

Liberated but not yet Free: Allied Policy, Jewish Displaced Persons, and Identity
in Occupied Germany, 1945-1948

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Julia Holmlund Thompson has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in History.

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INTRODUCTION

“...everyone in the world knew about the six million that died; no one ever asked questions about the survivors.” –Lily Schwarzschild, British aid worker¹

Typical historical narratives of the Holocaust often end with liberation – with the Allied forces’ liberation of Nazi concentration and labor camps, of cattle cars packed with prisoners abandoned mid-journey, and of cities and towns where persecuted people remained in hiding. This historiographical phenomenon usually identifies the liberators as unequivocal heroes, and the liberated as saved and the danger to their lives eliminated. The widespread emphasis on liberation also obscures a fact of World War II and of all wars: when war is “over” thanks to treaties signed, with “winners” and “losers” declared, ordinary people emerge with torn-apart lives and must try to pick up the pieces. Jewish victims of the Holocaust are no exception and, of the millions of lost, displaced people moving around Europe at the end of the war, Jews were arguably the most physically and psychologically damaged.

What did happen to Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution? By and large, Jews realized they wanted to get out of Europe. The systematic destruction of European Jewry rendered the few who survived generally loath to stay on the continent that was now graveyard to their relatives, and a place filled with people with questionable wartime allegiances, if not prejudices, that remained. Statistics, information from the liberation forces, and survivor accounts alike all describe a post-war Jewish diaspora. And while the fact that Jewish survivors emigrated from Europe in droves after World War II is generally known and undisputed, deeper knowledge of Jews right after the war is more sporadic. To leave Germany or Poland or Czechoslovakia was not a simple jump across the Atlantic or a quick journey to the soon-to-be state of Israel.

¹ Lily Schwarzschild, interview by Marci Rosenberg, September 19, 1997, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

Rather, the turbulent in-between time for Jewish survivors was for many marked by experiences as displaced persons. This designation, often abbreviated to DP, first came into usage during the post-war period in Europe, and today is used as a term equivalent to refugee.

As the war in Europe came to a close, the Allies implemented the occupation plan they had collectively agreed upon at Potsdam and Yalta, and Germany was divided into four zones of occupation: American, British, French, and Soviet. The occupation zones came to dictate international politics and affected European society in the long and short term. Jewish DPs in occupied Germany at war's end, or who ended up there in the immediate post-war period, had different experiences based on which zone they were in. Herein lies a fascination that inspired my research process: with thousands of Jewish DPs in Europe, some in each zone, how did their experiences differ? Moreover, how did they survive, could they thrive, how did they relate to occupation forces? To what degree did or could Jewish survivors maintain any semblance of their various nationalities, or their shared faith? And above all, after everything they had been through during the war, how did Jewish DPs conceptualize their own freedom while in DP camps? Did the Allied forces ostensibly protecting them promote or hinder the DPs' freedom? Jewish DP experiences, and specifically the differences between American and British policy toward Jewish DPs in their respective zones, were complex. My research into these questions and others culminates in my argument that Jewish DPs sought above all to identify as Jews, and reasoned that their collective struggle and identity warranted safe passage out of the European continent. This discourse of identity, however, made different impacts on American and British DP policy, resulting in humanitarian

and politically-based strategies respectively that were often at odds, and that generally prolonged the postwar displacement of European Jews.

Historical Context

The majority of DP camps in occupied Germany were clustered in the American Zone, but the largest DP camp, Bergen-Belsen – at the site of the former concentration camp of the same name – was in the British Zone. The French Zone had a few DP camps, but sources regarding them are simply not prevalent enough to provide comparative material. The Soviet Zone had none; their post-war policies included forcible repatriation – both from their zone and of Soviet citizens anywhere in Europe.² There were also scattered DP camps in Allied-occupied Austria and in France, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark. Again, such little source material exists on these camps that exploring them was not worthwhile. Most of the existing scholarship on Jewish DPs discusses British or American DP policy, and primary source material from each government and from former DPs or administrators is available from these zones, which were more important for DP history. I also limited my research of individual camps to Landsberg and Feldafing – the two largest in the American Zone, and both near Munich – and Bergen-Belsen. These three were some of the most important DP camps with influential leaders, strong communities, and somewhat of a presence in the international scene.

² Briefly, the third major Allied power – the Soviets – had a radically different repatriation strategy which included the forcible removal of their citizens from all the occupation zones, including from DP camps. Agreements from the Yalta and Potsdam conferences allowed this. Some unknown number of Jews were thus repatriated to the Soviet Union; for more information on Soviet policies and practices see Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees: 1939-1952* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1956), or Chapters 7-9 of Arie Kochavi's *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Who were the Jewish DPs? Were they really a significant population after the war? Very few European Jews remained at liberation, and thousands more died in the first week or so after liberation from diseases and starvation. Eight million prisoners of the Nazis were liberated by VE Day on May 8, 1945, and not all were Jews, of course.³ The Allies had been planning for repatriation since the year before, and in a truly amazing effort six million of the total were repatriated to their home countries within several months. Of the two million that remained, between 100,000 and 200,000 in occupied Germany and Austria were Jews.⁴ We can also identify three rough categories of Jewish DPs who ended up in Displaced Persons camps in the post-war period. The majority of those non-repatriable Jewish DPs belonged to the first and most straightforward category: people who did not and could not return home after liberation from Nazi camps and quickly entered into DP camps.

The other two categories of Jewish DPs appeared in occupied Germany a short time later. The second consisted of people who journeyed home after liberation but fled again for varying reasons. Many people chose to return home because it was their only hope of finding surviving relatives, but usually survivors' accounts describe finding nothing, no one, and no hope in their former towns. Reports of anti-Semitic verbal harassment were prevalent among those who decided to come to Allied-occupied zones after returning home, and acts of brutal violence towards Jews, even pogroms, also made staying in Eastern Europe unpalatable. The third group comprised Jews who had survived the war in Eastern Europe, mostly Poland and Russia, but who fled west after the war. Some escaped direct persecution by working for the Soviets during the war, while others had been in hiding or otherwise safe.

³ Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27; statistic corroborated by Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 132.

Even if Jews had evaded the Nazis in Eastern Europe, the chaos at the end of the war coupled with renewed anti-Semitism presented an incentive to get out. Together, these two types of DPs who made their way to Allied occupied Europe from the East are referred to in historical scholarship as infiltrees or infiltrators.⁵ Many of them pinned their hopes on easy immigration from Allied-occupied Germany, and some relied on an illegal network called Brichah to cross borders and reach Germany.⁶ The success of initial repatriation and the impact of growing numbers of these infiltrees is demonstrated by the fact that only 36,000 Jews were registered as DPs in January 1946; that number grew to over 140,000 in October of that year.⁷ The confluence of these three types of Jewish DPs of all nationalities and backgrounds only added to the chaos and confusion of the DP camps.

Historiography

Displaced persons after World War II have not received a large amount of historical attention. In the scheme of World War II history and Holocaust history, the experience of DPs is often overlooked in favor of other topics. Ben Shephard sums up nicely in *The Long Road Home* that the DPs' "story has been largely ignored by historians, mainly because it sits uncomfortably among such historical behemoths as the Second World War, the Cold War, the Holocaust, and the Israeli-Palestinian question."⁸ Of course, these topics are intertwined with the story of DPs but should not preclude study of the DP experience itself. The study of Jewish DPs in Allied-

⁵ Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁶ Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19; more discussion of infiltrees will follow in Chapters Two (Allied policy on infiltrees' DP status) and Four (the actual process of fleeing and its relation to emigration).

⁷ Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, trans. John A Broadwin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 43.

⁸ Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 5.

occupied Europe increased in the later twentieth century, in part as a result of the thousands born in DP camps coming of age and interested in their parents' histories. In addition, the burgeoning interest in overall Holocaust history and scholarship in the 1970s and 80s led to a jumpstart for the history of DPs, though at a smaller scale than Holocaust history itself. Although there are not yet discretely defined strands or schools of thought in the history of Jewish displaced persons, several themes stand out: emphases on displacement, on community-building, and on geopolitics and the creation of the state of Israel. The three historiographical trends trace, in a sense, DP experience from displacement to immigration, which this study will parallel. Furthermore, the nationality of historians working with Jewish DPs cannot be discounted in a survey of the existing literature. Most scholarship has come from Israeli and American historians, and a few German – these specific associations may play a part in the approaches of each historian.

The first strand of historical research involves viewing Jewish DPs within the lens of their displacement or uprooting. Mark Wyman, an American historian whose area of expertise is migration in general, takes a broad look at all DPs in Europe, focusing less on Jewish concerns and more on the wider postwar landscape. He offers a chronological, detail-packed account of the DP experience and the constant movement of the European population, without relying explicitly on theory or historical precedents – indeed, scholars after him often cite Wyman himself as a precedent. Wyman's approach in *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* also relies on an understanding of post-war displacement through the Cold War dichotomy. The twentieth century's massive population movements, Wyman asserts, "produced enormous numbers of refugees," which also meant that, by necessity, "the international community first developed coordinated systems of protection for those

forced to flee their homelands.”⁹ He also writes that for all DPs, Jews or otherwise, the growing East-West divide meant that “the issue of voluntary-versus-forcible repatriation could never be settled with a compromise.”¹⁰ While the Cold War emphasis is more tangential to my research focus, Wyman’s important work provides crucial context on the nature of displacement, serving as a helpful historical backdrop.

Quite a few historians, mostly in the twenty-first century, have explored the nature of community building in DP camps and the surviving Jews’ reclamation of identity. Emblematic of this strand of research is Zeev Mankowitz’s 2002 work *Life Between Memory and Hope*. His introduction notes that while prior research focused on the outsiders’ view of Jewish DPs and demoted the DPs to a passive role, Mankowitz tasks himself with adding to the growing body of work placing DPs in a position of, if not power, than certainly not passivity. Despite immense obstacles, Mankowitz writes, Jewish DPs “held fast, they got on with their lives to the degree that circumstances allowed, they married, had children and prepared for the future. Most importantly, they did not surrender...”¹¹ As a South African-born Israeli whose family made *aliyah* after statehood, Mankowitz perhaps has a vested interest in giving agency back to this small group of activist DPs in Germany.¹² While Mankowitz covers the surviving remnant in the American Zone, Israeli Hagit Lavsky’s extensive scholarship is an equivalent for the community approach for the British zone. Lavsky, born and educated in Israel, and whose scholarly interests lie in Zionism and immigration to Palestine/Israel, similarly ascribes important activism to Jewish DPs. In her most pertinent and comprehensive work, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950*, Lavsky’s goal is to

⁹ Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 12-13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 10.

¹² *Aliyah* is the Hebrew word that refers to Jewish immigration to Palestine/Israel specifically.

illuminate “the organization and shaping of socio-political life among the Jews in the British zone.”¹³ Chapters of *New Beginnings* look specifically at self-government, culture, education, and Zionism in the Belsen DP camp. Others who have covered Jewish DP camp organizing and culture extensively who are relevant to my research include Boaz Cohen, Atina Grossmann, Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel.¹⁴

The last category of historical research I have identified focuses on the interplay between the geopolitical scheme of the post-war world and Jewish DPs. This usually manifests in a discussion of the creation of the state of Israel and the political storm that gathered around that discussion. Particularly important for this trend is Arie Kochavi’s research that explores and relates the involvement of the British, Americans, and Jewish DPs in the ongoing struggle surrounding Palestine. Kochavi argues in the introduction of *Post-Holocaust Politics* that:

when governments on both sides of the Atlantic and the Iron Curtain were preoccupied with the reconstruction of their countries and the future shape of postwar power relations, the determination of the Zionists to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, the refusal of Eastern European Jews to rehabilitate their lives in their home countries...prevented the tragedy of the Holocaust from sinking into oblivion.¹⁵

The continued presence of the plight of Jewish DPs played a large part in the politics of both the U.S. and Britain, not to mention diplomacy between these two nations.

Kochavi is another Israeli historian, understandably with a special interest in understanding and researching how the nation came to be. While Kochavi is the main underpinning for my understanding of the politics of Palestine and Zionism in both DP camps and in Washington and London, basically all secondary sources about the DPs touch on this topic.

¹³ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 12.

¹⁴ See Boaz Cohen, “The Jewish DP Experience” in the *Routledge History of the Holocaust*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 412-422; Grossmann’s *Jews, Germans and Allies*, Konigseder and Wetzel’s *Waiting for Hope*, and others.

¹⁵ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, xii.

American scholar Anna Holian, whose research focuses include the post-war reconstruction of Europe, Jewish spaces in Germany, and European migration, employs a sort of combination of approaches in her book *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*.¹⁶ Holian focuses heavily on both the importance of displacement itself on DPs – Jewish or not – and on the political schemes that provide the backdrop to these experiences of displacement. Similar to Kochavi, though arguably from a more “American” point of view, Holian also focuses heavily on politics and diplomacy between different spheres of the world regarding DPs in the wake of the war. Instead of looking solely at Palestine and the soon-to-be state of Israel, Holian is more concerned with the legacy of Nazism for Jewish DPs and communism for Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian DPs, and how each ideology shaped the refugee experience. Perhaps we can attribute her focus to the American historical school of thought of the bipolar world, and the lingering concerns of fascism and communism for the United States after the war.

At a more conceptual or theoretical level, several historians drove my desire, to explore with this research the Jewish DPs’ impact on the historical narrative. Since they reflect some of the most victimized people of any given conflict situation, refugees or displaced persons are grossly underrepresented in any historiography. Traditional historical narratives present history from the top down and/or history from the victor’s perspective. These approaches automatically ignore the voices or contributions that refugees or other types of people who experience displacement could bring to a historical conversation. This has begun to be challenged in the last fifty or so years, along with efforts to portray history from the “bottom up,” from subaltern communities. This has begun to find a parallel in the historiography of the

¹⁶ Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism*.

Holocaust. Historians of both refugee and migrant history in general and of the Jewish experience have touched on the role that Jewish DPs did play within the larger historical scheme.

American historian Donna Gabbacia, who focuses on international migration and refugees, often alongside governmental policy, has written broadly about the status of migrants of all types in history. Gabbacia emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of the field and the fairly recent development of studying refugees themselves in addition to the institutions they relate to. In an essay in a new collection called *Migration Theory*, Gabbacia writes about the growth of history from the bottom up as key to the increase in the study of refugee history.¹⁷ Once immigrants, migrants, and refugees' voices – traditionally very underrepresented – began to figure into historical approaches, new and different ideas about these people within history began to come about. Gabbacia also mentions what may seem obvious, but should not be forgotten: migration and refugees cannot be studied without keeping in mind the notion of nation-states and borders, or without theories of conflict and war.¹⁸ The idea of nationality and what that means to the Jewish DPs is especially cogent to the following study and to the DPs' own conception of their identity.

British scholar Sharif Gemie and his associates similarly emphasize displacement and theories of refugees in the recent work *Outcast Europe*. This work places refugee status at the forefront of DP experience, a crucial recognition that is often implicit, or replaced by Jewish identity, in other scholarship. Gemie seeks to “explore the ‘inner world’ of outcast people, following their journeys from their

¹⁷ Donna Gabbacia, “Time and Temporality in Migration Studies,” in *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, ed. Brettell and Hollifield, 37-66 (New York: Routledge, 2015), 43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

homes, through desperate conditions, to their difficult struggles to recreate homes.”¹⁹ It is my goal, in researching DPs as one of many marginalized refugee groups, to continue this trend of acknowledging the importance of refugees’ power, agency, and active presence within history.

A common thread does seem to connect all of these historiographical trends. The notion of identity – the desire for Jewish DPs to come to terms with a distinct identity, the potential limiting factors of this identity, not to mention identity more broadly in migration and refugee theory – remains integral to most literature on the subject. Despite the benefits and worth of the current historiography, a comprehensive, comparative look at the American and British occupying forces’ policy is missing, particularly in regard to the interplay of policy with DPs’ varying hopes and dreams. This necessitates a mixture of social history: the analysis of personal accounts of Jewish survivors’ experiences as DPs, and political history: the examination of the administrative strategies of occupation forces. My goal is to maintain the importance of Jewish identity and DP communities in the historical picture, using first-person accounts to illuminate these notions of identity within the framework of Allied policy.

Primary Source Research

In addition to secondary materials, I have consulted a variety of primary sources. Two main categories of primary sources were helpful in the research process: first-person accounts from DPs, military officials, and aid workers; and government documents from both the United States and Great Britain. First-person accounts consisted of many oral histories. Unfortunately, few oral histories are

¹⁹ Sharif Gemie, et al., *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of Total War 1936-48* (London: Continuum, 2012), 25.

accessible today that were collected or recorded shortly after the war. Latvian-American researcher David Pablo Boder's pioneering collection, however, does have oral testimony transcripts dating from late 1940s in the DP camps.²⁰ The impressively indexed and huge collection of oral testimonies at the USC Shoah Foundation were invaluable and heavily consulted, both online and at the Los Angeles depository. Most Shoah Foundation testimonies were recorded in the 1990s; the delay since the post-war period was taken into account. Of these, testimonies useful to my research included those of Bernard Bermack, Abraham Klausner (U.S. military), Judah Nadich (British military), Alex Gringauz, Leon Borovick, Gerda Frieberg, Daniel Kurlancheek, Herschel Balter (Jewish DPs), and many others.²¹ The Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle, formerly the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center, has many local survivors' oral testimonies and their transcripts. Pertinent to this study were the testimonies of Sam and Nora Eilenberg, Frieda Hall, and Fanny Wald. Shoah Foundation and WSHERC/HCH testimonies and transcripts were either originally in English or translated into English.

First-person accounts in written form, usually memoirs or letters, were also plentiful and helpful. The collection of letters of Major Irving Heymont, U.S. Army commander of Landsberg was incredibly enlightening and truly invaluable for an American serviceman's perspective.²² Zippy Orlin's photographs and writing from aid work at Belsen, and a book titled *Belsen* with the 1951 recollections of dozens of DPs, are two more examples.²³ Buried within many printed secondary sources, of

²⁰ David P. Boder, Voices of the Holocaust Archive, Illinois Institute of Technology, http://voices.iit.edu/david_boder.

²¹ Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/> as well as the Foundation's depository.

²² Irving Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust, 1945: the Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont, United States Army* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1982).

²³ Erik Somers and Ren Kok, eds, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950: the Unique Photo Album of Zippy Orlin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2004).

course, are important voices of survivors and administrators. Particularly useful were David Lubetkin's story in Wyman's text, Dr. Samuel Gringauz of Landsberg as quoted extensively in Mankowitz, and an array of quoted DP survivors in the immense Bergen-Belsen exhibit catalog edited by Marlis Buchholz.²⁴

To set up an historical analysis of Jewish DPs' experiences, it is important to understand the limitations of their voices in the sources. What is often striking about the accounts of Holocaust survivors is not what they remember or include about life in DP camps, but what they do not. So many survivors give their time in DP camps cursory attention. Perhaps life in the DP camps was often unremarkable, but it was an important transition point for many Jews who ended up emigrating from Europe. Scholars have remarked on this phenomenon as well, and that the reasons for the silences might themselves have some meaning. As historian Ben Shephard writes, "the years in camps in Germany were for many of the refugees themselves a time of limbo, and interlude between stages in their lives – and therefore best forgotten."²⁵ One reason for these omissions in survivors' testimonials and memories is the phenomenon of waiting. Waiting for something to happen, waiting for emigration papers to be cleared, waiting for a relative in the United States or Britain to confirm sponsorship, waiting for the Allies to open Palestine for immigrants. Because no one wanted to stay in Europe, time spent in DP camps was often viewed as a waypoint and nothing more. Gerda Frieberg remembered feeling secure in Landsberg, but that overall, she stated in a 1996 interview, "you were waiting for the opportunity to go to

²⁴ David Lubetkin in Wyman, 144-145; Samuel Gringauz in Mankowitz, 161-191; *Bergen-Belsen: Wehrmacht POW Camp, 1940-1945, Concentration Camp, 1943-1945, Displaced Persons Camp, 1945-1950*, ed. Marlis Buchholz, trans. Georg Felix Harsch (Gottingen: Wallstein Verlag, with Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation, 2010), exhibition catalog.

²⁵ Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 5.

a new country to start a new life.”²⁶ This was important to remember during the research process. It required reading between the lines of oral histories to uncover meanings, and to dig into as many Jewish DP leaders’ accounts as possible, since these people were much more documentary with their DP experience than the “average” DP.

Documents that represent politicians, diplomats, and their policymaking comprise the second type of primary materials. The Harrison Report was an instrumental document to analyze from the American side. Others that represent American policy include documents from the Public Papers of the President, articles from the State Department Bulletin, and other memos and documents available today from the federal government. Obtaining British government documents presented a bit more of a challenge. Various public documents such as the White Paper of 1939 are available, and a small minority of British National Archives documents on displaced persons are privy to public use. Two online databases, Documents on British Policy Overseas – and its printed counterpart, and *Post-War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950* provided a large amount of British documents from the Foreign and Colonial Offices and from important governmental figures, in addition to documents of several Jewish aid agencies that operated in the DP camps and were based in Britain.²⁷

²⁶ Gerda Frieberg, interview by Linda Davidson, March 21, 1996, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

²⁷ *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. V*, ed. Pelly and Yasamee (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1990); *Post-War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950* is available by subscription only from Gale Cengage Learning’s Archives Unbound Series, and put together cooperatively by the Wiener Library, Henriques Collection, and the National Archives of the UK in partnership with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Trajectory

The project that follows traces the order of life as a DP would have experienced it: from arrival in a DP camp to life in one – however long that lasted – and finally, for most, to emigration. Chapter One demonstrates that DPs quickly abandoned national associations for a Jewish identity, rejecting the initial Allied policy of repatriation. The chapter chronicles cooperation between the Allies during the war and their plan for dealing with DPs after the war, as well as the state of postwar Jewry and the DPs camps of occupied Germany in summer 1945. Early DP activism and goals conflicted with the Allies' initially collaborative policy, which resulted in difficulties for all involved.

Chapter Two looks more closely at how the tension revealed in Chapter One resulted in certain policy reforms, especially from the American side. I argue that the United States and Britain's different contexts for understanding the DP problem led to different responses to the continued struggles of Jewish DPs. While the U.S. attempted to address grievances of DPs and their advocates with comprehensive policy changes to alleviate a humanitarian crisis, the costs for Britain were higher. The U.K. was less willing to bend to international and domestic pressure on what was for them a clearly political issue. This chapter focuses on the triangular interplay between DPs, the U.S. and the U.K. from above as well as on policy reform implementation in DP camps on the ground level.

Chapter Three argues that DPs transcended challenges of the camps and formed community organizations in an effort to both strengthen Jewish identity and to gain some measure of agency and autonomy. Groups of political, educational, and artistic nature were to varying degrees supported and limited by the Allied forces in

DP camps, but still flourished and presented a united cultural front onto which Jewish DPs could fall back, both in the camps and in new Jewish communities of the future.

The fourth and final chapter discusses the evolution of emigration/immigration policy of both Allied powers, and how the phenomenon and creation of the Jewish DP identity could or could not influence these policies. The discourse of Palestine, Zionism, and emigration overall in both the DP community and the Allied governments is analyzed. The true and final liberation of Jewish DPs could only be freedom in the form of safe passage out of Europe, which was consistently inhibited by both Allied governments, despite the protests of DPs, their advocates, and even some individuals within the Allied power structure.

While many historical works about the Second World War end with the liberation of Europe, this study will begin there. When the war in Europe ended in the spring of 1945, there was little for displaced Jews to do but to make their way to the initial assembly centers – later Displaced Persons camps – set up by the Allies. Eventually communities started to coalesce. Those who were not repatriated started to create their own institutions within the DP camps, and confronted British and American soldiers and officials, representatives of international bodies, and volunteers and aid workers from all over the world, not to mention fellow Jewish DPs of all sorts. At first, the DPs' intertwined goals of recognition as Jews and emigration from Europe were met with resistance from the Allied powers, but as time went on these positions were changed and nuanced, and colored by various political concerns.

CHAPTER ONE: EARLY ALLIED POLICY AND ITS CHALLENGES

To the Allies, Displaced Persons camps represented the way toward repatriation, not resettlement, and cooperation between the Allies during the war understandably led to an initial shared plan for dealing with DPs afterwards. Therefore, at first American and British policies toward Jewish DPs were more similar than dissimilar, and favored emergency response over long-term solutions, which by and large dissatisfied the displaced persons themselves. Most Jewish DPs rejected the Allied forces' desire for them to return to their homes, and favored resettlement elsewhere. The first tumultuous months after the war's end included initial agreement of the United Kingdom and United States on DP policy, which stressed repatriation and was unwilling to recognize a unique Jewish DP identity despite the DPs' collective insistence on making their unique group identity a priority right after liberation.

Creating the Mechanism for DP Assistance

Europeans from many nations were displaced at a grand scale throughout the Nazi reign of terror. With population movements and mass internment hard to ignore (although direct assistance to Holocaust victims as the genocide transpired was severely lacking), it was clear to the Allied powers before the end of the war that a plan to deal with displaced people would be necessary. A precedent for postwar refugee assistance existed – the aftermath of World War I and its refugee problem had necessitated the High Commission on Refugees, created by the League of Nations in 1921. In 1938, this became the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), which concerned itself primarily with those who sought to escape Hitler or Spanish

dictator Francisco Franco.¹ As the war dragged on in the forties, the Allied governments realized the potential enormity of the postwar refugee problem, and they wanted to construct a supplement to the IGCR.

Beginning in 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill spearheaded efforts to establish a new international agency to address the welfare of displaced people. By August, thanks to cooperation between the U.S., Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, an early draft of an agreement for this new group, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), was drawn up.² Conferences and discussions among all United Nations member states occurred over the next year, and eventually the new organization was made official on November 9, 1943.³ The agreed-upon responsibilities of the UNRRA were broad. The Administration's stipulated purpose was to:

...plan, coordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services; and to facilitate in such areas, so far as necessary to the adequate provision of relief, the production and transportation of these articles and the furnishing of these services.⁴

Although the Administration would clearly deal with a multitude of aspects of civilian welfare and assistance, one committee – the Committee on Relief and Rehabilitation Policies, and its subcommittee, Policies with Respect to Assistance to Displaced Persons – came to be the main avenue through which the UNRRA was obligated to take an active role in the DP issue.⁵ At the November 1943 signing, President Roosevelt acknowledged the importance of the Administration for the war's duration

¹ Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 46.

² Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees: 1939-1952* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1956), 99.

³ Several dozen nations allied during the war were collectively known as the United Nations as a precursor to the official UN chartered in 1945.

⁴ "Draft Agreement for United Nations Refugee and Rehabilitation Administration," *Department of State Bulletin* 222 (September 25, 1943), 211-216, 211.

⁵ Proudfoot, *European Refugees*, 101.

and after its conclusion. He asserted that the UNRRA was necessary to secure victory in military, political, and humanitarian aspects, linking the three types of victory inextricably together. For there would be no true peace, he said, “until there is a return of law and order in the oppressed countries, until the peoples of these countries have been restored to a normal, healthy, and self-sustaining existence.”⁶

At the time of its creation, the UNRRA was to cooperate as necessary with private relief and aid organizations as well as, most importantly, with military structures. The relationships and tensions between these varied groups would become especially salient after the war, when the DP problem turned out to be monumental and long-lasting. The UNRRA had some trouble getting off the ground, though, and in communicating with the military: tellingly, it was not until early 1944 that UNRRA officials made contact with the Allied command. According to Malcolm Proudfoot, even this was a “tenuous link,” and “the European Regional Office of UNRRA was out of touch with the military authorities, although the military were then engaged in planning refugee operations for the European campaign.”⁷ Whether or not they were truly “out of touch,” the creation of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF)⁸ in late January 1944 and the increasingly favorable turn of the tide of war heralded a new role for the Allied military – one that involved assisting refugees – whether they liked it or not.

In June 1944, SHAEF completed a huge plan for displaced persons. Of chief importance was the creation of “assembly centers,” a temporary fix and precursor to the DP camps to come. In late 1944, the Displaced Persons Executive (DPX) was

⁶ “Signature of Agreement for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Address by the President of the United States,” *Department of State Bulletin* 229 (November 13, 1943), 317- 319.

⁷ Proudfoot, *European Refugees*, 106.

⁸ SHAEF was a combined military group created for the final push of battle in Europe and specifically France, consisting of high-ranking American and British members of the military. For more on SHAEF, see Forrest C. Pogue’s *The Supreme Command* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army, 1954).

created as part of SHAEF and “was given control over UNRRA, the voluntary relief agencies, the IGCR, and the Repatriation Officers.”⁹ Furthermore, as military historian Earl Ziemke posits, “DPs from liberation to repatriation were to be cared for as a direct military concern,” though at the same time the creation of the DPX represented “the first example of a new form of organization that cut across existing organizational as well as national lines to coordinate work in a specific functional area.”¹⁰ All of this appeared to give the military ultimate responsibility in the arena of displaced persons. The U.S. and Britain also set up specific duties for the military and the UNRRA and, as Zeev Mankowitz writes, “in November 1944...Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of SHAEF, and Herbert Lehman, the Director General of the UNRRA, agreed to a division of labor between the two bodies in overseeing the treatment of displaced persons.”¹¹ This would prove to be much more difficult and complicated than SHAEF had intended, despite the intention to share duties.¹²

All of this military, civilian, and intergovernmental planning, however, included little mention of the Jews. The lack of discussion itself in the first half of 1945 is indicative of both the situation of the Jewish DPs and the attitude of the Allies. The number of Jewish DPs was simply a small fraction of the overall millions of displaced persons in need of aid. On the other hand, by the time the war was over, concentration camps had been liberated with great media attention, and the horrors of Nazi persecution were widely known. Despite this, SHAEF official policy – still

⁹ Proudfoot, *European Refugees*, 147.

¹⁰ Earl Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany, 1944-1946* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1975), 168.

¹¹ Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

¹² Although the intricacies of UNRRA’s politics and role is better suited for a different study, the coming chapters will touch briefly on the continued tension between the Administration, Allied command, and DPs. Consult Tommie Sjoberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted: the Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), 1938-1947* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1991) or Silvia Salvatici, “‘Help the People to Help Themselves’: UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25:3 (2012), 428-451 for more information.

without mentioning Jews specifically – stipulated that people persecuted during the war would be treated *after* the war as any other DPs were treated.

Specifically, a SHAEF memo of April 1945 stated that victims of Nazi (or other wartime) persecution “will be accorded the same assistance granted to United Nations displaced persons, provided that their loyalty to the Allies has been determined.”¹³ At this point official policy of both Britain and the U.S. was to ignore the Jewish faith or heritage of DPs in order to *helpfully*, in theory, reject the racist, anti-Semitic Nazi policies that had used terror to separate Jews out as inferior. The SHAEF memo mentioned above, however, did extend assistance to DPs by including “persecutees” who were ex-enemy nationals, for instance German or Romanian Jews who had previously been classified *only* as ex-enemy nationals, and were thus targets for mistreatment.¹⁴ In July 1945 SHAEF was officially dismantled and its various functions were parceled out; the DPX remained in existence as a joint British and American organization.¹⁵ The Allies’ early refusal to differentiate between Jewish and non-Jewish DPs would prove to be divisive and create some tricky situations in the DP camps in the next several months, and would in time become the main point of departure between American and British DP policy.

The Politics of Repatriation

The Allies concurred at the war’s end that displaced persons should be repatriated, and took on facilitating this truly monumental task. Moreover, the question of repatriation versus resettlement elsewhere framed the early political

¹³ SHAEF Administrative Memorandum 39 (Revised – 16 April 1945), “Displaced Persons and Refugees in Germany,” in Proudfoot, *European Refugees*, 461. The designation of “United Nations” in this document refers to the many nations allied together against the Axis during the war, not the UN organization as we know it today (although the latter in part grew out of the former).

¹⁴ Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 60.

¹⁵ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 12.

discourse of Allied DP policy. While an estimated eight million DPs existed in occupied Germany alone at V-E Day, by September 1945 only 1.2 million remained; the Allies had expedited the departure of, on average, 33,000 DPs each day.¹⁶ After these several months of admittedly very successful repatriation efforts, the American and British militaries in their respective zones were still faced with “nonrepatriables,” which included the “surviving remnant” of Jews, or *she'erit hapleitah* in Hebrew.¹⁷ Although statistics are extremely variable, there were definitely less than 100,000 displaced Jews in Allied-occupied territory several weeks after V-E Day, and probably around half of these people were in the American Zone of Germany.¹⁸

As summer 1945 stretched into fall, it became increasingly clear that some DPs who refused repatriation would likely be stuck for the long-term.¹⁹ The Allies were reluctant to accept, and had some trouble understanding, the surviving remnant's rejection of repatriation and of their countries of origin. Despite the extensive wartime plans for dealing with DPs, and the general acknowledgment that they would exist, apparently none of the Allied armies was truly “prepared for the possibility that hundreds of thousands of DPs would not be repatriated,” as Hagit Lavsky suggests.²⁰ Nevertheless, this became the harsh reality. A relief worker noticed the phenomenon and wrote in her journal in late May of 1945, “the most surprising thing is how many people don't want to go home. . .[v]ery few people I have met from Eastern Europe

¹⁶ Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁷ Wyman, *DPs*, 132; the Hebrew phrase is sometimes capitalized and Anglicized in a multitude of different ways.

¹⁸ Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 27; Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 103.

¹⁹ *Bergen-Belsen: Wehrmacht POW Camp, 1940-1945, Concentration Camp, 1943-1945, Displaced Persons Camp, 1945-1950*, ed. Marlis Buchholz, trans. Georg Felix Harsch (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, with Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation, 2010), exhibition catalog, 308; at this point, the only people left in the DP camps were those unwilling to be repatriated.

²⁰ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 49.

want to go and live under the Russians.”²¹ Her surprise alludes to the difficulty Allies and other “outsiders” in post-war Europe had comprehending the reasons why DPs remained DPs for so long, especially because she misidentified Russian rule or Communism as the reason why most Eastern European Jews refused to repatriate. The perspective of DPs themselves, however, communicate that devastated families and hometowns, continued anti-Semitism, and alienation from nations of origin were all more persuasive reasons than purely political ones to reject repatriation.

Those liberated from Nazi camps were faced with a continent nearly completely devoid of its Jews. Many were still starving or diseased, and thousands of former inmates died right after liberation. Those separated from their families had to wonder where their relatives were, and if any were alive at all. German historians Konigseder and Wetzel pose some of the pressing questions the Jewish DPs dealt with in the immediate aftermath of the war: “Would they, like some non-Jewish displaced persons, be forcibly repatriated and sent back to countries that were no longer home to them? What was the fastest way for them to obtain information about their families? Where would they live and where would they get food and clothing in the midst of this chaos, inside a hostile country destroyed by war?”²²

Almost invariably, the DPs themselves describe their immediate post-war experiences as hopeless. Despite newfound “freedom,” life would never be the same again. Survivor Leon Borovick recalled that, even though he was liberated, “I had lost my whole world. The whole universe fell apart...Everything was alien to me.”²³

²¹ Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 77; although this example hints at the fear of communism and its post-war spread in Eastern Europe, this is typically seen as less of an impetus for Jewish DPs to reject repatriation/leave their homes than the desire to live safely as Jews. See Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism*.

²² Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, trans. John A Broadwin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 12-13.

²³ Leon Borovick, interview by Diane Weinreich, February 20, 1997, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

Moreover, the momentary and shocking joy of liberation gave way to disbelief at the widespread destruction of Europe and of Jewry, and dismay at the uncaring attitudes of some non-Jews. Auschwitz survivor Ruth Kluger remembered, “I used to think that after the war I would have something of interest and significance to tell. But people didn’t want to hear about it, or if they did listen, it was in a certain pose, an attitude assumed for this special occasion...”²⁴ The post-liberation situation also created in survivors a sort of existential crisis. As Josef Dreiling, a Polish Jew in the Belsen DP camp remembered, “each and every one of us who survived stopped and asked himself, ‘What am I going to do with myself? What did I survive for? What’s my goal now? What am I going to do now? Where am I going to go?’”²⁵ Being in DP camps helped answer some of those questions for survivors, at least temporarily.

Displaced Jews ended up in DP camps not just because they had no home to return to and were literally stateless, but also because it seemed like the best and safest option for any kind of success in the future. Jewish DPs who had been under direct Nazi occupation or persecution came to the DP camps in two different ways. Some transitioned straight into the camps via Allied transportation or help from aid groups instead of going home. Others went home, or started that journey before deciding that finding a semblance of that home would be pointless. Many of the initial Jewish DPs experienced the extreme hardship of the concentration camps only to end up behind camp fences once again, though to most survivors DP camps still represented a safe haven. Although most Jewish survivors wanted to return home to look for friends or family, the indifference or harassment that they found, coupled

²⁴ Ruth Kluger, *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 107.

²⁵ *Buchholz*, 330.

with violence and other economic and political factors, played a part in convincing many Jews to seek refuge in DP camps.

Over and over again, former DPs in their oral histories mentioned the heartache and struggle of going back to a home that no longer had any familiar comforts of home. Take Celia Biniáz, who survived the Holocaust by working in one of Oskar Schindler's factories. Upon her liberation at age thirteen in Czechoslovakia, she hitchhiked home to Krakow with her parents, where she "really felt anti-Semitism," and the three promptly left for occupied Germany and ended up in DP camp Landsberg.²⁶ Or Herschel Balter, who after liberation returned to Ostrowiec, Poland, only to encounter anti-Semitic violence. He remembered non-Jewish locals saying things like, "still alive? What for, we don't want you here;" he also recalled that "they killed Jews everywhere who survived."²⁷ Instead of confronting more awful anti-Semitism, Balter and some relatives fled to the American zone via Czechoslovakia, something he says "everyone" was doing.²⁸ Likewise, Fanny Wald returned home to Poland with her family after liberation but the anti-Semitic violence there scared them into leaving again, and they were smuggled to the American zone in late summer 1945. She remembered anti-Semitism running rampant, with "our own citizens...killing the Jewish people at random and I got very scared."²⁹

Many others did not return home at all but began homeward journeys only to turn back, or were directed straight into a DP camp. Frieda Hall remembered not understanding the political climate after liberation and that she wanted to return east to Poland to look for family members. In hindsight, she recognized that the Cold War

²⁶ Celia Biniáz, interview by Carol Stulberg, January 25, 1996, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁷ Herschel Balter, interview by Rueben Zylberszpic, August 24, 1997, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Fanny Wald, interview by Ester Bailey, May 19, 1991, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center, Seattle, WA.

divide was already growing between Russians to the east and Americans to the west. Hall never ended up back home because people told her all the Jews would be gone. The rest of her family “wanted to leave Poland, we wanted to go back to Germany” (an astounding statement at face value) and – just like Balter – said that “everybody” did too.³⁰ Hungarian survivor Magda Bloom made it to the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, where the British officers deterred her from going home, saying “it will be painful, it won’t be home anymore.”³¹ These are but a few of the personal experiences of Jewish survivors who decided that life in Allied occupied Germany was preferable to whatever they might encounter in their places of origin.

A main foundation upon which the postwar Jewish DP identity rested was, as I have suggested, the overwhelming desire to leave Europe. Though the political intricacies will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Four, in the immediate aftermath of the war the British government in particular refused to deal substantively with the issue of immigration and resettlement, once again reflecting their emphasis on repatriation. In May 1945, right at the end of the war, according to historian Tommie Sjoberg, a British official stated that his “government had decided, for the time being, not to engage in any discussion of the broad problem of resettlement and to treat the matter passively.”³² Despite this, in the months to come Jewish DPs would continue to directly address and oppose Britain’s self-proclaimed passive policy. The United States’ attitude toward repatriation, though not at first borne out in policy, may have been marginally better for Jewish DPs. Although “American

³⁰ Frieda Hall, interview by Carl Berkenwald, August 11, 1991, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center, Seattle, WA.

³¹ Magda Bloom, interview by Corinne Oppenheimer, August 4, 1998, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

³² “Winant to Secretary of State, May 28, 1945,” Intergovernmental Committee, vol. II, Box 48, War Refugee Board records, FDR Library, Hyde Park, NY, quoted in Tommie Sjoberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted: the Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), 1938-1947* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1991), 169.

occupation officials... were hesitant to admit that displaced persons did not want to return home,” as Anna Holian posits, they also “unwittingly encouraged” the development of a discussion about whether repatriation was desired, one in which political goals were intertwined.³³ Crucially, as we will see in the following chapter, the American government did come to recognize Jews as Jews, separate from any other national identity.

As the memories of former DPs suggest, however, as time passed what were first known as assembly centers had to become permanent. Although originally meant as transit stops before repatriation, the temporary locations necessarily morphed into Displaced Persons camps.³⁴ German Jewish survivor Lucille Eichengreen recalled that although facets of life in the Belsen DP camp were difficult, “in other aspects it was very easy. You didn’t have a home and you didn’t have a family, but you were comparatively free and had enough to eat. But you had no future.”³⁵ Thoughts of the future such as Eichengreen’s dominated DPs’ everyday lives and subsumed concerns of the present. The uncertainty of the future played into many DPs’ fears and their continuing search for freedom, and ultimately, the majority of DPs decided that their conception of freedom involved leaving their old nations, and the entire cursed continent, behind.

National and Jewish Identities Conflict

The complications of repatriation inextricably intertwined DP policy with nationalism and Jewish identity. The Allies’ concern was with the return of Polish citizens to Poland regardless of their religion, or Hungarian citizens to Hungary, and so forth. Therefore, in order to facilitate repatriation as such, DPs were grouped

³³ Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism*, 81, 83.

³⁴ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 16.

³⁵ *Buchholz*, 330.

together according to nationality in camps. Even at the outset of the existence of DP communities, however, Jews prioritized their cultural and faith-based collective identity above any national identity they may have claimed before the war. Joseph Podemski expressed this sentiment in an interview years later as part of an exhibit for the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. He recalled that:

[i]f you were born in Poland, you were a Polish citizen to them [the British]. But we said, “No, we don't want anything to do with that. We've had enough. Our memories of Poland are gone!” And people who were born in Hungary or Czechoslovakia also said, “We're not Hungarian, we're not Czech, we're not Austrian. We are Jews!” This is what Hitler made out of us.³⁶

This idea pervaded the thoughts of many DPs, and though both British and Americans took care to avoid any differentiation of DP groups, “differentiation...became the goal of Jewish agency workers and DP spokesmen,” said DP leader Samuel Gringauz, quoted by Mark Wyman.³⁷ Since both Allied forces insisted on ignoring Jewish DPs' collective identity as Jews, it became crucial for DPs to begin to assert this identity.

After a few months the majority of DPs who remained in the occupation zones were either Jews or Soviet, Baltic and other Eastern European nationals who feared political changes in the East. For example, the Landsberg camp had a majority Jewish population, but also some non-Jewish Hungarians and Baltic peoples.³⁸ In the summer of 1945, Feldafing had a population of many Hungarian Jews, as well as non-Jewish Hungarians, Russians, Poles, and Yugoslavs.³⁹ At Bergen-Belsen, most of the Jewish DPs were Polish or Hungarian, and had been inmates of the Belsen concentration camp before liberation. There was also a contingent of thousands of non-Jewish Poles (ten thousand overall in the period between April 1945 and August

³⁶ Ibid., 364.

³⁷ Wyman, *DPs*, 134.

³⁸ Irving Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust, 1945: the Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont, United States Army* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1982), 5.

³⁹ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 225.

1946).⁴⁰ It seems that these non-Jewish Poles self-segregated from the Jews, and created their own organized committee, held Roman Catholic services, and more or less returned to Poland or immigrated elsewhere fairly quickly.

Primary sources illuminate relatively little about what exactly transpired between Jewish and non-Jewish DPs, but one can assume that this could be a less than ideal situation for the Jewish survivors. The Allied forces were supposed to adopt a screening process to ensure DPs with Nazi or fascist leanings were excluded from the camps, but due diligence was lax. In fact, war criminals and former Nazis were even Allied DP camps, and some made their way to the U.S. and Great Britain from them in the 1940s.⁴¹ Apparently Jews were sometimes living alongside these former persecutors in DP camps, “under constant threat of attack.”⁴² German historian Michael Brenner writes that in the late spring of 1945, “Polish DPs demolished the Jewish prayer house, destroyed the Torah, and fired shots at the rabbi” in Belsen.⁴³ Abraham Klausner, a Jewish chaplain in the U.S. army, recalled that people were killed in the camps “every day,” and that the contingent of non-Jewish Communist DPs were particularly violent.⁴⁴ Reports of deaths “every day” are uncorroborated, however, and the statement – made in the 1998 – seems suspect. Another American, Irving Heymont, camp commander of Landsberg, commented vaguely in 1945 that the convergence of Jewish and non-Jewish DPs was identified as a source of “administrative and social problems.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Buchholz*, 313.

⁴¹ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 13.

⁴² Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 52.

⁴³ Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 12.

⁴⁴ Abraham Klausner, interview by Toni Katsh Binstock, September 1, 1998, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁴⁵ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 17.

Jacob Oleiski, a Jewish leader at Landsberg, provides a DP perspective on the early mixed situation of camps. Oleiski spoke in Paris in 1946 about DP issues, and stated that “in the lagers have remained the criminals, and the murderers of us [those who committed at one time, crimes and murder against us] and of our families.”⁴⁶ This statement implies that Nazis or their collaborators were indeed displaced as well, and were living among some of their past victims, surely a situation that brought about discomfort and anxiety. Oleiski also remarked more specifically about how the mixed camps negatively affected the Jewish DPs’ experience:

The lagers were not [exclusively] Jewish. As I told you, they were mixed lagers, mixed with other nationalities. And it was clear that we had to take care of the most important problem – that we should prevail upon the military authorities to bring about a separation – that we should be able to have lagers for ourselves, Jewish lagers, in which we could be able [?] to organize our life...we cannot be together with them in the lagers, and we ought not to be with them, and we must separate our lives and begin to build up our lives anew [?] on the Jewish social principles as we understand them.⁴⁷

Oleiski’s wording, unlike Klausner’s retrospective vitriol about violence that occurred, does not explicitly condemn the “criminals” of acting on their past criminality and hatred while in the camps. But their presence, Oleiski asserted, blocked the proper existence and flourishing of a Jewish community; he differentiated very clearly between a Jewish way of life and a non-Jewish way of life, which he saw as incompatible. With this line of thinking, he rejected the assimilation that marked the Jewish diaspora, and in turn conflated the short-term consequences of living next to non-Jews with fears about the longer-term need for Jewish nationalism and a strong identity, which are implicit in his call for building new lives “on the Jewish social principles.”

⁴⁶ Jacob Oleiski, interview by David Pablo Boder, August 20, 1946, transcript trans. by Boder, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL, accessed February 18, 2015, http://voices.iit.edu/interview?doc=oleiskiJ&display=oleiskiJ_en.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* For some reason the German word for camp (lager) is used in the English translation from Yiddish. The question marks are additions of Boder denoting auditory fuzziness or confused meaning when he transcribed interviews.

A Brief Sketch of the Early DP Camps

While the consequences of the Allies' initial denial of differentiation between Jews and non-Jews were arguably most important to the DPs, many other factors also affected everyday life in the DP camps. What did the camps look like at the outset? What were the physical conditions like, and what drove DPs and their advocates to push for changes? The number of DPs per camp ranged widely, but all three camps of focus in this study were fairly large. In September 1945 Feldafing had nearly five thousand Jewish DPs,⁴⁸ Landsberg held just over five thousand that same month,⁴⁹ and Belsen in the British zone had at least eleven thousand in June 1945.⁵⁰

In addition, Mark Wyman identifies three types of DP camp created following the war: "casern camps," made up of repurposed German military or institutional structures like at Feldafing, "barracks camps," often former concentration camps such as at Belsen or Wehrmacht barracks as at Landsberg, and "dwelling-house camps...made up of entire villages...or a section of a city."⁵¹ Typically DPs lived communally in barrack situations or in small partitioned rooms, and ate in mess halls (universally recognized by DPs as serving unpalatable food) to discourage potentially unsanitary food preparation.⁵² Oleiski in his interview with Boder commented on this, saying that "the dwellings of the people are not happy, not decent [citizen-like] and not pleasant. Several families are compelled to live in one large room; people are compelled to eat in large refectories, it is impossible to create that genial [way of]

⁴⁸ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 226.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 170; hard statistics on Belsen are harder to pin down, but there is no question that Belsen consistently had the largest population of Jews – more than the populations of Feldafing and Landsberg combined.

⁵¹ Wyman, *DPs*, 43-44; curiously casern often refers to barracks, but not in Wyman's categories.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 54.

life....”⁵³ Health and hygiene was also a constant concern. In the immediate aftermath of liberation, DP camps such as Belsen that grew directly out of Nazi concentration camps were in particularly dismal conditions. Hundreds of former inmates tragically died each day at Belsen in the first month after liberation in April 1945.⁵⁴ Illnesses such as typhus and tuberculosis were common in all camps, and DPs were often severely undernourished.⁵⁵ These were far from comfortable places to be.

While hygiene and cleanliness in particular were of utmost importance to Allied administrators, DPs themselves saw these as less of a concern. The Allied military in its initial administration of the DP camps rightly took steps to prioritize health, hygiene, and sanitation above all else. As the weeks passed, though, the military governments maintained an obsession with the DPs’ physical surroundings and strict adherence to related policy at the expense of psychological help for survivors or long-term problem solving. As Atina Grossmann writes, “[m]ost of the chaplains and GIs wanted immediate action to deal with an extreme and unprecedented emergency.”⁵⁶ When the immense task of the Allies and the physical, emotional, and psychological hardships that DPs endured are both considered, it is not hard to see that early Allied policies and actions in the DP camps largely fell short of the mark needed to really help the DPs.

The overall disconnect between Allied policy and DPs’ needs can be summed up in the Allied insistence on short-term solutions and improvement of material, physical conditions, versus the DPs’ long-term goals of reuniting or creating families,

⁵³ Oleiski, *Voices of the Holocaust*; the brackets refer to slightly different translations from the Lithuanian Yiddish dialect Oleiski used to make the speech.

⁵⁴ Wyman, *DPs*, 21.

⁵⁵ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 150.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

emigration, and Jewish nationhood.⁵⁷ The resulting tension was ongoing. DPs in both zones struggled at times with their Allied commanders and forces when policies did not seem fair. Major Irving Heymont referred to the survivors in Landsberg as “naturally resent[ing] being treated as wards of foreign benevolence rather than full free citizens.”⁵⁸ In the British zone, “relations between the DPs and the occupying forces in the British Zone were tense right from the start.”⁵⁹ A spate of crime gave the British soldiers and officials reason – whether warranted or not – to distrust the DPs. In the summer of 1945, Major Noel Annan reported, “[t]hroughout our zone these unfortunate people, living in camps on a meagre ration, though the best that can be provided, and with nothing to do, are taking to breaking out at night to pillage the German population. After six years of intolerable existence some have become degraded and unscrupulous types.”⁶⁰ This assessment of “pillage” seems somewhat dramatic, and attitudes such as Major Annan’s – that the experiences of persecution, trauma, and “intolerable existence” during the war had made the Jews inferior people – fueled distrust between DPs and military forces. Demonstrations also broke out in Belsen shortly after liberation in response to the British policies that denied assistance to German Jews and refused special privileges to all Jewish DPs.⁶¹ As reflected in the protests, the tension between Allied goals and DP goals spurred the Jews to take matters into their own hands, which included the important establishment of representative groups to advocate for policy changes.

⁵⁷ See Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, for more on the interplay between Allied officials at Landsberg and DPs in terms of prioritizing cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation, and the implications for Allies’ conception of humanity in the DP camps.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁹ *Buchholz*, 356.

⁶⁰ “Report of a visit to Military Government Court at Brunswick, Enclosure in No. 9: Letter from Sir W. Strand (Lübbecke) to Mr. Harvey (Received August 24, 1945),” C 4981/95/18 in *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. V: Germany and Western Europe, 11 August – 31 December 1945* ed. Pelly and Yasamee (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1990), 43-48, 45.

⁶¹ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 39.

DP Activism Begins

The complex relations between the military, UNRRA, and DPs created tense situations in the DP camps. While the Allied forces were often hampered with their difficult administrative tasks, and insisted on certain practices that they thought would benefit DPs, DPs sought to make their voices heard amidst the chaos. Obviously, the camps were not the ideal environment for survivors, but when forced together in that setting, groups of all sorts began to organize, people met and started families, and DPs tried to make life as normal as possible.⁶² A sizable number of DPs were extremely motivated to improve their lives and to overcome the horrors they had endured. This resulted in community-building and activism that began right after liberation. As Polish survivor Joseph Podemski, a DP at Belsen, stated, “the next stage was for us to get our strength back, to transform our previous life into a new one, to start to build our own life with commitment and with the will to get back to society.”⁶³ And some did so with a vengeance.

Early DP groups in both the American and British zones played a role – along with their allies and advocates – in influencing policy changes to improve both their lives as DPs *and* their futures beyond occupied Germany. Judah Nadich, Jewish chaplain in the U.S. military and an eventual Special Adviser on Jewish Affairs, recalled that DP organization was not just important, it was vital, since complaints and demands would be listened to more effectively from an informed, reasonable individual that represented the whole.⁶⁴ In addition, from the very beginning, the motivation to organize into defined groups was intertwined with the desire to

⁶² While Chapter Three will discuss in depth the functions of Jewish DPs organizations of political, social, artistic, and religious natures, the following section will cover the conception of the Jewish organizational structure that was to guide DPs’ collective action over the next several years.

⁶³ *Buchholz*, 331.

⁶⁴ Judah Nadich, interview by Nancy Fisher, March 23, 2000, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

immigrate to Palestine. The Allies' recognition of the Jews as having a national and cultural, rather than a religious, identity, was the DPs' crucial goal. A main impetus for organization was emigration in general though, not just to Palestine.⁶⁵

The seed of an organized body of Jewish survivors may have sprung up first in the American zone among survivors of Buchenwald. A small group of them created a "Jewish Self-Help Committee" to assist the survivors when, after the liberation of Buchenwald, Jews were "refused separate representation" in an international aid committee.⁶⁶ Another early strand of organization was a concert and gathering at the St. Ottilien monastery-turned-hospital where hundreds of Jewish survivors gathered on May 27, 1945. Here, Lithuanian survivor Dr. Zalman (sometimes Solomon) Grinberg – who became an important DP figure in the U.S. zone – made a speech of remembrance for the millions who had been murdered. As Zeev Mankowitz posits, though no actual groups were formed or decisions made at St. Ottilien, "[t]he importance...is to be found in the gathering itself, in the sense of sharing the burden of the past and beginning to shoulder responsibility for what lay ahead. What emerged from the meeting was a feeling of community, the sense that this was a group of people with a shared identity and purpose rather than a random collection of survivors."⁶⁷ Despite their history of hardship, survivors were invested in a togetherness out of their shared tragedy, and efforts to organize formally were the next step.

One of the most important individuals in the early days after liberation was a fiery renegade American chaplain, Abraham Klausner. Klausner went absent without leave from his regiment, attached himself instead to the community of survivors in Bavaria and began a tracing service for survivors to connect. He was a force unlike

⁶⁵ This debate will be examined more fully in Chapter Four.

⁶⁶ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 26.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

any other in occupied Germany. Klausner disagreed with the U.S. military's policies that failed to afford Jewish survivors privileges he thought they deserved. In a later interview, Klausner recalled that the Allies did not want to establish camps at all (preferring everyone to repatriate), much less ones specifically for Jews.⁶⁸ In contrast to the position of the army he once belonged to, Klausner, in his own words, "had to take the position that Jews did not want to return and for good reason...[whereas] the Army did not want to recognize Jews as a separate group of people."⁶⁹ As Ben Shephard writes, "[f]rom time to time the military authorities caught up with him, and he was repeatedly admonished...."⁷⁰ But this never materialized into actual disciplinary actions, and by June he had already published the first of his volumes of names of survivors. Klausner, working outside the normal structure, but still with a distinct advantage because he *had* been a part of the army, found ways to circumvent the army's rules, and in doing so helped advance DPs' goals.

A definitive step in contrast to the informal St. Ottilien gathering was taken a month later with the official formation of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews of Bavaria (the U.S. zone having encompassed that German region) on July 1, 1945. Klausner's leadership, along with that of pioneering survivor-leaders, was instrumental in bolstering the fledgling organization. Sensing acutely the "need for overall representation that would be able to protect vital Jewish interests," forty-one Jewish survivor representatives descended on Feldafing, the largest DP camp in the zone and, at the time (thanks to Klausner's unconventional efforts), the sole Jewish-only one.⁷¹ In the American zone, individual camps began to form committees as well, and, Nadich stated, "very quickly, the Jews of each camp had elected a

⁶⁸ Klausner, VHA, USC.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 105.

⁷¹ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 47; Klausner, VHA, USC.

committee to represent them.”⁷² The committees were tasked with speaking to the Allied commanders of each camp, and representing to that leader the will of the entire camp population. Alex Gringauz, the son of Samuel Gringauz, the first president of the Landsberg camp committee, recalled that his father was respected by the U.S. military and had negotiated with officials when the camp was originally set up. Another advantage of the elder Gringauz as a leader was his relative political neutrality.⁷³ The Lithuanian survivor had a legal background and quickly became a fixture of Jewish DP leadership in the U.S. zone along with Dr. Grinberg and Klausner. Zeev Mankowitz quoted Samuel Gringauz, who described the goals for Central Committee activity as the “...need to fight for national understanding and national discipline...in order to know how to prosecute the struggle for our rights and our dignity.”⁷⁴

Survivors in the British zone, too, rapidly organized themselves into a unit, which coalesced even faster than those in the American zone. Survivors of Bergen-Belsen formed a “Jewish Committee” in late April 1945 which came to be known first as the “Provisional Committee” and then, in September 1945, the Central Jewish Committee in the British Zone.⁷⁵ Its head was Josef Rosensaft, a natural leader, “master problem-solver,” Zionist, and member of the Polish Jewish survivor community.⁷⁶ As a specific counterpoint to Allied policy, the Committee rejected how the British “saw the Jews only as a religious community,” and instead the group “saw themselves as a nation of their own. They demanded that the British authorities

⁷² Nadich, VHA Online.

⁷³ Alex Gringauz, interview by Manuel Bekier, January 16, 1997, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁷⁴ Dr. Shmuel [Samuel] Gringauz, “Khamisho ani yodea” (Five I know), *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung*, October 15, 1945, quoted in Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 161.

⁷⁵ *Buchholz*, 336.

⁷⁶ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 67.

respect this, recognize their autonomy and allow them to immigrate to Palestine.”⁷⁷

Survivors and liberators alike recall that the push for Palestine was a major priority of the British committee, which reflected general Zionist sentiments of survivors even right after liberation. British chaplain Isaac “Harry” Levy wrote in 1945, “[h]ere the voice of Palestine is heard and the yearning is intense. They speak Hebrew and talk of their future in Palestine.”⁷⁸ Survivors’ fervor for freedom was strong, and the leadership-minded ones were shrewd enough to know that only by working together would they have any hope of gaining autonomy and achieving their goals.

It is also clear that, from the beginning, the British authorities gave few concessions to the survivor organization. Jewish welfare organizations from abroad were limited in their activities in Germany, and aid offered specifically for Jewish survivors in the British zone was “severely restricted,”⁷⁹ in part because of the British government’s “suspicion of ‘sectarian’ organizations.”⁸⁰ The Central Committee was not recognized by the British authorities, but the DPs found their own strength in the community, and the Committee did hold a certain amount of power. Chaplain Levy recalled that, shortly after the transition of Belsen from concentration camp to DP camp, each “hut” or barrack had a representative, who was in turn part of the committee. The survivors, Levy said, “presented the authorities with a fait accompli. If you want to know anything about the organization inside this camp, you come to us. So the military had to ask them how to organize themselves inside the camp.”⁸¹ This was mere weeks after liberation. This proves that the DPs were anything but

⁷⁷ *Buchholz*, 336.

⁷⁸ Isaac Levy, letter to the editor, *Jewish Chronicle*, May 4, 1945, quoted in Lavsky, 64; since Hebrew was barely spoken in Europe, but in Israel, Rabbi Levy may either have remembered this detail incorrectly (most survivors spoke Yiddish) or he was referring to Palestinian Jews who were already in the DP camps and helping with various endeavors with a tinge of Zionism (see Chapter Four for more on the latter).

⁷⁹ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 74.

⁸⁰ Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 109.

⁸¹ Isaac Levy, interview by Sharon Tyler, January 30, 1996, Visual History Archive Online.

passive, that displacement and tragedy did not dull the ambition of some survivors. Despite their hardships and the very recent release from Nazi captivity, DPs were actively building communities and striving for democracy and autonomy.

Conflict existed from the outset between what DPs wanted for themselves and what the Allies wanted for them. Jewish DPs, who began to band together and organize in both zones almost as soon as they were liberated, firmly refused the repatriation to their home countries, instead typically preferring to reject former national ties and embrace a Jewish identity. The DPs' intertwined goals of emigration and assertion of Jewish identity only increased in import. As the weeks and months after liberation progressed, the Allies' political discussion did to an extent shift to recognize that repatriation would no longer be possible. Due to the geopolitical backdrop and economic constraints, however, Great Britain was less able to liberalize DP policies in their zone, while the U.S. was more likely and willing to make policy reforms. The following chapter will delve into these differences of attitude toward DP issues and consequent policy changes, or stagnation, in each zone.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HARRISON REPORT AND POLICY REFORMS

As summer 1945 turned into fall, change was brewing among policymakers on either side of the Atlantic. The Displaced Persons Executive (DPX) was dismantled in July when the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was. This left the administration of DP camps to the occupying forces in each zone as opposed to a joint effort, and opened up the opportunity for greater deviation in policy between the Allies. The numbers of DPs had dwindled but many Jews remained, unwilling or unable to be repatriated and instead hoping to emigrate from the continent. Each zone had a Central Committee, so Jewish DPs had begun to create the frameworks to affect change for themselves. Now the question was how responsive the Allies would be to the concerns of the DPs and their advocates. As struggles and discontent among DPs remained, the Allies' awareness of these grievances did grow, though their responses varied. While American policy partially acknowledged the issues of Jewish identity and nationhood, British policy failed to do so, and there were fewer reforms in the British zone due to a reliance on politically-focused, rather than humanitarian-focused, policymaking.

Military and occupation officials from both Allied powers were slow to respond with substantive actions. When they did respond, said actions were fraught with political tensions: the British and Americans remained resolute allies, but that did not mean they agreed on everything. As criticism of the treatment and conditions of Jewish DPs mounted among the Jewish diaspora, especially in the U.S., pressure also rose to change policy. For President Truman, the domestic importance of keeping American Jews content was a factor. The British government seemed not to acknowledge similar concerns, and instead placed the most importance on the geopolitical implications of the Jewish DP issue: the twin concerns of social, political,

and economic dynamics on the continent of Europe and the status of their Palestinian territory.¹ Moreover, practical issues in the postwar landscape led to two different approaches: Britain was literally and financially devastated, while the United States was on the ascendancy in many ways. The U.S. simply had more resources and tools to deal with DPs after the war. Thus the two nations had different contexts for understanding the DP problem, which affected their policymaking as it became clear in summer and fall 1945 that taking no action would be the worst decision.

Americans Take a Stand

Criticism of Allied policy from both DPs and outsiders began to filter its way out of Germany as soon as the war ended. It is hard to tell exactly how word spread, especially across the Atlantic, but armed forces communicated with relatives back home about the situation, and some DPs wrote to relatives in the “outside world” as well.² In any case, complaints that ended up in the U.S., whether to Jewish organizations, survivors’ relatives, or everyday citizens, did make an impact. One such concerned U.S. citizen – but with a clear political agenda – was Meyer Weisgal, head of the American branch of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, an organization primarily concerned with Zionist causes and supporting aliyah.³ On behalf of the Jewish-American community, Weisgal brought up his worry for the Jewish DPs with Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau in June 1945. According to Zeev

¹ The background on Britain’s involvement in Palestine will be covered in detail at the beginning of Chapter Four, but essentially, the British wanted to maintain the status quo of its Mandatory Palestine and avoid any international pressures or factors that would threaten that control.

² The means of communication between the DP camps and the outside world is not well documented. We do know, however, that some servicemen specifically wrote about the plight of Jews after the war to their friends and relatives back home. See Abraham Klausner, interview by Toni Katsh Binstock, September 1, 1998, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA. Klausner spoke to groups of U.S. military members and urged them en masse to write home and to criticize what he saw as abhorrent conditions for Jewish DPs.

³ Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 53.

Mankowitz, Morgenthau “succeeded in persuading the State Department of [an investigation’s] urgency and importance for the American Jewish community,”⁴ which was considered an important part of President Truman’s political constituency. The investigation was approved by acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew, and in turn by Truman himself.

Earl G. Harrison, a University of Pennsylvania dean and American representative of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), was selected for the fact-finding mission. Prior to the investigative trip, Harrison met with Weisgal; the businessman informed Harrison then that, as Ben Shephard recounts, “Jews of Europe...had three options: to complete their demise, to obtain equality, or to emigrate. Only the third was a realistic option – and the only possible destination was Palestine. This encounter would decisively influence Harrison’s approach.”⁵

Harrison’s official mission was very specific to the plight of the Jewish DPs.

According to a State Department memo to the President, Harrison was:

to ascertain the needs of the stateless and non-repatriables, particularly Jews, among the displaced persons in Germany and to what extent those needs are being provided at present by military authorities, international, national or private organizations. Mr. Harrison has also been directed to determine in general the views of the refugees with respect to their future destinations.⁶

The goal itself is revealing. By now the American government realized that there would be many “stateless and non-repatriables,” conceding that the wartime strategy of repatriation had its limits. Instead of ignoring the fact that Jewish DPs needed a place to go, and to resettle in, the American plan afforded DPs themselves a voice with which to engage with the U.S. government’s policy. Harrison was tasked with determining the DPs’ *own views* “with respect to their future destinations.”

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 111.

⁶ “Memorandum for the President” from Joseph Grew, Acting Secretary of State (21.6.1945), NA/800.4016 DP/16-2145, as quoted in Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 53.

Meanwhile, while Harrison prepared to leave for Europe, President Truman was already thinking about ways to improve the lot of Jewish DPs. At a higher diplomatic level the Americans contended that British policies toward Jewish survivors were unsustainable. Communication between President Truman and the British government in July 1945 shows the stark contrast in strategy. In a letter to Prime Minister Churchill, Truman wrote that concerned Americans “fervently urge the lifting of these restrictions which deny to Jews, who have been so cruelly uprooted by ruthless Nazi persecutions, entrance into the land which represents for so many of them their only hope of survival.”⁷ The existing restrictions, pursuant to the British White Paper of 1939, made Jewish immigration subject to Arab Palestinian approval, and on the whole the British mandate did not support a Jewish state. The British Foreign Office’s private response to Truman was to deny the existence of a problem. In accordance with their DP policy of repatriation and non-recognition, staff members noted that “it is important not to give the impression that Palestine, rather than the countries of which they are nationals, is the proper home of all Jews.”⁸ While in practice the Americans were not substantively changing policy, in theory the tide was shifting. It would only be a matter of time before America’s agenda and frame of reference for Jewish DPs was definitively separated from Britain’s.

The Harrison Report

After hearing input from American Jews, including Zionists, and with the government-sanctioned expectation that he carefully examine the needs of Jewish DPs, Earl Harrison left for Europe in July of 1945. He traveled with the European

⁷ “Memorandum from President Truman to Mr. Churchill (Berlin),” *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. I: The Conference at Potsdam July-August 1945*, 1043-1044, accessed January 20, 2015, *Documents on British Policy Overseas* database.

⁸ *Ibid.*

director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint), Joseph Schwartz, Herbert Katzki from the War Refugee Board, and Patrick Malin, a director of the IGCR. All told, the Americans visited thirty DP camps, with Harrison himself focused on camps in the U.S. zones of Germany and Austria.⁹ Harrison began his time in Europe with an in-depth talk with Abraham Klausner, the American chaplain who had become one of the most insistent advocates for the Jews. Harrison visited both Feldafing and Landsberg, where individual camp committees had already formed and, according to scholars, “led the way” with DPs’ successful leadership initiatives.¹⁰ These places were home to driven and politically motivated DPs, who likely gave Harrison an honest piece of their mind. Unfortunately there is little that recounts Harrison’s day-to-day experiences while in Europe in more detail, but after weeks of touring and discussion, Harrison wrote an official report and President Truman received the final version on August 24, 1945. The report’s findings and recommendations quickly caused a stir in Washington.

Harrison proposed that post-liberation Jews, though freed from the concentration camps, lacked liberation of the psyche. He outlined the survivors’ grievances with the U.S. military presence, and wrote that Jews felt liberated more in a military sense than actually. Harrison wrote that Jews “feel that they, who were in so many ways the first and worst victims of Nazism, are being neglected by their liberators.”¹¹ Harrison directly addressed complaints from the DPs about the military’s policies, and throughout his report primarily places blame for the condition of both DPs and their camps on the Allied forces. Harrison did not pretend that the military had ignored the DPs, but rather that the lack of unified response and attitude

⁹ Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, trans. John A Broadwin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Report of Earl G. Harrison,” *Department of State Bulletin* 327 (September 30, 1945), 456-463, 456.

towards them had created a large scale problem. For example, the phenomenon of tracing the fate of lost loved ones was obviously a high priority for Jewish survivors in DP camps, and Harrison characterized the military effort toward this end as erratic at best. If family members were found in occupied Germany, there was no guarantee that they could be brought together. He wrote, “it depends on the personal attitude and disposition of the Camp Commandant whether permission can be obtained or assistance received to follow up on the information.”¹² According to Harrison, the military officials relied too much on their personal opinions and proclivities, which resulted in arbitrary differences in policy. In addition, Harrison acknowledged the typically unbridgeable gap of understanding between Jewish DPs and members of the military. To help remedy this issue, Harrison recommended that there be immediate review of those in the U.S. military selected for duty in the DP camps.¹³

But the most important outcome of Harrison’s investigation was his clear view that the two basic needs of the Jewish DPs were: 1) their recognition and identification as a separate group, and 2) the necessity of their immigration. It cannot be overstated how significant it was for Harrison to articulate that Jewish DPs should be identified as Jewish and physically separated from non-Jewish DPs. Whereas the Americans and British had both forgone separating the Jews out in order to reject Nazi racial attitudes, Harrison recognized that “[t]he first and plainest need of these people is a recognition of their actual status *and by this I mean their status as Jews.*”¹⁴ Before and during Harrison’s investigation on the ground in Europe, Allied policy had, in his findings, neglected the unbearably horrific recent histories of displaced Jews; ignoring the Jewish identity of DPs had made administrators and Allies forget

¹² Ibid., 457.

¹³ Ibid., 462.

¹⁴ Ibid., 458.

the Jews' "former and more barbaric persecution...."¹⁵ Thus, while acknowledging the difficulty the Allies had in understanding the heinous barbarism of the Nazis, Harrison posited that this should not be an excuse to preclude policy reform that would recognize the Jews as a group. Harrison identified the second basic need of the Jewish DPs to be expedited immigration if repatriation to their home country was impossible. As most first person accounts from DP camps state, the "first and greatest expressed wish" of the Jewish DPs was to leave occupied Europe as soon as possible, and for many to leave for Palestine – "just as other national groups are being repatriated to their homes."¹⁶ Thus Harrison not only refuted the initial Allied focus on repatriation, but incorporated Zionist tenets by conceptualizing aliyah as the Jewish equivalent to non-Jews' return to their nation of origin.

Harrison also linked his recommendations for the future of DPs to the alleviation of short-term problems – mainly the difficult conditions of life in the DP camps. These included issues of health and hunger, sanitation and hygiene, clothing, housing, and physical rehabilitation. For instance, he described the DPs as living "amidst crowded, frequently unsanitary and generally grim conditions, in complete idleness."¹⁷ The inclusion of these material needs implied that, to Harrison and the U.S. overall, the longer-term goals of establishing Jewish identity and promoting immigration out of Europe were codependent on the everyday orderly functioning of the camps. Moreover, Harrison's linkage of bad conditions to "idleness" implied that perhaps increasing the activity of DPs would bring about changes in their surroundings. Harrison expanded on the problematic idleness of DPs, writing that "nothing in the way of a program of activity or organized effort toward rehabilitation has been inaugurated and the internees, for they are literally such, have little to do

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 456.

except to dwell upon their plight....”¹⁸ In this way, Harrison blamed the current administrators for failing to address personal improvement among the DPs. This notion pushed not necessarily toward social or psychological help first, but suggested camp improvements and DP labor initiatives, which were *in turn* thought to promote DPs’ psychological normalcy.

A final piece of the Harrison Report that deserves mention is the documentation of ineffective or nonexistent cooperation between the military, UNRRA, and other outside aid groups. Problems between the UNRRA and the U.S. had been simmering since the end of the war. All the things the UNRRA needed to function in the postwar world could be most easily provided by the Allied occupying forces, which led to an awkward power dynamic. Manpower was lacking – the militaries could provide that. The infrastructure and systems needed to distribute materials and supplies were already in place, thanks again to the Allies. These issues found an audience in Harrison, who may have heard grievances about the Administration from the opinionated Klausner; the former chaplain commented simply in retrospect that the UNRRA “just hadn’t worked out like it was supposed to.”¹⁹ The UNRRA had planned to completely take over control of the DP camps from the Allied forces on October 1, but this quickly looked impossible.²⁰ Harrison did not pull any punches in his treatment of the Administration:

UNRRA, being neither sufficiently organized or equipped nor authorized to operate displaced persons camps or centers on any large scale, has not been in position to make any substantial contribution to the situation. Regrettably there has been a disinclination on the part of many Camp Commandants to utilize UNRRA personnel even to the extent available, though it must be admitted that in many situations this resulted from unfortunate experiences Army officers had with UNRRA personnel who were unqualified and inadequate for the responsibility involved.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 457.

¹⁹ Klausner, VHA, USC.

²⁰ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 12.

²¹ “Report of Earl G. Harrison,” 459.

In this way, Harrison called into question the role of the UNRRA and the fulfillment of its duty, but also acknowledged that the supposed cooperation of the military was partially to blame.

Initial Reactions to the Harrison Report

While the Americans mulled over significant changes to the DP camps, the British were unreceptive to the Harrison Report and its demands. Although a main proposal of the Harrison Report was the broadening of immigration opportunities to Palestine, which was accepted enthusiastically by President Truman, there was little the American government could do about a situation controlled by the British. As Earl Harrison was sent off to Europe, communication between the U.S. and Britain regarding Palestine was already tense. The British Foreign Office noted in reaction to a memo from President Truman that “Zionists have been deplorably successful in selling the idea that, even after the Allied victory, emigration to Palestine represents for many Jews ‘their only hope of survival.’”²² The British alleged that Zionist propaganda had pervaded the American agenda for DP policy. The diplomatic and political situation between the U.S. and Britain grew ever tenser as Truman brought up the future of Palestine with Prime Minister Clement Attlee. The same day he sent the Harrison Report to General Dwight Eisenhower, at the time Governor of the American occupied zone, Truman also sent a copy to Attlee. In an accompanying letter, President Truman told the Prime Minister that he concurred with Harrison “in the belief that no matter is so important for those who have known the horrors of

²² *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. I, 1044.*

concentration camps for over a decade as is the future of immigration possibilities into Palestine.”²³

As Truman attempted to negotiate with Attlee and other British leaders, the media in Britain, as it did in the U.S., reported on the issue of the Jewish DPs. The *Manchester Guardian* lamented that the “plight” of Jewish DPs in Germany “is the most pitiable. They do not want to continue to live in Germany which herded them into concentration camps.”²⁴ Another British editorial claimed that Truman’s statement on allowing immigration to Palestine relied on “purely humanitarian basis without reference to ideological or political considerations.”²⁵ There is little disputing this fact, but it seems unlikely that the President actually believed that immigration to Palestine would be forthcoming. His provocative statement on the heels of the Harrison Report was intended to push conversation *toward* opening Palestine. Meanwhile, other steps – short of allowing Jews into Palestine – could be made to improve DP camps and the situation of Jewish DPs.

After receiving the report, President Truman took Harrison’s recommendations seriously, and made Harrison’s findings necessarily the business of the military in addition to the civilian government. On August 31, Truman sent the Harrison Report to General Eisenhower accompanied by a letter with his own pointed comments. Truman informed him that the conditions in the DP camps, as reported by Harrison, “are not in conformity with policies promulgated by... [the] Combined DPX. But they are what actually exists in the field. In other words, the policies are not

²³ “Letter to Prime Minister Attlee Concerning the Need for Resettlement of Jewish Refugees in Palestine. November 13, 1945,” 188 in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President April 12 to December 31, 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 469-470, 469.

²⁴ John Gilbert Winant, telegram to State Department, October 1, 1945, *Post-War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

being carried out by some of your subordinate officers.”²⁶ The President continued, writing that the U.S. holds “a particular responsibility toward these victims of persecution and tyranny who are in our zone.”²⁷ The reasons for this “particular responsibility” can only be inferred, but in the troubling time between World War II and the Cold War with its menace of communism, the U.S. felt obligated to champion democracy around the globe. The President also made it clear that he was personally interested in making immigration for DPs – and not just immigration anywhere, but especially aliyah – a reality. “I am,” he wrote to Eisenhower, “communicating directly with the British Government in an effort to have the doors of Palestine opened to such of these displaced persons as wish to go there.”²⁸ Of course, this would be easier said than done, even for the President of the United States. Overall, Truman took on executive responsibility to affect diplomatic change for the benefit of Jewish DPs, while also asking General Eisenhower to implement concrete improvements in the field in the U.S. zone.

General Eisenhower’s Role

General Eisenhower did act quickly to try and mitigate some of Harrison’s criticism of the military. There is no question, too, that Eisenhower was personally upset by the accusations leveled at the American military in Germany. Word of Harrison’s findings made their way to Eisenhower even before the report was published, and on August 24 the General appointed Judah Nadich, a former chaplain

²⁶ “Letter from the President to General Eisenhower Transmitting the Report of the United States Representative on the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (Harrison), August 31, 1945,” *Documents on American Foreign Relations Vol. VIII, July 1, 1945-December 31, 1946* ed. Dennett and Turner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948): 251-252, 252.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

introduced in the previous chapter, special adviser to the military for Jewish affairs.²⁹ Eisenhower then visited five different DP camps throughout the month of September, to evaluate firsthand the situation that had largely been disparaged by Harrison.

In early October, Eisenhower responded to Truman with a report of his own. This report demonstrated implementation of some policy changes, but also still resistance. In some areas, as William Hitchcock asserts, the General “could not resist challenging Harrison’s report.”³⁰ And understandably so – Eisenhower was implicitly blamed for the failings of the military when it came to the DPs, he wanted to defend the very difficult efforts the forces had taken on, and it was clear he was about to become the Army’s Chief of Staff. “In certain instances,” the General wrote, “we have fallen below standard, but I should like to point out that a whole army has been faced with the intricate problems of readjusting from combat to mass repatriation, and then to the present static phase with its unique welfare problems.”³¹ To be sure, the military was wholly unprepared for the “static phase,” and the American soldiers and camp commanders in the DP camps were neither relief aid operatives, social workers, nor immigration officials. Very few members of the armed forces would be able to successfully – and willingly – wear all of these hats. To provide a more specific example of the General’s defense, Eisenhower subtly refuted Truman’s request that German homes must be commandeered to house Jewish DPs, writing that “[t]he housing problem must be seen in full perspective.” There were nearly a million German homeless in need of housing, and, while the DPs allegedly had:

absolute preference over Germans for housing...the requirements of the distribution of supplies, the provision of medical care, and the need for welfare

²⁹ Arieh Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 93.

³⁰ William Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 322.

³¹ “Letter from General Eisenhower to the President, October 8, 1945,” *Documents on American Foreign Relations Vol. VIII*, 253-256, 255.

activities make it desirable that displaced persons be sufficiently concentrated so that these services may be performed efficiently by the limited supervisory personnel and transport at our disposal.³²

For better or worse, therefore, Jewish DPs in the American Zone were confined to camps.

Despite his resistance, it was also clear to Eisenhower that to do nothing would be politically and morally wrong. General Eisenhower stated plainly at the beginning of his report that “[s]ince Mr. Harrison’s visit in July many changes have taken place with respect to the condition of Jews and other displaced persons....Nevertheless, efforts to improve their condition continue unabated.”³³

Eisenhower wrote that “special centers [were] established for Jewish displaced persons”³⁴ beginning in late June, and progressed in earnest in September at Eisenhower’s behest (and in accordance with Harrison’s recommendations). This reflects true improvement and the partial fulfillment of the DPs’ broad goals: the recognition by occupation forces of their distinct identity rather than national origin.

In an effort to address the military’s shortcomings, and the issues brought up by Harrison about the UNRRA, Eisenhower also wrote that “I have fostered since before D-Day the development of UNRRA so that persons of professional competence in that organization might take over greater responsibilities, and release our combat men and officers from this most difficult work.”³⁵ In a testament to the success of President Truman in convincing Eisenhower and others in the military structure of the importance of policy change, American soldiers in the DP camps wrote that “the heat was on” from Eisenhower to clean up the camps.³⁶

³² Ibid., 253.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 255

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Irving Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust, 1945: the Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont, United States Army* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1982), 6.

But, as Harrison had tried to make clear in his findings, the problem was not only about the conditions in the camps – the DPs despite their grievances cared less about their immediate surroundings than opportunities, or lack thereof, to leave them. After Eisenhower’s October response, Harrison made another press release echoing that tension: “General Eisenhower refers to improved conditions in the camps... [w]hat we need is more action in getting the people out of the camps and less talk about improving conditions within the camps.”³⁷ Harrison’s insistence on immigration reform would take longer to find any measure of success, and as previously mentioned was contingent not only on American congressional action but British political agreement. Nevertheless, the changes implemented in late 1945 and instigated by Eisenhower were a positive step for the Jews’ hopes of self-determination in occupied Germany, at least in the U.S. zone.

Post-Harrison Report British Policy

Predictably, the British did not make substantive changes to DP policy in their zone to mirror Harrison’s recommendations. The Foreign and Colonial Offices in London were frustrated by the Harrison Report, and focused their criticism not only on American insistence of opening immigration opportunities to Palestine but on the changes that afforded Jewish DPs more recognition and autonomy as Jews. A telegram between Foreign Office officials, for instance, stated that: “We do not of course admit that Jews constitute a separate nationality, and are all against any attempt to label people as definitely and irrevocably ‘non-repatriable’ at this stage...it would indeed be disastrous for the Jews themselves if they were accorded special treatment on this basis in comparison with the people of the country where they

³⁷ *Jewish Chronicle*, October 26, 1945.

live.”³⁸ The supposed “disastrous” effects upon Jews should this occur were left unexplained.

In a strongly-worded October telegram from Secretary of Foreign Affairs Ernest Bevin titled, “[U.S.] State Dept. to be informed that H.[is] M[ajesty’s].G[overnment]. reject views in Harrison Report on Jewish DPs in Germany,” more reasoning behind the Foreign Office’s perspective was revealed. Bevin focused on a defeatist attitude he saw in both the Americans and the DPs in their rejection of repatriation. Harrison and the new U.S. policies, Bevin asserted, implied that the “Nazis were right in holding that there was no place for Jews in Europe.”³⁹ Again, as with the policy of separating Jewish DPs from others DPs, the British declared that the Americans’ ideology would do more harm than good and only perpetuate the Nazi’s genocidal thinking. This flawed logic ignored the fact that the American investigation specifically listened to DPs’ voices, stories, hopes and dreams – which said they wanted to leave Europe. Furthermore, in a paragraph remarkable for its insensitivity to the Jewish survivors’ plight, Bevin wrote that:

there is a crying need for all possible displaced persons... to return home... to build up their native lands where they all have their own part to play. Our task is surely to create conditions in which they will themselves feel it natural and right to go home rather than to admit at this stage that such conditions are impossible to create. Nor must it be forgotten that the Jews are not the only persecuted group and that groups of German Christians have suffered almost as badly.⁴⁰

Bevin the used the excuse that post-war Germany was still “chaotic” to explain his theory that in time survivors would somehow come around to the idea of repatriation.

Moreover, the British authorities were believed to dismiss or downplay reports of

³⁸ “Mr. Bevin to the Earl of Halifax (Washington),” No. 9986 Telegraphic [WR 2947/4/48], in *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. V: Germany and Western Europe, 11 August – 31 December 1945* ed. Pelly and Yasamee (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1990), 183-186, 183.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

anti-Semitic violence in Eastern Europe, which were contributing to new waves of refugees.⁴¹ This point of view, along with the comment diminishing Jewish persecution and wartime suffering, surely did little to endear DP sympathizers in the American State Department to their British counterparts.

Small Victories in the British Zone

While the British remained steadfast in some overall aspects of policy, such as a refusal to recognize Jews as a truly separate group from their non-Jewish national peers, Britain's generally hostile reception to the Harrison Report was challenged in the months that followed. For one thing, public outcry about the plight of the DPs, as among American Jews, certainly occurred in Britain as well, and some influential figures also wanted a different solution for the DP problem in the British zone. A.C. Kenchington, chief of the British Control Commission's Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons Division, "thought that some modification of British policy toward Jewish DPs was required if only because of the change of U.S. policy, which 'was no longer in line with ours,'" he wrote in a September 1945 memo for the Foreign Office.⁴² The wife of a British official complained that "distressing" reports on Jewish DPs in the British zone were "bogged down in the War Office files with no action taken."⁴³ Even if inaction was phrased as a political embarrassment – that the U.K. was not keeping up with American reforms – or as a bureaucratic failure of red tape (though to be fair, couched in "distress" about the DPs), concerns such as these likely pushed Britain toward some post-Harrison Report changes.

In October of 1945, according to minutes of a British Military Government conference, the powers that be begrudgingly agreed to "the segregation of Jewish

⁴¹ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 49.

⁴² Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 38.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

D.P.s as a matter of administrative convenience and without prejudice to any further solution of their settlement,” but this had yet to be cleared by London.⁴⁴ By the end of 1945 this instruction *had* actually been implemented, and on November 30, 1945 the British “issued a confidential directive...permitting Jews to be housed in separate accommodations reserved exclusively for them.” Still, this only sanctioned separation within DP camps, rather than entire camps reserved for Jews like those created in the U.S. zone.⁴⁵ Despite Britain’s deficient resources, they operated dozens of DP camps, most with few inhabitants, in their zone. It was not for lack of space that Jews and non-Jews remained in the same camps.

At Belsen, a new British camp commander took charge in November 1945. British reporters during a December visit “heard suggestions that the previous commandant had been inclined toward anti-Semitism,” whereas a DP claimed ““he was not so much anti-Semitic as more or less anti- DP.””⁴⁶ According to a press release (authorized by the British Control Commission based in Berlin, meaning it could well have been sanitized to further British political goals), the group found the DP camp in conditions “that had greatly improved since Major Murphy took command....” Leaders of the Jewish and non-Jewish (Polish) contingents were both interviewed, and they were “unanimous in their praise of Major Murphy,” but still lamented poor food, fuel, and clothing allotments.⁴⁷ Whether or not the “suggestions” of prior anti-Semitism were as mild as the press release makes them out to be, a concrete change such as replacing the commander of Belsen, which had the largest

⁴⁴ “Minutes of Military Government Conference held on 12/13 October 1945 at Main Headquarters, Control Commission for Germany (British Element), Lübbecke,” *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. V, Sec/Misc/M(45)9* [C 7581/24/18], 214-226, 221.

⁴⁵ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 171.

⁴⁶ Confidential press release, Control Commission for Germany (British Element), Political Division, Jewish Refugees File, *Post-War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Jewish DP population of camps in any zone, was a smart move, one that also mirrored the American insistence for personnel review.⁴⁸

Other British reforms reflected not only the desire to help DPs but to keep critics at bay. Since the end of the war, the British had continued to restrict contact between British Jewish relief groups and DPs, because, as Arieh Kochavi asserts, “the occupation authorities and the War Office were afraid that visits of Jewish representatives from Britain would lead to increased pressure...to change its policy....”⁴⁹ In October 1945, however, in an attempt to “forestall criticism” from the Americans and others, Foreign Office operative George Rendel suggested that outside Jewish aid workers be given “‘the fullest access to their co-religionists,’ a policy supported by the War Office.”⁵⁰ No doubt this was helpful and important – relief organizations had been clamoring to assist from the beginning – but it was proposed by Rendel as a substitute for actual policy improvements. Similarly, only after great pressure did the British appoint an adviser on Jewish affairs, Colonel Robert Solomon. “His main task,” Hagit Lavsky writes, “was to bring special Jewish needs to the attention of the British military authorities and to smooth as much as possible the complicated relationship between the Jews and the British.”⁵¹ Solomon did bring many issues to the attention of the British, but predictably they were not what London wanted to hear. As we will see in Chapter Four, his recommendations for increased immigration allotments to Palestine, for instance, fell on deaf ears.⁵²

⁴⁸ Nearly 10,000 at the time; “Jewish Displaced Persons – Conditions at Belsen,” Control Commission (British Element), November 25, 1945, *Post-War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950*.

⁴⁹ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 37.

⁵⁰ “Mr. Bevin to the Earl of Halifax (Washington)” No. 9986 Telegraphic [WR 2947/4/48] *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. V*, 183.

⁵¹ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 99.

⁵² See Chapter Four for a brief discussion of these recommendations and their reception.

Infiltrates and New Challenges

A major factor that tested the willingness of both Allied forces to consider new DP policies was the growing flow of refugees moving from Eastern Europe to occupied Germany, and once again, British decisions reflected an ongoing reluctance to liberalize policy. As anti-Semitic violence actually increased in late 1945 and in 1946 in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and elsewhere, outside groups began orchestrating illegal aliyah for European Jews, and word spread that occupied Germany would be an easy place for Jews to emigrate from.⁵³ Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer, who left Poland for Palestine on the eve of World War II, penned the first seminal volume on the infiltrates. In the preface, Bauer writes that in four years after Europe's liberation, a quarter million Jews traveled from Eastern Europe to the Allied occupied nations. He also established the name *Brichah*, which means flight in Hebrew, both for "the mass move itself...and [the] organization that was behind most, but by no means all, of this migratory movement."⁵⁴ These thousands of infiltrates would take up space in the DP camps – space that did not necessarily exist.

Once the idea of Zionist Jews entering the British zone became known in London, concrete steps were taken to stop the flow of infiltrates, and the British maintained strict control within, to, and from their zone. In December 1945, the U.K. "ruled that those who infiltrated by any route would no longer be admitted to their DP centers," although due to the severe needs of the population this cut-off date was pushed to August 10, 1946.⁵⁵ Furthermore, if infiltrates even made it to a British DP camp they were then refused rations and other supplies.⁵⁶ Despite the U.K.'s ongoing

⁵³ The threat of increasingly Communist governments, especially in Poland, also played a role in this exodus, but as Anna Holian writes, it was truly tangential to the Jews, whose main concern was passage to Palestine.

⁵⁴ Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970), vii.

⁵⁵ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 28.

⁵⁶ Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*, 268.

financial strife, which surely played into this policy, this seems questionable for humanitarian reasons. The British also (somewhat cruelly) enlisted the Jewish DP police in Belsen to find and report “illegals” to the authorities.⁵⁷ The British thus made the distinction that since some of the infiltrees had not directly been persecuted by the Nazis, they did not merit the special help and treatment provided in the DP camps.

The consequences of British policy soon became consequences for the American zone: as Buchholz writes, “because the British authorities refused to grant [infiltrating] refugees the status of displaced persons, the vast majority of them went to the American Zone.”⁵⁸ Importantly, then, the eastern end of Brichah operations deliberately steered Jews toward the U.S. zone. As reported in early 1946, reasons for the influx of infiltrees to the American zone specifically included “the expectation of generous treatment, the probability of finding relations there, the special activity in America on behalf of Jewish relief, and the feeling that the American zone was on the shortest route to Palestine.”⁵⁹ It was simply more likely that an infiltree could obtain official DP status in the American zone and thus become eligible to receive food and shelter, participate in educational or cultural programs, apply for legal immigration *or* more easily attempt illegal immigration to Palestine. Furthermore, there were political motives for the underground Brichah’s decision: “the more Jews brought into the U.S. Zone of Occupation and the more pressure put on the Americans to feed and house the refugees, the more the United States would urge Britain to relax its

⁵⁷ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 54.

⁵⁸ *Bergen-Belsen: Wehrmacht POW Camp, 1940-1945, Concentration Camp, 1943-1945, Displaced Persons Camp, 1945-1950*, ed. Marlis Buchholz, trans. Georg Felix Harsch (Gottingen: Wallstein Verlag, with Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation, 2010), exhibition catalog, 325.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry regarding the problems of European Jewry and Palestine*, (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1946); 11.

restrictions on emigration,” write Konigseder and Wetzel.⁶⁰ Administrative decisions thus greatly affected the network’s operations and in turn wielded power over refugees’ life-changing choices. Jane Zelmanowitz, a Polish Jew who had spent the war working for the Soviets in Russia, remembered, “I heard the best thing is to go to the American zone. There we will have a chance to travel.”⁶¹ Of course, travel here is code for emigration.

While the British closed their borders and the doors of the DP camps to infiltrees, the U.S. maintained somewhat of an “open door” policy. This was in part due to domestic politics and concerns. Bauer writes that American Jewry and groups like the Joint advocated in Washington for liberal policies toward the newest refugees, and apparently a major State Department official on DP affairs, General John Hilldring, “was thoroughly sympathetic to Jewish DPs. On July 31 [1946] he wrote a letter to the [Joint] which reflected the thinking of the State Department. He expressed the hope that the number of persecutees entering the U.S. zone would be kept at a minimum, but he added that the policy of the government was definitely to keep the door open to those who came.”⁶² That same summer, however, a public statement from General Joseph McNarney, the military governor of the U.S. zone, seemed to renege on the open door policy and declared that the occupation forces would prohibit “large scale” and “organized” waves of refugees, into the zone. This was met with widespread criticism from American Jews, which in turn led to another announcement the following month. This time, McNarney “clarified” his original meaning. As Yehuda Bauer posits, General McNarney reinterpreted policy due to the domestic pressure: in his new statement the General explicitly approved the entry of refugees

⁶⁰ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 46.

⁶¹ Jane Zelmanowitz, interview by Sidney Burke, March 17, 1997, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁶² Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*, 246.

from Poland and “that groups coming should not be larger than 100 – the definition of an organized movement being 100 or more at a time.”⁶³ Of course, this led to groups of infiltrees crossing the border into the U.S. zone no more than ninety-nine at a time.

Pulling from UNRRA and Joint Distribution Committee documents from 1946, Konigseder and Wetzel provide hard statistics that illustrate the impact of British policy on both zones: there were 9,000 registered Jewish DPs at Belsen (home to the vast majority of Jewish DPs in the zone) in January 1946, a figure which only rose to just over 11,000 in August of that year. In contrast, the U.S. zone registered 36,000 Jews by January 1946, and in October that number had nearly quadrupled to 141,000.⁶⁴ Moreover, Mankowitz asserts that at the end of 1946 two-thirds of the Jews left in the American zone “had not been personally and directly caught up in Nazi policies of terror, torture and killing.”⁶⁵ The British wanted refugees to play by the book – even if infiltrees were victims of Nazi persecution, or of postwar anti-Semitic violence, their move west after the British government decided to close the borders marked them ineligible for certain assistance and benefits. Meanwhile, despite some political back-and-forth, the Americans continued to accept infiltrees into the zone and into its DP camps. The issue of infiltrees only continued, and will be explored further in Chapter Four, specifically with respect to their attempts at illegal immigration to Palestine and Allied immigration politics.

Policy Reform and the UNRRA

Another complicating factor, as DP policies were questioned by both the British and Americans in the second half of 1945, was the state of the UNRRA. As Harrison had made abundantly clear, the UNRRA had a shaky start in its efforts to

⁶³ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 249.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁵ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 19.

assist DPs, and the supposed division of labor between the Allies and the UNRRA was breaking down. Major Heymont wrote, for instance, that in preparing for colder weather at Landsberg an UNRRA official and his team “had done nothing about the fuel situation. Mr. Craddock had assumed that the Army would, in some mysterious way, take care of it at the proper time.”⁶⁶ Heymont, however, also noted that the Army – until his arrival in August 1945 – “obviously did nothing more than ensure that rations were delivered to the camp.”⁶⁷ There was clearly a lack of communication at the outset between the groups at the Landsberg camp and likely elsewhere. Some members of the armed forces were unwilling to relinquish power to the Administration and perceived the UNRRA and outside aid groups as incompetent.⁶⁸ Although the UNRRA was technically supposed to take an active role, Hagit Lavsky asserts that after liberation and through 1945 “responsibility for the DP population fell largely upon the military occupation authorities.” Since the scope of the DP problem far surpassed the UNRRA and the Allied forces’ expectations, the Administration simply “did not have enough qualified personnel.”⁶⁹ The task was just too big for both the underprepared UNRRA and overwhelmed militaries to successfully divide.

These issues were not news to either of the Western Allies, and in the fall and winter of 1945 both governments spent time and effort to improve the effectiveness of the Administration. In October, British official George Rendel wrote that the “UNRRA really played no part to speak of in the work of repatriating displaced persons, which was one of the first tasks that the armies had to deal with as they advanced into Germany; and the original schemes worked out...in the early days of

⁶⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 12.

⁶⁹ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 34.

UNRRA were, more or less, forgotten.”⁷⁰ To add insult to injury, Rendel went on to write that “the military authorities did a grand job in getting back vast numbers of displaced persons with the utmost speed from the occupied areas, and we began to wonder whether there would be any work left for UNRRA to do.”⁷¹ Instead of determining that the Administration was completely useless, the Foreign Office decided that going forward the best job for the UNRRA would be continued work on the repatriation of remaining displaced persons in the Western occupied zones. As typical of the British policymakers, this decision once again ignored the DPs’ notions of emigration and resettlement. The UNRRA would become, if the British had their way, an unpopular organization doing an extremely unpopular task – perhaps the U.K. was interested in making the UNRRA, rather than the British occupation forces, into the “bad guys.”

The following month, the U.S. government also took steps to cement their support for the UNRRA. In a speech before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, William Clayton (the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs) acknowledged the troubles that had plagued the UNRRA but suggested renewed support by the member nations was necessary: “In reviewing the criticisms which had been leveled at UNRRA in the past and the corrective measures that might be taken to improve participation in UNRRA activities by member nations, the United States Delegation felt that the governments concerned should take a more active interest in furnishing supplies, services, and competent personnel to UNRRA.”⁷² The State Department’s view was that a rejection of the UNRRA would be a rejection of the

⁷⁰ “Letter from Sir G. Rendel: H.M.G. support UNRRA's caring for DPs in W. Zones of Germany,” *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. V*, 205-207, 205.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 205-206.

⁷² “Statement by the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Clayton) before the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, November 14, 1945,” *Documents on American Foreign Relations* Vol. VIII, 365-368, 367.

efficacy of international cooperation. In December, Congress duly approved the doubling of an already large budget for U.S. contribution to the UNRRA (the British could surely not afford something similar), as well as an extension of the Administration's planned "life" from 1946 to 1947.⁷³ Unlike the British, at this point in time the State Department did not express specific ideas or concerns for what the UNRRA should be doing, and whether it supported the British vision of repatriation help.

In late 1945, an alleged "American press campaign" maligning the British treatment of Jewish DPs came to London's attention. An officer from the Berlin headquarters followed up immediately, and issued a counter-report detailing adequate conditions: "Jews are kept separate from other DPs in the camp," it read. The leader of the British Central Committee, Josef Rosensaft was cited as well, saying "that he was well satisfied with the efforts that have been made by authorities to better the conditions."⁷⁴ The final paragraph of the report reads:

Much of this information has been given to you before in response to complaints from Jewish sources outside Germany. The state of DPs in the British zone should be looked at against the background of general conditions of Western Europe as a whole. Against this background there seems very little ground for the present criticism of the conditions of the DPs, but every effort continues to be made for its improvement.⁷⁵

Clearly the British chafed at negative representation in the press of their role in occupied Germany, and the government really did want to improve; there is very little in this statement to separate it from Eisenhower's defensive retort to Harrison several months before. But the Americans consistently took on what I think of as "offensive" or "aggressive" reforms rather than more "defensive" or "responsive" ones as the

⁷³ "Joint Resolution to Enable the United States to Further Participate in the Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Approved December 18, 1945," *Documents on Foreign Relations* Vol. VIII, 368-369.

⁷⁴ "Jewish Displaced Persons – Conditions at Belsen."

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

British did. The U.K. only acted when it was most necessary to change policies, while the U.S. could afford – economically and politically – to call for more wide-ranging improvements to DP camps and go the extra mile to meet some of the Jews’ requests. As we will see in the following chapters, though, a persistent unwillingness to conceive of the Jewish DPs as a unique interest group hindered further policy reform.

CHAPTER THREE: COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY CREATION IN THE DP CAMPS

In the midst of policy discussion and disagreement on either side of the Atlantic in late 1945, the DP camps were abuzz with debate and activity. If the Allies were changing policy slowly, if at all, the DPs would have to be activists on their own. And thus, out of the ashes of the horror that was the Holocaust, many Jewish DPs chose to work together and build new communities *within* the camps in order to achieve better futures outside them. The groups and initiatives organized by enterprising DPs ran the gamut from political structures to education to art. The DPs' endeavors were supported to varying degrees by the Allies, and despite limitations – mainly from the British authorities – these efforts were ways to reclaim a collective Jewish identity the DPs could affirm and celebrate together, while also presenting a united front to the Allied powers.

Organization of the Belsen Committee

As mentioned in Chapter One, Central Committees of each zone formed as soon as concentration camps were liberated in order to “shoulder the responsibility for shaping their own future.”¹ While the Allies often characterized the DPs as helpless, their organization efforts contest this notion. In both zones, Central Committees oversaw the creation of groups that were specifically intended to give the DPs more responsibility and autonomy to self-govern the camps they were stuck in. In the British zone, the Central Committee was based at Belsen, and thus functioned like the camp's individual committee as well as the committee of the entire zone.² According to aid worker Zippy Orlin, a member of the Jewish South African community who

¹ Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, trans. John A Broadwin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 79.

² This was the case until 1947, when a separate camp committee at Belsen was finally formed.

joined the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee cohort at Belsen, and who wrote about her experiences in 1949, the committee was “responsible for the smooth functioning of the camp, for the distribution of food and clothing, and for the education of the children - in short, for the well-being of the people in every respect.”³ The Committee had an integral role in facilitating day-to-day operations of the camps, communication with allies and advocates outside Germany, and cooperation with the military and relief workers who helped run Belsen.

The Committee wanted to act “as the government of the DP camp,” and, as Marlis Buchholz writes, the group was “organized in line with the model of an independent state.”⁴ The Committee President, Dr. Josef Rosensaft, was the executive figure. Next came the General Secretary, Dov Laufer, and then other members in charge of different departments such as Health (Hadassah Bimko), Economics (Karl Katz and Samuel Weintraub), Religion and the rabbinate (Hermann Helfgott), Culture and the newspaper (David Rosenthal, Paul Trepman, and Rafael Olevsky), the Theater (Sami Feder), and relations with non-camp Jews (Norbert Wollheim).⁵ The highly organized and centralized committee paralleled the cabinet of a democratic state despite being stuck in the camp, and in this way the Jewish DP leaders sought to express the freedom they felt they deserved. Since DPs were literally stateless, the Committee’s governmental structure gave them “citizenry” of the camp rather than a nation. Each group was responsible for the successful function of one segment of life in the DP camps, and the Committee, importantly, also

³ Zippy Orlin, “What it’s really like in a DP Camp: A South African girl in Belsen,” in Erik Somers and Ren Kok, eds, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950: the Unique Photo Album of Zippy Orlin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2004), 154-161, 155; originally published in *The Zionist Record*, March 4, 1949.

⁴ *Bergen-Belsen: Wehrmacht POW Camp, 1940-1945, Concentration Camp, 1943-1945, Displaced Persons Camp, 1945-1950*, ed. Marlis Buchholz, trans. Georg Felix Harsch (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, with Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation, 2010), exhibition catalog, 336

⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

represented the German Jewish survivors who resided outside DP camps thanks to Wollheim.⁶ The organization and structure of the British Central Committee was a concerted attempt of the DPs to take control over their own lives rather than being controlled by someone else. Despite the Committee's strong organizational structure and involvement in many aspects of camp life, the British government refused to officially recognize that the group even existed.⁷ Without the legitimacy that official recognition would bring, Jewish DPs continued to find it difficult to influence British policy at higher levels.

In Josef Rosensaft's own words, the Committee's concrete priorities after liberation were "the physical rehabilitation of the survivors; the search for relatives, if any; the political fight for our rights; [and] spiritual rehabilitation."⁸ After a few months, the latter two goals ascended in their importance after the first two were, for better or worse, resolved; Rosensaft also maintained in 1951 that "the political struggle took precedence over other tasks...."⁹ According to Hagit Lavsky, the Committee took on the task of becoming the liaison between the Jewish DPs and the outside world, and the group "embarked upon a broad range of semigovernmental activities: partnership with world Jewish organizations, political activism, and diplomatic efforts on behalf of the survivors."¹⁰ These endeavors were taken very seriously by executive members of the committee. Rosensaft, frustrated by the continuous lack of support from the British government, even traveled to the United States in 1945 against orders from the U.K., meeting with members of the American

⁶ Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 111.

⁷ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 171.

⁸ Josef Rosensaft, "Our Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'haezor Habriti, 1957), 24-51, 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 111.

government and the Jewish public.¹¹ This defiant move showed the British that the DP leadership was willing to resort to other means to try and get what they wanted, including contacting the other Allied power.

Law and Order at Belsen

Several quasi-governmental organizations that grew out of the Belsen committee were seen by the British as particularly threatening to British control over the DPs and the camp. A primary example of DP-led action in the camps were DP police forces. Hagit Lavsky, historian of the British zone, and from whom much of the background about activities at Belsen comes, writes that the Belsen Jewish police was created in December of 1945 in response to an attack on the Jewish community by non-Jewish Polish DPs.¹² Since the original DP police were also non-Jewish Poles, the Jewish DPs felt it was in their best interest to create their own police forces to actually protect Jewish interests.¹³ The Jewish-only police forces provided an effective buffer against anti-Semitic harassment from non-Jewish DPs, as Jews did not trust the British or non-Jewish DP police to necessarily provide adequate protection.¹⁴ Furthermore, the police force was just one way Jewish DPs perpetuated an identity separate from that of the remaining non-Jewish DPs.¹⁵

After its formation, however, the fledgling police force was in perpetual contestation with the British, who blocked the Jews' efforts to obtain uniforms and

¹¹ Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 193.

¹² Lavsky became important since few primary sources about the political or cultural activities existed, especially in English. Her scholarship draws primarily on Yiddish documentation from the Central Committee.

¹³ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 199.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Buchholz*, 313; non-Jewish Poles in particular remained a relatively large population in Belsen until August of 1946, when most were repatriated or admitted to the U.S. or Canada.

carry weapons.¹⁶ Despite these limitations, Zippy Orlin recalled that the Belsen police force “was 200 strong and maintained law and order for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Police guards were placed at every exit and entrance to the camp, and they supervised all incoming and outgoing traffic. No job was too small or too big for these men.”¹⁷ She also noted that the policemen always “marched at the head of every parade, and supervised all large gatherings.”¹⁸ Rosensaft remembered in retrospect the important role the Jewish police had in maintaining the peace: they “fulfilled a very difficult and thankless task. Their unfailing tact and discipline throughout the years, and especially when we shared the camp with other nationalities, contributed much towards the peace and good order of the camp.”¹⁹ According to these sources, the Jewish DP policemen were important pillars of the community.

One of the major tasks the Jewish police took on was to monitor black market activity in Belsen.²⁰ The DPs thought the British were excessively concerned with the black market, and also accused British officials of stereotyping Jews unjustly as embedded in the black market system. At Belsen the “military authorities had declared an all-out war on the black market, so...[to the DPs] the only way to keep out external intervention was to have Jews do the policing.”²¹ This, however, was an uphill battle to actually implement. Lavsky asserts that “the British authorities

¹⁶ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 119.

¹⁷ Orlin, “What it’s really like,” 155.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rosensaft, “Our Belsen,” 35.

²⁰ The black market in general was a huge concern of the Allies in occupied Germany, in or out of the DP camps.

²¹ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 118; the DPs in their policing of the black market probably turned a blind eye to certain minor offenses, but specific British and American individuals absolutely did the same despite overarching policies against black market dealings. In fact probably most Allied officials took advantage of the black market at some point. More about this topic is found in Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007) and throughout Irving Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust, 1945: the Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont, United States Army* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1982).

insisted on being the sole authority in the [black market] sphere, imposing curfews and conducting raids as if the Jewish force were nonexistent.”²² Nevertheless, in choosing to regulate illegal activities themselves, and managing a police force “without any outside help,” the Committee aimed to prove its efficacy by judging Jews fairly yet compassionately, which was, in the DPs’ opinions, not necessarily a feature of the British administration.²³ The self-differentiated and autonomous group of the Jewish police demonstrated that they were strongly intent on maintaining their own institutions made up of Jews, for Jews. When they took control of some of the policing, even if it was not comprehensive, Jews at Belsen took control of their own community’s needs, asserting what agency they did have in the camp environment and creating more autonomy while doing so.

Another feature of the Jewish Committee at Belsen was their camp court system. Although we know that these courts existed, and provided some kind of nominal judicial function, little information (at least that is translated into English from Yiddish) exists about them. Some can be extrapolated from the secondary sources, and there will be more in-depth discussion of the American incarnations of these courts later in this chapter. According to Lavsky, a camp court system was developed in the spring of 1946 by the Central Committee, but was only ever implemented at Belsen.²⁴ She also posits that it is unclear how effective this institution was, while Konigseder and Wetzel offer more information, writing that it “ruled on cases involving larceny, counterfeiting, the receipt of stolen goods, embezzlement, and the abuse of one’s position.” This last example included the arrests and trials of former kapos, the concentration camp inmates chosen by the

²² Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 119.

²³ *Buchholz*, 336.

²⁴ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 118.

Nazis to help enforce rules in concentration camps who often resorted to cruel tactics in order to save their own lives.²⁵

The Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria

The American zone, like the British, was temporary home to Jewish DPs who took on the large project of organizing and rebuilding a community amongst the rubble.²⁶ The Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria, as mentioned in Chapter One, officially formed in July 1945. The American Central Committee set out particular goals, and its ratification resolution stated:

In the shadow of the gas chambers and the fires of the crematoria, in view of the Jewish blood that has been spilled, we call upon the former Jewish inmates in Bavaria, upon the yishuv in Erets Yisrael, upon the whole Jewish people, to united and forget the partisan struggles that have deprived the Jews of so much of their strength...so that together we may build a Jewish state!²⁷

This resolution made it clear that the DPs were drawing upon a strong national identity, not just a religious or cultural one. The underpinning philosophy of the American Central Committee was an insistence on cooperation between Jews across the world toward a Jewish state. Like in the British zone, the governing structure of the Central Committee was made to echo a democratic state. On August 8, 1945 the Committee elected its members: five from Munich and three each from Feldafing and Landsberg.²⁸ The Central Committee saw itself, Mankowitz writes, as “the democratically elected representative of the Surviving Remnant, responsible for their welfare and rehabilitation while in Germany and committed to expediting their

²⁵ Ibid., 120; Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 199-200, the latter found more information than Lavsky, and used documentation from YIVO (Institute for Jewish Research) files in New York City.

²⁶ The Central Committee is fascinating, but most of the important primary source material, like that of the British Committee, is only available in archives in Israel and New York (much is in Yiddish). I will draw in this section mainly on Zeev Mankowitz and Konigseder and Wetzel, who have consulted many of these Yiddish documents.

²⁷ YIVO folio 135, quoted in Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 81.

²⁸ Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101.

departure for Palestine or any other destination.”²⁹ While emigration was the eventual goal, which reflects a broader theme of this study, one of the Committee’s strategies to achieve this goal was to act as liaison between the American Army and government and UNRRA, “to fight for the official recognition of the Jews as a people, for separate camps with internal autonomy and for improvement of supplies and services.”³⁰

The American administration and military officials were at first hesitant to recognize and work with the Central Committee of Bavaria. At a meeting at Feldafing, according to Konigseder and Wetzel, the Committee “was obliged to call itself an ‘information bureau’” since the U.S. military was unwilling to officially recognize the committee.³¹ As the months passed, however, various American officials came around to the idea that recognizing and sanctioning the Committee’s activities would not only empower and help the DPs, but remove some of the strain of governing and administrating from the occupation forces. At a zone-wide gathering in early 1946, a newly elected slate of leaders for the Central Committee “set about tightening up its organizational structure and developing a wide variety of new initiatives.” Relations with the army were renewed, and Americans consulted with camp committees in regard to “efficiency and democratic procedures,” in line of course with the American goals of democratization within their zone.³²

Despite the group’s intention to represent all Jews in the U.S. zone, tension surrounded the relationship of DPs in camps to those who were trying to resettle in German towns, and this in turn affected the Committee’s relationship to U.S. officials. DPs were most aware of, involved in, and loyal to the Committee in the Munich area, and small groups of German Jewish survivors, usually living outside DP camps, were

²⁹ Ibid., 102.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 81.

³² Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 120.

consistently underrepresented or simply ignored by the Central Committee.³³

Although the Committee proclaimed zone-wide and even worldwide Jewish unity, Ostjuden – Eastern European Jews, a group at times maligned by anti-Semites and Western European Jews alike – made up the vast majority of nonrepatriable DPs in camps, and thus made up the leadership of the Committee. Tensions between the largely Eastern European Committee and non-camp German Jews led to a rift and a lack of communication in the U.S. zone.³⁴

The main manifestation of the Committee's lack of communication was their insistence on administrative control over the zone: the Committee wanted to be the *only* voice and representation for Jewish survivors in the U.S. zone, but dismissed the German Jewish survivors' presence and any of their preexisting community associations. The Committee's charter stated that "the committee claimed to be the successor to the former German Jewish communities, associations, and federations, including successor to the rights of their assets."³⁵ The U.S. saw this as problematic. While the British authorities continued to refuse that zone's committee official recognition, the issue of "sole representation" was the determining factor for U.S. recognition of the Central Committee in Bavaria. Konigseder and Wetzel, building off of Wetzel's earlier (German language) scholarship on postwar Jews in Munich, assert that authorities from the office of General Joseph McNarney, Governor of the U.S. zone after Eisenhower, "studied the charter and were appalled at the political and financial demands it imposed. They reported that the Central Committee would not be formally recognized until it had written a new democratic charter and had

³³ Herbert Friedman, interview by Michael Berenbaum, 30 June 1999, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation; Munich held the headquarters of the Central Committee for most of its existence.

³⁴ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

renounced its claim to be the sole representative of the Jewish survivors.”³⁶ The Committee duly made these changes, but after McNarney’s approval and subsequent legal recognition in September 1946, it still seems the non-camp survivors’ voices were left out of the equation. This technically conformed to the new amendment, but brings up interesting questions about the DPs’ conception of post-Holocaust Jewish identity. How did DP leaders justify the exclusion of non-camp Jews? Many Ostjuden in the DP camps saw German Jews as “assimilationists,” to use Mankowitz’s phrasing, and not true participants in the new Jewish identity.³⁷ If some Jews were willing to (re)settle in Germany, did that not necessitate a continued identification and relationship with the nation and the people that created the Jews’ worst oppression? Resurrecting German Jewish communities also by nature went against the notion of Jewish statehood and DPs’ generally Zionist impulses.

The proclamation of Jewish unity was lacking not just between different types of Jews in the American zone, but also between the committees of the two zones. The sources are not clear-cut about whether the British or American Central Committee was more to blame for the breakdown in relations between the two organizations, but the U.S. zone’s DP Committee, as seen above, was more exclusionary in general. At an early meeting of DP representatives from both zones in July 1945, according to Hagit Lavsky, historian of the British zone, the proceedings were “in practice...run by the leaders of the American Zone alone and failed to establish a united organization for the whole of Germany.”³⁸ This was perhaps implicit exclusion of British DPs, who were a smaller population in number that also lacked the relative support of the

³⁶ Ibid., 88.

³⁷ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 245; for more on the recreation of Jewish life and communities in Germany – although this study emphasizes the desire of Jews to leave, a small amount of them stayed in the occupied zones, mostly German in origin – Michael Brenner’s *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) is the most comprehensive book on the subject.

³⁸ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 75.

American military and some policymakers. Zeev Mankowitz, a scholar of the American zone, writes instead that “the survivors in Bergen-Belsen...broke away from the Committee in Munich,” thus placing the impetus for a split on the British zone DPs.³⁹ In any case, by July of 1945 the two zones’ Central Committees largely went their separate ways.⁴⁰

Law and Order in the U.S. Zone

As in the British zone and Belsen, DP police forces were formed in American zone DP camps, but these camp police, under the jurisdiction of camp committees, were more effective at working in tandem with the camp administration. The DP police at American zone camps dealt with a wide range of issues, from theft to trespassing. Daniel Kurlancheek of Feldafing was part of that camp’s police force. In the 1990s, he mostly remembered guarding the camp from people who should not enter – who exactly he does not specify, but most likely local Germans or others without DP identification and with no need to be in the camp.⁴¹ Major Irving Heymont commented that the Landsberg camp committee was anxious to improve its police force; it was “extremely desirous of taking over the guard from [the U.S. military] as soon as possible.”⁴² The American Army even sponsored a special “DP Police Training School.”⁴³ In contrast to the British, who were hesitant to relinquish control to camp police forces, the Americans were positively liberal with their rules on policing. In the U.S. zone DPs had the approval and encouragement of the American forces to use their own policing efforts.

³⁹ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 51.

⁴⁰ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 84.

⁴¹ Daniel Kurlancheek, interview by Seymour Levin, September 7, 1997, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁴² Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Overall, the largest concern for DP police – as it was in the British zone – was black market activity, but in the American zone the DP police had more latitude to actually discipline such activity. Konigseder and Wetzel note a meeting that took place in November 1946 among the police chiefs of the four largest DP camps in the U.S. zone, in which camp police forces came together and made a multistep plan to combat the black market.⁴⁴ This did not mean, however, that the DP police strictly cracked down on all such activities, but interpreted them in their own ways. As Atina Grossmann writes after in-depth interviews with Helen Tichauer, a Czechoslovak survivor and Feldafing DP whose husband Erwin was DP police chief of that camp:

[t]he police...were careful to observe certain limits; they tried to control the ever problematic unsanctioned cattle slaughtering and egregious black-market offenses, for example, trafficking in fake penicillin with water-filled ampoules, but not the ordinary gray-market dealings that exchanged cigarettes for fresh vegetables or a pretty fabric.⁴⁵

Although Konigseder and Wetzel note how difficult it is to “judge how rigorous the camp police really were in dealing with the” black market,⁴⁶ Tichauer’s account suggests that there were levels of severity acknowledged, and a blind eye turned for more minor deals.

As in the British zone, DPs in the American zone had camp courts to further enforce law and order. Also like the British zone, camp courts were not officially recognized (in contrast with the U.S.’ recognition of DP police), but tolerated. The American authorities did continually butt heads with the DPs over the DP courts’ jurisdiction. Although the DPs were technically subject to American military law while in the camps, and thus their courts were illegal, they continued to use their own system and the Americans continued to (usually) quietly accept its existence.

⁴⁴ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 134.

⁴⁵ Atina Grossmann, “Chapter 4: Living On, Remembering Feldafing,” 72-94 in *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations*, ed. by Jürgen Matthäus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 86.

⁴⁶ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 135.

Sometimes a camp court ruling would be overturned or deemed inappropriate by the Americans. Courts became another means for Jewish DPs to take their lives and communities into their own hands, rather than be run by outside forces. The camp courts largely dealt with three types of cases: “civil disputes between camp residents...criminal offenses committed by Jews in the DP camps, and...cases in which former Kapos...and ghetto policemen were accused of having mistreated their fellow Jews [during the war].”⁴⁷ At Feldafing, the camp court system was quite strong and established. It “launched a project to codify laws for the camp in 1946 and led a movement to standardize law” for all Jewish DP courts in the American zone. In a stunning example of trust on the part of the occupying forces, the courts of Feldafing even “helped investigate the perpetrators of the Kielce pogrom of 1946.”⁴⁸

Some camps, like Föhrenwald, elected judges for their court. The courts were often busy with tasks that ranged from the downright trivial – a library book out too long – to the serious – a DP policeman threatening several other DPs with a knife.⁴⁹ DPs were also involved in the efforts to keep the peace inside camps. Survivor Solomon Fromer remembered acting as a juror in a trial that the camp court put on at Landsberg. Fromer and two others – chosen for their “unblemished past[s]” – sentenced a former kapo to two years in prison for collaborating with the Germans because he had maltreated quite a few Jewish inmates during the war.⁵⁰ The DPs’ ability to contribute to decisions such as this highlights the importance of the central and camp committees’ dedication to community involvement: Fromer did not have a leadership role at Landsberg, but was still asked to participate in a system that

⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Feldafing,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007030>.

⁴⁹ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 138.

⁵⁰ Solomon Fromer, interview by Esther Stearnes, September 13, 1995, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

mimicked the democratic and judicial processes of an independent state. At a higher level, the Central Committee based in Munich also had its Honor Court, or *Ehrengerichte*. Tichauer recalled that major offenses, such as “selling DP identity cards to Germans, probably Nazis trying to steal their identity,” were settled there.⁵¹ This institution also dealt with disagreements or debates between DPs and the Central Committee.⁵² In this way, the Central Committee functioned with checks and balances on its powerful role in the U.S. zone.

Ultimately, the committees in the British and American zones and their associated organizations of policing and law were an important part of gaining some autonomy from the camp administration. While DPs in the American zone typically received more support and backing both for committees’ actual existence and their quasi-legal organizations, the British authorities spent more effort limiting the committee’s role in keeping control and order.

Major Heymont and the Landsberg Camp Committee: A Case Study

Camp committees too, became locally strong entities. The best example I encountered of the relationship of an Allied official to a Jewish DP community is the experience of Irving Heymont, commander of the Landsberg DP camp during the turbulent second half of 1945. Heymont, at the tender age of 27, was thrust into an incredible situation when he was placed in the Landsberg camp in mid-September of 1945. Heymont had already spent the majority of the war years in Europe, had liberated a sub-camp of Dachau with his division, and was Jewish in heritage but not in practice.⁵³ During his several month tenure as camp commander of Landsberg,

⁵¹ Grossmann, “Living On,” 86.

⁵² Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 139.

⁵³ In fact, while at Landsberg Major Heymont deliberately chose not to divulge to the DPs that he was Jewish; Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 109.

documented in letters to his wife that he later published, Heymont described the monumental project it was to run the camp and also to empower the DPs. Heymont's voice through the letters illuminates the ways in which the struggle between order and humanitarianism in the DP camps played out amidst policy changes.

Although he displayed some attitudes typical of an American soldier, including an insistence on cleanliness and short-term improvements before larger issues could be tackled, Heymont took remarkable steps to promote the Landsberg camp committee's autonomy, and encouraged it to take control of the camp's affairs. In his first speech to the Landsberg committee, on September 19, 1945, Major Heymont made a revealing statement about both his goals as camp commander and his strategy for fulfilling them:

Although I had been given the responsibility for the camp, I expected the camp committee gradually to assume all of the responsibility. My ultimate goal, I explained, was to see Landsberg a self-governing community, with the Army only present to help. I told the members that our job was to help them in every possible way – but that their only immediate salvation was to help themselves and that the camp committee must be the agency to accomplish that... For the immediate tasks, I asked them to prepare plans for improved sanitation, betterment of the schools, establishment of central messes... and increasing the number of people available for work.⁵⁴

Heymont could not have been clearer about his intention to hand aspects of self-government over to the DPs, and to limit the army's direct involvement. Crucially, he identified the "immediate tasks" as the material improvements. Heymont wrote that the Army would turn responsibility over to the committee "as rapidly as the committee demonstrated" that it could handle the responsibility.⁵⁵ Heymont also took an interest in members of the community who showed leadership potential. He wrote that "the camp can best be helped by helping Dr. Oleiski – that is, after the camp has

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

been cleaned up.”⁵⁶ Although Major Heymont recognized the importance of leaders like Oleiski, who was an early member of the Landsberg committee, he also asserted that “helping” Oleiski, in whatever form that may have taken, was secondary to cleaning Landsberg. The way for the residents to prove their mettle and for the committee to increase leadership roles, autonomy, and eventual organization to leave, was through the successful implementation of the improvements Heymont asked for, and that the occupying forces overall needed.

After continued dismay over the conditions of the camp, Major Heymont reiterated the primacy of the committee taking responsibility for their surroundings. A week after his initial meeting with the camp committee, Heymont “stressed the importance of getting all available people in the camp to work...” and was met with concern that “the people...were not yet prepared psychologically to be forced to work by anyone.”⁵⁷ The committee also, in Heymont’s words, “keeps after me hammer and tongs to permit complete self-management of the camp...Of course, this is impossible now.”⁵⁸ He decided to make another speech to the residents, and this time used a carrot-and-stick approach. When Heymont announced reforms such as the abolition of a pass system and the removal of tall barbed wire fences, he emphasized again that the only way autonomy could be achieved was through collective action and organization for camp improvement: “I must strongly call your attention to the question of sanitation and cleanliness,” he says. “Now is the time to relearn the habits of work and industry. Now is the time to relearn how to be self-respecting civilized persons.”⁵⁹ Heymont vocalized directly to Landsberg residents a typical American reaction for the DPs to find useful activity, for rehabilitation through work. Heymont

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 27-28.

stated that the DPs have lost their humanity or civilization, undoubtedly not realizing the demeaning nature of his comment.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that Heymont thought he was making a concerted effort to help the DPs, he continued to be met with some resistance. Heymont wrote on October 10, 1945 that his relations with the camp committee were strained, that:

they insist on immediate control of all internal camp activities, and I insist on immediate and consistent minimum cleanliness within the camp...I explained to them for the hundredth or more time that, in clear conscience, I could not recommend that they be given the autonomy they want until it has been demonstrated that they can run a camp that meets our minimum standards of cleanliness.⁶¹

The difference in priorities here could not be clearer. To some Jewish DPs, conditions in Landsberg probably did not seem worthy of emergency action after all they had been through. And, after all, the DP camp was viewed by many as a waypoint: whether their hopes were to eventually return home, make aliyah, or immigrate elsewhere in the world, the DP camps were meant to be temporary – and a less than sparkling bathroom was of little concern.

Different priorities notwithstanding, Major Heymont was by all accounts loved by the Jews of Landsberg, and he made incredible strides in fostering the camp's leadership and self-governing initiatives. Unlike most British officials in either Germany or the U.K., Heymont went above and beyond to help the Landsberg DPs organize, and in October he played a key role in the process of electing a camp committee chairman; the Army, according to Heymont, actually "insist[ed] on having elections."⁶² Heymont found himself "battling with the camp committee on the

⁶⁰ This idea of occupation forces who dehumanized the DPs runs through much of the scholarship on the DP camps; General Patton for instance, made an infamous comment about the disgusting Jews as less than human. See Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies* in particular for more on this phenomenon, of which Heymont is a very subtle example.

⁶¹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 47.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 82.

general conduct of the forthcoming election.”⁶³ While the DPs had hoped to elect a committee which in turn would “appoint the heads of different administrative offices” using a slate system, Heymont did not see this as very democratic. Heymont “contended that in an election you vote for individuals and not parties. The committee insisted that the system they proposed was the one in common use in eastern Europe and the one most familiar to the people of the camp. I refused to budge from my stand. Despite protracted protestations, they finally gave in.”⁶⁴ In the end, the whole camp chose between eleven individuals, and the top six vote-getters would become the committee’s department heads. A candidate for committee chairman, Dr. Samuel Gringauz, who was the incumbent leader, ran unopposed.⁶⁵ Heymont and other American soldiers assisted on election day, which was full of rallies and last minute campaigning – an altogether lively scene. Heymont noted that the Americans “were flattered when all the candidates, winners and losers, thanked us for running the election so efficiently and fairly,” and also wrote that the soldiers were “all very proud of our success in reproducing the mechanics of an American election.”⁶⁶

Heymont commented in the aftermath of the election that it went a long way to spur the committee into action, that “they now find things that have to be corrected without our having to indicate them...I am also glad to see them taking a greater interest in the daily administration of the camp rather than worrying almost exclusively about politics and the great overall picture.”⁶⁷ Heymont thus saw practical reasons for the election. It resulted in some of the short-term improvements he had hoped for all along, and it furthered an American-style trust and appreciation of democracy in the DPs. The Americans’ zeal to promote direct democracy at

⁶³ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 65; 62.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 82.

Landsberg could be attributed to the United States' oft-cited goal in the twentieth century to spread democracy and freedom around the world, and the American – not European – version of democracy at that.

Culture and Society within the DP Camps

Besides maintaining law and order and coordinating political efforts both within and without the DP camps, the other main sphere of influence for the Central and local committees alike was camp cultural life. In comparison with the DP police and courts, social and cultural initiatives of the DP committees were less threatening to the Allies' power structure. Overall, both the British and Americans tolerated these innovations and endeavors within the camp. They helped appease the often disgruntled population of DPs and filled a void that the military definitely could not provide, and one that UNRRA and other aid groups struggled to provide as well. Moreover, the usefulness of social and cultural initiatives went beyond the everyday. As Dr. Jacob Oleiski of Landsberg stated in a 1946 interview with David P. Boder, they had a larger purpose that served to advance the Jews' collective identity and sense of community. Dr. Oleiski stated that, in the DP camps:

You have everything that once existed in the Jewish towns, but with a much greater impetus, in a much broader shape. You have on top a Jewish committee chosen by democratic elections, responsible...for the whole social and cultural life; so that we can say with pride that the Jew has returned again...that in a social and cultural sense he has again risen to the heights.⁶⁸

Education, the arts, and other cultural experiences clearly benefitted the DPs spiritual and moral rehabilitation in important ways. Reclaiming humanity included reacquainting themselves with the social constructs and cultural enjoyment that in part defines the human spirit. Furthermore, in Oleiski's eyes, this reclamation and

⁶⁸ Jacob Oleiski, interview by David Pablo Boder, August 20, 1946, transcript trans. by Boder, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL, accessed February 18, 2015, http://voices.iit.edu/interview?doc=oleiskiJ&display=oleiskiJ_en.

resurgence was specific and meant that, facilitated by the concentration of the DP camps, the DPs' cultural lives *as Jews specifically* had returned. In the Jews' long religious and cultural history, the Jewish DPs had once more begun to triumph over the odds stacked against them.

Educational Initiatives

Education for DPs of all ages was one of the most widespread and important facets of social life at DP camps. DP children in particular were in a unique position – many of them had not experienced a life without tumult and war, much less a normal education. Alex Gringauz (the son of DP leader Samuel Gringauz) remembered later that he got his “first chance at childhood” during his years at Landsberg.⁶⁹ The presence of child survivors – many among them orphans – in the DP camps, an exploding birthrate, and adults' desire to gain skills and training prior to emigration all contributed to education as one of the largest projects for DP committee members and leaders to oversee in both zones. At Belsen, the British Central Committee made education compulsory for all children until age eighteen.⁷⁰ At Landsberg, a wide-ranging educational infrastructure was present. Dr. Jacob Oleiski was a major figure in that camp's education system. In September 1945 Major Heymont described Oleiski's endeavors:

Landsberg has developed a remarkable school system. Despite the paucity of equipment and trained personnel, he had a number of garages converted into classrooms...Children are now learning to read and write. Adolescents, for the first time, are learning trades...nor were the adults neglected. Former shopkeepers and salesmen are learning to work with their hands. A variety of evening courses in cultural subjects is also offered.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Alex Gringauz, interview by Manuel Bekier, January 16, 1997, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁷⁰ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 182.

⁷¹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 12.

Oleiski had actually worked in education in Lithuania before the war for ORT (a group described below). His expertise was welcomed, and Heymont considered his guidance for education and the camp as a whole “remarkable.”⁷²

Education was also such a huge part of camp life that it became one of the main areas that relief and volunteer groups helped to facilitate. The international Zionist organization ORT, which originated in the late nineteenth century to provide training in trades to Russian Jews, became the main operative in the camps in terms of adult education.⁷³ In both zones, ORT programs, classes, and schools all prepared DPs for the future. Many adult DPs had very little education. Thus, education of any type would be of great help after the emigration DPs hoped for: as Dr. Oleiski stated in a 1946 speech, “if [the DP] should not have learned a trade he will be socially, entirely ruined. If he should come to the Land of Israel or any other land without possessing a trade he will go through another disappointment which may lead we know not to what.”⁷⁴ According to an ORT report published in July of 1947, the organization had begun work in the American zone as early as November 1945 “after the signing of a temporary agreement with the UNRRA.”⁷⁵ Growth in the ORT programs in the American zone was rapid from late 1945 through the next few years, and by mid-1947 ORT alone was in charge of 329 different education facilities, 5304 students, and 559 instructors of forty subjects from knitting to welding in the zone.⁷⁶

Although it is hard to extrapolate too much from the single ORT report, its implicit message is that their programs faced more challenges in the British zone.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ World ORT, “About Us,” accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.ort.org/en/about-us/about/>; ORT is the acronym that remains to this day for this organization; it comes from the impressively difficult to pronounce Yiddish moniker *Obshestvo Remeslennogo zemledelcheskogo Truda*, or The Society for Trades and Agricultural Labour.

⁷⁴ Oleiski, *Voices of the Holocaust*.

⁷⁵ *Report on the ORT Activities, August 1946-July 1947* (Paris: ORT Union, 1947), 42.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 45.

Their efforts began at Belsen in December 1945, but ORT wrote that it “faced at the beginning of our work in the British Zone a number of obstacles and difficulties which seemed almost insurmountable.”⁷⁷ A year later, an ORT official named Dr. Lvovitch “reorganized our activities [in the British zone] with the help of Military authorities and of UNRRA.”⁷⁸ We can only assume that there was perhaps tension between ORT officials and the British authorities at the outset. Also, at the same point in 1947 that the statistics on the American zone reflect, ORT in the British zone was only working with 44 instructors and 583 pupils. Their ambitious goal was to increase that to 3000 students by the end of the year.⁷⁹ Although there were fewer Jewish DPs in the British zone, the proportion affected by ORT programming in the U.S. zone far outpaced that of the British zone.

Newspapers and Publishing

The arts also began to flourish in the DP camps. Art of all types became a major outlet for DPs to express themselves, and the committees oversaw and organized these efforts as well. Perhaps some of the most important endeavors were camp periodicals, which served not only as creative outlets but as political tools for the thousands of residents at each camp. The committee at Belsen started the first DP newspaper in Germany when its *Undzer Sztyme* was first printed in July 1945. According to Thomas Rahe, *Undzer Sztyme* “aimed to both inform and to give Jewish DPs a voice to articulate their motives....”⁸⁰ The British Central Committee also published a monthly periodical *Das Monatsheft*, which focused on issues of Jews in

⁷⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁰ Thomas Rahe, “Social Life in the Jewish DP camp at Bergen-Belsen,” in Somers and Kok, 68-81, 78.

Germany overall.⁸¹ The American soldier Bernard Bermack recalled DPs publishing a newspaper at Landsberg. Among the DPs, he said in a 1997 interview, were writers and editors – they wanted a way to use their skills and talents, and to disseminate information. When the DPs wanted something, he stated with a laugh, they had a way of getting it, “one way or another.” Somehow, a printing press ended up at Landsberg, and soon the DPs also procured ink and paper.⁸² Thus the *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung* (Yiddish for Landsberg Camp newspaper) was born, and its first edition was published in October 1945.⁸³ Its content varied from literature to news and opinion pieces. Survivor Leon Borovick recalled writing poems which were published in the Landsberg paper.⁸⁴ Most other DP camps also published newspapers – all in Yiddish to reflect the Eastern European demographic. Feldafing began *Dos Fraye Vort*, or The Free Word, the same month as the *Landsberger Tsaytung*; the Central Committee in Bavaria published its own called *Undzer Veg*, or Our Way.⁸⁵ Besides cultural and literary dissemination through camp newspapers, these publications were also used to trace missing family members and to spread political information and opinions. The *Landsberger Tsaytung*’s editors even criticized the Central Committee in late 1945, writing that its leadership needed less talk and more action.⁸⁶ The following year, the paper followed the pogroms in Poland and subsequent wave of refugees to the American zone: “‘Jews are fleeing,’ wrote the editor of the *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung*, ‘[t]hey flee from East and from West, from North and from South, all are fleeing in the direction of one destination, even though

⁸¹ Konigseder and Wetzl, *Waiting for Hope*, 192.

⁸² Bernard Bermack, interview by Yana Katzap, March 30, 1998, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation. Major Heymont, too, commented that he was “not asking too many questions on this score.” He probably knows that the printing process and materials used were a bit less than legal.

⁸³ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 306.

⁸⁴ Leon Borovick, Feb. 20, 1996, interview by Diane Weinreich, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

⁸⁵ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 306.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

it is so far and so difficult to reach.”⁸⁷ This implicit destination was Palestine. As Zeev Mankowitz asserts in a close analysis of the Landsberg paper, its editors (Rudolf Vasonok and later Samuel Gringauz) used the newspaper to write extensively about their opinions on the state of European Jewry and their ardent belief in Zionism.⁸⁸

Camp publications were also outlets to publicize and spread the word about direct action against Allied officials and policies. In October 1945, *Undzer Szytme* reported about a lack of materials at Belsen and the proposed hunger strike in response:

The supply situation in all camps has sharply deteriorated recently...Because the situation was so serious, a hunger strike was called...A huge crowd of women, men and children formed a demonstration and marched past the British headquarters chanting slogans and carrying banners. A delegation of protesters told the camp's commandant that the camp's inhabitants would not eat until the supply situation was improved. People who were starved in camps for years will not allow the German system of starvation to go on after their liberation.⁸⁹

The very political nature of this article brings up questions about Allied response to this and other DP publications. It is difficult to tell how Allied officials or members of the military government reacted. It is known that for nearly two years *Undzer Szytme* was not sanctioned by the British because of a “strict...rule prohibiting publications in the camps,” but the military government turned a blind eye; it was finally granted a “license to publish” in May 1947.⁹⁰ It is unclear how the Americans reacted to camp newspapers or that of the Central Committee. Since the papers were in Yiddish, however, it does seem unlikely that many Allied authorities could even read such publications. If the lack of information about American occupation forces’ reaction to periodicals means anything though, it could reflect the continuing trend of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 270. Although it would obviously be ideal to see the original newspapers, they are all in Yiddish. Mankowitz himself translated relevant passages for his book so it was not useful to trace his quoted passages all the way back to the primary source.

⁸⁸ Mankowitz, “Two voices from Landsberg” in *Life between Memory and Hope*, 161-191.

⁸⁹ *Buchholz*, 326.

⁹⁰ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 154; Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 191.

the British as more concerned with controlling the DPs' activities and restraining their autonomy and political outspokenness.

Music, Theater and Film

The Allies in charge of DP camps sometimes attempted to provide some sort of entertainment or pastime to the DPs, but this was often met with confusion or indifference. For instance, a survivor remembered a performance at Belsen: “this female soldier and a man started doing these Scottish dances. It all seemed totally ridiculous to me. I said to my wife, ‘Look, they’re dancing!’ To me, the world wasn’t the same anymore. We were so despondent. I thought there was no such thing as normal life anymore.”⁹¹ Instead, the DPs in both the British and American zone began their own performing art groups, theaters, orchestras, and more to provide for themselves the entertainment they desired. Lavsky differentiates between public and private cultural experiences: while private cultural endeavors included books, reading, and libraries, as well as groups of friends and family that organized their own music, skits, or performances, public culture was typically under the auspices of the Central and/or camp committees and performed in public spaces within the DP camps.⁹² For the purposes of this section I will focus on these public arts activities.

Among the DPs were excellent musicians – some had even been part of ghetto or concentration camp ensembles, positions which sometimes ensured better treatment or survival. In his 1946 interview, Dr. Oleiski noted that Landsberg had several camp orchestras, which included musicians who had played in the talented Kovno (Lithuania) ghetto orchestra. One of these groups even traveled to other DP camps in the U.S. zone, and the music presented was, Oleiski stated, “of great cultural

⁹¹ *Buchholz*, 331.

⁹² *Lavsky, New Beginnings*, 157-158.

significance for the Jew.”⁹³ The orchestra also performed at Landsberg itself for various functions, such as the November 1945 opening of a new central mess hall.⁹⁴ Just the following day, another institution opened at the camp, this time expressly for music and dancing. The Café, as it was called, was dedicated by Dr. Oleiski, who according to Heymont remarked that “it was incredible to stand in the beautiful hall and watch people, who only six months before were in concentration camps, dancing like normal individuals.”⁹⁵

Major Heymont was personally very pleased with this cultural development. He wrote that the Café’s opening was “another step in a growing transformation,” and that a new UNRRA director at the camp had been instrumental in encouraging communal activities such as the orchestra. Cultural outlets such as the Café, with its music and dancing, Heymont asserted, “can only be most helpful in the rehabilitation process.”⁹⁶ This example demonstrates the positive relations and collaboration between the different people in the camp. The DPs, under the leadership of their newly elected camp committee, with the encouragement of the camp’s head UNRRA official *and* its American Army camp commander, made strides together and established a new cultural and artistic experience. Cultural programming created by and put on by the DPs was so well received, and was inherently rehabilitative, especially compared to the passivity and absurdity of the Allies’ shows like the Scottish dancing mentioned earlier.

In contrast to Landsberg’s rich tradition of music referred to by Dr. Oleiski and Major Heymont, it appears that Belsen was more focused on theater. This can probably be attributed to Sami (or Samy) Feder, who before the war was an

⁹³ Oleiski, *Voices of the Holocaust*.

⁹⁴ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 86.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

accomplished actor and director in the Yiddish theater community of Warsaw.⁹⁷ Not only was Feder the chair of the British Committee's Cultural Department, but he founded a theater troupe at Belsen in July 1947, the Katzet Theater. Feder's wife Sonia Baczkowska was both his assistant in the Cultural Department and the Theater's leading lady. Feder recollected in 1952 the Katzet Theater's opening night: "I have never played to such a grateful audience. They clapped and laughed and cried. When we gave, as our last item, the famous song 'Think not you travel to despair again,' the thousand people in the hall rose to their feet and sang with us."⁹⁸ Often the company's plays were centered on wartime experiences or DP life, thereby giving Belsen DPs an opportunity to reflect on and grapple with their shared past together. Feder's operation attracted worldwide attention – the *New York Times* reported on the Belsen theatrical activities in 1946, writing that the theater "symbolizes [DPs] will to live. It represents a culture that survived a systematic attempted extermination...[it] serves a therapeutic value in providing a great emotional release."⁹⁹ The Katzet Theater was even invited to perform in Sweden, England, Belgium and France in 1947, and its members were subsequently offered, and received, residency permits in Belgium.¹⁰⁰ In this case, art itself became the path out of the DP camps.

Belsen also had its own cinema hall, or "kino" as they are often called in Eastern European languages, which was allegedly the "most popular attraction for the camp inmates."¹⁰¹ Accessible to all DPs, the Joint and the UNRRA were successful at bringing various films into Belsen to be screened at the kino. An intriguing aspect about film at Belsen is the fact that Joint volunteers even helped DPs make some

⁹⁷ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 158.

⁹⁸ Samy Feder, "The Yiddish Theater of Belsen," in *Belsen*, 138-139.

⁹⁹ Joseph Wolhandler, "On a Concentration Camp Stage. Bergen-Belsen Players Depict Horrors of their Internment," *New York Times*, June 30, 1946, Arts and Leisure X1.

¹⁰⁰ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 159.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

films, which were then also shown at the Belsen kino.¹⁰² Landsberg too was home to a camp movie theater. Major Heymont wrote on October 29, 1945 that “[t]he opening of the camp movie theater the night before last was a fascinating affair.” They chose to show Charlie Chaplin’s 1925 film *Gold Rush*, and children and adults alike were very excited – many adults had not seen a movie in years, while some children never had at all.¹⁰³ The simple pleasure of being able to watch a movie with family or friends was available in these DP camps, and surely went a long way to both provide entertainment and to contribute to feelings of normalcy. Overall, these various artistic endeavors seemed only to provoke encouragement and admiration from Allied military authorities, rather than suspicion or limitations.¹⁰⁴

Religion and Reclaiming Judaism

The subject of post-Holocaust Jews addressing their faith could surely be the topic for many more theses, but it is important to address briefly the role of religion and Judaism as it relates to DP camp culture and society. Along with establishing governmental entities and arts organizations, reasserting Jewish religious traditions was an important factor in rebuilding Jewish identity and community within the DP camps.¹⁰⁵

At Belsen, a rabbinate of about half a dozen rabbis began operating shortly after liberation. Their first task was to perform burial rites, but later they became consumed with marriages, bar mitzvahs, circumcisions and other rituals, as well as

¹⁰² These can be watched today at Brandeis University and at Hebrew University in Jerusalem; Ibid.

¹⁰³ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ One aspect of cultural programming I have left out due to time and space is sports. Sporting events and teams were prevalent in all DP camps, and were yet another way DPs joined together for social and physical rehabilitation. For more please consult Philipp Grammes, “Sports in the DP Camps, 1945-1948,” in *Emancipation through Muscles: Jews and Sports in Europe*, ed. Michael Brenner and Gideon Reuveni, 187-212 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ In many ways religion in the DP camps was also tied to Zionism and the desired Jewish homeland, and this struggle specifically will be grappled with more completely in the following chapter.

religious education efforts, traditionally an integral part of any Jewish community.¹⁰⁶ For instance, a yeshiva was founded at Belsen in November 1945 called *Sheerit Israel*, or the remnant of Israel.¹⁰⁷ A unique factor of Jewish religious life at Belsen was the chief rabbi's leadership beyond the DP camps. Rabbi Zvi Azaria was also the chairman of a council of rabbis throughout the British zone, whether they lived and worked in DP camps or not. The assistance of Rabbi Azaria and other survivors was, Konigseder and Wetzel assert, indispensable to the small German Jewish communities trying to rebuild in the British zone. Similar action was not taken by Committee-affiliated rabbis in the American zone, reflecting the camp/non-camp tensions touched on earlier in this chapter.¹⁰⁸ Religious institutions *were* created in the DP camps themselves in the U.S. zone. For instance, Feldafing had its share of religious schools – from a religious elementary school for children to at least two seminaries.¹⁰⁹ Landsberg boasted a kosher kitchen and religious instruction, including an Orthodox yeshiva.

In many DP camps conflict arose between members of different Jewish sects. Tensions were particularly high between Orthodox survivors/infiltrates and non-Orthodox or secular DPs.¹¹⁰ The camp and zone-wide committees were mostly headed by non-Orthodox Jews, which led to the minority Orthodox (estimated at Belsen to be around twenty percent; at Landsberg Major Heymont considered them a small minority) to refuse to work with the camp leadership.¹¹¹ Major Heymont wrote that at Landsberg, “the non-orthodox majority ridicules the minority orthodox group as exponents of an archaic past. Similarly, the orthodox group views the non-orthodox

¹⁰⁶ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 196.

¹⁰⁷ *Buchholz*, 332.

¹⁰⁸ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 198.

¹⁰⁹ “Fedalfing,” USHMM.

¹¹⁰ Infiltrates from Eastern Europe had a proportionally larger Orthodox population than initial DPs.

¹¹¹ Rahe, “Social Life,” 79; Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 84.

people as nonconformists who are a threat to the continuation of Jewish life...”¹¹² An Orthodox contingent at Belsen refused to share aid packages from an Orthodox relief organization with other DPs, and also engaged in a “violent clash with camp police” over enforcement of the Sabbath.¹¹³ These various incidents illustrate the complexities of DPs’ religious beliefs and practices, and how they related to everyday life in the camps as well as the successful function of camp institutions.

The Allies’ role and reaction to DP religious activities was as varied as the religious activities themselves. It is important to note that Allied Jewish soldiers, including chaplains, were the first Jews from outside Europe that many Holocaust survivors encountered. These men were often instrumental in reestablishing religious practices for the survivors. In addition, in August 1945 the American military appointed an adviser on Jewish issues in their zone, Rabbi Judah Nadich, a former chaplain.¹¹⁴ His role as a liaison and religious authority helped bridge the gap between DPs and the authorities. There was also a concerted effort to bring Jewish Allied soldiers into the DP camps. Jewish GI Bernard Bermack, for instance, remembered being summoned to Landsberg because he was one of the very few soldiers who spoke Yiddish.¹¹⁵ On a daily basis, however, Allied officials in the camps – even Jews, who were understandably more comfortable with British or American culture than the Ostjuden culture that prevailed in the camps – could be puzzled by or downright ignorant of religious Jewish customs or tradition, which sometimes led to conflict and insensitivity.

Major Heymont, for instance, though Jewish by birth, was one such Western secular Jew unfamiliar with Jewish ritual. He wrote in December 1945 about finding

¹¹² Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 84.

¹¹³ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 196-197.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹¹⁵ Bermack, VHA Online.

in a Landsberg barrack an Orthodox Jewish ritual bath (a mikvah). It was filled with dirty water, and thinking it a serious health risk, he ordered that it “must be emptied at once.”¹¹⁶ This was met with extreme anger from the Orthodox group, which threatened to strike if Heymont removed the mikvah. It is not difficult to imagine the clash of understanding and cultures between the Major and the Orthodox DPs, and Heymont commented that he was “baffled at the thinking of the orthodox group....”¹¹⁷ Despite misunderstandings, as we have already seen chaplains like Abraham Klausner were instrumental in the creation of DP committees and governmental entities. British Chaplain Isaac Levy initiated the first religious services at Belsen, and Jewish Allied soldiers also started collection movements back home in their communities and synagogues for religious items needed: Torahs, prayer books, tefillin, and even matzo. Although cultural sensitivity was likely not a major part of the Allies’ training, the militaries recognized at the very least the need to be respectful. Most soldiers and officials were, and religious practices in the camps remained a source of comfort and hope for the DPs as they waited for their next step.

The DP camps presented a special opportunity for some Holocaust survivors to experience Jewish society and culture in a new way. While many DPs had lived in predominantly Jewish communities before the war, others had not. The Third Reich had also attempted to wipe out any semblance of Jewish culture from the continent. In the DP camps, however, people participated in educational ventures, the arts, and other activities – not to mention religious worship and ritual – that specifically emphasized the reemergence of Jewish-ness. Groups like the Central Committees of each zone as well as camp committees complemented and facilitated these endeavors, putting a political spin on the Jewish identity and leveraging a collective energy in

¹¹⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 83.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

efforts to push the Allied governments and occupying forces toward reforms that the
DPs wanted.

CHAPTER FOUR: IS EMIGRATION POSSIBLE?

As the previous chapters have alluded, the primary concern of most Jewish DPs was their ability to emigrate out of occupied Europe and to a new home of their choosing. Furthermore, the idea of emigration was intertwined with almost everything in DPs' lives. Whether it was the educational systems in camps that enabled DPs to gain and practice skills expressly for their post-emigration lives, the democratically-elected committee leaders that advocated for immigration on the international stage, or the cultural activities that fostered a renewed sense of Jewish identity and consciousness, camp life revolved more around DPs' future abroad than the immediacy of everyday life. Moreover, there was only one way for DPs to, in their opinion, achieve true and final liberation: freedom in the form of emigration from Europe, quite often to Palestine. This goal, however, despite some prominent figures' opinions and proposals, was consistently inhibited by both Allied powers.

Background and Context for Politics of Palestine

The importance of emigration for the DPs vaulted their *personal* issue to the international arena, where it was already a complex *political* issue. As will be explored in this chapter, ideas about immigration to Palestine, Zionism, and related matters in turn became central points of the political discourse whether or not all DPs wished to go to Palestine. Therefore, we cannot truly understand the nature of DP immigration policy without some background on the U.K. and Palestine. While at the time of World War I there were just 85,000 Jews and 600,000 Arabs in Palestine, it was already a focal point for international Zionism, which had gained traction thanks to the leadership of Theodor Herzl around the turn of the twentieth century.¹ The

¹ Bernard Reich, *A Brief History of Israel* (New York: Infobase, 2008), 16-17.

Balfour Declaration of 1917, a document negotiated between Zionist leaders and the British government (and endorsed by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson), proclaimed Britain's ostensible support for an imagined Jewish homeland, if only it would leave the current inhabitants undisrupted. Though widely interpreted as supportive of a Jewish state, the short Declaration was vague and provided no timetable or plan for assistance in Palestine.²

The British military, however, entered Palestine the following month, seizing control of the region from the Ottoman Empire – only a prelude to official defeat for the Ottomans at the close of World War I and the ensuing five-year-long process to create the British mandate in Palestine.³ In his *Brief History of Israel*, diplomatic historian Bernard Reich notes that the purpose of the mandate was “the peaceful accommodation of Arabs and Jews...and the development of Palestine by Arabs and Jews under British control.”⁴ Over the next several decades, though, “peaceful accommodation” was still out of reach, and conflict included everything from anti-British strikes by the Arab population to Arab-Jewish tensions to worldwide Jewry's complaints about Britain's immigration restrictions.⁵ As the world appeared on the verge of another massive conflict, London released the White Paper of 1939 which, as Arieh Kochavi paraphrases, “envisioned the establishment...of an independent Palestinian state with an Arab majority” but limited Jewish immigration as well as Jews' purchase of land.⁶ The document read, in part:

The objective of His Majesty's Government is the establishment within 10 years of an Independent Palestine State...[this] would involve consultation with the Council of the League of Nations with a view to the termination of

² “The Balfour Declaration on Palestine, November 2, 1917,” *Fifty Major Documents of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Louis L. Synder (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1955), 25-26.

³ Reich, *Brief History*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Arieh Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

the Mandate. The independent State should be one in which Arabs and Jews share government in such a way as to ensure that the essential interests of each community are safeguarded.⁷

The promise of an independent state was designed to appeal to Arab interests and hence gain Britain allies on the eve of the war; once the war began all bets on Britain's Palestine policy were off. Several proposals for a two-state solution were made and rejected, Jewish immigration amidst the Holocaust was limited to numbers even below the White Paper's stated minimum, and British fear of local revolts in Mandatory Palestine during wartime negated the possibility of policy changes.⁸

Palestine and Allied DP Policy Formation

As World War II came to a close, then, the question of Palestine remained unsolved, and the U.S. and Britain saw the issue of Palestine through different lenses. Britain, as Palestine's colonial ruler and with a sphere of influence in the entire region, was obviously interested in maintaining smooth operations in their territory. While Britain consistently set Palestinian politics apart from the issue of Jewish refugees in Europe, the United States, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, linked the two issues early on. To the U.S. government at large, opening Palestine to Jewish DPs came to be a humanitarian solution that, the British asserted, ignored inherent political problems. These two approaches at times created tense diplomacy between the Allies in the several years after the war. Moreover, the U.S. was essentially the only nation to come out of the war with economic growth and prosperity, while Britain had taken

⁷ *Palestine, Statement of Policy. Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty May, 1939.* London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939.

⁸ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 9. Many more Jews were admitted into Britain and the U.S. during the war than to Palestine, although still a tiny fraction of the number killed. For more information see Malcolm Proudfoot, *America and European Refugees: 1939-1952* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1956), David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), or Richard Breitman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

a heavy blow. Over a quarter million British soldiers and nearly one hundred thousand civilians were killed, infrastructure suffered, and its debt increased tremendously.⁹ Britain was most responsible, Kochavi asserts, for “checking Soviet expansionist ambitions” and for overseeing Europe’s rebuilding and renewal.¹⁰ The devastated British treasury (not to mention public morale) made British success contingent on American support, and the Western Allied powers’ departure on the future of Palestine and of DPs was not conducive to Britain’s hopeful maintenance of hegemony.

In the fall of 1945, the Truman administration echoed sentiments President Roosevelt had made earlier in the year suggesting that the U.S. government would form no position on Palestine “which might prove hostile to the Arab people.”¹¹ Secretary of State James Byrnes reported that Truman was discussing options to alleviate the DP problem with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, but that, “[s]hould any proposals emerge which in our opinion would change the basic situation in Palestine, it would be the policy of this Government not to reach final conclusions without full consultation with Jewish and Arab leaders.”¹² In other words, the U.S. government did not rule out the possibility of increased Jewish settlement in Palestine, but publicly maintained it would attempt a fair and measured exploration of the matter. Truman and his administration appeared to take stances in favor of the Jewish DPs, but Jewish statehood was a trickier matter for the U.S. to support.

As early as the Harrison Report of August 1945, however, the American government did call explicitly for the permission of DP immigration to Palestine.

⁹ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Attitude of American Government toward Palestine,” *Department of State Bulletin* 325 (October 21, 1945), 623.

¹² *Ibid.*

Earl Harrison wrote that Palestine was “definitely and pre-eminently” the first choice of destination for Jewish DPs, and that “if there is any genuine sympathy for what these survivors have endured, some reasonable extension or modification of the British White Paper of 1939 ought to be possible without too serious repercussions.”¹³ Harrison’s report also demonstrated his support of a Jewish Agency (the international Zionist group) petition that one hundred thousand immigration visas be made available for Jews in Europe to enter Palestine.¹⁴ President Truman agreed with Harrison’s polarizing position – in terms of relations with Britain – that these one hundred thousand visas should be issued. Going forward into 1946, therefore, the United States was clearly willing to support the opening of Palestine much more than the British government which was, of course, actually in charge of Mandatory Palestine.

Meanwhile, as described in Chapter Two, in December 1945 the British finally appointed an adviser on Jewish affairs. Colonel Robert Solomon was former chairman of the Jewish National Fund, a strongly Zionist group – making this choice by the British somewhat curious.¹⁵ Predictably, Solomon recommended that more immigration visas to Palestine be issued immediately to Jewish DPs based on his own surveys and investigation in the British zone. After several thousand DPs were accounted for, like those interested in staying in Germany or who needed to be in an institution (i.e., the elderly and infirm), Solomon declared in a 1946 report that ninety percent of the remaining nine thousand Jews in the British zone “wanted to go to Palestine; of these more than half (65 percent) would not agree to a compromise,

¹³ “Report of Earl G. Harrison,” *Department of State Bulletin* 327 (September 30, 1945), 456-463, 460.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 99.

while the others, if offered the opportunity to go elsewhere, would do so.”¹⁶ This high preference for Palestine shakes out to just over 3700 people willing to immigrate to places besides Palestine. Solomon proposed, based on these findings, that the British government could and should provide eight thousand visas to Palestine for Jewish DPs, effectively emptying the British zone’s camps. Since at this point both Allied military governments heavily favored closing the camps by 1947, yet the Colonial Office in London stubbornly continued to restrict the issuing of visas, the situation was at a standstill.¹⁷

Questioning Palestine’s Predominance

The major historiographical issue of Jewish DPs in relation to immigration is the struggle to uncover how crucial immigration to Palestine specifically was to the DPs. The statistic above from Colonel Solomon is one of the very few quantitative measures I was able to find. Plenty of oral histories and testimonies that present DPs’ views are available, but the majority in English are from people who immigrated to English-speaking nations and not Palestine/Israel. Undoubtedly some of those who ended up in the United States, Britain, Australia or South Africa had a precise reason for going there. This naturally skews the pool of my available primary sources toward those willing to go places besides Palestine. On the other hand, many of these DPs communicated that they did consider Palestine, or they wanted to resettle there, until logistical barriers or advice drove them toward other options. Many survivors who went to Israel have testimonies in Hebrew and Yiddish; these recollections could reflect strong tendencies to choose Israel.

¹⁶ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Many reports from government sources, especially American ones, state somewhat vaguely that the Jews desperately wanted to go to Palestine, that they would accept no destination but it, and so forth. This rhetoric of “Palestine or bust” also runs through the narratives of many historians, who – as addressed in the Introduction – are often Israeli. Furthermore, Jewish DP leaders used a collective “we” in reference to immigration. For instance, Dr. Jacob Oleiski, a major figure on Landsberg’s camp committee, stated in 1946 that “[w]e have waited and hoped for possibilities to emigrate to Palestine.”¹⁸ Was this accurate? Did the desire to emigrate to Palestine represent the sentiment of all, or even most, Jewish DPs? It does seem clear that the Jewish DP community *collectively* saw the need for a Jewish state in Palestine. Palestine was considered a safe haven from anti-Semitism and an escape from the assimilation that had shaped life for Jews of the diaspora all over the world. This line of reasoning was, unsurprisingly, particularly cogent after the war for Jewish DPs. Jacob Trobe, director of the Joint in Germany from July 1945 to January 1946, echoed this when he wrote that “one need not be a Zionist to see that Palestine has a significance for them that is tremendous.”¹⁹ It seems most accurate to posit that a vast majority of Jewish DPs supported the idea of a Jewish state, but that this did not necessitate that an individual or a family would *personally* prioritize Palestine above other options.²⁰

¹⁸ Jacob Oleiski, interview by David Pablo Boder, August 20, 1946, transcript trans. by Boder, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL, accessed February 18, 2015, http://voices.iit.edu/interview?doc=oleiskiJ&display=oleiskiJ_en.

¹⁹ Jacob Trobe letter of July 7, 1945 in Sara Kadosh and Eric Nooter, “The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Bergen-Belsen,” in Erik Somers and Ren Kok, eds, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950: the Unique Photo Album of Zippy Orlin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2004), 110-121, 113.

²⁰ The only group of DPs I have encountered that completely rejected the idea of a Jewish state were the Bundists, or International Labor Bund. This was a socialist political party with various iterations that valued nationalism, and wanted nationalistic Judaism to reappear and flourish in places like Poland and Lithuania.

There is evidence that Zionism did dominate politically in the DP camps. Dr. Oleiski spoke of “a broadly ramified party life...and all varieties of Zionism.”²¹ A member of the Jewish Brigade who spent time in Belsen wrote in the 1950s that what differences existed within the various Zionist groups were trumped by collaboration: “there was harmony and co-operation [sic] between them...And the...committee of the Zionist parties was one of the achievements of the Belsen Jews. It was based on genuine compromise and an appreciation that, in the first place, they were all Zionists.”²² Again, the notion of an all-encompassing, flexible definition of Zionism – that anyone could be in favor of Jewish statehood – was predominant among the DPs. Going further, an October 1945 editorial in the Feldafing newspaper *Dos Fraye Vort* opined that “Eretz Yisrael is no longer a question that concerns only Zionists. Today all Jews, be they religious, socialist or even Communist, are concerned with the problem.”²³ The stratification and variety of political affiliation and values in the DP camps led to discussions about the meaning of Zionism, Palestine, statehood, and Jewish identity. These formative processes in all likelihood aided the collective Jewish DP community to solidify that identity, for the Jewish DPs were more alike than they were different.

So, what *can* be gleaned about where DPs wanted to immigrate and why? Let us turn to more voices of the DPs, for each person had their own reasons. Different DPs provide a diverse array of opinions, thought processes, and events that shaped their conception of emigration/immigration. Survivor Daniel Kurlancheek recalled registering for immigration visas in Feldafing, but did not distinguish a destination. People, likely aid volunteers, Kurlancheek said, “came around [saying] that we should

²¹ Oleiski, *Voices of the Holocaust*.

²² Z. Zamarion (Halpern), “A Shaliach in Belsen,” in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me’haezor Habriti, 1957), 177-185, 179; the Jewish Brigade will be explained later in this chapter.

²³ Meir Gavronsky, “Said in love doesn’t cost anything,” *Dos Fraye Vort*, October 19, 1945, in Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 70.

register to go to Palestine or America or Canada or Australia,” and DPs would register in all of them in order to leave for whichever country took them first. Kurlancheek ended up in the United States.²⁴ His words and experience give credence to one reason why not all DPs were set on Palestine – some were indeed not set on any one destination, but rather would go anywhere that would take them.

Other first-person DP accounts illustrate not the indifference of Kurlancheek (or desperation, depending on the interpretation), but varying levels of negativity or skepticism about going to Palestine. Sam and Nora Eilenberg, Polish survivors who spent time in Landsberg, reflected this different take on the question of Palestine in a 1974 interview. The two had originally registered to immigrate to Palestine after liberation in Terezin, the concentration camp near Prague. While the Eilenbergs were sent next to Landsberg, Nora’s sister and her family left illegally for Palestine. What her relatives reported from Palestine actually changed Sam and Nora’s minds. According to Nora, “they had terrible times over there,” and told her, ““if you have a way to go to the U.S., go there instead.””²⁵ Leon Borovick, who spent time at both Feldafing and Landsberg, provides a similar example. When, in a 1997 interview, Borovick was asked about his plans while at Landsberg, he stops to think for a moment before saying, “I wanted to go to Israel.” Leon’s brother disagreed – he thought it would be too economically difficult in Palestine and preferred the U.S. Since Leon wanted to leave with his brother, the two waited for American visas.²⁶ A somewhat analogous situation met Herman Spiegel of Feldafing. He was willing to

²⁴ Daniel Kurlancheek, interview by Seymour Levin, September 7, 1997, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

²⁵ Sam and Nora Eilenberg, interview by Professor Saul Freidman, Youngstown State University, June 8, 1974, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center, Seattle, WA.

²⁶ Leon Borovick, Feb. 20, 1996, interview by Diane Weinreich, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation. Somewhat curiously, Leon recalled that “during that time [that they waited] many people went to Israel.” This seems somewhat unlikely because there was no large scale immigration to Israel from the camps until the late 1940s, and it seems strange that “many people” got to go to Palestine while Borovick was still waiting for his American visa. Possibly just a flaw in a fifty-year-old memory.

go to either Palestine or the U.S., but had relatives in America who encouraged him to join them.²⁷ These examples illustrate the complexities of DPs' own visions about their futures, specifically how family opinion came before other considerations, whether it was obeying a sister's advice or a brother's belief about the reality of life in Palestine – staying apart or sticking together, respectively.

Thomas Rahe writes that family connections did often trump ideology: “even ardent Zionists often refrained from emigration to Palestine or Israel” if they had relatives elsewhere who would be of significant economic and cultural assistance after emigration.²⁸ Survivor Helen Tichauer, introduced in the previous chapter, demonstrates this principle. Tichauer herself was part of the illegal Brichah network, although quite how or to what extent is unknown.²⁹ When, in a 1946 interview with David Boder, he asked her if many people want to go to Palestine, Tichauer responded that “of course,” many want a Jewish national state, but in her words “mostly the youth.”³⁰ Beyond this, she also specifically mentioned “Jews who have a relative in America and have lost their whole European family and are assembling now the rest of such a family who want to spend their life with them. Also the intention to learn near [relatives in the U.S.] a trade, to re-adjust...as free workers...in an American state.”³¹ Especially since Helen dealt with aiding illegal immigration to Palestine, her statement to Boder complicates Palestine's significance to the DPs as

²⁷ Herman Spiegel, interview by Leah Boman, December 10 1991, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

²⁸ Rahe, “Social Life,” 81.

²⁹ Eric J. Sundquist, “Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformation (Review),” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 160-162; see also the actual volume Jürgen Matthäus, ed., *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁰ Who knows how Tichauer defined “youth,” but this designation is interesting nonetheless, to some degree backed up by secondary sources and will be explored later in this chapter in connection with kibbutzim. Helen Tichauer, interview by David P. Boder, September 23, 1946, transcript trans. by Boder, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL, accessed November 26, 2014, http://voices.iit.edu/interview?doc=tichauerH&display=tichauerH_en.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the historiography often represents it. Helen herself would have preferred to live in Czechoslovakia, her home country, with which she “fe[el] a bond,” but her husband had relatives in South America. Eventually the Tichauers settled in the United States.

Even for those DPs who were intimately involved in advocacy for a Jewish national state, Palestine/Israel was not necessarily the destination of choice. Norbert Wollheim was the successful and important leader of German Jews (outside the DP camps) in the British zone for that zone’s Central Committee. Wollheim immigrated to the United States in 1950 because his wife’s sister, with whom she was close, had left for the U.S. Wollheim was a close associate of Josef Rosensaft, and, as oral historian Anton Gill writes, the two “had worked tirelessly...to help their fellow-Jews make the *aliyah*, to establish their rights, and to fight for reparation.”³² Likewise, Josef Rosensaft himself lived in Switzerland before immigrating to the United States in the late 1950s, also choosing this destination over Palestine.³³ The experiences of these DPs demonstrate that just because a DP advocated for a Jewish state did not mean they chose to live in that Jewish state. Political interest and personal interest in emigration to Palestine/Israel did not necessarily have to match.

Although it appears occasionally with DPs outside the leadership structure, like the communication between Nora Eilenberg and her sister, a hidden subtext to the decisions of leaders like Rosensaft to personally choose immigration to other destinations could be their insider knowledge. While the general rhetoric was that redemption, happiness, and a safe Jewish community could be theirs in Palestine, the reality after the war, and still after statehood in 1948, was somewhat different. Life in Palestine was often difficult – survivors who settled there cited acute struggles with

³² Anton Gill, *The Journey Back From Hell, Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors: an Oral History* (New York: Avon, 1988), 296; italics in the original.

³³ Irving Spiegel, “Josef Rosensaft, Fled Nazi Camps,” obituary, *New York Times*, September 13, 1975.

poverty, food, regional violence, and political issues.³⁴ It is possible that some of the more knowledgeable DPs, in communication with people and politicians from all over the world, thought their chances for success were greater in the United States, Britain, or other places besides Israel. Thus it is tempting to perceive Rosensaft and Wollheim as “talking the talk,” but not walking the walk. How did some of their friends or followers react when they did not make the aliyah they had fought for? Were leaders withholding the knowledge that times could be tough in Palestine?³⁵ The disconnect between message and personal action could be interpreted in different ways, but since the leaders sought to represent the group of collective DPs, this representation perhaps reflected that a true majority *did* prefer the destination of Palestine. Moreover, the international attention given specifically to the issue of Palestine, and the intensity with which the Allied governments dealt with it, necessitated that the DPs’ political narrative be unwaveringly focused on Palestine.

Max Garcia, a Sephardic Jew from Amsterdam and an Auschwitz survivor, offers the counterpoint of a DP who did not experience life in the DP camps. Garcia recalled in an interview with Anton Gill his choice to immigrate to the U.S. After the war, Garcia “knew two things: that I didn’t want to back to Holland to live, for there would be nothing left for me there; and that I didn’t want to go to Palestine, as I didn’t want to live only among Jews.”³⁶ Although he floated around the American zone after the war, Garcia never registered in a DP camp, but rather ended up unofficially attached to an American battalion. Could his lack of experience in the DP camps,

³⁴ Gill, *The Journey Back From Hell* Chapter 7, “A Home in Israel.”

³⁵ Although, as far as my sources say, this message was only communicated post-Israeli statehood, Ben Shephard recounts a message from Rosensaft to those still in Belsen after a short visit to Israel, disproving that information was withheld – at least after Israeli statehood. Rosensaft told DPs “that Israel was a wonderful but difficult country. He urged them to go there as long as they were prepared for the harsh conditions they would encounter there. He also warned them that they would be on their own. ‘Ben-Gurion will not meet you at the boat,’ he said, ‘and Eliezer Kaplan [Israel’s first finance minister] will not present you with a check.’” Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: the Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 367.

³⁶ Gill, *The Journey Back From Hell*, 302.

where Jewish culture was heavily concentrated, explain his disdain for a purely Jewish community? He had found a different group in the American soldiers, and this post-liberation attachment likely filtered into his desire to live in their country and not “only among Jews.” This points again to the importance of the DP camp environment as illustrated in Chapter Three, and its role in forming Jewish identities and communities. As we can see, there are a multitude of reasons DPs might or might not choose Palestine as their preferred destination. The above examples all provide a more nuanced view of DPs’ difficult choices beyond the simple fact of which country they preferred.

Outside Figures Encourage Immigration to Palestine

While personal preference, life history and experiences obviously played a large part in DPs’ immigration opinions, there is also evidence to suggest that international groups worked within DP camps to promote immigration to Palestine. While Chapter Three touched on how some Zionist groups sponsored education and encouraged strong Jewish communities in the DP camps, these efforts went hand-in-hand with efforts to persuade DPs to want to go to Palestine, or to make illegal immigration itself happen. This is reflected in survivor Abraham Bomba’s general recollection that “Zionist organizations” in the DP camps enlisted people to illegally immigrate to Palestine.³⁷ The influence of outsiders is hard to measure, but it definitely affected the Allies’ perception of some Jewish workers and organizations as spreading Zionist propaganda.

In the postwar experience of Romanian survivor Brakha Vider – one of the relative few DPs who settled in Israel but spoke to the USC Shoah Foundation in

³⁷ Abraham Bomba, interview by Louise Bobrow, 14 August, 1996, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

English rather than Hebrew – can be found an example of the Zionists’ influence in the camps *and* of ideology trumping family, the reverse situation of DPs discussed above. While in Belsen, Vider and her sister wanted to immigrate to the U.S., where some aunts had offered to help and sponsor them, rather than Israel, “where I ha[d] nobody.” However, unidentified Zionist figures in the camp actually, in her words, “made us stop...writ[ing] to our family” in America.³⁸ It seems that while waiting for an extended affidavit process that would allow immigration to the U.S., operatives of the illegal immigration network convinced Vider that going to Palestine, even illegally, was the better option. This example demonstrates clearly the power of both Zionist operatives and Zionist thinking in the DP camps. Vider and many others, dismayed by the roadblocks and waiting that came with legal immigration elsewhere, may have been swayed by volunteers or workers who promoted aliyah.³⁹

One specific Zionist group often mentioned as operating amidst the DP camps was the Jewish Brigade. The Jewish Brigade was actually several columns of the British Army made up of Jews from Mandatory Palestine who wanted to fight the Nazis during the war. After liberation, some stayed behind in Europe to work with Jewish survivors. Members of the Brigade created a committee “to bring aid and comfort to refugees and conduct Zionist activities among them,”⁴⁰ and they were a major force in assisting illegal immigration to Palestine, until the summer of 1946 when more “official” Palestinian envoys – usually sponsored by political parties – arrived to take on these roles.⁴¹ The Allies were aware of the Brigade’s existence and involvement. Major Heymont of Landsberg wrote in late 1945 that “...there are

³⁸ Brakha Vider, interview by Chana Gotlieb, April 22, 1999, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁹ Interestingly, Vider’s family in the United States was so “cross” that she and her sister eventually rejected the help and sponsorship to come to the U.S. that the American aunts asked her never to contact them again; Ibid.

⁴⁰ Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970), 63.

⁴¹ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 102-103.

groups from Palestine over here who are actively organizing the movement of Jews from eastern Europe to Palestine. There are men from the Jewish Brigade of the British Army frequently coming through the camp. I am sure that they are active in this movement.”⁴² So Major Heymont, as a relatively powerful American official, recognized the probable connection between the Brigade and illegal immigration networks, yet there is no indication he did anything to address this. Eli Benyacar, a Greek survivor, corroborated Heymont when he recalled the Jewish Brigade recruiting youth of Landsberg to go to Palestine as early as June or July 1945.⁴³ Benyacar actually went with some of the Brigade to Italy (a common next stop before sailing to Palestine) but some logistical concerns or a change of heart led to his return to Landsberg.⁴⁴

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, based in the United States, was one of the main Jewish aid organizations that operated in the DP camps, and contributed everything from material goods to teachers. According to Sara Kadosh, the Joint was also instrumental in working “tacitly with ‘illegal’ solutions implemented by Zionist organizations in cooperation with the Central Committee.”⁴⁵ These activities probably manifested themselves in various ways, and although official documentation of this “tacit” activity may not exist, the first-person account of Zippy Orlin demonstrates a Joint volunteer’s projection of insistence on Palestine as a destination onto the DPs. In a 1949 letter, Orlin spoke for DPs – whether accurately or not – and lauded relief efforts of her own ilk. “The majority [of

⁴² Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 93.

⁴³ Eli Benyacar, interview by Fran Starr, 5 May, 1996, Visual History Archive Online, USC Shoah Foundation.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Benyacar has probably the most colorful interview of any I watched. He was the self-professed ringleader of some kind of gambling and card-playing cartel in Landsberg DP camp, and his memories regarding his movement around Europe, and the eventual return to Germany instead of going on to Palestine, are unclear in his narrative.

⁴⁵ Kadosh and Nooter, “The American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee,” 120.

DPs]...knew that ultimately they would reach Palestine,” she wrote, presuming that this majority did reach Palestine, “and it was always a source of considerable comfort to them to know that they were not forgotten, and that the representatives of world Jewry had come to assist them in their rehabilitation.”⁴⁶ Thus Orlin assumed that the “majority” of DPs did prefer Palestine, and that they boldly “knew” they would make it there. In another intriguing example, Orlin wrote that orphaned children she worked with were excited to make aliyah. They were:

a wild, undisciplined crowd of youngsters who had been dragged from one country to another, from one concentration camp to another. Some had lived with Christian families since babyhood and did not know their names, who their parents were, or their country of origin. They had no faith in humanity and were suspicious of everything and everyone. They had only one desire -- to get to Israel.⁴⁷

The notion that these “youngsters” – Orlin worked with elementary-school-aged children – made their own informed decisions to want to go to Palestine is highly suspect. If some grew up in hiding, or were even passed off as Christian, it seems doubtful that they could understand their Jewish identity at a personal level, or conceptualize what it meant to immigrate to Palestine. Instead, this idea was likely inculcated in them by other Jews in Belsen, possibly Orlin herself.

Despite these activities and influences, it is also important to note that certain outside groups took the Allies’ legal requirements seriously and sought to uphold them. The Jewish Relief Unit, for instance, based in Britain, “retained a strong sense of loyalty to the British state,” as Sharif Gemie puts it, especially in comparison to the

⁴⁶ Zippy Orlin, “What it’s really like in a DP Camp: A South African girl in Belsen,” in Erik Somers and Ren Kok, eds, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950: the Unique Photo Album of Zippy Orlin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2004), 154-161, 154, originally published in *The Zionist Record*, March 4, 1949).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

more militant groups such as the Jewish Brigade.⁴⁸ This makes sense: aid groups' official activities were contingent on the British government allowing them to even be in the occupied zone. If a Britain-based organization was involved in illegal activities, such as helping smuggle people over borders or toward Palestine, or in fomenting radical Zionism, the British probably would have barred them from the DP camps (considering it took so long for them to be admitted in the first place). Likewise, not all American Jewish organizations were altogether receptive to the plight of DPs. Abraham Klausner, the renegade U.S. army chaplain – admittedly a hot-headed informant, even half a century later – remembered writing a report critical of the state of Jewish DPs and sending it to Jewish organizations in the United States. One group, the Jewish Welfare Board, issued a counter-report that said not to pay any attention to Klausner's.⁴⁹ Some aid groups, often quite secular and/or apolitical in nature, were not necessarily interested in getting involved in the contentious issue of immigration.⁵⁰

Infiltrates and Immigration

Chapter Two discussed the infiltrates from Eastern Europe and their effect on the Allies' DP camp policy. Beyond restricting entrance to zones or camps or limiting infiltrates' DP status, this wave also made a strong impact on Allied immigration policy, especially the British. It is important to recognize that the larger Brichah network that facilitated flight from Eastern Europe *was* connected with international Zionist groups and with the overall goal of a Jewish state in Palestine.

⁴⁸ Gemie, et al., *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of Total War 1936-48* (London: Continuum, 2012), 247.

⁴⁹ Abraham Klausner, interview by Toni Katsh Binstock, September 1, 1998, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁵⁰ This will be elaborated on later in the chapter in regard to American politics and its own immigration laws.

So how exactly did the Brichah system work? While it is difficult to ascertain precisely where or when it began, Yehuda Bauer identifies several important people and places from which Brichah can be traced, specifically the towns of Rivne and Vilna, Lithuania, and groups of Jewish partisans there who had also been active in resistance and smuggling operations during the war.⁵¹ By 1946, however, the Brichah organization at large had contacts and allies in all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. A Jew in Eastern Europe might begin their flight by taking advantage of help in their starting nation. For example, Daniel Kurlancheek recalled receiving assistance and preparation from the Jewish Agency in Poland for his journey. The Lithuanian survivor had false Polish identification papers made, and was then smuggled across three nation's borders: Poland to Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia to Austria, and finally across the border of Austria with the U.S. zone of occupation in Germany.⁵² Point people tasked with taking refugees through different legs of the trip, and specific towns, border crossings, and local police and officials known to be safe and trustworthy would have all helped Kurlancheek on this journey – who could have been alone or part of a group. Bauer also points out that the governments of some countries on the transit path actually collaborated with the smuggling. In Czechoslovakia, for instance, were apparently “highly placed Zionist officials employed in the Ministry for Social Welfare, headed by...a friendly and helpful Communist.”⁵³ Eventually Kurlancheek made his way from the southern German border to Munich, and then to the nearby DP camp of Feldafing.⁵⁴

The Brichah led to thousands of Jewish refugees who continued to enter the occupied zones of Germany instead of a static population in the DP camps that could

⁵¹ Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*, 11.

⁵² Kurlancheek, VHA, USC.

⁵³ Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*, 182.

⁵⁴ Kurlancheek, VHA, USC.

be dealt with. This resulted in population overflows even when the British tried to keep new refugees out, and the already small immigration quotas were not increased accordingly. Zippy Orlin reflected in 1949 on the state of Belsen in 1946, writing that the camp “was full to over-flowing with new people coming in every night – people fleeing from the anti-Jewish pogroms in Poland. Immigration was at a standstill. We managed to send out a handful of people every month, while hundreds poured in weekly.”⁵⁵ That Orlin was at Belsen, too, should be noted: only a minority of infiltrees ended up in the British zone, while far more made their way purposefully to the American zone. The pattern of having far fewer DPs leave than enter the camps in both zones only created a worse bottleneck in terms of emigration. Major Heymont discussed in detail the problems Landsberg already encountered in late 1945 with large groups of infiltrees entering the already crowded camp. The constantly-documenting Major Heymont illustrates the Allies’ general understanding of the complicated Brichah system. After speaking to some new arrivals from Poland in November 1945, Heymont wrote, “they said a rumor is current in Poland that all Jews in the American zone are to be evacuated to Palestine shortly but that Jews living in Poland will not be allowed to leave....Landsberg, I am convinced, is a stop on this modern underground railroad.”⁵⁶ Indeed, rumors abounded all over Europe about the future of Palestine and of world Jewry.

The American and British ideologies that relied on humanitarian and political strategies respectively also illuminate their policies on infiltrees. Whether the Allies expected and liked it or not, their DP camps became the staging grounds for illegal immigration. As Konigseder and Wetzel write, British officials were concerned that “the survivors streaming into the British Zone were part of a well-organized Zionist

⁵⁵ Orlin, “What it’s really like,” 161.

⁵⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 93.

scheme, financed by American Jewry, to force Britain to open the gates of Palestine...⁵⁷ This notion is reflected in the British government's construction of the infiltrees as intrinsically different from the Jews actually registered in DP camps. In August 1946, a British report stated that:

It is also a matter of concern to [His Majesty's Government] that a large proportion of the illegal immigrants [in Palestine] come from countries of eastern Europe, and not from the displaced persons centres in Germany, Austria, and Italy... The continuance of this traffic at the present time is likely to have an adverse effect on the hope of a general settlement in Palestine.⁵⁸

The British identified these illegal immigrants, likely arriving via the Brichah network, as unworthy of the same benefits not just within the camps as registered DPs, but also in terms of their privilege, or lack thereof, to emigrate. Moreover, the language of the report threatened that if illegal immigration continued, it would backfire on the Jews' overall dream of a home in Palestine. The growth in numbers of Eastern European infiltrees did not convince the British to acquiesce to Jews' demands, but rather to dig in their heels and maintain a hard line against immigration to Palestine. Indeed, as of January 1946, the British government instituted a policy of fifteen hundred immigration certificates to Palestine per month, but any *illegal* immigrants were counted and deducted from this legal quota.⁵⁹ Thus, Jews who entered illegally (more likely to be infiltrees than "original" or legally recognized DPs) took the spots of law-abiding Jews. Although this had the potential to pit some Jews against other Jews, this does not appear to have happened, and illegal immigration attempts continued unabated.

⁵⁷ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 27.

⁵⁸ "The British Government's Statement on Palestine," *Chronology of International Events and Documents* 2:16 (August 12-25, 1946), 508-510, 509. Royal Institute of International Affairs.

⁵⁹ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 63; although tangential to this study, it is important to note that the British, besides changing policy in their occupied zone to reflect a desired result for Mandatory Palestine, also embarked on major efforts in Palestine and its surrounding water to deter illegal immigration. Boats were refused entry, and Jews were deported back to Europe or detained in camps in Cyprus. More about these topics can be found in Kochavi, as well as Ruth Gruber, *Exodus 1947: the Ship that Launched a Nation* (New York: Union Square Press, 2007), or Michael Joseph Cohen, *The Rise of Israel: the Holocaust and Illegal Immigration, 1939-1947* (New York: Garland, 1987).

Zionist Action and Protest within the DP Camps

Many DPs, not just camp leaders and committee members, were aware of international politics and the complex issues of Palestine and immigration. DPs harnessed the collective Jewish identity that was cultivated in the DP camps and tried to use their agency to influence immigration politics. While Chapter Three discussed more broadly the political organizations of DPs and their roles in the practice of democracy and camp life, political actions were also attempted to make a statement to the Allies that immigration policy, and specifically Britain's Palestine policy, must be changed. For example, Major Heymont wrote in November 1945 in Landsberg that a hunger strike and a parade occurred in "protest of the British announcement that they will not permit 100,000 Jews to enter Palestine as had been requested by President Truman."⁶⁰ Photographs of this event from Heymont's collection gives an idea of what that event looked like. The parade actually marched out of the camp's confines and to the town square of Landsberg. The DPs, mostly men, were dressed all in black and marched in an orderly column, their wide protest banners displaying Yiddish slogans. Heymont himself also asserted that he "had given permission for the parade despite the misgivings of the local military government people."⁶¹ Major Heymont, knowing the intentions of the DPs, approved the protest's occurrence. This demonstrates that some Americans in charge, without themselves being complicit in anti-British activities, would not deny the DPs' right to protest.

Similar protest activities also occurred in the British zone. Overall, the Central Committee of the zone oversaw and controlled protests of the DPs against Britain's Palestine immigration policies, and ensured they did not get out of hand. Alex L. Easterman, a British representative in the World Jewish Congress, wrote in

⁶⁰ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 94.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

1951 of the tension between DPs and the British: “there was conflict concerning assemblies of protest against Ernest Bevin's Palestine policies and actions. And a hundred more issues requiring negotiation, tact and patience, but always involving rights and resistance to infraction of liberties.”⁶² There is surprisingly little about the details of these assemblies in any of the various source materials that exist. Perhaps, for the Jews, the doing and protesting was not so important as the outcomes. And, for the British, perhaps these moments in which the government and its policies were pointed out as unjust were better left forgotten in the grand scheme.

The most controversial and widely protested policy of the British was most likely the Exodus affair. In July 1947, the *SS Exodus*, filled with thousands of Jews seeking to make illegal aliyah, left France but was intercepted and attacked by British sailors in international waters just off the coast of Palestine.⁶³ Three refugees were killed, and over the next month the passengers were stuck in jail-like deportation ships before being returned to Europe, some to DP camps. People all over the world protested against the violence and mistreatment that had occurred, including DPs. In a reflective essay he wrote in 1951, Josef Rosensaft recalled that the

reaction to the return of the Exodus Olim to Germany was very bitter. We protested in our own way, and clearly indicated to the British what we thought of such a policy. Our situation was a delicate one. After all, we lived in the British Zone. But we did all we could for the Exodus people, both materially and politically. We shared with them our last slice of bread –literally! – until the J.D.C. was able to come to their aid. Jews in the British Zone did this as a natural duty, and as an expression of brotherly solidarity.⁶⁴

The people Rosensaft referred to had been returned to Belsen after the Exodus ordeal, and apparently were not afforded the same benefits as other DPs. Although Rosensaft does not delve into the details of the Committee's protest activities, scholars

⁶² Alex L. Easterman, “They Were Liberated but not Free,” in *Belsen*, 87-93, 92.

⁶³ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 202.

⁶⁴ Josef Rosensaft, “Our Belsen,” in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'haezor Habriti, 1957), 24-51, 46; *Olim* is a Hebrew word/concept used to refer to Jewish immigrants going to Palestine/Israel.

Konigseder and Wetzel describe actual signs and rhetoric used in these Exodus protests, such as Belsen DPs' banners with messages like: ““End the Bevin Terror in Palestine!’...and ‘Together with the *Exodus Mapilim* in the Struggle for a Free *Aliyah!*’”⁶⁵ The DPs pushed to make their fellow Jews' struggle, and their conception of the British laws as unjust, known in the wider world beyond the camps.

Another concrete manifestation of Zionist activity in the DP camps were *kibbutzim*.⁶⁶ Specific *kibbutzim* were formed by ardent young Zionists in DP communities in occupied Germany as hands-on practice for the emigration they hoped was imminent (in this case specifically to Palestine). Existing *kibbutzim* in Palestine sent emissaries to Germany who helped create some such *kibbutzim* and recruit members, and between these recruiting efforts and DPs' own fervent interest, the *kibbutz* movement was quite successful in occupied Germany.⁶⁷ Thomas Rahe writes in his essay on life in Belsen that by 1947, left-leaning Zionists “had organized 26 blocks as a *kibbutz*,” and that about a full quarter of remaining Jewish DPs were involved in this venture.⁶⁸ Major Heymont also wrote in September 1945 about *kibbutz* activity at Landsberg, demonstrating some puzzlement and frustration at their endeavor: “To add to my problems, I learned today that the young and best elements in the camps are organized into *Kibbutzim*....Each *Kibbutz* is very clannish and little interested in the camp life. [They] are after me to turn over to them some farms belonging to the Nazis.”⁶⁹ So the *kibbutzim* were communities both within and apart from the larger DP communities, complicating the notion of a unified Jewish DP

⁶⁵ Konigseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 203; *Mapilim* in Hebrew basically means illegal immigrant.

⁶⁶ Usually translated from Hebrew as something like “working community,” the concept of the *kibbutz* (or plural: *kibbutzim*) originated in early twentieth century Palestine but was transplanted to Eastern Europe, and, after the war, to survivors. They emphasize cooperation, equality, and a communal lifestyle in which all contribute.

⁶⁷ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 164.

⁶⁸ Rahe, “Social Life,” 80.

⁶⁹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors*, 21.

identity. These young Zionists were, like everyone, concerned with their prospects in the future, but with perhaps exclusionary, “clannish” zeal.

The Difficulty of Immigration to Allied Nations

While the maelstrom of issues surrounding immigration to Palestine continued to brew, the Allied governments, and the U.S. in particular, were ironically reticent to allow many Jews to immigrate to *their own* countries. This stubbornness put them in a political and a moral bind: if Britain was unwilling to allow much immigration to Mandatory Palestine, and the U.S. had been thus far unsuccessful at leveraging its power to make that happen, then the Allies could at least compensate by raising quotas or making more special allowances for the victims of Nazi oppression still stuck in Europe. Yet, this did not occur.

In December of 1945, President Truman announced a directive designed to expedite the entrance of Europeans in the American occupied zones: “[t]o the extent that our present immigration laws permit, everything possible should be done at once to facilitate the entrance of some of these displaced persons and refugees into the United States.”⁷⁰ In other words, current quotas and policies would remain the same, and these would certainly not satisfy the thousands of Jews, let alone all the DPs and refugees around the world who desired to come to the U.S. At the end of 1945 the American quota for immigrants from *all* Eastern European countries combined was only 13,000 people, and did not preference Jews over any other type of potential immigrant. Alex Gringauz, son of Feldafing leader Samuel Gringauz, remembered specifically that Polish Jews could only enter the U.S. under the Polish national quota,

⁷⁰ Italics mine; “Statement by the President (Truman), December 22, 1945,” *Documents on American Foreign Relations, Vol. VIII, July 1, 1945-December 31, 1946* ed. Dennett and Turner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948) 407-410, 407.

which he claimed had a waiting period of ten years.⁷¹ To add insult to injury, the German quota remained twice that at 26,000 and resulted in the admittance of former Nazis and SS officers into the United States among the postwar German immigrants.⁷² Understandably, DPs very often blamed the quota system for their inability to immigrate. For instance, Gerda Frieberg, her mother and sister were all Polish citizens. Frieberg recalled for a Shoah Foundation interview that her mother actually wrote to President Truman while in Landsberg, protesting unfair quotas and asking for admittance to the U.S. Gerda's father, a German citizen, had died in the Holocaust – had he still been alive, Gerda suspected they all could have entered the U.S. more easily.⁷³

Instead of increasing quotas and changing legislation, Truman's December 1945 directive proposed the rapid set-up of consular facilities and visa processing near the DP camps in the American zone, which would supposedly work smoothly by early spring 1946.⁷⁴ The President also announced a new interdepartmental group, made up of federal officials from the Departments of War and State, the Attorney General's Office, and other agencies "under the Chairmanship of the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization" to hasten the admittance of refugees.⁷⁵ While Truman's ideas sounded promising and helpful to DPs at first glance, there were numerous details besides the quota problem that stacked the cards very high against Jewish DPs. Truman was careful to point out that "[t]he provisions of law prohibiting the entry of persons likely to become public charges will be strictly observed," and

⁷¹ Alex Gringauz, interview by Manuel Bekier, January 16, 1997, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁷² Gill, *The Journey Back From Hell*, 42.

⁷³ Gerda Frieberg, interview by Linda Davidson, March 21, 1996, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

⁷⁴ "Statement by the President, Dec. 22, 1945," *Documents on American Foreign Relations Vol. VIII*, 409.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 412.

stated “that the majority [of immigrating DPs] will be orphaned children.”⁷⁶ Although many children were indeed orphaned, they were by no means a large proportion of DPs – most DPs were young adults to middle-aged. By insisting along with the letter of the law that those “likely to become public charges” not be admitted into the country, Truman denied the severe needs that other DPs had, and probably eliminated the opportunity for some DPs to emigrate. Helpless orphans could still be molded into good Americans, whereas large waves of adult refugees – with little to no assets, uneven educational and employment histories, and quite a bit of life trauma – were a wild card. Moreover, Truman shifted moral responsibility away from the government and placed the burden of assistance for DPs on welfare organizations, which he praised, and on DPs’ American relatives.⁷⁷ Based on all these factors and the inherent legislative bias against the DPs, it is not hard to see why through October 21, 1946, to President Truman’s surprise, “a mere 4,767 persons had been admitted.”⁷⁸

Why this resistance from the Americans? What factors were at play?⁷⁹ In brief, the United States was quite simply an anti-immigration nation after the war. Changing policy to admit more refugees and immigrants from Eastern Europe necessitated a huge congressional effort, which, according to historian Leonard Dinnerstein, President Truman was unwilling to embark upon.⁸⁰ It was easy enough for Americans, including American Jews, to call on Britain for the increase of immigration to Palestine, when the U.S. did not have a similarly sticky geopolitical situation as Palestine was for the U.K. Public opinion was also not on the side of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 408.

⁷⁷ DPs could generally be admitted to the U.S. only if they had an American sponsor; aid groups like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) were also later able to sponsor DPs.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 406.

⁷⁹ For a full exploration of this subject, Leonard Dinnerstein’s *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) is extremely useful.

⁸⁰ Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*, 137; the conclusion will elaborate on how and when this attitude changed.

admitting Jewish DPs to the U.S. A shockingly large 58 percent of Americans answered “yes” in June 1945 to the question “Do you think Jews have too much power in the United States?”⁸¹ American Jewish groups were reticent to start a pro-immigration campaign, both for strategic political reasons and because many of them, too, were not excited about large numbers of mysterious Jews from the Old Country entering the U.S. It became a higher priority to instead push against Britain’s Palestine policies, shifting attention away from the U.S.’ stagnant immigration policy.⁸² While in many cases the Americans demonstrated a greater willingness than Britain to employ rhetoric and strategies of humanitarianism for their DP policy in Germany, this did not translate to humanitarian, compassionate immigration laws for the U.S. itself.

If the British were stubborn about immigration policy to Palestine, the Allies were even more steadfast about denying substantial numbers of Jewish refugees entrance to the United States and Britain. As Abraham Klausner, the influential American Jewish chaplain noted in retrospect, “the borders to the U.S., U.K., France were not going to be open. The issue would be Palestine.”⁸³ Bluntly, the Allied nations would be more willing, when push came to shove, to shunt the thousands of Jewish refugees to Palestine rather than admit them in their own countries. The longer the British restricted immigration to Palestine, the more insistent DPs and international Jewish groups became that those restrictions be lifted, and the more intense Zionist activity became as well. Especially since the infiltrees who continued to flee Eastern Europe in 1946 and 1947 preferred Palestine more than the

⁸¹ Ibid., 6-8.

⁸² On the other side of the coin, Zionists all over the world were equally unwilling to support a campaign to liberalize American immigration policy, since that would divert attention away from the desired Jewish homeland.

⁸³ Klausner, VHA, USC.

“average” DP, insistence among DPs on Palestine as a first-choice destination only grew.

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry

As the immigration situation continued at an impasse, with too many DPs in the camps, more infiltrating all the time, and rules about entering the Allied nations themselves still rigid, both nations undertook a joint project to investigate potential solutions. This venture became known as the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. The Committee, or the AACI, was a joint taskforce of the U.S. and Britain specifically formed to investigate the status of Jewish DPs and the situation in Palestine and present recommendations. British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin, who typically represented anti-Zionist concerns in London, officially announced the Committee’s creation in November 1945.⁸⁴ After some debate and compromises, twelve members, six from each Allied nation, were chosen for the Committee. According to Dinnerstein, the formation and choice of committee members was close to a nightmare. With domestic politics coloring each nations’ picks, and the potential for Zionist sympathies to influence the Committee’s process, Dinnerstein writes that “if the Americans included some representatives who favored the Zionist point of view, the British contingent did not.”⁸⁵

After several months of travel and investigation all over the world in early 1946, followed by much contention and deliberation, the Committee’s final report titled *Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry regarding the problems of European Jewry and Palestine* was submitted on April 20, 1946.⁸⁶ The Committee’s

⁸⁴ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 44.

⁸⁵ Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*, 85.

⁸⁶ *Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry regarding the problems of European Jewry and Palestine*, (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1946); the American (Inquiry) and British

first recommendation stated that while it found no countries with “hope of substantial assistance” for Jews wishing to leave Europe, they did not call on any nation to permanently change immigration policy or legislation. Rather, the AACI asserted that the case of Jewish DPs represented an anomaly that necessitated the *relaxation* of rules to allow Jews to emigrate more freely, and not just to Palestine.⁸⁷ They also maintained that some Jews would and should stay in Europe, and that consequently efforts should be made to help rebuild shattered European Jewish communities.⁸⁸ Taken together, this somewhat paradoxical set of recommendations communicated that while the DPs’ choices were extremely limited, nations did not need to bend over backward to admit them. And, despite extremely strong evidence – including as presented in their own report – that DPs completely rejected the return to European nations of origin, the AACI’s decision to endorse DP repatriation is also baffling, and possibly represents London’s continued influence.

The recommendations that followed concerned more directly the future of Palestine. Given that members of the delegation were by no means pro-Zionist, and some, according to Dinnerstein, even held anti-Semitic opinions before the inquiry, the final unanimous recommendations appeared hopeful for Jews waiting to go to Palestine. Perhaps most importantly, the AACI echoed both Earl Harrison and President Truman, declaring “that 100,000 certificates be authorized immediately for the admission into Palestine of Jews who have been the victims of Nazi and Fascist persecution...[and] that these certificates be awarded as far as possible in 1946 and that actual immigration be pushed forward as rapidly as conditions will permit.”⁸⁹

This seemed like a breakthrough: the harrowing details the Committee was made

(Enquiry) English versions of this word are to blame for the discrepancy as I consulted a London-published edition of the report itself.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.

privity to on their visits to postwar Europe had made an impact. The report recalled their experiences in “Germany and Poland, which was often described to us as ‘the cemetery of European Jewry,’ where a Jew may see in the face of any man he looks upon the murderer of his family.”⁹⁰ The AACI acknowledged in the report, as heard from the survivors they talked to, that many Jewish DPs considered Palestine the only option of immigration.⁹¹ Despite these groundbreaking joint findings, the AACI’s report also still echoed the 1939 White Paper. In terms of the actual territory of Palestine, it called for no Arab or Jewish influence to be larger than the other in Palestine, and that violent tendencies there could not yet permit statehood. Furthermore, the AACI idealistically called for the cooperation of adjacent Arab states, and the Zionist Jewish Agency was also asked to terminate its involvement in, and support of, illegal immigration to Palestine.⁹²

Although British Foreign Secretary Bevin was actually desperate to push the AACI’s recommendations to come to fruition, and insisted that the U.S. be implicated in the process in order to spread the burden of the Palestine problem around, other British officials had to evaluate the recommendations of the AACI. Quickly, despite public opinion in both the U.S. and U.K. to the contrary, the Cabinet rejected the main recommendation of allowing 100,000 immigration visas to Palestine.⁹³ Although the AACI was basically unproductive in the short-term, every investigation, report, and media coverage of the DPs made the issue more prevalent in British media and in government circles. The continued progression of this information most likely had a snowball effect to eventually necessitate policy changes. The fact that DPs rejected

⁹⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁹¹ Ibid. A large part of the report (29-42, 60-79) is devoted to the situation on the ground in Palestine and the prospects and estimated reactions to statehood. This is a very complex issue and a different topic of research than my scope necessitated, but the AACI was cognizant of the different nationalities in Palestine and investigated Jewish and Arab reactions to the political question.

⁹² Ibid., 9.

⁹³ Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*, 94.

repatriation, and that the Allies rejected liberalization of their own immigration policy, only compounded the multiple reports since the end of the war that endorsed major reform to how Palestine was governed. Palestine as a destination for Jewish refugees increasingly became the most feasible option.

CONCLUSION

The Second World War unquestioningly brought about more destruction than any conflict in history. Millions of Jews were killed during the war and the Holocaust, and historical attention has rightly been pointed towards this overall outcome of tragic death. But as some scholars and survivors alike assert, the historical narrative has largely ignored the fate of those who did not perish. Memorializing and understanding what happened to those murdered in the Holocaust is crucial; but it still tends to place importance and attention on the perpetrators of genocide and hatred. Perhaps important historical lessons can be learned not from the Third Reich's actions, but from those who experienced the Holocaust and survived to recount their memories, and who fought after liberation to pick up the pieces of what remained of their lives. Instead of placing this study within the narrative of tragedy and of the role of National Socialism, I hoped to emphasize the experiences of a certain group of survivors: displaced persons who endured more difficulties postwar, but who also harnessed their collective strength to pressure the Allies, to assert their Jewish-ness once more, and to create new communities. This study has thus explored in detail the phenomenon of displacement, and the interplay of the Jews and their Allied administrators throughout the first year and a half or so after the end of World War II in Europe. Since refugees, asylum-seekers, and various migrants continue to move all over the world, and to experience hardship, the study of postwar Jewish DPs remains relevant and useful. The lives of the displaced, pushed to the margins of society and history, must be given attention.¹

The intention was to place this study among those that currently exist about Jewish DPs, their camp experiences, and the Allies' political concerns that constantly

¹ What comes to mind from recent press coverage are North African migrants attempting to enter Europe via boat; eerily similar to groups of Jewish refugees trying to reach Palestine who were rebuffed or detained by the British.

swirled around them, but to make two important changes. First, to more explicitly compare the reasons for, and implications of, different American and British policies. Secondly, to think critically about Jewish DPs' activism and influence after the war, and to place this marginalized refugee group that did gain a measure of power and autonomy into the historiography.

My research began with an overview of the context that surrounded Jewish individuals' displacement in the postwar world, before continuing to an exploration of DP life in the rough chronological order that any given DP would have experienced it. I constructed the initial situation of DP camps in occupied Germany and early approaches behind the Allies' policies, then looked more closely at how the tension between DPs and Allies led the U.S. in particular to listen to DPs, resulting in policy reform. Different political groups on either side of the Atlantic, including DPs, then continued to interact in the wake of American changes – and Britain's resistance to such changes. The DPs' actual communities in DP camps were also discussed, not just in terms of their immediate benefits but their long-term implications as well. Both political organization and activism as well as cultural activities strengthened those communities amidst continued limitations imposed, again particularly by the British. Finally, the evolution of immigration policy on the part of both Allied powers was analyzed, along with the phenomenon of the Jewish DP identity's ability (or lack thereof) to influence policy changes in terms of the collective goal to leave Europe.

As the tumultuous decade of the 1940s wound down, what were the next steps for the Jewish DPs? I have tried to make clear that liberation for many Jewish victims of the Holocaust did not result in their absolute freedom, but in a prolonged experience of internment. But I have also shown that the DP experience was, if not easy, nonetheless a beneficial part of these Jews' postwar reclamation and

solidification of identity through political, social, artistic and other means. Clustered together after enormous trauma, DPs were able to foment ideas, movements, and activities that all centered on the necessity of Zionism.² In spite of this rich cultural environment, and also *because of* that environment's insistence on emigration, DP camps represented transitory moments in Jews' lives. The point continually emphasized by DPs and their supporters around the globe was that emigration opportunities must be opened up. The late 1940s brought major political changes for both the Allied powers that deeply affected Jewish DPs' ability to eventually, finally, leave Europe. Additionally, the intransigence of both Allied powers in terms of their own immigration policy, and the post-Holocaust desire of DPs *specifically* among Jewish survivors to reject assimilation and prewar national identity for Zionist ideals, meant that creating a Jewish state was given more primacy than ever before.

The complexities of European Jews' actual postwar immigration patterns require a different research question and scope to fully explore, but a brief survey is useful to paint a picture of what the future held for Jewish DPs. The nations with control over the immigration situation were the United Kingdom and the United States, which were embroiled in power plays on a global scale. Each nation remained concerned with spheres of influence and the complex international issue of Palestine, while also considering domestic concerns that played into immigration policy. As seen in Chapter Four, the British had consistent qualms with allowing immigration to Palestine, while the American government was loath to allow immigration of Jewish DPs on a large scale into the U.S. Therefore, entrance to the DPs' top two destinations was inhibited in the years immediately following the war. Although effort was taken on the part of *both* governments to explore options of DP

² As described in Chapter Four, I believe that nearly all Jewish DPs thought of themselves as Zionist, or could be categorized as such, whether or not as individuals they sought refuge in Palestine/Israel.

resettlement, no truly satisfactory solution during the late 1940s was able to accommodate the mass emigration of Jews from Europe until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and, to a lesser extent, American legislation of 1948 and 1950.

The creation of Israel, on which in-depth research has been done, is another corollary topic to this study.³ In brief, however, Great Britain's withdrawal from Palestine, beginning in 1947, was influenced both by worldwide Jewish pressure and overarching geopolitical factors.⁴ In addition, the newly-formed United Nations created a United Nations Special Commission on Palestine in May 1947 and called for an investigation.⁵ The UNSCOP commissioners visited both the DP camps and Palestine, and ended up with similar results as the AACI.⁶ Specifically, the UNSCOP's official report prioritized several recommendations: their number one proposal was that: "[t]he Mandate for Palestine shall be terminated at the earliest practicable date."⁷ Furthermore, the UNSCOP delegation made important and uncompromising statements about the importance of admitting Jews to Palestine.⁸ The UNSCOP findings did what the British had consistently been reluctant to do: they pointedly linked the issue of Jewish DPs stuck in Europe to the issue of Palestine, and recognized explicitly that the British mandate was, whether the U.K. liked it or not, enmeshed in one of the consequences of the Holocaust: increased Zionism. The UNSCOP, in fact, went so far as to say that the admittance of Jews to Palestine was "a

³ See Michael J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982) or Abram L. Sachar, *The Redemption of the Unwanted: From the Liberation of the Death Camps to the Founding of Israel* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983).

⁴ Arieh Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 283.

⁵ The UNSCOP delegation consisted of eleven "minor" states from all around the world considered to be neutral; Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: the Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 355.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁷ *United Nations Weekly Bulletin*, "Majority Recommends Partition of Palestine." 111 no. 11 (September 9, 1947): 327-333, 327.

⁸ *Ibid.*

vital prerequisite” to a solution for the euphemistic “difficult conditions in Palestine.”⁹ It had taken an international body to finally illuminate what the British would not fathom politically, and what the U.S. had been unable to convince Britain to consider: a large portion of Jewish refugees must be admitted to Palestine.

Just several weeks after the abovementioned report came out, the cabinet in London did decide to abandon the mandate, and on November 30, the UN voted to approve the recommendations of UNSCOP.¹⁰ As Joint Distribution Committee official Leo Schwarz recalled, in Munich on that November day, “[t]he blue-and-white Zionist banner and the stars and stripes waved from flagpoles at the headquarters of the Central Committee. The streets resounded with congratulations. An ethereal joy imbued the very air. Happy faces were everywhere; people kissed and embraced. Mazel tov.”¹¹ Although the news initially appeared to be favorable for the DPs, reaction to the plan – which included partition into Arab and Jewish states – was met with criticism.¹² When on May 14, 1947, the British lowered the Union Jack in Jerusalem and David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israeli independence, fighting between Arabs and Jews was already smoldering.¹³ Despite this new conflict, the creation of the state of Israel went hand-in-hand with the entrance of thousands more Jewish DPs: about half of the overall total of Jewish DPs would move to Palestine/Israel.

In the United States, President Truman had been in communication with future leaders of the Jewish state, who called on Truman to support their cause, as they had for several years. Also on May 14, Truman released a statement: “This Government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and

⁹ Ibid., 328.

¹⁰ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 284.

¹¹ Leo W. Schwarz, *The Redeemers: A Saga of the Years 1945-1952* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953), 266.

¹² Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 360.

¹³ Ibid., 361.

recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the State of Israel.”¹⁴ Following in the footsteps of Earl Harrison, Henry Morgenthau, David Niles, and other U.S. government officials who influenced President Truman, one of the most powerful men in the world gave immediate approval to the fruit of the Zionist’s labor.¹⁵

Meanwhile, some American lawmakers had been working to change immigration policy and bring more DPs into the United States. As alluded to in Chapter Four, this was a controversial issue in the U.S. Public opinion about refugees’ potential resettlement in the U.S. was often negative; groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and conservative members of Congress alike balked at the prospect of admitting refugees. *The DP Story* noted that “opponents of the bill labeled displaced persons as degenerates, criminals, and subversives, who would never be assimilated in the United States...”¹⁶ On the other hand, other politicians, everyday Americans, and editorial boards across the country believed that the U.S. was not doing enough to open its doors to those in need in the wake of the war’s devastation.

The beginning of the eightieth session of congress in January 1947 saw “a veritable flood of bills...presented to permit the entrance of refugees or displaced persons.”¹⁷ President Truman backed the general sentiment of these bills, and emphasized America’s responsibility to admit refugees in his 1947 State of the Union

¹⁴ “Statement by the President (Truman) on Recognition of the Provisional Government of Israel. White House Press Release, May 14, 1948,” in *Documents on American Foreign Relations, Vol. X, January 1-December 31, 1948*, ed. Dennett and Turner (Bristol, CT: Princeton University Press, 1950), 660.

¹⁵ See David A. Friedman, “Against the Experts: Harry S. Truman, David K. Niles, and the Birth of the State of Israel, 1945-1948,” (Honors Bachelor of Arts thesis, Whitman College, 2011) for more on Niles and other pro-Israel influences on Truman.

¹⁶ *Memo to America: The DP Story, The Final Report of the United States Displaced Persons Commission* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1952), 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

speech and in a special message to Congress in April 1947. A subcommittee of the House committee of Foreign Affairs even traveled to Europe in late 1947, touring DP camps in several countries, paralleling other investigations made over the last several years. Unsurprisingly, the outcome of this trip was the subcommittee's unanimous conclusion "that the United States should take pride in the high moral position taken under its leadership that persons having 'legitimate fear of political or religious persecution in their homelands will not be compelled to repatriate.'"¹⁸ The question now, as it had been ever since the end of the war, was how the bureaucracy would respond to such an idea. Contentious debate over proposed DP legislation occurred throughout 1947 and 1948 in both the House and Senate.¹⁹ The "flood of bills" was slowly whittled down, and the first DP Act of 1948 was signed into law by President Truman with, in his own words, "very great reluctance," on June 25, 1948, just a month after Israel's proclamation of independence.²⁰

Truman and many lawmakers (mostly Democrats, opinions on the DP Act were divided along party lines) in Washington took issue with restrictions and limitations within the bill. Most importantly for Jewish DPs, the bill set cut-off dates that excluded many Jews from entering the U.S. Eligibility was defined as one "who on or after September 1, 1939, and on or before December 22, 1945, entered

¹⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹ The political debate surrounding the 1948 Act delved deeply into the intricacies of who to admit to the U.S. and why, and Jewish DPs were often at the center of this discussion. The exploration that this subject deserves is outside the breadth of my research, but consult *The DP Story* cited above and Leonard Dinnerstein's *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) for all the details.

²⁰ "Statement by the President (Truman) on Signature of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. White House Press Release, June 25, 1948," in *Documents on American Foreign Relations, Vol. X*, 458-460, 458.

Germany, Austria, or Italy....”²¹ Truman stated in his address at the bill’s signing that:

it must be frankly recognized...that this bill excludes Jewish displaced persons, rather than accepting a fair proportion of them with other faiths...It is inexplicable, except upon the abhorrent ground of intolerance, that this date should have been chosen instead of April 21, 1947, the date on which General Clay closed the displaced-persons camps to further admissions.²²

The President and other politicians recognized that the “inexplicable” date of December 22, 1945 disqualified hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors who, as discussed in Chapter One, returned home before coming to the Allied occupation zones, as well as infiltrees who had not experienced direct wartime persecution but who fled Eastern Europe after the war. Furthermore, as Leonard Dinnerstein asserts, the 1948 Act ironically canceled the admittance of 23,000 DPs, mostly Jews, who “had received preliminary approval to enter the United States” thanks to Truman’s December 1945 directive.²³

Luckily for critics of the 1948 Act, the 1948 elections gave Truman another term, and also replaced some of the anti-immigration members of Congress with others more willing to liberalize the existing law. Therefore, members of Congress began working immediately on amendments. Though roadblocks were numerous, a final DP Act was eventually instituted in June 1950.²⁴ Crucial changes included a major jump in the cut-off date for entering the occupation zones from late 1945 to January 1, 1949, and the explicit stipulation that “[s]election of eligible displaced persons and resettlement was to be made without discrimination in favor of or against

²¹ “An Act to Authorize for a Limited Period of Time the Admission into the United States of Certain European Displaced Persons for Permanent Residence, Approved June 25, 1948,” in *Documents on American Foreign Relations, Vol. X*, 452-458, 452.

²² “Statement by the President,” *Documents on American Foreign Relations, Vol. X*, 459.

²³ This directive, mentioned in Chapter Four, although fairly restrictive, did allow for a small number of Jewish DPs to enter the U.S., and more were in the works. But the DP Act automatically repealed that directive; Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*, 181.

²⁴ Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 381; opposition to amendments often came from the rigidly isolationist and anti-immigrant Nevada Senator Pat McCarran, for more on him see Dinnerstein’s *America and the Survivors*, Chapter 9, “Pat McCarran and the Amended DP Act.”

a race, religion, or national origin.”²⁵ The Displaced Persons Commission implemented the Act over the next several years, and over 400,000 DPs came to the United States as a direct result of the legislation, at least twenty percent of them Jews.²⁶

By 1952, the vast majority of Jewish DPs were resettled across the world, and the DP camps were transferred to West German jurisdiction. Many camps began to close in the early 1950s as the rate of immigration increased, but what is referred to as a “hard core” remained. Most of the hard core were sick or very old, and were not mobile enough to make a journey abroad. Almost twelve years after the war in Europe ended, the last DP camp in Germany – Föhrenwald in the U.S. zone – closed on February 28, 1957.²⁷

As the vestiges of Jewish refugee life left the former occupied zones, a unique chapter in history closed. Most Jewish DPs had been able to leave the land of their painful oppression behind, at least physically. The experiences of months or years spent in DP camps ranged from desperate and difficult for some to rehabilitating and hopeful for others. To generalize about the Jewish DPs leaves out the intricacies of personal experience, which I hope to have provided a glimpse of in previous chapters of this study. But overall, displacement represented another layer of DPs’ alienation from their prewar lives and identities, and resulted in the increased importance of Zionism for international Jewry. No longer Czechs, Lithuanians, or Poles, the stateless Jews and their resilient leaders deliberately abandoned these nationalities in favor of a collective Jewish identity. Jewish DPs’ insistence on that identity shaped Allied policy toward them, at different points for better or worse, in various ways to

²⁵ *The DP Story*, 38.

²⁶ More Jewish DPs came to the U.S. before and after the years the DP Act was in effect, or under other provisions. All told, the United States accepted about one quarter of the Jewish DP population, or over 200,000 people. Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*, 253;

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

hinder or help the Jews. This identity would eventually serve them well in the new state of Israel, or provide connections and comfort in the United States, Britain, South Africa or wherever DPs immigrated. Despite broader political concerns having a constant effect on DP policy and thus DPs' everyday lives, ultimately DP camps were the stages upon which the resurgence, celebration, and assertion of Jewish culture and identity played out in order to rebuild new lives.

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