DUBNOW-INSTITUT

Jahrbuch · Yearbook

XIX 2020/2021

V&R

JAHRBUCH DES DUBNOW-INSTITUTS (JBDI)
DUBNOW INSTITUTE YEARBOOK (DIYB)

2020/2021

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Jahrbuch des Dubnow-Instituts
Dubnow Institute Yearbook

XIX

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Diese Maßnahme wird mitfinanziert durch Steuermittel auf der Grundlage des vom Sächsischen Landtag beschlossenen Haushaltes.

Gefördert von

Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien

Redaktionskontakt:

Jahrbuch des Dubnow-Instituts / Dubnow Institute Yearbook
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Bestellungen und Abonnementanfragen
sind zu richten an:

Brill Deutschland GmbH | Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Abteilung Vertrieb
Robert-Bosch-Breite 10
D-37070 Göttingen

Tel. +49 551 5084-40
Fax +49 551 5084-454
E-Mail: order@v-r.de / abo@v-r.de
www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der
Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind
im Internet über https://dnb.de abrufbar.

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D-37079 Göttingen, ein Imprint der Brill-Gruppe
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Das Jahrbuch des Dubnow-Instituts ist ein Peer-reviewed Journal *(double blind)*.

Satz und Layout: Reemers Publishing Services, Krefeld

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN: 2198-3097 (print)
ISSN: 2197-3458 (digital)

ISBN: 978-3-525-30203-3 (print)
ISBN: 978-3-666-30203-9 (digital)

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Chiara Renzo

Individual Recovery and Collective Redemption through Skilled Labor after the Holocaust: The Organization for Rehabilitation through Training in Italy

In the summer of 1946, the American psychologist David Boder (1886–1961) traveled to Europe to record a series of interviews, representing the earliest known oral testimony project of the Holocaust. Carrying a wire recorder, Boder visited Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy, where he was able to collect the stories of the survivors with their own voices.[1]

In Paris, Boder met and interviewed Jacob Oleiski (1901–1981), a survivor of the Dachau concentration camp who was prominent in the Kovno (Kaunas) Ghetto and who had formerly been the director of the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT) in Lithuania. The ORT was originally established in St. Petersburg in 1880 to promote vocational training in order to ameliorate the living and working conditions of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement.[2] Soon after World War I, the ORT expanded its mission throughout Europe and, in 1921, its representatives decided to establish the ORT Union to coordinate fundraising efforts and to oversee the organization's growing activities. From the 1930s, when the situation in Europe became more acute as several European countries adopted anti-Jewish legislation affecting every aspect of the Jews' lives, the ORT developed new programs to support the increasing number of Jewish refugees. Even during World War II, the ORT continued its work in the ghettos where its mission became associated with issues of life and death.[3]

1 Boder's oral interviews are available on the website of the Illinois Institute of Technology, <voices.library.iit.edu/> (6 April 2023). For an analysis of Boder's interviews, see Alan Rosen, The Wonder of Their Voices. The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder, New York/Oxford 2011.

2 The ORT distributed funds to Jewish schools for handicraft and agricultural training and provided grants and loans to artisans and farmers living in the Pale of Settlement. On the origins and history of ORT, see Leon Shapiro, The History of ORT. A Jewish Movement for Social Change, New York 1980.

3 For an overview of the ORT activities in the prewar years and within the ghettos during World War II, see Sarah Kavanaugh, ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors, London/Portland, Oreg., 2008, 1–56.

JBDI / DIYB 19 (2020/2021), 55–80 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666302039.55

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In the Kovno Ghetto, Oleiski made all efforts to organize trade schools until the ghetto's liquidation in 1944. However, immediately after the liberation he resumed the ORT mission in the Landsberg Displaced Persons (DP) Camp in the American occupation zone of Germany. Soon, the ORT had established agreements with the Allies and, within a few months, hundreds of trade schools were opened in the DP camps of Europe.[4]

In August 1946, nearly a year after the inauguration of the first vocational training program in Landsberg, Boder met Oleiski, who was attending a conference of the ORT delegates in Paris. The psychologist, by virtue of his profession, invited Oleiski to explain what difficulties the ORT was experiencing while dealing with the Jewish DPs. The ORT promoter solemnly replied:

> "You must understand, and so the world in general must comprehend, that we were condemned to perish by labour. […] As a consequence, a certain 'complex' has developed among the 'liberated Jews,' a negative attitude towards work. [It is the task of the ORT and the Jewish DPs' leaders] to extirpate this negative complex, to eradicate it from the soul of the Jewish person, and to enlighten him and tell [him]: 'times are different and conditions are different; and therefore, the attitude towards work must be entirely different.' And that is the most important job which I am doing at the present. We endeavor, by various methods, to rehabilitate the Jewish person towards work. And by means of this we intend to liberate him from the dark past and prepare him for a brighter and clearer future – with faith in people, faith in life, and faith in himself, since this is the most important thing in achieving a healthy personality."[5]

Indeed, coordinated and supervised by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), a network of Jewish voluntary organizations was authorized in 1945 to start the challenging task of taking care of Jewish survivors and recovering what remained of their communities. Among them where the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (also known as the Joint or JDC), and the ORT. All of them – though they had different approaches and goals – worked together for the benefit of the Jewish survivors. It was exactly the cooperation between these organizations, each providing

4 On the work of ORT with Jewish displaced persons after 1945, see ibid., 57–131; Katarzyna Person, ORT and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors. ORT Activities 1945–1956, ed. by Rachel Bracha, with a foreword by David Cesarani, London 2012, 1–54. More information on the ORT in the DP camps is available at <dpcamps.ort.org> (6 April 2023).

5 David Boder's Interview with Jacob Oleiski, Paris, 20 August 1946. The interview and its transcript are available online at <iit.aviaryplatform.com/collections/231> (6 April 2023).

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a specialized intervention, that contributed to alleviating the DPs' stay in the refugee camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy.[6]

In fact, the number of Jewish DPs in the refugee camps did not decrease after the war. On the contrary, in 1946 a series of pogroms accelerated the escape movement of Eastern European Jewish returnees towards the refugee camps, thus increasing the Jewish DP population considerably. It has been estimated that between July and November 1946, the Jewish DP population in the US zone of occupation in Germany grew from around 105,000 to more than 173,000. At the beginning of November 1946, there were altogether 247,000 Jewish DPs throughout Germany (184,000), Austria (44,000), and Italy (19,000).[7] This movement of Jewish DP "infiltrees" (as the Allies used to call post-hostilities refugees) aimed to gain unofficial entry especially into Italy, where the Mossad le-Aliyah Bet – the secret branch of the Jewish

6 There is today a growing body of scholarship on the history of Jewish DPs. Among others, see Angelika Königseder/Juliana Wetzel, Waiting for Hope. Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany, transl. by John A. Broadwin, Evanston, Ill., 2001; Hagit Lavsky, New Beginnings. Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945–1950, Detroit, Mich., 2002; Joanne Reilly, Belsen. The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, London/New York 1998; Atina Grossmann, Jews, Germans, and Allies. Close Encounters in Occupied Germany, Princeton, N. J., 2007; Thomas Albrich, Way Station of Exodus. Jewish Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Austria, in: Michael Berenbaum/Abraham J. Peck (eds.), The Holocaust and History. The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined, Bloomington, Ind., 1998, 716–732; Thomas Albrich/Ronald W. Zweig (eds.), Escape through Austria. Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine, London 2002; Martina Ravagnan, I campi Displaced Persons per profughi ebrei stranieri in Italia (1945–1950) [Displaced Person Camps for Foreign Jewish Refugees in Italy (1945–1950)], in: Storia e Futuro [History and Future] 30 (2012), <https://storiaefuturo.eu/i-campi-displaced-persons-per-profughi-ebrei-stranieri-in-italia-1945-1950/> (6 April 2023); Chiara Renzo, "Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet." The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy. Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-Understanding (1943–1948), in: Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC 12 (2017), 89–111; Federica Di Padova, Rinascere in Italia. Matrimoni e nascite nei campi per Displaced Persons ebree 1943–1948 [Reborn in Italy. Marriages and Field Births of Jewish Displaced Persons, 1943–1948], in: Deportate, esuli, profughe [Female Deportees, Exiles, Refugees] 36 (2018), 1–19.

7 Malcolm J. Proudfoot, European Refugees, 1939–52. A Study in Forced Population Movement, Evanston, Ill., 1956, 341.

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Agency in charge of the organization of the clandestine departure of Jewish DPs to British Mandatory Palestine – had set up its headquarters.[8]

Hence, after 1945 Italy became a key site of transit for thousands of Jewish DPs. Their care involved a network of individuals and organizations who brought their expertise into the country and paved the ground for specific rehabilitation programs. Italian Jews also owed much of their recovery to this network, whose support influenced the early years of the reorganization of the communitarian institutions after the Holocaust. While the role of the Palestinian Jewish soldiers who had landed in Italy on the heels of the Allied forces and the help of the JDC have been analyzed in different studies, the history of the ORT in Italy is almost unknown.[9]

This article focuses on what have been called the "heroic years" of the ORT Italy, from its foundation by a small group of Italian Jews in 1946 through to the early 1950s.[10] During those years, the ORT devoted its efforts to the vocational education of the Jewish DPs awaiting their final resettlement outside of Europe and, after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, it struggled to attract Italian Jews for skilled labor. As the first part of the article shows, in dealing with postwar refugees, international humanitarianism attributed a precise rehabilitative meaning to vocationalism and employment. In different ways, Zionist and Jewish organizations also rec-

8 The movement of the Jewish survivors from Eastern Europe to the DP camps is best known in Hebrew as Brichah (flight), see Yehuda Bauer, Flight and Rescue. Brichah, New York 1970; Cinzia Villani, "We Have Crossed Many Borders." Arrivals, Presence and Perceptions of Jewish "Displaced Persons" in Italy (1945–1948), in: Sabine Aschauer-Smolik/Mario Steidl (eds.), Tamid Kadima, Immer vorwärts. Der jüdische Exodus aus Europa 1945–1948/Heading Forward. Jewish Exodus out of Europe 1945–1948, Innsbruck/Vienna/Bolzano 2010, 261–277. On the operations of the Mossad le-Aliyah Bet in Italy, see Ada Sereni, I clandestini del mare. L'emigrazione ebraica in terra d'Israele dal 1945 al 1948 [Illegal Immigrants of the Sea. Jewish Emigration to the Land of Israel from 1945 to 1948], Milan 1973; Mario Toscano, La "Porta di Sion." L'Italia e l'immigrazione clandestina ebraica in Palestina, 1945–1948 [The "Gate of Zion." Italy and Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945–1948], Bologna 1990.

9 Dina Porat, One Side of a Jewish Triangle in Italy. The Encounter of Italian Jews with Holocaust Survivors and with Hebrew Soldiers and Zionist Representatives in Italy, 1944–1946, in: Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei nell'Italia unita, 1870–1945. Atti del quarto Convegno internazionale, Siena, 12–16 giugno 1989 [Italia Judaica. Jews in a United Italy, 1870–1945. Proceedings of the Fourth International Convention, Siena, 12–16 June 1989], Rome 1993, 487–513; Guri Schwarz, Ritrovare se stessi. Gli ebrei nell'Italia postfascista [Finding Oneself. Jews in Post-Fascist Italy], Rome/Bari 2004, 19–25 and 42–47 (Engl.: After Mussolini. Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy, trans. by Giovanni Noor Mazhar, London/Chicago, Mich., 2021); Shira Klein, Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism, Cambridge 2018, 182–203.

10 This expression was used in a pamphlet published in 1980 by ORT Italy to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of ORT: ORT, 1880–1980, ed. by Organizzazione Rieducazione Tecnica, Rome 1980.

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ognized a sort of therapeutic power in "productive work," as this was seen as an effective tool to heal the traumas of the war and as an essential step to building a new Jewish identity among Holocaust survivors.

Commonly, this aspect of Holocaust survivors' rehabilitation has been exclusively associated with their experiences in the *hakhsharot*, those training centers run by Zionist youth movements, in which DPs and local Jews learnt about the pioneers' ideals and acquired the vocational skills necessary for their resettlement in kibbutzim.[11] Yet, the second part of the article exploring the efforts of the ORT Italy sheds light on a wider range of vocational training offered by the organization to Jewish DPs and local Jews. Analyzing still unexplored primary sources and ORT Italy publications, I here trace the origins and initial development of this organization devoted to vocational education, which was able to adapt the principles and goals of the World ORT Union to both the Jewish DPs' urgent need to leave Europe and the attitude of the Italian Jews who mostly longed for reintegration in Italy. Uncovering a forgotten chapter of the post-Holocaust reconstruction of Jewish life and institutions in Italy, the history of the ORT reveals more about the role of Italian Jews in helping the Jewish DPs and demonstrates how work reintegration was envisaged by Italian Jews as a fundamental step towards their readmission into Italian society.

11 For an overview of the establishment of the *hakhsharot* in and nearby DP camps in postwar Europe, see Judith Tydor Baumel, Kibbutz Buchenwald. Survivors and Pioneers, New Brunswick, N. J., 1997; Avinoam J. Patt, Finding Home and Homeland. Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust, Detroit, Mich., 2009; Arturo Marzano, Relief and Rehabilitation of Jewish DPs after the Shoah. The "Hachsharot" in Italy (1945–48), in: Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 18 (2019), no. 3, 314–329. See also Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History 21 (2022), no. 1: Chiara Renzo/Verena Buser (eds.), Training for Aliyah. Young Jews in Hachsharot across Europe between the 1930s and the Late 1940s, <https://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/?issue=21> (6 April 2023).

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Work and Vocational Training in the DP Camps

Historians agree that DP camps represented a sort of ground zero for the creation of an international and professionalized corps for humanitarianism.[12] The refugee crisis in postwar Europe extended the concept of relief from mere material assistance to a series of welfare services aiming at the personal rehabilitation of those people unable to provide for themselves. At the end of the military operations in Europe, when the Allied army authorized UNRRA to start its mission, its staff took over the management and care of the DPs, driven by the motto "help the people to help themselves."[13]

However, as Silvia Salvatici has suggested, against the backdrop of this novel regime for refugees, international humanitarianism "blended old prejudices against people in need with suspicions against displaced persons, and essentialized the difference between those who needed assistance, and those who gave it."[14] This asymmetrical relationship becomes especially evident when we focus on how social workers perceived the DPs. Both in official reports and personal memoires, DPs were depicted as passive and apathetic and their prolonged stay in the refugee camps was seen as a factor accentuating their inclination to idleness and carelessness. To control and care this DPs' intrinsic attitude, refugee agencies and humanitarian organizations made all efforts to feed, clothe, and provide for their physical recovery, while at the same time involving them in a set of educational, occupational, and recreational activities. Schools, vocational training courses, theater, music, and sports were all seen as tools aiming at the DPs' moral rehabilitation and re-education as future citizens of democratic societies. Therefore, in the framework of the postwar refugee welfare system, covering the educational gap of children, employing an otherwise inactive DP, or teaching them a trade were considered the most effective ways to re-orient DPs to normal

12 This aspect is emphasized in the following studies: Silvia Salvatici, Senza casa e senza paese. Profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra [Homeless and without a Country. European Refugees after World War II], Bologna 2008; Jessica Reinisch, Introduction. Relief in the Aftermath of War, in: Journal of Contemporary History 43 (2008), no. 3, 371–404; Anna Marta Holian, Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism. Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany, Ann Arbor, Mich., 2011; Tara Zahra, The Lost Children. Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II, Cambridge, Mass., 2011; Ben Shephard, The Long Road Home. The Aftermath of the Second World War, New York 2011; Gerard Daniel Cohen, In War's Wake. Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order, Oxford 2012.

13 For the history of UNRRA, see George Woodbridge, UNRRA. The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 3 vols., New York 1950.

14 Silvia Salvatici, "Help the People to Help Themselves." UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons, in: Journal of Refugee Studies 25 (2012), no. 3, 428–451, here 429.

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life. In other words, educated, skilled, and professionalized DPs would become desirable citizens of prospective resettlement countries.[15]

Moved by these emerging humanitarian ideals but also by organizational and economic reasons, the Allied army and the UNRRA recruited DPs as drivers, clerks, interpreters, and other assistants from the very inception of the refugee camps. The International Refugee Organization (IRO), which replaced UNRRA in mid-1947 with the ultimate goal of definitively solving the refugee crisis, improved and systematized employment and vocational programs in order to make them functional to the resettlement schemes. Indeed, when repatriation ceased to be a practicable option, the IRO started to negotiate with national governments overseas about the possibility of increasing emigration quotas for the DPs.

On 1 January 1948, a Division of Employment and Vocational Training was established at the IRO Geneva headquarters, where a conference of the organization's employment officers from Germany, Austria, and Italy was held the week after. The conference resolutions suggested registering and classifying the occupational skills of the employable refugees, verifying such skills by trade testing, and providing for the occupational pre-selection of candidates for resettlement missions.[16] Subsequently, the IRO occupational survey of 31 March 1948 reported that, out of a total of 630,000, more than 340,000 refugees could be classified as employable. Men accounted for almost 70 percent of the total: One third fell in the skilled category (tailors, shoemakers, saddlers, locksmiths, carpenters, and mechanics), one quarter consisted of agricultural workers, and about one eighth were registered with professional or managerial roles. Among the employable women, only 19 percent were classified as skilled workers (seamstresses, teachers, nurses, and agricultural workers) and 14 percent as trained in service occupations (mainly domestic workers). In January 1950, the IRO resettlement policy of classified DP workers reduced their number to 132,000 in Austria, Germany, and Italy, but the proportions of the occupational groups remained roughly the same.[17]

15 On labor among refugees and former deportees, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, Regeneration through Labor. Vocational Training and the Reintegration of Deportees and Refugees, 1945–1950, in: Journal of the Western Society for French History 32 (2004), 368–385; Silvia Salvatici, From Displaced Persons to Labourers. Allied Employment Policies in Post-War West Germany, in: Jessica Reinisch/Elizabeth White (eds.), The Disentanglement of Populations. Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944–9, New York 2011, 210–228.

16 Louise W. Holborn, The International Refugee Organization. A Specialized Agency of the United Nations. Its History and Work, 1946–1952, London 1956, 272 f.

17 According to the IRO, between March 1949 and January 1950 the number of tailors declined from 4,370 to 1,776, of electricians from 2,888 to 1,443, and of teachers from 2,528 to 1,124. Ibid., 274.

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In the postwar years, voluntary societies made a substantial contribution to organizing vocational training for DPs. As for the Jews displaced in the refugee camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy, the lead organization in this field was the ORT. Officially, its programs among the DPs in Europe started no earlier than November 1945, when David L'vovich (Chairman of the World ORT Union) made an agreement with UNRRA to set up vocational schools wherever possible in Germany. However, since October 1945 the ORT school opened under the auspices of Jacob Oleiski was already functioning in the Landsberg DP camp.[18]

Indeed, the emphasis on the rehabilitative power of work and "productivism" was also shared by Jewish DP leaders, who assigned a specific Zionist meaning to it. Oleiski, along with other Jewish deportees from Kovno to Dachau, was part of a group who following the liberation symbolically founded the *She'erit ha-Pletah*. This was a biblical formula adopted and updated by Holocaust survivors in the DP camps who used it to ambivalently refer to themselves as "the surviving remnant" or "the saved remnant."[19] The underground activities of the *She'erit ha-Pletah* paved the way for the early establishment of self-help committees and Jewish DPs' representative institutions, whose efforts were forcefully supported by Jewish military chaplains and soldiers serving in the Allied army.[20]

After the liberation, Jewish DPs' most urgent demand was for their free and immediate resettlement and an improvement of living conditions in the refugee camps.[21] In particular, Jewish DPs required more autonomy in running their own educational and recreational activities in order to prepare themselves for Aliyah, to which end they were supported by Jewish voluntary organizations and guided by Zionist delegates sent by the Jewish Agency. Regardless of their actual migration to Palestine or their real or alleged attachment to the Zionist national project, almost all the Jewish DPs in the

18 Kavanaugh, ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors, 65–82.

19 On the foundation of the *She'erit ha-Pletah*, see Zeev W. Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope. The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany, Cambridge 2002.

20 On the meeting between Jewish survivors and Jewish soldiers in the DP camps, see Yoav Gelber, The Meeting between the Jewish Soldiers from Palestine Serving in the British Army and "She'erit Hapletah," in: Israel Gutman/Avital Saf (eds.), She'erit Hapletah, 1944–1948. Rehabilitation and Political Struggle. Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, October 1985, Jerusalem 1990, 60–79; Königseder/Wetzel, Waiting for Hope, 18–21; Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope, 39–51. On the role of the Jewish chaplains serving in the Allied Army among the Jewish DPs, see Alex Grobman, Rekindling the Flame. American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry, 1944–1948, Detroit, Mich., 1993.

21 At the time Jewish migration to Palestine was drastically limited by the White Paper of 1939 issued by the British Mandate in response to the 1936–1939 Arab revolts.

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refugee camps were involved in such activities and developed a sense of belonging that revolved around a collective identity.[22]

Refugee camps became for Jewish DPs the locus of Hebrew classes, cultural events, political discussions, Jewish religious celebrations, and also *hakhsharot* and vocational training. Not surprisingly, by the end of 1947, the ORT ran over 700 courses, in which 934 teachers taught more than fifty trades to 22,620 pupils, almost one-tenth of the population of the DP camps of Europe at that time.[23]

Established to reverse the traditional Jewish occupational patterns and to facilitate the process of Jews' emancipation and deghettoization through their integration in the European working class, seventy years after its foundation, the ORT trade schools became for Jewish DPs the passport to leave Europe, to contribute to the "building of the Land of Israel," or to start a new life in overseas countries.

The "Heroic Years" of the ORT Italy

The ORT had established branches in several European countries before the war, but had not expanded its mission to Italy, despite the fact that the country was home to an ancient Jewish community and had been a transit country for many Jewish refugees and exiles during the first half of the twentieth century. In September 1945, Israel Kalk, a leading philanthropist of the Milanese Jewish community, received a letter from Aron Syngalowski, vice-president and director general of the World ORT Union, based in Geneva. The consortium of "societies for the promotion of handicrafts, industrial, and agricultural work among the Jews" – as the letterhead read – was looking for preliminary information on the conditions of the Jews in Italy in order to decide whether an ORT branch would be helpful in the country. Syngalowski asked Kalk:

22 For a discussion of the role of Zionism among the Jewish survivors, see Patt, Finding Home and Homeland. On education and Zionism in the Bergen Belsen DP Camp, see Lavsky, New Beginnings, 167–224.

23 Kavanaugh, ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors, 90.

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"What is the number of unfortunate people and small traders who are unable or unwilling to resume their professions? How many intellectuals are unemployed, unwilling or irresolute? How many are so-called 'Luftmenschen'? How many would like to learn a new easy profession in a short time? […] Is there any desire to resort to the aforementioned forms of relief among the Jews in Italy?"[24]

From the sources analyzed for this article, it seems that the correspondence between Syngalowski and Kalk did not continue. In fact, this was not the first attempt by the World ORT Union to solicit Italian Jews' interest in vocational training after the war, but it was only in 1946 that Italian Jews recognized the advantages that this organization could bring to the country.

The lack of an ORT branch in Italy until that time could be explained as the result of a combination of factors. Among the most evident were Italian Jews' strong assimilation and scarce interest in Aliyah, as well as their high level of education and their widespread placement in liberal professions and trades, at least until 1938.[25] This situation presumably made it unnecessary for Italian Jewry to seek support of an organization specialized in vocational training until that time. However, neither when the racial laws started to erode the Jews' life in fascist Italy, forcing them to abandon their professions and trades, nor when Mussolini joined the war and interned foreign and antifascist Jews in concentration camps in 1940, was there an attempt by the ORT to establish a local branch in Italy. On the other hand, even if Italian Jews' charities cooperated with international Jewish organizations to assist Italian and foreign Jews in need that were in the country during the war, Italian Jews never contacted the ORT. This fact was certainly also a consequence of fascist Italy's anti-Jewish legislation, which drastically limited and even-

24 Archivio dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane [Archive of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities], Rome (henceforth AUCEI), Attività dell'Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane dal 1934, Enti Mondiali 93 B, Aron Syngalowski to Israel Kalk, 14 September 1945. Syngalowski here used the German word *Luftmenschen* which refers to a person unconcerned with the practicalities of earning a living.

25 On Italian Jews' process of emancipation, see Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, Making Italian Jews. Family, Gender, Religion and the Nation, 1861–1918, London 2017. See also Klein, Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism. For an overview on the working and educational situation of Italian Jews after 1945, see Eitan F. Sabatello, Le conseguenze sociali ed economiche delle persecuzioni sugli ebrei in Italia [The Social and Economic Consequences of the Persecutions for Jews in Italy], in: La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa. Atti del Convegno nel cinquantenario delle leggi razziali (Roma, 17–18 ottobre 1988) [Anti-Jewish Legislation in Italy and in Europe. Proceedings of the Conference on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Racial Laws (Rome, 17–18 October 1988)], ed. by Camera dei deputati, Rome 1989, 77–94, here 89.

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tually prohibited any kind of Jewish activity and networking, forcing Italian Jewish charities into hiding from 1943 onwards.[26]

It was only after the liberation of Rome in 1944 that the ORT informally approached Italian Jews in the turmoil of the last months of the war and the simultaneous recovery of the Italian Jewish communities resolutely started by the Jewish soldiers serving in the Allied army. In September 1944, Henry Sonnabend – a promoter of the South African ORT and member of the South African Jewish Appeal, at that time serving in the Allied Army in Italy – met Renzo Levi – a Roman Jewish entrepreneur and leading figure of the Italian Jewish community – and invited him to think about the possibility of opening an ORT branch in Italy.[27] However, at Sonnabend's invitation, Renzo Levi skeptically replied that "Italian Jews would not have been willing to attend similar institutions," and that, consequently, he did not consider it appropriate to follow up on his proposal. Levi and Sonnabend met again in June 1945. The latter did not hesitate to reiterate his suggestion, but Levi declined again explaining that at the time it was necessary to solve "new and more important problems for Italian Jewry."[28]

26 There exists today extensive literature on the condition, internment, and persecution of the Jews in fascist Italy, which cannot be exhaustively reported here. On the racial laws in Italy, see, e. g., Enzo Collotti, Il fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia [Fascism and the Jews. The Racial Laws in Italy], Rome/Bari 2003. On the Jewish exiles in Italy between 1933 and 1945, see Klaus Voigt, Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945 [The Precarious Refuge. Exiles in Italy from 1933 to 1945], Scandicci 1993. For a comprehensive study of the origin, development, and implementation of the antisemitic legislation and persecution, see Michele Sarfatti, The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution, Madison, Wis., 2006. For a collection of essays on different aspects of the anti-Jewish politics in fascist Italy, see Marcello Flores et al (eds.), Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni [History of the Shoah in Italy. Events, Memories, Representations], 2 vols., Turin 2010.

27 Renzo Levi worked in the banking and industrial sectors from a young age. He occupied different positions in Italian Jewish institutions and charities, inter alia, the vice-presidency of the Union of Italian Israelite Communities (UCII) after the war. Henry Sonnabend was a professor of sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, specialized in psychological warfare. During the war he used his knowledge of cultural educational experiments at the Zonderwater Camp for Prisoners of War (near Pretoria), which between 1941 and 1947 hosted more than 100,000 Italian soldiers captured by the British Army on the North and East African front. During the 1950s, Sonnabend played a major role in the development of the neighborhood of Afridar in what is today Ashkelon (Israel), which was established for the resettlement of South African Jews. For a profile of Henry Sonnabend, see Ayala Levin, South African "Know-How" and Israeli "Facts of Life." The Planning of Afridar, Ashkelon, 1949–1956, in: Planning Perspectives 34 (2019), no. 2, 285–309, here 298.

28 Venti anni dedicati alla educazione professionale, 1946–1966 [Twenty Years Dedicated to Vocational Education, 1946–1966], ed. by Organizzazione Rieducazione Tecnica Italia, Rome 1966, 19.

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The turning point was Syngalowski's visit in the DP camps of Italy in May 1946, where 8,088 Jewish DPs were waiting for their final resettlement outside of Europe. On that occasion, Levi – at that time vice-president of the Union of Italian Israelite Communities (Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane, UCII) – was finally persuaded to recognize the potential benefits of the vocational training programs sponsored by the World ORT Union. A few months later, a notary deed dated 3 October 1946 formalized the constitution of the ORT Italy. Renzo Levi was elected president, Leon Garfunkel (at that time head of the Organization of Jewish Refugees in Italy) vice-president, and Abram Bass (delegate of the World ORT Union) secretary-general. Moreover, several UCII representatives and prominent Italian Jews were appointed as counsellors, among them Andrea Tabet, Saul Israel, Raffaele Cantoni, Guido Jarach, Oscar De Montel, Raffaele Jona, and Alfredo Orvieto. The purpose of the newly established voluntary organization was "to encourage, propagate, and develop artisan, industrial, and agricultural work among Jews through the creation of vocational schools for children, young people, and adults."[29] Its workload was distributed between two central offices in Rome and Milan and an agricultural department based in Turin.

ORT started its program in conjunction with the arrival of an endless flow of Jewish DPs, attracted by the rumors relating to the opportunity to reach Palestine from Italian harbors through clandestine ships organized by the Mossad le-Aliyah Bet. Palestinian Jewish soldiers and delegates of the Zionist youth movements channeled this originally spontaneous movement of Jewish infiltrees to Italy. Between May and December of 1946, the number of Jewish DPs in refugee camps and *hakhsharot* in Italy grew from a little more than 8,000 to almost 15,000, with another 4,600 living in towns.[30]

Although small in numbers by comparison to Germany, the Jewish DP population in Italy was characterized by a high mobility within and outside of the country, which challenged the rescue network in planning relief and rehabilitation activities. In this framework, Renzo Levi and his collaborators undertook enormous efforts to set up vocational training in the DP camps and to spark the DPs' interest in the importance of acquiring manual labor skills as a means of facilitating their resettlement. Besides the high mobility of the Jewish DPs in Italy, the success of the ORT activities was jeopardized by another factor: the DPs' mistaken belief that their stay in Italy would be only a short transit. This situation was confirmed in the first report submit-

29 AUCEI, 93 B, O.R.T. Organizzazione rieducazione tecnica, 8 October 1946.

30 Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (henceforth AJDC), NY AR194554/4/44/2/628, Italy: General, 1946, JDC Program in Italy 1946, 12 February 1947.

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ted by the ORT Italy to the meeting of the Central Board of the World ORT Union in July 1947:

"The work [of the ORT] in Italy started later than in other countries, as the mobility of the Jewish DPs was greater here, and their patience even less than that of their equally ill-fated brothers in Germany and Austria. One must keep in mind that the refugees, who had succeeded in reaching Italy, looked upon their stay here as the shortest of all, and were for this reason alone disinclined to be vocationally trained, no matter how short a time this training would last."[31]

Hence, both the conditions that led to the establishment of the ORT and the environment in which the organization started its work in Italy were quite different from what has happened in postwar Germany, or more precisely in Landsberg, where the ORT was reestablished on the initiative of the Jewish DPs themselves, thanks to Oleiski's personal drive. According to the ORT Italy's leaders, the lack of this spontaneous character "in no way" changed the nature of vocational education in Italy. They also criticized the chaotic administration of the *hakhsharot* and their ineffective vocational training methods.[32]

The *hakhsharot*, however, became the starting point of the ORT mission in Italy, in particular those run by the Youth Aliyah (*Aliyat ha-No'ar*). This branch of the Jewish Agency dealing with the organization of the Aliyah of children and youngsters and their final resettlement in kibbutzim in Israel was responsible for several children's homes for DPs in postwar Italy. Each children's home, functioning as a *hakhsharah*, was affiliated with a specific Zionist or Orthodox party, whose ideology inspired the educational principles of the respective place. However, training guidelines in the children's homes followed more or less a similar blueprint: The children dedicated half their day to studying and the other half to doing housework. They were educated to think of themselves as a community and to behave accordingly.[33]

As soon as the ORT established itself in Italy, the Youth Aliyah viewed vocational training as "the basis for [children's] existence in Erez Israel." This is what David Golding, head of the Italian office of the Child and Youth

31 World Ort Archives, London (henceforth WOA), d05a014, Report on the ORT Activities August 1946–July 1947, 53.

32 Ibid.

33 Youth Aliyah was started in Germany in 1933 by Recha Freier in order to rescue Jewish children through emigration to Palestine. It soon became a special program of the Jewish Agency, directed by Henrietta Szold. Until 1945, the Youth Aliyah brought around 25,000 children to Palestine, and between 1945 and 1948 another 16,000 managed to make Aliyah (most of them illegally). For an overview of Jewish DP children's homes in Italy, see Chiara Renzo, "To Build and Be Built." Jewish Displaced Children in Post-War Italy, 1943–48, in: Beatrice Scutaru/Simone Paoli (eds.), Child Migration and Biopolitics. Old and New Experiences in Europe, London 2021, 105–123.

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Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency, wrote to Syngalowski in November 1947.[34] At the time, ORT Italy was operating several courses in two children's homes: Avigliana (Turin), which hosted around 150 children, and Selvino (near Milan), with approximately 270 children. In the two children's homes, 56 boys attended training workshops in joinery, mechanical locksmithing, and electrical installations, while 33 girls learned knitting and dressmaking.[35]

Children were indeed considered priority candidates for Aliyah, therefore Golding endorsed the cooperation with the ORT and sponsored vocational training in children's homes as "the highest value for [the Youth Aliyah's] educative work."[36] As a consequence, the ORT extended its program to children living in the Grugliasco and Rivoli DP camps (Turin Province), where a Swiss pedagogue taught cardboard work and bookbinding. This was a great achievement for the newly established ORT Italy, which in its first report to the World ORT Union commented that:

> "All those who have seen the drab life of a child in a DP camp will understand the joy with which the 150 children in those 2 camps [under]took this agreeable and interesting occupation. The opening of those workshops was felt to be an important event in the camps and was greeted as such. The joy and zeal of the pupils [is] generally recognised."[37]

Confronted with many obstacles, but aware that only cooperation could improve the situation, the ORT started its mission with adolescent and adult DPs. It established agreements with national and international institutions in order to develop a program and integrate it into its existing refugee and welfare systems. First, ORT Italy collaborated both with the JDC, which co-financed its activities, and the UNRRA, which often operated the ORT courses. Other important agreements were signed with various Italian ministries (such as the Ministry of Postwar Relief, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Labor), which provided premises, raw materials, and machines for the launch of ORT classes, and sometimes commissioned handicraft products from ORT pupils.[38]

This joint effort was essential to solving two problems that ORT Italy identified as disincentivizing Jewish DPs' participation in vocational training programs. On the one hand, the JDC and UNRRA improved the food

34 WOA, d05a015, Report on the ORT Activities July–November 1947, 135.
35 WOA, d05a014, Report on the ORT Activities August 1946–July 1947, 54 f.
36 WOA, d05a015, Report on the ORT Activities July–November 1947, 135.
37 Ibid., 67.
38 WOA, d05a014, Report on the ORT Activities August 1946–July 1947, 53 f. and 120 f.; WOA, d05a019, Three Years of ORT Activities. Report for the Period August 1946–June 1949, 84.

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situation and alleviated hunger in the refugee camps, therefore decreasing the number of refugees who refused vocational training for this reason. On the other hand, an agreement between the ORT and the Italian Chamber of Labor (the national confederation of trade unions) officially recognized the ORT diplomas and allowed ORT graduates to be employed in their trades in Italy, thereby decreasing the widespread phenomenon of black marketeering and partially tackling the problem of unemployment outside of the camps.[39] Finally, when the IRO's negotiations with governments opened new chances of resettlement to countries overseas, whose migration quotas placed a considerable emphasis on occupational skills in selecting refugees, many Jewish DPs became anxious to be vocationally trained.

With these premises, ORT launched a variety of courses for women and men in the northern DP camps of Grugliasco, Rivoli, and Cremona: mechanic locksmithing, tinsmithing, joinery, electrotechnics, radio technology, shoemaking, dressmaking, mechanical knitting, dental technology, chemical laboratory assistance, and others.[40]

Interestingly, to remedy the lack of instructors on site, ORT Italy employed those DPs who in their prewar lives had worked as artisans. For instance, during the summer of 1947, the ORT opened three training workshops for furriers directed by two qualified instructors, who had both worked in this trade in Galicia. These courses were attended by around fifty pupils, but the ORT registered a long list of candidates that would allow the organization of another training unit almost immediately.[41] At the beginning of 1948, many of the furriers who had graduated from ORT courses were already employed in Italy, and in 1949, forty furrier trainees were chosen by the Canadian Selection Board for resettlement in Canada.[42] The manufacturing of shoes was also taught by the DPs themselves in Grottaferrata, where 31 pupils attended this ORT class.[43]

The ORT Italy also established a fruitful and long-lasting cooperation with Italian technical institutes and companies. In Rome, the ORT collaborated with the Italian state school Righi, whose radio technicians trained a group of thirty Jewish DPs, while in Piedmont the well-known company for typewriters Olivetti offered ORT the chance to inaugurate a school for typewriter mechanics within its factory in Ivrea. With the help of an ORT instructor acting as interpreter, two experienced Italian precision mechanics

39 WOA, d05a016, Three Months of ORT Activities, December 1947–March 1948, 61.
40 WOA, d05a020, One Year of ORT Activities. Report for 1950, 74–76.
41 WOA, d05a015, Report on the Activities July–November 1947, 67.
42 WOA, d05a016, Three Months of ORT Activities, December 1947–March 1948, 61; WOA, d05a021, ORT Activities in 1951, 63.
43 WOA, d05a015, Report on the Activities July–November 1947, 67.

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recommended by Olivetti taught seventeen pupils. They were gathered from various DP camps in northern Italy and the UNRRA was in charge of their board and lodging. This partnership with Olivetti was celebrated as a great accomplishment by ORT Italy: "[In the Ivrea factory,] in an atmosphere in no way recalling life in the camps, they can devote themselves entirely to their professional formation, thus making rapid progress."[44] In his testimony, Leon Sender, a Jewish DP from Vilnius and a pupil of the ORT-Olivetti school in Italy, recognized how attending the training course in type writer mechanics facilitated his later resettlement in the United States.[45]

Given its growing success, the ORT programs solicited the attention of various Zionist parties and Zionist-oriented institutions involved in the organization of a series of activities aiming at the practical and ideological preparation of prospective immigrants to Palestine. In particular, Zionists showed great interest in the ORT school for construction workers set up in Milan, which prepared young Jews to become masons, carpenters, tilers, and brick manufacturers. The first cohort of pupils were former bookkeepers, shop assistants, and yeshiva graduates, who soon after the end of their training were able to find temporary job opportunities at Italian construction enterprises.[46] The Zionists saw this school as an opportunity to respond to the increasing demand for craftsmen in the construction industry in Palestine and, in view of a large-scale Aliyah of skilled workers, invited the ORT at the end of 1947 to open other courses of this type in the Adriatica, Cinecittà, and Rivoli DP camps.[47]

The trade schools did not attract only Zionist groups in preparation for Aliyah, but also the unique case of a group of fifty Jewish DPs organized in a "non-Palestine-bound *hakhsharah*" affiliated with the Bund movement. This was known as the "Oyfboy" cooperative, which greatly benefited from the vocational training for cutting men's garments operated by the ORT in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Labor and UNRRA.[48]

44 WOA, d05a014, Report on the ORT Activities August 1946–July 1947, 55 f.; WOA, d05a015, Report on the Activities July–November 1947, 65.

45 Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D. C., RG-50.163.0069, Interview with Leon Senders, 28 April 1988, tape 3, 00:00:48–00:02:10.

46 WOA, d05a014, Report on the ORT Activities August 1946–July 1947, 55; WOA, d05a015, Report on the Activities July–November 1947, 67.

47 WOA, d05a015, Report on the Activities July–November 1947, 66; WOA, d05a016, Three Months of ORT Activities, December 1947–March 1948, 59; WOA, d05a017, Report on the ORT Activities 1 March–30 June 1948, 96.

48 The term Bund is abbreviated from Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland. It was a secular Jewish socialist movement founded in the Russian Empire at the end of the nineteenth century. The Bund is commonly associated with devotion to Yiddish and with the idea of Jewish nationalism and autonomism in Eastern Europe. WOA, d05a015, Report on the Activities July–November 1947, 63.

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A remarkable project was also initiated by the ORT in the field of agriculture. In the Avigliana *hakhsharah* it established an agricultural school equipped with eight hectares of land with a large kitchen garden and an orchard, a dairy with eight cows and calves, and a hen house with an incubator. The school was managed by an agronomist, a gardener, and a teacher of theory who trained 25 young pupils. Similar programs in agriculture, apiculture, viticulture, gardening, dairy and poultry farming, and classes for tractor drivers were held in the Rome area and in *hakhsharot* in Rivoli, Grugliasco, and Bari.[49]

The first years of ORT activities in Italy were drastically affected by the high mobility of the Jewish DPs, the lack of adequate premises, the difficulty of finding instructors on site, and delays in delivering machines, tools, and raw materials. Nevertheless, between the end of 1946 and mid-1947, the ORT was able to organize 41 trade schools, training workshops, and vocational courses attended by 936 pupils.

"Such an energetic and firm beginning of systematic ORT activities," observed the ORT Italy leaders, "has exercised an encouraging influence in all respects on large refugee masses who have been disappointed for so long."[50] At this point, ORT Italy was proud to inform the World ORT Union about the changed attitude of the Jewish DPs towards vocational training:

> "The longer the insecurity of the DPs' existence lasts, the stronger […], quite logically, the nervousness among the DPs and [the] fluctuation in the[ir] work. This is more or less true of all countries where there are DPs. In Italy, however, quite the opposite can be seen. The longer [the] ORT work is continued among the DPs, the stronger [the] relation[ship] aris[ing] between it and the DPs, and the greater their ambition […] to continue their training until its successful conclusion."[51]

The number of Jews who decided to join ORT classes in Italy grew considerably: Between 1 July 1947 and 30 June 1948, 3,712 pupils attended more than sixty vocational training courses.[52]

The establishment of the State of Israel marked a turning point for the activities of ORT Italy. The consequent mass Aliyah brought considerable changes in almost every field of the DPs' lives, and led to the sudden departure of a large number of ORT pupils. These new conditions forced the ORT to rebalance its program and confronted it with two main changes: On

49 WOA, d05a014, Report on the ORT Activities August 1946–July 1947, 57; WOA, d05a016, Three Months of ORT Activities, December 1947–March 1948, 59.

50 Ibid., 54.

51 WOA, d05a016, Three Months of ORT Activities, December 1947–March 1948, 57; WOA, d05a019, Three Years of ORT Activities. Report for the Period August 1946–June 1949, 82.

52 WOA, d05a017, Report on the ORT Activities, 108.

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the one hand, its "center of gravity" moved from the north to the south of the country, while on the other hand, its vocational training programs finally welcomed new recipient categories.[53]

At this stage, the DP camps in Bari, Barletta, and Trani became sites of transit and embarkation for thousands of Jewish DPs coming from northern Italy, Germany, and Austria, and, therefore, the new main locations of the ORT trade schools. Most Jewish DPs in the southern area were resettled in Israel in a short time, but those who applied for resettlement in other countries had to wait longer before leaving for the United States, South America, Canada, or Australia. They were "fully aware of the fact that without an ORT diploma in their hands their chances of emigration [would have been] very slight," thus many decided to attend the ORT schools.[54]

With the gradual evacuation of the DP camps and the decreasing Jewish DP population, ORT Italy started to address the particular needs of the few hundred Jewish DPs who had decided to settle in Italy and required assistance in job placement, as well as of those DPs (defined as "hardcore cases") whose precarious health conditions made both repatriation and resettlement impossible.[55]

At the end of 1949, representatives of the ORT, IRO, and JDC met in order to develop a specific occupational therapy and rehabilitation program for chronically ill Jewish DPs in the Merano Sanatoria and Grottaferrata Convalescent Home (both run by the JDC). In 1950, ORT Italy estimated that 53 pupils in Merano and 83 in Grottaferrata were studying to obtain diplomas as radio technicians, leather workers, electricians, dressmakers, shoemakers, poultry farmers, dental technicians, and watchmakers. Offering vocational training "raised great hopes in the life of these exceptionally unhappy Jewish DPs," declared ORT Italy, especially once the Israeli government declared that it would accept 25 "hardcore cases" per month who had completed a full course of vocational training with satisfactory results.[56]

At the same time, the ORT consolidated some projects previously started for Italian Jews, such as the Dario Ascarelli School in Rome and the *hakhsharah* of Tel Broshim ("Cypress Hill," also known as San Marco in Cevoli, Pisa), and developed new programs to motivate more of them for vocational training.

53 WOA, d05a018, Report on the ORT Activities July 1–October 31, 1948, 90.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 WOA, d05a019, Three Years of ORT Activities. Report for the Period August 1946–June 1949, 87; AJDC, G 45-54/4/27/3/P.I.142, Israel: Emigration of Post TB Patients from Rehabilitation Centre. 1949–1950, 1954, Criteria for Selection of Candidates from TB Rehabilitation Centers for Emigration to Israel, 18 March 1949.

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Tel Broshim was opened by the Italian He-Ḥaluẓ (Pioneer) movement in 1947 to train exclusively a small group of young Italian Jews who wished to be resettled in kibbutzim. The Italian Jews who decided to join Tel Broshim embraced agricultural and manual labor as part of their training for Aliyah. In this endeavor, they received the help of the ORT, as Israel Corrado De Benedetti, a member of Tel Broshim, remembered in his testimony:

"At the beginning of 1948, the ORT took charge of financing and organizing agricultural studies on the spot. It built a stable and bought four cows and a primitive egg incubator. ORT also financed small agricultural facilities, such as a greenhouse for the nursery and, in the 1950s, even a primitive irrigation system. […] With the help of the ORT, the haverim [members of the *hakhsharah*] cultivated between two and four hectares […], a piece of vineyard, a vegetable garden, and produced some cheese."[57]

Even if Italian Jewry after the Holocaust experienced a pro-Zionist shift that influenced the principal Jewish institutions and was reflected especially in the blossoming of youth movements and associations, very few Italian Jews decided to leave for Palestine/Israel during those years.[58] Between 1945 and 1948, while the Mossad le-Aliyah Bet organized clandestine departures of thousands of Jewish DPs to the Land of Israel, only 431 Italian Jews decided to make Aliyah. Unlike other Jewish communities in Europe, which registered large-scale migrations to Palestine/Israel after the Holocaust, Italian Jews witnessed instead what the historian Arturo Marzano called "a miniature aliyah."[59] For this reason, except for Tel Broshim, the work of the ORT among Italian Jews mainly addressed the needs of those who wished to learn a new trade in order to find employment in Italy.

Hence, the ORT supported the Dario Ascarelli School in Rome, considered "one of the cherished institutions" originally opened by the local Jewish Community to look after children who could not continue their studies after

57 Israel Corrado De Benedetti's testimony is taken from Anita Tagliacozzo (ed.), Sulle orme della rinascita. Cronaca e memorie del Movimento "Hechalutz" italiano dal '44 al '54 [In the Footsteps of Rebirth. Chronicle and Memory of the Italian "He-Ḥaluẓ" Movement from 1944 to 1954], Rome 2004, 114. See also Israel Corrado De Benedetti, Anni di rabbia e di speranze 1938–1949 [Years of Anger and Hope, 1938–1949], Florence 2003. On the ORT program at Tel Broshim see also WOA, d05a017, Report on the ORT Activities 1 March–30 June 1948, 102.

58 Schwarz, Ritrovare se stessi, 48–100.

59 Arturo Marzano, The Italian Jewish Migration to Eretz Israel and the Birth of the Italian Chalutz Movement (1938–1948), in: Mediterranean Review 3 (2010), no. 1, 1–29, here 2 f. See also idem, "Prisoners of Hope" or "Amnesia"? The Italian Holocaust Survivors and Their Aliyah to Israel, in Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC 1 (2010), 92–107; Marcella Simoni, Young Italian Jews in Israel, and Back. Voices from a Generation (1945–1953), in: Francesca Bregoli/Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti/Guri Schwarz (eds.), Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century. Bridging Europe and the Mediterranean, Cham 2018, 173–200.

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mandatory schooling (at the age of eleven) or orphans living in the streets.[60] It was taken over by the ORT in late 1948, when 58 Italian Jewish girls attended courses in dressmaking, embroidery, and mechanical knitting. The ORT expanded the Ascarelli School in order to make it accessible to its long waiting list of candidates and broadened its educational program to include boys. In 1950, the number of pupils had grown to 82 (between twelve and sixteen years old) and the practical training was enriched with a general education curriculum in accordance with the Italian program for public schools to enable young Jews to get a school leaving certificate.

The ORT was engaged in the expansion of children's vocational training to the local Jewish community schools, negotiating for the inclusion of handicrafts in the school syllabi. The program was soon started for 210 children in Milan and one year later it was implemented in elementary and secondary schools in Turin, Livorno, and Florence.[61] Simultaneously, the ORT opened trade schools of different types for youngsters and adults in almost all Italian Jewish communities. In 1950, the ORT Italy ran vocational workshops and schools for dressmaking, shirt-making, radio technology, electrotechnics, leather works, woodwork, cardboard works, joinery, and dental technology that were attended by more than 300 pupils in Rome, 309 in Milan, 107 in Livorno, 121 in Florence, as well as 106 children and 27 adults in Turin.[62]

Skilled Labor as an Equalizing Factor

To celebrate the first year of ORT Italy's activity, the Italian Jewish and Zionist-oriented newspaper *Israel* dedicated four pages to the voices of its founders and leaders. Among them, Renzo Levi stressed that while "remarkable results have been achieved especially in the education and re-education of refugees," the organization suffered from the almost complete absence of an "Italian element."[63] The ORT used its presence in the *Israel* newspaper to inform Italian Jews about the program it would offer them for free. Sparking the Italian Jews' interest in vocational training was at that time "the greatest challenge for the ORT." According to its leaders:

60 WOA, d05a020, One Year of ORT Activities. Report for 1950, 74.
61 Ibid., 74–76.
62 Ibid., 74–79.
63 Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (henceforth CZA), PR/9100, Renzo Levi, in: Israel, 25 December 1947, 3.

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"[The most difficult goal for the ORT will be to overcome Italian Jews'] natural tendency to remain in the traditional ghetto jobs, which are easier and apparently more economically advantageous. A habitual and stubborn attachment to the hawker trade, to the paternal warehouse, to the shop, to the small box of objects to sell, to the pawnshop still keep Jewish youth in Italy and abroad away from the spirit of vocational re-education in the ORT schools."[64]

Historians have documented the difficulties encountered by Italian Jews in their readmission into their long-lost work posts or their reintegration into the job market after 1945. Even if the reparatory legislation established a return to principles of equality, Jewish occupational reintegration was a lengthy and turbulent process. Rather than offering an opportunity to recover their social and economic conditions, it aimed at the moral and political recovery of the nation.[65]

Seven years of prohibitions, discrimination, persecution, and deportations, followed by a complicated and disappointing readmission into the national economy, led to lasting occupational and professional changes within the Italian Jewish minority. Demographic studies help us to better grasp how the Jews' expulsion from public schools and universities, their exclusion from public functions, and the limitations on property and work between 1938 and 1945 affected Italian Jews' economic and occupational life after the Holocaust. Until 1938, juridical equality and a high level of education allowed many Italian Jews to perform liberal professions and work in public administration. However, after the war, the victims of the racial laws mostly settled for the trade sector, a choice or makeshift solution that represented a "kind of economic and social refuge"[66] for the Jews in Italy.

The reintegration of the Jews into Italian society must be contextualized as part of a broader process of renewal that involved all sectors and aimed at the careful and fast recovery of the nation. Eager to atone for its recent fascist past and to regain a position in international politics and economy, postwar Italy adopted a set of measures that led to a prolonged period of strong economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, also known as the "Italian economic miracle."[67] This upturn started with UNRRA aid in the immediate aftermath of the war and from 1948 continued through a system of grants and

64 CZA, PR/9100, La ORT e gli Ebrei, in: Israel, 25 December 1947, 5.

65 On Italian Jews' return to work after 1945, see Ilaria Pavan, Tra indifferenza e oblio. Le conseguenze economiche delle leggi razziali in Italia (1938–1970), Florence 2004, 218–236 (Engl.: Beyond the Things Themselves. Economic Aspects of the Italian Race Laws [1938–2018], transl. by Johanna Bishop, Jerusalem 2019).

66 Sabatello, Le conseguenze sociali ed economiche delle persecuzioni sugli ebrei in Italia, 84–87.

67 On the history and politics of post-fascist Italy, including its socioeconomic transformation until the 1960s, see Paul Ginsborg, A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics, 1943–1988, London/New York 1990, 72–253.

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loans allocated to Italy by the European Recovery Program (ERP) within the framework of the Marshall Plan.[68] As part of this long process of economic regeneration and modernization, Italy invested in vocational training, the organization of which was often delegated to private companies.[69]

It was in this changing socio-economic situation that ORT Italy again strengthened its relationship with Italian state institutions, for whom it became a cornerstone in the field of vocational training, and not only among Jews. In its reports, ORT Italy frequently and proudly informed the World ORT Union of this uninterrupted and reciprocal collaboration. It indeed cooperated with the Provincial Consortium of Technical Instruction, in charge of promoting vocational training within the mandate of the Ministry of Education, in the establishment of several schools.

The Italian branch of the ORT was also involved in international initiatives. These ranged from its participation in the ERP International Conference on Manpower held in Rome at the beginning of 1948 to the United States Escapee Program (USEP), through which the United States in 1952 allocated 4.3 million dollars to assist refugees from behind the Iron Curtain and to facilitate their resettlement in Western Europe or the United States. As a transit country, Italy hosted a few hundred USEP refugees, many of whom attended the ORT schools to learn English, bookkeeping, dressmaking, technical design, and electrical engineering.[70]

In addition to this overall economic and functional interpretation of ORT Italy's mission in the aftermath of World War II, it is also important to expand upon its cultural dimension. Indeed, the virtues attributed by its leaders to vocational training and work blended a sharp pro-Zionist attitude with an emphasis on Jewish religious traditions, both characterizing Italian Jewry's institutions and collective identity after the Holocaust.

The aim of the professional training proposed by the ORT was not only to provide pupils with the technical knowledge necessary to practice a trade and

68 On UNRRA aid to Italy, see Silvia Salvatici, "Not Enough Food to Feed the People." L'UNRRA in Italia (1944–1945) ["Not Enough Food to Feed the People." The UNRRA in Italy (1944–1945)], in: Contemporanea. Rivista di Storia dell'800 e del '900 [Journal for the History of the 19th and 20th Centuries] 14 (2011), 83–99; for an overview of the history of the Italian economy after 1945, see Patrizia Battilani/Francesca Fauri, L'economia italiana dal 1945 a oggi [The Italian Economy from 1945 until Today], Bologna 2014, 55–85.

69 Fulvio Ghergo, La formazione professionale regionale iniziale. Alla riscoperta di una identità [Initial Regional Vocational Training. The Rediscovery of an Identity], here, 9–11 (Supplement to Rassegna CNOS 2 [2009]).

70 WOA, d05a016, Three Months of ORT Activities, December 1947–March 1948, 61; ORT-Italia. Dieci anni dedicati alla educazione professionale, 1946–1956 [The ORT Italy. Ten Years Dedicated to Vocational Education, 1946–1956], ed. by Organizzazione Rieducazione Tecnica, Milan/Rome 1956, 3.

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earn a living, but also to transmit a work ethic. In its campaign to acquaint the Jewish population with the organization's aims, the ORT promoted manual and creative labor as a means of cultural elevation able to reinvigorate both the body and the soul. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of ORT Italy's foundation, Guido Jarach, at that time president of the organization, called its work among the Jewish DPs a "miracle" and added:

> "Human beings who in extermination camps lost any vital force, willpower, and hope have been able to regain an interest both in their present and future, to get to know themselves and their own resources, and to finally regain control over themselves thanks to the ORT's classes and the knowledge of a trade. […] Jewish survivors have become humans again – productive humans."[71]

After the Holocaust, ORT Italy's leadership posed questions about the "Jewish meaning" of work, both in the cultural and religious spheres. On several occasions, ORT Italy promoters stressed the surviving Jews' "intellectual and spiritual proclivity" in contrast to their problematic and unstable job placement over the centuries. In this regard, Saul Israel, a board member of ORT Italy since its foundation, maintained that if antisemitism was unable to annihilate Jews' faith, traditions, and identity, it instead gradually succeeded in excluding them from any form of work.[72] Israel believed that the prolonged failure of integrating Jews effectively into the labor market contributed to strengthening the stereotype of the "Jewish parasite," living on the margins, avoiding physical work, and enriching himself with minimal effort at other people's expense. In Israel's secular vision, the integration of Jews into productive work would help to "normalize" their position and condition

71 Ibid. Guido Jarach (1905–1991) was born to a prominent Jewish Milanese family. His father Federico Jarach was an entrepreneur and covered different important posts in national institutions and in both the local administration and Jewish leadership in Milan. Guido Jarach himself was an entrepreneur and a banker who fled to Switzerland to escape antisemitic persecution. After the war, he resumed his activity in the sector of textile and graphic machinery and served as adviser and then president of the Banca Popolare di Milano. Jarach held important functions in the Italian Jewish community: He was an active member of several charities, President of the Jewish Community in Milan, and President of the UCII.

72 Saul Israel (1897–1981) was born in Thessaloniki and moved to Rome in 1916 to complete his university studies in medicine. He later specialized in biology. Because of the increasingly difficult situation of the Thessaloniki Jewish community, Saul Israel decided to stay in Italy. In 1919, he applied for and obtained Italian nationality, which was revoked between 1938 and 1945. He practiced as a doctor for his entire life and became a key figure of Italian Jewry. After the war, he promoted the creation of a secular Jewish movement, enhancing the fundamental principles of Jewish thought, understood as a religious and philosophical experience. For further information on Saul Israel's life and writings, see also <https://sites.google.com/site/giorgioisrael/saulisrael> (6. April 2023).

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with regard to "the other nations." In a short article entitled *Healing Function* published in an ORT pamphlet, he explained that:

"Even if antisemitism will not disappear, only [through Jews' reintegration into the job market] will it lose its singular abstractness that makes it a pathological phenomenon. At that point, Jews will live openly and will no longer seem to follow an underground or hidden course lacking both anxieties and hopes. The aspirations and sufferings of the Jewish people will become similar to those of other human beings and there will be no need to reach this extreme peak of cruelty and abomination in order to be understood by the rest of the world."[73]

In Saul Israel's perspective, Jews' employment in skilled labor would have been an important factor in strengthening equality between Jews and non-Jews. Parallel to this, the religious representatives among the ORT promoters also elaborated on the concept of work in Jewish religious tradition. Among them was Rabbi Yoseph Colombo, who in several ORT-related publications praised skilled labor, quoting and analyzing passages from the Torah and the Talmud.[74] Colombo argued that if historical circumstances had prevented Jews from exercising certain trades, pushing them towards commercial activities, it would be a serious misunderstanding to think that manual work contrasts Jewish ideals of religious life. Drawing on the Talmudists' interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:19, understanding "You shall choose life" as "You shall choose yourself a trade," Colombo maintained that Judaism could give a distinct value to manual work and to the human contact with raw materials:

"Through work, humans overcome the hardness of nature and bend it to their needs, creating what in the Renaissance was called *regnum hominis*, that is, humans' dominion over nature. God gave mankind dominion over creation and therefore the faculty to break stones and soften iron. Thus, working with natural materials and forces is equivalent to carrying out an eminently religious work. It means finding ourselves with the Lord and becoming his collaborator, precisely in manual labor."[75]

Beyond the specific points of view of its secular or religious promoters, ORT Italy invited Jews, and especially Italian Jews, to associate a rejuvenated

73 ORT-Italia, 7.

74 Yoseph Colombo (1897–1975) was a rabbi and kabbalist from the Jewish community of Livorno. Until 1938, he served as a professor and then dean of the Antonio Roiti High School in Ferrara. As a consequence of the racial laws and the expulsion of Jews from public schools, he moved to Milan and with other Italian Jews founded the Jewish school in Via Eupili to allow children to continue their education. He continued to deal with Jewish studies and also taught at Bocconi University. On the figure of Yoseph Colombo see Dino Voghera, In ricordo di Yoseph Colombo [In Memory of Joseph Colombo], in: La Rassegna Mensile di Israel [Monthly Journal Israel] 51 (1985), no. 1, 22–29.

75 Venti anni dedicati alla educazione professionale, 1946–1966, 49 f. (emphasis in the original).

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social and religious value with work. Developing specific professional skills in accordance with the postwar labor market would facilitate the Jews' resettlement and occupational placement. Moreover, as envisaged by ORT Italy after the Holocaust, skilled labor would allow them to redefine their Jewish identity in egalitarian societies. Indeed, in addition to its rehabilitative function providing Jews with a new self-awareness and purposefulness, ORT Italy attributed a collective redemptive power to the Jews' involvement in manual labor. The regeneration of the individual through work reflected on the entire community, narrowing the distance between Jews and non-Jews that had become increasingly acute during the fascist period.

At the end of 1956, ten years after the foundation of ORT Italy, there were 1,403 pupils attending vocational training in several Jewish communities (Rome 675, Milan 416, Livorno 144, Trieste 87, and Venice 22), twelve *ḥaverim* were still learning from agricultural workshops in Tel Broshim, and 261 non-Jewish refugees were taught a number of courses as part of their resettlement program. In the following years, ORT Italy continued to adapt its activities and priorities to the needs of its pupils, helping hundreds of Jewish refugees who reached Italy between the end of the 1950s until the 1970s from North Africa and the Middle East and arranging appropriate programs for the changing Italian Jewish minority.

The history of ORT Italy uncovers the role played by Italian Jewry in supporting Jewish DPs and sheds light on a still unknown chapter of the Italian philanthropic tradition. Moreover, ORT's relationship with international Jewish organizations and its long-lasting cooperation with Italian state institutions help us to better grasp the process of reconstructing Jewish life after the Holocaust and how Italian Jews envisaged their reintegration in a nation that only a few years earlier had placed them on the margins of society and threatened their existence. Despite the constant readjustments of its educational programs, the history of the ORT teaches us about the evolution of the Italian Jewish community and how this minority struggled to preserve its identity through education and vocational training from the post-Holocaust years until today.

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Jewish Material Culture
in East Central Europe during the Twentieth Century

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