

**“Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet.”
The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and
Self-understanding (1943-1948)**

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Abstract

This essay deals with the fate of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy from the liberation of the Camp of Ferramonti di Tarsia, by the Allied Army in 1943, until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It focuses on the creation of a complex network of agencies, organizations and individuals involved in assisting the Jewish DPs in Italy, in the framework of the post-war refugee crisis. The article discusses the approaches and ambitions of the rescuers (military authorities, UN agencies and representatives from the Yishuv) and the desires of the Jewish DPs themselves, who played an active role both in the administration of the refugee camps as well as in the political discourse regarding their resettlement in British Palestine. Through an analysis of hitherto unexplored archival sources, it will illustrate the development of new sense of belonging and of a renewed identity among the Jewish DPs.

Introduction

Jewish displacement in Italy: Rescuers’ Ambitions and Recipients’ Desires

A Network for the Assistance of the Jewish DPs: National, International and Voluntary Organizations

Rehabilitation and Self-understanding: Towards a New Identity

Conclusion

Introduction

World War II left a legacy that Europe had never experienced before: a refugee crisis of unique scale. Between 1939 and 1945, approximately 55 million people

were uprooted, forced to leave their homes, expelled and deported to forced labor and to concentration camps.¹

At the end of the war, 7 million refugees fell burden to the Allies, mainly in the occupied zones of Germany, Austria and Italy. In order to manage this multitude of people, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) prepared an outline plan for the control, care, repatriation and resettlement of refugees. Following the Liberation, they were gradually sheltered in temporary accommodations in refugee camps and assembly centers, often set up in former concentration camps or requisitioned buildings (such as schools, barracks, monasteries, etc.). The Allies adopted repatriation as the principal means to reduce quickly the number of refugees, who were classified “eligible” or “ineligible” for receiving international help according to their nation of origin. On the basis of the neologism “displaced person” (DP) coined by the Allies, only those who were Allied nationals or those who had been persecuted for religious, racial or political reasons, were recognized as eligible for international assistance; whereas those refugees originating from enemy countries were to remain the burden of their national governments.²

Among these men, women and children longing for home, the Jewish survivors comprised a minority that nonetheless constituted for many years a burning issue pending a definitive solution. Refusing the nationality line and the repatriation policy adopted by the Allies, the Jewish DPs strove to be recognized as a national collective with the right to make *‘aliyah* or to leave Europe and, in order to achieve these goals, they formed committees to represent themselves as a separate political entity.³

¹ Evgenii M. Kulisher, *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes, 1917-47*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 305.

² On the displacement in post-war Europe see the pioneering works of Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 296-345 and Mark Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*, (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989).

³ For an overview on the Jewish displacement in Germany, Austria and Italy, see among the others: Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish displaced persons in post-World War II Germany*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001); Margarete Myers-Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); *Escape through Austria, Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine*, eds. Thomas Albricht and Ronald W. Zweig, (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002); Mario Toscano, *La 'Porta di Sion.' L'Italia e l'immigrazione clandestina ebraica in Palestina, 1945-1948*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990).

This position and the aspiration for leaving Europe shared by the majority of the Jewish DPs in the refugee camps throughout Europe found powerful expression in the ideological foundation of the *She'erith Hapleitah*, a biblical formula used by the Jewish DPs to refer to themselves and ambivalently translated as “the surviving remnant” and “the saved remnant”⁴. Though there are many interpretations of the initial use of this term, it is commonly understood by historiography as an obvious attempt to build a collective and transnational identity among the Jewish survivors, as pointed out by Zeev Mankowitz:

In a more limited sense *She'erith Hapleitah* 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 [...]. For some of the leaders of this unique community driven by a sense of historical responsibility, *She'erit Hapleitah* was also viewed as the saving remnant who were called upon to play a formative role in shaping the Jewish future.⁵

Meanwhile, the atrocities experienced by the European Jews slowly began to resonate worldwide in the public opinion, especially after the extensive coverage given by the media to the results of Earl G. Harrison’s mission. In 1945, Harrison was appointed by US President Truman to head an urgent inquiry regarding the situation of Jewish survivors in Germany and Austria. His description of the Jewish DPs’ condition was chilling, and his Report recommended that Great Britain modify the limitations on ‘*aliyah*’ decreed by the White Paper from 1939 regarding the British Mandate on Palestine, recognizing that “the only real solution of the problem lies in the quick evacuation of all non-repatriable Jews [...] to Palestine.”⁶ Hence, the publication of the Harrison Report linked the situation of the Jewish DPs in Europe to ‘*aliyah*’ in British Palestine and sparked a

⁴ The term *She'erith ha-Pleitah* as a biblical expression occurred in Genesis 32:9, First Chronicles 4:43 and Jeremiah 31:1. About the foundation of the *She'erith Hapleitah* in the concentration camps as well as about the establishment of committees of resistance, self-representation and mutual aid by the Jewish DPs in Germany, see: Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope. The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); see also: Judith Tydor Baumel, *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁵ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 2-3.

⁶ The full text of the Harrison Report was published in the New York Times on September 30, 1945. On this topic and for an analysis of the US response to the Holocaust, see: Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 34-38 and 292-304.

diplomatic debate between the US Government, which began to openly support the solution proposed by its delegate, and Great Britain, which aimed at securing the future of its Mandate on Palestine implementing the White Paper.⁷

During the months and years following the end of the war, the “Jewish question” interconnected not only with the political debate among the Allies, but also with the ambitions of the *Yishuv*, the general refugee crisis and the political, social and economic reconstruction of Europe, the development of new humanitarian approaches to control and take care of the refugees as well as the needs and desires of the refugees themselves.

There exists today an extensive literature on the history of the Jewish DPs that – while investigating a wide range of perspectives on the topic – centers in particular on the situation in Germany.⁸ In contrast, research regarding the Jewish DPs in Italy focuses almost exclusively on the organization by the *Mossad le-‘aliyah bet* of the illegal immigration of the Jewish refugees from Italian shores to Palestine and the attitude of the post-war Italian Government towards these clandestine departures.⁹ Though these studies still represents a landmark for the analysis of the Jewish DPs’ experience in Italy, they stress its diplomatic framework and its transitory dimension, while leaving several aspects unexplored.

⁷ For an analysis of the post-Holocaust policies adopted by Great Britain and the United States towards the Jewish DPs with particular reference to Germany, see: Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics. Britain, the United States and the Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 13-153.

⁸ On different aspect of the Jewish displacement in Germany, see for example: Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*; Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*; Lavsky Hagit, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies. Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), *Patt Avinoam, Finding Home and Homeland. Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009); “We are here”: *New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, eds. Avinoam Patt and Michael Berkowitz, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).

⁹ The *Mossad le-‘aliyah bet* was an underground branch of the Jewish Agency in charge with the organization of the illegal departures of the Jews to Palestine challenging the restriction on ‘*aliyah* imposed by the British Mandate through the White Paper of 1939. On the *Mossad* in Italy, see: Maria Grazia. Enardu, “L’immigrazione illegale ebraica verso la Palestina e la politica estera italiana, 1945-’48,” *Storia delle relazioni internazionali* 1 (1986): 147-66; Toscano, *La «Porta di Sion»*; Jacob Markovizky, “The Italian Government’s Response to the Problem of Jewish Refugees 1945-1948,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 19/1 (1998): 23-39; Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

This essay deals with the fate of Jewish displaced persons in Italy starting from the liberation of the concentration camp of Ferramonti in 1943. It highlights the political, social and cultural developments that the Jewish DPs experienced in Italy, up to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. In particular, this paper analyses the complex network of organizations engaged in assisting the Jewish DPs, and sheds light on the way in which the new humanitarian techniques adopted in post-war Europe facilitated the aggregation of the Jewish DPs around a sense of belonging to *Eretz Israel*. In the peculiar framework of the refugee camps after the traumatic experience of the *Shoah*, Zionism - challenging the Allies' policy of repatriation - acquired the features of a powerful and functional ideology able to meet both the Jewish DPs' need to start a new life and playing an active role in the effort of the *Yishuv* to encourage the surviving remnants of European Jewry to make *'aliyah*.

Jewish displacement in Italy: Rescuers' Ambitions and Recipients' Desires

On the September 8, 1943, the Italian Government signed an armistice agreement, declaring the unconditioned capitulation of Italy thereby splitting the country into two areas. In Nazi-invaded north Italy, Mussolini founded his puppet Italian Social Republic (RSI) and, in the attempt to maintain his dictatorship, deported political opponents as well as national and religious minorities. In the gradually liberated southern regions, the Allied Military Government on Occupied Territories (AMGOT) provided immediate aid to civilians through a network of sub-commissions.¹⁰

For the Jews still under the Nazi occupied area and RSI controlled territories, the Italian armistice marked the "assault on Jewish lives": more than 6,000 Jews (mostly Italians) were violently arrested, murdered, abused and deported from Italy to extermination camps.¹¹ In contrast, the Allies' landing in Italy and the consequent armistice led to the liberation of the Jews who had been interned in previous years as "enemy aliens" in Fascist concentration camps, located mainly in south Italy. The restrictive policy adopted by Mussolini from 1940 (when Italy

¹⁰ On occupied Italy see: David W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943-45*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985).

¹¹ The expression "assault on Jewish lives" is taken from Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: from Equality to Persecution*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 178-211; on deportation from Italy between 1943 and 1945, see Liliana Picciotto Fargion, *Il libro della memoria: gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943-1945)*, (Milan: Mursia, 2002), 27.

joined the War) through 1943 led to the internment of thousands of non-Italian Jewish exiles who had made their way to Italy, but it was indeed the geography of their internment that paradoxically saved them from deportation and made them the first core of Jewish DPs in Italy.¹²

In tracing the Jewish DPs' experience in Italy, the liberation of the Fascist concentration camp of Ferramonti di Tarsia (Calabria) in September 1943 represents a sort of starting point.¹³ According to a report by Gertrude Clarke (Special Representative of the American Red Cross in Italy) there were by the end of November 1943, approximately 2,000 Jews in Ferramonti Camp, assisted by the military authority.¹⁴ This first group of liberated Jews formed the so-called "old refugees," which included German and Austrian Jews who escaped Nazi controlled territories during the 30s, Eastern European survivors of failed attempts of illegal migration to Palestine as well as several Yugoslav Jews interned starting from the Italian occupation of part of Yugoslavia in 1941.¹⁵ Between the last months of 1943 and early 1944, the continuing arrival on the shores of Apulia

¹² Between 1938 and 1943 the Fascist policy against the Jews in Italy experimented various phases, which eventually evolved in different types of internment, see Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *I campi del duce. L'internamento civile nell'Italia fascista (1940-1943)*, (Florence: Giuntina, 1987); on the historical debate on the genesis and implementation of the Racial Laws in Italy, see moreover: Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, (Turin: Zamorani Editore, 1994); Id., *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, in *Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, eds. Marcello Flores, Simon Levis-Sullam, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, Enzo Traverso, (Turin: Utet, 2010).

¹³ On the history of the concentration camps built by the Fascist Government in Ferramonti di Tarsia, see: Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *Ferramonti. La vita e gli uomini del più grande campo d'internamento fascista (1940-1945)*, (Florence: Giuntina, 1987); for an overview of statistical data and distribution of non-Italian Jews interned in Italy between 1940 and 1943, see, Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945*, (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1996), vol. 2, 88-99.

¹⁴ *Letter from Gertrude Clarke to Mr. Philip R. Ryan, November 30, 1943*, NY AR193344/4/36/2/720, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives (hereafter, AJDC), Jerusalem-New York.

¹⁵ Between 1933 and 1945 a lengthy and constant movement brought around 20,000 Jews to look for a refuge in Italy in order to escape discrimination and persecution in Nazi occupied territories between 1933 and 1945. On the Jewish migration in Italy and on the Italian regulations regarding the treatment of the Jewish exiles in those years, see: Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945*, (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1993) vol. 1; for an overview of the different origins and backgrounds of the Jews in Ferramonti, see, Capogreco, *Ferramonti*, 56-62, 98-108, 114.

of refugees escaping Yugoslavia increased both the number of non-Italian refugees and that of the “old refugees” on Italian soil.¹⁶

The northward advance of the Allied Army in Italy continually brought to light other Italian and foreign refugees displaced in the country because of the conflict, among them several thousands of Jews who barely succeeded in escaping deportation by hiding themselves in rural areas. It soon became necessary to regulate mass population movements in order to facilitate military operations. Therefore, in late 1943 AMGOT entrusted this task to two separate sub-commissions: the Italian Sub-Commission, in charge of assisting Italian refugees, in cooperation with the Italian authorities, and the DPs Sub-Commission, providing assistance to foreign refugees and stateless persons.¹⁷

The Ferramonti Camp was soon converted to a refugee camp, and - in order to accommodate more DPs - the Allied DPs Sub-Commission set up other refugee camps, assembly and screening centers in Apulia, Basilicata and Campania. Afterwards, the ending of the war in spring 1945 increased the refugee population and necessitated opening additional refugee camps in the newly liberated areas of the country.

Hence, a second wave of Jewish survivors reached Italy, they were the so-called “new-refugees” who managed to enter Italy through the Alpine passes, launching the “*Brichah*” movement (in Hebrew, “flight”). This seemingly ceaseless migration began in the spontaneous fleeing of individuals and small groups, and in a short time took on an organized form.¹⁸ This mass movement of Jewish survivors was generally carried out through illegal or quasi-legal means and involved Jews who wished to avoid repatriation as well as all those who attempted to return home after liberation only to be compelled to move again

¹⁶ Voigt, *Il rifugio precario*, vol. 2, 524-5.

¹⁷ *Provisional Directive Governing the Functions of Internees and Displaced Persons Sub-Commission*, UA – Headquarters Allied Commission (AMG), Reel n. 9A, A.M.G. OT, Refugees, July 1943 – October 1943, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter, ACS), Rome.

¹⁸ About the *Brichah*, see, Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*, (New York: Random House, 1970); about the entries of the Jewish refugees in Italy through the Alps passes, see: Cinzia Villani, “‘We have crossed many borders.’ Arrivals, presence and perceptions of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy (1945-1948),” in *Tamid Kadima, Immer voerwArts. Der Jüdische Exodus aus Europa 1945-1948*, eds. Sabine Aschauer-Smolik and Mario Steidl, (Innsbruck, Vienna and Bozen, 2010): 261-77.

because of recurrent episodes of anti-Semitism.¹⁹ The *Brichah* movement involved some 250,000 Jews and was soon linked to the clandestine activities of the *Mossad le-‘aliyah bet*, whose main headquarters was in Italy. Notwithstanding the fact that not all of the Jews displaced in Italy opted eventually for resettlement in Palestine, in the collective imagination of the Jewish DPs, Italian harbors were seen as the jumping-off point for *Eretz Israel*, as exemplified in the memoirs of Shmoel Mordekhai Rubinstein, a Polish Jewish DP who reached Italy from Salzburg:

In Salzburg we found a camp for refugees ‘who were going’ to *Eretz Israel*. They continually talked about the soldiers from *Eretz Israel*, the emissaries from *Eretz Israel*, the ships of their political movements that sailed from Trieste to *Eretz Israel*, and so on. It seems that all you need to do was to reach Italy, once there you already were in *Eretz Israel* [...].²⁰

From 1945 until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, an average of 15-16,000 Jewish DPs per year found accommodation in refugee camps or assembly centers in Italy. Though these numbers are small as compared to the numbers of Jewish DPs in Germany, the Jewish displacement in Italy was characterized by a high fluidity of arrivals and departures and constituted constantly the majority of the total number of DPs passing through Italy in those years.

The first report concerning the specific “conditions of the Jews in Italy, Sicily and Sardinia” was drafted by the DPs Sub-commission in January 1944. The estimated population of Jewish DPs assisted by the Allies at that time was just 5-6,000, but caring for these Jewish DPs began already to raise a critical problem for the Allies:

Jews [...] have no interest and no wish to take part in either local or national political life. On the contrary, most expresses a strong desire to

¹⁹ About anti-Semitism in Poland after 1945, see for example, Jan T. Gross, *Fear. Anti-Semitism In Poland After Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, (New York: Random House, 2006); Fabio Maria Pace, “L’impossibile ritorno: gli ebrei in Polonia dalla fine della Guerra al pogrom di Kielce,” in *Il ritorno alla vita e il problema della testimonianza. Studi e riflessioni sulla Shoah*, eds. Alessandra Chiappano and Fabio Minazzi, (Florence: Giuntina, 2007).

²⁰ Shmoel Mordekhai Rubinstein, *Memories*, available in Hebrew on line http://srmemo.blogspot.it/2008/08/blog-post_185.html (accessed on October 28, 2017).

be allowed to enter Palestine where they expect to be free from political influences and persecution.²¹

Before long, the Allies in Italy began to be aware of the singular “plight of the Jewish refugees,” whose claims were being systematically reported to the DPs Sub-commission by Jewish soldiers (in Hebrew, *hayalim*) and chaplains serving in the Allied Army.²² The Jewish soldiers acted as mediator between the military authorities and the Jewish DPs and were instrumental in facilitating a sense of community among the Jews in the refugee camps in Italy as well as in initiating an efficient assistance network on behalf of the Jews in Italy. Indeed, upon their arrival in the country, the Jewish soldiers attempted to reinstate the role of the Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Refugees (known with the acronym DELASEM) with the purpose recruiting local help in rescuing the Jewish survivors, along with the other Italian Jewish institutions, in order to facilitate the reconstruction of the Italian Jewish communities.²³ Driven by humanitarian and political motivations, the Jewish soldiers were soon able to gain the trust and support of the Jewish DPs; to establish the first contacts between the “remnants” of the Diaspora and the Jews in *Eretz Israel*; to play a prominent role in the reconstruction of the Jewish communities in Italy; and to stress emigration to Palestine as the preferred solution to the Jewish DPs’ condition.²⁴

²¹ *Conditions of the Jews in Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, 30 January 1944*, UA – Headquarters Allied Commission (AMG), Reel n. 104 F, Jews in Italy, December 1943 – March 1944, ACS, Rome.

²² *Jewish Refugees, 8 October 1943*, UA – Headquarters Allied Commission (AMG), Reel n. 599B Disposal Jewish Refugees, October 1943 – February 1944, ACS, Rome. The term “*hayalim*” is used throughout this article to indicate the Jewish soldiers of the *Yishuv* who voluntarily joined the Allied Army, with reference to both those who arrived in Italy in 1943 as part of various military units, and those who eventually merged into the Jewish Brigade in 1944, see: Yoav Gelber, *Toldot ha-hitnadvut*, (Jerusalem: Yad Itzhaq Ben Zvi, 1983).

²³ From its foundation in 1939 to 1943 when it was declared illegal and a large number of its officials were arrested or forced to escape Italy, DELASEM was the main Italian Jewish institution that assisted the Jewish refugees in Italy. It was primarily financed by American Jewry (first, by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and with many difficulties it continued to operate underground even during 1943-45, see: Settimio Sorani, *L’assistenza ai profughi ebrei in Italia (1933-1941). Contributo alla storia della DELASEM*, (Roma: Carucci, 1983); Sonia Menici, “L’opera del Joint in Italia. Un “Piano Marshall” ebraico per la ricostruzione, *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 69/2 (2003): 593-617.

²⁴ On the role played by the Jewish soldiers upon their arrival in Italy, see, Michele Tagliacozzo, “Attività dei soldati di Eretz Israel in Italia (1943-1946). Il corpo ausiliario dei soldati palestinesi nell’armata di liberazione inglese,” *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 2/ 69 (2003): 575-86; Dina Porat, “One Side of the Jewish Triangle in Italy: the Encounter of Italian Jews with Holocaust Survivors and Hebrew Soldiers and Zionist Representatives in Italy, 1944-1946,” in *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei*

Within a few months of their arrival in Italy, the *hayalim*'s efforts resulted in the founding of the *Merkaz ha-Plitim* (in Hebrew, Centre for the Refugees), the first institution of reference for the Jewish DPs. The *Merkaz* established its headquarters in Bari, in the barrack that served as a club for the Jewish soldiers, and included several facilities for the DPs, such as a canteen, a clinic, a synagogue, a dormitory, a school for children, and a meeting-room.²⁵ The *hayalim* also supported the Jewish DPs' organizing themselves in *hachsharot* as alternative accommodation to the DP camps and with the view of training the Jewish survivors for resettlement in Eretz Israel.²⁶ Moreover, other facilities for the relief of the Jews were opened by the *hayalim* in gradually liberated regions and - following the establishment of the Jewish Brigade, on the 29th of October 1944 - the *Merkaz Ha-Plitim* changed its name to *Merkaz la-Golah be-Italia* (in Hebrew, Center for the Diaspora in Italy, also known as the *Merkaz la-Golah*).²⁷

The structure and nature of the information contained in the reports of the *Merkaz ha-Plitim* and the testimonies of the *hayalim* lead to reconsider and re-evaluate the role the *hayalim* played in 1943-44. These sources challenge the idea of an initial lack of guidelines from the *Yishuv* with respect to civilian rescue operations.²⁸ It appears that the soldiers of the *Merkaz ha-Plitim* established early-on a collaborative relationship with the Jewish DPs in Italy, while constantly updating the Jewish Agency on their activities. The *hayalim* clearly

nell'Italia unita 1870-1945. Atti del convegno internazionale (Siena, 12-16 giugno 1989), (Rome: Ministero Beni Culturali e ambientali, 1993), 487-513.

²⁵ *La-Merqaz Ha-Iny'aney Ha-Plitim Be-Yehidot Ha-Yivriyot, Ba'ri, 23 January 1944*, P118 E.E. Urbach Archives, File 11, Central Archives for the History of Jewish People (hereafter CAHJP), Jerusalem.

²⁶ *Hachsharah* (Hebrew, pl. *hachsharot*) is translated as collective or training farms. It was a form of collective living that followed the principles of the kibbutz and functioned as an agricultural self-supporting institution. Each *hachsharah* in post-war Europe was affiliated with a Zionist or religious youth movement from the *Yishuv* and served as ideological and practical training for the Jewish DPs longing for 'aliyah. On the Jewish DPs and the youth Zionist movement after World War II with focus on Germany and Poland, see, Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland*.

²⁷ The restructuring of the *Merkaz* was agreed in Rome upon a conference of the representatives of the Jewish organizations, who met in order to plan a more organized structure of the *Merkaz* in view of the Nazi surrender. See the autobiography of a soldier of the Jewish Brigade involved in the rescue of the Jewish DPs in Italy from 1943: Hanokh Patishi, *Ma hateret Ba-madim: Ha-"Haganah" Ha-Ereṣ- Yišra'eli Be- ṣava' Ha-Briṭim 1939-1946*, (Tel Aviv: Misrad Ha-Bitahon, 2006), 170.

²⁸ From the archival point of view, the information and the documents related to the *Merkaz ha-Plitim* as well as the *Merkaz la-Golah* are scattered in many locations. This information resulted from an extensive research on the topic conducted by the author of the article in Israeli Archives.

stood out for their resourcefulness, but their actions can be fully grasped only by looking at the shift that occurred when the Zionist leadership became aware of the role the survivors would play in the Zionist struggle after the war and gradually reconsidered the principle of selective ‘*aliyah*.²⁹ Zvi Ankouri’s oral testimony on his experience as leading figure of the first units of Jewish soldiers that arrived at Ferramonti with the Allied Army in 1943 are illuminating on this aspect:

We felt that the different groups would have speak as one voice to the Allies and to the Jewish Agency regarding ‘*aliyah* certificates and relief funds. This meant coordination and a new political orientation. [...] They had to be given a new Zionist orientation.³⁰

It appears that the primary goal of the *hayalim* was to channel the Jewish emigration to Palestine. In this regard, in cooperation with the Jewish DPs in liberated Italy, the Jewish soldiers had already established in December 1943 the Joint Palestine Emigration Committee (JPEC), charged with the registration of the Jews willing to make ‘*aliyah* and the promotion and implementation of the Jewish immigration to Palestine. JPEC was headed by a board of eight Jewish DPs from Ferramonti and Bari refugee camps who were already affiliated and active in Zionist movements or served in important roles in Zionist institutions in their countries of origin.³¹

Whilst in January 1944 there were 1,300 Jewish DPs registered at the JPEC,³² only in May 1944 did the Supreme Allied Commander approved the appointment of a representative of the Jewish Agency, in charge of selecting immigrants for Palestine and of issuing immigration certificates subject to the prior approval of

²⁹ Yoav Gelber, “The Meeting Between the Jewish Soldiers from Palestine Serving in the British Army and the She’erit Hapletah,” *Sherith Hapletah, 1944-1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle, Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference*, eds. Israel Gutman and Avital Saf, (Jerusalem, October 1985), (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 60-79 About the attitude of the *Yishuv* towards the Holocaust survivors, see moreover, Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust. Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power*.

³⁰ Zvi Ankouri (interview: Jerusalem, 1974), 8 (147), Oral History Division (hereafter OHD), Jerusalem.

³¹ *Joint Palestine Emigration Committee for Italy, Ferramonti, December 14, 1943*, P118 E.E. Urbach Archives, File 11, CAHJP, Jerusalem.

³² *Conditions of the Jews in Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, 30 January 1944*, UA – Headquarters Allied Commission (AMG), Reel n. 104F, Jews in Italy, December 1943 – March 1944, ACS, Rome

the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR)³³. Accordingly, the Jewish Agency appointed as its official delegate in Italy Umberto Nahon, who was able to reach the country only in February 1945.³⁴ Despite the uncertain status of the Jewish Agency's role in Italy before Nahon's arrival, in May 1944 a ship carrying approximately 560 Jews left from Taranto port for Palestine.³⁵ Though it was one of the few ships authorized to sail for British Palestine, the relations with the *Yishuv* continued to intensify, especially with the arrival in Italy of the *shlihim*, the representatives of the political movement of the Jewish Agency.³⁶ They shared the same goals of the *hayalim*, but their intervention marked a sort of transition from the military to the civilian operations of the *Yishuv* in aiding the "remnants." On the one hand, their efforts definitely attributed to the *She'erith HaPleitah* a political factor able to influence the Zionist struggle for the establishment of a Jewish National Home and, on the other hand, successfully directed the Jewish DPs to evolve a sense of belonging to *Eretz Israel*.

As illustrated in the next sections, the enterprise of the *Yishuv* representatives developed in conjunction with the humanitarian missions of institutional and voluntary organizations that pursued a new approach in managing and assisting the refugees. In this framework, for the Jewish survivors in the DP camps, Zionism took on the particular character of an organizational and unifying ideological paradigm that in a pluralistic way was able to influence their lives while displaced.

³³ *Displaced Persons – Representation of IGCR and the Jewish Agency in Italy, and proposal to move displaced persons of Jewish extraction to Fedala, May 22, 1944*, UA – Headquarters Allied Commission (AMG), Reel n. 58A Jews and Policy, December 1943 – June 1944, ACS, Rome. IGCR coordinated under the military authority's supervision the activities of the representative governments of the UN who had the task to assist and repatriate their own national. About the IGCR, see Marrus, *Unwanted*, 171; Tommie Sjöberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted. The Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR) 1938-1947*, (Lund: Lund University Press, 1991).

³⁴ *Memorandum submitted to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine by. Dr. S. U. Nahon – Representative in Italy of the Jewish Agency for Palestine*, P239 Archivio U. S. Nahon, File: 14, CAHJP, Jerusalem.

³⁵ *Immigration Jews to Palestine ex Italy, May 23, 1944*, UA – Headquarters Allied Commission (AMG), Reel n. 58A Jews and Policy, December 1943 – June 1944, ACS, Rome.

³⁶ *Duah Me-Pe ulat Merkaz ha-Pliṭim Be-Bari Me-15 Be-Y ànwàr 1944 ád 15 Be-Marš 1944, March 28, 1944, S25/4719, CZA, Jerusalem.*

A Network for the Assistance of the Jewish DPs: National, International and Voluntary Organizations

The administration of the displaced persons after the war provided a testing ground for the rise of new humanitarian techniques and ideologies. Thus, the aid network in post-war Europe faced the DPs crisis by means of a completely innovative approach that combined for the first time immediate relief actions with long-term physical, moral, social, cultural and educational rehabilitation projects, with the purpose of guiding the DPs towards “normalization.”³⁷

In the particular context of Italy, a new stage in the administration of the refugee crisis and a fundamental turning point for the Jewish displacement was sparked by the liberation of Rome in June 1944. It marked the establishment of a coalition government composed mainly of anti-fascist parties eager to achieve a new position in international politics as well as the beginning of the complicated reconstruction of the main Italian Jewish communities and institutions.³⁸

The urgency of solving the post-war crisis prompted a successful cooperation among military authorities, institutional agencies and private organizations, through a system of mandates and agreements. At a national level, the establishment of the new Italian government led also to the foundation of the High Commissioner for Refugees, who took over the administration of the refugee camps billeting Italians, as well as the Italian refugees’ reintegration in the country.³⁹ Instead, at the international level, the Allies had prepared well before

³⁷ For an analysis of the European displacement as a landmark for the development of a new humanitarian approach, see, Liisa H. Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: from «Refugee Studies» to the National Order of Things,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495-523; Daniel G. Cohen, “European Displacement and the Birth of Modern Humanitarianism in the Aftermath of World War Two,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (2008): 437-49; Id., *In War’s Wake. Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58-78; Silvia Salvatici, *Nel nome degli altri. Storia dell’umanitarismo internazionale*, (Bologna, Il Mulino: 2015), 185-192.

³⁸ On the establishment of the post-war government in Italy, see Elena Aga-Rossi, *L’Italia nella sconfitta: politica interna e situazione internazionale durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1985), 125-90. About the reconstruction of the Italian Jewry after World War II, see Guri Schwartz, *After Mussolini: Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy*, (London and Portland, OR, Vallentine Mitchell, 2012).

³⁹ For an analysis of the management of the refugee crisis in Italy between 1944 and 1951, see: Silvia Salvatici Silvia, “Between National and International Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Post-War Italy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49/ 3 (2014): 514-36; on the administration of the national refugees by the Italian Government between 1944 and 1947, see: Giacomo

the end of the War a specialized rescue program and had established in November 1943 the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), dealing with the urgent economic and social questions expected to arise in Europe after the War, including the predictable refugee crisis.⁴⁰ Starting from September 1944, UNRRA provided Italy with limited aid (food supplies, medical help, welfare service for children and mothers) and was in charge of housing, feeding, guaranteeing medical care and assisting in repatriation and resettlement the DPs eligible for receiving international help.⁴¹

The general picture of the refugees' situation in Italy became clearer when UNRRA published in May 1946 the results of its "Eligibility Survey." It emerged that out of 18,553 persons interviewed, only 7,920 – mostly Jews – had been accepted in UNRRA camps, whereas the other 10,633 remained under the Allies' responsibility.⁴² By the end of 1946, out of a total number of more than 40,000 refugees in Italy, UNRRA was assisting 17,095 Jews "not desiring to return to their country of origin," of whom 7,152 were in camps, 5,943 in *hachsharot* and 4,000 in towns.⁴³

While groups of Jewish DPs were scattered in almost all Italian regions, it appears that the largest groups were located in four DP camps in Lecce province (i.e. Santa Maria al Bagno, Santa Maria di Leuca, Santa Cesarea Terme and Tricase Porto). Others Jewish survivors were accommodated in several transit camps in Bari area, in Rome area (Cinecittà DP Camp and several *hachsharot* nearby Castel Gandolfo, Ostia, Ladispoli and Grottaferrata), in small DP camps in Tuscany and Marche, in Piedmont (in particular, the DP camps and *hachsharot*

Canepa, "Rifare gli italiani. Profughi e progetti per il welfare (1944-47), *Meridiana. Rivista di Storia e Scienze Sociali* 86 (2016), 57-78.

⁴⁰ For an analysis of the development of an international plan for the rescue of post-war Europe that led to the establishment of UNRRA, see: Ben Shephard, "Becoming Planning Minded': The Theory and Practice of Relief 1940-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43/ 3 (2008): 405-19.

⁴¹ Because of Italy's status as a cobelligerent country, the UNRRA mission in Italy was initially a matter of debate and discussion. The UNRRA Council approved it only in September 1944, see Silvia Salvatici, "'Not enough food to feed the people.' L'UNRRA in Italia (1944-1945)," *Contemporanea. Rivista di Storia dell'800 e del '900* 1 (2011): 83-99.

⁴² *Eligibility Survey, May 1, 1946, Attachment V: Eligible and Ineligible Displaced Persons in Unrra-ACC Camps*, War Record Office, WO 204/10837, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew – London.

⁴³ *Estimated Jewish Refugees in UNRRA Camps, February 18, 1947*, NY AR194554/4/44/2/628, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York.

in Rivoli e Grugliasco), in Lombardy (such as in Milan area and Cremona DP camp), in nearby Genoa and in Reggio Emilia DP camp.⁴⁴ This distribution of the Jewish DPs remained largely unchanged at least until spring 1947, when UNRRA closed the large refugee camps in Lecce province and the residents were transferred northward. The closure coincided with the announced end of the UNRRA mission in Italy as well as with the restoration of Italian sovereignty in 1947. Henceforth, another temporary organization of the United Nations - the International Refugee Organization (IRO) - was charged with the definitive and specific operational task of bringing about “a rapid and positive solution of the problem of *bona fide* refugees and displaced persons” in post-war Europe by repatriation or by resettlement.⁴⁵

Along with military authorities, government representatives and international refugee agencies, numerous voluntary organizations were active in assisting the DPs after 1945. As a matter of fact, the cooperation between institutions and voluntary organizations led to the creation of a network that in many cases was able to guarantee a high standard of assistance as well as to alleviate and improve the workload of the intergovernmental and governmental agencies. In the specific case of the Jewish DPs in Italy, the most effective contribution came from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, also known as “Joint” or JDC. The goals of the JDC mission in Italy were delineated in early 1945, when an agreement with UNRRA established that JDC would act as a specialized

⁴⁴ This list of location is the result of a research conducted by the author of this article regarding the Jewish displacement in Italy, based on several unpublished primary sources. Indeed, there is currently no detailed map of DP camps, assembly centers and *hachsharot* accommodating Jewish DPs in Italy between 1943 and 1948. Nevertheless, there are several studies about specific places, see, Sara Vinçon, *Vite in transito. Gli ebrei nel campo profughi di Grugliasco (1945-1949)*, (Turin: Silvio Zamorani, 2009); Cinzia Villani, “Milano, via Unione 5: un centro di accoglienza per displaced persons ebrae nel secondo dopoguerra,” *Studi Storici* 50/2 (2009): 333-70; Stefania Pirani, *Storia dell’haksharà di Fano dal 1945 al 1948 attraverso i documenti e le interviste ai testimoni*, (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2008); Fabrizio Lelli, “Testimonianze dei profughi ebrei nei campi di transito del Salento,” in *Per ricostruire e ricostruirsi. Astorre Mayer e la rinascita ebraica tra Italia e Israele*, ed. Marco Paganoni (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010), 111-9.

⁴⁵ In July 1947, between the 80 and 85% of the refugees and DPs who came under the mandate of IRO were living in Germany, Austria and Italy. In these countries, out of a total number of around 800,000 DPs, there were 154,333 Jewish DPs receiving care and maintenance by the newly established UN agency. In particular, the Jewish DPs in Italy under the mandate of IRO were 17,047 and represented almost the 60% of the total number of DPs assisted by the UN agency, see: Louise W. Holborn, *International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of The United Nations. Its History and Work, 1946-1952*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 47 and 199.

Jewish agency providing supplementary facilities and services to all Jewish DPs within the UN agency mandate. In post-war Italy, the JDC – though maintaining itself as an apolitical organizations – was a resolute ideological supporter and the main financier of the (often Zionist-oriented) rehabilitation programs for the Jews in DP camps as well as *hachsharot*, and acted as liaison between the UN agencies and the Jewish DPs.⁴⁶

The endeavor to provide aid as well as to rehabilitate the Jewish survivors in DP camps so they would be capable of leading a productive life challenged the Allies' post-war plans, the Jewish Agency's purposes and the policies of the international and voluntary organizations. In this multifaceted scenario, the Jewish DPs did not remain passive "recipients" of the political and humanitarian strategies adopted by the above-mentioned rescue network. Instead, they themselves became involved in their own rehabilitation.

In order to shed light on this aspect of the Jewish displacement in Italy, the following section of this article will focus on the rehabilitation activities carried out in the DP camps, on the tension between the (ambiguous and often non-coinciding) politics of the "rescuers" and the desires of the Jewish DPs as well as on how this situation shaped the remarkable features of the Jewish displacement in Italy.

Rehabilitation and Self-understanding: Towards a New Identity

Following the gradual stabilization in the management of the DPs after the war, the establishment of regional and local committees among the *She'erit Hapleitah* in Germany and Austria as well as the political orientation undergone by the Jewish displacement in Italy, the Jewish DPs themselves founded in November 1945 the Organization of the Jewish Refugees in Italy (OJRI). This entity – that served as the official administrative and political organization representative of the Jewish DPs in the country – was the result of two further motivating forces. On the one hand, the refugee agencies – "hewing to the model of active welfare"⁴⁷ - advocated the formation of DP committees in order to include the refugees in the administration of the camps. On the other hand, this inclination towards

⁴⁶ Letter from Benjamin N. Brook to American Joint Distribution Committee, November 30, 1945, NY AR194554/4/44/2/629, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York; *JDC. Program in Italy – 1946, 18 February 1947*, NY AR194554/4/44/2/628, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York.

⁴⁷ Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism. Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 48-9.

self-representation and organization begun with the liberation of Ferramonti was further encouraged by the *hayalim*, who sponsored soon Zionism as leading ideology. Indeed, a centralized organization of the Jewish DPs in Italy would help in reducing the workload of the international missions, in giving the DPs the chance to renew their purposefulness and guaranteeing them a certain extent of independence as well as the opportunity of being spokespersons of their own needs.

According to the leaflet of invitation to the First Conference of the Jewish Refugees in Italy (Rome, November 26-28 1945), OJRI's main goals were to

re-educate them [i.e. the Jewish DPs] for life in civilized society and develop their sense of social responsibility; sponsor the creation of institutions for mutual aid; educate them to productive work; satisfy their cultural and spiritual needs; fight against phenomenon of demoralization among the refugees [...]; re-awaken their sense of human dignity, their self-confidence and in general to give them guidance in their return to a normal way of life; promote agricultural and professional training in view of emigration to Palestine.⁴⁸

It is evident that for the Jewish DPs' leaders, moral rehabilitation and a renewed sense of self-respect could be achieved only through a Zionist-oriented education which sponsored the ideals of mutual aid, productive work, and *'aliyah* as guideline for starting anew. As pointed out by Atina Grossmann, the "Zionists, both the emissaries from Palestine and the young leaders of kibbutz groups, were determined to look ahead rather than dwell on the effects of trauma."⁴⁹

With the motto "The Eternity of Israel Will Never Fail, Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet,"⁵⁰ the First Conference of OJRI institutionalized the Jewish DPs presence in Italy and started an official political discourse among the Jewish DPs in the country. The Conference contributed to a worldwide recognition of the precarious condition of the Jewish survivors and of the obstacles to their *'aliyah*. With the establishment of OJRI, the Jewish survivors in Italy claimed an active role in determining their own future, motivated by the "urgent necessity to

⁴⁸ *Conference of the Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy, November 26-28, 1945*, L16/521, CZA, Jerusalem.

⁴⁹ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 158.

⁵⁰ *Opening Speech by L. Garfunkel at the Conference of the Jewish Refugees in Italy, Rome, November 26, 1945*, L16/521, CZA, Jerusalem.

improve the situation of the Jewish DPs in Italy, to hasten their emigration and settlement in Palestine, and to assist them in their efforts towards rehabilitation and ultimate emigration.”⁵¹ In accomplishing these goals, Zionism filled the Jewish DPs’ need for an ideology and soon permeated their lives in the refugee camps, accelerating the process of self-understanding undertaken by the Jewish survivors. Furthermore, Zionism became the most important element of cohesion: for those Jewish DPs who did not wish to be resettled in *Eretz Israel*, it nevertheless became a powerful ideology, supporting their urgency to reaffirm their Jewish identity; whereas, for those who longed to make *‘aliyah*, Zionism represented the concrete opportunity to start a new life after the war. Indeed, in contrast to the marginality produced by the displacement, nationality as well as a national project became a leading parameter determining group belonging in the refugee camps.⁵²

Zionism was fostered by OJRI who received the constant support of the Jewish Agency through its delegates as well as the help of the JDC, which became the major sponsor of OJRI activities and acted as liaison with the camp administrators. Under the supervision of the UN agency, the cooperation between the Jewish DPs’ self-representative organizations, the *shlihim* and the JDC focused on improving the condition of the DPs’ life, their care and their health; on implementing the return to manual labor; and on managing educational programs in order to elevate the DPs’ cultural and mental level. All these purposes - in particular, those related to productivity and culture - were bent towards training the Jewish DPs in view of their expected resettlement in Palestine through a bottom-up education process. The joint work of this Jewish network facilitated launching a Zionist-oriented education program, whose best expressions were the so-called *hachsharah* movement, the vocational training and a wide-ranging cultural program.

The *hachsharah* scheme – initiated by the *hayalim* in 1943-44 – represented the primary means “to prepare young people for future life in Palestine.”⁵³ *Hachsharah* groups were organized according to the age of the residents and their

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² On this aspect, see also Hagit Lavsky in her analysis of the Jewish DPs’ experience in Bergen Belsen. She wrote about “functional Zionism” with reference to “the national leaning [...] the Jewish survivors used, discovered, interpreted and implemented as a renewed kind of Zionism in the context of their own experiences and struggles.” Hagit Lavsky, “The Experience of the Displaced Persons in Bergen Belsen. Unique or Typical Case?” in “*We are here: New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*,” eds. Patt and Berkowitz, 246.

⁵³ *Report on the Jewish Activities in Italy, January 8, 1945*, S25/5279, CZA, Jerusalem.

affiliation to a specific Zionist movement. OJRI managed this program in close collaboration with the *Merkaz He-Halutz* (Hebrew for the “Pioneer’s Center”), established by the *Merkaz La-Golah* in January 1945 in agreement with the Zionist youth movements in order to select and lead the Jewish DPs in *hachsharot*. However, the main sponsor of these collective farms was the JDC, which obtained recognition for the *hachsharot* from UNRRA and IRO that agreed to consider them as self-governing organizations and to grant international assistance to their residents, who were treated as “out-of-camp” DPs⁵⁴. Indeed, JDC officers chose the *hachsharot* as “the policy for Italy,” stressing that “the *hachsharah* community type of living offers an excellent opportunity to help these people become re-orientated to normal community living and to help rehabilitate them to undertake constructive and productive efforts.”⁵⁵

Providing work and vocational training programs in the DP camps were a means toward the wider goal of rehabilitating the victims of the war and impacted as well on migration policies.⁵⁶ Even in this field, the UN agencies and the Jewish

⁵⁴ Letter from Jacob L. Trobe to Mr. H. Katzki, February 19, 1947, G 45-54/4/13/14/IT.107, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York.

⁵⁵ Report of a Field Visit to Italy, August 12-27, 1947, NY AR194554/4/44/7/651, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York; Letter from Benjamin N. Brook to Julian L. Tomlin, December 15, 1945, NY AR194554/4/44/12/656, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York. It is quite impossible to give a precise estimation of the population residing in *hachsharot* in post-war Italy, mainly because of the high mobility of the Jewish DPs within country and across its borders. It is even complicated to establish the exact number of *hachsharot* set up in Italy, since they were often established or closed according to the arrivals and departures of Jewish DPs. Nevertheless, according to several JDC archival sources I analyzed, the JDC aided during 1945 approximately 40 *hachsharah* establishments, housing altogether about 4,000 persons. In early 1946, the Jewish DPs living in almost 70 *hachsharot* numbered 7,000, of a total refugee population of 26,600. One year later, in February 1947, the number of Jewish DPs organized in collective farms reached its peak: of a total number of 24,638 Jews, 7,469 were housed in 77 *hachsharot*, 10,673 in camps and 6,496 in towns. This number remained static until the establishment of the State of Israel in April 1948, when the JDC estimated 7,256 Jews in 74 *hachsharot*. Exactly one year later, only 29 *hachsharot* were still active in Italy, hosting 2,577 DPs. The last *hachsharah* hosting Jewish DPs, in Castel Gandolfo near Rome, was closed in 1951. For an analysis of the *hachsharah* system in Italy between 1945 and 1948, see also: Arturo Marzano, “Post-War Relief and Rehabilitation. The *Hachsharot* for Jewish DPs in Italy (1945-48),” in *Italian Jewish Networks in the Early Modern and Modern Period*, eds. Francesca Bregoli, Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti and Guri Schwarz, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, forthcoming).

⁵⁶ About rehabilitation through work in refugee camps, see, Daniel G. Cohen, “Regeneration through Labor: Vocational Training and the Reintegration of Deportees and Refugees, 1945-1950,” in *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, vol. 32 (2004), 368-85; on employment and vocational training in the DP camps in post-war Germany, see Silvia Salvatici,

organizations worked together offering extensive work programs with the common goals of reducing the risk of idleness and black-marketing in the refugee camps and allowing the DPs to acquire vocational skills that would grant them further opportunities of employment as well as better chances of resettlement. A pamphlet concerning the activities of the JDC between 1945 and 1946 emphasized these aspects:

[...] the process of engaging in purposeful labor and study develops at an early stage a spirit of self-respect and hope on the part of the student. [...] Apart from such practical achievements, however, there is a unique therapeutic value in these activities which must not be overlooked. Every trainee, who feel that he is making progress toward a new life, is an investment in the welfare of Jewry at large.⁵⁷

In the particular case of the Jewish DPs, the stress placed on work and productivity was associated also with Zionist ideology that glorified manual labor, and agriculture in particular, and sponsored a direct participation of the Jews in “building” the Jewish National Home. In *hachsharot* and DP camps, a considerable number of residents were engaged in cooking, house-cleaning, laundry, etc. as well as in taking part in vocational training workshop of agriculture, carpentry, tailoring, plumbing, fishing, building construction.⁵⁸

Even the cultural activities among the Jewish DPs in Italy did not follow a blueprint, but rather they followed the haphazard lines of development of the general situation of the Jewish refugees. Educational activities of one kind or

Senza casa e senza paese. Profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 199-254.

⁵⁷ *J.D.C. Aid for Vocational Training, July 24, 1947*, G 45-54/1/1/4/ADM.162, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York.

⁵⁸ The high mobility of the Jewish DPs made it difficult to establish long-term workshop training as well as the coming and going of the DPs prevented many to participate in a training course for sufficient time to acquire new skills. From this point of view, the situation ameliorated in 1947, with the beginning of the IRO mission that dealt with rather static DPs and with the activity in Italy of the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT). ORT was a Jewish specialized organization which provided work program in order to support the Jewish resettlement, see: Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT. A Jewish Movement for Social Change*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1980); Jack Rader, *By the Skill of Their Hands: The Story of Ort*, (Geneva: World Ort Union Centre International, 1970); Sarah Kavanaugh, *ORT, the Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008); *ORT and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors*, eds. Katarzyna Person and Rachel Bracha, (London: World ORT, 2012).

another originated early-on, either spontaneously or, more often, through the effort of the Jewish soldiers who were “anxious to bring the message of the *Yishuv* and world Jewry to the pitiful remnants of Europe’s Jewish community.”⁵⁹ The establishment of a Culture and Education Department of OJRI aimed at filling in the educational gap in the younger Jewish DPs caused by the six-year war and develop *ad hoc* programs, with the emphasis on providing the DPs in Italy a “national education.”⁶⁰ Starting from 1946, the Jewish DPs’ representatives in cooperation with JDC were able to plan a comprehensive educational program, with the support of UNRRA and IRO. In particular, JDC played a direct role in the DP camps, where it supported a successful program, as confirmed by the Director of the JDC Educational Department in 1947:

the educational programme in Italy cannot be confined to administrative routine, it must be a creative one. No other country in Europe affords such opportunities for educational and cultural activities [...] Compared with the cost of the other phases of our programme, the money spent for educational and recreational purposes is most productive of morale building values and the most appreciated.⁶¹

In 1947, one year after the establishment of its Culture and Education Department, OJRI was managing 9 schools for almost 800 students and 8 kindergartens for 252 children in 10 refugee camps in Italy. For these schools, OJRI prepared special study programs based on the educational system developing at the same time in the *Yishuv*. The study program was thus an intensive one; most of the lessons were given in Hebrew and students were encouraged to discuss topic related to life in *Eretz Israel*.⁶²

At the beginning of summer 1946, OJRI founded also an Art Department, which dealt with dramatic and musical activities, individual as well as groups of artists. A special installation - supported by JDC and coordinated by the Art Department of OJRI - hosted only Jewish artists displaced in Italy: it was the *Kibbutz Omanut* (“Art,” in Hebrew) in Castel Gandolfo, near Rome. The institution had a capacity of 35 residents, and accommodated painters, sculptors, musicians, singers, dancers, writers and journalists. Their task was to prepare material, train instructors, stimulate and organize activities in the field of art as

⁵⁹ *Various Reports, September 17, 1946*, NY AR194554/4/44/2/628, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York.

⁶⁰ *Conférence of the Jewish Refugees in Italy, November 26-28, 1945*, L16/521, CZA, Jerusalem.

⁶¹ *Contents: Country – Italy, February 18, 1947*, NY AR194554 / 4 / 44 / 2 / 628, AJDC, Jerusalem-New York.

⁶² *Ibid.*

well as to conduct dramatic groups, orchestras, choral groups, etc. that toured the camps and the *hachsharot* at frequent and regular intervals.⁶³

This overview on the flourishing of such a “creative” and wide-ranging cultural and educational program helps us to understand Italy not only as a place where the Jewish DPs passively waited for their resettlement. Instead, the above-depicted situation testified to the active and enthusiastic role of the Jewish DPs and their representative institutions in cooperating with different actors for the implementation of a suitable comprehensive rehabilitation plan.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding the high mobility and the different backgrounds and ambitions of the Jewish refugees, the Jewish DPs across post-war Italy moved together on the path towards the re-definition of their Jewish identity. The extraterritoriality of the refugee camps, the yearning for a new life as well as the fundamental support of the Jewish voluntary organizations and the influence exercised by the *Yishuv* contributed to the creation of a successful environment wherein the “surviving remnants” elaborated their personal experiences and shaped a new collective national identity.

The Jewish DPs’ (more or less) convinced affiliation with Zionism ascribed to the condition of Jewish displacement a clear political dimension. The active participation as well as the determination of the Jewish DPs in defining their future is evidence of the fact that Zionism became “the main available language of hope” for those Jews yearning to recreate a familiar environment and longing for a sense of home.⁶⁴

The DP camp became a dynamic place where its inhabitants shared a common past and actively strove to secure themselves a better future. Thus, the displacement represented for the Jewish survivors a sort of *in-between* that marked the slow transition from the diasporic past towards a normal life in *Eretz Israel*, as well as in other countries. In this framework, DP camps, assembly centers and *hachsharot* were powerful meeting places for the Jewish DPs and gave birth to a vibrant “community in transit.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ This expression is taken from Cohen, *In War’s Wake*, 127.

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How to quote this article:

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 Fondazione CDEC*, n. 12 December 2017

url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=394