found across Central and Eastern Europe. Other activities were explicitly future-oriented: lecture series sponsored speakers from Palestine to excite and prepare their audiences for the joys and trials awaiting them in their new homes.

This chapter focuses on the liminal period of waiting when the DPs realized they would need to begin their own rehabilitation process in Italy. This rehabilitation process was often self-initiated by the refugees and assisted by humanitarian aid workers. This chapter first looks at the creation of the DP-led governing body and argues that from the start, rehabilitation was tied to cultural activities. Then it turns to the work of historical

⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Excerpts from a Report by the Central Organizations of Refugees in Italy,” February 2, 1949.

commissions, arguing that these played an integral role for those in the DP camps in both remembering the past and preparing for change in the future. The following sections examine the roles of the written word and artistic and recreational activities in the current lives of refugees. Seeking to begin the process of rehabilitation, the goals here were primarily threefold: to raise the spirits of fellow Jewish DPs, to connect them to groups outside their camp, and to begin to grapple with what a new, post-Holocaust Jewish culture might actually look like. Finally, it will explore the results of this cultural system, arguing that the reports of refugees and their organizations allow us to question the theory of camp space as only providing for “bare life.” By contrasting the experiences of Eastern European Jewish refugees, the significantly larger group, with those of Libyan Jewish refugees, it demonstrates that this cultural rebirth was only possible for the former group. For refugees stuck in Italy, the idea was to imagine a Jewish future outside of Italy, but as this chapter demonstrates, the practices of cultural renewal became part of a system that also bound them to their temporarily Italian home. By exploring this complicated creation of culture, this chapter demonstrates the importance of self-governance and refugee agency within the rehabilitation process through the many facets of cultural life in the DP camp.

Reordering and Self-Governing

The aims of the Organization of Jewish D.P.'s in Italy are...to reeducate [all Jewish DPs in Italy] for life in civilized society and develop their sense of social responsibility...to educate them to productive work...to satisfy their cultural and spiritual needs...to fight against the phenomena of demoralization among them, caused by the terrible conditions of persecution and the necessities of their fight for survival in Ghettos and concentration camps...to reawaken their sense of human dignity, their self confidence and generally to give them guidance in their return to a normal way of life.... [All Jewish DPs] attach major importance to the

cultural and intellectual work, especially since the education of a great part of them was interrupted through the war.⁷

The first thing the survivors wanted was a sense of self-determination, and thus they immediately began forming camp committees for self-representation with the governing authorities.⁸ Thus, between November 26 and 28, 1945, Jewish DP leaders held their first Conference of Jewish Refugees in Ostia, Rome. Here OJRI garnered official recognition as the voice of Jewish DPs. Leading up to the conference, 140 delegates were selected from across the country, roughly one per every one hundred refugees present then in Italy; voting for delegates had taken place on November 8, and each delegate had to have the support of at least 20 other refugees. These delegates were then tasked with the creation of a Central Committee, which played the role of mediator between relief agencies and refugees.⁹ Each camp then had an elected camp committee that was the official representation to the non-refugee camp administration for that camp.¹⁰ OJRI elected Leo Garfunkel as its first president. Garfunkel, born in Kovne, Lithuania, had been a leader in the Kovne ghetto and was active in its resistance movement before his internment in Dachau. The former lawyer represented the Central Committee at all official meetings with the Allied forces, the United Nations Relief and

⁷ "List of norms on how to elect delegates for the Conference of Jewish Refugees in Italy. Conference of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy," November 26-28, 1945; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 2, Reel 1.4, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁸ Jewish Refugees set up a temporary council as early as August 1945 and called for a general conference in November 1945 "to replace the provisional Central Executive Committee by a democratically elected and fully authorized Committee." "List of norms on how to elect delegates for the Conference of Jewish Refugees in Italy. Conference of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy," November 26-28, 1945; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 2, Reel 1.4, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁹ "List of norms on how to elect delegates for the Conference of Jewish Refugees in Italy. Conference of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy," November 26-28, 1945; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 2, Reel 1.4, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

¹⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.163, "Letter from Benjamin N. Brook to American Joint Distribution Committee, Subject: Report on Southern Italy Camps," January 30, 1946.

Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and other voluntary agencies. At this first meeting, the Central Committee divided itself into seven departments, which camp-appointed representatives looked after: Religious Affairs, Statistics and Information, Health, Productivity, Supply, Art, and Culture. The goal of this all-refugee committee was to ameliorate life for Jewish refugees, and to this end they placed an emphasis on rehabilitation through education, job training, and renewed cultural activities.

This cultural renewal was slow in starting, as most DPs still held out hope that they would be leaving quickly; but by April 1946 it was clear to both the refugees and the voluntary organizations that assisted them that they would need to begin to restart their lives in the camps. Refugee groups and international agencies all began cultural programs, as one voluntary agency reported, “in reluctant recognition of the fact that the refugee program, contrary to early hopes, was not to be liquidated in a matter of weeks or even months and that, during the enervating period of waiting, the people should be given the opportunity for education and rehabilitation.”¹¹ The enervating period of waiting would soon be filled with the attempts at rebirth started both by refugees and the external agencies there to assist them. The cultural renewal that took place in the DP camps was inspired both by the refugees and the external agencies there to assist them; the refugee leadership of OJRI found itself somewhere in the middle of this top-down and bottom-up wellspring of ideas. The majority of events were funded and organized by some combination of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), OJRI (and its camp committees), and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or the “Joint”), and, in particular, the latter two.

¹¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder, 634, “Report Education Department July 19, 1946,” July 19, 1946.

The JDC was one of the most important voluntary agencies for Jewish relief work in the postwar period.¹² They were responsible for sending funds and material goods, gathered through donations to the United Jewish Appeal, to Jewish DPs across Europe; records show that they raised \$194 million between 1945 and 1948 and shipped 99,789,548 pounds of food, clothing, and medicine between 1946 and 1950.¹³ In addition, they provided materials and aid workers for schools, child cares, hospitals, and religious institutions. Their assistance was integral in allowing Jewish DPs the means and ability to resettle in a variety of countries. These funds, however, would prove to be “wildly insufficient,” in the words of Avinoam Patt and Kierra Crago-Schneider, as the DPs’ needs were even greater than initially envisioned. This created a sense of abandonment in the minds of some DPs, especially Libyan refugees, and which will be addressed at length in chapter four. But, overall, the JDC proved to be a crucial ally for survivors in the DP camps by funding and supporting DP-led organizations.

Founded in the wake of World War I, the JDC sent field workers to Italy in 1944 opening offices in Rome following its liberation by the Allies.¹⁴ From this office, the JDC coordinated relief efforts and sent packages and money to needy Jews, Italian and foreign alike, across the country. Initially, the JDC program differed from North to South; in the southern regions where camps had been created earlier, camp committees were

¹² For more on the JDC see Avinoam Patt et al., *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* (Wayne State University Press, 2019); Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Wayne State University Press, 1981); Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jewry on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 1989).

¹³ Avinoam Patt and Kierra Crago-Schneider, “Years of Survival: JDC in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957,” in *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* eds. Avinoam Patt et al., (Wayne State University Press, 2019), 361; Kurt R. Grossmann, *The Jewish DP Problem Its Origin, Scope, and Liquidation* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, World Jewish Congress, 1951), 35

¹⁴ Shira Klein, *Italy’s Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 185.

responsible for carrying out JDC programming, including the allocation of the monthly budget and supplementary aid subject to UNRRA approval, whereas, in the north, JDC workers directly administered the programming. By the end of 1946, however, the JDC had a new agreement with UNRRA wherein the JDC provided supplementary facilities and services to UNRRA camps, and two regional representatives reported directly to the head of camp department.¹⁵ This rearrangement allowed for streamlining of services and enabled the JDC to focus its energies on enabling more particular services where they were needed, especially those run by the refugees themselves.

Both the JDC and OJRI also deeply believed in the importance of cultural rebirth *within* the space of the DP camps in Italy, as the JDC stated that “no other country in Europe affords such opportunities for educational and cultural activities.”¹⁶ Italy played host to a smaller number of Jewish refugees than Germany, thus allowing the JDC to offer more individualized and tailored commitments to the refugees. By the end of 1946, JDC reports explained that “great variation exists at present among the camps in meeting the cultural needs of the residents. This is a responsibility which the camp administration has delegated to the camp committees, who are assisted by the welfare officers in providing and establishing cultural facilities.”¹⁷ Practically this often meant that the JDC provided the supplies, such as books or game materials, and the refugees then created and participated in the programs; this division allowed refugees to express some agency over the kinds of programming that occurred. The cultural programming was largely run

¹⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, “JDC Program in Italy – 1946,” March 1, 1947.

¹⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 628, “Contents,” February 18, 1947.

¹⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.163, “Letter from Benjamin N. Brook to American Joint Distribution Committee, Subject: Report on Southern Italy Camps,” January 30, 1946.

through the religious, educational, and cultural departments of OJRI.¹⁸

OJRI benefitted from its partnership with the JDC, in particular, as the JDC took on an advisory role while most of the time recognizing OJRI's independence. OJRI's reports show that the JDC, or the Joint, "recognized the fact that these masses had an inner leadership. The Joint, therefore, welcomed, inspired and abetted the creation of self-government for the refugees. None are more eager to take their own fate into their own hands than these once enslaved and convicted masses."¹⁹ The results of these various OJRI-run programs, such as newspapers and theater groups discussed further below, demonstrate that the self-governance with its many departments and committees worked. Importantly for OJRI, the JDC believed that cultural and educational activities should be under the purview of OJRI. But at the same time, the JDC also believed that JDC officials themselves had "the responsibility to be consultant adviser and expediter," which meant that should an issue arise the JDC would also "study the matter independently" and "make suggestions" to OJRI.²⁰ This role as "adviser" occasionally created tension between OJRI and the JDC. If the issue were a financial matter, such as determining the number of teachers necessary and their salary, then the JDC would have the final say.²¹ We will explore the ways OJRI pushed back on the JDC and also UNRRA in more detail in chapter four. JDC aid workers' reports offer insight into how they viewed the cultural

¹⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, "Untitled Typewritten Document," September 16, 1948.

¹⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, "Editor's Note: One of the most moving and illuminating reports on the condition of displaced Jewish men, women and children in Italy was made at the Thirty- Second Annual Meeting of the Joint..." January 17, 1947.

²⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.127, "Letter from Jacob L. Trobe to AJDC Paris, Subject: Italy H. Q. Education Committee Minutes," February 13, 1947.

²¹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.127, "Letter from Sadie Festenstein to AJDC Paris," April 2, 1947.

programs.

The existence, persistence, and importance of the cultural activities in the camps also afford us the opportunity to argue against the common conceptions of the DPs as “apathetic” and “lazy.” Training had conditioned many aid workers to view DPs as “recipients” and themselves as “rescuers” in the postwar world. These “recipients” became inherently passive and apathetic in the minds of these workers, and thus were often looked down upon and patronized. Silvia Salvatici explains that “Heroism meant not only fortitude but also tirelessness, while the DPs’ exhaustion was often characterized as apathy and idleness. Relief workers described their own hectic days and made much of their hyper-activism....The hyper-activism of relief workers not only stood out in contrast to the DPs’ inaction; the staff’s strenuous efforts were also aimed precisely to counter this passivity.”²² The aid workers were not always understanding about the traumas and resulting exhaustion felt by many DPs; their focus remained on productivity, thus they allowed the understandable inaction or tiredness of some DPs to color their view of all refugees. The self-governed cultural activities of the DP leadership, however, clearly demonstrate that many of the DPs were anything but passive in their own rehabilitation. And this distinction is an important one, because still much of our knowledge regarding the DP camps comes from the papers of aid organizations and their reports color the way we understand refugee life. By looking for elements of cultural life from the DPs themselves we begin to find a necessary corrective to this often one-sided view.

²² S. Salvatici, “‘Help the People to Help Themselves’: UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 442.

“Everyone has Experiences to Tell”: Historical Commissions and Learning from the Past

David Boder: And what do people do here [in the Tradate camp] all day?

Jacob Schwarzfitter: We learn “Kikhot,” we learn Hebrew.²³

David Boder: What is “Kikhot?”

Jacob Schwarzfitter: That means discussions. People discuss Jewish history, Zionist history, world history, we learn.

David Boder: Hm...And...

Jacob Schwarzfitter: And the time passes. We sing, we tell each other experiences of the lagers [concentration and extermination camps]. Because everyone has experiences to tell.²⁴

OJRI was committed to creating cultural institutions, including inaugurating and supporting historical commissions. These commissions, including the *Pakhakh* movement, OJRI’s own internal group, and the interviews of David Boder, were designed to trace the past and to situate the present.²⁵ This desire to document the past was not limited to Italy. Koppel Pinson, head of the JDC’s Education and Culture Department in Germany wrote that “every DP is a private document center and every DP camp has an historical commission.”²⁶ Some documentation was self-initiated.²⁷ Testifying offered a potential means of re-identifying oneself and re-connecting to a larger group. The Nazis had attempted to isolate and de-individualize their victims; telling one’s story made space

²³ Jacob Schwarzfitter likely said or at least meant “*sichot*,” that is “conversations.”

²⁴ Jacob Schwarzfitter “Voices of the Holocaust.” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. August 31, 1946, https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17679, Accessed July 19, 2020.

²⁵ For more on historical commissions in the DP camps see Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012), especially chapter 4; On other documentation projects see Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (Conference on Jewish Social Studies, 1980), 500–524.

²⁶ Koppel S. Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 1947): 109.

²⁷ Shmuel Krakowski notes: “Hundreds of Holocaust survivors, both the educated and the ordinary folk, set down their recollections immediately after the war, even before they rebuilt their homes. Many of these compositions are hundreds of pages long and relate not only what befell the author and his family but also the history of many communities in the Holocaust.” Shmuel Krakowski, “Memorial Projects and Memorial Institutions Initiated by She’erit Hapletah,” in *She’erit Hapletah, 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle (Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, October 1985)*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 395.

for others to affirm their similar experiences and allowed for the formation of a new self in the context of a broader community of *Sheyres Hapleyte* (Yiddish, “surviving remnant”). The veracity of survivor testimony represented a potential problem that was solved by placing the testimonies under the scrutiny of historians and other survivors. Yet, the head of the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, still recognized that “apart from official sources (archives) there are—and these are the very most important—living sources, quivering reality with traces of the ‘historical process’ on their bodies and in their hearts.”²⁸ These living sources testified and created historical commissions for a variety of reasons including the need to chronicle the past for posterity, the desire to bring perpetrators to justice, and the hope for increased morale amongst the scattered DPs.

In Italy, the *Pakhakh* movement, whose name was an acronym derived from the Yiddish words *Partizaner, Khayalim, und Khalutsim* (Partisans, Soldiers, and Pioneers), quickly became one of the primary drivers in calling to remember the past.²⁹ Under the leadership of Moyshe Kaganowicz, a Lithuanian journalist turned partisan, five thousand former partisan fighters started the movement in Poland in spring 1945 with a goal of collecting the narratives of those who had fought the Nazis. Collecting testimonies in Poland, however, quickly became problematic, as a majority of partisans left the country intending to go to Palestine because of the continued antisemitic persecution they faced on Poland. Kaganowicz recognized this and moved the movement westward intending to

²⁸ Friedman, “Di forshung fun unzer khurbn,” *Kiem*, (January 1948), 49. As seen in Mark L. Smith, “No Silence in Yiddish: Popular and Scholarly Writing About the Holocaust in the Early Postwar Years,” in *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* eds. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, (Routledge, 2011), 63.

²⁹ In modern transliteration the acronym would appear as PAHAH – and refer to “hayalim” and “halutzim,” which is the more conventional transliterated spelling of these words. Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 156. For more on *Pakhakh* see also Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (Random House, 1970), 24-25.

make *aliyah*.

Unable to reach Palestine initially because of the British blockade, the *Pakhakh's* Central Historical Commission transferred their primary operations to Italy, which they saw as the gateway to Palestine, and where a large number of partisans also resided in DP camps. OJRI was their primary support in Italy, thus they established their central office near OJRI's in Rome, and Kaganowicz ran it until 1948.³⁰ From here they also communicated with their other branches in the German and Austrian DP camps in Leipheim, Graz, and Linz.³¹ The primary mode of publicizing the efforts of *Pakhakh* was through their newspaper, *Farn Folk* ("For the People"). Printed in Yiddish in Rome and distributed throughout the DP camps, *Farn Folk* contained calls for testimonies from fighters and invitations to fill out their questionnaire. By 1946, the newspaper also contained some of these testimonies both to memorialize the actions taken during the war and to inspire others to come forward and testify. In total they received over 700 narrative biographies and 100 interview depositions.³²

Pakhakh specifically focused on testimony from those who had fought during the war either as resistance fighters or as partisans or in the ghettos and forests. They believed this documentation would provide moral support for future generations, as well as honor those who had fallen in the fight. These testimonies would show both to themselves as well as to any outsiders who would doubt them that Jews had not simply "been led like sheep to the slaughter" but had fought back. Unlike the Central Jewish

³⁰ "All-Europe Association of Partisans, Italian Section, 1948," Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; box number 24, folder number 351, reel 26.439, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

³¹ Laura Jockusch, "*Khurbn Forshung* – Jewish Historical Commissions in Europe, 1943–1949," *JBDI / DIYB • Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 6 (2007), 447

³² David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (Routledge, 2011), 17.

Historical Commissions in either Poland or Munich, the testimonies collected by *Pakhakh* were not initially intended to fight for legal justice or retribution.³³ Some of the testimonies collected were translated into English and used by early historians such as Leo Schwarz who published a collective narrative of Jewish resistance fighters in 1949;³⁴ these translations also demonstrated to non-Jews who could not read Yiddish that they had fought and survived. The commission was dissolved in 1948 following the creation of the state of Israel, and they moved the collection to Israel's newly created Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem.³⁵

In contrast, OJRI's own official enquiry was ostensibly established to focus on the present and the future, but the answers it received forced them to grapple with the past as well. As noted in chapter one, among their first acts as an organization was designing a

³³ One organization committed to fighting for justice was the Central Jewish Historical Commission (*Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna*, CZKH). Established in Poland in August 1944 as Allied forces cleared out the Nazi occupiers, the CZKH grew by March 1945 to twenty-five regional branches operating out of its home base in Łódź. Dr. Philip Friedman, who had been a lecturer in Judaic Studies in Warsaw and survived the war by hiding in Łódź, became the first president, and Rachel Auerbach, who helped unearth the *Oneg Shabbat* underground archive in the Warsaw ghetto, was one of its first activists. The goals of the CZKH were legally oriented from the start. The CZKH received many of their testimonies through questionnaires distributed in Łódź in 1945, which initially appeared to advocate for the need for historical accuracy in its stated goal to gather material to destroy Fascism. They hoped, by distributing a questionnaire designed by a variety of scholars, to receive answers that would help them reconstruct the events of the genocide and identify specific perpetrators to bring them to trial. In the first two years, the CZKH collected over 6,000 testimonies, primarily in the form of the questionnaire. Other historical commissions were created at the same time, including the Central Historical Commission (CHC) in Munich. The CHC, created in the American zone in Germany, interviewed refugees and displaced persons, collecting over 2,500 testimonies and 8,000 questionnaires. Their purpose was also largely legal, as German local officials used their information to map out concentration camps in Germany. They believed they needed as much evidence as possible to put the Germans on trial. For more see Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012); David Bankier and Dan Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography in Context*, 229; Beate Müller, "Trauma, Historiography and Polyphony: Adult Voices in the CJHC's Early Postwar Child Holocaust Testimonies," *History & Memory* 24, no. 2 (2012): 167; Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 78-79.

³⁴ Leo Walder Schwarz, *The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People* (New York: Rinehart, 1949).

³⁵ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 158-159.

questionnaire to be given to all Jewish refugees in Italy. They sent out 12,000 questionnaires and received 9,174 responses. From these, the Central Committee then produced a booklet with the results including a detailed opening analysis of the data acquired, a sample questionnaire, three tables and indices, and one hundred sample interviews copied in full. In the first line of their analysis they stated: “The only and simple purpose of this enquiry is to make clear for ourselves what is our present situation and what are our longings. We tried to avoid in our enquiry everything belonging to ‘those’ times, to those years of inhuman sufferings until the moment of our liberation.”³⁶ In their language one hears the striking call to bracket off “those times” as separate from their current realities in an effort to look forward. Many of the refugees who filled out the questionnaires, however, were determined to include those moments of their past.

The intent of the inquiry was to determine the present status of those Jewish DPs in Italy, especially as their future was concerned: they wanted to know where the refugees came from, if they were willing to return there, and if not, where they wanted to emigrate to. They then grouped the answers and presented them in three tables, the columns of which were created by the answers of the refugees. They found that only one person responded “yes” to repatriation to their home country and 98% of those polled wanted to emigrate to Palestine.³⁷ When tabling the responses to “why they were against repatriation” OJRI found it important to avoid generalizable categories such as “political, national-cultural, psychological, moral, economical, religious and other” and instead to

³⁶ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, “We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” page 1, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³⁷ Ibid., 3, 18.

use categories of answers “as the refugees themselves had expressed them.”³⁸ Yet, these answers revealed more than the committee had intended, as the committee stated in their analysis:

As already mentioned we did not want to touch the wounds from the recent past; [this has not] been our aim. But we see from the answers that the hostile attitude towards us on the part of our former fellow-citizens during the horrible years of German occupation constitutes one of the main reasons explaining why it is impossible to return to the former homes. We find, therefore, that after the end of the damned conception of “German Nazism”, after the end of the occupation a new chapter has been revealed which is, maybe, not less tragic.³⁹

A great many of the answers, understandably, focused on the past, both actions taken during the Holocaust and continuing persecution since.

The results of the enquiry, as discussed in the first chapter, also confirmed the supposition of those in leadership that nearly all Jewish refugees wanted to emigrate to Palestine, although this desire stemmed from a variety of reasons. The largest percentage (33%) stated they were Zionists committed to a Jewish state, whereas sixteen percent explicitly said they were not Zionist but still believed a “secure and productive life” was only possible there.⁴⁰ The second largest percentage (22%) wrote answers that fit under the category “I want to live in such a place where I shall be able to live a national-cultured life.”⁴¹ That nearly one-quarter of Jewish refugees listed that their desire to live in a place where they could once again practice their own culture was their primary reason for making *aliyah* confirmed yet again the importance of OJRI’s cultural department.

The enquiry brought to light more than just simply graphs and charts of refugee

³⁸ Ibid., 4.

³⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Table III.

⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

numbers: it also demonstrated the need to feel heard. Multiple times in their explanation, the Central Committee cited the deep emotions of the refugees who wrote these answers. The Committee wanted its readers to see more than just the tables: “All that assemblage of the tables cannot, however, express the whole pain and exasperance [sic] with which the refugee writes about the facts and events in his enquiry-questionnaire. Reading those answers, one feels with what kind of emotion the refugees write.”⁴² They called for a deeper understanding of the human experience, one that would be better expressed in the words of the refugees themselves than in the statistical data alone. Although they did not set out to capture testimonies of the past, the emotionally laden responses became clear witnesses for the historical record.

The vast majority of testimony collections gathered in the immediate postwar years in Italy and elsewhere were created through written accounts. In many of the DP camps, adult and child refugees alike were asked to fill out questionnaires where the goal was both to preserve memories of the past and to maintain written records about as much of the present as they could.⁴³ Youths, for instance, were asked in schools, by social workers, or in the form of composition competitions to write about their past, about the journey that had brought them to where they were.⁴⁴ Most frequently, in order to gather

⁴² Ibid., 17.

⁴³ See for example “Reports and correspondence from various camps in the South, mainly Bari and Tricase, July - September 1946,” Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box: 4, Folder: 62, Reel: 5.1, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research; “Reports from Cultural Department, Religious Affairs Department., 1947-1948,” Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box: 6, Folder: 81, Reel: 5.1212, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. For questionnaires specific to children see “Questionnaires for orphans aged 4-13, prepared by the Educational Section of the Cultural Department,” 1947, Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box: 19, Folder: 243, Reel: 20.366, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁴⁴ YIVO in Vilna held autobiographical competitions in 1932, 1934, and 1939. In these they asked Jewish youth from 16 to 22 to write about their daily lives. For more see Jeffrey Shandler, *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland Before the Holocaust*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

these testimonies, an interviewer from the historical commission at hand would question the survivor based on the questionnaire and then the interviewer would compose a document in paragraph form that summarized the responses of the interviewee. The interviewee would then read the document and sign that they agreed with the rendering of their words. Occasionally, especially in interviews with children, the interviewer would also leave notes in the margins of the completed text that offer insight into the personalities of the children and the atmosphere of the testimony.⁴⁵

Psychologist David Boder's use of the wire recorder in this early postwar atmosphere thus was incredibly novel both for its different technique and its ability to more fully capture many of these emotionally laden testimonies. David Boder, who we were introduced to in chapter one, was a Chicago-based Latvian Jewish psychologist who traveled from the United States (where he had immigrated in 1926) to Europe in the summer of 1946 to capture the stories of 129 war refugees.⁴⁶ He carried a huge and expensive wire recorder with him on all his visits to the refugee centers. Written records were often the product of careful consideration for form and word choice. By taping their voices, Boder gave his interviewees the ability to record their remembrances in a more spontaneous fashion, refusing to allow them to use any kind of prepared notes. After the interview, Boder would play back some of the recording to the interviewee, allowing them, many for the first time, to hear their own voices telling their story.⁴⁷ Listening to their recordings today, one can truly connect with their stories, hearing their moments of

⁴⁵ Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 77.

⁴⁶ Boder was born in Libau, Russia, today Latvia. For more about Boder's biography see Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially chapter one.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

pain and silence together with laughter and joy, something we do not have in audible form anywhere else from these early years after the war.

When he conducted an interview, David Boder worked with a particular script and a psychological practice he tried to follow meticulously. He started each interview with a prescribed statement: “We know very little in America about the things that happened to you in concentration camps. If you want to help us out by contributing information about the fate of the displaced persons, tell your own story. Begin with your name, give your age, and tell where you were when the war started and what has happened to you since.”⁴⁸ He then reportedly placed himself physically behind the interviewee in order to not influence their story.⁴⁹ Boder was committed to his scientific practice and therefore attempted to recreate a clinical environment to the extent possible. Listening to the recordings of the interviews, however, one quickly notes that he was far from the sterile space he was accustomed to, as external noise—doors slamming, people talking, cars starting—is clearly audible.

When Boder arrived in Europe in 1946, he told the leaders of DP camps that he was not there to record the exceptional.⁵⁰ He “wanted the rank and file experience—not the unusual story;” stories that would offer a window for his broader American audience

⁴⁸ Boder explains his opening statement in his book but it is not present in the taped portions of the interviews. The recording of the interviews typically starts with Boder asking the interviewee their name or with him directing them to speak into the microphone. David P. Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, vol. xix (Champaign, IL, US: University of Illinois Press, 1949), xii-xiii.

⁴⁹ This is a disputed point. Many of the interviewees remember him sitting across them, but he writes in his book that he followed standard psychological practice and sat behind them.

⁵⁰ According to Alan Rosen, the historian who wrote the first definitive work on Boder, Boder’s project had four clear goals: “First of all, he wanted to preserve an authentic record of wartime suffering. Second, he was professionally interested as a psychologist in the impact of extreme suffering on personality. Third, he wanted to increase the knowledge of a post-war American public who knew little about what happened to the victims in the ghettos and in the concentration camps. And finally, he hoped that the [Displaced Persons’] stories could be effective in advocating on their behalf for immigration to America.” Alan Rosen, “David Boder: Early Postwar Voices: David Boder’s Life and Work,” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. http://voices.iit.edu/david_boder

into the “typical” experience of a Holocaust survivor.⁵¹ However, despite some outward similarities, these survivors have individual Holocaust narratives; so, what he received in fact demonstrated the wide variety of Holocaust experiences. And yet, while they described horror upon horror, Boder reminded the reader of his appropriately titled book of interviews: “they are not the grimmest stories that could be told—I did not interview the dead.”⁵² Boder’s work on preservation and advocacy meshed with the work of the various other European committees, but it was aimed at a different audience. Rather than working for justice in trials, Boder hoped his work would help survivors start over, and indeed he often promised to contact various family members of the interviewees back in the United States.⁵³

In three locations—Geneva, Tradate (Italy), and Paris—Boder’s interview space included a specific time for musical contributions. He recorded thirteen songs in Italy, the majority are sung in Yiddish with a few in Hebrew and a few in German. Six of those recorded mournfully commemorate the past, whereas the other seven focus on defiant past actions and an unquenchable hope in a new future.⁵⁴ Some of these songs are particularly sorrowful, such as “Dort in dem lager” (“There in the Camp”) which expresses the pain of finding oneself alone asking “How much more do we have to endure?”⁵⁵ Shirli Gilbert, who had made an extensive study of music and survivors in the

⁵¹ David P. Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, vol. xix (Champaign, IL, US: University of Illinois Press, 1949), xii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xix.

⁵³ For example, in his interview with Polia Bisenhaus, Boder discovers she has an uncle in Chicago and offers to see him. Polia Bisenhaus, interview by David Boder, in Paris, France, “Voices of the Holocaust,” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. July 29, 1946. https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17587, Accessed July 19, 2020.

⁵⁴ Joseph Toltz and Anna Boucher, “Out of the Depths: Complexity, Subjectivity and Materiality in the Earliest Accounts of Holocaust Song-Making,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, 48:3, (2018) 321-322.

⁵⁵ “Dort in dem lager,” Boder Collection, file RVA-0492, Tradate, September 1, 1946, USHMM. Quoted in Shirli Gilbert, “Songs and Survival among Jewish DPs,” in *“We Are Here”: New Approaches to Jewish*

postwar period argues that overall the songs of the DP camps, both those created by the DPs themselves and those contributed by outsiders “seem consciously to be centered around the need for comfort, strength, and regeneration at this critical transitional moment and to recognize the constructive role that music could play in that process.” This defiance can be seen in “Di Shif ‘Seder,” (“The Ship, ‘Seder”) for instance, which described the attempted *aliyah* of DPs on a ship that had been stopped by the British.⁵⁶ Calls for strength and assertions of agency are clear in “Haymat” (“Homeland”) and “Faroyts tsum kamf!” (“Onward to the Fight!”), which both demonstrate that the future is what will be important.⁵⁷

These historical commissions were incredibly important in the DP camps, because as Jacob Schwarzfitter in the Tradate camp reminded Boder “everyone has experiences to tell.”⁵⁸ These early collections from historical commissions differed in their understandings of trauma, healing and ethics in their collection of testimonies. Yet, a sharing of experiences was one of the foundations of the cultural renewal as it gave these disparate groups something to bind them together. The opportunity to share about their past experiences gave many DPs the hope that their recent struggles would be remembered and perhaps even avenged. And this was the case even when remembrance was not the stated purpose of the project, such as was the case with OJRI’s initial survey. For people leaving the only home they have known, these acts of remembrance ensured a

Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany Avinoam J. Patt and Michael. Berkowitz, eds., (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 295-296.

⁵⁶ “Di Shif Seder,” Music and the Holocaust. ORT. <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/memory/dp-camps/di-shif-seder/> Accessed July 20, 2020.

⁵⁷ “Es benkt zikh nokh a haym” as transcribed by Shirli Gilbert, “Songs and Survival among Jewish DPs,” 296.

⁵⁸ Jacob Schwarzfitter “Voices of the Holocaust.” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. August 31, 1946, https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17679, Accessed July 19, 2020.

continuance of their story and created a shared Jewish community of commemoration within the DP camps.

The Printed Word: A Vehicle for News and Culture

The time spent wandering in the DP camps necessitated a reflection on the past in order to change the present and the future. The head of OJRI's Cultural Department, Eliezer Yerushalmi, was the former director of the Shavler ghetto *folkshul* (a secular school in the ghetto), and a partisan during the war. Yerushalmi, who had received his doctorate in history from the University of Kharkov, Kovne, and Kenisberg, stated that his first priority in the DP camps was education both for children and adults. He focused on creating new schools, investing in job training programs, and ensuring that there was a library in every camp with access to newspapers and books. Writing to the JDC director for Italy in August 1946 after receiving a shipment of books from them, Yerushalmi explained that "The importance of these books for the cultural work is quite enormous. They are giving us the possibility to develop a very large activity. We shall do [the] utmost in order to take every advantage possible of these books in our work."⁵⁹ The power of the printed word became quickly apparent as a source of news sharing, remembrance, and pleasure.

Newspapers quickly became a focal point for the Cultural Department, as they allowed for the easy transmission of information from across the camp system in Italy and within the broader Jewish world. Wall newspapers, for instance, were hung in nearly

⁵⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 1351, "Letter from Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Section for Cultural & Education Home to Mr. Trobe, Subject; Book from Palestine," August 1, 1946.

all the camps. These newspapers were most frequently hand-drawn and primarily written in Yiddish. Some were simple announcements of camp meetings, like the three-color message that adorned the wall in the Cremona camp when Leo Bernstein from OJRI's central office visited in October 1947 and announced that the meeting would be held in the theater.⁶⁰ In addition to announcements, these wall newspapers were a source of entertainment for those in the camp, as all residents were encouraged to submit drawings and articles about camp life. "Shpilkes" ("Pins"), for instance, was a reoccurring comic strip that poked fun at a range of subjects such as inefficient camp directors and rabbis who only prayed and did not clean.⁶¹ The wall newspapers, which had their roots in the Soviet propaganda of the early twentieth-century, were thus a tool used by community organizers for announcements and also an outlet for creative expression within the camps.⁶² Other political groups within the camps also had their own newspapers, such as *Farn Folk* (*For the People*) of the former partisans *Pakhakh* and *Undzer Vort* (*Our Word*) of the *Poalei Zion Hitachdut* (Association of Zionist Workers) and a few camps, such as the camps in Rivoli and in Santa Maria di Bagni, also had their own papers. Newspapers were written primarily in Yiddish, although a few came out in Hebrew, Polish, and Hungarian.⁶³

⁶⁰ YIVO Archives, RG 294.6, Series II: Italy; Subseries 5: Displaced Persons Camps and Centers, 1946-1948, undated; Subsubseries D: Camp Cremona, 1946-1948, undated, Folder 12, Item ITA.153v, General camp meeting with Bernstein, Picano, Laskow, (אלגעמיינע פארזאמלונג) 1947, Permalink to the Center for Jewish History online catalog record for YIVO Archives' Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6: http://search.cjh.org/permalink/f/d40h2n/CJH_ALEPH004600686.

⁶¹ YIVO Archives, RG 294.6, Series II: Italy; Subseries 5: Displaced Persons Camps and Centers, 1946-1948, undated; Subsubseries D: Camp Cremona, 1946-1948, undated, Folder 12, Item ITA.160, שפילקעס / Shpilkes (Pins) #4 Part 1. Permalink to the Center for Jewish History online catalog record for YIVO Archives' Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6: http://search.cjh.org/permalink/f/d40h2n/CJH_ALEPH004600686.

⁶² Anna Shternshis, "From the Eradication of Illiteracy to Workers' Correspondents: Yiddish-language mass movements in the Soviet Union," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 32:1 (2002), 130.

⁶³ The YIVO Library holds the newspapers published in DP camps in Italy. It is possible to find them in the catalog under the subject: Holocaust survivors - Italy - Periodicals.

By August 1945, OJRI had already created their own newspaper, *Baderekh*, meaning “On the Way,” produced by the Cultural Department and financed by the JDC.⁶⁴ Printed in the Cinecittà camp in Rome, *Baderekh* was distributed freely in all camps and *hachsharot*. Initially a weekly four-page newspaper, it was soon enlarged to six pages and printed three times a week at its peak in 1946. The goal of the paper was to share important news, information, and current events. It included sections for the news from the DP camps, Palestine and the world more broadly, but also included literary material, JDC and UNRRA columns, and a Hebrew section. The paper was written in the most commonly read language of the refugees, Yiddish, in an attempt to allow for widespread access. Although refugees could write into the paper, primarily it was refugee leaders who wrote these columns; it appears that no female refugees wrote any of the articles.⁶⁵ The paper does seem to have been widely read, as reports from the Cultural Department show that there were never enough copies in the reading room to accommodate all who wanted to read it.⁶⁶

The printed word also became a source of information and connection to the broader Jewish world. This knowledge made the DPs feel less disconnected from Jewish culture and perhaps gave them the sense that they had not been forgotten. OJRI’s general report in 1948 stressed the importance that newspapers had for the DPs, especially after the formation of Israel:

Library work had an important place among the activities intended to raise the

⁶⁴ Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy, 1945-1951* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011); Chiara Renzo, “‘Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet.’ The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-Understanding (1943-1948),” *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 12 (December 2017): 89–111.

⁶⁵ Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 210.

⁶⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Excerpts from a Report by the Central Organizations of Refugees in Italy,” February 2, 1949.

cultural standard of the refugees. The reading room which is part of the library in every camp—is the center for all adult inmates of the camp. There is not one Jew in camp who does not come in at least once a day to read a newspaper. One should not underestimate the importance of newspaper reading nowadays. Reading the press in Yiddish and other available languages during the period following the 14th of May 1948—is not mere reading. It is a spiritual lift! It is the acquisition of consciousness of grandiose realities undreamt of; it is healing and strengthening for the crushed soul of the refugee.⁶⁷

The press gave them a new sense of hope, a feeling that a more permanent home may soon be coming.

There was, however, perhaps no better example of the past-present-future roles for the cultural department than the journal *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur un kunst* (*In Progress: Monthly Journal of Literature and Art*) later known as *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur, kultur un gezelschaftlekhe problemen* (*In Progress: Monthly Journal of Literature, Culture and Societal Problems*). *In Gang* was the monthly literary periodical of the Union of Jewish Writers, Journalists, and Artists in Italy.⁶⁸ The journal ran from March 1947 to February 1949 and was edited by Eliezer Yerushalmi, who was also the director of OJRI's Cultural Department, and Berl Kahn.⁶⁹ Lithuanian Kahn was the prewar editor of *Dos Vort* (*The Word*), Kovno's Socialist-Zionist daily newspaper. He survived the Kovno Ghetto before joining the partisans and was ultimately liberated by the Russians. Kahn was the editor of both *Baderekh*, the newspaper of the DP camps, and *In Gang*. Altogether *In Gang* ran for fifteen issues, which ranged in length from thirty-two pages to over one hundred. In her comparative study of DP camp

⁶⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, "Excerpts from a Report by the Central Organizations of Refugees in Italy," February 2, 1949.

⁶⁸ The *Fareyn fun yidishe literatn, zhurnalistsn un kinstler in Italye* (Union of Jewish Writers, Journalists, and Artists in Italy) was established in March 1946.

⁶⁹ Berl Kahn was also called Berl Kagan and Berl Cohen, but he is known to have preferred Berl Kahn himself.

periodicals across European DP camps, Ayelet Kuper Margalioth, noted that when compared to the journals Germany where there was a much larger DP population, *In Gang*'s sheer size was impressive.⁷⁰

The journal *In Gang* was designed to create connections; to memorialize Jewish creativity of the past while fostering new talent in the present. This dual-desire to preserve and create is evident from their first issue in which the editors set out to explain their creation of the journal with an impassioned defense against an imagined straw man:

Surely there will be skeptics, protestors. Is it necessary to publish a literary journal for the small Jewish community in Italy, for a temporary community? Is this not a luxury? Yes, it is a luxury, if culture itself is a luxury. It is however... a luxury not of prosperity, it is a burden, it is a task, it is the fulfillment of an oath of a people....The Germans have exterminated the Jews. But they did not find any gas chambers for their culture. Culture remains....Revenge! Revenge was demanded by the thousands of writings left on the walls of the German prisons....And vengeance is first and foremost, that not only do we live, but that we create. The Germans did not reach their goal....We are creative, we create works of culture.⁷¹

The re-creation of a European Jewish culture was transformed into a solemn duty owed to those who had perished, into an act of vengeance against those who had sought to erase every trace of their existence. The editors and contributors desired to inspire through their works a new Jewish culture with Jews across Europe and around the world, building a bridge between those who experienced the Holocaust first-hand and those who had not.

Their goals were three-fold: to print the works of well-known Jewish authors, to encourage the writing of new Jewish authors, and to inspire "local literary efforts" by the

⁷⁰ Ayelet Kuper Margalioth, "Yiddish Periodicals Published by Displaced Persons, 1946-1949." (University of Oxford, 1997), chapter 4, pg. 1

⁷¹ "Fun der redaktsye," *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur un kunst*, 1 (1947), 1 quoted in "La vita politica e culturale all'interno dei campi DP" as seen in Martina Ravagnan, "La vita politica e culturale all'interno dei campi DP," *DP Camp IT 82: Cremona. Arrivo e partenze. Traiettorie, incroci, vite, storia. Atti della Tavola rotonda Cremona, 28 gennaio 2017* (Cremona: Fantigrafica, 2017), 31. Also seen at Wiener Holocaust Library, P1131/11.

DPs themselves.⁷² They hoped to combine literary criticism about pre- and post-war Jewish literature. Here works by prominent prewar Jewish authors like Sholem Aleichem and Chaim Nachman Bialik were placed in conversation with contemporary pieces by authors like Avraham Sutzkever (later proclaimed the “greatest Holocaust poet” by the New York Times). But they also made space for their “own young talents,” who were just starting out writing within the DP camps.⁷³ The *shtetl*, that had been a defining feature of pre-Holocaust Jewish life became an important motif and object of nostalgia in discussing writings about the Holocaust;⁷⁴ other articles examined then current trends in Hebrew literature from Jewish authors living in Palestine. In addition, this ambitious journal attempted to connect to the cultural traditions of Jewish history in the Italian land around them, offering an introduction, in Yiddish, to modern Italian literature and, through illustration, to the familiar religious tropes used in ancient Roman art.

The hope was to “create life” through a cultural renewal with articles written “by refugees for refugees.”⁷⁵ Unlike *Baderekh*, however, *In Gang* was to be a literary magazine, which by its nature, would exclude some refugees who were not of more educated backgrounds. They attempted to maintain an equal distribution of writings by more famous authors and articles by refugees themselves; in his concluding article, editor Kahn admitted that they were more successful at the former than the latter. Ultimately, however, their attempts at cultural rebirth during this period were destined to be forgotten

⁷² B. Kahn *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur, kultur un gezeshaflekhe problemen*. n. 15 (1949), 3. Wiener Holocaust Library, P1131/11

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For an early discussion on the impact of the shtetl on prewar Jewish life see Mark Zborowski, *Life is with People: the Cultures of the Shtetl* (Shocken, 1952). For further discussion of shtetl life in Poland see Nancy Sinkoff, *Out of the Shtetl: Making Jews Modern in the Polish Borderlands* (Brown Judaic Studies, 2003); and for reevaluations of shtetl life see Steven T. Katz, *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (NYU Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur un kunst* n. 1 (March 1947). Wiener Holocaust Library, P1131/11

as works about Yiddish European Jewish culture and the Holocaust were suppressed following the creation of the state of Israel in an effort to create a wholly new Jewish culture, one that looked forward not backward. Yet, the inclusion of Yerushalmi in the 1948 World Jewish Culture Congress as a representative of the Italian DP community clearly showed that the broader Jewish world in the late 1940s recognized both the existence of this cultural renewal and its importance.⁷⁶

Bodily Rehabilitation: The Athlete and the Artist

The written word was not the only way refugees engaged in cultural activities that attempted to address what a post-Holocaust Jewish culture could look like. In part this rebirth of culture took the form of creating connections across DP camps, between refugees and local Italians, and extending connections outside of Italy, especially with Jewish groups in the United States and Palestine. These connections allowed refugees to reflect on the ways cultural activities could influence life in the present in the DP camps and their future lives in more permanent homes.

Soccer, for instance, offered one outlet for thinking about the dual work of cultural renewal. Soccer clubs formed in the camps with matches bringing together refugees from different camps in a spirit of friendly competition.⁷⁷ On the one hand, engaging in this sporting activity allowed refugees to reclaim a particularly Jewish spirit in their activity. These clubs offered the DPs the opportunity to proclaim a pride in their

⁷⁶ Martina Ravagnan, "I campi Displaced Persons per profughi ebrei stranieri in Italia (1945-1950)," *Storia e Futuro* 30, no. 30 (November 2012).

⁷⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.163, "Letter from Benjamin N. Brook to American Joint Distribution Committee, Subject: Report on Southern Italy Camps," January 30, 1946.

Jewish identity that had been denied them during the war; they turned symbols that had meant ostracization and potential death into badges of honor, as uniforms nearly always included a large Star of David.

Playing soccer, however, also encouraged thinking about what it meant to be a refugee living in Italy. This rethinking allowed for a sense of incorporation into a group larger than one's own. This was particularly important for these individuals who had experienced intense segregation and persecution from the broader national cultures of their countries of origin. For instance, Beirach Winnik who had lived in a mixed camp in Santa Maria di Bagni, recalled that soccer brought people together: "We were living together nicely. Playing soccer."⁷⁸ Soccer fostered a cross-cultural environment with local Italians and Allied troops still stationed in the region as competition extended outside the camps with DP residents playing against or for local Italian teams. Interviewed in 1998, Irving Berk, a resident of the Cremona DP camp, for instance, remembered playing soccer within the camp but also played on the Italian teams in Cremona and Trani.⁷⁹ For some, these connections extended beyond the period of the DP camps; Sidney Zoltak, a survivor who lived in camps in both Selvino and Cremona and now resides in Canada, still regularly follows the Cremona soccer team and has returned several times to visit old friends from the city.⁸⁰ Soccer, for Zoltak and so many of the young survivors, offered an outlet for rehabilitation and reconnecting with the world.

⁷⁸ Beirach Winnik, Interview 4762, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁷⁹ Irving Beck, Interview 55125, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1992. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁸⁰ "Ritorno allo Zini per il profugo ebreo polacco Sidney Zoltak" *Cremona Oggi: Il Quotidiano online di Cremona*. February 24, 2018. <https://www.cremonaoggi.it/2018/02/24/settantun-anni-profugo-sydney-zoltak-torna-allo-zini/>

OJRI and voluntary agencies believed that integrating physical and mental rehabilitation was particularly important for youth. They attempted to include sports and recreational activities, agricultural production, and manual labor classes within the space of the camps to provide these types of bodily outlets. But the camps themselves were often viewed, by both the leadership and the refugees themselves as too restrictive to achieve full physical rehabilitation; they wanted the youth to experience nature, whether in the mountainous Alps or the southern seaside. By early 1946, building on the tradition of youth summer getaways, local national organizations and the JDC supported the creation of summer camps or colonies in “every country in shattered Europe” including Italy.⁸¹ In Italy, it was the combined efforts of OJRI and the JDC that made these camps successful for several hundred youth each summer.

The goal of the summer camps was to provide thousands of particularly at risk youth, those who were especially undernourished and/or orphans, a place to “learn the happy games of childhood,” away from war-torn cities and DP camps.⁸² And then, “tanned and taller, heavier and healthier, they [would] come back to their towns and villages next fall stronger and better able to start new lives of decency and dignity.”⁸³ This vision of a physically fit teen contrasted sharply with images of the scrawny, malnourished concentration camp survivor; it called to mind prewar Zionist posters of young *halutzim*, or emigrant pioneers, who were frequently depicted as suntanned and muscular, rugged in a desert environment. But more than just simply physically useful in

⁸¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 1009, “J. D. C. to Operate summer Camps for Jewish Children in Europe,” June 21, 1946.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

creating “tanned and taller” youth, the JDC believed that within the summer colonies “the beneficial influence for the mental and moral health, national, social and esthetic education [was] invaluable.”⁸⁴ These colonies would create better future citizens of whatever nation would have them.

Leaders of the *hachsharot* in particular also quickly turned to the combination of physical and mental activities in their rehabilitation work. These leaders, most frequently refugees themselves supported by the Jewish Agency and the JDC, provided or promoted work training to prepare residents for life in Palestine. Much of this work focused on recreating the cultural and physical space of Palestine in Italy. Classes in Hebrew and Jewish history and Zionism were held on a regular basis in 98 percent of the *hachsharot* according to the JDC.⁸⁵ DP residents learned to work the land through farming or fishing, depending where the *hachshara* was located. The creation of *hachsharot* was nothing new in Italy; these transitional training centers had been active in Italy since the 1930s for both Italian and foreign Jews who were hoping to immigrate to Palestine before the war. They believed the similarity of climate and soil between Palestine and Italy made the Italian *hachsharot* ideal spaces to begin preparing for a new future home.⁸⁶

Other DPs focused on the arts to reconnect and rehabilitate. One *hachshara*, *Kibbutz Omanut* (Art), in Castel Gandolfo outside Rome, was specifically created just for Jewish DP artists.⁸⁷ The 35 residents represented a variety of arts from the visual to the

⁸⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 1009, “Everybody recognizes the great importance which is attributed in all civilized countries to summer colonies for school children...” March 31, 1949.

⁸⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, “JDC Program in Italy – 1946,” March 1, 1947.

⁸⁶ Arturo Marzano, “Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah: The Hachsharot in Italy (1945–48),” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18 (January 14, 2019): 316.

⁸⁷ Chiara Renzo, ““Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet.” *The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-understanding (1943-1948)*”, in *Miscellanea* 2017, eds. Quest Editorial

dramatic to the musical, and regularly toured the country visiting camps and *hachsharot*, visiting over 70 in 1947 alone. Their purpose, according to OJRI, was to “develop among the people the love for Jewish arts and literature. It must follow the task of forming and raising artistic taste among the mass of Jewish refugees in Italy. The Ensemble must also be the bearer of the Zionist idea.”⁸⁸ OJRI tasked the group with encouraging rehabilitation within the camps themselves but also promoting the plight of the Jewish DP to a broader audience, thus enabling, they hoped, faster emigration. The *Kibbutz Omanut* orchestra, an official from the JDC claimed, could “become famous in the Jewish world” if only they would “find a good conductor who would force them to practice hard and regularly.”⁸⁹ They apparently impressed Sol Hurok, an American impresario who had been touring the DP camps, as he offered them a six-month contract to tour in the United States.⁹⁰

OJRI’s emphasis on cultural activities also made it easier for many artistic groups to form, which allowed them to make connections across DP camps and outside of them, thus spreading their cultural inspiration. Theater troops, for instance, became prominent in the camps, with groups like *Ufboy* (“Construction”) from the Santa Maria di Bagni camp touring in camps across the country. The *Kinstlerischer Kollectiv* (Artistic Ensemble), formed in 1945 around the same time as the conference in Rome, claimed

Staff, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n.12 December 2017

⁸⁸ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Artists’ Center,” 21 June 1946, Quoted in Arturo Marzano, “Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah: The Hachsharot in Italy (1945–48),” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18 (January 14, 2019), 319.

⁸⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, “Untitled Typewritten Document,” September 16, 1948.

⁹⁰ “15 Displaced Jewish Artists from Italian Dp Camps to Tour United States,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency (July 8, 1948), <https://www.jta.org/1948/07/08/archive/15-displaced-jewish-artists-from-italian-dp-camps-to-tour-united-states>, Accessed July 19, 2020.

their primary goal was to “bring joy to the refugees through songs.”⁹¹ And it appears this worked as a memo from the Cultural Committee in the camp Santa Maria di Bagni to the director of the camp in Rome asks that they welcome the appropriately named drama group *Tekuma* (“Rebirth” or “Revival”) to visit Rome and other camps in the North. They claimed that “M. Riger [the group’s director] has presented some of his excellent literary [sic] works very successfully enhancing thus the spirit and disposition of our camps inmates.”⁹²

Artistic endeavors often sought inspiration from the recent and distant past to enliven their audiences. Some of these efforts were undertaken by individuals rather than OJRI. In his 1946 interview with David Boder, for instance, Isaac Wolf, a member of the Tradate *hachshara*, explained that he wrote a play “composed about the experiences of the Jews, from the beginning of the war till the end of the war.”⁹³ However, he entitled the play “In *Eretz* I Found My Happiness,” a future promise not yet fulfilled. His play then both reflected on a recent past with longing for a new future, but it also brought happiness in the present moment. He noted that he “made a few thousand liras [from people attending the play]...and it was a nice success. I was written up in the newspaper [*Baderekh*]. I still have [the paper] to this day.” He gave the money to the leaders of his Kibbutz but kept the newspaper mentions for himself as evidence of his successful endeavor as a playwright and actor.

⁹¹ Shmuel Epshteyn, “Tetikeyt fun di yidishe pleytim-kinstlers in Italye (Attività degli artisti tra i profughi in Italia),” *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur, kultur un gezelschaftlekhe problemen*. n. 13-14, (July-August, 1948), 29. Wiener Holocaust Library, P1131/11

⁹² “Subject: M. RIGER. Visit to north camps,” December 27, 1946. Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 4, Folder 63, Reel: 5.147, Slide 0150, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁹³ Isaac Wolf, “Voices of the Holocaust.” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. September 1, 1946, https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17695, Accessed July 19, 2020.

Cultural activities also helped refugees begin to think about their future in a new country. The majority of DPs in Italy hoped that this new home country for them would be Palestine. For these Palestinian-bound DPs, one of the most important aspect of the cultural programming was making connections with individuals they hoped would be their national compatriots one day. This was often done through lectures from Zionist leaders. Posters and wall newspapers again were the primary method of announcing these lectures. Many were explicitly future oriented such as Baruch Duvdevani's "Today and tomorrow in Zion"⁹⁴ and I. Zaltsman's discussion of the tasks of refugees when they arrive in Palestine.⁹⁵ Others were designed to give historical and current insights into the present situation in Palestine such as Zelig Shoshan's the "Political situation in the Land of Israel"⁹⁶ and Professor A. Tartakover's "Problems of the Jewish people after the World War."⁹⁷ Still others offered insight into broader international issues, including reports on the conferences of the new United Nations.⁹⁸ Some lectures were accompanied by

⁹⁴ Language: Yiddish 29 x 19-1/4 inches; white paper, handpainted—Mizrachi. Lecture by Baruch Duvdevani, "Today and tomorrow in Zion" (א רעפערעט פון א"י עליה) , undated, Folder: 5, Object: ITA.72. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁹⁵ Language: Yiddish 40 x 17 inches; brown paper, handpainted; mounted on oily black tar paper—Lecture by I. Zaltsman on situation in the Land of Israel and the tasks of refugees (רעפערעט פון א"י עליה) , undated, Folder: 8, Object: ITA.102. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁹⁶ Language: Yiddish 39-1/2 x 29-1/2 inches; white paper, handpainted—Hashomer Hatzair. Lecture by Zelig Shoshan, "Political situation in the Land of Israel" (1947 , רעפערעט פון זליג שושן) , Folder: 5, Object: ITA.62. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁹⁷ Language: Yiddish 31-1/2 x 19-1/2 inches; gray paper, handpainted—Lecture by Professor A. Tartakover, "Problems of the Jewish people after the World War" (פרובלעמן פון יידישן פאלק נאכן וועלטקריג) , undated, Folder: 14, Object: ITA.192. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁹⁸ Language: Yiddish 39 x 27-1/2 inches; white paper, handpainted—Zionist-Socialists. Lecture by Zalman Rubashov, on way back from UN Lake Success (זלמן רובאשאוו "די פאליטישע לאגע פון די יידן") , 1948, Folder: 6, Object: ITA.80. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

parties⁹⁹ or were given to address memorial events¹⁰⁰ or to offer greater insight into past Jewish culture, like Shmuel Kantor's "Sport in Jewish antiquity."¹⁰¹ These talks offered greetings and welcome from leaders within the DP camps as well as the Jewish community in Palestine.¹⁰²

For some, the Jewish community outside of Italy and Palestine had a greater influence, as not all Jewish DPs wanted or were able to go to Palestine. In its 1945 survey of DP camps, the OJRI report showed that only two percent of DPs wanted to emigrate somewhere other than Palestine; as the years wore on, however, more individuals began to look to emigrate to other countries for a variety of reasons.¹⁰³ Some were in that initial group of DPs who wanted to emigrate elsewhere from the beginning for family or job purposes. For some, like Mendel Herskovitz, Palestine was not a viable options because the thought of continued communal life was too difficult: "I don't want to join a Kibbutz, because I picture it to myself...it is the same as in a lager...Like in camp, a living together [communal life]. And I don't like such a 'living together.'...I have already had enough. I remember at home we had a family life, and for that I am longing again."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Language: Yiddish 39-3/4 x 29-1/2 inches; gray paper, handpainted—Lecture by Duvdevani followed by Hanukkah party (א רעפערט און מסבת חנוכה), undated, Folder: 9, Object: ITA.122. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

¹⁰⁰ Language: Yiddish 39-1/2 x 29 inches; gray paper, handpainted—Herzl-Bialik memorial event (הערצל-ביאליק אקאדעמיע), undated, Folder: 18, Object: ITA.246. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

¹⁰¹ Language: Yiddish 26 x 18-3/4 inches; white paper, handpainted; double-sided (on other side: Item ITA.169r)—Lecture by Shmuel Kantor, "Sport in Jewish antiquity" ספארט אין יידישן אלטערטום, undated, Folder: 12, Object: ITA.169v. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

¹⁰² Language: Yiddish 29 x 19 inches; brown paper, handpainted—Greeting from Israel by Yosef Goldenberg (א גרוס פון א"), undated, Folder: 18, Object: ITA.245. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

¹⁰³ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, "We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946," table III, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁴ Mendel Herskovitz, "Voices of the Holocaust." David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. August 31, 1946, https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17621, Accessed July 19, 2020.

Family was certainly a strong factor for many, as DPs searched and found family members and connections in other countries. Many who were youths at the time remembered attempting to persuade their parents to make *aliyah* instead of joining family in another country. Gertrude Goetz recalled that “when I reported my newly acquired Zionist ideals to my parents, they were less than enthusiastic. They made me realize that our first priority, as far as emigration was concerned, was to be reunited with my aunt living in the United States. Years later I realized that my parents wanted to emigrate to the United States to ensure a better life for me.”¹⁰⁵ Some, perhaps like Goetz’s own parents, were disheartened to hear reports of difficult life in Palestine from individuals who had emigrated and then returned to Italy.¹⁰⁶

For these DPs, cultural rebirth centered on a new life, one that was not necessarily connected to Jewishness. Many later discussed the need they felt to learn how to fit in right away with their new home;¹⁰⁷ this was a need they began to address even while in the DP camps. Connections to the outside world were formed through a variety of media, but especially through films. Posters in the collection of DP materials at YIVO make it quickly clear that film showings were a frequent and regular feature of camp life.¹⁰⁸

Broadsheets hand printed in Yiddish were posted around camps to announce the showing

¹⁰⁵ Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness: Growing up in War Torn Europe* (Xlibris Corporation, 2001), 98.

¹⁰⁶ One JDC report put the number of returnees as high as 1,000 individuals. JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder P.I.206, “Memorandum from Welfare Department to Mr. M. W. Beckelman, Re: Returnees from Israel to Italy,” February 13, 1950.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Goetz discusses this in his memoir, *I Never Saw My Face* (Hudson House, 2007). For more see Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), see especially chapter 3, “Saving Remnant.”

¹⁰⁸ For example see Film, “Pimpernel Smith,” with Leslie Howard (פִּימפֶרנֶל סְמִיט) , undated, Folder: 4, Object: ITA.53. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/7/archival_objects/363597 Accessed July 20, 2020; Russian film screening, “Hello, Moscow!” (Здравствуй, Москва) (שָׁלוֹם, מֹאסְקוֹוֶה) , undated, Folder: 8, Object: ITA.110r. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/7/archival_objects/363640 Accessed July 20, 2020.

of various American, Italian, or other films. Bernat Rosner, a child survivor remembered that

another kind of America reached the camp as well—the America of glamour. In films like *Sotto il Cielo di Hawaii*, Hollywood stars like Alan Ladd and Rita Hayworth moved in a fabulous world of make-believe and wealth. The language of the subtitles did not matter—Italian, English, or whatever. It was the images that made a powerful impression of a magic kingdom beyond the horizon to the west.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, Gertrude Goetz recalled having pinups of famous American actors in her small room in Santa Maria di Bagni.¹¹⁰ American films had an impact, in particular, on those DPs not committed to making *aliyah*, perhaps because they depicted a completely new culture. Often resigned to waiting several years for visas because of quota restrictions or illness, America-bound DPs used the films to imagine this kind of “magic kingdom” that they might one day be a part of.

DP Camps: Spaces of Bare Life or New Life?

The examination of the creation of camps and the importance of cultural rebirth for Jewish refugees is striking for many reasons, but among them is that this examination may bring some clarity to Giorgio Agamben’s claim of the camp as a “space of exception” containing only “bare life.” Agamben’s idea, combining Foucault’s theories of bio politics with Hannah Arendt’s philosophies of dislocation and displacement first applied to concentration camps and only later refugee camps. Scholars of migration and forced displacement have argued that Agamben’s idea of the camp is a metaphor for modernity found in the present day refugee camp: “Like the concentration camps, the

¹⁰⁹ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship: From Opposite Sides of the Holocaust* (University of California Press, 2010), 156-7.

¹¹⁰ Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness*, 98-101.

famine or refugee camp set up during a state of emergency after a disaster or drought also rapidly becomes a permanent space of exception.”¹¹¹ Through their practices of enforced confinement and denationalization, modern refugee camps often strip individuals of any political power and force them to rely solely on humanitarian groups to meet their needs. And these practices, which often begin as exceptional states of affairs intended only for temporary use, quickly become a permanent solution as individuals spend decades in camps. These “spaces of exception” hardly reflected the broader Jewish DP experience in Italian camps; they may apply, however, to more particularized cases.

In its efforts to promote a rebirth of culture, OJRI focused exclusively on Central and Eastern European Jews. But, as described in more detail in chapter two, the DP camps were also home to a contingent of North African Jewish refugees seeking asylum and safe passage to Israel. The majority of these refugees arrived in late 1948–50, just as European DPs made their way to Israel and OJRI began to shut down its operations in Italy. This much smaller group of refugees was not included in the cultural revival occurring in the Italian DP camps. Throughout their time in Italy, the Libyan Jewish refugees struggled to create the kind of temporary “home” space that many of the Eastern European Jewish DPs had been able to. We see two primary issues: the timing of their arrival and a cultural divide between the refugees and aid workers within the camps.

With the majority of Jewish DPs having left the country by mid-49, it seems the Libyans were too late to receive the benefits of cultural rehabilitation. Aid worker in the Salerno camp Chava Frankel argued that “only love and understanding as well organised

¹¹¹ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195-197. For more see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 72-74; Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond State of Emergency* (Routledge, 2013), 25-43

activities [would] achieve in no time a happy and disciplined camp.”¹¹² It seems, however, that “well-organized activities” were not as stable in Salerno as they had been in camps for Europeans. During Purim, the youth in Salerno “performed a most successful play for which all inmates of the camp were invited and was enjoyed by all.”¹¹³ Children and youth in the DP camps commonly put on Purim plays, so this certainly would not have been unusual, but there are no other mentions of art or theater productions from the Libyan camps.¹¹⁴ The Youth Aliyah was able to sponsor an educational outing to nearby Pompei, which “was most appreciated and liked, but, unfortunately, any further excursions have to be stopped, as no transport is available for such purposes. On account of the scarcity of the transport a musical and dramatical evening had to be cancelled.”¹¹⁵ Continued requests for recreational equipment also went unheeded by organizations attempting to wrap up their refugee work in Italy; the JDC noted, for instance, that there was a “decided drop in the percentage [of their budget]

¹¹² Letter to Asst. Camp Director from Senior Welfare Officer, Subject: Meal Distribution, March 14, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880760, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹³ Welfare Officer’s Report (For the Month of March), n.d., Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scans 81880722, 81880725, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC. Harvey Goldberg shows that local Purims were important to Libyan Jews. It is not clear from the source material still available whether they were able to celebrate either the Purim Ashrif (or Sherif) or Purim Burghul, which would have been in late January 1949 before they moved into Salerno. Harvey E. Goldberg and Rosie Pinhas-Delpuech, “Les Jeux de Pourim et Leurs Déclinaisons a Tripoli: Perspective Comparative Sur l’usage Social Des Histoires Bibliques,” *Annales*, 1994, 1183–1195.

¹¹⁴ For example, see JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Letter from Central Committee to AJDC, Rome, Re: Report of Activities,” March 11, 1947; Concert and ball, Bialik Hebrew Gymnasium (Canti e Balli), undated, Folder: 1, Object: ITA.5. Displaced Persons Camps and Centers Poster Collection, RG 294.6. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/7/archival_objects/363099 Accessed July 22, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Welfare Officer’s Report (For the Month of March), n.d., Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880722, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

which went for religious and cultural activities” at the end of 1948 leaving little for the Libyans in 1949.¹¹⁶

Perhaps the greater issue for the Libyans, however, was the lack of cultural knowledge about the Jewish experience in North Africa on the part of the British, American, and Israeli aid workers. Separated by culture and language, the Libyan Jews and the aid workers often misunderstood each other. Other reports discuss this cultural divide with aid workers stating that “the North Africans have their own mode of living and it was not possible within the short space of time they were in Italy, to alter any of their habits.”¹¹⁷ Issues in the camps such as bare feet and torn clothing, which will be discussed further in chapter four, were attributed to a lack of supplies available from the warehouse but also the belief that it was “no doubt a habit of the children to go without shoes in North Africa.” No space is given in these reports to address why children might be going without shoes in Libya at that time: given that over two-thirds of the Libyan Jewish population depended entirely on subsidies from the international Jewish community, this was likely a “habit” they might have acquired simply because they had no means with which to purchase them.¹¹⁸

If one were to only consider the experiences of Libyans in the DP camps, Agamben’s terms might be appropriate: spaces where norms of human legal and ethical modes no longer apply as they do elsewhere, and where individuals are stripped of all political and cultural power, down to simply the “bare life” of existing. But the majority

¹¹⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, “JDC Program in Italy, 1946,” October 30, 1947.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 38, “Tunisia and Tripolitania Section B Tripolitanta,” October 12, 1949.

of DP camps across Italy tell a different story. Here we see the revival of a community, politically through elections and organizations of leadership and governance and spiritually through the rebirth of culture. And this revival, and the importance the entire community gave it, demonstrate that these individuals are still endowed with *bios*, that is a political and cultural will, Agamben's antithesis of "bare life." And it is this will that allows them to create homes in these liminal camp spaces.

It is difficult to ascertain the efficacy of cultural activities on abstract concepts like "raising the spirits of the DPs" because we lack quantifiable, measurable standards against which to judge them. Looking at the comments by refugees and aid workers, however, offers us one window through which we can make some determinations. First, refugee leaders felt that their programming worked. One year into camp life, leader of OJRI's Central Committee Leo Bernstein, remarked "that the general moral state of the refugees, regardless to their grave political state, shows to be in incredible progress."¹¹⁹ He attributed this progress to an increase in jobs, new trade schools, and a new cultural life. In its retrospective report written in early 1949 after the majority of DPs had emigrated, OJRI described the present moment in light of past work:

There is no doubt that the present hour, the eve of closing the camps, is not, conducive for broad cultural work and there certainly, can be no talk now of productive undertakings and the establishment of new institutions. To the credit of the active chaverim it is to be mentioned that they, (that is the few who have remained for a short while) are continuing to carry the burden of the work patiently and obstinately and are watching over the continuation of the cultural services that have been established and developed in the course of the two preceding years.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ "L. Bernstein Report on my visits in the Souther D.P. Camps from 15-th to 30th October 1945," Ephraim Urbach collection, Accession Number: 2016.186.4, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, "Excerpts from a Report by the Central Organizations of Refugees in Italy," February 2, 1949.

That refugee leaders continued “patiently and obstinately” in the cultural work even amidst the closing of the camps clearly demonstrates they had produced positive results in the realm of rehabilitation.

The biggest proof of rehabilitation according to many DP leaders was the renewed spirit of the youth, which will be explored more fully in chapter five. Bernstein’s report, for instance, went further to say that “special praise is to be given to the schooling, which has reached a high extent in all the camps and produced of the Displaced children a generation for a joyous future, a fact that affects positively even the parents. A specially favorable influence on the public life exerts the artistic works.”¹²¹ For young people who had grown up largely only knowing war, freedom of expression and a return of the arts and sport proved to be integral to their recovery. Living in the *hachshara* children’s home, Selvino, Smuel Shilo remembered the impact this cultural influence had on him: “After two weeks I also began to throw pillows, and I also started dancing with girls, and I also started playing football... It took two weeks, no longer, and we were restored to our original age.”¹²² Despite this renewed interest in physical and social activities, there were undoubtedly limits on the completeness of rehabilitation one could hope to achieve in the limited period they spent in the camps. Certainly not all refugees remember the camps with such fondness. Yet, restoration of body and spirit and a renewal of hope were themes that carried through the majority of cultural activities that refugees put on in the

¹²¹ “L. Bernstein Report on my visits in the Souther D.P. Camps from 15-th to 30th October 1945,” Ephraim Urbach collection, Accession Number: 2016.186.4, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²² “Testimony of Shmuel Shulman Shilo, born in Luck, regarding his experiences in the Luck Ghetto, hiding and Krasne labor camp,” November 6, 1991, Yad Vashem Archives, O.3/6705/V.T/135. Seen https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/dp_camps_italy/index.asp#selvino

DP camps.

Voluntary organizations in the DP camps also felt that the cultural renewal was important, and their reports show a continued interest in its improvement, giving educational and cultural programs their own budget lines.¹²³ Responding to the JDC's offer of new books of the libraries, head of OJRI's Cultural Department, Eliezer Yerushalmi explained that "the raising of the cultural level of the Jewish refugees in Italy will be the best rewards for your endeavors."¹²⁴ JDC medical officer Gershon Gelbart's report in 1947 demonstrated that this was precisely what had happened. He wrote a persuasive conclusion saying that when "compared with the cost of the other phases of our programme, the money spent for educational and recreational purposes is most productive of morale building values and the most appreciated."¹²⁵ This kind of "morale building" by the JDC was recognized by those living in the DP camps. Leo Bernstein, general secretary of OJRI, argued that the JDC played a unique and special role in the DP camps.

A resume of [the JDC's] accomplishments can be given in one sentence: If the help of UNRRA for the refugees, which we can by no means minimize or belittle, can be designated as a certain formless objective, then the [JDC] gave to this formlessness the appearance of human form; into this aid the J.D.C. breathed the all important life-giving essence and love.¹²⁶

The investment in culture produced results, many DPs agreed. The JDC's aid stimulated

¹²³ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, "JDC Program in Italy – 1946," March 1, 1947.

¹²⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 1351, "Letter from Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Section for Cultural & Education Home to Mr. Trobe, Subject; Book from Palestine," August 1, 1946.

¹²⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 628, "Contents," February 18, 1947.

¹²⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, "Editor's Note: One of the most moving and illuminating reports on the condition of displaced Jewish men, women and children in Italy was made at the Thirty- Second Annual Meeting of the Joint..." January 17, 1947.

both a material and spiritual renewal.

One figure, however, who might have agreed with Agamben's classification of the camps as spaces of "bare life" was David Boder. During his analysis of the interviews he had collected, Boder created a "theory of deculturation" to describe survivors of the Holocaust.¹²⁷ Coined by Boder as an antonym to the sociological concept of "acculturation," the gathering of an individual into a group, "deculturation" represented the breakdown of an individual by pulling them out of their society. Yet, with his predetermined focus on trauma and deculturation, Boder largely ignored the moments where the interviewees spoke about their growing *acculturation* into a new society. He refused to acknowledge their desire to see the camps as spaces of new life, not "bare life."

Boder's interviewees living in the DP camps presented him with a different picture; they showed him a new life, one that moved out of the deculturation he described. Some, of course, continued to be held in the grip of what they had experienced, unable to move forward with their lives. Many though could relate to Ludwig Hamburger's words describing being brought to a refugee children's center:

Ludwig Hamburger: Then we were brought to different homes [by the Swiss Red Cross].

David Boder: Yes?

Ludwig Hamburger: And we were shown life from a completely different angle than we have know till now.

David Boder: Hm.

Ludwig Hamburger: They wanted to show us. They took pains to show us what life really looks like...

David Boder: Yes?

¹²⁷ In an effort to categorize his interviews, Boder created a "traumatic index," a catalog of leading trauma-inducing events he found in his interviews with survivors. It was this index that helped Boder create his "theory of deculturation" David P. Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, vol. xix (Champaign, IL, US: University of Illinois Press, 1949), xviii-xix.

Ludwig Hamburger: ...to show us how one should behave in company, and they showed us the ways of friendship and family [life].¹²⁸

Those living in DP camps often had a support group around them, a group that had had similar experiences, and caretakers who worked to show them how to readjust to living in society. The deculturation Boder described certainly was present during the war, but most did not remain this way. As Hamburger told Boder, (re)acculturation must begin: “We have to catch up with the lost time that we spent in concentration camp. We came out wild from the concentration camp, like animals...Slowly we got used to the new atmosphere which we have entered. Then I told myself I must have knowledge. I have to learn a trade in order to better build my future life. I began to search.”¹²⁹ These searches often led DPs to training courses and to studying in one of the many camp libraries. Often the only survivors in their family, they often looked to others in the camps, aid workers and fellow refugees alike, to learn to (re)build a new life. And that rebuilding started with the renewal of Jewish life in the DP camps.

Conclusion

“Jewish culture was the air which we [the refugees] breathed. The Jewish person, even if a refugee, needed a Jewish school, a Jewish newspaper, a Jewish literary or cultural organization.”¹³⁰ Written in 1948, these words of Eliezer Yerushalmi, first director of the Cultural Department of OJRI, explained that nearly from the beginning

¹²⁸ Ludwig Hamburger, “Voices of the Holocaust.” David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. August 26, 1946, https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17619, Accessed July 19, 2020.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ E. Yerushalmi, “Di 1-te yidishe algemeyne kultur-konferents in Italye: derefn-rede.” *In Gang: khoydesh-zhurnal far literatur, kultur un gezelschaftleke problemen*. (1948), 15. Quoted in Ayelet Kuper Margalioth, “Yiddish Periodicals Published by Displaced Persons, 1946-1949.” 5.

there had been a plan for cultural rebirth in the DP camps. This rehabilitation could only take place, they believed, if the DP were given a chance to reinvest in themselves. For many refugees, the time of the DP camps perhaps felt like a second wilderness experience, stuck yet again on a peninsula between liberation and expectation fulfilled; like their ancestors before them, they could see the “promised land” but were prevented from reaching it. Life in refugee camps in the 1940s, like today, could be a grueling and dehumanizing experience. Refugees were classified by international authorities based on their location of birth, ethnic or religious group, and the believability of their story. They possessed little to no political will or authority over their final destinations.

And yet, unlike today, between 1945 and 1951, Jewish refugees in Italy were able to create an authorized body of representatives that could speak to power on their behalf. Recognizing that simply surviving the camps would not bring about the much-needed revival of their people, the organizers set out on a path of rehabilitation that largely and perhaps somewhat paradoxically took the form of cultural rebirth. Despite sometimes still lacking basic necessities and paperwork, Jewish DPs set about to answer the question of what a new life could be for refugees in Italy. They sought to discover a post-Holocaust Jewish identity that they believed could start forming even in these temporary homes; this group of “de-cultured” individuals, to use David Boder’s term, fought to “reawaken their sense of human dignity...in their return to a normal way of life,” which must begin now.¹³¹

¹³¹ “List of norms on how to elect delegates for the Conference of Jewish Refugees in Italy. Conference of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy,” November 26-28, 1945; Record of the DP Camps of Italy; RG 294.3; Box 1, Folder 2, Reel 1.4, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

CHAPTER FOUR

“It is impossible to stand it any longer”: Deprivations, Frustrations, and Uncertainty in the DP Camps

“How to come to grips with a group who have been through the Holocaust, lost their families, were living in, the best I could say, in substandard housing in the camps, even though some of them were villages, how could they come out of that trauma? How could they get up every day, having lost their families, living in these wretched conditions?”¹

—Theodore Feder, aid worker

“We didn’t know what was waiting for us at the next corner. We had no idea how long it’s going to take us, what the situation was, who was going to help us out getting out. So we just hung in there.”²

—Erika Kinel, DP

“I was still worried about food. ‘Is there enough food available there?’ I was still hungry psychologically, although they provided us with enough food in these camp... my first question was ‘how do people get enough food there?’”³

—Baruch Goldstein, DP

In 1946, Walter Grimes was one of many U.S.-based advocates who wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt.⁴ Grimes’s relatives in the Italian Displaced Persons (DP) felt they were being mistreated in the camps because they were Jews from Roumania rather than Poland like the majority of Jewish refugees. He said, however, that he was thinking of more than just his own niece: “what happens to her and her family is, of itself, unimportant. What does matter is that such conditions should be permitted to exist and

¹ Interview with Theodore Feder, June 2, 1995 RG-50.030*0335, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

² Interview with Erika Kinel, March 8, 1995, RG-50.030*0309, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³ Baruch Goldstein, Interview 47918, Segments 204-205, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1998. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁴ The title of this chapter is from a letter from a DP residing in the Bari transit camp to the *Jewish Daily Forward* describing the poor conditions of the DP camps. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.111, “Letter from Hersz Blank to Editors Office,” September 28, 1947.

that people who have undergone so much suffering over the past few years should have to endure still more.”⁵ Grimes and the many others who also wrote to the U.S. icon appealed to Roosevelt on the basis of her humanitarian work, hoping she might hold relief agencies accountable for their work in the DP camps.⁶ Since her appointment to the U.S. delegation at the United Nations General Assembly in 1945, Roosevelt had worked tirelessly on issues related to “refugees, relief, and rehabilitation and human rights.”⁷ In her nationally syndicated daily newspaper column, “My Day,” Roosevelt often wrote of her visits to the DP camps in Germany and of the letters she received from those in the camps.⁸ Grimes was willing to grant that there might be “valid reasons for this country [the U.S.] to continue to restrict immigration as if nothing had happened to the world in this decade.” But he argued that, at a minimum, the DP camps should be improved and aid organizations held accountable for poor conditions because “relief without proper supervision is no better than no relief.”⁹ If affidavits could not be won and quotas would not be lifted, then the camp must become more homelike.

There was a great deal of uncertainty in the postwar years. The issue of not having enough material goods—food, clothing, blankets, etc.—was widespread throughout

⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.113, “Letter from AJDC New York to AJDC Paris,” October 29, 1947.

⁶ Daniella Doron, *Jewish youth and identity in postwar France: rebuilding family and nation*, (Indiana University Press, 2015), 55; Geraldine Kidd, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Palestine, Israel and Human Rights* (Routledge, 2017).

⁷ Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War’s Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

⁸ Eleanor Roosevelt wrote the column from 31 December 1935 until 26 September 1962 (six days a week until January 1961, then three days a week thereafter). “My Day” has since been digitized by The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, Columbian College of Arts & Sciences, at The George Washington University. Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day, February 15, 1947,” *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Digital Edition* (2017), https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1947&_f=md000575, Accessed July 20, 2020.

⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.113, “Letter from AJDC New York to AJDC Paris,” October 29, 1947.

postwar Europe, but in the early years after the war, it hit DP camps particularly hard. In the months of their formation and formalization, camps often ran out of food and lacked seasonally appropriate clothing, leading to many problems, even illness and death. When the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) arrived in Italy in 1944, Italian Bureau Chief Spurgeon M. Keeny wrote that “there was not enough food to feed the people.”¹⁰ But how much food was enough? As the years in the DP camps stretched on, refugees and humanitarian aid workers began to disagree about the answers here.

It was also unclear during these years just how long the refugees would be living in the camps; refugees wanted out, but legal emigration routes were hard to find as countries continued to maintain immigration quotas and restrictions. One could only live in this space of liminality for so long, however, regardless of how much it began to feel like home. Waiting took its toll on the refugees. Some participated in hunger strikes like those in the Italian port town of La Spezia to protest the British blockade to Palestine. Others grew tired of waiting to emigrate to Palestine and of camp life. In its 1945 survey of DP camps, the DP-led coalition of refugees, the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) reported that only two percent of DPs wanted to emigrate somewhere other than Palestine; as the years wore on, Palestine remained the primary objective for the majority of DPs, but more individuals began to look to emigrate to other countries for a variety of reasons.¹¹

¹⁰ 8 Una, S-0520-0086, Unrra, Bureau of Areas, Executive Office, Country Files, 1943-1949, Italy 1944 - Observers' Mission - Report 1943-1949 seen in Silvia Salvatici, “«Not Enough Food to Feed the People» L'Unrra in Italia (1944-1945),” *Contemporanea: Rivista Di Storia Dell'800 e Del '900* 14, no. 1 (2011): 84.

¹¹ The Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI) was created in late 1945 to be the voice of all Jewish DPs in Italy. It was alternatively called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Italy or the *Irgun ha-plitim be-Italia*, *Merkaz ha-Plitim*. Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee,

Throughout the tenure of the DP camps, refugees and aid workers alike used a vast amount of paper to send letters, memos, inventories, and telegrams addressing the numerous issues surrounding material goods, including their amount, quality, and timely delivery. In Italy, where the influx of Jewish refugees remained nearly continuous between 1945 and 1948 as individuals desperately tried to get to Palestine, the situation around material goods stabilized, reached relative stability by 1946. But 1947, when there were approximately 26,500 Jewish refugees in Italy, witnessed a sudden resurgence in complaints about a lack of goods.¹² This resurgence is largely due to three factors: the continued flow of refugees into Italy with very little flow out of Italy, the transition in power from UNRRA to the International Refugee Organization (IRO), and the growing frustration with waiting to emigrate. The year 1949 also represents a turning point in the history of the DP camps, when we find again an uptick in the number of problems and complaints, but this time they come largely from a different population. The founding of the State of Israel in May 1948 allowed many Jews to make *aliyah* (“ascent,” meaning Jewish immigration to Israel), as the blockade and quotas were largely finished; thus, by the end of 1948, large portions of the Eastern European Jewish population had left the DP camps. Late 1948 through 1949 saw the arrival of refugees from Libya who often found themselves in transit camps in poor conditions. Prepared in haste for these unexpected arrivals, the camps were often unfit for prolonged habitation.

“We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946,” table III, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹² JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.32, “Letter from Jacob L. Trobe to His Excellency the Foreign Minister,” February 26, 1947.

This chapter investigates problems within the camps. It argues that the problems were often centered around two primary issues: not having enough material goods and not knowing how long they would be in the camps. Refugees and aid workers responded to this lack of goods and the unknown timeframe in different ways, often relying on their own personal wartime experiences as a guide. When left unchecked, these different responses combined to create an atmosphere of tension, mistrust, and anger within the camps where refugees felt unattended and aid workers felt unappreciated. This chapter interrogates the question of enough: did the Jewish DPs in Italian camps have enough, enough food, enough material goods, enough support, enough freedom? The idea of “enough” is a very context specific thing: how much is enough for whom and in what situation? This question offers insight into the complex world of expectations. And within the DP camps it quickly becomes apparent that there were vastly different expectations about what counted as good enough.

Enough Food and Material Goods?

In its annual report for 1946-1947, the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT), a vocational training organization in the DP camps, reported that

The realisation of this important plan (for vocational training), which was to be applied to Italy, is hampered here by a situation, the extent of which could not be foreseen by us, and moreover is little known outside Italy. The fact is that the overwhelming majority of refugees are complaining of hunger—and with reason, too. As a result of the under-nourishment, even those willing to work and to learn, choose the easiest trades, and decline the working of metal and wood on the grounds of their obvious physical weakness. If a remedy cannot be found, all the efforts of the ORT will be in vain.¹³

¹³ ORT *Obschestvo Remeslenovo i zemledelcheskovo Trouda* (The Society for Handicrafts and Agricultural Work). JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “ORT’s Statement on the Refugee Situation in Italy,” July 31, 1947.

The DPs were reaching a breaking point. ORT reported of two “good pupils” who had left cabinet-making to be street sweepers “because they could earn a little money that way and thus appease their hunger.” ORT assured its listeners that this was “not a unique case” and that others would soon follow if nothing was done to introduce more food.¹⁴

One of the primary issues here was that if these camps were to be “home” for a while, their current conditions were not acceptable. The issue of food and material goods was one that would remain present throughout the tenure of the camps. Needs, both actual and perceived, were varied and changed depending on location and time. This section will look at DP camps across Italy in the years 1947 and 1949, although it will draw many of its examples from three particular camps, Cremona in the North, Bari in the Southeast, and Salerno in the Southwest. Cremona and Bari were both large and well-established camps by 1947, and Salerno was prepared as a special home for Libyan youth in 1949; this diversity allows us to see how these issues were not limited in geographic scope, but rather affected many of the DP camps across Italy. These three camps provide useful counterpart case studies as they were set up differently, but they were still all spaces with particularly vocal DPs who used similar methods to fight for the problems they saw with their material situation. Interestingly, in all of these cases aid workers’ reports often differ from what refugees say they’re experiencing. Part of the difference seems to originate in what DPs and aid workers conceptualized as the appropriate comparison class against which to judge their standard of living.

¹⁴ Ibid.

1947 and UNRRA-IRO transitions

The year 1947 saw three major changes in the Italian DP camp system. First, in the spring of 1947 UNRRA closed camps in the Lecce region of Italy in the heel of the boot just south of Bari.¹⁵ These camps had been home to a large number of Jewish DPs, the vast majority of whom had hoped to make *aliyah* quickly. This closure forced many to move to camps in northern Italy, much farther from the ports and thus decreasing, at least in their perception, the likelihood of a quick departure. The year 1947 also marked the return of Italian sovereignty, which allowed Italian officials to take over some of the DP camps. At the start of 1947, Italian officials noted that a maximum of 32,000 Jewish refugees could fit in the operating DP camps and nearby communities; thus with 26,500 Jewish refugees already present in the camps, “hospitality was reaching its limit...camps were full.”¹⁶ And finally, July 1, 1947 marked the end of UNRRA’s mission in Italy and the arrival of the IRO. These transitions were marked with challenges, and the second half of 1947 got off to a rocky start.

One place where the many problems surrounding food combined to create an atmosphere of tension, mistrust, and anger was the camp in Bari. This “camp” was actually a combination of one official IRO transit camp, some *hachsharot*, and some refugees living out of camp in the town of Bari and the surrounding region.¹⁷ By 1944, the camp in the small coastal town of Bari was a bustling center for foreign refugees and served as a port for both legal and also clandestine immigration to Palestine. Bari was an

¹⁵ For more on camps in the southern regions see Mario Mennonna, *Ebrei a Nardò: Campo profughi n. 34, Santa Maria al Bagno, 1944-1947* (Congedo, 2008). And Nardò 1943-1947. *L'accoglienza ai profughi ebrei* (Nardo: Besa, 2007).

¹⁶ Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 67.

¹⁷ The primary camps in the region were the Palese Camp, the Barletta Camp, and the Bari Transit Camp. Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 70-72.

endpoint of the “Underground Railroad” that extended from the Brenner Pass, between Italy and Austria, across the main intake centers in Milan and Rome, to the southern port in the Lecce region.¹⁸ When the mountain pass became too difficult to cross in the winter, Bari became the transit site for small boats of Jewish refugees arriving from Yugoslavia.¹⁹ Bari remained a primary transit route for *aliyah* throughout the tenure of the DP camps. The camp itself consisted of “brick and stone built barracks partitions into small private rooms. Each family therefore has its own dwelling and privacy and is able to lead some semblance of a home life.”²⁰ This semblance of home life, however, proved shaky as problems with material goods hit.

Among the primary concerns with the IRO takeover of DP operations in Bari and across Italy was a fear that current refugees might lose their status, and thus their assistance, and that the current standard of living would decrease. As it turned out, the refugees did have cause for concern: the IRO reduced daily caloric rations from 2450 to just over 2000 and limited the amount of clothing and other material goods that it would give to the refugees. Fearing the implementation of this decrease, Hersz Blank, a DP residing in the Bari transit camp, wrote to the *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York saying “the nourishment, which we receive is not sufficient, and we cannot stand it much longer. I have to add we are emaciated from those passed years...There are of course quite a few

¹⁸ Eva Pfanzelter, “Between Brenner and Bari: Jewish Refugees in Italy 1945 to 1948,” in *Escape through Austria: Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine*, ed. Thomas Albrich and Ronald W Zweig (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), 90.

¹⁹ Eva Pfanzelter notes that refugees made this crossing approximately 30 at a time a few times a week starting in November 1946. Eva Pfanzelter, “Between Brenner and Bari: Jewish Refugees in Italy 1945 to 1948,” in *Escape through Austria: Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine*, ed. Thomas Albrich and Ronald W Zweig (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), 90.

²⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.24, “Letter from Hannah Nottes to Mr. J. Trobe, Subject: Quarterly Report, July to September, 1947,” October 24, 1947.

people, who have relatives to support them, but the majority is starving. It is impossible to stand it any longer.”²¹ Blank, like many DPs, felt that their needs were not being met by the IRO or the voluntary organization in the camps, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). He also felt that applying to the JDC for more help would not solve their problems, so he sought help from elsewhere. Perhaps recalling the effectiveness of the La Spezia DPs who bolstered their claims by drawing on an international audience, some refugees reached out to co-religionists, especially in the United States. The New York newspaper declined to publish Blank’s letter but did reach out to the JDC requesting that they look into the complaint. The JDC Europe office wrote to the Italian branch, saying

Of course we know that the people down in Bari aren’t starving and on the other hand we understand that due to cuts in the budget and reduction of supplies available, it is not possible for you to do as much for these people as the JDC would like you to do...On the other hand, however, there may be some particular reason for this complaint and we would like to have you look into it and send us a report.²²

Following up in December 1947, the JDC reported that the main issue was a reduction in the rations allotted DPs by the IRO that had taken place a month before the letter was written but also a general resentment at still being dependent on others.

The reports of Hannah Nottes, a JDC aid worker in Bari and broader Southern region, indicate that the changeover was more of a problem than the JDC’s main office was willing to admit. When the IRO took over from UNRRA in July, the caloric rations were acceptable, but the food not the most desirable: “Although the quantity of food

²¹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.111, “Letter from Hersz Blank to Editors Office,” September 28, 1947.

²² JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.111, “Letter from Melvin S. Goldstein to AJDC Rome, Re: Attached Letter from Bari, Forwarded from AJDC New York,” November 25, 1947.

supplied by IRO seemed adequate there is absolutely no variety and the people of [the Bari camp] have become very weary with this monotonous diet.”²³ We see here the idea from well-intentioned aid workers who maybe had the thought that refugees surely would be grateful for relatively little in comparison to the nothing they had during the war. Viewing the refugees as people who must be “rescued” allowed aid workers to expect little push back toward their “saviors.”²⁴ Nottes, who was born in Lithuania but grew up in South Africa and later was in the first class at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work in Versailles, seems to have been more attuned to the refugees’ needs and desires than many of her JDC superiors. Her summation of the situation clearly calls for more JDC action: “The difficulties in this area are great and with the reduction of IRO assistance as of October 1st the position will worsen unless the AJDC stepes [sic] in with a larger all-round contribution than even before.”²⁵

Food was not the only concern of the refugees; often the very camps built to give them a home were inadequate for the numbers of people in them or for the seasonal changes. Some DPs had relatives to whom they wrote in an effort to find themselves a better situation. New York resident Sol Kollander received a letter from his niece and nephew in which they complained to him of terrible living conditions in the Barletta camp next to Bari: “[There are] almost 300 people in one block. Every movement of your neighbors is heard. Children’s crying at night. Noises in the corridor, one can have not

²³ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.24, “Letter from Hannah Nottes to Mr. J. Trobe, Subject: Quarterly Report, July to September, 1947,” October 24, 1947.

²⁴ S. Salvatici, “‘Help the People to Help Themselves’: UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 428–51.

²⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.24, “Letter from Hannah Nottes to Mr. J. Trobe, Subject: Quarterly Report, July to September, 1947,” October 24, 1947.

one moment of peace.”²⁶ They then detailed how they had sought help from every corner: all living relatives were unable to help them either with money or affidavits, and they accused the JDC of withholding material assistance from them. Kollander forwarded this letter to the JDC, explaining he was unable to help financially and asked for a response to the allegations that the JDC was not doing anything to help the DPs in the camps.²⁷ The JDC response echoed their words about the food situation: “We recognize the difficult housing conditions in the camps in Italy and have done all we can to improve them, but this seems to be a superhuman task.”²⁸

This “superhuman task,” however, often had very human answers in the minds of the DPs. They often felt that the agencies in charge were caring but far too inefficient. S. Edelsburg, representing the Cremona Camp Committee, wrote to the Chief of Operations of the Cremona DP Camp, requesting a meeting to discuss difficult living conditions in the camp.

With all fairness to you, Sir, and your staff who is doing its utmost best for our people, we are bound to state that living conditions in this camp are extremely bad. For the last four months we have been constantly pointing out to the local and regional administration the problems of leaking roofs, missing doors and windows, ruined electrical system and the extreme difficulty of keeping latrines in working order. These trivial things are of the greatest importance for 1200 people stuffed in unappropriately [sic] small buildings.²⁹

²⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.109, “Transl. Letter from Barletta, Italy, Dated October 16, 1947,” November 18, 1947.

²⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Letter,” November 11, 1947.

²⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.109, “Letter from M. Jacob Joslow to Mr. Sol Kollander,” December 19, 1947.

²⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Letter from AJDC Rome to AJDC Paris, Subject: Living Conditions in Cremona Camp,” November 18, 1947.

Edelsburg stated that they had been “constantly told that steps were being taken to get necessary budgetary allowances to start repairs,” but that no repairs had materialized. Or when they had, they had been far too late to be useful—desperately needed lumber, for instance, finally arrived three months after it was requested, but “winter unfortunately moves faster.” Edelsburg wrote that it was not a lack of money that was their problem: “Hundreds of examples could prove that many a time our people are suffering hardship not because of actual lack of funds but only because of slow and unaccurate [sic] work of the somehow too bureaucratic administration machine.”³⁰ The wheels of the bureaucratic administrative machine were slow to make progress in this case.

The DP Camp IT 82 Cremona was one of the largest in Northern Italy, but it was frequently overcrowded and underfunded.³¹ Situated about an hour southeast of Milan, this town of roughly 64,000 people housed up to 4,000 foreign Jewish refugees. The camp itself was made up of three connected monasteries, San Benedetto, Corpus Domini, and Santa Chiara, called the *Parco dei Monasteri*. These monasteries, reconverted into military barracks when under Habsburg control in the seventeenth century, were located in the middle of the historic old town. The Jewish refugees living here, like in camps across Italy, were originally from a variety of European countries. But the majority were from Poland, and thus the locals often simply called the Jewish DPs “*i pulàch*,” or “the Poles” in the Cremonese dialect. The population of the Cremona camp was often transitory as it was established so close to an illegal entry point on the Austrian border. Despite the complaints, Cremona was later touted as the most successful vocational

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For more on the Cremona camp see Roberta Aglio and Monica Feraboli, *DP Camp IT 82: Cremona. Arrivo e partenze. Traiettorie, incroci, vite, storia. Atti della Tavola rotonda Cremona, 28 gennaio 2017* (Cremona: Fantigrafica, 2017).

school in Italy. The camp closed in 1948, and all remaining refugees were moved to camps further south.³²

In Cremona, the DP camp residents were particularly adept at making their voices heard, both using the power of their local camp representatives and staging protests that involved large portions of the local Italian community. Camp Committees, made up of DP residents and given the power by both the DPs themselves and the IRO to represent the camp, were often very vocal in their complaints. Angered by the proposed changes brought by the arrival of the IRO, the camp population called a general meeting in October 1947 wherein the refugees called on both the IRO and the JDC to reexamine their rations policies arguing that “the new rations-scale compells [sic] all the camp population without regard to age to a standard of vegetation living and permanent hunger.”³³ They urged the camp committee to advocate on their behalf and to create a larger coalition of all of the Northern Camps to fight the changed rations. The JDC was soon forced to explain these poor food conditions to those outside the organization. The letters Rabbi Jacobson received in Massachusetts in late 1947 followed a typical pattern of expressing discontent with the situation and displeasure with the response of local aid organizations to help them. In response, Rabbi Jacobson sent the *Jewish Morning Journal* a telegram: “Please inform if the Joint [or JDC] help the Jews in Kremona [sic] Refugee Camp number 82 Italy I received a dozen letters that the Jews suffer very badly there I am ready to publish the letters or the papers please answer.”³⁴ The *Journal*, like the

³² Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 162-163.

³³ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.92, “Untitled Typewritten Document, 12/10/1947,” December 10, 1947 [actual date: October 12, 1947].

³⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Letter from AJDC New York to AJDC Paris,” February 17, 1948.

Jewish Daily Forward before it, declined to publish the letter and passed the telegram on to the JDC.

The primary issue seemed to be one of timing: the DPs had lost confidence that they would be able to leave Italy quickly. This unexpected delay, exacerbated by a rocky transfer of jurisdiction from UNRRA to IRO and a general sense among the DPs that conditions were getting worse, led to the growing number of complaints during this period. Camps in the northern part of Italy were being shut down during the transfer from the UNRRA to the IRO, but Cremona, the JDC learned, would remain open through the winter of 1947-1948, longer than expected. IRO rations had just come into effect in October. The camp housing was inadequate to provide warm shelter the harsh winters of the Italian alps, so the JDC petitioned to winterize the living quarters. UNRRA, however, because it “was ceasing its operation on June 30, [thus] refused to initiate these repairs and when IRO came in, it realized that repairs needed to be made but could do very little because of its limited funds.”³⁵ Financial supplementation for emergency repairs by the JDC was not enough to fully winterize the barracks, which meant there was fuel and moderate heat but that “living conditions [were] not satisfactory.”³⁶ In his report, Jacob Joslow from the JDC made a point to say that the JDC had to first help those who were in the worst conditions; new arrivals in the camps would receive more immediate help because they “arrive in such poor physical condition.”³⁷ But since the arrival of newcomers was constant and emigration was slow, relatively little aid was given to longer-tenured camp members.

³⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Letter from M. Jacob Joslow to J. M. Jacobson,” February 16, 1948.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

When their letters to the voluntary agencies produced few results, some DPs turned to other methods for procuring the goods they needed. These methods took many forms from continuing to receive ration cards and goods for dead or emigrated DPs to falsifying records to buying and selling on the black market. Claiming hunger, armed refugees and youth gangs stole rations, spreading panic and public disturbances.³⁸ Most common, however, was the use of the black market, as Leo Bernstein, a representative from OJRI, declared “The black market is a necessity for those who are able to make it...Smuggling across the frontiers exists.”³⁹ There was a danger here, however, he continued because “Fascist propaganda makes the equation: black market—the Jews. In the Province Lecce where there is a Center of Pleitim [that is, Jewish DPs], the press published obscene articles against the Jewish black market.”⁴⁰ While there certainly were documented cases of Jewish DPs in Italy using the black market to sell goods brought in by aid organizations such as the IRO and the JDC, these cases are much smaller in percentage than those reported in German DP camps.⁴¹ In Italy, a variety of groups including occupying soldiers and other DPs were involved in black market activities—high rates of unemployment nationally made it one of the best ways of *arrangiare*, that is “getting bread on the table”—thus, it was not seen as a particularly Jewish problem in the same way as in Germany.⁴²

³⁸ Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 162-163.

³⁹ “Conversations held between Dr. Schwarzbart and Dr. Serebrenik and Dr. Leon Berstein, Representative of the Merkaz Hapleitim, Rome, on Tuesday, February 11, 1947, at 3:45 P.M.,” February 11, 1947, Box C74, File 4, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in File C74 4, Scans C74-0416—C74-0417 RG-67.005, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ For an analysis of the black market in German DP camps see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁴² Susanna Kokkonen, *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy*, 61.

Feeling inadequately supported (if supported at all) by the organizations working in the camps and resigned to remaining in Italy for the foreseeable future, DPs in Cremona determined to take matters into their own hands. They began a larger scheme to obtain material goods through a practice known as “*taubenindustrie*.” This was “the securing of money and parcels from individuals or welfare agencies abroad under false pretenses.”⁴³ Camp residents used newspapers to find the names and addresses of Jewish families and agencies living in the United States. They then wrote to these individuals and organizations, often pretending to be relatives or to have information about relatives and requested material and financial aid. “The swindlers, registered with various Relief Institutions and ‘*Landsmanschaften*’ [mutual aid societies] under false names, receive parcels and other subsidies in kind from them. These people are not ashamed to request assistance even from individuals whose relatives they pretend to be (whom they know to be dead).”⁴⁴ By February 1948, however, OJRI became suspicious of what they deemed too many inquiries from organizations abroad into the welfare of DPs in the camps, and specifically about the complaints coming out of Cremona. Accordingly, OJRI set up a special revision committee to investigate the matter.

This revision committee, headed by a Mr. Esterovic, determined that about 80% of camp residents were involved in the “Parcels Affair.” Given the high percentage of involved individuals, OJRI’s report stated that it seemed “obvious that the camp committee is not willing to take energetic action against this social dangerous

⁴³ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Letter from AJDC Milan to Mr. Melvin S. Goldstein, Subject: Camp Cremona Your Letter No 82, of March 11th, 1948,” March 26, 1948.

⁴⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Translation Letter from Vaad Esori, Milan to Chief, Northern Region, Subject: Parcels Obtained Under False Pretenses,” March 3, 1948.

occurrence.”⁴⁵ The camp committee, whose job it was to represent the DPs in the camp, understandably did not want to promote actions that would damage activities that the majority of the camp participated in. It took the revision committee several meetings to negotiate an agreement between the DPs and the camp committee. Under the terms of their agreement, all “*taubenindustrie*” would cease on March 15, about two weeks after the terms were agreed to. Before March 15, anyone could claim the illegal packages, but the receiver would be required to pay a percentage of the value of the parcel to OJRI.⁴⁶ After the March 15 deadline, all parcels would be confiscated and redistributed with the common welfare goods.

The real problem, as the revision committee claimed, was that “such actions, besides their definite criminal nature, also influence public opinion against Jewish refugees in general, thus damaging their interests.”⁴⁷ There was a great fear that Jewish individuals and agencies would stop supporting refugees if they found that their help had been so misused. Whether this fear was well-founded or not, the revision committee was able to convince the camp committee and camp residents that the danger was at least

⁴⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Untitled Typewritten Document,” February 22, 1948; JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Translation Letter from Vaad Esori, Milan to Chief, Northern Region, Subject: Parcels Obtained Under False Pretenses,” March 3, 1948.

⁴⁶ Costs were broken down as follows: CARE parcels would require Lit. 1500, other parcels Lit. 500, money remittance would be 50% of the value. The monies obtained this way would be divided 75% to Migal Habitachon and 25% to local social aid. JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Untitled Typewritten Document,” February 22, 1948; JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Translation Letter from Vaad Esori, Milan to Chief, Northern Region, Subject: Parcels Obtained Under False Pretenses,” March 3, 1948.

⁴⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Untitled Typewritten Document,” February 22, 1948; JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Translation Letter from Vaad Esori, Milan to Chief, Northern Region, Subject: Parcels Obtained Under False Pretenses,” March 3, 1948.

potentially viable. The agreement included punishment for those who continued in this illegal practice of attempting to get goods from abroad stating that “persons who in future will be guilty of such propaganda, will be put under trial and expelled from the community.”⁴⁸ False pretenses were condemned and the guilty would be punished. All the camps were to be informed of the illegality of this practice in order to maintain a good international image for the Jewish DP as they were seeking to create a new home for themselves.

Apprehension about this practice, along with other illegal ventures such as black marketeering, reflected the concern many Jewish DPs, especially those in leadership positions, felt about their situation. Here they faced the predicament of being caught between the burden of securing enough material goods to live adequately and preserving the image of one’s community. The latter was particularly important for this survivor community, as these types of actions could easily be interpreted as playing into certain racial stereotypes by those outside their community. Atina Grossmann notes this problem also occurred in the German DP camps where many Jewish leaders worried this kind of black market or deception would influence world leaders against Palestine;⁴⁹ leaflets were handed out to DP residents in these camps reminding them that even if they did not personally participate in these kinds of activities, Jews were always “lumped together according to the old [antisemitic] recipes.”⁵⁰ For those focused on entering Palestine, this kind of attention spelled potential disaster. Another group hoping to enter Israel after

⁴⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Translation Letter from Vaad Esori, Milan to Chief, Northern Region, Subject: Parcels Obtained Under False Pretenses,” March 3, 1948.

⁴⁹ Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 157-160.

⁵⁰ YIVO DPG 249.2/(folder)167/MK(microfilm)483/R(eel)14, Cirkular Nr. 5, December 2, 1946 and May 6, 1947. Seen in Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 158.

1948 faced a variety of different problems than the European Jewish DPs, but many of their issues also centered around worries related to getting material goods.

Material or Materialism Problems in Salerno

While the issues of their eligibility for aid with the IRO were being argued in IRO headquarters in Geneva, as we discussed in chapter two, Libyan Jewish migrants who had already arrived in Italy had to be housed and cared for somewhere. The later months of 1948 and early months of 1949 show hodgepodge efforts to give care and maintenance at *hachsharot* spread out throughout the Rome and Naples regions. This section will use the IRO camp of Salerno as a case study of the broader Libyan experience of material goods in Italian DP camps. The issues that arise around food and housing demonstrate a lack of consideration for the fact that these refugees were youths, orphaned or without parents present, and that they were from Libya, giving them a much different background than their European counterparts.

In late January 1949, as the numbers of Libyan youth arriving continued to grow, the IRO created a center for unaccompanied children and youths in Salerno, a town outside of Naples in southwestern Italy. Originally built as a vacation camp for children under IRO care, the center was rebuilt in order to accommodate over five hundred children and was used first to house North African children. IRO personnel would oversee the camp as it was one of several in the area. The Jewish Agency for Palestine Child and Youth Immigration Department (the Youth Aliyah) would be responsible for the daily life of the camp. The Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad would supply a welfare worker and liaison officers. The JDC would be in charge of food and material

supplies in this camp. As of late February 1949, after a meeting among the IRO, the Youth Aliyah, and the JDC, it was determined that the IRO would not increase rations to Salerno. The JDC stepped in to increase its supplementing of rations and clothing, although it took some time for the goods to be delivered.⁵¹ The JDC and the Youth Aliyah then faced the enormous task of providing care and maintenance for recuperating individuals without much help from the IRO.

Many of the reports from Salerno came from British aid worker Eva Frankel of the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad whose original assessment of the camp in February 1949 provided a complicated but promising picture: “It is far from being perfect and very many odds and ends need to be seen to. Our main headache is food as well there are rather cold nights at present and it is very hard for the children to go back to the beginning of Genazzano. Otherwise I can’t stress enough how wonderful the children are and it is a great pleasure to work for them.”⁵² The cold nights could be attributed to the camp’s location five-minutes from the sea and the tin walls of the Nissen huts that made up the lodging.⁵³ It quickly became clear, however, that neither the children nor the camp itself were set up for a prolonged tenure. A month later, Frankel wrote to the camp director that

There is a great unrest and amongst the children, which makes it very hard to break the disorder and dissatisfaction and only love and understanding as well organised activities will achieve in no time a happy and disciplined camp. In view

⁵¹ Letter to Chava Frankel from David Golding, February 23, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880769, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵² Letter to L.K. Dickinson from Chava Frankel, n.d., Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880731, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵³ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, “Letter from AJDC New York to Louis D. Horwitz,” March 2, 1949.

of our up till now wonderful [sic] co-operation it is in our both interest of smooth settlement and I can assure you that I will avoid any further complains [sic] if it is for the best of the children's camp.⁵⁴

Food, however, would remain a constant headache.

This headache comes to a fore just before *Pesach* (Passover), celebrated in 1949 from April 13 to 20. Here we see the efforts of aid workers to increase sensitivity within the aid agencies around some of the religious and cultural differences the Libyan Jews represented. After being informed by the JDC and the Youth Aliyah that the children would have to stay in the camp through *Pesach*, Chava Frankel wrote to Eva Levy of the JDC in Naples

You cannot imagine the great disappointment, disillusion and resentment which has brought forth the decision that the children are supposed to spend *Pessach* [sic] in the camp. For the sake of the children's peace of mind (if they have not run away before) and that the feast should not be a failure, the following should be cared for and is needed immediately.⁵⁵

Her letter then included a list of goods that she wanted the JDC to contribute such as food, kitchen items, and a cook or two.

Frankel's letters also alert us to the importance of particular food for these children. Coming from highly Orthodox environments, the Libyan youth adhered to *kashrut* dietary laws, but this was heightened during *Pesach*, Frankel reminds the JDC. In an effort to coordinate *Pesach* foods in all their camps, the IRO Department of Supply and Transport sent out notification that "Jews observing Passover in the orthodox manner

⁵⁴ Letter to Asst. Camp Director from Senior Welfare Officer, Subject: Meal Distribution, March 14, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880760, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵⁵ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, Subject: Passover, April 7, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180281, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

are prohibited by their religion from eating bread and cereals normally issued by the Camps” and that additional foods would be provided to compensate for this loss.⁵⁶ Frankel, however, reminded the concerned parties that it was not only bread and cereals that were forbidden but “anything connected with it in any way...Also the living quarters, dining-hall, and by all means the kitchen have to be clened [sic] from any stains of bread or even bread-crumbs [sic].”⁵⁷ They would also need to replace all the dishes and utensils, which had not been kept according to *kashrut* in the joint kitchen, because they could not perform the religious ritual of ablution through which they would be purified.⁵⁸ This additional concern shows the amount of detail and consideration of some welfare officers who worked with the youth in the camps but also demonstrates the ways larger organizations were not always knowledgeable about those in their care.

Yet the waiting and problems with material goods also created mismatched perceptions of the situation by aid workers and refugee youth. Part of the problem arose amongst the aid workers themselves who did not always agree on how to treat these refugees. In mid-March, there was a disagreement over how to handle the children’s eating and working time. The IRO assistant camp director, B. Martinovich, sent a sternly worded memo to the aid worker complaining that the youths were not finishing their

⁵⁶ Letter Subject: S&T Circular Letter Observance of Jewish Passover, March 31, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880776, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵⁷ Letter Subject: Memorandum about the Jewish Passover, April 6, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880785, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵⁸ Letter Subject: Exchange of Utensils, Dishes and Cutleries Before Passover, April 8, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880779, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

meals quickly enough and were not helping enough with the chores; he stated he was “not prepared to tolerate such things in the future.”⁵⁹ Chava Frankel explained that the children’s mealtimes did not align with the workers’ mealtimes, which did not seem to be a problem in her mind. As for the chores, she argued, that “Each child has been appointed to certain tasks and duties in the camp, but as this is regarded as a special children’s camp, more patience and toleration should be given until the children have been settled.”⁶⁰ The struggle to convince all the aid workers of the need for leniency and extra care continued through the duration of the camps.

Separated by culture and language, the children and the aid workers often misunderstood each other. Frankel, who was initially so hopeful for the center appeared completely frustrated by the end of March. “In all my life and experiences in the camps,” wrote an exasperated Frankel, “I have never found any children who are so materialistic as ours. And maybe this is the reason and problem of our work here.”⁶¹ But this perceived attachment to material things might have been better understood as a coping mechanism rather than an innate “materialism.” Many of these children had lived through two

⁵⁹ Letter Subject: Meal Distribution, March 14, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880780, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁶⁰ Letter to Asst. Camp Director from Senior Welfare Officer, Subject: Meal Distribution, March 14, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 508, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880760, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁶¹ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 1, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180305, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.; Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 11, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180278, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

pogroms in Libya, had watched most if not all of their family's possessions destroyed or taken, and had been shipped off to a foreign country remarkably different from their own.

According to Frankel, these “problem children” as she called them in April, were materialistic and “absolutely refused to cooperate.”⁶² This refusal to cooperate that she describes likely refers to, among other things, a hunger strike that many in the camp participated in. The hunger strike, oddly absent from Frankel's March report, is, however, relayed from the youths to the chief rabbi of Rome, David Prato by Lillo Arbib. Arbib, a prominent lawyer and former president of the Jewish Community of Tripolitania, was a delegate of the Tripoli Community in Italy living in Florence during the spring of 1949 when a rash of letters were sent to him by the youth in Salerno. These letters, which do not appear to have survived, reportedly tell of hunger and hardship, which Arbib relays in a letter to Chief Rabbi Prato and copied to David Golding of the Youth Aliyah: “They tell me that there is no bread on the table, that meals are made with lard, that for four days the food has consisted of a slice of bread and a glass of milk at noon and a slice of bread and two boiled potatoes in the evening.”⁶³ Initially, he says, he thought it was just the disorder from the early days of the camp's establishment, but the letters continued arriving long after those initial days.

Like many of the aid workers in the camps for Eastern Europeans, Arbib admits the children are likely exaggerating about the conditions—“they tell me that they are

⁶² Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 11, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180278, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁶³ Letter to David Prato from Lillo Arbib, March 14, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170014, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

treated worse now than the German Jews under the SS”—but still argued that the hunger strike showed him that “certainly there must be some truth in all this.”⁶⁴ It is interesting to note the language of the youth’s “exaggeration” in which they claim to be treated worse than the German Jews under the Nazis rather than pointing to the very poor treatment of their own country people under the Nazis and the Italian Fascists. This may stem in part from their desire to not blame the very people they are seeking help from and whose country they are residing in. It may also point to an already growing recognition that Nazi crimes in the East were more notable and relatable to the European and American aid workers than those done in the Arab world.

The problems around food deeply troubled Arbib as he asked for help from the head of Italian Jewry. Poor food and continued hunger strikes would hinder the ability of the youth to make *aliyah*. Arbib wrote “They tell me that many of them are wasting away and have lost weight, and this makes me very sorry since we want to send beautiful, healthy, and strong youth to Israel and not youths who have wasted away in the camps.”⁶⁵ These youths represented some of the best of Libyan Jewish youth, Arbib proclaimed. They were meant to represent their country, which they would not be able to do well if they were not properly cared for. According to Chava Frankel, however, all the letters and petitions did nothing to change the situation: “everything is just as it has been all the time, with no improvements what so ever and all its hardship. ACT NOW.”⁶⁶ Neither

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ All caps in the original. Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 22, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180351, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

strong words nor advocacy seems to have made a difference as they could not “alter the fact, that the children are in a great mess.”⁶⁷

Was it Enough?

Yet despite the nearly unanimous agreement among the camp residents that neither the IRO nor the JDC were properly addressing all their basic survival needs, the JDC regional chief in Milan wrote to the main European office in Paris that “We certainly agree that [the situation of the DPs in the Cremona camp] might be better, but we can assure you that it is not so bad, and certainly not worse than in any other camp in Italy.”⁶⁸ These were hardly words of reassurance for those enduring those “not wholly satisfactory” living conditions. There was a further distinction that the JDC wanted to make, however: “I will agree that these people are not living comfortably nor are they satisfied with their lot but I definitely disagree that they suffer badly.”⁶⁹ Suffering here became a comparative measure, and compared to former suffering, this was not so bad.

Here we begin to see issues around categorization as aid organizations tried to determine what exactly was the space between “enough” and “wholly satisfactory.” Cremona was “not worse than in any other camp in Italy,” said the aid worker, whereas DPs may have thought that the camps as a whole were not up to par. DPs and aid workers appeared to have different standards of adequate both in terms of food and housing.

⁶⁷ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 26, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180356, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁶⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.112, “Letter from AJDC Milan to Mr. Melvin S. Goldstein, Subject: Camp Cremona Your Letter No 82, of March 11th, 1948.” March 26, 1948.

⁶⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.112, “Letter from M. Jacob Joslow to J. M. Jacobson,” February 16, 1948.

Some, like Umberto Nahon representative of the Jewish Agency in Italy on the Intergovernmental Commission on Refugees believed that simply providing *something* was what the DPs needed: “Let us remember that everything is important when life is reduced to the minimum and that every token of affection brings hope and light in hearts of men and women, whose existence was for so long time almost hopeless, whose life has been for so long without any ray of light.”⁷⁰ A lack of material goods was certainly a problem, but Nahon wanted to focus on what he saw as a larger issue here, namely a social problem. DPs in the camps were feeling forgotten, left alone in the world. They no longer connected with their countries of origin and had not yet found a new home. Jews in Palestine to whom Nahon’s report was addressed could extend a “brotherly gift” with deep roots to the Jews in the Diaspora, extending the gift of hospitality and welcome to a new home, should the DPs choose to make it. He wanted to focus on the future.

In contrast, many DPs wanted to focus on the past, as they stressed the similarity of their present and past suffering claiming as one letter writer did of the southern Bari camps: “We arrived here a week ago. It is a camp just as in Hitler’s times...Now we are again where we were at the concentration camp, one is hungry and can buy nothing since one earns nothing. Why have we remained alive if we have to go through all these tortures?”⁷¹ Having to “stand in line again in order to get the bad food from the kettle” was a continued injustice and much too reminiscent of time recently spent in concentration camps. There was also an expectation that people’s expectations were

⁷⁰ Letter from S.U. Nahon to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, January 3, 1946, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 502, as seen in Reel 8188, Scan 81880499, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁷¹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.109, “Transl. Letter from Barletta, Italy, Dated October 16, 1947,” November 18, 1947.

guided by their recent history, which perhaps gave aid workers a false sense of what the people they were serving were needing. DPs' expectations were shifting faster than others' were—they now needed more calories than they had in the concentration camps, for example. Their expectations were for a more permanent, stable home, one that looked nothing like the camps they had just survived.

One also finds direct comparisons to the local, national, or continental demographics during this time. In these comparisons, the refugees themselves seemed divided. Some, including the OJRI Chairman Leo Bernstein, argued that the DPs' food allotment was not bad when compared to the caloric standards of the day. In a report to the World Jewish Congress (WJC) Bernstein stated

nor is the material lot of the groups in question any worse the general economic conditions of the refugees in the camps. All these refugees receive about 2,000 calories a day from the IRO and a supplementary ration of 600 calories a day from the Joint Distribution Committee. Naturally these rations fall short of a wholesome diet, but they are way above the general standard of nourishment in Europe.⁷²

Food rations were not great, Bernstein, a DP himself, admitted. Yet, even at the reduced number of 1500 calories per day that reports indicate many were actually receiving, rather than the 2,000 the IRO had promised, they were still in fact better off than those of the general public in Europe, including Italy, which had the lowest average caloric intake in Western Europe in 1947.⁷³ Recognizing that things could be far worse, Bernstein argued the DPs should be grateful for this.

⁷² Letter from Leo Bernstein to Kurt R. Grossmann, February 5, 1948, Box C74, File 4, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in File C74 4, Scans C74-0426–C74-0427, RG-67.005, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁷³ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 86.

But it was all a matter of comparison; if one was comparing the DP camps with life in the United States, of course the camps seemed unfavorable: “Of course JDC does not seek to give the impression that has established a living standard comparable to that of the U.S. With the limited funds at our disposal the best we can do is to provide for the minimum or essential needs. We can definitely say though that there is no starvation nor is there any suffering.”⁷⁴ Starvation and suffering became synonymous in their view. The *claim* to suffering, however, was understandable, they argued. In a response to one of the complaints received, the JDC wrote: “I would like to add that the general conditions in camps are by no means ideal, but as you can see from the above report, the letter in question is rather exaggerated, due no doubt to the psychological reaction of the writer through the stress and hardship he has endured for the past few years.”⁷⁵ Many welfare workers seemed to claim that, psychologically damaged and traumatized by stress and hardship, the DPs were in no position to accurately assess their own suffering.

In the JDC’s response, we see the context-sensitivity of “enough” come to fore. Enough for whom? And enough by whose lights? The JDC contended that, although the DPs were not receiving enough aid by the standards of a contemporary US population—when the US was the relevant comparison class—they were receiving enough by the standards of contemporary Europe. In fact, they were receiving more than enough by European standards. This allowed the JDC to claim that although, in one sense, the DPs

⁷⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.117, “Letter from M. Jacob Joslow to Mr. Samuel Buchcltz, Re: Letter from Kibbutz Mizrahi, Cremona, Italy to Temple Beth Hillel, San Fernando Valley,” October 29, 1947.

⁷⁵ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.113, “Letter from Mr. Abe Loskove to Mr. Trobe, Subject: Conditions in IRO Camp It. 77 Milan ref. Paris Letter #1201,” November 19, 1947.

are saying something true—the food *was not* enough by US standards—it was false in another way, when considered in the context of contemporary Europe.

Perhaps more concerning, however, was the JDC's suggestion that DPs were not fit to evaluate the degree of their own suffering. Caught on the defensive, the JDC even seemed to suggest that experiencing the Holocaust counted against DPs' abilities to assess their own suffering now. The Holocaust then was utilized by refugees and aid workers alike to argue for different standards of treatment. In the case just mentioned, the JDC used it to discredit the testimony of DPs. In an earlier case, a DP said that the camps were "as bad as Hitler's," which perhaps was a strategy for establishing a level of credibility. The DPs' personal experience of the concentration camps gave them an authority over these camps against the aid workers who had no direct knowledge of the concentration camps; the aid workers were not in the concentration camps, so it was hard for them to epistemically challenge the DPs' claims in a direct way. Yet we also see moments of solidarity and concern as in the case in which an aid worker said that the bad conditions of the DP camp were especially problematic since the DPs had already suffered so much during the war. Examining the question of "enough" from a multiplicity of angles, we find that "adequate relief" may not have been enough for the population for whom the relief was actually intended.

"What's temporary?" DPs and the Question of Knowing

"Most people who were in these displaced persons camps were there obviously for temporary periods of time. In our case the question was 'what's temporary?'"⁷⁶ Al Finci

⁷⁶ Al Finci, Interview 19887, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

was told that they might have to stay in Italy for ten years before a visa was available for the United States. Born in Sarajevo in 1929, Finci survived the war in Italy and Switzerland with his family before making his way to the DP camp in Santa Maria di Bagni in 1945. After being told their “temporary” stay would be extended longer than they desired, they moved to Rome, seeking to begin a normal life. In 1950, however, word unexpectedly arrived that their visas to the United States had been approved, and the family made their way to New York.

These words of Al Finci would have resonated with nearly all those in the DP camps. Many DPs felt the pain of uncertainty about their future acutely; they did not know where they were going to go or what they would do to support themselves when they got there. This section examines how these fears were only perpetuated by the “enervating period of waiting” that stood in front of them in Italy.⁷⁷ Not knowing when they would be allowed to leave Italy provoked a variety of responses from the refugees. Some clung resolutely to their initial plans of emigration, while others changed their minds, tired of waiting for Palestine or hoping to leave earlier. Delayed *aliyah* felt unfair and caused great resentment amongst the DP population, and one of the most common responses was to protest. The uncertainty was made worse for some DPs whose waiting was due to illness, either their own or that of a family member’s.

Accommodating Temporary Living

⁷⁷ Dr. Gershon Gelbart of the JDC wrote that OJRI, UNRRA, and the JDC all began cultural programs “in reluctant recognition of the fact that the refugee program, contrary to early hopes, was not to be liquidated in a matter of weeks or even months and that, during the enervating period of waiting, the people should be given the opportunity for education and rehabilitation.” JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Report Education Department July 19, 1946,” July 19, 1946.

The refugees, however, refused to be dissuaded, both from their calls for greater assistance and from their resolve to find better lives for themselves. They reminded the JDC of its promise to help the Jewish DPs who were “kept in camps against their will,” explaining to them yet again that they were determined to resettle elsewhere.⁷⁸ They tired of the temporariness of living in the unknown, as two DPs wrote to their uncle in the United States: “If we only had a country, a home, we both would work anything to support ourselves, but everything is so hopeless!”⁷⁹ For many DPs this sense of not knowing when they would call a new place home only strengthened their resolve to fight for their emigration rights. This fight looked different for different people: some changed their minds about where they would resettle, while others hoped to find some kind of work to make the time pass more quickly or at least more productively, and still others continued to petition leaders, both national and international, for emigration reform.

Some who had been Zionists committed to immigrating to Palestine in the early years of the camp began to change their minds as the waiting time increased. Twenty-eight-year-old Peter Sedgman from Lublin explained how frustrating the continued waiting could feel:

In February 1946 we were included in a group selected for departure. We transferred to Barletta, not far from the port of Bari, where our temporary accommodation was in corrugated, iron ex-army barracks. Stella, [my wife,] was very unhappy with these changes and she started to cry. I reassured her that it was only for a short time until we could board the boat to achieve our goal. We waited for about three months. Three times we boarded ships, but were taken off each time. The English blockade was very hard to penetrate. Many ships were intercepted and *Olim*, the people wanting to settle in Palestine, were taken off and

⁷⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.92, “Untitled Typewritten Document, 12/10/1947,” December 10, 1947 [actual date: October 12, 1947].

⁷⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.109, “Transl. Letter from Barletta, Italy, Dated October 16, 1947,” November 18, 1947.

taken to Cyprus and put behind barbed wire. All of this news had a very bad effect on Stella. By now she decided that all she wanted was to go back to our camp and have the baby in Italy. After all that we had been through the past three months, I agreed with her. We returned back to Santa Maria al Bagno, not to the same accommodation that we had before, but luxurious in comparison with the barracks in Barletta. I continued back in my position as interpreter, not only in English but by now Italian as well. Stella was happy and now looked forward to the birth of our child.⁸⁰

Part of the frustration for the Sedgmans, and many other DPs, was feeling so close to achieving one's goal of resettlement only to have it pulled away. Unable to get legal exit visas because of the small quota numbers, many *shlichim*, that is emissaries from the Brichah movement helping individuals get to Palestine, attempted sea crossings with the refugees; most were turned back to Italy or taken to Cyprus where the British had created internment camps for those attempting to enter Palestine without papers.⁸¹ The Sedgmans were initially determined to resettle in Palestine, but the repeated setbacks and uncertainty about when they would actually leave began to weigh on the couple, especially as they considered having to care for a newborn in a Cyprus internment camp. With the newborn in mind, the Sedgmans ultimately decided against making *aliyah*, and instead immigrated to Australia where they had some family connections.⁸²

The waiting also felt interminable for those attempting to emigrate elsewhere. Continued limits on emigration from Europe to the United States put a large number of DPs in a state of limbo. William Stern made his way from his internment in Yugoslavia

⁸⁰ I thank Peter Sedgman's grandson, Mike Evans, for sending me a soft-copy of his grandfather's memoir. Peter Sedgman, *As Far As I Can Remember* (Sydney: Sydney Jewish Museum, 2006), 41-42. Pagination in these citations reflects a pre-print sent directly to the author. His memoir was also recently published in Italian. Peter Sedgman, *Per Quanto Posso Ricordare*, Trans. Tristano Matta (Battello 2020).

⁸¹ Internment camps were operational in Cyprus from August 14, 1946 to February 10, 1949. In total 52,000 refugees were interned there on their way to Mandatory Palestine. For more on the Cyprus internment camps see Yitzhak Teutsch, *The Cyprus Detention Camps: The Essential Research Guide* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

⁸² Peter Sedgman, *As Far As I Can Remember*, 44-45.

to the Bari transit camp where he immediately signed up for an affidavit to come to the United States: “We didn’t know how long it would take for us to continue. My mind was made up: I was going to America. There was no question about it...little did we know it was going to take another three years. It took that long for our number to come up...I had no idea how long it would take, but I certainly didn’t expect it to take that long.”⁸³ His uncle in the United States managed the collateral that allowed Stern to get an affidavit, which ultimately enabled his resettlement in the country. Stern decided to use the time in the DP camps to learn English because he was convinced of his final destination. Joseph Leinburd had a similar strategy for making use of his time, although he lacked the family connections that would secure him an affidavit.⁸⁴ He tried to get into the United States first, but there was a quota, and the line for Romanians was too long, he decided. So, instead, he opted for Canada. He took up tailoring because he had heard that Canada was making a special provision for skilled tailors, but he received his diploma too late to be a part of the scheme.⁸⁵ Unable to emigrate on this quota, he moved south to the Bari transit camp where he became a tractor mechanic before finally getting his papers and resettling in Canada.

The issue of gainful employment in the DP camps remained a problem throughout their tenure. Reports vary over what percentage of the DP population was employed at any given time. Some refugees felt the frustrations of a lack of work, including Herz

⁸³ William Stern, Interview 16364, segment 122, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁸⁴ Joseph Leinburd, Interview 55216, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁸⁵ The Canadian Jewish Congress, the Jewish Labour Committee, and prominent Jewish garment manufacturers persuaded the Canadian government to admit over 3,000 Jewish tailors and furriers with their families to Canada in 1947-1948. For more on the move to Canada see Adara Goldberg, *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955* (Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2015).

Blank, who wrote about his concerns to the *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York: “Above all, refugees are not permitted to work, although there are many among us who are capable persons, who could easily make a living being in possession of sound professional knowledge. We are not permitted to work, because there is not sufficient occupation for Italy’s own population.”⁸⁶ It is clear that not all DPs were forbidden to work; many actually worked for UNRRA/IRO and the JDC. But work was scarce in general in Italy where postwar conditions created high levels of unemployment in all sectors.⁸⁷

To enable the DPs to obtain some gainful employment as well as learn skills that would help them in their new homes, some voluntary agencies focused on work training. The Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT), an organization that began in Russia before the First World War and later based in France, arrived in late 1946 to the camps in order to ensure those old enough could receive job training.⁸⁸ ORT explained in its annual review that “the work in Italy started later than in other countries, as the fluidity of the Jewish DPs was greater here, and their patience even less than that of their equally ill-fated brothers in Germany and Austria.”⁸⁹ Because the camps in Italy were at first viewed as temporary, the ORT only began working in the camps after it became clear that DPs were not able to emigrate as quickly as originally thought. Despite their late arrival, ORT quickly created a variety of successful vocational schools across Italy; by

⁸⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.111, “Letter from Hersz Blank to Editors Office,” September 28, 1947.

⁸⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943- 1988* (London, England ; New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 1990), 64, 80.

⁸⁸ ORT was originally called the *Obschestvo Remeslenovo i zemledelcheskovo Trouda* (The Society for Handicrafts and Agricultural Work), Sarah Kavanaugh, *ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors* (Valentine Mitchell, 2008).

⁸⁹ *Report on the ORT Activities: August 1946–July 1947*, (Paris, Geneva: ORT Union, June 1947), 53

1950 there were nearly 60 ORT training centers operational within the DP camps. The ORT created courses designed to give refugees vocational training in everything from dress making to mechanical lock-smithery to dentistry.

It did depend on what camp you lived in and when, however. For those in the Santa Maria di Bagni camp in the heel of Italy, work was often described as part of their everyday experience. Rose Finci, for instance, explained that nearly everyone she knew worked while in the camp: she worked in the office, her father worked a warehouse, and her brother was a nurse. “We were always just working,” she stated in a 1996 interview. She then paused and laughed saying “And I had a lot of fun. I used to go to the beach all the time. That’s when I met again Al, my husband.”⁹⁰ Work, in her narrative, was a normal and natural part of her camp experience. For Peter Sedgman, work allowed him to at least momentarily forget the temporariness of his position in Italy. He worked in Santa Maria di Bagni as an interpreter for UNRRA, and after moving to Rome, work helped keep things constant for him.⁹¹ As he stated in his memoir, “Not long after [we arrived in Rome], I started to work with UNRRA once again. They gave me a jeep and life was very good, and the thought of leaving Italy was not so pressing any more.”⁹² His ability to work in Italy gave him hope for a future; unlike Leinburd, Sedgman was not training to learn a new skill to increase his odds of immigration, but both found that work enabled them to maintain a better present that would lead to a new future.

The many Zionists in the DP camps, however, remained resolute in their desire to make *aliyah*, regardless of the time it took. In mid-1946, the Cremona camp population

⁹⁰ Rose Finci, Interview 19888, Segment 9, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁹¹ Peter Sedgman, *As Far As I Can Remember*, 41.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 45.

reportedly refused to participate in polls requested by the camp committee on behalf of UNRRA and the IRO to determine where individuals wanted to resettle.⁹³ They stated that they had already responded to similar polls claiming that nearly all wanted to immigrate to Palestine, and nothing had changed. As members of the staunchly Zionist center, the DPs in Cremona believed that this poll was only another stalling technique. A year later, following the transfer from UNRRA to IRO, camp leaders decried the change in rations specifically tying them to the issue of emigration stating: “if food restrictions of that kind are intended to compell [sic] the people to go back to their origin countries nevertheless they will not achieve that aim, because even that will be unable to weaken our desire to go to Palestine.”⁹⁴ They believed the cuts were intended to weaken their resolve to make *aliyah*. The early months of 1947 saw an increase in agitation by DPs within the camp with several anti-British protests, in which they were often joined by local Italian residents, and complaints regarding the quality of the material goods provided.⁹⁵ These protests were largely spurred on by the success of the famous strike that had taken place a few months prior in the port town of La Spezia, Italy.

Hunger Strikes in La Spezia and the Spectacle of Mass Protests

“We wanted to go to Israel. We said that we were not going to leave the ship. We

⁹³ Norman Stoken, “News Summary: Italy” *Historical Jewish Press of the NLI & TAU. The Sentinel*, (June 20, 1946), 4.

⁹⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.92, “Untitled Typewritten Document, 12/10/1947,” December 10, 1947 [actual date: October 12, 1947].

⁹⁵ These kinds of protests were widespread across Italy. For more on the southern region see Franca Pinto Minerva et al., *Terra di frontiera: profughi ed ex internati in Puglia, 1943-1954* (Bari: Progedit, 2000), 86-87. And for more on the Cremona camps see Roberta Aglio and Monica Feraboli, *DP Camp IT 82: Cremona. Arrivo e partenze. Traiettorie, incroci, vite, storia. Atti della Tavola rotonda Cremona, 28 gennaio 2017* (Cremona: Fantigrafica, 2017).

were going to stay there and die if it meant dying, unless we were to get permission to get to Israel. We started a hunger strike and we went without food for a hundred and four hours. Everybody's spirits were high. Nobody cheated.”⁹⁶ Thea Aschkenase was born in Munich, Germany in 1923 and survived Auschwitz before traveling through the DP camps in Italy on her way to Israel. In spring 1946 she boarded a ship in the Italian harbor of La Spezia, hoping to sail with the pre-state Zionist military organization the *Haganah* to British Mandatory Palestine, but the ship was stopped. The resoluteness of the DPs to regain control over the timing of events in their future becomes clear here. The events surrounding this transport allow us to examine the relationship between food and political action: they also illustrate how elective hunger can be a form of persuasive, public protest.

The story of the ships the *Fede* and *Fenice* began on the roads in the town of La Spezia.⁹⁷ In late March 1946, Mossad agents smuggled 1,014 Jewish refugees in 38 British military vehicles from Italian DP camps into the Western port town of La Spezia, intending to transport them to Palestine aboard the *Fede*. Before they could reach their destination of the ship, however, the trucks were pulled over by Italian officials, who, paradoxically, were present because they had been given a tip that pro-Fascist escapees would be attempting to make their way to Franco's Spain via the port in La Spezia. The Italians then immediately notified the British Military Authorities of the impending “illegal” departure. Upon recognizing these DPs were Jewish and not the Fascists they

⁹⁶ Report by Thea Aschkenase, Reel 0001, File 0256, RG-67.026M YIVO Eyewitness Accounts of the Holocaust Period, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁹⁷ For more information on the La Spezia incident see Eliana Hadjisavvas, “Journey through the ‘Gate of Zion’: British Policy, Jewish Refugees and the La Spezia Affair, 1946,” *Social History* 44, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 469–493.

were looking for, the Italians wanted to let them go, but the British were now in charge of the situation.⁹⁸ The Jewish DPs, however, attempted to use to their advantage the Italian hostility around their loss of control to the British: they “showed the Italians the concentration camp numbers which had been branded on their arms,” which induced the Italian officials to let them board the ship “where they could be kept until the matter was cleared up.”⁹⁹ Thus, they boarded the ship on April 4, 1946.

Leader of the group, Yehuda Arazi, was in fact himself not a refugee. He was a Polish Jew from Palestine who worked with the pre-state Zionist military organization the *Haganah* to transport Jewish refugees to Palestine after the Holocaust.¹⁰⁰ After their arrest, however, Arazi proclaimed himself to be one of the DPs and to be the voice for the community. Their manifesto consisted of one unyielding demand: that they all be allowed to sail immediately to Palestine, regardless of the British blockade. When this was denied, Arazi decided to use the moment to highlight the extent of the British hold over entrance to Palestine and to garner support for lifting the ban. But to do this they would need a strong action.

On April 8, Arazi and the refugees declared a hunger strike, asserting that there would be mass suicides before they would ever disembark the ship in Italy. In an interview seventy years later, Yitzhak Kaplan, a then 16-year-old Holocaust survivor, declared he “will never forget the hunger” he felt during those hours, but that he was “never frightened...more than anything I was angry.”¹⁰¹ This anger fueled much of the

⁹⁸ “Refugees Detained at La Spezia Call Hunger Strike; Insist on Sailing for Palestine,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin*, vol. 13, n. 84 (April 10, 1946), 1.

⁹⁹ Jon Kimche and David Kimche, *The Secret Roads, the “Illegal” Migration of a People, 1938-1948* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), 129.

¹⁰⁰ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (University of California Press, 1998), 27-32, 131-133.

¹⁰¹ Rosie Whitehouse, “Forget Paul Newman, This Italian Port Tells the Real Story of the Exodus,” *Haaretz*

spirit behind the protest. Two other DPs spoke vehemently about their decision to participate in the hunger strike and ultimately declared that “Life has no meaning for us, we are all prepared to die on this ship in order to open the gates of Palestine.”¹⁰² They were very serious about the threat behind the hunger strike, but also knew that if it were called off and they were given permission to leave, they would have to rely on others to provide sustenance to get them to Palestine.

The hunger strike had a “double purpose” according to Umberto Nahon, a representative of the Jewish Agency in Italy.¹⁰³ First, it ensured that they would have enough food for their journey. The DPs knew that if they were not allowed to leave quickly, they would run out of food because they did not actually have enough of it. The DPs arrived in La Spezia with enough food for ten days for all 1,014 individuals; this would be enough food for the voyage to Palestine under ideal conditions, plus an extra few days’ worth, in case of bad weather or delays.¹⁰⁴ When they started their hunger strike, the DPs had just about half of their allotted rations left. On the one hand, the strike was a calculated move by the DP leadership who did not want to give the British any reason to hold up their journey.

The second reason, however, was much more important than the first: a hunger strike would draw attention to their plight and the plight of all DPs in Italy. The hope was to garner enough public support to spur political action. If this story sounds familiar, it is because the events would be repeated with slight variation on the ship *President*

(May 5, 2018), <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-this-italian-port-tells-the-real-story-of-the-ship-the-exodus-1.6054466>, Accessed July 20, 2020.

¹⁰² Report from Dr. S. U. Nahon to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, April 14, 1946, page 4, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1934 (1934–1948)*, b. 91A, f. 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power*, 27-36, 141.

Warfield—renamed *Exodus 1947*—just over a year later, in 1947.¹⁰⁵ The *Exodus* has garnered much more lasting remembrance, but in its time, the La Spezia port strike also achieved high levels of domestic and international recognition.¹⁰⁶ Newspapers around the world carried headlines proclaiming the Jewish struggle in La Spezia. Meanwhile, local Italians, chafing under British authority, were highly pleased with the awkward position this case put the British in. Socialist and Communist parties across Italy wrote of their support for the hunger strike.¹⁰⁷ The Italian captain of the port declared that he would not charge the DPs rent for the pier space nor bill them for electrical or other services—the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* reported that the water alone was estimated at 100,000 lire (\$400)—because he supported their cause.¹⁰⁸

Jewish communities around the world were very vocal about their support for the La Spezia refugees. The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* reported that “Jewish trade, Industry and transport were paralyzed today and Jews throughout [Palestine] fasted in a demonstration of sympathy with the 1040 [sic] Jews detained aboard the Italian motor ship ‘Fede’ at La Spezia, Italy.”¹⁰⁹ Fifteen influential political leaders living in Palestine, in support of the La Spezia refugees, participated in a hunger strike at the same time as

¹⁰⁵ The first book dedicated to the “Exodus” was Ruth Gruber, *Destination Palestine: The Story of the Haganah Ship, Exodus 1947* (Current Books, 1948). For more historical analysis of the “Exodus,” see Tony Kushner, *Journeys from the Abyss: The Holocaust and Forced Migration from the 1880s to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 248-286; Arie J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003), 266-275; Aviva Haramish, *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine* (Vallentine Mitchell, 1998).

¹⁰⁶ Eliana Hadjisavvas, “Journey through the ‘Gate of Zion’: British Policy, Jewish Refugees and the La Spezia Affair, 1946,” *Social History* 44, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 469-71.

¹⁰⁷ Report from Dr. S. U. Nahon to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, April 14, 1946, page 7, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1934 (1934-1948)*, b. 91A, f. 5.

¹⁰⁸ “La Spezia Refugees En Route to Palestine; Forbidden to Land There Until May 17,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency daily News Bulletin* vol. 13, n. 108, (May 10, 1946).

¹⁰⁹ “Strike Paralyzes Palestine as Jews Fast in Solidarity with La Spezia Refugees,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency daily News Bulletin* vol. 13, n. 88 (April 15, 1946); “Jews Join Leaders in Fast and Strike,” *The Palestine Post* vol. 21, n. 6076 (April 15, 1946).

those on the ship. After three days without food, these fifteen leaders had weakened but were “reported to be in good spirits and in generally good physical condition.”¹¹⁰ The leaders represented a broad coalition of Jewish groups and interests and even included future Israeli prime minister Golda Meir. In an address to crowds outside the Jewish Council building, these diverse leaders “stressed that the unity of all Jews will insure that Jewish immigrants are allowed to enter Palestine freely.” Unity was the way forward, they argued. Jewish refugees in DP camps across Italy also went on hunger strike with the La Spezia DPs which was reportedly “a complete success.”¹¹¹ This show of solidarity demonstrated clearly that the refugees living in camps across Italy saw themselves as part of a larger DP community.¹¹²

In the end, the DPs and the international pressure they produced were enough to persuade the British to change their policy, although only for this specific group. Harold Laski, a Jewish member of the British Labor Party, was designated as intermediary between the DPs and British authorities. With good faith promises of support, Laski was able to stop the hunger strike and, after several weeks of deliberation, convince the British to “let my people go.”¹¹³ To better facilitate their departure, the British gave the DPs a second ship, the *Fenice*, and allowed them to depart for Palestine on May 8, 1946.

¹¹⁰ “A cable received today in the Rev York office of the JTA from its Palestine bureau disclosed that as a result of the telegraph and telephone strike in Palestine, JTA dispatches from Rome and La Spezia reporting that the detained refugees had suspended their hunger strike after the intervention of Harold Laski, have not been received in Palestine. The Jewish community, therefore, has apparently been unaware that the La Spezia strike was called off on Thursday.” “Two More Join Hunger Strikers; Others Plead to Participants,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency daily News Bulletin* vol. 13, n. 88 (April 15, 1946).

¹¹¹ “La Spezia Detainees Still Aboard Ship; will Hold Seder Tonight,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency daily News Bulletin* vol. 13, n. 88 (April 15, 1946).

¹¹² Report from Dr. S. U. Nahon to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, April 14, 1946, page 6, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1934 (1934–1948)*, b. 91A, f. 5.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Galvanized by their desire to make Palestine their new home, this group of refugees found a way to make this fight public and internationally important. The idea of young people who had until only recently been long denied food by Hitler's regime now willingly giving up their easy access to food shocked communities around the world. Reports of sick and pregnant women denying themselves meals to the point of fainting inspired solidarity fasts in many countries. Ultimately the fast worked. Its success would inspire many other similar fasts in the DP camps in Italy, although most would not garner the same level of international attention. In La Spezia, Jewish refugees were able to call attention to their plight within a broader Jewish community, garnering both international and domestic support for their demands to be able to create their own future—on pain of death, if necessary. North African Jewish refugees lacked many of these international connections, but they also attempted a similar strategy in demanding changes for their futures.

Tired of Waiting for Aliyah or for Treatment

Like their Eastern European counterparts, the Libyan youths in the DP camp in Salerno were very vocal about their distress over not knowing their timeline for leaving. This distrust stemmed from both their poor physical rehabilitation that we saw earlier and also the broken promises of the Youth Aliyah. The month of April 1949, two months after their transfer to Salerno and many months after their arrival in Italy, was extremely difficult for all involved. The youth were promised to go on *aliyah* several times, but it was canceled at the last minute without much explanation. Both the welfare officer and several youth wrote to liaison agent, David Golding, from the Youth Aliyah agency in

charge of their resettlement. Their welfare officer Frankel wrote in one of several missives that she hoped they had “arrived to a happy solution about the children’s future” as she was “awaiting unpatiently [sic] about your advise” on how to handle the children.¹¹⁴ The youths’ letters are full of emotion, decrying their sense of being ignored: “I have waited a long time for you and since you have not shown up I have spoken to Miss Franchel [sic] and she advised me to write you this note.”¹¹⁵ After waiting nearly a year for emigration, they now felt forgotten.

Others were from Libya desperate for news of their family. Rachele Buaron, for instance, wrote to David Golding reminding him that “since my departure from Tripoli [8 months ago] I have not received any news about my family’s papers...Please take an interest [in my case] not least because my journey has been like a madman.”¹¹⁶ They were worried about family back home in Libya, but also family members who were now in Italy. The arrival of family members could prove problematic as some letters explained when the fathers of two youths in the camp made the journey from Tripoli to Naples and wanted a family reunion:

Could you kindly tell the person who will receive them that the fathers could come here to visit their sons. But there is also a problem involved which you only can solve it. Namely I don’t know the attitude of IRO. As far as the children are known here as children without parents, it will be difficult to arrange relatives visits. But I hope you will clear that up.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 1, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scans 82180305–82180306, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹⁵ Letter to David Golding from Rachele Buaron, March 20, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scans 82180310–82180311, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, Subject: Passover, n.d., Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scans 82180337–82180339, RG–68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Sometimes visits were permitted, but they were often difficult to arrange because a lack of status often meant difficulties with obtaining travel permits. In his advice for future camps of Libyan youth, Golding suggested to the JDC “that only orphans and those cases of children, who for various reasons, should better be separated from their parent, be hospitalised there.”¹¹⁸ The added stress for the aid agencies of families rather than individuals was to be avoided if at all possible.

When their letters to the Youth Aliyah failed to produce better conditions in the camp and when they continued to be denied departure to Israel, several Libyan youths ran away from the home. And for some, running away apparently produced the results they had been seeking: they were taken to Israel. When the youths still in Salerno heard this, Frankel reported “You cannot imagine the chaos which has greated [sic] the news [that the two boys who had run away had just made *aliyah*] and I shouldn’t be surprised if all of them would do the same. But in any case, they have declared non-co-operation as they were told if they don’t behave properly, they will be sent away.”¹¹⁹ This threat backfired as several more children reportedly said they would run away rather than remain in the camp for another longer, still uncertain period.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Letter to Mr. Horowitz from David Golding, April 10, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170251, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹⁹ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 1, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scans 82180305–82180306, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²⁰ Letter to David Golding from Chava Frankel, April 12, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 808, as seen in Reel 8218, Scan 82180275, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

One explanation for why the Libyans experienced such uncertainty about the time they spent in the DP camps was illness. The original plan according to the JDC was to send these North African refugees immediately on to Israel; this plan became problematic for some, however, when “it was found that their physical condition did not allow them to move on without some opportunity to recuperate in [Italy].”¹²¹ A JDC medical officer’s report explained that

The Jewish population of Tripolitania was willing and had to emigrate to Israel, and a considerable number of applications were being submitted to the Jewish Agency since long time. The Israeli Government was only accepting healthy people, not affected by any infectious disease, as with the mass-evacuation a young State, such as Israel, could not be engaged in the treatment of the “past” sicknesses of the emigrants, (I refer only to chronic and infectious diseases).¹²²

Stopping refugees with chronic illness from immigrating was not a new policy nor was it aimed solely at North African refugees; in fact, the policy would create thousands of so called “hard core” cases across Europe and North Africa that would prove to be a serious problem for years to come.¹²³ But Israel was looking for a new future and it wanted healthy immigrants to help build the state; dealing with chronic illnesses meant more engagement with the “past” than they wanted. Thus, to meet these requirements and ultimately make *aliyah*, the ill Libyan refugees in Italy needed a more permanent transitory camp to recuperate in.

¹²¹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.1, “Untitled Typewritten Document.” November 04, 1948.

¹²² JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder LY.21, “Medical Sanitary Activity of the AJDC-OSE in Tripolitania,” February 26, 1952.

¹²³ The so-called “hard-core” of the postwar refugee population, were individuals, and often their families, whom the UN or national governments deemed too old or too sick to repatriate or resettle in Europe from the 1940s to the 1960s. The majority of these hard-core cases had been made or chose to be stateless and were thus lacking a stable legal status. These hard-core cases became quite problematic for the leaders of the NGOs and national leaders who wanted to claim to respect human rights but who recognized they might be required to continue care and maintenance indefinitely for these people despite the lack of resources. For more see Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956-1963* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Archival records do not tell us exactly how many Libyans were ill when they arrived in Italy, however, we do know that illness, especially trachoma and tuberculosis was widespread in Jewish communities in Libya. A 1943 report from the Italian Jewish Representative Committee affiliated with the World Jewish Congress explained that in Libya “Hygienic conditions are, on the whole, unsatisfactory. The extreme poverty of the people causes them to live in crowded areas with meagre facilities, ventilation and light. These areas, as can well be imagined, are breeding-grounds of disease, namely: trachoma, tuberculosis, syphilis, malnutrition and rickets.”¹²⁴ Poverty had only worsened after the two pogroms as Jewish businesses were destroyed. The pogroms also generated fears of reprisals, which, when combined with growing poverty, induced many to move into the already crowded *hara*, or Jewish quarter in Tripoli. Conditions then were ripe for rampant disease spreading.

The JDC and the *Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE, or the Society for Assistance to Children) provided medical treatment for the Libyan Jewish community after the war and their reports show a concerning picture, especially for children.¹²⁵ From March 17 to December 31, 1949, over half the Libyan Jewish population, some 17,906 individuals, visited the ophthalmic department in Tripoli; of these, 14,151 were found to

¹²⁴ “War and Post War Problems Memorandum on the Jews in Italy and Libya,” July 20, 1943, Box C99, File 8, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in File C99 8, Scan C99-08127, RG-67.005, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²⁵ The *Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE, or Society for Assistance to Children) is a Jewish humanitarian organization that assisted Jewish children during and after the war particularly in the fields of health, education, and social work. The original OZE (Obshchetsvo Zdravookhraneniya Yevreyev, Organisation for the health protection of Jews) was founded in Saint Petersburg in 1912 before relocating to Berlin in 1923 and then France in 1933. For more on OSE see Daniella Doron, *Jewish youth and identity in postwar France: rebuilding family and nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 140-143; Laura Hobson-Faure, Mathias Gardet, Katy Hazan, and Catherine Nicault. *L' Oeuvre De Secours Aux Enfants Et Les Populations Juives Au Xxe Siècle: Prévenir Et Guérir Dans Un Siècle De Violences* (Paris: A. Colin, 2014)

be healthy, meaning the infection rate for eye diseases, including trachoma, was closer to 21 percent of the tested population. At the Pietro Verri school, the percentage of illnesses were much higher: 1,712 youths were examined and of these 1,236 were found to be sick: one-third with trachoma, one-third with tinea, and one-third with both.¹²⁶ All patients suffering from trachoma required surgery before they would be issued the necessary paperwork to leave for Israel.¹²⁷

Some trachoma patients were sent to Italy—reportedly by the OSE but more likely by the Jewish Agency—specifically to recover there before moving on to Israel. According to an agreement reached by the UCII, the JDC, and the Israeli consulate in Italy, all transfers through Italy were supposed to be stopped in March 1949 because individuals could now legally go from Libya directly to Israel.¹²⁸ For those who were ill, however, Israel was not an option until they were treated, and some felt this treatment would be easier to get in Italy. Gabriele Arbib was one such patient. Born in Tripoli in 1903, Arbib was forty-five when he arrived in Naples in May 1949. Upon arrival in the port, his group of roughly forty sick Tripolitarians was hospitalized in Trani in the IRO hospital there. In his interview with the IRO, Arbib explained that when his boat docked his British Military Administration-issued travel papers had been taken from him by a man who was likely an employee of the Jewish Agency; he was instructed by this man to claim to be from Rhodes, not Libya, and to say he had no personal identification documents. He hoped to recover in Italy and then immigrate to Israel.

¹²⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder LY.4, “Medical and Sanitary Activity in Lybia for the Period 17th March 1949 to 31st December 1949 Green Cards Issued - 14.862,” December 31, 1949.

¹²⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder LY.9, “Letter from Dr. Raphael Grinberg to Dr. Alexander Gonik,” May 2, 1950.

¹²⁸ Meeting Notes, March 29, 1949, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41.

For others, a trachoma diagnosis was yet another unfortunate setback in the middle of their journey. The case of Josef Tajar, whom we met in chapter two, was one such instance.¹²⁹ Tripoli-born Tajar was thirteen when his parents sent him to Italy in the hopes that he would be given aid and sent on to Israel. Like Arbib, Tajar had his identification documents confiscated and was instructed to say he was from Bulgaria, although the IRO subsequently discovered his true nationality. Tajar lived in the Genazzano *hachshara* and then the Salerno camp with others from Tripoli. When his turn came up for *aliyah*, however, it was discovered that he had trachoma. This meant more waiting in Italy; he was sent to Rome along with seven other youths for treatment until he finally made *aliyah* in May 1949.¹³⁰

For those Libyans who were ill, physical rehabilitation, centered around recovery from trachoma and TB, became the focus in their new “home” spaces. For some, like Gabriele Arbib, their illness required hospitalization rather than camp life. Although even in these spaces individuals could fall through the cracks; Arbib’s family in Libya, concerned that they had not heard from him, wrote to the IRO three months after his arrival in Italy asking for an update on his whereabouts and condition.¹³¹ They received notification six months later that Arbib was still in the hospital in Trani; however, after

¹²⁹ CM/1 Form for Josef Tajar, 3.2.1.2/80523446/International Tracing Service (ITS) Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

¹³⁰ On April 11, Tajar was sent to Rome and then departed for Israel on May 2, 1949. Letter from David Golding to Lea K. Dickenson, June 22, 1949, Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170233, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC; Expenses for 23 days of treatment for eight youths with trachoma came out to 55,200 lire. Untitled typewritten note, n.d., Central Zionist Archives, RG L58, Youth Aliyah Department b. 783, as seen in Reel 8217, Scan 82170236, RG-68.124M, Youth Aliyah Department, Continental/European Office, Geneva - Paris, L58, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³¹ Letter from Comunità israelitica della tripolitania to UCII, Subject: Gabriele Arbib di Eliau, August 23, 1949, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41.

writing to the hospital they learned that he had actually been discharged from the hospital two months after his arrival (a full month before their first letter).¹³² Given the large numbers of emigrants leaving Italy in 1949, it is likely the then healthy Arbib made his way to a DP camp and ultimately traveled on to Israel. Not all those who were ill were cured this quickly, however. And some had their families with them. This often meant long and painful stays in Italy.

Problematic conditions were reported at a camp specifically set up for North African refugees, where the visit of an American caused quite a stir. A photographer for the U.S. Office of War Information, Ellen Conreid stumbled across one of the transit camps used to house North Africans outside of Naples. In a letter back home she described her visit:

Today I visited transit Camp Resina, Naples. I think the memory of that camp will haunt me the rest of my life! The conditions there are inconceivably atrocious!...No concentration camp in Germany could have been worse, nor as far as any documentary films that I have seen, was any worse! The place was a factory - no heat - today was cold and rainy - children running around in bare feet, in rags - no warm clothing for old or young - they aren't given any - no soap or dentifrice has been given to them...They eat off the cement floor between rows of broken down double-decker beds covered with dirty mattresses - no bed linen of any kind...The people were desperate - Such pitiful stories they told...It is horrible beyond belief.¹³³

¹³² Letter from R.M. Lydon to Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane, January 13, 1950, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41; Letter from the Vice Presidente (presumably Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane) to Direzione dell'Ospedale I.R.O. Trani, January 19, 1950, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41; Letter from Teresa Lamendola to Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane January 24, 1950, *Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41.

¹³³ Underline in original. JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.115, "Letter form A. J. D. C., New York to A. J. D. C. Paris, Re: Camp Rosina, Naples, Ital,," November 22, 1949.

Her friend sent a copy of this letter to the JDC, demanding an explanation. In a very thorough response, the JDC was quick to point out that they were not, in fact, in charge of this camp. They then argued for comparison again: “when compared with other such camps, the standard, if not a high one, was not worse than that of many others.”¹³⁴ They then argued that the lack of organized activities and poor lodging was due to the “extra-transitory” nature of their stay, despite the fact that many Libyan Jews had been there for several months already. These were primarily individuals who “were relatives of persons hospitalized and they were becoming very discontented at having to stay around here for such a long time.”¹³⁵ According to the JDC, this discontent was understandable but unavoidable, given the lack of personnel and budget.

And these refugees in Resina were not alone in their disgust and disapproval of their treatment. In mid-May 1949, the president of the Italian Jewish Communities received a message from Massimo Adolfo Vitale of the *Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei* in which he stated: “I am informed that the Tripoli refugees passing through are ‘outraged’ by the treatment they have received from the Joint [or JDC]. Their exasperation is such that it could even explode in acts of violence. To avoid unpleasant accidents, it would perhaps be a good idea if you could properly refer to the Joint itself.”¹³⁶ It does not appear that explosions of violence actually occurred, but it is clear that the refugees and the aid organizations were not always in agreement about what were adequate conditions for living and for knowing about their future.

¹³⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.115, “Letter from AJDC Rome to Mr. Melvin S. Goldstein, Subject: Resina Camp,” December 28, 1949.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Letter from Vitale to UCII president, May 19, 1949, *Archivio dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Fondo Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1948 (1948–1965)*, b. 259, f. 41.

Conclusion

In 1947 a Holocaust survivor in an Italian DP Camp reported “it looks now, as if people will starve to death...when will come our liberation?”¹³⁷ The DPs, many so recently liberated from Nazi and Fascist control, were tired of not having enough. The DP camps were spaces of cultural renewal and rebirth, but they were also places of loss and need. Refugees and aid workers struggled to understand one another, and this often resulted in conflict. Overcrowding and a lack of mobility only heightened these tensions; refugees cried they were starving while aid workers claimed the DPs were simply overwrought.

Focusing on the question of uncertainty, this chapter examined the issues of agency and the importance of contextualization in the relationships between the aid organizations and the DPs. There were two turning points when uncertainty about food and housing caused an uptick in complaints: first, in 1947 and then in 1949. Both of these were in times of transition, from UNRRA to the IRO and a transition in population as many Europeans left and North Africans arrived. Letters of appeal from hungry DPs written to Jewish communities around the world, especially in the U.S., allowed us a window into the minds of DP camp committees and how they understood their place in the world. But material goods were also a marker of difference both religious and cultural. In La Spezia, Cremona, and Bari, and indeed in many other DP camps across Italy, Jewish refugees were able to call attention to their plight within a broader Jewish community, garnering both international and domestic support. In Salerno, by contrast,

¹³⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the JDC, 1945–1954, Folder Italy: Camp Complaints-Bari 1947-1948, Letter from Hersz Blank to Editors Office, September 28, 1947.

we see a group that lacked these connections and found themselves DPs in a time of “refugee fatigue.” In the end we find that this lack of certainty created different expectations around material goods and future status for refugees and aid workers and necessitated some complicated navigating to find feasible solutions.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Orphans from another planet”: The Youth of Selvino

“Selvino’s hundred and eighty children form a community of their own. Nearly all of them are orphans. They remained alone, abandoned, homeless. Here they have found a home. And when listening to the stories of their past, one wonders whether the word ‘family’ is not even a better definition of this group than the usual term ‘children’s community.’”¹

—JDC report

“I didn’t fit in too well. I felt like a fish out of water in the midst of all these strangers. I had no one to talk to and no time to myself. We got up at six in the morning and kept going from one communal activity to another until it was time to go back to bed. Everything was done in a group.”²

—Jack Weiss, DP, former Selvino child

Avraham Aviel almost wasn’t allowed to enter the children’s home in Selvino, Italy.³ When he arrived at the gates in November 1945 having hitchhiked his way from Milan because he had been told that this was a home for children wanting to go to Palestine, Moshe Zeiri tried to turn him away. “This is a children’s home,” Zeiri told him, “not the right place for you. You have to go back to Milan. There, they will tell you where to go.”⁴ Aviel looked much older than his sixteen years and Zeiri feared he would be a bad influence on the other children. After some discussion at the gate, Zeiri decided

¹ In late 1945, Theodore Szejberg-Hatalgi paid a visit to Selvino in order to write a report on Jewish children in JDC-subsidized homes and camps. The German and French educated Szejberg-Hatalgi had been active in a youth Zionist organization in his native Poland before the war. After surviving the Nazi concentration camps, Szejberg-Hatalgi decided to immigrate to Palestine. Waiting for this paperwork to come through, Szejberg-Hatalgi took a job reporting and sitting on the education committee for the JDC in northern Italy. It was in this role that Szejberg-Hatalgi wrote his first glowing appraisal of the children’s home in Selvino. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder, Italy, Children, 1945-1954, “AJDC Helps Jewish Children in Italy.” May 20 1947.

² Jack Weiss, *Memories, Dreams, Nightmares: Memoirs of a Holocaust Survivor* (University of Calgary Press, 2005), 208.

³ The title comes from a quote by Haim Luftman, Interview with Yad Vashem, 2008, quoted in Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe: gli orfani della Shoah e la nascita di Israele* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2018), 190.

⁴ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness* (Kotarim International Publi, 2008), 69-70.

to allow Aviel to stay the night on a trial basis. This was the beginning of his new life. Aviel recalled that once he was allowed in, “he let go of his rucksack and, with it, his independence and the adult responsibility that [his wartime experiences] had forced upon him. Avremele went back in time. Having won the struggle for physical survival, he now had to decide what to do with his life.”⁵

Located in the foothills of the Alps roughly 70 km from Milan in northern Italy, Selvino became the rehabilitation center for nearly eight hundred Jewish children, primarily foreign orphans and unaccompanied minors aged 4 to 17, during the years 1945 to 1948. The roots of Zionism ran strong here. The adult leaders in the home were Zionists from Eastern Europe and Palestine, teachers and nurses with a desire to revitalize the Jewish community through its youth before moving on to Palestine. These leaders taught the children the skills they would need for a life in Palestine: agricultural methods, Hebrew language, and Jewish religious and cultural history. They attempted to rekindle a passion for Jewish religious tradition by celebrating Shabbat and observing the holidays. The primary requirement for entry into the home was an agreement between the child and Zeiri that they would adhere to the rules and maintain a desire to resettle only in Palestine.

This chapter orients itself around the lives of foreign Jewish children, most of whom were stateless orphans, living in Displaced Persons (DP) camps and children’s centers in Italy. It looks specifically at questions of power and control, asking who helped these children make the decisions that would ultimately shape their future. And here we see a clash of interests connected by the idea of doing work “in the best interests of the

⁵ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 74-75.

child.” Competing arguments were made for individualist, familialist, collectivist, and nationalist policies to be implemented in DP camps and especially in children’s homes. Collectivist policies, those that argued it was in the best interests of children to recover from past traumas in a group of peers rather than individual families, became prominent in the *hachsharot*, or training centers, such as Selvino in Italy; yet, by examining the lives of children in Selvino, we find more variety in their choices of preferred recovery method. Often narratives of East European Jewish children traveling to Palestine focus on the ways that the political philosophies and rehabilitation strategies of aid organizations and of home leaders shaped these children’s futures. In addition to these strategies, this chapter also focuses on the ways that children exercised their own agency, sometimes pushing back against their caretakers.

This chapter challenges the assertion that child DPs were simply pawns within a larger national or international struggle by discussing the actions of a variety of NGOs within the Italian camps revealing the times when children chose their own paths and geographical destinations. Because of their age, and thus perceived malleability, Jewish youth in the Displaced Persons (DP) camps were uniquely desired by many nations. This gave Jewish DP youths a degree of agency over their new homelands on a level not afforded to many older DPs. Aiding, and at times hindering, this transition from past to future, from camp to home, were a variety of non-governmental organizations. These included the Jewish Agency, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the International Refugee Organization (IRO), and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), among others, which had great influence over refugees in DP camps. Representatives of these agencies did indeed decide much about the children’s

lives in the camps, but the children themselves, as we will see, also shaped their own fates in a variety of ways. Viewing DP youths as the “promise of tomorrow,” however, also created great friction amongst the aid workers charged with implementing and evaluating rehabilitation policies. This high level of importance afforded the youths also made arguments about their treatment that much fiercer.

This chapter will focus on disputes over youth rehabilitation and the question of Zionism using the Youth Aliyah home Selvino as a case study for investigating how decisions were made among the various international organizations, voluntary agencies, and refugees themselves. It argues that Selvino became a new “home,” something much richer than simply a shelter, for many of the children who passed through it because those in the home shared common principles and goals; yet there were those children in the home who ultimately rejected or were rejected by, depending on the case, this concept of “home” and “family.” Italy became a land of rebirth for the child survivors, perhaps more accurately the birthplaces of their future selves. Many had little to no memory of their lives before the war and even fewer had any familial connections to this past left. The Italian DP camps were spaces where they could figure out who they wanted to become. Utilizing a combination of sources from a variety of agencies and the children themselves, we can see how conflicts over personal agency, rehabilitation, and discipline became central to the new lives of the Selvino children.

The Creation of Selvino

The children’s home in Selvino was originally the combined effort of the Italian Jewish community in Milan and the Jewish Brigade. When the war ended in mid-1945,

the Italian Jewish community began to come out of hiding and to worry anew about the future of Judaism in Italy. One of the first priorities was the return of Jewish children from Catholic homes and monasteries. Milanese-born Raffaele Cantoni made it his mission to retrieve all these children into the Jewish fold. A preeminent figure in the Jewish community from before the war, Cantoni worked with Matilde Cassin (also known as Rachel Varadi), a young Florentine-born Jewish nurse, to rescue Jewish children under Fascist occupation. Both had worked tirelessly during the war to find safe spaces for Italian Jews, eventually having to flee to Switzerland following the Nazi occupation of the north in 1943. In the postwar period they worked together to track down Jewish children in individual homes, monasteries, and convents, bringing them to a small boarding home in central Milan. They were able to return many of the Italian Jewish children they recovered to their families fairly quickly;⁶ they soon, however, recognized the problem was much bigger than finding Italian Jewish children, as many that they retrieved from their wartime rescuers were not Italian. Cantoni and Cassin began to look for help outside of the Italian Jewish community to deal with these foreign refugee children.⁷

And this help first came in the form of Jewish Brigade Group of the British Army and a soldier named Moshe Zeiri. This group, established formally in 1944 in Palestine, included over 5,000 Jewish volunteers who fought against the Nazis and the Fascists in Italy until the end of the war.⁸ In May 1945, Jewish Brigade soldiers from the 745th

⁶ Michael Marrus, "The Vatican and the Custody of Jewish Child Survivors after the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 3 (January 1, 2007): 378–403.

⁷ The background information on the history of Selvino comes primarily from Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children: Journey to the Promised Land* (London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002) and Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*.

⁸ Not allowed to create their own fighting units under the British, Jewish volunteer units in Palestine were initially incorporated into the greater British Army. These units fought in World War II in Greece, Egypt,

Company of Royal Engineers arrived in Milan. This unit, founded by the *Solel Boneh* Company, was a labor battalion made up of some 260 engineers and electricians, and also builders and tradesmen, political activists, artists, and teachers, all from Palestine who volunteered to fight the Nazis.⁹ The *Solel Boneh* Company fought and served in Egypt, Libya, and southern Italy before making their way north after the hanging of Mussolini in 1945. Their primary purpose in Italy after the war was to assist refugees emigrate to Palestine. Among their company was a man named Moshe Zeiri, originally from Poland, who was brought in to teach Hebrew at the new Italian Jewish school in via Eupili in Milan to prepare the children to make *aliyah*. Approached by Cantoni and Cassin to be the director alongside Cassin of a new home for Jewish children rescued from Catholic convents in the area, Zeiri agreed immediately.

Moshe Zeiri was born Moshe Kleiner in Kopyczyńce, Poland on June 15, 1914.¹⁰ Born to an Orthodox family in the former Galician shtetl, Zeiri and his older sister, Rivka, grew up speaking only Yiddish in the home while attending the local Polish school. After his father's death, Zeiri, then fifteen or sixteen, moved to the nearby town of Leopoldi, a move he credits with inspiring his eventual move to Palestine. In Leopoldi he lived with other members of the Socialist-Zionist youth movement that embraced Zionist pioneering values and agenda and he took a course with the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT) to learn carpentry skills.¹¹ Here Zeiri became a

and North Africa before making their way to Italy. Their formalization process occurred in September 1944. The British disbanded the group in the summer of 1946.

⁹ The construction company was responsible for most Palestinian roads and buildings. They were also deeply involved in both the colonial and Zionist enterprises. For more on this see Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006) especially chapter 1.

¹⁰ Today the town is in Ukraine after being annexed by the USSR following WWII.

¹¹ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 22

part of the Gordonia movement, a Zionist group dedicated to the “Tolstoyan religion of work,” which felt that the Jewish state should be founded not on a class struggle but by occupation of the land.¹² Zeiri decided to make *aliyah* himself sometime around 1935, leaving behind his mother in Poland and joining his sister who had made the journey several years earlier. He also brought with him his new bride, Chava (later called Yehudit), a fellow Gordonian Zionist. It was at this point that he decided to change his name—“new life, new name”—first to “Moshe Ben David” (that is, son of David) and then to “Moshe Ze’iry” (which the British authorities changed once more to “Zeiri”). It seems that “Zeiri” was a simple descriptive translation as both “*klein*” and “*zair*” mean “tiny” in German and Hebrew, respectively, and Zeiri was only around 5’6” tall.¹³

Moshe Zeiri placed a high value on the importance of education for youth. Before the war, Zeiri lived on the Kvutzat Schiller agricultural collective in Palestine whose founders were academics from Lviv and who brought an education centered approach to the kibbutz. After agreeing to direct the new children’s home, Zeiri wrote excitedly to his wife, Yehudit, who was back home in Palestine, that he was finally going to be able to work with the displaced children. He called the youth the future of his kibbutz and by extension the new Jewish nation, stating that he needed “to give back to these young people at least something that has been taken away from our cruel generation.”¹⁴ They worked first in Milan out of the refugee resettlement headquarters at ViaUnione 5 and the Italian Jewish school in via Eupili but quickly found a space that would be just for

¹² The movement was created in opposition to the prevailing theories of Zionism in Youth Aliyah movements that were based on social class. It was named after Aharon David Gordon and founded by Zeiri’s friends, the Lubianiker brothers, in 1923 in his hometown. Ibid., 23.

¹³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴ Letter from Moshe Zeiri to Yehudit, May 12, quoted in Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 161.

children. This home was started in Piazzatorre, a small town about 43 miles northeast of Milan, in the nearby province of Bergamo. This home, open from July through August 1945, housed roughly 200 children—40 of whom were foreign orphans while the others were Italian orphans and non-orphans—with the goal of getting them out of the big city for the summer months.¹⁵ At the end of August, the Italian children returned home to their parents and communities and Zeiri and Cassin were left with forty mouths to feed and a desire to do something bigger, something more permanent.

Back in June 1945, while looking for a location for their summer colony, Zeiri and Cassin had visited a home in the small town of Selvino, located roughly 70 km from Milan. Within this small town in the foothills of the Alps between Milan and Switzerland there was a large house named “*Sciesopoli*,” after Antonio Amatore Sciesa, a local hero of the battles against the Austrians in the Italian *Risorgimento*, or unification in the late nineteenth-century. Adamant that this was the perfect spot for his new Zionist orphanage, Zeiri pushed Cantoni to pursue at least temporary ownership of the home. In the confusion caused by the fall of the Fascist party in 1945, the house was given to the Socialist party to be used as a home for Socialist youth. Luigi Gorini, Milanese professor appointed head of Socialist youth activities and ardent antifascist, agreed instead to help convince the Allied Military Government to give the home to the Jewish community for the purpose of housing Jewish youth on their way to Palestine¹⁶.

¹⁵ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 173-178.

¹⁶ On September 21, 1945 the Allied Military Government gave them official control stating: “The Allied Authorities have directed the Intendenza di Finanza to make the Sciesopoli Building at Selvino, Bergamo, available to the Comunità Israelitica di Milano.” Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 177; Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 38.

Both aid workers and the children themselves believed it would be a perfect place for recovery and training for resettlement. Most frequently referred to simply as “Selvino,” the four-story house consisted of an enormous dining hall, a generous kitchen, several dormitories, classrooms, an infirmary, an indoor pool, and a home theater all amidst large gardens and a small forest. Or, as one child remembered it, “You name it, and it was there.”¹⁷ In the fall of 1945 Cantoni and Zeiri opened the doors of Selvino, transporting their young charges with them up the mountain.

The Children

Before we can understand the importance of Selvino we must first look at who these children were, how they arrived in Italy in the first place, and how their arrival created a need for homes like Selvino. By the end of the war, a mere eleven percent of Jewish children in Europe were still alive. The number that had been killed—over 1.5 million—represented a quarter of total Jewish lives extinguished during the Holocaust.¹⁸ “Children” here is a tricky and ambiguous category, one that has been defined broadly, to include anyone under 18 in 1933, and narrowly, to only consider those who remained under 18 in 1945. The National Association of Jewish Child Holocaust Survivors, for instance, defines a “child survivor” as anyone who was a child or teenager during any of the time between 1938 and 1945.¹⁹ In the postwar period, however, UNRRA and the IRO both considered those under seventeen as “children” when filing their paperwork,

¹⁷ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 75-76.

¹⁸ Dana Mihăilescu, “Traumatic Echoes of Memories in Child Survivors’ Narratives of the Holocaust: The Polish Experiences of Michał Głowiński and Henryk Grynberg,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D’histoire* 21, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 73

¹⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust,” *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002): 280.

although the statistics are often broken down in a variety of ways.²⁰ For the sake of clarity, this chapter will include discussion of those who were under the age of eighteen at some point during their tenure in the DP camps, even if they reached the point of adulthood before leaving the camps. It will also use the words “child” and “youth” largely interchangeably.

When they first moved into the home in Selvino in fall 1945, the group was primarily made up of children from the original Piazzatorre location, the children who had been hidden in Italy during the war. They were soon joined by survivors of concentration camps and later survivors of the war in the East Soviet territories. These children arrived at the home often times in groups created in Poland or Soviet territories; the *Brichah* movement helped these groups find their way across the Alps to Italy and the central receiving station in Milan sent them to Selvino. Housing an average of two hundred and fifty children at a time, over three years Selvino became home to nearly eight hundred children, practically all orphans or unaccompanied minors. The home was open to children of all ages, but the majority were those born in the late 1920s and early 1930s, primarily because in general, younger children in Eastern Europe survived the Holocaust at a much lower percentage than older children; a smaller minority were born between 1935 and 1939.²¹ Although concrete statistics are unavailable given the sometimes extremely transitory nature of the stays for some children, it is estimated that a

²⁰ For example: “Table IV: Unaccompanied Children, 16 years and under, eligible for IRO assistance,” AJ/43/1130/19 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 14, RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

²¹ There were a few children in the home with their parents, such as Batia and Yehudit, children of teachers. In 1946, Moshe Zeiri’s wife and daughter joined him and a year later another son was born. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Report Education Department,” July 19 1946.

high majority of those who passed through Selvino went on to Israel by the time the home closed in late 1948.²²

Refugee children arrived in Italy in a variety of ways: Some arrived just before or during the beginning of the war. These were primarily children from Central Europe and Germany, hoping to escape Hitler by running to the seemingly more moderate Italy. Most of these children traveled with their parents or family units. Many were sent to internment camps or confined in small towns in southern Italy, where the Allies freed them in 1943.²³ Doris Schechter, for example, fled to Italy from Austria with her family where they were sheltered by the local population in Guardiagrele, in Abruzzi. As Schechter explained: “We lived in Italy from 1939 to 1944, as ‘free prisoners’—*libero confine*—an oxymoron meaning that we were allowed to walk around freely, though each morning my father had to report to the mayor that we were present and accounted for.”²⁴ Others remained hidden in the north of the country during the war, staying with local families or in monasteries. After the takeover of the Germans in 1943, individuals and religious institutions also hid both foreign and Italian Jewish children and adults stuck in the occupied North.

The majority of refugee children that found themselves in Italy were not originally from Italy and only arrived after the war ended. When the war ended, across Europe Jewish children who had survived resurfaced, and many attempted to return to the land of their birth. When repatriation proved unfeasible or untenable, most looked instead

²² Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*.

²³ Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *I campi del duce: l'internamento civile nell'Italia Fascista, 1940-1943* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004).

²⁴ Doris Schechter, *At Oma's Table: More than 100 Recipes and Remembrances from a Jewish Family's Kitchen* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2007), see especially the Introduction.

to restart life in a completely new environment. These so-called “lost children” of Europe—those who had been separated, often permanently, from their parents during the war—came to represent a microcosm of the problems Europe was facing as a whole.²⁵ Some of these children were registered in DP camps in Germany or Austria but then heard about the greater freedoms and mobility available in Italy and thus decided to go. Others had returned home, for example to Poland or Ukraine, after the war only to find continued persecution and so determined to leave Europe. Although some were, many of the children who eventually made their way to Italy were not part of Zionist groups before the war; instead, they were recruited after the war’s end either in the DP camps or in the war-torn regions of their birth. Although not the only group attempting to help these “lost children,” Zionist groups were often the most charismatic, promising a future in a land full of others like themselves.²⁶ And the Youth Aliyah was among the most active in getting children across the Alps and into Italy, from where they assumed travel to Palestine would be more accessible.

Children were a small portion of the DP community in postwar Italy; records show, for instance, that at the end of 1946 out of the 26,600 Jews DPs in Italy, only 8.1 percent were under eighteen.²⁷ In these early years of the camps, the majority of child refugees in Italy were survivors of concentration camps or partisans between the ages of eleven and seventeen.²⁸ As time went on, the baby boom that occurred in German DP

²⁵ See for example Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

²⁶ Avinoam J Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 1-6, 201.

²⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.163, “Report No, 394 Stencilled 3/5/47,” February 18, 1947.

²⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, “Childrens’ Institutions in Italy,” September 17, 1945.

camps also took place in the Italian camps.²⁹ In the *hachsharot*, for example, in January 1947 there were 218 babies between zero and twelve months older; this number jumped to 493 by May 1947 and remained above 350 for the rest of the year.³⁰ By mid-1947, refugee children made up 13.2 percent of the refugee population, or 2,762 out of 20,861 individuals.³¹ Within the *hachsharot*, children made up a higher percentage of the total DP population than they did in the camps. In mid 1947 children under eighteen represented one 9.8 percent of the DP camp population but 19 percent of the *hachsharot* population.³² This was largely due to the creation of children's homes that were under the purview of the *hachsharot*.

Yet, children and especially their education became singularly important to those running the camps. The JDC declared that it was their "primary duty to take care of these few remnants of children who survived the annihilation of European Jewry."³³ For this

²⁹ Federica Di Padova explores the rates of marriage and birth in the Italian DP camps and concludes that after the first year, survivors become more convinced of their longer tenure in Italy and marriage/birth rates begin to rise. Federica Di Padova, "Rinascere in Italia. Matrimoni e Nascite Nei Campi per Displaced Persons Ebree 1943-1948," *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe. Rivista Telematica Di Studi Sulla Memoria Femminile* 36 (2018): 1–19. Atina Grossmann examines more closely the issues of gender and reproduction in the German DP camps describing what has become known as the "Jewish baby boom." She demonstrates that the idea to use reproduction as retribution becomes prevalent in the DP camps as DPs themselves begin to feel an urgent need to replace murdered families. This boom was so great that by 1947 the birthrate for non-Jewish Germans outside the DP camps was roughly 7.6 per 1,000 women whereas the Jewish birthrate skyrocketed to 50.2 per 1,000. This high birthrate, which helped lead to a reconstruction of Jewish culture within the DP camps, also necessitated further connections between Jews and Germans in and out of the camps as medical staff, house cleaners, and teachers. Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), see especially chapter 5.

³⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.163, "Population groups in Haehsharet: Jan.47 - Feb.48," March 1, 1948. These numbers also largely hold true for the camps. 332 children, or 27.4 percent of all those under 18, are under the age of one in March 1947. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, "Facts and Figures on AJDC's Children Care in Italy," March 31, 1947; JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, "Facts and Figures on AJDC's Children Care in Italy," March 31, 1947.

³¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, "Facts and Figures on AJDC's Children Care in Italy," March 31, 1947.

³² Ibid.

³³ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, "AJDC Helps Jewish Children in Italy," May 20, 1947.

reason, they believed that “the first and foremost need is to bring these children together where thought and interest can be expense[d] on them.”³⁴ They reasoned that the best way to accomplish the much needed rehabilitation of these child survivors was through the creation of dedicated children’s homes. Children’s homes were created in Selvino, Avigliana, Rome, Florence, Salerno, Grottaferrata, Genazzano, Fano, Agudah-Cairo, Soriano, Ansano del Parco, and Leghorn by a combination of efforts from UNRRA/IRO, the Youth Aliyah, and the JDC in order to care for the growing numbers of children arriving in Italy, although not all were open for the duration of the DP period in Italy. The children in these homes were nearly always “unaccompanied minors, that is, youth who had applied for UNRRA/IRO care without an adult;”³⁵ this most frequently meant the children were orphans, but it could also refer to children with one or two parents still alive. In the latter case, these children had determined to live apart from their parents who were either still in their home country or in a DP camp in Germany, Austria, or Italy.

The majority of children who lived in Selvino were unaccompanied minors.³⁶ Some had one or two living parents, often in a nearby camp, but the children chose to stay in Selvino. Many were true orphans whose parents had died or been killed, but some who had thought they were orphans, such as young Bernard, soon discovered the parent

³⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 631, “Childrens’ Institutions in Italy,” September 17, 1945.

³⁵ There were 473 unaccompanied Jewish children in Italy in February 1947, 506 in April 1947 according to UNRRA records. “Table XIX Breakdown of Unaccompanied Jewish Children shown in Table XVIII,” February 28, 1947, AJ/43/1130/14 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 14, RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC; “Table XXI Breakdown of Unaccompanied Jewish Children included in Table XX,” April 30, 1947, AJ/43/1130/12 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 14, RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944–1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³⁶ There were a few cases of children living there with their parents who were teachers in Selvino, but this was highly unusual.

they thought was dead was actually alive. A friend from his hometown of Krakow who was living in Milan informed Bernard that his mother was still alive and looking for him all over Poland. Bernard decided to leave Selvino and return to Poland to find his mother. After a month, Bernard made his way back over the Alps to Selvino leaving his family in Poland; back in his chosen temporary home, Bernard said that he felt this was “a real homecoming.”³⁷

Rehabilitation Strategies

“I think it is presumptuous on our part to encourage the careless delegation of the responsibility for the education of young children without careful review of that program...The question really posed is, who has the custody of orphaned children and who is in a position to speak on the form of education they should receive?”³⁸ Speaking of Youth Aliyah children’s home Selvino, Jacob Trobe, JDC director in Italy, questioned specifically what would constitute the “best interests” of the children and then who was in a position to decide this. The answer, it seems, depended on who you asked.

One of the primary issues in Selvino for many in the JDC was the controversy surrounding its leader, Moshe Zeiri. The former Jewish Brigade leader was a polarizing figure; to many traumatized refugee children struggling to rebuild trust in the adults in their lives, Zeiri became like a new father. As former Selvino child Bernat Rosner remembered him, Moshe Zeiri, the “towering giant...was everywhere, dealing with the

³⁷ Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 62-64.

³⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.111, “Letter from Jacob L. Trobe to Mr. White, Subject: Selvino, Your RD/208.” September 20 1946.

past, organizing the present, and preparing for the future of his young disciples.”³⁹ Zeiri’s larger than life personality, rather than his physical size left deep impressions on the children. Others, like Avraham Aviel remembered Zeiri as the imposing figure who at first blocked his entrance to the home but eventually “permitted him to enter this paradise”⁴⁰ and become part of a new family.

The section examines rehabilitation in Selvino, and in particular, the ways the various groups involved—some combination of UNRRA/IRO, the Youth Aliyah, the JDC, family members of the child, and the children themselves—debated what was best for the children. The main disagreements surrounded what type of environment was best for children to recover in and what types of rules should be put in place to ensure the best responses to past trauma. This section turns first to the issue of “self-help” as an educational strategy for helping youth rehabilitate. On this model, youths and adults were treated as equals; they shared responsibilities and did the same chores. The home, then was communal: all things were shared in common. The section then examines the process of trauma recovery. The home leader prescribed a method of recovery that was entirely present and future oriented, disallowing any discussion of the past. This section examines whether this controversial method was successful in helping the children learn to deal with past traumas.

³⁹ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship: From Opposite Sides of the Holocaust* (University of California Press, 2002), 156-7.

⁴⁰ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 74-75.

Self-Help and Work

For many of those in the postwar period working with DPs and refugees, the concept of rehabilitation was linked first to physical and mental wellness and then job training and education with behavioral modification included in order to give the refugee their best chance at a prosperous future. At Selvino and many other *hachsharot* in Italy, however, this was all secondary to the production of the virtue of “self-help,” which focused less of finding one’s place in society and more on recreating a new society with different rules and norms that centered around communal, shared living.⁴¹ Understanding the idea of self-help ultimately meant that Selvino was judged a success by those connected to it. JDC’s Education Department Director, Gershon Gelbart, wrote “It is an outstanding institution operating on the principle of self-help and has achieved miracles with neglected, orphaned and tortured children who escaped from the Nazi hell. Headed by an able, devoted and energetic director...it provides a well-rounded curriculum and a sound preparation for life in Palestine.”⁴² His largely positive assessment of the home is perhaps better understood when we consider his inclusion of the statement “*judged by the standards by which it is guided*, Selvino is a highly successful institution.”⁴³ A knowledge of those guiding standards, Gelbart appears to be claiming, helps one better recognize the actions of the home as successful. Gelbart’s basic understanding of the structure of Selvino was based on his knowledge of the youth centers in Palestine wherein the primary focus is on the idea of “self-help.” In this setup, “scholastic, vocational,

⁴¹ You can see more examples of this idea in Dalia Ofer, “Mending the Body, Mending the Soul,” in *Holocaust Survivors: Resettlement, Memories, Identities*, Eds. Dalia Ofer, Françoise S. Ouzan, and Judy Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, (Berghahn Books, 2011), 127-131.

⁴² JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Report Education Department July 19, 1946,” July 19, 1946.

⁴³ Emphasis mine. Ibid.

recreation and physical needs of the children are completely integrated into a way of life;” by gaining life skills in all these areas, the youth would learn to be self-reliant.⁴⁴

After their move to Selvino from Milan, Zeiri began to make the new home into one appropriate for children preparing to make *aliyah*. He modeled the home after Janusz Korczak’s famous orphanages. Korczak, born “Henryk Goldszmit” in 1878, was an immensely popular Jewish doctor and writer in Poland in the early twentieth century who was later killed in Treblinka.⁴⁵ Korczak was appointed head of the Jewish orphanage in Warsaw, the largest Jewish orphanage in Poland, in 1912, and began to institute a radically different educational environment. The foundation of his theory of education was that children should be treated as individual, emotional beings whose growth ought to be observed, not molded to suit adults. In his writings and his educational work, he focused on the problems that occur when there is a power struggle between children and adults, stressing the need for adults to respect children and attempt to understand their world. His theories spread rapidly across Poland, where Zeiri first encountered them as a student. After receiving control of Selvino, Zeiri began to implement Korczak’s ideas, focusing particularly on the ideas of independence and equality between adults and children.

As David Zugman remembered it, Zeiri created small groups within the home to facilitate both the re-creation of family type bonds and to instill a sense of independence

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Korczak’s ghetto diary has been published in which he describes the orphanage he created in the ghetto and the offers of Jews and gentiles alike to rescue him from the ghetto. Korczak, however, refused to leave the children in his orphanage, and so when they were taken by train to Treblinka, he boarded along with them. Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary* (Yale University Press, 2003).

and responsibility in the children within these smaller groups. The focus on self-reliance was also evident in the house standards Zeiri created:

1. Self-sufficiency—all work was to be done by children and teachers
2. Shared responsibility
3. Common property
4. All adults to share work with children
5. Hebrew as the house language
6. No dwelling on the past
7. The importance of studies.⁴⁶

The children were first to be self-sufficient, which meant there was work to be done. All chores were communal, with little to no differentiation between the adult leaders and the children in the home. Avraham Aviel, who entered the home when he was about sixteen explained how chores were divided:

Moshe, together with his team of youth leaders, ran the establishment, but all the daily tasks involved in running the institution were done by the children. Everywhere, there was an atmosphere of activity. Some children got up early to do cleaning duty. They worked hard at scrubbing and cleaning the floors and the stairs. Others worked at gardening and cleaning the yard, or worked the kitchen and the dining room, in the laundry, in the carpentry shop, and doing shoe repairs and tailoring. Children of every age had their allotted tasks. Most of the work was related to the current upkeep of the place. Some of the children volunteered to work in the kitchen.⁴⁷

Zeiri was concerned with preparing the children for their move to Palestine, including how to take care of a space. A local Italian gardener and maintenance worker was employed to work in the home when bigger repairs were necessary, but the older children were responsible for most of the daily work done in the house from cooking to cleaning to weeding.

Schooling was also an important feature of Selvino, as it was for all children's centers. The study of Hebrew was paramount for children who would soon be living in

⁴⁶ Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 46-47.

⁴⁷ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 109.

Palestine. When the home opened in 1945, Aviel recalled that “There were no organized study courses. Improvised Hebrew lessons were provided by those of the youth leaders who had managed to obtain knowledge of the language before the war, so basic reading and writing were taught. Boys and girls took over the leadership of those just a few years younger than themselves.”⁴⁸ By mid-1946 there were organized study courses with teachers brought over from Palestine, although older kids continued to mentor and teach younger ones as maintaining permanent teachers remained a constant headache in Selvino.⁴⁹ Rosner, for instance, who grew up in a highly Orthodox family in Hungary continued to tutor younger camp mates in Hebrew because he was fluent in the language.⁵⁰

Not everyone agreed with Zeiri’s educational model. Some of the children initially rebelled against the idea that they would have to work in the home. Ze’ev, for example, wrote about his arguments with Zeiri and the others stating “What’s going on? Do we have to work here, too? Didn’t I work enough in Germany?”⁵¹ He said that he eventually changed his mind and began to see the benefit in the work, in part because he realized that his “future depended on it.” Helping the children see the value of their work and the importance self-sufficiency held in their futures was a primary goal of the home. Bernie Rosner, another Selvino child, agreed with Aviel’s assessment explaining that “Camp chores were performed by the young initiates in such a way as to nurture a spirit

⁴⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 634, “Letter from AJDC Rome to AJDC Paris and AJDC New York,” September 4, 1946.

⁵⁰ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 156-8.

⁵¹ Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 57.

of solidarity with each other and with the larger Zionist cause.”⁵² This kind of solidarity would help see them through the difficult travel times ahead.

Yet, even within the Zionist circles there was discontent surrounding the Selvino home. Young Polish Zionist Theodore Szejberg-Hatalgi who had written such a glowing review of the home after his first visit in 1945 was appalled when he returned in mid-1947. Szejberg-Hatalgi would soon be leaving Italy for a job with the Jewish National Fund in Palestine, but before he left, he could not help passing on his concerns.⁵³ He wrote that he found “instead of a progress, a very essential regress for the period of nearly two years.”⁵⁴ This “regress” extended to issues of hygiene, sanitation, and cleanliness throughout the home inside and out. Most concerning, however, was the behavior of the children, which he describes as “very unpleasant.”⁵⁵

Szejberg-Hatalgi was quick to lay the blame for this “insufficient education” on the management of the home. He believed that children from such traumatic backgrounds could hardly be held responsible for learned behaviors. It was the duty of the management, specifically home director Moshe Zeiri, to provide an education that taught organization, discipline, and traditional social rules. Szejberg-Hatalgi stated that Zeiri “seems to be a very intelligent person, but what one sees in Selvino puts necessarily Mr. Zehiri’s [sic] educational abilities under a big note of interrogation.”⁵⁶ He argued that the “lack of discipline” was clear from the ways the children spoke back to the adults and the

⁵² Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, 158.

⁵³ Margalit Toledano and David McKie, *Public Relations and Nation Building: Influencing Israel* (Routledge, 2013), 76-79.

⁵⁴ Underline in the original. JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder, IT.144, “Letter from Theodore Szejberg to Mr. Julius Levine, Subject: Impressions from my trip to the North.” June 26 1947.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

general disorder he witnessed on his visit. Given the overall positive reviews we have of the home from that time period, it is perhaps safe to assume that Szejberg-Hatalgi arrived on a bad day; or perhaps he was there when a new group of children had just arrived, making it understandable that they would not be as comfortable in the home or as familiar with the rules; or maybe what he really misunderstood was precisely the social rules in these Youth Aliyah homes. In the end, however, he recognized that the children themselves were happy: “as far as the feeling of the children is concerned, I won the impression that they like their staying in Selvino and that they really love their director.”⁵⁷ The JDC’s ultimate acceptance of this idea as a possible method of rehabilitation ensured the home’s survival and helped to safeguard the integrity of many other *hachsharot*.

Selvino: New Home, New Family?

In this house [Selvino], for the first time in years, they had a roof over their heads, a corner to relax, and food to satisfy their hunger. Here, for the first time, they had found security, and some rest for their tormented souls. Here, they became accustomed to a regular, daily routine. They now felt they were members of a community of sane human beings with equal rights. They belonged; they were part of an indestructible Jewish people. And with that feeling, came a renewal of faith in the Glory of Israel, and hope for a better future. Now they had something to live for, and the joy of youth began to make itself felt. They banded together like lost lambs who had gone astray. A good friend would somehow replace the brother or sister who was no longer. They were one family.⁵⁸

Avraham Aviel was born Avraham Lipkuński in 1929 in the tiny town of Dugalishok, Poland (today in Belorussia) to a family known for their “scrupulously orthodox” lifestyle.⁵⁹ He was educated in a Talmudic yeshiva with his older brother

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 111-112.

⁵⁹ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 28-29.

Pinchas in nearby Raduń, where they both hoped to become rabbis. In November 1941, Aviel, along with his parents and two brothers, was sent to the newly opened Raduń ghetto where they lived until May 10, 1942. News of an impending liquidation of the ghetto sent Aviel's father and older brother, Moshe David and Pinchas, fleeing from the house before the first day's light, but Aviel and his mother and younger brother, Sara Mina and Yekutiel, were taken outside the town to be shot. Years later at the Eichmann trial on May 5, 1961, Aviel recalled this long walk to the freshly dug pit as his mother recited aloud the prayer of his people "Hear, O Israel" while soldiers shot whole families and pushed them into the pit. "I repeated the words after her, but inside I rebelled, I did it reluctantly...Because my idea...my idea had always been...at least one must survive, one must remain alive...*überleben*, so that one could tell...one could tell what had happened."⁶⁰ Holding on to this one thought, he dropped to his hands and knees and started crawling through the crowd and once he was on the edge, he ran into the nearby forest; his mother and brother were shot soon after.⁶¹ He was reunited with his older brother and father and joined a partisan unit fighting the Germans. His brother, Pinchas, was killed in an ambush that December and in June 1943 his father was killed by a group of Poles. Now alone, Aviel joined some Jewish partisans in the Nacza Grodno Forest where he remained until their liberation in June 1944. After returning briefly to his hometown to ensure proper burial for Pinchas's remains, Aviel made his way to Italy determined to get to Palestine.

⁶⁰ Avraham Aviel, testimony at the Eichmann Trial, May 5, 1961, quoted in Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 89

⁶¹ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*.

Aviel's arrival in Selvino as a lone orphan without a group was by no means unique, although it was more common for the children to be escorted from the registration office in Milan or other DP camps by Fetter Moishe, one of the home leaders, instead of traveling up the mountains by themselves.⁶² Starting in late 1945, larger groups of children began arriving in the home, groups that were formed elsewhere and already had a sense of community. The first such group was the *Achva* (Hebrew: Brotherhood) group that formed with survivors from Gordonia in Lodz. The group was guided by twenty-one-year-old Yeshayahu Flamholz, or Shayek, who had grown up in a wealthy Zionist home and had escaped the Blizhi concentration camp.⁶³ Having heard about the home in Selvino, Shayek was determined to get the group there. After traveling for two months through Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria pretending to be Greek refugees, speaking Hebrew instead of Polish or Yiddish because they thought it might sound like Greek, the 30 members of the *Achva* group were smuggled into Italy by the Jewish Brigade. Their arrival in Selvino created a new bond amongst all the members of the home, one focused on shared responsibility and communal living. They showed that this could also be a community in the present tense, a community in their home in Selvino, a community that did not need to wait until it reached Palestine to exist, a community that was becoming a family.

Themes of family and rebirth, most frequently connected with a new life in Palestine that was beginning there in Selvino, filled the pages of the household newspaper, *Nivenu*. *Nivenu*, meaning "Our Words," was the newspaper created nearly

⁶² "Fetter Moishe" or Uncle Moishe was Moshe Engert, another Jewish Brigade soldier in the Solel Boneh Company. Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 64-66

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

entirely by and for the Selvino children. It was meant to be a way for them to give voice to their current experiences and future hopes. First published on October 27, 1945, Moshe Zeiri proclaimed it was “the first expression of community.”⁶⁴ The primary editors were Yaakov Meriash and Shmulik Shulman, and they were assisted by Avraham Aviel, Bernat (or Baruch as he was called in Selvino) Rosner, and the Liberman sisters, Ayala and Adina. The newspaper was supposed to be published in Hebrew, but in actuality it included writings in both Hebrew and Yiddish; Polish and Hungarian texts had to be translated, most frequently into Hebrew by Zeiri himself, as the final product of each issue was handwritten in Hebrew characters. Each issue consisted of four to eight pages of mostly prose with some poetry and drawings, and editorials could be anonymous while articles were all signed by the author. Copies were limited but were shared widely throughout the house.

Within the first few months of the home opening, the children demonstrated their own commitment to responsible communal living. Aharon Steinberg, for example, wrote in *Nivenu* that the children

must eradicate the bad habits of the Diaspora and acquire new habits that will make us fit for a life of work in the Land of Israel. There we shall be able to demonstrate that Jews were not meant to be turned into soap but that they are able to work the land, to build, and to defend themselves. From this point on we must begin to live the life of a collective, so that when we reach Palestine we will not be overwhelmed by the wastelands of the Negev, or by any other difficulties, but will be able to work our land willingly. I would like to end with this: We here are contented Jewish youth, for we are receiving a Zionist education.⁶⁵

Several editorials in subsequent issues also addressed the themes of discord within the home, in which Poles and Hungarians were fighting and children were bullying each

⁶⁴ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 231.

⁶⁵ Aharon Steinberg, “Unser Wort” *Nivenu*, October 27, 1945. Quoted in Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 84.

other.⁶⁶ Calls for unity from the children themselves were driven in part by the recognition that they had survived and that this hatred had come from the camps and must be left behind. As Mordechai Stern wrote several issues later: “brothers, I implore you, let us join together in forging bonds of love and let us live together in a partnership not only of property but also of ideals. All of us share the same ideals, and the same Mother — the Land of Israel!”⁶⁷ The future of their lives in Israel required that they learn to live in harmony.

Rehabilitation was not only about work; it also meant encouraging the children, many of whom arrived “undersized in body [but]...old in mind,” to relearn how to play and have fun.⁶⁸ They had missed, according to the JDC “what should have been the most important play period of their lives” and instead had witnessed the “hardships and horrors of the camps.”⁶⁹ This combination of play and work created “a daily routine, so long denied them, [and] reestablished a sense of normalcy in their lives,” Rosner declared.⁷⁰ Their daily routine was “guided by a social order in which activities were arranged both for the good of all and for the benefit of the individual.”⁷¹ Self-sufficiency was thus to be balanced with the needs of communal living. And a large part of this communal living was to be future-oriented, to the extent that Zeiri strictly forbade any discussion of one’s past experiences.

⁶⁶ Moshe M. “What Counts in our Life Together” *Nivenu*, October 27, 1945; “Here at our House” next issue Quoted in Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 85.

⁶⁷ First article written in Hebrew. Quoted in Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 86

⁶⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder 631, “Children’s’ Institutions in Italy,” 09/17/1945.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 156-7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

Trauma and Recovery

The inculcation of self-sufficiency and adaptation to communal living became primary markers of rehabilitation for Moshe Zeiri, but they were not the only ones. Zeiri also expected the children in the home to focus solely on the future. He believed that the only way for these child survivors to recover from the overwhelming amount of trauma they had faced during the war was by not speaking about it. Thus he implemented a strict no speaking of the past policy—no speaking of one's birthplace, experiences during the war, or how they found themselves in Italy—in Selvino in an attempt to help the children look to the future.

This decision was not made lightly by Zeiri. It appears that Zeiri struggled with how to interact with the children and how to best encourage them. In one of his many letters to his wife, Yehudit, Zeiri admitted his own difficulty in knowing how to help them and at first feeling like he might not be the best person to do this:

When I listen to these children's stories, I feel so small and insignificant. What is my strength compared to their life experience and the wisdom they have acquired? If only I could review them one by one, write down the tattooed number on the arm, and pass on the world of each of them. Tracing the external description and the inner essence...And the extraordinary social discoveries of mutual help, the willingness to sacrifice for a friend, more than once. I'm sorry not to be able to stay aloof, to be invisible. To watch them for a long time, them and their lifestyle. It is more than books and newspapers. But for their own good it is also necessary to know and study. To prepare them, to know how to give them back what was stolen from them.⁷²

One can hear the sincerity in his words but also the confusion; he wants to collect and share their stories, to give them their own space to come to terms with their past, but also feels that these are not the most helpful things he can do. Instead, he must propel them forward, push them to learn the new and shed the old.

⁷² Letter from Moshe Zeiri to Yehudit, Quoted in Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 180-181.

The Selvino children themselves responded in different ways to Zeiri's "no discussion of the past rule." Some children agreed with Moshe Zeiri's self-assessment above; they thought that it would not matter if they could discuss the past, because he and the other leaders from Palestine were simply not in a position to understand as they had not experienced the camps. Haim Luftman was a young survivor who came to Selvino via Magenta. Speaking in a Yad Vashem interview seventy years later, Luftman said he really liked Moshe Zeiri and felt very good about the general conditions of life at Selvino. Nevertheless, he would "judge [the leaders] as 'not good enough' because they were undermined by a fundamental misunderstanding: 'They did not know how to treat us. We were not just orphans. We were orphans from another planet.'"⁷³ Zeiri and other leaders had endured a very different wartime experience than the children. As Avraham Aviel remembered it, Zeiri was "incapable of helping the children psychologically" because he had too much to do, too many daily needs to meet.⁷⁴ The present and the future were all that Zeiri had space for.

Other children argued later that of course there were discussions of the past, that there was not really a way to stop them.⁷⁵ *Nivenu* frequently contained stories or songs from the children's pasts. There were also frequent reports of nightmares, especially in the early days of a child's arrival. Bernie Rosner who had grown up in an Orthodox family was fourteen when he lived in Selvino described a religious service planned to commemorate Rosh Hashanah. It started off well, but "the service had to be stopped when the entire group of youngsters began to wail and sob. The rituals so long forbidden

⁷³ Haim Luftman, Interview with Yad Vashem, 2008, quoted in Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 190.

⁷⁴ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 131.

⁷⁵ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 236

only brought forth memories of the terrible losses they had suffered, especially the loss of their families, with whom they had practiced their faith.”⁷⁶ The services were intended to be a celebration of the continued presence of Judaism and Jewish life, but they instead reminded the children of what they had lost.

The space itself was also really interesting for this persistent focus on the future instead of looking backward because the architecture itself refused to allow them to fully forget the past. The home had been created to honor Italian national heroes during its unification in the late nineteenth-century. During the *ventennio*, the twenty years of Mussolini’s reign, the home was used as a boarding school for elite Fascist youth where soldiers on leave could vacation and watch the parades and drills of young Fascist recruits. A list of Fascist donors remains engraved on the entryway wall to this day. Benito Mussolini name alongside his contribution of 5,000 lire are prominently noted at the top. This meant that anytime anyone entered the home, an homage to Fascism greeted them.

Moshe Zeiri was not the only children’s leader to propose these theories about trauma recovery. We see a very different approach, for instance, taken by Lillian Robbins, an UNRRA social worker from New York City, who worked at a monastery in Bavaria after the war. In a cable to Washington the UNRRA team reported:

When the first batch of Hitler’s smallest victims arrived, it was expected that their minds would be warped almost beyond hope through the suffering they had endured. But Miss Robbins and her staff were surprised. Within a day or two she could say: ‘These children are astoundingly normal, considering all they have been through.’ Their first desire on arriving at the Monastery was not to eat regularly, as might be expected, but to talk. ‘It was as if they wanted to talk all the fear and horror out of their minds,’ said Miss Robbins. ‘Many of the older children used to follow us about, begging us to listen to them. Many of their stories are long. Most of the children have been in 7 or 8 concentration camps. All

⁷⁶ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 155.

the stories are frightful. We have 2 Polish boys of 16 who worked in the crematorium at Auschwitz, stoking fires. We have another Jewish boy of the same age who was put on cutting down the bodies of people who had been hanged. We've heard all their stories now, but in case there is something left unsaid, something that might reveal some part of these children's minds we know nothing about, I'm planning to have each child who can, to write out fully the story of his or her experiences.⁷⁷

According to Zeiri, however, rebirth required the price of silence—"we don't sing about blood and battles, we sing about life and creation."⁷⁸ He desperately wanted the children to be able to envision a new life and future for themselves in Palestine, and this would be most easily done with blank slates, he reasoned.

Others came to similar conclusions about a need to focus on the future. Working at the same time as Zeiri, Dr. Thérèse Brosse, on behalf of the newly formed United Nations Specialized Agency for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), wrote a report entitled "War-Handicapped Children: Report on the European Situation" which was intended to create a new plan for the United Nations to deal with the educational development of these children. The report focused on the educational, medical, and social problems these children faced as a result of the war. Brosse split the report into three sections: problems of re-socialization and social order, developmental issues, and solutions to correct all of these. Their solutions included providing more education only after basic needs of food and shelter were met and relying more heavily on international organizations. Broad in its scope and goals, the UNESCO report formed the basis for

⁷⁷ "In a twelfth century Monastery at Koster Indersdorf in Bavaria, 200 children from German concentration camps are being cared for by an UNRRA team under the direction of Miss Lillian Robbins of New York City. A prominent feature of the children's life at Koster Indersdorf is the national spirit which they have fostered among themselves. In all, 200 children comprise 14 different nationalities and have formed themselves into national groups." "UNRRA Cable re: UNRRA care of concentration camp children, Bavaria," October 27, 1945, AJ/43/96/1687 *Archives Nationales*, Paris. Seen in Reel 1, Scan 4994, RG-43.048M *Organisation Internationale Pour Les Réfugiés* (IRO), 1944-1955, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁷⁸ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 230.

much humanitarian work and has laid out the issues and statistics, offering welfare agencies a chance for further analysis.⁷⁹

Based on field work conducted in 1948, the report also addressed the importance of looking to the future for children's development. Brosse argued for the inclusion of children in the future planning for rehabilitation:

Any sort of future gives meaning to the child's life as it assumes a specific form in his imagination and makes educational rehabilitation possible. (That fact is fully appreciated in Zionist Homes, in which the active enthusiasm evoked by plans for the future tends to fill the gap of the past which is lost.) Displaced children are only too willing to devote to the country which welcomes them the effort which a normal child would want to devote to his family.⁸⁰

The child's agency was important. Her theory was that if the child felt excited by future prospects, they would begin to heal from their wounds in the past. It was less important to her where that future happened, although she recognized that Zionist homes were particularly good at instilling a sense of new national hope in children. This hope could turn a new home into a new family.

The largely positive legacy of Selvino that we find in the literature today can be attributed to many things including an influential and charismatic leader, the generous donations of organizations such as the JDC, and the children themselves. Avraham Aviel recalled that when the children entered the home "They began to consider the meaning of life. Each child, in his own way, had to come to terms with the past—the loss of a childhood, the loss of family and friends—and to conquer his fear, to learn to live in the present, and to dream about the future."⁸¹ Despite Zeiri's rules, it is perhaps more

⁷⁹ For another early work, see Dorothy Macardle, *Children of Europe: A Study of the Children of Liberated Countries, Their Wartime Experiences, Their Reactions, and Their Needs* (Boston, 1951).

⁸⁰ Thérèse Brosse, *War-Handicapped Children: Report on the European Situation*, vol. 439 (Unesco, 1950), 20

⁸¹ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 111-112.

accurate to say that many children learned “to come to terms with the past” on their own. Doubtless the moratorium on discussing the past proved to be re-traumatizing for some children. Aviel reasoned that the children “carried with them the burden of their sufferings, which they were unable to unload, and from which they were unable to release themselves. Sympathetic ears and comforting arms were lacking.”⁸² Some may have learned, or at the very least been encouraged to believe that speaking of the past was taboo, a message Alex and Aviva Sarel carried into adulthood. Others confided in their friends and leaders in the home or in the new families they created after resettling.⁸³ For all, however, a focus on the future was vital because a positive future gives new hope. This new hope was a lifeline for many of the Selvino children.

Zionism: A Force of Accord or Discord?

“The young Holocaust survivors who sat crowded round the ping-pong table did not need to be persuaded that it was in their best interests to return to the land of their forefathers. They were convinced that they must do so in order to survive, and that there was no point in trying to make a fresh start anywhere else. They were prepared to undergo any privation, to the point of sacrificing their lives, to attain this goal.”⁸⁴

These words of Avraham Aviel, the sixteen-year-old Holocaust survivor determined to make it to Palestine, would have strongly resonated with a great many of the youths in the DP camps, and in Selvino especially. When Aviel arrived in Italy in 1945 having survived the liquidation of the ghetto in Radun, Belarus and years fighting with the local partisans, he only had one goal: to find a way to Palestine. With no surviving family, Aviel felt he had very little left to wait for and saw Selvino as his best

⁸² Ibid., 130.

⁸³ Aharon Megged, *The Story of the Selvino Children*, 249-251

⁸⁴ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 130.

chance to make *aliyah* as quickly as possible. What he did not expect was that Selvino would first become the beginnings of his new future, a future he thought would only come with his arrival in Palestine. The strong Zionist spirit that ran through Selvino and the strictness of rules focused on preparing them for life in Palestine helped Aviel find not only a new homeland but also a new family, starting right there in Italy.

In Italy we see perhaps one of the largest convergences of “collectivist” ideals groups because of the many Zionist groups present. Collectivist policies, advocated by continental social workers and many Jewish groups, argued that it was in the best interests of the child to allow them to remain in a larger group of other children their own age and of their own beliefs.⁸⁵ Here, children were brought together to be rehabilitated and, especially for Zionist groups, to help form a basis for a new nation. Jewish children represented the future of the Jewish race, and this future should be within their own nation, Zionists claimed. British and American social workers, on the other hand, often favored an individualist or familialist model of rehabilitation.⁸⁶ These social workers believed that returning a child to her own family or a new family would prove to be the best policy for the child’s healing and future. A struggle then between “individualist, familialist, and nationalist rhetoric” placed children in the middle of families, religions, and nations who all claimed authority over them, each seeking to rehabilitate children

⁸⁵ Tara Zahra, “‘The Psychological Marshall Plan’: Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II,” *Central European History* 44, no. 01 (March 2011): 52-53. For an examination of the French case see Daniella Doron, “‘A Drama of Faith and Family’: Familialism, Nationalism, and Ethnicity among Jews in Postwar France,” *Journal of Jewish Identities*, 4, no. 2 (2011): 1-27.

⁸⁶ Tara Zahra explains “British and American social workers deployed to Europe sought to apply and disseminate the individualist, psychoanalytic, and familialist visions that dominated child welfare in Great Britain and the United States in the 1940s. Recent histories of twentieth-century Europe have typically depicted World War II as a watershed moment in the advancement of liberal, individualist values in western Europe.” Tara Zahra, “‘The Psychological Marshall Plan’: Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II,” *Central European History* 44, no. 01 (March 2011): 40.

armed with their own understandings of psychology and trauma. This also seems to indicate that despite claiming to know what was best for youth, neither Jewish groups nor the international organizations always knew how best to help their charges heal.

This section examines the ways in which Zionism shaped many of the refugee children's homes in the postwar period in Italy. On an organizational level, it investigates how strong political stances surrounding the question of Zionism sparked tension and generated conflict in relationships among various organizations, particularly between the Youth Aliyah movement and the JDC. Then focusing on the experiences within the Selvino home, it looks at what Zionism meant in those homes. For some children, Zionism was a link to their past and to the movement they had grown up in; for others, Zionism was a new venture, one that would lead them to new homes and new families, to create a form of rebirth in their lives. Yet there were some who turned away from the home's strict Zionist policies, choosing a different path for a variety of reasons.

Zionism and the JDC

When the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) entered Italy as the war was ending, they declared they would never support the work of politically active Zionist organizations.⁸⁷ In a postwar space teeming with refugees who refused to go home, however, the JDC was forced to rethink their position, especially when it came to children homes and the Youth Aliyah. With large numbers of children being brought to Italy en route to Palestine, the JDC struggled with how best to fulfill their mandate to aid the *Sheyres Hapleyte*, the "surviving remnant" of Holocaust survivors. By examining the

⁸⁷ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (University of California Press, 1998), chapter 6, see especially 184-190.

workings of Selvino, we can see the often conflicting relationships between the Zionist home leaders and their JDC benefactors who wanted to avoid taking a stance on Zionism.

The initial problems in Selvino were many: inadequate food and clothing, a lack of educational materials, the inexperience and paucity of Jewish educators, and the dearth of medical supplies and trained nurses. After moving from the center of Milan to their mountain home, Selvino leaders struggled with a lack of basic resources to feed and clothe their young charges. Several factors hindered their ability. UNRRA, which only began their operations in Northern Italy after its liberation in early 1945, was still playing catch up to secure appropriate goods to the right places. The JDC appears to only have gotten involved with the home after its installment in Selvino, and thus began issuing materials late.⁸⁸ The summer of 1945 also saw a tremendous uptick in the number of refugees pouring over the mountains into Italy. The problem of material goods dominated early conflict between the home, the JDC, and the Youth Aliyah. But as material goods became more readily available, the underlying fault lines of subsequent controversy were exposed, revealing the competing values, goals, and methodologies of the two organizations.

By mid-1946 controversy was brewing among JDC workers themselves and between the workers and Selvino leaders. Reports were piling up for and against the home, reports concerning enough to reach the desk of the JDC European director, Joseph Schwartz. It began in May 1946 with a report by Gershon Gelbart to fellow JDC official

⁸⁸ There appears to be some controversy here over when the JDC became involved. Aahron Megged cites the JDC's involvement only after 1946, but JDC documentation from November 1945 shows they were already beginning to provide supplemental rations. JDC Archives, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder 664, "Letter from Reuben B. Resnik to Mr. Morris Laub." November 2 1945.

Frederick White from his visit to Selvino. In this he claims that “the institution as a whole is perhaps one of the brightest spots in our entire Italian program.”⁸⁹ His report then details the few areas where he sees difficulties which he believes are “real but not alarming,” namely health and sanitation, administration, and the need for some material goods. He argues that “it is agreed that assistance is needed in the Home but, contrary to the prevalent impression, I feel that it would also be most welcome by the staff.”⁹⁰ The controversy surrounding Selvino during its operation can be described by three main and interconnecting issues: institutional leadership, image control, and rehabilitation methodology.

JDC workers appeared split in their opinion of Zeiri, as some like Gershon Gelbart upheld him as “an able, devoted and energetic director,”⁹¹ while others like Elias Gordin decried him as simply “an idealist”⁹² without any sense of reality. Gordin, one of the medical supply workers for the JDC, interacted with Zeiri on several occasions and they appear to have started off on the wrong foot. Firmly committed to the non-partisan stance of the JDC regarding Palestine, Gordin found little common ground with the Polish Zionist youth leader. Gordin expressed his opinion of the home in a harshly worded letter to JDC Italy head of mission Jacob Trobe: “If you wish to have this institution run on the lines of communal settlement, if you wish the children to work until 12 midnight (not because Zeiri is cruel, but because of his ideals), you must employ him.

⁸⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder IT.118, “Letter from Dr. Gershon Gelbart to Mr. Frederick C. White.” May 22 1946.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ JDC Archives, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder 11, “Report Education Department,” July 19 1946.

⁹² JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder IT.118, “Letter from Mr. Elias Gordin to Mr. Jacob L. Trobe, Subject: Selvino Institution.” September 9 1946.

If your emphasys [sic] is to have a clean, normal children's home, then you must immediately dispense with Mr. Zeiri's services."⁹³ He goes on to describe a recent trip Zeiri had taken through the rough hills overnight accompanied by many young children just in order to see an opera in Milan, claiming that in this place "culture is more important than physic."⁹⁴ Selvino had become a Zionist kibbutz where work and ideals trumped all, according to Gordin.

The children in the home, however, often felt differently about Zeiri's work and ideals. Sixteen year old Bernie Rosner, for instance, declared that Zeiri's leadership inculcated "a deep sense of his own worth" within a young and impressionable Rosner.⁹⁵ He also described this trip to see the opera—Bizet's "Carmen"—in Milan, but went on to note that the opera was not their only visit in Milan; instead, the children had also participated in a Zionist demonstration that day protesting the British blockade and advocating for the creation of a Jewish state.⁹⁶ The Youth Aliyah advocated for the children's participation in these types of events, stating that this would allow the children to feel closer to their future lives. The JDC, however, feared the politicization of these events.

Zeiri also had his supporters in the JDC. Dr. Gershon Gelbart, a noted child psychologist from the United States, continually wrote favorable reports about Selvino and Zeiri in particular, claiming his work to be one of the best in all children's centers in Italy. Following the condemnations of Zeiri by Gordin in September of 1946 and the subsequent investigations by Frederick White and Jacob Trobe, Gelbart wrote that Zeiri

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 156-7.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 156-7.

had been “met with an attitude of petty jealousy, Prussian bureaucracy, unsympathetic interference and broken promises” from the JDC.⁹⁷ One can perhaps see some of the “petty jealousy” in Gordin’s letter in which he claims “I have had many interviews with Zeiri; I have every respect for his intellectual honesty, which is never prostituted to our ideas of honesty.”⁹⁸ Gordin’s version of “honesty” could not be aligned with Zeiri’s Zionism. The clash here truly appears to be over the understanding of the political orientation of the home.

Investigating this controversy in Selvino also gives us the opportunity to see how the JDC cared about its own image abroad and within its own donor base, particularly in regard to its connection with Zionism. The JDC saw itself as an *American* institution first and foremost, and thus took great care to avoid ties to political organizations or expressions of partisan viewpoints.⁹⁹ Even at the end of the war in 1945, the JDC leadership continued to resist involvement with any Zionist clandestine activity, especially the illegal movement of Jews to Palestine. Historian Idith Zertal pinpoints the first signs of change in the JDC mindset to two events in August 1945.¹⁰⁰ First, the JDC appointed Charles Passman to be the head of JDC Mediterranean operations. Passman, who had been a JDC official in Cairo, believed strongly in the Zionist mission in Palestine. But perhaps even more important was the involvement of JDC European director, Joseph Schwartz, in the delegation sent to investigate conditions in the DP camps. Schwartz helped prepare the Harrison report—the result of this investigation—

⁹⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.163, “AJDC Italy Education Department.” November 29 1946.

⁹⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.118, “Letter from Mr. Elias Gordin to Mr. Jacob L. Trobe, Subject: Selvino Institution.” September 9 1946.

⁹⁹ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power*, 184.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

and committed the JDC to following its recommendations.¹⁰¹ It was not until February of 1946, however, that a full agreement of cooperation was reached between the JDC and Zionist groups in Italy.¹⁰²

As Zertal remarks though, these early months in 1946 were “kind of a honeymoon period” for the JDC and Zionism, smooth sailing before the changes in JDC policy that would later occur. By late spring, during the La Spezia Affair in which over one thousand refugees boarded a boat in the western port city and declared a hunger strike if not allowed to leave for Palestine, the JDC had ended its financial support of clandestine immigration. JDC directors reversed this decision, however, during the summer and pledged \$100 per refugee to the Mossad. Although precarious as this new agreement also stipulated that it had to be re-approved every three months, this decision lasted through the end of the DP camps in Italy.¹⁰³ Overall, the history of the JDC in Italy, particularly its work with refugees in the camps, was very positive, but closer inspection demonstrates the clear moments of tension around the issue of Zionism.

Elias Gordin, the JDC official who wrote scathingly about Moshe Zeiri also took issue with the home’s goals. In a second letter to JDC Italy Director Jacob Trobe, Gordin reported on a conversation he had had with Selvino supporter Gershon Gelbart in which he claimed that Gelbart argued “that Zeiri has every right to regard this institution as a Zionist institution in his sense of the word.”¹⁰⁴ This kind of free reign for practicing one’s

¹⁰¹ In July 1945, U.S. President Harry Truman sent Earl G. Harrison, former commissioner of immigration and then dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, to investigate the conditions of the DP camps in Germany and Austria. Harrison’s subsequent report detailed his concerns about the poor conditions and inspired change in treatment. Earl G. Harrison, *The Plight of the Jews in Europe: A Report to President Truman*. Released by the White House September 29, 1945.

¹⁰² Ibid., 184-9.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 202-3.

¹⁰⁴ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.118, “Letter from Mr. Elias Gordin to Mr. Jacob L. Trobe.” September 12 1946.

political ideology while using JDC resources was too much for Gordin and would not be appreciated by other funders: “I suggest very firmly to you that many of the contributors to AJDC funds in South Africa would be horrified to learn that we almost entirely support an institution of this type and with these political aims.”¹⁰⁵ It was at the end of his letter though that he truly drove his point home as he wrote in the threatening end of his note “If this were publicized, (and I must say I will be the first to publicize it when I leave the AJDC), such supporters would raise the skies.”¹⁰⁶

This threat to the image and reputation of the JDC could not and did not go unnoticed. In a response to Jacob Trobe, Frederick White, JDC’s leader of the northern region of Italy, proclaimed that he did not believe Gordin’s remarks were “in any way justified.”¹⁰⁷ White believed, in accord with the JDC’s agreement with the Zionist groups over the summer of 1946, that Selvino could maintain its Zionist roots and goals while still adhering to JDC policy. But he recognized that Gordin might not be able to reconcile these two stating “I furthermore think that it is not only unpleasant, but simply impossible for a man of his strong concepts and prejudices to become exponent of Joint operations anywhere.”¹⁰⁸ It would seem in this case that Moshe Zeiri was not the only person whose strong opinions guided his actions. His strong talk notwithstanding, it appears that Gordin never followed through on his threats to publicize the JDC’s connection to these Zionist groups.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.118, “Letter from Mr. Frederick C. White to Mr. Jacob L. Trobe, Subject: Selvino.” September 12 1946.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

In the mindset of voluntary agencies like the JDC, children's homes appeared particularly vulnerable for takeover by politically active groups in a way that general DP camps were not. These homes were often full of orphaned children whose lack of parental figures made space for other adult figures to become guiding forces. With this in mind, Jacob Trobe explained that a full review of the Selvino home was in order. He argued that "just because a group of orthodox leaders, or on the other hand, Zionist leaders, or on the other hand, leftist leaders, claim a group of children and insist upon their indoctrination with a give school of thought, it does not mean that we must be a party to this without review."¹⁰⁹ Tensions between JDC officials and Selvino settled down after this rash of letters. In a November 1946 report, child psychologist and longtime supporter of the home Gershon Gelbart noted that "In spite of the urging of this [Education] Department to clarify our policy with regard to this home, our administration of this installation has been marked by confusion and indecision...It is only recently that with the cooperation of Mr. Harold Trobe and Mr. Tabb, AJDC has begun to honor its own commitments to Selvino."¹¹⁰ And these commitments remained firm despite Theodore Szejberg-Hatalgi's second and much more negative report on the home that appeared in mid-1947; JDC officials and Moshe Zeiri thus maintained a level of peace that would last through the home's closure in 1948 after all the children left.

¹⁰⁹ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.118, "Letter from Jacob L. Trobe to Mr. White, Subject: Selvino, Your RD/208." September 20, 1946.

¹¹⁰ JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-54, Folder IT.163, "AJDC Italy Education Department." November 29 1946.

From Selvino to Zion

For someone like Avraham Aviel, Selvino represented a new start, a chance to gain a new family. And as it turned out, he met his future wife in the home. Ayala Liberman-Aviel was born Inda Liberman in Rovno, Poland in 1928. Her parents were university-educated pharmacists who were able to provide a bourgeois lifestyle for their two daughters, Ayala and Adela (born 1926). The girls grew up going to a private Jewish school and studying piano and dance. They were also introduced to the local Zionist group from a young age, as their mother was the vice-president of WIZO.¹¹¹ Both sisters survived the liquidation of Rovno, November 7-9, 1941, and the massacre in the forest of Sosenki, but the family was soon ushered into the newly built ghetto.¹¹² After escaping the second liquidation, the sisters headed west under false names where they hid in plain sight as “workers from the East” in the Freidrich region of Germany. Surviving the war under the noses of their persecutors, Ayala and Adela returned home but found nothing for them there. They then decided to make *aliyah*, traveling with the Youth Aliyah first to Italy where they found themselves in Selvino.

Avraham and Ayala both took Moshe Zeiri’s passion for a new Jewish state, a home for all Jews, very seriously. And they believed that this home could start before they reached the promised land. They believed in, as Avraham later remembered, “the dream of a kibbutz as an ideal lifestyle, a communal life, where each helped the other. In this community, where all were equal, ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ did not exist; all were part of one

¹¹¹ Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 25-27.

¹¹² Meir, their father, arranged transport for all of them to Palestine, but their escape did not happen, as the night before their planned departure the Aktion started. Meir and his wife Feige hurried the girls out of the house through the window and instructed them to head straight out of the ghetto via the gap in the barbed wire they’d found earlier, promising they’d all be together again soon. Ayala and Adela never saw their parents again. Adela testified on their behalf in 1945 to the Polish inquest into German war crimes. Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 85-86.

large family...the idea of Zionism and the kibbutz ideal blended nicely. It would be a fitting 'happy end' to the years spent in camps, in hiding in the forests, and taking part in partisan activities."¹¹³ And Zionism was not something that was forced on the Selvino children, Avraham insisted, but rather it was "the instinctive result of their suffering and survival."¹¹⁴ As we saw in chapter one, the results of the DP questionnaire in 1945 indicated that Jewish refugees in Italy had varying relationships with Zionism.¹¹⁵ Like many of the other DPs in Italy, some children arrived in Selvino with a firm grounding in the tenants of Zionism; others declared themselves to be Zionist only after their experiences in the Holocaust. Zionism, they all agreed, however, was what would see them into a new future for themselves, a future with a new communal family.

This image of communalism was exactly what advocates of collectivist rehabilitation policies thought would be most helpful for youth who had experienced trauma. Ernst Papanek, a child psychologist and educator, was one such advocate. Born in Vienna in 1900, he fled with his family following the occupation of France in 1940 to the United States where he continued his work with refugee children. In 1946 he traveled back to Europe to study various child welfare institutions, especially those set up for refugees. In a paper specifically dedicated to the question of European Jewish refugee children, Papanek explains why he believed collective rehabilitation strategies, especially through communal group homes were the best strategy: "we must recognize that such group treatment is indicated where mass neurosis has been created by a trauma suffered

¹¹³ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 114.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹¹⁵ Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy, Central Committee, "We Jewish Refugees in Italy: Enquiry Results February 1946," page 20, Accession Number: 2015.381.5, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

by many in common with many.”¹¹⁶ In essence, group trauma required group solutions as “such community life must be the cornerstone of the psychic reconstruction of the individual.”¹¹⁷ The children’s group home gave the children a space to recover from the traumas of the Holocaust in community and it allowed them to regain a “feeling of security that influences most the psychology of the homeless refugee child.”¹¹⁸ This new home space offered a sense of belonging, even temporary as it was.

Selvino was a community committed communal living and also to Zionism, to the creation of a new Jewish homeland, which we see in the recounting of Jewish folklore and heroic deeds in days long past. In an article in *Nivenu*, Avraham Hasman wrote about the new understanding of family he had come to at the end of the war: “Well, I changed my family with another. My father: my strength of action, through which I will form and defend myself in spite of every obstacle. My mother: Eretz Israel. I will dedicate to her all of my energy and my talent. My brother and sister: the friends that I have found with me and that help me to reach my objective.”¹¹⁹ So powerful was his commitment to this new promised future that here the mother image is not a nurturing female figure, someone like Matilde Cassin, as Zeiri earlier reported; but rather it is the new land itself, which will soon be joined by the father image, Hasman’s strong will and determination to succeed, and bring forth children, new pioneers for this new home. In an early spring edition of *Nivenu*, Adela, Ayala’s sister, wrote a poem about the hope and promise of spring. The end lines became something of a rallying cry for the children:

¹¹⁶ Ernst Papanek, “Social Services for European Jewish Children,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 24 (1948): 416.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 416.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 415.

¹¹⁹ Avraham Hasman refused to discuss the fate of his family for at least ten years after the Holocaust when he gave his testimony to Yad Vashem. Avraham Hasman, “My First Letter to My Uncles in Tel Aviv,” *Nivenu*, January 15, 1946 [original in Hungarian], quoted in Sergio Luzzatto, *I bambini di Moshe*, 234.

From ghetto, from forest, from festering camps,
 We will make Aliyah, we will come, we will come,
 May the Lord bless all your arduous toil
 With a lush harvest reaped from a bounteous soil.
 Now alone, without home, we will come, we will come,
 To make a new life, to be with you as one,
 Cruelty and hate we will leave over there,
 Many outstretched hands await us here.
 The dust we will scatter,
 The dark become light,
 We will reach our own Land.
 Spring has arrived.¹²⁰

Selvino may have become a place for family formation for many of the Selvino children, but they knew it could only be a temporary home in its current space, as they would not be able to remain in Italy forever. And for some of the Selvino children, this missing piece was enough to push them to make different choices about their own futures.

Different Choices: Family over Zionism

Moshe Zeiri came to view the Selvino children as his own sons and daughters. His rule over Selvino was tough, but he remained deeply invested in the children, a fact we can see clearly in his letters to his wife, Yehudit. This love, however, was predicated on an assumed shared set of values, the most important of which was that Palestine was and needed to be the new home for all Jews. Desires for resettlement in places other than Palestine were viewed as a betrayal of the home values and of Zeiri himself. This betrayal must be cut out and removed as quickly as possible: Zeiri feared that “one rotten apple (wanting to go to America) may spoil the whole barrel.”¹²¹ And yet, some children in the

¹²⁰ Adela Liberman, *Nivenu* quoted in Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness* (Kotarim International Publi, 2008), 139.

¹²¹ David B. Zugman, “On a Wing and Prayer,” in *Children Who Survived the Final Solution* ed. Peter Tarjan, (iUniverse, 2004), 145.

end decided to not settle in Palestine. Some discovered they had family still alive elsewhere, whereas others simply tired of life in the collective.¹²² But the home had strict policies about this, as Dov Zugman reported that once he decided not to go to Palestine, “Moshe Zeiri expelled [me] from the home since he feared [my] presence would diminish the school’s strong Zionist ideology.”¹²³ When a child decided he or she no longer wanted to go to Palestine, “the shit hit the fan,” as Bernat Rosner remembered, and Zeiri lost no time in trying to change their minds; but once this was deemed impossible, the child would be expelled from Selvino.¹²⁴

Chana (or Ilana or Halinka, as she was also known) Liebeskind’s case is notable for her reversal in where she wanted to resettle. Born in Kalisz, Poland in 1930, Liebeskind survived life in the Warsaw Ghetto, Majdanek, Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Nuestadt-Glove. Fluent in Yiddish and Polish and with a working knowledge of German, the liberated Liebeskind was determined to go to Palestine. She arrived with the *Achva* group in Selvino in November 1945. As a young fifteen-year-old, Liebeskind arrived at Selvino knowing that during the war she had lost her parents but with perhaps little to no knowledge of the rest of her family. Her UNRRA form mentions no other close family, filling the blank space with large black letters: ORPHAN.¹²⁵ As many others have related, Selvino became a place that attempted to fill in these familial gaps, to give orphans and

¹²² See for example CM/1 Form for Halina Liebeskind, 3.2.1.2/80416300-80416303/ITS Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); CM/1 Form for Aszer Lieberman, 3.2.1.2/80416089/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

¹²³ “Group portrait of Jewish youth at the Selvino Youth Aliyah children’s home.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #49338. Courtesy of David B. Zugman. Copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

¹²⁴ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 160.

¹²⁵ CM/1 Form for Halina Liebeskind, 3.2.1.2/80416300-80416303/ITS Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

semi-orphans a renewed sense of community.¹²⁶ And based on the many smiling pictures of her at Selvino, she appears to have been happy there, wanting a new life to resettle in Palestine along with many of her other comrades.¹²⁷ But by 1947, she had left her community in Selvino for Cremona; by 1948 she was requesting resettlement in the United States. She even had an affidavit and a quota number, as she told the social worker filling in her IRO form.¹²⁸ Her uncle in Chicago, Edelsburg Fischel, was sponsoring her resettlement. We don't know more of the specifics on Liebeskind's case, as nearly all of our information comes from her two UNRRA/IRO forms. Her case takes a final interesting turn, however, when further research shows her listed on a passenger manifest list leaving Marseille for Israel in June 1949.¹²⁹ It seems that in the end she did decide to make *aliyah* rather than join her uncle in the United States. Had she found other family in Palestine or was she more motivated by Zionist beliefs?

For Sidney Zoltak, family weighed more heavily than other considerations. Sidney Zoltak was born in 1931 in Siemiatycze, Poland. The Soviets arrived in 1939 and held power over the town until the arrival of the Germans in June 1941. By August 1942, all Jews were forced into the ghetto, which was liquidated a few months later. Zoltak

¹²⁶ For example, see any of the numerous articles that have appeared concerning the reunion that occurred in September 2015. Stefania Consenti, "Amarcord della colonia di Selvino: tornano i bimbi salvati dalla Shoah," *Il Giorno: Milano*, (6 Sett. 2015), <http://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/shoah-colonia-selvino-bambini-1.1272993> Accessed July 19, 2020; "I 'bimbi' ebrei sono tornati a Selvino: Il commovente ricordo di Sciesopoli" *Bergamo Post*, (26 Sett. 2015), <http://www.bergamopost.it/vivabergamo/storie-volti-e-ricordi-da-sciesopoli-quando-selvino-accolse-bimbi-ebrei/>, Accessed July 19, 2020.

¹²⁷ Halinka Liebeskind, a teenage survivor from Poland, plays a guitar in the Selvino children's home. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #66418, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹²⁸ For more on U.S. policies surrounding immigration in the immediate postwar period see Arie J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003); Beth B. Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (Rutgers University Press, 2006).

¹²⁹ T/D File for Halina Liebeskind, 6.3.3.2/ 100635409/ITS Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

survived with his family by going into hiding and changing locations every few months until their liberation in July 1944. They returned to Poland but within a year they decided to leave and made their way to Italy. Zoltak, then fourteen, started living in the Cremona DP camp with his mother and father but upon hearing about the children's home in Selvino he begged his parents to allow him to live there.

It took me a few days to find the courage to approach my parents. I pleaded, cried and emphasized the educational component. My parents were realists. They agreed that a children's home would be a better environment for me than a DP camp. However, after seeing their only child come out alive from hell, separation was unthinkable. [Still, m]y mother, who respected the value of education above all else and who knew that my formal schooling for the past four years had been practically nil, finally relented.¹³⁰

Zoltak recognized the implications here of potential permanent separation from his parents. He stayed in Selvino for nine months but was always torn between the idea of making *aliyah* alone and having to leave his mother. The death of his father in December 1945 pushed him closer to the idea of returning to live with his mother.

While he lived in Selvino, Zoltak was initially permitted to visit his parents. After his father's death, he wanted to visit his mother who was lonely, and he went several times to Cremona with permission. After a few trips, however, Zeiri wouldn't give him permission to visit her "because he was thinking what's best for the whole house."¹³¹ Nobody was allowed to leave, so he was trying to make it fair for everyone. Zoltak quickly realized "this was not going to work. [I realized] that I wanted to go see my mother, and that I too was lonely."¹³² He decided to return to Cremona in mid-1946.

¹³⁰ Sidney (Yehoshua) Zoltak, "La Casa di Sciesopoli: 'The House,'" *The Hidden Child: As If It Were Yesterday*, (Hidden Child Foundation/Anti-Defamation League, 2015), 30.

¹³¹ Sidney Zoltak, Interview 54453, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 2001. Accessed March 10, 2020.

¹³² Ibid.

Together they immigrated to Canada in 1948. Zeiri had attempted to remake the home into a family for the children; for some, like Avraham Aviel, this worked, but others felt the loss of blood family too strongly. Zoltak remembered these family bonds created in Selvino—“my friends [in Selvino] were not really my friends; they were my brothers and sisters, and we were like one big family”¹³³—but this was not enough when he had a family outside the camp. Perhaps at one time a believer in his own future in Palestine, Zoltak in the end yearned for life with family. It would appear that in this case, blood family trumped both political ideals and collective community.

Tired of Collective Living

And it was not just the leaders who disagreed about what would help the children heal from their past trauma: the children themselves were divided over what kind of home they wanted then and future they envisioned for themselves. Jack Weiss was one who vehemently protested against the idea of collective living. Jack Weiss was born Erno Weisz in Bereghovo, Czechoslovakia, in 1930.¹³⁴ In his first concentration camp, the guards deemed “Erno” not a real first name and thus recorded him as “Ernst.” After liberation he was given the name “Yakov” in his first kibbutz, which he anglicized to “Jack” after settling in Canada. A survivor of Buchenwald, Weiss first returned to his hometown but quickly determined there was nothing left there for him and decided to make *aliyah*. From the beginning, however, one can see that group living was a struggle for him; he traveled to Italy with the Youth Aliyah kibbutz *Shomer Hatz'air*, which he

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Bereghovo was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until 1914 and then was seceded to Czechoslovakia but remained largely Hungarian in sentiment; it returned to Hungary in 1939.

described as “practis[ing] a form of Marxism not even seen in the Soviet Union.”¹³⁵ He struggled his way through several camps, including Selvino and another children’s home in Avigliana, but never felt like he fit in either with the other children or with the rules that governed the camps. He remembered:

I had no trouble learning to speak *Ivrit* [Hebrew]; otherwise, I didn’t fit in too well. I felt like a fish out of water in the midst of all these strangers. I had no one to talk to and no time to myself. We got up at six in the morning and kept going from one communal activity to another until it was time to go back to bed. Everything was done in a group. You couldn’t wipe your behind without a discussion and a vote. What type of toilet paper should I use? how many sheets? I couldn’t get used to communal living.¹³⁶

Communal living perhaps also reminded Weiss of his time spent in Buchenwald where he had experienced the worst of collectivization.¹³⁷ After the trauma of having his freedom striped away, Weiss was deeply concerned about being able to make his own individual choices again; his postwar years were spent trying to regain control over his own life, as he stated, “I was only fifteen years old but, after what I’d gone through, I was no longer prepared to be treated like a child, so I ignored them and did whatever I wanted.”¹³⁸ Another former Buchenwald child survivor, Mendel Herskovitz, speaking in an interview with Dr. David Boder in 1946 also bristled at the idea of continuing communal living.¹³⁹ Herskovitz knew he would need some source of income and a form

¹³⁵ Jack Weiss, *Memories, Dreams, Nightmares: Memoirs of a Holocaust Survivor* (University of Calgary Press, 2005), 189.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹³⁷ Tara Zahra explains that most of the Buchenwald Boys found collective life “particularly challenging.” Tara Zahra, “‘The Psychological Marshall Plan’: Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II,” *Central European History* 44, no. 01 (March 2011): 105-106.

¹³⁸ Jack Weiss, *Memories, Dreams, Nightmares*, 176.

¹³⁹ David Boder was a Jewish Latvian-born, American-resident psychologist. He traveled to Europe in the summer of 1946 to interview survivors about their wartime experiences. He interviewed 130 individuals in France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. For more on his life and work see Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of training before he could move forward with his life and thus was training as a furrier in Paris:

Mendel Herskovitz.: So the only way out for me is...Palestine. I don't know how I stand with it. In the meantime I expect to remain in France.

David Boder: Yes? One doesn't make out much with furs in Palestine.

Mendel Herskovitz: If I go to Palestine, naturally, I won't stay with this trade.

David Boder: Hm.

Mendel Herskovitz: There are other trades. There are "Kibbutzim" [communal farms], but because of this one thing, I don't want to join a Kibbutz, because I picture it to myself...it is the same as in a lager [concentration camp].

David Boder: What?

Mendel Herskovitz: A kibbutz.

David Boder: Yes. The same as what? As in a...

Mendel Herskovitz: Like in camp, a living together [communal life]. And I don't like such a "living together."

David Boder: Hm. You do not like "living together."

Mendel Herskovitz: No. I have already had enough.

David Boder: Hm.

Mendel Herskovitz: I remember at home we had a family life, and this...to this...for that I am longing again.¹⁴⁰

David Boder, the psychologist who had arrived in Europe to interview Holocaust survivors did not always understand the world the DPs were living in. His attempted humor fell flat here as Mendel bristled at Boder's criticism of his plan. For Boder being a furrier made no sense if one was destined to go to Palestine, but perhaps being a furrier was Mendel's way of escaping the call to Palestine—what call was there for furriers there? Whereas later in their conversation Mendel became excited, smug even, over learning the English word "clothing," here he appeared despondent. Mendel longed for something very different: his lost family. He was fighting for a return to what he had before the Nazis. And it is important to note that Mendel differentiated between "family"

¹⁴⁰ Mendel Herskovitz, "Voices of the Holocaust." David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. July 31, 1946, https://iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231/collection_resources/17621, Accessed July 19, 2020.

and “community.” The former he desperately wanted, whereas the latter reminded him of being in the camps, and thus, he rejected the *kibbutz* with its entailed communal living.

The Buchenwald Boys, as the group of child survivors of Buchenwald including Weiss and Mendel became known as, represent a very small number of Holocaust survivors. The majority of Jewish children from Eastern and Central Europe did not live to see the end of the Nazi regime, and many whom survived because they were hidden in gentile homes and churches. As young camp survivors, these boys saw death and experienced torture firsthand, and thus knew just how precarious life could be. Often the only survivors in their family, they felt a strong need to remember the past while looking to the future. They may have been traumatized, but they needed to rebuild.

Jack Weiss, however, left this group of boys when he decided to return home to Hungary rather than travel with aid groups to the West. In his later remembrances he talks about this decision, giving another reason for his discomfort, feeling pressured toward a decision without a foundation of established trust.

Politically active leaders emerged from the general population and tried to influence our decisions. The Communists said the Soviet Union was the land of milk and honey; the Zionists said Palestine was the only land that would welcome a Jew. They were both wrong. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian dictatorship, and Palestine would soon be off-limits to the Jews, thanks to a British embargo. Most of the *Heflings* [“prisoners”] who opted for Palestine spent another few years in displaced persons camps and never set foot on Holy Land soil. The American Red Cross gave us children the option of going to the United States, but not many chose to go. What did we know? American was a foreign country where we would be like fish out of water. Someone from my area of Hungary organized a group of children who wanted to go home. I was one of them.¹⁴¹

Although he might have been off a bit in his knowledge of who eventually made it to Palestine, as arguably the largest percentage of Jews in the displaced persons camps did

¹⁴¹ Jack Weiss, *Memories, Dreams, Nightmares*, 168.

make *aliyah*, his feeling of coercion was very real. And the pressure he felt, rather than reassuring him that someone was invested in his future, made him distrustful of the authority figures in his life. He spoke of a friend who had traveled with him from his hometown: “He was very gregarious. He liked everyone and everyone liked him. Kibbutz life suited him perfectly. It didn’t suit me at all. I didn’t trust anyone.”¹⁴² His distrust further isolated him until he finally decided Palestine was not the place for him. Instead he opted to go to Canada, remembering “I didn’t know a thing about Canada. But anyplace was better than living in another camp. I was sick of depending on others and being treated like a child. I was seventeen years old and ready to take responsibility for my life...I wanted to make a fresh start. Not in two years, or even two months, but immediately.”¹⁴³

For some children it was the sudden appearance or exerted influence of family that made them decide against *aliyah*, whereas for others it was a disgust with communal life; but for Bernat Rosner, it was the unexpected arrival of a stranger and the hope that he promised that ultimately swung Rosner’s decision against Palestine. Bernat Rosner, called “Bernie” by his friends, was born in Tab, Hungary in 1932. His family were moderately well-off, middle-class, ultra-orthodox Jews. By his early school years Rosner could speak, read, and write in Hungarian, Hebrew, and German. His mother was the most well-educated person in the family with her teaching certificate, and she remained his source of strength throughout the war. But by the end of the war, he was the only remaining member of his family left, having survived Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen.

¹⁴² Ibid., 206.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 237.

In the days following his liberation, Rosner first encountered the Palestinian Jewish Brigade. As his friend and biographer described:

After all his suffering for being Jewish, Bernie now came to know a proud group of young Jews not only in control of their destiny but also ready to guide others to a life of self-affirmation and dignity. But more important than pride for Bernie and his fellow refugees was the simple fact of being treated as human beings to be nurtured. He stood in awe before these uniformed Jews who for him were heroes, not victims.¹⁴⁴

And Rosner wanted desperately to become a part of this group of self-sufficient, heroic Jews. He quickly joined their convoy and made his way across Austria and into Italy.

Here his life was to take another surprising turn. Housed in a camp in Modena, Rosner appointed himself doorman of the American G.I. wing of the camp hoping to earn some spending money. One day he offered to carry in the luggage of a young soldier who turned out to be Charles Merrill, Jr., son of the famed and wealthy banker back in the United States, Charles Merrill. The two became quick friends: “what impressed [Merrill, Jr.] about the teenage Bernat was his energy, upbeat personality, and courtesy,” Rosner’s biographer recorded. “He did not see in him so much the lost waif as I had assumed. Rather, Bernat Rosner appeared to the American GI as a youngster ready to take on the world, if only it gave him a chance.”¹⁴⁵ But Merrill was soon shipped out of Modena, and Rosner was moved to the children’s home in Piazzatorre and then on to Selvino.

Rosner seemed a natural fit at Selvino. “The primary purpose of the institution at Selvino was to mold young minds to the Zionist cause, to inculcate in the survivors the image of a heroic ‘New Jew’ who was ready to take the collective future of the Jewish survivors and make it part of what was to become the nation of Israel.”¹⁴⁶ Rosner was

¹⁴⁴ Bernat Rosner and Frederic C. Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 150-151.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

psychologically ready to make *aliyah* as a young survivor with no remaining family in his hometown, ready to make a difference with his future in a new land, and practically ready as he already had a solid knowledge of Hebrew. And yet, the harder these Zionist leaders pushed Rosner to become a leader and to make *aliyah*, the more he began to retreat from the idea. Then on November 4, 1945, Charles Merrill, Jr. wrote him with an offer that Rosner could come and live with the Merrill family in the United States if he wanted. Suddenly he was faced with a dilemma:

And in spite of all the individual attention Bernie received at Selvino, he did not fail to notice that it was a collective force that attempted to mold the young concentration camp survivors. He was torn by an inner conflict between his sense of solidarity with and pride in belonging to a group of Jews who were no longer victims and his intense desire for personal freedom, his need to escape restraints, to not be fenced in physically or mentally. In his childhood, he had dreamed of a beautiful life to be lived if only he could follow the sun. Now he discovered that certain things sat deeper in him than his pride and newfound solidarity with the Palestinian cause his Zionist mentor had outlined for him. He wanted to have a family again.¹⁴⁷

This desire to create a new family, one that was not bound up in political ideologies, one that would require much less fighting, in the end won. He decided to accept the Merrills' offer. Over the course of the next year, Zeiri and other leaders attempted to persuade him to change his mind, but in January 1948, he boarded a plane for New York. He recalled the importance of this moment as he wrote:

He had papers in hand, some money in his pocket, and his sponsor, Charlie, in the New World. This time no Nazi thugs, no government officials or any of the myriad authorities, uniformed or civilian, good or evil, that had crossed his path over the years appeared to question his moves or to hold power over him. No one had the authority to prevent Bernat Rosner from boarding the airplane that would take him west.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 159-160.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 161-163.

Self-agency over his own future prevailed as he reveled in the freedom from the authorities who had dictated so much of his young life to that point.

The question of Zionism was inescapable in the postwar period. Avraham Aviel had argued that young survivors “did not need to be persuaded that it was in their best interests to return to the land of their forefathers [that is, Palestine].”¹⁴⁹ He, like many others, believed this was the only way they would survive. Yet, these stories demonstrate that this idea was neither self-evident to all nor acceptable to everyone. In Rosner’s case there was actually a great deal of persuasion attempted by Zeiri and other leaders. Yet, Rosner, like Sidney Zoltak and many others, decided rehabilitation and recovery would be better found in a different space, a space formed by family instead of community.

Conclusion

“Reason for not wishing to return [to country of origin]: ‘I am the only survivor of the family.’”¹⁵⁰ Aszer Lieberman’s form is bleak. Through the creases, smudges, and tear stains, we discover that he was a fifteen-year-old Czechoslovakian Jew who had been sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau and later Buchenwald.¹⁵¹ Surviving the concentration camps, Lieberman found himself in Italy in 1945 dictating his life story to a worker from UNRRA in hopes of receiving care and maintenance and resettlement help. During his three years in Italy, he changed his mind about where exactly he wanted to resettle, first thinking Palestine and later applying to go to Canada before ultimately deciding to make *aliyah*. Throughout, however, he was definite that he would not return to Czechoslovakia.

¹⁴⁹ Avraham Aviel, *Freedom and Loneliness*, 130.

¹⁵⁰ CM/1 Form for Aszer Lieberman, 3.2.1.2/80416089/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

¹⁵¹ Lieberman was born in Velka Sevlus, which was part of Czechoslovakia until Hungary invaded in 1939 and changed the name to Nagyszollos or Nireghaz. The town today is Vynohradiv, Ukraine

His stark claim of aloneness would certainly have resonated with the other Jewish orphaned displaced children in Italy in the late 1940s. This recognition, as brief as it is, of being the only one left and the resolution to not return can be found in countless other IRO forms, including those of youths. And even for those who did have or find family members, it was not always enough. Some, like Sidney Zoltak, disrupted their plans to move to be closer to family, whereas others, like Bernard from Krakow, had to leave their families behind to find a new future for themselves.

“The lost identity of individual children is *the* Social Problem of the day on the continent of Europe,” claimed Vinita A. Lewis, an officer with the IRO in Germany.¹⁵² A lost identity was surely the result of the catastrophe for some, but there is much less work done on reexamining those “lost children” once they regained a self-identity. The history of the aftermath of the Holocaust often presents us with children in crisis, which they undoubtedly were. But we can now follow it with a discussion of how children made decisions to contribute to creating some semblance of normality that would have an impact on their future. Many groups in the postwar period from parents, to humanitarian aid workers, to youth leaders from Palestine felt that they had a stake in what the children would do in the future, and this led to unique, at least relative to that of other DPs, pressures for the children to navigate; they had to decide between different kinds of family or communal life alongside planning for their entire futures. At the same time, this pressure came with certain kinds of opportunity. Because groups wanted to claim or train them as their version of a bright tomorrow, this provided the children with a source of

¹⁵² Memo to Mr. A. C. Dunn, Policy on Unaccompanied Children, May 27, 1949, 43/AJ/926, *Archives Nationales* Paris. Quoted in Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 1.

external pressure but also with a mechanism for expressing agency. Choices gave them some kind of power and turned these “lost children” into determined agents.

CHAPTER SIX

“I Thought a New Life was Starting”: Memories of the DP Camps in Italy

*“It must have been the second or third day after our arrival in Santa Maria [di Bagni Camp] that armed with a towel and God only knows what I used as a bathing suit that I made my way to the beach. As I made my way down the hill and the full extent of the ocean came into view, the blue waters mirroring the golden rays of the sun called forth indescribable emotions in me. It was a glorious feeling to be young and feel that from now on a better and safe life was surely beginning for me and my parents.”*¹

—Gertrude Goetz, DP

Under history, memory and forgetting.

Under memory and forgetting, life.

But writing a life is another story.

*Incompletion.*²

—Paul Ricoeur

I met Sidney Zoltak in 2018, in a small town in northern Italy at a presentation for a book that had just come out about experiences, including his own, in Italian Displaced Persons (DP) camps.³ I watched as this 86-year-old Polish-born, now-Canadian resident spent the evening conversing with archivists, librarians, scholars, and locals, and presenting his own personal story, all in beautiful Italian. They were old friends, the people of the town of Cremona and Zoltak. He told me that the day before he had attended a soccer match of the local team, the *Cremonese*—“his team” he said beaming with pleasure—where he was presented with a personalized jersey with his name on the back. He recalled “In Cremona, the people welcomed us with warmth. In the camp, I was reborn. I restarted my studies, played sports, and followed the *Cremonese*”—which,

¹ Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness: Growing up in War Torn Europe* (Xlibris Corporation, 2001), 97-98.

² Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 506.

³ The title is from an interview with Gertrude Goetz, Interview 9758, Segment 18, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed March 10, 2020.

incidentally, he continues to do ordering the Italian newspaper *La Gazzetta della Sport* to his home in Montreal.⁴ He only lived in Italy for about four years, but his time there made such a deep impression on him that he continues his connections to this day. This period was one of rebirth for Zoltak, and this experience helped create a new future for him.

In this chapter, I explore how the identity-shaping memories of former Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in Italy changed over time. I focus primarily on the oral testimonies from the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, alongside written memoirs. Although most of the narratives in these testimonies center on wartime experiences, many also include postwar experiences in the DP camps. Testimonies written or transmitted orally have become an even more important source of information as fewer and fewer survivors remain with us. These also give us insight into what is important to survivors today. As Tony Kushner writes: “how a person puts together their life experiences in a coherent way tells us as much about their life now as about their past, for all are bound together in creating the individual’s identity.”⁵ Access to documents from the immediate postwar period as well as these later sources allows us to investigate further this process of putting together one’s life experiences. Within this comparison we can see how stories have shifted and changed over time, potentially to fit a more cohesive narrative. All of this must be placed within the current context(s) of the autobiographical narrative formation as we explore

⁴ “Ritorno allo Zini per il profugo ebreo polacco Sidney Zoltak” *Cremona Oggi: Il Quotidiano online di Cremona*. February 24, 2018. <https://www.cremonaoggi.it/2018/02/24/settantun-anni-profugo-sydney-zoltak-torna-allo-zini/>

⁵ Tony Kushner, “Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation.” *Poetics Today* 27:2 (Summer 2006): 282.

how these past memories manifest themselves in the present. Paying particularly close attention to moments of change across time, this chapter draws connections between these moments and overall strategies of remembering.

This chapter tracks the remembrance of the camps over time, both as spaces in personal memory and in collective narratives present today. It will look first at the issue of personal memory contrasting immediate postwar narratives with more recent testimonies gathered in the last thirty years. Within these more recent sources, the DP camps are often discussed as spaces of contentment where refugees felt well-treated. These statements appear at odds with documents written by refugees while living in the camps, which often describe spaces of scarcity and dissatisfaction. Secondly, this chapter will discuss the myth of the “*italiani brava gente*,” or the myth of the “good Italian.” It will examine the ways in which survivors’ memories of their time in Italy contribute to the continuation and perpetuation of the myth and suggest reasons why this might be. Here it also looks at Libyan Jewish responses to Italy and Italians. In these we see a picture complicated by years of colonialism and internment; yet, by and large, we find the same feelings among Libyan Jews as we do among other foreign Jews who lived in Italy in the immediate postwar period. Through its examination of these themes, this chapter explores moments of contrast between past and present narratives questioning the roles of collective memory and trauma in describing one’s own experiences and conveying these to a broader audience.

Memories of Contentment

“Whatever they needed they came to complain to Joint!” recalled a slightly laughing Rahlyn Woolf Mann.⁶ A former social worker for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC, also known as the “Joint”) in the southern camps of Puglia, namely Santa Maria di Bagni, Santa Maria di Leuca, Tricase, and Santa Cesarea, Mann was very familiar with the plight of the Jewish DPs in Italy. The twenty-four-year-old from South Africa had been tasked with sorting out the welfare responsibilities in the camps, and her reports document clearly the many problems and complaints the Jewish residents had there. As we discussed in chapter four, there were many complaints about the quality and lack of food and other material goods during the time of the DP camps, and many of these complaints were in fact addressed to the JDC. In her 1996 video interview, however, Mann states that she remembers receiving some complaints about food and other issues but that they were neither numerous nor very extreme. Her reports from 1946–1947, however, offer a more mixed report: far more complaints than she remembers from some camps and very few from others.⁷

These kinds of changes between early documentation and later memory are common. In the 1990s and 2000s, there was a surge of interviews and memoirs from

⁶ Rahlyn Mann, Interview 13594, Segment 55, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁷ See for example: JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Letter from A.J.D.C., Lecce to Director, A.J.D.C., Rome, Subject: Report for the Month of January 1947,” February 5, 1947; JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Letter from A.J.D.C. Lesoe to Director, A.J.D.C., Rome, Subject: Report for the Month of August 1947,” August 3, 1947; JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.202, “Letter from A.J.D.C., Camps Dept., Bari to Director, A.J.D.C., Rome, Subject: Report for the Month of March 1947,” April 14, 1947; JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.116, “Letter from Rahlyn Woolf,” June 14, 1947.

former refugees. These allow us to compare reports from DPs in the immediate postwar period with their memories several decades later. This chapter argues that there is a general trend moving from representing the camps as places of continued trial (during the postwar period) to places of rebirth (in later memories). These trends are not, of course, universal. But there is a marked transition in DP testimonies between concurrent fear that the camps would represent continuity with their immediate, atrocity-filled past and retrospective framing of those same experiences as the beginning of a new, self-created future.

This section examines three ways survivors' memories have changed over time and offers some possible explanations as to why they may have changed in these ways. It looks first at the connected issues of trauma and forgetting; here it argues that for some survivors the trauma of the Holocaust resulted in a fragmentation of memories that blocked out some memories or caused a division between what they knew and how they felt. The section then turns to a second method of change: reframing one's memory. Using theories of collective memory, this section provides evidence for how memory transforms, in part in response to changing plot structures and social expectations. Finally, the section investigates the spaces where memories are changed because of added information. Although smaller in number because we have fewer instances of the same person testifying at length about the DP camps multiple times, these cases demonstrate explicitly the connections between personal and collective memories.

Fragmentation of Memory: Trauma and Forgetting

“[E]verything that happened to this other ‘self,’ the one from Auschwitz, doesn’t touch me now, *me*, doesn’t concern me, so distinct are deep memory [*mémoire profonde*] and common memory [*mémoire ordinaire*].”⁸ In his *Holocaust Testimonies*, Lawrence Langer takes these words from Charlotte Delbo and applauds her distinction between “common memory” and “deep memory” as a “verbal breakthrough” that will help make sense of testimonies.⁹ Deep memory and common memory are distinct, Langer argues, but dependent upon one another. Deep memory is focused on the self as it was in the moment of trauma, whereas common memory attempts to fill in the gaps of pre- and post-trauma events from the perspective of the present day. The interplay between the two creates ruptures in the flow of one’s narrative, as the individual struggles to represent both selves at war within herself. Trauma appears in these interviews in a variety of ways, but most commonly through the issue of fragmented narratives.

When examining different Holocaust testimonies given by the same person, one must be aware of different forms of forgetting and remembering in order to make sense of the changes therein. In his monumental work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur describes the act of forgetting as “the disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory and the epistemology of history...[that] is experienced as an attack on the reliability of memory. An attack, a weakness, a lacuna. In this regard memory defines itself, at least in the first instance, as a struggle against

⁸ Charlotte Delbo, *La mémoire et les jours*. (Paris: Berg International, 1985), 13. As seen in Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

forgetting.”¹⁰ This struggle often results in fragmented remembrances. Sometimes these fragments are created by the interviewee forgetting a particularly traumatic moment within a memory. For instance, in his 1999 interview, Isak “Mike” Danon expressed a block when talking about his family reunification. Danon was born in 1929 in Split, Yugoslavia (now, Croatia) and after the Germans entered his town, he joined the partisans with his father, leaving his two younger sisters and mother behind. They were eventually all reunited in Lecce, Italy in 1944. The interviewer asked him to pause and describe the moment he saw his mother. He replied

You know, that’s the problem, that—I’d like to describe it, but I just don’t have it in my memory unit. It’s not there. I’m trying to retrieve it, it’s not. All I remember is the second day, I took my sisters on the town. And I remember—well, I had some money and I took them to an ice cream place. In Italy, like in Yugoslavia and throughout Europe, outdoor cafes were very popular. So there was this one outdoor cafe where we used to go hang out, and my father and me and all our friends would meet there. It was called *Cincin*, I remember that. Yeah, anyway, I took them there and I ordered special ice cream. It’s called, in Italian, it’s called *cassati*. It’s a frozen round thing and you cut pieces and then you put whipped cream on top. Anyway, during the war, this was a big thing. And I remember, I ordered for them and me and I guess their stomach was not used to it, so both of my sisters got sick from that... They both got sick, I remember that part.¹¹

This reunion has been blocked from his memory; he cannot retrieve it from his “memory unit” he says. Danon gave his testimony in a recorded format at least nine times between 1989 and 2012. Interestingly, this is the only time he mentions this block. In his other interviews, he describes the way the family ultimately leaves Italy: they were accepted as part of Franklin Roosevelt’s plan to create a safe haven in Oswego, New York for 982

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 412-413.

¹¹ Interview with Isak M. Danon, February 26, 1999, RG-50.549.02*0038, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Post-Holocaust oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

refugees from Europe.¹² He explains that he and his father were accepted into the group headed for the Fort Ontario shelter and were supposed to sail only days before they learned the rest of the family was in Italy. He then quickly moves from their reunion—“we were reunited,” he simply says—to the more immediately pressing matter of ensuring the family could travel together to the United States. The moment of reunion appears locked in his deep memory, as Langer would say, and instead the focus is on their acceptance on the boat for the trip to the United States. The plot lines of his story have shifted from the personal to the political, to the larger narrative.

Danon’s later relationship with his parents appears to have been complicated, which also likely impacted his testimony. He described his mother as “non-communicative when it [came] to personal stuff” and that there “was not too much affection displayed, either between [my parents], or among us kids, cause we didn’t know how to express it. We learned it later. I think I learned it from my younger sister, the affection.”¹³ The emotional nature of reunion was likely not something that would have been spoken about by his mother, and he implies that he also received this learned emotional distancing. Carroll McC. Lewin describes this kind of emotional forgetting as the “negotiated self” where “memory, rather than integrating past and present, tends to

¹² For a firsthand account of Fort Ontario see Ruth Gruber, *Haven: The Dramatic Story of 1000 World War II Refugees and How They Came to America* (New York: Random House, 2000). Gruber was the Secretary of the Interior’s special assistant who accompanied the refugees to America. See also Sharon R Lowenstein, *Token Refuge: The Story of the Jewish Refugee Shelter at Oswego, 1944-1946* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). For more on the history of the efforts of the U.S. in assisting refugees, particularly after January 1944 and the creation of the War Refugee Board, see Rebecca Erbelding, *Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America’s Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2018).

¹³ Interview with Isak M. Danon, February 26, 1999, RG-50.549.02*0038, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Post-Holocaust oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

assault and divide the self.”¹⁴ Instead, Danon is able to remember, with a great degree of specificity, the time he spent with his sisters the following day taking them to get ice cream. His sister becomes a hero in his memories as the one who convinced his mother to go into hiding and who taught him affection; his negotiating with the past allows him to integrate that memory of joy with his life narrative but not the initial emotional reunion.

Sometimes the memories did not come back, particularly difficult or traumatic ones. For others, however, the fragmentation created a divide between what they *knew* to be the case and what they *felt* to be the situation. Cathy Caruth, in her study on trauma, argued that the traumatized “carry an impossible history within them,” one that repeats in their memories and feels real, but resists interpretation.¹⁵ In his discussion on his time in the DP camps for his Shoah Foundation testimony, Baruch Goldstein reflects on how deeply concerning the *idea* of hunger was for the refugees. “I was still worried about food. ‘Is there enough food available there?’ I was still hungry psychologically, although they provided us with enough food in these camps that I had been experiencing until now. But my first question was ‘how do people get enough food there?’”¹⁶ Born in Mława, then part of the Kingdom of Poland under Russian partition, Goldstein lived through four ghettos, six concentration camps, and a forced death march before arriving in the Italian DP camps in his mid-twenties. During this time, he says, food became an obsession. He remembers having enough food in Italy, certainly more food than he had had in the concentration camps but was still concerned about it being there the next day.

¹⁴ Carroll McC Lewin, “Negotiated Selves in the Holocaust,” *Ethos* 21, no. 3 (1993): 295–318.298. See also R. N. Kraft, “Archival Memory: Representations of the Holocaust in Oral Testimony,” *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 326–8.

¹⁵ Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁶ Baruch Goldstein, Interview 47918, Segments 204–205, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1998. Accessed March 10, 2020.

And this concern impacts the ways he talks about food and hunger in the present.

He tells the interviewer about some of the main things he experienced during the war:

I learned a pain of hunger. Whenever I have a chance to tell young people particularly is that hunger is a common experience we're all hungry once in a while but the fact that we know there's a refrigerator full of food or if you have a dollar in your pocket you can buy a cup of coffee — maybe now you have to have two dollars, or with a donut — but still, it's available. So, the hunger is maybe painful, hunger is painful. But if you know that even after you that slice of bread, you're still hungry, and the hunger continues on and on for days and months and years, then you become obsessed with food to an incredible point. You know what my dream was? My dream was that if I survive, I will buy for my first thing, a whole loaf of bread, just to hold in my hand a whole loaf, because for so long I only got a slice. And I will start eating from the beginning and finish it up to the end. That will be my first satisfaction.¹⁷

The idea of hunger becomes a common touchstone he can use to reach his audience, particularly of young people he says. Hunger is something they have all experienced, to some extent, but the knowledge that there is more food available makes that hunger bearable. Here his words exemplify what Cathy Caruth described in her study on trauma that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.”¹⁸ The psychological trauma of knowing but not feeling like there was going to be enough food in the DP camps remains a constant reminder for Goldstein about this period of worry. His continued focus on hunger makes the memory continue to feel real and perhaps like it might be reexperienced. This repetition was a common response for Holocaust survivors, Caruth argues, because “trauma is not experienced as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment. The trauma is a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Baruch Goldstein, Interview 47918, Segment 216, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1998. Accessed March 10, 2020.

¹⁸ Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

As Goldstein related, the DP camps were spaces of recovery where “physical recovery was the easy one” but mental and psychological recovery often took far longer.

Reframing the Narrative

For many former DPs, the changes we find in their later stories are often the result of reframing their memories. In these cases, Yael Zerubavel’s understanding of turning points as liminal spaces is instructive. As spaces that followed liberation from wartime experiences but proceeded a permanent resettlement, the DP period can be understood as a liminal space and a turning point in the lives of many DPs; these turning points, because they are transitional by nature, can be closely associated in the survivor’s memories with either the preceding or the following time periods. Yael Zerubavel explains that “their highly symbolic function of representing historical transitions grants the turning points more ambiguity than events that the master commemorative narrative clearly locates within a particular period...the liminal position of the turning point allows for different interpretations, obscuring the tensions between them, and thereby protecting the sacredness of these events.”²⁰ Viewing the camps as turning points in one’s life narrative allows us to understand how and why survivors might remember and reframe them the ways that they do.

In their interviews and memoirs, many specifically compare their wartime experiences in concentration camps, fighting, or hiding with their postwar DP camp experiences, often drawing lines of stark contrast between them. Many DPs remember there being enough food in the DP camps, by stating there was definitely more food than

²⁰ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9-10.

they had had during the war. William Stern, a Viennese survivor of several concentration camps in Yugoslavia, described his entrance to the Bari transit camp: “We had our first meal with spam and corned beef and all these *wonderful* things which we’d never heard of before and we really wanted to enjoy.”²¹ Food was plentiful, something to be enjoyed again. Yet, as discussed in chapter four, we find many references in the 1940s calling the spaces “a camp just as in Hitler’s times” where “the food is bad and the bread scarce...Now we are again where we were at the concentration camp, one is hungry and can buy nothing since one earns nothing.”²² What can explain this change over time?

This change may be the result of adhering to the growing consensus of a narrative about DP life. Although DP camps remain largely on the periphery of Holocaust testimony, we can see the influence of collective narrative in viewing this period as a time of rebirth and new life, especially for youth; it was a liminal space of time after destruction but at the beginning of something new. The notions of “collective memory” and “collective narrative” are particularly useful when thinking about changes from reframing. Maurice Halbwachs, in his groundbreaking essay, argues that all social groups contain memories that they carry collectively.²³ These collective memories are those that are developed within the group structure to differentiate the group from others; collective memory relies on individual memories but remains broader in both its formation through multiple social entities and its generational continuity. Yet collective memory also changes over time, which can align with but also cause changes in personal memory.

²¹ William Stern, Interview 16364, Segments 120-135, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

²² JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder IT.109, “Transl. Letter from Barletta, Italy, Dated October 16, 1947,” November 18, 1947.

²³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. 50-87.

Yael Zerubavel argues that collective memory is “an organic part of social life that is continuously transformed in response to society’s changing needs.”²⁴ In particular, during the making of new group identity—like the identity of “the survivor” or “the DP”—the group draws on or reacts to an earlier collective memory or memories but transforms this memory to fit a different paradigm and identity.²⁵

Following the work of Hayden White and Eviatar Zerubavel, we can utilize the concept of *emplotment* to help make sense of these changes.²⁶ *Emplotment* allows us to make connections between past events in a way that forms a narrative for the present. When thinking about past memories, one often formulates them into generic plotlines that offer an easy way to remember the events in question, even though they did not occur exactly in this more simplistic way. Through the use of these plotlines “we habitually reduce highly complex event sequences to inevitably simplistic, one-dimensional visions of the past.”²⁷ The changes we see from early to later narratives often use comparison and difference as markers for their wartime and postwar experiences.

In this way, an explanation for reframing may also be the lack of continuing need. In the 1940s, many DPs felt unsettled and forgotten, and thus often wrote to family, friends, or organizations hoping to gain help and recognition for their continuing plight and homelessness. In the moment, feelings of resentment grew within the DP population, as we see from this letter written from the Bari camp

Do not forget, three years have passed after the termination of the war. People hoped to be liberated from the camps, hoped to join their family, hope[d] to start

²⁴ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hayden V. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 83; Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

²⁷ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 13.

again a normal life. It looks as if nothing much has been changed, except that today we are free and not threatened with death... We have spent so many years in camps until this very day that it is high time, we should get our share of a normal life.²⁸

Liberation had only brought about freedom not a return to normalcy. Life in any camp then was seen by many as unbearable.

In their later memories, however, many former DPs draw clear distinctions between the different kinds of camps and situations. For instance, the camp Santa Maria di Bagni was “very, very good in comparison [to life on the run in Yugoslavia]...marvelous in comparison,” according to Rose Finci.²⁹ With similar enthusiasm, William Stern proclaimed that it did not matter what kind of space the DP camp was, as long as it was not a concentration camp. He remembered his first camp housing “had open rooms, cubicles for rooms, with open air [for ceilings] so you had no privacy, but who cares? To us, it was heaven on earth.”³⁰ Stern, who had experienced the *Anschluss* of Austria as a twelve-year-old in his native Vienna, fled from Austria to Yugoslavia before making his way to Italy. Stern lived in the Bari transit camp for three years, including the period of great turmoil and protests over food described in chapter four. In 1996, however, Stern remembered a different relationship with food than these protests indicated, as he compared the DP time to wartime hunger challenges:

In the meantime, we lived in the transit camp [in Bari]. We got regular meals. We had all we wanted to eat. I mean, it was unbelievable. Every morning I woke up saying is that possible? I don’t have to worry about getting killed, I don’t have to worry about dying from something else, I don’t have to worry about being *hungry* all the time? I was so hungry for four years; I can’t tell you. It was constant. There

²⁸ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Letter from Hersz Blank to Editor’s Office,” September 28, 1947.

²⁹ Rose Finci, Interview 19888, Segment 9, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

³⁰ William Stern, Interview 16364, Segments 120-135, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

wasn't one time you could say "well, you really ate your fill," because there really wasn't such thing because even if you couldn't eat anymore because your stomach couldn't take it, you weren't full, you were still hungry.³¹

Hunger was deeply troubling to Stern during the war, and by comparison his life in the DP camp felt free of this worry in his memory. Perhaps it was precisely because it was a *camp* that was providing the food that Stern felt so incredulous about its continued presence: after having spent years being hungry because he was in a camp, he was now full because he was in a camp. The distinction between the two types of camp remains clear in Stern's retelling.

Often these changes in memories were also correlated to the amount of time they spent in a particular camp; those who spent more time in the camps, often had more complicated remembrances of the camp life revealing their at times mixed relationships with the space. Erika Kinel spent five years in the Bari camp, starting when she was eighteen. She initially answered the question of what the Bari camp was like by saying there was "nothing to do [in the camp]. At least they fed us, but there was nothing to do."

³² A few moments later, however, the interviewer presses further asking "what did you do all day?" Here her response becomes more expansive:

In the beginning, nothing. [We were all] trying to get a better, some other barracks, like a room, family quarters or something...In the beginning it was hard, because there was still war and you know we were afraid to go [out], but later on there were buses that took us down into town. If you wanted to shop or a movie or whatever, it made it easy but, in the beginning, it was very hard.³³

Kinel was born in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, in 1926. She spent 1941 to 1944 on the run with her parents and her elderly grandmother hiding first in Ljubljana-Bežigrad, Slovenia and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview with Erika Kinel, March 8, 1995, RG-50.030*0309, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

³³ Ibid.

later in Mombercelli, Italy before their liberation in Empoli, Italy in 1944. Her experiences in the DP camps began thus before the war ended, a fact which she notes likely contributed to the additional hardship in the beginning.

Her interview follows what Henry Greenspan has termed “the story of the frustrated storyteller.”³⁴ For Greenspan, this meant places in the interview where interviewees struggle with the “inadequacy of the story form itself,” most frequently seen when talking about traumatic events.³⁵ They must become “a person who must ‘make stories’ for a ‘not-story,’” to find ways to communicate memories with those who did not experience them, and this process is clearly frustrating.³⁶ Greenspan argues that to do this, survivors must create structures for their stories and that these structures depend both on the events themselves and on the survivor’s experiences since then. When recounting, survivors rely on a variety of stories and analogies that can appear contradictory as they are used and discarded or repeated depending on the moment. In Kinel’s interview, we find clear overarching statements at the beginning and the end of a topic but nuanced and even contradictory statements when asked for more details. The camp was “a letdown” when she first introduced it; it was a space where there was nothing to do. However, it quickly becomes clear that the first year they were in the camp, the year during the war, had colored the rest of their experience: one had nothing to do, unless you had a job, which they got after the war ended; one could not leave the camp unless you had a pass, which was easy to get after the war ended; there was nothing to do in town unless you wanted to shop or go to a movie, which were available after the

³⁴ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony: Second Edition* (Paragon House, 2010), xviii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xviii.

war ended. Her memories go back and forth in time as she remembers what things they were and were not able to do. She laughs as she recalls hitchhiking on a military water tank and getting the soldier in trouble because he let her steer it and again as she describes her time with friends and a new boyfriend in the camp. She remembers the frustration of having to wait in the camp for five years before getting a visa. She was asked “Were you afraid that you wouldn’t get out?” And she replied, “No. Eventually we knew; it was just a matter of time.” This kind of pragmatism fills the interview. Yet in the end, she is asked “When you look back, what images stick with you?” and her answer is perhaps surprising: “the camp. Like I say, the best years of my life.”

Others similarly now felt that these had been some of the best years of their lives. For these individuals, the liminal spaces of the camps set them on a new trajectory, one that focused on the ways the camps connected to their new beginnings. And many explicitly used the language of rebirth when describing their experiences. This is language we do not find in the immediate postwar period to describe the time of the camps. William Stern who was so content with the conditions in the camp earlier had a similarly poignant way of describing this rebirthing process. He remembered when they first arrived at the camp and they had to go through a lice removal process: “Everything we had with us, except maybe those few photos we still carried was destroyed, burned, burned—they didn’t throw it away, they burned it... We really got rid of [the lice] in one fell swoop, it was like being reborn, [pause] being reborn.”³⁷ With all of his worldly belongings gone, apart from a few precious photographs, Stern felt he was starting over. Like a phoenix, he could rise from the burnt ashes of wartime trauma.

³⁷ William Stern, Interview 16364, Segments 120-135, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

And we also know that from the beginning there had been a plan to nurture a cultural rebirth in the Italian DP camps, as described in chapter three. Jewish refugees created schools and theater groups, produced newspapers and radio shows, and engaged in religious services and cultural activities. For many DPs the combination of work and cultural activities made a big difference in their stay, especially in their later memories, as Miriam Moskowitz explains:

We were waiting. We were told that when the quota of people were organized, we will be transferred to Palestine. In the meantime, while we're waiting there were also formed cultural groups. They were forming a library, which we didn't have books for so many years. We formed a library. They have formed a dramatic group that a friend of mine suggested one day that I should go to a rehearsal. That day I went to a rehearsal to the dramatic group, and I met my future husband. He was the director of the Jewish theater. He formed a group, a dramatic group...And he wrote a lot of plays from the war. He wrote a lot of plays...And automatically we fell in love. And I joined the group, and I played with my husband on the stage. We went from one displaced person camp to the other, entertaining displaced person people like us, we entertained them.³⁸

For Moskowitz, the ability to participate in a theater group enabled her to feel part of something bigger. As she traveled from camp to camp, she was able to form a bond with her husband and with her fellow inhabitants in the camps. She brought joy to “people like us,” that is, people who had been deprived of these kinds of cultural activities throughout the war. The cultural activities gave Moskowitz a real sense of purpose within the camps as she could work and lift the spirits of others. The purpose of the work was not only to fill time and fight boredom; it also allowed one to feel useful and to gain a sense of purpose after being dehumanized during the war.

For some, the rebirth narrative was a later addition to their story. Greater temporal distance from the events and possibly more interactions with other former DPs influenced

³⁸ Miriam Moskowitz, Interview 27443, Segments 128-129, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

the growth of language around the camps as new beginnings. Gertrude Goetz, who was a resident of the camp in Santa Maria di Bagni, has given at least two interviews and written a memoir between 1984 and 2005 and in these we can see a transition in her memory of the camps, or at least of how she chooses to represent them. In her 1984 interview she stated: “Thinking back they were very difficult years [those in the DP camps]. And yet, as I mentioned before, reflecting back, I was thinking that some of the years were bad, and yet, when one is young and a child, they’re also happy times.”³⁹ Ten years later, her thinking had slightly shifted as she thought back on this time: “In Santa Maria we lived quite well...and we had a good time because we were young, at least I. The ocean was there, the sun. Slowly people were coming in ’45 from concentration camps and there were activities.”⁴⁰ In this later testimony, she further describes her feeling of rebirth centered around the image of the ocean. She recalled that this was “the first time we experienced freedom. For the first time I saw the ocean. And the thrill of being free and going down to the ocean, and I felt new life was starting.”⁴¹ The ocean came to symbolize the new freedom that had finally arrived, and this memory replaced some of the more difficult ones.

Viewing the DP period as a difficult time, however, also enabled some survivors to describe their time there as a moment of restarting. Rae Kushner in 1982, for instance, said that her experience of the DP camp was “like being in the ghetto again.”⁴² From

³⁹ Oral History Interview with Gertrude Goetz, May 19, 1984, RG-50.005.0015, Oral history interviews of the University of California, Los Angeles Holocaust Testimonies Project, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴⁰ Gertrude Goetz, Interview 9758, Segments 18-20, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interview with Rae Kushner, 1982, RG-50.002.0015, Oral history interviews of the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean University collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

here, however, her narrative follows what Eviatar Zerubavel has termed a “progress narrative,” commonly seen in “rags-to-riches” or “humble origins” biographical stories.⁴³ Kushner tells her story as one of success. The DP camp was the liminal space at the beginning of this new timeline, one that would offer the family space to succeed on their own. She recalls “In 1949, we got papers, then the visa came for us to go to the United States. The HIAS organization asked us if we wanted to go through them or by ourselves. We did not need their help, but they offered. We didn’t really need our cousins’ help either. We were young and able to work. My husband was 26, I was 24. My father was 55 and my sister was 20. We all planned to work.”⁴⁴ It remains important to Kushner that she and her family made their own way; indeed, she repeats this in her other interviews as well.⁴⁵ Appropriate to the notions of *progressionism*, the family remakes their life themselves, this time in the United States. Later in that same interview she returns to the time in the DP camp: “We were depressed in the Displaced Persons camp. After going through what we did we thought that the world would greet us with open hands. Instead, we were put in another ghetto.”⁴⁶ This may help us understand why she felt it was so important that we know her family succeeded on their own. Her expectation of life after the Holocaust was of a warm and welcoming community; when she was put back in a camp, she felt forgotten and alone. “Nobody opened their doors to us,” she stated. “What

⁴³ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 16.

⁴⁴ Interview with Rae Kushner, 1982, RG-50.002.0015, Oral history interviews of the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean University collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴⁵ She recalled “HIAS wanted to take us over, but we said, ‘no. We’re young people, we’re going to work.’ And they gave us a room” Rae Kushner, Interview 18937, Segment 76, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁴⁶ Interview with Rae Kushner, 1982, RG-50.002.0015, Oral history interviews of the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean University collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

was the world afraid of? I don't understand. Thank God, now we live normal lives with our family and friends. But this question always stays on my mind."⁴⁷ There was no one left to rely on but oneself.

Transitions and Additions in Memory

Looking at multiple testimonies given by the same person also allows us the opportunity to see the ways in which collective narratives have influenced personal memory. Analyzing the connections between history, memory, and forgetting, both Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Ricoeur describe two types of memories: personal (mine) and collective (ours).⁴⁸ In his distinction between individual and collective memory, Halbwachs notes that "the individual memory, in order to corroborate and make precise and even to cover the gaps in its remembrances, relies upon, relocates itself within, momentarily merges with, the collective memory."⁴⁹ In these moments of merging, sometimes pieces are added to one's personal story. The information added simultaneously connects the teller with a collective of others who have shared similar experiences and allows the story to be understood by a broader audience that may have little to no familiarity with the particular situation being related in the memory.

Thinking about Holocaust testimony, Annette Wieviorka offers another compelling reason to understand testimonies through the lens of collective memory: "In principle, testimonies demonstrate that every individual, every life, every experience of the Holocaust is irreducibly unique. But they demonstrate this uniqueness using the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

⁴⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1980), 50-51.

language of the time in which they are delivered and in response to questions and expectations motivated by political and ideological concerns.”⁵⁰ Survivors interviewed many years after the war often find themselves charged with conforming to a national or socially accepted version of events surrounding the particular aspects of their experience. Upon closer inspection of these testimonies, one often sees the interviewee attempting to balance their individual experience in the camps, ghettos, hiding, etc. with the now well-known version of events. The result, Henry Greenspan argues, is that “certain forms of recounting tend to evolve that are, simultaneously, more or less tellable by survivors and more or less hearable by others.”⁵¹ More practice creates a more easily understood narrative.

For some the creation of a “tellable story” becomes linked to these more commonly known narrative plot points as the survivor tells their story more frequently. Isak “Mike” Danon, for example, regularly told his story of survival in the “First Person: Conversations with Holocaust Survivors” program at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum between 2006 and 2012. This series, in which journalist Bill Benson interviews a Holocaust survivor in front of an audience for about an hour about their experiences, gave Danon the opportunity to retell his narrative at least seven times. In these interviews, Danon explicitly connects his ability to leave the DP camps with D-Day. He is one of the nearly one thousand refugees who were able to enter the United States in 1944 through the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter program. In order to give his listeners context for his story of the lesser known refugee shelter in Oswego,

⁵⁰ Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), xii.

⁵¹ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony: Second Edition* (Paragon House, 2010), 30-31.

New York Danon now places this event within larger historical contexts—he includes the American role in his story, as tells the audience that it was the night before D-Day that they were told that the US government has opened its doors to 1,000 refugees, and they signed up.⁵² There is no mention of D-Day or of American action during this part of the war in his earlier interview; when asked about how they were able to come to the United States, he cannot quite remember when it happens: “in June, near the end of June. Dates escape me right now, but I know we were preparing to go to United States in July and I remember about sixth of July is when we left.”⁵³ By connecting his story to the larger narrative of the war, he focuses on a part of the war that would have been highly important in his new country (the United States) but perhaps less immediately important for his life in that moment in 1944 in Italy. His story now includes far more details both from his own memory and from what he has read or heard elsewhere. This section has demonstrated some of the ways in which memories shift over time, often to align themselves with the narratives of others as survivors struggle to sift through their remembrances and forgetting.

The Italian Question

One can find in many immediate postwar testimonies a great emphasis on blaming the Germans. Take for instance, the diary of a fourteen-year old Italian-Polish

⁵² Interview with Isak M. Danon, August 16, 2006, RG-50.999.0725, Oral history interviews of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s First Person Program, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC; Interview with Isak M. Danon, April 17, 2012, RG-50.999.0369, Oral history interviews of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s First Person Program, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

⁵³ Interview with Isak M. Danon, February 26, 1999, RG-50.549.02*0038, Oral history interviews of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Post-Holocaust oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

boy, Leo Bermann, living in the Cinecittà DP camp in Rome after the war.⁵⁴ The pages of his diary are full of stories from his own time in hiding and from other people's concentration camp experiences, alongside the more mundane concerns about school. But throughout one can feel the palpable sense of anger he expresses: "That which I am now writing, if it comes out one day, will be a warning for those who do not want to believe. This is a simple story of one of the many who had been in the concentration camps for five years, tortured by those ferocious beasts, the SS. Calling those monsters ferocious beasts is not enough... These monstrous murderers must all die."⁵⁵ And he argues that his anger must never end: "Should there be another war against Germany, I will be the first one to volunteer, and I won't feel pity for anyone, just as they have done. After all I have seen and heard, my hatred for this damned people will never cease."⁵⁶ Bermann's passion is increased as he feels he still living amongst those who had wronged them saying "the thing that made me most angry was that some of these lesser murderers are even here in this camp."⁵⁷ And we know from later records that some Nazis and Nazi collaborators did escape Europe and prosecution likely by going through the DP camps, so perhaps we would even say his anger is not misplaced.⁵⁸

More recent testimonies too express anger about the concentration camps and the persecution they faced at the hands of the Nazis; however, for many the most lasting hurt seems to have been the persecution and antisemitism shown by their own neighbors

⁵⁴ In 1945 Leopold Berman wrote about his experiences in 1943-1945. He also wrote a diary in 1945 of his experiences in the Cinecittà DP camp in Rome. The text has been translated from the Italian and is held by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Leo Berman, *Storia d'un ragazzo Ebreo (Story of a Jewish Boy)* (Brattleboro, VT: Simi Berman, 2008).

⁵⁵ Leo Berman, *Storia d'un ragazzo Ebreo*, 47.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁸ Mark. Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Philadelphia; London: Balch Institute Press ; Associated University Press, 1988), 57-60.

during and even after the war. These survivors recall the pain of returning to their cities of birth and being rejected from their homes. Miriam Moskovitz states that they wanted to go to Palestine rather than home to their birthplace in Poland: “Because we used to be called *staatenlos*, people without a country. Because we were so against Poland. We were so bitter of the treatments that they did...what they did to us, and the collaboration that they did with the Germans that we hated them on the same level as the Germans, even more.”⁵⁹ But even with this anger, many have placed themselves within a particular scheme of collective memory that argued for peace above revenge. In so doing, many sought to find ways to find the saviors and demonstrate gratitude, and here we find a perhaps surprising recipient of this gratitude.

One surprising discovery I made regarding the memories of those in the DP camps was the near-universality in the abundance of gratitude these survivors had for Italy and the Italian people. Apart from those Jews who had been sheltered and hidden during the war by Italians, one finds very little mention of Italy or her people in the pages of writings done in the immediate postwar period. Complaints, requests, and gratitude were primarily expressed to and against American and British officials and organizations. But in later testimonies, a great many survivors describe the wonder of their experience with Italians during their stay in Italy. For Sonya Schek who lived both in a DP camp and then later out of camp, it was the Italian people who made a difference. “The Italians were unbelievable. They were so generous and so helpful, and they had so much love for

⁵⁹ Miriam Moskovitz. Interview 27443. *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

us; they really had a feeling what we went through...I don't know if it was because of Mussolini or whatever, but they were absolutely unbelievable people.”⁶⁰

There are far fewer testimonies and memoirs from Jewish Libyans who spent time in Italian DP camps. For example, out of the over 55,000 testimonies in the USC Shoah Foundation Archive, only 13 of those individuals were born in Libya, and only one discusses her time in a DP camp.⁶¹ Starting in 1998, historical researcher, documentary filmmaker, and former executive director of the American Sephardi Federation Vivienne Roumani-Denn set out to capture the oral histories of those she called “the last Jews of Libya.”⁶² She interviewed dozens of individuals in Israel, Italy, and the United States weaving together a narrative history of a former community before donating the interviews to the Library of Congress for future researchers.⁶³ These interviews and the few memoirs published tell us very little about the time these individuals spent in the Italian DP camps, and thus make generalizing about this experience more difficult. However, they offer a unique perspective on the mixed emotions many Libyan refugees felt toward the Italians as former colonizers turned saviors.

⁶⁰ Sonya Schek, Interview 53045, Segment 265, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁶¹ Ilda Mimun describes her time in the Aversa DP Camp in 1944/45 on her way back to Tripoli. Ilda Mimun, Interview 36350, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020. Others born in Libya whose interviews are within the *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation are: Moshe Migidish. Interview 10595; Mazal Tov Lahmish. Interview 22359; ‘ester Hayun. Interview 29216; Faraji ‘ezra’. Interview 34792; Odoska Morgante. Interview 35644; Ya’arah Ben Torah. Interview 45054; Clem Mimun. Interview 43369; Sion Burbea. Interview 45704; Benjamin Pinhassi. Interview 48045; Miryam Hanunah. Interview 46705; Yitshak Zouaris. Interview 48767; ‘ines Kardi. Interview 51457.

⁶² There is more information on her project here: Vivienne Roumani-Denn, *Jews of Libya*. VR Films LLC. <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁶³ Some of the interviews are also online at Vivienne Roumani-Denn, *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC. Accessed March 10, 2020. <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies.html>. They are also a part of Hebrew University’s Oral History Division’s online presence. For example, Interview No. (236) Collection. Oral History Division, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6nitJPTwFA>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

This section examines the connections among the DPs and Italy and Italians. It opens with a discussion of origins and uses the myth of the “*italiani brava gente*.” Here it demonstrates the ways the myth has been used to uphold the distinctions between antisemitism and Fascism and the connections of each of these to the Italian people. The section then interrogates the ways in which survivor narratives by non-Italian Jews have contributed to the perpetuation of this myth. In so doing we find a surprising theme: the *brava gente* myth that shielded Italians from culpabilities for atrocities during the war was adopted by DPs in Italy who had suffered those very atrocities.

The Myth of the “Brava Gente”

The attitude of many Jewish survivors in their remembrances of the DP camps conformed to the collective narrative of the “*italiani brava gente*,” or the notion that Italians are inherently good people. This myth has been part of Italians’ national ideology and belief system since Italy’s origin as a nation in nineteenth century, when leaders desired to create a new kind of national identity that would encompass the newly formed country. According to David Bidussa and Angelo Del Boca, the myth originally related to Italian unification against outside forces, but has been adapted over the generations since then to fit the social context of the time.⁶⁴ Others, including Filippo Focardi describe the ways the myth has been used to effectively whitewash Italy’s crimes of racism and xenophobia during its colonial and imperialist era.⁶⁵ In the 1920s, for example, Mussolini

⁶⁴ David Bidussa, *Il Mito del Bravo Italiano* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1994); Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, Brava Gente? Un Mito Duro a Morire* (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 2005).

⁶⁵ See: Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria: la Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi* (Roma: Laterza, 2005); Robert S. Gordon, “The Holocaust in Italian Collective Memory: *Il Giorno Della Memoria*, 27 January 2001,” *Modern Italy* 11, no. 2 (2006).

claimed Fascism was the natural result of the country's unification and likened Fascist leaders to *brava gente* heroes from Italy's past.⁶⁶

After the Second World War, Italian national leaders recognized the need to redeem Italian national identity in order to satisfy both the international community and the Italian people at home. To do this, they infused messages with comparisons that varied according to audience. To the international community, antifascists stressed the differences between themselves and the Germans, particularly focusing on the era between 1943 and 1946. As the perpetrators of the Holocaust, Nazi Germany embodied moral failure to an international audience; in the eternal struggle between good and evil, the *cattivi tedeschi* (bad Germans) provided, in a binary opposition, the opponent against which the Italians could define themselves as the *brava gente*.⁶⁷ Attempts to distance themselves from both Germany and Fascism began as early as 1943.⁶⁸ German occupation strengthened their claims, showing the foreign nature of their invader and equating it with the political party that had taken over their country. Many referred to the Fascist regime in the words of the great historian philosopher Benedetto Croce, as a "parenthesis" within Italian society, "in which Mussolini's regime was depicted as a foreign body (and thus also a short-term matter), which had by chance entered a democratic system."⁶⁹ Taking a page from Dante's Italian classic, Croce decried the path

⁶⁶ Claudio Fogu, "Italiani Brava Gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 170-2.

⁶⁷ Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer. "The Question of Fascist Italy's War Crimes: The Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943–1948)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*. 9, no. 3 (2004): 336.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁶⁹ Mirco Dondi "The Fascist Mentality after Fascism" in R. J. B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani. *Italian Fascism: History, Memory, and Representation*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 141, quoting ideas but not full text from Benedetto Croce, "Chi é Fascista?," *Il Giornale di Napoli*, 29 October 1944.

of Fascism as “*la via smarrita*,” or the “lost path.”⁷⁰ Faced with the Fascist collaboration with the Nazis from 1943 to 1945, antifascists decried the political invasion that had taken over their country.

In 1945, three political groups became prominent within society: the Christian Democrat Party (DC), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). And in 1946, following the general election, democracy won over monarchy as form of government and the DC and the PSI were given joint control of the country with the PCI in a secondary role until elections could be held in 1948.⁷¹ Recognizing the need to work together in order to make the new government coalition work, each group advocated for the now common *Risorgimento* theme of unity within Italy.⁷² PCI leader and vice-prime minister Palmiro Togliatti often spoke of the need for Italian unity. In a speech prior to the end of the war, Togliatti argued that the need for all Italians was to “liberate the country from the foreign invasion [of Nazi-Fascism],” but to do this effectively, they must be united.⁷³ The DC leaders also strongly supported cross-party cooperation. From 1945 to 1954, the DC published the *Bollettino della Direzione*, a

⁷⁰ Here he’s drawing on the opening lines of Dante’s *Inferno*: Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, / ché la diritta via era smarrita. (When I had journeyed half of our life’s way, / I found myself within a shadowed forest, for I had lost the path that does not stray) Benedetto Croce, *Storia Del Regno Di Napoli*. (Bari: G. Laterza & figli), 1925.

⁷¹ The constituent election of 1946 led to a Christian Democrat victory only 15% higher than Socialist party and 17% above the Communist party, leading to a three party rule for nearly two years. For more see Robert Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 25-8.

⁷² Classified documents from U.S. archives show that while political parties publicly desired unity, party leaders still maintained allegiance to their own party above all else. DC leaders greatly feared “the eventual [communist] conquest of indecisive and disillusioned masses (l’eventuale conquista delle masse indecise e disilluse),” but also knew they needed more support to free the country from the Fascists, seen as the greater evil at the time. “Rapporto sul PCI: Piani, Organizzazione, Propaganda” Nara [National archives and records administration], rg. 226, s. 108, b. 155, f. jr-1500, January 8, 1945, quoted in Nicola Tranfaglia, *Come Nasce La Repubblica: La Mafia, Il Vaticano e Il NeoFascismo nei Documenti Americani e Italiani 1943-1947* (Milano: Bompiani, 2004) 279-282.

⁷³ Palmiro Togliatti, “Dobbiamo Liberare l’Italia dall’Invasione Straniera [We Must Liberate Italy from this Foreign Invasion],” speech in Naples, 2 April 1944 quoted in *Italian Fascism and AntiFascism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Stanislao Pugliese (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 206-9.

newsletter written for regional party leaders across the country. Particularly in 1945, the *Bollettino* stressed the great need for all political parties to work in harmony to get Italy put back together. On July 14, 1945, for instance, head secretary of the DC and presiding Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, wrote to the leaders of the PSI calling for the “solidarity of the anti-Fascist parties” because this was the only way to develop a “stable and healthy democracy.”⁷⁴

The antifascists then looked for ways to make themselves appear as “good people.” By surrendering, Italy could claim to be an unfortunate victim of Nazi-Fascism. A country deluded by a mad dictator who himself appeared under the spell of Hitler, remained much easier to forgive than a country that staunchly stood behind their totalitarian ruler. For instance, the writings of army officers Giaconda Zanuck and Giuseppe Angelina attempted to minimize war crimes by “placing all responsibility for the war of aggression that was ‘neither wanted nor felt’ on Mussolini’s shoulders.”⁷⁵ The new government connected antisemitism and the racial laws solely to the Fascist government and wrote them off as a “mistake” in the history of Italian society, rather than as something that people actually supported. Paolo Pezzino wrote of the Italian resistance to their responsibility for the war that “the myth of the Italians as ‘good people’ thus fed on self-serving oblivion and cancellation, seen above all in that ‘great displacement’

⁷⁴ De Gasperi, “Le Nostre Proposte ai Socialisti,” *Democrazia Cristiana: Bollettino della Direzione del Partito*, n. 3, July 14, 1945, http://digital.sturzo.it/periodico/bollettino-della-direzione-del-partito/1945/bollettino-della-direzione-del-partito_19450714/3/002, Accessed July 18, 2020.

⁷⁵ Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer. “The Question of Fascist Italy’s War Crimes,” 339. The sources they refer to are “a series of excessively self-acquitting, memorialist volumes published between October 1945 and November 1946, [which] enthusiastically revived the characteristic image of the ‘good Italian’ and negated that Italians had committed war crimes” (339). See G. Zanussi, *Guerra e catastrofe d’Italia*, vol. 1, Rome: Corso, 1945. and G. Angelini, *Fuochi di Bivacco in Croazia*, Rome: Tipografia Regionale, 1946.

which concerned national Fascism's persecution of the Jews."⁷⁶ By denying the Italian origins of Fascism, Italians were able to, by association, deny that antisemitism was Italian.⁷⁷

Postwar leaders repurposed the *bravo italiano* to stand in opposition specifically to the *catitivi tedeschi* by claiming they too were victims in this war against the Nazis. As Italian society, still reeling from the destruction of war, attempted to piece life back together and regain a sense of national worth, the idea of the *brava gente* as one who helped Jews offered Italians a "self-acquitting myth" whereby Italian self-image could be redeemed both nationally and internationally.⁷⁸ In the immediate postwar period, this self-acquitting myth was linked to a series of figures that could testify to the inherent goodness of the Italian—the rescuer of Jews, the resistance fighter, and the victim of Fascism. Together they seemed to support the claim that antisemitism was the product of Fascist ideology and rule, as opposed to an innately Italian attitude, and hence an aberration.⁷⁹ Antisemitism and war crimes were thus linked to the "parenthetical regime" of Fascism and Italians could claim again to be *brava gente*.⁸⁰ The *brava gente* could

⁷⁶ Paolo Pezzino, "The Italian Resistance Between History and Memory," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2005): 402.

⁷⁷ Anna Bravo, "The Rescuers and the Rescued in Private and Public Memories" in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945*, Ed. Joshua D Zimmerman, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). 314; Paolo di Cori "Le Leggi Razziali" in *I luoghi della memoria: Simboli e miti dell'Italia unita*. Ed. Mario Isnenghi, (Laterza, 1996), 465.

⁷⁸ Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer. "The Question of Fascist Italy's War Crimes." I use their concept "self-acquitting myth" to explore the ways Italians attempted to recreate their own self-image in light of their actions in the war.

⁷⁹ Claudio Fogu, "Italiani Brava Gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 169.

⁸⁰ The idea of Fascism as a "parenthesis" within Italian History can be linked back to Benedetto Croce. Benedetto Croce, "Chi è Fascista?," *Il Giornale di Napoli*, 29 October 1944. For more on the connections between a denial of Italian antisemitism and the "brava gente" myth see Pavan Ilaria and Guri Schwarz, *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione Fascista e reintegrazione postbellica* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2001); Guri Schwarz, "On Myth Making and Nation Building: The Genesis of the 'Myth of the Good Italian,' 1943-1947," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, n. 1 (2008), pp. 111-143; Schwarz, *After Mussolini: Jewish life and Jewish memories in post-Fascist Italy* (Edgware, Middlesex and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012).

absolve Italy of its Fascist past; as Alexis Herr argued, “the ‘brava gente’ became the colander through which all national questions were strained.”⁸¹ This “straining” created the division between Italian and German wartime events that became a part of Italy’s public memory.⁸²

In their desire to create an enemy to which the entire state could relate, antifascists often turned to works of literature and cinema to support their vision of identity, and again, comparisons with Germany prevailed.⁸³ Films such as Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma, Città Aperta (Rome, Open City)*, which opened in theaters in September 1945, strove to show Italians as innocent victims.⁸⁴ Set in Rome just prior to its liberation in 1944, *Open City* depicts the lives of Italian resisters, which in this case include all the Italian characters except for three, and their struggles against the barbaric Nazis. In an effort to unite Italian identity against the Nazis, Rossellini’s characters reflect varying class, political, and religious beliefs; Giorgio Manfredi, a communist partisan, seeks shelter from the Germans in the home of Francesco, a printer of an underground newspaper and his fiancé, Pina.⁸⁵ Torn between love for God and country, don Pietro Pellegrini, chooses to aid the local resistance movement, claiming God to be

⁸¹ Alexis Herr, *The Holocaust and Compensated Compliance in Italy: Fossoli Di Carpi, 1942-1952* (Springer, 2016), 140.

⁸² This idea of “public memory” is encapsulated by Rosario Forlenza’s definition based on the crystallization of the founding myths of the Italian republic. According to him, public memory was “the collective memory of the war imposed between 1943 and 1947 by the anti-Fascist forces—Catholics, communists, socialists, liberals, moderates—which was to become the public memory of the Republic.” Rosario Forlenza, “Sacrificial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Postwar Italy: Reliving and Remembering World War II,” *History and Memory*, Vol. 24, n. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012), 74.

⁸³ In literature, see for example Italo Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Einaudi, 1947) and Alberto Moravia, *Il Conformista* (Milano: Bompiani, 1951)

⁸⁴ *Roma, Città Aperta*, produced by Roberto Rossellini, 100 minutes, Excelsa Films, 1945.

⁸⁵ Cultural historian, David Ward, argues that “no film more than...*Open City* has been as influential in defining an image of a popular Italian spirit, united across ideological barriers, untouched by the corrupting hand of Nazi Fascism, whose example, if followed, would lead Italy into a new and glorious postwar future.” David Ward, *AntiFascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943-46: Benedetto Croce and the Liberals, Carlo Levi and the “Actionists”* (Madison, N.J: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 90.

on their side: “I believe that those who fight for justice and truth walk in the path of God and the paths of God are infinite.” Rossellini also mirrored the rhetoric of antifascists in his portrayal of Fascists, seen here in the two traitorous women Marina and Loretta and the one Fascist policeman, as those who had been duped by the Germans and must be eliminated. Hatred of the Germans remains evident, such as in the torture scene in which German commanders discuss the inevitability of Giorgio betraying his comrades. And if he did not break? “Then it would mean an Italian is worth as much as a German. It would mean there is no difference in the blood of a slave race and a master race. And no reason for this war.” The film became a symbol in postwar Italy of a new national collective.⁸⁶ The great desire of the antifascists to reinstate a sense of Italian pride remained evident alongside the equally important idea that Italians were not responsible for the situation they found themselves in: Fascism was.

Foreign Jews and the “Good Italian”

And while it is reasonable that Italians would be attempting to remake their own image, repurposing myths, and redefining national narratives, the former DPs’ embrace of this collective memory narrative calls for further investigation. Many DPs describe what they perceived as a lack of antisemitism in Italy. Miriam Moskovitz, for instance, stated “When I learned the language, and I told them that I am ‘*ebreo*,’ it means ‘Jewish,’ they couldn’t understand the difference.”⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that she seems to take comfort in this lack of differentiation, which is perhaps understandable especially after

⁸⁶ Ora Gelley, *Rossellini’s War Trilogy: Italian Cinema and National Identity 1945–1950* (Routledge, 2012).

⁸⁷ Miriam Moskovitz, Interview 27443, Segment 141, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

years of persecution based on particularized discriminations. Yet, there is also something troubling about the erasure of these distinctions, as this can and often did lead to a homogenizing of victims. Miriam Moskovitz's testimony demonstrates that this attitude also prevailed in the postwar period.⁸⁸ Antisemitism, she felt, had not existed in Italy because Italians didn't differentiate between Jews and non-Jews. Italy was safe.

The postwar image of a "safe" Italy also colored the way DPs who entered Italy after the war understood Italy's Fascist past. For instance, Brenda Senders emphatically proclaimed, "I love the Italian people!" She then notes some initial confusion on her part regarding how she should feel about being in a former enemy-allied country: "In the beginning I felt a funny feeling about Fascism and Mussolini, but after I find out he was also like a victim ...after we met the Italian people, I didn't feel bad about it, because we knew that [the Germans] tricked [Mussolini]...it's a work of, I think of the Nazis, of the Germans, they pushed on him. And so, I didn't felt resentment."⁸⁹ Mussolini becomes almost a puppet-like figure who is linked to the larger category of victims within her narrative. Her memories demonstrate an acceptance of the *brava gente* myth that the antifascists had worked to spread in the postwar period: the Italians had simply been tricked.

This alignment with the *brava gente* myth is particularly interesting when one considers that the majority of the Jewish DP population had very little immediate contact with Italians; it was primarily the Americans and British in charge of the camps. Often,

⁸⁸ Although it should also be noted that she lived primarily in the southern part of Italy where there were fewer Italian Jews than in the north, so the lack of recognition on the part of the Italians she met may simply have been the result of them never having met a Jewish person before, rather than high levels of assimilation.

⁸⁹ Interview with Brenda Senders, February 22, 1998, RG-50.549.02.0011, Oral history interviews of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Post-Holocaust oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

refugees speak of a particular interaction with specific local Italians. Lily Margules, for instance, recalled that near the DP camp there was an Italian bakery whose owners allowed them to use their oven, but other than that she “didn’t have too much contact” with local Italians.⁹⁰ Despite this, many still feel grateful to the Italians for their perceived care and compassion. The “Italian people were very nice and very friendly to us,” Margules stated several times in her interview despite her stated infrequent interactions with them.⁹¹

Some DPs did have more frequent and direct contacts with the Italian population during their stay in Italy and even in these instances, the “good Italian” as savior myth often held true in many recent testimonies. Sidney Zoltak, whom we met at the start of the chapter, says that apart from the death of his father, his stay in Italy was wonderful; the Italians were helpful in any way they could be, which for him meant befriending him and helping him practice his Italian.⁹² For him, the continued presence of Italians in his later years only further cemented his view of the place and people as wonderful. Like Zoltak, Sonya Schek also lived in the Cremona DP camp, although she soon moved to the town and rented a room from a local Italian. Her interactions with the locals then gave her a broader picture on Italy’s wartime experience. In the end, she believed that it was the human-human contact that made the difference as she remembered “Italy was like coming through to be again a human being...we were considered human beings.”⁹³ And

⁹⁰ Interview with Lily Margules, August 27, 1996, RG-50.549.01.0021, Oral history interviews of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Post-Holocaust oral history collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Sidney Zoltak, Interview 54453, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 2001. Accessed March 10, 2020.

⁹³ Sonya Schek, Interview 53045, Segment 266, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

this notion of “humanity” or human goodness was echoed in many testimonies and memoirs. Hans Heimann, for instance, recalled when he was working for the JDC that “The Italians were really good. The Italians had a saying. It said we are all ‘*Cristiani*,’ which doesn’t mean Christians in the strict sense of the word. It means human being.”⁹⁴ It is striking that Heimann appears to have accepted, albeit with some qualification, this religious homogenization; indeed, he seems unbothered by the idea that it was acceptable practice to describe all those seen as “good” with a term whose origins and most common usage indicate one particular group. Yet, he also indicated that it was more than simple, straightforward goodness on the part of the Italians.

Heimann was one of at least 15,000 foreign Jews who were arrested and interned in Italy between 1940 and 1943.⁹⁵ Men were most frequently taken to internment camps, while women and children were placed under house arrest or interned in small villages. The majority of these were interned in camps in the southern portion of Italy, such as the most famous camp of Ferramonti di Tarsia in Calabria; this would later save their lives after inauguration of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* in September 1943, as the Allies were able to liberate the South before the Nazis’ arrival, whereas 6,806 Jews were deported from the Nazi-occupied Northern regions.⁹⁶ Heimann expressed gratitude

⁹⁴ Interview with Hans Heimann, October 18, 1990, RG-50.030*0091, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁹⁵ Indice generale degli ebrei stranieri internati in Italia 1940-1943, *Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea* (CDEC), http://www.cdec.it/ebrei_stranieri/, Accessed March 10, 2020. CDEC notes that this Index is generated by two external databases: “The database created by Francesca Cappella includes names and data of 5,829 foreign Jews, for whom there is a personal file in the State Central Archive, “Fondo Ministero dell’Interno, Cat. A4bis, Internati stranieri e spionaggio” (Ministry of Interior Fund, Cat. A4bis, Foreign Internees and Espionage). The database created by Anna Pizzuti includes names and data of 9337 foreign Jews and it is continually updated; these names are basically taken from the lists at the State Central Archive, “Fondo Ministero dell’Interno, Cat. A16, Stranieri ed ebrei stranieri” (Ministry of Interior Fund, Cat. A16, Foreigners and Foreign Jews), and the research expands to many other archives.”

⁹⁶ Joshua D Zimmerman, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), in particular see the Introduction.

toward the Italians and said he never had any problems with the authorities there. When asked why he thought that was he responded

Why do I think that happened? Because out of the goodness and the kindness of the Italian people and also because they knew it was a lost cause, and they wanted to be on the winning side. They told us “I hope when the British come and when the American, when the *American*i are coming, that you’ll always remember us and tell them of our friendship towards you and that we never tried to do you any harm.”⁹⁷

Italian goodness then was contingent on their wanting to be seen in a better light; it was a calculated move to ensure their own future in changing circumstances.

Similarly, Jakob Ehrlich’s memory of Italians during the 1940s is more ambivalent than straightforward adherence to the *brava gente* myth. During his time in Italy, Ehrlich became friends with a local Italian teenager who helped him gain a semblance of normal young boy life by loaning him his bike and stealing grapes together with him from a local vineyard.⁹⁸ He recalled seeing a protest by local Italians near the camp in which he was living in Santa Maria di Bagni after the Allied forces had requisitioned the summer homes of residents in the region to be used by the DPs.

These protesting Italians were angry that their properties were taken away from them. Those villas and buildings we were living in were owned by very influential and rich people who were required by the Allied forces to give up their residences. The homes were not given voluntarily to the refugees for “some greater good.” Their homes were confiscated because the Italians lost the war. When the Jewish refugees came to Santa Maria al Bagno, it was the Allies who dictated what would happen. They saved us and I will always be grateful to them. They gave us food, shelter, education and even shoes. When we arrived, the shoes on my feet were so worn out and pitifully falling apart. I still remember the building in the center of Santa Maria al Bagno, near the beach, where I got a new pair of shoes from a Hindu soldier in a British uniform.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Interview with Hans Heimann, October 18, 1990, RG-50.030*0091, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁹⁸ Jakob Ehrlich and Jean Daniels, *A Boy Named Jakob: A Holocaust Story* (Independently Published, 2019), 22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

Ehrlich reminded his reader that not all Italians were motivated by “some greater good” to help the DPs; they were also required to. The Allies were clearly in charge. And in this memory, it is the Allies he called saviors, not the Italians. In his conclusion, however, Ehrlich defended his choice to write a memoir shifting the savior figure: “I wanted to share my views about Italy, because it wasn’t always thought of in a good light during and after the war. I especially wanted to share my story of how Italy was a savior for my family. My life is an interesting story about how we escaped, how we survived, how we went through the world. Survival was key.”¹⁰⁰ He allowed himself to hold both ideas somewhat in tension: that not all Italians were willingly helpful, but that overall Italy should be seen in a good light for its saving of individuals. This kind of pattern holds true for many survivor narratives: when focused on specific memories, many survivors like Ehrlich articulate greater complexity and sometimes even contradictory evidence to their overall statements, whereas conclusions often remain more one-sided and from a more distant perspective.

In their remembrances, many foreign Jews in Italy or Italian-occupied areas during the war did see the Italians as saviors.¹⁰¹ In the case of Feri and Zlata Noiman, a young couple from Yugoslavia, the Italians were literal saviors. The Noimans were among the five hundred Slovak refugees aboard the *Pencho* which nearly sank off the coast of Calabria, Italy. Italian soldiers saved them and subsequently interned them in the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, cases in Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 205-208. See also Ivo Herzer, Klaus Voigt and James Burgwyn, eds. *The Italian Refuge: Rescue of Jews During the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989); Ugo Pacifici Noja and Silvia Pacifici Noja, *Il Cacciatore di Giusti: Storie di non Ebrei Che Salvarono i Figli di Israele dalla Shoah* (Cantalupa (Torino): Effatà, 2010). For letters from Jews (foreign and native) to Catholic refugee houses see Alessia Falifigli, *Salvati dai conventi: l'aiuto della Chiesa agli ebrei di Roma durante l'occupazione nazista* (San Paolo, 2005).

southern camp of Ferramonti. In an interview, Zlata related her opinion of the Italians: “I knew that the Italian people had joined the fight on the German side; I thought them no better than the Germans. But when I arrived in Italy and stayed there a year and a half, then I saw that the Italian people were different, that they are very good people, with a heart.”¹⁰² For the Noimans, as for many foreign Jews, Italy had offered the first truly safe haven in Europe. Before 1943, official state policies regarding the Jews, though legally antisemitic, still refused to allow Jews to be deported. This refusal ensured Jews some measure of security and increased their perceptions that Italians were good. It also colored the way DP’s who entered Italy after the war understood Italy’s Fascist past.

But, for some foreign Jews, Italy was confusingly both a space of deportation and also a refuge. Ilda Mimun was born in Tripoli in 1930 and was one of the roughly 870 Libyan Jews with British passports deported to Italy during the war. She recalled arriving in winter 1941 or 1942 with her family and specifically remembers the train journey from Rome to Arezzo where “The Italians, every time the train stopped, they threw us chocolates, good things. They felt sorry [for us], you know, such a big family and children and all.”¹⁰³ Her family was interned first in a camp and then later in two different villages. She is, however, very dismissive of the idea that the camp was an internment camp; she says, shrugging, “I have to tell you the truth, the Italians were very nice to us. Even in this concentration camp, that they call a concentration camp, it was

¹⁰² Nicola Caracciolo, *Uncertain Refuge: Italy and the Jews During the Holocaust* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), 29-31. Journalist Nicola Caracciolo interviewed over sixty Jewish survivors in the 1980s to make sense of Italian action and experience during the war. While he wanted to glorify Italian efforts during wartime with a work that argued against “a dispassionate and ‘neutral’ examination of the facts,” the words of many Italian Jews refused to allow him to unequivocally proclaim the greatness of Italians.

¹⁰³ Ilda Mimun, Interview 36350, Segment 5, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020.

like a villa. We really enjoyed ourselves.”¹⁰⁴ The Italians interned her and her family, but the camps were not like Hitler’s camps, according to Mimun. Unlike the nearly 400 other Libyan Jews also interned in Italy, she and her family were spared a second deportation to those camps in the East, and instead find themselves in a DP camp in Aversa. When asked about this time, she simply says that they waited in something like “a big hall, you know, where all the families from other camps came in...that’s why we waited, because they wanted to collect all the families that they saved...and then they sent us to Tripoli.”¹⁰⁵ The Italians were the saviors here again because despite their initial deportation at the hands of the Italians, they had nevertheless found a refuge in Italy.

Testimonies from Libyan Jews offer the perspective of colonial subjects (sometimes citizens) who then moved to the metropole. Their stories are often replete with contradictory attitudes toward the Italians, similar to many other foreign Jews interned in Italy during the war. Sometimes their memories were more similar to those of Italian Jews whose reflections on the Italian state were complex. Many Italian Jews felt betrayed by their country, which had been their “persecutor and stepfather for six years;”¹⁰⁶ yet, as Guri Schwarz argued, in order to reintegrate, Jews had to be willing to accept myth of Italian non-culpability.¹⁰⁷ Saul Legziel, for instance, when asked whether life was better for Jews in Benghazi under the Italians or under the British and responded, “without any doubt under the Italians before the Racial laws.”¹⁰⁸ Legziel, the former

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Segment 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Segment 13.

¹⁰⁶ Andrea Tabet, “Venticinque Anni di Libertà Costituzionale,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* (1970), 292-93 quoted in Mario Toscano “Abrogation of Racial Laws and Reintegration of Jews in Italian Society,” in David Bankier, *The Jews Are Coming Back* (N.Y.: Berghahn Books, 2005), 160.

¹⁰⁷ Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare Se Stessi: Gli Ebrei Nell’Italia PostFascista*, (Roma: Laterza, 2004), 369.

¹⁰⁸ Testimony of Saul Legziel, December 1998. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC, <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonysaul.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

president of the Jewish community of Benghazi, credited much of this to Governor Italo Balbo whom he said, “did not want to respect the laws imposed by Mussolini.” Legziel characterized Balbo as “very friendly with the Jews,” in part, Legziel believed, because Balboa had Jewish friends back in Italy. The interviewer then asked, “So why were the Jews happy when the Italians left Libya?” Here we find a different answer than those given by many of the foreign Jews who sought refuge in Italy: “Because the [Italian] population itself was anti-Semite [sic]...we later understood that it wasn’t all roses with the English...but all in all we managed to disentangle ourselves.”¹⁰⁹ After the war, things had changed in Italy, for the worse thought Legziel. The Italian population, which may not have been outwardly antisemitic before the war, demonstrated its true nature with the implementation of the racial laws and no help they gave to the Libyan Jews in the Italian DP camps would change that.

Sometimes it is the interviewers who questioned the idea of Italian goodness and safe haven, particularly with those interviewees who had experienced more interaction with Italians during the war. Evelyn Bergl’s 2005 testimony confuses her interviewer, Joan Ringelheim, particularly around her description of life with the Italians:

Joan Ringelheim: Let me ask you something. On the one side when you talk about the Italians, they’re wonderful.

Evelyn Bergl: Wonderful.

Joan Ringelheim: On the other side, you get put into a concentration camp, you are certainly on the run, and —

Evelyn Bergl: Mm-hm.

Joan Ringelheim: — in really terrible circumstances —

Evelyn Bergl: Mm-hm.

Joan Ringelheim: — for at least a year, if not longer.

Evelyn Bergl: Mm-hm.

Joan Ringelheim: That’s still in the context of Italy, so is Italy a sort of a puzzle to you?

¹⁰⁹ Testimony of Saul Legziel, December 1998. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC, <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonysaul.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

Evelyn Bergl: No.

Joan Ringelheim: It's not?

Evelyn Bergl: Italy is wonderful.

Joan Ringelheim: It's wonderful.

Evelyn Bergl: Wonderful. If it wasn't for Italy, we wouldn't be alive. They helped us; the people were wonderful. The people that we knew—there were some son-of-a-gun that wanted to have our neck, okay, the heck with them. But most people were helpful, most people were understanding. They were wonderful, that's all I can tell you. They warned us, you know. They fed us whenever they could. Now there were some people that had, but didn't want to show that they have, so they didn't give, and—cause they were afraid for themselves, maybe. I don't know. But they're wonderful people, they really are. I love them dearly, I really do.¹¹⁰

Interviewer Ringelheim questions if there was any ambivalence or confusion on the part of Bergl on her remembrances of the Italians, but Bergl denies this. Bergl begins to make distinctions between different types of Italians, those who were helpful and those who were not, but lets these go quickly because she does not want Italy to be a puzzle. For her, Italians were by and large wonderful and saviors and that is how she wants to remember them. And she is not alone in her recollection; despite having been interned or hunted by the Fascists, the majority of foreign wartime interned Jews have a very positive view of Italians in their later retelling of their life stories.

And this positivity often contrasted starkly with the remembered treatment of others during or immediately following the war. A survivor of the 1945 Tripoli pogrom, “Lydia,” who preferred to use a pseudonym in her 1999 interview, had very clear feelings about the Italians. Her memory of the Italians in Libya was straightforward: “we did not have dealings with [the Italians]. They did not do anything to us. But they fought against the Arabs, and they escaped.”¹¹¹ She overlooks the years of racial laws, and in so doing,

¹¹⁰ Interview with Evelyn Bergl, September 13, 2005 RG-50.030*0498, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹¹ Lydia is a pseudonym used here by the interviewer. Testimony “Lydia.” January 1999. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC. <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonylydia.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

finds the Italians blameless. The central theme of her testimony is Arab violence, which she noted the Italians escaped from while she did not. She lived in Amrus, the town with the largest Jewish population in Tripolitania outside of Tripoli and saw firsthand the violence that ended up killing 40 people there.¹¹² Her testimony is full of graphic details, the memories of which are still noticeably upsetting more than fifty years later. She remains far too upset with the Arabs and the British, who allowed the attack to happen in her view, to express any real anger toward the Italians; they had escaped, and were thus not a part of her persecution.

It is her later description of interactions with Italians, however, that expresses more fully her memory of the Italians. She describes in some detail her clandestine journey to Italy, which started when her brothers paid some Arabs 30,000 lire each to smuggle them safely to the port and then to Italy. When they arrived in the port town, she recalled:

Lydia: And I do not know how to swim. But I said I will swim. I went, and went, and went, as if G-d was holding my hand, to the sea, until I reached the ship... We suffered in the ship, the water was coming from here and from there... we were dying. We arrived at this village [and] we were hungry, [but] we did not have food. One [person] had [some] bread, [and] he shared it; some got some, [but] others did not. Good, now what do we do? We went out and started shouting help, help, help where is the help? There was no one. [Laughs]. Two men took a bicycle and went... As they went, the police stopped them, The police said "what do you want?" [The Libyan men] said "we came from Tripoli and we do not know where to go." The police came, they brought us a car, they took us to a city, I do not know [which city]. They gave us bread; they gave us sardines. We ate them.

Interviewer: These were Italians?

Lydia: Italians. Then where did they take us? We were many, [so] they spread hay on the ground, and we slept on the hay. How many days? Truthfully, I do not

¹¹² Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970*, Trans. Judith Roumani, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 112.

know how many. One week, two weeks, I do not know. They were, truthfully, they were good to us, and they started crying, crying, crying, “you have luck! How did you get here? It was cold, [and] you did not drown in the sea?” They were all crying really. I do not forget. They took us to the city... We stayed there almost a year, in Italy.¹¹³

The Italians, as she remembered them, were empathetic saviors. Their tears on her behalf made an indelible impression that colored any previous colonial interactions with Italians. For the rest of her time in Italy she was likely helped not by Italians but in a DP camp or center by a combination of the JDC and the Jewish Agency, as she notes several of her friends were part of pre-state Zionist military organization the *Haganah* in Italy. Yet, these early moments of help from Italian police and locals remain the defining feature of her testimony to her time in postwar Italy.

Early moments of help from Italians often contrast sharply with moments of rejection by one's former country people in DPs' remembrances. Many other DPs directly compared the Italians with others. In their discussions of Italian action compared with the action of others during the Holocaust, many DPs mirror the *brava gente* language. In her memoir, Viennese-born Gertrude Goetz spends an extended time in an epilogue giving her rationale for writing the book. Here we find explicit comparison between Italy and one's former home:

I have asked myself repeatedly what prompted me to add one more story to the many far more gripping accounts of survival during the Holocaust. The intent of my account is to bear witness that human decency and kindness did exist during the dreadful days of the war and that there were people who extended a helping hand to those persecuted by the Nazi regime. The past twenty-five years I returned several times to my native Austria, the country my family was expelled from in 1939 and Italy, the country that offered us relatively a safe haven. Returning to Vienna and revisiting my family's former apartments, I found the new tenants unresponsive to my requests to see once again our living quarters and found that the front door was slammed forcefully in my face...I was invariably

¹¹³Testimony “Lydia.” January 1999. *Jews of Libya - Testimonies*. VR Films LLC. <http://jewsoflibya.com/LibyanJews/testimonies/testimonylydia.html>, Accessed March 10, 2020.

treated to such comments as “terrible things were perpetrated on the Jewish people by the Nazis—but then we too suffered greatly.” Not once did I hear an admission that the Austrian people shared any complicity in the persecution of their fellow Jewish neighbors...My return visits to Italy presented a far different experience. My fondness of Italy and its people date back to my early childhood in Vienna, when my father would relate many stories, embellished, of course, of his experiences while serving in the Austrian Army in World War I on the Italian front. My fondness and above all gratitude to Italy and its people has only grown over the years when I reflect on the kindness and the decency with which many Jews were treated during the war. Returning to the little village we were interned to and reintroducing myself to some of its residents, I was repeatedly received with the humble comment “we did not care that you were Jewish or foreigners, we tried to help you as a fellow human being in need” or “we had very little ourselves and wanted to share the little we had.” It is statements like these uttered by humble peasants, and even at times former Fascists who helped my family survive, that made me realize that not many people could speak with such clear conscience of having saved or extended a helping hand to their fellow human beings. I want to dedicate this personal account to the Italian people who many times even at great risk to themselves helped us survive.¹¹⁴

For Goetz, as for many other Jews, Italian goodness is magnified in comparison to Austrian indifference or callousness. And this kind of callousness could even be attributed to those who were actively trying to help the DPs. During his filmed interview for the Shoah Foundation, Sidney Zoltak described his entrance into Italy. Talking about the journey across the border, Zoltak is still visibly upset about the fact that they were brought over in cattle cars; it did not matter that the cattle cars were now driven by allies. He says that Italy was the first place they were “shown a little bit of warmth, compassion, friendship, and help from the local inhabitants.”¹¹⁵ For him, the trauma of the Holocaust was continued by the indignity of the cattle car journey and only ended with the compassion of the Italians, the *brava gente*.

¹¹⁴ Gertrude Goetz, *Memory of Kindness*, 131-132.

¹¹⁵ Sidney Zoltak, Interview 7427, Segment 140, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed March 10, 2020.

Conclusion

Memory can be very slippery. For Holocaust survivors, remembering proves to be a shifting process that often includes forgetfulness, guilt, and trauma. As this chapter has demonstrated, survivor narratives written in the years immediately following the war often look very different than those recorded 30 to 50 years later. These early narratives often paint a more complicated picture. They prioritize their needs within the space of the DP camps and express a desire for change. They often discuss the hardships and trauma they faced during the war and their current dissatisfaction with their current position in the DP camps. They were highly mobile but felt stuck, without a real say over their future homes in either location or timeline. We see complaints that their treatment has been no better than it was in Germany. But in speaking about an upcoming DP camp closure in 1947, former social worker Rahlyn Woolf Mann wrote “It was during this period that people realized how attached they had become to their homes, even though these are only small rooms, and the thought of moving once more was not a pleasant one.”¹¹⁶ And this attachment to their “homes” can be recognized in the shifts in memories we see in later testimonies. The hardships of the DP camps, of course, have not been forgotten, but rather there is a different story to tell here.

DPs’ memories change in some predictable ways: gone is the zeroed in focus on food scarcity, lack of work, and the desire for vengeance, and instead we more often see narratives of rebirth and gratitude. Survivors are often drawn to notions of broader collective memory. These narratives emphasize positive associations with Italy and good

¹¹⁶ JDC Archives, Records of the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1945-1954, Folder 662, “Letter from A.J.D.C., Lecce to Director, A.J.D.C., Rome, Subject: Report for the Month of January 1947,” February 5, 1947.

experiences with the not antisemitic Italians they encountered or imagined. Italy itself becomes the opening chapter of lives being rebuilt after the Holocaust. And their narratives perpetuate this notion of innate goodness of Italians that continues to dominate the historiography. Throughout this chapter has demonstrated that there are gaps between the experiences of the camps as they were recorded and as they were remembered. This gap implies some degree of error, but this is not the intended takeaway. Rather one can understand these changes in memory as the continued rehabilitation of the refugees' lives that began in Italy.

CONCLUSION

David Boder: We have to conclude, my automobile is waiting. [We're] in the synagogue that was desecrated in 1937 or '38, and which had its holiday service for the first time today, although not yet re-dedicated. What we have heard from this woman . . . is about a story what we have heard from everybody. I'm concluding my project in Germany, and I want to thank [...] all those who made this project possible [...] I can't speak, I don't recall, remember the names now because I am just in a trance after this woman's report. I am concluding this project, the automobile is waiting, I am going to Frankfurt. Who is going to sit in judgment of all this, and who is going to judge my work? Illinois Institute of Technology wire recording. I am leaving tonight for Paris, the project is concluded.¹

Sitting alone in a rehabilitated synagogue in Wiesbaden, Germany, psychologist David Boder could barely comprehend the tragedies he has heard. Broken, speaking to himself on his wire recorder after listening for an hour to the story of Anna Kaletska who survived the war only to discover the baby she hid with a gentile woman had been killed three weeks before the Red Army reached her hometown, Boder cannot take anymore. He is in a trance, he says, speaking so slowly and laboriously that the listener of these tapes seventy years later is forced to lean closer to hear him. Long pauses stretch out this short paragraph to nearly three minutes with wire crackling from the magnetic tape interrupting the silence before Boder does. "Who is going to sit in judgment of all this, and who is going to judge my work?" Boder mutters to the void.

It is here that Boder appears to recognize, seemingly for the first time, that his work needs to be more than simply recording for further linguistic, psychological, and sociological study. Speaking as the Nuremberg Trial of Major War Criminals (November

¹ David Boder switches to English at the end of his final interview of his trip to record his postscript to the project. It was not initially transcribed when he wrote up all the interviews. Anna Kaletska, Interview by David Boder, in Wiesbaden, Germany, "Voices of the Holocaust," David P. Boder Archive. Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. September 26, 1946.
http://voices.iit.edu/interview?doc=kaletskaA&display=kaletskaA_en

20, 1945 – October 1, 1946) was nearing an end, Boder recognized that someone must sit in judgment over the terrible injustices described by his interviewees. Someone must find justice for them. Throughout his nearly 130 interviews, Boder rarely, if ever, allows himself to be caught up in the emotional stories of loss he's hearing. This objective stance allowed him to maintain a scientific atmosphere of distance between himself and the interviewee, but as he began to ponder the implications of his work, this distance all but evaporated. His interviews now complete, he realized his work was going to be judged, perhaps by those most intimately involved, those who knew these stories of pain firsthand. When he returned home, Boder did not transcribe this last addendum to Anna Kaletska's interview, ending the project instead with words about her story. The horrors Kaletska and the many other survivors reported to Boder prompted some to listen, including international lawmakers who sought to find justice and solutions to the refugee crisis the war had caused.

This dissertation is a study of the liminal spaces of the displaced persons camps in Italy. These were spaces where refugees and displaced persons (or DPs) found themselves pulled between mobility and stability in what they termed "an enervating period of waiting."² This dissertation is a study in the lines between mobility and immobility in the immediate postwar period. It examines the daily lives of individuals stuck while on the move. On the one hand, the refugees were highly mobile. Their mobility had an origin point, which the vast majority refused to return to, and a desired

² Dr. Gershon Gelbart of the JDC wrote that OJRI, UNRRA, and the JDC all began cultural programs "in reluctant recognition of the fact that the refugee program, contrary to early hopes, was not to be liquidated in a matter of weeks or even months and that, during the enervating period of waiting, the people should be given the opportunity for education and rehabilitation." JDC Archives, Records of the Geneva Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954, Folder 634, "Report Education Department July 19, 1946," July 19, 1946.

end destination. Although the end point sometimes changed over time, this study has demonstrated the ways in which the DPs viewed their time in Italy as a midway plot point in their life's narrative structure. There was a directed wandering, one that intended to exit Italy at the first opportunity, but for many that opportunity was slow in coming. Desiring to continue their path of mobility, DPs soon found themselves stuck instead. Here they began to feel the pull of stability, a desire to settle down and restart their lives. This pull induced them to rebuild communities and create homes in what would only be a temporary space. This study has demonstrated that for many, this "home" making is what they remember about their time in the DP camps; it was a space of rebirth and renewal. It is between these two pulls—the mobilizing tendency and the home-making tendency—that a new sense of self was negotiated. The expression of agency can be found most clearly in the negotiating between these two tendencies, as refugees struggled to maintain self-determination while waiting on the threshold of their new futures.

Structurally the dissertation is divided into six central chapters thematically linked through these concepts of mobility, (im)permanence, and identity formation. The first two chapters defined the broader periods under study, discussing in turn, 1945–1948 with a focus on Eastern European Jewish refugees and their desire to depart for Palestine and then 1948–1949, which is centered on Jews from Libya and their struggles to achieve recognition as refugees. The subsequent four chapters then integrated these European and North African stories. The third chapter focused on the process of cultural renewal created by both the refugees and aid workers as a form of rehabilitation and home-making. Chapter four, in contrast, explored the very real material problems in the camps alongside the despair and restlessness refugees felt as their prolonged wait turned from

weeks into years; in addition, it demonstrated ways the DPs fought against this very uncertainty, often through conflicts with aid organizations. The fifth chapter is a case study of one children's home for European Jewish children and argued that youths were often active participants in their own rehabilitation utilizing Zionist groups and aid organizations as tools for their own benefits. Chapter six studied the change in the memory of the DP camps over time from spaces of discontentment to places of rebirth.

This dissertation intervenes in a number of historiographies, but I would like to highlight three of these as we conclude here. First, it reorients the study of displaced persons camps to reconsider the role of Italy and the particularities of the Italian case to refugee life. Here it argues for the importance of the Italian camps as distinct from the German and Austrian camps in three primary ways: first, the majority of Jewish refugees entered Italian camps expressly as a way to make *aliyah*. This meant that they often anticipated little to no waiting time in Italy, a fact which makes their transition to creating a temporary home life more surprising. Italy also had a complicated wartime history as both oppressor and victim; this duality allowed postwar politicians to redefine the connections between Fascism and antisemitism, describing both as foreign invaders of the country rather than Italian. In examining the testimonies and memoirs of Jewish refugees, we find that DP memory further perpetuated this myth of the Italians as "*brava gente*," or good folks. This is interesting in part because the DPs do not give a similar label to the local German population in postwar Germany; there is no German "*brava gente*" myth advocated by Jewish DPs. Finally, and perhaps most uniquely, the Italian camps were also spaces for North African Jewish refugees. These migrants, largely from Libya, expand the national and cultural backgrounds of the refugee population, allowing

us to interrogate the place of colonization and “otherness” in the camps, which bring to light systemic problems of classification.

In addition, this dissertation intervenes in the field of refugee studies, particularly investigating aid organizations and youth populations around the issue of rehabilitation. International relief organizations, such as the International Refugee Organization (IRO) and voluntary agencies like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), played a crucial role in the DP camps as they often wielded immense power in the postwar period. This study describes the ways these humanitarian aid groups were often the primary, if unpredictable, source of support for all refugees in the DP camps; but their advocacy and support of the North African refugees was particularly important, as they largely lacked other international connections. In Italy, this dissertation demonstrates, these groups aided in the cultural rebirth that occurred but also refused to or at best were unable to truly understand the complex and changing needs of the survivor population. Here, this study develops scholarship on children and youth and in particular the power of Zionism in the postwar world, especially as an external pressure in Italy. As it interrogates the ways youths made choices about their own futures, however, it demonstrates that this pressure also created a mechanism for the expression of agency by the youths themselves.

Finally, this dissertation expands the study of post-Holocaust Jewish life. This scholarship includes geographically and linguistically diverse groups: Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe who were often Ashkenazi and spoke Yiddish, North African Jewish refugees who were often Sephardic and spoke Judeo-Arabic or Italian, and international aid workers, of whom many were Jewish and most often American or

British, some of whom spoke Hebrew. Through its analysis of DP memories, it argues that post-Holocaust collective narratives often shape the ways survivors reframe their remembrances not only of the Holocaust but also of DP camp life, often precisely by placing these camps in stark contrast with their wartime experiences. Including Libyan Jewish DPs in the study allows us to reexamine the discussion of post-Holocaust human rights. Jewish DPs are often viewed as catalysts for changing this discussion, but these cases demonstrate that this was not the universal Jewish migrant experience; human rights were still particularized and nationalized, not universal, even for Jewish survivors.

“This Universal Declaration of Human Rights may well become the international Magna Carta of all men everywhere,” proclaimed a hopeful former First Lady and United States delegate to the United Nations in 1951.³ Eleanor Roosevelt firmly believed they had made history three years earlier with the pronouncement of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which had called for the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”⁴ In her speech she made reference to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) and the American Bill of Rights (1791) along with “countless other declarations” that had sought to produce peace and freedom for all peoples. Many, Roosevelt included, credit the presence of millions of displaced persons (DPs) in the aftermath of the war, in particular the famous “last million” placed in Western and Soviet control, with triggering proclamations of international protections.⁵ Through its discussion of the international aid

³ Eleanor Roosevelt, “Address on Human Rights,” Speech at the United Nations, 1951. Quoted in United Nations Dept of Social Affairs, *The Impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1951), 8.

⁴ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations General Assembly, Paris, 10 December 1948. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> Accessed July 20, 2020.

⁵ Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.

organizations and policy creating entities, this dissertation also engaged in the question of postwar human rights.

Empirically we can see that during the aftermath of the Holocaust there was an increase in visibility for notions of human and universal rights; but in examining the issue of migrants from North Africa or the Middle East, this dissertation has questioned the notion that there was a clear-cut “revolution” in human rights policies.⁶ We find that notions of individual human rights were advocated in the 1940s to make up for or cover up the failure to protect minority group rights in the previous decade. The League of Nations, created in the interwar period for the international protection of human rights lacked the power to make minority rights universal; therefore, they could not protest racial segregation in the United States, colonization by Britain or France, or German treatment of Jews after 1933. The ultimate failure of the League to defend minority rights became one of the touchstones for the individual human rights movement within the newly created United Nations.⁷ In July 1951, representatives from 26 nations and several voluntary agencies gathered in Geneva to craft a new United Nations declaration birthed out of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document would enable them to create legal boundaries to deal with the millions of people who had been displaced and were seeking aid and compensation. The 1967 Protocol expanded the

⁶ Cohen lists the following as examples of declarations and agreements that shaped the postwar human rights regime: the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950). *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷ Mark Mazower claims that “for many of those involved [in promoting postwar human rights] human rights offered an attractive and plausible alternative to minority rights.” Mark Mazower, “The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933–1950,” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 02 (2004): 387; for further analysis see Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations: the End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, (Princeton University Press, 2009)

1951 Convention to make it apply to a wider audience both geographically and temporally by including events that occurred after January 1, 1951. These documents defined “refugee” and offered guidelines to those seeking aid and to those offering it.⁸

Yet, these “international” human rights that were proclaimed in the aftermath of the war were not truly designed to transcend the power of the nation.⁹ This would prove problematic, especially for Jewish DPs who were often stateless and thus had not obvious recourse to rights as citizens, making salient the importance of human rights that were recognized regardless of nationality. International and non-governmental organizations continued to challenge this nationalizing of human rights, particularly during the postwar refugee crisis. In 1947 the IRO sent the Commission on Human Rights a detailed agenda to protect the rights of refugees and DPs. In this agenda was the notion of a human individual right to asylum wherein “all persons who do not enjoy the protection of any state shall be placed under the protection of an international organization established by the UN.”¹⁰ This right, however, was not accepted by any of the Great Powers. That they were pronounced by a multinational body in the 1940s did not make their power international, nor were they given much publicity in either the framing nations or the second-tier ones. The rising power of the Cold War essentially pushed human rights conversations largely out of the public eye in the West as anti-Communism began to

⁸ These words come from the 1967 Refugee Convention Protocol. Refugee: “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” For a full text of both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol see UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, “Convention and Protocol Relation to the Status of Refugees,” <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html> Accessed July 20, 2020.

⁹ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 7, 44.

¹⁰ Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 97.

matter more than an individual's rights. In addition, this notion of human rights coexisted with colonial rule, and for all its language of rights, anti-colonialism remained an often racist and not wholly revolutionary force that remained committed to national sovereignty over individual freedom until the period after decolonization.¹¹ This all created a more particularist implementation of human rights in the 1940s and 50s, particularly in regard to women, children, and the subaltern.

In 1951, following the collapse of many of the totalitarian regimes of the early twentieth-century, Hannah Arendt challenged the optimistic view that the horrors of the previous decade would usher in a new era of rights recognition:

For, contrary to the best-intentioned humanitarian attempts to obtain new declarations of human rights from international organizations, it should be understood that this idea transcends the present sphere of international law which still operates in terms of reciprocal agreements and treaties between sovereign states; and, for the time being, a sphere that is above the nations does not exist.¹²

Human rights proponents and NGOs sought individual freedoms as the solution to totalitarian oppression. But the largely unenforceable nature of these "rights" outside of the national sphere proved in Arendt's mind their abstract, almost wishful thinking-like qualities; declarations of human rights were necessarily interconnected with the nation-state, so despite their universal intent, their application was national. This was also problematic for Jews in Libya who sought recognition with the U.N. as Maurice Perlzweig gave in his Statement on Behalf of the Jewish Community of Tripolitania to the Political Committee of the General Assembly:

Mr. Chairman, I speak for a group which has been the victim of hate, but, seeks to be a protagonist of brotherhood. I speak for a group which seeks no "special privilege," but affirms the equal right of all human beings. I speak for a group

¹¹ For more on this argument, see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, chapter 3 "Why Anticolonialism Wasn't a Human Rights Movement."

¹² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 298.

which, because it is small, remote and insecure, has no defense but justice. If we are denied justice, then human right everywhere is insecure. In the international community justice must be universal, or it is nothing; and it is to the international community that we address our plea. If it is answered, not we only will be the beneficiaries. You will have laid down the doctrine that, among communities as among men, the weakest should be as strong as the strongest before the law. In the minorities and forgotten communities throughout the world, who live in fear or insecurity, you will have awakened a new hope, and with it a new faith in the United Nations.¹³

The ultimate vote for an independent Libya, however, set aside the concerns of the Jewish minority. Abstract and not internationally enforceable, human rights talk continued to leave power in the hands of governments and big states.¹⁴ The “human rights revolution” of the immediate postwar period may not have been as thoroughgoing as was once believed, but at the very least, perhaps the situation of European DPs marked the “frustrating, often hypocritical” beginnings of the recognition of human rights.¹⁵ This question of human rights, however, still remains a challenging quandary for many states in the twenty-first century, including perhaps especially Italy where camps for migrants continue to cover the country.

This dissertation has told the story of one population’s refugee crisis, but of course, such crises have not gone away. The UN Refugee Agency currently reports that 70.8 million people are forcibly displaced as refugees, asylum-seekers or stateless persons—and once again, Italy finds itself as a central way station, hosting at least 296,000 DPs.¹⁶ Can these cases from the past tell us anything about the present? This

¹³ Statement on Behalf of the Jewish Community of Tripolitania to the Political Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, May 1949, Box 140, Folder 38, MS-361, World Jewish Congress Records, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, as seen in Roll 137, File B140-385, RG-67.006, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁴ Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War’s Wake*, 80-81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶ UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, “Figures at a Glance,” <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html> Accessed July 20, 2020; The International Rescue Committee puts this number much higher at 491,000 IRC, “Arrival in Europe: Italy,” <https://www.rescue.org/country/italy> Accessed July 20, 2020;

dissertation has examined the ways refugees' self-agency was actualized in the camps as they created internal governing bodies and (re)built cultural institutions. Conflicts occurred when the expectations of refugees differed from those sent to help them. It argued that refugee protests could bring about change, but largely only when an international audience was involved. Additionally, this dissertation has demonstrated some of the ways humanitarian aid groups worked in the DP camps: by supporting refugees financially in their efforts to bring about a cultural rebirth amongst the refugees and recognizing their need for self-governance in these areas; by thinking deeply about ways to help children recover from past trauma, even if they disagreed amongst themselves about what would actually be in the children's best interests; and by challenging aid eligibility processes for those who lack a voice to push for change themselves. Yet it also shows us how often authorities at various levels who were charged with ameliorating refugees' circumstances and helping them to make a new life also worked against that end in demonstrable fashion.

Ultimately these case studies showed us that refugee rehabilitation was best accomplished when aid organizations took an auxiliary role, working alongside the refugees as partners rather than directors; but in cases of more immediate crisis, where a refugee's mere presence in a country was challenged, rehabilitation often took a back seat to the more fundamental need to supply goods for basic survival. Partnership allowed refugees to advocate for themselves, but not all of our cases were afforded this type of personal agency. The case of the Libyan Jewish DPs challenges us to re-examine the policies and procedures of aid groups working with refugees who because of their citizenship or place of birth were unable to avail themselves of the care and maintenance

of the U.N. supranational organizations. It was—and perhaps is still—only through the combined efforts of refugees and humanitarian aid organizations working together that those in the DP camps were able to find their way out of the liminal space and into the dawning of their new futures.

But are these migrants today finding a temporary home in Italian refugee camps like their Jewish postwar predecessors? For some, it seems the answer is yes: “Many young people have established relationships with the citizens of Castelnuovo” says a worker for Castelnuovo di Porto asylum seeker center. These young refugees “volunteered and played for the local sports teams.”¹⁷ But the camp, which had been there for over ten years, has recently been closed, transferring the over 500 refugees living there to other parts of Italy. “They now find themselves having to change everything,” remarks the center worker. And for one of these residents, this change was nearly fatal: Faitha, a young Nigerian woman who was past term in her pregnancy was put on a train alone without any medical documentation explaining her condition and sent eight hours south; a few hours after she arrived she gave birth.¹⁸ Faitha’s exact situation may be unique, but the broad circumstances—being moved from one place to another without proper paperwork or direction—is far too common.

It is this lack of certainty that defines the modern refugee moment in Italy, a trend that as we have seen, extends onward from the early postwar period. Today, in what

¹⁷ Cecilia Ferrara, “Migranti, chiuso Cara di Castelnuovo di Porto. Sindaco: ‘Erano parte della comunità’. Cgil: ‘120 lavoratori a rischio’” *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (January 22, 2019) <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/01/22/migranti-chiuso-cara-di-castelnuovo-di-porto-sindaco-le-persone-erano-della-comunita-cgil-120-lavoratori-a-rischio/> Accessed July 20, 2020.

¹⁸ Alessandra Ziniti, “Faitha, mandata via da Castelnuovo di Porto, partorisce appena scesa dal treno,” *La Repubblica* (February 2, 2019) https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/02/02/news/faitha_mandata_via_da_castelnuovo_di_porto_partorisce_appena_scesa_dal_treno-218092232/ Accessed July 20, 2020.

appears to be a fast-forwarded version of the past, asylum centers are constantly opening and closing, often without any warning, and laws are frequently being rewritten such that one's legal presence in the country might change from one day to the next. In her striking study of migrant pathways in Italy, Stephanie Hom describes this constant state of precarity because "when mobility comes by way of force, not choice, people are shunted into an existence of temporary permanence."¹⁹ This kind of "temporary permanence" is prescribed even in the original name of these centers: *Centri di permanenza temporanea*.²⁰ Migrants detained here are deemed "*ospiti*," that is, literally, "guests," the irony of which does not escape them: "They call us guests," one detainee reported, "However we are guests who are not allowed to have a comb, a book or a pen to write."²¹ They are unchosen guests of a system that does not want them. Hom further explains that "Trauma and mobility are thus intimate bedfellows of the camp. Every *ospite* has suffered them, usually as the result of attempting to escape the one (trauma) through the other (mobility)...Many of these *ospiti* believed in the emancipatory potentials of mobility, and they acted on those hopes. Yet instead of ameliorating life, what resulted for many of them was total collapse of life."²² Jewish refugees, too, believed in the "emancipatory

¹⁹ Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire's Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy's Crisis of Migration and Detention* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 5.

²⁰ These are spaces for "stranieri irregolari," or "irregular foreigners," that is individuals who have arrived in Italy without the proper paperwork to be in the country, who the state intends to repatriate. The centers have changed names multiple times and were initially called *Centri di permanenza temporanea e assistenza* (CPTA), then termed *Centri di permanenza temporanea* (CPT), then *Centri di identificazione ed espulsione* (CIE), and finally as of 2017 are now known as *Centri di permanenza per i rimpatri* (CPR). Camera dei deputati "Documentazione parlamentare. Studi – Istituzioni. I Centri di permanenza per i rimpatri," Parlamento Italiano (June 27, 2019) <https://temi.camera.it/leg18/post/cpr.html> Accessed July 20, 2020.

²¹ Quote by Ali, detainee in Ponte Galeria Centre. Seen in "Behind Higher Fences. Report on the identification and deportation centre of Ponte Galeria in Rome," *Medici per i Diritti Umani* (June 2012), <https://mediciperidirittiumani.org/en/behind-higher-fences-2/> Accessed July 20, 2020.

²² Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire's Mobius Strip*, 70-71.

potentials of mobility,” as they sought clandestine, and often illegal means of escape; their collapse, however, was buoyed by their ultimate arrival “home.”

For many current refugees, however, even the promise of a permanent home appears unfulfillable. The case of rapper Abdel Karim Islam offers a clear picture of these dashed hopes. Karim arrived in Italy legally in 1995 from Egypt; the death of his father caused him to “go off the rails” as he said and enter a rehabilitation facility to receive help. This, however, meant that the renewal of his permit to remain in Italy was denied, and he was eventually sent to live in the *Ponte Galeria* refugee transit center outside Rome. After his eventual release, he appeared in the documentary “Limbo” about the lives of those in these refugee centers.²³ Here he shared his song “*Tutto tace*” (All is quiet) that described his experience with the Italian legal system:

How can a whole State make a mistake
 About my entry, my true identity.
 I’ve been here 20 years!
 They say I came in 2007 on a raft.
 I live in silence
 With a thousand fears inside...
 And none of this is right
 But I’m not complaining...
 ...
 Being free like a seagull
 When you’re in chains
 Hostage of a state
 That tears me away from my home in Milan
 To fly towards the Vatican
 So beautiful
 Who could imagine
 Finding a place so inhuman
 ...
 Thinking back on my first day inside
 Cage with a thousand other races
 Lost and dispersed
 Like me blinded by rage
 Honest people locked up with the worst.

²³ Ibid., 114-117

Lucky “everyone’s equal under the law” –
[this is] a load of shit written on courthouse walls.

...

I chose to fight
Swearing I’d only leave dead!
I’m not ready
To leave everything
To go back to my country of origin.
No way!
It’s like pulling an oak
From its roots
My woman, family, friends.
There’s no remedy
When the cops are aggressive
The first not to respect the law.
Who will fix this system?
I don’t buy the Lega’s bullshit!
No one gives a damn!
While I write this
My mind sends my heart ugly images
Raw truths hidden behind those walls
Me against it all
I’m not afraid!
How did I do it?
I need to soar again!
This can’t be my end!
Let me out!²⁴

Karim, like many of the Jewish refugees in Italy in the 1940s, feels forgotten by the outside world. Like the Jewish refugees who sent countless letters to international agencies and governments in an effort to achieve a better situation, so too do the migrants stuck in Italy’s many internment centers seek to tell the world about their plight. Hunger strikes, like those we saw in La Spezia in 1946 abound in these centers of temporary permanence; individuals have sewn their mouths shut in desperate acts of defiance as their protests have little effect on changing policies. Requests for political asylum and

²⁴ Abdel Karim Islam, “Tutto tace” Translated by Abdel Karim Islam and Micaela Tassinari. From the film *Limbo* by Matteo Calore and Gustav Hofer. https://youtu.be/YdF_pBYHuUw Accessed July 20,2020.

refugee status continue to fail at a remarkably high rate.²⁵ Yet, as Karim's song indicates, many migrants in Italy today still consider Italy to be their home.

Many (although not all) Jewish refugees in the 1940s, however, held the reasonable expectation that they would soon be moving on to a more permanent home. But these expectations were repeatedly frustrated. Although their stay in Italy was temporary because neither they nor the Italian government wanted them to become permanent residents, their journey was not as quick as they would have liked. Trauma from their Holocaust experiences, the often deplorable food and housing arrangements they faced in the camps, especially in the beginning, and the pervasive feeling of loss undeniably caused hardship and a multitude problems. This assurance of new home space, however, allowed many to start remaking the camp into temporary homes, recreating culture and families in the places they were in with an eye to the future. A popular DP song "Es benkt zikh nokh a haym" ("We Long for a Home") captured this tension between despair and hope that often filled Jewish refugees in Italian DP camps:

We long for a home, where can one find such a place in the world?
We long for a home, every road is blocked to us.
Yet one must keep hoping, it can't be otherwise,
Then life can be full of beauty, charm, and happiness.
We long for a home, a warm inviting home as before.
We long for a home, for our misery the only cure.
The past was filled with evil, we prayed for better lives
Now we want to live again, the right time has arrived!²⁶

This study has demonstrated the ways in which refugees vacillated between mobility and forced stagnation. For some, the stagnant periods were barren and stripped of rights: the

²⁵ Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire's Mobius Strip*, 70.

²⁶ Happy Boys, "Es benkt zikh nokh a haym" (We Long for a Home), Quoted in Shirli Gilbert, "Songs and Survival among Jewish DPs," in *"We Are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* Avinoam J. Patt and Michael. Berkowitz, eds., (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 296.

new home would have to wait. Yet, the longing for a home enabled many to find a space to begin to rebuild, even as they waited upon the threshold.

APPENDIX A

Map of Displaced Persons Camps in Italy



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources – Published Material

- Affairs, United Nations Dept of Social. *The Impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations, 1951.
- Aviel, Avraham. *Freedom and Loneliness*. Kotarim International Publi, 2008.
- Boder, David P. *I Did Not Interview the Dead*. Vol. xix. Champaign, IL, US: University of Illinois Press, 1949.
- Brosse, Thérèse. *War-Handicapped Children: Report on the European Situation*, vol. 439. Unesco, 1950.
- Debenedetti, Giacomo. *October 16, 1943 ; Eight Jews*. Translated by Estelle Gilson. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.
- Ehrlich, Jakob, and Jean Daniels. *A Boy Named Jakob: A Holocaust Story*. Independently Published, 2019.
- Gerbi, David. *Costruttori di pace: storia di un ebreo profugo dalla Libia*. Appunti di viaggio, 2003.
- Goetz, Gertrude. *Memory of Kindness: Growing up in War Torn Europe*. Xlibris Corporation, 2001.
- Goetz, Samuel. *I Never Saw My Face*. Hudson House, 2007.
- Goldman, Louis. *Friends for Life: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor and His Rescuers*. New York: Paulist Press, 2008.
- Grossmann, Kurt R. *The Jewish DP Problem Its Origin, Scope, and Liquidation*. New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, World Jewish Congress, 1951.
- Gruber, Ruth. *Destination Palestine: The Story of the Haganah Ship, Exodus 1947*. Current Books, 1948.
- Holborn, Louise W. *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations: Its History and Work, 1946-1952*. London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Journo, Arthur, and Maria S. Palieri. *Il Ribelle*. Firenze: Le lettere, 2003.
- Kimche, Jon, and David Kimche. *The Secret Roads, the "Illegal" Migration of a People, 1938-1948*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1954.
- Kulischer, Eugene. *The Displacement of Population in Europe*. Montreal: International Labour Office, 1943.
- . *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes, 1917–1947*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1948.
- Levi, Primo. *Se non ora, quando?* Einaudi, 2015.
- . *Se questo è un uomo*. Torino: F. de Silva, 1947.
- Luzon, Raphael. *Libyan Twilight: Story of An Arab Jew*. Darf Publishers, 2017.
- Magiar, Victor. *E venne la notte: ebrei in un paese arabo*. Casa Editrice Giuntina, 2003.
- Meghnagi, David. "Un Ragazzo Nel Pogrom-Giugno 1967." *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 49, no. 1/4 (1983): 324–331.

- Nahon, Umberto. "I Mille Immigranti Fermati a La Spezia Nel 1946." *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 37, no. 6 (1971): 361–73.
- Papanek, Ernst. "Social Services for European Jewish Children." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 24 (1948): 412–17.
- . "They Are Not Expendable: The Homeless and Refugee Children in Germany." *Social Service Review* 20, no. 3 (1946): 312–19.
- . "Treatment by Group Work." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 15, no. 2 (1945): 223–229.
- Pinson, Koppel S. "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's." *Jewish Social Studies*, (1947), 101–26.
- Rosner, Bernat, Frederic C. Tubach, and Sally Patterson Tubach. *An Uncommon Friendship: From Opposite Sides of the Holocaust*. University of California Press, 2002.
- Schechter, Doris. *At Oma's Table: More than 100 Recipes and Remembrances from a Jewish Family's Kitchen*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2007.
- Schwarz, Leo Walder. *The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People*. New York: Rinehart, 1949.
- Sedgman, Peter. *As Far as I Can Remember*. Sydney: Sydney Jewish Museum, 2006.
- Sereni, Ada. *I clandestini del mare. L'emigrazione ebraica in Terra d'Israele dal 1945 al 1948*. Milano: Mursia, 1973.
- Vernant, Jacques. *The Refugee in the Postwar World*. New Haven, CT, 1953.
- Weiss, Jack. *Memories, Dreams, Nightmares: Memoirs of a Holocaust Survivor*. University of Calgary Press, 2005.
- Woodbridge, George. *UNRRA: the History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1950.
- Zoltak, Sidney J. *My Silent Pledge: A Journey of Struggle, Survival and Remembrance*. Toronto, ON Guernica Editions, 2013.

Secondary Sources

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998.
- . *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Aglio, Roberta and Monica Feraboli. *DP Camp IT 82: Cremona. Arrivo e partenze. Traiettorie, incroci, vite, storia. Atti della tavola rotonda cremona, 28 gennaio 2017*. Cremona: Fantigrafica, 2017.
- Ahmida, Ali Abdullatif. *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture, and Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- . *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya*. Routledge, 2013.
- . *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, Second Edition*. SUNY Press, 2011.
- Albanese, G., and R. Pergher. *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*. Springer, 2012.
- Albrich, Thomas, and Ronald W. Zweig. *Escape Through Austria: Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine*. Psychology Press, 2002.

- Allwork, Larissa. "Interrogating Europe's Voids of Memory: Trauma Theory and Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational." *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 10 (2016): 1–22.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. and Extended ed. London ; New York: Verso, 1991.
- Anderson, Lisa. *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966.
- . "We Refugees." In *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, edited by Marc Robinson, 110–19. Faber & Faber, 1994.
- Arielli, N. *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933–40*. Springer, 2010.
- Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- . "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony." *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 261–73.
- . *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*. Fordham University Press, 2016.
- Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–133.
- Auslander, L. "Coming Home? Jews in Postwar Paris." *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 237–59.
- Baldinetti, Anna. *The Origins of the Libyan Nation : Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State*. Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern History ; Routledge, 2013.
- Balint, Ruth. "Children Left Behind: Family, Refugees and Immigration in Postwar Europe." *History Workshop Journal* 82, no. 1 (October 2016): 151–72.
- . "The Use and Abuse of History: Displaced Persons in the ITS Digital Archive." In *Freilegungen: Spielgelungen Des NS-Verfolgung Und Ihrer Konsequenzen*, 173–88. Gottingen [Germany]: Wallstein Verlag, 2015.
- Ballinger, Pamela. "Borders of the Nation, Borders of Citizenship: Italian Repatriation and the Redefinition of National Identity after World War II." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 03 (July 2007).
- . "Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya." *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 4 (October 2016): 813–38.
- . "Entangled or 'Extruded' Histories? Displacement, National Refugees, and Repatriation after the Second World War." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 366–86.
- . *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*. Princeton University Press, 2003.
- . "Impossible Returns, Enduring Legacies: Recent Historiography of Displacement and the Reconstruction of Europe after World War II." *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 01 (February 2013): 127–38.
- . "The Culture of Survivors: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Memory." *History and Memory*, 1998, 99–132.

- . *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Bankier, David, and Dan Mikhman. *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*. Berghahn Books, 2008.
- Bankir, David. *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin After WW II*. Berghahn Books, 2005.
- Barnett, Michael N. and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World : International Organizations in Global Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Battini, Michele. *The Missing Italian Nuremberg : Cultural Amnesia and Postwar Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Battisti, Danielle. "The American Committee on Italian Migration, Anti-Communism, and Immigration Reform." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 31, no. 2 (2012): 11–40.
- Bauer, Yehuda. *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945*. Wayne State University Press, 1981.
- . *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*. Random House, 1970.
- . *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jewry on Post-Holocaust European Jewry*. Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 1989.
- Baumel, Judith Tydor. "DPs, Mothers and Pioneers: Women in the She'erit Hapletah." *Jewish History* 11, no. 2 (September 1997): 99–110.
- Bek-Pedersen, Kathrine, and Edith Montgomery. "Narratives of the Past and Present: Young Refugees' Construction of a Family Identity in Exile." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 1 (2006): 94–112.
- Belco, Victoria. *War, Massacre, and Recovery in Central Italy, 1943-1948*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Benedetti, Corrado Israel De. *I sogni non passano in eredit'a: cinquant'anni di vita in kibbuz*. Casa Editrice Giuntina, 2001.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. "Fascism, Writing, and Memory: The Realist Aesthetic in Italy, 1930-1950." *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 3 (September 1, 1995): 627–65.
- . *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- . "History as It Really Wasn't: The Myths of Italian Historiography." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 2001): 402–19.
- . *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*. Bloomington, United States: Indiana University Press, 2015.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth, and Mia Fuller. *Italian colonialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth, and Stephanie Malia Hom. *Italian Mobilities*. Routledge, Routledge, 2015.
- Bensoussan, Georges. *Jews in Arab Countries: The Great Uprooting*. Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Bernard-Donals, Michael F. "The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival, and: Testimony after Catastrophe: Narrating Traumas of Political Violence (Review)." *Comparative Literature Studies* 44, no. 3 (2007): 340–345.

- Bernard-Donals, Michael, and Richard Glejzer. "Between Witness and Testimony: Survivor Narratives and the Shoah." *College Literature* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 1–20.
- Bernhard, P. "Behind the Battle Lines: Italian Atrocities and the Persecution of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews in North Africa during World War II." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 3 (December 1, 2012): 425–46.
- Bertilotti, Paola. "La délation des Juifs. Une mémoire silencieuse dans l'Italie républicaine (1944-1961)." *Laboratoire italien. Politique et société*, no. 10 (December 1, 2010): 193–222.
- Bettin, Cristina M. *Italian Jews from Emancipation to the Racial Laws*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Bidussa, David. *Il mito del bravo italiano*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1994.
- Bidussa, David, Enrica Collotti Pischel, and Raffaella Scardi. *Identità e storia degli ebrei*. FrancoAngeli, 2000.
- Bosworth, Richard J. B., and Patrizia Dogliani. *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- Boum, Aomar. *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco*. Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Boum, Aomar, and Sarah Abrevaya Stein. *The Holocaust and North Africa*. Redwood City, United States: Stanford University Press, 2018.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Bramwell, Anna C. ed., *Refugees in the Age of Total War*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988.
- Brenner, Michael. *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Brown-Fleming, Suzanne. *Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- Byfield, Judith, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Sikainga, eds. *Africa and World War II*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Capogreco, Carlo Spartaco. *I campi del duce: l'internamento civile nell'Italia Fascista, 1940-1943*. Einaudi, 2004.
- Caponetto, Rosetta Giuliani. *Fascist Hybridities: Representations of Racial Mixing and Diaspora Cultures under Mussolini*. Springer, 2016.
- Capussotti, Enrica, and Liliana Ellena. "The Way of Oblivion: Refugees in Italy." *Feminist Review*, no. 73 (2003): 148–152.
- Caracciolo, Nicola. *Uncertain Refuge: Italy and the Jews During the Holocaust*. University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- . *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Cesarani, David, ed. *Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Europe after the Second World War*. London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010.
- Cesarani, David, and Eric J Sundquist. *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012.

- Chillemi, Annibale. "La Condition Juridique Des Étrangers En Libye / The Legal Position Of Foreigners In Libya." *Civilisations* 7, no. 3 (1957): 327–42.
- Cohen, Beth B. *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America*. Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Cohen, Boaz, and Rita Horváth. "Young Witnesses in the DP Camps: Children's Holocaust Testimony In Context." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2012): 103–25.
- Cohen, Gerard Daniel. "Between Relief and Politics: Refugee Humanitarianism in Occupied Germany 1945-1946." *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (July 2008): 437–49.
- . *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- . "The Politics of Recognition: Jewish Refugees in Relief Policies and Human Rights Debates, 1945–50." *Immigrants and Minorities* 24, no. 2 (July 2006): 125–43.
- Cohen, Michael J. *Palestine and the Great Powers 1945-1948*. Princeton, 1981.
- Collotti, Enzo. *Ebrei in Toscana tra occupazione tedesca e RSI: persecuzione, depredazione, deportazione (1943-1945)*. Roma: Carocci, 2007.
- Comet, Theodore. "Life Reborn in the Displaced Persons Camps (1945-51)." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 76, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 299.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Corni, G. "The Exodus of Italians from Istria and Dalmatia, 1945–56," in Eds. J. Reinisch and E. White. *The Disentanglement of Populations. Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944–9*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 71–90.
- Crago-Schneider, Kierra Mikaila. "Jewish" Shtetls in Postwar Germany: An Analysis of Interactions Among Jewish Displaced Persons, Germans, and Americans Between 1945 and 1957 in Bavaria." University of California, Los Angeles, 2013.
- Crainz, Guido, Raoul Pupo, and Silvia Salvatici. *Naufraghi della pace: il 1945, i profughi e le memorie divise d'Europa*. Donzelli, 2008.
- Crane, Susan A. "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory." *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1372–1385.
- Cronin, Stephanie. *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa*. Routledge, 2012.
- Davidson, Naomi. "'Brothers from South of the Mediterranean': Decolonizing the Jewish 'Family' during the Algerian War." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 76–96.
- Davis, Belinda J. *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- De Felice, Renzo. *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.
- . *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*. Torino: Einaudi, 1961.
- Del Boca, Angelo. *Gli italiani in Libia*. Roma: Laterza, 1986.
- . *Italiani, Brava Gente? : Un mito duro a morire*. Vicenza: N. Pozza, 2005.

- . *La guerra d'Etiopia l'ultima impresa del colonialismo*. Milano: Longanesi, 2010.
- . *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya*. Italian and Italian American Studies. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Del Vivo, Caterina. "La Storia Del Mondo è Fatta Di Tante Storie." *Mondo Classico e Tradizione Ebraica Nella Narrativa Di Laura Orvieto, Antologia Vieusseux* 43 (2009): 5–34.
- Di Padova, Federica. "Jewish Displaced Persons in Italia (1945-1950)." *E-Review. Rivista degli Istituti Storici dell'Emilia-Romagna in Rete* 4 (March 17, 2017).
- . "Rinascere in Italia. Matrimoni e nascite nei campi per displaced persons ebrei 1943-1948." *Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile* 36 (2018): 1–19.
- Diner, Hasia R. *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Doná, Giorgia. "Making Homes in Limbo: Embodied Virtual 'Homes' in Prolonged Conditions of Displacement." *Refuge* 31, no. 1 (2015): 67–73.
- Donati, Sabina. *A Political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950*. Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Doron, Daniella. *Jewish youth and identity in postwar France: rebuilding family and nation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.
- Duggan, Christopher. *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008.
- Dwork, Deborah. *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Eastes, Victoria Marite Helga. *The Illusion of Peace the Fate of the Baltic Displaced Persons, 1945-1952*. College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University, 2010.
- Eastmond, Marita. "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research [article]." *Journal of Refugee Studies*, no. 2 (2007): 248.
- Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Enardu, Maria Grazia. "L'alijah bet nella politica estera italiana 1945-1948." In *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei nell'Italia Unita 1870-1945. Atti del IV convegno internazionale*, edited by A.A.V.V., 514–532. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1993.
- . *L'immigrazione illegale ebraica verso la Palestina e la politica estera italiana, 1945-1948*, "Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali." Vol. 2, 1986.
- Erbelding, Rebecca. *Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America's Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe*. New York: Anchor Books, 2018.
- Erll, Astrid. *Memory in Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian reason a moral history of the present times*. Translated by Rachel Gomme. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Fassin, Didier, and Richard Rechtman. *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry Into the Condition of Victimhood*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Faure, Laura Hobson. "Towards Consensus? American Jewish Organizations in France after the Shoah." In *American Responses to the Holocaust, Transatlantic*

- Perspectives*, edited by Hans Krabbendam and Derek Rubin, 79–96. Peter Lang, 2017.
- Favero, Paolo. “Italians, the ‘Good People’: Reflections on National Self-Representation in Contemporary Italian Debates on Xenophobia and War.” *Outlines-Critical Practice Studies*, 2010.
- Fehrenbach, Heide. “War Orphans and PostFascist Families: Kinship and Belonging after 1945.” In *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, edited by Frank Biess and Robert Moeller. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.
- Feinstein, Margarete Myers. “Jewish Women Survivors in the Displaced Persons Camps of Occupied Germany: Transmitters of the Past, Caretakers of the Present, and Builders of the Future.” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, no. 4 (2006): 67.
- Felman, Shoshana. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Taylor & Francis, 1992.
- Foa, Anna. *Gli ebrei nella vita di ogni giorno*. Giuntina, 2000.
- Focardi, Filippo. *La guerra della memoria: La Resistenza nel dibattito politico Italiano dal 1945 a oggi*. 1. ed. Roma: Laterza, 2005.
- Fogu, Claudio. *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*. University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Foot, John. *Italy’s Divided Memory*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Fournier, Sara Cohen. “Sharing and Unsharing Memories. Life Stories of Jews from Muslim-Arab Countries: Fear, Anger and Discontent within a Silenced Displacement.” *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, Memory and Forgetting among Jews from the Arab-Muslim Countries. Contested Narratives of a Shared Past, 4 (November 2012): 15–31.
- Forlenza, Rosario. “Sacrificial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Postwar Italy: Reliving and Remembering World War II,” *History and Memory*, Vol. 24, n. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012)
- Francesconi, Federica. “Lo spoglio di archivi americani per lo studio dei profughi e della ricostruzione: un primo bilancio.” In *Per ricostruire e ricostruirsi: Astorre Mayer e la rinascita ebraica tra Italia e Israele*, edited by Marco Paganoni. Milano: F. Angeli, 2010.
- Frank, Matthew, and Jessica Reinisch. “Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe, 1919–59.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (July 2014): 477–90.
- Gabaccia, Donna R. *Italy’s Many Diasporas*. Routledge, 2013.
- Gatrell, Peter. *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956-1963*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- . *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- . *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent*. Basic Books, 2019.
- Gilbert, Shirli. *Music and the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.
- Gillette, Aaron. *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- . *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, 2014.

- Ginsborg, Paul. *A History of Contemporary Italy : Society and Politics, 1943- 1988*. London, England ; New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Golan, Yvonne Kozlovsky. "Childhood Memories from the Giado Detention and Forced Labor Camp in Libya: Fragments from the Oeuvre of the Artist Nava T. Barazani," n.d., 42.
- Goldberg, Adara. *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955*. Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2015.
- Goldberg, Harvey E. "From Sephardi to Mizrahi and Back Again: Changing Meanings of 'Sephardi' in Its Social Environments." *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 165–188.
- . *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- . "Language and Culture of the Jews of Tripolitania: A Preliminary View." *Mediterranean Language Review* 1 (1983): 85-102.
- . "Patronage as a Model for Muslim-Jewish Relations in North Africa: Contributions of Anthropological Field Research and a Case from Libya: Patronage and Muslim-Jewish Relationships." *Religion Compass* 6, no. 2 (February 2012): 152–62
- Goldberg, Harvey E., and Rosie Pinhas-Delpuech. "Les Jeux de Pourim et Leurs Déclinaisons a Tripoli: Perspective Comparative Sur l'usage Social Des Histoires Bibliques." *Annales*, 1994, 1183–1195.
- Gordon, Robert. *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944–2010*. Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Gottreich, Emily, and Daniel J Schroeter. *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011
- Greenberg, Gershon. "German Displaced Persons Camps (1945–1948): Orthodox Jewish Responses to the Holocaust." *Historical Reflections* 39, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 71–95.
- Greenspan, Henry. *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony: Second Edition*. Paragon House, 2010.
- . *The Awakening of Memory: Survivor Testimony in the First Years after the Holocaust, and Today*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 2001.
- Grodzinsky, Yosef. *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Struggle between Jews and Zionists in the Aftermath of World War II*. Common Courage Press, 2004.
- Grossmann, Atina. *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- . "Victims, Villains, and Survivors: Gendered Perceptions and Self-Perceptions of Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Postwar Germany." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, no. 1 (2002): 291.
- Gruber, Ruth. *Haven: The Dramatic Story of 1000 World War II Refugees and How They Came to America*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- . *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*. University of California Press, 2002.
- Gutwein, Daniel. "The Privatization of the Holocaust: Memory, Historiography, and Politics." *Israel Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 36–64.

- Hadjisavvas, Eliana. "Journey through the 'Gate of Zion': British Policy, Jewish Refugees and the La Spezia Affair, 1946." *Social History* 44, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 469–93.
- Halamish, Aviva. *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine*. Vallentine Mitchell, 1998.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hametz, Maura E. "The Ambivalence of Italian Antisemitism: Fascism, Nationalism, and Racism in Trieste." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 16, no. 3 (2002): 376–401.
- Harper, John Lamberton. *America and the Reconstruction of Italy, 1945-1948*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Herr, Alexis. *The Holocaust and Compensated Compliance in Italy: Fossoli Di Carpi, 1942-1952*. Springer, 2016.
- Herzer, Ivo, Klaus Voigt, and James Burgwyn. *The Italian Refuge: Rescue of Jews during the Holocaust*. Catholic University of America Press, 1989.
- Heuman, Johannes. "Promoting Global Holocaust Memory in the Era of the Cold War: The Tomb of the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris." *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past*, no. 1 (2015): 116.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. "The Witness in the Archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies." *Memory Studies* 2, no. 2 (May 2009): 151–70.
- Hobson-Faure, Laura, Mathias Gardet, Katy Hazan, and Catherine Nicault. *L' Oeuvre De Secours Aux Enfants Et Les Populations Juives Au Xxe Siècle: Prévenir Et Guérir Dans Un Siècle De Violences*. Paris: A. Colin, 2014.
- Holian, Anna. *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*. University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Hom, Stephanie Malia. *Empire's Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy's Crisis of Migration and Detention*. Cornell University Press, 2019.
- . *The Beautiful Country: Tourism and the Impossible State of Destination Italy*. University of Toronto Press, 2015.
- Hoppe, Jens. "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945: An Italian Affair?" In *The Holocaust and North Africa*, by Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, 50–75. Stanford University Press, 2018.
- Hughes, H. Stuart. *Prisoners of Hope: The Silver Age of the Italian Jews 1924-1974*. Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Innocenti, Marco. *L'Italia del dopoguerra: 1946-1960*. Ugo Mursia Editore, 1995.
- Iriye, Akira, Petra Goedde, and William I Hitchcock. *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Isaac, Julius. "European Migration Potential and Prospects." *Population Studies* 2, no. 4 (March 1949): 379.
- Jockusch, Laura. *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- John, Ronald Bruce St. *Libya: Continuity and Change*. Routledge, 2015.
- Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. New York: Penguin Press, 2005.
- Kaplan, Marion A. *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- Katz, Ethan. *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France*, 2015.
- Katz, Steven T. *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*. NYU Press, 2006.
- Kavanaugh, Sarah. *ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors*. Vallentine Mitchell, 2008.
- Klein, Shira. *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Knowles, Anne Kelly, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano. *Geographies of the Holocaust*. Indiana University Press, 2014.
- Kochavi, Arieh J. "Anglo-American Discord: Jewish Refugees and United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration Policy, 1945-1947." *Diplomatic History. The Journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 529–51.
- . *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Kokkonen, Susanna. "Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Italy, 1945-1951." *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 2008, 91–106.
- . *The Jewish Refugees in Postwar Italy, 1945-1951*. Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011.
- Königseder, Angelika, Juliane. Wetzel, and John Broadwin. *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post- World War II Germany*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Kozlovsky-Golan, Yvonne. "Site of Amnesia: The Absence of North African Jewry in Visual Depictions of the Experience of World War II." *Jewish Film & New Media* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 153–80.
- Krondorfer, Björn. "Is Forgetting Reprehensible? Holocaust Remembrance and the Task of Oblivion." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 2 (June 2008): 233–67.
- Kushner, Tony. "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation." *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 275–95.
- . *Journeys from the Abyss: The Holocaust and Forced Migration from the 1880s to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Langer, Lawrence. *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Laqueur, Walter. *A History of Zionism*. New York, 1972.
- Laskier, Michael M. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.
- Lauren, Paul. *The Evolution of International Human Rights*. Philadelphia, 1996.
- Leenders, Marij. "From Inclusion to Exclusion: Refugees and Immigrants in Italy between 1861 and 1943." *Immigrants & Minorities* 14, no. 2 (1995): 115–37.
- Lelli, Fabrizio. "Profughi ebrei nel Salento (1944-1947): nuove testimonianze." *Eunomia. Rivista Semestrale Di Storia e Politica Internazionali*, no. 2 (2017): 277–290.
- Levy, Daniel, and Natan Sznaider. *Human Rights and Memory*. Penn State Press, 2010.
- Lewin, Carroll McC. "Negotiated Selves in the Holocaust." *Ethos* 21, no. 3 (1993): 295–318.
- Lifton, Betty Jean. *The King of Children: The Life and Death of Janusz Korczak*. Macmillan, 1997.

- Lombardi-Diop, Cristina, and Caterina Romeo, eds. *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*. First edition. Italian and Italian American Studies. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Lowenstein, Sharon R. *Token Refuge: The Story of the Jewish Refugee Shelter at Oswego, 1944-1946*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Lucrezi, Francesco. "Neither Africans nor Europeans: The Jewish Libyan Community between Integration, Separation and Expulsion." *Fundamina: A Journal of Legal History* 14, no. 2 (2008): 37–49.
- Luzzatto, Sergio. *I bambini di Moshe: gli orfani della Shoah e la nascita di Israele*. Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2018.
- Malkki, Liisa H. "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 377–404.
- Mankowitz, Zeev. *Life Between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Markovizky, Jacob. "The Italian Government's Response to the Problem of Jewish Refugees 1945-1948." *The Journal of Israeli History* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 23–39.
- Marrus, Michael Robert. *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Marzano, Arturo. "Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah: The Hachsharot in Italy (1945–48)." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18 (January 14, 2019): 314–29.
- . "The Migration of the Italian Jews to Israel and Their Perception of the 'Arab Problem' (1945-1958)." *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 2010): 285–314.
- Matthäus, Jürgen. *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and Its Transformations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Mazower, Mark. *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations: the End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, 2010.
- . "The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933–1950." *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 02 (2004): 379–398.
- McLaren, Brian. *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya: An Ambivalent Modernism*. University of Washington Press, 2006.
- Medding, Peter Y, and Makhon le-Yahadut zamanenu 'a. sh. Avraham Harman. *Sephardic Jewry and Mizrahi Jews*. Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Megged, Aharon. *The story of the Selvino children: journey to the promised land*. London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002.
- Menici, Sonia. "l'opera del joint in italia. Un 'piano marshall' ebraico per la ricostruzione." *La Rassegna Mensile Di Israel*, terza serie, 69, no. 2 (May 1, 2003): 593–618.
- Mennonna, Mario. *Ebrei a Nardò: Campo profughi n. 34, Santa Maria al Bagno, 1944-1947*. Congedo, 2008.
- Michaelis, Meir. *Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy, 1922-1945*. Clarendon Press, 1978.

- Miletto, Enrico. *Con Il Mare Negli Occhi. Storia, Luoghi E Memorie Dell'esodo Istriano a Torino*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2005.
- Müller, Beate. "Translating Trauma: David Boder's 1946 Interviews with Holocaust Survivors." *Translation and Literature* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 257–71.
- . "Trauma, Historiography and Polyphony: Adult Voices in the CJHC's Early Postwar Child Holocaust Testimonies." *History & Memory* 24, no. 2 (2012): 157–95.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe Studies in the Presence of the Past*. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Nardò 1943-1947. *L'accoglienza ai profughi ebrei*. Nardo: Besa, 2007.
- Niewyk, Donald L. *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Nissan, Ephraim. "Aspects of Italy's Jewish Experience, as Shaped by Local and Global Factors." *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire* 18, no. 1 (February 2011): 131–42.
- Nissim, Giorgio, and Liliana Picciotto Fargion. *Memorie di un ebreo toscano, 1938-1948*. Roma: Carocci, 2005.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between History and Memory: Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24.
- . *Les Lieux de mémoire: Les France*. Gallimard, 1984.
- Ofer, Dalia. "The Past That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory." *Israel Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–35.
- Ofer, Dalia, Françoise Ouzan, and Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, eds. *Holocaust Survivors: Resettlement, Memories, Identities*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333–348.
- Paganoni, Marco. *Per ricostruire e ricostruirsi. Astorre Mayer e la rinascita ebraica tra Italia e Israele*. FrancoAngeli, 2010.
- Paoletti, Emanuela. *The Migration of Power and North-South Inequalities: The Case of Italy and Libya*. Springer, 2010.
- Patt, Avinoam J. *Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009.
- Patt, Avinoam J., Atina Grossmann, Linda G. Levi, and Maud S. Mandel, eds. *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism*. Wayne State University Press, 2019.
- Patt, Avinoam J., and Michael. Berkowitz. *"We Are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010.
- Pavan, Ilaria. *Persecution, Indifference, and Amnesia*. Wallstein Verlag, 2008.
- Pavan, Ilaria, and Guri Schwarz. *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione Fascista e reintegrazione postbellica*. Casa Editrice Giuntina, 2001.
- Patriarca, Silvana. "Fear of Small Numbers: «Brown Babies» in Postwar Italy." *Contemporanea*, no. 4/2015 (2015): 537–68.
- Peck, Abraham J. "'Our Eyes Have Seen Eternity': Memory and Self-Identity among the She'erith Hapletah." *Modern Judaism* 17, no. 1 (February 1997).
- Pezzino, Paolo. "'Experts in Truth?': The Politics of Retribution in Italy and the Role of Historians." *Modern Italy* 15, no. 03 (August 2010): 349–63.

- Pfanzelter, Eva. "Between Brenner and Bari: Jewish Refugees in Italy 1945 to 1948." *Journal of Israeli History* 19, no. 3 (1998): 83–104.
- Picciotto Fargion, Liliana. *Il libro della memoria : gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943-1945)*. Milano: Mursia, 1991.
- . *L'occupazione tedesca e gli ebrei di Roma : documenti e fatti*. Roma; Milano: Carucci ; C.D.E.C., 1979.
- . "Ebrei Turchi, Libici E Altri, Deportati Dall'Italia a Bergen Belsen." *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 76, no. 3 (Settembre-Dicembre 2010): 243–59.
- . "Gli Ebrei in Libia Sotto La Dominazione Italiana." In *Ebraismo E Rapporti Con Le Culture Del Mediterraneo Nei Secoli XVIII-XX*, 79–106. Firenze: Giuntina, 2003.
- Porat, Dina. "One Side of a Jewish Triangle in Italy: The Encounter of Italian Jews with Holocaust Survivors and with Hebrew Soldiers and Zionist Representatives." *Italia Judaica: Gli Ebrei nell'Italia Unita, 1870-1945: Atti Del IV Convegno Internazionale, Siena 12-16 Giugno 1989* 4 (1993): 487–512.
- Proudfoot, Malcolm. *European Refugees, 1939–1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement*. Evanston: North-Western University Press, 1956.
- Pupo, R. *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio*. Milano 2005.
- Raeymaekers, Timothy. "Not Going Home: Displaced Youth after War." *Forced Migration Review*, no. 36 (November 2010): 21–22.
- Reinisch, Jessica. "'Auntie UNRRA' at the Crossroads." *Past & Present* 218, no. suppl_8 (2013): 70–97.
- . *The Perils of Peace: The Public Health Crisis in Occupied Germany*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- . "'We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation': UNRRA, Internationalism and National Reconstruction in Poland." *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (July 2008): 451–76.
- Reinisch, Jessica, and Elizabeth White. *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944-49*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Renzo, Chiara. "'Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet.' The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-Understanding (1943-1948)." *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 12 (December 2017): 89–111.
- . "The Organization of the Jewish Refugees in Italy: Cultural Activities and Zionist Propaganda inside the Displaced Persons Camps (1943–48)." *Remembrance and Solidarity Studies in 20th Century European History* 5 (2017).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Rosen, Alan. *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Romano, G. "'Gli indesiderabili'. L'Italia e l'immigrazione clandestina ebraica in Palestina 1945-1948." *La Nuova Storia Contemporanea* 4, no. 6 (November 2000): 81–96.
- Rosenberg-Friedman, Lilach. "National Mission, Feminine Identity and Female Leadership in a Mythical Masculine Organization: The Story of Ada Sereni, Head

- of the Mossad Le'Aliyah in Italy during the 1940s." *Women's Studies* 43, no. 5 (July 4, 2014): 589–618.
- Rosetto, Piera. "Space of Transit, Place of Memory: Ma'abarah and Literary Landscapes of Arab Jews." *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 4 (November 2012).
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Roumani, Jacques, Judith Roumani, and David Meghnagi. *Jewish Libya: Memory and Identity in Text and Image*. Syracuse University Press, 2018.
- Roumani, Maurice M. "The Final Exodus of the Libyan Jews in 1967." *Jewish Political Studies Review* 19, no. 3–4 (2007): 77–100.
- . *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement*. Brighton [England]; Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2008.
- Rystad, Göran. *The Uprooted: Forced Migration as an International Problem in the Post-War Era*. Lund University Press, 1990.
- Salvatici, Silvia. "Between National and International Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Italy." *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 514–36.
- . "'Help the People to Help Themselves': UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 428–51.
- . *Senza casa e senza paese: profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra*. Il mulino, 2008.
- Sanfilippo, Matteo. "Per Una Storia Dei Profughi Stranieri E Dei Campi Di Accoglienza E Di Reclusione nell'Italia Del Secondo Dopoguerra." *Studi Emigrazione* 43, no. 164 (2006): 835–56.
- Sarfatti, M. *Il Ritorno alla vita: vicende e diritti degli ebrei in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*. Casa Editrice Giuntina, 1998.
- Sante, Di, Costantino, and Lorenzo Bertucelli. *Stranieri Indesiderabili: Il Campo Di Fossoli E I Centri Raccolta Profughi in Italia (1945-1970)*. Verona: Ombre corte, 2011.
- Sarfatti, Michele. *Il Ritorno alla vita: vicende e diritti degli ebrei in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*. Casa Editrice Giuntina, 1998.
- . *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: From Equality to Persecution*. Madison, Wis: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2006.
- Satloff, Robert B. *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2006.
- Schechtman, Joseph. *European Population Transfers, 1939–1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- . *On Wings of Eagles: The Plight, Exodus, and Homecoming of Oriental Jewry*. T. Yoseloff, 1961.
- Schwarz, Guri. *After Mussolini: Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy*. Vallentine Mitchell, 2012.
- . "The Reconstruction of Jewish Life in Italy After World War II." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8, no. 3 (November 2009): 360–77.

- . “On Myth Making and Nation Building: The Genesis of the ‘Myth of the Good Italian,’ 1943-1947.” *Telos* 2013, no. 164 (September 1, 2013): 11–43.
- Segev, Tom. *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*. New York, 1993.
- Seton-Watson, Christopher. “Italy’s Imperial Hangover.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1980, 169–79.
- Shandler, Jeffrey. *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- . *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors’ Stories and New Media Practices*. Redwood City, United States: Stanford University Press, 2017.
- Shapira, Anita. “The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memory.” *Jewish Social Studies*, 1998, 40–58.
- Shephard, Ben. *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.
- Simon, Rachel. *Change within Tradition among Jewish Women in Libya*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992.
- . “It Could Have Happened There: The Jews of Libya during the Second World War.” *Africana Journal* 16 (1994): 391–421.
- . “The Sephardi Heritage in Libya.” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 10, no. 3 (1992): 90–112.
- Simon, Reeva Spector, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer. *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*. Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Sinkoff, Nancy. *Out of the Shtetl: Making Jews Modern in the Polish Borderlands*. Brown Judaic Studies, 2003.
- Slatt, Vincent E. “Nowhere to Go: Displaced Persons in Post-V-E-Day Germany.” *Historian* 64, no. 2 (December 1, 2002): 275–94.
- Sorani, Settimio, and Francesco Del Canuto. *L’assistenza ai profughi ebrei in Italia (1933-1941): contributo alla storia della Delasem*. Carucci, 1983.
- Stargardt, Nicholas. “Drawing the Holocaust in 1945.” *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 11, no. 2 (June 2005): 25–37.
- Steimatsky, Noa. “The Cinecittà Refugee Camp, 1944–50.” In *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, edited by John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel, 101–31. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Stein, Sarah Abrevaya. *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*. University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Stille, Alexander. *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism*. New York: Summit Books, 1991.
- Stillman, Norman A. *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991.
- Stone, Dan. *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, 2015.
- Toscana, Mario. *La Porta di Sion: l’Italia E L’immigrazione Clandestina Ebraica in Palestina, 1945-1948*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990.
- Vandewalle, Dirk J. *A History of Modern Libya*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

- Veidlinger, Jeffrey. "One Doesn't Make out Much with Furs in Palestine: The Migration of Jewish Displaced Persons, 1945–7." *East European Jewish Affairs* 44, no. 2–3 (September 2, 2014): 241–52.
- Villani, Cinzia. "Milano, via Unione 5. Un Centro Di Accoglienza per «displaced Persons» Ebree Nel Secondo Dopoguerra." *Studi Storici* 50, no. 2 (2009): 333–370.
- Vincenzi, Stefano. "Italy: A Newcomer with a Positive Attitude?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 13, no. 1 (2000): 91–104.
- Vincon, Sara. *Vite in Transito: Gli Ebrei Nel Campo Profughi Di Grugliasco (1945-1949)*. Silvio Zamorani editore, n.d.
- Voigt, Klaus. *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945*, Translated by L. Melissari. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1993.
- . *Notizie statistiche sugli immigrati e profughi ebrei in Italia (1938-1945)*, in "Israel" un decennio 1974-1984. Roma: Carucci, 1984.
- . "Profughi E Immigrati Ebrei Nella Resistenza Italiana." *Rassegna Mensile Di Israel* 74, no. 1/2 (Gennaio-Agosto 2008): 229–53.
- White, Hayden V. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Wieviorka, Annette, and Jared Stark. *The Era of the Witness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Wright, John. *A History of Libya*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Wyman, Mark. *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*. Philadelphia; London: Balch Institute Press ; Associated University Press, 1988.
- Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. University of Washington Press, 2011.
- Young, James Edward. *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2016.
- Zahra, Tara. "'A Human Treasure': Europe's Displaced Children Between Nationalism and Internationalism." *Past and Present* Supplement 6 (2011): 332–50.
- . *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- . "Lost Children: Displacement, Family, and Nation in Postwar Europe*." *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 1 (March 2009): 45–86.
- . *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families After World War II*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- . "'Prisoners of the Postwar': Expellees, Displaced Persons, and Jews in Austria after World War II." *Austrian History Yearbook* 41 (April 2010): 191.
- . "'The Psychological Marshall Plan': Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II." *Central European History* 44, no. 01 (March 2011): 37–62.
- Zborowski, Mark. *Life is with People: the Cultures of the Shtetl*. Shoken, 1952.
- Zertal, Idit. *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. "Easter and Passover: On Calendars and Group Identity." *American Sociological Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1982): 284.
- . *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

- Zerubavel, Yael. "Memory, the Rebirth of the Native, and the 'Hebrew Bedouin' Identity." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2008): 315–352.
- . *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Zimmerman, Joshua D. *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Zuccotti, Susan. *The Italians and the Holocaust : Persecution, Rescue, and Survival*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.