Zionism and the Diaspora: Jewish Youth Engagement in Poland and America

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Introduction

It's always been a source of pride in my family that we have a distant relative who has their own Wikipedia page. Our family name, Tabenken, is unusual, which made the discovery of Yitzhak Tabenkin quite exciting. After reading his Wikipedia page, I learned that he was born in the same area as my father's family, was a major figure in the Kibbutz Movement in Palestine in the early 20th century, and was later a Knesset member (Israeli parliament). Most interesting to me was Tabenkin's continued involvement with Eastern European Jews through the youth movement of Hehalutz in Poland even after settling in Palestine. Tabenkin would travel back to Poland to speak to Jewish youth on pioneering in Palestine, Zionist and socialist ideology and the kibbutz in the diaspora. This is how I came to discover Zionist youth movments and their popularity among Eastern Europen Jews in the first half of the 20th century, as well as their role in facilitating immigration to Palestinian kibbutzim. As a Jew who grew up in America, I was also keen to investigate the history of Zionism to better understand my experiences growing up and especially the transition to college life, where Zionism is a contentious subject.

This thesis will explore why Zionism came to be such a popular and important movement for both Polish youth in the interwar years and for American Jews post-WWII, even though the circumstances from which the movements emerged were very different. I will argue that, while there are clear similarities between Polish and American Zionism and Zionist youth engagement methods, Zionism had to be completely reframed in order for American Jews to accept it as a mainstream belief system. In addition, the long history of Jews in Poland informed much of the actions of Zionist youth in their quest to solve the "Jewish Problem." American Jews, who had begun immigrating to America in large numbers relatively recently, had many reasons to be

suspicious of Zionism; after all, they had moved to America, not Palestine, in search of a new Zion.

There exists a small collection of scholarship in English on Zionist Youth movments in Eastern Europe. These sources were a great help to me in terms of getting access to primary sources in English within these materials so I could gain a clearer understanding of Zionist youth in their own words. Of course, much more scholarship on Zionist youth movements, the Kibbutz movement and Jewish scouting exists in Polish, Hebrew, etc. Rona Yona's thesis, "A Kibbutz in the Diaspora," was a great source of background information on the context of early Zionist youth movements as well as specific information on the Klosova Kibbutz. Yona's thesis inspired me to switch my primary focus from kibbutzim in the diaspora to the ideological movements which backed these organizations. Elkana Margalit's "Social and Intellectual Origins of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement, 1913-1920" provided much of the background information I needed to complete my first chapter and set the stage for my second chapter. Instead of tracking one movement over a period of time through a distanced lens, I center the middle of my thesis around four former Zionist youth movement members in an attempt to find out the motivations, concerns and beliefs of everyday youth from before to after WWII, in their own words. To do this, I utilized oral histories and a memoir in English found in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive. With the transcripts of the oral history interviews available on the online archive, I was able to efficiently refer back to the interviews and search for keywords.

Much more abundant is scholarship on American Judaism, American Zionism and the American Jewish emotional connection to Israel in contemporary times. Many studies have been done on the urban Jewish community in America, the rise of the synagogue and histories which make arguments for why and how Zionism rose in popularity in America. I also supplement

these secondary sources with American Jewish opinion polls collected from 1945-1985, as well as immigration statistics. While much of the literature I consulted on this topic highlighted the Eastern European influence on the rise of Zionism in America, none directly compared Zionist youth movements and Zionist youth engagement in America as a way to continue Jewish diaspora history.

Chapter 1 of my thesis will focus on the historical origins and intellectual foundations of the two largest Zionism youth movements in Poland, Hashomer Hatzair and Hehalutz. First, it will explain the historical struggle of Jews to find a place to belong, without persecution, and the ways in which Jews in Poland attempted to solve this problem in the mid 19th century to the early 20th century. Next, it will chart the origins of the Hashomer Hatzair and Hehalutz youth movements, including the societal challenges they faced, as well as their goals and methods. Lastly, it will introduce the concept of pioneering and the Zionist philosophy of labor. This chapter uses mainly secondary sources in order to build the historiography needed to understand the next chapter.

Chapter 2 will present my primary research findings based on three oral history interviews as well as one memoir. First, building off of Rona Yona's thesis on the Klosova Kibbutz, I will explain the impact of the permanent kibbutz model on future Zionist youth movement organization. Next, I will analyze the primary sources in order to gain a better understanding of Jewish youth and how they interacted with youth movements. Taking into account their religious background, family life, childhood location and what age they were first introduced to Zionist youth movements, I will piece together patterns of behavior, while also acknowledging how each situation was unique. Lastly, I will shift the focus to how WWII

ultimately displaced all of the subjects of the chapter to American, as opposed to Palestine, which is one reason Chapter 3 will focus on the rise of American Zionism.

The third and final chapter will follow the rise of Zionism in America, as well as the solidification of an emotional connection with Israel within the typical American Jewish identity. It will also compare youth engagement strategies of Zionist youth movements in Poland and post-war Zionist youth organization in America. First, I will begin with explaining the post-war immigration trends of the remaining Jews in Eastern Europe, and in Poland specifically. Next, I introduce the people and factors which led Zionism to grow in America during the interwar years. I then consider Jewish youth engagement with Israel following 1948 and the ways in which they were similar to Zionist youth movements in Poland. Finally, I raise questions for further contemporary research on American Judaism and Zionism.

While the topic of this thesis was inspired from personal experience, I believe the research of this thesis is important for contemporary understanding and questioning of the meaning and role of Zionism in the 21st century. Completing the research for this project has broadened my perspective, challenged my preconceptions and has moved me to continue researching the American Jewish (as well as other diaspora centers) relationship to Zionism and Israel. Completing thorough secondary and primary research broke down the romantic ideals I ascribed to kibbutz life and the ideology of the Zionist youth movement and helped me to think critically about every source I read.

Chapter 1: A Short Background on Zionist Youth Movements

Introduction

In the first chapter of my thesis I will be examining the origins of two popular Jewish Zionist youth movements in the interwar period, mostly in the area of what is today modern Poland. Membership numbers skyrocketed in groups like Hashomer Hatzair (The Young Guard) and Hehalutz (The Pioneer) in the 1930s, reaching unprecedented heights of youth involvement in the Zionist movement. There were an innumerable amont of other Zionist youth movements, varying by region, membership size, level of religious observance and special interests, like sports and politics; I will be mainly focusing on these two youth movements—Hashomer Hatzair and Hehalutz—because they had the largest membership numbers out of other similar groups. Most importantly, they sponsored *hakhshara,* or preparational programs for immigration to Palestine, more robustly than other groups; many members also organized themselves by living in diaspora-style kibbutzim—communal collectives. What makes these groups unique is that they were created by youth, for youth, a project largely independent of older adult supervision at the local level. I am interested in the specific reasons so many Polish Jewish youth were drawn to Zionist youth movements and the kind of benefits they recieved from their membership, which I will explore further in my next chapter. In order to gain a better understanding of these things, it is first important to understand why the movements sprung up in the first place, and how they evolved over the decades through WWII. In this chapter, I will begin with breifly explaining the often tense relationship between Christian Poles and Jews and how that relationship contributed to the formation of Jewish Zionist youth movements. Next, I will cover the origins of the Jewish Zionist youth movement phenomenon, its influences, offshoots and subsequent programs. In addition, I will consider the oppositional assimilationist movement to show the range of opinions

regarding the place of Jews in Polish society. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the problems the Zionist youth movements faced and their position in society on the eve of WWII.

Choosing an Identity

Since the Babylonian Exile of 586 BCE began the Jewish Diaspora, Jews have had to face the challenges that come along with being a religious and ethnic minority in a foreign land. The question, therefore, is age-old: To assimilate, or not, and is it even possible? How should Jews relate to non-Jewish people, society, and culture? In Eastern Europe, Jews toiled with these questions a great deal and with increasing urgency towards the end of the 19th century when pogroms and anti-Semitism swelled in frequency. Polish and Jewish opinion regarding the position Jews ought to have in Polish society depended on social and political background as well as location. Different provinces had distinct concerns regarding Jews and where Jewish loyalty supposedly lay; under Prussian rule, Poznania Jews in the west tended to be more Germanized and were thus viewed by Poles "with no less hostility than the entire German element."[1] Eastern Jews, who immigrated in mass numbers from the Pale of Settlement to towns like Warsaw, Lodz and Wilno after 1880s Russian pogroms, spoke Russian and therefore threatened, in the eyes of the Poles, the Polish character of their towns.

Conversely, the overall character of Jewish-Polish relations in the first half of the 19th century were heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, which held that the advancement of society should be encouraged and directed by the governing authority. This influence can be seen in 1861 when the Polish Patriotic movement decided to include Jewish emancipation in their agenda, a decision supported by the Warsaw rabbis and their co-religionists. The movement believed Jews could be considered simply as "'Poles of Mosaic denomination,'" whose religion

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[1] Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland,* Edited by Maceij Jachimczyk, Chimen Abramsky and Antony Polonsky (New York: B. Blackwell: 1986), 75.

(or ethnicity) did not prevent them from being integrated into Polish society and being loyal to Polish causes.[2] The subsequent Russian emancipation of the Jews in the Congress Kingdom of Poland was a significant turning point in Polish-Jewish relations. In large cities, the *Kahal,* or Jewish governing body, and their co-religionists overwhelmingly supported assimilation. Jews of intellectual prominence, upper class Jews and urban Jews who supported assimilation, however, made up a small percentage of the total Jewish population in Polish areas. More rural communities of Jews lived in insular villages called *shtetls*. Traditional Jews of the *shtetls* on the whole wished to maintain their religious and ethnic distinction but were of course desperate to end incessant pogroms that made life incredibly difficult and dangerous. In their view, if assimilation was the goal, it should mean an end to anti-semetism, but not an end to traditional Jewish culture, as they feared the Jewish intelligentsia, upper class and urban Jews supported.

In 1870, a prominent Polish journalist, Bolesław Prus, wrote that Poles ought to imitate characteristics of the Jews such as their "orderliness, thrift, and spirit of solidarity," and to celebrate their many charitable contributions to Warsaw.[3] A Warsaw positivist, Prus believed Jews should be assimilated into Polish society as a religious minority. Yet Prus also would have found it acceptable to laugh at Jews "as every minority is laughed at," and even lecture and sermonize them.[4] On the whole, anti-semetism was considered in bad taste among progressive milieu, but the continuing alienation of Jews through being treated differently as a minority left the embers of anti-semetism hot and ready to be flamed by the end of the 19th century.

Dashed Assimilation Hopes and the Birth of the Jewish Youth Movement

Russian emancipation of Jews in 1861 in the Congress Poland Kingdom raised hope within the much of the Jewish community that assimilation and the end of discrimination was

[2] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland,* 74.
[3] Ibid, 74.
[4] Ibid, 75.

soon to follow. Yet emancipation, which was subject to heavy legislative control under Russian rule, did not spur a widespread assimilation movement with an agreed upon goal that Poles and Jews could work together to achieve. While there was a decently sized movement organized by Jews to push for assimilation, which I will consider later in this chapter, it did not gain enough widespread Jewish support to make definitive change. Even as Jews spoke Polish and attended Polish schools, "they found themselves being *returned* to Jewish society" in spite of their sincere attempts to join Polish society.[5] The capacity of organized Jewish society to instill traditional values among the younger generation was crumbling. Children who had grown up in the *shtetls* began to grow disdainful of the rigid traditional way of life, even describing it as backwards. The trend of moving to larger cities, moving abroad and secularization were demonstrative of this process. "Moved by a desire to find an alternative identification—" these were the circumstances the young founders of Hashomer Hatzair found themselves in.[6]

What is a Youth Movement?

Youth movements, a self-organization of youth, reject "the world of adult values." Participants are driven to recognize their "uniqueness and achieve independence" from their families.[7] Historian J. R. Gills argues that the turn of the 19th century witnessed a "'Discovery of Youth,'" a change in the way young people viewed the period of their youth and their self-image.[8] Instead of the previous view that youth was an arduous and tedious stage of life to be gotten through as quickly as possible, it became increasingly popular for youth to enjoy the uniqueness of that period in their life, to search for meaning outside of the home and family trade. Naturally, youth movements, created by youth themselves, provided outlets and

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[5] Elkana Margalit, "Social and Intellectual Origins of the Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement, 1913-1920," *Journal of Contemporary History,* 4 (1996): 27.
[6] Ibid, 28.
[7] Zvi Lamm, *Youth Takes the Lead: The Inception of Jewish Youth Movements in Europe* (Yad Ya'ari: 2004), 9.
[8] Ibid, 15.

opportunities to explore these new desires. Jewish Zionist youth movements like Hashomer Hatzair and Hehalutz took inspiration from British Scouting and the German Free Youth movement, Wandervogel, in crafting their ideologies and programs. British Scouting was a movement created for youth by adults who wished to take control of orphaned and unaccompanied children roaming the streets while their parents worked in factories and shape them into mature, functional adults who could serve the needs of British society. Conversely, Wandervogel was a German youth movement self-organized by young people with an emphasis on intimate friendships and excitement. Jewish Zionist youth movement programs in general combined Wandervogel's self-organization and excitement with a desire to aid the Jewish community and society at large.

Scouting as a philosophy and way of life was created by Robert Baden-Powell in England at the beginning of the 20th century. Originally created to solve the problem of unattended children of factory workers who roamed the streets and children who lacked good morals, Baden-Powell created a scouting manual in the hopes that he could educate a generation of young men into good citizens. These good citizens would be prepared to defend the British Empire by serving in the military. In his manual, published in 1908, Baden-Powell argues that the reason for the downfall of the Roman Empire was a lack of good citizens and patriotism; his scouting method would save the British Empire from experiencing the same fate.[9] Scouting was incredibly successful in the British Empire; its incorporation of "'fashionable stances'" likes "'imperialism, Social Darwinism, and the cult of national efficiency'" gave hope to the ruling class that England could be saved from social deterioration.[10] Scouting made its way to Poland in 1911 after Baden-Powell's manual was translated into Polish. Polish youth were inspired by the

[9] Lamm, *Youth Takes the Lead,* 96.
[10] Ibid, 98.

pre-military spirit, inspiring them to decide that it was up to them to free their country. Jewish youth were excluded from Polish scouting groups, but the universality of the scouting program allowed Jewish youth to adapt it to their needs. From the beginning, educating youth about Zionism was one of the foremost goals of Jewish scouting. Instead of crafting a good citizen, Jewish scouts wanted to create a "'new human being.'"[11] Before scouting, there had been Jewish organized activities for youth, such as hiking and fishing, but what came next was a movement created by youth, for youth that would change the way Jews thought about Zionism and Israel.

The End of Assimilation Attempts?

Anti-semitism was of course a significant factor for many young Jews to seek out solidarity from youth movements. The resulting difficulty in successfully assimilating into Polish society also contributed to the rise in Jewish youth movements. Predating the burgeoning Zionist youth movements was the assimilationist movement that rejected the idea of Jewish Nationality and emigration to Palestine as a necessity. The assimilationist movement can be traced back to the *Haskalah,* or Jewish Enlightenment, of the 18th and 19th centuries. The *Haskalah* sought to bring forth a Hebrew literary renaissance while also promoting the integration of Jews into their surrounding society and adopting modern values; it represented a "genuine attempt to combine the ancient and the modern in a new synthesis."[12] An assimilationist youth group called Zagiew (Association of Polish Youth of Jewish Origin) declared in 1919 that the Jewish nationalist scouting movement impresses upon the Jewish youth a "'dissatisfaction and hatred of Poland and the Polish people,'" and encourages "'anti-Polish trends.'" These Jewish nationalists were of the "worst and most inexorable kind'" ('Jewish nationalists' referring to Zionists).[13] Zagiew

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[11]Lamm, *Youth Takes the Lead*, 109.
[12] Jonathan Frankel, "Assimilation and the Jews in nineteenth-century Europe: towards a new historiography?" in Steven Zipperstein and Jonathan Frankel, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in the Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge University Press: 2004), 7.
[13] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland*, 118.

members wished deeply for the full assimilation of Jews into Polish society, and held strong Polish nationalist beliefs. The key to assimilation in their view was for Jews to be "good Poles."[14] Good Poles did not give up on assimilation like Jewish youth movements had, nor did they advocate for Jews to leave Poland. For assimilationists, there was no other homeland than Poland; Palestine was a foreign land with which they had no meaningful connection. As I will uncover in the next chapter, some Zionist youth movement members shared this lack of connection to Palestine and did not wish to leave their native land of Poland. Because of these reservations, some decided to switch their affiliation to a non-Zionist group, such as the Communist Bund, as a way to remain engaged with other Jewish youth. While Zionism became the most popular ideology among Polish Jews in the interwar period, assimilationist groups and their commitment to a future of coexistence between Poles and Jews appealed to a significant group of Jews. The excerpts from Zagiew's manifesto leave no room for interpretation on their opinion of Jewish Nationalists as a movement which interfered with Zagiew's noble mission to solve the 'Jewish Problem.' It was ultimetly Jewish Zionist youth movements which gained more traction by Polish government and society.

While a good majority of Jews in Poland struggled to have friendly relations with their Polish neighbors, there were some areas where Jewish-Polish relations were civil. In fact, Israel's first prime-minister, David Ben-Gurion, recalls that his hometown of Plonsk was relatively free of discrimination against Jews. In his memoir, Ben-Gurion explains how he never "'suffered anti-semetic persecution'" and that his inclination towards Zionism had little to do with anti-semetism. Instead, Ben-Gurion believes it was the "'positive purpose of rebuilding a homeland'" that drew Polish Jews (a very high number of whom came from Plonsk) to

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[14] Cheryl Malcom, "A Good Pole in Yavneh: Cynthia Ozick's 'The Shawl,'" *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 21 (2002), 123.

Palestine.[15] There were plenty of rather assimilated Jews in Poland who did well for themselves and thought of themselves as Polish Jews as opposed to Jews in Poland. In addition, there were many young Jews who were hesitant to adopt Zionist ideology, having little interest in leaving behind their Polish home. Though Ben-Gurion remembers Plonsk as town accpeting of Jews, the sharp increase in the popularity of Zionist youth movements in the 1930s, when Hitler would take power, goes to prove that for many, anti-semetism and exclusion from Polish society were serious problems that assimilation had failed to solve, and for which Zionism provided a solution. As will be explained below, many Zionist youth movements members in the late interwar period, after Ben-Gurion's youth in the 1910s, were indeed trying to escape persecution and believed immigration to Palestine was the only way to survive as Jews.

Origins of Hashomer Hatzair

Founded on the Eve of WWI, the Hashomer Hatzair movement, while conceptually conceived in Galicia, actually began to materialize in Vienna; Russian invasion of Austrian-owned Eastern Galicia and the subsequent increase of anti-semitism and pogroms forced many Jews to flee as refugees to Vienna, Austria, where they stayed from 1915-1918. There they lived in poor conditions, with families broken up, and "Jewish social and political life was virtually paralyzed."[16] Coming of age as refugees in Vienna and returning to Galicia to find the new government just as anti-semitic as they left it made quite an impression of the Jewish youth and pushed them to begin organizing more seriously. Interacting with the Western German Jewish 'Blau Weiss' (Blue White) youth movement back in Vienna had exposed Galician youth to that movement's "freedom, calmness and naturalness" in coeducational settings.[17] Blau Weiss was a German Jewish youth movement founded in 1912 that broke away from the German youth

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[15] David Ben-Gurion, *Memoirs* (World Publishing Co.: 1970), 36.
[16] Margalit, "Social and Intellectual Origins," 30.
[17] Ibid, 31.

movement, Wandervogel (The Wandering Birds), when they stopped accepting Jewish members and adopted German Nationalist ideology. With a heavy emphasis on hiking, camping and reconnecting with nature, Blau Weiss sought to provide a space for young German Jews to celebrate both their German and Jewish heritage; they sang songs in German, Hebrew and Yiddish around the campfire. The goal of the group was not assimilation into German society, however, for according to one member, "'anti-semitism will always keep Jews out,'" but to further develop Jewish identity as alternative to the German identity.[18] By 1922, Blau Weiss adopted Zionist ideology and an argicultural preparation program in advance of immigration to Palestine. The contradiction between celebrating their German heritage while actively advocating for aliyah presents an interesting conundrum. It seems these youths recognized the futility of assimilation yet acknowledged and held onto the cultural and emotional ties they had to a German society they could view from the outside but never truly enter. Hashomer Hatzair youth in Vienna, while they greatly admired Blau Weiss, also had doubts about their "Jewish and Zionist inadequacies."[19] The Galician youths likely felt Blau Weiss should leave their German heritage behind and focus more on the future of Jewish youth. While the Blau Weiss movement was relatively short lived (it was disbanded in 1929), it was one of the first youth movements of Germany and left a lasting impact on future youth movements in Poland.

Longing for communal identification and established roots, the Jewish youth of Hashomer Hatzair found expression "in the establishment of institutions, funds, journals, [...] and in the emergence of a leadership," which was all completed without adult supervision in Vienna.[20] These expressions emerged as an "explicit response to a need" of the Jewish youth

[18] World Zionist Organization: The Central Archive, "The Blau-Weiss Archive," http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/en/AttheCZA/Pages/BlauWeiss.aspx.
[19] Margalit, "Social and Intellectual Origins," 31.
[20] Ibid, 31.

living in the mid 1910s.[21] Interestingly, members often came from well-to do Jewish families and had an exemplary education in Judaism and its history; these youth would soon reject their familial economic status to engage in hard labor in the name of preparing to work in Palestine and forging their own independent path in the world. In 1917, *The Guide to Hasomer Leaders* was published in Vienna. This document served to define the essential identity of the movement and called for the consolidation of other smaller youth movements like Tseirei Zion and the Hashomer (Scouts) into the whole of Hashomer Hatzair. Hashomer Hatzair was committed to remaining apolitical and during this time can best be described as a counter cultural movement with "'romantic anti-capitalist'" characteristics, rather than having a concrete socialist ideology.[22] The hesitancy to become inherently political was driven by a fear of losing control over ideology of the movement. By 1927, the Hashomer Hatzair leadership in Palestine had adopted revolutionary Marxism yet remained unaffiliated with any party. For Hashomer Hatzair in Poland, the main goal was immigration to Palestine and settling on kibbutzim; getting involved in governmental and political affairs was not a priority.

Problems facing Jewish Youth in Early Interwar Years

In the early days of the movement, when members of youth movements made up a minority of Jewish youth, one young author named I. Scheininger sought to explain the national and youth problems facing Jews. Scheininger argues that the Jewish youth experience is made singular through the "tragedy of our exile." Referencing the original Babylonian Exile as an ongoing event with the modern expulsion from Polish societies, Scheininger explains how Jewish youths' homes, families and schools in Poland, meant to foster their growth, "deny and distort the most essential element in us [them] as youth."[23] By being treated as an 'other' lacking

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[21] Lamm, *Youth Takes the Lead,* 254.
[22] Margalit, "Social and Intellectual Origins," 38.
[23] Lamm, *Youth Takes the Lead,* 84.

as human beings by both their families and the Polish people and schools, Jewish youth are unable to truly connect to a specific society. It is this detachment that is the "basis of the anomaly of our [their] lives" and the problem that Hashomer Hatzair sought to answer with their educational program. In their first publication, *The Guide*, Hashomer Hatzair again addressed this problem, stating that "'we are not complete healthy human beings, nor are we complete healthy Jews,'" therefore there is no melding of these identities.[24] With love for their nation and a desire to reform Jewish humanity, Hashomer Hatzair centered the education of the individual around a spirit of protest against the Jewish *shtetl* way of thinking and in pursuit of creating a whole Jew. In comparison with the youth of other nations who live a "normal national life," Jews carry the burden of a two-fold mission to "rescue both the Jew and the human being within."[25] To achieve national sovereignty Jews must first revive Jewish humanity.

The New Jewish Youth

The trauma endured by Jewish youth in Eastern Europe (along with anti-semitism and alientation from mainstream society) was a signifigant factor in their seeking a new way of spiritual and social identification. Feeling fractured and equally alienated from traditional eatern European Jewish society and Polish society, the architects of Hashomer Hatzair, "imbued with a religious spirit" that was distinctly secular, sough to outline the 'whole Jew' as one who celebrates the Jewish past (selectively), learns the Hebrew language (not Yiddish, the traditional eastern European Jewish language, and likely their parents mother tongue), and is educated in cultural and religious Judaism.[26] By returning to the roots of Jewish culture and history, Hashomer Hatzair youth adopted elements of Judaism that resonated with them and helped them to separate themselves from their family's traditions and non-Jewish Polish youth. This desire to

[24] Lamm, *Youth Takes the Lead*, 88.
[25] Ibid, 89.
[26] Margalit, "Social and Intellectual Origins," 35.

learn Jewish history and law and speak the modern version of the ancient language of Hebrew, coupled with a secular religious spirit can come across as muddled and unclear. How can one return to the ancient past as a way to push forward into a new future? For the youth who came of age during WWI and directly afterwards, however, this outlook resonated deeply.

German Jewish philosopher Martin Buber had a great influence on this new outlook and secular Zionism. Buber promoted the idea that in order to sustain the Jewish religion, Jews should not be concerned with the truth of religious history, but should preserve the aspects of Judaism which feel most relevant to them. In this way, Buber felt that he could preserve "Jewish religiosity" by being willing to "sacrifice much of the Jewish religion."[27] For German Jews, who would pass along Buber's philosophy to Polish Jews, Buber made being authentically and proudly Jewish a modern alternative to assimilation. In his 1912 essay "Three Addresses on Judaism," published in *HaShiloah*, a prominent Hebrew-language literary journal, Buber implored young Jews to "'be a Jew truly from within, to live as a Jew with all the contradiction, all the tragedy, and all the future promise of his blood.'"[28] This is Buber's solution to the problems raised by I. Scheininger concerning the "tragedy of our exile." Focused on the future and grounded in the ancient past, Hashomer Hatzair youth had found their philosophical muse.

Hehalutz

At the same time Hashomer Hatzair was quickly growing, Hehalutz was also gaining traction as a movement; the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British Government expressed support for a Jewish state in Palestine, encouraged great enthusiasm among Jewish youth. Groups started forming of their own accord, owing their origins to "'a group of former Shomrin (scouts)—'" this ideological history also provided a membership base from which to

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[27] Adam Kirsch, "Modernity, Faith and Martin Buber," *The New Yorker* (2019).
[28] Ibid.

draw.[29] Hehalutz originated in Russia and was indirectly influenced by the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions. Russian Jewish pioneers brought with them to Poland proletarian pride and mannerisms and customs of the Russian Revolution, such as the collective lifestyle and a scorn for traditional religious observance. From the beginning, Hehalutz's goal was to gather Jewish youth together who wished to immigrate to Palestine and "live by their own labor," rejecting the exploitation of workers.[30] A major figure in the movement, Joseph Trumpeldor—who would later be held by the following generation of youth as a hero—joined the Russian movement in 1918. Soon he published a pamphlet in Russian entitled *He-Halutz* which laid out the basic requirements for members and the ideological groundwork for the movement: that the movement would accept members over eighteen years of age who recognized Hebrew as their national language and wanted to prepare for immigration to Palestine, and that the movement was Zionist, yet nonpartisan. Hehalutz would be an organization of workers who wished to live by their own labor in Palestine, "rejecting the exploitation of others' work," not politically biased.[31]

Another post-WWI development in Hehalutz was the promotion of the *hagshama azmit* ideal, meaning self-realization. Instead of focusing on broader Zionist goals and acting on behalf of all Jewry, there was increased emphasis on the goal of making each individual member "'whole.'"[32] This concept harkens back to the ideological beginnings of Hashomer Hatzair in which estrangement from the national and the family prompted the problem of having a Jewish youth who were considered by Hashomer Hatzair to lack a 'healthy wholeness.' Berl Katznelson, a Zionist pioneer and educator who made aliyah in the early 1920s, believed that Zionist education should strive to teach this concept of the individual that "entailed a moral imperative

[29] Israel Oppenheim, *The Struggle of Jewish Youth for Productivization: the Zionist youth movement in Poland* (East European Monographs: 1989), 9.
[30] Jewish Virtual Library, "HeHalutz," https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/he-x1e24-alutz-2.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Abraham Edelheit and Hershel Edelheit, *History of Zionism: a handbook and dictionary* (Avalon Publishing: 2000), 320.

for a public-spirited sense of responsibility."[33] Katznelson passionately believed that education should be a core value of the movement and that teachers should be fostering the personal growth of their students and lead by example.

While the Russian government had originally approved Hehalutz activity to operate freely, by the late 1920s, that policy was reversed and supression of any Zionist activity ensued. At a Workers Nonpartisan Conference in Kiev in 1926, a coalition of workers asked the Soviet government to prohibit Hehalutz or any Zionist activity becuase it was "dangerous, counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet."[34] Stalin's drive toward Russification in the 1930s discouraged minority language and culture but maintained vehemently opposed to antisemitism (in state propaganda). This led to the center of the movement shifting to Poland.

A major pillar of the Hehalutz period grew to be *hakhshara* centers—places in which Hehalutz members would live together and learn about farming techniques while adjusting to manual labor. These centers functioned as proto-kibbutzim, giving members a taste for communal living and how life would be structured in Palestine. Following the Fourth Aliyah that took place from 1926-1928, a new phase of the movement began. The youth section of Hehalutz (for those younger than 18 years of age), Hehalutz Ha-Tza'ir formed, and many other subgroups came into existence, like the Religious Pioneer and the Central Pioneer. Hehalutz viewed the numerous independent youth movements as an obstacle to general unity. By 1928, Hashomer Hatzair and Gordonia merged with Hehalutz, yet they remained autonomous on the branch level—each group would control their own pioneer training and organization of immigration to Palestine. Hehalutz functioned as an umbrella organization for these absorbed groups. Members

[33] Micha'el Tanchum, "Early Zionist Education," AMIT, https://amitchildren.org/early-zionist-education/.
[34] Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Workers Non-partisan Conference in Kiev Asks Soviet Government to Prohibit He'chalutz in Russia," *Jewish Daily Bulletin,* 1926.

of the absorbed groups met the change with mixed feelings, and these tensions ultimately laid the seeds for future disagreements over group independence that would occur in the ‘30s.

<u>*Hakhshara*</u>

Beginning in the 1920s, *hakhshara* became an inseparable part of many Zionist youth movements. Translating from Hebrew to “preparation,” *hakhshara* was a practice that began as a way for Zionist youth movements to accomodate the needs of Palestine. Leaders considered which industries needed the most manpower and specialized training. By focusing on training members in vocational skills and industry specific labor, like mining and lumber, and later, mostly in Poland, in agriculture, Hehalutz could use their membership base to cater to the developing state’s needs. as the means of preparing members for hard labor and life on the kibbutz. *Hakhshara* was a natural continuation of scouting activities of the early 1910s which encouraged fit young Jews to reconnect with nature while working towards a Zionist goal. Participation in *hakhshara* was wide spread among Zionist Jewish youth during the interwar period and time commitments varied depending on that years policy and the age of the member. It was common for every youth movement member to participate in some sort of *hakhshara* training, whether that be working on a farm and living in a kibbutz, attending a Zionist summer camp and learning Hebrew, or being part of an urban workers commune. In the early years of agricultural *hakhshara*, participation was seasonal according to crop harvesting and land was usually rented from non-Jews. The practice was a money losing venture; extra hands were often needed to complete the harvest and living conditions were incredibly poor. If a member got sick, they would return home; holidays were also a cause to return home. The training farm was a transitory and temporary place to wait until immigration to Palestine became possible. The seasonal aspect of the *hakhshara* farm, in which participants split their time between home and

the kibbutz or commune led to a more individual immigration to Palestine rather than in coherent groups of pioneers. Each time members returned to or began their *hakhshara* experience, they could be with new members; strong communal ties could not be established when living together for one short season. Once communes and later kibbutzim were established in Palestine, there began a demand for pioneers to practice for communal living and to immigrate as close knit communities to Palestine.

A sort of cult of labor on the land emerged among pioneer leaders as early as the First Aliyah in the late 1880s. Inspired by Rousseau's ideas on land and property and promoted by Ben-Gurion, it held that "the right to land lies (...) in labor." The true owners of the land are those who work it."[35] Palestine would only be acquired and redeemed as a homeland for the Jewish people if pioneers could infuse their labor with the land, thereby making it theirs. This romantic idea of a reconnection to the land through labor inspired Hehalutz to make physical labor a main tenant of *hakhshara*. The fact that Jews in the diaspora farmed much less than the indigenous populations, forced to indirectly create their own source of livelihood, also pushed a return to agriculture in *hakhshara* as preparation for a return to their own homeland where they could farm and sustain themselves. Young Jews rejected the "abnormal economy" and the socioeconomic constraints of the *shtetl* and advocated for the invention of a new lifestyle.[36] Through education on Palestine, Jewish history and language, connection with labor and land and the eventual self-realization of Zionism, young Jews would forge the best Jewish future. The new lifestyle would imbue the pioneer with collective-communal values.

It was the pioneers of the Second Aliyah (1904-1914) who established worker communes centered around a single industry, typically agriculture, in Palestine which they called *kvutzot*

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[35] Oppenheim, "Hehalutz in Poland," 25.
[36] Ibid, 53.

(before the use of the word kibbutz). They inspired Hehalutz to instruct the next generation of pioneers to organize themselves in *kvutzot* in the diaspora to physically and socially prepare themselves to live in this style in Palestine. By the Third Aliyah (1919-1923), the first kibbutzim were established in Palestine. Kibbutzim did not limit themselves to one industry, often working on infrastructure projects, and embraced membership increases. In the diaspora, the fledgling kibbutzim were successful with the financial help of their Jewish neighbors, but once members were granted passage to Palestine and left the diaspora kibbutz, its structure fell apart. A "vacuum in leadership" made the kibbutz "extremely unstable" and rendered the possibility of a permanent diaspora kibbutz to seem unlikely.[37] After all, it took a dedicated young Zionist to want to leave the comforts of home for a life of poverty and hard labor—many members deserted after arriving to the kibbutz and realizing these facts. The popularity of Zionism also contributed to the success or failure of the kibbutz; if there were no prospects for aliyah because of immigration restrictions, there seemed no point to put one's children through the grueling process of *hakhshara*. The popularity of Zionism among Eastern European Jews fluctuated alongside aliyah waves, going up when aliyah periods began and losing popularity as immigration began to recede. In times of diminished Zionist activity and when Zionism had little support within the Jewish community in general, young Jews with radical tendencies shifted their attention to other movements like the Jewish Socialist Bund or the Polish Communist Party, both of whom were anti-Zionist.[38] Without the promise of reaching the homeland realized through *hakhshara* with fellow young Jews, many were restless and sought alternate membership and identity. It was for these reasons that Hehalutz leaders decided it was necessary to change the timeline of *hakhshara* by stabilizing its structure and making it a long term prerequisite for making aliyah. This is what

[37] Rona Yona, "A Kibbutz in the Diaspora: the Pioneer Movement in Poland and the Klosova Kibbutz." *Journal of Israeli History* 31 (1) (2012), 13.
[38] Ibid, 14.

led to the formation of the Klosova kibbutz, led by Benny Marshak beginning in 1926, the first permanent kibbutz in the diaspora and the model all future kibbutzim would follow.

Conclusion

The Zionism that emerged in the late 19th century would become one of the most influential ideologies among Polish Jewish youth in the early decades of the 20th century. Through youth movements, young Zionist leaders created new ways of engaging with Jewish identity, culture and history within a largely anti-semitic society. Immigration to the land of Palestine and the building of the Jewish state was seen as the only viable option for persecuted Jews. Through youth movements, Zionism was integrated into the daily life of Jewish youth. They were taught about Palestine, ancient Jewish history, Hebrew, and communal principles that would prepare them for life in the future Jewish state. The creation of a 'whole' Jew, inspired by Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's opinion that the next generation of Eastern European Jews ought to "'be a Jew truly from within, to live as a Jew with all the contradiction, all the tragedy, and all the future promise of his blood.'"[39] The 'whole' Jew principle became a foundational ideology for Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist youth movements.

Not all Polish Jews believed in Zionism or that the solution to their problems was immigration to Palestine. Assimilation movements offered an alternative to the Zionist solution by advocating for Jews to remain in Poland and fight for their place in Polish society. They viewed Jewish nationalism as anti-Polish and believed that if Jews would just become 'good Poles' they would eventually become assimilated into Polish society. The Assimilationist movement waned in popularity in the early interwar years; Zionism and the Communist Bund were the two most popular ideological organizations among Polish Jews in the interwar years. The Bund was another anti-Zionist ideological alternative to Zionism; in contrast to the

[39] Kirsch, "Modernity, Faith and Martin Buber."

Assimilationist movement, the Bund worked to foster a modern Jewish culture grounded in Eastern European Jewish history. The Bund wanted to keep Jewish youth engaged with their community while fostering integration into Polish society. Overall, it can be said that Zionism was the more prevalent and far reaching general ideology among Polish Jews.

The emergence of the training kibbutz in the diaspora in the early decades of the 20th century proved a defining characteristic of the Zionist youth movement experience. The diaspora kibbutz provided the setting through which Zionist youth movements could prepare youth for life in Palestine; pioneers learned agricultural methods or trades, how to live communally and the value of hard labor. The experience of living and working on a kibbutz was called *hakhshara*, meaning preparation. Zionist leaders debated how long pioneers should be required to live on a diaspora kibbutz before being allowed to apply for aliyah. Some advocated for a short term stint to get pioneers to Palestine faster, and some advocated for year long kibbutz stays that would ensure an ideologically secure and loyal pioneer in Palestine. The debate remained in the 1930s over the necessity of permanent *hakhshara* versus seasonal *hakhshara*. Leaders struggled to define just exactly what *hakhshara* should be prioritizing—creation of a new lifestyle/man, enduring hard physical labor, cultural and religious education, socialist education, etc. Nonetheless, training farms, worker communes and industrial kibbutzim sprung up all over Poland and the surrounding region throughout the interwar years. It was a new age in the movement, and with the solidification of the permanent kibbutz method, the generation of young Jews coming of age in the 1930s would experience the most organized *hakhshara* to date. As I will show in the next chapter through various oral histories, participation in Zionist youth movements and *hakhshara* became widespread and normalized through WWII and in the immediate postwar years. In addition, I will discuss the significance and nuances of the Klosova

kibbutz—the first permanent diaspora kibbutz— in order to to better understand their function within the Zionist youth movement and the experiences of leaders and typical members.

Jewish Youth Movements fundamentally changed the way Jews considered their personal identities within the context of the diaspora. Within the context of a rapidly changing world, Zionist youth movements provided structure, community, and a solution for the ongoing problems facing Jews in Eastern Europe. The ideology of movements like Hashomer Hatzair and Hehalutz resonated deeply with a disaffected Jewish youth struggling to find direction in their Jewish identity following WWI. In addition, these movements provided structure and community in times of great distress. In the following chapter, I will discuss oral history accounts of former youth movement members in interwar Poland. Through these testimonies, I will create a clearer picture of the reasons by Jewish youth were drawn to Jewish youth movements, why they stayed or left, and how their experiences in these movements influenced their decisions later in life.

Chapter 2: The Zionist Youth Experience in Oral History

Introduction

In this chapter, individual oral history testimonies will serve as the primary sources through which a more realistic story of Jewish youth movements, Zionism and the institutions of *hakhshara* and the kibbutz will form. The archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, housed in the Shapell Center in Bowie, MD, has an extensive collection of oral history testimonies given in English by Holocaust survivors, which have been invaluable to my research. The primary research I conducted for this chapter will build off of the backgorund information on Zionist youth movements I presented in Chapter One. Knowing the ideological foundations of Hashomer Hatzair and other Jewish youth movements will inform the oral histories of this chapter.

First, an examination of Benny Marshak and the creation of the Klosova kibbutz will reveal the origins of the permanent kibbutz and how this impacted Zionist youth movement organization. Uncovering the challenges Benny Marshak faced, the strategies he used to overcome them and his personal background will give a greater context to the experiences of the subjects of the oral histories I will discuss. The first permanent kibbutz in the diaspora, the Klosova kibbutz became the model for all other kibbutzim in Eastern Europe by the late 1920s. Marshak, who led the Klosova kibbutz beginning in 1926, set forth strict rules on kibbutz members while at the same time allowing chaos to flourish in the communal home (there were times when going to work was not enforced). Marshak's devotion to Hehalutz and *hakhshara* serves as a comparison point to the stories of the oral history subjects. Of course, this is why he was chosen by Yitzhak Tabenkin, a prominent kibbutz movement leader, to head the important Klosova kibbutz. In addition, Marshak's level of devotion to the ideology of Hehalutz and the

Klosova kibbutz was certainly not the rule as will be seen in the oral histories. The fact that Marshak was a teenage orphan likely played a significant role in his commitment to Klosova—Leah Hammerstein, a survivor I will discuss in this chapter who also lost her mother, made the decision to live in a ghetto kibbutz an easy one. For those with strong family ties, Zionist youth groups, and what they demanded from their members, caused these Jewish youth to reevaluate their previous beliefs. It seems that most of the time, factors that may seem inconsequential, like access to a ping pong table, were what initially drew young pre-teens into Zionist youth movement meetings. This isn't to say that those young teens did not later develop a deeper understanding of Zionism and their personal beliefs about it (and many did once WWII began or they first experienced widespread anti-semitism), but that before the war, it was Jewish community, games, and group outings are what got Jewish youth in the door. Towards the eve of WWII, as the subjects in this chapter were in their mid-late teens, their involvement in youth movements became much more serious—that is, it became a matter of life or death in many cases.

By examining oral history testimonies of former youth movement members, one is able to uncover these patterns and have the chance to zero in on unique experiences that contribute to a general understanding of daily life in the interwar period. I will follow the stories of youth movement members from the interwar period and to the postwar period to investigate how they reacted to their horrific new reality during WWII, life in the ghetto and the new urgency of making it to Palestine. These oral history interviews will help me to investigate how the increase of antisemitism following the rise of Hitler changed the way young Jews thought about Zionism. I will argue that though there is much diversity in every survivor's experience, antisemitism does not seem to be the propelling factor that led youth to join Zionist youth movements. Instead,

social opportunities and intellectual stimulation drew young Jews to join the movement. That being said, antisemitism and the outbreak of WWII were often reasons why older youth chose to stay within Zionist youth movements, even if it meant leaving their family and country behind to immigrate to Palestine. For most, it was antisemitism that forced this reckoning of Jewish youth to confront the reality of their situation in Eastern Europe, what forced them to decide what path they were going to take. If they chose to leave Zionist youth movements when they got older, it was potentially being separated from family, having to leave their home country and an acceptance of the failure of assimilation that weighed heavily on these youth's decisions. Antisemitism shaped Jewish youth's relationship to youth movements. Once the war began, alignment with Zionism or other Jewish movements had less to do with ideology and more to do with daily circumstances and survival.

Hashomer Hatzair was secular Zionist organization, though it still attracted Jewish youth from religious families. Further, it was an equally popular movement in areas with high and low levels of pre-war antisemitism. Antisemitism was a widespread issue for Jews in Poland, but those living in majority Jewish towns or urban areas were often reletively safe until Hitler came to power. If antisemitism wasn't a palpable problem for these Jewish youths, what made Zionism make sense to them? No matter if they spoke Polish or Yiddish, were from a religious family, rich or middle class, big or small family, Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist youth movements touched the lives—in ways big and small—of all of the youths discussed in this chapter. For the average Jewish child, the idea of Israel as the promised land is introduced at a young age. The dream of celebrating a holiday "next year in Jerusalem," a phrase said at the end of the Passover Seder and at the end of Yom Kippur, is, for many Jews, an abstract dream in the back of one's mind; afterall, there was no Jewish state or Jewish Jerusalem in the interwar years. The idea of

the promised land has been an ideal ingrained in Jewish culture since biblical times. For the first time, the interwar period saw an unprecedented level of hope for making the Jewish state a reality, especially in the years preceding WWII. So, the idea of Zionism was not radical to these youths, who began to be involved with Hashomer Hatzair at as young as ten years old. As they grew older and Hitler's message of hatred grew increasingly popular, the idea of immigration to Palestine started to seem practical, if not necessary, to some Zionist youth movement members.

Klosova and the Permanent Kibbutz Model

When teen-aged and fatherless Benny Marshak met Yitzhak Tabenkin in 1926 at a Hehalutz seminar in Poland, it was the beginning of, in his words, a "'deep fatherly-spiritual relation'" that would last a lifetime.[40] Tabenkin, leader of the largest kibbutz movement in Palestine, Kibbutz Hame'uhad, had made the trip back to Poland on an urgent mission to better organize the fast growing pioneer movement; as the Fourth Aliyah (1924-28) arrived in Palestine, most pioneers chose not to settle on kibbutzim at a time when the fledgling kibbutz movement desperately needed them. By establishing direct ties with Hehalutz, Tabenkin would establish a "'reserve of pioneers [abroad]'" for their kibbutz movement.[41] With his youthful energy and absolute devotion to the cause, Marshak stood out to Tabenkin as the perfect candidate to reinvigorate the Klosova kibbutz. Following the completion of the seminar, Marshak had fully adopted Tabenkin's ideology which stressed the moral value of hard physical labor and the idea of labor as more than an economic activity; labor was the way the Jewish homeland would be built.

In 1926, there were 55 members affiliated with the Klosova Kibbutz, including members who had concluded their training and returned home. Benny's goal was to make the kibbutz a

[40] Rona Yona, "A Kibbutz in the Diaspora: The Pioneer Movement in Poland and the Klosova Kibbutz," *Journal of Israeli History* 31:1 (2012): 16.
[41] Ibid, 16.

year-round home for members, meaning they would remain through Jewish holidays and the cold, less prosperous winter months. This would create a separation from their childhood homes and families and direct their attention more fully to the kibbutz community and goals and to developing their pioneer identity. The grim conditions of the Klosova kibbutz made it difficult to convince young adults to join the kibbutz (and gain their parents approval), but Benny's unyielding faith in the future of the kibbutz and his motto, "'this is our home'" convinced a decent number of members to stay.[42] With the kibbutz transformed into a full-time operation, it was no longer simply a waiting place for Aliyah, a short-term goal. Members had to be willing to endure the treacherous conditions of the kibbutz for longer periods of time with no prospects of legal Aliyah, which Benny believed would benefit the kibbutz movement in Palestine by cultivating more "'complete pioneers.'" To financially sustain the kibbutz, members worked in a nearby quarry, and maintained a small garden; this was often not enough to feed every kibbutz member. Marshak's anarchistic tendencies meant he sometimes did not enforce going to work even when one did not have a reason for staying home. Benny was prepared to sacrifice everyone's comforts of home in the same of "'suffering for the entire movement.'"[43] Liberation from parental authority was a major theme in Benny's ideology and in written records from the Klosova kibbutz. The drive to separate members from their families physically and ideologically falls in line with Hehalutz ideology discussed in Chapter One.

Marshak often went against Hehalutz conventions, however. In 1928, it came to Benny's attention that a couple within the kibbutz planned to get married once they made Aliyah. Benny insisted they marry at Klosova as a symbol of the kibbutz's legitimacy. Traditionally, Hehalutz pioneers had to be single before making Aliyah. When a child was born of the union in Klosova,

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[42] Rona Yona, "A Kibbutz in the Diaspora," 16.
[43] Ibid, 17.

Hehlutz leadership disapproved, saying Benny had "gone too far" in his project to make the diaspora kibbutz. Nonetheless, Marshak was a charismatic leader to whose success Klosova is owed. The tight-knit community created by the permanent kibbutz is what drew many new recruits and revived the pioneer movement in times of a lulling in Zionist enthusiasm. This brief story of the Klosova kibbutz explains the formation of the permanent kibbutz model that became dominant in the 1930s and presents a base point from which to compare kibbutzim during the war and afterwards.

Oral Histories

In this chapter I will be examining three oral histories and one written autobiography all from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Branch and are part of the Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive. The interviewers conducted the interviews on behalf of the USHMM. The oral histories were collected between 1994-96, about 50 years after the end of WWII, and the autobiography was written in 1991, 46 years after the end of WWII. Oral histories, especially collected from Holocaust survivors, reflect the desire to preserve human memory and to place it within the context of a broader history. Interviewees present a subjective point of view, personal opinions and memories that can be used in conjunction with other oral histories/primary sources and secondary sources to gain a better understanding and insight into history. Oral histories help turn historical events and trends into real, lived experiences—they help historians learn about important aspects of history, like personal motivations and the influence of family, often overlooked in primary print sources.[44]

While many of the testimonies I considered featured similar themes and experiences, each one has their own unique twists and insights. In the first chapter, I highlighted the popularity of Zionist youth movements, especially in the later interwar years, and explained their

[44] Ingrid Ockert, "How Oral History Opens Up the Past," Distillations, Science History Institute, June 11, 2019.

origins, ideologies and influences. In this chapter I will be able to follow each subject's lives from origin on through the war and afterwards, focusing on periods of active Zionist youth movement membership, experiences during the war, kibbutz involvement, and immigration. Even though these oral histories were recorded much later in these survivors' lives, which one might cause one to worry about issues of memory, the distance from their childhood offers a nuanced perspective, as if looking back on what was once a confusing mystery but with all the clues of adulthood to make sense of it all. In addition, almost all of the subjects in this chapter remember small details like names, dates and where they were during important events. I will uncover the personal motivations of the survivor's membership in Zionist youth movements, how their families and social upbringing influenced their views, and how their views changed with the onset of WWII and following the war's conclusion. Finally, I will synthesize the timeline of information from chapter one with the primary accounts of this chapter to form a more realistic picture of Zionist youth movements and their members.

Experiences in the Ghetto Kibbutz

The outbreak of WWII pushed Hashomer Hatzair leaders east to Vilna where they thought they would be safe to continue operating under Soviet rule (as opposed to Nazi rule). Naively, the leaders believed the Soviets would be sympathetic to their groups socialist leanings, but Zionism was soon made illegal and Hashomer Hatzair realized it would have to operate underground. In their attempt to "swim against the current," members were encouraged to return to major centers in Nazi territory to reestablish movement institutions and organize kibbutzim within ghettos.[45] In the ghettos, Hashomer Hatzair joined forces with more radical left-leaning Jewish organizations, like Poalei Zion (Zionist and communist movement) and other communist

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[45] Raya Cohen, "'Against the Current': Hashomer Hatzair in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2000): 63-80. JSTOR. 67.

groups (in 1940, Hashomer Hatzair held to the belief that the Soviets and communism would liberate the Jews). The growing distance from Palestine felt by Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist groups, as facilitated by the White Paper of 1939, turned their hope and support away from the British, who had pledged support for a Jewish state in 1917. The White Paper of 1939, a policy paper, was written by the British Parliament in response to the 1936-39 Arab Revolts in Palestine; it further limited Jewish immigration to Palestine. Zionists shifted their sights to the Soviet Union as a resource of liberation from oppression. This affinity for the Soviet Union influenced Hashomer Hatzair to solidify their socialist tendencies. It was not until 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union and rumors of the systemic elimination of Jews reached the Warsaw ghetto, that Hashomer Hatzair began to focus more on working together with like minded organizations to support the ghetto rather than focusing on self-cultivation.[46] In this way, Hashomer Hatzair was pushed into being more politically active in an effort to win public funds and support from the Judenrat, the Jewish council of the ghetto.

As an orphan, Benny Marshak found within Hehalutz a cause to dedicate himself to, a chosen family within a kibbutz. This is likely the reason the idea of a permanent diaspora kibbutz appealed to him so strongly. Similarly, Leah Hammerstein, who lost her mother and had an tenuous relationship with her step-mother, found within Hashomer Hatzair a framework of belonging and a cause to believe in. Hammerstein was interviewed about her experiences growing up through WWII in Warsaw in 1996, 51 years after the end of WWII, by Randy Goldman on behalf of the USHMM Oral History Branch. Her story is one of 51 oral histories included in the Miles Lerman Center for the Study of Jewish Resistance, and is also part of the Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive. Hammerstein's story was compelling because of her early involvement with Hashomer Hatzair, how her family situation influenced her decisions,

[46] Raya Cohen, "'Against the Current,'" 69.

and her experience living in a ghetto kibbutz in Warsaw at such a young age. Ghetto kibbutzim were established by Zionist youth movement leaders who had decided to return in 1940 to Nazi occupied areas (after fleeing to Vilna in 1939) under an obgligation to the Jewish people. They established kibbutzim and underground schools and press in the ghettos and were able to remain in communication with other ghettos through a network of underground messengers.[47]

The interview begins with Hammerstein recounting her childhood and family life; she lived in a suburb of Warsaw, Poland, and was born in 1924. She enjoyed the fun outings and intellectual education Hashomer Hatzair provided in her early teens; she grew up desiring to make Aliyah. When the Jews of Warsaw were forced into ghettos by the Germans in 1940, Hammerstein chose to live in a kibbutz in the ghetto created by Hashomer Hatzair with about 20 other members–she was 15 years-old. This way she could escape her difficult family life, and food rations were often better within ghetto kibbutzim than average households—residents received three bowls of soup a day with a piece of bread, Hammerstein remembers, which was more than many other households could afford. Male members found work outside of the ghetto in the nearby airfield, while women stayed in the kibbutz to work on domestic chores. Living in the kibbutz saved Hammerstein from starvation, but Hammerstein could do nothing but bring a piece of bread for her father, who starved to death a month after being confined to the ghetto with no way to make a livelihood. Nazis sprayed chemical disenfectant on households infected with Typhus and bodies piled up on the sidewalks in front of houses who could not pay for proper burial services. She describes the few months spent in the ghetto as "hell on earth."[48]

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[47] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Jewish Youth Movements in Wartime Poland: From Minority to Leadership," Holocaust Encyclopedia. Accessed on 02/25/22.
[48] Leah Hammerstein interview by Randy M. Goldman, May 22, 1996, transcript, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Shapell Center, 15.

As the horrific reality of impending "'total physical annihilation'" of Jews, as one ghetto publication put it, settled in the consciousness of Warsaw Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz members, the ideological commitment to self-realization in Palestine had to be reinterpreted. Instead of a focus on the individual, "'loyalty to the Jewish people and preservation of its national honor'" to be attained "then and there [in the diaspora]" became the new ideological status quo. A readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice constituted the "'sublime heroism'" of the diaspora pioneer.[49] Hammerstein, confirming this ideological shift, remembers losing hope of ever making it to Palestine once news of mass killings reached the ghetto. Survival and self-defense took priority over all else.

For teenagers with an unstable home life like Hammerstein, the Hashomer Hatzair ghetto kibbutz offered structure and continuity from pre-war times that aided her in weathering the mental and physical traumas of the war. As will become clear in this chapter, kibbutzim conditions depend greatly on the time period in which they operated. Benny Marshak's prewar kibbutz experience and Hammerstein's ghetto kibbutz experience have some similarities yet operated under massively different contexts. Both suffered from cold, starvation and poverty, though Hammerstein's kibbutz suffered arguably more with the psychological trauma of being confined to the ghetto and witnessing the starvation of her family. Both held on to the sense of community and intellectual activity to sustain them through difficult times. The Klosova kibbutz was colored by hope, perseverance, and a reformed ideology, while the Warsaw ghetto kibbutz concerned itself with sustaining members and providing refuge from the horrors that surrounded them.

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[49] Cohen, "'Against the Current,'" 71.

The Diaspora Kibbutz Post-WWII

The end of WWII saw another significant change in the structure and purpose of the diaspora kibbutz. June Friedman's memoir presents an alternate perspective on the kibbutz as a young orphaned girl trying to find security after the war. The Postwar diaspora kibbutz was distinct from any kibbutz before it; operating in an unprecedented time, foreign leadership and a rush to find resettlement for war refugees framed their operations. *Under Providential Guidance*, Friedman's memoir, was written in January 1991, 46 years after the end of WWII; she begins framing her story in the present: the then current Persian Gulf war and recent Iraqi Scud missile attacks on Israel reminded her of "how war changes everybody's life."[50] Asked by her daughter to preserve her memories in writing for future generations, Friedman says she will write her memoirs so her family will know "why I am today the way I am."[51] Friedman struggled to find safety and security after the loss of both her parents during a purge of the Boryslaw ghetto in 1943. Born in 1930 in Lwow, a part of southern Poland that now belongs to Ukraine, Friedman was a young teenager by the time the war ended. Orphaned, with only unfamiliar relatives to rely on, Friedman traveled to Krakow to stay with an uncle. This uncle allowed her to stay with him in Krakow, but it soon became clear he had no intention of financially or emotionally supporting Friedman. In Krakow, she met a group of Russian Jewish teenagers who chose to join a kibbutz even though they had living families. These teenagers persuaded Friedman to want to go to Israel for she believed there was no future for Jews in Poland. In her heart, Friedman did not really wish to leave Poland behind; she had grown up quite assimilated in Polish society, considering herself a Polish girl whose religion was Judaism and spoke Polish. Nonetheless, Friedman joined

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[50] June Friedman, "Under Providential Guidance," January 1991, Personal Narrative from U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Shapell Center, Bowie, MD.
[51] Ibid.

the kibbutz—though it was more of a resignation to a last resort, as her uncle had since refused to financially support her.

The kibbutz was overcrowded, with poor quality food and a militaristic atmosphere; Friedman recalls that she "disliked everything and everybody there."[52] According to Friedman, many of these postwar kibbutzim often sold provisions allocated to the kibbutzim by organizations like the United Nations Refugee Relief Agency, which explains why the food was poor and lacking in nutrition. Friedman was even reprimanded for not participating enough in games and meetings on the kibbutz, therefore being a bad influence on other members. The kibbutz leaders "did not like individual thinking and wanted a robot," which Friedman resented.[53] Friedman had no prior experience with Zionist youth groups and her depression hindered her from being an "ideal member" of the kibbutz. Given how popular Zionist youth movements became in the prewar years, it is likely that many kibbutz members had prior exposure to Zionism and therefore were more comfortable with the ideology. It is not clear what youth movement or Zionist organization the kibbutz Friedman stayed at was affiliated with, but the emphasis on group conformity presents a distinction from the ideologoy of prewar Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim. While Hashomer Hatzair wanted members to gain experience in communal living through *hakhshara,* ideology also emphasized the importance of cultivating the self and one's Jewish identity. Another reason for this difference in atmosphere would likely be the postwar setting in which Friedman joined the kibbutz. Kibbutzim members before the war obviously had no idea what lay in store for European Jews; the atmosphere of the 1930s was not colored by the trauma of war—most were too young to remember WWI. Postwar kibbutzim had to "deal primarily in matters of daily life and border crossing" as opposed to the prewar "gradual

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[52] Friedman, "Under Providential Guidance."
[53] Ibid.

process of learning and preparation" of *hakhshara*.[54] In addition, an acute lack of trained staff meant leaders were trained on the fly and often had joined the Zionist movement shortly after liberation. Former partisan and Zionist movement leader, Antek Zuckerman, recalls in his memoirs that "kibbutzim" established after liberation were in fact "'nothing but a soup kitchen;'" calling these collectives "kibbutzim" allowed survivors a "'framework'" through which to maintain "'a sense of self-respect.'"[55]

After a few months Friedman found a kibbutz that promised illegal passage to Israel. Immigration to both Palestine and the U.S. was largely limited in the years directly following the end of WWII. Before British troops began to withdraw from Palestine in 1948, British navy forces would intercept ships full of illegal immigrants that arrived in Palestine and deport them to internment camps on the island of Cyprus.[56] However, these deportations did not deter the many Holocaust survivors determined to settle in Palestine–of the 300,000 Jews in Displaced Person camps in Central Europe, "roughly two-thirds came to Israel," and the rest went primarily to the United States.[57]

During the long journey, Friedman's kibbutz group stopped on a farm to learn agricultural techniques, but Friedman was never enthused. During a stay with this group at a kibbutz in Munich, Friedman went to go visit a nearby friend for two weeks. When she returned, the whole kibbutz had departed for Israel without her. Friedman did eventually make it to Israel, legally, in 1949, after she married in Poland; when she arrived in Israel, she refused to learn Hebrew out of

[54] Shimon Redlich, "The Zionists," in *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Lodz, 1945-1950,* 151-80 (Academic Studies Press: 2010), 153.
[55] Ibid, 153.
[56] "Postwar Refugee Crisis and the Establishment of the State of Israel," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
[57] Sharon Kangisser Cohen, "Choosing a Heim: Survivors of the Holocaust and Post-war Immigration," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 46, no. 2 (2013): 33.

protest and longing for her homeland of Poland. Friedman and her husband later settled in America in 1950 seeking better employment opportunities.

Friedman's story provides an incredible opportunity to learn about how kibbutzim evolved after the end of WWII, and consider the perspective of someone who was forced to rely on kibbutzim to survive, and how that affected her view of Zionism and Israel. Growing up in a largely assimilated family and having no experience with Zionist youth movements before the war, Friedman was never interested in leaving Poland for Israel. This together with a lack of supportive family are what forced Friedman to rely on kibbutzim to survive. That she was not there by choice seems to be a major reason why Friedman never found community, security or a cause to believe in during her stay. Even if she grew up involved with a Zionist youth movement, I would venture to predict that Friedman would still have resented the kibbutz. As Antek Zuckerman said of the postwar kibbutz, its function as a soup kitchen of sorts stripped the idea of the kibbutz down to such bare bones that the tight-knit, joyful community of the prewar kibbutz makes no comparison. Of course, this also explains why Friedman was not happy to move to Israel and refused to learn Hebrew out of protest. Friedman is the only person studied in this chapter who had exposure to and relied on Zionist organizations later in her teens and after the war—all the other survivors joined their first youth movement in their pre-teens or early teens—making her story unique and an interesting case of the impact of Zionism after WWII.

Family Ties in the *Shtetl*

For Aron Derman, who was born in 1922 and grew up in Slonim, Poland, by the mid-30's, it was clear that "we had no future to live in Poland."[58] Derman was interviewed by Sandra Bradley on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History

[58] Aron Derman, interview by Sandra Bradley, November 30, 1994, transcript, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Shapell Center, 2.

Branch in 1994, 49 years after the end of WWII. The interview is one of 51 oral histories included in the Miles Lerman Center for the Study of Jewish Resistance, and is also part of Jeff and Toby Herr Oral history archive. Derman's story illustrates the complex factors that impacted his wartime decisions in relation to Zionism and resistance. When Derman was a child, Slonim was a town of 12,000 people, 80% of whom were Jewish, he estimates. Life before Hitler came to power in 1933 was happy, normal, and largely free of outward antisemitism, unlike other towns and cities in Poland that did not have a Jewish majority. A middle class family of six, the Dermans operated a clothing store and did well for themselves. Derman joined Hashomer Hatzair when he was ten years old and greatly enjoyed the social outlet it gave him. After learning more about Palestine, young Derman decided he wanted to make Aliyah. Even though Derman's family had lived in Slonim for many generations and had many family members nearby, Derman was determined to leave for Palestine. By the mid-30's, Derman recounts how Slonim's churches began to preach antisemitism. Imported Polish workers would get drunk on the weekends and destroy Jewish property in town. Derman applied to an agricultural school in Palestine and was accepted. He would have gotten his papers to go to Palestine with Youth Aliyah,[59] but by that time the war had broken out—it became almost impossible to get to Palestine legally due to British immigration restrictions.

By 1941, Derman and his family had been forced into the Slonim ghetto under German occupation. Hashomer Hatzair had begun operating underground ever since the war broke out, and Derman was still an active participant who hoped to be put to use in the underground resistance. When he finally got orders to go on a mission, his mother begged him not to go. She cried, demanding how her son could "'leave us [his mother and three sisters] by ourselves,'" as

[59] Youth Aliyah, founded in 1933, was an organization that sought to save Jewish children from the Nazi regime by evacuating them to Palestine and settling them on kibbutzim and youth villages.

Derman became the "head of the household" when his father passed away.[60] Derman explains that his mothers reaction was an uncommon one: he goes as far as to say that many mothers would let their children go and say, "'maybe you'll survive.'"[61] His mothers reaction, specifically her reminder that he was now the head of the household, persuaded Derman to change his mind and return home. Never again did Derman receive another invitation to join the underground, and was almost kicked out of Hashomer Hatzair all together over group accusations of being disloyal. It took Derman many years to rationalize if he did the right thing or not.

In many of the oral histories I studied, the issue of being separated from one's family weighed substantially on their decision of whether or not to take the leap and make aliyah or take other major risks. Derman's family had deep roots in Slonim but this did not deter him from applying for Youth Aliyah. This could be attributed to the young adult desire to begin an independent life (which was promoted by Hashomer Hatzair), especially encouraged for males at the time, or it could be that Derman expected his family would follow him to Palestine once he was settled, as many Youth Aliyah participants and their parents hoped.[62] In the following oral history, having to leave one's family was a hard line that Hashomer Hatzair could not make her cross, leading her to shift allegiance primarily to the Communist Bund, and anti-zionist political movement sweeping the region.

Urban Assimilation

Rose (Rachel Rozka) Perczykow Klepfisz's story is unique in this chapter because she grew up being involved in Hashomer Hatzair, but ultimately left and chose to align herself with the Bund. She was interviewed by Joan Ringelheim, on behalf of the United States Holocaust

[60] Derman, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, 18.
[61] Ibid, 18.
[62] Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 117.

Memorial Museum Oral History Branch, in 1996, 51 years after the end of WWII; the interview is also part of Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive. The Bund was a Jewish socialist labor group that was anti-Zionist (feeling Zionism favored bourgeoise Jewry over lower classes) and sought to engage Jewish workers by educating them in revolutionary conciousness and Russian and Polish culture. Klepfisz's abandonment of Zionism in favor of Bund politics makes for an incredibly interesting look into the factors of assimilation, family and war that made her change her mind. Born in Warsaw in 1914, Klepfisz describes the atmosphere of her family of five siblings, mother and father as "very warm."[63] In terms of religious observance, Klepfisz explains how her family was not religious, per se, but observed major holidays. Klepfisz explains that her father "had to have God" but "not in a religious way," exemplifying more urban Jewish practices of the time.[64] When speaking with her parents, Klepfisz spoke Yiddish; with her siblings and classmates, she spoke Polish. Her parents weren't troubled by this difference in language—in fact, they chose to send her to Polish public schools rather than Yiddish schools, as they feared their daughter would be a more obvious target for anti-semitism by attending a Jewish school. This doesn't mean that it was uncommon for Bund members to send their children to Yiddish schools, Klepfisz points out, but her parents felt it was more strategic for their daughter to try and blend in with other Polish children. The fact that Klepfisz spoke Yiddish only with her parents, Polish with most everyone else, went to Polish public schools, and was brought up in a mostly culturally Jewish household exemplifies the common Polish Jewish experience of walking the line between assimilation—identifying as a Pole who practices Judaism, and traditionalism—identifying as a Jewish person living in Poland.

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[63] Rose (Rachel Rozka) Perczykow Klepfisz, interview by Joan Ringelheim, October 18, 1996, transcript, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Shapell Center, 4.
[64] Ibid, 6.

When her father passed away in 1927, the family was able to get by with the help of her older siblings; they ensured Klepfisz continued her schooling. Growing up, she was involved with Maccabbee, a Zionist sports club, where she practiced gymnastics. When Klepfizsz was about 14 years old, she joined the local branch of Hashomer Hatzair which was led by a man from Palestine, a typical practice at the time to maintain close relations with pioneers. There she learned Hebrew—she says the leaders of the organization were "very serious" about this—and was expected to speak it with fellow members.[65] For two summers Klepfisz participated in *hakhshara*, staying and working on a farm with other Hashomer Hatzair members as preparation for immigration to Israel. The work on the farm was difficult; eventually Klepfisz realized her attachment to her family was too strong for her to leave them behind and immigrate to Israel. She resolved to stay in Warsaw, and did not participate in *hakhshara* anymore. Instead, Klepfisz joined a new sports club, Jutrznia, which had Bundist ties. In Jutrznia, Klepfisz was trained in modern dance and worked in the Bronislaw Grosner Library, named after a prominent Bundist. Even though she was now significantly involved in Bund organizations, Klepfisz did not consider herself an official member of the Bund.

Her older siblings were Bundist with the exception of one communist sister. The entire family was politically active and often discussed their political choices and affiliations. Klepfisz's boyfriend and future husband, Michal, was a Bundist and held an earnest belief in the power of socialism to positively change the world. Michal did not learn to speak Yiddish until his early twenties, and Klepfisz explains that even among the children of prominent Bundists, it was less common for them to speak Yiddish. Michal had many more Polish friends and connections than Klepfisz, which would later be strategic in navigating the ghetto.

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[65] Klepfisz, interview by Joan Ringelheim, October 18, 1996, transcript, 3.

Once the war began when Germany invaded Poland, Klepfisz, her family and in-laws were forced to move to the Warsaw ghetto. Klepfisz and Michal communicated every so often with the Bund underground, which worked together with young members of the Polish Socialist Party to mount secret resistance to German occupation. Klepfisz even mentions a few instances when she was outside of the ghetto and was granted help from Polish acquaintances made through Michal before the war. At this point in Klepfisz's story, politics and ideology became less important in daily life, but her connections to Bund members remained. Crisis after crisis, Klepfisz and her family–she now had a daughter—fought everyday to make sure there was enough food to go around, evading raids, violence, battling sickness. Michal still participated in underground resistance, assuring Klepfisz of his belief the war would soon be over, taking dangerous risks like showing others in the resistance how to make bombs, and once jumped off a train and got shot in the leg by Germans who had captured him.

The fact that Klepfisz grew up primarily speaking Polish, attending Polish public schools and practicing a mostly secular Judaism, yet interacted with few non-Jewish classmates is an interesting example of how even the most sincere attempts at assimilation often fell short of being accepted by mainstream society. While Hashomer Hatzair was a popular movement for young Jews in Warsaw, it also had to compete with the Bund for members. For someone like Klefisz who was close to her family— a family that was politically active and favored Bund ideas—it's not surprising that her family would be a major influence on her life decisions. As Klepfisz explained, she decided to leave Hashomer Hatzair because she could not fathom having to leave her family behind; she might have continued to dream of a Jewish state in Palestine, but ultimately sided with the Bundist belief that the best Jewish future would "unfold in the same places in the Diaspora in which it had experienced its past."[66]

[66] Daniel Blatman, "Bund," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. 2010.

Conclusion

What are these oral histories telling us? Jewish youth movements and kibbutzim functioned differently for each member and in each specific temporal context. Location, language, experiences of antisemitism, family life, etc. all factored into what members recieved from Jewish youth organizations, when they joined and when they left, and how the movement impacted their WWII experiences. My goal was to use these oral histories to form a clearer interpretation of what Jewish youth movements meant to young Jews. I also included perspectives from a survivor who joined the Bund, who did not wish to leave their home country and who changed their mind about Zionism when confronted with certain scenarios to demonstrate the variety in Jewish youth movement experience. While they all had common themes of antisemitism, struggles with assimilation and finding one's identity, human experiences can't be wrangled into one united story. The uniqueness of each story proves that in order to understand history, you have to hear from those who lived it.

For all discussed in this chapter, with the exception of Friedman, Jewish youth groups were major influences in how each person came to view Israel and Zionism. Rose Klepfisz decided to leave Hashomer Hatzair after participating in difficult *hakhshara* labor and coming to terms with the fact that continuing to be a Hashomer Hatzair member meant that one day, if she was granted passage to Palestine, she would have to leave her family behind. She was able to find Jewish community in a Bundist sports club, allowing Klepfisz to retain a strong Jewish identity and Jewish community without the obligation to leave her native Poland behind. Klepfisz attended Polish public schools and spoke Polish with her sisters, friends and boyfriend, showing she was quite assimilated into Warsaw society. This is surely another reason why Hashomer Hatzair did not end up meeting her expectations—life as a Jew in Warsaw during

Klepfisz's childhood was largely free of direct antisemitism until the mid 1930s. For children like Aron Derman, antisemitism became the reason he decided to commit to making aliyah, but was not the reason he initially joined. Like Klepfisz, Derman was drawn to Hashomer Hatzair for the social aspect. Even though Derman had a large family in Slonim like Klepfisz did in Warsaw, he remained committed to making Aliyah. During the war, Derman had the chance to go on an underground assignment for Hashomer Hatzair. This time, his mother was able to convince him to stay, given that Derman's father had died and was absent as the head of the household. While I have not discussed topics of gender in my thesis, it would be interesting to investigate the intersection of gender and Zionist youth movements. Why did Klepfisz feel like she could not leave her family but Derman had no qualms about leaving Slonim before the war? Gender may have played a role in how they decided to proceed before and during the war with regard to leaving or staying with their families, but likely the more important factor is that Klepfisz grew up in an assimilated Jewish community while Derman grew up in a traditional *shtetl.* Klepfisz felt a sense of belonging in Poland that Derman never did.

June Friedman, like Klepfisz, grew up assimilated in Polish society. The pattern emerges that the more assimilated one is in mainstream society, it is more likely they will consider that society their true home, rather than Palestine—an abstract and foreign place in their view. This is exactly how Friedman viewed Palestine before and after the war. Abandoned by relatives, Friedman had no choice but to be led towards making aliyah by the kibbutz and later by her husband. The diversity in Jewish opinion on aliyah and Israel during this time is represented in this chapter by including survivors who changed their mind about Zionism and who remained Zionist throughout the war. Not one of the people discussed in this chapter, save Benny Marshak, settled in Israel. In fact, all settled in America eventually. Friedman lived in Israel with her

husband for just a year before immigrating to the United States in search of job opportunities. Her husband also had family in the U.S. which provided a vital support system for their young family. Hammerstein, who lived in the ghetto kibbutz in Warsaw, immigrated to Palestine in 1949, married and started a family there. In 1968, however, her family immigrated to the U.S. as they were on the "threshold of poverty," as Friedman's family was; Hammerstein's husband could not find a job.[67] Derman, who was active in Hashomer Hatzair throughout the war, married in Rome in 1947 and sailed for America to visit relatives (they thought they would then return east and settle in Palestine). After feeling the embrace of their family, though, Derman and his wife decided to settle in Chicago. On her way to visit her sister in Australia, Klepfisz, who worked with the Bund during the war, stopped in New York to see another sister but decided to stay there—she felt the long boat ride to Australia wouldn't be good for her young daughter. Benny Marshak, arguably the most committed Zionist in this chapter, who had no living family, came to Israel to fight in the war of Independence in 1948. Clearly, family ties were an incredibly significant factor in deciding where to settle one's family permanently. For Holocaust survivors especially, surviving family members were precious.

Zionist youth movement representatives and Jewish Brigade soldiers[68] did much to raise morale and encourage aliyah among survivors in DP camps, which explains why the majority of Holocaust survivors chose to make aliyah. As mentioned in Friedman's story, of the 300,000 Jews in Displaced Person camps in Central Europe, "roughly two-thirds came to Israel," and the rest went primarily to the United States.[69] Overall, it can be said that Zionist youth movements had great success in establishing kibbutzim in Palestine, encouraging and assisting in postwar immigration to Palestine and played a significant role in fighting for the creation of the Jewish

[67] Hammerstein interview by Randy M. Goldman, May 22, 1996.
[68] Palestinian Jews who fought in the British Army during WWII, incorporated in 1940.
[69] Cohen, "Choosing a Heim: Survivors of the Holocaust and Post-war Immigration," 33.

State. Early Palestinian kibbutzim provided a framwork from which to grow the Jewish state and Zionist youth movements produced many prominent leaders and fighters in the process of creating the Jewish state, like Benny Marshak, Abba Kovner and Golda Meir. For the subjects of this chapter, family and economic opportunities, rather than Zionism, drove their immigration decisions. The people discussed in this chapter shed light on experiences discussed less often in the typical discussion of Zionist youth movements: those for which the movement caused them to decide not to be Zionist, and Zionist survivors who did not stay in Israel becuase of the difficultly of finding sustainable employement or who felt the pull of family support. Discussing the stories of the survivors in this chapter shows how complex and individual each survivor's experiences and mindset are, how hard it is to fit them within a mold.

In the next and final chapter of my thesis, I will shift my focus to the new center of the Jewish diaspora, the United States of America. Following WWII, the US became the destination for a third of Jewish refugees living in Displaced Persons camps. Indeed, all of the subjects of the oral histories presented in this chapter eventually settled in the US. Eastern European Jewish immigrants had a profound impact on how Jewish Americans thought about Zionism. Being aware of the trajectory of Zionism in the early 20th century, I will be able to show similarities and differences in Zionist youth outreach and engagement in interwar poland and post WWII America. Further, I will investigate the American attitude towards Zionism in the first half of the 20th century, how the world wars influenced this attitude, and how the establishment of the state of Israel acted as a catalyst for a surge in Zionist education in America that would change the way American Jews were raised.

Chapter 3: Zionism in the American Diaspora Post-1948

The Post-War Exodus

The stories of Polish Jewish survivors examined in the pervious chapter are a precious preservation of personal history considering how few Polish Jews survived the Holocaust. Of Poland's pre-war Jewish population of 3 million, 97.5% perished during WWII.[70] The end of the war did not bring an end to anti-semitism in Poland—a series of postwar pogroms in 1946 pushed 63,387 of Polands remaining Jews towards the safety of the Allies and Displaced Person camps in Germany. The founding of the state of Israel and an opening up of immigration to the US towards the end of the '40s saw a surge of Eastern European Jews fleeing postwar conditions—332,000 in total left between 1948-1950. By 1950, about 45,000 Jews remained in Poland. In the decades following WWII, Jews in Eastern Europe were largely non-practicing and thought it prudent to keep their Jewish identity under wraps. Immigration to America and Israel offered Jews the chance to live openly as Jews; most of Western Europe was not keen on a large influx of Jews. Those who settled there would have to continue to conceal their identity as they had during the war. It is no surprise why the promise of Zionism, to live a life free of persecution in the safety of a Jewish homeland, drew the majority of postwar Jewish refugees to Israel. Many of those who went to America, seeking family conncetions and better economic opportunities than Israel could offer, however, still retained a Zionist sympathy and an emotional connection to Israel. In this chapter I will investigate the nature of the continuing emotional connection to Israel in the postwar American Jewish diaspora and how American Jews adjusted Zionism in a way that suited their Americanness. The influx of Eastern European Jews between 1880-1924 had a profound impact on the future of Zionism in America in terms of changing the ethnic demographic of the American Jewish community and sharing their Zionist sympathies and

[70] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 804.

educational practices. This exchange of culture can be seen in the similarities of Polish Zionist youth movement operation and American Zionist youth engagement practices postwar.

Poland was home to Europe's largest community of Jews before WWII. Since America became the home to the largest number of Jews following WWII, a great many of them from Eastern Europe, and a center of Zionist organization and youth involvement with Israel, I will be focusing on how American Jewish views on Zionism changed in the decades leading up to WWII and directly following the war in comparison to prewar Polish Zionist organizing.[71] In 1948 when the Jewish state of Israel was founded, it forever changed the way Jews would relate to and think about Israel and the ideology of Zionism. Jewish youth organization and education in the diaspora would also be altered in the context of the new reality of Israel. Pre-1948 Zionism had a completely different meaning to Jewish youth than it did in the decades following 1948. In the prewar years, there was still a goal to be reached, ideology to develop and the possibility of a utopian Jewish state to be developed through pioneering in Palestine. How did the success of Zionism in creating a Jewish State affect the meaning of Zionism and its role in the diaspora, especially among Jewish youth? How were youth taught about Israel once it was established compared to Zionist youth movement education in interwar Poland?

While vastly different circumstances encouraged the growth of Zionism in Eastern Europe and America, there are clear patterns that emerge in both contexts. In the first chapter of this thesis, I discussed the assimilation movement that opposed Zionism in the mid-late 19th century. For a time, the movement garnered substantial support among Eastern European Jews who wished to fully assimilate into the surrounding society and reject the confines of Jewish traditions. Zionism, however, overtook the assimilation movement in popularity and success by the early 20th century and was characterized as embracing aspects of Jewish tradition while

[71] "Total Jewish Population in the United States," Jewish Virtual LIbrary, Accessed March 9, 2022.

adopting Zionism as a modern response to anti-semetism and as a way to reinvigorate the next generation of Jewish youth. Similarly, the first large wave of Jewish immigration to America in the mid 19th century was primarily made up of Reform German Jews who embraced assimilation and thought of Judaism as their religion only. Through the increase of Eastern European Jews sympathetic to Zionism, a reawakening of peoplehood among American Jewish leadership around WWI led to Zionism becoming widely accepted by the time Israel was founded. Similarities can also be found between youth engagement in interwar Eastern Europe and post-1948 America. An emphasis on teaching Hebrew, Israeli songs, folk dance, and historical highlights in Sunday school, summer camps and extracurricular activities can also be found in Zionist youth movement activities in interwar Eastern Europe. A major difference between these two youth education programs is that in Eastern Europe, Zionist youth movements were genuinely founded by youth for youth, whereas in American, youth movements like NFTY were founded by Adult religious leaders and organized by them for Jewish youth.

American Jewish Post War Opinion

Though Israel immediately went to war once it declared itself a state, and continued to be at war with their Arab neighbors in the coming decades, to Jews, a majority of whom "joyously celebrated the birth of their new nation," Israel's repeated successes stood for the resilience of the Jewish people after suffering tragic loses during the Holocaust.[72] A series of polls taken from American Jews from 1947-1983 reveal the extent to which the American Zionist movement was successful in persuading American Jews of the importance of having a strong connection to Israel, and in solidifying the belief that Zionism did not lessen their connection to America or blur their national loyalties. In analyzing these polls, Eytan Gilboa found in 1986 that American Jewish opinion of the state of Israel has remained positive and relatively stable from 1945

[72] History.com Editors, "State of Israel Proclaimed," History.com, 2010.

through the early '80s. In 1945, 80% of American Jews "through all economic levels" supported the statement that every effort should be made to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, while just 10% disapproved.[73] In 1948 after Israel's establishment, 90% of American Jews approved of the action. From 1957-1983, an average of 92% American Jews responded favorably toward Israel across 6 different polling groups. Despite what seemed like a clear ideological contradiction to American Jews in the early 20th century, American Zionism became practically mainstream by the end of WWII. How was this shift from anti-Zionism so successful, how was it undertaken, and why?

From Fringe Cult to the Mainstream

The origins of the shift of American Jewish leaders towards Zionism date back to the WWI years. Louis D. Brandeis, a distinguished and widely known Jewish lawyer, undertook the project of influencing Jewish opinion when he was elected chairman of the new Provisional Executive Commitee for General Zionist Affairs of the American Jewish Committee in 1914.[74] The context through which Zionism became widely accepted by Amrican Jews was far different than the Eastern European Zionist origins, which were in large part a reaction to never-ending anti-semitism and a failure to assimilate into the surrounding socieies. Brandeis understood that in order to make Zionism accepted in the American Jewish community, he would have to prove that Zionism was compatible with American values of democracy and social justice. In addition, Brandeis would have to give a reason for American Jews to feel a need to support Zionism even if they did not wish to immigrate to Palestine themselves.

Jews who came from Germany around the mid 19th century, the first large wave of Jewish immigration to the U.S., found that "America itself was a new Zion." Any anti-semitism

[73] Eytan Gilboa, "Attitudes of American Jews Toward Israel: Trends over Time," *The American Jewish Year Book* 86, (1986), 112.
[74] "Louis D. Brandeis," Jewish Virtual Library. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/louis-d-brandeis.

these Jews faced was of a “low intensity” and was “the exception rather than the rule,” seemingly eliminating the need for Zionism all together.[75] Things changed at the outbreak of WWI when the American Jewish Committee sought to relieve the suffering of fellow Jews affected by the war in Eastern Europe. As the chairman of the newly created Provisional Executive Commitee for General Zionist Affairs, Brandeis promoted a progressive outlook on what it meant to be an American immigrant and opposed the traditional “melting pot” philosophy. Immigrants should be loyal to America, of course, but progressives like Brandeis argued that they should also “value the heritage and customs of their ancestral homes” in order to avoid “‘national suicide.’”[76] Ironically, Zionism ended up hastening Americanization as Zion became for many Jews a “utopian extension of the American Dream.”[77] No longer was Zionism about active preparation for departing and settling in Palestine as it was in Eastern Europe. In America, Zionism was a way for Jews, religious and secular alike, to take on a “sacred task” that linked them to other Jews. This task helped to fulfill their mission to better the world by assisting in the creation of a Jewish homeland for persecuted Jews around the world (who were restricted from immigrating to America).[78] This version of Zionism offered a way for Jews to be secure in their Americanness while combating the fear that American Judaism would “cease to be” in the face of assimilation pressures. The fact that Eastern European Jews made up approximately 85% of the American Jewish population by 1914 would ensure the future of American Judaism as Zionist.

The Eastern European Jews who immigrated to America between 1880-1924 were uncomfortable with Classical Reform Judaism, the denomination of German Jews who

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[75] Melvin I. Ufrosky, “Zionism: An American Experience,” *American Jewish HIstorical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1974), 219.
[76] Ibid. 223.
[77] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 202.
[78] Ibid, 205.

immigrated in the mid 19th century, and preferred to "maintain tradition, albeit in a modern context."[79] Classical Reform Judaism's dismissal of Zionism clashed with Eastern European Jewish historical sympathy for Zionism. In classical Reform Judaism, anti-Zionism "was a hallmark of official Reform ideology" all the way up until WWII.[80] The Reform Movement is a liberal strand of Judaism that originated in Germany and flourished in the United States in the mid 19th century. It is characterized as placing less emphasis on ritual observance and more on ethics and Judaism as an evolving, progressive religion. Reform Jews historically wanted to assimilate into their surrounding society, unlike their Orthodox co-religionists, and believed that Judaism could be just a religion, rather than also a national and ethnic identity. This explains why American Reform Jews before WWII tended to be anti-Zionist, viewing themselves as Americans who practiced Judaism and were increasingly assimilated into mainstream American society. European Zionism pre-WWII called for all diaspora Jews to settle in Israel and contradicted the place Reform Jews had found for themselves in America. By 1948, the Reform movement's leadership and members had adopted Zionist beliefs and educational principles, to the chagrin of "Old-Timers." The older generation of American Reform Jews viewed the acceptance of Zionism as "'nationalistc, racist, self-segregated, secular, or otherwise non-American,'" which were all aspects classical Reform Judaism sought to fight against.[81]

The postwar years saw a pendulum swing from classical Reform Judaism towards an embracing of facets of traditionalism previously thought outdated, and adopting new ideologies like Zionism and gender equality in the synagogue. The increasing number of Eastern European Jewish immigrants joining Reform communities during the interwar-postwar period influenced

[79] Joellyn Zollman, "Jewish Immigration to America: Three Waves," My Jewish Learning.
[80] Emily A. Katz, "Pen Pals, Pilgrims, and Pioneers: Reform Youth and Israel, 1948-1967," *American Jewish History* 95, no. 3 (2009), 250.
[81] Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, 289.

this shift back toward more "traditional conceptions of Jewishness" (such as Hebrew as the national language of Jews, rather than Yiddish) and a "greater openness to the notion of Jewish peoplehood," a notion which had strong Eastern European origins.[82] A parallel can be seen to a similar cultural shift among interwar Zionist youth in Poland who moved to embrace specific Jewish traditions and the Hebrew language as well as working towards the formation of a modern Jewish culture in Palestine. The context of interwar Zionist youth movements in Poland and the American Jewish communtiy in the '30s and '40s was of course very different, but it seems like the influx of Eastern European Jews into American Reform communities had a signifigant influence in the begining of the Reform movement towards accepting Zionism.

Reform Jewish leaders still had to work to convince Reform Jews of the acceptability of Zionism in ways that Eastern European Jews did not. For many Eastern European Jews, Zionism was an practiacal and necessary ideology in the face of anti-semitism and the failure of assimilation after a centuries long existence in European society. Jews were looked upon as a people (as opposed to just a religion) and viewed themselves as such. The idea of Jews as a people gained prominence again in American Jewish communities, even among Reform Jews, as news of Nazi persecution of the Jews reached America. Following the successful Israeli War of Independence in 1948, American Jews across denominations forged a "'unity of purpose on a scale unprecedented in the modern history of the Jews.'"[83] Recall that even at the height of Zionism in Eastern Europe in the 1930s, there still remained a significant opposition in the form of the communist Bund and assimilationist movements. In the wake of the tragedy of the Holocaust and the subsuquent establishment of Israel, American Jews were able to

[82] Emily A. Katz, "Pen Pals, Pilgrims, and Pioneers: Reform Youth and Israel, 1948-1967," *American Jewish History* 95, no. 3 (2009), 250.
[83] Ibid, 252.

overwhelmingly agree to support Zionism and to incorporate Israel into education and religious life in unprecedented ways.

American Jewish Youth Engagement with Israel Post-1948

The overwhelming acceptance of Zionism in America by the late ’40s manifested itself in a flourishing of synagogue engagement with Israel. Through sermons, new prayers for Israel, new celebrations, decorations and educational practices, a vibrant connection was formed between the next generation of American Jewry and Israel. With the move of many Jewish families away from tight-knit urban communities and into the suburbs, there began a need for a new kind of synagogue that could fulfill the social, ethnic, educational and religious needs of the Jewish suburban family. In urban areas, everyone and everything they needed was in close, walkable proximity with an adult-oriented synagogue. The move to suburbs called for a child-oriented Jewish community to raise the next generation of American Jews. Sunday religious school for children and extracurricular education in the form of summer camps and youth groups grew popular across all denominations during the decades following 1948. Within the Reform movement, The North American Federation for Temple Youth (NFTY) was founded in 1939 as a way to provide an “outlet for young people to engage in the life of their synagogues.”[84] Post-1948 NFTY began implementing Israel-related programming in their chapters all over the country. Activities included Israeli song and dance, study sessions in Hebrew and Israeli-themed weekend getaways. Under Zionist leadership, extracuriculars like summer camps, youth groups and Sunday schools helped young Reform Jews transform into “enthusiastic American Zionists.”[85] Conservative and orthodox denominations were also funding new youth engagement programs like summer camps at a similar rate as the Reform movement.

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[84] “Our History,” NFTY.
[85] Katz, “Pen Pals, Pilgrims, and Pioneers,” 254.

Zionist religious leaders beleived that Zionism and connection to Israel would be a powerful remedy for religious indifference and assimilation, a worry exacerbated in the wake of the Holocaust in America, now the new largest home to diaspora Jews.

Keeping Posted, a Jewish mass magazine for young people, was created by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) in the mid-1950s as an educational supplement for synagogue schools; it went on to become a major resource for American Jewish youth to learn about Israeli youth and society. In the early 1960s, *Keeping Posted* advertised the advent of a new student exchange program for American Jews to go to Israel; scholarships were available for young men and women active in NFTY with a solid Hebrew foundation and stellar academic records. Exchanges and pilgrimages to Israel increased in popularity over the second half of the 20th century among all Jewish denominations. In the interwar years in Eastern Europe, these types of cultural and religious exchanges were not yet possible. Instead, Zionist youth movements brought Eretz-Israel to the disapora in the form of kibbutzim and *hakhshara.* Being able to travel to Israel and enjoy the sights, people and culture without the pressure to settle there as a pioneer allowed a strong, positive emotional bond to form between American Jewish youth and Israel. Drawing on interwar Zionist youth movements educational methods, Jewish religious schools in America increasingly incorporated Israeli songs, folk dance, Israeli pen pal programs and celebrations of Israeli Independece Day into their curriculums. At summer camps, Jewish youth would have the opportunity to be immersed in Jewish life and learn about Jewish history through reenactments, such as setting up Kibbutzim in the camp; these activities strengthened campers' connection to Israel. This was not the first time Israel had appeared in the American Jewish educational curriculum—it was the newfound importance of Israel in American Jewish life that was new.

This increased support for Zionism was part of a Jewish cultural revival that began in the mid-'30s. This revival can be seen in a proliferation of new Jewish organizations, publications and educational programs for Jewish youth. The Jewish Publication Society, who "promoted Jewish education and culture through books," flourished once again; the *American Jewish Yearbook,* an academic publication of the JPS, reported that "a larger number of new organizations [(47)]" had formed between 1940-1945 "than in any previous five-year period" in American Jewish history.[86] As mentioned previously, sleepaway summer camps grew in number and popularity during this time. Camp Massad, established in 1941, was situated in the Poconos of Pennsylvania and operated as an immersive "little Hebrew world" with a utopian aesthetic. Devotedly American in its activities and celebrations, Camp Massad also emphasized a non-denominational Zionist outlook and a "positive" attitude toward Jewish religious traditions.[87] The ideological and educational features of Camp Massad exemplify the goal of revival-born organizations to "to inspire [young] Jews to be Jews," help them identify with a Jewish peoplehood and ultimately encourage them to bring up their children as jews.[88] Postwar, the increase in revival organizations activity was undoubtedly a response to the catastrophe which befell the Jews of Europe.

Conclusion

These themes recall the interwar Zionist youth movements in Poland discussed in the 1st chapter of this thesis. Both the American Jewish revival and the Eastern European Zionist youth movment were spured into action in response to antisemetism and adversity within the Jewish community. Each movement used Zionism as a form of cultural resistance, whether providing a solution to the "Jewish Problem" in Poland or ensuring the next generation of

[86] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 270.
[87] Ibid, 268.
[88] Ibid, 269.

community-engaged American Jews. The wave of Eastern European Jews immigrating to America between 1880-1924 had a profound impact on the future of Zionism in America. These immigrants changed the demographic makeup of the American Jewish population; with them, Eastern European Jews brought their established culture of Zionism, their education and religious traditions, all of which greatly influenced the ability of the burgeoning Zionism to flourish in America after WWI.

Key among the shift in opinion on Zionism was the news of the great suffering of European Jews during WWI. Russian troops advanced almost to Krakow in 1914; heavy fighting and "especially brutal antisemitism on the part of Russian Cossaks" forced many Galician Jews to flee to Austria.[89] Feeling sympathy for the suffering of their fellow Jews softened American opinion on Zionism and further supported the need for a Jewish state. Together with the steady increase of Eastern European Jewish immigrants joining the American Jewish community, Zionism was shaped into an essential aspect of American Jewish life. In order for this shift to take place, Zionist leaders like Louis Brandeis had to convince American Jews that Zionism did not conflict with their strongly held American identity, and that ancestral nationalities should be celebrated. Zionism in America did not dictate that one must make aliyah, as it did in interwar Poland. Instead, Zionism was about fostering a connection to peoplehood and reviving religious community engagement, especially among youth. The subsequent flourishing of new cultural traditions for youth, like immersive summer camps, student trips to Israel and the increase in Israel related curriculum in Sunday religious school changed the way the next generation of American Jews thought about their Jewish identity. Jewish opinion polls from 1945 to the

[89] Alan Kramer and John Horne, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (Yale University Press, 2001), 83.

mid-'80s indicate a "strong emotional attachment of American Jews to Israel," confirming the solidification of Israel and Zionism within the American Jewish experience.[90]

The American Jewish engagement with Israel has only grown through the end of the 20th century and into contemporary times, especially among youth. Programs like Birthright and Israeli Bonds instill within Jewish youth this connection to Israel. While there is evidence of a continuing emotional attachment to Israel among American Jews in contemporary times, a new discourse has gained popularity in which Israel's actions are being called into question. A reckoning with the past and the Zionist backed narrative of the origins of Israel led to the emergence of the academic genre of Post-Zionism in the mid '80s-90s. Post-Zionists believe that Zionist ideology should be considered no longer relevant given that it fulfilled its mission in 1948 with the establishment of Israel. Post-Zionism questions Israel's role as a safe haven for Jews, if it can indeed be a Jewish and democratic state, and investigates the intricacies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is a very simple overview of the discipline, but its emergence signals the beginning of a shift in how American Jews think about Israel and Zionism. By examining Jewish opinion polls, one can notice the trend in the 1980s that educated Jewish youth were less likely to be as committed to Israel than older, less educated and more religious Jews.[91] Towards the end of the 20th century, Jews and scholars alike began to increasingly question the role of Zionism, if any, in a post-1948 world. The promise of a Jewish utopia made to the Jewish people by Zionist leaders came into question in the face of Israel's continuing inability to escape constant conflict. This debate and discussion over the myth versus reality of Israel persists in Jewish and non-Jewish discourse today, and will likely continue for the foreseeable future. I will

[90] Gilboa, "Attitudes of American Jews Toward Israel: Trends over Time," 115.
[91] Gilboa, "Attitudes of American Jews Toward Israel: Trends over Time," 125.

close my thesis with a brief discussion of the shift in American Jewish opinion on Zionism and Israel in contemporary American Jewish discourse.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to uncover the reasons why Zionism flourished during the interwar years in Poland and in the postwar years in America. Further, I investigated how Zionist youth movements impacted the lives of Jewish youth in Poland, as well as the American Jewish community postwar. Finally, I compare how Zionism was taught to youth and the emotional connection to Israel in America to interwar Poland. Using secondary sources focusing on the Polish Jewish experience, the history of youth movements, and studies of specific Zionist youth movements, I pieced together a history of how and why these movements were successful in furthering the Zionist cause and in engaging a large number of Polish Jewish youth. I then utilized oral history interviews from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum archive to analyze the individual experiences different Jewish youth had regarding Zionism, assimilation and postwar migration. I found that even among this small sample of primary sources, there emerged certain predictive factors in how each subject would react to Zionism, youth movements and *hakhshara.* Since all of the oral history subjects I investigated eventually settled in the United States, I decided to focus my third chapter around the experiences of American Jews, youth specifically, with Zionism and their relationship to Israel post-1948. Opinion polls, youth publications and a charting of Zionism's rise in America served as the foundation for my argument.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I found that to many Eastern European Jews, Zionism and the buiding of a Jewish state in Palestine was seen as the only solution to the unceasing anti-semitism and lack of peaceful coexistence between Jews and their neighbors. The movement's modern origins date back to the mid-late 19th century, and by the 1930s, it had exploded in popularity, expanding to include more specific Zionist youth movements, seasonal

hakhshara and permenant diaspora kibbutzim. Youth movements provided structure, community as well as an ideology which informed a new, revolutionary way of identifying as a Jew in Eastern Europe. Zionism gave hope to many young Jews that they would one day live together as a nation, free and 'whole.'

The main takeaway from my research in Chapter Two was that family connections or obligations were the determining factor in youth committing to make aliyah and where to settle postwar. While I analyzed a small sample of primary sources, each interviewee grew up in a distinct environment, from urban, suburban or *shtetl*, and had different family dynamics and levels of religious observance. Yet among all these varying factors, each subject had the same outcome, which was postwar settlement in America. Family obligations or connections were what led to the same outcome among this small, but diverse sample. It surprised me that Zionist ideology did not necessarily play a large role in everyday life, and even less during and after the war. For those who were members of Zionist youth movements, it seems like membership was less a concious, ideology driven decision and more a natural social one, made to seek out Jewish culture and solidarity. While I was initially disappointed to be restricted to English language oral history interviews—I was unable to hear any perspectives of Polish Jews who did permanently settle in Palestine—they ultimately inspired the final chapter about American Zionism, and moved the thesis into more contemporary history, which interests me greatly.

The third chapter explored the changing American Jewish relationship to Zionism and Israel during the first half of the 20th century, and the educational legacy created in the decades following 1948. Following WWII, Zionism all but became an essential identity among the majority of American Jews, when just thirty years before, it was a fringe movement. This was in part a personal exploration since I am a descendent of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, and

have experienced growing up in a Reform Jewish synagogue in the United States. My final chapter did not cover all the aspects I originally sought to consider, but this first exploration into the topic allowed me to understand the context in which Zionism flourished in America, the reasons why Zionist leaders chose the ideology to revive the future of Jewish life and how they shaped the identity of young American Jews. Zionism in America became its own distinct movement, colored by the formation of a strong Jewish community, as well as the recent tragedy of WWII that weighed heavy on everyone's mind and informed important decisions regarding the next generation. Many other aspects, such as searching for change in American Jew youth's relationship to Zionism and Israel in the late 20th to the early 21st century (in conjunction with the emergence of post-Zionism) and an investigation of specific Israel-related Hebrew school curriculum in the second half of the 20th century, remain for further consideration. Contemporary studies have begun to explore some of these trends, such as the growing number of "Troubled Committed" Jews who still remain emotionally attached to and supportive of Israel, yet find the Israeli government's increasingly actions harder to condone or justify.[92] This is just one example of contemporary scholarship in the arena of American Jewish studies, and there was unfortunately no room to discuss the American Jewish view of Israeli politics in this thesis. However, I hope to continue investigating these issues in the future to help make sense of my own experiences as an American Jew, and to help others understand.

When I first began work on this thesis, I did not anticipate adding the American Jewish perspective on Zionism, and didn't realize how integral it would feel to the overall thesis in the end. I was surprised by the strong connection that exists between Eastern European Zionism and American Zionism, and also the important ways they diverge. Ultimately, I hope this thesis breaks down some of the myths and romanticization about Zionism and instead gives readers

[92] Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman, "Liberal Zionism and the Troubled Committed," *Sources* (Fall 2021), 1.

some of the tools necessary to more clearly consider the role of Zionism in the contemporary American Jewish identity. In a time when the topics of Israel and Zionism are increasingly polarizing and contentious, especially at post-secondary institutions in America and abroad, understanding the difference between movement ideology (and where it comes from, its historical context) and the culture of everyday people it affected will hopefully serve to broaden the perspective of those interested, and be a starting point to then reevaluate history as it has been told by one side.

Glossary

Aliyah: Migration to Israel, literally “going up” in Hebrew. When numbered, eg. ‘Fourth Aliyah,’ refers to a period of increased and sustained Jewish migration to Israel.

Hakhshara: Meaning “preparation” in Hebrew; preparational program sponsored by Zionist youth movements to prepare young Jewish pioneers to live and work in Palestine.

Haskalah: The Jewish Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries

Shtetl: Traditional small Jewish town in Eastern Europe.

Kibbutz (pl. kibbutzim): A Jewish collective, communal settlement in Israel (in this paper, I focus on kibbutzim created in the diaspora and those established in pre-state Palestine).

Kvutza (*pl. *Kvutzot): A ‘proto-kibbutz’ of sorts, the *Kvutza* was an early communal settlement of Jewish pioneers in Palestine and in Eastern Europe. Their founders intended to keep the settlements small and agricultural, but eventually the kibbutz model of adopting different industries and larger populations grew more popular and the name *Kvutza* was phased out.

Pogrom: An organized violent riot condoned by ruling authorities intended to massacre Jewish people, notably in Eastern Europe and Russia during the 18th and 19th centuries.

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