

Life Between Memory and Hope

The Survivors of the Holocaust
in Occupied Germany

ZEEV W. MANKOWITZ



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The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany

Zeev W. Mankowitz tells the remarkable story of the 250,000 survivors of the Holocaust who converged on the American Zone of Occupied Germany from 1945 to 1948. They envisaged themselves as the living bridge between destruction and rebirth, the last remnants of a world destroyed and the active agents of its return to life. Much of what has been written to date looks at the Surviving Remnant through the eyes of others and thus has often failed to disclose the tragic complexity of their lives together with their remarkable political and social achievements. Despite the fact that they had lost everyone and everything, they got on with their lives, they married, had children and worked for a better future. They did not surrender to the deformities of suffering and managed to preserve their humanity intact. Using largely inaccessible archival material, Mankowitz gives a moving and sensitive account of this neglected area in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.

ZEEV W. MANKOWITZ is a senior lecturer at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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Life between Memory and Hope

*The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied
Germany*

Zeev W. Mankowitz

Hebrew University of Jerusalem



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In loving memory of Gene
and to our children Yonit and Noam,
the light of my life

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My association with the International Center for Advanced Studies at Yad Vashem in 1999 allowed me to reenter the world of research while a Koerner Visiting Fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies granted me a year of friendly support and productive peace midst the sylvan beauty of Yarnton Manor. The Melton Center for Jewish Education, my academic home in the Hebrew University, is justifiably known for the intellectual ferment and generous collegiality that I have been fortunate enough to share. I owe a special vote of thanks to my friend and mentor Michael Rosenak, to Carmen Sharon, the Administrative Director, whose friendship and concern went far beyond the call of duty, and Vivienne Burstein who graciously granted me academic assistance every step of the way. I should also like to acknowledge the

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Abbreviations and note on spelling and dates

AACI	Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine
AJDC	American Joint Distribution Committee (often shortened to JDC or, simply, the Joint), the charitable arm of American Jews to needy communities overseas
AZA	American Zionist Archive
CDPX	Combined Displaced Persons Executive
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DP	Displaced person, stateless as a result of the dislocations of the Second World War
<i>FLK</i>	<i>Fun Letstn Khurbn</i> (From the Recent Destruction)
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
<i>HHA</i>	<i>Hashomer Hatzair</i> Archive
IDF	Israel Defence Forces
IMT	International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg
<i>LLT</i>	<i>Landsberger Lager Tsaytung</i> (in the original Polish transliteration ‘ <i>Caitung</i> ’), the influential weekly of the Landsberg DP camp
NA	National Archives, Washington DC
OHD	Oral History Department of the Institute for Contemporary Jewry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
OSE	L’Oeuvre de Secour aux Enfants, a leading French–Jewish philanthropic organization focusing on the health needs of children
PRO	Public Records Office, London
Rec.A-A	Records of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
<i>THK</i>	<i>Tsentraler Historisher Komisiye</i> , Central Historical Commission
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UZO	United Zionist Organization in Bavaria

- YIVO The well-known Yiddish Institute for Jewish Research that was transferred from Vilna, Lithuania, to New York in 1939
- YSA Yad Vashem Archive
- YT *Yiddishe Tsaytung* that replaced the *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung*
- ZK *Zentral komitet fun di bafreite yidn in datyshland* – the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in Germany (later changed to ‘in Bavaria’)

Note on spelling and dates

She'erith Hapleitah – the Surviving Remnant has been variously transliterated and I have retained the variant forms that appear in the diverse sources I have used.

In the second half of the 1940s the accepted plural acronym for Displaced Persons was DP's which I have retained when quoting. Elsewhere I prefer the contemporary usage – DPs.

I have used the European practice of day/month/year throughout.

Introduction

This study sets out to examine the initial responses of Holocaust survivors to the tragedy that overtook them. It focuses on the history of *She'erith Hapleitah* – the Surviving Remnant – in the American Zone of Occupied Germany which, despite its inherent limitations as a group in transit, rose to temporary prominence in the immediate post-war years. While the term *She'erith Hapleitah* refers to all surviving Jews in Europe, it designates most particularly those who converged on Germany between 1945 and 1949.

As the impending defeat of Nazi Germany grew closer and the hope of possible liberation more tangible, the thoughts of the concentration camp inmates in Germany increasingly turned to the fate of those who would be lucky enough to survive. It is in this context that the term *She'erith Hapleitah*, the biblical concept of the saved or surviving remnant, comes to describe those who would survive to see the Allied victory. Apparently the first recorded reference to *She'erith Hapleitah* appears in the Channukah 5705 (November–December 1944) number of *Nitzotz* (The Spark), the underground organ of the *Irgun Brith Zion* in the Kovno Ghetto, which began to appear in Kaufering, a sub-camp of Dachau, to which the last remnants of the Ghetto had been deported five months earlier. In the five extant issues of the paper (two were lost) the term *She'erith Hapleitah* is freely used to describe those who would hopefully survive, suggesting that it was already an integral part of shared language in Kaufering even before *Nitzotz* was reissued. In certain cases the term refers to survivors throughout Europe and in others is restricted to those who would remain alive in Bavaria; sometimes the focus was on physical survival but at other times it was bound up with both personal survival and the rebirth of Jewish life in Palestine, a task for which they, “the generation of the desert,” needed to steel themselves.¹ With liberation this multivalent notion of *She'erith Hapleitah* gained immediate acceptance and wide

¹ See “D’var hamifkada” (A word from headquarters), *Nitzotz*, no.3(38) (Channukah 5705 – November 1944): 1.

currency. Indeed, when the young American chaplain, Rabbi Abraham Klausner, found himself in Dachau towards the end of May 1945 and began to help the liberated in their desperate search for family, the first in a number of volumes containing the names of thousands of survivors in Bavaria was entitled *Shearit Hapletah*.² From 1943 the leadership of Palestinian Jewry also, quite independently, began to refer to those who would hopefully survive as *Sh'erith Hapleithah*.³

The earliest mention of the term appears in Genesis 32:9 when Jacob, who was greatly distressed about his imminent reunion with Esau after so many years of estrangement, divided his people and property into two camps saying: "If Esau come to the one camp and smite it, then the camp [*hanish'ar lifleithah*] which is left shall escape." Already this enunciates in a preliminary way the themes of danger, destruction and the survival of a remnant that carries the promise of the future. The redemptive theme becomes central to Isaiah's usage as can be seen in his prophecy to Hizqiyahu regarding Sanheriv, King of Ashur: "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Yehuda shall yet again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards. For out of Jerusalem shall go [*She'erith Upleithah*] a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Ziyyon" (Second Book of Kings 19:30–31). In First Chronicles 4:43 "And they smote the remnant of Amalek who had escaped [*She'erith Hapleithah le-Amalek*]" the term, as it attached to survivors of the Holocaust, appears in a quantitative, almost technical usage. A slightly different version but with the same connotation – *She'erith Yisrael* – the Remnant of Israel appears in Jeremiah 31:7 and from there found its way into the Verses of Supplication in the Daily Prayer Book.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust the term, in its broadest construction, connoted the saved remnant, that is to say, all European Jews who survived the Nazi onslaught including the hundreds of thousands of Polish, Baltic and Russian Jews deported to the interior of the Soviet Union for political reasons or as part of Stalin's "scorched earth" policy. In a more limited sense *She'erith Hapleithah* referred to the collective identity of some 300,000 displaced persons in Occupied Germany, Austria and Italy who turned their backs on their former lives and actively sought to leave Europe for Palestine and many other destinations. Having escaped the unavoidable constraints of rebuilding their former lives and now living temporarily under American protection in a land they despised, it

² See Alex Grobman, *Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry* (Detroit, 1993).

³ See Dalia Ofer, "The Leadership of the Yishuv and She'erit Hapletah," in Yisrael Gutman and Adina Drechsler, eds., *She'erit Hapletah 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle* (Jerusalem, 1990): 306–310.

was primarily these survivors who publicly identified themselves as the Surviving Remnant. For some of the leaders of this unique community driven by a sense of historical responsibility, *She'erith Hapleita* was also viewed as the saving remnant who were called upon to play a formative role in shaping the Jewish future. In the words of Samuel Gringauz, one of their prominent leaders:

The Sherit Hapleta sees as its task to symbolize the Jewish national tragedy zzz this task is viewed zzz as one laid upon it by destiny and history regardless of the strength of its bearers zzz The Sherit Hapleta must demonstrate to all Jews everywhere their involvement in a common fate zzz Jewish unity for them is no political program but an actual and living fact of experience. This is why they feel themselves prophets of a national rebirth zzz and of being the backbone of its realization zzz For international Zionism the Sherit Hapleta is an argument, a strength, a reserve zzz Without the situation of the DP's as a basis of appeal, American Jewry could not be mobilized so effectively for the upbuilding of Palestine, nor could the Jews of other lands be nationally awakened and united. Thus the Sherit Hapleta feels today that it is the dynamic force of the Jewish future.⁴

The discussion opens towards the end of 1944 as the Second World War is entering its final stages and in the concentration camps of Germany, the inmates take their first steps towards preparing for liberation. The narrative draws to a close in early 1947 when *She'erith Hapleita* is well established and the major institutions that will accompany it to its dissolution in 1948–1949 are firmly in place. It has not been our intention, furthermore, to write a comprehensive history of this brief, albeit pregnant moment in history. We wish to focus on the internal history of a unique community that had abandoned its past and was yet to find its future. Much of what has been written to date looks at *She'erith Hapleita* through the eyes of others and thus has often failed to disclose their richly complex inner life. Our concern is with this dynamic community of survivors itself, its people, movements, ideas, institutions and self-understanding, how it grappled with the unbearable weight of the past, the strains of the present and the shape of a different future. *She'erith Hapleita* as subjects rather than as objects of history is what we seek to uncover.

Thus, a good few months before the war was over the seeds of survivor organization were germinating in Buchenwald, in the numerous satellite camps of Dachau and elsewhere. On the morrow of liberation of the camps in April–May 1945 we already witness a flurry of activity amongst the survivors that naturally focused on the pressing problems of

⁴ Samuel Gringauz, "Jewish Destiny as the DP's See It," *Commentary*, vol. 4, no. 6 (December 1947): 501.

food, health, shelter, clothing, the search for family and a safe future but which, over the next few months, rapidly elaborated itself into a network of representative and camp councils, political movements, newspapers, youth groups, children's homes and schools, vocational training and a wide range of cultural pursuits. Amidst this remarkable effort at self-rehabilitation in the most unpromising of circumstances, we also find the first sustained public attempt to grapple with both the implications of the Shoah and some of the major questions of post-Holocaust Jewish life: who would lead the Jewish world with the demise of European Jewry? How would Jewish life and faith change in the aftermath? How should the Jewish people relate to those that turned on them or that stood by in their hour of need? How should they relate to the civilization that for so many Jews held out the promise of a more humane future? In a profound sense *She'erith Hapleitah* served as a formative bridge between the Holocaust and what was to come after.

Despite its importance and some early attention, the inner history of *She'erith Hapleitah* has suffered neglect and, until recently, was almost a forgotten history. In 1947 comprehensive reports were published by Leo Srole,⁵ the social welfare officer of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in the Landsberg camp, by Koppel Pinson⁶ the well-known historian who directed the Education Department of the Joint Distribution Committee in Germany and by Chaim Hoffman (Yachil)⁷ who headed the Palestinian Delegation to Occupied Germany. In 1953 Leo Schwarz who served as director of the JDC in Germany from 1946 to 1947 published the first and to date the only full-scale history of *She'erith Hapleitah* in Germany.⁸ It appears that initially only those who worked with the survivors in Germany saw the broader historical implications of their personal engagement.

Over the next twenty years very little was written on the subject and it was in 1970, twenty-five years after the liberation of the camps, that the picture begins to change: Zemach Zemarion who himself served with *She'erith Hapleitah* in Occupied Germany published his survey of survivor newspapers as an expression of their most pressing concerns⁹ while Yehuda Bauer published his study on the *Brichah*, the illegal or semi-legal

⁵ Leo Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait: Proposing an International Plan of Rescue," *Commentary*, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 1947): 13–24.

⁶ Koppel S. Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's," *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 9 (April 1947): 101–126.

⁷ Chaim Yachil (Hoffman), "Peulot ha-mishlachat ha-eretz yisraelit le-she'erith hapleitah, 1945–1949" (Report of the Palestinian Delegation to *She'erith Hapleitah*, 1945–1949), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 30 (November 1980): 7–40, and no. 31 (April 1981): 133–176.

⁸ Leo W. Schwarz, *The Redeemers: A Saga of the Years 1945–1952* (New York, 1953).

⁹ Zemach Zemarion, *Ha-itonut shel She'erith hapleitah ke-binui le-ba'ayoteha* (The press of *She'erith Hapleitah* as an expression of its problems) (Tel Aviv, 1970).

movement of some 250,000 Jews from Eastern Europe primarily to the American Zones of Occupied Germany and Austria.¹⁰ Bauer concluded that from mid-1944 to October 1945, when the first Palestinian emissaries were integrated into this clandestine activity, the *Brichah*, which quietly received financial help from the JDC, was entirely the initiative and work of survivors. This went against the grain of conventional wisdom and, in some quarters, is still looked at skeptically despite additional research that has confirmed Bauer's conclusions.¹¹ In a parallel study Bauer suggested that in the larger scheme of things this movement was also of critical importance in the creation of the State of Israel, a theme that will be addressed below.¹²

How, then, does one account for this seeming neglect when rich archival material was readily available to historians in both Israel and abroad? First, it was perhaps to be expected that the brief moment of *She'erith Hapleitah* on the stage of history would be overshadowed by the devastation of the Holocaust on the one hand and the revolutionary promise of Jewish statehood on the other. In addition the widespread sense, both secular and religious, that the move from Holocaust to Rebirth was ineluctable, almost preordained, meant that the stormy and uncertain progression of events from May 1945 to May of 1948 was lost from view. If what happened was inevitable, there was scant need to trace the detailed unfolding of events while carefully assessing the concrete contributions of those involved. This lack of attention to detail was reinforced in Israel by the widespread, close to axiomatic assumption that the underground fighting forces had pushed out the British and, in their military victory over the Arabs, achieved statehood.

If it became apparent that statehood was not a direct outcome of the Holocaust and that, in fact, the destruction of the human hinterland of the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe almost precluded the achievement of Jewish sovereignty, this might open the way to new interpretations of the move from Holocaust to Homeland. And, indeed, this is what has happened. A series of new studies tracing the interrelationship of British, American and Zionist diplomacy in the aftermath of the Second World

¹⁰ Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York, 1970).

¹¹ Shlomo Kless, *Bederech lo shulah: toldot habrichah 1944–1948* (On the unpaved road: a history of the *Brichah* 1944–1948) (Kibbutz Dalia, 1994); in this regard see also David Engel, *Bein shichrur le-brichah: nitzolei ha-shoah be-polin ve-ha-maavak al hanhagatam, 1944–1946* (Between liberation and flight: Holocaust survivors in Poland and the struggle for leadership, 1944–1946), (Tel Aviv, 1996).

¹² Yehuda Bauer, "The Holocaust and the Struggle of the Yishuv as Factors in the Creation of the State of Israel," in *Holocaust and Rebirth: A Symposium* (Jerusalem, 1974), and "From the Holocaust to the State of Israel," in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2001).

War rendered the compelling story of the phoenix rising from the ashes somewhat suspect and suggested in its stead a story of turbulent ups and downs with no certain outcome.¹³ Some historians of Zionism have gone so far as to suggest that Jewish statehood was achieved at the last moment in a political constellation that, in point of fact, did not favor the success of the Zionist endeavor. In his conclusion to *A History of Zionism* Walter Laqueur argues that: "The Jewish state came into being at the very time when Zionism had lost its erstwhile *raison d'être*: to provide an answer to the plight of east European Jewry. The United Nations decision of November 1947 was in all probability the last opportunity for the Zionist movement to achieve a breakthrough."¹⁴

Historians of the period, nonetheless, were slow to revise their estimate of the minor role allotted to *She'erith Hapleitah* itself in these developments. Part of the explanation might lie in the focus of these studies which unthinkingly cast the survivors into a subsidiary role of supplicants: their basic necessities were supplied by the US Army, their camps were administered by UNRRA, they were supported by the Joint, inspired by soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, guided politically by the Palestinian Delegation, led over the Alps and transported to Palestine by the *Mossad Le-Aliyah Bet* and their political fate was ultimately determined by the domestic pressure of American Jewry and the creation of the State of Israel. While this description is not without truth it does tend, without ill intent, to cast *She'erith Hapleitah* into a supine role and deprives them of a will of their own.

This image of passivity was rendered more plausible, moreover, by a pervasive stereotype that portrayed survivors as broken and helpless, ground to dust by unspeakable torture, a view that began to circulate

¹³ See Amitzur Ilan, *America, britania ve-eretz yisrael: reishitah ve-hitpatchutah shel me'uravut artzot ha-brit be-medinyut ha-britit be'eretz yisrael, 1938–1947* (America, Britain and Palestine: the beginning and development of the involvement of the United States in British policy in Palestine, 1938–1947) (Jerusalem, 1979); Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry and Israel* (New York, 1979); Shmuel Dothan, *Ha-ma'avak al eretz yisrael* (The Struggle for Palestine) (Tel Aviv, 1981); Michael J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers 1945–1948* (Princeton, 1981); Yosef Heller, *Be-ma'avak la-medinah: ha-medinyut ha-ziyonit be-shanim 1936–1948* (In the struggle for statehood: Zionist policy in the years 1936–1948) (Jerusalem, 1984); Yoav Gelber, *Toldot ha-hitmadvut III: nosei ha-degel – shlichutam shel ha-mitnadvim la'am ha-yehudi* (A history of voluntary service III: the standard bearers – the mission of the volunteers to the Jewish people) (Jerusalem, 1983); David Sha'ari, *Geirush kafrisim 1946–1949: ha'apalah, ha-machanot ve-chevrat ha-ma'apilim* (Deportation to Cyprus 1946–1949: clandestine immigration, the camps and the social bonding of the illegal immigrants) (Jerusalem, 1981); Ze'ev (Venia) Hadari and Ze'ev Tzachor, *Oniyot o medinah: korot oniyot ma'apilim ha-gedolot "pan york" ve-"pan crescent"* (Ships or state: a history of the large "illegal" immigrant ships the "Pan York" and the "Pan Crescent") (Tel Aviv, no date); Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982).

¹⁴ Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York, 1972): 594–595.

in the Yishuv (pre-state Palestinian Jewry) even before the war ended,¹⁵ and that gained wider currency with the first photographs and newsreels of the liberation of the camps: suddenly the “walking skeletons” and “helpless heap of human wreckage”¹⁶ were there for all to see. These images which were repeatedly used by Jewish fundraisers and in the Zionist campaign against British policies in Palestine became fixed in the public mind. The stereotype, in addition, was secretly fed by a dark account of survival which assumed that the virtuous went under while the less worthy survived. After all, even the survivors themselves spoke of a process of “negative selection.”¹⁷ These expressions of survivor guilt were often taken at face-value without any sustained attempt to uncover their deeper meaning. Interestingly enough, even when Elie Wiesel, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Terrence Des Pres¹⁸ succeeded in transforming “the survivor” into a culture hero in an age of mass death, it did not translate into a new understanding of *She'erith Hapleimah*. Their collective enterprise recorded primarily in Yiddish and bearing the profound stamp of East European Jewish life remained a closed book for most. Indeed, even as perceptive an historian as Tom Segev has little appreciation for how the people of *She'erith Hapleimah* organized themselves, fought for recognition and struggled to master their fate. From beginning to end he portrays them as little more than clay in the hands of Zionist envoys quite lacking a face of their own.¹⁹

Over the last decade or so this picture has begun to change and a slow but steady flow of studies have contributed richly to the brief but remarkably complex history of *She'erith Hapleimah*. In 1985 Yad Vashem devoted its International Historical Conference to the rehabilitation and political struggle of *She'erith Hapleimah*;²⁰ Juliane Wetzel and Angelika Königseder have written on Jewish life in Munich and Berlin respectively in addition to a general account of Jewish DPs in the aftermath of the war,²¹ Jacqueline Giere and Ada Schein have written on education and culture

¹⁵ Yechiam Weitz, “Ha-yishuv ve-she'erith hapleimah: 1944–1945” (The Yishuv and *She'erith Hapleimah*: 1944–1945), Master's Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 1981): 8, 59.

¹⁶ Leo W. Schwarz, “The DP's: Fiction and Fact,” *American Zionist*, vol. 43, no.15 (June 1953): 16–17.

¹⁷ Dr. Shmuel Gringauz, “In tsaykhn fun martirertum hofnung un arbet” (Under the sign of martyrdom hope and work), *LLT*, no. 2 (14) (18 January 1946): 1.

¹⁸ See for example Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After* (New York, 1972); Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York, 1963); Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York, 1976).

¹⁹ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993).

²⁰ Gutman and Drechsler, eds., *She'erit Hapleimah 1944–1948*.

²¹ Juliane Wetzel, *Jüdisches Leben in München 1945–1951: Durchgangsstation oder Wiederaufbau?* (Munich, 1987); Angelika Königseder, *Flucht nach Berlin: Jüdische Displaced Persons 1945–1948* (Berlin, 1998); Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Lebensmut in Wartesaal: Die jüdischen DPs im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Frankfurt a.M., 1994).

in the DP camps in Germany,²² Saul Touster has edited a survivors' Haggadah,²³ Yehudit Tidor Baumel has published her study of *Kibbutz Buchenwald*,²⁴ Yosef Grodzinski has written a critical left-leaning history of *She'erith Haple'itah*,²⁵ Joanne Reilly and Chagit Lavski researched the liberation of Belsen and Jewish DPs in the British Zone,²⁶ Irit Keynan has studied the work of Palestinian emissaries in Germany,²⁷ Nachum Bogner and Dalia Ofer have examined the Cyprus detainees,²⁸ Idith Zertal has published a wide-ranging study of Jewish illegal immigration,²⁹ Hanna Yablonka has traced the absorption and integration of survivors into Israeli society,³⁰ Yehuda Bauer has continued his research on the JDC with a study of the impact of American Jews on post-Holocaust European Jewry,³¹ Haim Genizi has written up the history of the office of the Special Adviser on Jewish Affairs to the American Army,³² *Yalkut Moreshet* devoted a special volume to *She'erith Haple'itah* and the establishment of the State of Israel,³³ while Aryeh Kochavi, Mark Wyman, Wolfgang Jacobmeyer and Michael Marrus have written about European

²² Jacqueline Giere, *'Wir sind unterwegs, aber nicht in der Wüste': Erziehung und Kultur in den Jüdischen Displaced-Lagern der Amerikanischen Zone im Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945–1949* (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), see also, "We're on Our Way, but We're not in the Wilderness," in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed and the Reexamined* (Bloomington, 1998): 699–715; Ada Schein, *Homeless Persons as Partners in the Zionist Enterprise: Survivors in German and Austrian Displaced Persons Camps and the Jewish National Fund* (Jerusalem, 1997).

²³ Saul Touster, ed., *A Survivors' Haggadah* (Philadelphia, 1999).

²⁴ Yehudit Tidor Baumel, *Kibbutz Buchenwald* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1994).

²⁵ Yosef Grodzinski, *Chomer enoshi tov: yehudim mul tziyonim, 1945–1951* (Good human material: Jews versus Zionists, 1945–1951) (Tel Aviv, 1998).

²⁶ Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London, 1999); Chagit Lavski, "The Day After: Bergen-Belsen from Concentration Camp to the Center of Jewish Survivors in Germany," *German History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1993): 36–59.

²⁷ Irit Keynan, *Lo nirga ha-ra'av: nitzolei ha-shoah ve-shlichei eretz yisrael: germaniyah 1945–1948* (And the hunger was not stanchied: Holocaust survivors and the emissaries from Eretz Yisrael: Germany 1945–1948) (Tel Aviv 1996).

²⁸ Nachum Bogner, *I ha-geirush: machanot ha-ma'apilim be-kafrisin, 1946–1948* (The island of deportation: Jewish illegal immigrant camps in Cyprus, 1946–1948) (Tel Aviv, 1991); Dalia Ofer, "Holocaust Survivors as Immigrants: The Case of Israel and the Cyprus Detainees," *Modern Judaism*, 16 vol. (February 1996): 1–23, and "From Illegal Immigrants to New Immigrants: The Cyprus Detainees 1946–1949," in Berenbaum and Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History*: 733–749.

²⁹ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley, 1998).

³⁰ Hanna Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War* (London, 1999).

³¹ Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford, 1989).

³² Haim Genizi, *Yoetz u-mekim: ha-yoetz la-tzava ha-amerikani u-le-she'erith haple'itah 1945–1949* (The Adviser to the American Army and *She'erith Haple'itah* 1945–1949) (Tel Aviv, 1987).

³³ "She'erith haple'itah vehakamat hamedinah: leyovel medinat yisrael" (*She'erith Haple'itah* and the establishment of the State of Israel), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 65 (April 1998).

refugees in general and displaced persons in particular.³⁴ While much work remains to be done especially with respect to the internal history of the Jewish DPs in Occupied Germany, a body of research is now available that will help us better to tell and interpret the story of *She'erith Hapleitah*.

One of our guiding goals, therefore, has been to uncover and understand a small but significant chapter of contemporary history. This was also the task that Leo Schwarz set himself some forty-six years ago. He entitled his work *The Redeemers*³⁵ in order to underscore his reading of *She'erith Hapleitah* as the “saving remnant” that, as part of its own return to life, contributed richly to both Jewish life in general and the creation of the State of Israel in particular. His commitment to *She'erith Hapleitah* together with his dramatic Thucydidean reconstruction of historic occasions, conversations and speeches led Schwarz to a measure of romanticization that historians today find somewhat unsettling. Ironically, the people of *She'erith Hapleitah* themselves were far more open and critical about their own failings and, in truth, their achievements are best understood against the background of the persistent problems they had to overcome. Today, a half a century later with a plethora of rich materials in ready reach it is perhaps easier for the historian to achieve a more balanced perspective. Nonetheless, Schwarz’s assessment a decade after publishing his book still rings true: “no matter how objective you attempted to maintain yourself, there was an unconscious identification with the people. You took their side even if you knew they were wrong. And this influenced zzz a great deal.”³⁶

The question of how to strike the right balance in the portrayal of *She'erith Hapleitah* persists. Like all those who approach this topic sympathetically, I have faced the same temptation and, I am sure, have unthinkingly succumbed to it more often than not. After all, these were ordinary folk who had lived through experiences that beggar description. In most cases they had lost everyone and everything, they were condemned to a protracted stay in grim conditions in the land of their oppressors, they were cast into a debilitating dependence on others and lived in perpetual

³⁴ Arieh J. Kochavi, *Akurim ve-politika beinleumit: britanya ve-ha-akurim ha-yehudim le-achar milchemet ha-olam ha-shniyah* (Displaced Persons and international politics: Britain and the Jewish Displaced Persons after the Second World War) (Tel Aviv, 1992); Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951* (Ithaca, 1998); Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer: Displaced Persons in Westdeutschland 1945–1951* (Göttingen, 1985); Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1985).

³⁵ Schwarz, *The Redeemers*.

³⁶ Leo W. Schwarz, Interview, the Oral History Department of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 7(4) 3.

uncertainty about the future. Yet, despite their many failings that were all too human, they, by and large, held fast, they got on with their lives to the degree that circumstances allowed, they married, had children and prepared for the future. Most importantly, they did not surrender, as a rule, to the deformities of suffering and somehow managed to preserve their humanity intact. This is the story we seek to tell.

1 The occupation of Germany and the survivors: an overview

In February 1945 the Allied armies began their full-scale invasion of Germany and on 9 May 1945, after the unconditional German surrender, declared that the war in Europe had come to an end. A month later the Allied Control Commission began administering the country and divided it into four occupation zones in accordance with the principles agreed upon at the Yalta Conference earlier in the year. Germany was in almost total disarray: its large cities had been laid waste, vital services were paralyzed, transport and communications were virtually non-existent and governmental activity had ground to a halt. Returning these vital public services to a minimal level of operation placed an enormous burden on the Allied forces and seriously hindered them in giving their full attention to more than 9 million forced laborers from various countries and 80,000 concentration camp inmates they liberated as they advanced into Germany.

The Allies were fully aware of the large number of forced laborers they would uncover with the conquest of Germany and prepared in advance for the complex problems they expected to encounter. The forty-four states that comprised the United Nations set up UNRRA¹ in November of 1943 and its leaders were party to the discussions of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) as it planned the invasion of Europe.² In November 1944 General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of SHAEF, and Herbert Lehman, the Director General of UNRRA, agreed to a division of labor between the two bodies in overseeing the treatment of displaced persons. The military would take responsibility for registration, housing, clothing, medical supplies and security while UNRRA would run the assembly centers where displaced persons would be gathered prior to repatriation and, in addition to health and welfare services, would see to cultural activities and vocational training where appropriate.

¹ For the history of UNRRA see George Woodridge, *UNRRA* (New York, 1950).

² For a detailed discussion see Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*: 9–38.

The US Army, according to this initial planning, would transfer overall responsibility for the DPs to UNNRA in October 1945 but, as things turned out, this was not to be. In April 1945 the first seven UNNRA teams were advanced into Occupied Germany; by May their number rose to 100 and by mid-July 350. Whereas the original plan called for 6,000 workers, by this date some 2,600 had been called forward and a year later their number had increased to 4,600. The training of these workers had been hasty, the selection process not always effective and, as a result, by the beginning of 1946 about a third were found unsuitable and had to be sent home. The military authorities, in addition, had little patience with a new organization that was dogged by inefficiency and had yet to find its way. In August of 1945 with well over one and a half million DPs still found in Germany, Austria and Italy, UNNRA decided to limit the scope of its activities and, for the time being, left the overall responsibility for the DPs in the hands of the army. One of the important functions relevant to *She'erith Hapleitah* that UNNRA held on to was the supervision and coordination of non-governmental agencies working with the DPs. Workers of the JDC which officially began its operations in Occupied Germany in August 1945 and the emissaries of the Palestinian Delegation who began to arrive in December 1945 both wore military uniforms and operated under the aegis of UNNRA.

With the dismantling of SHAEF in July 1945 the Western powers continued to coordinate their DP policies in the context of the Combined Displaced Persons Executive. By October, however, policy was determined in large measure by the military authorities in each of the four occupation zones and in the American Zone the overall policy of the US Army was straightforward and clear: the massive and speedy return of DPs to their countries of origin. It was a policy driven by a number of goals: to respond to the urgent desire of most DPs to get home as quickly as possible, to lighten the overwhelming administrative burden that tied down the occupation forces, to reduce the heavy costs of caring for millions of DPs and, in pursuit of normalization, to help the resettlement of some 11 million Germans and people of German descent who either fled or were expelled from Czechoslovakia, Western Poland and what was formerly East Prussia. This huge undertaking was expedited by some 8,000 liaison officers from almost every European nation who encouraged their citizens to return home and join in rebuilding their countries. Between May and September 1945 about 6 million DPs left Germany at the rate of 60,000–80,000 a day and by mid-1946 nearly all the West Europeans had been repatriated and, under far less auspicious circumstances, the bulk of those who came from the Soviet Union and its newly acquired satellites.³ At

³ For a brief survey of this sad and disturbing story see Wyman, *DPs*: 61–85.

this point in time, a little more than half a million DPs remained in the American Zone of Occupation, about 50 percent Poles and Ukrainians, some 90,000 from the Baltic states, approximately 70,000 Jews, 20,000 Yugoslavs and a smattering of smaller national groups.

The East European DPs who refused to return home were, for the most part, either anti-Communists or Nazi collaborators who followed the retreating German forces westwards for fear of their lives. Ironically and, at times tragically, survivors of the Holocaust sometimes found themselves sharing camp facilities with their erstwhile persecutors. In the second third of 1945, as General Hilldring reported to a Congressional Committee,

procedures were established for eliminating from the camps those persons who were not entitled to receive United Nations displaced persons treatment. Under existing directives, the military authorities are now authorized to screen all displaced persons for pro-Nazi or pro-Fascist tendencies and to discharge people in those categories from displaced persons camps. They are authorized to repatriate without regard to their individual wishes and by force if necessary, those displaced persons desired by their governments who have actively collaborated with the enemy.⁴

However, despite continuing protests on the part of both American Jewish organizations and *She'erith Hapleitah* itself, the screening process remained lax and the military exercised its authority but rarely. Over the last few decades retrospective testimony to this fact can be found in Canadian and American extradition trials of war criminals who succeeded in entering these countries, often with the connivance of their respective secret services, via the DP camps of Occupied Germany.

When we turn to locate *She'erith Hapleitah* midst this welter of forces we should stress, once more, the predominant role of the US Army and the fact that the logic of its policy, designed primarily to deal with the complex challenges of post-war Germany, was often at odds with the special needs of the many survivors who resisted the idea of repatriation. In the first flush of victory and the chaotic conditions that followed, the remaining 50,000–60,000 concentration camp survivors were, by and large, lost from sight. Without taking this general background into account we shall not be able to arrive at a balanced assessment of the army's seemingly insensitive and somewhat summary treatment of *She'erith Hapleitah*. In this context it is instructive to note that studies

⁴ Statement of Major General John H. Hilldring, Director, Civil Affairs Division, War Department before Subcommittee on War Mobilization and Senate Military Affairs Committee, 6 March 1946, found in the papers of Dr. Chaim Yachil (Hoffman). I thank Professor Leni Yahil for allowing me access to these papers.

of the American occupation of Germany barely mention the presence of survivors.⁵ The US Army foresaw the existence of groups with special needs and in the Administrative Memorandum No. 39 of 16 April 1945 laid down that “stateless and non-repatriables . . . will be accorded the same assistance granted to United Nations displaced persons. Enemy and ex-enemy nationals persecuted because of their race, religion or activities in favor of the United Nations will receive similar assistance.” The directive stated, in addition, “that displaced persons who did not wish to or could not be repatriated, should be collected to special assembly centers. Teams such as the Joint Distribution Committee would be requested for Jewish centers.”⁶

Despite their declared intentions, the military authorities were constrained to decide and act under the pressure of unremitting circumstances and, as a result, generally adhered to overall policy directives without allowing for exceptions. At the same time, at least according to one reading of what transpired, the policy of accelerated repatriation accorded with the desires of many survivors in Germany.⁷ According to the estimate of Yehuda Bauer, significant numbers of survivors from Western Europe, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary joined the first waves of mass repatriation and returned home.⁸ Only a handful of Jews from Poland and the Baltic states followed suit while the majority chose to stay where they were and they, to a great extent, constituted the founding nucleus of *She'erith Hapleitat* in Occupied Germany. Malcolm Proudfoot estimated that in September 1945 there were approximately 32,000 Jewish DPs in Germany and Austria.⁹ While Proudfoot based himself on British estimates which did not relate to Jews as a separate group, if we add the 15,000 survivors who crossed over into Italy seeking the protection of the Palestinian Jewish Brigade and in the hope of finding a way to Palestine to his base figure, we arrive at an estimate that is close enough to that of other scholars. The differences that still obtain relate to the first months of liberation and then converge around the figure of 50,000 in late July 1945. At that time, according to Bauer’s estimate,

⁵ Earl F. Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany, 1944–1946* (Washington D.C., 1975) and Edward N. Peterson, *The American Occupation of Germany: Retreat to Victory* (Detroit, 1978).

⁶ Memorandum on Stateless and Non-Repatriables, Executive CDPX, 5.8.1945, in Yehuda Bauer, ed., *Machanot ha'akurim be-germaniyah 1945–1948* (DP camps in Germany 1945–1948) (Jerusalem, 1962–1963): 7–8.

⁷ Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982): 237–238.

⁸ Bauer appears to base some of his estimates on his research of the death marches in 1944–1945. See Yehuda Bauer, “The Death Marches: January–May 1945,” *Modern Judaism*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1983): 1–21.

⁹ Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees: A Study in Forced Population Movement* (Evanston, 1956): 238–239.



1 The anguish of liberation, Dachau, April 1945

there were 14,000–15,000 Jews in Bavaria, 7,000 in Vienna, 13,000 in Belsen and 8,000 in Berlin.¹⁰

¹⁰ Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*: 48. See also the personal estimate of Chaplain Abraham J. Klausner, “A Detailed Report on the Liberated Jew as He Now Suffers this Period of

The initial steps of those who preferred to remain in Germany were dogged by difficulties: they were forced to resist continuing pressure to return home, they had to fight for recognition as a separate Jewish entity and for the right to live in separate camps. While repatriation policy differed from place to place – in southern Germany the Third Army under the command of General Patton, for example, was notorious for its harsh pressure and lack of consideration – the refusal to recognize the Jews as a separate group was more general. What appeared to hamper the US Army was the absence of a consensual view of the nature of the Jewish group and the fear that dividing them off would be seen as akin to the Nazi policies of separation and exclusion. It was only in August 1945 when the determined struggle of *She'erith Hapleitah* together with the vocal protests of American Jews led to the presidential mission of Earl G. Harrison that real changes came into effect.

Towards the end of 1945, as the stage of mass repatriation drew to a close, the tension between the aspirations of the Surviving Remnant and military policy took on a new guise. With the appearance of the first signs of the Cold War, the strengthening of Germany as a strategic frontier with the Communist bloc became a goal of overriding importance. In practical terms the policy entailed softening the hard line that had been agreed to in Yalta and Potsdam with respect to de-nazification, German reeducation and the neutralization of Germany's industrial power.¹¹ Against this background, moreover, we can better understand the forbearance shown to East European war criminals who were noted for their strident anti-Communism. The normalization and rehabilitation of Germany came to be seen as an important priority and thus rendered the resolution of the DP problem more pressing. As the months went by the military, most especially those who were new to Germany, increasingly viewed *She'erith Hapleitah* as undisciplined, unforgiving troublemakers who constantly clashed with the local population while enjoying the vocal protection of their brethren in Washington and New York. Most disturbingly of all, from the point of view of the military authorities, their numbers continued to swell until they accounted for about 25 percent of the DP population in Germany. In sum, nonetheless, the enlightened policies of the military high command and the close interest of American Jews served to counter-balance these negative tendencies most especially with

Liberation under the Discipline of the Armed Forces of the United States," in Bauer ed., *Machanot ha-akurim be-germania*: 19–26; Report of the First JDC Team in Germany, Paris, 30.8.1945, AJDC/DP's Germany 1945; Chaim Yachil (Hoffman), "Displaced Persons," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. VI: 76.

¹¹ Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization* (New York, 1954): 536–546.

regard to uninterrupted entry of Jewish refugees from East Europe into the American Zone of Occupation in both Germany and Austria.

In September–October 1945 the first groups of Polish Jews organized by the *Brichah* began to infiltrate the American Zone of Occupation. The *Brichah* (the word itself connotes flight and escape) refers to the clandestine organization of the great latter-day exodus from Eastern Europe. It was originally organized by ghetto fighters and partisans in areas liberated by the Red Army in the second half of 1944 and in the next few years succeeded in moving more than 250,000 Jews, primarily from Poland, to Italy and the American Zones of Germany and Austria. In its early phases the founders tried to find a way to Palestine through Romania and, when that proved unsuccessful, they made contact with the Jewish Brigade and opened a route to Italy that was operational – on a small scale – from June to August of 1945.¹²

Once the British Army attempted to block entry to Italy and transferred the Jewish Brigade to Western Europe, the flow of refugees was directed to Germany. At the beginning of 1946 some 40,000 Jews had found their way to Bavaria and by the end of the year their number had grown to 142,000. In the first half of the year a monthly average of 6,550 refugees entered the American Zone via Austria while in July 1946, following the pogrom in the Polish town of Kielce, the monthly average jumped to 17,000 and UNRRA in conjunction with the JDC found themselves unable to cope. At this stage the army intervened and began to move those living in poor and crowded conditions in Austria into transit camps in Germany. Having taken care of 48,000 newcomers in August and September alone, from October to December 1946 some 9,000 refugees were admitted.¹³ Of the 127,000 Jews officially registered with UNRRA in November 1946, 71 percent were from Poland, 6 percent Hungarian, 4 percent Czechoslovakian, 2.5 percent German, 2.5 percent Romanian, 2 percent Austrian and 10 percent declared themselves stateless.¹⁴ Clearly, the changing fortunes of the Jews in Poland had a decisive influence on the ebb and flow of refugees guided to Germany by the *Brichah*. Those who left Poland in the latter half of 1945 had been, by and large, directly implicated in the Holocaust: survivors of the concentration camp system, ghetto fighters, partisans and those that had survived in hiding. From the beginning of 1946 the picture

¹² See “Reishitah shel ‘ha-brichah’ ke-tnuat hamonim be-eduyotav shel abba kovner” (The beginning of the *Brichah* as a mass movement in the testimonies of Abba Kovner), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 37 (June 1984): 7–32, and no. 38 (December 1984): 133–146.

¹³ Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*: 75–112.

¹⁴ See G.H. Muentz, AJDC Statistical Assistant, to Mr. Leo Schwarz, AJDC Director, American Zone re Jewish Population in US Zone of Germany, YIVO/DPG 70.

begins to change and Polish Jewish repatriates – those who were exiled to the interior of the Soviet Union and fortunately beyond the reach of the Nazi destruction machine – began to return to Poland and to swell the ranks of those moving westwards. In September 1944 the first in a series of Polish–Soviet agreements was reached regarding the repatriation of Polish citizens. Yisrael Gutman estimates that in the framework of this accord some 25,000 Polish Jews returned home during 1945.¹⁵ To this figure we need to add the Jewish soldiers in the ranks of the Polish Army who participated in the liberation of Poland and the 157,420 Jewish repatriates who returned by mid-1946 under the terms of a second accord signed in July 1945. According to this estimate some 195,000 Polish Jews had been repatriated from the end of 1944 to the middle of 1946.

These repatriates put the new Polish government in a delicate situation. They returned from the Soviet Union bereft of all and discovered on their return that their homes, property and places of work had been taken over by the local population. The solution that was found involved transferring 80 percent of this group to the western regions of the country that had been annexed from Germany and emptied of its *volksdeutsche* population. The repatriates, however, did not succeed in striking roots anew. Their numbers were too small to recreate the richness of pre-war Polish Jewish life; they were haunted by memories of the world they had known and an abiding sense of living in a vast cemetery. This and more: they felt threatened by a murderous wave of antisemitism that stemmed, at least in its more immediate causes, from demands for the return of property and popular Polish identification of the new and despised Communist regime as Jewish-inspired. Between November 1944 and December 1945, 351 Jews suffered fatal attacks and by the summer of 1947 the numbers had exceeded 1,500. The high point was reached in the Kielce pogrom in July 1946 when, following charges of the ritual murder of a Polish child, forty-seven Jews were killed and another fifty wounded.¹⁶

All these factors pushed an increasing number of Jews to leave Poland and to seek refuge in Occupied Germany on their way out of Europe. In its first stages the *Brichah* served a limited number of predominantly Zionist groups but as time went by and conditions in Poland worsened, it became a broad-based, popular movement westwards. In the second half of 1945, 33,275 people departed and by October 1946, a further 78,267. In July 1946, for example, about 19,000 Jews departed and in August a further 30,722 followed suit. From November 1946 to February 1947 the numbers dropped noticeably with altogether 7,180 departing. An

¹⁵ This analysis is based on Yisrael Gutman, “Hayehudim be-polin le-achar ha-milchama” (The Jews in Poland after the war), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 33 (June 1982): 65–102.

¹⁶ See Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*: 113–151.

additional 20,000–30,000 Jews made their own way to Germany bringing the total to 140,000. One *Brichah* route led through Stettin to Berlin while two others went via Czechoslovakia and Austria.¹⁷

This being the case, it turns out that by the end of 1946 fully two-thirds of *She'erith Hapleimah* were repatriates who had not been personally and directly caught up in Nazi policies of terror, torture and killing. They had endured harsh and, for some, fatal years of exile; in most cases they lost their families from whom they were separated and, on their return, found their homes occupied by others, their property stolen or confiscated and facing a world that had turned alien and implacably hostile. Their situation, nonetheless, was very different from those who had survived the horrors of the Shoah and their demographic structure, most particularly, was strikingly dissimilar to that of the founding nucleus of *She'erith Hapleimah*. Because their chances of escape and survival had been so slim during the war, no group in post-war Europe had lost so many children and older people. A survey carried out in a number of DP camps at the end of 1945 showed that out of a sample population of 900 there were no children under the age of 5, 3 percent were 6–17 years old and but 0.2 percent were over 65.¹⁸ For the same reasons while two-thirds of the 18–45 year olds – the overwhelming majority – were male, only one third were female.¹⁹ Until February 1946, given that the influx from Eastern Europe was predominantly of direct survivors, the picture remains basically the same. A survey of 30,000 DPs at that time shows that 1.2 percent were children up to the age of 5, 9 percent were of school-going age and the percentage of older people remained at a constant low.

Significant changes began to make themselves felt from mid-1946 in the wake of the large influx of the repatriate population from Poland. By the end of the year 4.5 percent of *She'erith Hapleimah* were infants below the age of 1, 4 percent were 1–5 year olds, 11.8 percent were aged 6–17, the 18–41 year olds accounted for 68.1 percent and 11.6 percent were above the age of 45. The increase in the number of children can also be attributed, in part, to the growing birthrate within the founding survivor group. Whereas couples were common amongst the repatriates, the Nazi policy of sundering men from women only rarely allowed both husband and wife to survive. However, during 1946 many marriages were consummated, indeed from the middle of 1946 the rate of marriage was 27.4 per thousand souls while the parallel rate in the Bavarian population was 2.8.²⁰ These surprising figures point up the terrible loneliness of the survivors as well as their desire to return to life and to invest, once more, in

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 152–189. ¹⁸ See Muentz to Schwarz, YIVO/DPG 70.

¹⁹ Paris Memo 1114 to AJDC New York, 18.12.1945, AJDC/DP's Germany 1945/1946.

²⁰ See Muentz to Schwarz.

the future. Despite these differences all of the groups making up *She'erith Hapleitah* were united in the feeling that they were, together, survivors of the Holocaust.²¹

For months after liberation many survivors continued to live in primitive, crowded and demoralizing conditions lacking both nourishing food and adequate medical care. Only in August 1945, following the investigation and report of Earl G. Harrison to President Truman, were significant improvements introduced. Others because of their own initiative or the welcome assistance of local officers (oftimes Jewish) managed to improve their lot sooner. The St. Ottilien monastery not far from Munich became a survivor hospital under the direction of Dr. Zalman Grinberg; the army barracks in Landsberg were transformed into a reception camp for those liberated in Dachau and was run effectively by Major Irving Heymont in cooperation with the talented, local leadership group; Feldafing, a Hitlerjugend camp on the shores of Lake Starnberg, was transformed into an absorption center for death march survivors in that region by Lieutenant Irving Smith; Jewish soldiers helped to set up a camp in Zeilsheim in an I.G. Farben housing project near Frankfurt. These camps, together with Föhrenwald which was set up in October 1945, housed 4,000–6,000 inmates each and together served as the driving force behind *She'erith Hapleitah*. In 1945 most of the survivors in the American Zone were to be found in Munich and the large camps nearby while in 1946 we find movement northwards to new camps in Leipheim, Eschwege, Ulm and others in Hessen and Württemberg.²²

As conditions began to stabilize in the late summer of 1945 the camp inmates had to contend with three major concerns: improving their living conditions which proved to be a long and tedious struggle, establishing separate Jewish camps which began to materialize in September 1945 and official recognition of their right to manage their own internal affairs. In this regard it was Landsberg that led the way and, soon after elections for a Camp Committee in late October 1945, other camps began to follow suit. Of course the authority of the Camp Committees was strictly limited because they had no financial resources to speak of while their

²¹ On survivors and repatriates see Dr. Joseph J. Schwartz to Moses A. Leavitt, 9.11.1946, AJDC/DP's Germany 1945/1946; Divrei chaim hoffman be-kinus ha-shlichim be-germania (Address of Chaim (Yachil) Hoffman to Conference of Emissaries in Germany), January 1947: 2, CZA/S/4685; Chaim hoffman lehanhalat hasochnut (Chaim (Yachil) Hoffman to the Executive of the Jewish Agency), 19.6.1946, CZA/S/4676; Eli zeirah le-va'adat chutz la-arezt (Eli Zeirah to the Overseas Committee), 25.7.1946, Archive of *Lochamei Hagetaot*, Overseas Committee, Container 10, file 5; Report of Irving Kwasnik, October 1946, YIVO/DPG-215, and Phillip S. Bernstein, Report on Jewish Displaced Persons in the US Zones Germany and Austria to the Five Organizations, New York, 12.5.1947, YIVO/DPG 61.

²² Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany": 107–108.

constituency lacked political clout. On the other hand, they did take responsibility for the quality of life in the camp and many of the able adults were voluntarily employed in caring for cleanliness and sanitation, education and culture, public health, sport, religious needs and, in the larger camps, the publication of a camp newspaper.

In objective terms the achievements of the camp inmates were rather modest but, seen in the context of their singular situation what they managed to do takes on a different aspect. This, on the one hand, is how a Palestinian emissary portrayed the destructive negative side of DP camp life:

On the narrow street you will always find people . . . roaming about in search of something. I think they are seeking content for their lives. In the morning they get up without knowing what for. The day passes and night comes and so on . . . the present is superfluous and its only job is to bridge between the life that once was and what is yet to come. The sense of the provisional is felt at every turn. There is no stability, neither material nor spiritual. Yesterday they were in hell and tomorrow they'll be in an earthly paradise and betwixt and between emptiness and idleness.²³

After months of intensive work with the inmates of the Landsberg camp this is the way Dr. Leo Srole described what may be seen as the other side of the coin: "The displaced Jews have an almost obsessive will to live normally again, to reclaim their full rights as free men. Their energies and talents have been dramatically exhibited in the vigorous communities they have created in the camps, despite scant material resources and highly abnormal environmental conditions . . . It deserves the world's admiration."²⁴

Those who, despite the drawbacks, decided to remain within a camp framework, and they were the clear majority, sought the warmth of a shared life and, equally, the minimization of their direct contact with German society. Those who could no longer bear the unavoidable intimacy of camp life and were willing to forgo UNRRA assistance looked for a modicum of privacy in German homes, usually in the larger cities. In Munich and Frankfurt, for example, there were many thousands living privately while in other cities the numbers were considerably smaller. Thus, of the 47,698 Jewish DPs in the American Zone at the end of January 1946, 30,424 were to be found in camps and 17,274 in open communities.²⁵ At the end of the year 94,667 were to be found in

²³ Chaim Avni, *Im ha-yehudim be-machanot ha'akurim: rishmei shlichut 1945-1947* (With Jews in the DP camps: impressions of a mission 1945-1947) (Tel Aviv, 1980): 35.

²⁴ Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait": 13.

²⁵ Jewish Population in the US Zone of Occupation in Germany, 27 January 1946, AJDC US Zone in the papers of Chaim Yachil (Hoffman).