

***Hachsharot* in Greece, 1945-1949: Camps or Vocational Centers?**

by *Kateřina Králová*

Abstract

Drawing on rich and eloquent sources, both institutional and personal, this article outlines how internal documents of the American Joint Distribution Committee, press reports, and personal testimonies present vocational training in the hachsharot for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Greece. How do these sources communicate with each other, and what problems are they silent about? Through their close examination, I seek to paint a more accurate picture beyond the Zionist idea of aliyah and to interconnect Holocaust survivors' attempts to move from Greece to Palestine with the Greek Civil War, the Cold War, and the situation in the Middle East. To this end, I analyze the attitudes of local and transnational actors as well as personal recollections of the multifold postwar experience of these vocational training centers in Greece.

Introduction

Public Representation vs. Internal Documents on *Hachsharot* in Greece

Operating *Hachsharot* in Greece: From Optimism to Decline

***Hachsharot* in Greece in Eyewitness Accounts**

The Obstructive and Destructive Phase of *Hachsharot* in Greece

Conclusion

Introduction*

On October 11, 1944, German troops, which had occupied Greece in April 1941, left Athens for good. After four years of war, Jews in Greece who survived in hiding or by joining the leftist resistance finally felt free again; they would attend a synagogue service and pray for the return of the deportees who were still missing. It took another year and a half before the last of the Nazi camps' survivors crossed the border back into Greece. The newly established Central Board, representing all Jews and Jewish Communities in Greece, gave its final tally of the number of Jewish survivors in Greece as 10,027.¹ This number made it clear that 87 percent of the Jews of Greece had been murdered in the Holocaust, a very high percentage even compared to the rest of Europe.

For Jews in Greece, the autumn of 1944 thus turned out to be less joyful than one would expect for a country just freed from German, Bulgarian and, until September 1943, Italian occupation. Not only did they lose most of their loved ones, but before long, political tensions erupted again in yet another conflict. This time it was the civil war (1946-1949), the impact and the massive power shift of which would be felt in all of Greece for decades to come. Within less than ten years, despite the postwar baby boom among Holocaust survivors, the number of Jews in Greece dropped by half, as most of them moved to the land of Israel.² As early as the summer of 1945, hundreds of them joined vocational training activities in the newly established greenfield projects of the *hachsharot*. While some survivors, namely 175 Jewish children from Greece that had been declared orphans, accompanied by 25 adults (parents or guardians), plus 39 Jews from Bulgaria, were

* This research was possible thanks to my tenure at the Humboldt University in Berlin as an Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung research fellow in 2021/22. Thanks to Megan Nagel and Marc Raymond Lange for editing this paper. I am also thankful for the invaluable feedback from my colleagues who read the manuscript.

¹ KIS to the Central British Fund for Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation, February 24, 1946, Selected records of the Central Board of Jewish Communities (KIS) Athens, Greece, KIS 0127, RG-45.010, USHMM, Washington DC.

² Report, April 9, 1946, KIS 0096 and Report, August 18, 1967, KIS 0214, RG-45.010, USHMM. See also Adina Weiss Liberles, "The Jewish Community of Greece," in *The Balkan Jewish communities: Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar (Lanham: University Press of America-Center for Jewish Community Studies of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1984), 106.

allowed to leave the country in summer 1945 with the official approval of Greek and British authorities, others relied on the semi-legal practices of mostly Jewish organizations, both local and international.³

Postwar Greece remained under British patronage until 1947, thus putting Greek sovereignty in question. In these circumstances, creating and establishing a vocational training camp for Jews to resettle them in Mandatory Palestine was a tricky business, as it went against Downing Street's official policy. Regarding postwar Palestine, it was again the British, and their wartime Western allies under the umbrella of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), who dictated the terms and conditions of Jewish immigration and they were reluctant to increase the quotas for Jewish immigrants. Aware of the fact that newly liberated Italy and Greece were hardly interested in regulating Jewish attempts to cross the Mediterranean, British policymakers failed to persuade the governments in Rome and Athens to put a halt on these trips. The direct engagement of international welfare organizations, such as the United Nations' Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), further hindered their endeavors.⁴

Nonetheless, I argue that in Greece the parties involved readily supported the Zionist cause at the local level, not primarily out of sympathy for Zionism, but as an effective narrative framing for the relocation of Holocaust survivors. Although some organizations involved in the resettlement process avoided publicity for the sake of political consensus, especially with the British, others competed in taking credit for the organization of *aliyah*, the Jewish "repatriation" to the land of Israel. While the JDC, that supported financially the hachsharot in Greece, kept a low public profile, its internal records are an invaluable source on the actual situation in the vocational training camps. Examples of the photographic documentation

³ Jews who left Greece for Palestine on 8/4/45, Registration of Liberated Former Persecutees at Various Locations 3.I.I.3/001-0197_78779776_o_1-78779789_o_1, International Tracing Service (ITS) collection, Bad Arolsen archives, accessed at the USHMM. On this group, see also Karina Lampsa and Iakov Sibi, *I zoi ap' tin archi: i metanasteusi ton ellinon Evreon stin Palestini (1945-1948)* [Life from the beginning: The emigration of Greek Jews to Palestine, 1945-48] (Athens: Alexandria, 2010), 194-198, and Pothiti Hantzaroula, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Greece: Memory, Testimony and Subjectivity* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2021), 100-101.

⁴ Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 245-249.

taken in Athens at the time provide a picture of both the state of the facilities and the people in it. Finally, personal testimonies of Jews who went through the hachsharot, even if limited in number and in the space they dedicated to the hachsharot, demonstrate their perception of the transition camps and their emotions connected to aliyah.

Apart from the political conditions, I focus in my article on the discourses around the actual goals and living conditions in the hachsharot in Greece between 1945 and 1949, i.e., the entire period of their existence. I further analyze the personal testimonies of the Holocaust survivors, many of them ex-deportees, and their motivation to do aliyah. Was it commitment to Zionism that triggered Jewish migration from Greece? And was a *hachsharah* an example of the survivors' expectations of a new beginning, or rather a somber reminder of what they had experienced under occupation? To answer these questions, JDC archival documents on this period were particularly useful. The interview with Gaynor Jacobson, the JDC country director in Greece that established the hachsharot in 1945, sheds new light not only on the JDC but also on his personal role in this endeavor.⁵ Until recently, many of these sources remained unstudied since a comprehensive research on the hachsharot in Greece has yet to be carried out.⁶ Even though postwar Greece attracted Jews from countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria,⁷ a topic still awaiting systematic research analysis, in this article I decided to limit my scope to the Jews from Greece, since they were at the main focus of interest in my sources.⁸

⁵ Oral history interview with Gaynor I. Jacobson, conducted by Tad Szulc (1988), RG-50.968.0032, USHMM.

⁶ In contrast with the growing body of literature on DP camps, ever since Mark Wyman's *DP: Europe's displaced persons, 1945-1951* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), the Greek case is represented by a single chapter in Rika Benveniste's *Die Überlebenden: Widerstand, Deportation, Rückkehr: Juden aus Thessaloniki in den 1940er Jahren* (Berlin: Edition Romiosini, 2016), 131-228. With the exception of a few pages in Lampsá and Sibi, themselves mostly a translation of the IRC document analyzed here, the hachsharot in Greece have so far remained outside scholarly attention. Lampsá and Sibi, *Izoi ap' tin archi*, 198-211.

⁷ On the so-called "Greek period," when Jews travelled through Europe pretending to be Greek, see, e.g., Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 172.

⁸ Although Greece was regarded as an important transition center in the wake of the anti-Jewish measures in Germany, especially in the late 1930s, before the outbreak of World War II, during and after the war Jewish migration from Europe shifted to other Mediterranean countries in Europe, such as Portugal, Italy, France, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia. See Dalia Ofer, *Escaping from*

Public Representation vs. Internal Documents on *Hachsharot* in Greece

During the interwar period, which seemed like a distant past in the mid-1940s, there had been an increase in Jewish migration, with around 3,000 Jews moving from Greece to Palestine,⁹ due mainly to the Zionist movement's efforts and the dire economic situation in Greece.¹⁰ Back then, Jews from Greece settled mostly in the Sephardic communities of Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Akko and Haifa, which quickly developed into modern Middle Eastern ports. In Tel Aviv there was a Greek Zionist Club, Kadima, and in 1936 a cooperative agricultural settlement called Moshav Tzur Moshe was established in Netanya by Jews from Thessaloniki and Kastoria.¹¹ Organized by Abba Hushi, the leader of the Zionist labor federation and the postwar mayor of Haifa, these large transfers of Jewish immigrants from Greece were the result of persistent recruitment, targeting especially precarious laborers, such as the dockworkers in Thessaloniki. The organization of aliyah was supervised by Moshe Sharett (Shertok), the head of the Jewish Agency's political department and one of the top representatives of the Yishuv, the Jewish residents in Palestine.¹² Sharett remained in his position throughout the war and organized the aliyah of Holocaust survivors in its aftermath. Thus, the Jewish Agency's

the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁹ Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece – A Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 237 n 70; see also the statistics in *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 39 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938), 780. Accessed April 1, 2022, <http://ajcarchives.org/main.php>.

¹⁰ Mark Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Mogens Pelt, *Tobacco, Arms and Politics: Greece and Germany from World Crisis to World War 1929-41* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1998); Athanasios Lykogiannis, *Britain and the Greek Economic Crisis, 1944-1947: From Liberation to the Truman Doctrine* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002). On the formation of Zionism in Greece see Philip Carabott, "The Great War and the coming together of Zionists in Greece, 1914-19," in *The Macedonian Front, 1915-1918: Politics, Society and Culture in Time of War*, eds. Basil Gounaris, Michael Llewellyn-Smith, and Ioannis Stefanidis (Milton: Routledge, 2022), 210-216; and Rena Molho, "The Zionist movement up to the first Panhellenic Zionist Congress," in *Salonica and Istanbul: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects of Jewish Life*, ed. Rena Molho (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2005), 165-186.

¹¹ Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 100.

¹² Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905-1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76-77 and 123-134.

connections and the networks created by Jewish Zionists, both those in Greece and those who had left Greece for Palestine before the Nazi persecution, were already in place right after the war.¹³

As regards the Jews in Greece, it was obviously the local Zionists who from the very beginning openly supported migration to Palestine, even if clandestine. In November 1944, the Zionist Federation of Greece was officially restored, led by Robert Raphael, a staunch Zionist who had survived the war by hiding in Athens. Its branches soon appeared in all the cities in Greece where Jews were still present. Through its mouthpiece, the Bulletin of Jewish News (*Deltion Evraikion Idiseon*), the Federation pleaded for the free migration of Jews from Greece to Palestine.¹⁴ Of course, this position found a great supporter in the first postwar president of the Central Board of the Jewish Communities and Zionist leader, Asher Moissis. A native of Trikala and a graduate of the Athens' Law School, Moissis spoke next to Judeo-Spanish and French, the dominant languages among Jews in prewar Greece, also fluent Greek and had extensive contacts in the capital and in Thessaloniki, where he had practiced law before the war. As a prominent Jewish personality in Greece, Moissis was responsible for the institutional rebuilding of the Jewish Communities in Greece and later even became honorary consul of Israel in Athens.¹⁵

In May 1945, the Jewish Agency officially reopened its Palestine migration office in Athens and sent its own staff to work there.¹⁶ About a month later, the Agency found an appropriate estate in Athens and inaugurated the first hachsharah. On July 13, 1945, the Bulletin printed a report on the opening ceremony in Patisia,

¹³ Thurston Clarke, "Epilogue, August 1, 1946-1980," in *By Blood & Fire: The Attack on the King David Hotel* (New York: Putnam, 1981), 255-264; Friling, "Turkey and the Jews during the World War II," 376 and 407-416; Karina Lampsas and Iakov Sibi, *I diasosi: i siopi tou kosmou, i antistasi sta geto ke ta stratopeda, i Ellines Evrei sta chronia tis Katochis* [The Rescue. The silence of the people, the resistance in the ghettos and the camps, and the Greek Jews during the occupation] (Athens: Ekdosis Kapon, 2012), 190-206. See also Asher Moissis' personal memoir *Greek-Jewish patrimony* (North Charleston: CreateSpace, 2012), 148-151.

¹⁴ Philip Carabott and Maria Vassilikou, "'New Men vs Old Jews': Greek Jewry in the Wake of the Shoah, 1945-1947," in *The Holocaust in Greece*, eds. Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 266-269.

¹⁵ Raphael Moissis, preface to Moissis, *Greek-Jewish Patrimony*, iii-iv.

¹⁶ Jewish Agency for Palestine Summary of Relief Work in Europe during 1946, 6 March 1947, Jewish Agency 1947, NY AR 1945-54/2/4/22/1730, JDC Archives, New York.

praising its creators and simultaneously contextualizing it within the history of Jewish migration from Greece to Palestine before the Nazi persecution:

This is the first time a hachsharah (agricultural preparation) operation has been undertaken in Greece. It is true that long before the war the Zionist Federation in Thessaloniki, in collaboration with the Histadrut group, had organized a hachsharah and for a few months, several Halutzim had supervised the agricultural and spiritual introduction, of whom some left for Eretz Israel.¹⁷

Next to the local Zionist leaders, Raphael and Moissis, representatives of the Jewish Agency, the David Magen Adom, and the JDC were present at the ceremony. After the opening speeches of the Halutzim's representatives, namely Asher Moissis, Jacob Tchernowitz, who served as the Jewish Agency's envoy to Greece, and Robert Raphael, the floor was given to Gaynor Jacobson, the JDC country director for Greece.¹⁸

Carabott and Vassilikou, who examined the Bulletin in depth, identify "Greek Zionists" as the most outspoken supporters of the Jewish Agency, helping Jews to move from Greece to the land of Israel. This might have been the case in Thessaloniki, which had a strong Zionist tradition, and what was left of it was organized in the local Theodor Herzl club. The main stream of potential Jewish migrants, though, headed for Athens, where the whole migratory procedure was essentially in the hands of the Jewish Agency and the JDC.¹⁹ The scant research done by Greek historians does not really address the role that the JDC played in this effort, which I wish to bring into focus here.

Presenting itself as a nonsectarian and apolitical relief organization with the main aim of assisting Holocaust survivors in rebuilding their communities, JDC officially downplayed both its ideological and material support of aliyah. Such a position was crucial to maintaining the status quo between the United States as a rising world power and the declining British Empire.²⁰ Since rivalries among the

¹⁷ "Ta egkenia tis Achsara" (Inauguration of the hachsharah), *Deltio Evraikion Idiseon*, July 13, 1945, 5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lampsas and Sibi, *Izoi ap' tin archi*, 204.

²⁰ Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Linda G. Levi, and Maud S. Mandel, "Introduction," in *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 12-13;

international relief organizations and the Jewish survival groups themselves were omnipresent, finger-pointing and verbal attacks made their way into the organizations' internal reports, the Greek authorities' records, and occasionally even into Jewish newspapers. Although such tensions soon appeared in most countries in postwar Europe, in Greece—the second country after Italy in which the JDC started operating—the situation was different.²¹ As Gaynor Jacobson stated, unlike in Italy, “the total work of relief and rehabilitation [was] shouldered by UNRRA and directly administered by the Government of the country.”²² Therefore, each JDC project had to be submitted for review and approved by UNRRA and comply with its policy of equal opportunities in providing assistance, regardless of ethnic, religious or political belonging, a condition difficult to meet for the hachsharot.

For this reason, perhaps, the JDC practically never appears in the records of the Greek Foreign Ministry in connection with organizing Jewish migration to Palestine. When featured in the domestic or international press, as in the interview with the JDC country director Gaynor Jacobson for a Belgian magazine, the hachsharot were portrayed not as transit camps for aliyah but as agricultural training schools established by the Jewish Agency and maintained by the JDC.²³ Only in its first year, such support cost the JDC about 175,000 USD, with half of that sum being paid as subsidies to the migrants (20 USD per person/month).²⁴ From the very beginning, the Jewish Agency for Palestine became the most prominent external nonprofit organization mentioned in regard to hachsharot in Greece. Soon it decided to expand its original number of two local emissaries to

Eliana Hadjisavvas, “‘From Dachau to Cyprus’: Jewish Refugees and the Cyprus Internment Camps – Relief and Rehabilitation, 1946-1949,” in *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference*, eds. Suzanne Bardgett, Christine Schmidt, and Dan Stone (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 148-149.

²¹ For Italy, see Guri Schwarz, *After Mussolini: Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012), 35-39.

²² The American Joint Distribution Committee's Program Greece, April 27th - June 30th, 1945, 1 August 1945, Greece, General, I.-VII. 1945, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/387, JDC Archives, New York.

²³ Article to be printed in “OFFI PRESS,” see Letter from Israel G. Jacobson to Moses A. Leavitt, Subject: Article for the Press, September 25, 1945, Greece, General, VIII.-XII.1945, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/386, JDC Archives, New York.

²⁴ “Greece,” April 30, 1946, Greece, General, 1946-1948, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/385; “Salonika, Fieldtrip December 2nd - 6th, 1945,” Letter from Israel G. Jacobson to Mr. Leavitt, December 17, 1945, Greece, General, VIII.-XII.1945, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/386, JDC Archives, New York.

three. On the basis of an agreement of September 1944, the Jewish Agency units to arrive in Greece were subordinated to UNRRA.²⁵ This lasted until the summer of 1947, when the organization closed its activities and consequently ceased to exist. During his visit to Athens, Moshe Sharett, head of the Jewish Agency's political department, negotiated on the continued existence of the hachsharot. The manner in which the proposal was put forward to the Greek Prime Minister in April 1945, with agriculture and minors clearly placed at the forefront, is quite telling. The Prime Minister office reported that:

Mr. Shertok called for moral support of the [Greek] Government in providing training in farm work for young Greek Jews so as to enable them to move to Palestine with farming experience and contribute to the development of agriculture there. In this respect, the Greek Government could propose to UNRRA that facilities (in the form of farming implements, seeds, etc.) given to the Jewish children being educated as above for the purpose.²⁶

This was immediately followed by internal Jewish Agency and JDC reports that reveal that education and agriculture were rather secondary.

Two Jewish medical welfare teams sent by the Magen David Adom from Palestine, 35 people overall, started their service in Greece in June 1945, operating all over Greece and in the hachsharot. At that point two hachsharot were established, one in Patisia in the vicinity of central Athens and another one in Thessaloniki at the American Agricultural School, both working in close cooperation with the main JDC office in Athens. About half a year later, a Jewish Agency report on its relief work in Greece described its achievements (including the establishment of one additional hachsharah on the outskirts of Athens) and, above all, its impact on local public opinion, overly optimistically: "The attitude towards Palestine in that country [Greece] today," it says, "is more positive than anywhere else."²⁷

²⁵ Jewish Agency for Palestine Summary of Relief Work in Europe during 1946, March 6, 1947, Jewish Agency, 1947, NY AR 1945-54/2/4/22/1730, JDC Archives, New York.

²⁶ Quote from Photini Constantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, eds., *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews: Records from Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 1998), 319.

²⁷ Quote from Jewish Agency for Palestine Summary of Relief Work in Europe during 1946, March 6, 1947, Jewish Agency 1947, 1945-1954, NY AR 1945-54/2/4/22/1730; see also The American

Although one can only speculate about the true nature of Greek support for Jewish resettlement, the idea of philo-Semitism was readily embraced by the Greek Foreign Ministry, as shown by its Historical Archives. Its 1998 collection of selected documents on Jews in Greece clearly supports the Greek hegemonic narrative of hospitality and Greek-Jewish solidarity, more for political reasons than for historical accuracy. The volume reveals, for example, how it did not escape the attention of the ministry that the Greek government's attitude towards aliyah was praised in Palestine, another opportunity to highlight Greek exceptionalism and superiority in regard to the Jewish cause, especially in the context of Southeastern Europe. According to a press release issued by the Greek Consulate in Jerusalem in September 1945, "the Greek Government is the only administration in the Balkans which is favorably inclined towards Zionism and which has assisted the Zionists in an entirely exemplary manner."²⁸

Although similar strategies, such as embellishing the attitude of Greek central authorities towards Jews and displaying Jewish commitment towards Greece, were typical in those days of both Jewish Communities in Greece and the Jews of Greece who had left the country, Greek policy towards the land of Israel was actually fairly restrained in its support. In his eminent historical research, Amikam Nahmani highlights that in 1948, in the middle of the Greek Civil War and the Israeli War of Independence, Greece interrupted all supply transfers to the land of Israel. In 1949 and later, Athens sided with its strategic partners in the Middle East, voted against the admission of the newly created State of Israel to several international organizations and abstained from voting on its membership in the United Nations.²⁹ Although Greece formally recognized the State of Israel in 1990, Greek public opinion in regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict has remained consistently pro-Arab.³⁰ In such a constellation, the Zionists, as visible promoters of aliyah, came

Joint Distribution Committee's Program Greece, April 27 - June 30, 1945, August 1, 1945, Greece, General, I.-VII. 1945, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/387, JDC Archives, New York.

²⁸ Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, 340.

²⁹ Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey, and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean* (London-Totowa, NJ: F. Cass, 1987), 89.

³⁰ Andreas Stergiou, "The struggle for the past': Socialists against Communists in Post-junta Greece," in *Aspekte neugriechischer Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Heinz Richter (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 123; George N. Tzogopoulos, "Why Is Israel's Image Improving in Greece?," *BESA Center Perspectives Paper 625* (2017). Accessed June 1, 2002, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrepo4448>.

in handy for both officially impartial international organizations and Greek officials that strategically kept out of this business.

Operating *Hachsharot* in Greece: From Optimism to Decline

At the hachsharah opening ceremony in Patisia, in early July 1945, Gaynor Jacobson stated on behalf of the JDC that “it is only there that the Zionist ideology is cultivated and the hearts are formed and the arenas are created, and therefore a positive and inextricable creation takes place. The work of the Hachshara,” said Jacobson, “must be supported by all the people who are convinced that the Jewish people will be able to be saved by their close contact with the soil.”³¹ When Morris Laub, who had served in Greece with UNRRA during World War II and became a JDC employee in July 1944, visited Jacobson in the summer of 1945, he delivered to the JDC Headquarters a report on his stay in Athens, in which he pointed to the hachsharot as one of the most promising projects. In line with the apolitical rhetoric of the JDC, Laub further reported that there, “young men and women receive vocational and cultural education preparatory to their emigration to Palestine.”³²

From the very beginning of their existence, hachsharot in Greece were sought out primarily by survivors of the Nazi camps, deported in 1943 to Auschwitz from the country’s largest Jewish Community in Thessaloniki, many of them lacking basic formal education as a result of persecution. This fact was repeatedly put on the agenda by the JDC, especially when the Jewish Community in Thessaloniki demanded its allowances to be increased. The JDC then argued that while about 1,500 out of the 54,000 deportees had survived and returned to Greece, hundreds of them were being taken care of in the hachsharot. For this reason, JDC refused to rise its grants to Thessaloniki but rather continued supporting hachsharot as much as it could.³³

³¹ “Ta egkenia tis Achsara,” *Deltio Evraikion Idiseon*, July 13, 1945, 5.

³² Letter from Morris Laub to Dr. J. Schwertz [sic], Re: Greece, August 23, 1945, Greece, General, VIII.-XII.1945, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/386, JDC Archives, New York.

³³ “Salonika, Fieldtrip December 2 - 6, 1945,” Letter from Israel G. Jacobson to Mr. Leavitt, December 17, 1945, Greece, General, VIII.-XII.1945, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/386, JDC Archives, New York.

It was not exclusively the job of the JDC to take care of the hachsharot and its residents. While some food was provided by the Greek Red Cross, the Jewish Community in Athens supplied fuel and vegetables. For sick and pregnant women, the ICRC helped out with milk, a commodity scarce all over war-thorn Greece and postwar Europe in general. In the hachsharot survivors engaged in activities such as refurbishing the place, taking classes by qualified members of their community, and plowing and cultivating the land at their disposal, but no help was sufficient to change the unsettled condition in which camp survivors found themselves, stripped of any possessions and deprived of their families. Since nothing was holding them back, their main goal and desire were to leave Greece.³⁴ The hierarchy applied in the *hachsharot* to maintain order the lack of natural age diversity, since in Greece families were not allowed to join these facilities, as well as the disproportion of men and women, all somehow resembled incarceration in the Nazi camps. On top of that, during 1945, the hopes to reach Palestine were fulfilled for only 251 Jews from Greece, the ones on board the *Gabriella* (40) and the *Berl Katznelson* (211).³⁵

There was also a difference in how the hachsharot were physically arranged. According to the picture presented by the ICRC delegate in Athens, André Lambert, who visited the two hachsharot in Athens in January 1946, the main problem of the first one in Patisia, on the Tsakonas estate, was space:

The Patisia camp could have been quite well arranged. Once repaired, the small houses will become very habitable. Kitchen, refectory, storage room, it is all very well arranged. The dorms too. Everything is perfectly well kept in order and neatness. However, I must point out that the dormitories are too small for the number of people accommodated there who are piled one on top of the other.

³⁴ Comité International de la Croix Rouge—Genève, “Rapport relative aux camps Israelites dans les environs d’Athènes et intitulés: ‘Camps de Transit’,” February 28, 1946, The World Jewish Congress Geneva Office records, RG-68.045M, Reel 54, USHMM, Washington DC.

³⁵ Lampsas and Sibi, *I zoi ap’ tin archi*, 214-219. Jewish children left for Mandatory Palestine on August 4, 1945, on board the “Empire Petrol,” *Ibid.*, 194.

This presents a serious drawback, especially for hygiene, and it is unfortunately very difficult to remodel.³⁶

Although the black-and-white JDC photographs taken in summer 1946 in the Patisia hachsharah in Athens show its young residents as a cheerful group of men and women, some of them dressed according to their occupations (nurses, workers, laundry women), it is evident that the site was still in the making. Except for one picture with a line of small one-story houses, residents had to live in tents in the field and the main hall seemed to be still under construction.³⁷ A group photograph that should portray all hachsharah residents must feature over a hundred trainees, comparable with the written report and the names list of the Jews living in Patisia and Frankoklisia prepared by the ICRC in mid-January 1946, most probably on the same occasion. Out of 214 Jews, all of them with a domicile of origin in Greece, only 62 did not have a number tattooed on their forearm, meaning the rest survived Auschwitz. The absolute majority of the residents between 16 and 37 years of age indicated Thessaloniki as their hometown, followed by 39 from Athens and 16 from Corfu. Other Jewish Communities of prewar Greece, including Ioanina, Kastoria, Kavalla, Didimotycho, Larissa, Volos, Patra, were represented in even lower numbers.³⁸

According to the written report from early 1946, Patisia sheltered 139 Jews (24 women), while the second hachsharah in Athens, Frankoklisia, established in autumn 1945, became a temporary home for 127 Jews (37 women).³⁹ At that time, there were about 60 trainees in the Thessaloniki hachsharah, most of them—

³⁶ Comité International de la Croix Rouge - Genève, “Rapport relatif aux camps israélites situés dans les environs d’Athènes et intitulés: ‘Camps de Transit’.” February 28, 1946, The World Jewish Congress Geneva Office records, RG-68.045M, Reel 54, USHMM, Washington DC.

³⁷ Thirteen photographs on the *hachsharah* in Athens from c. July 1946, NY_20001-3, 20005-13, 20015, JDC Archives, New York.

³⁸ List of Members of the Hachsharaoth “Patisia” and “Frankoklissia” on the 15.1.46, Registration of Liberated Former Persecutees at Various Locations 3.1.1.3/0015_78779800_1, 78779801_1, 78779804_1, 78779807_1, 78779809_1, ITS collection, Bad Arolsen archives, accessed at the USHMM.

³⁹ Comité International de la Croix Rouge—Genève, “Rapport relative aux camps Israelites dans les environs d’Athènes et intitulés: ‘Camps de Transit’,” February 28, 1946, The World Jewish Congress Geneva Office records, RG-68.045M, Reel 54, USHMM, Washington DC.

again—survivors of the extermination camps.⁴⁰ Many women were or became pregnant in the hachsharah, often outside marriage, because they were either officially single or their husbands had been murdered during the Holocaust. Under these circumstances, group marriages were organized in the hachsharot, for which the JDC provided at least a modest dowry, required by Greek law.⁴¹ In a photograph taken in Athens in 1946, the faces of ten hachsharah wedding couples hardly suggest they felt relaxed, free and easy. Lined up, grooms in black suits in the front and brides in wedding gowns standing over them in the second row, with a waving Jewish flag and about a dozen onlookers squeezed in the back, there is just one wedding couple that smiles.⁴²

Still, the situation in Patisia was much better than that in Frankoklisia, which was actually only a tent camp, short on blankets, shoes and clothing for its inhabitants. Half of the inmates lacked many accessories to eat in the canteen tent, even plates, cups and spoons were largely missing when the ICRC delegate André Lambert visited the facility. Such general conditions and the deplorable sanitary situation made worse the harm inflicted on former deportees in the concentration camps, ranging from avitaminosis to the effects of pseudo-medical experiments.⁴³ None of the documents, however, mentions specifically the afflictions of the temporary residents, neither during the war nor afterwards.

In the light of the situation in which the Jews found themselves in Greece, and with the Civil War raging in the country, Eliahu Shachnai, the head of the Jewish Agency mission in Greece, approached the JDC's representatives to adapt their local agreements to the new circumstances. Until then, the Jewish Agency's accounting and monthly reports had been non-transparent, or rather non-existent; so from spring 1946 on, the Agency was obliged to submit all expenses for

⁴⁰ "Greece," April 30, 1946, Greece, General, 1946-1948, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/385, JDC Archives, New York.

⁴¹ Letter from Herbert Katzki to AJDC New York, Re: Report on Greece, October 23, 1950, Greece, General, 1949-1954, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/384, JDC Archives, Washington DC.

⁴² Fleming, *Greece*, 174.

⁴³ Comité International de la Croix Rouge - Geneve, "Rapport relatif aux camps israélites situés dans les environs d'Athènes et intitulés: 'Camps de Transit'." February 28, 1946, The World Jewish Congress Geneva Office records, RG-68.045M, Reel 54, USHMM, Washington DC.

approval not only by the local JDC authorities but also by the JDC European Headquarters in Paris.⁴⁴

This arrangement, however, did not put an end to the disagreement between the Jewish Agency and JDC, which in fact continued until the last hachsharah in Greece was closed down. The pervasive chaos and disorder—a condition that survivors either do not mention or quickly pass over in their testimonies—must have reminded them of the concentration camps at the end of the war. This time it was no longer the brutality but the persistent state of despair that undermined their expectations for a possible restoration of normalcy in their lives.

***Hachsharot* in Greece in Eyewitness Accounts**

Compared to other European cases, the life-writing of Jews from Greece gained its momentum only at the turn of the last century. Although several Holocaust survivors who made aliyah published memoirs, their account of the hachsharah experience is very limited. One of the most prominent among these writers was Moshe Aelion, an Auschwitz survivor that worked in the crematorium as a member of the so-called Sonderkommando. His experience, however, does not relate to hachsharah in Greece but rather in Italy, from where he clandestinely migrated to Palestine. His words nonetheless confirm the main motivation behind many young Jewish men's decision not to return to Greece for good. Although the Holocaust, which destroyed his family and the entire Jewish community he came from, played a significant role in his choice, the news about the Greek Civil War and compulsory military service, including for Jewish camp survivors, that reached him in Italy sealed his decision to migrate.⁴⁵ This is confirmed by the testimonies of Jewish men from Greece in interviews collected in Israel by Shmuel Refael in the 1980s.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The JDC made clear there is “no general agreement.” Letter from E. Schahnay [*sic*] to Mr. Goldfine, 6 May 1946, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁴⁵ Moshe Ha-Elion, *The Straits of Hell: The Chronicle of a Salonikan Jew in the Nazi Extermination Camps Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Melk, Ebensee* (Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 2005), 73.

⁴⁶ Shmuel Refael, *Bi-netiveyshe'ol: yehudey yavan ba-sho'ah-pirqey edut* [The road to hell: Greek Jews in the Shoah. Testimonies] (Tel Aviv: ha-Makhon le-heqer yahadut Saloniki, 1988), see for

Eftychia Osmo is the only Jewish woman from Greece to have given an extensive written account of her post-war migration to Palestine. Her parents and youngest siblings were murdered, yet Eftychia survived Auschwitz and returned to her two sisters who were hiding in their native Corfu during the war. Her Zionist beliefs and the harsh conditions she encountered in Greece upon her return, however, convinced her to make aliyah.⁴⁷ At the age of 23, with a good knowledge of Hebrew from school and hachsharah experience gained in Italy before returning to Greece, Eftychia was an ideal candidate for aliyah. After contacting the Jewish Agency office in Athens in the spring of 1946, she was assigned to work in Patisia. She recounts her recruitment experience and subsequent life on the ground as follows:

They wanted me to stay in Greece for another year and deal with the matters of the *hachsharah*. They gave me a list of members and boxes of cigarettes to share. I was also instructed to make the list of girls who worked in the laundry for the [*hachsharah*] members, and other everyday matters. There were many groups who waited for almost a year to emigrate.⁴⁸

Although JDC and former residents themselves describe the hachsharah, in its early stage between 1945 and 1946, as a facility for a temporary stay of two to three months, Israel Gatenio, Eftychia's husband-to-be, was one of those to spend over a year there. For men of compulsory military service age, it was the only effective way to avoid the draft. Even so, Israel and Eftychia were among the lucky ones, as they were spared the deterioration of the hachsharah, without any real prospect of an organized transfer to Palestine. Soon after Eftychia joined the hachsharah, both she and Israel were moved to the provisional transit camp in Sounio, on the west

example the interview with Isodor Alalouf, 35, Yaakov Jabari, 137, and Gedalia Levy, 282. On Refael's documentation project, see Alisa Meyuhas Ginio, *Between Sepharad and Jerusalem: History, Identity and Memory of the Sephardim* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 324-326.

⁴⁷ Nata Gatenio, 30258, Visual History Archive (VHA), USC Shoah Foundation, accessed at the Malach Centre for Visual History, Charles University, Prague, with funding from the LM2015071 LINDAT/CLARIN Research Infrastructure. Lampsas and Sibi, *I zoi ap' tin archi*, 319-321.

⁴⁸ Nata Gattegno-Osmo [*sic*], *Apo tin Kerkyra sto Mpirkenaou ke stin Ierousalim, I istoria mias kerkyreas* [From Corfu to Birkenau and Jerusalem: The story of a Corfu woman] (Athens: Gavriilidis, 2005), 134.

shore of the Aegean Sea, about 60 kilometers south of Athens. Living in tents that in the warm May weather created the impression of being at a Jewish summer camp, they waited for the ship that would secretly take them to Palestine. According to Eftychia, rules were relaxed: Jews moved freely in and out of the camp to visit old family friends during the day and had fun with new Jewish friends from all over Greece while staying in Sounio overnight. Their migration expectations were fulfilled just at the outbreak of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, on June 2, 1946, when they boarded the *Haviva Reik* with 461 other survivors, mostly from Greece.⁴⁹

Since in Greece *hachsharot* were meant exclusively for Jewish youth, some parents decided to split the family, a strategy which in many instances had proved useful during the war. Salomon Koen, former resistance fighter whose non-Jewish wife Toula Dolma was killed during the civil unrest in Athens in December 1944, was one of them. While planning aliyah for himself and his infant son, Samis, he placed his motherless baby in the Jewish orphanage in Athens. Samis left Greece as a child passenger on the first and only official voyage to Palestine on August 4, 1945 and Salomon joined the *hachsharah* to embark on the overcrowded *Haviva Reik* about a year later and meet his son in the land of Israel.⁵⁰

Jewish children's migration to Palestine was imperative not only in parents' view but also in the perception of the first postwar JDC country director, Gaynor Jacobson. He also pointed to adolescent Jewish women as vulnerable subjects. For them, JDC established a shelter in Athens where they learned crafts and were taken care of.⁵¹ Teenagers Sarah and Dora Tivoli, originally from Thessaloniki, who had survived the war in hiding but lost their parents and other close relatives in the Nazi camps, were among those who stayed in the shelter. From there, they went to the *hachsharah*. Sarah—then only seventeen—describes in her interview the training they received there: Hebrew classes, history and geography of the land of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 136. For the national composition of the passengers on board the *Haviva Reik*, see Lamps and Sibi, *Izoi ap' tin archi*, Table 6, 367-377.

⁵⁰ Shlomo Cohen, 6883, VHA, USC Shoah Foundation. See also the list of members of the *Hachshara* "Patissia" and "Frankoklissia" on the 15.1.46, Registration of Liberated Former Persecutees at Various Locations 3.1.1.3/0015_78779800_1, ITS collection, Bad Arolsen archives, accessed at the USHMM.

⁵¹ Oral history interview with Gaynor I. Jacobson, tape 8, conducted by Tad Szulc (1988), RG-50.968.0032, USHMM.

Israel, working in the garden, in the kitchen and the laundry, and learning Hebrew songs and dances after work was done. She also describes her fears, that lasted long after the war, how trust and intimacy were all gone, and how the only thing that mattered was survival.⁵²

Two months later, in June 1946, Sarah became yet another passenger of the *Haviva Reik*, bound for Palestine. The distressing sense of incarceration, which had hunted her in the hachsharah, only intensified when Sarah and other clandestine migrants on board were put in the Atlit detention camp for refugees in Palestine, encircled by barbed wire. Sarah also recalls that her early integration into the new environment was hampered by the fact that her sister Dora and brother Sam, an Auschwitz survivor, were separated from her and did not arrive in the Middle East until much later.⁵³

Jacobson in his interview seems proud of JDC's achievements regarding the shelter for homeless girls in Athens, but what remains unmentioned is the migration of potential Jewish conscripts in the Greek Army to the British Mandate of Palestine. Some of them had been resistance fighters during the war that in its aftermath tried to avoid military service in Greece but were ready to fight for Israel. Jacobson was aware that because of his involvement in clandestine aliyah, his bending of the rules and his lack of impartiality, he "was soon regarded as dangerous by the British Foreign Office."⁵⁴

One of the resistance fighters who refused conscription as a conscientious objector, and whose loyalty to Greece was undoubtedly questioned by postwar authorities, was Zakinos Rousso. During the Greco-Italian war (October 1940 to April 1941), in his early twenties, Zakinos had fought against the Italian aggressors. With the German invasion in April 1941, he was discharged and returned to his native town, Serres, in northern Greece. As part of Bulgarian occupied Thrace, almost all Serres Jews were deported and murdered in the Nazi extermination camp of Treblinka in 1943. Zakinos left just in time to join his brother in Athens but there they were arrested by the Italian authorities. He was imprisoned in the Ario camp in the Peloponnese, first by the Italians and then by the Germans. Zakinos managed to

⁵² Sarah Cohen, 16995, VHA, USC Shoah Foundation.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Oral history interview with Gaynor I. Jacobson, tape 8, conducted by Tad Szulc (1988), RG-50.968.0032, USHMM.

escape from the camp and joined the left-wing resistance. He was discharged after the Varkiza Agreement in February 1945 and then, learned about the possibility of migrating to Palestine from a fellow Jewish resistance fighter.⁵⁵

At a Zionist gathering in Athens, where Zakinos met other young Jewish survivors, he finally realized he was not alone in his fate. Ready for action in support of Jewish recovery, he felt that “suddenly, from a Greek patriot, I became a Jewish patriot. The energy I gave for my first homeland I would now give for the second, which could give me a better future so that what happened does not happen again.”⁵⁶ With this attitude, Zakinos became a perfect candidate for aliyah. Zakinos, with his Jewish companion and on the advice of the Jewish Agency’s emissary, sought out the hachsharah in Patisia in summer 1945, at a time when it had just come into existence. A year later, he too boarded the *Haviva Reik*. What he saw in Patisia upon arrival was a farm with small stable-like buildings housing about fifty to sixty people. He was received by a member of the Jewish Agency in British uniform who explained to him in Hebrew where to stay. Soon he got three more roommates, all of them Auschwitz survivors. He recalls that almost every day during the summer of 1945 there were five to six newcomers. Regardless of their former occupation, all were required to learn to farm and somehow adjust to the rules of the hachsharah.

Zakinos also brings to light that none of the residents really wanted to work, but that was not the only problem that Patisia’s managers faced. Although food and cigarette rations were provided as part of the relief packages, Zakinos describes how goods were smuggled into the hachsharah.⁵⁷ Even alcohol was available and some of the Nazi camps survivors, such as Isaak Dente, tried to alleviate their suffering by drinking.⁵⁸ Once supplies inaccessible in war-torn Greece started being stolen from JDC’s warehouses and entered the black market in Athens, something not unnoticed by the Greek police, Jacobson became scared that the JDC in general and the hachsharah project in particular would run into trouble. The warehouses, however, seemed to be well-guarded by young Jewish trainees

⁵⁵ Zakinos (Itzhak) Rousso, 45, Jewish Museum of Greece (EME).

⁵⁶ Quotation from the interview with Itschak Rousso in Lampsas and Sibi, *I zoi ap’ tin archi*, 347.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Isaak Dente, 36II, VHA, USC Shoah Foundation. Some interviews with former hachsharot residents, including Isaak Dente, can be also found in the Fortunoff Video Archive. Their description of the hachsharot is, however, brief and therefore not really relevant for this research.

from the hachsharot and protected by a wall with barbed wire and steel fences in the windows. Jacobson recounts the mysterious thefts as follows:

We did everything we could to figure it out. People were checked in terms of their clothing that they did not walk out with two or three pairs of pens. [...] By accident, we learned that one or two of these young Zionists had friends on the outside. They were not as devoted Zionists as we thought, and they went to the toilet [...] and they were able to maneuver [goods out of the window] using some kind of a slingshot [...]. That was the most disappointing thing to me that [it was done by] the young people who were taken to the *hachsharot*.⁵⁹

The attitude of Holocaust survivors apparently shocked Jacobson. He immediately discharged the Jews involved in stealing from the warehouse from their duty but neither reported them to the police nor expelled them from vocational training. The story was only revealed in the interview recorded with Jacobson more than forty years later.⁶⁰

Obviously, the time spent in the hachsharot helped Jewish inhabitants gain a new sense of community and belonging, even devotion to Zionist ideas, but their camp mentality to live and stay alive, to seize the moment, prevailed. In a way that relief workers could not understand, their transgressions of the rules, which Holocaust survivors confessed to in their personal testimonies and which were to fade away only gradually, probably strengthened a sense of individual agency they had been deprived of during the persecution and helped them start their life anew.

The Obstructive and Destructive Phase of *Hachsharot* in Greece

Throughout 1946, over a thousand Jews from Greece left the country in an organized but clandestine way overseen by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, with the substantial support of JDC authorities. Their voyages, however, were far more complicated than those in 1945. In June 1946 the *Haviva Reik* was seized by British

⁵⁹ Oral history interview with Gaynor I. Jacobson, tape 8, conducted by Tad Szulc (1988), RG-50.968.0032, USHMM.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

authorities at the coast of Mandatory Palestine and its 463 Jewish passengers were detained in the Atlit camp south of Haifa as illegal immigrants. In July 1946 Jewish migrants on the *Henrietta Szold* could not even get off the ship. Instead, British authorities transferred them to British refugee camps in Cyprus. Located in the southeast Mediterranean, between Greece and Palestine, these camps were under the supervision of JDC country director Morris Laub and hosted over 52,000 refugees until they were closed in February 1949, after the Israeli War of Independence was over and Britain de facto recognized Israel.⁶¹

Although personal testimonies on the hachsharot in Greece are absent for the period after 1946, documents from the JDC reveal the state of affairs quite poignantly. During the summer of 1947 the question of the responsibility for the Patisia hachsharah in Athens was raised repeatedly by the then-JDC country director for Greece, Harold Goldfarb. By that time, the Tsakonias estate in Patisia was the only remaining hachsharah in Greece and was in a “pretty demoralized state.”⁶² Disagreements over its management were pervasive and profound. In August, Goldfarb received an answer to his letter from Herbert Katzki at the JDC European Headquarters in Paris, stating that there are “no general agreements between the JDC and the Jewish Agency,” but the JDC’s willingness to support vocational training still applied.⁶³ Katzki also suggested that the JDC should only inspect the hachsharah and not employ its own staff there. The overtones of the ongoing correspondence suggest that Goldfarb’s local experience told him that such an approach could not work effectively.⁶⁴

In March 1948, Goldfarb clearly expressed his bitterness about what was going on in Greece regarding the hachsharah in a five-page-long reaction to a letter from the JDC Headquarters in New York. In that letter, Henrietta K. Buchman stated that there were still over a hundred people living in the hachsharah, and to an outsider,

⁶¹ Hadjisavvas, “From Dachau to Cyprus,” 146-164; for more on Cyprus detention camps see especially Dalia Ofer, “From Illegal Immigrants to New Immigrants: The Cyprus Detainees,” in *Holocaust and History, The Known, The Unknown, The Disputed and The Re-examined*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 733-749; and Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 66-78.

⁶² Letter from AJDC Athens to AJDC Paris, Re: Hachsharah, July 30, 1947, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁶³ Letter from Herbert Katzki to AJDC Athens, Re: Hachsharah, August 8, 1947, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

living conditions looked “utterly destitute,” with “very little food and virtually no clothing.”⁶⁵ In justifying JDC’s work in Greece, Goldfarb minced no words:

The clue to the situation about which you enquire in your letter of March 19th is the fact that the Hachsharah is really not a Hachsharah. It comprises a group of heterogeneous people who were led by the expectation of immediate emigration to Palestine, created by the local representatives of the Jewish Agency, to assemble in a kind of “staging area,” basically inadequate for housing the 100 to 110 people concerned. Lacking cooperative spirit, unused to discipline, unable to work together for their own best interests, such as even keeping their own quarters clean and presentable, and unable to utilize existing facilities to their maximum benefit, these people present a far more woeful aspect to a casual visitor than a careful examination of the situation would reveal.⁶⁶

Goldfarb made the Jewish Agency fully responsible for this distressful situation. He listed separately all clothing for men (70), women (35) and children (8), bedding, flatware as well as food and toiletries the JDC delivered to the hachsharah within the past year. Additionally, JDC was covering hospitalizations, special diets, and the medical treatments needed by residents, with doctors coming for medical inspection directly to the hachsharah. By far the most serious problem, according to him, was the attitude of the people in the hachsharah. Nonetheless, as Goldfarb also revealed, imports of goods were lately obstructed by malfunctioning customs regulations in Greece.⁶⁷

Given the ongoing civil war in Greece, most Jewish men consistently saw the hachsharah as the only option to escape military conscription. Unlike in Germany, Austria, and Italy, Jews in Greece were not DPs but mostly Greek citizens. And since men between the ages of 18 and 40 had to have a military registration to work in Greece, they had little chance of finding work outside the facility. Nevertheless,

⁶⁵ Letter from Melvin S. Goldstein to Blanche Bernstein, Re: Hachsharah in Greece, March 17, 1948; quote from the Letter from AJJDC (sic!) New York to Mr. Harold Goldfarb, March 19, 1948, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁶⁶ Letter from AJDC Athens to Mrs. Henrietta K. Buchman, Re: Hachsharah, Athens, Greece, March 24, 1948, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

most of those eligible for military service, who were de facto hiding in the hachsharah and avoiding compulsory conscription, were unwilling to contribute to its sustainability either by working on the farm or otherwise.⁶⁸ Goldfarb described them repeatedly as lacking a “sense of collective responsibility,” adding that this can hardly be stimulated if their only “desire to migrate to Palestine” is postponed indefinitely.⁶⁹ Those men were virtually broken because of their unfulfilled expectations.

A year later, in summer 1949, when the dissolution of the hachsharot was imminent throughout Europe, the situation in Patisia had not change much, even though the Greek Civil War was reaching its peak and coming to an end. At that point, the hachsharah situation became well known in certain circles because of the uproar caused by a letter by Asher Moissis, which he distributed widely in his official position as an Israeli consular official in Athens. The letter, primarily addressed to the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Israel, was forwarded by Moissis to, among others, the JDC offices in New York, Paris and Athens, as well as to the Jewish Agency Headquarters in Jerusalem.⁷⁰ The fact that Moissis did not consult with JDC representatives in Athens before sending it, that he presented himself as the problem-solver, and that Goldfarb only learned about it from his superiors, outraged the JDC.⁷¹ Although the legal status of the hachsharah in Athens became moot after the Jewish Agency withdrew its involvement in late January 1949 and the lease was terminated a month later, increasing numbers of Jews

⁶⁸ Letter from AJDC Athens to Mrs. Henrietta K. Buchman, Re: Hachsharah, Athens, Greece, March 24, 1948; Letter from Melvin S. Goldstein to Mrs. Henrietta K. Buchman, Re: Hachsharah in Greece, March 26, 1948; Letter from Melvin S. Goldstein to AJDC Jerusalem, Re: Hachsharah in Greece Activities in Tripolitania, March 30, 1948, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁶⁹ Letter from AJDC Athens to Mrs. Henrietta K. Buchman, Re: Hachsharah, Athens, Greece, March 24, 1948, Greece: Athens: Hachsharah Expenses 1947-1950, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.25, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁷⁰ Letter from Asher Moissis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hakirya, June 7, 1949, Greece, General, 1949-1954, NY AR 1945-54/4/33/2/384, JDC Archives, New York.

⁷¹ Letter from A. J. D. C. Athens to Mr. Robert Pilpel, Re: Hachsharah—Greece, June 22, 1949; Letter from A. J. D. C. Athens to Mr. Melvin Goldstein, Re: Hachsharah situation and the Moissis Report, June 27, 1949, Greece: Tsacona Hachsharot 1949, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.41, JDC Archives, Geneva.

started to arrive from the Greek provinces, escaping from the escalating civil war. The situation at the facility deteriorated rapidly and required a decisive solution.⁷² Given the changing circumstances, the JDC office in Athens quickly prepared a rescue plan, in which the hachsharah was officially transformed into the *Athens Shelter for destitute Jews*, with a final closing date set to September 30, 1949. The key negotiator of the transformation was Harold Goldfarb and the implementor was Bell Mazur, a scholar of ancient Greece and a former UNRRA representative, now working for the JDC. Goldfarb succeeded in extending the renting contract and engaged both the Relief Committee of the Jewish Community in Athens and, after much hesitation, the Relief Committee of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece in this uneasy endeavor. Although the Central Relief Committee officially supported the Zionist cause, it was most concerned about the lack of material and financial support, to the detriment of the Jews who remained in Greece and to the benefit of those who left.⁷³

The JDC continued its policy of not accepting additional administrative responsibilities but was unwilling to “abandon the hachsharah to its fate.”⁷⁴ The Tsakonas estate was again refurbished, and the food, as well as other expenses, were again covered by the JDC. Only the soup kitchen closed in favor of individual food vouchers. The JDC Headquarters in Paris expressed satisfaction with the report delivered by Goldfarb and encouraged him to make clear to Asher Moissis how dissatisfied they were with the letter he had written, which they found “most unjustified and unwarranted.”⁷⁵ They seemed to be aware of, and sympathetic to, his efforts to show himself in a good light and to strengthen his position both in the Jewish community and in the Greek political reality as well as vis-à-vis Israeli authorities. At the same time, however, they made clear that they saw Moissis, a lawyer with good language skills familiar with the local situation and helpful in the matter of Jewish property restitution, as useful for other goals they were pursuing in Greece, and therefore advised Goldfarb not to reduce his salary.

⁷² Letter from A. J. D. C. Athens to Mr. Robert Pilpel, Re: Hachsharah—Greece, June 22, 1949, Greece: Tsacona Hachsharot 1949, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.41, JDC Archives, Geneva.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Letter from Hachsharah—Greece to Mr. Harold Goldfarb, July 1, 1949, Greece: Tsacona Hachsharot 1949, G 1945-54/4/9/6/GR.41, JDC Archives, Geneva.

As agreed, the hachsharah in Patissia was dissolved in autumn 1949, shortly after the last battle of the Greek Civil War had been won by the ruling elites in Athens and the communist opponents defeated. The threat of Holocaust survivors having to enlist and fight in a war had passed, and so the remaining inhabitants of Patisia could begin to decide their future regardless of this looming risk. The position of the JDC office in Greece and the involvement of the prominent Jewish leader Asher Moissis in this matter remain unclear. His role in the post-war reconstruction of Jews in Greece has a firm place in his family's legacy but is largely neglected in historical scholarship.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The existence of the hachsharot, and especially their coming to an end in autumn 1949, coincided with the end of the Greek Civil War. Over a period of four years, Holocaust survivors made the decision to leave their country of origin, to which many had just returned after a long journey from the Nazi camps, based not only on the realization that almost no Jews survived, or on their adherence to Zionism, but much more so on the political circumstances in Greece, where the risk of participating in another war was high and personal reconstruction almost impossible. Still, their stay in a hachsharah and the adaptation to a new life in the land of Israel, unavoidably gave their personal narrations a Zionist imprint. The fear Jews in Greece shared was aptly brought closer by historian Katherine E. Fleming when she said that for Jews since the beginning of the Greek nation-state

⁷⁶ Moissis, *Greek-Jewish Patrimony*, edited by his son Raphael Moissis. The only recent research focusing on Asher Moissis is Leon Saltiel, "Two Friends in Axis-Occupied Greece: The Rescue Efforts of Yomtov Yacoel and Asher Moissis," *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 3 (2019): 342-358, but it deals only with his actions during the war. Fleming's pioneering work of does not mention his name except for one footnote: Fleming, *Greece*, 258, n 115. In the recent volume on Jews and the (post)Holocaust in Greece, only two chapters mention his name explicitly but without much context. Maria Kavala, "The Scale of Jewish Property Theft in Nazi-occupied Thessaloniki," 200, and Kostis Kornetis, "Expropriating the Space of the Other: Property Spoliations of Thessalonican Jews in the 1940s," 245, in *The Holocaust in Greece*, ed. Antoniou and Dirk Moses. While Carabott and Vassilikou in their sub-chapter on Greek Zionists briefly introduce another Zionist leader in Greece, Robert Raphael, Moissis is absent in their work: Carabott and Vassilikou, "'New Men vs Old Jews,'" 266.

“the long century of Greek expansion had concluded not with the chance for consolidation and normalization but with its opposite.”⁷⁷ The Greek Civil War as a reason for aliyah—after all the brutalities to which the Jews of Greece had been subjected to in previous decades—appears repeatedly in the personal testimonies of the Holocaust survivors who went through the hachsharot. Although Jewish residents from Greece usually address their hachsharah experience and routine only vaguely, internal JDC and ICRC documents make clear that the living conditions in these vocational training centers significantly deviated from those of normal life. While some survivors felt more like prisoners in the closed facility, which made them feel depressed, apathetic and numb, others tried to leave the hachsharah at every possible opportunity, avoiding training and staying inside only overnight. Transgressions against the rules, particularly in the area of work morale, were of concern to the authorities in charge, especially the JDC office in Greece, which was concerned about possible damage to its local image. However, no JDC source reported any residents misbehaving towards each other, nor on sexual issues, which would be expected, given the high number of pregnancies.

Blatant discretion on political issues in Greece is apparent not only in the press releases on the hachsharot but also in JDC sources, where even the notion of a Greek Civil War, and the violent ideological clashes connected to it, is as good as absent. For the JDC office, this certainly has to do with the apolitical positioning of the whole organization. The Jewish Community sought to avoid enmity with both international aid-donors and Greek government officials.

More generally, the discourse about the hachsharot and the concealment of their problems reflects, on the one hand, the evolving political order in Europe, divided by the emerging Cold War and in which Greece found itself in the West, and, on the other hand, the radical upheaval of Britain’s imperial position after the United States became the Western superpower. Under the circumstances, and because of Britain’s inability to stabilize the situation in war-torn Greece, the United States proclaimed the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and effectively took over from Britain.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Fleming, *Greece*, 188.

⁷⁸ Howard Jones, *A New Kind of War: America’s Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Mogens Pelt, *Tying Greece to the West: US-West German-Greek relations 1949-1974* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006); Konstantina E. Botsiou, “New Policies, Old Politics: American Concepts of Reform in Marshall Plan Greece,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 27, no. 2 (2009): 209-240.

This placed London in a subordinate position to Washington not only in Greece but also regarding the changing constellation in the Middle East, whereby it became more difficult to obstruct Jewish migration.

In the climate of the civil war, Greek authorities, who historically and politically did not see Jews as very loyal citizens, and even less so if they had joined the left-wing resistance during the war,⁷⁹ did not really stand in the way of their migration. The 1998 collection of the Greek Foreign Ministry's documents even gives the impression that they received news of it with some relief. With some exceptions, such as Asher Moissis, the postwar Jewish Community in Greece seemed more consumed by the competition to allocate benefits to those who were to remain, rather than being overly concerned with their fellow Jews in the hachsharot and their departure from the country, discursively supporting the Zionist cause without really addressing it.

Kateřina Králová is Associate Professor in Contemporary History, Charles University, focusing her work on reconciliation with the Nazi past, the Holocaust and its memory. An alumna of Phillips University Marburg, Králová has received notable international fellowships, including the Alexander von Humboldt, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute, IKY fellowship in Thessaloniki, USHMM Fellowship and a Fulbright Fellowship at Yale University, thus conducting a substantial part of her research abroad. She authored, among other things, the book *Das Vermächtnis der Besatzung: Deutsch-griechische Beziehungen seit 1940* (Köln: Böhlau, 2016; BpB, 2017) and co-edited with Marija Vulesica, and Giorgos Antoniou, *Jewish Life in Southeast Europe: Diverse Perspectives on the Holocaust and Beyond* (London - New York: Routledge, 2019). The special issue "Troubled Pasts and Memory Politics in Central and Southeastern Europe" on which she served as guest editor is forthcoming in *Nationalities Papers* and a volume on memory cultures in Southeast Europe after 1945 as a *Südosteuropa-Jahrbuch* in P. Lang Verlag (2022).

Keywords: Migration, Relief, Holocaust, Greece, Hachsharah

⁷⁹ Kateřina Králová, "‘Being Traitors’: Post-War Greece in the Experience of Jewish Partisans," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017): 263-280.

How to quote this article:

Kateřina Králová, “*Hachsharot* in Greece, 1945-1949: Camps or Vocational Centers?” in “Training for *Aliyah*: Young Jews in *Hachsharot* across Europe between the 1930s and late 1940s,” eds. Verena Buser and Chiara Renzo, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 21, no. 1 (2022), DOI: 0.48248/issn.2037-741X/13315