AFTER THE WAR

REBUILDING SHATTERED LIVES,
RECOLLECTING WARTIME EXPERIENCES
In the March 1946 volume of the Hashomer Hatzair movement newspaper, Zelig Shushan, an emissary from the Yishuv in Palestine, described his encounter with the survivors in Europe in an article entitled “The Meeting with the Comrades in the Diaspora.”

We thought that all of the Jews had been killed, that we were the only survivors, that no Jews would come to Eretz Israel because each one had been killed in the death wagons, gas chambers, in the crematoria . . . Yet, some of you managed to survive, in the forests, in a bunker, fighting with the partisans . . .

And when I come to you and I see what you have managed to create, how you have already instilled content to your life, when I see the devotion to the kibbutz, to comrades, I see exactly in you the light that I see in the windows around us . . .

You are not alone in your struggle. You are comrades in a large movement “Hashomer Hatzair.”

These young survivors, he suggested, who had lost mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters, now carried an obligation to those who had died to continue along the path of halutziat (the pioneering way). This was a path in which they would not have to struggle alone, however; they were now part of a larger family, the worldwide movement of Hashomer Hatzair. In the aftermath of catastrophe, young survivors such as those addressed by Shushan turned to the kibbutz groups created by Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist movements after the war. What drew them to the kibbutzim of the Zionist youth movements in such disproportionately large numbers? Why did they choose to join the kibbutzim of the pioneering Zionist youth movements rather than those frameworks created by other political parties? Was it an overwhelming Zionist ideological conclusion reached during the war or a more fundamental need for family, homes, and belonging that drew them to the movements? For
the emissaries from the Yishuv, and indeed the Yishuv leadership as a whole, the success of the kibbutz groups in recruiting young people after the Shoah would play a vital role in decisions leading to the creation of the State of Israel. The perceived Zionist enthusiasm of the Surviving Remnant played no small part in convincing outside observers from the United States, Great Britain, and the United Nations that the Jewish survivors had reached an overwhelming Zionist conclusion after the Holocaust. Administrators and diplomats assigned to finding a solution to the Jewish Displaced Person (DP) situation interpreted the Zionist demonstrations by the youths in the kibbutzim as a sure sign that the DP population as a whole desired final settlement in Palestine. Nonetheless, though the members who joined the kibbutz groups in Poland described by Shushan had made the decision to travel with their group to Germany as part of the Bricha (the clandestine movement of Jewish departure from Poland), their membership in the kibbutz did not mean that they were the ardent Zionists they were perceived to be. In fact, their knowledge of Zionist ideology, history, and culture was elementary at best, and their decision to remain within the framework of the kibbutz depended more on the structure and security offered by the kibbutz framework, as well as the emotional and psychological support it provided to them. Using the lens of children and family as a frame of analysis, this chapter will examine the function of Zionism in the kibbutzim of the Zionist youth movements in postwar Poland and Germany, in an attempt to understand the widespread appeal of such frameworks for largely orphaned Jewish youths in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Such an analysis suggests that the kibbutz framework proved appealing for Jewish youths after the Holocaust, many of whom had lost one or both parents, siblings, and extended family during the war, by providing a surrogate family in a structure that sought to recreate the warmth of the prewar home, while offering a sense of camaraderie and purpose in a highly therapeutic and productive social unit. Thus, for many among the survivor youths, what made Zionism most appealing after the war were its functional, pragmatic, and psychological benefits, not its ideological ones. Still, this did not preclude the growth of Zionist enthusiasm once in the kibbutz and the strengthening of ties to the wider Zionist project; indeed the two needs worked hand in hand — it was the desperate need for family and camaraderie that often kept young survivors within the kibbutz group, even when more desirable immigration and living options became available. At the same time, the membership of the young survivors in the kibbutzim and the Zionist youth movements would transform the nature of these movements in the wake of the Holocaust and ultimately aid in the creation of the Jewish state.
JEWS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

From the first days following liberation, the age of the surviving Jewish DP population skewed dramatically to those under the age of thirty. A series of reports and surveys presented by various agencies working with survivors in Germany and representing a broad spectrum of interests, from the earliest weeks following liberation and for years thereafter, consistently estimated the proportion of Jewish DPs between the ages of fifteen and thirty at more than half and often above 80 percent of the total Jewish population. Considering that survival required strength, hardiness, selection for labor, quickness of foot and wit, general adaptability, and the ability to cut ties from family and friends, it should be no surprise that young adults were most likely to survive. As youths came together in Germany in the first weeks and months following liberation, a number of them formed kibbutzim, or collective social frameworks affiliated with Zionist youth movements, and kibbutzei hakhshara (agricultural training farms), such as Kibbutz Buchenwald or Kibbutz Nili on the estate of Julius Streicher. Such kibbutzim had the appeal of isolating youths from the less-than-ideal existence in the DP camps and providing a replacement family for the one lost during the war. Likewise, many among the youths in postwar Poland gravitated to such frameworks for a variety of pragmatic reasons, including the offers of food, shelter, security, camaraderie, warmth, and the promise of departure from Poland, as well as the offer of something to do on a daily basis. (These kibbutz groups, based on the prewar collectivist models of the Zionist youth movements, differed from the kibbutzim in Israel in that they were not necessarily agricultural in nature, although over time some of the groups did move to one of the forty hakhsharot, or agricultural training farms, operated in the American-occupied zone of Germany.) Still, membership in the youth movements came with the expectation of additional “adult” responsibilities often thrust upon adolescents and young adults—namely, conscription to fight in Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 and a leading role in the Ha’apalah movement in 1947—in the collective struggle to create the State of Israel.

RECRUITING SUCCESS IN POLAND

The first recourse for many Jewish youths in Poland after the war was to turn to the local Jewish committees that had been formed, seeking answers to their most pressing needs, including food, shelter, health, and security, before they could turn to the larger questions of how and where to continue their lives. Beginning in the summer of 1944 in eastern Poland, Jewish survivors rapidly organized a system of communal and political organizations. From early on, there was a great deal of competition among the Jewish political groups for control of the “Jewish street.” In accord with the Bricha’s
effort to organize willing segments of the Jewish public for departure from Poland, the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement, in unison with *Dror*, began to organize kibbutzim in a number of cities in Poland in the spring and summer of 1945, including Warsaw, Lodz, Sosnowiec, Bytom, and Kraków. Over the summer of 1945, the movement also opened kibbutzim in Będzin, Częstochowa, Gliwice, and Katowice. The political debate between the various Zionist movements did not eliminate the potential for cooperation among the various movements, with *Left Poalei Zion, Poalei Zion C. S.*, *Dror*, and *Hashomer Hatzair* joining together in June 1945 to form the League for Labor Palestine. In addition to the movements that joined together in the League were the General Zionists and *Mizrachi*, who initially combined with *Gordonia, Akiva*, and *Noar Zion* to form *Ichud. Ichud*, like the United Zionist Organization (*uzo*) and *Nocham* in Germany, was intended as a political group to represent the unity of the *She’erit Hapletah*, but from early on was involved in a great deal of competition from the pioneering youth movements. The Zionist youth movements enjoyed success in recruiting a growing percentage of surviving Jewish youths into the kibbutz framework for Jewish youths in postwar Poland. According to the calculations of historian David Engel, from the spring of 1945 the total percentage of Jewish youths in Poland who had joined the kibbutzim grew from 7.5 percent to 17 percent by the fall of 1945. Between June and November 1945, the number of Jewish youths living in the kibbutzim of youth movements grew by at least 500 percent. Among the youth movements that emphasized “pioneer” training (*Hashomer Hatzair, Dror*, and *Gordoniah*), the number had increased to 7167 members by the spring and summer of 1946, from as few as eight hundred the winter before. This quest for members would in turn assist in swelling the numbers of Jews departing in the *Bricha*, the semiorganized movement of Jewish departure from Poland. Over the course of 1945–1946, over one hundred thousand Jews left Poland as part of the *Bricha*, over one-third of them youths organized in the kibbutzim of the pioneering youth movements (such as *Hashomer Hatzair, Dror*, and *Gordoniah*) and many of them bound for Palestine via the American zones of Germany, Italy, and Austria. By the beginning of 1947, one American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (*JDC*) survey counted sixteen thousand kibbutz members in the DP camps of the American zone of Germany, approximately 10 percent of the total Jewish DP population.

**KIBBUTZ LOCHAMEI HAGETAOT ‘AL SHEM TOSIA ALTMAN**

Among those groups traveling with the *Bricha* from Poland to Germany in November 1945 was a group of 110 young survivors, who had joined kibbutz groups in Bytom and Sosnowiec. The two *Hashomer Hatzair* kibbutzim united after their arrival in the Landsberg DP camp, and like many of the *Hashomer*
"Hatzair" kibbutzim named after heroes of the wartime resistance, came to take the name *Kibbutz Lochamei HeGettaot 'al shem Tosia Altman* (the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz named after Tosia Altman; hereafter, Kibbutz Tosia Altman). The kibbutz groups were initially named after the town where they were organized. The decision to name many of the kibbutzim after the movement’s resistance fighters who had died during the war was only taken at the first *Hashomer Hatzair* movement conference in postwar Germany at Biberach on December 10, 1945. There several of the kibbutzim were renamed after *Hashomer Hatzair* resistance fighters such as Mordecai Anielewicz (the first groups from Sosnowiec and Bytom), Chaviva Reik, Yosef Kaplan (first from Warsaw and Kraków), Tosia Altman, Aryeh Vilner, and Zvi Brandes. Other kibbutzim carried symbolic names such as “LeShichrur” (Toward Liberation), “BaDerech” (On the Way), and “BaMa’avak” (In the Struggle). Members of Kibbutz Tosia Altman wrote a collective diary detailing the history of the kibbutz, providing an excellent opportunity to study its experience from within and providing a glimpse of what life was like for young survivors who chose to join the kibbutzim after the war. Forty years after the completion of the diary, it was translated from the original Yiddish into Hebrew by surviving members of the kibbutz. The two *madrichim* of the kibbutz, Miriam and Baruch Wind (Yechieli), who served as the guides, teachers, and spiritual leaders of the kibbutz, had returned to Lublin after spending the war in the Soviet Union. After spending fourteen months in the American zone, eight of which they spent farming the soil of Germany, the majority of the kibbutz left for Palestine in early 1947. They arrived there only in the spring of 1948 following a yearlong internment in Cyprus.

The *madricha* of Kibbutz Tosia Altman, Miriam Wind (née Richter), arrived in Lublin in March 1945. A member of the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement before the war, she first escaped from her hometown of Rowno (Rivne) to Vilna in 1939 (at the age of eighteen); after her capture in Romania in 1941, she escaped and spent the years from 1942 to 1945 in Tashkent, where she met her husband, Baruch. Once in Lublin after the war, she met with the postwar leaders of *Dror* (Yitzhak Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin) and *Hashomer Hatzair* (Israel Glazer and Shlomo Mann), who instructed Miriam to organize and lead the third postwar kibbutz in Sosnowiec. She separated from her husband, Baruch, who was sent to lead the fourth kibbutz group in Bytom, and began to organize a kibbutz group in Sosnowiec in the beginning of April. The movement focused on organizing kibbutzim in Silesia, where many youths were to be found after repatriation by the Polish government. The close access to Germany would also become advantageous for the *Bricha* movement in the emerging program of departure from Poland. Miriam looked for the first members of the kibbutz at the Jewish Committee in Sosnowiec, where they
had gone to look for family. She also wandered the city looking for children to join the kibbutz. Youths arrived on trains, resettled by the new Polish government in Silesia, and were redeemed from monasteries and Polish families where they had hidden during the war.

The madrichim like Baruch and Miriam were uncertain of what they would find among these traumatized children and young adults. The youth who composed the postwar kibbutzim and the youth movement leadership in Palestine clearly had rather different understandings of Zionism. The youth movement leadership in Palestine was most concerned over what it referred to as the “quality” of the new membership. Thus, evaluations of these youths by the youth movement and Jewish Agency emissaries tended to evaluate the Zionist potential of these survivors to buttress their numbers in Palestine, to function as the vital added weight that could tip the balance to the creation of the Jewish state. The descriptions of the survivor youths by the youth movement emissaries were far from flattering or optimistic. They emphasized the demoralization, isolation, and indolence of the survivor youths.19 Hashomer Hatzair activists expressed serious concerns over their ability to educate the thousands of refugee youths who filled the kibbutzim. In the words of one: “One needs a great deal of strength of spirit in order to create from this material a new type of man . . . it will take quite a few days and months [of] effort for them to be like us.”20

Shaike Weinberg (later the director of the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) wrote an educational program for Hashomer Hatzair activists working with kibbutzim, identifying what he understood to be the central characteristics of this “new human material.” He characterized the youths by their lack of education, absence of a normal childhood, stunted mental development, and general demoralization and distrust in man, as well as “strong resentment and anger towards the collective lifestyle . . . and a cynical relation to ideals in any form.”21 With this in mind, he urged the madrichim to deepen loyalty to the movement, while not arousing in the youths the renewed feeling of being placed in a framework of coercion. The ideal activity was agricultural work in the kibbutzim when possible, or at the minimum a few hours each day of service work. In the cultural sphere, holiday ceremonies (both Jewish and Zionist for social life), general education to make up for lost time, as well as the teaching of Hebrew, Jewish history, the history of Zionism, Hashomer Hatzair, and socialism were of central importance. The leadership believed that Zionism, specifically Hashomer Hatzair Zionism, had the power to heal this “broken youth” by turning them into ideologically committed Zionists and that such training was an ideal use of time while kibbutz youths waited to leave Europe. Negative assessments of survivor youths notwithstanding, a closer look at the youths who chose to
join the kibbutzim, and their reasons for doing so, reveals a relationship that is far more complex. The youths may have been traumatized by their wartime experiences, but they were willing to become active participants in the flourishing kibbutz framework—and in so doing challenged the expectations of the Yishuv activists, who questioned the ability of the survivor youths to aid in the building of the Zionist future. In the process, the survivors transformed the very nature of the youth movements, which came to depend on the young survivors for their existence.

JOINING THE KIBBUTZ GROUPS IN BYTOM AND SOSNOWIEC

Most of the young Jewish survivors who joined the kibbutzim in Bytom and Sosnowiec had either lost their entire family or had only one relative remaining. Many had survived in hiding, after the trauma of witnessing the destruction of their families. Some had returned from concentration camps and death marches, while others had managed to conceal their identities or be sheltered by non-Jewish families. This diverse group of youths found themselves together in the communal living format of a kibbutz in western Poland.

The stories of the young members of Kibbutz Tosia Altman and their reasons for joining the kibbutz—first, the relative security of the framework that offered stability, structure, and the warmth of home in the chaos and confusion after liberation, and second, the offers of departure for Palestine and the hope for a better future—provide a glimpse into the experiences of those who joined kibbutz groups after the war.

At the age of seventeen, Haim Shorrer was liberated by Russian troops from his hiding place in a forest in eastern Poland in June 1944. Three months earlier, he had witnessed the murder of his entire family after their discovery in a bunker by Ukrainian collaborators and had only narrowly managed to escape. After four years in hiding and on the run, disconnected from the rest of the world, he now faced liberation, alone and with few prospects for the future. As he recalled years later, “The period following liberation was more difficult than the war itself. Once I was liberated, everyone went on their own path.” A Jewish man by the name of Haber adopted Shorrer and brought him to his home in Klosowa, where he sought different forms of work, trying to make a living in Poland for the next year. By the summer of 1945, however, Shorrer left Klosowa and made his way to Bytom, where he joined the kibbutz led by Baruch Wind (Yechieli).

Like Shorrer, Monish Einhorn (Haran) found himself completely alone at the end of the war. Born in 1926 in Zaleszczyki on the Dniester, on the interwar border between Poland and Romania, Einhorn was part of a large family that was completely wiped out during the war. Before a mass deportation of Jews from the area in May 1943, he managed to escape to the forests and survived...
until being liberated by the Red Army in March 1944. He escaped a German counterattack and traveled to Czernowitz, where he remained until the end of the war, when he was repatriated to Sosnowiec by the newly formed Polish government. Once he arrived in Sosnowiec, completely alone and in foreign surroundings, Einhorn looked for a new home. He found it in the kibbutz led by Miriam. “Everything was new there, life was new . . . It is difficult to describe how important it was. The kibbutz gave a framework to kids who didn’t know what to do with themselves, who had no family.”

Members of the kibbutzim in Bytom and Sosnowiec often found their new homes in a random manner. Fishl Herszkowitz, a Galician Jew aged seventeen at the time of liberation, had survived in hiding, fighting with a partisan group against the Ukrainians at the end of the war. He first lived with a group of Jews in the area of Husiatyn following liberation, but the constant threats from Ukrainians led him to seek family to the west. He boarded a train of repatriates and arrived in Bytom; when he disembarked, he heard about the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz and, being nicely received by kibbutz members, decided to join it.

Other young Jewish survivors who joined the kibbutz groups in Bytom and Sosnowiec also found the kibbutz by chance, either hearing about it in the streets of the town or running into old acquaintances who told them about the kibbutz. Haim Bronstein was among a group of young survivors from the small town of Skalat (Skałat, prewar Polish name) in western Ukraine, who had been resettled by the Polish government in Bytom. Wandering through the streets of the city, he happened to see a blue-and-white flag inside the window of an apartment and overheard voices singing inside. He recognized two old acquaintances from Skalat, who had already joined the kibbutz, and decided that the kibbutz presented a better option than any others available to him at the time.

The recognition of a familiar face among a world of strangers was often enough to convince orphaned survivors to join such kibbutz groups. Aharon Segel was also an unlikely candidate to join the kibbutz in Bytom. He had survived under an assumed identity in the Tarnopol district working as a cattle herder. Nine months after liberation, he returned to his village near Skalat to discover that he was the only one from a family of seven children to survive the war.

I was basically adopted by the head of the community, Moshe Gelbtukh, who gave me a pair of tefillin (ritual phylacteries), and I returned from being a devout Catholic to a devout Jew. After six months in Skalat we went to Gliwice, but there was no room for me there, so Mr. Gelbtukh sent me to a Ha-Poel HaMizrachi kibbutz in Kraków. On the way we passed through Bytom,
and I met someone who told me that a friend from Skalat, Haim Bronstein, was living in a secular kibbutz in Bytom. I decided that it would at least be better to be with one friend so I stayed in Bytom.27

Thus, Aharon Segel went from growing up in a traditional Jewish family to passing as a Catholic during the war and then returning to the Jewish fold, only to finally join a secular Marxist-Zionist kibbutz in Bytom bound for Palestine. Yolek Weintraub (Yoel Ben-Porat), also from Skalat, was only fourteen at the end of the war. He managed to survive in the forest with an uncle from 1941 to 1944; at the end of the war, he was adopted by a Russian family that wanted him to convert. He instead chose to be repatriated by the Polish government and thus found himself in Bytom. There he ran into Aharon Segel, who told him that he had joined a kibbutz and that Yoel’s cousin, Haim Bronstein, was also a member of the group. He had never heard of a kibbutz before, but decided that living with friends would be preferable to being on his own in Bytom.28 In this way, the group of boys from Skalat all independently found their way into the HaShomer HaTzair-Dror kibbutz in Silesia.

A number of the kibbutz members joined the kibbutz only after first trying to rejoin Polish society. Salusia Altman (Sarah Ben-Zvi) was born in Częstochowa to a religious family in 1931. When the war broke out in 1939, she was not even nine years old. Her family moved into the Częstochowa ghetto; but when the deportations began, they were hidden in the family factory by the foreman, Jacques. After the ghetto was liquidated, her father disappeared, and she and her mother were placed in the Hasag forced labor camp. Following her liberation from the camp on January 16, 1945, she returned first to Lodz and then to Częstochowa. Although she knew other youths who were joining kibbutz groups, Altman had first sought to return to Polish society, focusing on her education before entertaining any thoughts of departure. However, her encounter with an antisemitic teacher led her to join the kibbutz in Bytom, a little over six months after her liberation from the Hasag camp, with the approval of her mother.29

Inka Weisbort also first made an effort to integrate into the newly liberated Polish state by joining the Polish army. Nineteen years old at the end of the war, she had survived a death march from Auschwitz and managed to escape from Ravensbrück in April 1945. After three months recuperating in Germany, she returned to Poland to try to find her family, but found no one. She tried to join a unit of the Polish army in July 1945, but was expelled when her Jewish origins were discovered. She found the sister of her stepfather in Sosnowiec, where she heard about a joint kibbutz of Hashomer Hatzair and Dror. Having few other options, she decided to join the kids all “crowded into a small apartment” in September 1945.30 Like Salusia, her first choice was to reenter Polish
society. However, her encounter with antisemitism and the slim prospects for a future in Poland led her to look for other social options. This was how she became a part of the kibbutz organized by Miriam.

Many of the young survivors who joined the kibbutzim in Bytom and Sosnowiec (which would later comprise Kibbutz Tosia Altman) came from homes that made them unlikely candidates to join a Zionist kibbutz. Their wartime experiences, while traumatic, were far from uniform, and the process of finding the kibbutz differed for many of them. Yet, many of those who reached the kibbutz decided to remain with it. As Miriam described, the priority was not to find youths with a Zionist background; in fact, this was the least of her concerns: “The only goal then was to rescue the youth . . . to remove them from monasteries, to gather them; they didn’t have a home . . . The majority of them came from camps, from hiding with non-Jews (goyim) . . . from Ukraine, from towns, from the forest.” The youth movement focused on providing shelter for the various youths who would constitute the future of the movement. In so doing, they managed to create a surrogate home and family for youths orphaned by the Holocaust.

THE DIARY OF KIBBUTZ TOSIA ALTMAN

The members of the kibbutzim in Bytom and Sosnowiec provided a snapshot of their everyday life within the kibbutz by keeping a kibbutz diary. Members did not sign entries, but instead wrote them in the first-person plural describing events collectively. This look into kibbutz life reveals the mutually beneficial nature of the relationship between the youths and the youth movement desperate for new members. Miriam instigated the writing of the diary with the second group while the kibbutz was still in Germany and assigned subjects to various members. The journal itself begins with the initial period in Poland; apparently members described these events as they remembered them in the months after their departure from Poland. While it must certainly be treated cautiously as a historical document that underwent editing, with sections whose authorship or genesis is unclear, it provides a rich and exceptional point of view on the Zionist experience in postwar Europe.

The opening pages of the diary from the first three months in Poland testify to the value of the kibbutz to its members in both Bytom and Sosnowiec, while also revealing the beginning of another subtle process in this period, the transition from individual to collective thinking. Some kibbutz members initially had difficulty with the notion of self-maintenance (meshek atzmi) and the sharing of clothes and all wages earned at outside work, complaining about the poor allocation of clothing and the need for connections (protekcja) to get certain items. Indeed, some members acknowledged that it “was difficult to drop ‘I’ from one’s vocabulary,” but the madrichim helped to inculcate
the value of collectivism in the members. Although ideological development was rather slow in the early period, the two sections of the kibbutz developed socially, learning what was positive versus negative behavior and deciding which members would be allowed to stay and which (like the lazy Yakov Ha-Sandlar) would be expelled for failing to contribute. It was in this early period that members developed pride in contributing to the collective, happy to bring money into their new “home.” Nonetheless, it was quite clear that members of the kibbutz had little knowledge of the ideological debates that had suffused Polish Zionism in the interwar period and soon reemerged despite the unity efforts following liberation. For example, when Hashomer Hatzair decided to break off from the other Zionist youth movements in August 1945, the members of Kibbutz Tosia Altman were informed of these developments, but had little understanding of the ideological differences that distinguished them from Dror or other movements. Even though Miriam and Baruch used this opportunity to explain the specifics of the Hashomer Hatzair ideology and educational program, members were more concerned with division within the kibbutz itself than any division between the movements, perhaps indicating an allegiance that was far more connected to the new “family” than to the movement as a whole.

The kibbutz members settled into a routine in Sosnowiec and Bytom, spending their days at work and their evenings immersed in “cultural” activities such as lectures, discussions, singing, and reading. Activities in the early period in Poland were differentiated between men and women, reinforcing traditional gender roles despite the wartime interlude. Women cooked, cleaned, and did the laundry, while the young men looked for outside work, creating a new home and family for the young survivors that replicated standard gender divisions. Boys and girls slept in separate bedrooms, sharing the available bed space. Tremendous labor was necessary to ensure the day-to-day functioning of the kibbutz, with constant work in the kitchen to keep kibbutz members fed, usually work done by the women. Needless to say, housework was not the most popular assignment among the kibbutz members. Still, the sense of camaraderie created by living and working together was highly therapeutic for the young survivors. For the women involved in sewing, the group activity provided them with a forum in which to talk about their experiences during the war and in the camps. The young men worked and earned money together, providing for their new family. They looked up to Miriam and Baruch, who were certainly the “mother” and “father” of their respective groups in Sosnowiec and Bytom, despite being only three or four years older than most of their chanichim (youth movement members). The “cultural” activities prescribed by Shaike Weinberg constituted an important part of the daily experience for the youths in Sosnowiec and Bytom (and later
in Germany as well), as they acquired the “Zionist” tools necessary for their future learning of Jewish and Zionist history, Jewish culture, and Hebrew.

Despite the increasing sense of comfort, after two months in the kibbutz the members began to grow impatient, constantly asking the madrichim when they would depart. Miriam in turn looked to the Bricha activists in Katowice for guidance on their date of departure from Poland. At the end of October 1945, both groups received the news they had long been waiting for: they would finally be able to leave Poland.

The Sosnowiec group departed on October 29, 1945, taking a train from Katowice to Prague, where the next day they were joined by Baruch’s groups arriving from Bytom. Some questioned why they had to continue to conceal their identities after so many years in hiding (and the stationmaster at the Czech border questioned why “Greeks” would choose to go to Prague instead of Bratislava), but they did and thus managed to cross the border and reach Czechoslovakia. (The Bricha movement often supplied its groups with false Greek papers to facilitate travel through Europe.) After nearly two weeks in Prague, the group arrived in Munich, where the members began the next stage of their journey, as a united kibbutz in the DP camps of Germany.

The two sections of the kibbutz united in Landsberg (near Munich) with a total of 110 members in mid-November 1945. This timetable meant that the kibbutz in fact preceded much of the Bricha from Poland— with the majority of the “infiltrtees” into the DP camps arriving in the summer and early fall of 1946, following the Kielce pogrom on July 4 of the same year. Although Kibbutz Tosia Altman eventually spent its last eight months in Germany on a farm, the majority of the 280 kibbutzim (with over 16,000 members) were to be found within the DP camps of Germany, where there were a total of 156,000 Jews by June 1947.

“CRISIS” WITHIN THE KIBBUTZ

Despite entries in the diary that suggest that this renewal of organizational and cultural work within the kibbutz (and contact with the wider movement) fortified members “prepared to face the difficulties of the future,” it is clear that the difficult transition to the Landsberg DP camp in Germany took a toll on the kibbutz. According to one entry in the diary written shortly after their arrival in Landsberg, a number of members decided to depart from the kibbutz group; and out of thirty prospective members (aged seventeen to eighteen) who arrived from Prague to join the kibbutz, only five decided to stay, rejecting the idea of shituf (sharing) and the poor conditions in the kibbutz. All in all, some fifteen original members (13–14 percent) decided to leave the kibbutz within the first two weeks in Landsberg, not only because of the difficult physical conditions they faced, but also because of political opposition
within the camp. Some members discovered acquaintances within the camp and chose to join them instead, leaving the kibbutz for personal and familial, not political, reasons. The difficulty of the transition to Landsberg left the kibbutz in a perceived state of “crisis.” Indeed, it seems that while the period in Poland was marked by efforts to attract new membership, the period in Germany for many kibbutzim would be defined by efforts to maintain membership and deepen loyalty to the movement.

While still in the DP camp in Landsberg, the madrichim worked to overcome a crisis of low morale through ideological education; and in one of the more fascinating episodes in the diary, the madricha, Miriam, decided that a mock trial would be ideal in order to stimulate discussion in the kibbutz and overcome the boredom which had begun to set in. The mazkir (secretary general) of the kibbutz, Monish, was put on trial for supposedly deciding to leave the kibbutz to attend a conservatory in Frankfurt. At the trial, his attorneys argued that the kibbutz and Zionism were flawed; the setup of the kibbutz, with its emphasis on shituf (cooperative living), prevented a comfortable life in the kibbutz. Many speakers spoke strongly against Monish, arguing that it would be irresponsible of him to abandon the kibbutz.

In the diary, in a personal entry written after the “trial,” Monish describes the treatment he faced from members stunned by his “betrayal.” He endured shouting, curses, and even spitting. His closest friends seemed to become his greatest enemies. Yehudit stated that she simply “won’t allow it,” while Paula’s reaction was personal: “I no longer respect him as a person, even if he does end up staying.” Another female member questioned, “How could he take on the position of mazkir when he always knew that he was going to leave?” Friends who previously would loan him a hat or clothes now refused. Others came to him in tears begging him to stay, while Hinda and Tzintza sat in their room “as if they were sitting shiva [the week-long mourning period observed by Jews after a death], wiping tears from their eyes.”

The dining room of the kibbutz was turned into a courtroom with space provided for the prosecution, defense, a judge, the accused, and the witnesses; the rest of the room was reserved for the audience. Arguing in his own defense while enduring shouts and catcalls from the audience, Monish blamed the faults of the kibbutz and the Zionist movement for his decision to leave. His defense attorneys, Yehudit and Ruth, still unaware that the trial was a farce, also blamed the Zionist movement and the institutions of the kibbutz. Ruth, who was also the administrator for sharing, blamed the idea of shituf, asking, “How is it possible that each individual not have his own pajamas and be forced to wear those of another?” Yehudit suggested that the work assignments in the kibbutz were not properly delegated and that a person needed “connections” (protekcja) in order to secure favorable positions. Monish
indicted the whole concept of collective decision making in his own defense: “If I need to smoke a cigarette, the kibbutz will decide only five per day; if I want to go to the movies, do I have to wait until everyone is ready to go together?!” Finally, the prosecution (Inka, Hinda, and Salusia) spoke, “dismantling the house of cards that I (Monish) built in my charges” and defending the kibbutz and the Zionist movement. After a period of questioning from the audience, the judges left to deliberate and returned with a verdict that was intended to be binding: “Whether by or against his will, Monish must recognize the fact that Zionism is the only way to establish (resurrect) the nation and the kibbutz the only way to actualization (hagshama). He must stay in the kibbutz!” Monish read a statement accepting the verdict of the court, and “all of a sudden, my worst enemies once again became my best friends. . . . I even received two rations of chocolate.” Afterward, the members discovered that Monish had in fact been acting. The reactions of the members seem to have tended toward happiness and relief; there is no reference in the diary or in subsequent recollections to any sense of having been manipulated by Monish or Miriam and Baruch.

Accordingly, in the final decision of the “judges,” which was meant to be binding, it was decided that Monish must recognize that Zionism was the only way to resurrect the Jewish people and the kibbutz—which, of course, he later said he had known all along. The episode of the “trial” so soon after the arrival and unification of the kibbutzim from Sosnowiec and Bytom points to a number of questions that the kibbutz group would have to face in Germany: how would members be encouraged to remain with the kibbutz now that other, potentially more attractive options were open to them? Why should they choose to stay with Hashomer Hatzair, as opposed to any of the other movements promising aliyah (“ascent,” or immigration to the Land of Israel) and perhaps better connections to achieve this goal? Why would certain members choose the kibbutz over the prospect of migration to another country or the option of settling in Germany?

The complaints about the kibbutz and shituf suggest that for many of the members, these ideological goals were only worthy of sacrifice when considered in the light of the greater value of the kibbutz as a new family. Departure from the kibbutz, even if shituf and the lack of individual freedom were to blame, was an inexcusable betrayal. The pressure to conform and follow the dictates of the kibbutz remained strong. The “trial” stood out in the memory of the kibbutz members as a significant event in the development of the kibbutz. Miriam recalled the trial, nearly sixty years later, as a great success; and Monish was surprised by the ease with which he was able to slip into his role, as if he was “descended from a great line of actors.” However, the episode of the trial also points to the tensions that could easily boil to the surface when
the kibbutz was faced with the crisis of one of its leaders’ departure. Those arguing in his defense were quick to blame the narrow constraints of shituf and collectivism; his accusers were less concerned with his choice to leave the Zionist path than his decision (especially as mazkir) to abandon the kibbutz family, the ultimate act of betrayal.

Was the trial successful? It did reveal the degree to which the members of the kibbutz were susceptible to coercive tactics of ensuring continuing loyalty to the kibbutz group. It also revealed the intense need that many of the members felt to preserve the integrity of their new family following the wartime loss of their own families. In terms of the goals of the madrichim, Miriam and Baruch were successful in using the trial as an educational tool to demonstrate to the membership the importance of maintaining the kibbutz. The psychologically manipulative impact of the episode on the kibbutz is striking. Yet, there is no indication that any of the members were sufficiently put off by the manipulation to leave the kibbutz; on the contrary, the episode seems to have reinforced the reasons for remaining with the group for members who may have questioned the kibbutz framework. Nonetheless, it is also of note that the reasons put forth by the members for remaining within the kibbutz had little to do with the ideological basis of the kibbutz or the youth movement. On the contrary, his accusers first vilified Monish for abandoning his comrades in the kibbutz before defending the concepts of collectivism and the goal of aliyah.

KIBBUTZ LIFE IN GERMANY

When Miriam and Baruch’s kibbutz groups arrived in the Landsberg DP camp near Munich in November 1945, they hoped it would be a brief stop on their ultimate journey to the Land of Israel. They did not realize that they would be forced to remain in the American zone of Germany for nearly fourteen months, moving from Landsberg to Leipheim and then to an agricultural training farm near Eschwege, before being selected by the movement to depart in January 1947 (those who departed in 1947 would be forced to spend one more year in Cyprus before reaching Israel in 1948). The length of the period within the DP camps raised the question of whether the kibbutz could continue as a cohesive group or would remain the most appealing option for the youths who had arrived in Germany. Still, through a focus on materials created by young Jewish DPs themselves living in the kibbutzim, it becomes evident that the time spent by the youths in the kibbutz groups was put to use in deepening Zionist enthusiasm and strengthening attachment to both the Jewish past and the Zionist future. Crucially, as weeks dragged into months and years, it was the sense of attachment to their new family in the kibbutz group that kept members within the group as other housing and immigration
options became available over the course of 1946–1947. Those who chose to remain with the kibbutz engaged in a process of transforming themselves from pragmatic Zionists who had joined the kibbutz for the offers of shelter and camaraderie in Poland into individuals eager to acquire the tools necessary for their future lives in Eretz Israel.

Although the various Zionist youth movements were divided by ideological differences, the daily experiences of their members shared much in common. Like the kibbutz groups of Hashomer Hatzair, the Dror and Gordoniah groups followed similar patterns in their departure from central east Europe with the Bricha and in their experiences once in Germany. Preparation for life in Palestine dominated the activities of most of the movements; what distinguished them was their idea of what the future Jewish state would look like. Dror and Hashomer Hatzair, for example, emphasized the need to create a socialist society in the new state; Poalei Agudat Israel and Bnei Akiva worked toward the creation of a state that would be a synthesis of the religious ideals of Torah with a Zionist ethic. Generally, these groups were also formed in Poland, usually as one group in a specific town; later kibbutz groups arrived from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania. During their time in Germany, they interacted with the central leadership regularly, compiling activity reports, paying dues to the movement, and relying on the movement for educational materials, the movement newspaper, and questions of aliyah and internal movement in Germany. After spending the first few months in a DP camp, part of the kibbutz would move to a kibbutz-hakhsharah (agricultural training farm) in order to gain experience with agriculture before departure. Such was the experience of Baruch and Miriam’s first kibbutz groups from Sosnowiec and Bytom (which later formed Kibbutz Mordecai Anielewicz), living in various DP camps before moving to the movement farm in Eschwege. Over time, certain members would be selected for aliyah while others would remain, continuing to learn and train while in Germany. Those who did not depart were often left to hold places and supplies for new groups of kibbutzim arriving from the east.

In Poland, the kibbutz group had focused primarily on planning for departure and creating a cohesive group. Once the kibbutz had arrived in Germany, the educational and cultural work necessary to prepare for “life in Israel” took place in two venues: the DP camp and the training farms that would be opened by the movements in Germany with the assistance of American authorities, the Central Committee, and Zionist movement emissaries from Palestine. The period spent by the kibbutzim in Germany is thus central in the postwar history of the Zionist movement on two levels: first, the arrival of increasing numbers of Jewish DPSs in the American zone of Germany over the course of 1946 created a situation in which a diplomatic solution to the Jewish refugee
problem would become urgent; and second, the time spent by the youths in the kibbutzim was used to deepen Zionist enthusiasm, prepare them for their future lives, and rebuild the European Zionist youth movements.

Over the next fourteen months, the members of Kibbutz Tosia Altman, like those youths in other kibbutzim of Hashomer Hatzair, Dror, Nocham, and other movements, continued to engage in the “cultural” and educational work expected of them, as well as in the agricultural labor instilled in the farm to prepare for their future lives as pioneers in Israel. The sense of collective responsibility bestowed upon the youths as the “future of the Jewish people,” a highly developed notion of familial obligation and collective duty after the Holocaust—the cataclysm which had orphaned so many Jews, but at the same time reminded them that they were all bound together—this sense of collective responsibility resulted in a division of labor developed in the DP camps in which the youths, and especially those in the kibbutzim, became responsible for carrying forward the banner of Zionism on behalf of the entire DP population, the Surviving Remnant. This would become especially clear when it was the youths, specifically those between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five, who were called upon to “do their duty to the people” and join the fighting in Palestine (something that some eight thousand conscripts from the DP camps in Germany in fact did).47

CONCLUSIONS

The experiences of the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim, as described in the diary of Kibbutz Tosia Altman and the correspondence of other kibbutzim from their time in the DP camps in occupied Germany, suggest a number of explanations for why members chose to remain within the kibbutz framework. From the beginning, on the psychological level, the continuing peer pressure and techniques employed by the madrichim and leadership persuaded members not to leave the group. The kibbutz granted structure and work, giving members something to do every day and reintroducing them to a daily schedule on the time and calendar of the movement. However, the favorable situation in the DP camps of Germany also gave the kibbutz members time to engage in learning and education, providing members with access to knowledge for which they “hungered.” The kibbutz also offered a basis for identity, as membership in the movement provided a sense of belonging to a larger group and a larger family; the identification of the kibbutz with the wartime heroism of the ghetto fighters only served to strengthen this basis of identity. Finally, through the promise of aliyah, staying with the kibbutz carried the additional incentive of an expedited route to a future life in Palestine. While the initial psychological and structural factors kept members in the group, the time in Germany offered the movement and the members an
opportunity to deepen their attachment to Hashomer Hatzair and the ideals for which it stood.

While the kibbutz groups frequently could not succeed at being self-sufficient, they did give the youths a sense of purpose in their lives. In the kibbutzim, youths learned Jewish history, Hebrew, youth movement folk-songs, principles of socialism, and more. The communal setting created a sense of family and tended to emphasize the positive potential of a Jewish future, despite the dark Jewish past. The kibbutz provided pride in being Jewish and offered goals for the future. The kibbutzim represented an alternative to the established Jewish committee or life alone in the DP camps, but a way of life that was not dependent on the official community framework. In this way, the kibbutzim ended up being highly therapeutic for the young survivors, placing them with a similar community of youths who had undergone wartime trauma. The activity within the kibbutz, both in daily work and in education, could help to avert the depression, anxiety, and anger that were certain by-products of the posttraumatic stress many of these survivors were perhaps facing.

Throughout the experiences of the youths in the kibbutzim, a common tension emerged, however, one in which the members had to balance their preparation for a future life in Palestine with the difficulties of everyday existence in the present. Departure for Palestine was certainly not guaranteed; as they waited for a diplomatic solution or their chance to be selected for aliyah, members had to work to avoid depression and a growing sense of impatience with their situation. In their “cultural work,” kibbutz members acquired the necessary Zionist tools to qualify them for aliyah; such exercises simultaneously filled the function of keeping kibbutz members occupied, thereby lessening the potential for boredom, laziness, and demoralization. In classes, reading newspapers, and listening to lectures, kibbutz members learned the politics and geography of Palestine while still facing the reality of continued life in Germany. The appropriation of Jewish tradition and the transformation of a traumatic past into a source of heroic pride perhaps provided members with the psychological balm necessary to continue life in the wake of such tragedy. Still, in some cases, individuals decided to try life outside of the kibbutz, choosing to live independently or join friends and family in other groups.

Just as important, on the diplomatic level the high visibility of the kibbutzim and their manifestations of Zionist enthusiasm demonstrated to outside observers a perceived state of “Palestine passion” on the part of the Jewish DPs. The apparent importance of Zionism for the increasing numbers of arriving DPs confirmed the necessity of the Zionist solution for observers such as Earl Harrison, representatives of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, and the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, who continued to rec-
ommend immigration to Palestine as a solution to the Jewish refugee problem created by the war. The kibbutz could thus also serve as a way for the Jewish DP to leave Europe before he or she really left, to symbolize the rejection of existence in Europe, while simultaneously functioning as a postwar tool of revenge.48 Above all, it represented a solution to the intense feeling of homelessness and abandonment that accompanied their wartime loss of family—by providing membership in a larger Jewish family.

NOTES
2. Ibid.
3. In June 1945 two Paris-based representatives of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Ruth Kliger and David Shaltiel, told the heads of the political and immigration departments of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem that up to 95 percent of the survivors were under thirty-five years old. Kliger and Shaltiel to Shertok and Dobkin, June 11, 1945, Central Zionist Archives, (CZA)-S6/3659, Jerusalem. A survey of Jewish DPs in Bavaria taken in February 1946 found that 83.1 percent of their number was between the ages of fifteen and forty, with over 40 percent between fifteen and twenty-four and 61.3 percent between nineteen and thirty-four. “Jewish Population in Bavaria,” February 1946, YIVO Archives, MK 488, Leo Schwarz Papers, roll 9, folder 57, no. 581, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York. A study by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee of Jews in the US Occupation Zone in Germany over one year after liberation found that 83.1 percent were between the ages of six and forty-four. “Jewish Population, US Zone Germany,” November 30, 1946, YIVO Archives, MK 488, LS 9, 57, no. 682, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.
8. See David Engel, Ben Shikhrur Li-Verihah: Nitsolei ha-Shoah be-Polin veha-ma’avak ’al Hanhagatam, 1944–1946 (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), 71.
9. Ibid.
10. Engel, Ben Shikhrur Li-Verihah, 203n221.
11. Other sources also testify to the expansion in number and membership of the Zionist youth movement kibbutzim in postwar Poland. See Yochanan Cohen, Ovrim kol Gvul: Ha-Brichah, Polin 1945–1946 (Tel Aviv: Zemorah-Bitan, 1995), App. 5, for a thorough analysis of the development of Zionist kibbutzim in postwar Poland.


14. The above-mentioned kibbutz groups were named after individuals who participated in the Jewish resistance during the war, such as Mordecai Anielewicz (b. 1919, d. May 8, 1943), the commander of the Warsaw ghetto uprising; Tosia Altman (b. 1918, d. ca. May 24, 1943), one of several Hashomer Hatzair activists in the Warsaw ghetto uprising; Aryeh Vilner (b. 1917, d. May 8, 1943), one of the founders of the Jewish Fighting Organization, ZOB, in the Warsaw ghetto; Zvi Brandes (b. September 3, 1917, d. August 7, 1943), a leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Zagłębie region; and Chaviva Reik (b. 1914, d. November 20, 1944), born in Slovakia and emigrated to Palestine in 1939 as a member of Hashomer Hatzair. She volunteered to join the parachutists’ unit and was dropped over Slovakia on September 21, 1944, where she organized Jewish partisan groups to assist in the Slovak national uprising. She was captured and executed on November 20, 1944, at Kremnica.

15. Information on the following kibbutz groups is available at the Hashomer Hatzair Archives, Yad Yaari, Givat Haviva, Israel, and in the Ha’apalah Project, 123/Hashomer Hatzair/410, Haganah History Archives, Tel Aviv, Israel:

1. Kibbutz Mordechai Anielewicz
2. Kibbutz Chaviva Reik in Pocking
3. Kibbutz Tosia Altman
4. Kibbutz Aryeh Vilner
5. Kibbutz Yosef Kaplan
6. Kibbutz Ma’apilim al shem Zvi Brandes in Feldafing
7. Kibbutz al shem Fareinigte Partizaner Organizatye in Vilna (FPO)
8. Kibbutz BaDerech
9. Kibbutz LaMered
10. Kibbutz BaMa’avak
11. Kibbutz LeShichur
12. Kibbutz Vatikim in Herzog (July 1946)
13. Kibbutz Vatikim in Schlifing (older kibbutz with families)
14. Kibbutz Bachazit (older kibbutz with couples and babies)

(There was apparently another kibbutz named after Shmuel Breslaw, but correspondence between it and the central leadership is not available).

16. From the preface to the diary, Shaltiel, ed., HaYoman: Kibbutz Lochamei HaGetaot al Shem Tosia Altman.

17. For more on her experiences during the war, see Miriam Wind, “Be-vatei keleh Sovyetim (1939–1940),” Yalkut Moreshet 26 (1978): 159–86.

of sixty children (aged seven to eleven) from Poland to Germany in 1946 and eventually reached Palestine.


20. Zilberfarb to leadership, March 23, 1946, Hashomer Hatzair Archives, (1)38.2, cited in Sarid, Be-Mivchan he-Anut veha-Pдут, 284. In the words of one emissary: “One needs a great deal of strength of spirit in order to create from this material a new type of man . . . it will take quite a few days and months effort (plowing) for them to be like us . . . we are working and endeavoring to serve as an example and a symbol in our private lives and behavior.”


24. Interview with the author, June 7, 2003, Jerusalem, Israel.


26. Ibid., 190–91.

27. Ibid., 203.

28. Ibid., 184.

29. Ibid., 185.

30. Ibid., 198–201.


32. Shaltiel, HaYoman, 48. In one incident in Bytom, Baruch, the madrich, staged a theft in order to have a pretext to collect zlotys from kibbutz members who refused to share (45).

33. Shaltiel, HaYoman, 29. At the kibbutz asefa on September 13, 1945, the kibbutz voted to expel the “lazy” Yakov HaSandlar.

34. After the first postwar Zionist conference in August 1945 in London, the brief period of postwar youth movement unity ended as Hashomer Hatzair broke off from the other movements. Under pressure from Meir Ya’ari and the leadership of Hashomer Hatzair in the Yishuv, Chaika Grossman split off from her wartime comrades in Dror, despite her reservations to the contrary.

35. Shaltiel, HaYoman, 26.

36. Ibid., 27.

37. This timetable meant that Kibbutz Tosia Altman, in fact, preceded much of the Bri’cha from Poland, with the majority of the eighty thousand “infiltrtees” arriving between April and October 1946 into the DP camps from Poland. See YIVO Archives, MK483, DP Germany, reel 3, folder 29, no. 63, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.


39. Shaltiel, HaYoman, 66.

40. Ibid., 62.

41. Ibid., 63.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 64.
44. Ibid., 64, from Monish’s description of the trial.
45. Monish (Einhorn) Haran, interview with the author, June 7, 2003, Jerusalem, Israel.
46. Noted in interview with Monish Haran, June 7, 2003, in Shaltiel, HaYoman, 64.
47. See Patt, Finding Home and Homeland, chap. 6.
48. Finally, added to the political symbolism of this choice was the potential for the Zionist settlement on German soil to act as a postwar tool of revenge. The occupation of Julius Streicher’s estate by Kibbutz Nili in Pleikhershof took on this added level of meaning. As one of its members explained the names of the kibbutz dogs to Leo Schwarz, “Their names are Julius and Streicher. They obey and protect us! It’s a pity to humiliate innocent animals with such swinish names. But we couldn’t resist the temptation.” Leo Schwarz, The Redeemers: A Saga of the Years 1945–1952 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953), 100. For a discussion of marriage and procreation as a form of revenge, see Atina Grossmann, “Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1948,” in Life after Death, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, 115 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).