Hachsharah Training Centers in Czechoslovakia and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

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Abstract

Immediately after the foundation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, activities, focus groups, bureaucratic structure, and organization of hachsharah *training centers had to change considerably. Chances to emigrate became more and more limited. Since the completion of the* hachsharah *training became a prerequisite for obtaining the emigration certificate, the reorganization of* hachsharah *training centers became a crucial task for Zionists. Various agricultural training centers, vocational training, and requalification courses were established and organized with unprecedented intensity. For these activities, He-Halutz department of the Palestinian Office was responsible, and organized these places mostly on farms and manors of Czech farmers; this became a part of the economic exploitation of the Jews. The paper will analyze changes in age groups, social status of emigration candidates and trainees, reorganization of training camps from the perspective of the Zionist movement as well as temporal changes of Jewish geography in the former territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.*

Introduction*

The role and evolution of the *hachsharot* in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia can be traced only with significant difficulties. For the purpose of the study, I tackle the issue in relation to the geopolitical changes that affected this region during the interwar period and the Second World War. I will focus predominantly on the former Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Although I am aware that Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia also played a crucial role in the shaping of the hachsharot, the region stays somewhat aside for the purpose of this study. Jews' participation in agricultural training in this area developed in parallel with the discourse on (national) Jewish identity, which was deeply affected by the partition of Czechoslovakia and the consequences of the annexation of the Protectorate to Nazi Germany. In the period analyzed in this article, Jews lived in a turbulent time of integration, commitment to the national aspirations of Czechoslovaks and/or Zionists, growing discrimination and exclusion, and eventually ghettoization and deportation. With a certain measure of simplification, the Jews of Czechoslovakia determined and reconfigured their identity and affiliation to Zionism accordingly. Against the backdrop of this complex scenario, I will examine Jews' approach to and participation in the ideological and practical training for *aliyah* and the hachsharot. My analysis will focus primarily on two pioneer youth movements: Tchelet Lavan, which originated from the German romantic movement Wandervogel, and the socialist Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir, which has its origins in Galicia. Drawing on documents from the archives of these two youth movements and the contemporary Jewish press, I will try to reconstruct their ideological, educational, and organizational program in the hachsharot. Intertwining these sources with memoirs and oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors who participated in the hachsharot, this article also sheds light on the impact of Zionist propaganda on young pioneers and the way they perceived their training experience. The article shows that, if initially the hachsharot were perceived as vacation camps, later they were seen as a social and economic lifeline by the young Jews of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This development was, however, significantly affected by the Second World War.

While historical research has demonstrated that the Zionist project in Czechoslovakia never became a mass Jewish movement, the experiences of the young Jews who joined the hachsharot have not been addressed yet.[1] Thus, this study faces many difficulties. Educational programs and hachsharot were somehow neglected in Czech historiography. Exploring the transformation of hachsharot training centers between the 1930s and the autumn of 1941 provides a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the Zionist ideological education of leftist Jewish youth in Czechoslovakia and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. As we shall see, during this period, the hachsharot evolved from being an almost complete failure to playing a crucial role as part of a more comprehensive system of retraining and employment for Jews in the early years of the Protectorate. Indeed, the pioneer youth movements' focus on the cult of the chosen body[2] resulted in a substantial discrepancy between the ideology of the educational programs and their practical implementation.

From a methodological point of view, this work is based on analyses of educational and propaganda materials from both movements, which represented specific practices and discourses, and on oral history testimonies. In the post-war period, most of the documents were transferred to Israeli archives. The sources used here are related to the movements mentioned above and can be found in the Israeli research and documentation center of the Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir movement in Givat Haviva and in the Machon Lavon Archives for the Labour Movements. I

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[1] For more information about Zionism in Czechoslovakia see Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Tatjana Lichtenstein, *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016); Vít Strobach, *Židé: národ, rasa, třída. Sociální hnutí a „židovská otázka" v českých zemích 1861-1921* [Jews: Nation, Race, Class. Social Movements and the "Jewish Question" in the Czech Lands in 1861-1921] (Praha: NLN, 2015). General information can be found in these books, and a very short summary in the article by Dalibor Státník, "Hachšara jako předpoklad alije (cesta z moderního židovského područenství k vlastní státnosti)" [Hachsharah as a Precondition of Aliyah (The Way from Modern Jewish Subordination to the Own Statehood], in *Židé v boji a odboji: rezistence československých Židů v letech druhé světové války. Příspěvky účastníků mezinárodní konference konané ve dnech 17.-18. října 2006 v Praze pod záštitou prof. RNDr. Václava Pačesa, DrSc., předsedy Akademie věd ČR* (Praha: Historický ústav, 2007), 357-364.

[2] The phrase "chosen body" refers to the cult of building the nation and the individual body: Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

also used memoirs and testimonies of former *hachsharah* participants from the Oral History Collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague.[3] On the basis of these documents, we can trace the role of the hachsharot training camps in fulfilling the goals of Socialist Zionism, as two different movements in interwar Czechoslovakia conceived them. We can also get a better image of the program of these centers and its perception by Jewish youth themselves. And last but not least, we can get an insight into Zionist propaganda during the interwar period and at the beginning of Second World War, when the Jewish population, in general, became more interested in emigration and in the organization of hachsharot and vocational training centers. It is apparent from the materials and testimonies under study that there was a substantial discrepancy between the ideology behind the educational programs and their activities in practice.[4]

Zionism as an identification strategy in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia

In the interwar years, the Jews of Czechoslovakia formed a well-integrated minority in a heterogeneous national society. However, the Jewish community itself was not uniform: Jews differed in language, national and political affiliation, education, and character. As a result of Joseph II's reforms of in the 1780s, a new German school system was founded and a significant part of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia adopted the German language and culture naturally. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that part of these Jews started leaning toward Czech nationalism and later toward Czech-Jewish and Jewish national movements.[5]

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[3] The collection is focused on the testimonies of the first and second generations of survivors. I am aware that the interviews from the collection deal mainly with the experience of the Holocaust, and therefore the interviewees' memories and recollection of their experience in the hachsharot might be influenced by what they went through afterwards. However, I consider their testimonies as valuable sources to understand the hachsharah from the participants' perspective.

[4] Part of the article is based on my unpublished PhD thesis, Daniela Bartáková, "Židovská pionýrská mládež v meziválečném Československu mezi sionismem a komunismem – budování vyvoleného těla" [Jewish Pioneer Youth in Interwar Czechoslovakia between Zionism and Communism - the Building of the Chosen Body] (PhD diss., Palacký University Olomouc, 2020).

[5] Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community*: *The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Broadly speaking, there were differences between the Eastern and Western parts of the republic. In Bohemia and Moravia, Jews were highly urbanized, primarily involved in commerce, trade and industry; they were physicians, lawyers, members of the middle-class, and came from educated families. In Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Jews represented a rather less-educated, orthodox minority, settled in villages and small cities, and characterized by Ezra Mendelsohn as an Eastern European type of Jewry. According to the census of 1921, there were more than 350,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia.[6]

Historical research has pointed out that Czechoslovak Jews viewed Zionism as way to anchor themselves as an integrated minority in a multi-national state, rather than as an "exit strategy," as explained by Lichtestein:

> In interwar Czechoslovakia, Zionists adopted a model for citizenship that combined an ethnonational Jewish identity with patriotism. Indeed, to Zionists, the nationalization of Jewish society was a necessary precondition for good citizenship. While the country's constitution guaranteed Jews equal rights, actual social and civic equality depended on a broader public identification of Jews as belonging to the state and Jews' feeling of being at home. Zionists' political project of belonging aimed to define the boundaries and loyalties of the Jewish nation as well as to contest narratives that marked Jews as outsiders and excluded them from the community of equal citizens.[7]

Zionism, as an identification strategy, cultural movement, and a socialist push to make Jews move to Palestine, never became a mass movement. The Shekel statistics[8] help us understand the extent of Czechoslovak Jews' affiliation to Zionism as they provide data on the number of registered members of the Zionist movement who paid membership fees. These sources reveal that in 1933 there were 23,766 Jews registered in the Shekel statistics, more precisely 4,330 in Bohemia, 5,774 in Moravia and Silesia; 8,106 in Slovakia; and 5,556 in Subcarpathian

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[6] Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 131-170.

[7] Lichtenstein, *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia*, 2-3.

[8] The Zionist statistics of those who paid a membership fee, the so called Shekel.

Ruthenia.[9] However, between the 1920s and 1930s Zionist youth organizations of different orientations proliferated in Czechoslovakia, and for many of them the cult of youth became an integral part of their Zionist curricula.

The establishment of a He-Halutz branch in Czechoslovakia played an essential role in the creation of the first agricultural training centers—the hachsharot—which aimed to provide pioneers with appropriate training in agriculture and practical training for life in collective settlements. The He-Halutz movement originated at the end of the First World War in Eastern Europe. After the communist regime in Russia prohibited He-Halutz activities, Poland became its new center. Its ideology reflected the labor wing of Zionism. The term *halutz* itself—meaning "pioneer" and "vanguard" —carries the connotation of a firm determination to achieve the goal of carrying out the socialist national project.[10] In 1921, He-Halutz was incorporated into the overall organizational structure of Czechoslovak Zionists, who provided both administrative support and financial aid to its pioneering activities. The ideological training of the hachsharot was based on the concept of Socialist Zionism, and its goal was to create an agricultural and working-class in Palestine through the social and economic re-stratification of the Jewish population. The youth movements mentioned above also pursued these goals.

This early phase of the hachsharot in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia ended in 1928 after He-Halutz gave up on running training farms due to the economic crisis in Palestine and the restriction on aliyah implemented by the British administration. These made it extremely difficult to obtain immigration certificates for young emigrants from Czechoslovakia. According to He-Halutz, between 1923 and 1925 the number of its affiliates grew from 105 to 382. Still, the

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[9] Nezpracované spisy ústředního sionistického svazu [Unprocessed Writings of the Central Zionist Union], Varia, 1933[Various], signature 2130, box139, Archiv židovského muzea v Praze [Archives of The Jewish Museum in Prague] (AŽMP). Unfortunately, it is impossible to come up with exact numbers for the membership of each Zionist movement.

[10] The movement continued the activities of the first Zionists who left for Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century. These were members of the Bilu and Hibat Zion organizations. However, He-Halutz acquired its fundamental importance and more robust structure during the Third Aliyah (1919-1923). See Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 232-234. Daniela Bartáková, "Hašomer Hacair a Tchelet Lavan v Československu (1918-1938)*"* [Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair and Tchelet Lavan in Czechoslovakia] (Unpublished MA thesis, Olomouc, 2010), 34.

number of those who made aliyah did not: 113 men and 14 women.[11] These factors had a decisive impact on He-Halutz, since their few Jewish pioneers abandoned the hachsharot. According to Lichtenstein, the lack of funds and certificates was not the only problem, as "activists also complained of a significant gender imbalance, with three times more boys than girls joining in [...]."[12]

Leading youth Movements and Key Ideologies behind the *Hachsharot*

Among the many Jewish Zionist youth movements that proliferated at the time in Czechoslovakia, the Tchelet Lavan and Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir were strongly influenced by the labor wing of Zionism and scouting ideologies. The Tchelet Lavan was inspired by the German romantic movement Wandervogel, which promoted youth autonomy, the return to a more authentic and spiritual way of life, and the commitment to nature and communal experiences. The first group of the Blau-Weiss organization, directly inspired by the Wandervogel, was established in Prague in 1919 and found its members predominantly among German-speaking Jewish youth, especially in Bohemia and Moravia. The Czechoslovak branch was established under the name The Association of the Jewish Youth Tchelet Lavan (Jüdischer Wanderbund Blau-Weiss), and focused primarily on health and the spiritual, moral, and physical preparation of its members through hiking and camping.[13] In this phase, learning about Jewish history, Zionism, and Eretz Israel was secondary for the Blau-Weiss. The radicalization of German nationalism and the growing antisemitism, which spread through youth movements and organizations such as the Wandervogel and the Blau-Weiss, questioned the presence of Jews in their ranks. As noted by Čapková, the Blau-Weiss in Bohemia strictly opposed the militarism that started to characterize the German Blau-Weiss, including the military-like features of the scouting movements, which were also distinct features of Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir.

[11] Data taken from Lichtestein, *Zionism in Interwar Czechoslovakia,* 408, footnote 48. Quoted from "Bericht über die Weidah des čsl. Landesverbandes Hechalutz," Z4/2154, 26-27 Dezember 1925, Central Zonist Archives, Jerusalem.

[12] Lichtenstein, *Zionism in Interwar Czechoslovakia*, 284.

[13] "Blau-Weiss", Spolkový katastr, PŘ, SK XIV/342, Archiv Hlavního Města Prahy [Archives of the City of Prague]; Bartáková, "Jewish Pioneer Youth."

After the First World War, the Blau-Weiss in Czechoslovakia became completely independent from the German organization as it started to commit primarily to Jewish-Zionist education, and in 1923 changed its name to Tchelet Lavan (Blue-White). In 1938 a Czech-speaking branch split from Tchelet Lavan—it was named El-Al.[14]

The Czechoslovak Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir movement had its predecessor in Poland. It was inspired by the international scouting movement founded by Baden-Powell, which emphasized outdoor educational activities, productive work and a more military-like organization. The migration waves of Ostjuden brought these ideas to the Eastern part of the Republic during the First World War, and these put down roots, especially in the Eastern part of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. In these regions, Baden Powell's scouting ideology was widespread throughout Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir's organization. In the Eastern part of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, these ideas were also found in the Kadima organization. After both movements merged in Ha-Shomer Kadima, their common platform promoted education of the Jewish youth, fostering He-Halutz activities and supporting productive work in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora. However, soon after that, the movement split, and the Slovakian branch of Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir was established.[15]

The geographical sphere of influence of the two movements was different. While Tchelet Lavan appealed to the Jewish youth of Bohemia and Moravia as a movement opposing the bourgeois life of the older, middle-class, German-speaking generation, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir appealed to the youth of the Eastern part the Republic as a way out from orthodox Jewish life.

In the mid-1920s, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir and Tchelet Lavan signed an agreement that established their spheres of action in different territories of Czechoslovakia. Thanks to this agreement, the hachsharot became places of mutual interconnection and confrontation between the two movements. From the second half of the 1920s, He-Halutz training centers moved mainly to the East of

[14] For more on the history of the Blau-Weiss and Tchelet Lavan in Bohemia see also Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?*, 228-234.

[15] Pavol Mešťan, *Hašomer Hacair – Dějiny hnutia* [Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir – History of the movement] (Bratislava: SNM – Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2001); Livia Rotkirchen, "Slovakia II., 1918-1938," in *Jews of Czechoslovakia, Historical Studies and Surveys*, Vol. I., eds. Huge Colman, Guido Kisch, and Aharon M. Rabinowicz (Philadelphia: JPS, 1968), 85-124.

the republic, where a new membership base was growing rapidly. Thus, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir established separate hachsharot, next to the so-called "mixed" hachsharot, consisting of members of youth organizations as well as young people without a previous affiliation to Zionist movements. It was also on the fields of the mixed hachsharot that the cooperation between the two movements became apparent.[16]

At that time, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir represented a well-organized movement with its own history and precise curricula oriented toward the Jews from the Eastern part of the republic. In the same period, Tchelet Lavan focused instead on Jews from Bohemia and Moravia. Cooperation between the two movements was problematic from the very beginning: their separate historical development and the different character of their membership was apparent, especially in the kibbutz movements in Palestine and the activities of their emissaries (*shlihim*). Then they clashed on the issue of the relationship with the international pioneer youth movement He-Halutz.

Despite considerable differences between the two organizations and a distinct membership base from different parts of the republic, the two movements had much in common in their ideological programs. However, in this initial phase, Zionism, intended as a nationalist movement to persuade youth to make aliyah, characterized neither Tchelet Lavan nor Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir. Both of them stood out for their scouting activities and for embracing Zionism's socialist ideology during the First World War, under the influence of the Balfour declaration and the Russian revolution.

Socialist Zionists adopted the politics of social and economic re-stratification of the Jewish nation as it was introduced by the fathers of this wing, Dov Ber Borochov, Aron David Gordon, Nachman Syrkin, and many others. They introduced a mixture of class struggle and nationalism and formulated the principles of "normalization" of the Jewish nation through the colonization project, physical labor, and the return to the land.[17] Among the goals of the

[16] Martin J. Wein, "Zionism in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Palestinocentrism and Landespolitik," in *Judaica Bohemiae* 44, no. 1 (2009): 5-47.

[17] Their ideas were based on the studies of prominent Austro-marxists, and applied the concept of national and class struggle to the Jewish nation. See Ber Borochov, "The national Question and the Class Struggle," in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Herzberg

Socialist Zionist's program were *Shlilat Ha-Golah*—negation of diaspora; *Hagshamah Atzmit*—self-realization through physical work; aliyah—emigration to Palestine; and *Kibbush Ha-Aretz*—the conquering of the "Promised Land."[18] These goals were supposed to be achieved thanks to the cult of the "New Hebrew Man," whose typical representatives were young Jewish pioneers—the *halutzim*. As mentioned in the testimony of the former pioneer and leader of the Jewish pioneers in Palestine, Meron Benvenisti, the Zionist slogans about the negation of the diaspora with which he grew up were supposed to instill in the youth a deep sense of shame for the miserable and inauthentic life of their ancestors. In this respect Zionist terminology served as an effective power practice. The Zionist apparatus set up a formal and informal educational system, through which it promoted the ideas of Socialist Zionism both in Palestine and in individual countries. The cult of the homeland through which the Jewish pioneer youth were initiated into the discourses and practices of Socialist Zionism was framed in terms of the country's reconstruction project.[19]

The ideology of the hachsharot was closely linked to the goal of building a "New Hebrew Man" and promoting the idea of *hagshamah*—self-realization through physical work, which entails the practical realization of the national goals and ideals of Socialist Zionism, principles anchored in the ideological program of both movements under discussion. The practical ideology of the hachsharah was a mixture of eclecticism, socialism, and collectivism with the aim of making Jewish youth productive and building a chosen collective national body. The successful completion of the program became a necessary precondition for aliyah. In addition to fulfilling the goals of Socialist Zionism, it promoted the occupational, social and economic re-stratification of the Jewish population through work in agriculture. More generally, a healthy lifestyle was widely promoted among nationalists from the end of the nineteenth century and it became another goal of

(Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 356; Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (Basic Books: New York, 2017), 147-158.

[18] Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (London - New York: Verso, 2008).

[19] Meron Benvenisti, *Conflicts and Contradictions* (New York: Villard Books, 1986).

Jewish pioneer youth.[20] In the training camps, the equality of all members was strongly emphasized. Participants were required to have and cultivate their sense of responsibility, duty, and justice. Stress was put on relations between individual members, mutual communication, and a strong sense of solidarity, which should not be motivated only by ideological goals but also by emotional ties between members.[21]

The connection between men's bonds and nationalism was an apparent reference to the ideas of Hans Blüher and other ideologists of nationalism, whose views on the cult of the body and corporeality had been taken up by nationalists since the late nineteenth century. Hans Blüher was a co-founder and the leading theoretician of the German youth movement Wandervogel. He promoted his ideas in the books *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*[22] and *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen*.[23] No less important for the ideological evolution of Jewish youth pioneering activities was the Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger and his book *Geschlecht und Charakter*, which was a bestseller at the time. Both authors were well known for their antisemitic ideas, but various Jewish youth organizations took inspiration from their works nonetheless.[24] For Blüher, sports, combat, and military youth organizations helped forge a manly society and a specific male Eros, crucial factors that shaped the national state and patriotism. On the one hand, the national state represented a homosexual construct based on erotic, masculine male bonds. On the other, family represented a social heterosexual construct. Thus, homosexuality was not perceived as an expression of femininity or weakness; on the contrary, it indicated male power. In this representation, man reproduces the state through homosexuality, while women can reproduce humankind only. A strong nation

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[20] Israel Oppenheim, *The Struggle of Jewish Youth for Productivization: The Zionist Youth Movement in Poland* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989), v-vi; Weiss, *The Chosen Body,* 1-6.

[21] Oppenheim, *The Struggle of Jewish Youth*, v-vi.

[22] Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*, vol. 2., (Jena: n.p., 1918).

[23] Hans Blüher, *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen. Ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnis der sexuellen Inversion* (Berlin: n.p., 1912).

[24] Oppenheim, *The Struggle of Jewish Youth,* v-vi; Hanan Cohen, "Tchelet Lavan in the years 1926-1939," in *Rhapsody to Tchelet Lavan in Czechoslovakia: Hashomer Hatzair, Noar Tzofi Halutzi, Netzach*, eds. Amos Sinai, Amir Gershon, and Nanne Margol (Israel: The Association for the History of Tchelet Lavan-El Al Czechoslovakia, 1996), 57-59.

can be created once family ties and sexual urges between men and women are disrupted.[25] In his works, Blüher criticized Jews' strong family ties, their racial and ethnic bonds, and the absolute lack of male bonds (*Männerbundschwäche*) among them. Therefore, Jews were not capable of creating a national state, and unless they fostered such bonds, they would always be merely a race and not a nation. Similarly, Weininger also combined contemporary antisemitic stereotypes and misogynistic depictions of female weakness.

These educational ideals were incorporated into the more comprehensive notion of the "New Hebrew Man" mentioned above, the cult of healthy, strong, and courageous men. Nationalists adopted it as the symbol of a "new," physically and psychically healthy man, representing a masculine stereotype, a figure inspired by ancient Greek heroes. Enlighteners, on the other hand, investigated the relationships between man, woman, and nature. They pursued the harmonization of the physical body and the psyche. Also, new scientific fields helped cultivate the national and individual body, and these played a crucial role in specifying those who were not allowed to participate in nation building. Contemporary scientific discourse by (male) hygienists, racial experts, eugenicists, anthropologists, and other scientists, provided ample evidence about the inferiority of those then marginalized by society—i.e., Roma, Jews, vagrants, prostitutes and criminals. Marginalized groups were seen as sick, neurotic, hysterical, and degenerated.[26] At least some nationalists supported male characteristics and depicted them as the opposite of their corresponding female features. Negative female attributes formed the immoral and non-rational substance of certain social groups—disloyal groups unable to create their national state.[27]

The German Jugendbewegung, the cultural and educational youth movement of the nineteenth century, played a key ideological role in cultivating the ideal of the individual and collective body, supporting a return to nature, and criticizing the

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[25] Todd Presner, *Muscular Judaism*: *The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London-New York: Routledge, 2007), 14; Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik*.

[26] George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 56-76; Daniela Tinková, " 'Přirozený řád' a ideologie oddělených sfér. Příspěvek k otázce konstruování 'přirozené role ženy' v pozdně osvícenské vědě" ["Natural Order" and the Ideology of Divided Spheres. A Contribution to the Issue of Constructing the "Natural Woman in the Late Enlightenment Science"], *Kontext: časopis pro gender a vědu* 3-4 (2003): 1-17.

[27] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 56-76.

bourgeois way of life. Various sports and gymnastic organizations connected to the German romantic movement—which promoted physical fitness and extolled man's will, courage, and morality—played a no less important role.[28] A leading intellectual that dealt with the diagnosis and cure of the degenerated Jewish body on a collective and individual basis was a German Jewish physician and the forefather of the Zionist movement and the notion of Muscular Zionism, Max Nordau. As pointed out by Meira Weiss: "In Nordau's term, coined as early as 1898, Zionism was to be 'Judaism with muscles.' The 'muscle Jew' was to replace the pale-faced and thin-chested 'coffeehouse Jew,' and to regain the heroism of his forefathers in the land of Zion."[29] Furthermore, he called for the systematic collection of statistical data on the Jewish population. At the World Zionist Congress in 1901, he called for collecting data on—among other indicators—mortality, fertility, housing and contraception, to analyze them and subsequently utilize them in the project of national regeneration.[30] Statistics represented a crucial scientific discipline at that time, and one should understand data collecting in the context of the time. Within national movements, it became a common practice. In 1902, Alfred Nossig founded the Boureau der Statistik der Juden in Berlin. He collected and analyzed anthropological and biological data about European Jewry, including family relationships, skull sizes, alcohol and other drug addictions, numbers of suicides, and so on.[31] The Boureau's main task was the so-called regeneration of Eastern European Jewry, their "Westernization."[32] At the same time, many other Jewish and non-Jewish statisticians, demographers, physicians, eugenicists, anthropologists, and other scientists looked for a solution to the Jewish degeneration caused by long-lasting life in ghettos and separation from the soil. Cultivation of the Jewish body was the cure, and the means to achieve it were the Socialist Zionist Program's practices. Since hachsharah played a crucial role in the whole regeneration process, statistical data and candidate selection became an integral part of the entire procedure.

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[28] Gerhard Albricht, Hans Christ, and Wolfram Hockel, *Deutsche Jugendbewegung im Südosten* (Bielefeld: Gieseking, 1969).

[29] Weiss, *The Chosen Body*, 1.

[30] Presner, *Muscular Judaism*, 208.

[31] Ibid., 208.

[32] Strobach: *Židé: národ, rasa, třída,* 153-154.

When youth and gymnastic movements became supporters of this type of masculinity, Jewish youth organizations, such as Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir and Tchelet Lavan, drew strong inspiration from them.

The "New Hebrew Man" construct followed the European notions of masculinity mentioned above and was adopted and elaborated by various other Zionist movements and organizations. Jewish youth movements in general, and sports and gymnastic clubs in particular, were crucial for Zionists because of their potential to mobilize Jews in support of Zionism and the cultivation of national and individual bodies. Thus, like other Zionist youth movements, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir and Tchelet Lavan internalized fin-de-siécle stereotypes about Jews, such as Galut (Diaspora) Jews being examples of physical and moral disorder. Consequently, the Jewish race could build a strong and healthy nation through the systematic cultivation of the (national) body and appropriate physical and educational activities.

Propaganda and Recruitment Campaign

Within the pioneer groups an important role was played by charismatic leaders, the so-called *shlihim* (messengers, emissaries) from Palestine, members of the He-Halutz movement, experienced in organizing training camps, and actively acquainted with kibbutz life. Their task was to bypass individual Zionist movements and mobilize Jewish youth to join pioneer organizations and the hachsharot.[33] These young men were often Eastern European Jews who had arrived in Czechoslovakia during the First World War as refugees escaping pogroms and had gone on to make aliyah. During the period of the First Republic, they visited Czechoslovakia to promote ideas of collectivization and kibbutz life. Among the *shlihim* of the Czechoslovak pioneer movements Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir and Tchelet Lavan were the prominent Viennese member of Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir Meir Yaari and the important member of the Polish branch Chilek

[33] For details, see Philip Boehm, " 'Tchelet Lavan' a School for Zionist Self-Realization," in *Rhapsody to Tchelet Lavan*, eds. Sinai, Gershon, and Margol, 29; Helena Barski, "The Founding of Heftziba," in Ibid., 31-32; Nanne Margol, "Educational Method," in Ibid., 144-154; Amos Sinai, "In the Footsteps of the first pioneers looking back after 70 Years," in Ibid., 36.

Harari (Jechiel Grünberg). They helped organize summer camps and advised on how to make young people practice collectivism. "The representative of He-Halutz was a young Russian Jew who had lived in a kibbutz for many years," recollects a former Tchelet Lavan member from Brno, Fritz Beer, in his memoirs:

> We had mostly heard all he had to say; how they're making the desert blossom with a spade and a hoe, how they're overcoming the heat and their own inexperience, about setbacks and disappointments, about the immeasurable joy of the first harvest and the first calf born in a cowshed which they had built themselves. He spoke in Yiddish, with sentiment, his accent and words, that were rooted in old German, were alien to us. When he would lose all hope, he would get new strength by walking through orange groves and the cowshed. Yes, there was dirt, sweat and stench; but also a new kind of joy, even in a bit of stinky cow manure, because it was a Jewish cow's stench.[34]

Beer grow up in well-to-do family, under the influence of his brother, the well-known journalist Kurt Konrád. Fritz later abandoned the Zionist movement for the Communist Party.

As part of their propaganda efforts to recruit affiliates, Zionists urged young people to give up their university studies in favor of state-building activities in Palestine. Besides encouraging Jewish youth to do agricultural work, a generational split between young people and their families was often supported by *shlihim* and movements leaders.[35]

As a part of the process of building a healthy chosen body, the most capable candidates from the ranks of pioneers were to be selected to leave for Palestine. Each applicant had to undergo a thorough selection procedure, including psycho-technical tests.

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[34] Fritz Beer, *...a tys na Němece střílel, dědo?* [Did You Shoot at Germans, Grandpa?] (Praha - Litomyšl: Paseka, 2008), 55.

[35] Akiva Nir, "Sionistická organizácia, mládežnícke hnutia a emigrácia do Palestíny v rokoch 1918-1945" [Zionist Organization of Youth, Youth Movements and Emigration to Palestine in 1918-1948], in *Tragédia slovenských Židov: meteriály z mezinárodného symposia* [Tragedy of Slovakian Jews: Documents from International Symposium], ed. Dezider Tóth (Datei: Banská Bystrica, 1992), 27-43.

In addition, the complex process leading to aliyah included a questionnaire to be filled in by both the candidate and their group leader. The questionnaire evaluated the candidates' intelligence, organizational skills, autonomy, conscientiousness, manual dexterity, and physical fitness. There were also questions about the candidates' behavioral nature, focusing on some qualities, such as dealing with people and problems. Various questions examined abstract thinking, leadership abilities, attitude towards authorities, tendencies towards confrontation, subordination, isolation, devotion, superficiality, as well as learning abilities, thoroughness, social altruism, egoism, and dreams. Other character traits that were examined to determine participants' admission were their self-confidence, sense of adventure, fearfulness, doubtfulness, character inconsistency, bravado, prudence, sensitivity, openness, obstinacy and cunning. Group leaders focused on the level of possible physical exertion of candidates and their tendencies to avoid work. They had to describe the candidates' endurance to psychical and mental efforts under pressure; personal characteristics such as sensitivity, aggressiveness, and the way they settled disputes; and finally the candidates' character itself, their ability to act or their shyness.[36] Thus, all aspects of the candidates' lives, including family, financial and social relationships, and the economic and social position of each candidate's family members, were subjected to a detailed examination. The questionnaires also covered the area of leisure time, interests, hobbies, and popular but also unpopular reading preferences of each applicant.[37]

Educational Activities and Training Practices, and their Impact on *Hachsharot* Participants

In the second half of the 1930s, both Tchelet Lavan and Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir organized hachsharot in temporary training camps that lasted about four weeks. There, Jewish youth learned not only agriculture and the history of the Jewish nation, but also the ideology and practices of Socialist Zionism, i.e., the physical empowerment of the young body and the internalization of ideological notions.

[36] Fragebogen – Misrad für Berufsberatung, Histadruth Techeleth Lavan, III-54A-437-2, Machon Lavon – Archives for the Labour Movements, Tel Aviv (ML).
[37] Ibid.

The hachsharot promoted a transformation of Jewish life both at the individual level and across the whole of Jewish society, whose social-economic structure was supposed to be changed entirely. Each individual was to toughen their body with hard work, strengthen their muscles, sharpen their mental abilities, and overcome the so-called "Jewish degeneration" collectively.

In the circulars Tchelet Lavan dedicated to the organization of training camps in 1937, we find a clear appeal to Jewish youth, pointing out physical work in agriculture as an integral part of the movement's ideological content. It must not be an "episode or a holiday experience" we read; instead, it must be seen by participants as a "test of authenticity and power of thought," a life goal. According to the records of the Tchelet Lavan training camps, the mission of the halutzim was "a synthesis between spiritual and physical work [...]. The meaning of life becomes a productive interaction between manual labor and mental activity."[38]

The working day in the training camps lasted ten hours, and the young participants were paid a minimum wage depending on the work performed and the farm's owner.

In these circulars, we can also find general descriptions of camp activities. The twenty-five-day Tchelet Lavan training camps started with the morning physical warm-up, followed by the necessary personal hygiene, breakfast, work assignments, personal hygiene, and lunch. After a short break, the program continued with lessons on the ideological principles that inspired the movement and sports activities. It was followed by another meeting or afternoon work assignments, dinner, and the evening program. The teaching of Hebrew was not neglected either, since it represented an essential part of Zionist education.[39]

The archives of Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir provide a deeper insight into the educational program of the hachsharot. As made clear by the author of the educational brochure, Ruben Spira, the young had to understand the major historical milestones of world Zionism. The movement's ideological teaching

[38] Choser, Zum Arbeitslager 54, 24.5.1937, 1, ML.

[39] Ibid., 2-4. A similar range of educational materials can be found in documents related to the Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair movement—See Pokyny k praktické práci [Instructions for Practical Work], (4)1.2.2, Yad Yaari - The Centre for Research and Documentation of HaShomer HaTzair Movement and of the Kibbutz Artzi Federation, Givat Haviva, (YY); Ruben Spira, Ideologia našej výchovy [Ideology of our education], 1937, (2)2.2.-2, YY.

focused on the synthesis of socialism and Zionism, the problems of assimilation and Jewish nationalism, class struggle and Borochovism, and educational issues—criticism of the schooling system, the study of adolescent psychology, science, scouting, physical education. The contemporary situation in Palestine was also reflected in the movements' curricula. Alongside the general socialist ideology of the hachsharot, their educational programs went hand in hand with the (specific) dogmas and doctrines of the two movements.[40]

Hachsharot participants learned about the history of Eretz Israel from the First World War to the present (the war period, the immigration waves, the internal political crisis of the pioneer movement, the White Paper); the economic situation, and the problem of Jewish workers in the Yishuv, the kibbutz movements, the position of Eretz Israel in the Middle East, and the British administration. In addition to the historical part, there was extensive ideological training based on two main curricula. The first focused on the development of socialism from utopia to science. Here, discussion ranged from the beginnings of socialism during the French Revolution through the workers' movement in England and Robert Owen's ideals to the socialist movement in Germany. The second was focused on works by Karl Marx and his followers. The leaders in the camps gave a series of lectures on Marx and the Communist Manifesto, the development of the international workers' movement and the First International, the expansion of the political doctrine of Marxism, and the crystallization of historical materialism in the works of Friedrich Engels. The list of recommended literature and teaching materials was dominated by leading leftist intellectuals, such as Eduard Bernstein, Franz Mehring, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Dov Ber Borochov, Bruno Bauer, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.[41]

In the memoires of hachsharah participants can often be found recollections of these centers as summer adventures. The diary named *Aliat Noar – Necach,* written in a camp in July 1939 in Malá Čermná, describes hachsharah as an adventure, a mixture of work, teaching, and unrestrained youthful entertainment. As mentioned in the diary, there were 45 participants in the camp. They remember tying sheaves [of wheat] and carrying out forest work, learning Hebrew, and an

[40] Pokyny k praktické práci, (4)1.2.2., YY; Ruben Spira, Ideologia našej výchovy, (2) 2.2.-2, YY.
[41] Ibid.

entertainment program that was more amusing than the lectures by "Palestinian teachers." The diary reveals that the moment most appreciated by participants was a joint meeting of Tchelet Lavan, El-Al,[42] and Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir members. The memoir also includes funny stories about the establishment of the Club Drben (Club of Gossips) as a "culturally humane camp institution with an exclusively critical mission."[43] Besides the details on work and communal activities, the dairy points out that all participants underwent medical screening to assess their physical condition and potential qualities useful for establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. At the end of the diary, the unknown author expresses his undisguised joy that all participants were recommended for aliyah.[44] This is further evidence of the Zionist youth movements' emphasis on their mission to build the chosen body.

Preparations for emigration to Palestine and building a new society were crucial activities for both movements. However, the lukewarm attitude of those members who perceived their participation in the hachsharot as a leisure activity rather than a real training for emigration became an issue both movements had to deal with. This is apparent in a number of testimonies:

> [Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir] was a very progressive organization; it still has its kibbutzim and headquarters in Israel today. Its goal was to build kibbutzim in Palestine. The pioneers who went to Palestine to establish kibbutzim were primarily members of He-Halutz or Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir. I got into a certain ideological contradiction because the goal of every member of Ha-Shomer was to go to the hachsharah and make *aliyah*, to move out. As soon as it became apparent I wouldn't go to *aliyah* after high school, they erased me from the movement, it seemed to me.[45]

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[42] El-Al was the Czech-language branch of the Tchelet-Lavan movement founded in 1937 as a result of growing German irredentism in Czechoslovakia. For more information, see Otto B. Kraus, "El-Al Divertimento," in *Rhapsody to Tchelet Lavan*, eds. Sinai, Gershon, and Margol, 257.

[43] Joman, Tábor Aliat Noar Necach [Diary, Camp of Aliyat Noar Necach], 10, Oral History Collection, AŽMP.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Testimony no. 260, J.U., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.

Other testimonies about the training programs emphasize that the participants' desire to continue studying in Europe rather than emigrating to Palestine represented an obstacle for the success of the hachsharot in Czechoslovakia. Mr. Š. L. in his oral testimony remembered: "I attended the hachsharah, but later on, after I graduated, my parents wanted me to continue my studies, [...], but that was actually forbidden in the movement. When someone studied, it meant leaving the movement [...]."[46] Since it was clear that Palestine needed strong hands to build a "promised land," intellectuals did not have a strong position within these movements. Since their inception, hachsharot clashed with the actual aspirations of many Jewish middle-class families from the Czech lands, whose strong commitment to education was one of their characteristic features and one of the fundamental pillars of their successful social mobility for several generations.

Despite the Zionist youth movements' propaganda and their efforts to organize training camps, departures to Palestine were hindered not only by the affiliates' inclination to stay in Europe, but also by the difficulties to obtain migration certificates and the lack of family support. In this spirit, several Zionist appeals came out, calling on young people to give up their lives, detach themselves from the home environment, their parents, their schools, and consciously choose a different future, the future of the nation. In many ways, the style of this recruitment propaganda resembled the radical style of Czech and German nationalists' campaigns at the time of the establishment of the First Republic. "Get up, son! [...] Do not listen, son, to your moralizing father and do not follow your mother's teachings."[47] This was also the way in which Zionists called on young people to join their movements. The movement's records also show complaints that grammar schools would not allow students to join the hachsharot, not even Jewish schools. Schools threatened students with failing their studies, and conducted anti-Zionist campaigns.[48]

Consequently, Jewish youth were encouraged to attend the movements against their parents' will, join their ranks in secret, or even take part in hachsharot secretly. A Ha-Shomer Ha-Tai'ir leaflet related to the hachsharah in Košice stated:

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[46] Testimony no. 354, Š.L., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.

[47] Giora Amir, "Na úvod" [At the Introduction], in *Hašomer Hacair*, ed. Mešťan, 11.

[48] Zápis moaca galilu Brenner, 5. júna 1930. [Note of the Moatza of Galil Brenner, June 5, 1939], (1)1.2.-2., YY.

> He [a Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir movement member] has to leave the pleasant life of his parents and leave a possibly beautiful future here and go to Eretz as an ordinary worker [...]. *Shome*r opposes parents who do not want their children to meet an unknown destiny; under the veil of love, parents want to turn their children away from it [...]. *Shomer* must therefore fight against his parents; he must prove to them that they raised him not for themselves but for a nation that has been wandering in Galut for millennia.[49]

Anxiety on whether to leave for Palestine after training in the hachsharah was emphasized by the young participants themselves. They expressed their fears and doubts on the pages of pioneer periodicals. For example, an unnamed sixteen-year-old expressed his fears in a poem published in the El-Al journal:

> Two roads to different directions,
> two roads and I don't know which one,
> I will choose one of them,
> I stand on one of them already,
> Fate put me there,
> the urge drives me to the other one.
> I can not decide,
> should I return and start to fight with Fate,
> Self-appointed guardian,
> Should I follow the paved road,
> the way millions have passed,
> and some came to happiness.[50]

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[49] Hachšara Košice, 1929. Boj šomera v každodennem životě. [Hashara Košice, Struggle of Shomer in Everyday Life], 15, (1) 4.2.-2., YY.

[50] "Dve cesty rozneho smeru, / dve cesty a neviem ktorú, / z nich vyvoliť mám,
Na jednej stojím už priam, / vložil ma na nu osud, / Ku druhej ženie ma pud. /Nerozhodný sem, / či vrátit sa a začať boj s Osudem, / Samozvaným poručníkem, / Či ďalej ísť cestu vyšlapanou, / Cestou, co miliony prešly, / z nich niektorí došli i šťastia /"; El-Al: Iton schichvat hacofim lehistadrut Hašomer Hacair, Moravská Ostrava. December 1935, (3) 3.2.-2., YY.

In the same journal, in an article entitled "Kus cesty" (A Piece of the Road), we can read about members' fears of an uncertain future and hard physical work, and worries about the fate of their families after their departure.[51] In this context, we see again the names of scientists whose works and teachings had already appeared in the educational materials of the Ha-Shomer Hatza'ir movement. Among the topics discussed were psychoanalysis and national autonomy, the goals of Socialist Zionism, and the mutual interconnection of national and family dysfunctions, i.e., the impact of family imbalances, and especially the relationship between parents and children, on nation-building. Works by the Socialist Zionist psychoanalyst Siegfried Bernfeld appeared in literature produced by Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir. Bernfeld criticized parental care as a source of an individual's social dysfunctions. He developed the idea of a national revival in which orphans could adapt especially well to the broader environment of the national community due to their lack of family bonds. According to this view, a community of young people without ties to their families but with strong, mutual relations could build a national community in a proper way.[52]

An integral part of the history of the Tchelet Lavan movement was the foundation of its Czech-language branch El-Al in 1937. The movement soon became quite successful and by the following year it already had about two hundred members. As mentioned in its statutes, El-Al fostered Jewish tradition, science, and art, to uplift the physical and moral qualities of the Jewish Youth. The means to achieve these goals were scouting, camping, sports, gymnastics, lectures, etc.[53] In February 1939, the El-Al movement split, the majority returned to the Tchelet Lavan movement while the minority joined the Makabi Ha-Tzair organization.[54] The emergence of El-Al might have reflected growing support for Nazism in Germany and related anti-German attitudes, an attempt to bring Czech-speaking Jews closer

[51] Kus cesty [Part of Way]. 5-6, (3) 3.2.-2., YY.

[52] Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and Bottle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 146-148; Elkana Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement, 1913-20", *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 (1969): 25-46. Accessed June 8, 2022, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/002200946900400202.

[53] EL-Al, SK XXII/2705, Archiv hlavního města Prahy [Prague City Archives].

[54] "Tchelet Lavan and El Al in the Years 1939-1941 a Memorandum," in *Rhapsody to Tchelet Lavan*, eds. Sinai, Gershon, and Margol, 275.

to Zionism, the choice to use the Czech language instead of German, and a struggle against assimilation.[55]

In the testimonies of some movement members we can also find a strong reflection of their loyalty and admiration for Czechoslovakia, alongside their identification with the Czech language. One of these witnesses recalls the creation of El Al as follows: "In 1937, a Jew named Pavel Kohn and a few others founded the Czech speaking Zionist movement." He also describes how some Jews perceived negatively the use of the German language within Zionist associations:

> We were very sensitive to that, even more so than the Czechs. So El-Al saw that only by being Czech-speaking, having a Czech-character, and with a Czech sense of humor, freedom and friendship can join the Czech environment, and they were also called El-Al. [...] [In a sense] up to that goal and upwards.[56]

The use of the Czech-language was even more significant for some members due to President T.G. Masaryk's personality and his popular cult. The president enjoyed great popularity and loyalty from Czechoslovak Jews, as confirmed by other witnesses' memories of this Czech branch of the movement:

> I grew up under the influence of T.G.M., and he was such a role model for all of us, and the truth will prevail, we believed it, even though it didn't turn out to work. But his humanistic ideals, I think we grew up on those, and he's been with us our whole lives.[57]

Similarly, another witness, Mrs. E.G., recalls:

> [...] we founded the El-Al, because what angered us in that Tchelet Lavan was, that they spoke German there. I said that I did not want to go to any German club [...] that we inclined to Czech a lot. In the 1920s, between

[55] Otto B. Kraus: "El Al Divertimento," 257.

[56] Testimony No. 331, A.O., Oral History Collection, AŽMP. In the last sentence the author refers to the Hebrew translation of El-Al as quoted above.

[57] Testimony no. 281, E.A., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.

> the wars, the Czech culture and books and theaters developed so nicely and everything, and [...] we went to F. Burian and Voskovec and Werich, they were our Gods. So at first [...] we founded some kind of a debating club [...]. And finally, we agreed that we would be somehow connected with Tchelet Lavan, but in the Czech edition [...].[58]

It is also worth mentioning that although the movement originated in the second half of the 1930s, since 1932 Tchelet Lavan had been publishing a Czech-language magazine that had a strong national content and often reported events associated with Czechoslovak nationalism. This was caused by growing support for Nazism in Germany, German irredentism, and the consequent natural inclination towards Czechoslovak/Jewish nationalism. This was apparent in the Czech-language branch of the Tchelet Lavan movement El-Al, the Tchelet Lavan movement itself, and Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir. However, despite the emphasis on training in the spirit of collectivism and Socialist Zionism, a large part of the Zionist youth never seriously considered emigration to Palestine, not even those who did their training in the hachsharot. Fritz Beer, a Tchelet Lavan member, wrote in his memoir: "Although re-stratification and emigration to Palestine as an agricultural worker was the goal of Tchelet Lavan, it did not mean anything to me at first. Czechoslovakia was my homeland and the world seemed to me to be untouched, as yet."[59] Especially for German-speaking members from bourgeois families hachsharah was a problematic experience, as Beer further points out in his recollection of his training near Opava in 1928:

> The first day of my introduction into the honorable task of transforming a stony desert into a blooming garden was very encouraging. I collected garbage on a meadow after a summer fete. [...] After I finished in the evening with a broken back, the meadow looked exactly the same as that morning. The next day I was taken to the field to plant some beet. [...] It seemed easy for the seventeen-year-old keen reader to spud the dry soil by the hoe – as far as the seventh beet. By the eighth my back started to hurt,

[58] Testimony no. 153, E.G., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.

[59] Beer: *...a tys*, 56.

> by the thirty-first I had blisters on my hands and after the forty-second my knees were trembling. [...] When they brought us milk and bread for lunch I fell asleep with exhaustion. In the afternoon I was thinking about the desert in Palestine, and that every lousy painfully planted beet was a strike against the world's antisemitism. It helped! – at least for the following quarter of an hour.[60]

Estimating the number of Jews who emigrated to Palestine during the First Republic of Czechoslovakia presents serious difficulties. An approximate estimate is between five to six thousand.[61] Participation in the hachsharot and He-Halutz movement played an important role in their emigration, alongside the certificate issued by the Palestinian Office and a touristic visa—after the document's expiration applicants remained in Palestine. However, as historian Martin Wein stated, "Overall, *aliyah* never became a major element of Czechoslovak Jewish life, and *halutzim* remained a minority in the Zionist minority in the Jewish minority."[62] After all, Czechoslovakia was a country where most of the Jewish young people felt anchored and secure.

The building of the chosen body and a socialist society based on the ideas of collectivization, the physical and moral revival of the Jewish nation and its social restratification, found a strong competitor in the period of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia in the form of Communism, which offered Jews an international identity on a very similar basis. However, this is a different story.[63]

Today, it is almost impossible to map all the locations of these training camps, nor the exact dates of their periods of activity. Dozens of places where hachsharot operated are mentioned in documents and the testimonies of witnesses. During the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, an important vocational school for Tchelet Lavan was founded in 1924 in Moravská Ostrava. Another important training farm was established in Bratislava; neither of them lasted long. A new farm was founded at Komorau near Troppau: "The farm extended over 22 hectares, used for grazing land, growing hay, a vegetable garden, and a cattle shed and chicken

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[60] Ibid., 61-62.

[61] Wein, "Zionism in Interwar Czechoslovakia," 5-47.

[62] Ibid., 18.

[63] Lichtenstein, *Zionism in Interwar Czechoslovakia*; Strobach, *Židé, národ, rasa, třída*.

houses." It became an important center for the Czechoslovak He-Halutz movement. However, it shut down after a few years of existence.[64] From 1924, the hachsharot project moved almost entirely to Slovakia. In the first war years, hachsharot and vocational training centers sprang up like mushrooms with extraordinary intensity, but their duration and very existence changed significantly with the Second Republic.

Hachsharot in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia at the Beginning of World War II

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement in 1938, the following Nazi occupation, and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 changed the organization of the hachsharot and their ideological program significantly. The Jewish community had to react to the growing danger immediately and adjust to the possible departure of young people from the country. In addition, after such extensive territorial changes, the areas where they operated had to be changed too. Our knowledge on the hachsharot organized during the first years of the war comes mostly from the Report of the Jewish Religious Community of 1942, [65] the contemporary press, and the testimonies of movements' members.

After the Jews' exclusion from economic life, the need to speed up the training of young people for emigration to Palestine became an essential goal for Jewish Community leaders. At the beginning of 1939, all the Zionist associations in Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, and an already existing umbrella organization, Die zionistische Zentralverband (Central Zionist Union), with several subdivisions, took over their activities. As far as Jewish emigration was concerned, the crucial role was played by the Palästina-Amt (Palestinian Office), He-Halutz, and the

[64] Yehuda Erez (Rezniczenko), "Hechalutz in Czechoslovakia 1921-1934,"in *Rhapsody to Tchelet Lavan*, eds. Sinai, Gershon, and Margol, 67.

[65] Helena Krejčová, Jana Svobodová, and Anna Hyndráková, *Židé v protektorátu: hlášení Židovské náboženské obce v roce 1942: dokumenty / Die Juden im Protektoraten Böhmen und Mähren* (Havlíčkův Brod: Maxdorf, 1997).

Jüdische Jugendhilfe (The Jewish Help for Youth), which took care of the preparation for emigration of the youth aged from 12 to 17 years.[66]

The possibility of emigrating to Palestine depended on the number of immigration certificates issued by the British Administration in Palestine. Their number was limited and allocated to Palestinian Offices worldwide; their clerks subsequently proposed to the British consulates those applicants corresponding to emigration directives, and then consuls assigned certificates accordingly. Thus, the Palestinian Office under the Central Zionist Union became the only provider of organized emigration in the Protectorate; soon after its foundation, it was overwhelmed by applicants' requests for two reasons. Firstly, Zionists were traditionally well acquainted with the emigration process to Palestine and flexible in reacting to its changing conditions. Secondly, they were capable and willing to help with the emigration procedure of individuals to other countries as well.[67]

"Since the number of certificates was limited, the selection of candidates became the most difficult task the Palestinian Office had to deal with."[68] A newly founded service provided all the necessary information regarding the emigration procedure to applicants and helped them obtain all the required documents. Once the applicants filled out comprehensive questionnaires and submitted relevant documents, the Palestinian Office chose those candidates who had the highest chance of getting the certificates. The candidates' ability to work in agriculture or crafts was examined, and so was their potential to contribute to the welfare of the Jewish community in the Yishuv. Families with children who had undergone hachsharah training were preferred. A chance of emigrating was also given to people who would establish enterprises in Palestine with a cash guarantee above 1000 pounds. However, there was also a fund to make it possible for applicants without warranties to emigrate. These candidates, though, had to gain certificates of training for manual work.[69]

For this purpose, retraining and vocational centers and courses, agricultural working groups, and youth camps were organized with the permission of the

[66] Ibid., 178. The other subdivisions of the Palestinian Office were The Karen Kajemet Le Jisrael Fund and Karen Hajesod.

[67] Ibid., 179.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 179-180.

Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung (Central Office for Jewish Emigration).[70] "Even before the foundation of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration (March-July 1939), the Palestinian Office trained for emigration 888 people."[71] In the same year 1939, thanks to the Palestinian Office, another 2,654 people emigrated successfully—1,988 of them had no financial guarantees. In the following years, emigration to Palestine became even more complicated, and the Palestinian Office oriented its activities to the emigration of young people to neutral countries, from where they were supposed to emigrate to Palestine after completion of their vocational training.[72]

To make as many candidates as possible emigrate, Zionists redistributed retraining and re-qualification activities across its different subdivisions: young people were organized into agricultural groups, while the others underwent vocational training in crafts.[73] Already in 1939, even before Jews were excluded from the economy, many Jewish young people decided to work in agriculture to obtain emigration certificates. In spring 1939, about 550 people were employed as agricultural workers at various farms supervised by the Jewish Labor Centre.[74]

He-Halutz was responsible for the re-qualification of the age group from 17 to 35 years. The organizational structure of the hachsharot changed, as well as the age of their participants. While before the war it was young Zionists from almost all social strata who emigrated, now the older age group was called to leave the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia too. The situation became even more complicated as the number of emigration certificates to Palestine decreased. He-Halutz still organized and provided agricultural training farms, which gathered groups of hundreds of workers, usually during the harvest season. However, its activities in the field of Jewish youth emigration overlapped with those of the Jewish Help for Youth and the Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Prague.[75]

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[70] After the foundation of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Prague in July 1939, the centralization of the Zionist activities became even stronger, and the chances of emigrating even more restricted. Ibid., 180.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] One of the biggest groups of Jewish agricultural workers was active during the harvest at the farm in Požár u Křivoklátu. See more Ibid., 111.

[75] Ibid., 180. "Vystěhovalectví mládeže" [Emigration of Youth], *Židovské listy*, November 24, 1939.

In order to register Jews excluded from economic life, the Jüdische Arbeitszentrale (Central Jewish Labor Office) was established in cooperation with the Jewish Religious Community. The goal was to record the occupation profile of men aged 18-50 years and provide them with work assignments, since Jews could not get unemployment benefits. Soon after that, unemployed Jews would get jobs in road and railway construction, industrial companies, forestry, etc. "Medical examinations of physical abilities served as a basis for a work assignment; the Central Jewish Labor Office provided it by order of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Prague, the Imperial Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, and the Ministry of Social and Health Care."[76] Since there was an effort to offer emigration to adults too, vocational training centers were also opened to them, especially to intellectuals. Participants were trained in many disciplines and got acquainted with emigration procedure as well.[77]

The Jewish Help for Youth assisted the age group from 12 to 17 years in Prague and Brno and trained them for emigration. In these cities Aliyah Schools were established in cooperation with the Jewish Religious Community. The Jewish Help for Youth also helped some of the participants move abroad to Denmark after hachsharah training.[78]

From 1939, the young people's aliyah was also reported in *Židovské listy* (Jewish Papers):[79] "[...] On the immigration of young people aged 15-17 years old to Eretz Israel: Young people live there in groups of 20 to 40 members and work for about 6 hours a day. In addition, they receive general and theoretical vocational training."[80] The text goes on: "The first step is registration [...]. Registration also includes a medical examination by our trusted doctors. The final selection takes place in four-week preparatory camps. The condition for 'aliyah' is a certificate of

[76] Ibid., 106.

[77] Ibid., 180.

[78] Ibid.

[79] *Jewish Papers* was published from 1939 and was the most important journal for Jews, since all the new Nazi orders and regulations were announced there. It also printed advice and practical information about the organization of social and medical help, vocational training, working opportunities, etc.

[80] "Alija mládeže" [Youth Aliyah], *Židovské listy*, December 1, 1939.

participation in this camp and a medical certificate." For those not sent to aliyah immediately, vocational training is organized.[81]

As pointed out by Radka Šustrová, "A healthy population was one of the central bio-political goals of modern states, and it was also a crucial factor for Nazism during its expansion and the building of the Nazi state."[82] The fact that Nazism was obsessed with the discourse of national health and eugenics was not in contradiction with its destructive methods.[83] However, medical examination of the population in the Protectorate is outside the scope and topic of this text.[84] Although the Jewish and Roma population were under the scrutiny of Nazi authorities in an even stricter way than the Czech population, for the purpose of this work I will focus on the medical tests mentioned in connection with hachsharah training activities only. I will leave aside medical testing of the Jewish population in the Protectorate that appeared to assess their labor value; I am going to quote memoirs on the hachsharot instead.

Calls to retrain and leave aimed at the Jewish youth to fulfill the Zionist goal of social and economic re-stratification of the Jewish population were widely announced on the pages of *Židovské listy*. It was prominent, for example, in the long article "Hachšará - Duševní a tělesná příprava Hechalucu" (Hachsharah - Mental and Physical Training of He-Halutz), which analyses a shift in the membership base and in camp organization.

> The former composition of the hachsharah was characterized by the fact that it mainly consisted of *haverim*, who came from the eastern part of the former republic, and only a tiny part consisted of *haverim* originally from Bohemia and Moravia, primarily people from the youth movements. [...] The *haverim* from the East, mainly the Jewish poor, are slowly becoming the minority in our *hachsharot*. Instead, new *haverim* are coming from the West. They were partly Zionists before, partly not, but have been taught

[81] Ibid.

[82] Radka Šustrová, *Zastřené počátky sociálního státu. Nacionalismus a sociální politika v protektorátu Čechy a Morava* [Ambiguous Origins of the Welfare State. Nationalism and Social Policy in Bohemia and Moravia] (Praha: Argo - MÚA, 2020), 277.

[83] Ibid., 277-343.

[84] Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 139-178.

> recently that Zionism is not a theoretical question but a practical one that they must carry out.[85]

The article further mentions the problem of the poor physical condition of the youth in the hachsharot, something often mentioned also in witnesses' testimonies. The lack of farms where young people could be retrained through hard work for Eretz and social and economic re-stratification stressed the need to increase efforts to achieve young Jews' aliyah. Therefore, it was announced that hachsharot would be operative the whole year, and not just in the summer or at harvest time. Those who underwent hachsharah training were supposed to be sent directly to Palestine to make aliyah or abroad for further retraining, most often to Denmark, as already mentioned. The possibility of an expansion of the program and further cooperation was negotiated with Sweden and the Netherlands. The article warns that all new members must undergo and pass a thorough medical examination.[86]

The issue of the health status of the participants remained crucial for hachsharot programs. As in the pre-war period, great emphasis was put on the health of those participants who considered emigration to Palestine seriously. Especially at the beginning of the war, this topic was widely stressed. In the Jewish press, young people were warned not to conceal their actual health conditions, and articles about suitable and unsuitable candidates for emigration were issued with some frequency.[87] In the article titled "Zdraví lidé – zdravá budoucnost" (Healthy People – A Healthy Future) published in *Židovské listy*, we can find the following warning:

> Certainly, the sudden re-emergence of a businessman or intellectual who did not perform any physical work until arrival to Eretz is associated with many difficulties. The weak body gets tired quickly, there are signs of muscle and heart disorders, and mental depression, which adversely affects the physical condition; it is common. However, the best way to overcome

[85] "Hachšará – Duševní a tělesná příprava Hechalucu" [Hachsharah – Mental and Physical Training of He-Halutz], *Židovské listy*, December 1, 1939.

[86] Ibid.

[87] "Zdraví a vystěhovalectví I" [Health and Emigration I, *Židovské listy,* December 22, 1939.

> this fear is *hachsharah*, systematic retraining, and getting used to physical work already in Galut [...]. Of course, the basic premise is that people with diseases are excluded from the hachsharah.[88]

A similar article was written about the importance of occupational hygiene, physicians and statistics for hachsharah training. "There are quite a few people who do not belong to gainful employment, but rather to an old people's home, hospital, or other institutional care. And we have already recommended many of them to go to the hospital instead of joining the course," concludes the author of the article, M.D. Otto Šťastný.[89]

Before making aliyah, young Jews filled an in-depth questionnaire requesting personal information. Alongside questions on actual health conditions, applicants' skills were examined too: knowledge of foreign languages (especially Hebrew), the desired form of employment and abilities, eligibility to particular professions, but also the family's financial situation, and information about candidates' relatives. The medical history of each applicant and his/her family was investigated too. We can find records about size, weight, bone structure, dental records, blood pressure and pulse, psychological state, etc. Similarly, as during the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, these questionnaires were submitted to the He-Halutz Department for further eligibility assessment of the applicants and enlistment into the appropriate hachsharah training.[90]

Last but not least, there were articles about the need for psycho-social control of the young people who were about to emigrate to Palestine. On the basis of a sample of 50 candidates, abilities such as "[...] understanding of technology, general skills, manual ability, practical intelligence, understanding of form and space (and much more), and psycho-technical skills," were examined.[91]

In 1939, one Oskar Fischmann wrote an article in *Jewish Papers* about the importance of retraining and doing farm work titled "Education – Retraining.

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[88] "Zdraví lidé - zdravá budoucnost" [Healthy People – A Healthy Future], *Židovské listy*, November 29, 1940.

[89] M. D., "Otto Šťastný, Lékař o správné volbě povolání" [Otto Šťastný, Doctor – About the Right Choice of Profession], *Židovské listy*, December 6, 1940.

[90] Questionnaire of the He-Halutz Office for those interested in Hachsharah Training, 1939, Documents of Persecution, AŽMP.

[91] "Školství - Přeškolování" [Education - Retraining], *Židovské listy*, December 29, 1939.

Retraining for Agricultural Workers." He perceived agriculture as the only job opportunity for immigrants in most overseas countries. At the same time, he wrote about the foundation of an institute, in the Troja district of Prague and under the supervision of the Social Department of the Jewish Community, to retrain for agricultural and similar professions. On the one hand, Fischmann reported that the local training farm offered participants 160 hectares of land, cows, horses, pigs, and theoretical and practical training. On the other, he specified that

> [...] the prospective farmer must have a firm plan for the future; in addition to goodwill and intent, a farmer must be healthy and has to learn how to love his new profession. Feelings of inferiority or fear of one's helplessness must not hamper his resolve. [...] The emigrant strengthens his body, learns how to handle and love the soil, knows animals, tools and instruments and thus gains self-confidence.[92]

However, it is not entirely clear to what extent these medical certificates were an integral part of the Nazi interest in health and medical research—as requested by the Imperial Protector of Bohemia and Moravia and The Ministry of Social and Health Care—or if Zionists had not yet given up on the concept of a strong and healthy Jewish national and individual body, or both. Later on, it will become clear that Zionists had not ceased their appeals to Jews to foster physical strength and focus on a productive form of employment in Palestine.

One of the retraining camps most often mentioned in, and best described by documents and oral history testimonies, was the Lípa farm near Německý Brod. In the summer of 1940 the camp had been well equipped by the Jewish Labor Office for the vocational training of Jewish youth.[93] According to a Report of the Jewish Religious Community from 1942, its capacity was 400 beds, and it had a dining and living space, a kitchen, workshops, offices, a doctor's office, and a fire patrol room. The retraining camp was supervised by the Central Office for Jewish Emigration. The daily routine had a precise schedule, from getting up in the

[92] "Dipl. Agr. Oskar Fischmann: Školství – Přeškolování. Přeškolování na zemědělce" [Education – Retraining. Retraining for Agricultural Workers], *Židovské listy*, December 15, 1939.

[93] Krejčová, Svobodová, and Hyndráková, *Die Juden*, 108-110 and 115-116.

morning, to the lunch break, the evening roll-call, and rules governing participants' free time. The young participants were assigned to fieldwork and ancillary work, working in the garden, in the woods, in workshops and in stables, and they took care of the administration of the farm.[94]
Several witnesses recall their participation in agricultural work/hachsharot during wartime, among them Mr. R.S.:

> The university was closed [...], so we were grouped. To found a group of Jewish academics was our initiative, and we found a farm in Lhotsko na Hané, where we were registered as workers. [...] It wasn't a *hachsharah*; we were there as a bunch of people. But it became a *hachsharah* later on. Someone from He-Halutz came there and turned us into a *hachsharah* group.[95]

The witness further describes the size of their group, numbering 25-30 members, and how they how they joined He-Halutz in Brno and Prague, where Tchelet Lavan operated as a representative of the whole He-Halutz. As part of his activities, he worked in the Lípa farm, a hachsharah that was, in fact, "a retraining camp under the code name *hachsharah*."[96]
Another witness, one of the organizers of Aliyat HaNoar, recalls his participation in the hachsharah in Černá nad Orlicí and the Jews' relationship with the farmer:

> [...] It was such an intellectual group [...]. Nobody led that. It was a completely free collective of Mr. Jansa's slaves. Jansa was a farmer, and he knew how to use us very well [...]. We worked as we should, from early morning to night. Officially, working hours in agriculture were ten hours, unlike in industry. There was an extra hour, eleven hours during the war, and whoever worked with horses or cows as a milkmaid and feeder had to add two hours to clean and feed the animals. Since the Jews were forced to wear a Jewish star, Mr. Jansa said: "Jews, and beards, and all that, it won't be with me!" [...] Those people in the Orlické Mountains are a particular

[94] Ibid., 115-116.
[95] Testimony no. 952, R.S., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.
[96] Ibid.

> race of decent people. And when we left, not only Jansa, but the people from the whole area went with us, waved, and cried.[97]

It is unclear what the testimony meant by referring to Jansa's comment on Jewish beards and "all that," one can only assume it was the farmer's way to articulate his disagreement with the public labeling of Jews. Memories of the work on farms, from where young people were often deported directly to Terezín, reflect many aspects of daily life and the relationship with the non-Jewish population.

> He-Halutz made contracts with every farmer. We had a representative and a salary. We were paid like everyone else. Now it occurs to me that the other workers, non-Jews, behaved absolutely wonderfully. We really couldn't work, and there was no way they didn't go into our line, for example, with beets, and they didn't help us get to the end faster. They behaved amazingly [...].[98]

Such relationships are also remarked upon in another testimony in relation to a farm in Vacanovice na Hané:

> As a young man, one takes everything with humor, [...] the young landowner was nice to us, the old one was yelling at us that he will get a star on the building, and people will shout that it is a Jewish house and so on. We were hosted by all the peasants in the village, and there was terrible trouble. Those people took farm work for granted, and we didn't understand it at all. I remember we were at a farmhouse [...], and we planted potatoes badly, we didn't even know they had to be planting with sprouts up, and the potatoes didn't germinate at all [...].[99]

Recollections of the inability to do agricultural works properly and participants' physical weakness start appearing in testimonies from the very beginning of training camps' activities. The Central Zionist Office – Palestinian Office was

[97] Testimony no. 82, G.W., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Testimony No. 119, E.D., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.

suddenly abolished on May 10, 1941, "because it had no agenda."[100] Even though retraining centers still continued their programs by inertia, testimonies reflect other changes that affected their activities and the organization of the hachsharot*:* the so-called Heydrichiada,[101] the increasing number of Jewish deportations and the gradual end of vocational training and the hachsharot themselves.
In the testimony of one of the organizers of hachsharot in 1939-1940, Mr. D.H., we can read:

> We worked for food only. [...] We had many problems; Jews never worked in agriculture, it was hard work, and we also had issues with landowners who did not give us enough food. There were also problems because Jews were no longer allowed to travel. [...] When Heydrich was assassinated in 1942, landowners were afraid to employ Jews. I drove from one to the other and asked if they would still use Jews – they didn't want to.[102]

Unfortunately, even to determine the locations of all the hachsharot and retraining centers operating under the He-Halutz department in the interwar period and at the beginning of the Second World War is not possible. Some of them are well documented; others we can trace from mentions and testimonies of the movements' former members. However, locating them is not within the scope of this text.[103]

Conclusion

The article has tried to offer an insight into the programs and structure of the hachsharot during the period of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia and the first war years. It focused on the question of building a chosen body, a cult of body-

[100] Krejčová, Svobodová, and Hyndráková, *Die Juden*, 178.
[101] The period following the assassination of the Protector of Bohemia and Moravia Reinhard Heydrich in May 1942.
[102] Testimony no. 504, D.H., Oral History Collection, AŽMP.
[103] Daniela Bartáková, "Mapping the Hachshara Trainning Centers in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia," *EHRI. Document Blog*. Accessed November 1, 2021, https://blog.ehri-project.eu/2020/05/19/mapping-hakhshara-training-centers/.

building and corporeality. Jewish pioneers and scouts organized their activities to fulfill the political, cultural, and ideological goals of Socialist Zionism. Among other activities, they learned Hebrew and organized lectures on the history of Zionism and socialism. Above all, these movements were active in the practical implementation of the training centers—hachsharot, and in the organization of emigration to Palestine—aliyah.

Last but not least, these movements became active agents of the concept of building a chosen national body at the individual and collective levels. On this point, however, there was a significant difference between theory and reality. Based on the preserved materials, documents, press articles, and testimonies, it is pretty clear that the movements paid considerable attention to the issue of health and body cultivation in both the pre-war and war periods. It must be admitted, though, that a lot of the didactic material and the questionnaires had an advisory character, and we do not know what its real impact was on the emigration of young people.

So far, we can only estimate the absolute number of those who emigrated to Palestine. Still, witnesses' memoirs and surviving documents show that many young participants in Zionist movements and hachsharot perceived their activities as just a holiday and a collective adventure. This changed during the war, since participation in retraining courses and hachsharot became a necessary precondition for those who wanted to escape from Nazism. The Jewish Community in Prague immediately reacted to this need and organized vocational training camps with higher frequency and in many more places. Although health requirements were still stressed in newspapers and the medical records of candidates filled in by doctors and training centers leaders, Zionists focused their activities on enabling the emigration of as many candidates as possible.

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Keywords: Aliyah, Body, Hachsharah, Jews, Youth, Zionism

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