Immigration, Ideology, and Public Activity from an American Jewish Perspective

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Immigration, Ideology,
and Public Activity from an American Jewish Perspective

A Journey across Three Continents

By

Zohar Segev

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Preface

The names Aryeh Tartakower, Aryeh Kubovy, Jacob Robinson, and Benjamin Akzin are unfamiliar to the public. Nor do they feature much in scholarship on the formation of the state of Israel or on American Jewry in the first half of the 20th century.

Yet the long days I spent in various archives and the many hours during which I peered at the computer screen revealed a very different story. These figures continually cropped up in the context of the most dramatic events linked to Jewish life during the first half of the twentieth century in the USA and in Israel.

The personal archives of Tartakower, Kubovy, Robinson and Akzin, along with documents related to them found in the archives of various organizations, constitute a priceless treasure for the historian. These men deliberated, struggled, and operated during the most dramatic period in modern Jewish existence. Their stories teach us historians how important it is to examine the “second level” of political activists and organizations, and not only the top echelon of political leadership. Perusal of the personal archives of the historical figures featured in the book reveals that they are less well ordered than the official archives of leaders such as David Ben-Gurion, Haim Weizmann, Abba Hillel Silver, or Steven Wise. We may assume that our protagonists themselves collected and put their documents in order, without an intermediary administrative layer, which means that the material remained virtually uncensored. The perspective of those who actually did the job is refreshing and innovative and displays events that appeared cut and dried in a new light. The documents of the book’s protagonists reveal that owing to their relatively short sojourns in the USA they felt rather alienated from American society and from the Jewish community in particular, despite the important roles they played in leading Jewish organizations. It is precisely this sense of alienation and marginalization emerging from their documents and writings that affords us a fascinating perspective on fundamental issues relating to the US Jewish community in general and to the intricate inter-relationship between the US Diaspora and the Jewish society in Palestine and Israel.

 The debate on these issues is not confined to the historical events of the first half of the twentieth century and remains highly relevant to this day. Our four protagonists adopted a complex world view. While they supported the founding of a Jewish state and viewed this as the most important event in modern Jewish life, they did not consider the Jewish state to override all else and favored the continuation of Jewish life in the Diaspora alongside the state of Israel. They believed that the Jewish Diaspora was far more than a negligible offshoot of sovereign Jewish existence in the land of Israel and constituted a viable political and organizational entity that maintained a nuanced and significant reciprocal relationship with the state of Israel.

During the initial stages of collecting the documents and writings, I believed that the book would focus on the impact of the American arena on the protagonists’ worldview and public activity. Indeed, their sojourn in the USA did have a major impact on the worldviews and modus operandi of the figures
I studied. This is significant since, although they did not become political leaders of the first order in Israel, they did play key roles in shaping the complexion of Israeli society and displayed a singular worldview with regard to the patterns whereby Jewish nationality and the state of Israel should evolve. The present research reinforces the perception that the USA impacted the Zionist movement, Jewish society in Palestine, and the state of Israel rather more than appears at first glance.

The further I proceeded in my research, the more it became apparent that the issue of American influence covered only one aspect of the fascinating content of the documents relating to Tartakower, Kubovy, Robinson, and Akzin. This material adds a further layer to historical scholarship and affords us an additional perspective on the dramatic events in which these men participated during the first half of the twentieth century in the USA. Of particular interest is the role they played in the supreme effort to rescue European Jewry and in the struggle to establish a Jewish state as part of the political arrangements put into place following World War ii.

A feature of historical scholarship is the isolation of the scholar. Unlike those in other disciplines, we generally sit alone reading in archives and write articles and books on our own, without co-authors. Yet this view is somewhat deceptive. The work of historians in general and on this book in particular depends on the help of other scholars, friends, and family.

Archival documents form the foundation of the historical research that led to the writing of this book. My research could not have proceeded without the devoted assistance and professional input of archive personnel in the USA and in Israel. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the team at the Central Zionist Archive in Jerusalem; the Archive of the American Jewish Historical Society, New York; the Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem; the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum in Hyde Park, New York; the Jabotinsky Institute Archive in Tel Aviv; the Labor Party Archives in Beit Berl, Israel; and the Ben-Gurion Archives at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism at Sde Boker, Israel.

I extend my special thanks to Gary Zola, head of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH and to its staff. Professor Zola and his team have created a most pleasant and homely ambience in the archive alongside their uncompromising professionalism. The most generous grants I received from the Cincinnati archive along with the wonderful physical conditions I enjoyed at the archive and campus of the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati were instrumental in enabling me to completemy research.

Historical research conducted on two continents presents a financial challenge of its own. My work would not have been possible without the generous research grant I received from the D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum in Hyde Park, New York, and the support of Haifa University and its rector at the time of writing, Professor Gustavo Mash. In 1952 a stamp was issued in Israel to mark the inauguration of the Zionist Organization of America building in Tel Aviv, which symbolizes the complex relationship between Israel and the US Jewish community. The stamp appears on the cover of the book. My heartfelt thanks to the staff of the Philatelic Service – Israel Post and to the Finance Ministry for their permission to use this image.

I am deeply indebted to the friends and fellow scholars whose advice I sought while writing the book: Professor Anita Shapira, Professor Mark A. Raider, Professor Gary Zola, Professor Daniel Gutwein, Professor Hasia R. Diner, Professor David Myers, Professor Aviva Halamish, Professor Pamela Nadell, Professor Ofer Schiff, Professor Jonathan D. Sarna, Professor Orit Rozin, Professor Meir Hazan, Professor Tony Michels, and Professor Tuvia Friling. Their comments helped to remove obstacles, throw light on difficulties, and define research questions. My conversations with them opened new research perspectives and they offered their assistance with heartwarming generosity. The process of writing the book in English could not have proceeded without the assistance and dedication of Ms. Merav Datan. I am extremely thankful to Merav, without whom this project would not have materialized. The Department of Jewish History and the Faculty of the Humanities of Haifa University provided me a welcoming home during the writing of the book.
I thank them for supporting me over these many years.

Last but certainly not least, the team at Brill Publications, who brought this project to its conclusion. Every author would be delighted to work with such a professional, friendly, and pleasant publishing team. My special thanks to Dr. Erika Mandarino, Associate Editor, Ancient Near East and Jewish Studies, to Mr. Lloyd Cabasag, who oversaw the book’s production, and to the series editor Professor Joshua Holo.

The intricate process of turning historical research into a manuscript accessible to the reader could not have taken place without close collaboration with my partner Na’ama. Thanks to her sharp observation and constructive criticism the quality of the manuscript was enhanced no end.

During the writing of the book our lives here in Haifa on the shore of the Mediterranean and on Mount Carmel underwent a far-reaching transformation. New family cells were built, our children left home, returned, and once again went out into the world. Against the splendid backdrop of the Mediterranean Sea, a wonderful, varied, and empowering fabric of life was woven. I dedicate this book to my partner Na’ama, to her children and mine, and to their partners and children.

Introduction

1 A Journey across Three Continents

In 1978 Aryeh Tartakower, a Zionist activist, sociology professor at the Hebrew University, and one of the founders of Israeli sociology, wrote a letter to his sister informing her of his decision to donate most of his capital and his library to a memorial center commemorating his son. Yohanan, Tartakower’s only son, had enlisted in the American army and been deployed to France, where he fell in battle on September 29, 1944. Tartakower’s life story and the death of his son embody the complex and dramatic nature of Jewish reality in the twentieth century.

Born in Brody, Galicia, Tartakower (1897–1982) immigrated with his family to Vienna in 1914. He studied law at the University of Vienna, during which time he was also intensely active in the Socialist-Zionist Jewish youth movement HaShomer HaTza‌ʾir (“The Young Guard”). He was conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army, participated in fighting in Italy, and was discharged with the rank of an officer. In 1920 Tartakower received a Doctor of Law degree and immediately thereafter emigrated to Palestine, where he maintained a pioneering lifestyle, as was customary among immigrants of the Third Aliyah (the third wave of Jewish immigration to pre-state Israel, 1919–1923). In 1922, having contracted malaria, he returned to Vienna.

After several years in Vienna, during which he earned a second doctorate, in political science, Tartakower returned to Poland. He was very active in various sectors of the labor movement in Poland. Among other activities he served as coordinator of the youth movement HaHalutz (“The Pioneer”), established a network of bilingual Polish and Hebrew schools, and served as president of the Central Jewish Emigration Society in Poland – jeas. He was also a member of the Łódź City Council and, beginning in 1927, a regular participant in the Zionist congresses. After the 1939 Zionist Congress, Tartakower, unable to return to Poland, immigrated to the United States, where he served as chairman of the Welfare and Relief Committee of the World Jewish Congress (wjc). Following the Nazi invasion, his wife Malka and his son managed to reach Polish territories that had been captured by the Soviet Union. In the course of their dramatic escape, mother and son were separated and the former was deported to Siberia. Yohanan managed to establish contact with Tartakower, who sent him a Guatemalan passport with which he travelled from Russia to Japan and from there to the United States. At a later stage Tartakower was also able to rescue his wife.

In addition to his public activities, Tartakower engaged in a wide range of academic activities in the field of sociology. In 1923, after completing his doctorate in political science at the University of Vienna on top of his 1920 doctorate in law from the same institution, he began working as a political science instructor at the Institute for Jewish Studies in Warsaw. In 1946 he was appointed a faculty member at the Hebrew University and moved to Palestine. Aside from his prolific academic work as a professor of the sociology of the Jewish People at the Hebrew University, Tartakower continued to engage in public activity in the Israeli arena and served, among other positions, as director of the WJC’s Israel office.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Like Tartakower, Zionist activists from all sectors of the Zionist movement followed a similar journey.[[2]](#footnote-2) Aryeh Leon Kubowitzki (later Kubovy), a lawyer and Zionist activist, served as chairman of the WJC’s Rescue Department during World War ii, later as the organization’s secretary-general, and after immigrating to Israel as envoy to Czechoslovakia and Poland, ambassador to Argentina, and chairman of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jacob Robinson founded the Institute of Jewish Affairs and later served as legal advisor for the Jewish Agency, was active at the United Nations, served as special advisor on Jewish issues at the Nuremberg trials, and played a key role in formulating the prosecution’s case at the Eichmann trial.[[4]](#footnote-4) Benjamin Akzin, while in the US, served as secretary of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs in Washington and, from 1949, as a professor of political science and constitutional law at the Hebrew University in Israel.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The historical figures in this book immigrated to the United States from Europe in the 1930s against the background of the existential crisis that had befallen European Jewry, which reached its tragic culmination with the Holocaust. The Jews who emigrated from Europe to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s encountered many difficulties stemming from the strict US immigration laws of the time. Notably, the dire condition of European Jews between the two world wars generally, and after the Nazi rise to power in Germany in particular, did not prompt the US to change its immigration policy regarding Jews. Among the many studies on this issue, which are too numerous to review here, a majority are strongly critical of the American immigration policy at the time. Some researchers have also emphasized President Roosevelt’s inability to change the immigration laws, given the pervasive opposition to such a move among a substantial majority of senators and congressional representatives from the Democratic and Republican parties alike.[[6]](#footnote-6) Accordingly, for broad cross-sections of European Jewry, immigration to the United States was not a viable option. Yet, unlike the European Jewish masses, the historical figures in this book had special standing as Zionist public activists between the two world wars and extensive ties with American Jewish organizations and key figures in the American Jewish community, which enabled them to immigrate to the United States.

The ties between the figures appearing in the book and the American Jewish arena represent the tip of an iceberg: between the two world wars, a dramatic shift took place in the reciprocal relations between US Jewry and Jewish communities in Europe. During World War i, and even more so after the war ended, American Jewish organizations became increasingly involved with Jewish communities in Europe generally and in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. This increased engagement was facilitated by an improvement in the socioeconomic status of the Jewish immigrant community in the United States. The process of empowerment that the American Jewish community underwent is attributable to the rapid integration of second- and third-generation East European Jewish immigrants in the economy and social fabric of major urban centers, particularly on the East Coast. Despite inherent tensions between the East European immigrant community and American Jewish elites from German-speaking territories, the two communities underwent a process of unification. Distinct illustrations of this process include the American Zionist movement and the Jewish Reform movement. Abba Hillel Silver, for example, was born to an Orthodox Jewish family in Lithuania and at age eleven immigrated to the United States, where in 1917 he was appointed as rabbi of the Jewish community in Cleveland – one of the prominent Reform communities in the United States, whose membership comprised a considerable proportion of immigrants from German-speaking territories. Conversely, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, whose family had emigrated from Prague, served as president of the Zionist Organization of America, the vast majority of whose members in the US belonged to the Eastern European Jewish immigrant community.[[7]](#footnote-7) The integration of Eastern European immigrants, in combination with the growing status of American Jewish elites from German-speaking countries and American society’s willingness to accept and accommodate US Jews’ community activism, created a unique range of possibilities for meaningful ethnic Jewish activity in the American arena and in Europe. The power of the Jewish community in United States was particularly striking in light of the events in Europe during the inter-war period. The situation in post-World War i Europe subjected the Western European Jewish communities to a continuous state of political and economic weakness. Meanwhile, Jewish communities in Eastern and Central Europe were in a constant and ever-increasing state of crisis throughout the inter-war period. The Nazis’ rise to power in Germany in 1933 exacerbated the situation and accelerated these trends, leading to their dramatic culmination following the outbreak of World War ii.

Rogers Brubaker has described the difficult and complex challenges facing voluntary organizations that represent ethnic minorities scattered across different countries. These organizations seek to take practical action on behalf of their community while also being seen as the exclusive representatives of most members of a particular ethnic minority. In Brubaker’s view, this is impossible in practice for two reasons. First, the great diversity that typically characterizes an ethnic group does not allow for uniform representation. Second, members of the ethnic group are dispersed across various countries and primarily concerned with existential problems not necessarily linked to their belonging to a minority. Even if their existential problems are related to the realities of life as an ethnic minority, the needs of ethnic minorities vary significantly across different countries. In fact, at times these needs discernibly vary among members of an ethnic group even within the boundaries of one state because of socioeconomic differences among members of the group.[[8]](#footnote-8)

An examination of the activity of Jewish organization between the two world wars, during and after the Holocaust, indicates that the story of world Jewry during the first half of the twentieth century departs from Brubaker’s conceptualization, necessitating a different set of evaluation tools. The crisis that befell European Jewry was exceptional in its intensity. It resulted in the exclusion of European Jews from all political, economic, cultural, and social systems, giving rise to a new reality in which all Jews faced similar problems. The intense state of crisis and the attacks against Jews were not merely the fate of individual communities in different countries. This was a collective phenomenon that, unlike the situation for other ethnic minorities, required a response of an ethnic, cross-border nature. The German, Polish, or Romanian Jew was not facing economic and political hardships related only to place of residence, but rather a pan-European phenomenon. Thus, in contrast to cases involving other minorities, American Jewish activism on behalf of the various Jewish communities of Europe was an organizational and ideological phenomenon of existential relevance for Jews between the two world wars. Indeed, an examination of US Jewish organizations’ patterns of activity during this period points to the emergence of a significant American Jewish organizational network that was active in Europe. In 1914 the Joint Distribution Committee (jdc) was founded, and 1936 marked the founding conference of the World Jewish Congress, which despite its designation as an international body was in fact an American Jewish organization. Simultaneously, existing Jewish organizations such as Bʾnai Bʾrith and the American Jewish Committee increased their efforts on behalf of European Jewry.[[9]](#footnote-9) Notably, between the two world wars, American Jewish organizations and individual donors also became increasingly involved with the Yishuv (Israel’s pre-state Jewish community). Examples include Hadassah (the Women’s Zionist Organization of America), Zionist philanthropies, Nathan Straus, and the Warburg family.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In any study it is essential to provide a narrow and concise definition of the field of research, and particularly in the case of a historical study dealing with knowledge relating to the modern era and characterized by a vast body of primary material. It goes without saying that other historically significant public figures undertook similar journeys across Europe, the United States, and Palestine during the same timeframe. The selection of figures relevant to this study was based on two interconnected criteria. The first criterion was that they had engaged in significant public activity in each of the three arenas – European, American, and Israeli. To be clear, I use the term “public activity” to refer to activity with organizational and political elements. Thus, the present study does not, for example, include writers and thinkers whose works focused on these issues. The second criterion, which relates to the first, involves a definition of the ideological and organizational circle to which the figures studied in this book belonged. For the present study, I chose to focus on figures who were active in various circles within the Zionist movement, from the labor movement to revisionism. Hence, for example, these definitions exclude Jacob Lestschinsky, a demographer, statistician, and historian who immigrated to the United States in 1938 and from there to Israel in 1958. Lestschinsky’s activities in the United States focused mainly on scholarship and philosophy. Although he immigrated to Israel in 1958, he was not active in Zionist circles while in the United States. Likewise, Raphael Mahler, recipient of the Israel Prize in the category of Jewish history, emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1937 and remained there until 1951, when he immigrated to Israel. He, too, was not active in the American Zionist arena, but rather focused most of his efforts on teaching and research at the yivo Institute for Jewish Research.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Other key members of the Zionist leadership in Palestine and the Zionist movement also spent significant periods of time in the United States, although they did not experience similar journeys across Europe, the United States, and Palestine. Of particular importance was a visit by Israel’s future prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and future president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who came to the United States during World War i.[[12]](#footnote-12) Beyond the fact that, unlike the historical figures in the book, they received considerable attention in the research, neither is a subject of the present study, because the time they spent in the United States did not have a decisive impact on them. There is no evidence to suggest that it substantively altered their worldview. Three factors may account for this lack of impact. The first relates to the relatively brief time they spent in the United States – only three years. Second, most of their activity in the United States took place within the community of first-generation Jewish immigrants to the United States from Eastern Europe. Their primary language was Yiddish and they had only limited exposure to the elements of Jewish and Zionist identity in the United States. As a consequence, the unique characteristics of American Jewish and Zionist identity, which had such a tremendous impact on the book’s protagonists, left almost no mark on Ben-Gurion or Ben-Zvi. At the personal level, the time he spent in the United States did have a significant impact on Ben-Gurion. It was during this visit that he married Paula Munweis (later Ben-Gurion). Yet even though she had received training as a nurse in New York and was fluent in English, her social network remained within the circles of first-generation immigrants. His marriage to Paula did not, therefore, expose Ben-Gurion to the world of US Jewry beyond this network. The third reason relates to the nature of Ben-Gurion’s and Ben-Zvi’s public activity in the United States. Neither of them worked for or through American Jewish organizations; their efforts focused solely on the Yishuv. The most striking example of this was their contribution to the formation of an “American Battalion” within the Jewish Legion. The battalion was composed mainly of volunteers from the first generation of East European Jewish immigrants to the United States, who joined the war effort in the Middle East and Palestine, as part of the British Army, during the later stages of the war. The nature of this activity reinforced Ben-Gurion’s and Ben-Zvi’s disengagement from broad sectors of US Jewry, aside from the community of first-generation immigrants, and curtailed any impact that their stay in the United States might have had on their worldview.[[13]](#footnote-13)

It goes without saying that the historical figures in this book did not view themselves as a distinct group, nor did they operate as such; however, an examination of their activities in the American arena indicates that all of them were active in the public and organizational efforts relating to the two primary struggles underway in the United States on behalf of Jews during and after World War ii. The first of these was the enormous and frustrating struggle to save Jews during the Holocaust and assist the survivors. The second struggle was for the establishment of a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine within the framework of the post-World War ii political arrangements. Of course, non-Zionist sectors of the American Jewish community, such as Agudat Yisrael and the American Jewish Committee, also participated in the large-scale endeavor to save European Jews. What distinguishes our protagonists is their combination of participation in these two struggles and their later immigration to Israel. After immigrating to Israel, they continued to be active in the public sphere, or to combine academic and public activity.

My exclusion of Nahum Goldmann from among the figures examined here probably deserves a special explanation. Nahum Goldmann (1895–1982) immigrated in 1942 to the United States, which became his main country of residence for the next few decades. Aside from the fact that the vast scope of his public activity would necessitate a separate study, and although he continuously held senior positions in the Zionist movement and the wjc, he remained what one might term a “citizen of the world.” He did not make Israel the center of his life or the basis of his public activity, and despite his prominence in the Israeli public arena, his activities centered on Jewish organizations around the world and the Zionist movement beyond Israel’s boundaries.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The fact that this book’s historical figures emigrated from Europe to the United States as public figures helps explain the absence of women from this group. Thanks to Hadassah and its activities, women did have a significant presence in the Zionist public arena in the United States. David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency and later the first prime minister of Israel, wrote in 1941, “The largest Zionist organization in America – and of course the most important one – is Hadassah.” Hadassah’s unique status in the Yishuv, the Zionist movement, and the United States meant that despite opposition by the male establishment of the Zionist Organization of America, there was a substantial presence of women in the Zionist public arena in the United States. For reasons beyond the scope of the present study, this was not the situation in the Zionist arenas of Europe and the Yishuv; the absence of women reflects the situation there, which differed from the American reality.[[15]](#footnote-15) Golda Meyerson, later Meir, a future Israeli prime minister, immigrated as a child to the United States in 1906 and to Palestine in 1921. Henrietta Szold was born in Baltimore, USA in 1860 and immigrated to Palestine in 1933. Both do not meet the criteria for inclusion in the present study. Despite this, the activities of American Jewish women in Palestine and the State of Israel and especially Szold and other leaders of the Hadassah organization, such as Rose Halprin and Rose Jacobs, served as a model to examine the American Zionist influence on the Zionist movement, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Journeys across Europe, the United States, and Israel, combined with intensive public activity in three different arenas, are a fascinating topic in their own right, but their importance goes beyond that. Drawing on the papers of Tartakower, Robinson, and Kubovy, I wish to address three main issues in this book. The first is the influence of the American arena on the worldview and public activity of the book’s protagonists. In my view, their time in the United States had a decisive impact on their worldview and modes of public activity. This is significant because, even though they did not have senior political leadership positions, they played key roles in shaping the image of Israeli society, and they presented a unique worldview regarding paths to the consolidation of Jewish nationalism and the State of Israel. Immigration to Palestine and the State of Israel from the United States did not take the form of a significant social phenomenon. Even notable historical events, such as the founding of Israel in 1948 and the Six-Day War in 1967, drew only small numbers of immigrants,
a very sizable proportion of whom returned to the United States.[[17]](#footnote-17) The small numbers of Jewish immigrants from the United States to Palestine and later Israel, in combination with the minimal presence of US immigrants in important leadership positions in the Yishuv and the State of Israel, contributed to the prevailing view that US Jewry had only a minimal impact in terms of shaping and building the Yishuv and, after 1948, the State of Israel. The inherent American influence on our protagonists’ continuous journey of immigration is supplemented by additional evidence of a substantive American impact on the pre-state and Israeli arena. Examples include Hadassah’s activities in the sphere of healthcare, Judah Leib Magnes’s service as president of the Hebrew University, Henrietta Szold’s activities as head of the Jewish National Council’s education and social services division, and the contribution of American Zionist leaders and activists such as Stephen S. Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, and Emanuel Neumann to the Zionist movement within and outside the United States. The present study reinforces the hypothesis that the American influence on the Zionist movement, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel was more significant than it appears at first glance. The book will examine the patterns of public activity, research, and publicist writings of our protagonists after their immigration to Israel in light of American influences.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The second issue to be explored relates to the unique nature of our protagonists’ public activity. They held key positions in the organizational network of US Jewry. Naturally, the relative weight of each sphere of activity varied among the four figures. Thus, for example, Kubovy, who chaired the WJC’s Rescue Department during World War ii, worked mainly on issues related to the rescue of European Jews, while Akzin devoted most of his efforts to the establishment of a Jewish state. For understandable reasons, after World War ii, Jewish public activity in the United States shifted its focus to the struggle on behalf of Holocaust survivors, restoration of Jewish communities in Europe, and the establishment of a Jewish state. In contrast to their American Jewish colleagues’ efforts in the 1940s, and given that they became involved in public activity in the US almost immediately after immigrating there, the protagonists of this book maintained close ties – to the extent possible given the reality of a world war – with European Jewry. At the same time, their intensive engagement in the Zionist movement beyond the American arena also enabled them to maintain close reciprocal relations with Zionist activists and organizations in the world generally and the Yishuv specifically. Similarly, in their later public activity, after immigrating to Palestine or Israel, they remained in continuous contact with the American arena from which they had emigrated and, to the extent possible, Jewish communities in Europe. Their unique position at the center of Zionist and Jewish activity during and after World War ii makes their archival papers an important and fascinating repository for the historian. In many cases their personal archives add another layer to historical research and provide the researcher with an additional perspective on the dramatic events in which our protagonists were involved. Kubovy’s papers, for example, provide new information about the WJC’s approach to the bombing of Auschwitz; Benjamin Akzin’s archives contribute valuable information about the Exodus affair (involving a ship transporting illegal immigrants); Aryeh Tartakower’s letters shed light on efforts in the United States to rescue European Jews; and the documentation on Jacob Robinson’s activities contributes important information to our understanding of the Eichmann trial.

The third issue I wish to examine in this book also relates to the unique nature of the immigration path presented here. Our protagonists’ papers reveal that because their stay in the United States was relatively brief, and despite the important positions they held in the American organizational network, they felt somewhat like foreigners in American society generally and its Jewish community specifically. Yet it is precisely this sense of foreignness and marginality, as expressed in their archival papers and writings, that provides a fascinating perspective on fundamental questions surrounding the American Jewish community in general and the intricate reciprocal relations between the American Diaspora, on the one hand, and the Yishuv and (after 1948) the State of Israel, on the other. Despite their sense of foreignness and the relatively brief nature of their stay in the United States, it constituted a significant period with a strong impact on the worldviews of the figures examined in this book. Accordingly, what they wrote in Israel regarding fundamental questions about the composition of the Jewish People and the relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community provides an excellent starting point for contributing to the discussion on the complex interrelationship between the State of Israel and US Jewry.

In addition to discussing these three issues, the book will devote a separate chapter to American Zionism and the World Jewish Congress, in which I will briefly present their ideological foundation and their relationship with the central Zionist leadership that emerged in the Yishuv during the first half of the twentieth century. From its beginning in 1897, American Zionism had a unique worldview that distinguished it ideologically and operationally from its counterparts in Europe and the Yishuv.[[19]](#footnote-19) Because all the historical figures in this book operated in the American Zionist arena or in a context associated with the American Zionist movement, it is essential to consider the unique nature of Zionism in the United States in order to understand the influence of the American Jewish community on their worldview and modes of activity in the United States and Israel. Understanding the difference and uniqueness of American Zionism is also essential to understanding the difficulties confronted by the figures studied in this book. On the face of it they shifted from one arena of Zionist activity, the European one, to another, the American one, but in light of the fundamental differences between American and European Zionism, this was a complex, difficult, and challenging transition.

chapter 1

American Zionism

1 Zionism without Zion: Zionism from an American
Jewish Perspective

The emergence of the Zionist movement, under Herzl’s leadership, coincided with a massive wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States, from 1881 until 1924, when the borders were effectively closed to Jewish immigrants.[[20]](#footnote-20) American Zionist leaders had a unique interpretation of Zionism, which essentially aimed at granting legitimacy to Jewish life in the United States within the framework of the Zionist movement and, simultaneously, developing the Zionist movement in the United States as a political, public, and ideological means of improving and reinforcing the status of Jews within the American immigrant community.[[21]](#footnote-21) American Zionism was originally a poorly resourced minority movement, but over time – particularly after Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis became an active Zionist during World War i, and following the issuing of the Balfour Declaration – it became one of the major public forces among US Jews and played a key part in the dramatic events that the Jewish People experienced in the 1930s and 1940s.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The existential crisis of European Jewry began in the 1920s and reached its horrible climax in the Holocaust, led to a significant change in the relationship between American Jewry and the Zionist movement in its first phase and to the state of Israel in its second. The result was overwhelming support for a Jewish state. The process had begun gradually since the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the end of World War i. It grew notably stronger with the Nazi rise to power in Germany followed by ever-growing knowledge about the Final Solution. The climax came with the unprecedented political and economic support of American Jewry for establishing the state of Israel and for supporting the state during its first decade. It is hard to see how the state could even have come into being without that support.[[23]](#footnote-23)

However, support for Jewish sovereignty in Palestine was just one element in American Zionist identity – and not necessarily the most important one.

Just how minor the Jewish state issue was, historically, in the United States, was clear even to American Jews who defined themselves as part of the Zionist movement. Stephen Wise and Richard Gottheil were among the important founding leaders of American Zionism. Both devoted considerable intellectual efforts to creating an ideological synthesis that would serve as a bridge between Herzl’s thinking and American-style Zionism. The former, a Reform rabbi, was among the founders of the Zionist movement in the United States and one of the most prominent American Zionist leaders until his death in 1949. In his memoirs he described his participation as an American Zionist Federation delegate to the Second Zionist Congress in 1898 in Basel, as well as his first meeting with Herzl on that occasion, as the most important formative event of his life.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Wise’s decision to become a Zionist activist in the United States and in the World Zionist Organization is not self-evident. His decision to support Zionism was an unusual one within the Jewish community of Central European heritage to which his family belonged, and it flew in the face of the anti-Zionist stance held by most Reform rabbis in the United States during those years.[[25]](#footnote-25) Wise explained his decision to join the Zionist movement as stemming from the education and values instilled in him by his family, and he recounted childhood experiences that included saving pennies so that he could donate them to emissaries from the Yishuv. Zionism was, in his words, in his blood, and it became a central facet of his personality as a result of his father’s enthusiastic Zionism, which he described as one of his earliest and sweetest childhood memories.[[26]](#footnote-26) Wise did not regard Herzlian Zionism as a revolutionary movement aimed at changing the fate of the Jewish People, but rather as the natural extension of Jewish history. In this spirit, he included philanthropic expressions of proto-Zionist Jewish solidarity in his definition of Zionism, and he described his father as having given him a Zionist education in his childhood even though the movement itself had not yet been founded.[[27]](#footnote-27) Wise’s conclusions regarding the importance of the Zionist movement in Jewish history should be understood in the context of the scholarly and ideological debate over different approaches regarding the sources of Jewish nationalism generally and the Zionist movement specifically. A central theme of this debate was whether Jewish nationalism represents continuity or discontinuity relative to the Jewish history that preceded it. In the opening pages of his memoirs Wise blurred and downplayed the innovative and revolutionary elements of the Zionist movement, focusing instead on its elements of continuity and thereby lending support to the worldview that emphasized the elements of continuity in Jewish nationalism and Zionism.

Wise’s remarks on the first page of his autobiography are the exception that proves the rule. They should be understood in the context of the time in which they were written and their publication soon after the Holocaust of European Jewry and the founding of the State of Israel. One might surmise that Wise, a politician and Jewish public figure in the United States and the global Zionist movement, believed it was appropriate to underscore the elements of continuity and inclusion in Jewish history on the first page of his memoirs as a way of explaining his decision to become a Zionist. He was seeking to present a view that correlated with the trends prevalent in the Jewish community at the time, even though in other situations, as we shall see, he presented entirely different views and rationales, which are attributable to his unique outlook as an American Zionist.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In the summer of 1929, Wise delivered a lecture at a conference in memory of Herzl. In his opening remarks he asserted that Herzl had reshaped the Jewish People and changed the patterns of public activity of Jewish elites.[[29]](#footnote-29) Before Herzl’s time, some Jews, whom Wise defined as powerful, would provide aid to needy Jews through philanthropic efforts, but never in conjunction with the Jewish masses. Herzl changed all of that by turning collaborative efforts involving Jews from all socioeconomic sectors into the basis of Jewish life. In Wise’s view, evidently, Herzl thereby created a genuine, firmly grounded Jewish solidarity that became an essential element of the renewed national Jewish reality. Wise went on to explain that, in the era preceding Herzl, the public discourse on problems related to Jewish existence had been the purview of non-Jews, who often proposed solutions that were then imposed on Jews. The Jews would, at most, try to minimize the damage inflicted on them. Wise described this situation as “tragic” and stressed that in those days Jews did not consider what they themselves might do to overcome what he had previously termed “Jewish issues.” In his view the situation changed completely as a result of efforts by Herzl, who transformed the “Jewish issues” into an issue within the Jewish purview. Before Herzl’s time anti-Semitism had been the driving force of Jewish life, and Jews were limited to responding to the hardships it generated. Often Jews were convinced by the anti-Jewish reasoning of anti-Semites and tried to alter their Jewishness accordingly or blur their distinct identity as Jews. Herzl transformed the situation by making Zionism the central, proactive, and driving force of Jewish life, a force that did not succumb to anti-Semitism, but rather fostered Jewish pride. Wise compared Herzl’s significance and importance in Jewish history to that of the Messiah, and explained that the internal Jewish transformation engendered by his efforts was greatest of miracles.[[30]](#footnote-30)

In the same lecture, Wise expounded on the elements of innovation in Herzl’s character and teachings. He gave special emphasis to Herzl’s revolutionary impact on the awakening of Jewish solidarity: After World War i, Jewish solidarity and activity on behalf of world Jewry became a central feature of American Jewish organizations and the American Zionist movement. Wise criticized the philanthropic, elitist nature of the Jewish financial elites’ activity before Herzl’s time, as compared to the cooperative, democratic style of Jewish activity inspired by Herzl’s efforts. Wise’s remarks in this regard relate directly to the nature of his own political and public activity in the Jewish world. For many years, he strove to establish an international Jewish organization whose main objectives would be to democratize the Jewish world and counteract the Jewish philanthropists and the philanthropic nature of their organizations.[[31]](#footnote-31) These principles were implemented in practice when the World Jewish Congress was established in 1936, following prolonged labor pains that had begun in the early 1930s.[[32]](#footnote-32) One can identify many parallels between those elements of Herzl’s teachings that Wise emphasized and the foundations on which the wjc, which he founded, was intended to operate within the Jewish world for the sake of Jewish communities that needed its help, throughout the world and in Eastern Europe in particular. Wise sought to draw legitimacy from Herzl and his teachings so as to reinforce his own standing in the American arena, as a counterweight to the power of the Jewish financial elites in the United States.

His 1929 lecture was not the only occasion on which he used Herzlian Zionism to try to shape the Jewish community in the United States. Although Wise placed the struggle against Jewish elites at the top of his public agenda, from the very beginning of his public activity he recognized the need to expand the circle of members and supporters of the Zionist movement in the United States so as to include the educated and wealthy socioeconomic strata, in addition to the first generation of Eastern European immigrants who already supported the Zionist movement and whom he identified as poor. Wise explained that in order to change the situation it was necessary for Herzl to visit the United States for a few weeks. Herzl’s education, rhetorical skills, and Central European heritage were key factors in Wise’s effort to change the American perception of Zionism as East European in nature and to recruit Jews from Central Europe and Germany to the Zionist movement.[[33]](#footnote-33)

It is important to examine Wise’s 1929 lecture on Herzl and his teachings from another angle as well. Wise ignored the most central aspect of Herzl’s teachings and the Zionist plan he formulated – namely, the territorial concentration of Jews in Palestine. This omission is particularly striking given that the lecture was delivered in 1929, more than a decade after the Balfour Declaration and in the midst of intensive Zionist settlement in Palestine. Wise’s non-inclusion of the principle of territorial concentration might be attributable to differences in the way American and European Zionism developed. US Zionists refrained from identifying Aliyah (Jewish immigration to the historical Land of Israel) as a key element of their ideology and action. They transformed Zionism into a core aspect of the fabric of their lives within American society, rather than a means of pursuing Aliyah.

Wise’s omission of the issue of anti-Semitism might be viewed in the same vein. Herzl and commentators on his teachings often emphasized anti-Semitism as a key factor that contributed to Herzl’s transformation into a Zionist and projected onto the Zionist movement, whose very emergence must be understood in light of the intensity of anti-Semitism in Europe. Yet in the United States, unlike Europe, anti-Semitism was not a major factor shaping Jewish life.[[34]](#footnote-34) For this reason Wise ignored the issue of anti-Semitism and chose to highlight the elements of modernism, independence, and national pride, which in his view had become inseparable aspects of Jewish life, particularly in the United States, in light of Herzl’s efforts. By stressing these elements, he was emphasizing the status of the Jewish community in the United States and its full integration into American society, which accorded with his personal efforts and worldview throughout all the years of his public activity.[[35]](#footnote-35) Conversely, he refrained from mentioning the problem of anti-Semitism, as raising the issue might have created the impression of a divide between the American Jewish community and American society at large.

Stephen Wise was not the only one who applied Herzl’s teachings to American reality. Richard Gottheil, a professor of Semitic languages at Columbia University, president of the American Federation of Zionists from 1898 to 1904, and like Wise a founder of the American Zionist movement, also presented a clear and systematic doctrine regarding the unique course of development of Herzlian Zionism in the American arena. Notwithstanding their collaboration in the United States, however, one can discern a difference in the nature of Wise’s and Gottheil’s Zionist activities. Although Gottheil was a member of the Zionist General Council and the delegate to several Zionist congresses, his Zionist activism centered primarily on the United States; Wise, whose Zionist activity took place mainly in the United States as well, also devoted a significant portion of his time to the global Zionist movement. As a result, Gottheil was not exposed to the political and public limitations that Wise encountered in the World Zionist Organization and, accordingly, he was not deterred from highlighting the unique integration of Herzlian Zionism into the United States and did not choose to blur the differences between American and European Zionism. In this spirit, Gottheil asserted that Herzl’s objective was not the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. He believed that Herzl sought to create a safe haven for East European Jews. Conceivably, his emphasis on the East European dimension of Herzl’s ideology and action was meant to speak to Jewish immigrants in the United States, a decisive majority of whom were from Eastern Europe and were very troubled by developments there. A territorial concentration of Jews with limited autonomy under the patronage of one of the liberal superpowers of the time served this aim most effectively, as compared with an independent state whose existence would be far more precarious and achievement far more difficult.[[36]](#footnote-36) As proof, Gottheil cited the Basel Program (the first manifesto of the Zionist movement), which referred to a “national home” rather than a “Jewish state.” According to him, the term “national home” was inserted not in order to blur or distort the aims of the Zionist movement, nor to downplay the international opposition to its establishment, but rather because Herzl and the movement’s founders did not view the establishment of an independent Jewish state as their objective. Gottheil was aware that many Zionists around the world regarded an independent state as the goal of the movement, but he asserted that these views were only voiced by individuals without authority, who were acting without supervision and illogically because of their desire to establish an independent Jewish state in Palestine.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Gottheil recognized the difficulties of adapting European Zionism to American reality. He noted that Zionism had emerged in the midst of the adversity facing European Jewry, an adversity that did not have a direct bearing on the fate of US Jews, and described the American Reform movement’s resistance to Zionism as a clear indication of the complexity of incorporating Zionism into the fabric of Jewish life in the United States.[[38]](#footnote-38) The fact that US Jews did not need Palestine as a refuge did not, in his view, negate the need to integrate Herzlian Zionism into the life of American Jewry. He believed that the main role of Zionism as a secular, modern movement lay not in the territorial concentration of world Jewry in Palestine, which was pragmatically impossible and would not in fact address the needs of Western Jews generally or US Jews specifically. He regarded Zionism as the foremost means of safeguarding Jewish solidarity and ensuring the continued existence of the Jewish People in their countries of residence, given that the Jewish religion no longer served as a tool for preserving Jewish unity in light of the secularization of Western Jewry and the rise of nationalism – a nationalism that required these Jews to integrate into their countries of residence and adopt the customs and language of the land, thereby threatening the continued existence of the Jewish People in the United States and the Western world. The mass immigration of East European Jewry to the United States prevented them from realizing the existential threat facing US Jews, in Gottheil’s view, but the moment waves of Orthodox Jews stopped arriving at the shores of the United States, American Jews would face the threat of extinction – unless they adopted Zionism, in its American version, as their leading ideology.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The concept of “American Zionism” was liable to pose many difficulties, foremost among which was the issue of dual loyalty.[[40]](#footnote-40) Gottheil gave prime consideration to this problem, arguing that there was no contradiction between membership in the Zionist movement and American citizenship:[[41]](#footnote-41) The state cannot demand that its citizens renounce their familial and ethnic history, given that it constitutes an essential element of the American fabric of life, and in this sense American Jews are no different from Americans of German or Irish heritage, who have established a range of ethnic organizations that contribute to American society. Moreover, Gottheil argued, international Zionist activity in the format he proposed renders the issue of dual loyalty irrelevant, because Zionism in this form serves to guide and regulate global Jewish efforts on behalf of the Yishuv, rather than constituting a centralized international organization with defined political objectives. Such a Zionist movement does not offer its members an alternative to citizenship, especially if one considers Gottheil’s explanations that the movement did not seek to bring all the Jews to Palestine, and that its goal was not the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state there.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Gottheil’s view of the essence of Zionism in Western countries generally and the United States specifically can also be understood in light of his earlier approach to this issue. In December 1900 Gottheil defined Zionism as an intense longing to be a better Jew, with the aim of becoming a better person. Such an interpretation of Herzlian Zionism makes use, in a way unique to that period, of particularistic Zionist ideology for the sake of universal aims. The significance of belonging to the Zionist movement, according to Gottheil, goes beyond the narrow boundaries of the Jewish People; it has positive implications for human society in general and for the nations among which Jews live as individuals.[[43]](#footnote-43) It is hard not to notice the similarity between Gottheil’s remarks in 1900 and Louis Brandeis’s famous definition of Zionism: “To be good Americans, we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Gottheil’s remarks add another dimension to Brandeis’s view of the Zionist movement and indicate that the uniqueness of American Zionism is rooted in its inception and its founders’ awareness that the reality of life in the United States required adapting Herzlian ideology to the needs of the American Jewish community.

Historian Melvin Urofsky recounted a Zionist myth that was circulating on the eve of the First Zionist Congress in 1897, according to which American Zionism was composed of only two people, both of whom were considered mentally ill: Stephen Wise and Henrietta Szold.[[45]](#footnote-45) Notwithstanding their joint efforts to establish a Zionist movement in the United States, Szold differed from her American colleagues during Herzl’s time and from most of the American Zionist leaders who came later in that she chose to immigrate to Palestine and play a prominent public role there. Thus, Henrietta Szold’s worldview, in contrast to those of Wise and Gottheil, focused on Palestine, and in this sense, it was closer to Herzl’s outlook. Nonetheless, one can identify uniquely American elements in Szold’s Zionism, even in the context of her work in the Yishuv, and particularly in her efforts to moderate extremist expressions of Jewish nationalism in Palestine and promote the integration of the Yishuv and the future Jewish state into the fabric of the Middle East.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The myth Urofsky recounted portrays the leaders of American Zionism during Herzl’s time as an abnormal and delusional minority within the American Jewish community. Although American Zionism had indeed been a minority movement at the time of its inception, its founders were not a delusional minority, but rather leaders who recognized the unique character of US Jewry and worked hard to adapt Zionism to the American arena. Stephen Wise, Richard Gottheil, and Henrietta Szold belonged to the Jewish community that traced back to Central Europe and Germany, but their families were not among the community’s wealthy elite. The Zionist movement was a means by which they could integrate into American society. Through Zionism they cultivated elements of national pride that were suited to the American immigrant community. The Zionist movement and the national revival taking place in the Yishuv were a means of reinforcing their status in the United States, similar to the situation among other immigrant groups whose status in American society was influenced by impressions of their motherland in the United States.[[47]](#footnote-47) By promoting the Zionist movement in its American format, they could preserve the elements of Jewish unity and democracy that, in their view, were lacking in the ideology and activity of the philanthropic organizations of the German Jewish elite in the United States, into which Gottheil, Wise, and Szold could not fully integrate because of economic and cultural differences as well as differences of opinion regarding overall American social issues.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The uniqueness of Wise and Gottheil’s conception of Zionism, as distinct from the dominant approach in the Zionist movement, is starkly illustrated by a letter that Chaim Weizmann sent in the summer of 1919 to Felix Frankfurter, a Zionist activist, Harvard law professor, and future American Supreme Court justice. Weizmann, the most prominent European Zionist leader at the time and the future president of the Zionist movement, was writing in the context of a struggle between himself and Brandeis over the nature of the Zionist funding system in the aftermath of the Balfour Declaration. He presented his view of the fundamental principles of Zionism and described what differentiated his approach from that of Brandeis and Frankfurter, as representatives of American Zionism. He argued that Zionism was built on one fundamental principle, namely, international Jewish efforts within a national format for the sake of returning the Jews to Eretz Israel (the historical Land of Israel) and renewing Jewish life there. This was, in his view, the main objective of Zionism as a national movement, and all political and economic efforts should be in service of that goal. The stark differences between his Zionist outlook and the Zionist worldview of Brandeis and Frankfurter stemmed from the fact that Brandeis and Frankfurter’s Zionist activity was focused on the American arena, whereas Weizmann’s efforts on behalf of Zionism were focused on Palestine. He underscored these differences by closing his letter with the declaration that Brandeis could have been a prophet in Israel and Frankfurter could have played a part in the Zionist movement comparable to that of the Jewish socialist leader Ferdinand Lassal in the German labor movement, but instead Brandeis had chosen to be an American Supreme Court Justice and Frankfurter had chosen to be a professor of law at Harvard University.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The efforts of American Zionist leaders continued to reflect a uniquely American Zionist worldview and make use of Herzlian Zionism to distinguish American Zionism from the Zionist movement and the Yishuv throughout the first half of the twentieth century until the founding of the State of Israel. The use of Zionism in its Herzlian incarnation in order to legitimize the unique character of the Zionist experience in the United States was characteristic of not only the founders of American Zionism. A similar pattern is evident in the writings of Abba Hillel Silver, Wise’s political rival during the 1940s and his most important successor during the latter half of the 1940s, until Israel achieved statehood. Silver, like Wise, adapted his position on Herzl and his philosophy to the forum in which he was delivering his views.

In his draft autobiography – which he never completed because he passed away in the midst of the editorial work – Silver wrote about Herzl’s important contribution to the consolidation of his own Zionist worldview, as concretely illustrated by the fact that when he was 11 years old, the year Herzl died, following his father’s advice, Silver established a Zionist club – the Zionist Club in Memory of Dr. Herzl.[[50]](#footnote-50) Commenting on Herzl’s death, Silver described him as a prince or king without a kingdom, who through his charisma and charm had managed to revive the messianic dreams of the Jewish masses.[[51]](#footnote-51) In so doing, Silver obscured the innovative aspects of Herzl’s image and work, locating them as an inseparable part of the Jewish past and transforming Herzl into a symbolic, unreal political figure, thereby circumventing a critical discussion of his thinking or an assessment of the realistic possibility of actualizing his vision in the United States. The manner in which Silver portrayed Herzl in his autobiography was unusual. At other times he actually emphasized the innovative and revolutionary elements of Herzl’s thought, did not shy away from substantively critiquing Herzl, and proposed a Herzlian Zionism adapted to his own outlook as an American. Presumably, in the context of his autobiography, Silver chose to present a non-controversial ideological outlook.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In contrast, in a 1929 article titled “Herzl and Jewish Messianism,” which Silver published in a special edition of the journal New Palestine marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Herzl’s death, he presented an entirely different outlook.[[53]](#footnote-53) He did not ignore Herzl’s unique contribution to the consolidation of Jewish nationalism, but rather, alongside expressions of admiration, Silver strongly critiqued the fact that Herzlian Zionism emphasized the political aspect in its reconfiguration of Jewish life, used concepts borrowed from nineteenth-century European theories of nationalism, and ignored the prophetic and universal pillars of Jewish history. In Silver’s view this process was foreign to the spirit and essence of the Jewish People. He voiced support for those who opposed Herzl in this regard, particularly Ahad Ha‌ʾam, who sought to emphasize the moral and spiritual elements of the Jewish national awakening, rather than focus solely on the political process aimed at establishing a territorial and national Jewish center in Palestine.[[54]](#footnote-54) Silver was not opposed to the consolidation of Jewish nationalism in Palestine, and he even emphasized that the universal aspects of Zionism could not be realized without a functional national existence, but he argued for the integration of prophetic moral foundations into Zionism. In his view, such an approach was not the fanciful dream of a few romantics, but rather an element of the thinking and action of sober, practical Zionist activists. He was in favor of having the political phase of Zionism conclude with the establishment of a national Jewish home. He expressed the hope that it would not be necessary to keep stressing the value of nationalism in the Jewish context, and he concluded his article with the following remarks: “It is well that the political phase of Jewish Messianism is coming to a close in the upbuilding of the National Homeland. We shall not have to lay so much stress in the future on the importance of nationalism. We shall henceforth be confronted not with its lack but with its consequences.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Silver took advantage of the publication commemorating Herzl to criticize the various forms Jewish nationalism had taken since the founder of the Zionist movement launched the enterprise. He juxtaposed this nationalism with an alternative Zionism that, while rooted in Herzl’s enterprise, emphasizes prophetic, moral, and universal elements and downplays the political dimension of Herzl’s thinking – a Zionism that accorded with Silver’s own worldview as a Reform rabbi in the United States and an American Zionist.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Silver’s 1929 article criticizing the emphasis on national ideology in Herzl’s doctrine was not the only such instance. In 1951 he voiced similar views in relation to the Israeli education system. He argued that the problem with the young state’s education system was not purely technical but rather, and primarily, substantive and spiritual. Prior to statehood, the notion of a struggle for a sovereign Jewish state had been the main source of the conceptual and moral content that informed the education system in the Yishuv. The subsequent realization of this goal created an ideological vacuum that was likely to have a destructive effect on the model of Israeli youth. Silver cautioned the heads of the education system and leaders of Israel that although the concept of nationalism and the desire to establish a Jewish state are an important part of Jewish tradition and culture, they are only part of the existential essence of the Jewish People in the United States and Israel.[[57]](#footnote-57) In this spirit he argued that Israel’s establishment was a historical event and the way it is handled must not remain solely the purview of those Jews who were lucky enough to be living in the country when it achieved statehood. The founding of Israel was not just a technical matter, he argued, and it needs to be supplemented by the establishment of a new society that, through its noble values, has an influence on humanity as a whole – as did the Jews of ancient times.[[58]](#footnote-58) The tendency to use Herzlian ideology as a way of framing the Jewish People generally and Israel specifically, as evidenced in Silver’s writings, is further reinforced in observations about Israel’s establishment in the writings of his political collaborator and personal friend Emanuel Neumann, who served as president of the Zionist Organization of America (zoa) during 1947–1949 and 1956–1958. Neumann believed that the realization of Herzl’s vision through the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine obligated American Jews, and especially American Zionists, to redefine their relations with the Yishuv, now a state, and to infuse new meaning into their experience as American Zionists. The fundamental questions about American Zionism that had arisen before Israel’s founding, as expressed and addressed through attempts to adapt Herzl’s doctrine to American reality, became more pressing after 1948.

In a 1955 lecture marking the anniversary of Herzl’s birthday, Neumann argued that the importance of Herzl’s contribution to Jewish history lay not only in the successful establishment of a sovereign Jewish state, but also in the creation of new modes of Jewish life across the world. As a byproduct of world Jewry’s concerted effort to build a national home, the global Jewish community had become a political force with common goals and active institutions. The achievement of Israeli statehood did not negate this reality, according to him, and now there was no going back. The Jewish Diaspora would continue to function as a political and public force even after the creation of a sovereign Jewish state, including in the Israeli arena.[[59]](#footnote-59) On another occasion, Neumann explained that the State of Israel cannot be regarded as the sole legitimate venue in which Jewish history develops, and the rehabilitation of Diaspora Jewry is an inseparable and legitimate part of Jewish existence.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Neumann’s intent was to establish an ideological and practical foundationfor the existence of Diaspora Jewry in the aftermath of the emergence of a Jewish state, and to enable Diaspora Jews in general and American Zionists in particular to take an active part in building the state. Accordingly, he argued that this formulation of Jewish life was a product of the transformation of the Jewish People brought about by Herzl’s work. Neumann was familiar with Herzl’s writings and aware of the differences between his stated views and Herzl’s perspective, but evidently he believed that the importance of Herzl’s contribution to shaping the Jewish People stemmed not only from the Israel-focused aspects of his endeavor: the reverberations of the Herzlian revolution had led to deeply meaningful, long-term changes in the patterns of Jewish life worldwide and particularly within the American community, which in effect expropriated Herzlian ideology from Herzl and his successors. Although the consolidation of the American Jewish community and its formation of a relationship with the State of Israel were not part of Herzl’s vision, they were a product of his activity and ideology. Similar views are evident in the writings of the sociologist and historian Ben Halpern, a professor at Brandeis University whose writing and thinking were highly influential and reached beyond the relatively narrow confines of academia. Halpern argued that Herzl had ignored the fundamental problem of the continued existence of the Jewish Diaspora after the realization of a Jewish state. The possibility that significant sectors of the Jewish world would want to continue living a Jewish life in their countries of residence was a realistic one, even in Herzl’s time, and indeed became a reality after the Jewish state was established. Herzl’s avoidance of this issue forced his successors to develop an ideological and bureaucratic framework for the continued existence of Diaspora Jewry.[[61]](#footnote-61) That being so, according to Neumann, US Zionists would not accept being labelled as assistants whose role is merely to support Israel unconditionally; the State of Israel belongs not only to Israelis but to Jews the world over, and the interests of both groups must be reflected in the process of shaping the Jewish state.[[62]](#footnote-62) Silver and Neumann emphasized that Israel and the Jewish Diaspora are not two separate bodies, and as such American Zionists are fully entitled to take measures in Israel aimed at shaping the state in accordance with their worldview as American Zionists and citizens of the United States. The view presented by Silver and Neumann, using Herzl to justify intervention in the Israeli arena, was atypical for American Zionists and differed from that of their colleagues in the movement, such as Stephen Wise, who opposed American political and public activity in Israel and relied on the figure of Herzl only for the sake of positing an ideological justification for the existence of the American Jewish community and, more specifically, American Zionism.

Herzlian Zionism posed a complex challenge to the founders and shapers of the American Zionist movement. The difficulties inherent in the Americanization and integration of Herzl’s teachings in the United States are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the complexity stemming from the very existence of an American Zionist movement, most of whose members did not view Aliyah as an integral element of their Zionist outlook. At the same time, they did identify with the Jewish People throughout the Diaspora as well as the Yishuv and the State of Israel, and they perceived their Zionism as an integral aspect of their ethnic identity in the United States. The Americanization of Herzl as described here was part of an ongoing ideological exercise in which various American Jewish intellectual elites engaged. Both before and after Israel achieved statehood, American Jewish thinkers such as Simon Rawidowicz, Horace Kallen, and Mordecai Kaplan strove to provide an ideological foundation for Jewish life in the United States and infuse it with practical value as part of the Zionist movement.[[63]](#footnote-63) The organizational and ideological framework they proposed may be defined as “diaspora nationalism” – a concept Ernest Gellner explored in depth, noting that diaspora nationalism is a salient and important subgenre of nationalism and pointing to Israel as the most famous example of successful diaspora nationalism.[[64]](#footnote-64) In his book Nations and Nationalism Gellner emphasized the negative and perilous aspects of diaspora nationalism generally and in the Jewish case specifically. He wrote that existence within the framework of diaspora nationalism is a dangerous situation that could expose a minority that chooses this course to the threat of expulsion or genocide, sometimes forcing it to maintain a shaky, uncomfortable equilibrium.[[65]](#footnote-65) According to him, it was first the persecution in Eastern Europe and later the Holocaust that led to the actualization of national aspirations in Palestine.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The discussion surrounding the concept of “diaspora nationalism” in the American Jewish setting took on a different form. Although it focused on the same concept, in contrast to Gellner, who categorically rejected the capacity to function as a nation in this context and emphasized the choice of a national existence in Palestine after the Holocaust, many in the American arena took a very favorable approach to Jewish Diaspora nationalism and argued that it could and should coexist with a Jewish state. In their view this was the appropriate way to ensure continued Jewish existence in both the ideological sense and the practical sense, as it would be impossible to have all the world’s Jews immigrate to Palestine. American Jewish intellectuals recognized the value of Palestine and the State of Israel for Jewish existence in the modern era, but they did not regard this link as the most important factor. In their view it was necessary to create an ideological foundation and organizational network that would allow for Jewish life in the Diaspora, and the relationship with Palestine and the State of Israel would be just one aspect of the cumulative ethnic identity of world Jewry.[[67]](#footnote-67) Notably, while the American Zionist worldview is based on Jewish life in the United States, it also has European roots. The most prominent representative in this context was the historian and philosopher Simon Dubnow, whose theories drew much attention throughout the American Jewish community.[[68]](#footnote-68) Significant similarities are evident between Dubnow’s doctrine and the principal themes of the American Zionist worldview. Although unlike Dubnow, the architects of American Zionism did not seek to promote an autonomous Jewish Diaspora, there are other areas of overlap. Like the American Zionist figures examined in this book, Dubnow was not opposed to the basic concepts underpinning a cultural and spiritual revival of Zionism along the lines advocated by Ahad Ha‌ʾam, but he believed that having Zionism focus on Palestine was not practical and would not resolve the Jewish existential problem. Dubnow believed that leaders of the Zionist movement must understand that a revival of Jewish life in Palestine constitutes only one aspect of the renewal of Jewish life in the modern era. He sought to change the patterns of Jewish life in the Diaspora but did not see such a way of life solely as a repudiation. He believed that the Diaspora is a legitimate part of Jewish life.[[69]](#footnote-69)

By examining how Herzlian Zionism was received in the United States, we can trace the roots of the processes that generated and shaped American Zionism. This will give us a better understanding of the difficulties that Zionists faced in the United States and allow us to trace the formation of the ideological basis that allowed the American Jew who chose to be a Zionist to bridge the gap between Zionist ideology, which was tailored primarily to Europe, and American reality. The American Zionist writers discussed above used Herzl’s teachings to create a Jewish nationalism that minimized the elements of territorial concentration and political sovereignty. Their approach emphasized the moral and spiritual elements of Judaism and, in particular, of Zionism, and adapted his teachings to the United States in order to overcome obstacles, such as the question of dual loyalty, that could jeopardize the very foundation of Zionism in the United States and simultaneously prevent American Zionists from becoming significant players in the Zionist movement. An examination of the ways in which Herzl’s teachings were received in the United States not only sheds light on the formation and evolution of American Zionism, it also reveals and explains the different courses of development followed by Zionism in the United States as opposed to the Zionist movement elsewhere and, in particular, in Palestine. As such, it can also help us better understand the challenge faced by the Zionist movement in the past and by the State of Israel today, in an effort to foster fruitful reciprocal relations with the American Jewish community while recognizing its uniqueness.

2 The World Jewish Congress

During their years in the United States, all four of the figures in this book worked for Zionist bodies or for organizations such as the wjc, which, though not explicitly identified as Zionist, had a decisive majority of members and leaders who were active in the Zionist movement. The activity at the World Jewish Congress was significant for the historical figures presented in the book far more than a source of livelihood. The activities in the organization influenced their worldview and shaped their patterns of public activity for many years.

The founding conference of the wjc convened in Geneva in August 1936, with the participation of 280 delegates from thirty-two countries. Although this was a new organization, its ideological roots traced back to the transformations that Jewish communities in the United States and Europe had undergone in the aftermath of World War i and the Balfour Declaration. The wjc was intended to maintain the traditions of the American Jewish Congress (founded in 1918) and the Committee of Jewish Delegations (founded in 1919), to operate as a voluntary organization representing Jewish communities and organizations from across the world before government authorities and international institutions, and to cultivate social and cultural life in Jewish communities worldwide. The founder and first president of the World Jewish Congress was the Reform rabbi Stephen Wise, one of the most prominent Zionist leaders in the United States and an active supporter of President Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Although designated as an international organization, in practice the wjc operated as an American Jewish organization. It was headquartered in the United States, and its European and South American offices were funded by American sources and reported on their activities to the organization’s leadership in the United States. In 1939 Nahum Goldmann, who had co-founded the wjc with Wise, expressed the view that the United States was the only potential source of funding for the organization’s activities, particularly in Europe. He emphasized that because it was an American initiative, and in light of the dire circumstances of European Jews, American Jewish leaders and Wise personally, as a founder, had a greater responsibility to secure the resources needed to ensure the organization’s continuing operations.[[71]](#footnote-71) This pre-World War ii state of affairs naturally became even graver once the war broke out. Indeed, the wjc leadership issued an official announcement explaining that following the outbreak of war, the organization’s main offices were being transferred to New York.[[72]](#footnote-72) The announcement stated that the wjc branches in London and Geneva would be re-designated as departments focused solely on efforts on behalf of European Jews, which marked a shift from their past function. The European offices would report to the headquarters in New York, and organizational policymaking would take place exclusively in New York. The announcement explicitly stated that European branches were not to engage in any substantive undertaking without prior authorization from New York, and that the organizational change would entail the relocation of key staff members from Europe to the United States. The document’s drafters explained that this organizational change was necessary because the democratic character of the United States, in combination with the relative power of its Jewish community, meant that the American arena was the only one in which it was possible to engage in meaningful Jewish endeavors in the early 1940s.[[73]](#footnote-73)

The dramatic circumstances of the Jews in the 1940s made the American aspects of the wjc extremely important and redefined it as a primarily American Jewish organization. Nonetheless, a combination of circumstances – the fact that the organization was founded as an international entity, with many of the preparatory processes having taken place in Europe, as well as the organization’s focus on supporting European Jewry – made it easier for European Jewish activists who were familiar with the organization’s activities in Europe to integrate into wjc activities after immigrating to the United States. It was no coincidence that Tartakower, Kubovy, and Robinson – three of this book’s heroes – chose the wjc as the platform for their activity once they arrived in the US. Their work within the framework of the wjc gives us an insight into the exceptional and singular ethnic Jewish mix to which they were exposed in the United States and presents an alternative to the predominant patterns of Jewish life in the modern era. The leaders of the wjc supported the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, but as noted, it was not their overriding concern. They saw themselves as representatives of the Jewish world on the eve of World War ii, during the war, and in its aftermath, and as such, they worked for the establishment of a Jewish state and the revival of Jewish life in the Diaspora as two goals that did not contradict, but rather, complemented one another.

In 1946, the wjc headquarters in New York issued a document titled “The Program of the World Jewish Congress.” At the outset, the document described the fundamental principles on which the wjc was founded and the political circumstances surrounding its establishment in 1936. Among other factors,
it noted,

The isolated efforts of single Jewish organizations in individual countries could not meet the needs of the entire Jewish People. And so international Jewish associations for the attainment of specific objectives came into being. In 1897 the World Zionist Organization was formed for the purpose of establishing a legally secured, publicly recognized Jewish homeland in Palestine. The creation of an organization to look after the needs and interests of Jews throughout the world waited for a later opportunity to materialize.[[74]](#footnote-74)

These concise, formal remarks were a cursory reference to a political and ideological undertaking of tremendous importance that the wjc embodied in its very inception, and which the organization promoted and led throughout the Jewish world during the first half of the twentieth century. Its aim was to create an international Jewish organization that would support the establishment of a Jewish state, while also actively enhancing the ethnic and national dimensions of life in Jewish communities throughout the world.

The founding of the wjc and the organizational and political activities of its institutions were based on a particular ideological outlook, as reflected in a wide range of speeches, articles, and minutes of meetings dating back to the organization’s inception. In 1933 the WJC’s founding committee and the American Jewish Congress jointly disseminated an open letter in the United States, informing the American Jewish public of the plans to establish the organization and describing the ideological position underpinning the initiative.[[75]](#footnote-75) The starting point for the WJC’s founders was that the situation facing world Jewry in 1933 had made it undeniably clear, to Jews as well as non-Jews, that the Jewish Diaspora was a distinct entity with a common destiny. According to the letter’s authors, international recognition of the need to establish a national home for Jews in Palestine, as expressed by the Balfour Declaration, did not clash with, but rather reinforced, recognition of the existence of a Jewish entity in the Diaspora. In their view, a national home in Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora were two sides of the same coin, reflecting parallel tracks of national Jewish development that coexisted and nourished one another.[[76]](#footnote-76)

The authors returned to the issue of Palestine later in the letter as well. The WJC’s leaders did not ignore Palestine’s importance as a land that could receive immigrants, but they emphasized that they regarded Jewish immigration from Europe to Palestine as ideologically based, and therefore it need not fall within the purview of the wjc, whose mission was to find a comprehensive solution for the Jewish masses in Eastern and Central Europe. Palestine, in their view, could not offer a remedy for the dire situation of East European Jewry.[[77]](#footnote-77)

The founders of the wjc recognized that the need to establish an international Jewish organization in the mid-1930s was not self-evident, particularly given the presence of the Zionist movement and the philanthropic Jewish organizations operating at the international level. A pamphlet they produced for the American Jewish public in 1934 reflects their recognition of this fact. Using a question-and-answer format, the pamphlet aimed to introduce the wjc to the Jewish public and explain why it differed from other groups and why it was necessary.[[78]](#footnote-78) It opened with the question: What is the World Jewish Congress? In their response, the authors underscored the democratic character of their organization and noted that it would operate with a view to addressing the difficult problems facing the Jewish People in the 1930s. The pamphlet also presented questions about what differentiated the wjc from existing Jewish organizations with a mandate to protect Jewish rights and improve the economic conditions of Jews. In response, the authors argued that existing organizations represented only a small proportion of the world’s Jews and sometimes, because of their non-democratic nature, did not properly represent the interests of the Jewish masses. Moreover, the efforts to improve economic conditions for Jews essentially depended on philanthropy, whereas the wjc was seeking to fundamentally transform the global Jewish economic structure.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The pamphlet also highlighted the unique nature of the wjc relative to existing Jewish organizations. In response to a question about the problems to be addressed by the future organization, the authors listed a wide range of issues, from Jewish immigration through the rehabilitation and improvement of conditions for Jews who could not immigrate, to the struggle against anti-Semitism and on behalf of the basic rights of Jews as human beings. The response noted that the issue of immigration to Palestine fell within the purview of the Jewish Agency, and that in this area the wjc would limit itself to supporting and assisting the Jewish Agency. In framing the issue this way, the pamphlet’s authors were presenting a unique worldview, to be expounded more clearly later in this book, according to which the wjc was not opposed to the Zionist enterprise in Palestine but also did not view it as the most important issue.[[80]](#footnote-80)

The historical narrative pertaining to American Jewry and the Holocaust, is, for the most part, one of harsh criticism of the insubstantial effort made by American Jews with regard to the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, while at the same time celebrating the contribution of the American Jewish community to the founding of the State of Israel. The conventional interpretation maintains that the individual and public shock induced by the Holocaust and the unease generated by the futility of their campaign to promote the rescue endeavor led American Jews and their leaders to summon all their energy to work for the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the international arrangements instituted after World War ii. The willingness of American Jews to act as an ethnic group in pursuit of specific political goals is all the more noteworthy in that they were endeavoring to promote the establishment of the state in the face of opposition from the Democratic administrations of Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman. In effect, they used the Jewish vote as a political tool to alter the policy of the administration with respect to the founding of a Jewish state in the Middle East.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The founding of the State of Israel in 1948 reinforced the need to grapple with the problems that had surfaced in the past regarding the WJC’s role and status regarding the Jewish state. Wise addressed this issue in his opening speech at the Congress’s conference in Montreux, Switzerland, in June 1948.[[82]](#footnote-82) He declared that despite the founding of the state, the heads of the wjc represented the large majority of world Jewry, and was the conduit through which they could make their concerns known. The founding of the state required that the wjc reshape Jewish life in the Diaspora. The Congress would work to ensure that Israel and the Diaspora cooperated productively, and that future Jewish life in the Diaspora would be thought out according to a predefined objective, rather than haphazardly.[[83]](#footnote-83)

The Israeli wing of the Congress published an action program in 1949 clarifying the wjc characterization as the representative of Diaspora Jewry: The wjc leadership thought of the organization as the sole representative not just of Jews in its member countries, but of all Diaspora Jews, and would advocate on their behalf in dealings with Israel’s government vis-à-vis international bodies and United Nations institutions, and with respect to the Israeli government itself. By virtue of its status, the wjc intended to maintain ongoing contact with Israel’s foreign ministry regarding the fate of Jews in Arab countries, and to cooperate with the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency on this and any further issues requiring its involvement. The wjc would systematically expose the problems of Diaspora Jewry, present them to the Israeli public, and gather information from those migrating to Israel about their communities.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Both Wise’s speech and the action plan demonstrate the belief of Congress functionaries that the establishment of the state had not rendered their organization redundant. The Holocaust and the failure to rescue significant numbers of Jews reinforced their conviction that only Jewish unity allied with a worldwide organizational structure would stand world Jewry in better stead in the future. This need for a Jewish nationality in the Diaspora to which the State of Israel would not constitute an alternative was one of the most important implications to be drawn from the Holocaust. Moreover, Wise declared that the significance of the wjc transcended the boundaries of the Jewish world. As he viewed it, “justice for the Jews,” and their integration with the world that was emerging in the wake of World War ii were not purely Jewish objectives because their realization would assure “world peace.”[[85]](#footnote-85)

3 The Zionist Diaspora in the United States – a View from Palestine and Israel

The forms that Zionism took in the United States point to the need for an in-depth examination of the complex reciprocal relations of the Yishuv until 1948, and later Israel, with the American Jewish community. The existential crisis facing European Jewry, beginning in the 1920s and culminating with the tragedy of the Holocaust, substantially transformed the approach among American Jews and their leadership to the Zionist movement during the first phase and the State of Israel during the second phase. The crisis generated sweeping support for the establishment of a Jewish state in the framework of the post-World War ii international political arrangements. The importance and exceptional nature of this support should be understood in light of the opposition among a decisive majority of American Jewish elites – Zionists as well as non-Zionist – to the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East. The transformation began to take place gradually in the aftermath of World War i and the Balfour declaration and accelerated significantly in response to the Nazis’ rise to power in Germany, the Holocaust, and news of the “Final Solution,” and it peaked in the form of unprecedented political and economic support among US Jews for the founding of Israel and its reinforcement during its first decade. It is difficult to imagine how the State of Israel could have emerged without this support. Indeed, many researchers have noted that the political and economic support of American Zionists was a key enabling factor in the founding of Israel.[[86]](#footnote-86)

In early 1941 David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency’s executive committee, delivered a report to the other members of the committee on his visit to the United States. First he explained the purpose of his visit and described his relations with American Zionists:

I regarded it as necessary to provide American Zionism with a political Zionist program…. I told them: I came here as a simple Zionist, an uninvited guest, you did not invite me, but I received a visa from the American consul and I deemed it necessary to stop here on my way to Eretz Israel, for Zionist consultations. At the moment we only have two politically significant concentrations of Jews, the Jewish community in America and the Yishuv in Eretz Israel. In Eretz Israel we never know what the next day will bring, and much depends on the position of American Zionism and Jewry. It is imperative that American Zionists know and decide how to act during and after the war, because it is not possible to live “from hand to mouth.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

Ben-Gurion’s remarks reflect a historical reality. As the world was being swept into the storm of war and the crisis facing European Jewry was becoming ever more dire, the global Zionist leadership became increasingly aware of the potential possibilities presented by American Jewry and the Zionist movement in the United States. This was also a reflection of the growing power and importance of the United States in the global arena and of US Jewry among the world’s Jews. Beginning in the latter half of the 1930s, and despite American Jews’ fears about the rising anti-Semitism stemming from the economic crisis and anti-Jewish propaganda originating in Germany, large sectors of American Jews became increasingly willing to join efforts on behalf of the Jewish cause and Zionism. This was reflected in the volume of funds raised by philanthropies and Zionist foundations and in a dramatic increase in Hadassah’s membership. The worsening conditions of Germany’s Jews, the rise of anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe, and the ever-widening rift between Britain and the Zionist movement galvanized the Jewish sense of solidarity, which manifested as Zionist activism. The power and significance of American Zionism during the 1930s and 1940s is attributable to American Jews’ identification with the goals of the Zionist movement, which went far beyond narrowly identifying themselves as official members of the American Zionist Federation or Hadassah. They recognized that through their efforts on behalf of the Zionist cause, they were choosing to position themselves at the extreme end of the spectrum of ethnic particularism within the American arena of the time.[[88]](#footnote-88) Ben-Gurion’s remarks in 1941 reveal an internal contradiction that characterized his attitude towards American Zionism: on the one hand he recognized its economic power and the possibilities inherent in enlisting it on behalf of Zionist aims; on the other hand he wanted to preclude its independence and ensure its subservience to the Zionist leadership outside the United States.

Ben-Gurion’s concerns about increased American Zionist involvement in Palestine were not unfounded. The impact of Zionism manifested not only in the unique modes of its Americanization but also in an interest in intensive, independent involvement in the Zionist movement. American Zionism’s modes of engagement in the Zionist movement and the Yishuv, from World War i until the founding of Israel, were not uniform. They varied in accordance with two discernible periods: the first was the inter-war period, and the second began in 1939. In the aftermath of World War i, Louis Brandeis, in his capacity as an American Zionist leader, tried to influence the structure of the global Zionist movement and its activities in Palestine in accordance with his own worldview. Brandeis waged a fierce struggle with Chaim Weizmann, the foremost Zionist leader at the time and president of the Zionist movement from 1921, regarding the structure of Keren HaYesod, the fundraising apparatus of the Zionist movement on behalf of Zionist efforts in Palestine.[[89]](#footnote-89) Brandeis sought to create a decentralized economic and political system that would neutralize the political aspect of the Zionist movement and ensure the independence of US Zionists within the movement. The political struggle between these two Zionist leaders ended with Weizmann’s victory. After Brandeis’s loss the patterns of activity that emerged in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s indicated that American Zionists had relinquished influence over the Zionist movement. During this period their role in the Zionist movement was primarily philanthropic.[[90]](#footnote-90) Their power and status declined, as did the scope of their activity. During the second period, when the figures studied in this book were active, US Zionists had regained their position as an important political power in the global Zionist movement, concurrent with a dramatic increase in the scope of their activity in the US itself. It is evident that Brandeis’s struggle was not an isolated or exceptional case in American Zionist history. The American desire to influence the structure of the global Zionist movement resurfaced in the late 1930s, catalyzed by the growing strength of the American Zionist movement.

American Zionist leaders were not content with providing economic and political support services to the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. They wanted to use Zionism’s transformation into a significant factor within the ethnic fabric of American Jewish life, as well as their own enhanced status in the Zionist movement, to influence the formation and development of the future Jewish national home they anticipated and the manner of its integration – as a state with a Jewish majority – into the Middle East. In their view the important role of US Zionists necessitated that they be ready to deal with the key questions that would arise in post-war assessments. A major question in this context – presumably the most important issue facing Zionism and the Jewish state in the future – was the place of a Jewish state in the Middle East. Their papers indicate that their efforts went beyond the examination of Jewish-Arab relations as a matter of principle. They proposed practical programs addressing diverse problems such as water, refugees, regional economic cooperation, and the role of international organizations in the Middle East. Their aim was to provide a concrete, pragmatic foundation for their desire to achieve cooperation and coexistence between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The efforts of US Zionists to influence the course of development in the Yishuv vis-à-vis the Arabs were met with strong opposition by David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Zionist Executive (executive body of the World Zionist Organization) at the time and the most prominent Zionist leader in Palestine. Ultimately the nature of relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and the integration of the Jewish state into the Middle East were determined and implemented by the leaders of the Zionist establishment in Palestine, in accordance with their worldview and the political and social reality that emerged in the Yishuv, which was entirely different from the concepts expressed in the plans of US Zionists.

Diaries, memoirs, letters, and minutes of meetings from the United States, Palestine, and Israel indicate that US Zionists had a prominent status in the Zionist movement during the decade preceding statehood and the early decades of Israel’s independence, the period spanning most of the activity of the protagonists of this book in the American and Israeli (including pre-state) arenas. This description is incomplete, however, without an examination and elucidation of the foundation of the struggle between American Zionism and most of the Zionist establishment in Palestine and elsewhere in the world, the roots of which trace back to the unique evolutionary patterns of American Zionism, which were examined earlier in the book. As the following chapters will illustrate, the activities of our protagonists in Palestine and Israel were characterized, among other factors, by support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and, later, its consolidation, but this was not the be-all and end-all. In fact, they proposed a unique form of Jewish existence in the post-Holocaust world, in which the Jewish Diaspora would not be an addendum to the emerging sovereign Jewish entity in the Middle East, but rather a legitimate and valued part of Jewish life in the modern era. The exceptionality of this worldview should be understood in light of the fact that a decisive majority of the Zionist and Israeli establishment, and Ben-Gurion in particular, rejected it.

By the early 1940s, Ben-Gurion was already aware of the dramatic changes underway among US Jews as a consequence of the horrific crisis in Europe. For Ben-Gurion US Jewry constituted a key factor in the strategic, long-term struggle to establish a Jewish state. Ben-Gurion and his colleagues in the Zionist leadership sought to take advantage of the economic and political potential inherent in the growing strength of American Zionism, while at the same time preventing the American Zionist leadership from having any authority that would allow it to influence developments in the Yishuv and the Zionist movement prior to statehood and in the State of Israel after 1948.[[92]](#footnote-92) A symbolic expression of Ben-Gurion’s concerns surrounding American Zionist leaders’ involvement in the Yishuv is evident in remarks he made in 1945 about Abba Hillel Silver, the foremost American Zionist leader at the time. At the time Mapai (Mifleget Poʾalei Eretz Israel, the “Workers’ Party of the Land of Israel” to which Ben-Gurion belonged) was preparing for the Twenty-Second Zionist Congress, at which Silver and Ben-Gurion in fact joined efforts in an attempt to remove Weizmann from the leadership. Towards this end, Ben-Gurion collaborated with Silver because he believed it was not possible to operate in the American arena without him, but at the same time he made every effort to prevent Silver from gaining status in the Zionist movement. Ben-Gurion’s remarks to the Mapai Secretariat in December 1945 speak for themselves:[[93]](#footnote-93)

Until now the right wing in the country has not had a Zionist leader. They have a local leader, Rokach [Israel Rokach, mayor of Tel Aviv], but they have not had an important Zionist figure. Now the right wing in the country has found its leader. Although Silver would not be so foolish as to present himself as a leader of the right, he has ties to the right. He has ties to the Revisionists. It is not inconceivable that he will take over the next Congress. He is not Jabotinsky. It is true that he lacks some of Jabotinsky’s remarkable skills, but at the same time he does not have the disadvantages that Jabotinsky does. He does not have a record of war against the workers. He will send his bureaucrats to London and Jerusalem. This will be a system of rule by bureaucrats.

Before Israeli statehood and during the early years of statehood, Ben-Gurion was very concerned that Silver might leave his community in Cleveland and immigrate to Israel in order to vie for the premiership. Ben-Gurion’s fears were not unfounded. During the first decade of Israel’s statehood, there were intensive political exchanges regarding such a possibility between the members of Silver’s camp in the United States and the General Zionists Party in Israel (a centrist party with significant political power in the 1950s). Immediately after Israel attained independence, Ben-Gurion launched a fierce struggle against Silver and, in fact, managed to remove him from every official position in the Zionist movement. Concurrently, Ben-Gurion also succeeded in creating an absolute separation between the Zionist movement and the State of Israel and ensuring the subservience in practice of the Zionist movement and its institutions to the government of Israel. One might surmise that Ben-Gurion’s intensive opposition to Silver’s efforts to become involved in the Israeli arena, in combination with Silver’s own assessment that he would not be able to compete successfully with Ben-Gurion and his deep ties as a Reform rabbi with his congregation in Cleveland, precluded further engagement by Silver and his associates in the State of Israel during the 1950s.[[94]](#footnote-94)

The protagonists of this book sought to foster collaboration between the American Jewish Diaspora and the State of Israel. Their worldview juxtaposed with concerns about an American Jewish takeover of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel after 1948. It was not only Ben-Gurion who had such concerns. This issue was also the main theme of remarks by Golda Meyerson (later Meir) to the Mapai Central Committee on the occasion of her appointment as acting head of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department, following the departure of Moshe Shertok (later Sharett) to the United States in accordance with a decision by the Twenty-Second Zionist Congress in 1946. Golda was convinced that the Twenty-Second Congress should be viewed as a failure and insisted on this point to the party’s members. She explained to her fellow party members that, notwithstanding Weizmann’s operative removal from the presidency of the Zionist movement and Ben-Gurion’s new status as the most important political figure in the movement, Silver’s appointment as overseer of Zionist political activity in the American arena and his new role as a key figure in the Zionist movement’s leadership did not bode well for the Labor Party generally and Mapai specifically. “During the three days that I have been back in the country I managed to speak with a few party colleagues, only briefly, and the overriding impression is that many members are in a state of depression,” she said. The US Zionists were the reason that “it was not possible to say much of anything positive about the Congress.” She insisted that American Zionism was the strongest political force at the Congress, but only because of the catastrophe that had befallen European Jewry. According to her, despite their large numbers, US Zionists were not willing to fulfill the important role assigned to them: “They arrived with something that was the opposite of modesty and gave no impression whatsoever that their power and weight at the Congress was a coincidence and the consequence of a huge Jewish catastrophe.” Golda went on to mention Silver explicitly, noting that “Silver came to the Congress with rather ‘modest’ demands [quotations marks in the original]. He wanted to be president of the Zionist Organization, and if not that then he wanted to be one of the presidium of three who head it, and if not that then the same status as Ben-Gurion. In my view he got more than he deserved.”[[95]](#footnote-95)

During the latter half of the 1940s, in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, massive numbers of US Jews enlisted in the cause of establishing a Jewish state. At the same time, it is evident that the establishment of a Jewish state formed only part of the American Zionists’ process of consolidating an ethnic identity in the post-Holocaust world. Two examples – a fuller discussion of which would exceed the scope of the present study – illustrate this point. The first was the intensive effort for the rehabilitation of Jewish communities in Europe and, in effect, the empowerment and reinforcement of Jewish life in the Diaspora. The second, and closely linked, example was the use of the memory of Holocaust to reinforce the ethnic identity of US Jewry. The importance that US Zionists ascribed to the issue is evident in speeches by Stephen Wise. During the latter 1940s a significant change took place in the American Zionist leadership, with Abba Hillel Silver replacing Wise as the most important American Zionist leader of the time. Nevertheless, Wise, former president of the American Zionist Federation and one of the most prominent public figures in the American Jewish community, had an exceptionally eminent public status and his speeches had a resounding impact. In 1945, Wise delivered a lecture to the European Division of the World Jewish Congress, an organization he had founded and, at the time, headed.[[96]](#footnote-96) In his opening remarks, Wise emphasized that the world’s Jews should be regarded as one people, who share a faith and a future. The two main problems facing the Jewish People after the war, according to Wise, were the opening of Palestine’s gates to Aliyah and the renewal of Jewish life in the countries that had been liberated after World War ii. Wise praised the Zionist movement and the Yishuv and emphasized the monumental importance of 600,000 Jews in Palestine as a basis for the continuation of Jewish existence after the Holocaust. Despite the importance of the Zionist movement in the context of Palestine, however, when it comes to the renewal of Jewish life in Europe, the only entities interested in and capable of completing this mission, in Wise’s view, were US Jewry and the World Jewish Congress. He stressed that concurrent efforts on behalf of both missions – the establishment of a Jewish state and rehabilitation of Jewish life in Europe – is a multifaceted process that, in essence, defies those who view Zionism as the only solution to the problems facing Jews and are opposed to the organization of Jewish life in the Diaspora. In his view, his Zionism does not prevent him from engaging as a Jew in the problems of Jewish existence throughout the world, beyond Palestine.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Israel’s founding in 1948 reinforced the need to clarify problems that had arisen in the past regarding the role and standing of the World Jewish Congress as a pro-Zionist organization in relation to the State of Israel. This is reflected in a speech by Wise at the opening of the WJC’s plenary assembly in Montreux, Switzerland, in June 1948.[[98]](#footnote-98) Wise asserted that, notwithstanding the founding of the State of Israel, the leaders of the World Jewish Congress represent the decisive majority of world Jewry, and the organization is the means by which the world’s Jews can raise their concerns. Israel’s founding necessitates re-planning Jewish life in the Diaspora, he added, and the aim of the wjc is to ensure that there is optimal cooperation between Israel and the Diaspora and that the future course of Jewish life in the Diaspora is laid out with defined objectives, rather than random and unstructured.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Wise’s remarks indicate that, in his view, one of the most important lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust is the need for Jewish nationalism in the Diaspora, for which the State of Israel does not constitute a replacement. Wise stressed that “justice for the Jews,” as he defined it, and the integration of Jews in the global order after World War ii are problems with implications not only for the Jews, and their resolution will ensure “world peace.”[[100]](#footnote-100) The full import of Wise’s remarks should be understood in light of the other opinions voiced, and discussed above, by Abba Hillel Silver and his colleagues in the American Zionist leadership regarding the founding of Israel. During the 1940s, Wise and Silver were engaged in a bitter political and personal rivalry. The fact that these two American Zionist leaders, who disagreed on every significant issue in the American and Zionist arena, supported comparable positions regarding the essence of Jewish existence after the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel points to the supremacy of this worldview among Zionists in the United States.

chapter 2

Aryeh Tartakower

1 The International Committee of the Red Cross

The events of 1939 in Europe prevented Tartakower from returning to Poland after the Twenty-First Zionist Congress, and he immigrated to the United States. As a result of this move, the nature of his political activity underwent a transformation. In Europe and Palestine, Tartakower had primarily operated within various circles of the labor movement and Socialist Zionism, whereas in the United States most of his public activity centered on the World Jewish Congress and, to a lesser extent, various organizations associated with Polish Jewry in the United States. During World War ii, Tartakower served as chairman of WJC’s Welfare and Relief Committee. His decision to operate within the framework of the wjc was not self-evident, and it points to a significant shift in the nature of his public activity following his immigration to the United States. Until then, the wjc had played only a marginal part in his public activity. To fully appreciate the significance of his decision, we must look at the unique nature of the wjc within the spectrum of Jewish organizations operating during the first half of the twentieth century.

Tartakower’s papers reveal the breadth of his efforts during World War ii on behalf of European Jews, and Polish Jews in particular, within the framework of the wjc and in his capacity as chairman of the American division of the Representation of Polish Jewry (part of the Polish Government-in-Exile). Tartakower engaged with the American government to arrange the transfer of funds from the US to Europe in support of European Jewry, participated in wjc efforts to save Jewish children in France, and took action to promote better treatment of Jewish soldiers in the Polish army and, when necessary, their transfer to the British army.[[101]](#footnote-101) It was during a visit to Britain in 1944 that the issue of Jewish soldiers in the Polish army came up. In his report on this visit, he related that, shortly after his arrival in early January of that year, eight Jewish soldiers serving in the Polish army decided to leave their bases in Scotland and travel to London in protest against the unbearable anti-Semitism in the Polish army. Eventually Tartakower persuaded the soldiers to return to their bases by promising to take measures to eliminate anti-Semitism in their units and to create a bureaucratic process that would allow any soldier who sought to leave the Polish army for the British Army to do so.[[102]](#footnote-102) The issue of Jewish soldiers in the Polish army turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg: Tartakower engaged in intensive efforts on behalf of this cause but ultimately, according to him, without success. Another failure to which he attested was his effort to establish cooperation between Polish immigrants in the United States and the American Jewish community. His aim was to initiate a political and public process that would help reduce Polish-German collaboration in sending Polish and European Jews to extermination and labor camps in Poland.[[103]](#footnote-103) Concurrently Tartakower also conducted a large-scale project to secure passports from South American countries for European Jews in Nazi-occupied lands. In some cases, Jews with foreign passports were able to improve their conditions as Nazi captives, and in other cases they were able to leave Nazi-occupied Europe. The passports were delivered to Europe by couriers or by regular mail that sometimes, miraculously, reached its destination. Tartakower recounted failed efforts to deliver passports to the poet Itzhak Katzenelson and to Emanuel Ringelblum. In both cases the passports were issued but never reached their destination.[[104]](#footnote-104) Once the war was over, Tartakower focused his public activity on the cause of the displaced, through efforts aimed at the American administration and international refugee agencies, including, in particular, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (unrra), as well as philanthropic efforts by the wjc in Europe. unrra, established in 1943 and incorporated into the United Nations in 1945, operated as an international agency until 1947, with a mandate to initiate, conduct, and manage relief efforts in Europe.

Reviewing the archives of Jewish and Zionist leaders and rescue activists from the time of the Holocaust can be an emotional process for the historian. Their papers reveal the tremendous difficulties they faced in their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust and their terrible sense of helplessness when these efforts were unsuccessful. According to many rescue activists, the fact that the International Committee of the Red Cross (icrc), based in Switzerland, refused to play a significant part in rescue efforts was a major contributing factor to the difficulties they faced in Europe. Unlike many other rescue agencies operating in Europe, icrc representatives were based in occupied Europe. Moreover, the organization provided care for German prisoners of war, particularly during the later stages of World War ii, and many rescue activists believe that this gave the Committee the means to apply pressure on the leaders of Nazi Germany. No other organization that was engaged in rescuing European Jews had any comparable means of leverage.

Tartakower’s archives provide particularly interesting information about the efforts that he and his partners in the American struggle on behalf of European Jews took to enlist the icrc to their cause. The icrc is a private, independent institution that operates strictly in accordance with the authority granted to it under the Geneva Convention. Its seat is in Geneva and it is staffed by Swiss citizens, in light of Switzerland’s wartime neutrality in the modern era. Notably, the various Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Agency, were not granted any official status in relation to the icrc. Officially they were represented by the British government and the British Red Cross, which made it very difficult to have any influence on the Committee during World War ii. Researchers as well as observers at the time were very critical of the icrc for not taking meaningful action on behalf of European Jews until the later stages of World War ii in the European theater.[[105]](#footnote-105) The ICRC’s policy greatly encumbered the efforts of American Jewish organizations on behalf of European Jewry. They were unable, for example, to send food supplies to European Jews through the Committee, nor could they receive information via the Committee regarding individual Jews or entire communities.

On December 10, 1943, Tartakower wrote a detailed letter to the icrc delegate in the United States, Dr. Marc Peter, presenting the Committee with specific demands.[[106]](#footnote-106) The letter began by strongly protesting the ICRC’s non-inclusion of Jews among those entitled to its protection under the 1929 Prisoners of War Treaty. The background to Tartakower’s remarks involved two proposed international treaties drafted by the icrc. The first became the 1929 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. The second, addressing civilians in war zones, was adopted by the icrc at its 1934 international conference in Tokyo, but the outbreak of World War ii interrupted the diplomatic process that would have led to official approval of the draft treaty. Tartakower discussed the significance of excluding European Jews from icrc protection, pointing out that icrc delegates had only visited internment camps for Jews in occupied France a few times during the latter half of 1941 and failed to take further action in this regard. Specifically, as Tartakower wrote,

[They] did not visit any internment camps for Jews in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia,Greece, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, or occupied Russia, and especially the Polish Ghettos, the death camps of Mauthausen and Treblinka and the Transnistrian camps. The Reports concerning the visits of the delegates are published in the “Revue International de la Croix-Rouge” and comprise almost all internment camps the world over, but no report about the visit of any camp for Jewish internees, the most unfortunate of all the civilian prisoners of war.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Citing material that supported his argument, Tartakower emphasized that the Nazi leaders presented their anti-Jewish actions as a countermeasure to a military threat posed by Jews to their regime. He personally rejected this distorted and baseless view, but asserted that once the Germans had made this claim, one could no longer argue that Jews should not be included within the purview of the icrc. Later in the letter, Tartakower presented the German outlook, which held that the Jewish issue was an internal German matter. The Germans had also argued that Jews arrested on lands occupied by Germany were “detained civilians” rather than “civilian” internees, and therefore could not receive assistance from the icrc. In light of what he had noted in earlier sections of his letter, Tartakower emphasized that the German arguments were unacceptable, strongly criticized the ICRC’s conduct in relation to Jews during the war, and argued that Germany’s problems and the Allies’ success enabled the icrc to apply pressure on the German government to allow the Committee to assist Jews in occupied territories in Europe.

In his closing paragraph Tartakower tried to plea on behalf of European Jews and convey the full import of the historical mission facing the icrc to its US delegate:

It is our opinion that the International Red Cross is bound “to carry out the task of relieving sufferings arising out of war, sickness or disaster” and our suffering people have the greatest moral claim upon the speedy, the urgent assistance of your organization. We think that the German and the Italian fascists are in dire need of the relief work carried on by the International Red Cross, and that the latter is consequently in a position to bring pressure to bear upon those regimes and their satellites. The inclusion of the Jewish civilian internees within the scope of the international Red Cross would, in fact, spell the physical deliverance of remaining European Jewry. In the name of undying humanity, we appeal to the International Red Cross to devote itself unreservedly and without delay to this historical task.[[108]](#footnote-108)

With these closing words, Tartakower was emphasizing the moral considerations that he thought might encourage the icrc leadership to take action on behalf of European Jewry. However, there was another dimension to the letter as well. Tartakower was also voicing the opinion that the icrc had failed in its international mission, thereby arousing anger, bewilderment, and dissatisfaction among the Jewish public in general, and particularly in the US. In my view, these remarks convey a veiled threat towards the Committee. In effect, Tartakower was informing the icrc representatives in the United States that the American Jewish public’s dissatisfaction could take the form of a public campaign against the Committee. Presumably, Tartakower and his associates in the wjc leadership would not have actualized this threat because the extreme difficulties they faced in their efforts to rescue European Jews would not have allowed them to squander a potential course of action, and by creating a complete rift between themselves and the icrc they would have lost any potential advantage of cooperation, however slight. Nonetheless, the WJC’s earlier conduct in the international political arena and its efforts on behalf of Eastern and Central European Jews during the latter half of the 1930s indicate that in the past the organization’s leaders had not hesitated to use the public influence of American Jews as a political means of improving the conditions of European Jews, even marginally.[[109]](#footnote-109)

The reply from the icrc representative in the United States arrived about a week later.[[110]](#footnote-110) His letter essentially offered a series of official rationales for the exclusion of Jews from the Committee’s scope of operations in Europe. The main argument presented by Marc Peter was that the icrc is a voluntary organization that can only offer its assistance to countries in a state of war: as an organization of volunteers without official authority, and in contrast to Tartakower’s claims, the Committee’s ability to apply political pressure on the German authorities to allow it to assist European Jews is negligible. According to Peter, Tartakower appeared to be suggesting that the icrc make its aid for German prisoners of war and German citizens held by Allied countries conditional on Germany acquiescing to the provision of assistance to European Jews by icrc representatives. However, he asserted, the icrc assists people who need its services as individuals, regardless of their government’s activities. Moreover, he argued, in contrast to Tartakower’s claims, the Committee’s lack of success on behalf of European Jews did not result from inaction, but rather occurred despite its intensive efforts:

As you know very well, the Committee has done its utmost to be allowed to bring relief to your suffering people. If the Committee has not been entirely successful in receiving this permission, it is not fair to speak of it as “inactive.” It is also wrong to imply that where the Committee has not been successful it is because it has not brought enough pressure to bear upon the belligerent government concerned, as it has so many times offered its services to all the victims of the war, and especially to your people. I feel sure that you will understand the position of the International Committee and agree with me.[[111]](#footnote-111)

The words of the Red Cross delegate speak for themselves. The formality of his response and his unwillingness to accept Tartakower’s arguments and follow through on his pleas did not deter Tartakower and his colleagues from their rescue efforts. Possibly it was their inability to take effective action on behalf of European Jews through other channels that prompted them to continue trying to enlist the icrc to this cause. A letter from the Red Cross representative in New York to President Roosevelt, dated September 19, 1944, reinforces Tartakower’s claims. In contrast to the arguments that Peter presented to Tartakower, this letter describes in great detail the ICRC’s efforts in Europe on behalf of the civilian population, beginning in 1940 and up to the time of the writing. According to the letter, the icrc was providing assistance to the civilian population throughout the world, and particularly in European countries under Nazi occupation. The aim of the letter was to request additional funding from the American government in order to better cope with the dire situation of the civilian population during the war, particularly in Europe.[[112]](#footnote-112)

Tartakower was the main speaker at a meeting between wjc and icrc representatives that took place in London in late January 1944.[[113]](#footnote-113) Once again he demanded that the icrc take action on behalf of Jews being held as prisoners by the Germans, or at least declare publicly that the provision of assistance to Jews under Nazi rule falls within its purview. Presumably Tartakower believed that such a public statement by the icrc could somewhat ease the living conditions of Jews in occupied Europe. At the same time, he sought to enlist icrc representatives in the delivery of food packages to countries he identified as satellite states of the Nazi regime, particularly Romania and Hungary. He believed that it would be possible to deliver food to Jews in those countries through the icrc, and various ways of amassing the necessary quantities of food were discussed. The records of the meeting indicate that even if the icrc had been able to acquire the necessary permits, it would have been extremely difficult to assemble the necessary quantities of food, which would have to be purchased in South America and transported to Europe.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Tartakower’s aforementioned letter to the icrc delegate sparked the ire of the Committee’s leadership, as reflected in the minutes of a secret meeting between Aryeh Leon Kubovy and the delegate, Marc Peter, in January 1944.[[115]](#footnote-115) Dr. Peter opened by saying that it would have been better if Tartakower had never sent his letter. A fierce and tense exchange then followed. Like Tartakower, Kubovy asked the icrc delegate to declare publicly that the icrc regards Jews as civilian internees. He dismissed Dr. Peter’s contention that the Committee had most likely issued a statement along these lines, asserting that he and others would have heard of it. In response to Peter’s claim that “I can inquire but I can only repeat that if a government is determined to exterminate a race, it is in a position to do so,” Kubovy replied, “If the International Red Cross would be authorized to visit the camps where Jews are interned, they would be saved. The Germans do not want witnesses of their crimes.”[[116]](#footnote-116)

An assessment of the accuracy of Kubovy’s assertion is beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, we can infer from the letters and minutes of meetings described above that Tartakower and others in the wjc and various Jewish organizations believed that a shift in the ICRC’s mode of activity would have buttressed the efforts to save European Jewry. The dry, official tone of the documents provides first-hand testimony of the insurmountable gap between the sense of passion and urgency among Tartakower and his associates, on the one hand, and the formality of the ICRC’s responses, on the other.

The increasing state of chaos in Europe during the later stages of World War ii led to intensified efforts to urge the icrc to act on behalf of European Jewry. These efforts were based on the assessment that an imminent Allied victory and the collapse of the Nazi regime would facilitate such activity. At the same time, icrc representatives and Jewish organizations were also aware that the impending defeat of the Nazis could catalyze opposing trends and lead to intensified efforts to exterminate Jews during the final days of the Nazi regime. These concerns were reflected in a meeting between Kubovy and the president of the icrc, Professor Carl Jacob Burckhardt, in February 1945.[[117]](#footnote-117) The minutes of this meeting indicate that the approaching Allied victory exacerbated, rather than eased, tensions between the icrc and Jewish organizations. They also reveal that Tartakower and Kubovy were at the forefront of those who had applied pressure on the icrc president to hold a meeting with Heinrich Himmler in Germany. Burckhardt and Kubovy were divided in their opinions regarding the outcome of such a meeting. While the icrc president believed he had nothing of value to offer the Germans, Kubovy believed that the Allied victory provided the icrc with a wide range of opportunities to influence the Germans, who very much needed its services. The following summary of remarks by Kubovy during the meeting reflect their different assessments of the Committee’s efforts vis-à-vis European Jews:

If the wjc had constantly insisted on a public statement on the part of the Red Cross, it was because the Jewish People and public opinion in general could not understand the persistent silence of the Red Cross in the face of the extermination policy. He [Kubovy] would be grateful if even now he could receive an explanation for this silence which he could bring back to America. The wjc leadership could not accept the thesis, which had been offered for instance by Dr. Peter and Mr. Zollinger, that icrc was a committee of a few privet [sic] people without power nor authority. In our opinion the icrc was much more and was in a position to get important results whenever it asserted its authority.[[118]](#footnote-118)

Following the end of World War ii and revelations about the full extent of the Nazi extermination machine, the icrc launched a media and public campaign aimed at countering the criticism that its efforts on behalf of European Jews during the war had been negligible. In response, in May 1946 Tartakower published an article in the wjc bulletin, summarizing his assessment of the ICRC’s wartime activities in the Jewish context.[[119]](#footnote-119) Tartakower opened by asserting that Jews as well as non-Jews were responsible for the atrocities of the recent years, and there was no room for mutual accusations. In his words, “No one, therefore, should cast stones at another.” Nevertheless, he emphasized that the story of the Red Cross during World War ii was an exception, and he felt an obligation to present his criticism of the Committee, particularly in light of its efforts to redeem its reputation. In Tartakower’s view, the icrc was the only international organization that, had it fully exploited its power in Europe, could have reduced the scale of the mass murder of European Jews. He outlined the various arguments that he and his colleagues had voiced during the war regarding the Committee’s legal authority to act on behalf of European Jews, stressing that during the war the Red Cross, in contrast to every other organization, had the capacity to apply pressure on the Germans because it was the sole provider of assistance to German prisoners of war. He described the Committee’s efforts on behalf of European Jews during the later stages of World War ii as minor, adding that even its limited efforts had yielded some results, and that had they been taken sooner, the results would have been significantly greater. Tartakower did not overlook the ICRC’s contribution to rescuing some of Hungary’s Jews but argued that this was the result of heavy pressure applied by Jewish organizations on the Committee, and that it only partially compensated for the Committee’s inactivity during earlier stages of the war.[[120]](#footnote-120)

2 The Jewish Diaspora after World War ii

In September 1949, in his capacity as chairman of the Israel Executive of the wjc, Tartakower convened a press conference in Jerusalem.[[121]](#footnote-121) He was the main speaker at the conference, whose purpose was to present the activities of the wjc during the summer of 1949 to the Israeli public. Tartakower emphasized that the problem of relations between the Israeli public and Diaspora Jewry was a central issue on the organization’s agenda. He noted that most of the Jewish People do not reside in the State of Israel and underscored the importance of explaining the significance of its relations with the Diaspora to the Israeli public, making it clear that he regarded the Jewish People outside of Israel’s borders as an inseparable part of the fabric of Jewish life. In contrast to the worldview of Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir mentioned earlier, the outlook presented by Tartakower held that the State of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora are equally important, and their division would be destructive. He expressed strong support for the empowerment of the World Jewish Congress as a representative of Diaspora Jews in the international system, describing the wjc as “the most representative and effective Jewish representation” of the Jewish People. Tartakower was aware that a debate on issues related to the configuration of the Jewish People at a time when the State of Israel was struggling for its existence could be met with harsh criticism from many sectors of Israeli society. He countered this by arguing that these were fundamental problems that had to be addressed immediately: It had to be made clear, at the very outset of Israel’s formation, that it was not responsible for, or representative of, Diaspora Jews. The representation of Diaspora Jewry and engagement in issues affecting it had to come within the purview of Jewish organizations in the Diaspora. The State of Israel could not be involved in the lives of Jews in other countries. Such a situation would contravene international law and generate questions about dual loyalty. Tartakower warned against the emergence of two separate national entities, within and outside Israel, and emphasized that only the establishment of an organizational system that represents Diaspora Jews and works cooperatively with the State of Israel could prevent such a situation.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Tartakower’s activities as a senior wjc representative in Israel were a natural extension of his work with the wjc in the United States. The September 1949 press conference is just one example of his public activity aimed at reviving Jewish life in Europe after the Holocaust and securing recognition of Diaspora Jewish life as an inseparable and legitimate part of the post-Holocaust Jewish world. During the second half of the 1940s, after the end of World War ii, Tartakower took practical measures to actualize his worldview. One such example was his initiative to establish a training program in the United States for Jewish social workers who, after graduating, would be sent to Europe to help rehabilitate its Jewish communities. Preparations to launch the training program began in late November 1944, with the intention of sending the graduates to Europe when the political and security situation allowed it.[[123]](#footnote-123) The program was to be run cooperatively by the wjc and the New School for Social Research, with assistance from Professor Horace Kallen in the development of its curriculum and selection of its teaching staff. Appended to the curriculum was a position paper that reflected Tartakower’s worldview of the post-war configuration of the Jewish People and the tasks for American Jewish organizations. It described the need for a special program to train social workers, which stemmed from the unique problems facing the Jewish People in the aftermath of World War ii and the Holocaust. In this context, it cited the need to save hundreds of thousands of Jews from famine and disease, the urgency of arranging the mass movement of Jewish refugees, and the fundraising and management of the vast sums required to resettle the displaced Jews in Europe. The paper’s authors, members of the wjc Welfare and Relief Committee under the chairmanship of Tartakower, underscored the social and economic challenge of planning and implementing the reintegration of Jews in the greater European fabric of life. They described the training of a sizable group of social workers to provide aid and relief as one of the most important means of reviving Europe’s Jewish communities. Because European Jewry’s social support network had not survived the Holocaust, they pointed out, the only way to train a workforce capable of coping with the monumental tasks ahead was by establishing a special program to train Jewish social workers in New York.[[124]](#footnote-124) A memorandum prepared by Tartakower and the program’s organizing committee stated,

The tasks with which the Jewish community in Europe will be faced after the present war stand unique in the history of the world. Hundreds of thousands, and in all probability even millions, will have to be saved from starvation and from epidemics, a mass movement of deportees and refugees will have to be secured for the uprooted Jewish population, that means for the majority of the Jews especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the process of merging the Jewish economic and social life with the general life of European countries will have to be organized. If the necessity of organizing the migration of the considerable part of the European Jewish population and of helping all those who may have difficulties in the process of their economic readjustment will be added, then the magnitude of the problem may be understood, which will have to be solved and which scarcely can be equaled in the Jewish or in any other history.[[125]](#footnote-125)

The memorandum expressed concern that it might not be possible to find enough American Jews who would be willing to participate in the program. Ultimately, however, there was no shortage of suitable candidates and some of the applicants had to be turned down.[[126]](#footnote-126) The program of study was particularly intensive – only five months – because of the need to send the graduates to Europe as soon as possible. Its budget of $4,000 was underwritten by the wjc. The participants did not pay tuition, but neither did they receive a subsistence grant. The program was not intended exclusively for Jewish students, and during preparatory meetings, the possibility of having non-Jewish applicants, such as Quakers, was discussed. Yet an examination of the list of candidates and students reveals that in the end there were no non-Jewish applicants.[[127]](#footnote-127)

A review of the planned program of study indicates that its architects recognized the unique status of Palestine as a safe haven for the dispossessed. Nonetheless, Palestine occupied a minor place in the curriculum, which instead reflected the great importance that Tartakower and his colleagues ascribed to the rehabilitation of survivors in post-war Europe. The curriculum and syllabus point to the program’s objectives and its formulators’ worldview, which centered on working within Europe for the reconstruction of its Jewish communities. An information sheet on the program, titled “Fundamentals of Social Work” and issued by the wjc and the New School for Social Research, gave voice to this outlook. In explaining the syllabus, it stated that the purpose of the program was to lay a foundation for social services that would enable the personal and communal revival of European Jews:

The purpose of this series is to examine social work concepts as they have developed in the United States with a view primarily to estimating their relevance and usefulness for overseas work. The subjects to be discussed will include: Clients and sponsor, transitory and perennial problems, community characteristics and their study, organization principles, techniques of social work, such as case work and group work, psychological problems in offering or receiving help, difference in American and continental viewpoints, public and private sponsorship, problems of personnel, the place of professional practice, and relations with other professions at work.[[128]](#footnote-128)

The program’s architects gave special attention to the economic issue and to the integration of economic and social reconstruction. In this context, they stated, since the reconstruction of the Jewish economic life in Europe is both a problem of social work and of economic policy, the knowledge of the elements of both must be taken as granted with people who will direct the work of reconstruction. In the first period of the reconstruction, elements of social work may be more evident, but with the development of the activities, problems of a strictly economic character will become more and more important and the possibility of having the work of reconstruction shifted in this direction must be secured.[[129]](#footnote-129)

The selection of instructors and guest lecturers included the most prominent in the field. The noted anthropologist Margaret Mead, for example, taught a course titled “Sociological Aspects of Food Problems.” Ernst Popanek, a psychologist and pedagogue known primarily for his work with refugee children during and after World War ii, taught the course “Emergency Relief, Food, Clothing, Shelter.” Benjamin Akzin, a future Hebrew University faculty member and one of the protagonists of this book, taught a history course, “The United States War Refugee Board.” Interestingly, despite Tartakower’s fierce criticism of the icrc during the Holocaust, the syllabus included a course titled “The International Red Cross” taught by the Red Cross delegate to the US, Marc Peter, with whom he had clashed during World War ii.[[130]](#footnote-130) His inclusion among the teaching staff probably stemmed from expectations that the graduates would be working in close cooperation with the icrc in Europe, which made it important to introduce the students to the Committee’s work and establish direct ties between them and senior icrc representatives. The curriculum also included courses on problems of citizenship in the context of aid work, discussions on the reconstruction of Jewish communal life, and lectures on the provision of welfare services in the context of relations with governments, international organizations, and the private sector.

A course taught by Tartakower titled “Jewish Social Work before the War” provides a representative example of the nature of the studies. In June 1945 Tartakower’s students had an exam.[[131]](#footnote-131) Notwithstanding the course title, a review of the exam form and the students’ responses indicates that a major portion of the course was devoted to discussing the reconstruction of Jewish life after the war. One question, for example, asked the students to assess the main roles of the Jewish social work system in post-war Europe. The responses included a range of political solutions aimed at facilitating Jewish integration into European life, as well as an extensive discussion of the best ways to achieve personal and communal economic reconstruction.

The responses pointed to two channels of activity. The first was the integration of Jews into the economic structure in which they had operated before World War ii. The second entailed developing additional spheres of economic activity, particularly in agriculture and industry in Europe. In one exam, which received a grade of A, the student, Horace Kallen, emphasized that the problems facing European Jewry required two complementary approaches: immigration to Palestine and the reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe.[[132]](#footnote-132) The former was understandably beyond the scope of the course. Regarding the latter, the examinee noted that after providing immediate aid it would be necessary to design and implement a long-term system of services. In this context it would be necessary to rebuild the family unit and construct a comprehensive professional system of training that would prepare Jews for a variety of professions, with the aim of preventing their concentration within a narrow range of occupations. Notably, the examinee emphasized that despite the need for occupational variety, priority should be given to professional training that would facilitate Jewish integration in the economic system managed and controlled by the state. In the examinee’s assessment, such an approach would prevent or at least reduce the possibility of economically based tension and competition between Jews and non-Jews. The social workers, he asserted, are expected to provide a community-based support system that serves as a necessary complement to occupational training: care for orphans; healthcare, including mental health, services; creation of a complementary education system; and cultural services for Jewish communities. The resources needed for the various initiatives are tremendous, he added, beyond what American Jewish organizations can provide on their own. As such, economic and communal reconstruction would have to be managed by the Jewish social workers in close cooperation with the various governments and international organizations operating in post-war Europe. Towards the end of the exam, the student briefly discussed the appropriate political approach to integrating Jews in Europe during the latter half of the 1940s. According to him, and as the course itself conveyed, the concept of minority rights that were expected to serve as the basis for Jewish life in Eastern and Central Europe after World War i had completely failed – for Jews as well as other minorities. In the writer’s assessment, the concept of minority rights had contributed to the extermination of European Jews. In his view, the appropriate solution for Jews and other minorities in post-World War ii Europe lay in granting them full equality as human beings and citizens of the various European countries. Without the guarantee of equality, he believed, the reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe would be meaningless. A review of this document and the syllabus indicate that the program’s architects were seeking to reconstruct Jewish life in Europe. This was a particularly difficult challenge given that they wanted to work among Jewish communities not only in Western Europe but also in central and eastern states, where the Jewish communities had been almost completely destroyed and the local population was opposed to their return.[[133]](#footnote-133)

From a review of the applications to the program, it emerges that the candidates were aware of its ideological agenda. They sought to enroll in the program in order to be sent to Europe upon completion of their training so that they could contribute to the reconstruction of its Jewish communities. Most of the candidates and accepted students had not been born in the United States, but rather immigrated from Europe as children, teenagers, or young adults.[[134]](#footnote-134) Presumably, as in Tartakower’s case, their emigration from Europe had fostered a deeper sense of identification with its Jewish communities than the sense of identification among Jews born in the United States. In addition, they were more familiar with the reality of life in Europe and had a command of Yiddish and other European languages that were vital for the success of their mission.

Sylvia Markowitz, an applicant to the program, believed that her bachelor’s degree in sociology from Hunter College and seven years of teaching in New York public schools meant that she had a suitable academic and professional background. She stressed that she was aware that the purpose of the program was to have its graduates contribute to the reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe, and not merely to provide relief services. She wrote, “The problem is staggering – thousands of homeless Jewish people who have already suffered unspeakable tortures are in desperate circumstances. I feel that I can assist my people in troubled times. To that performance of the job, I will bring a deep understanding of social problems, of people uprooted and the sure, strong will to carry through.”[[135]](#footnote-135)

Another applicant, Ruth Stone, stated that she was 25 years old and had a bachelor’s degree from Hunter College. Although her degree was in pre-medical studies, she had taken many courses in the social sciences and had been accepted to Fordham University’s school of social work. She described her religious affiliation as “Hebrew” and emphasized that she was primarily interested in learning about and engaging in reconstruction processes in the context of welfare services.[[136]](#footnote-136)

The program operated from March 19, 1945, until June 14, 1945, with a total enrollment of 83 students. Classes met four days per week, and the average attendance was 57 students. The lowest number of attendees – 43 – was recorded on the day of President Roosevelt’s death. American citizens accounted for 75% of the student body, and only four students were over the age of 50.[[137]](#footnote-137)

A decisive majority of the students had an academic degree. Tartakower and the other members of the program’s steering committee believed that the best way to place the graduates in Europe was by integrating them into the activities of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, whose mandate was to provide relief for all refugees in areas controlled by the Allied states in Europe and the Far East after World War ii. This would presumably have facilitated complex logistical and bureaucratic issues related to the practical aspects of working in Europe. In the reality of 1945 and the immediate aftermath of World War ii, it was very difficult to send civilians to work in Europe. Integrating into the activities of unrra would ensure organizational funding for the work of the program’s graduates. In addition, and subject to budgetary constraints, a number of delegates would be sent as direct representatives of the wjc in Europe. Because they expected most of the work in Europe to be conducted through unrra, and in light of UNRRA’s policy of not employing citizens of the countries in which it operated, the program’s overseers sought to ensure that most of the candidates they accepted had American citizenship.[[138]](#footnote-138) Integrating the graduates into the work of unrra was not a simple task. In early 1945, Tartakower, the program’s initiator and driving force, conducted intensive exchanges with unrra officials in the United States in an effort to ensure the inclusion of the program’s graduates in its activities. He was aware that a significant portion of the student body had only acquired American citizenship relatively recently and had previously been citizens of countries regarded as enemy states during the war. Some did not even have American citizenship. In his exchanges with unrra officials, Tartakower pointed out the absurdity of regarding these program participants as subjects of enemy states when the fate of Jews under Nazi rule was known to all. He also explained the unique situation of European Jews after the Holocaust and his view that social workers who were intimately familiar with the Jewish community could make a greater contribution to the reconstruction of Jewish life than other relief workers. Another interesting rationale cited by Tartakower for including the program’s graduates in UNRRA’s work had to do with the intellectual qualifications of the European Jewish community: Before World War ii and the Holocaust it had been a highly intellectual community, but most of its members had been exterminated by the Nazis. The social workers who had immigrated to the United States belonged to these highly intellectual classes, and they had survived because they left. Thus, according to Tartakower, there is an inherent advantage in having a group of high quality that is familiar with the European Jewish community and able to contribute to its reconstruction in a broad range of areas, from providing personal care for survivors and their families, to reconstructing the community’s institutions and rebuilding its educational systems and places of knowledge and higher learning. He wrote,

Some of these people have particularly thorough knowledge of the conditions of life in their countries of origin, especially of the Jewish life with its various aspects. They can truly be considered as possessing the best experience in this field and their cooperation in the post-war relief work in these countries should be considered invaluable. Furthermore, chances are very slim of finding on the spot persons who would be able to participate in the work of unrra because the higher intellectual classes of the Jewish population in these countries, classes out of which came the social workers, have been decimated by the Nazis to a very large extent.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Although there is no precise information about the graduates who were sent to Europe, the program’s documents indicate that some graduates approached unrra and joined its efforts, while others were integrated into the work of the wjc and various Jewish philanthropies in Europe.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Tartakower’s attempts to integrate the program’s graduates into UNRRA’s work were part of ongoing efforts by him and other relief workers in New York to examine and understand its activities. He believed that only an international organization such as unrra could handle the complex mission of post-World War ii reconstruction in Europe. Tartakower was aware that integrating philanthropic Jewish efforts with those of unrra would allow for more meaningful and intensive work on behalf of European Jews, but this was not the only reason for his interest in combining efforts. He also believed in the organization’s approach and the worldview it represented, as reflected in his observations following UNRRA’s fourth conference, in Atlantic City in 1946: “These, then, were the aims: To mobilize the force of mankind for a great work of mercy to help liberate peoples rapidly to recover strength and stability and to achieve this by international solidarity…. It goes without saying that these feelings were fully shared by the Jewish people.”[[141]](#footnote-141)

Tartakower did not overlook the difficulties facing the organization in Europe. He argued, however, that these stemmed not from conceptual flaws in the ideas underpinning its mission, but from the limitations and obstacles posed by the post-World War ii reality in Europe, which was effectively subject to a military regime of the Allied states. According to him, the military authorities had yet to grasp and accommodate the organization’s activities in Europe, and states were opposed to the apparent threat to their sovereignty resulting from philanthropic activity by an international organization within their jurisdiction. These states sought, unsuccessfully, to pursue independent reconstruction efforts, which undermined UNRRA’s ability to carry out meaningful reconstruction. Opposition to UNRRA’s work was particularly strong in Eastern Europe because the lion’s share of the organization’s budget came from the United States and Britain, which tainted its reputation as an international organization and created the impression that it was representing the interests of those two states. Tartakower emphasized that these obstacles were not a reason to suspend its activities but, on the contrary, to reinforce the international aspects of UNRRA’s work in order to promote genuine, fruitful trans-border cooperation. In this context he wrote, “The spirit in which unrra daily work is being done may point the way toward a new future, but it may also become a symbol of inability to cope with the fundamental problem of mankind.”[[142]](#footnote-142)

The difficulties unrra was facing in Europe pointed not to the need for its dissolution, according to Tartakower, but on the contrary, to the need to reinforce it and grant its representatives in Europe more authority and freedom to operate. He pointed out that a stronger unrra was particularly important for the Jews: In the past, during the years between the two world wars, the League of Nations recognized the rights of European Jews in the framework of minority treaties, and this process had failed utterly. Tartakower, rather than ignoring the failure of the international system in the past, asserted that this failure pointed not to the need to abandon international efforts in Europe, but to create mechanisms that would ensure their success. He argued, “We Jews are no less interested than others in this kind of development. We may be even more interested…. The problem of Jewish displaced persons will never be solved without the cooperation of official international machinery…. This is the reason of our blessings for its future work. God knows we mean it sincerely. Let us hope that we shall not be disappointed again.”[[143]](#footnote-143)

3 The Jewish Diaspora and the State of Israel: Tartakower
and Jewish Nationalism

Tartakower’s activities on behalf of the wjc in Israel constituted only part of his public and intellectual life in the country. His public and academic work in the State of Israel generated a vast range of studies, books, and scholarly and popular articles. He served as a professor of the sociology of the Jewish People at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was elected chairman of the Israeli Executive of the wjc, established the Israeli section of the United Nations Association, and chaired the Israeli Committee for Ethiopian Jews. Tartakower had engaged extensively in scholarship even before he selected the Hebrew University as his academic home. Examples include his early study on Jewish socialism and the Jewish labor movement, published in three volumes during the years 1929–1931, and his monumental book on the history of Poland’s Jews, the first volume of which was published in 1929 and the second in 1934.[[144]](#footnote-144) During his years in the United States, Tartakower began publishing studies on Jewish immigration, and, later in Israel, he conducted important studies on Jewish settlement in the Diaspora, the sociology of Jewish society, and Jewish nationalism.[[145]](#footnote-145)

Tartakower asserted that it was important to create a political and organizational division between Diaspora Jewry and the State of Israel, and he attempted to establish and define the status of important Jewish organizations in the United States, such as the wjc, as having both the right and the duty to enhance Jewish life in the Diaspora. According to him, the wjc was a prime example of an organization capable of conducting political activity on behalf of Diaspora Jewry while also creating a cultural experience that would enable Jewish life to continue throughout the world in the post-World War ii era. In effect, Tartakower displayed an ideological foundation and advocated for the creation and cultivation of a bureaucratic system that would prevent the designation of Israel as the sole representative of Diaspora Jews. In his view, such a separation would preclude questions of dual loyalty on the part of Jewish communities in various countries and enable the continuation of a meaningful Jewish life in the Diaspora alongside Israel.

Tartakower’s arguments should be understood in the context of Ben-Gurion’s views on the American Jewish Diaspora, as described earlier, and the political steps he took immediately after the founding of Israel. Ben-Gurion sought to establish the State of Israel as the sole representative of Diaspora Jewry and the only entity with political, organizational, and ideological responsibility for Jewish life throughout the world. Accordingly, he effectively subordinated the Zionist movement to the Israeli government, took measures to prevent the separation of the Zionist movement from the State of Israel, and institutionalized the involvement of Israeli government representatives in the Jewish Agency.[[146]](#footnote-146)

In 1958 Tartakower published his book Jewish Settlement in the Diaspora. In the introduction he pointed out that although the book was being published as the second volume of a comprehensive study on Jewish settlement, it was actually a self-contained work that could be read independently of the previous volume, which had explored the concept of settlement as a social phenomenon.[[147]](#footnote-147) Tartakower felt it necessary to explain his reasons for publishing a comprehensive study on the history of Jewish settlement outside of what he defined as “the settlement enterprise in Eretz Israel and the State of Israel.” He explained that in his view Israeli society in general, and Israeli academia in particular, had ignored Jewish settlement outside Palestine before 1948 and outside Israel thereafter. In his introductory remarks Tartakower in essence presented a sense of mission that went beyond academic scholarship. He stressed that his decision to study the Diaspora settlement enterprise had an ideological and educational basis beyond regular scholarship, and that he was seeking to change the predominant thinking of 1950s Israeli society. He wrote,

Almost nothing remains in our time from the epic Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe. The strongholds that had existed in other countries have been drastically reduced as well. Yet whatever course this situation takes, the Jewish settlement enterprise in the gola [outside of Israel] has significance. From the Jewish colony in southern Russia, in the fields of Serbia, and in La Pampa in Argentina, and with endless guarantees from the United States, Canada, and others, there is a golden chain linking the ingathering and settlement of workers in Eretz Israel, whether it is visible to all or – as is more often the case – deeply buried in a person’s consciousness. In this sense the present book is an introduction of sorts to the historical chapter of the establishment of the national home on the soil of the homeland. And it would be good if word of this introduction spread to a wider audience than it has reached so far. The task facing me was not an easy one, and were it not for my reluctance to repeat a phrase that many use – not always completely justifiably – I would tend to call it pioneering.[[148]](#footnote-148)

In this introduction and through his research generally, Tartakower challenged the prevailing Israeli and Zionist perspective of the 1950s, which viewed Israel’s existence as the prime objective and opposed a Jewish Diaspora in the form of an independent political and organizational system aimed not at supporting the State of Israel but at empowering Jewish life around the world. Like the leaders of the American Zionist movement up to the 1950s, Tartakower did not regard Jewish sovereignty in the framework of the State of Israel as the only legitimate option for Jewish life in the modern era, and he sought to present his readers with a composite vision of an integrated Jewish existence within and beyond Israel.

Tartakower’s book on Jewish settlement is not an isolated example. A review of his studies and publications related to his public activity in Israel reveals that he often challenged the accepted Zionist worldview during the first two decades of Israeli statehood. He urged that immigrants to Israel be allowed to retain their separate ethnic identity, warned against emphasizing the national aspects of Jewish life in the Israeli context, seeking instead to highlight moral aspects, objected to the repudiation of the Diaspora, stressed the contribution of American Jewry to the founding of Israel, and proposed a model of multifaceted loyalty as a possible solution to Jewish life in the post-World War ii world, using a new model of Jewish nationalism that would recognize the existence of Diaspora nationalism and facilitate a Jewish existence that integrates the Diaspora and the State of Israel.[[149]](#footnote-149) Tartakower was deeply concerned about the emerging nationalist trends in Israel. In his view the greatest enemy of democracy was the modern state, and the inherent challenge of a national existence in a democratic format was particularly serious in Israel because of the state’s intensive involvement in the lives of its citizens, more so than in any other Western democratic state. He was critical of the discrimination against the Arab minority in Israel, supported strengthening the local Arab governing authorities, and sought to cultivate and reinforce ideals and practical measures on behalf of peace and international cooperation in the country. Tartakower presented a worldview in which the Zionist movement had a universal human mission rather than a strictly national one. According to him, Zionism, by its essence, supports international cooperation and promotes international mechanisms in the pursuit of justice across the world. He believed there was a real danger that after years of not experiencing sovereignty and in light of the horrors faced by the Jewish people in the past generation, these aspects of Zionist ideology and practice would be forgotten and only the national elements would receive attention. The Jewish and Zionist past as a persecuted minority that has supported universal justice and cooperation while suffering at the hands of militant nationalism would be forgotten. Tartakower termed this process “the slave who would be king.”[[150]](#footnote-150)

Israeli society’s repudiation of the Diaspora greatly preoccupied Tartakower. In this context he felt it necessary to explain why he frequently used the term galut or gola (“exile” in Hebrew – referring to the Jewish Diaspora) rather than “Diaspora”: as a sociologist he preferred the former because it embodied the far-reaching implications of a divide between a people and its homeland, whereas the Hebrew translation of the concept of Diaspora (tfutza, from the Hebrew word “dispersion”) was in his view “mechanical” and detached from the unique Jewish reality. But he underscored that his use of the term gola was without negative connotations and he spoke out against the disparaging use of this term.

The discussion surrounding a new book by Simon Rawidowicz provided Tartakower with a platform to present his views on the issue of the gola.[[151]](#footnote-151) He described Rawidowicz as “one of the great intellects of the [Jewish] people” and someone who had not received the recognition he was due. As Tartakower explained, “It was Simon Rawidowicz’s fate that his reputation as an extreme supporter of the gola would precede him across wide sectors of the Jewish public. This would likely generate discomfort from the outset with the various haters of Zion and their political parties.”[[152]](#footnote-152) Tartakower identified with Rawidowicz’s concerns regarding the emergence of a new Jewish nationalism like that of the First Temple era, which ignores universal values and the possibility of a meaningful Jewish life both within and beyond the Eretz Israel, along the lines of the Second Temple era. He emphasized that the ideology and practice of the Israeli leadership, particularly during the early years of Israeli statehood, contained elements that validate Rawidowicz’s concerns. He further noted that he was strongly opposed to these trends and was very pleased to see that in the early 1960s, the time in which he was writing, one could discern the winds of change in Israeli society.

Tartakower gave special attention to the American Jewish community. He regarded American Jews as an inseparable part of American society and took a very positive view of their integration into it, underscoring their contribution to shaping and building the country, and dismissing the dire predictions that the Jewish community in the United States was destined for extinction. He argued that among American Jews there is virtually no one who denies Jewish nationalism, and that the blame for the absence of meaningful ties between Israeli society and the American Jewish community lies mainly with the State of Israel rather than American Jews. According to Tartakower, much of the criticism voiced against US Jews stems from the interests of the Israeli leadership and its delegates to the United States, who seek to turn American Jews into an instrument in the service of the State of Israel. The representation of American Jews as a community that can only guarantee its future through ties with the State of Israel serves this purpose. Tartakower voiced opposition to this trend, which in his view did not stand the test of reality, as he asserted in 1954, on the 300-year anniversary of the Jewish community in United States.

Relations between Israel and the gola in recent years have fostered neither respect nor benefit. Alongside the large camp of those who are simply apathetic that the gola does not exist for them, or exists only to the extent that it is necessary for the State of Israel, there stand out those who apparently decided, because of a semi-sadistic approach, to emphasize and reemphasize every negative sign regarding gola Jewry, and they are unanimous in expecting it to die out, if not as a result of anti-Semitism and ever-present riots, then because of cultural and moral atrophy and all-devouring assimilation. In light of
this situation, we should clarify matters not on the basis of what people in Israel say, but through the testimony of the gola, and not by referring to polemical statements in newspapers and at gatherings, but by looking at the results of serious scholarly work that aims to delve into the issues rather than seize on some coincidental sign or another. The delegates from whom we learn most about the lessons of the gola deserve respect, but there are those among them who wittingly or unwittingly set out with prejudicial views, and there are more than a few who consider themselves qualified to make a judgment after a brief visit of a few weeks or months.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Tartakower’s view of American Jewry is also evident in the meaningful connection he formed with Mordecai Kaplan, one of the most prominent Jewish thinkers in the United States and an enthusiastic Zionist. Like Tartakower, Kaplan viewed Zionism as a movement aimed at rehabilitating Jewish civilization worldwide, rather than a movement focused exclusively on establishing and strengthening the State of Israel. In his view the rehabilitation of Jewish life in the Diaspora had to be one of Zionism’s foremost objectives. Tartakower discussed Kaplan’s philosophical outlook in an essay titled “On the Fundamental Problems of Bi-Culturalism around the World and for Us,” which appeared as part of a jubilee publication in honor of Kaplan’s seventieth birthday.[[154]](#footnote-154) In this essay Tartakower voiced enthusiastic support for the bi-cultural format as a Jewish way of life throughout the world and especially in the United States. The presumption here is that the Jew not only can but must live as part of two cultures because that is the path to cultural wholeness. The Holy One Blessed Be He [God] was charitable towards us in this respect as well, by dispersing us among the goyim [nations], for this has given us the opportunity to live in two cultures and to provide a path for others. This unintentionally brings to mind Simon Dubnow’s famous theory about the principle of life in the Diaspora and self-governance as a solution to the Jewish national problem. Dubnow, too, believed wholeheartedly that the Jewish People could maintain its existence in the Diaspora if it were granted its own self-governance, and he too saw this as a special calling of the People, who would pave the way for others and teach them how to maintain a life of dignity even without a country or state of their own. Although Dubnow, in building on this premise, rejected Zionism as unnecessary for the People’s existence, in contrast to Kaplan, who viewed Zionism as absolutely necessary and its realization as one of the conditions for our existence in countries outside of Israel, this difference, whatever its significance, is not an essential one. The need for the Diaspora in cultural terms nevertheless remains. We should therefore examine this problem more deeply, firstly in terms of its essence and the means of its realization in day-to-day life.[[155]](#footnote-155)

In my assessment, Tartakower’s years in the United States had a decisive influence on his worldview. An analysis of his scholarly and popular writings before he left for the United States reveals completely different points of emphasis. In 1934 he wrote a textbook in Hebrew for secondary schools and youth groups, titled The Jewish People in Our Time, in which he presented a comprehensive description of Jewish life in the 1930s in terms of demographics, the economy, immigration, culture, and politics.[[156]](#footnote-156) The book describes the state of world Jewry and highlights the centrality of Zionism and Jewish settlement in Palestine. It portrays Jewish life outside Palestine as a flawed phenomenon that poses a threat to the existence of the Jewish People. This danger could be physical, in light of the growing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, or cultural and ideological, as a direct result of assimilation in the Soviet Union and the United States, which only Zionism can prevent.[[157]](#footnote-157) The Zionist enterprise, in the context of Palestine, is presented as the only option for Jewish life in a national format in the twentieth century.[[158]](#footnote-158) The primacy of Palestine and marginality of the Diaspora, alongside the assessment that Jewish life outside Palestine should only be a means of reinforcing the Zionist enterprise, emerged as salient factors in Tartakower’s analysis of Zionist efforts on behalf of world Jewry. He wrote, “The aspiration to link realization of the Zionist enterprise with the struggle to fortify strongholds in the gola was already evident in the early years of the current century, and the ‘galut program’ became an integral part of the plan of action for the Zionist organizations within countries.”

He took care to point out, however, that the central aim of this move had not been to enhance Jewish life throughout the world, but rather to enlist Jewish support for the Zionist movement. “It should be taken into account that this defense of the daily interests of the Jewish public in gola lands draws to the Zionist movement multitudes of people who would not otherwise join the Zionist camp, or at least would not be waging our struggle with such dedication.”[[159]](#footnote-159) Tartakower supported political, economic, and cultural activity among European Jews but emphasized that the purpose of such activity was not the creation of a foundation for Jewish life in Europe; rather, it constituted a process of comprehensive training before immigrating to Palestine and was intended to facilitate a reasonable quality of Jewish life at the individual and communal level prior to immigration. He described Jewish life in the Diaspora as an “anomaly” that would be resolved only through the establishment of Jewish life in Palestine. Tartakower did not ignore Jewish immigration to the United States, but he asserted that the integration of Jews in the American labor force and their ability to lead a communal life there were short-term phenomena. In the near future, the American arena would also see the emergence of the European Jewish anomaly. Accordingly, Tartakower fiercely criticized those sectors of the Jewish labor movement that sought to lay a foundation for a long-term Jewish existence in Europe.[[160]](#footnote-160) It is safe to assume that Tartakower’s activities as a member the ŁódźŁódź city council and his engagement in community and educational endeavors in Poland should be understood in this light. These activities did not indicate that he recognized the possibility of establishing a Jewish way of life in Poland; rather, they constituted public activity aimed at enabling a reasonable quality of Jewish life until it became possible to emigrate, while also preparing the Jewish public for the challenge of emigration.

In other publications prior to his immigration to the United States, Tartakower presented Zionist activity in Palestine as the decisive factor that could resolve the problem of Jewish existence in the first half of the twentieth century.[[161]](#footnote-161) With respect to the American Jewish community, although he did not ignore the mass emigration from Eastern Europe to the United States up until 1924, which numbered millions of Jews, he devoted very little attention to this community in his writings. Moreover, when he did address American Jewish matters, he focused on the socialist branches of the Jewish labor movement in the United States. He almost completely ignored non-socialist sectors of the American Jewish community, and any references to them demonstrated a lack of knowledge intertwined with criticism. For example, he referred to the American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, as the “Committee of Assimilated American Jews.”[[162]](#footnote-162) The Committee’s founders were in fact members of the economic elite who had emigrated from German-speaking lands to the United States, but to describe them as assimilated is far from accurate. They sought to defend East European Jews and promoted Jewish immigration to the United States as an important means of bettering the lives of these Jews.[[163]](#footnote-163) Tartakower’s perspective on the American Jewish community, like his observations regarding Diaspora Jewry generally, changed significantly after he immigrated to the United States.

An examination of Tartakower’s public activity and research reveals a unique Zionist outlook, with roots in the American Jewish arena. As he saw it, there was no contradiction between his Zionism and his activity in the wjc, and he did not regard the organization as superfluous even after Israel was established. In fact, the opposite was the case. He identified as a Zionist and put all his effort into the cause of establishing a Jewish state, while at the same time continuing the struggle to reinforce Diaspora Jewry’s ethnic identity, of which Zionism was a key element. His worldview should be understood in light of the nature of Zionism in the United States, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century, as has been presented earlier in the book. American Zionists refrained from including Aliyah as a central element of their ideology and practice. Zionism was, for them, an important aspect of their lives within American society, rather than a means of actualizing immigration to Palestine or Israel. They strove to create a Jewish nationalism that minimized the elements of territorial concentration and political sovereignty, resisted the concept of “repudiation of exile,” and emphasized the moral aspects of Judaism generally and the Zionist movement specifically. In this spirit, Tartakower saw no contradiction between efforts to enhance the ethnic and national identity of Diaspora Jews after the Holocaust, on the one hand, and support for the establishment of a Jewish state, on the other. On the contrary, for him Zionism was a political and social process that granted legitimacy to, and infused modern content into, Jewish life in the Diaspora, and particularly in the United States. He believed that Zionism allowed Jews to live in the modern world while preserving a unique ethnic and cultural identity that was of crucial importance for humanity generally and Jews specifically, and that the importance of Zionism in Jewish history stemmed not only from the successful establishment of a sovereign Jewish state, but also from the creation of new Jewish ways of life throughout the world. In this context, one byproduct of the tremendous effort of world Jewry to establish a national home was the creation of a global Jewish community as a political power with shared aims and functional institutions.

Interestingly, Tartakower’s views on Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine and the Middle East were also similar to the outlook of most American Zionist leaders during the first half of the twentieth century. The heads of the American Zionist movement at the time were not content merely to provide economic and political support for the Zionist movement and the Yishuv in Palestine. They also sought to build on the important role that Zionism had acquired in the ethnic fabric of American Jewish life, and on their own prominence within the Zionist movement, in order to influence the formation and development of the Jewish national home they believed would emerge, as well as its integration, as a state with a Jewish majority, into the Middle East. In their view, the permanent status of American Zionists obligated them to be prepared to deal with the key questions that would emerge in post-war assessments. A central question in this context was the place of a Jewish state in the Middle East, which they expected to be the most important issue that Zionism and the Jewish state would have to address in the future. Their papers reveal that they looked beyond the matters of principle related to Arab-Jewish relations. They also proposed practical plans addressing a range of problems, including the question of water rights, the refugee issue, regional economic cooperation, and the role of international organizations in the Middle East arena. Their goal was to express in practical terms their desire to establish patterns of cooperation and coexistence between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. Like them, Tartakower supported the complete, egalitarian integration of Arab citizens and believed in making a concerted effort to reduce gaps between Jews and Arabs in the future Jewish state. He regarded the future state’s obligation to care for newly arriving Jewish immigrants and its obligation to better the socioeconomic conditions of the Arabs in the same light. In his view these missions were of equal importance. In this context, he placed special emphasis on the labor market. He believed that the Jewish state must take measures to eliminate professional discrepancies between Arabs and Jews and open the Jewish sector’s labor market to Arabs, by integrating them into professions that require high levels of skill and education. Tartakower also believed that it would be possible to achieve peace and cooperation with the neighboring Arab states through joint efforts to promote regional development based on the professional knowledge and experience that the Jewish state had accumulated.[[164]](#footnote-164)

chapter 3

Aryeh Kubovy

1 Support, Opposition, Reservation: The Bombing of Auschwitz as Brought to Light by Kubovy’s Papers

Dr. Aryeh Leon Kubovy (Kubowitzki) (1896–1966) was born in Lithuania, the sixth of eleven children. In 1906 his family immigrated to Belgium, where after completing a doctorate in classical philology and law at Université de Liège, Kubovy combined his legal practice with public activity. Among other pursuits, he served as a member of the Zionist General Council and, in light of his activism in the Belgian socialist movement, was elected to the Antwerp city council. When Germany invaded Belgium, he fled to the United States, where like Tartakower, he became more involved in wjc activities, although he had already been somewhat active in Europe. In 1940 Kubovy joined the efforts to rescue European Jews through a special wjc committee based in New York, and in 1944 he was elected as chairman of the WJC’s newly founded Rescue Department, also headquartered in New York.[[165]](#footnote-165)

In 1946 Kubovy immigrated to Palestine, where he quickly assimilated into various spheres of the Yishuv’s public activity and, after 1948, into the Israeli bureaucracy. In 1951 he was appointed as Israel’s envoy to Czechoslovakia and Poland but had to step down a year later, after the Czech government declared him persona non grata. According to Czech authorities, the decision was taken in response to his efforts to promote Jewish immigration to Israel and his ties with Rudolph Slánský, who was convicted of treason in the 1952 Prague show trials.[[166]](#footnote-166) He subsequently held senior Israeli Foreign Ministry positions as an envoy to South America, including the post of ambassador to Argentina. In December 1958 he resigned from the Foreign Ministry and, in March 1959, he became the second chairman of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. His position consisted of two roles: chairman of the Board and chairman of the Yad Vashem Council. He held this post until his death in 1966, after which the two roles were divided into separate positions.

Kubovy’s standing as head of the WJC’s Rescue Department placed him in one of the most important pivotal roles in the rescue effort, particularly in the US. Studies on the American Jewish leadership of the 1930s and 1940s have devoted special attention to the WJC’s leaders, closely scrutinizing, and often strongly criticizing, their actions.[[167]](#footnote-167) This is especially true with respect to efforts on behalf of Europe’s persecuted Jews. The vast literature exploring the inability of the American Jewish leadership to rescue Jews during the Holocaust is beyond the scope of this study.[[168]](#footnote-168) Nonetheless, and unrelated to the WJC’s weaknesses, it should be underscored that the Congress’s most prominent rescue activists – including Kubovy and the wjc chairmen, notably Chairman of the Board Stephen Wise and Executive Committee Chairman Nahum Goldmann – played an important role through both public and backchannel contacts with the American administration on various issues related to world Jewry and the Zionist movement, working on behalf of and through the wjc to shape the American Jewish public’s response to the Holocaust in accordance with their worldview. To appreciate the full import of Wise’s and Goldmann’s efforts in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, one should also take into account Wise’s status in the Democratic party and the impressive network of contacts Goldmann forged with key figures in the American political system after arriving in the US as a refugee in the early 1940s.

Kubovy’s personal papers and documents from the department he headed provide a wealth of valuable information on rescue efforts by US Jewry during the Holocaust. Particularly fascinating is the assortment of documents on the question of bombing the Auschwitz extermination camp – a question that arose in the context of the 1944 campaign to save Hungarian Jews or, to the extent possible, minimize their slaughter.

Auschwitz was the collective name of a complex of camps, some of which served as labor camps. Among these camps was Birkenau, which contained extermination facilities. Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest of the concentration and extermination camps on Polish land, serving simultaneously as both a labor and concentration camp and a death camp. More than 1,000,000 Jews, 70,000 Poles, 25,000 Roma, and 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war were killed at the camp. The ancillary camp of Birkenau (Auschwitz ii) was established in October 1941, three kilometers from Auschwitz, and in March 1942 this new camp began operating as an extermination camp. Most of the new arrivals were Jews, who were immediately sent to the gas chambers. Only a small portion of those who underwent the selection process were assigned to compulsory labor at the camp itself or at weapons facilities located in satellite camps. During the spring and summer, as Jews were being brought to the camp from Hungary and the Łódź ghetto, the rate of extermination rose sharply.

The transports from Hungary to Auschwitz-Birkenau, which had been expanded and adapted to receive Hungarian Jews, began in May 1944.[[169]](#footnote-169) About 437,000 Jews were killed in 56 days. In addition, following the rise to power of the Arrow Cross Party in October 1944, thousands of Budapest’s Jews were slaughtered on the banks of the Danube and tens of thousands were sent on death marches to the Austrian border. In all, about 565,000 of Hungary’s Jews were killed.[[170]](#footnote-170)

The Auschwitz death camp was within Allied firing range, particularly for the American 15th Air Force, which operated from bases in southern Italy and whose targets included the area surrounding Auschwitz.[[171]](#footnote-171) This fact fueled calls for the complex to be bombed, especially after efforts by others to prevent the slaughter of Hungarian Jews had failed. Advocates of bombing believed that destroying the camp’s facilities would at least lead to the temporary suspension of operations or reduce the scale of the slaughter of Hungarian Jews. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the symbolic significance of a concerted Allied effort to sabotage the operations of the Nazi machinery for the extermination of European Jewry. The fact that ultimately the death camp was not bombed, in combination with the dramatic intensity of Hungarian Jewry’s slaughter during the later stages of World War ii, turned the non-bombing of Auschwitz into a symbol of the powerlessness of both the free world and the Jewish and Zionist leadership, and of the futility of their efforts to save European Jews.[[172]](#footnote-172) That symbolism is probably among the driving factors behind the extensive research on this chapter in history.

The scholarship on the non-bombing of Auschwitz touches on one of the most sensitive aspects of relations between Jewish or Zionist organizations in the free world and the Allies within the context of rescue efforts on behalf of European Jewry. This is a complex field of research spanning different and diverse arenas: from questions about the technical capability to bomb the camp, to an assessment of the information about Auschwitz that was available to the Allies and Jewish and Zionist organizations, to a discussion of the functioning and response of political and military systems, to the concrete question of bombing the camp in 1944. Notwithstanding the complexity of this discussion, one can identify two fundamental, discernible lines of thought within the discourse. The first examines the factors that led the Allies’ political establishments and military leaderships to refrain from bombing the camp, and a parallel field of study focuses on the efforts of Jewish and Zionist organizations to influence Allied leaders and persuade them to bomb the camps. A second set of studies examines factors that, in the researchers’ view, contributed to the decision not to bomb the camp. In this context the questions examined include whether a bombing operation was technically feasible, whether a strike against Auschwitz would have reduced the scope of slaughter, and what information about Auschwitz was in fact available to the Allies and the Jewish and Zionist organizations.

The bombing of Auschwitz had not been a focus of historical or public discourse on the Holocaust until 1978, when an article by David Wyman appeared in the magazine Commentary.[[173]](#footnote-173) From Wyman’s perspective, which he further developed in later studies, the Allies should have bombed the Auschwitz extermination site, and the fact that it was not bombed stemmed from a chilling combination of two factors: the first was the lack of will or power, on the part of the Zionist leadership generally and American Jewish leaders specifically, to apply massive pressure on the American government to bomb the camp; the second factor was the blind eye that the Allies and the American government turned to the fate of Europe’s Jews. For Wyman, the non-bombing of Auschwitz came to symbolize the abandonment of European Jewry, as reflected in the title of his 1984 book, The Abandonment of the Jews.[[174]](#footnote-174) Wyman’s view received strong support following the publication of aerial photographs of the extermination site – which had been in the hands of the Allies – as well as extensive research about the information that had evidently reached the free world, including Jewish organizations, in the aftermath of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler’s escape from Auschwitz. The subsequent report had been sent to Washington on June 16, 1944, and shortly thereafter, in November 1944, it appeared in the American press.[[175]](#footnote-175) Because Gerhart Riegner, the wjc delegate to Switzerland, had a role in sending the report to Washington, one may surmise that Kubovy and his colleagues in the wjc leadership would have been aware of it. Additional information about the camp also reached the Jewish communities and the Allies following the escape from Auschwitz by Czeslaw Mordowicz and Arnost Rosin, who provided information about the preparations underway at Auschwitz for the slaughter of Hungary’s Jews, as well as chillingly vivid testimonies of the extermination process itself, which they had personally witnessed.[[176]](#footnote-176)

Wyman’s study focused mainly on the American arena. In the British arena, as well, the leadership’s 1944 decision not to engage the Royal Air Force in a strike against Auschwitz became a matter of criticism and the focus of a debate, which centered mainly on Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s involvement. Researchers have explored the question of his support for bombing, and whether, had he supported it, he could have persuaded military officials to carry out such an attack despite their personal opposition.[[177]](#footnote-177) A few studies have also addressed the possibility of Soviet armed forces having taken action against Auschwitz.[[178]](#footnote-178) One of the options initially considered, when the possibility of bombing Auschwitz was first raised, was to bomb the train tracks leading to the camp. Over the years much information has accumulated regarding the very limited success of Allied attempts to strike at German-controlled railroad tracks, which in turn led most researchers to conclude that bombing the rail lines leading to Auschwitz was not a realistic possibility, and that this fact was known in 1944 as well.[[179]](#footnote-179) The same conclusion emerges from documents that focus on the question of bombing the camp itself. Because Kubovy’s papers deal mainly with the American arena, the present study will focus on developments in the United States in 1944.

Over the years, alongside scholarship that supports Wyman’s view, there have emerged many studies on the futility of bombing Auschwitz.[[180]](#footnote-180) Opponents of bombing emphasize the limitations Allied bombers would have faced were they to attempt the mission, point out that bombing the camp would not have led to the cessation of mass slaughter in 1944, and even question the ability of the Allied intelligence network to correctly analyze information received through aerial photography, given the means available in 1944. Researchers have also sought to expose the complexities of applying pressure on the American administration, in the midst of a world war, on behalf of rescue efforts generally and the bombing of Auschwitz specifically, and have examined the non-bombing of the camp as part of a continuum of failed attempts to prevent or significantly reduce the Nazis’ slaughter of European Jews during World War ii.[[181]](#footnote-181)

A key issue that emerges from a survey of books and articles on the question of bombing Auschwitz is what information the Allies and leaders of Jewish and Zionist organizations actually had regarding the horrific systematic and industrial slaughter taking place at the camp. Information about what was happening at Auschwitz reached the free world relatively late, and according to evidence presented by a variety of studies, the Allies and the Polish government attempted to censor information about the camp. Nonetheless, there is a consensus among scholars that in 1944 the American government, the British government, and the Jewish leadership were aware of the systematic, industrialized slaughter taking place at the camp’s extermination site. To those leaders it was clear that the Jews of Hungary were being sent to Auschwitz, where their fate was to be slaughtered by the Nazis.[[182]](#footnote-182)

wjc documents and Kubovy’s papers confirm the conclusion that the Congress’s leadership and other Jewish leaders definitely knew about the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews at the Auschwitz extermination camp during the latter stages of World War ii. A highly confidential telegram from the wjc office in Switzerland to Kubovy unequivocally indicates that they had information about the mass murder of Hungarian Jews. In the cable, Riegner, the wjc delegate to Switzerland, referred to information about hundreds of thousands of Jews being deported from Hungary and sent to Germany to work as forced laborers in the German industry. He asserted that this was strictly Hungarian propaganda, pointing out that Hungarian government representatives had relayed information in this spirit to Red Cross delegates but had not addressed the delegates’ questions as to why the deportees included women, children, and elderly who could not work. Riegner’s telegram makes it clear that he believed the deported Hungarian Jews were being sent to Auschwitz.[[183]](#footnote-183)

In 1944, drawing on the experience in Portugal and Spain, wjc leaders sought to implement a similar escape plan, by which small groups of Jews could leave Hungary for partisan-controlled areas under Tito’s leadership in Yugoslavia or take shelter in Slovakia and hiding places prepared by the local underground. Accordingly, wjc representatives made initial contact with members of underground resistance movements in various areas, significant sums of money changed hands in order to fund the plan, and a small number of groups set out. The information relayed by wjc delegates in Europe was that despite tremendous efforts, the escapees had been caught by Germans, and the escape plan had failed because of technical difficulties transiting from Hungary to areas under partisan control and because some of the partisan and underground groups in the area were unwilling to cooperate actively in facilitating the Jews’ escape.[[184]](#footnote-184) Besides trying to arrange groups of escapees, wjc bodies engaged in extensive political efforts across various countries, with the aim of persuading them to declare publicly that Hungary’s Jews were citizens of their country and entitled to its protection. The organization’s leaders understood that such an announcement would be purely symbolic but hoped that it would make clear to Hungary’s leaders the importance that the international community ascribed to the welfare of Jews living there. In the context of these efforts, Kubovy wrote to Portugal’s ambassador in Washington, conveying what he described as the horrific slaughter of Jews in Hungary, and emphasizing that the lives of tens of thousands of Jews were in imminent danger. He was evidently seeking to build on an earlier understanding between the wjc and the government of Portugal, which stipulated that the Portuguese Embassy in Budapest would provide protection for a small number of Jews. In this context he mentioned the efforts of Raoul Wallenberg, Sweden’s delegate to Budapest, who had been authorized by his government to provide protection papers for thousands of Jews to whom the Swedish government was granting shelter and special housing. Kubovy proposed that the government of Portugal undertake a similar initiative by launching a broad political movement aimed at stopping the mass murder of Hungary’s Jews and encompassing all the neutral states.

At the same time, in a move initiated by wjc members in Britain, wjc leaders in Washington approached both the American administration and the British government, to seek their protection for Hungary’s remaining Jews. They understood the legal difficulties entailed in declaring these Jews to be citizens, and therefore proposed the following formulation: “This country would proclaim that it considers all Jews remaining in Europe as being under its protection as far as their physical safety is concerned, and that any infringement upon this safety (such as removal from their dwellings, subjection to starvation diets, etc.) will be dealt with as if American citizens were concerned.” The wjc leaders assessed that a public statement in this spirit, if it received widespread publicity, could prevent or at least reduce harm to the remaining Jews in Hungary or other German-occupied territories. In contrast, the American administration – through the War Refugee Board – and the British government concluded that they could not grant genuine protection to Jews declared to be citizens or subjects, and therefore it would not be appropriate to take
this measure.[[185]](#footnote-185)

The importance of Kubovy’s involvement in efforts surrounding the question of bombing Auschwitz is evident from studies on this issue. A decisive majority of these studies, in discussing the call for military action against the extermination site, do indeed mention Kubovy’s activities in the American arena.

These studies pay particular attention to the correspondence between Kubovy and Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy. On August 9, 1944, Kubovy wrote to McCloy, conveying a request from Ernest Frischer, a prominent Jewish activist in Czechoslovakia and a member of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and the Czechoslovak Council in London: to bomb Auschwitz and the railway lines leading to it. McCloy’s response arrived only a few days later, on August 14. In a brief, infuriating letter that has received a great deal of attention, the assistant secretary of war rejected the suggestion, arguing that bombing the camp would require the use of significant airpower, which would undermine the Allied war effort. McCloy also voiced reservations about the effectiveness of the proposed bombing action and posited that it could lead the Germans to institute even stricter measures against the Jews
of Europe.[[186]](#footnote-186)

Of particular relevance for our purposes is a letter from Kubovy to John W. Pehle, executive director of the War Refugee Board (wrb), a special agency of the US government mandated to save and assist victims of World War ii. The wrb was founded in January 1944 by order of President Roosevelt, and in practice most of its efforts focused on the rescue of European Jews.

In the letter, dated July 1, 1944, Kubovy asked the American government to launch a military operation against the death camp – not a bombing operation but a land-based military action. Kubovy’s view is summarized in the following excerpt, which is underscored in the archival version of the letter: “The destruction of the death installations can not be done by bombing from the air, as the first victims would be the Jews who are gathered in these camps, and such a bombing would be a welcome pretext for the Germans to assert that their Jewish victims have been massacred not by their killers, but by the allied bombings.”[[187]](#footnote-187)

Also notable in the context of calls for military action against Auschwitz – other than bombing it – was the Jewish Agency meeting of June 11, 1944, which discussed the assessment that the camp should not be bombed. The response of the Yishuv and Zionist institutions to the Holocaust of European Jewry, an important issue with far-reaching implications, is beyond the scope of the present discussion. For our purposes, however, it is significant that even the Jewish Agency’s decision not to call for the bombing of Auschwitz is presented by scholars as a mistake that can be understood retrospectively in the context of communication difficulties and information gaps stemming from the realities of a world war. Many scholars have emphasized that the Jewish Agency’s leadership, and Ben-Gurion himself, very soon changed their stance in support of bombing Auschwitz.[[188]](#footnote-188)

Kubovy’s letter, as the scholarship presents it, was an isolated event and a personal initiative on his part. The research in this field suggests that his letter only had a marginal impact on the American administration’s decision not to bomb the camp, and was not indicative of a substantive strategic move on the part of the Jewish leadership in the United States. The letter was not the outcome of systematic consideration or discussion, nor did it result from conclusions or decisions reached by the wjc and other Jewish organizations based in the United States and working jointly on behalf of European Jews. The aforementioned compilation The Bombing of Auschwitz, which summarizes the main research findings up to the time of its publication and presents new studies disputing the existing perspectives, illustrates the marginal importance ascribed to Kubovy’s letter.[[189]](#footnote-189) The compilation contains an impressive appendix with important documents relating to the decision not to bomb Auschwitz. Although Kubovy’s letter is included in this appendix and earns a few mentions in the compilation, the scant attention it receives essentially reinforces the view that the document did not reflect a substantive political move.[[190]](#footnote-190)

Kubovy’s personal papers, however, point to a far more complex reality. The letters and minutes of meetings archived among Kubovy’s own files indicate that, in contrast to what the scholarship suggests, Kubovy’s letter of July 1, 1944, to wrb Executive Director Pehle represented a larger substantive political and strategic effort calling for action – other than bombing – against the death camp.

On the day of his letter to Pehle, Kubovy also wrote to Lawrence S. Lesser, assistant executive director of the wrb, asking that if the Board does take a favorable view of his call for action against the extermination camp, without resort to aerial bombing, he be permitted to promote such a measure outside the corridors of the American administration as well. Kubovy proposed that the Board’s network of contacts be used to approach the Soviet, Polish, and Czechoslovak ambassadors to London and push for a ground attack against the camp. He pointed out that given the realities of 1944 and the censorship restrictions, he was unable to send a cable in this spirit to wjc delegates or others in London himself, and was therefore requesting the assistance of the War Refugee Board in conveying the request. In closing Kubovy stressed that he did not know whether the Board itself supported his call for action against the death camp, but in the event that his request was passed along, it should be clear that he was referring to a ground operation rather than aerial bombing. Kubovy wrote, “May I insist that if it is sent, it should stress the fact that we are opposed to bombing the camps for the reasons indicated in my letter to Mr. Pehle.”[[191]](#footnote-191)

Kubovy’s papers reveal that he and his associates knew that the extermination process at Auschwitz was continuing, but they did not know the details. Eventually, an order issued by Hungarian leader Horthy Miklos put an end to the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, and the last convoy from Hungary reached Auschwitz in November 1944. During August, Jews were also continuing to arrive at Auschwitz from other parts of Europe, including its largest remaining ghetto, Łódź, where more than 60,000 Jews still resided. The first train from Łódź to Auschwitz arrived on August 15, 1944.[[192]](#footnote-192)

Throughout the summer of 1944, Kubovy continuously urged leaders of the War Refugee Board to support a ground attack against the Auschwitz extermination camp. On August 24, 1944, he wrote once again to wrb Executive Director John Pehle, this time conveying an appeal by Ignacy Schwarzbart, a member of both the wjc and the Polish National Council in London, seeking to enlist the American administration in approaching the non-Jewish population in Poland, particularly the Polish underground, and urging them to support military action against Auschwitz. Kubovy added that the Red Army was still situated relatively far from the camp, which made the need for action by the Polish underground even more imperative. The possibility of an airstrike is not mentioned in the letter. It is evident from the letter that Kubovy supported a ground operation and was urging Pehle to inform him as soon as possible regarding any progress towards the launching of such an operation against the death camp.[[193]](#footnote-193)

On August 30, 1944, Kubovy again wrote to McCloy regarding military action against Auschwitz. He stated that he recognized the American administration’s commitment to act on behalf of European Jews, adding that he knew there were major obstacles that could prevent such a military operation. Kubovy then reemphasized that, as a representative of the World Jewish Congress, he was not calling for the death camp to be bombed, but rather for other measures to be taken against it. Referring to his letter of July 1, 1944, he pointed out, “You may notice that in this letter we did not ask for the destruction of the death installation by bombing from the air. We asked that the destruction be done either by Soviet Paratroopers or by the Polish Underground. More recently, we have suggested that the paratroopers should be members of the allied forces who would volunteer for the task.”[[194]](#footnote-194)

In contrast to the positive tone of his opening remarks regarding the American administration and its potential to act against the death camp, Kubovy’s closing remarks strike a different note. He underscored the historical significance of refraining from action against the extermination facilities at Auschwitz and criticized the administration’s inaction: “The remnants of the Jewish population in Europe are being exterminated in the death camps at the rate of twelve thousand a day in the camp of Oswiecim alone. I am afraid history will fail to understand that no way has been found to slow down the pace of the annihilation by the destruction of the instruments of murder – the gas chambers, the gas vans, the bath, the crematoria.”[[195]](#footnote-195)

McCloy was quick to respond to Kubovy’s letter. His reply made clear beyond any shadow of a doubt that government officials in Washington and American military leaders had given serious consideration to the use of ground forces, as opposed to an airstrike, against the extermination sites:

The use of operational troops to which you refer in your letter must be subject to the discretion of the theater commander. Such operations as you suggest could fall within the jurisdiction of the allied Mediterranean Commander, and he has been fully informed of the situation obtaining in the “death camp areas.” He must be the judge of the practicality of such an operation and its likely result. I am sure he would do anything he felt he could to check these ghastly excesses of the Nazis. Perhaps an alteration in the tactical situation may make it possible for him to take some effective steps along the lines you propose.[[196]](#footnote-196)

In the margins of this letter there appears a note that Kubovy’s wife added later, which reinforces the view that Kubovy’s appeal of July 1, 1944, to Pehle was not an isolated instance carried out at his own initiative, but a comprehensive strategic approach aimed at sabotaging the extermination facilities at Auschwitz using ground forces rather than airstrikes. Miriam Kubovy wrote, “One month later the Jews in two concentration camps in Slovakia were released by force by partisans. Already in July 1944 the World Jewish Congress had asked for such action. The World Jewish Congress had consulted specialists and had been told that it could be done in Oswiecim as well as in other death camps.”[[197]](#footnote-197)

It is difficult to say whether the success of the operation in Slovakia indicates that a similar operation on Polish soil would have been successful. For the purposes of the present discussion, the important point is that Kubovy’s letter to Pehle was not an isolated incident but rather part of a process of examination and assessment that took place within the offices of the wjc. This finding is reinforced by the minutes of a joint meeting of the Advisory Council on European Jewish Affairs and the European Representative Committee that took place on October 17, 1944, at which Kubovy presented a detailed report on the call for action against extermination sites at Auschwitz: “We have said to all whom it might concern: History will never understand that there have been death factories organized to kill human beings at a speedy pace, and that nothing was done to destroy these installations, so as to slow down at least – the pace of the slaughters. We have asked that the installation be attacked in force either by the Polish underground or by Soviet paratroopers or, if possible, by allied paratroopers.”[[198]](#footnote-198)

Throughout that month the exterminations at Auschwitz continued, including the slaughter of Jews from the Theresienstadt ghetto. Although a total of 33,000 Jews had been killed over the course of 31 days, the possibility of an airstrike never once came up during the meeting! At a later stage of the discussion, Kubovy described the efforts taken to bring about a ground attack against the extermination sites. In terms of contacts with the Polish government-in-exile, he explained that despite the initially positive approach demonstrated by the government representative, the difficult position in which the Polish underground found itself following the failed revolt in Warsaw effectively prevented any action against the extermination facilities at Auschwitz.[[199]](#footnote-199) Kubovy presented a similar assessment of the Polish underground’s inability to take action again the death camp in a letter to the chairman of the Jewish Agency’s Rescue Committee, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, on October 16, 1944, a day before the meeting, when he wrote, “Dr. Schwarzbart informed me on September 8 that the Polish Council of Ministers decided on August 25 to ask ‘The Commander of the Home Army to consider the possibilities of destroying the concentration camps and freeing the political prisoners before they are murdered or deported and that appropriate orders were issued by the Commander in Chief.’ It seems however that the Polish Home Army is in no position to carry out the instructions it has been given.”[[200]](#footnote-200)

In the above instances Kubovy demonstrated some understanding for the Polish underground’s failure to take action against Auschwitz or on behalf of Jews in Polish lands. Yet on other occasions he was strongly critical of the Home Army. In a letter to Ignacy Schwarzbart, for example, Kubovy sought to exploit the latter’s close contacts in the Polish government-in-exile and make its members aware that the Home Army’s failure to take action against the extermination sites at Auschwitz was drawing fierce criticism in the Jewish community. Kubovy underscored that this criticism was compounded by other testimonies of the government-in-exile’s failure to take action to save Jews in Polish territory.[[201]](#footnote-201)

Kubovy further reported to the meeting’s participants that wjc leaders had approached Jan Masaryk, foreign minister of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, to examine the possibility of the Czechoslovak underground contributing to an operation against Auschwitz. Masaryk had replied that, having consulted with relevant officials and associates in the government-in-exile, they concluded that the difficulties entailed in conducting such an operation rendered it impracticable.[[202]](#footnote-202)

In addition, Kubovy related, they had approached the Soviet embassy in Washington to promote the cause of a ground operation against Auschwitz, and although he had been impressed by the positive attitude of the embassy’s personnel, he stressed that this measure, too, had failed to yield results. In addition to Kubovy’s extensive correspondence with American government officials, he also mentioned holding several meetings with Assistant Secretary of War McCloy and conveying a verbal appeal for a ground operation against Auschwitz. Urgent calls for land-based military action were also conveyed through wjc members in Britain. These were aimed at applying pressure on Henry Maitland Wilson, who, in his capacity as Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, was responsible for any type of ground operation that might be taken against Auschwitz.[[203]](#footnote-203)

The discussion that took place during this meeting reflects the horrible sense of powerlessness felt by the wjc leadership, as Kubovy’s concluding remarks attest: “And if there are some appropriate methods we did not resort to, and you want to suggest to us, please do it.” Importantly, despite the failure to initiate a process leading to a ground operation against the extermination compound at Auschwitz, Kubovy never raised the possibility of bombing the camp (a possibility known to all), and he asked that the meeting’s participants only consider alternatives related to ground-based action.[[204]](#footnote-204)

Although their first appeal to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile had been unsuccessful, the wjc officials did not despair. They continued trying to persuade Czechoslovak leaders to mobilize their underground to take action against the transportation routes leading to Auschwitz. On the day of the meeting at which Kubovy reported on efforts to promote ground-based action against Auschwitz, he also wrote a detailed letter to Jan Papanex, the Czechoslovak ambassador to Washington, presenting the ambassador with his view of the most recent developments in Europe, which he believed justified this renewed appeal to the Czechoslovak government. Kubovy went on to explain that the weakening of the Germans in the European arena now made it possible for its underground resistance movements – including the Czechoslovak underground – to take more meaningful action. The successes of the French resistance during the fighting to liberate France, according to Kubovy, point to the tremendous potential of underground activities: the French experience suggests that an action by the Czechoslovak underground has significant potential to strike at the German extermination machinery. Kubovy wrote, “The German war machine shows many signs of weakness, and energetic measures, which would have been a failure three or four months ago, may be successful today. The Germans may even be able to get rid of the liability of keeping Jews imprisoned through token resistance. Suggestions: Therefore, we would be grateful to the Czechoslovakian Government if they would give instructions to their Underground forces fighting along the Hungarian border, but especially those fighting in Sub-Carpathian Russia, to do the following….”[[205]](#footnote-205) Kubovy then presented a detailed plan that included the following measures: striking at the railway lines leading into Poland, to the extent possible striking the trains themselves and liberating the Jews they were transporting, attacking the concentration camps and liberating the imprisoned Jews, establishing direct contact with German commanders in order to facilitate local initiatives to rescue Jews, using the underground propaganda machine to warn the Germans against continuing the slaughter, and encouraging the local population to provide assistance to Jews. Kubovy appended a detailed list of the main railway lines leading from Hungary to Poland, against which he hoped the Czechoslovak underground would take action.[[206]](#footnote-206)

Kubovy’s papers reveal that reports on political efforts to promote land-based action against the extermination sites at Auschwitz reached the Zionist leadership in Palestine as well. On October 16, 1944, Kubovy wrote to Yitzhak Gruenbaum about the tremendous efforts he and his associates had been making to bring about a ground-based operation against the death camp. The possibility of an airstrike received no mention. Instead Kubovy first referred to communication issues between himself and Gruenbaum, explaining that the present letter was part of an ongoing dialogue between two rescue activists with regard to military action against Auschwitz. He then described the full range of his and his associates’ efforts to urge a ground operation against the camp, both within and beyond the American political arena, and provided examples of contributions to the cause by other American Jewish figures, such as Nahum Goldmann. He added, “I also discussed with Mr. Alexander Kapustin, Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy, our suggestion concerning the use of Soviet paratroopers for the destruction of the death installations. Mr. Kapustin informed me that the ambassador had already cabled to Moscow on this matter after a talk he had had with Dr. Goldmann, and promised to convey anew to Moscow our recent information and our request.”[[207]](#footnote-207)

Gruenbaum’s documents provide further evidence that he was regularly informed of the efforts to bring about a ground attack against Auschwitz. Towards the end of October 1944, the American General Counsel in Jerusalem transmitted a document from the wrb in Washington to Gruenbaum. The document, prepared by Kubovy, described political efforts in London in support of a ground operation against Auschwitz, as well as an appeal to the Soviet embassy in Washington in this regard. It bluntly stated, “The War Department in Washington has fully informed General Wilson, Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, with regard to the Anglo-American action in the matter of death camps.”[[208]](#footnote-208)

These letters, cables, and minutes indicate that the campaign for a ground operation against Auschwitz and the railway lines leading to it was the main focus of wjc activity in 1944. This conclusion is reinforced by an assessment of the instances in which Kubovy and his associates did appeal to the American administration to conduct an aerial operation against the extermination camp at Auschwitz. The range of documents examined in the present study indicate that most of the appeals to the governments of the United States, the Allies, and governments-in-exile focused on a ground operation rather than airstrikes. Moreover, an analysis of the calls for an aerial operation reveals that they differed significantly from the appeals for a ground operation. In those letters that called for an airstrike against Auschwitz, Kubovy was in fact conveying an appeal by a third party rather than speaking in his own name or on behalf of the wjc. Thus, in a well-known letter of August 9, 1944, to Assistant Secretary of War McCloy, Kubovy conveyed an appeal by the representative of Czechoslovak Jewry, Ernest Fischer, a member of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and member of the Czechoslovak State Council.[[209]](#footnote-209) In the same spirit he also conveyed urgent requests from Switzerland to appeal to Roosevelt and Churchill to bomb Auschwitz, in the hope of saving at least some of the Jews imprisoned there.[[210]](#footnote-210) In a report on rescue efforts, submitted on October 6, 1944, to the wjc Executive Committee, Kubovy conveyed the Polish government-in-exile’s assessment that there was sufficient distance between the extermination facilities and the housing compound at Auschwitz. This fact, presumably, would have made it possible to bomb the camp. According to Kubovy, the Polish government-in-exile had conveyed a message in this spirit to both the British government and the American administration. Kubovy reported to the Executive Committee members on the Polish government’s appeal verbatim, without any expression of support, opinion, or mention of the fact that the wjc had in fact joined this appeal.[[211]](#footnote-211)

Likewise, Kubovy and his colleagues in the wjc leadership chose to convey European Jewry’s desperate cries for help verbatim. It was because of the futility of efforts to stop the horrendous slaughter of Hungary’s Jews, conceivably, that they also mentioned the possibility of bombing the extermination site – not as a possibility they sought to promote but as an option that had to be raised given the failure of all the other alternatives. Indeed, the assessment that there was only a slim likelihood of action being taken against the extermination camp received explicit mention at the wjc Executive Committee meeting of October 20, 1944: “Re bombing or attack of the extermination installation in the concentration camps, Dr. Kubowitzki had the impression that no action had been taken on his suggestion that the American Ambassadors discuss this matter with Stalin, Churchill and Mikolajczyk [minister of the Polish government-in-exile]. Pehle had never felt very keen on
this subject.”[[212]](#footnote-212)

Although the next chapter is devoted to Benjamin Akzin’s Zionist activism in the American arena of the 1940s, his approach to the question of bombing Auschwitz is also of relevance to the present discussion. During 1944–1945, Akzin was an active member of the wrb and therefore received regular updates on the slaughter of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz. From his analysis of this information in the summer of 1944 he concluded, in contrast to Kubovy and his associates, that an airstrike against the extermination camp would be the correct approach. In this spirit, on June 29, 1944, he drafted a memorandum in support of the bombing of the camp. Akzin argued that even though an airstrike would also claim the lives of Jewish prisoners, ultimately more might be saved by such an operation. He also took a favorable view of the symbolic significance and propaganda value of a substantial military operation by the Allies on behalf of Hungarian Jewry. We should bear in mind that, in contrast to Kubovy, Akzin prepared this document in his capacity as a member of the wrb, rather than a public Jewish figure in the United States: he was presenting an expert opinion within his professional capacity, rather than acting as an American Jewish leader. Moreover, a close review of Akzin’s memorandum indicates that he was meticulously cautious and reserved about the possibility of an airstrike actually reducing the scope of the slaughter. He wrote, “The methodical German mind might require some time to rebuild the installations or to evolve elsewhere equally efficient procedures of mass slaughter and disposing of the bodies. Some saving of lives would therefore be a most likely result of the destruction of the two extermination camps.”[[213]](#footnote-213)

In sum, a review of Kubovy’s papers and documents produced by his fellow wjc leaders in the US from 1944 reveals that an aerial strike against Auschwitz was not their preferred course of action. On the contrary, they had reservations about such an approach and specifically sought to promote the sabotage of the extermination network through a ground operation, rather than an aerial bombing.

The letters, cables, and minutes of various meetings reveal that voicing opposition to an airstrike against Auschwitz was not a personal initiative on Kubovy’s part, but rather a substantive strategic undertaking that, after being discussed within wjc bodies, was conveyed to the Zionist leadership in Palestine and carried out over a significant period of time through correspondence and contact with the American administration, the Allies, and governments-in-exile.

In contrast to their stance in 1944, later references by Kubovy and other wjc leaders to the non-bombing of Auschwitz omit any mention of the Congress’s opposition to airstrikes. In 1959, while delivering a speech during a demonstration at the cultural center in Tel Aviv, Kubovy had the following to say about the non-bombing of Auschwitz:

History needs to be written because time does not stand still, and human beings will not live forever. About a year and a half ago in America, one of the hidden heroes of that period passed away, Rabbi Michael David Weissmandl [an ultra-Orthodox rabbi and a prominent rescue activist during the Holocaust], a rabbi from Slovakia who in wonderful and mysterious ways knew how to keep the diasporas in free countries stirred up over the course of many days. Among other things, during the height of the war we received a detailed plan of the Auschwitz camp from him. He demanded that the Allies bomb the gas chambers and the furnaces, so as to interrupt the continuous slaughter for at least a few weeks and perhaps a few months. I took the plan to the Russians and the Americans. The Russians said they would respond but their reply never came. The Americans, after considering the issue, replied that they needed all of their airplanes for the war effort.[[214]](#footnote-214)

Beyond the fact that Kubovy chose not to share information about various other sources available to him regarding the extermination camp at Auschwitz, he also decided to completely omit any mention of his campaign against an aerial operation and support for ground forces. A similar approach is evident in Kubovy’s response to an article that appeared in Davar in 1963 and presented probing questions about the reasons for the non-bombing of the extermination facilities at Auschwitz. Kubovy argued that even though answers have been found to many important questions in the area of Holocaust research, there are still no satisfactory answers as to why the American administration and British government refrained from bombing the extermination facilities at Auschwitz. Kubovy told of the WJC’s efforts to bring about the bombing of the camp, while completely omitting the fact that he and the organization he represented had been opposed to the aerial bombing of Auschwitz.[[215]](#footnote-215) A similar approach is evident in a letter Tartakower wrote to the editor of the Israeli daily Herut, in response to an article by Shlomo Nakdimon criticizing Kubovy’s conduct as head of the wjc Rescue Department during the Holocaust. Tartakower strongly objected to the criticism leveled against Kubovy; he praised the latter’s efforts in the American arena on behalf of European Jews, asserting that he had played a key role in saving considerable numbers of Hungarian Jews. The issue of Kubovy’s and his associates’ opposition to the bombing of the camp – and the tremendous effort they had made to promote a ground operation against Auschwitz’s mass slaughter facilities – received no mention.[[216]](#footnote-216) Likewise, the transcribers of the WJC’s official organizational history opted to overlook the Congress’s involvement in the events surrounding the non-bombing of Auschwitz.[[217]](#footnote-217)

In the post-World War ii public discourse, and in the context of framing and memorializing the Holocaust, those actors who had called for Auschwitz not to be bombed opted to overlook, or at least downplay, the fact that their campaign for military action against the camp had omitted the call for its aerial bombing. Conceivably, in hindsight and in light of information about the Nazi extermination machinery – especially its implementation against Hungarian Jewry in 1944 – they concluded that airstrikes would have been the right move in 1944. One might also ask why the documents that surfaced among Kubovy’s papers have not been part of the historical scholarship to date. The manner in which documents relating to the bombing of Auschwitz were assembled among Kubovy’s personal papers suggests that he was planning to write a book about his efforts during the Holocaust. It is possible that Kubovy had removed some of these documents from the official archives and kept them among his files, which made it difficult to locate them. We should also bear in mind that the wjc archives are among the largest institutional collections of documents related to Jewish history in the modern era. The scope of archival material is tremendous, and even though most documents are located in the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, there are also many papers among the archival collections in Israel and Europe. The fact that documents related to the bombing of Auschwitz were filed among Kubovy’s personal papers facilitated their discovery and use for the purposes of the present study.[[218]](#footnote-218)

It is difficult to determine the extent to which the WJC’s opposition to airstrikes against Auschwitz contributed to the decision not to bomb the camp. Given the organization’s prominent role in rescue efforts in the US, its opposition to bombing could conceivably have contributed to the opposition that formed within the American administration. This view is supported by the WJC’s involvement in another key issue that formed part of the American administration’s response to the Holocaust of European Jewry: the establishment of the War Refugee Board in 1943. The rescue efforts of wjc delegates in Europe generated a wide range of bureaucratic activity in Washington, a notable example being the system that emerged for financial transfers by the wjc and other Jewish organizations to occupied Europe. The tremendous difficulties encountered by wjc representatives seeking the necessary permits to transfer funds, and the activities in which they engaged in order to implement these arrangements, essentially highlighted the need to establish a government agency for refugee issues that would coordinate rescue efforts and minimize bureaucratic processes in Washington to the extent possible.[[219]](#footnote-219)

An examination of the War Refugee Board’s activities indicates that many Jewish rescue organizations participated actively in efforts undertaken by federal agencies – from the wjc to the rescue agencies of the Orthodox community in the United States, to the Joint Distribution Committee (jdc, or “the Joint”). Their involvement included facilitating the transfer of funds needed to finance rescue efforts as well as participating, on the ground, in rescue operations.[[220]](#footnote-220) One example is an undertaking by the wjc and the Joint in Spain and Portugal, which required working cooperatively with representatives of the War Refugee Board on the Iberian Peninsula. Spain’s and Portugal’s status as neutral states and Spain’s shared border with France made it possible to concentrate rescue efforts on the peninsula. The wrb contributed to financing a smuggling operation that transported Jewish children from France to Spain and brought them together in Portugal, and its delegates joined efforts with the wjc and the Joint in establishing the refugee status of Jews in Spain and Portugal. Moreover, wrb delegates were also involved in coordinating and systematizing the working relations between representatives of the two organizations, and in outlining the cooperative undertaking by the Joint and the wjc.[[221]](#footnote-221)

The involvement of Jewish rescue organizations in the US administration’s efforts should be understood in light of two factors. The first was the Jewish activists’ familiarity with the reality in Europe. As we have seen, a significant portion of the rescue activists were Jewish immigrants who had arrived in the United States at various times before the outbreak of World War ii. In contrast to most members of the administration, they were familiar with Europe and fluent in the relevant languages, which enabled them to operate in the European arena and serve as vital mediators for members of the War Refugee Board. The second factor relates to the strong commitment by members of Jewish organizations to the rescue efforts in Europe. The realities of World War ii meant that various departments within the American administration were struggling to cope with a wide range of daily crises and missions. The rescue of European Jewry, as important as it was, was only one of these issues. For Jewish organizations in the United States, however, the rescue of European Jewry was a matter of the highest priority. The rescue activists were fully committed to this mission and focused exclusively on it, and the American administration gladly took advantage of the knowledge and commitment of the rescue organizations’ personnel. Reciprocally, the rescue activists and the organizational networks they represented benefited from the patronage of the American administration and made use of its bureaucratic infrastructure, which provided them with a vital platform in the midst of a worldwide war.

Nahum Goldmann has described the complexity of reciprocal relations with the American administration. To convey to his listeners the depth of the WJC’s wartime dependence on various networks and bodies of the American administration, especially the State Department, Goldmann recounted the tremendous difficulty involved in transferring funds from the United States to wjc offices in neutral countries, and from there to occupied Europe, in order to finance the rescue efforts. A regular money transfer through the banking system was not possible under the conditions of a world war. Moreover, under US law, any substantial transfer of funds from the United States to occupied European countries was, by definition, regarded as a transfer to an enemy country and required authorization from the American president, the Treasury, and the State Department. Goldmann explained that even if the president approved the transfer, the State Department could delay the process for various reasons, so cooperation by its officials was essential for the success of this complex undertaking. He stressed that the wjc had to operate within the context of American law, and any expectation that it would engage in illegal activity within the American arena was completely unrealistic. Moreover, according to Goldmann, there was a vast difference between engaging in illegal conduct in the United States and doing so in Europe during World War ii. The wjc did indeed learn how to conduct underground activities in occupied and neutral European countries, but only with the support and backing of the American administration and the Allies.[[222]](#footnote-222)

The Jewish organizations’ commitment to the rescue of European Jewry had financial aspects as well. A significant portion of the rescue efforts, including endeavors in which the American administration was involved, were funded by various Jewish organizations, particularly the Joint.[[223]](#footnote-223) Involvement by Jewish philanthropies in the US administration’s rescue efforts should be understood in light of the broader and characteristically American practice of cooperation between the administration and philanthropic organizations in a wide range of areas.[[224]](#footnote-224)

2 Rescue Activist and Refugee: Kubovy in the United States

Kubovy played a prominent role in the WJC’s rescue efforts, as evidenced by his part in the American Jewish organizations’ call for military action against Auschwitz. His files shed light on the extent and intensity of his efforts on behalf of European Jews, beyond calling for the bombing of Auschwitz. He had close ties with American administration officials, promoted the ICRC’s involvement in rescue efforts, and maintained a complex network of contacts among various governments-in-exile.[[225]](#footnote-225) The importance of Kubovy’s standing in the context of American rescue efforts is starkly illustrated by his meeting with Pope Pius xii in September 1945. At the meeting, which took place after Germany’s surrender, Kubovy presented the Pope with two requests. The first related to the Church’s view of Jews: Kubovy asked the Pope to issue a public statement regarding the Church’s positive view of Jews and, in particular, absolving the Jews for the death of Christ. The Pope replied, “You mean a statement? We will consider it, most favorably, with all our love, we will consider it.”[[226]](#footnote-226) The second request related to Jewish children and youths taken into hiding in convents during World War ii, whose parents had been killed in the Holocaust. Kubovy sought the Pope’s approval and support for the transfer of these children and teenagers to the authority of American Jewish organizations and the Zionist movement. Once again, the Pope’s response was not unequivocal, and he asked that Kubovy prepare a memorandum for him on the issue.[[227]](#footnote-227)

Notwithstanding the polite atmosphere of the meeting, it alludes to the strong criticism that Kubovy and his fellow rescue activists had towards the Vatican for not acting to save European Jewry, especially the Jews of Hungary and Slovakia during the later stages of World War ii. Kubovy had approached Catholic leaders in the United States, close associates of the Pope, and ambassadors of various countries in his effort to enlist the Pope on behalf of European Jews. In tandem, the wjc leadership also engaged in intensive diplomatic efforts to arrange the meeting between Kubovy and the Pope.[[228]](#footnote-228)

Kubovy’s papers include the minutes of a particularly interesting meeting with Jan Karski on September 19, 1943. In the context of his mission as courier for the Polish underground to the Polish government-in-exile, Karski was scheduled to visit the United States. Before he departed Poland, members of the Jewish underground in the Warsaw ghetto, having learned about his upcoming mission, asked that he convey information about the fate of the Jews to the free world. Towards this end they arranged for him to visit the Warsaw ghetto and a concentration camp whose precise location and name are a matter of dispute among researchers. While in the United States, Karski met with President Roosevelt, senior administration officials, and members of the Jewish community. His meeting with Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, in particular, produced what has become a well-known anecdote: After hearing Karski’s report, Frankfurter replied, “I do not believe you!” When the Polish ambassador, who was also present, attested to Karski’s integrity, Frankfurter added, “I did not say that he is lying; I said that I don’t believe him.”[[229]](#footnote-229) There is a wide-ranging debate among scholar as to the priority of the Jewish issue within Karski’s mission. Although that debate exceeds the scope of this study, for our purposes it is worth noting that Kubovy’s meeting with Karski was devoted solely to the issue of Polish Jewry. Karski explained that hiding Jews in Poland was dangerous because it could result in an immediate death sentence for the entire family of the person hiding the Jews. Bribing someone to hide Jews therefore usually required a great deal of money, and in order to reduce the risk of exposure, only Jews who did not appear Jewish were taken into hiding. In Karski’s view, it would only be possible to conceal Jews in agricultural areas where there was enough space to create a hiding place, but even then, the difficulties and risks meant that only a few farmers would be prepared to shelter Jews.

In light of Karski’s remarks, Kubovy asked about the possibility of transferring funds to Poland to support efforts to conceal Jews. Karski replied that under the circumstances it would not be possible to transfer significant sums of money to Poland: the difficulties were insurmountable and there was no certainty that the vast sums needed to help shelter Jews would indeed reach their intended destination. However, Karski believed that it would be possible to initiate a large-scale, institutionalized system of payments by which the Allies could bribe Germans to permit significant numbers of Jews to depart Nazi-occupied Europe. On this point, the Allies and large numbers of Jewish rescue activists did not agree with Karski’s assessment that it would be possible to implement a large-scale economic and political process involving payments to Germans in exchange for Jewish lives. Rescue activists within and outside Europe tried unsuccessfully to initiate such measures towards the end of World War ii. Their failure was a source of fierce debates at the time and would continue to be so among future historians.[[230]](#footnote-230)

Towards the end of their meeting, Kubovy asked Karski how much, in his view, the German rank-and-file soldiers in Poland knew about the slaughter of Jews, to which Karski replied that he was absolutely certain that all the hundreds of thousands of German soldiers in Poland were aware of the extermination of Jews. He stressed, however, that most of the soldiers were keeping this information to themselves because they were ashamed of what was happening in Poland and felt no urge to share their knowledge with families and friends in Germany.[[231]](#footnote-231)

Kubovy’s unique position in the eye of the storm of American rescue efforts and his status as an immigrant – indeed, as a refugee who was not part of the American Jewish establishment – make his personal papers particularly valuable for the historian. His files provide a different and fascinating outside perspective.

Kubovy was strongly critical of the WJC’s efforts on behalf of European Jews during the Holocaust, as unambiguously conveyed by his letter of December 4, 1942, to wjc President Stephen Wise:

Despite my deep admiration for your great personality, I can no longer refrain from writing you those lines and communicating them to the inner circle of the members of the Executive Committee. I read today in the NY Times: “Only 1,250,00 Jews are still alive in Poland of the 3,500,00 before the German occupation.” May I take the liberty of asking you, Dr. Wise: What are you going to do about it? Since July 27 I am desperately beseeching you with proposals on how to stop the murderers of our people. Many have been dismissed as hysterical, but you Dr. Wise are not hysterical enough…. If this heavy burden is too heavy, why don’t you share it with us? Why do we expose ourselves to be asked by future generations why we acquiesced in the crime of inaction in such times and did not try everything I say everything in the world? In deep affliction, sincerely yours, Leon Kubowitzki.[[232]](#footnote-232)

Kubovy’s criticism was directed not only against the wjc leadership, but also against the American Jewish community for its overall response to the catastrophe that had befallen European Jewry. In this context he wrote,

But why didn’t they close the shops there as the Jews did in South America? How can one explain that the Jewish leaders in the States did not dare ask for it? This too is a vicious circle: They are afraid not to be followed, and since they don’t demand anything daring – they are not recognized as leaders. How come, that the Jewish Union leaders asked only for a ten minute work stoppage? There have always and there will always be two instruments for achieving political aims: Compulsion and bribery. Hitler has to be compelled if the allies are against bribery. Words will achieve nothing. How can retaliation be achieved now? The allies will bomb German cities and German civil citizens before this war is brought to an end, of that I am sure. But not now, only when it will be too late.[[233]](#footnote-233)

Kubovy’s remarks were directed at the American Jewish leadership for having played a minor public role and not doing enough to place the slaughter of European Jewry at the center of public discourse in the United States. At the same time, Kubovy also believed that the American administration had not taken sufficiently meaningful measures to prevent or at least reduce the slaughter. Evidently Kubovy thought that more intensive public activity on the part of Jews in the United States could have had an influence on the administration and the measures it took. A similar impression emerges from his notes on a meeting at Wise’s office on October 3, 1943:

We met in Wise’s study. Schults reported about the meeting the Jewish Congressmen had with the President, and which showed Roosevelt does not accept all the answers given us by the State Department. He expressed himself; A. In favor of feeding European Jews. B. In favor of taking Jewish children out of Europe and C. In favor of relaxing the quota procedure in the U.S. and by the way, he said to the Jewish Congressmen that the talk about the transportation difficulties are pure nonsense: There are enough military transports returning empty which could carry millions of refugees to the United States. I am always puzzled when I hear such reports. These, on part of Roosevelt are not just answers, as a politician he could have avoided to be so outspoken [sic]. So why aren’t things moving and [why] doesn’t the U.S. save Jews? Or how mighty is a U.S. President and how mighty – [Under Secretary of State] Sumner Welles?[[234]](#footnote-234)

Kubovy’s description lays bare the vast gap between President Roosevelt’s promises – namely, to take significant measures to improve the conditions of European Jews and contribute to rescue efforts – and what Kubovy regarded as the president’s failure to deliver on his promises. Significantly, Kubovy chose to note that the briefing at Wise’s office had not been an isolated event, and that the impressions recorded in his journal recurred often. Kubovy’s comments on the meeting at Wise’s office reveal that he was critical not only of President Roosevelt but also of those Jewish congressmen who had met with the president and accepted what he had to say without demanding that he implement the promised measures.

Kubovy’s internal criticism of the wjc leadership was accompanied by a deep sense of frustration due to the ineffectiveness of the rescue efforts. In his journal entry of October 30, 1943, he wrote,

The most distressing part of our endeavors is that notwithstanding all the intellectual and physical efforts which are invested in our efforts – one never sees results. They are hidden maybe and perhaps one day we will know what we accomplished. Stephen Wise is not young any longer, but he travels to Washington almost every week. The people they see at the State Department are top people and then wise [sic] and Goldmann come back and report. This time six weeks have passed, and nobody has been heard of, and as far as we know – nothing has moved. Having waited for a long time, I am then at the next Executive meeting. Taking up the problems again. One by one, because this belongs to my job and Wise and Goldmann decide to go to Washington again with list of crucial, urgent but pending questions. And since there is talk of me taking over soon the Rescue Department and of Tartakower keeping the Relief, we are both in Washington quite often too. Riegner of our Geneva office and our British Section are demanding guidance and clamoring for action, but we, the main office, has [sic] no answers.[[235]](#footnote-235)

These words, undoubtedly written in a state of intense emotion, indicate that in Kubovy’s view the wjc leadership in the United States had not responded appropriately or satisfactorily to the calamitous events in Europe. It is difficult to assess the extent to which Kubovy’s criticism influenced Wise’s own efforts to save European Jews. Interestingly, however, in a letter of February 15, 1943, to Bʾnai Bʾrith President Henry Monsky, Wise referred to several of Kubovy’s arguments, particularly regarding cooperation with additional actors in the Jewish community and criticism of the American administration for its minimal efforts to save European Jewry. Wise proposed convening an urgent meeting to address the horrifying news coming from Europe. He described the state of European Jewry as one of the greatest tragedies in human history, arguing that the Allies were not doing anything to save them. According to him, it was imperative to decide now (the word was handwritten and underscored) what needed to be done in order to save the Jews of Europe, and that should be the sole focus of activity, to the exclusion of all other issues. In closing his letter, Wise presented several possible rescue efforts, such as the transport of Jewish children out of Europe or rescue attempts in Romania.[[236]](#footnote-236)

Towards the later stages of World War ii, Kubovy began voicing his criticism not only within internal wjc circles but also among broad sectors of the wjc membership and Jewish public – such as during the wartime wjc conference in November 1944 in Atlantic City. With delegates from twenty-six countries in attendance, this was the first international wjc conference to take place since the war, and the Holocaust, had begun. The delegates included representatives from the United States, Palestine, South America, and European countries liberated from Nazi occupation, as well as Jewish community representatives who had managed to escape from countries and regions still under Nazi control. A total of 1,500 participants who attended the opening event heard speeches by Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldman.[[237]](#footnote-237) The conference took place in the shadow of shocking news reports about the scale of loss, and with the slaughter in Europe still ongoing. Kubovy was one of the keynote speakers at the conference, which took place shortly after the massive slaughter of Hungarian Jewry. His remarks reflect the inherent complexity for American Jewish philanthropic organizations of pursuing rescue efforts within the reality of a worldwide war and in the face of powerful bureaucratic and military institutions. With chilling honesty, Kubovy related the inability of the wjc and his own department to stop or even reduce the mass slaughter of European Jewry. Speaking in his capacity as chairman of the wjc Rescue Department during World War ii, he said,

The time has not yet come to draw up the balance sheet of the rescue efforts in which the World Jewish Congress has been engaged since the outbreak of this war for survival. To the minds of many, the very thought of a balance sheet still to be drawn up, may appear a tragic paradox. To them the balance sheet exists, indelibly written in the facts and figures of the extermination. Our inability to halt, even to slow down the most terrible catastrophe in our history, has been total. To what extent was it actually possible to save Europe’s Jews from Germany’s determination to annihilate them? To what extent have we had a share in the rescue of those who survived? Two facts must weigh heavily against us in the scales: The immense discrepancy between the instruments of death and the instruments of salvation and our inability to move the United Nations to take any serious chances in order to save the Jewish people from destruction. The Jewish people had no agency for rescue, it had relief agencies. And years passed before the fundamental difference was realized between relief and rescue, between instruments intended to distribute alms, food and clothing in normal times, and a machinery aiming at snatching away human lives from inexorable and powerfully armed killers. The explanation is to be found in the incredibility to the normal human mind of the German determination to exterminate our people.[[238]](#footnote-238)

Interestingly, the other critiques of the WJC’s American leadership for its conduct during the Holocaust came from European, rather than American, delegates. The remarks by a representative of Polish Jewry are indicative:

Of course, the World Jewish Congress is a wonderful organization, but we have sinned, we have committed a mortal sin, we are mortally guilty. I have not heard one resolution yet that has any teeth in it. We ought to stand at the mourning biers and beg forgiveness from our dead. Every one of us here is partially to blame for these slaughters. None of the punishments of war crimes that we talk about will be of any avail if we do not take upon ourselves some of the guilt.[[239]](#footnote-239)

Kubovy also expressed criticism beyond the circles of his own organization – the World Jewish Congress – sharing his views with members of the Zionist movement in general. On January 12, 1945, he stated as follows in the British Zionist journal Zionist Review: “Millions of Jews have died. Our failure has been crushing. However, we feel it is our duty toward our people, toward our children to be not only unsparing to ourselves but also to try to explain and to understand.”[[240]](#footnote-240)

During World War ii, activist members of American Jewish organizations rarely voiced criticism of their leaders regarding the rescue of European Jews. Such criticism usually came from voices outside the organizational network of American Jews, as in the case of the so-called Bergson Boys.[[241]](#footnote-241) Even towards the end of the war, as the extent of devastation began to come to light, most of the criticism came from figures outside of the inner circle of Jewish activists in the United States – as the wjc conference in Atlantic City again exemplifies. Thus, Kubovy’s criticism of his organization’s conduct is exceptional and, in my view, should be understood in the context of his unique standing as an important actor within the wjc array of rescue efforts in New York, as well as a refugee whose immigration to the United States had been dictated by the circumstances.

The uniqueness of Kubovy’s approach to saving Jews, within the overall mix of efforts by US Jews, should also be understood in light of his East European roots and his very recent immigration to the United States, shortly before the outbreak of World War ii and the start of his own engagement in public activity. Aryeh Tartakower, Kubovy’s partner in US-based rescue efforts, described the unique character of Polish immigrants’ endeavors in the United States during World War ii:

As a consequence of the war, the center of both Jewish and Polish life began shifting increasingly to the United States. The Poles became ever more aware that they should take advantage of their status in America, far more than [they had] to date, so as to establish Poland’s status in the eyes of the Jewish public in the West, while the broad masses of American Jews of Polish origin, who as noted had not worried about their ‘Polishness’ to date, other than in specific matters, they too reached the conclusion that their heritage necessitated political action on behalf of Poland’s Jews. This conclusion was shared by several other Jewish institutions, and first and foremost the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress.[[242]](#footnote-242)

Tartakower summarized the efforts in the United States on behalf of Polish Jewry by noting, “The disappointments were felt, and the overall [outcome] was far from encouraging. In this sense the chapter on the political activity on behalf of Poland’s Jews is similar to the entire tragedy of the Jews in those days.”[[243]](#footnote-243)

Tartakower’s remarks indicate that he saw something unique in the activities of Polish Jews in the United States. Many members of the Jewish community in the United States had emigrated from Eastern Europe, especially from the zone delineated as the state of Poland in the aftermath of World War i. Tartakower differentiated between Jews who had immigrated to the United States earlier and those who arrived from Poland during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Because their immigration had been relatively recent, they were naturally in close contact with their country of origin as well as the non-Jewish Polish community in the United States. In fact, members of this community maintained strong ties with various sectors of the non-Jewish Polish establishment in the United States, the Polish government-in-exile, and Jews in Poland. In his article Tartakower was referring to immigrants from Poland, but in my view similar patterns are evident in the activities of each of the protagonists of this book, all of whom immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe. It is important to bear in mind that while Kubovy, Tartakower, Akzin, and Robinson were Zionist activists, in Europe they had maintained a public and professional network of contacts with the non-Jewish world – and this fact facilitated their efforts vis-à-vis the various governments-in-exile, immigrant communities in the United States, and international organizations. As a consequence, their activity took a different course from the rescue efforts pursued by other members of the American Jewish leadership. They identified more deeply than others in the American Jewish community with the cause of saving European Jewry, and they had stronger criticism of the American Jewish establishment for its conduct in this regard.

Tartakower, Kubovy, Akzin, and Robinson assimilated into the steadily expanding efforts on behalf of Jewish communities outside the United States, especially the struggle to save Jews during the Holocaust. But they also added a unique dimension of their own and an exceptional intensity that stemmed from their experience as recent immigrants to the United States under the extraordinary circumstances of the 1930s.

The fierce criticism that was leveled against the American Jewish leadership for its conduct during the Holocaust has been a theme throughout this discussion of the issues surrounding the non-bombing of Auschwitz. Indeed, contemporaries as well as subsequent researchers have strongly criticized Jewish organizations in the United States and worldwide for their helplessness in promoting the cause of European Jewry during the interwar period and the Holocaust. Although this is a complex issue beyond the scope of the book,
I wish to note that even those who criticize the Jewish organizations’ efforts on behalf of European Jewry acknowledge that these efforts were both substantial and subject to an exceptionally strict network of constraints.

The point of view held by Tartakower, Kubovy, and their associates was not uncompromisingly critical of the conduct of the Jewish establishment in the United States during the Holocaust. Their criticism was combined with great admiration for the activities of the American Jewish establishment, as the abovementioned letter from Kubovy to Wise demonstrates. They recognized the limits of US Jewry’s power, the difficulty of enlisting international networks and organizations for the Jewish cause, and the Nazis’ determination to pursue their plans for mass slaughter. In this spirit Tartakower wrote, “This total sum, which is quite negative, still does not detract from the significance of the activity that did take place at the time, and it constitutes a chapter in itself within Jewish political history, a chapter that should truly be transmitted to future generations as further evidence of great hopes and tremendous efforts, regardless of the final outcomes.”[[244]](#footnote-244)

Kubovy took part in the WJC’s rescue efforts from 1940 until 1946, when he immigrated to Palestine – a seemingly brief but remarkably intense span of time. His most significant role in the Israeli public arena was as chairman of Yad Vashem. A review of Kubovy’s writings and speeches from his years in this position reveals how important the American experience was in shaping his approach to the Holocaust and his decision to focus his public activity in Israel on Yad Vashem.

In his capacity as chairman of Yad Vashem, and in the spirit of the criticism he had voiced during World War ii, Kubovy often stressed the importance of examining the responses of Jewish organizations, the Zionist establishment, and the Allies to the Holocaust, and of doing so in close cooperation with Diaspora Jewry.[[245]](#footnote-245) He had the following to say about Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day:

The law recognizes the continuity of Jewish history. It conveys that we cannot ignore the Holocaust era without denying our own essence. There is a duality of values in our people’s approach to this period. We are torn between the pain over those who have been lost but not forgotten and the insult of the oppressor having been able to decree the slaughter and loss of six million of our people – and the guilt of our powerlessness to help them. Yet there is no escaping the obligation to research this period and learn its lessons. Such powerful events cannot be erased from the annals of human history, and denial on our part is only likely to cause us mental anguish.[[246]](#footnote-246)

Kubovy presented a complex historical picture that combines the necessity of examining Jewish responses to the Holocaust with recognition of the tremendous difficulties faced by Jewish rescue activists, particularly in the United States. Thus, for example, he expressed veiled criticism of Jewish organizations and the Zionist establishment for not managing to establish a unified, systematic rescue network, while at the same time he took care to point out the obstacles and difficulties that confronted Jewish rescue activists: “Yet this is the place to add that even if the Jewish People had managed to establish a rescue agency capable of coping with the extermination machinery, in time, it would not have been able to achieve more without the full support of the Allies in their various capacities and the International Red Cross. Private organizations would not have been able to take one step without stumbling into the thousand and one conditions created by the military authorities.”[[247]](#footnote-247)

chapter 4

Benjamin Akzin

1 Akzin in the American Zionist Emergency Council

Benjamin Akzin (1904–1985) was a professor of political science and constitutional law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He entered Israeli academia in 1949, becoming one of the first members of the university’s law faculty and a founder of its political science department. An Israel Prize Laureate in jurisprudence (1967), he was also among the founders of University of Haifa and served as its first rector.

Akzin specialized in the theory of regimes and the connection between political reality and its legal-constitutional manifestations. Akzin is considered, along with Yitzhak Klinghoffer, to be the founder of public law and thus made a crucial contribution to the development of young Israeli democracy. Akzin proposed a constitution for the State of Israel and in 1962 wrote a remarkable article on the legal aspects of the declaration of Independence. In it he supported the strengthening of the legal status of the Declaration of Independence.[[248]](#footnote-248)

Akzin was born in Riga, Latvia. He began to engage in Zionist activities around the time he entered the University of Vienna, in 1922. In 1925 he joined Brit HaTzionim HaRevizionistim (Union of Revisionist Zionists), serving as a member of its board in Austria, and in the future as a member of the presidency of the New Zionist Organization and head of its political department. Akzin received a doctorate in political science in 1926 from the University of Vienna. In 1929 he received a doctorate in law from the University of Paris, and again in the early 1930s from Harvard University.

Akzin spent the years 1932–1936 in the United States as a Rockefeller Foundation research fellow. Although based at Harvard University most of this time, he also visited academic institutions throughout the United States. In September 1938, as the Nazis were carving up Czechoslovakia, he immigrated to the United States, and in 1940 he acquired American citizenship.

His decision to immigrate to the United States in the late 1930s places Akzin among the protagonists of this book. There were, however, some unique facets to his public activity in the American arena prior to his emigration to Israel in 1949. Thanks to his rich academic background and the contacts he had made during an earlier visit to the United States, he was able to find a place within the realm of activities supported by the American administration. The unique circumstances of World War ii contributed to his successful integration into the American bureaucratic networks. Akzin was very familiar with the European arena, which made his status as a new immigrant a relative advantage rather than a disadvantage. During his early years in Washington, from 1941 to 1944, Akzin served as an expert on law and international relations at the Library of Congress in Washington, where his work included advising senators and members of the House of Representatives. In 1942, while employed at the Library, he married Eliza Leventhal, a Jewish refugee from Berlin, and in 1943 his son Michael was born. His daughter Shoshana was born in 1947. During the years 1944–1945, Akzin served as a senior expert on international affairs for the War Refugee Board established by President Roosevelt. Thanks to the experience he accumulated in Washington, Akzin became the leading candidate for directorship of the political bureau within the American Zionist Emergency Council in Washington. Although his official title was Consultant to the Emergency Council, it was made clear to him as well as the staff of the Washington office that he would in fact be in charge.[[249]](#footnote-249)

The Zionist Emergency Committee was established in 1939 by a resolution of the Twenty-First Zionist Congress. On July 26, 1943, its name was changed to the Emergency Council. With a format based on a similar committee that operated during World War i, the Emergency Committee was expected to represent the Zionist Executive and promote Zionist interests in the United States, under the conditions of a global war. Because the Zionist Executive continued to operate during World War ii, the Emergency Committee functioned mainly as a political pressure group aimed at persuading the administration to support the Zionist cause.[[250]](#footnote-250) Akzin held this position until his appointment as a professor of political science and law at the Hebrew University in 1949.

Any overview of Akzin’s life, however brief, would be incomplete if it did not address his participation in the Revisionist movement and relations with the Revisionist Zionist leader Zeʾev Jabotinsky. As a student at the University of Vienna in the early 1920s he had joined Brit HaTzionim HaRevizionistim (known by its acronym, HaTzhohar) and served on the movement’s board in Austria. He remained active in the Revisionist movement throughout the years, acting as head of the political division in the New Zionist Organization (nzo, founded by Jabotinsky after the Revisionist Party seceded from the Zionist Organization in 1935) in London during 1936–1939. Working closely with Jabotinsky, he forged diplomatic ties with public officials in Europe and, on behalf of the nzo, appeared before the Peel Commission in Jerusalem. When Akzin learned that Jabotinsky was not planning to return to the Zionist Organization, he resigned from the New Zionist Organization, yet he maintained close ties with the inner core of the Revisionist movement in the United States after immigrating there. In March 1940 Jabotinsky arrived in United States, thereby greatly vitalizing the movement in the country. Akzin took an active part in all the events surrounding Jabotinsky’s stay in the US, from moderating the gatherings at which Jabotinsky spoke to ensuring suitable accommodation for the movement’s leader. Notwithstanding their cooperative efforts in Europe and the United States, Akzin regarded himself as Jabotinsky’s disciple rather than his friend. When Jabotinsky died of a heart attack on August 5, 1940, Akzin marked the date as a watershed moment, after which the Revisionist movement became significantly less active in the American arena. Following Jabotinsky’s passing, Akzin shifted the focus of his work to public activity related to American academia and the administration in Washington.[[251]](#footnote-251) He did not take part in the delegation to New York that represented Etzel (Irgun Tzva‌ʾi Leumi – “National Military Organization” – a Zionist paramilitary group), which was headed by Hillel Kook, and when he did act on behalf of the Zionist cause during the latter 1940s, it was not as a representative of the Revisionist movement.[[252]](#footnote-252)

To appreciate the full significance of Akzin’s appointment as head of the American Zionist Emergency Council in Washington, one should consider the importance of the position. The United States was the main center of activity for the leadership of the Zionist movement during the decade preceding Israel’s founding, especially during the latter half of the 1940s. It was evident to the Zionist movement generally, and specifically to David Ben-Gurion as chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, that the path to establishing a Jewish state would have to go through Washington and New York. This was a complex and difficult task given the substantial opposition to a Jewish state in the Democratic administrations of presidents Roosevelt and Truman, who believed that such a development would harm American interests in the Middle East.

American Zionists played a key part in the political campaign in the United States, but activities in the American arena took place in the shadow of a fierce dispute between US Zionists and the leadership of the Zionist movement, including, in particular, the Zionist center emerging in Palestine. The origins of the struggle are illustrated by remarks that Brandeis made in 1940 in support of American Zionists’ independence in areas other than the economic sphere.[[253]](#footnote-253) Brandeis raised four points that were to serve as the basis for the Emergency Committee (later Council) and the Zionist network in the United States during World War ii.[[254]](#footnote-254) The starting point for Zionist activism in the United States, according to Brandeis, should be a strict separation between international and American issues. On international issues American Zionism should be guided, to some extent, by the Jewish Agency or its representatives. In the American arena, on the other hand, its actions should be guided solely by its own discretion. Only American Zionist organizations should initiate and oversee activities related to the American public or to contact with the American administration.[[255]](#footnote-255) Brandeis stressed that in order to prevent intervention by non-Americans in US-based efforts, it was imperative that any official contact with any department in the American administration be handled solely by American citizens. This condition would have prevented representatives of the Jewish Agency Executive or its affiliates from operating in the United States, even if they were residing there for extended periods of time. Brandeis was using American citizenship as a means to regulate Zionist activity in such a way that decisions about who could operate in the United States would not be in the hands of international Zionist institutions. Instead, they would be based on a definition that had nothing to do with the Zionist movement and granted American Zionists a monopoly over activities in their country. The Zionist organizations based in the US – rather than the Jewish Agency Executive – would be deciding on and directing efforts in the American arena. Because the broad powers thus granted to American Zionists would necessitate an organizational infrastructure for systematic decision-making, Brandeis proposed establishing a special commission composed of representatives from the various bodies comprising the American Zionist movement; alternatively, the Zionist Organization of America could assume the responsibility for political activities.[[256]](#footnote-256) Brandeis also sought to clarify which areas of responsibility should fall within the purview of American Zionism. In his view, American Zionists should oversee Zionist activity in the United States, with the majority of their efforts directed at supporting the Jewish community in Palestine. Although he was aware of the difficulty of distinguishing American Zionist political activism from Zionist activism that fell within the purview of the Jewish Agency, he still insisted that American Zionists should be the ones to decide where to focus their efforts and what to leave to the Zionist Executive or its representatives – depending on the issue at hand and the circumstances.[[257]](#footnote-257)

American Zionists’ areas of responsibility, according to Brandeis, should be broadly defined, encompassing most of the efforts on behalf of Zionism in the United States. In contrast to the official distinction that he drew between political activity in the United States, which was to be the responsibility of American Zionists, and international Zionist efforts, for which the Jewish Agency would be responsible, in practical terms Brandeis’s measures would have meant that the American Zionist movement was responsible for all Zionist activity in the United States. His approach would have granted American Zionists authority to determine their own areas of responsibility – which in turn would have granted them almost unlimited powers and responsibilities while undermining the legal authority of the Jewish Agency Executive. Under the unique circumstances of early World War ii, a significant portion of the Zionist movement’s political activity was taking place in the United States, through intensive interaction with various departments in the US administration. The stipulations in Brandeis’s proposal relating to American Zionists’ responsibility for political activity in the United States suggest that this issue was part of an overall outlook in favor of independence for the American Zionist movement. Had Brandeis’s suggestions been implemented, the Jewish Agency Executive would have become a strictly passive actor in the American arena. Considering the importance of the United States in the political struggle for Zionism and the centrality of the American Zionist movement within Zionism as a whole, such a situation would have severely undermined the status of the Zionist Organization and its ability to operate. It is difficult to imagine what status the Jewish Agency Executive would have had, were it stripped of authority on the use of funds raised in the United States, and its members of the responsibility for handling contacts with the American administration. Brandeis’s view of the appropriate modes of political Zionist activity in the United States reflected the position of most American Zionist leaders, who despite differences of opinion on other issues, were united in their belief that the right to conduct Zionist political activity in the American arena was theirs alone. This position took the form of concrete efforts to sabotage Ben-Gurion’s attempt to become the sole representative of the Zionist movement in the United States, as well as measures to ensure their own dominance over the organizational infrastructure underpinning Zionist activity in Washington.

Brandeis’s 1940 letter reflected a deeper, more intense, and continuous political struggle over the management of Zionist activity in the American arena, especially in relation to the Emergency Council. A January 1942 letter from Ben-Gurion to Wise, Emergency Council chairman, illustrates this point: Ben-Gurion noted that he was turning to Wise because of the latter’s unique standing among American Zionists, in his capacity as chairman of the Emergency Council, and as a personal friend.[[258]](#footnote-258) He went on to tell Wise about the ongoing campaign against himself and news items in London’s Jewish press directed against his independent political efforts in the United States. These items were claiming that Ben-Gurion intended to establish a special office for Zionist political activity in Washington, an idea that met with opposition and dissatisfaction on the part of American Zionist organizations. One article argued that implementing this plan would create a division between Ben-Gurion and Zionist groups in the US.[[259]](#footnote-259) Ben-Gurion responded by claiming that the information had been planted to create the appearance of a conflict between himself and American Zionists, asserting that he had no intention of establishing a political office in Washington, that he was acting in full cooperation and harmony with the Emergency Council, and that the report from London was based solely on malicious rumors.[[260]](#footnote-260) He added that similar assertions had appeared in the American Jewish press. One article further claimed that while the Emergency Council was not entirely pleased with Ben-Gurion’s plans to establish his own political outpost in Washington, preparations were proceeding swiftly and the search for premises was already underway. According to a sidebar to the article, the Emergency Council saw Ben-Gurion’s initiative as a potential source of rivalry since it had enjoyed exclusive control over political activity in Washington, and in its members’ view the situation should remain unchanged. Aside from the matter of principle, the article questioned Ben-Gurion’s ability to achieve greater political success in Washington than the local Zionist leadership, which was highly familiar with the American political arena and had ties with members of the administration and Congress. The article further observed that for the British embassy it would be easier to take action against Ben-Gurion, as a British subject, than against American Zionists, as citizens of the United States.[[261]](#footnote-261)

Ben-Gurion, in response, asserted that the claims about his plans to establish a rival office to the Emergency Council were false rumors aimed at preventing him from operating in the American political sphere. He stated that these rumors had originated as deliberate leaks intended to raise concerns about competition among American Zionists and opposition to Ben-Gurion’s plans to engage in independent political action. The articles, he claimed, focused on his own efforts to undermine the status of American Zionists, rather than on his legitimate struggle to exercises his lawful rights as chairman of the Zionist Executive. The purpose of presenting things this way was to trigger opposition by a majority of the Zionist leadership in the US and thereby prevent Ben-Gurion from implementing his plans. The public relations campaign against Ben-Gurion was largely successful. Felix Frankfurter, for example, informed Ben-Gurion of troubling messages he had received, conveying complaints by some of Hadassah’s leaders about Ben-Gurion engaging in political activity in Washington.[[262]](#footnote-262)

Notwithstanding his denials, Ben-Gurion’s plans to engage in independent political activity in Washington were undoubtedly aimed at establishing an autonomous political presence. In fact, his interest in establishing a Washington office dated back to 1939: In reaction to Weizmann’s assessment about the likelihood of a war in the near future, Ben-Gurion had noted in his journal that it was necessary to open a Washington office immediately. Because he wanted to be able to operate independently in the American capital, yet could not completely disengage from the Zionist establishment in the US, he noted that managing the office would require a delegate from Palestine or London.[[263]](#footnote-263) He was aware of the difficulty of operating in Washington in light of his lack of high-level government contacts and the opposition his initiative was likely to spark among American Zionist leaders, and he therefore decided that he would personally take on this role: “I decided to settle in Washington and I took it upon myself to do the work for the entire duration of my stay. I was aware of all the hardships, and of my own flaws, but I am familiar with our cause and I have faith in its justness and practicality.”[[264]](#footnote-264)

 The question of his political activity in Washington was a major factor in Ben-Gurion’s relations with American Zionist leaders. It was one of the subjects addressed during an Emergency Council meeting in which he participated.[[265]](#footnote-265) The Council members learned that he had decided to shift the base of his efforts in the US from New York to Washington, where he planned to set up an independent organizational network – that is, to operate outside of the auspices of the Emergency Council. In response, several members of the Council argued that this could lead to unwanted duplication and a situation in which two representative political bodies of the Zionist movement are operating in parallel, without a clear division of powers and duties, which would undermine Zionist efforts. Therefore, they argued, Ben-Gurion’s activities must be fully coordinated with those of the Council. Ben-Gurion responded that he had no intention of duplicating or replacing the Emergency Council, and that he would strive to maintain close cooperation with the Council to the extent possible, considering the inevitable constraints of secrecy required for political action. He added that even though the Jewish Agency was legally authorized to engage in political activity in the US, it would be wise to cooperate with American Zionists. And yet, in contravention of the spirit of cooperation he was trying to foster, Ben-Gurion stressed that he no intention of reporting to the Emergency Council in advance of scheduled meetings with administration officials or elected officials in Washington because he was prohibited from reporting on future events classified as top-secret. Emanuel Neumann replied that such arrangements were unacceptable: if Ben-Gurion did not report on his meetings, the Emergency Council would be unable to oversee matters during his periods of absence from the United States. In light of Neumann’s objection, it was decided to establish a small political committee to coordinate efforts between Ben-Gurion and the Council. Judge Louis Leventhal, former president of the Zionist Organization in the United States, was appointed as trustee, so that Ben-Gurion would not be required to report on classified meetings.[[266]](#footnote-266) From the discussion that ensued it is evident that at the declaratory level Ben-Gurion was willing to establish a spirit of cooperation, but the practical implication of his proposed format was that the Emergency Council would be stripped of any political authority. Moreover, his comments implied that the Council members could not be trusted to keep a secret, which they saw as an insult to their credibility. Thus, contrary to his assertions that he had no intention of competing with the Emergency Council or establishing a political office in Washington, Ben-Gurion did in fact intend to create an alternative organizational infrastructure to the Emergency Council that would allow him to act independently in the American arena.

A permanent Washington outpost of the Emergency Council was eventually established in November 1943. Silver, who alongside Stephen Wise had been elected as co-chairman of the Emergency Council, appointed Leon I. Feuer as head of the office. The struggle for control over this office continued to reverberate during the process leading to its formation. Among the factors that catalyzed the creation of the Washington office were concerns that the Jewish Agency might step in to fill the void in Washington, acting in place of the Emergency Council. In light of previous struggles between Ben-Gurion and the Council, and to ensure that the Agency remain involved, Arthur Luria, former political secretary of the Jewish Agency office in London and future Israeli ambassador to the US, Canada, and Britain, was appointed as political secretary.[[267]](#footnote-267)

The establishment of an Emergency Council outpost in Washington headed by Leon Feuer (and in the future Akzin), did not mark the end of the internal Zionist struggle over political efforts in Washington. The importance of this issue also led Chaim Weizmann, president of the Zionist movement, to take parallel action to establish an office of the movement’s president in the American capital, a move that involved clashing with Abba Hillel Silver, who wanted to reserve Zionist activity in the American arena exclusively for US-based Zionist organizations. Ultimately Silver accepted a proposed compromise that ensured his control over political activity in the US, alongside the continuing activities of the Emergency Council office in Washington. Nahum Goldmann was appointed as head of the office but in practice it was run by Akzin.[[268]](#footnote-268) The proposed compromise was also adopted by the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, which resolved as follows:

The Executive has taken note of the decision regarding the political arrangement between [our] associate Dr. Nahum Goldmann and the Emergency Council in the United States. The Executive notes with great satisfaction that we have managed to achieve the unity of forces that is now more necessary than ever, because the Zionist movement in America now has a responsibility of a singular nature and our political activity in the United States carries significant weight in terms of our future. At the same time, it is understood that the Board reserves the full right to approach the US government in the name of the Jewish People on any matters regarding Palestine and Zionism, in accordance with the constitution of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency and in accordance with the Mandate.[[269]](#footnote-269)

Besides approving the compromise, the Executive underscored the Jewish Agency’s right to engage in political activity in the United States on an independent basis, without the mediation of the Emergency Council or American Zionists. This assertion carried the kernel of the continuing struggle between Silver, on the one hand, and Ben-Gurion and large segments of the Zionist establishment, on the other, for control over political activity in the United States throughout the 1940s, until the State of Israel was founded. Such an office would have enhanced the authority of the Jerusalem-based Jewish Agency Executive, reduced the powers of the Emergency Council, and undermined Silver’s political standing among American Zionists and in his relations with the US administration.

The question of responsibility for Zionist political activity in the US generally, and in Washington specifically, greatly preoccupied Zionist leaders and institutions for quite some time, although the circumstances of World War ii meant that there were other crucial issues on the Zionist agenda. The intensity of attention this issue drew therefore indicates its importance. Responsibility for political activity in Washington was not purely a technical matter. Given the importance of the United States for the Zionist political struggle of the 1940s, having this authority meant having tremendous political power and the potential to influence the struggle for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Maintaining contact with the American administration at various levels was vital for Weizmann, Ben-Gurion, and Silver. If any one of them had been able to achieve exclusive control over this channel, he would have become the most important political figure in the Zionist arena. The question of political activity also had an impact on the status of US Zionists within the Zionist movement – an issue that greatly troubled Akzin, and which this chapter explores. The importance of political action in Washington turned the question of having an office in the city into a litmus test on the issue: If US Zionists had been able to secure exclusive responsibility for political activity in Washington, there would have been far-reaching implications for the structure of the Zionist movement. It would have dealt a blow to the authority of the Jewish Agency board and resulted in the transfer of tremendous political power to US Zionists. From the Agency’s perspective, shifting control over political activity in the US to the American Zionist leadership could create a precedent that would also shape relations between the future Jewish state and American Zionism. Resistance among American Zionist leaders to non-American Zionist actors engaging in political activity in the US can also be seen as stemming from concerns about being perceived in American public opinion as motivated by narrow ethnic interests. Subordinating US Zionists to representatives of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Executive could fuel charges of dual loyalty on the part of American Jews and especially the American Zionist movement. Such accusations could then serve as political weapons in the hands of opponents of the Zionist movement in the US, thereby diminishing the potential public influence of American Zionists acting on behalf of the cause.

In late May 1945, after his appointment as chairman of the Emergency Council Washington office, Akzin secretly wrote to the Council’s chairman at the time, Stephen Wise. His letter attests to the unique nature of his work in the American Zionist arena and the difficulties he encountered within the American Jewish community. According to Akzin, the combination of his status as a recent immigrant to the United States and his background in the Revisionist movement in both Europe and the US led to his political marginalization by the American Zionist movement, whose leaders overwhelmingly opposed the Revisionist worldview. He wrote,

I have noticed that the suggestions I have been making in connection with the [American Zionist Emergency] Council’s work in line with my appointment to advise the Council on political affairs have met with a more than skeptical reception. This is unfortunate since it restricts very much the likelihood of my usefulness to the council. It occurs to me that the explanation may lie in the fact that you and your colleagues are thinking of me mainly as a man who comes from the ranks of Revisionism and therefore is habitually addicted to taking the radical side on each and every issue, irrespective of merits.[[270]](#footnote-270)

Akzin’s letter, in the context of his appointment as head of the Emergency Council office in Washington, is instructive. It points to a recurring pattern that characterizes the work of Tartakower, Kubovy, and Akzin in the American context. In each case, a protagonist of this book played a key part within the framework of Jewish and Zionist activities in the United States. Tartakower and Kubovy focused mainly on saving European Jews, while Akzin worked for the War Refugee Board and ran a political campaign in support of a Jewish state as part of the political arrangements reached after World War ii. Each of the book’s protagonists had a crucial role in advancing Jewish and Zionist efforts in New York and Washington. Tartakower, Kubovy, and Akzin, all refugee immigrants, were appointed to their respective positions very soon after arriving in the United States. The unique circumstances of World War ii transformed their status as European immigrants into a relative advantage in the American setting. Their familiarity with the European world, the connections they had forged during their public activity in Europe, and their experience in public activity were invaluable assets for the World Jewish Congress and the Zionist movement. Nevertheless, as Akzin’s letter illustrates, they had to contend with a complex and burdensome sense of rejection and marginalization rooted in their status as refugees and recent immigrants. Akzin’s Revisionist background also highlights the complexities, for himself and his fellow public and political activists, of integrating into the American Jewish community. He portrayed his Revisionist background as an obstacle, but his network of contacts in the Revisionist movement, in combination with his willingness to act outside of its organizational and ideological frameworks while in the United States, made him a unique political and public figure, able to serve as a mediator between the Revisionists and other sectors of the American Jewish community. A notable example is a 1935 meeting that Akzin arranged between Felix Frankfurter – a Zionist activist, Harvard law professor, and future Supreme Court justice – and Jabotinsky. Stressing the ideological and political differences between the latter and Frankfurter, whom he described as closely aligned with the labor ideology of the Zionist movement, Akzin wrote, “I thought it would be both useful and interesting to have him meet the leader of the ‘Militant Right’ in Zionism and decided to try to bring about such a meeting. Accordingly, I brought them together at [a] luncheon.”[[271]](#footnote-271) Only Akzin could have arranged and moderated such a meeting.

2 Myth and Fact, Denial and Concealment, the Jewish Voice in Akzin’s Papers

Akzin’s papers from his time on the Emergency Council provide a fascinating peek behind the scenes of Zionist activity in Washington during the latter 1940s, particularly in relation to the Jewish vote. To appreciate the full significance of Akzin’s political activity in the United States, one should take into account the broader issue of ethnic Jewish politics in the United States in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War ii, on the eve of Israeli statehood.

In February 1941, David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and future first prime minister of Israel, reported on his visit to the United States to members of the Executive in Jerusalem. Ben-Gurion emphasized that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt objected to the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii global order. He then laid out his view of the political means by which to persuade the Roosevelt administration to change its policy on Jewish statehood.[[272]](#footnote-272) He believed that any attempt to enlist Jews with key positions in the administration – such as Ben (Benjamin) Cohen, a close advisor to Roosevelt who had held senior positions in the American defense establishment; Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter; or Louis Brandeis, a former Supreme Court justice and one of the prominent Zionist leaders in the United States – and have them try to persuade the White House to change its policy on Palestine was doomed to fail. In his view, their support for the creation of a Jewish state was limited. Moreover, even if they did take action to promote the cause of Jewish statehood, their efforts would be insufficient in light of President Roosevelt’s opposition. Ben-Gurion remarked,

Among the Jews surrounding him [Roosevelt], there are good Zionists – Ben Cohen, Frankfurter, and Brandeis. Whether they have much influence over Roosevelt, I do not know. I think Cohen has influence. He is a man with a very sharp mind, who sees things clearly, his help is needed, and he fills many different roles in the government. Frankfurter is in any event a member of the Supreme Court, but I doubt that the two of them can make him believe in the Land of Israel, because I do not know how much they themselves believe. And we must not forget that Roosevelt also has non-Zionist Jewish friends, and maybe even anti-[Zionist], some of whom have influence. So I concluded that the way to the acquisition [rekhisha, also translatable as “procurement” or “purchase”] of the government in America is through acquisition of the people, acquisition of public opinion.[[273]](#footnote-273)

Ben-Gurion then outlined a long-term strategic plan that presupposed willingness on the part of American Jews, as an ethnic group, to use the Jewish vote in order to promote a shift in American foreign policy towards Palestine.

An examination of Ben-Gurion’s proposal indicates that his strategy did not emerge in a vacuum but, in fact, took into consideration the dramatic changes underway among US Jews, and Zionists specifically, during the late 1930s and the 1940s. Over the course of those years Ben-Gurion spent extended periods of time in the United States, engaging intensively with members of the American Jewish community. His acquaintance with American Jewry dated back to World War i, and his extended stays in the United States allowed him to form an understanding of the Jewish community there.[[274]](#footnote-274)

Beginning in the latter 1930s, and despite growing concerns about anti-Semitism in the United States in light of the Great Depression and anti-Jewish propaganda originating in Germany, interest in mobilizing on behalf of the Jewish cause and Zionism increased markedly among broad cross-sections of the Jewish public. Fundraising by Jewish philanthropies and Zionist foundations, Hadassah membership, American mobilization for the Zionist cause, and participation in Zionist events had all been on the rise since the early 1930s. The worsening condition of German Jewry, growing anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe, and the emerging rift between Britain and the Zionist movement outweighed concerns about domestic anti-Semitism and galvanized the Jewish sense of solidarity that manifested as Zionist activity.[[275]](#footnote-275)

The details about the Holocaust that emerged following the Allied victory contributed significantly to American Jews’ readiness to act as a single ethnic group, with defined political aims, within the American political arena. The personal and public shockwaves they felt compelled US Jews and their leaders to put all of their efforts into the realization of a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii international order, and thus Zionism became the most powerful ideological, political, and organizational force among American Jews. To appreciate the intensity and significance of American Zionism during the 1940s, one must take into account the nature of US Jews’ identification with the aims of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel: beyond the limited definition of official membership in the Zionist Organization of America and Hadassah, or their own awareness that by pursuing Zionist goals they were placing themselves at the particularistic ethnic end of the American spectrum, they also acted as pioneers and a model for other ethnic groups in the United States.[[276]](#footnote-276)

The significance of the American Jewish contribution to the political struggle within the United States for the creation of the Jewish state derives from the fact that presidents Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman were opposed to the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East.[[277]](#footnote-277) Akzin’s papers make it possible to trace the practical means by which the Jewish voting apparatus was set in motion in the 1946 mid-term elections. An examination of his papers reveals the hurdles Akzin and American Zionist leaders faced in operationalizing the Jewish vote and sheds light on their approach to the complex challenge of engaging in ethnic politics in the United States of the 1940s. From Akzin’s files we learn that the political use of the Jewish vote, which the heads of the Zionist establishment in Palestine and the global Zionist movement regarded as a natural and straightforward device in service of the cause, posed tremendous challenges for American Zionist leaders, including the need to obscure or conceal the very use of this device. Despite their reservations, however, Akzin and his associates could not avoid making use of the Jewish vote as a key element in their efforts to influence the US administration’s approach
to Palestine.

During the latter half of the 1940s, in tandem with their campaign for a Jewish state, American Jews strove to improve conditions for the displaced persons in refugee camps and support the absorption of refugees who wished to settle in the United States.[[278]](#footnote-278) They also worked to better the economic conditions and reinforce the political status of European Jews collectively after World War ii. Leading American Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the World Jewish Congress played a crucial part in the cause of European Jewry. Yet this undoubtedly complex and highly important political and public effort differed from the campaign for a Jewish state. Most of the activities on behalf of European Jews took place behind the scenes of the political stage and did not require exploiting the dynamics of an ethnic political struggle in which the American Jewish vote was a core element, and therefore Akzin did not devote much attention to this issue as part of his work in Washington. His important status as part of the struggle for a Jewish state is evident from another angle as well. American Zionist leader Stephen Wise, one of Roosevelt’s prominent supporters in both the Jewish community and the Democratic party, chose Akzin in order to convey his impression that Roosevelt was pursuing a pro-Zionist policy consistent with the worldview of most American Zionists. After Roosevelt’s death, Wise wrote to Akzin to say that the issue of Palestine had been one of the main topics that preoccupied the president throughout his years in the White House, and that he supported unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine and believed that the land should become a Jewish national home. Wise claimed that the charges of anti-Zionism in Roosevelt’s policy were part of a deliberate and deceptive propaganda campaign aimed at vilifying and denigrating the late president. In his view Roosevelt’s policy of not displaying hostility towards the Arab world was in harmony with the outlook among US Zionists, who had never demanded that the president take action against the Arabs.[[279]](#footnote-279)

Roosevelt’s death and his succession by Truman exacerbated the internal Zionist debate over the Jewish vote. Truman lacked Roosevelt’s public stature, which in turn gave the Jewish vote greater weight and presumably meant it could be an important player in the upcoming presidential and congressional elections. Akzin surmised that while Roosevelt had a better grasp on the question of Palestine than Truman, the latter needed the Jewish vote more than the former. This fact was expected to provide the American Zionist movement with political leverage over Truman that it could use in pursuit of its aims.[[280]](#footnote-280)

As the debate over resolution of the question of Palestine intensified, so too did the inter-party struggle in the United States. The narrowing gap between Democrats and Republicans during the 1946 congressional elections, and as the 1948 presidential elections approached, gave greater weight to the Jewish vote and intensified the dispute over its use among Zionist leaders in the United States. Zionist leaders and American politicians alike concluded that the Jewish vote had more potential than ever before to shape the outcome of national elections. American Zionist leaders therefore became increasingly inclined to use it as a means of applying pressure on the administration to resolve the question of Palestine in a manner consistent with the interests of the Zionist movement.

Following the midterm elections of 1946, for the first time since 1928, the Republicans achieved a majority in both houses of Congress. Particularly noteworthy, considering the large concentration of Jewish voters, was the Democratic defeat in New York, where Republican Governor Thomas Dooley was reelected and Democratic Senate candidate and former governor Herbert Lehman lost.[[281]](#footnote-281)

The enhanced importance of the Jewish vote took a pragmatic form in remarks made by Solicitor General James McGrath to Benjamin Akzin in the latter’s capacity as director of the Emergency Council office in Washington. McGrath believed that the Zionist movement in the United States had mismanaged its political struggle, and that the movement’s leaders should have used political means rather than technical arguments to elicit the Truman administration’s support for the Zionist movement. The term “political means” as he used it was a euphemistic reference to efforts to influence Truman’s policies through the Jewish vote. Akzin’s response to McGrath’s comments reflect the efforts of the Zionist leadership to obscure the existence of an official policy in support of using the Jewish vote. He took pains to point out that there was no such phenomenon as a Jewish vote and that the American Zionist movement had no intention of orchestrating a uniform Jewish voting bloc. In contrast to this official declaration, however, a subsequent conversation between Akzin and McGrath indicates that both were aware of the political potential of the Jewish vote and both were prepared to use it to influence government policy. Akzin began by explaining that many American Jewish supporters of Zionism felt they had been deceived by Democratic administrations that did not act on their promises to advance the Zionist cause. He therefore expected the disappointment and anger against Democratic administrations to create a counter-reaction in the form of support for Republican candidates. He stressed that the disappointment felt by the Jewish community was so great, that the only way to redirect the Jewish vote away from the Republicans would be to introduce a sudden and significant shift in government policy in advance of the elections. Later in the conversation, Akzin asked McGrath for advice on using the Jewish vote to apply pressure on candidates in the upcoming elections while also obscuring the use of this leverage and refraining from openly mobilizing Jewish voters as a single, unified political bloc. In response, McGrath proposed putting pressure on Democratic candidates behind the scenes and in one-on-one meetings. This pressure should focus on candidates for the Senate and for governorships in key states with a large population of Jewish voters who could threaten their candidacy by supporting their rival. Following this, those candidates who were vulnerable to the Jewish vote could be expected to hold meetings with the president and senior administration officials to explain the need for a policy shift to ensure that their chances of being elected were not undermined. This pressure by the candidates was expected to force the government to change its policy on Palestine. In other words, McGrath translated the American Zionists’ strategy of using the Jewish vote, while denying its existence, into political practice. The essence of this practice was the option of refraining from using the Jewish world by threatening to use it – a threat that was expected to yield the desired results without revealing the existence of a uniquely Jewish pattern of organized voting driven by an independent, distinctly Jewish political agenda.[[282]](#footnote-282)

A few days after his conversation with McGrath, Akzin held a meeting with Republican Senator Owen Brewster of Maine that also focused on the use of the Jewish vote in advancing Zionist policy.[[283]](#footnote-283) According to Brewster, the only way to shift government policy in line with Zionist expectations was to make it clear that the administration’s position on Palestine would result in a loss of votes for the Democratic party in upcoming elections: the 1946 congressional elections and the 1948 presidential elections. He argued that the two major parties – especially the Republicans, who wanted to return to power – would closely examine whether Zionism was going to have a substantial impact on the 1946 elections. If it turned out that Jewish voters were deciding on the basis of the candidates’ and the administration’s views on Palestine, then the Republican Party would have to devote significant attention to Zionist aspirations in the remaining two years before the presidential election. Thus, the Zionist movement could ensure that the question of Palestine remained at the top of the political agenda in the United States, compelling the Democratic administration to change its Middle East policy so as not to hurt its chances in the upcoming elections. Akzin, in response, expressed opposition to a uniform, organized Jewish vote and denied any possibility that the American Zionist movement would politically exploit the Jewish voting public. As in his meeting with McGrath, however, his official denial was purely for the record. As the conversation proceeded, Akzin and Brewster examined how the Zionist movement might maximize the political potential of the Jewish vote. Akzin suggested that because the 1946 elections were midterm elections – that is, congressional rather than presidential – the impact of a Jewish protest vote against the Democratic administration might be diluted if many Jews were to cast their ballots for pro-Zionist Democratic candidates despite the administration’s unsatisfactory policy. Such a voting pattern would diminish the weight of the Jewish vote and could create the misleading impression that despite the Democratic administration’s policy, it still enjoyed large-scale Jewish support. Brewster observed in response that despite the importance of a particular candidate’s success, the leaders of the American Zionist movement had to prioritize the overall political picture. He stressed that as the Democratic Party and its candidates lost support in areas with large numbers of Jewish voters, then party leaders and governors would be compelled to change their policy on Palestine in order to regain Jewish support in advance of the 1948 presidential elections.[[284]](#footnote-284)

Akzin tried to use his meeting with Brewster to secure concrete political gains from the Republican Senator using the Jewish vote. He stressed that American Jews were tired of speeches and pro-Zionist declarations by leaders of the two major parties. Jewish voters had developed a degree of cynicism, and speeches and statements could no longer sway their votes. In response Brewster asked how an opposition party such as the Republicans might proceed when it does not have control of the government. Akzin replied that the Republicans could perhaps influence American foreign policy through party representatives with key positions in UN bodies, who can exploit this channel to shape American foreign policy and UN resolutions on Palestine.[[285]](#footnote-285) Akzin’s observation about Republican representatives in UN bodies carried a veiled but unmistakable threat: The American Zionist movement and Jewish voters would no longer be content with empty promises. In order to change Jewish voting patterns significantly in the 1946 elections and subsequently the presidential election, the Republicans would have to demonstrate that there was a difference between their approach and that of the Democratic administration to the question of Palestine in pragmatic terms.

The Jewish vote as represented by Akzin was an important political tool of the Zionist movement in the United States. Yet its use was camouflaged, and its existence even denied, in order to neutralize possible criticism of American Zionists for attempting to shape US foreign policy to serve Zionist rather than American interests. This pattern resulted from American Zionists’ fears that they could be accused of dual loyalty or even of acting against American interests. Such concerns plagued American Zionists throughout the 1940s, and with the conclusion of the war they coalesced into an effort to prove that American and Zionist interests in the Middle East overlapped.[[286]](#footnote-286)

Another way to learn about Akzin’s political activism in the United States is by examining his relations with Bartley Crum, an attorney and close associate of President Truman, and one of the American members of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, established in 1946. In the course of his work for the committee, Crum visited displaced persons camps in Europe, where he spoke with the refugees and gathered first-hand information about the horrendous fate that had befallen European Jews. As a result, he became an enthusiastic supporter of a Jewish state in Palestine in the framework of the post-World War ii political order. In effect Crum became a Zionist who collaborated covertly with the American Zionist leadership in its efforts to establish a Jewish state.

A highly confidential letter from Benjamin Akzin to Harry Shapiro of the Emergency Council illustrates the differences between the publicly visible campaign and behind-the-scenes efforts in the US on behalf of the Zionist cause.[[287]](#footnote-287) Having learned of Crum’s intention to write a book about his impressions as a member of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Akzin wrote to explain that in his view, Crum should not be overtly identified with the Zionist movement. If he were to come across as a spokesman for the movement, his ability to influence the American public and the political establishment would be drastically reduced. He would no longer be seen as an independent political figure and an objective member of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. Instead, he would be seen solely as a representative of and spokesman for American Zionists. To avoid such a situation, Akzin proposed a number of clandestine measures: Close associates of Crum with no ties to American Zionism would take measures to ensure his inclusion on the faculty of leading universities and research institutes specializing in American foreign policy. His engagement with academic research institutes would enhance Crum’s image as an objective statesman, which Akzin believed was the way to buttress his authority as an important and leading political figure rather than a representative of the Zionist cause. Akzin therefore sought to prevent Zionism from infusing the process. Were the Zionist influence to become known, it would undermine Crum’s image as independent and objective. To underscore the supposed disconnection between the Zionist movement and Crum, Akzin sought to ensure that American Zionist institutions and organizations affiliated with US Zionists refrain from inviting Crum to speak at Zionist conferences. Akzin proposed that this covert Zionist support for Crum take the form of financial assistance as well. He explained the advantage for American Zionist public relations efforts if Crum’s book on the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry were to be issued by a major American publishing house. He therefore proposed that the Zionist movement secretly purchase a large number of advance copies, with the expectation that such a commitment would provide the incentive necessary to persuade a major publisher to accept the book.[[288]](#footnote-288) On another occasion Akzin highlighted the importance of Crum’s status in Washington for the Zionist movement. His report on his own efforts in Washington included an explanation of Crum’s vast network of contacts among members of Congress and other key Washington figures.[[289]](#footnote-289)

Akzin’s concerns about Crum’s pro-Zionist efforts undermining his public status were founded. Following the publication of his book, Crum was attacked by a variety of political critics. Some accused him of publishing false information, while others accused him of committing a crime by releasing state secrets. The source of attacks against Crum was the State Department, whose main spokesman, Director of Near Eastern and African Affairs Loy Henderson, was known for his anti-Zionist position. To discredit Crum and minimize the public significance of what he had written, Henderson accused him of lacking objectivity and being a communist sympathizer. Crum himself stated, in a letter to Silver, that in his view the attacks against him stemmed from his ties with the Zionist movement and from his having taken a stance against the policy of the State Department’s Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs by calling for a pro-Zionist policy.[[290]](#footnote-290)

Akzin continued to make use of the Jewish vote even after Israel achieved statehood. During the 1948 elections he claimed that Dewey, the Republican candidate, had chosen to remain silent on the future US policy in the Middle East because, presumably, pro-Zionist declarations would not yield any electoral advantages. In his view, Dewey and his advisors had concluded that not only would a pro-Zionist position attract relatively few Jewish votes, but it might in fact alienate other voters opposed to US support for the Zionist movement. Akzin offered to provide Dewey with a proposal that would make it possible to integrate the question of Palestine into American foreign policy in a way that would not trigger anti-Jewish reactions.[[291]](#footnote-291)

Akzin’s papers reveal that the unique circumstances in the United States during the second half of the 1940s made it possible for the Zionist movement, for the first time in its history, to alter the political modes of activity that had been accepted to date. The shock experienced by the American Jewish community after the Holocaust, American society’s willingness to contain and accept ethnic political activism, and the gradually improving socioeconomic status of US Jewry, in combination with Akzin’s efforts, made it possible to shape the Jewish vote into an effective political and public tool during the latter 1940s.[[292]](#footnote-292) To this one must, of course, add the charismatic leadership of Abba Hillel Silver, who strongly supported the cynical use of ethnic Jewish politics in the United States. Conceivably, it was precisely Akzin’s status as an immigrant observer of the American political system from the sidelines, and the realistic possibility that despite being an American citizen his stay in the United States would be brief, that enabled him to maneuver relatively freely in Washington while operating a covert system of political pressure that his American Zionist associates refrained from implementing for fear of undermining their status as US citizens. Thus Akzin, a refugee immigrant who had come to the United States from Europe in the late 1930s because of the existential Jewish crisis underway at the time, made an important contribution to shaping the Jewish vote in the United States into a substantial political tool, and in effect contributed to shaping the character of US Jewry as a whole. American Jews’ willingness to act as a united ethnic group and make use of the Jewish vote in order to change American policy had a short but highly significant lifespan. From a political perspective, the efforts of US Jews in the American arena contributed significantly to the feasibility of establishing a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii political order. However, the importance of the Jewish vote goes beyond that. The effective and successful use of ethnic politics by US Jewry and its leadership during the second half of the 1940s enhanced the sense of unity among American Jews, reinforced their ethnic identity, and contributed to the consolidation of US Jewry as an ethnic group capable of self-organization and prepared to struggle for its own cause and on behalf of non-Jewish issues with which it identified.[[293]](#footnote-293) In the future, in contrast to the 1940s, most American Jews will continue to follow ethnic voting patterns, but the unique nature of these patterns relates to the United States and to the various worldviews of US Jews as Americans.[[294]](#footnote-294)

3 American Citizens as a Political Agent in the **Exodus** Affair

Akzin’s use of the Jewish vote reflected just the tip of the iceberg. He was deeply engaged in the main political and public issues that preoccupied US Jewry and the Zionist movement during the latter 1940s. A striking example was his involvement in the Exodus affair.

The Exodus (named for the Jewish “exodus” from Europe) was the name of a ship used for the clandestine transport of refugees to Palestine, part of a larger illegal immigration network. It departed France on July 1, 1947, with more than 40,000 Holocaust survivors. The British intercepted it near the shores of Palestine, and the refugees on board were transferred to another ship for deportation, initially to France and later to British-occupied Germany. The Exodus incident was one of the most important chapters in the Zionist struggle for the establishment of a Jewish state in the aftermath of World War ii.

During the British seizure of the ship, dozens of passengers were injured and three of the crew and operators were killed. Because the Exodus reached the Haifa port during a visit of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (unscop), the chairman and another member of the committee witnessed the refugees being transferred to another ship for deportation. The deportation process and the refugees’ initial detention in France, followed by their forced transfer to British-occupied Germany, received widespread and very sympathetic coverage from the world’s major media outlets. In 1958 Leon Marcus Uris published his famous book Exodus. Although the book and subsequent movie of the same title bear little resemblance to the actual incident, they contributed greatly to public interest in the issue.[[295]](#footnote-295)

The American perspective, and the Jewish American viewpoint in particular, was a major factor in the way events unfolded in the Exodus affair. Like the nine clandestine immigration ships that preceded it, the President Roosevelt (the ship’s original name) had been purchased in the United States. The funds for its purchase were donated by American Jews. In tandem, 250 crewmembers were hired for all the ships purchased in the United States. Volunteers were recruited out of an interest in saving the costs of hiring foreign maritime crews who would presumably demand especially high fees for this difficult and dangerous mission. The professional American crewmembers chosen for the voyage had significant previous maritime experience with the American Merchant Marines or the US Navy. Additional volunteers were recruited for the non-professionalized aspects of the operation as well. Some of the volunteers received wages, particularly if they had maritime training, while others received nominal spending money and travel expenses. The American crewmembers’ decision to volunteer for this operation was strongly affected by their recent exposure to the fate of Jews during the Holocaust.

The architects of this rescue operation had not intended for American crews to be used publicly as a political tool. In the event of seizure by the British, American crewmembers were expected to avoid identifying themselves, and instead to blend in with the passengers and return to the United States as soon as possible. Akzin’s papers reveal that despite this, and in contravention of the policy of the Zionist leadership in Palestine, he and American Zionist leaders decided to try to turn the American aspect of the Exodus affair into a powerful political tool.

The Exodus had thirty-six American crewmembers, all but two of whom were Jewish. The case of John Stanley Grauel, a Methodist minister who was active in the Christian Committee for Palestine, is interesting. He continued to receive a salary from the committee while on the Exodus, as the plan had been to use his experience and whatever information he was able to gather during the voyage as material for continued campaigning in the United States. Once in Haifa, therefore, the minister identified himself to the British and disembarked from the ship. The American crewmembers had been instructed to take cover in the ship’s lower decks in the event of a British seizure, after which they were to disembark in Haifa with the assistance of local underground activists. Ultimately most of the Americans decided not to hide, and instead to depart with the refugees. Twenty-five Americans therefore sailed to France with the refugees, helping to oversee day-to-day operations on the deportation ships. Some disembarked in France, where they joined the crews of other refugee ships, or simply left the crew of the Exodus and returned to the United States. Another group of volunteers remained with the refugee ships that continued to Germany. Most of these crewmembers later returned to the United States, although a few immigrated to Palestine using forged documents.

Nine American volunteers hid in the lower decks of the ship and disembarked along with the Jewish escorts from Palestine. William Bernstein, a volunteer and first officer of the Exodus, was one of three crewmembers killed in clashes when the British seized the ship. Notably, the British reports about their takeover highlight the role of the Americans. Presumably, the fact that the American crew consisted of healthy young volunteers driven by a sense of duty made them stand out. Another reason for the attention to American crewmembers in the British reports was that most of the interaction between British soldiers and the smugglers was conducted via the Americans, as they spoke English.

One American crewmember was injured and hospitalized. Three additional American volunteers were arrested by the British, one of whom identified himself as the captain in order to prevent exposure of the ship’s true captain, “Ike” Aronowicz, who had an important role in the clandestine network for the illegal transport of refugees and whose identity was therefore to be concealed. These four crewmembers eventually returned to the United States in mid-September.[[296]](#footnote-296)

Akzin’s papers deal mainly with the American volunteer who was killed and with the four crewmembers captured in Haifa by the British. His own efforts on behalf of the Exodus entailed collaboration with Abba Hillel Silver, chairman of the Emergency Council at the time. He and Silver waged a struggle on behalf of the Exodus, which began with a letter of July 30, 1947, from Silver to Secretary of State George C. Marshall.[[297]](#footnote-297) Interestingly, Silver’s letter opens by recalling the names of the three American citizens who had sailed with the Exodus, rather than noting the fate of the thousands of Holocaust survivors aboard. The three were detained in Palestine on charges of engaging in illegal immigration activities. Silver also mentioned another American crewmember, whom the British had deemed an illegal immigrant and deported from Palestine. He pointed out that according to the information available to him, the American consular services in Palestine had reported to the State Department on the condition of the American crewmembers. Silver pointed out that the four American citizens had been arrested by the British when the latter seized the ship, which occurred beyond the territorial waters of Palestine. Moreover, it was during this seizure that William Bernstein, an American citizen and former Marine, was killed.[[298]](#footnote-298)

 Silver goes on to present a complex argument about the legality of the British action against American citizens, claiming that it constituted a gross violation of international law. According to him, aside from the fact that these American citizens were captured in international waters, the immigration efforts in which the Exodus crew was engaged cannot be considered illegal – a fact that contributed to the severity of the British action against American citizens. To substantiate his claim, Silver presented a complex series of international precedents relating to the nature of British governance over Palestine from the start of the Mandate until 1947. Among other sources, he noted the 1939 resolution of the League of Nations’ Mandates Committee and the conclusions of the 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. The purpose of this legal discussion was to argue that, given the involvement by the international political system in the British Mandatory government of Palestine, the British lacked the authority to rule that the passengers on board the Exodus constituted illegal immigrants. In light of Akzin’s knowledge and experience in the field of international law, it is safe to assume that it was his suggestion that Silver raise these arguments and that he provided the evidentiary support. Silver summarized,

Since the actions against the four American citizens are the consequence of the capture of the Exodus 1947, they further involve the grave question of possible interference with shipping on the high seas. This question is also involved very clearly in the killing of William Bernstein in the course of the ship’s capture. American citizens having been the victims of both actions, it is impossible to deny American interest in the issue, however narrowly one may choose to construe this interest.[[299]](#footnote-299)

In the letter’s concluding paragraphs, Silver stressed the exceptionality of the Exodus affair: The State Department typically moves swiftly when the rights of American citizens are trampled by foreign governments, but not so in the case of the Exodus. This time, according to Silver, the State Department was being passive and doing nothing in face of the British government’s gross violation of international rights. This situation was a source of great concern for the American public generally, and particularly among those American citizens represented by Silver.[[300]](#footnote-300)

Notably, moral arguments regarding the fate of Holocaust survivors on board the Exodus did not serve as a key theme in the arguments formulated by Akzin and Silver for the latter’s letter to the Secretary of State. They chose a distinct line of argument that differed significantly from the core Zionist argument regarding the Exodus incident, focusing instead on international legal issues and the harm inflicted on American crewmembers rather than the refugees.

Some days later, on August 6, 1947, the State Department issued its response, with Henry S. Villard, acting director of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs, answering on behalf of the Secretary of State.[[301]](#footnote-301) The letter opened by citing the British government’s response to the incident, the gist of which was that the action against the Exodus had taken place in the territorial waters of Palestine in response to an illegal immigration operation, and that the British seizure was met with violent resistance, which resulted in injuries and fatalities. The British response was presented verbatim, without any commentary or opinion on the part of the State Department’s representative. The letter then went on to cite a report from the American consulate in Jerusalem, according to which only one of the American crewmembers had sought the consulate’s assistance, and that person was already on his way from Palestine to the United States as a result of action taken by the consulate in Jerusalem.[[302]](#footnote-302) None of the other American citizens had sought the consulate’s assistance, although they had been informed that the American Consul’s representatives were prepared to act on their behalf. The letter’s author was essentially drawing a categorical distinction between individual cases in which the State Department takes action on behalf of American citizens – which it does proactively – and the Department’s rejection of Silver’s demand that it conduct an extensive diplomatic campaign against Britain:

The Department and its representatives abroad will continue to follow developments with close attention, and to render all proper assistance to the American citizens concerned. With regard to additional action of the character suggested in your letter, this Government has the general aspects of the matter under consideration.[[303]](#footnote-303)

All subsequent contact with State Department officials regarding the Exodus affair was handled solely by Akzin, a fact that further supports the supposition that he was heavily involved in drafting Silver’s opening letter as well.

During the months in which the Exodus passengers were being deported, initially to France and later to Germany, an intensive exchange of letters regarding the affair took place between Akzin and various State Department officials. Akzin presented sworn testimony by Methodist minister John Stanley Grauel attesting to the British use of violence on board the Exodus. He described the minister as a journalist, in line with Grauel’s cover story, and underscored the fact that First Captain William Bernstein, who ultimately died, had been denied medical.[[304]](#footnote-304) Addressing Akzin’s call for action against the British government in light of the harm it had caused to American citizens, the State Department’s legal division responded on September 3, 1947:

In order that full consideration may be given to the questions which you set forth in your letter, it will be necessary for the owners of this vessel to send to this Department affidavits and documentary proofs regarding their ownership, the nationality of the directors and shareholders if it is owned by a corporation, the circumstances under which it was acquired, its registry and copies of the contracts under which the persons mentioned in your letter were employed.[[305]](#footnote-305)

Akzin’s response on behalf of the Emergency Council points to the vast gulf between his own demands and the State Department’s efforts to steer completely clear of the Exodus affair. A striking example is his letter of October 3, 1947:

The [American Zionist Emergency] Council’s interest in the Exodus affair springs from the broad public issues raised by killing, wounding and detaining of American citizens by British authorities as a result of British seizure of a ship on the high seas in pursuance of a Palestine immigration policy which is itself violative of valid international agreements. It is on the basis of these broad issues of public interest that we have requested the Department of State to take suitable action. This interest of ours is quite independent of any questions regarding ownership or nationality of the vessel, the identity of the directors or shareholders of any shipping corporation, or the terms of the contracts of any crew members. I would greatly appreciate your letting us know what, if any action the Department of State is taking with regard to these issues of broad public interest stated in our previous letters and restated here.[[306]](#footnote-306)

Marshall’s opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii political order is well known. The correspondence between Akzin and State Department officials lends support, from another angle, to the assessment that the State Department’s policy posed a challenge to the Zionist movement and significant obstacles to the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine. Akzin’s exchange of letters regarding the Exodus affair is important from another angle as well, given that he was the direct negotiator with the State Department. Moreover, these letters, though written on behalf of the American Zionist camp, focused primarily on questions of international law, citizenship, and international treaties pertinent to the Exodus incident. This was a completely different set of arguments from those representing the official Zionist stance, which emphasized the moral aspects of the fate of the Holocaust survivors on board the ship. Yet it was Akzin, a refugee and recently naturalized American citizen, who used the concept of American citizenship to challenge and attack the State Department policy on the matter. This affair adds another layer to the complex reality presented in earlier chapters. The endeavors of Akzin, Tartakower, and Kubovy in the American arena represent a unique and fascinating mix of marginalization as refugee immigrants and leadership as part of the forefront of decision-making bodies within the Zionist movement and American Jewish organizations during the latter 1940s. For this reason they had a different, and sometimes critical, way of looking at the reality in the United States and, accordingly, they chose different paths. Akzin was convinced that using an alternative set of arguments, based mainly on harm to American citizens rather than Holocaust survivors, would add a facet to Zionism’s political struggle in the United States, beyond the important moral aspect of the Holocaust survivors on board the Exodus.

4 Akzin and American Jewry

Akzin’s efforts in the US political arena on behalf of a Jewish state represented only one aspect of his public activity in the United States. At the time he was also engaged in an intensive endeavor to ensure continuing cooperation between US Zionists and the State of Israel after independence. He strove not only to create the ideological and organizational basis for cooperation between these two communities, but also to ensure the political standing of American Zionists and the Zionist movement in the Jewish world after the creation of a Jewish state. His efforts in this regard should be examined in light of the challenges American Zionists could expect once a Jewish state was founded. Their own efforts, under the leadership of Abba Hillel Silver during the late 1940s, attest to the political trap in which they found themselves. The cause of a Jewish state was the main agenda item on Silver’s political and Zionist agenda. It was the basis for his status in the American Zionist movement and the cause for which he challenged the American administration. The differences between Silver and his rivals in the United States turned mainly on the latter’s unwillingness to engage in a fierce struggle for the cause of a Jewish state. At the same time, however, a successful struggle by Silver, ending with the establishment of a Jewish state, potentially meant that his own political status would diminish, as would the relative power of American Zionists throughout the Zionist movement and the Jewish world. Considering the opposition on the part of the Zionist establishment in Palestine to Silver engaging in political activity in the United States, it is safe to surmise that in the context of an independent state this opposition would only intensify. Indeed, the moment a Jewish state came to be seen as a realistic possibility, Silver and his American Zionist associates tried to propose a new political structure that would ensure the standing of US Zionists – and in essence their own standing – within the framework of relations linking the State of Israel, US Jewry, and the global Zionist movement, while also infusing American Zionist institutions with new areas of activity.

The issue of US Zionists’ relations with the Zionist movement and the State of Israel was the main theme in an article by Silver’s loyal assistant, Emanuel Neumann, in the newsletter of the Zionist Organization of America, New Palestine. He asserted that the establishment of a Jewish state would lead the Zionist Organization of America to suspend its activities in the country. On the contrary, he argued, US Zionists would need to increase their financial and political support and become involved in the economic development of the emerging state. He further asserted that US Zionists should invest their money primarily in the private sector and support the establishment of research and development institutes aimed at promoting this sector. In his view, the Zionist Organization of America should also handle the export of technological knowledge from the United States to Israel and remain in charge of the state’s public relations in the United States vis-à-vis both the general public and the administration.[[307]](#footnote-307)

 A similar approach to future relations between US Zionists and the State of Israel is evident in a memorandum prepared for Silver by Benjamin Akzin in his capacity as director of the Emergency Council office in Washington at the time. Akzin explained that, given the establishment of Israel, it was now necessary to reorganize the Zionist institutions in the United States. He proposed that the American branch of the Jewish Agency Executive continue operating not only in the United States but throughout the Western Hemisphere. He explained, arguing along the same lines as Neumann, that the American branch should continue to engage in public relations with Jewish as well as non-Jewish communities, offering local communities training on engaging with various governments. Akzin advised that in order to prevent communities outside the US and local American communities from approaching the government of Israel directly instead of turning to an American body, all American members of the Jewish Agency Executive should conduct visits in the United States and other countries so as to reinforce their authority. He added that, after the government of Israel assumes responsibility for handling international relations, US Zionists should ensure their central role in the economic sphere while continuing the proven practice of engaging in public relations, paying membership dues to the Zionist movement, and preparing for upcoming Zionist congresses. Akzin further proposed that as part of the reorganization of Zionist institutions in the United States, the Emergency Council continue operating in the same format and areas in which it had been successful, such as public relations. Its name would have to be changed and the word “emergency” deleted in order to establish it as a permanent body. Akzin expected there to be clashes between the state’s institutions and US Zionists in various areas, and he therefore proposed that Silver wage a campaign to prevent the transfer of responsibilities from American Zionist institutions to the State of Israel.[[308]](#footnote-308)

From Akzin’s memorandum we learn something about his efforts behind the scenes to ensure that US Zionists remain an active and influential political player even after Israel achieved independence. In tandem he also worked to draw attention to the tremendous contribution by US Jews, especially American Zionists, to the cause of a Jewish state. A few months after Israel was founded, Akzin published an op-ed titled “Prelude to the Jewish State,” in which he stressed the contribution of US Zionists to the creation of the State of Israel.[[309]](#footnote-309) In his view, the mobilization of US Jewry for the cause of the Jewish state was particularly important, because in the past a significant portion of American Jewish elites had objected to Jewish statehood – thus posing substantive difficulties for the Zionist movement. Akzin explained to his readers that World War ii and the Holocaust had profoundly altered the American Jewish community, which then mobilized itself economically and politically for the cause of Jewish statehood. He wrote,

The main theatre of the struggle for Jewish Statehood was necessarily Palestine itself. It was Palestine Jewry that bore the brunt of the fight both before and after the declaration of Israel’s independence. But a fateful part in the political development leading to the emergence of the Jewish State was played by the Jews of America who, in the years of the Second World War, grew increasingly aware of their new responsibilities.[[310]](#footnote-310)

Akzin chose to highlight the importance of American Zionists’ role in the struggle for Israel’s statehood by describing the work of Abba Hillel Silver, the leading American Zionist figure during the latter 1940s. He told his readers about the Zionist movement’s complex and unrelenting campaign to ensure UN passage of the Partition Plan resolution during the months leading up to the General Assembly vote and, as the date of the vote drew nearer, in the corridors of the United Nations itself. Akzin essentially equated the work and roles of Silver and his political assistant Emanuel Neumann with the efforts and contributions of Ben-Gurion and his associates. The US-based group and Palestine-based group had contributed equally to the success of the Zionist struggle and UN approval of the Partition Plan. He observed, “The planning and presentation of the Jewish case was largely the work of David Ben-Gurion, Aubrey Eban, Dr. Emanuel Neumann, Moshe Shertok, and Dr. Abba Hillel Silver.”[[311]](#footnote-311)

The full import of Akzin’s praise for Silver’s efforts as an American and a Zionist in the US arena can best be understood by comparison with the past. In 1936 he had published an article in The Jewish Post fiercely attacking the efforts of Lord (First Baron) Alfred Moritz Mond as a Zionist and British politician. Lord Melchett had served as labor and housing minister in Lloyd George’s government from 1916 until the government collapsed in 1922. Subsequently he served for six years as a member of Parliament. In tandem with his work in the British political system, he also served as president of the British Zionist Fund, which he represented in negotiations with the British government. At the same time he also contributed substantially to a range of Zionist projects. According to Akzin, Lord Melchett’s position as a British politician disqualified him from participating in Zionist affairs because his role as a politician could affect his Zionist activism, leading him to prioritize British over Zionist interests. He argued that only non-British Zionist activists could properly represent Zionist interests in dealing with Britain. His outlook changed, however, after he immigrated to the United States, where he became better acquainted with the American Jewish community and formed long-lasting relations with its Zionist leadership. In contrast to what he had written in 1936, Akzin was now convinced that Silver and his associates in the American Zionist leadership were indeed driven by Zionist interests.[[312]](#footnote-312)

Akzin continued to voice his view of US Jewry’s decisive contribution to Israel’s statehood. In a 1949 article he observed that, while the public was generally aware of American Jews’ financial support for the establishment of Israel, this aspect represented only part of a far more comprehensive system of support. He described how American Jews had voluntarily enlisted in the military struggle for Israel’s independence. He especially emphasized the American Jewish political struggle within the United States on behalf of Israel’s independence, explaining that the United Nations Partition Plan would not have been adopted were it not for the efforts of US Jews.[[313]](#footnote-313)

At the same time he was writing about US Jewry’s contribution to the founding of Israel, Akzin was also participating in a wide-ranging discussion on the life of the Diaspora Jew outside of Israel after World War ii. In an article that appeared in the summer of 1944, he stressed the importance of the Yishuv’s continuous development since World War i, but argued that Jewish life outside of the Land of Israel would continue in parallel with the important Jewish center in Palestine.[[314]](#footnote-314) Akzin listed some of the tremendous challenges awaiting those Jews who opted to remain in Europe and revive Jewish community life in the aftermath of World War ii: the reformulation and reestablishment of civil rights for Jews, the return of or compensation for assets owned by Jews before the war, reparations for other injuries or harm caused to Jews during the war, and a judicial and punitive process for all those involved in causing harm to Jews and violating their rights. In Akzin’s view, the rehabilitation of Jewish life in Europe could not take place separately in each country. Only a transnational system operating under one international legislative umbrella could, he believed, enable the revival of Jewish communities. Akzin stressed that the Jewish question was not an internal domestic issue. Rather, considering the hardships Jews had been facing in their respective countries since World War i, international involvement and oversight were essential. The intensity and reach of the problem attested in his opinion to the unique nature of the Jewish question across the world and the need to create an international system to allow Jews to integrate into their countries of residence. Akzin was not overlooking the lessons of failed post-World War i political agreements aimed at regulating the status of Jews and other minorities. However, he believed that their failure did exclude the possibility of comparable measures being suitable to the post-World War ii reality; instead it pointed to the need to improve and fortify the international system’s ability to safeguard the fate of Jews across different countries. Akzin concluded that, notwithstanding international law’s importance in resolving the Jewish question, it could not provide a sufficient means of action. In his view, Jewish statehood was in fact the means to ensuring Jewish life elsewhere. The emergence of a Jewish state would not undermine Jewish communities around the world; on the contrary, a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii political order would constitute a decisive step towards the normalization of Jewish life around the world, not only in the future Jewish state. Jews who wish to, would be able to immigrate to the new state, while others could continue building a life in their countries of residence. The latter would of course be free to determine the role of the Jewish state in their ethnic identity. In concluding, Akzin wrote,

As far as the Jewish question is concerned, the condition which breeds it must give way to a pattern more nearly resembling that prevailing among other ethnical groups, a pattern which would not appear ‘abnormal’ to perplexed observers. Such a change would imply State and nationhood on a given territory, coupled with a fair degree of immigration to that territory. Once this is done, the uniqueness of the Jewish position would largely disappear, leading on the one hand to a fuller opportunity for individual Jews outside that territory either to identify themselves with the newly founded state or to integrate themselves more completely with their surroundings, and on the other to greater degree of tolerance of Jewish minorities by non-Jewish populations.[[315]](#footnote-315)

Akzin did not ignore the existential challenges facing the world’s Jewish communities during the 1940s:[[316]](#footnote-316) First and foremost, Europe’s Jewish communities were coping with the devastating loss and destruction caused by the Nazis. Moreover, in his assessment, the continued survival of Jewish communities after World War ii would entail complex challenges. In Western states, the secularization and integration of Jews in their countries of residence would pose a threat to the future of communal Jewish life. The widespread acceptance of a worldview that links citizenship with nationality further reinforces the tendency among these Jews to define their identity in religious rather than ethnic or national terms in order to avoid potential conflict between their national identity and status as citizens. Communal Jewish life, even through the limited lens of religious identity, was in danger because of the secularization Akzin mentioned earlier.[[317]](#footnote-317) In Eastern Europe the situation was different. Integration was far more difficult for Jews than on the western side of the continent, which reinforced communal framework. Yet these communities also had to cope with unrelenting loss and destruction, a state of affairs that challenged their capacity to continue functioning. Thus across the world, for different reasons and in different ways, the Jewish community faced complex, multifaceted challenges. Despite the harsh circumstances, however, Akzin believed that Jewish community life in the Diaspora would continue. In response to the challenges of integration faced by Jews around the world in their countries of residence, the Jewish community had, over the generations, developed a sophisticated network of bureaucratic mechanisms, especially in the realm of philanthropy. These apparatuses would, in his view, serve it and enable it to cope with future challenges. Although he believed that Jewish community life would continue, Akzin also thought that Jewish communities would have to adapt themselves to a changing reality, and specifically to adopt democratic processes and free themselves of leadership based on wealth – that is, plutocratic leadership.

Despite the dire state of Diaspora Jewish life in 1944, Akzin regarded the Yishuv as only one element of the Jewish world – an important part of the tapes­try of Jewish life but not the be-all and end-all. He believed that the existing Jewish Diaspora would continue alongside Jewish life in Palestine and later Israel.[[318]](#footnote-318) Jewish communities around the world and their network of relations with the State of Israel constitute a unique phenomenon with a history that departs from the typical origination narrative of Diaspora communities. In many cases these communities form as a result of emigration from the homeland for various, often economic, reasons. The attitude in the homeland towards these emigrants and their descendants varies between indifference and loathing, depending on perceptions of the harm their departure had on the country and whether their contributions to its well-being and economy are ascribed significance. The Jewish Diaspora is an exception to this pattern. The relationship between the State of Israel and US Jewry is based not on apathy and loathing, but on cooperation, and as such it offers many advantages to both sides.[[319]](#footnote-319)

In Akzin’s view, by the 1930s and 1940s American Jews had largely overcome the residual manifestations of discrimination endured by earlier generations. They were able to attain social and economic status in the United States on the basis of equal rights and opportunities. As a group, US Jews have not campaigned for collective or ethnic rights, or called for affirmative action. Nor has American society viewed the Jewish population as an ethnic minority deserving of special attention. It is Jewish organizations that typically provide the format and means for Jewish community activities. Jewish community life and activities in the United States have usually taken place via fora supplied by Jewish organizations, which work not only on matters relevant to US Jewry but also on the provision of support and aid to Jews outside the United States.[[320]](#footnote-320) Akzin posed the question of whether this pattern of activity means that the American Jewish community constitutes “part of a nation in its own right.”[[321]](#footnote-321) His complex answer indicates that he considers Jewry a unique case: “The question of whether all these activities mean that one may view Jewish communities in the Diaspora as parts of a nation in its own right or not depends … on the use of the term nation in the society under consideration. In any event, nearly all are aware of the common Jewish fate – that same shared destiny that many theoreticians of nationalism in Central Europe used as a key criterion in deciding whether to classify a group as a nation.”[[322]](#footnote-322) Akzin went on to describe the importance of Jewish solidarity in the modern era, concluding that “only Jews who have thoroughly estranged themselves from the Jewish collective consider themselves freed of this obligation. All other Jews, even the fairly assimilated, have upheld it to a greater or lesser extent. And since the emergence of the State of Israel, relations between the dispersed communities of the Diaspora and the Jewish nation that found its home in the state have reflected this awareness, an awareness of a shared destiny that embodies the imperative of a common interest and mutual support.”[[323]](#footnote-323)

Akzin further asserted that Zionism retains its legitimacy outside of Israel’s borders even after statehood. This position is critical to understanding that his support for US Zionists did not stem from political considerations linked to his collaboration with Silver during the late 1940s, but instead represented an informed and grounded ideology. This is evident in a 1971 letter he wrote in his capacity as president of the Israeli United Nations Association to the chairman of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, which was established in 1946 with the aim of promoting international cooperation based on UN values. In an effort to explain his Zionist outlook, Akzin wrote,

Zionism is the movement which advocated the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and which continues to support its right to exist. Zionists are those Jews who either want themselves to live in Israel or are in sympathy with others who want to live there…. The Israeli or, if you prefer, Zionist case is that the creation of Israel is part of the worldwide process of giving each group the chance of independent existence somewhere on earth, which naturally does not mean that every individual belonging to it must choose to live there.[[324]](#footnote-324)

In Akzin’s view, Jewish life across the Diaspora would carry on even after World War ii and the Holocaust, and the emergence of a Jewish state might actually pose a threat to Diaspora communities. He voiced thoughts along these lines in a study group dedicated to the issue of Jews in the Diaspora, which took place at the residence of President Zalman Shazar in 1966. Referring to the outlook that sees Israel as the means to the “normalization” of Jewish life in the world, he observed that the word “normalization” has a twofold meaning in this context and possibly represents some degree of threat: For Jews who move to Israel, normalization might mean the fortification of their ethnic consciousness through the bond of territory and statehood, but for those who remain in the Diaspora normalization means the obliteration of their relationship with the ethnic Jewish unit, with Jewish nationalism, not only in the eyes of the nations of their countries of residence but also in their own eyes. We should ask ourselves, he continued, whether we are prepared to accept such a future without a struggle. And if we want to struggle against such developments in the Diaspora, then it is best not to frame them as normalization, because this term grants a semantic victory to a pattern of developments we wish to avoid.[[325]](#footnote-325) On another occasion Akzin asserted that the main difficulty in cultivating the complex relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jewry lies not in the latter’s disregard for the State of Israel, but rather in Israel’s dismissal of Diaspora Jewry. Addressing the elements of consciousness and connection, he pointed out that substantive changes had taken place among some sectors of Israel’s population with respect to “the object of consciousness and of the bond” linking Israel with the Diaspora. For many, the object of the bond was not the Jewish People as a whole, but instead what is termed Israeliness, which “replaces Jewish consciousness” and also represents an ideology. “And perhaps it expresses an ideology more than a pursuit of interests, given that our interests actually link us to Diaspora Jewry whereas the Israeli-centered ideology essentially scoffs at the collectivity of the Jewish People.”[[326]](#footnote-326)

In Akzin’s view, Israel’s dismissal of Diaspora Jewry is particularly blatant in light of the differences between the State of Israel and the Zionist movement in its pre-1948 incarnation. He emphasized that he considered territorial concentration in a Jewish state to be a necessary stage aimed at ensuring the continuing existence of the Jewish nation throughout the world, not only in the Jewish state itself. After Israel’s independence, the government ostensibly maintained a policy that necessitated relations between the state and the Diaspora, but in fact a completely different educational and ideological environment took shape on the ground:

Unintentionally, the main [Israeli state] education system cultivated an educational paradigm that prioritizes the acquisition of knowledge over the teaching of values. In the event that values and ideological approaches do work their way into the schools, they take the form of general social and socialist humanitarian values, without a corresponding focus on national Jewish values. From the outset, even before the emergence of the state, the notion of the Yishuv’s supremacy over Diaspora Jewry was nurtured, and from it there sprouted the tendency to disparage the attributes of the Diaspora as well as the Jewry of the Diaspora. Against this background there developed a sense of detachment from Diaspora Jews and scorn towards them, which undermined the sense of unity among world Jewry. The attitude towards Jewish tradition was cool (and sometimes hostile) among many teachers, but their negative attitude towards Jewish culture in the Diaspora applied to its secular forms as well. Over time the knowledge about Diaspora culture has diminished and nearly disappeared in the circles. Thus educational paradigms evolved and a generation of teachers and educators was raised with minimal awareness of either collective Jewish consciousness or historical Jewish culture.[[327]](#footnote-327)

In Akzin’s assessment, this state of affairs has had far-reaching implications since the alienation on the Israeli side inevitably produced similar effects among Diaspora Jews, thus generating an increasingly intense vicious cycle that can only be reversed by fortifying the collective Jewish consciousness within the State of Israel.[[328]](#footnote-328)

Akzin’s expressions of support for Diasporic consciousness-raising within the State of Israel must be seen as part of the bigger picture presented in this chapter. Diaspora Jewry did not turn into a static or passive element of the Jewish world with the achievement of Israeli statehood. The attitude in the State of Israel towards Diaspora Jews cannot be based on a sense of superiority or on the view that they represent the residue or surplus of Jewish life. On the contrary, relations between the Jewish Diaspora and the State of Israel are complex and multidimensional. As such, and as evidenced in memoranda he drafted on the eve of Israel’s founding, Akzin sought to develop and consolidate a political, ideological framework in which Diaspora Jewish life, including in the United States, continues, and Diaspora Jews remain engaged with the State of Israel.

Notwithstanding his Revisionist background, Akzin’s support for Silver and US Zionists cannot be ascribed to the political connection that Ben-Gurion drew between Silver and the Revisionist movement in the latter 1940s. In spite of Ben-Gurion’s remarks to the Mapai secretariat, noted at the start of the chapter, Silver actually had no ties to the Revisionist movement. In fact, Silver objected to the entire spectrum of Revisionist activities in Palestine: he opposed acts of terror, calling instead for a policy based on peace agreements with the Arabs of Palestine and neighboring countries, in a spirit of compromise and moderation. The link Ben-Gurion drew between Silver and the Revisionists actually reflected his own interest in enlisting fellow party members to his political campaign against Silver, rather than a realistic description of the political situation. It would be difficult to make the case that Akzin was never exposed to Silver’s worldview or to the fact that Silver maintained strong political ties with the General Zionists party, which at the time advocated decidedly different policy positions from those of the revisionist movement.[[329]](#footnote-329) Importantly, from his own perspective as well, Akzin’s support for Silver cannot be ascribed to support for the Revisionist movement. During Akzin’s years in the United States, his political worldview underwent a significant transformation. He drifted away from the Revisionist movement and closer to General Zionist circles. Eventually, in 1951 in Israel, he joined the Progressive Party, which elected him to the party’s central committee in 1959.[[330]](#footnote-330) It is reasonably safe to conclude that Silver’s years in the United States and his close ties with US Zionists who identified with the General Zionist movement also contributed to the transformation of Akzin’s political worldview.

chapter 5

Jacob Robinson

1 Robinson and the Institute of Jewish Affairs

The life story of Jacob Robinson, from his birth in 1889 in Lithuania until his death in 1977 in New York, epitomizes the complexities of Jewish life in the twentieth century. Robinson, a legal scholar by training, immigrated to the United States with his family in 1940. After 1948 and the establishment of
the State of Israel, most of his public and political activity centered on matters relating to the newly founded state.

Jacob, the oldest of David and Bluma Robinson’s seven children, was born in the small Lithuanian town of Seirijai. The family had a strong tradition of participating in diverse circles devoted to Jewish learning, instruction, and exegesis. Robinson’s father was a scholar and a teacher who, because of his personal lineage and status as an educator, became the community spokesperson, representing it before either the Russian or the German Imperial authorities, depending on the changing political environment. The first phase of Jacob Robinson’s education consisted of traditional Jewish studies, after which he completed his secondary school studies at the gymnasium in Suvalki. His dramatic decision to deviate from a traditional Jewish education was due in part to the influence of his uncle Efim Semenovich London, one of the first Jews employed in medical research in the tsarist empire. In 1914 Robinson earned a law degree from the University of Warsaw. That same year he married his former high school classmate Clara, immediately after which World War i broke out and he was drafted into the Russian army and sent to the Eastern front. Roughly a year later, in September 1915, he was captured by the Germans near Vilna, taken as a prisoner of war, and held for three years. Thanks to his command of several languages and his organizational skills, he became the unofficial speaker for Jewish and Russian prisoners of war in their dealings with the Germans, who in turn recognized his unique status by granting him the rank of an officer, releasing him from physical duties, and assigning him responsibility for the acquisition of newspapers and books for the camp. In 1919, with the end of the war, he returned home to an independent Lithuania, where he pursued a wide-ranging public career that straddled Zionist and Lithuanian affairs. Robinson founded the Hebrew gymnasium in Virbalis and served as its principal from 1919 to 1922. During 1923–1925 he worked as a senior editor for the Yiddish-language Zionist daily, Di idishe shtime (The Jewish Voice). Robinson was a leader in the struggle to establish a body of law in Lithuania that would grant Jews the right to self-organization in the spheres of education, culture, and religion. In tandem, he strove to create an internal Lithuanian Jewish legal and political system. The crowning achievement of his efforts was the “National Council” of Lithuanian Jews – the Nationalrat – the highest-ranking state institution responsible for Jewish autonomy, which operated until the onset of the Soviet occupation, in 1940.

For many years Robinson chaired Lithuania’s Zionist central committee, took part in managing the pioneering training farm it had established, and participated in several Zionist congresses. He was also active in Jewish affairs at the regional European level. From 1925 to 1931 he was a prominent spokesman at the Congress of European Nationalities, an umbrella organization for Europe’s minorities whose purpose was to promote the common interests of minorities throughout Europe.

Robinson was a member of the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) from 1923 until it was dispersed following a military coup in 1926. As a member of the Seimas, he served as chairman of the Jewish party and leader of the minorities’ bloc. He waged a particularly fierce struggle against proposed days-of-rest legislation that would require Jewish merchants and craftsmen to close their businesses on Sundays and Christian holidays in addition to the Jewish Sabbath and holidays. On the basis of his public service and legal training, Robinson was appointed as legal advisor to the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, where he represented Lithuania in a legal dispute over the northern strip of Eastern Prussia (Memel Territory). Although Lithuania had acquired this territory in the framework of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany, having changed its position, was now reasserting a claim to the land. Robinson represented Lithuania on the matter before the Permanent Court of International Justice in the Hague and was largely responsible for the Foreign Ministry’s success in swaying the court. His efforts in the international sphere during the 1920s were not limited to his work for the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry. He was also active at the regional European level, promoting Jewish rights specifically and minority rights more generally, and he was the keynote speaker at a 1925 conference that brought together fifty representatives of minorities in Geneva. In 1927, in parallel with his public activity, Robinson began to practice law alongside his brother Nehemiah.[[331]](#footnote-331)

In 1940, shortly before the Soviet Union annexed Lithuania, Robinson and his family managed to emigrate to New York, where he worked for the World Jewish Congress. His achievements included founding the Institute of Jewish Affairs – a joint project of the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Congress – with his brother Nehemiah in 1941. In 1965 the Institute was transferred to London, where in 1994 it was reinstated under a new name, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. The Institute worked on a wide range of issues related to Jewish life during and after World War ii, including the collection of information about the Holocaust, rehabilitation of Jewish life in Europe, reparations for European Jews in the aftermath of World War ii, prosecution of war criminals, and the promotion of human rights in the post-World War ii environment. In 1943, in the course of his research at the Institute, Robinson published his first study in English, Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?, which took a critical look at the post-World War i minorities treaties.[[332]](#footnote-332) The study was part of the Institute’s research that aimed to examine possible solutions for European Jewry after World War ii, building on a broader historical perspective in both Jewish and non-Jewish contexts.

Robinson served as head of the Institute, and simultaneously as a professor of international law at Columbia University, until 1947, when his brother Nehemiah replaced him as director of the Institute.

Robinson participated in the San Francisco conference at which the United Nations Charter was drafted (from April to June of 1945). As a delegate of the wjc, which had observer status, he strove to promote human rights and provided assistance on these matters to the Jewish Agency’s delegation as well.

The next phase of Robinson’s public activity was inextricably linked with the Nuremberg trials. He served as an advisor on Jewish issues to Judge Robert H. Jackson, the chief US prosecutor, and had a major role in establishing the legal basis for the Jewish case against the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials.[[333]](#footnote-333) His experience at the Nuremberg tribunal and the wealth of information on the fate of Jews during the Holocaust that his work at the Institute made available to him were among the factors that led to his appointment to the Eichmann trial prosecution team in 1960.

In parallel, Robinson was actively involved with the United Nations, where he contributed substantially to the consolidation of a human rights policy. In addition, he remained engaged in legal affairs relating to war crimes even after the conclusion of the Nuremberg trials.

After the State of Israel was founded, Robinson shifted the focus of his public and political efforts to Israeli affairs. He was appointed as legal advisor to the Jewish Agency’s New York delegation and played an important part in the Zionist campaign to ensure UN approval of the Partition Plan in 1947. After Israel achieved statehood he remained in this position as advisor to Israel’s official mission to the UN. In time he also helped organize the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s legal department. His rich legal background and command of the German language were factors in his appointment as a member of the Israeli delegation to the negotiations on reparations with Germany. Robinson was responsible for the legal aspects of the agreement reached with West Germany and played a key role in formulating the reparations treaty that Israel and Germany signed on September 10, 1952. In addition, he was appointed as advisor to the Claims Conference founded by twenty-three representatives of international Jewish organizations. The conference is a collective body that represents the Jewish People in dealings with the government of Germany on the basis of an agreement between it and the government of Western Germany as well as an agreement with the government of Israel. Of particular importance for Robinson was the documentation of the Holocaust. He was deeply involved with Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center established in 1953, and actively promoted public efforts and research aimed at memorialization of the Holocaust. His part in the Eichmann trial is especially notable. He had a crucial role in formulating the prosecution’s case and participated prominently in the public and intellectual discourse surrounding the trial.

An examination of Robinson’s life reveals that he took part in the major formative events and processes that shaped Jewish life in the twentieth century. Moreover, his public activism represented a unique and fascinating paradigm of Jewish nationalism that manifested in the ideology and deeds of American Zionists described in the first part of this book. Robinson supported the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii political order, while at the same time aspiring to strengthen and empower Jewish communities across the world. He opposed the rejection of the Diaspora. In his view the Jewish Diaspora constituted a significant, legitimate, and evolving part of Jewish life, especially since World War i. The emergence of the State of Israel did not change his worldview. Robinson constantly straddled two worlds, integrating Jewish activism with the critical contributions he was making to shaping the post-World War ii international arena – from prosecuting war criminals to formulating key issues relating to human rights and minority rights in the framework of the United Nations and other international organizations.[[334]](#footnote-334)

Robinson’s unique conceptualization of Jewish life manifested in very concrete terms in his own life. A review of his activities after Israel’s founding reveals that he was deeply involved in forming the institutions, events, and processes that shaped the State of Israel during its first decades, and that he represented Israel at important international fora. Yet his own life was centered in New York, and he in fact never made Israel his permanent residence. Even the question of his citizenship remains shrouded in fog, and it is unclear whether he ever became an Israeli citizen. His life in New York in combination with his activities as an Israeli, both within Israel and around the world, were a concrete manifestation of a unique mix of Jewish life that blended Diaspora life with a national Jewish way of life based in Israel. Likewise, his work at the UN integrated the Diaspora with the State of Israel. In 1947 he was appointed as advisor to the UN Commission on Human Rights. In essence, the World Jewish Congress was “lending” Robinson to the UN for the benefit of the Commission. Robinson was deeply involved in formulating the main UN human rights mechanisms at the time, in the aftermath of World War ii. Of particular note are the Genocide Convention, the International Refugee Convention, and the UN War Crimes Commission. His involvement in these issues corresponded not only with his role as a representative of Israel but also with his intensive efforts on behalf of these causes as a representative of the World Jewish Congress and other organizations during the interwar period and later in the United States after the outbreak of World War ii.[[335]](#footnote-335)

The argument posited here is not that Robinson himself regarded the complex and composite blueprint of his life as being of relevance to the Jewish masses after World War ii. His unique and extreme case does, however, reveal a post-World War ii outlook on Jewish life that integrates an active Diaspora Jewry with Jewish statehood.

The foundations on which the Institute of Jewish Affairs in New York was founded essentially embody the goals Robinson was pursuing when he established the Institute. The main goal he and his associates sought to promote was intensive engagement in shaping the post-World War ii Jewish world. They supported the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii political order, alongside an enduring Jewish Diaspora with unique ethnic characteristics and a presence throughout the world, a Diaspora that takes part in the all-encompassing international process of reinforcing minority rights and protecting human rights generally. Robinson’s work at the UN therefore included campaigning for a Jewish state, but he did not see statehood as the be-all and end-all. His efforts also included struggling for universal minority rights through the United Nations and securing the status of Diaspora Jewry through his work for the Claims Conference.

In 1941 Robinson introduced readers of the wjc newsletter, Congress Weekly, to the Institute of Jewish Affairs.[[336]](#footnote-336) He explained that the European powers already have dedicated research institutes whose role is to conduct studies and gather factual data for the political sector, so that decision makers can make informed choices. Yet the world’s seventeen million Jews, despite the complex existential problems confronting them, have no comparable institutes. It was precisely the hardship and challenges of Jewish life around the world, especially in Europe, that gave rise to the need for a research institute dedicated to providing vital information for leaders of the Jewish People and for the future international order that would have to address the Jewish problem after the war. Robinson was, of course, aware of the academic research institutes operating in Palestine and around the Jewish world, but he argued that in the past they had been unable to provide necessary data and, likewise in the future, they would be unable to supply the information needed by the Jewish world’s decision makers.[[337]](#footnote-337) In response to claims that the Institute should be established in Palestine rather than the United States, Robinson pointed out that, because its sphere of operations would be the Jewish Diaspora, it was ideologically and practically more appropriate to situate it in New York. Being based in New York would make it easier for the Institute to collect research data and maintain continuous contact with international institutions, while also providing an unmediated channel of communication with the Jewish Diaspora, which constitutes its field of research and whose leaders it is intended to serve.[[338]](#footnote-338) Robinson stressed that the Institute’s research would not focus solely on the theoretical, but that the staff would examine developments taking place in Europe at a day-to-day level, on the basis of which it would then formulate practical plans for the rehabilitation of Jewish life in Europe and worldwide. To meet these challenges, the Institute would operate research departments focused on diverse aspects of Jewish history over the course of the preceding twenty-five years. Its activities would include examining Jewish life in the present from the legal, political, and economic aspects, and proposing solutions in matters of immigration and rehabilitation.[[339]](#footnote-339)

Robinson’s perspective provides a fascinating insight into the significance of the Institute. It was no coincidence that he alluded to the European powers’ research institutes in support of his position. The Jewish People does not have its own European state, but it has national characteristics and a developed political and bureaucratic system that justify having a research establishment comparable to those of European countries. The importance of the Institute of Jewish Affairs lay not only in its value as a symbol of Jewish nationalism in the Diaspora, but also in the research data it would gather, which would infuse genuine meaning into this abstract concept of Jewish Diaspora nationalism.[[340]](#footnote-340) The dire state of European Jewry since the 1940s was no reason, in his view, to delay or suspend his plans to open the Institute. On the contrary, the state of emergency and rise of anti-Jewish propaganda reinforced his belief in the need for this Institute. This crisis necessitated the collection of factual, credible data, to the extent possible, and the preparation of contingency plans for the future, after the defeat of Nazism. Moreover, in his assessment, these ideological and physical attacks against the Jewish world demanded the creation of an academic research institute to reinforce the national Jewish identity in the Diaspora and provide well-founded, effectual, and informed responses to the enemies of Judaism.

A confidential memorandum prepared by Robinson in 1941 presented the Institute’s work plan and provided important information about the circumstances leading to the creation of the Institute and delineation of its spheres of activity.[[341]](#footnote-341) Robinson was aware that at the time, in the midst of a world war, a Jewish research institute could be construed as a luxury under the circumstances and especially in light of the catastrophe that had befallen European Jewry. He therefore pointed out that even though war was raging, wjc officials had to demonstrate the responsibility required of them as leaders of the Jewish People by planning for the post-war era. Because the present war was so devastating to the Jews in particular, preparing for its end was vital to ensuring Jewish survival. The ongoing crisis facing the Jews served to underscore the responsibility of wjc leaders to represent the Jewish issue optimally before the international community, with a view to the post-war order to be established in Europe and globally. The Institute’s studies were expected to provide wjc bodies with facts, figures, and future work plans that would enable the organization’s leaders to present the Jewish perspective to the world as effectively as possible. Robinson insisted on the working hypothesis that Germany would eventually be defeated, as this was the only possibility that permitted future planning of any sort. Yet from a Jewish perspective, victory over Germany was not the only aim, nor would it ensure the preservation of Jewish rights after the war. He termed it “naïve” to assume that the horrible suffering endured by European Jewry would lead to “automatic” resolution of the Jewish problem. Jewish leaders had to be ready to confront the nations of the world in order to secure a future for Jewry. This would require meticulous preparatory work, taking into account the dramatic shifts in the status of Jews globally over the preceding two and a half decades, as well as a careful examination of past mistakes committed by organizations that represented Jewry before the international system.[[342]](#footnote-342)

Robinson pointed out that a preliminary proposal for an institute for Jewish affairs had already been considered and approved by wjc bodies in April 1939. Initially the intent had been to establish the institute in Geneva, but with the outbreak of World War ii its location was shifted to New York, where it began operating on February 1, 1941. The Institute received an annual budget of $100,000 and a staff of four researchers. Its main goal was defined as the collection of facts and data regarding the state of European Jewry since 1914, with special attention to the Jewish fate under Nazi rule. The Institute’s researchers were instructed to create a large library and archives that would include relevant literature, government publications, economic data, and statistics about Jewish life in various communities, especially in countries where economic war was being waged against the Jewish minority. The objective was to collect any written material that could contribute to a better understanding of the state of the Jews and provide information about the fate of European Jewry. The researchers were to process and analyze the information, presenting their findings in the Institute’s publications and position papers. The Institute was expected to place special emphasis on examining the legal and political status of Europe’s Jews in light of the momentous changes brought about by the Nazi rise to power in Germany and the subsequent outbreak of World War ii.

The legal status of Jews and its implications for their right to participate through representative organizations in the post-World War ii political process was a source of great concern for Robinson. Two years into the Institute’s operations, he argued that, even if Jews regard themselves as a separate group, this does not prevent their leaders from taking part in the political process that will determine the post-war order. The Institute of Jewish Affairs now needed to pursue the delicate, intricate task of finding a formula to express the unique status of Jews in terms of international law and their legal right to take part in international processes. In Robinson’s view a legal remedy along these lines and the organizational backing to implement the relevant legal principles did not yet exist, especially as the Jewish Agency, the only organization legally mandated to represent the Jewish People at the international level, did so only in relation to Palestine.[[343]](#footnote-343)

In addition to conducting research, the Institute’s staff would monitor discussions and preparatory work by governments and international organizations seeking to consolidate the global arrangements that would form the post-war order. In practical terms this took the form of efforts by wjc leaders to establish cooperative relations between the Institute and the US State Department’s research divisions. At a meeting that Nahum Goldmann and Stephen Wise held with Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles, for example, the latter promised that the State Department’s research bodies would maintain regular, official contact with the WJC’s research institute.[[344]](#footnote-344)

The Institute’s work plan devoted a good deal of attention to its future activities in the area of migration and colonialization. In this context Robinson wrote,

The Institute, therefore, proposes to study the records of migration during the past twenty-five years and the experiences of that period, especially in connection with the refugee problem. It will study the attempts by governments, free organizations and individuals to bring order and system into an unplanned migration. Open spaces throughout the world and limits of city and country settlement will be carefully studied. Closely related to the migration question is that of colonization. Efforts at Jewish colonization in the past will be studied [and] a plan for Jewish colonization formulated in addition to the rehabilitation of the Jewish National Homeland in Palestine. Looking ahead the Institute will study all available data relative to the form which the post-war Europe is to take, such as greater units (Federations), etc. The opportunities for Jews in this new world order will be considered in detail.[[345]](#footnote-345)

The Institute’s work plan, especially in relation to migration and colonization, represents the worldview Robinson held in the 1940s and supports the claim that, like most leaders of the American Zionist movement, he did not see Jewish sovereignty in Palestine as the all-encompassing solution. He sought, instead, to integrate the migration of Jews to Palestine with the rehabilitation of Jewish life in Europe. His years in the United States and his collaborative work with the wjc leadership allowed Robinson to create a powerful organizational and research infrastructure that supported and advanced a worldview based on an active Diaspora Jewry alongside a Jewish state.

Robinson’s insistence on inaugurating the Institute for Jewish Affairs in the midst of the global crisis of the 1940s, combined with the breadth of its mandate, reflects the decisive role he foresaw for the Institute in shaping the lives of the world’s Jews as an ethnic minority after World War ii. The collection of data from diverse sources, its analysis, and the formulation of work plans required extensive research and bureaucratic efforts that, in Robinson’s assessment, no other entity in the Jewish world or the Zionist movement of the 1940s was able to undertake. He was aware that other US-based Jewish organizations also wanted to establish such institutes after the war. However, he insisted that the only entity capable of providing credible information was the Institute of Jewish Affairs, whose research infrastructure was unique in the Jewish world and whose staff had accumulated a vast wealth of information over the years of its operation. Efforts to create other research institutes would waste resources and exacerbate the current financial hardship. Moreover, having multiple research institutes would undermine Jewish organizations’ ability to present a united front and make it more difficult to consolidate a policy towards Diaspora Jewry aimed at rehabilitating the Jewish People in the aftermath of World War ii.[[346]](#footnote-346)

2 Holocaust Documentation and Historiography

The shocking news about the mass slaughter of European Jewry and the Nazis’ “final solution” dramatically altered the Institute’s research program. Beginning in 1942, Robinson and the Institute’s researchers shifted their attention from preparing position papers and work plans for the post-war period to gathering information about the fate of European Jewry, classifying it, processing it, and disseminating it to the general public and decision makers in Allied countries. They regarded the collection of information about European Jews during the Holocaust as a mission of the utmost importance. Under Robinson’s leadership, the Institute’s researchers were driven by a sense of duty. They saw themselves as having both the right and the obligation to act in the name of all the world’s Jews in documenting what had happened in Europe and developing appropriate means of memorialization towards, and immediately after, the end of the war. The Institute’s location, in New York, created a unique situation: its researchers were far removed from the horrors of the war, yet they still received up-to-date information about developments in Europe thanks to the close ties between the wjc leadership in New York and its offices in Europe.[[347]](#footnote-347) These new developments and the Institute’s shift of focus are reflected in Robinson’s remarks from 1946:

When the Institute was established for the purpose of post-war planning, its primary concern was European Jewry. At that time Europe was still the greatest center of Jewish life both in number and in importance. The initial assumption was that, after the war, we should have to deal with approximately the same number and distribution of Jews as prior to the war. In the course of 1941–1942, the situation changed radically. It became obvious that it would be useless to continue planning on the basis of the pre-war Jewish community in Europe. Furthermore, since current information was both vague and contradictory, it was imperative that our organization take the lead in establishing the facts. Although we did not for a single moment discontinue our thinking and planning with regard to post-war problems, inadvertently the emphasis shifted to a realistic appraisal of the situation as it appeared at any given moment.[[348]](#footnote-348)

What Robinson was describing turned into a far-reaching research enterprise that comprehensively and systematically exposed the full and hitherto-unknown spectrum of Nazi atrocities against European Jewry. In light of the situation in Europe, conducting field research was particularly challenging. Researchers from the Institute of Jewish Affairs and its representatives in Europe faced tremendous logistical difficulties gathering information in post-war Europe. Because they were representatives of a philanthropic organization, the Institute’s researchers had no official status in the Allies’ bureaucratic and military infrastructure in Europe. Until late 1945, for example, they were denied free and unrestricted access to displaced persons’ camps.[[349]](#footnote-349) The findings of the Institute’s studies were published during the war in the form of a large multi-volume series. The Nazis’ treatment of Jews, from the time of their rise to power in 1933 until 1943, was covered in three books authored by the Institute’s staff under Robinson’s guidance: Jews in Nazi Europe (November 1941), Hitler’s Ten Years War on the Jews (August 1943), and Starvation over Europe (1943). Around the same time Aryeh Tartakower and Institute researcher Kurt Grossman also published a study addressing the problem of displaced Jews, titled The Jewish Refugee (1933–1944).[[350]](#footnote-350)

The Holocaust research conducted at the Institute of Jewish Affairs was part of a larger undertaking by Robinson to organize and systematize Holocaust research around the world, particularly in the United States. He pointed out that the state of affairs at the time precluded professional documentation, resulted in the loss of vital primary source material, wasted valuable resources because of duplication, and did not facilitate the dissemination of information to the public. Robinson sought to change this situation. He raised the issue in a confidential letter to renowned historian Salo Wittmayer Baron of Columbia University in mid-October 1946.[[351]](#footnote-351) Robinson was presumably aware not only of Baron’s prominence but also of his special interest in the fate of Europe’s Jews during the Holocaust. The issue concerned him both at the personal level, having immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe while most of his close family members remained in Europe, and as a historian, as later demonstrated by his testimony at the Eichmann trial.[[352]](#footnote-352) It is also quite conceivable that Robinson and Baron had met each other earlier, before immigrating
to the United States. Baron had worked at the League of Nations as a lawyer for the committee overseeing international treaties on minority rights during the same years that Robinson had worked there.

Robinson’s letter summarizes extensive exchanges that had evidently taken place between himself and Baron. He began by mapping the various organizations in the United States, Europe, and Palestine that were seeking to document the Jewish fate during the Holocaust, or in his words “the history of the Jewish catastrophe.”[[353]](#footnote-353) In addition to naming these organizations, he identified the type of the information gathered by each one. The US-based organizations he mentioned included his own Institute of Jewish Affairs as well as yivo – the Institute for Jewish Research, and the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (jdc). The strength of YIVO’s collection lay in its vast assortment of Nazi material about Jews. The jdc, not content with merely gathering material related to its own research on the Holocaust, also encouraged and funded additional documentation efforts in Europe. The Institute of Jewish Affairs’ collection consisted of a unique mix of private and institutional papers. Although the Jewish Agency in Palestine systematically documented its own Holocaust-related efforts in Europe, it granted researchers access to only a small portion of its files. Robinson also described the important work that historical commissions were carrying out in various European cities. Time, he underscored, was a critical factor because as more time passes since the events surrounding the destruction of European Jewry, it will become increasingly difficult to locate documents, and some will be lost forever.[[354]](#footnote-354)

Robinson’s years in the United States had made him realize that, under the prevailing circumstances, US Jews offered the only potential source of funding for the information collection and documentation effort. He argued that this gave rise to an important responsibility, essentially necessitating the concentration of Holocaust-related research in the United States. It would require a budget to create and administer a modern catalog system based on microfilm, the only means that would allow for the relatively simple transfer of documents between organizations and their dissemination among researchers. Such a system would make it possible for local collection centers in Europe to convey relevant material to a research center in United States. He concluded,

The situation cannot be considered satisfactory. There can certainly be no discussion on the particular responsibility of American Jewry for work in this field. The European group need encouragement. All the groups need historians to give real guidance to the usually amateurish character of the work. There is no organized and permanent contact between the organizations working in thus [*sic*] field. They are not aware of what the others possess or are doing. They are handicapped by lack of financial means.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Duplication, budgetary restraints, and lack of professionalism had created complete chaos. Robinson believed it was imperative to reorder work and research priorities. Towards this end he sought to establish a central research institute in the United States. Material from around the world would be transferred to the central institute, which would catalog it and make it available to researchers and the general public. At the same time the Institute’s researchers would produce two book series: collections of documents with annotations and commentary, presented in a scholarly format; and a series of research monographs under the heading Remember. Robinson insisted that the institute would have to include non-Jewish historians. He also suggested that it be established not in New York but nearby, so that the researchers could benefit from their proximity to the important metropolis but would also enjoy the peace and quiet that fosters optimal academic activity. He wanted to inaugurate the institute immediately with a proposed annual budget of $300,000. He explained,

The proposed Institute for the History of the Jewish Catastrophe in the U.S. should be a central body. It should first of all embrace the existing American organizations which should be persuaded to merge into this greater organism. The investments of the existing organs would be of various character, including both documentation, studies, and trained personnel. All the material in the local organizations should by appropriate measures be immediately put at the disposal of the new institute. Following this a plan should be worked out by the institute on how with the assistance of persons specially delegated to Europe the work of collecting the material is to be continued.[[356]](#footnote-356)

The research on the conditions of Jews in Germany and Europe before and during World War ii not only served the purposes of documentation and memorialization but also established an evidentiary basis for the prosecution of war criminals. The question of judicial proceedings for Nazis and their European collaborators who participated in the slaughter of Jews had been a theme in Robinson’s conversations with colleagues since 1943. Their examination of the issue focused on the difficulties of incorporating Jews into an international tribunal intended to pass judgment on Nazis and on the risk of Jewish action against war criminals sparking anti-Jewish sentiments in Europe, which in turn could make it more difficult for Jews who wished to return to their countries of residence to do so. Their discussions also touched on the status of the international prosecutor, and they attempted to formulate a unique definition of Nazi crimes against Jews that would also correspond with an all-inclusive definition of Nazi crimes. Some discussants raised provocative questions, such as how Reichstag members who had passed anti-Jewish laws were to be judged, or how to deal with Hitler, who personally had never physically harmed a Jew.[[357]](#footnote-357) In Robinson’s view, the prosecution of Nazi war criminals following World War ii was necessary not only because of the interest in punishing the perpetrators of crimes against Jews, but also as a means of symbolizing a new and fundamentally different world order from that which the Nazis had attempted to create.

Robinson closely monitored the extent of Allied leaders’ commitment to prosecuting war criminals and received up-to-date information about disputes and differences of opinion among them. Although a request submitted by Robinson and his colleagues to take part in the United Nations War Crimes Commission, established in October 1943, was denied, they continued to press for a broad definition of war crimes that would include Nazi actions against Jews before 1939 and the onset of World War ii.[[358]](#footnote-358)

Their campaign for the prosecution of war criminals also took a very practical form: in 1945 Robinson and the Institute’s researchers published what he termed a “Master List” of war criminals responsible for crimes against Jews. Under his guidance the Institute also provided highly valuable first-hand information about Nazi crimes against Jews to the American prosecution team in preparation for the Nuremberg trials and during the trials themselves. Robinson’s impression was that the wjc and the Institute were almost alone in their struggle for the post-war prosecution of Nazi war criminals. His remarks at a staff meeting in late 1944 reflect this sentiment:

It is worthwhile to stress one point of political, not scientific character. While the wjc in its activities has a great number of competitors in every field, in the realm of war crimes it is left alone, without any competition, research or political. This imposes a tremendous responsibility on the wjc, which will be held responsible for our failure in this field, and rightly so. The work of our political bodies is limited by the extent of our preparatory work, which in turn increases our responsibility.[[359]](#footnote-359)

Robinson stressed that conducting legal research would require the Institute’s staff to adopt new practices. Framing the fruit of their studies as a means of facilitating the prosecution and punishment of war criminals, he observed, “The writing should be done in a manner different from the Hitler’s Ten Years War. Now we are not only historians, we are primarily attorney generals. Here we must have a source for every statement, fact, names, date.”[[360]](#footnote-360)

The minutes of the meeting reveal that in seeking to develop a clear and effective presentation of their findings for the sake of prosecuting war criminals, the researchers identified and refined research questions that would in fact continue to preoccupy Holocaust researchers in the future. They found, for example, that the mass slaughter of Jews only took place in Eastern Europe and that extermination camps were established only on Poland’s territory, rather than anywhere in Western Europe, but they disagreed over the underlying reasons. Some argued that the Germans refrained from committing mass slaughter in Western Europe because of concerns about the local population’s reaction, while others claimed that the deportation of Jews from Western to Eastern Europe resulted mainly from an interest in using some of the Jews for forced labor, which could only take place in Eastern Europe. Robinson and the Institute’s researchers also developed the glossary of terms they would use to define and describe the various Nazi actions against Jews. Towards this end, they concluded that the most appropriate way to describe Nazi crimes was by using their own terminology and concepts. Given the future involvement by the Institute’s researchers in the Nuremberg trials, and Robinson’s own contribution to these trials and later to the Eichmann trial, it is reasonable to conclude that the research practices established by the Institute’s researchers in 1944 shaped the future development of the historic and legal discourse surrounding the Holocaust. Thus, the future use of such terms as “the final solution” should also be seen in light of the Institute’s decision to use the Nazis’ own definitions to describe the events of World War ii in relation to Jews and in the context of the research activities of the Institute of Jewish Affairs in 1944.[[361]](#footnote-361)

The importance of Robinson’s contribution to the Jewish memorialization of the Holocaust is evident in an exhibition on the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust that he initiated and directed. The exhibition was launched at the wjc wartime conference in Atlantic City in November 1944, after which it was shown throughout the United States. Robinson was responsible for the format, substance, and presentation of the exhibition, which was the first of its kind, preempting the creation of Holocaust museums and memorial centers in the United States.[[362]](#footnote-362) The exhibition was intended to combine a description of the day-to-day life of Jews under Nazi-occupied Europe, with a presentation of the means by which the Nazis propagated their anti-Jewish ideology. In light of space limitations, it was decided that the exhibition would present only the most essential information about European Jewry before the Nazi rise to power in Germany, including the anti-Semitic trends in Europe in the Middle Ages and modern era. On the other hand, the exhibition would present as much information as possible about the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and Jews who joined Allied forces. The exhibition’s displays and explanatory information were to be organized chronologically.[[363]](#footnote-363)

Historians are divided on the question of the extent to which the slaughter of European Jewry was part of the collective memory of World War ii during the latter 1940s. Notwithstanding this debate, however, there is a general consensus among scholars regarding the complex challenges and difficulties entailed in transforming the horrifying slaughter of European Jews by Nazis into part of the collective consciousness of Jews and of the American public generally with respect to World War ii.[[364]](#footnote-364) Historian Tony Kushner has argued that historians and contemporaries alike wanted to believe that the liberation of the camps in 1945 and the information gathered about the final solution would naturally bring the Holocaust of European Jewry to the public’s attention and make it a substantive part of the collective historical memory of World War ii and the Nazi regime. According to Kushner, this assumption turned out to be unfounded for a variety of political and psychological reasons. In his view, it was precisely the shocking and undigestible nature of the information about the extermination process that resulted in denial by the general public during the years immediately following World War ii. Moreover, Kushner stressed, the initial American and British media reports on the slaughter and atrocities committed by the Nazis barely mentioned the Jews at all.[[365]](#footnote-365)

An examination of Robinson’s activities in the immediate aftermath of World War ii reveals that, as a Jewish public activist involved in the non-Jewish world, he agreed with the view that integrating the memory of the Holocaust into the American experience immediately after the war would not be a natural, simple, or easy process. Robinson believed that a comprehensive, intensive public education campaign within and beyond the Jewish community was necessary to ensure the positioning of what would later be called the Holocaust of European Jewry as part of the collective memory of Jews and non-Jews alike in relation to World War ii. The nature of his work at the Institute of Jewish Affairs indicates that thorough, in-depth historical research on the Holocaust of Europe’s Jews constituted the foundation on which Robinson built his public campaign to shape the Jewish and non-Jewish consciousness of the Holocaust in the post-war world. This historical research also provided him with the means by which to pursue the prosecution of war criminals. At the same time, Robinson realized that a documentation process, no matter how thorough and comprehensive, is of limited value if its findings remain within the walls of the Institute. He considered it his duty as a researcher and public figure to present these findings and data to the general public. Towards this end, Robinson was not content with the “traditional” practice of publishing books and articles. He therefore developed other means of presenting and exposing the Institute’s findings, such as the exhibition he had initiated and overseen. Notably, his aim in disseminating information about the Holocaust was not limited to depicting the event itself. He also sought to use the memory of the Holocaust to inform the character of the Jewish People, and the post-war world more generally, in accordance with the worldview he had developed during his years in the United States and his close interaction with the wjc leadership. For Robinson, the memory of the Holocaust served as a tool to reinforce the ethnic identity of American Jews, empower Jewish communities in Europe, and promote global trends opposed to the ideology and deeds of the Nazis.

The practices Robinson established during his years in the United States continued to inform his efforts to memorialize the Holocaust in Israel after 1948. He played a key part in the Eichmann trial and in founding Yad Vashem, and engaged in a wide range of public and research activities aimed at promoting research on the Holocaust, systematizing it, and presenting the findings to the public.

In line with the worldview he developed in the United States, Robinson viewed the memorialization of and research on the Holocaust in the Israeli context as part of a larger global mix. He was convinced that the State of Israel has an important but not exclusive role in the field of Holocaust research, the importance of which extends beyond the geographical borders of Israel. He saw it as a critical issue that demanded the attention of researchers and public opinion shapers throughout the world, Jews as well as non-Jews, during the second half of the twentieth century.

It is worth noting that although Robinson was intensively engaged in complex historical issues, his formal training was as a legal scholar rather than a historian. He did not deny this fact but pointed out that he had years of experience in historical research and that every word and sentence he had ever written in this context was fully supported by primary sources.[[366]](#footnote-366)

A clear example of his efforts in this regard in post-1948 Israel is the international conference of scholars he convened in Jerusalem under the heading “A Conference on the History of the Jewish Catastrophe.”[[367]](#footnote-367) The conference was intended to be a collaborative project on the part of research institutes, academic institutions, and researchers from Israel, Europe, and the United States. Robinson urged international cooperation in researching the Holocaust but stressed the great importance of holding the conference in Jerusalem to underscore Israel’s central role in Holocaust research. In his introductory remarks he listed the reasons for holding this conference in Jerusalem:

The need for a Conference on the history of the Jewish Catastrophe has been felt for some time. Two factors have particularly underlined this need. The first is that the so-called revisionist movement has found followers among persons who claim to know something about the Jewish catastrophe. The second is that the Claims Conference, the main benefactor of the Jewish Research Institutions, will go out of business next year, the problem of financing these institutions will then become more acute than ever before. It is therefore necessary that the Jewish research institutes work together, both to counteract the incompetence and outright malice of some self-styled historians, sociologists and psychologists who have written on the Catastrophe and to solve the new financial problem.[[368]](#footnote-368)

The conference eventually took place in 1968. Its delay was most likely due to organizational difficulties and struggles within the Yad Vashem administration. Robinson’s approach to the conference was consistent with the nature of his efforts in the United States: he sought to have Yad Vashem combine public memorialization of the Holocaust with academic research of the highest standard.[[369]](#footnote-369) Furthermore, he wanted to ensure that the research would not be limited to a narrow examination of the Holocaust but would in fact form part of the broader body of scholarship on the history of Israel. This was his reason for proposing that the conference be held in Jerusalem, in parallel with another conference being convened in the city by the World Congress for Jewish Studies, and that experts from other fields, such as sociologists and psychologists, be invited.[[370]](#footnote-370)

His efforts to convene an international conference in Jerusalem were part of a larger undertaking by Robinson to improve and systematize Holocaust research in Israel and throughout the world. Another illustrative example was his research initiative leading to the publication Chronology of Jewish History under Nazi Impact. The work sessions and discussions that preceded the book’s publication took place during the latter 1950s. The minutes of these meetings reveal methodologies that shaped the later study and teaching of the Holocaust, alongside deliberations over the fundamental questions with which Holocaust researchers struggle to this day. The chronology was published in 1960.[[371]](#footnote-371)

A crucial issue that preoccupied Robinson was what to include in the chronology. As a guiding principle, he looked at the relevance of various historical events to the fate of Jews in Europe during the Holocaust. In this spirit he instructed participants at a work session in 1962, as reflected in the minutes of a preparatory meeting: “As regards events such as bilateral pacts like the German-Polish non-aggression agreement, Dr. Robinson explains that we will also have to be very discerning as to which include [*sic*]. The Munich pact had great influence on the Jewish situation but the pact between Germany and Poland was perhaps of lesser importance in this respect.”[[372]](#footnote-372)

Another issue that concerned Robinson and his colleagues was the interesting question of a geographic definition. In their words, “Since the extermination of European Jewry to a great extent took place in Poland, she [Poland] will have a central position in our Chronology. Everything that happened on Polish soil concerning Jews from different places in and out of this country will have to be noted in the part devoted to Poland.” Although Poland had occupied a central place in the extermination process, Robinson sought to underscore two points. First, in terms of the book’s division of topics, there was no escaping some degree of repetition. Thus, for example, the deportation of France’s Jews to Poland would be discussed under two separate categories – France and Poland. The second issue continues to preoccupy Holocaust researchers, politicians, and public opinion shapers to this day – namely, the role of non-Jewish Polish citizens in the slaughter of Jews, considering that Germany was operating its extermination camps on Polish soil. Even though the extermination of Jews had taken place on Polish land, Robinson believed that Germany’s responsibility for the slaughter of European Jewry should be clarified and underscored: “The final solution is a German invention. No other country mentioned or thought of an Endlösung [“final solution” in German]. The Germans knew about it all along. The question was only the method of killing as the final solution and the places.”[[373]](#footnote-373)

The Chronology was a concrete outcome of Robinson’s belief in the imperative of creating an international network of research on the Holocaust centered mainly in Israel and the United States. The book was published in New York in 1960 as a joint project of Yad Vashem and yivo – the Institute for Jewish Research. The collaboration between Jerusalem and New York was reflected not only in the publication but also in the book’s introductory material, written by two historians – one from Jerusalem and another from New York. Professor Ben-Zion Dinur, a historian, minister of education, Israel Prize Laureate, and the first chairman of the board at Yad Vashem, wrote the first foreword, and Professor Salo Baron authored the second one.[[374]](#footnote-374)

The significance of Robinson’s 1960 book and subsequent publications during the following decade becomes apparent if examined in relation to research undertaken around that time by Raul Hilberg. Hilberg’s The Destruction of European Jews was published in 1961, only a year after Robinson and Friedman’s book.[[375]](#footnote-375) Robinson would almost certainly have been aware of Hilberg’s study before its publication because Hilberg, after concluding his doctorate in 1955, had submitted the study for publication by Yad Vashem, which turned him down.[[376]](#footnote-376) Robinson recognized the importance of Hilberg’s research but was fiercely critical of the latter for not using Jewish sources, a fact that in his view had produced a biased study and essentially obscured the correlation between the Jewish identity of those killed and the Nazis’ decision to single them out for extermination.[[377]](#footnote-377) Robinson’s critique corresponded with the broader criticism being leveled against Hilberg for his argument that the Jewish leadership’s passivity during the Holocaust and its collaboration in practice with the Nazis contributed to the latter’s ability to operate a mass extermination network against European Jews. Thus, the research Robinson conducted in the latter half of the twentieth century provided a comprehensive database of Jewish sources for Holocaust research and, in effect, an alternative approach to the one taken by Hilberg, who had not drawn on Jewish sources.

3 The Eichmann Trial

In early July 1960, in the context of preparing for Eichmann’s trial, wjc president Nahum Goldmann wrote to Jacob Robinson as follows: “I am of the opinion that you should participate in the Eichmann trial as the Prosecutor General on behalf of the Jewish People, as the man who oversees this entire affair. I know of no one who could do this as well as you, both in terms of familiarity with the period and in terms of skills and presentation. I would be interested in hearing your views on this matter before I speak about it with the esteemed [Minister of Justice Pinchas] Rosen, Ben-Gurion, and others.” As we know, Robinson was not appointed as prosecutor for the Eichmann trial. That role went, instead, to Gideon Hausner, who had been appointed Attorney General only two weeks before Eichmann’s capture. Although the complex debate over the appointment of a prosecutor for the Eichmann trial is beyond the scope of this book, the above letter deserves mention because it indirectly demonstrates Robinson’s deep involvement in the Eichmann affair.[[378]](#footnote-378) Robinson had legal training, extensive knowledge about the final solution, and a history of involvement in the Nuremberg trials – a unique combination and, presumably, the reason that he was enlisted to participate in preparations for the Eichmann trial and in the trial itself. Officially Robinson served as an advisor to the prosecutor, but in practice he played a far more significant part. In her important and groundbreaking book about the trial, Hanna Yablonka discusses the importance of Robinson’s contribution to shaping the judicial process.[[379]](#footnote-379) His own papers reveal additional levels of personal involvement in the trial, thus contributing another layer to the scholarship surrounding this complicated chapter of history.

The Eichmann affair came to public attention on May 23, 1960, when Ben-Gurion informed the Knesset that Eichmann was imprisoned in Israel. It concluded on May 31, 1962, with his death by hanging. Eichmann was put on trial in accordance with Israel’s 1950 Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law. Prior to his trial, Israel had launched judicial proceedings against a few dozen Jews accused of collaborating with the Nazis, and the ensuing trials had sparked interest only within the relatively small circles of Holocaust survivors. The Eichmann trial was a different matter. Interest in the trial extended to broad social sectors in Israel and throughout the world. Eichmann had been a high-ranking member of Germany’s Nazi apparatus and one of the main overseers of the final solution in practice, as an operation for the extermination of European Jewry. In March 1941 he was placed in charge of the Gestapo Department for Jewish Affairs, which handled population deportation, and he held this position until the collapse of the Nazi regime. Having risen to the rank of an ss colonel, Eichmann was responsible for the entire operation in which Jews from across Europe were conveyed by train to concentration or death camps.

After World War ii Eichmann fled to Argentina, where he lived under an alias until 1960, when he was captured by the Mossad and brought to Israel. Israeli society first learned about Eichmann’s extermination operation as a result of the 1954 Gruenwald trial, which became known as the Kastner trial. In 1944 Rudolph Kastner, a leader of the Hungarian Jewish community, had engaged in negotiations with senior ss officials in an effort to save Hungarian Jewry. Eventually he managed to arrange the rescue and departure of 1,685 Jews by train from Hungary. He also succeeded in organizing the transfer of another 15,000 Jews to a camp near Vienna, thereby saving their lives. After the war, however, many Hungarian Jews leveled serious accusations against Kastner, charging that he had personally selected the passengers for this “vip train” and that Hungarian Jews had essentially been deceived so that a handful of privileged individuals could be saved. In late 1947 Kastner immigrated to Israel and entered public service. In 1952 Malchiel Gruenwald produced a pamphlet reasserting the above accusations, and Kastner responded by suing for defamation. Judge Benjamin Halevi dismissed the defamation suit, holding that Kastner had “sold his soul to the devil.” Kastner was subsequently murdered, in March 1957, and in January 1958 the Supreme Court overturned Judge Halevi’s ruling. Kastner’s three killers were sentenced to life in prison, but their sentence was mitigated soon thereafter, and they were released. The Kastner affair constitutes one of the most complex chapters of Israel’s history. For our purposes the important point is that Israel’s intensive engagement in this affair during the 1950s drew attention to the figure of Eichmann as the driving force behind the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Hungary’s Jews towards the end of World War ii.[[380]](#footnote-380)

Eichmann’s capture and transfer to Israel stirred up a range of emotions for Israeli society. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and other public figures saw the trial as a historic opportunity to present the atrocities of the Holocaust to the citizens of Israel and the entire world.[[381]](#footnote-381) On April 10, 1961, after months of intense investigation and information gathering, the trial opened in Jerusalem before a bench of three judges. The presiding judge, Supreme Court Justice Moshe Landau, was accompanied by Jerusalem District Court Judge and President Judge Benjamin Halevi and Tel Aviv District Court Judge Yitzhak Raveh. Dr. Robert Servatius, who had previously represented a number of prominent Nuremberg trial defendants, led the defense team. At the outset of the trial Servatius challenged Israel’s jurisdiction to try Eichmann. Among other claims, he argued that Eichmann had been illegally conveyed to Israel and could not expect a just trial within the State of Israel. Next came the evidentiary phase, in which the court was presented with more than a hundred witnesses and some 1,600 documents. The prosecution laid out the history of the Holocaust of European Jewry across various countries, from the initial anti-Jewish legislation through the systematic slaughter of Jews. Its aim was to present Eichmann as the overseer of all phases of the extermination enterprise. The defense, for its part, did not dispute these facts but sought to downplay Eichmann’s role, portraying him as having been compelled to carry out these orders because of his position. For the purposes of the trial, Hausner, working with police investigators and Ben-Gurion himself, selected 110 witnesses. Most had never met Eichmann before the trial, and their stories did not relate directly to his deeds. The witnesses began to appear as soon as Salo Baron concluded his lecture on European Jewry, and they presented horrendous testimonies over the course of the trial. Some of these witnesses came to symbolize the trial and, in effect, the Holocaust of European Jewry.

The impact of the Eichmann trial was dramatic. Through eyewitness testimonies, Israeli society was exposed in a direct and unmediated way to the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. As a consequence, a better understanding of the patterns of response among European Jews began to emerge, and the phrase “lambs to the slaughter” began to dissipate. In parallel, the Eichmann trial also catalyzed interest in Holocaust research around the world and accelerated the prosecution of Nazi war criminals in Germany and other European countries.[[382]](#footnote-382)

Robinson’s papers reveal the key role he played in shaping the judicial process and formulating arguments in favor of trying Eichmann in Israel. The news of Eichmann’s capture and Israel’s intention of putting him on trial triggered an international debate over the state’s right to conduct such proceedings. Robinson played an important part in this global dispute and essentially formulated what became the state’s approach in response. In the summer of 1960, he published an article comprehensively analyzing this issue in the influential magazine Commentary.[[383]](#footnote-383) He opened by explaining that a wide range of post-World War ii United Nations resolutions obligate member states to try Nazi war criminals who had committed crimes against humanity. The government of Argentina, however, was not implementing these resolutions or pursuing any judicial measures against Eichmann. The government of Israel, therefore, in accordance with UN resolutions, was obligated to take action on Argentinian soil so as to bring the Nazi war criminal Eichmann to justice in Israel. Despite having evaded the Nuremberg tribunal by fleeing, he had been identified as a war criminal and perpetrator of crimes against humanity in the course of those proceedings. Accordingly, it was the government of Israel’s right and obligation to hold a trial for Eichmann. Robinson underscored that a comparable judicial process could not take place in Argentina.

Addressing the claim that Israel could not try Eichmann because his crimes had not been committed within its jurisdiction, Robinson argued that an examination of the history of international law exposes the hollowness of these arguments. Many states, he explained, have adopted legislation enabling them to conduct trials within their own jurisdiction for crimes committed against their citizens, even if the crimes took place outside of the state. Furthermore, international law has a large number of precedents establishing judicial processes for crimes committed beyond a state’s territorial jurisdiction. The judicial processes established against maritime piracy starkly exemplify this process.

Robinson offered additional legal arguments in support of holding Eichmann’s trial in the State of Israel. Although Eichmann had been identified as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity, in practical terms the atrocities he committed were directed exclusively against Jews. Approximately 300,000 Holocaust survivors had settled in Israel, making it home to the largest concentration of survivors in the world. It is safe to presume, he continued, that the prosecution witnesses in Eichmann’s trial would include some of the survivors now residing in Israel. The fact that witnesses for the trial are located in Israel therefore reinforces the logic of holding the trial in Israel, he argued.

In further support of this position, Robinson pointed out that the mass extermination machinery developed by the Nazis was not of a national or territorial nature. It was directed against all Jews regardless of their nationality. According to him, the strong bond between world Jewry and the State of Israel is evidenced in a series of international decisions, from the Balfour Declaration to the adoption of the UN Partition Plan in 1947. Israel’s central role in receiving and rehabilitating Holocaust survivors is also reflected, legally and practically, in the 1952 Reparations (Luxembourg) Agreement between the State of Israel and the West German government. Because it is not possible to isolate a single territorial space in which Nazi crimes against Jews took place, and in light of the substantive concentration of Jews in Israel, Robinson argued, a trial addressing crimes against the Jewish People must be held in the State of Israel.

Finally, Robinson addressed the possibility of holding Eichmann’s trial at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. At the time of his writing, he pointed out, the International Court of Justice only had the mandate to hear disputes between states and therefore lacked the jurisdiction to consider the charges against Eichmann. He closed by pointing out that no other country, aside from Israel, had officially requested to try Eichmann, and this fact in combination with the legal and practical arguments presented in the article led to the conclusion that the only venue for Eichmann’s trial was the State of Israel.[[384]](#footnote-384)

Robinson’s article in Commentary focused on the legal issues and should be understood in the context of his rich experience in the field of international law and his interest in ensuring the international legitimacy of holding the trial in Israel. Yet despite his unequivocal support for Israel as the venue, Robinson was also aware of the difficulties entailed in trying Eichmann in Jerusalem. He worked closely with the legal team during preparations for the trial, shaping the judicial process in accordance with his own worldview.

In early November 1960 Robinson sent a highly confidential memorandum titled “A Preliminary List of Problems Requiring Discussion and Decision in the Near Future,” to Minister of Justice Pinchas Rosen.[[385]](#footnote-385) The memorandum, which addresses fundamental questions about conducting Eichmann’s trial in Israel, reveals the depth of Robinson’s involvement in shaping the actual course of the trial. Fully aware of the political and public significance of the trial, he opened by stating, “This trial has already aroused and will continue to arouse great interest around the world. At one and the same time we will be judging the accused, and the world (both big and small, meaning the Jewish world) will be judging the State of Israel and its judicial branch on the basis of the principles accepted by enlightened states.”[[386]](#footnote-386)

In light of this, Robinson believed, it was necessary to address a number of questions that would, in his words, make it possible “to situate the trial within the narrow confines of rejection of the criminal events of World War ii, without clashing with the accepted foundations of law in enlightened countries.” He posed the following questions: How do we conduct a just trial when the sentiments surrounding the accused in Israel are so strong: will there be witnesses from abroad, and if so, how do we approach witnesses who belong to the Nazi party? (In this context Robinson recalled the law prohibiting Nazis from entering the territory of Israel.) How do we prevent the trial from becoming unduly long? Should we allow other countries and organizations that have been harmed by Eichmann’s activities to take part in the trial? Should we focus on the accused’s activities throughout Europe or only on specific countries? How do we strike an appropriate balance between testimony and documentation during the trial? Robinson stressed that the accused could not be tried in a vacuum, and that thought should be given to ways of linking him with his superiors. He further pointed out that, notwithstanding the importance of documentation to the judicial process, it was imperative that witnesses be summoned. He explained, “The documentation in itself does not give us a picture of Jewish suffering in its entirety – not across different geographical areas, not within the concentration camps or extermination camps, and of course not in terms of the experience of the individual, the victim of the entire Nazi enterprise. And it completely overlooks the unique cruelty towards children, women, the elderly, and the disabled. Such information is necessary not in order to create a sense of drama, but in order to balance the evidence. It will be necessary to have Jewish witnesses, and here as always there will be problems of quantity and quality.”[[387]](#footnote-387)

Robinson’s letter to the minister of justice went beyond consideration of the legal issues. He was writing not only as a jurist but also as a Jewish activist and public figure intimately familiar with the international political system and involved in academic and intellectual circles prone to taking a strong interest in the trial. He sought to ensure that Eichmann’s trial would serve the political and public interests of the State of Israel and be well received by Jews as well as non-Jews throughout the world, particularly in the United States. It would naturally have been very important for Robinson, whose life took place in the public, intellectual, and public sphere of New York, that the trial be perceived as legitimate beyond Israel’s borders. His letter to the minister of justice therefore pointed out: “I am not a public relations expert, but one cannot ignore the fact that this trial will have major reverberations around the world and its power and influence will to some extent be dependent on the efficacy of public relations efforts. As to the question heard not only from non-Jews but also from Jews – ‘Why bother with this work?’ – one must provide a complete and convincing answer.”[[388]](#footnote-388)

Although Robinson emphatically supported holding the trial in Israel, he was quite concerned about the complex interrelationship between law and history as it related to the Eichmann trial. He was well aware that while, in strictly legal terms, only Eichmann was on trial, the significance of the trial was much greater. He framed the question as follows: “Who is on trial? A. The German people? B. The National-Socialist regime? C. Anti-Semitism (generally or in its Nazi form)? D. The ss? E. The ‘Final Solution’ and its implementers (including the Mufti?[[389]](#footnote-389))? F. The accused as initiator, participant, and executioner?”

Robinson warned that “the greatest potential danger in this trial is the blurring of borders between criminal law and history. Of course, we cannot try the accused without the historical background of the period in which he lived and operated.” He wanted to integrate the necessary historical background into the trial without making it the essence of the proceedings. Towards this end he proposed using the precedent set by the Nuremberg trials, at which the prosecutor, Robert Jackson, had summoned the future first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, to describe the general background of the Jewish question in Europe in relation to the Nazis. Robinson proposed a similar approach of calling on a credible expert witness, or witnesses, to present the big picture surrounding the events. He did not ignore the educational importance of including the historical dimension in the trial, but he argued that “the nature of a criminal judge’s work differs so much from that of a historical researcher that it is doubtful whether a criminal court can also conduct a historical, and not only criminal, trial. And just as the court cannot play the part of history’s judge, so too it cannot become a bureau of statistics. There is no need today to revisit the Nuremberg judgment. It is not our role to undermine it. That is the work of those interested in reducing the victim count and justifying
the criminals.”[[390]](#footnote-390)

In order to incorporate a broad historical perspective into the Eichmann trial, the prosecution team decided to invite a historian as an expert witness. Robinson played a central part in selecting the expert historian, and in fact it was only after he gave his final approval that Professor Salo Baron was invited to testify at the Eichmann trial.[[391]](#footnote-391)

Prosecutor Gideon Hausner had the following to say to Robinson about the use of “historical evidence” at the trial: “I request once again that the only consideration with regard to ‘historical evidence’ be its substantive value, and that if you have any doubt about inviting Professor Baron after meeting with him, please inform me and we will find a way to reinstate the previous plan.”[[392]](#footnote-392) The correspondence between Hausner and Robinson does not disclose the nature of this “previous plan.” Robinson indeed met with Baron in New York, where they agreed that the professor would deliver his testimony in Hebrew. Robinson also prepared Baron for the subsequent cross-examination by the defense, and they scheduled additional meetings before Baron departed New York for Israel to testify. Robinson’s conclusion was that “Baron is the person qualified to prepare the testimony and see it through.” It was only after Robinson gave his final approval that Baron was officially invited to testify.

Despite consenting to Baron’s invitation, however, and notwithstanding the preparatory meetings the two held, Robinson had strong criticism of Baron’s actual testimony at the trial. His critique has not escaped the notice of historians of the Eichmann trial. Robinson’s papers indicate that there were two facets to his view of Baron’s testimony. On the one hand, he was fiercely critical of the testimony’s historical accuracy, as illustrated by his observation regarding Baron’s portrayal of Europe during World War ii. Robinson wrote that Baron’s response was “full of mistakes, like [the seeds of] a pomegranate, too many to count. Here are a few examples. Italy joined the war not in May but in June 1940. Within a span of two sentences [he] says first that Germany seized control of the Balkans with the help of the Bulgarians, yet while speaking, instead of Bulgaria, Hungary already appears.”[[393]](#footnote-393)

At the same time, Robinson questions Baron’s historical analysis: “We are not debating beliefs and opinions. He had the right – taking into account his own professional responsibility as a witness – to regard the period between the two world wars as ‘days of glory’ – just as Weizmann had the right, in his testimony before the Peel Commission, to regard this period as in fact a time of danger to the Jewish People. Another problem is how to bridge between the sense of ‘days of glory’ and the aspiration of most Jews to leave Europe, which he emphasizes so much?” Robinson also raised questions about Baron’s direct testimony about the extermination of European Jewry. He had the following to say regarding Baron’s remarks about “Jewry’s losses”: “Accepts the figure of about six million. Hints at ‘righteous suffering’ and its impact. Rabbi Kalman’s sermon and four sentences about ‘ghetto heritage’ neither add nor distract. Strays to remote [topics] that have no bearing on the question.”[[394]](#footnote-394)

Some of Robinson’s criticism of Baron’s testimony may be considered a reflection of the complex relationship between historians and the judicial system as it relates to the role of historians as expert witnesses. Typically, a historian serves as an expert witness in judicial proceedings that focus on mass slaughter and various forms of genocide. The historian’s role in such a case comprises two primary tasks. The first is to provide the documentation and primary sources to support the various testimonies. The second task is to present the comprehensive historical background essential to understanding the issues under consideration. In the Eichmann case, historical research centers such as Yad Vashem and the historians they employed worked with the prosecution to provide the evidentiary basis for the indictment. The purpose of having Baron testify was to present the court with the broad historical background relevant to European Jewry and to describe the main aspects of their fate during the Holocaust.

Historians and jurists alike are aware of the difficulties inherent in the use of historical testimony in judicial processes. Tension between the presentation of facts and the historian’s personal interpretation is a potential risk of such expert testimony. Is it the duty of the historian, as an expert witness, merely to present the facts, or should the historian also offer a personal assessment? And how should the court regard the historian’s analyses? Many historians have voiced the concern that the relatively circumscribed framework of courtroom testimony does not allow for the broader perspective essential to understanding the developments the historian is expected to present. Even though the work of both historians and jurists requires them to interpret past events and reconstruct facts, there are significant differences between the two disciplines. The historical field is far more diverse and decentralized than the legal field. In contrast to jurists, historians not only determine their own research framework, theoretical hypotheses, and methodologies, they also selectively choose the data and facts relevant to their study. A judicial process, however, takes place in a forum with precise, inflexible rules of procedure that specify how the necessary information is to be obtained and presented for the purpose of the proceedings. In historical research, there is a general consensus regarding the weight of various sources and the manner in which a historian is to extract information, but decisions about methodology constitute part of the research itself, which the historian has discretion to determine during the course of a study and which are therefore sometimes subject to dispute. Few historians believe that, considering the challenges of including historians in the judicial process, it is preferable that they refrain from participating in legal proceedings. Reciprocally, many historians believe that despite the inherent problems, there is no substitute for the historical perspective in a judicial process, particularly in the case of historical events such as the Holocaust. The historical perspective is, in their opinion, essential for a fuller and more in-depth understanding of complex, dramatic historical processes along these lines. According to this view, credible, professional testimony by historians has the potential to mitigate or reduce any concerns that a case of mass murder might degenerate into a flawed and politically driven judicial process.[[395]](#footnote-395)

Indeed, the transcript of Baron’s testimony reveals several examples of tension between his observations as a historian and judicial standards. The judges occasionally had to reframe Baron’s statements in their own words or ask him to clarify his remarks and address the questions directly. A clear illustration is his response to defense attorney Dr. Servatius’s last question during cross-examination:[[396]](#footnote-396)

Q. This is my last question to this witness, your Honours. The witness is certainly aware that Hitler often used to rely on what was termed historical Providence, and notwithstanding this, his efforts were in vain. If a leader of nations cannot exert the influence desired by him, how much more so would the effort of one individual out of several, one in a crowd, on being asked to wield influence, be of no value at all?

A. In reply to this question – this is not a historical question, but more a legal question. To what extent an individual person who is not a leader is also responsible in the historical sense – there is no doubt that sometimes insignificant people have much more influence on the course of history than their importance to the state warrants….

Presiding Judge: Why do you refer to this as a legal problem? This is not clear to me.

Witness Baron: I thought that here there was a question whether there is a distinction between a leader and an ordinary person as to whether he is responsible for changes in history or not.

Presiding Judge: Let us perhaps leave that to the jurists.

Witness Baron: Quite right.

Robinson’s critique arguably strays from the discourse on historians as witnesses. Intriguingly, his criticism of Baron’s testimony at the Eichmann trial focuses mainly on issues relating to the essence of Jewish nationalism. In Robinson’s view, Baron overlooked both the complexity and the many forms that Jewish nationality takes in the Diaspora. He wrote that Baron offered “no response whatsoever regarding the forms of the national movement, and as to youth, [his] description is fragmented and flawed.” Moreover, Baron’s testimony failed to mention the tremendous contribution Jews have made to human civilization and offered only “a cursory review of Hebrew literature and the Jewish contribution to culture generally, artistic treasures, and libraries [and] not one word about ‘human culture’.” Robinson was especially critical of Baron’s use of superlatives to describe the Jewish People’s success.

In support of his claim, Robinson counted the number of times Baron used what he considered to be hyperbolic language: outstanding, astonishing, I was astonished, quite wonderful, quite terrible, with all the strength of their effort, of the highest level.[[397]](#footnote-397) Robinson considered such terms boastful and representative of excessive nationalism. Notably, he did not object to Baron having raised these issues. The original understanding between Hausner and Robinson regarding Baron’s testimony had stipulated that his statement in court was intended to form part of a comprehensive frame of reference based on fundamental facts and historical, national, and cultural evidence. It was the actual content of Baron’s statement to which Robinson objected.

The motives behind Robinson’s harsh criticism of Baron’s testimony require an explanation, even more so in light of his remarks about Baron’s approach to issues stemming from Jewish nationality and Jewish life in the Diaspora. His criticism strays from the contours of the inherent historian-jurist tension. In his professional life, Robinson himself integrated academic training in jurisprudence with vast historical knowledge – a combination that would presumably have made him sympathetic to the difficulties Baron faced as a historian delivering expert testimony in court. Yet Robinson still chose to express very strong criticism. This is even more puzzling in light of their earlier interactions regarding institutionalization of the Holocaust research and their preparatory meetings in advance of Baron’s testimony.

Robinson’s observations about Baron’s testimony were fiercely critical of what he regarded as factual mistakes. Most of his criticism, however, was directed against the way in which Baron presented Jewish nationality and Diaspora Jewish life. This was his reason for mentioning Weizmann’s testimony before the Peel Commission, rather than referring to an expert historian: he sought to challenge Baron’s historical perspective. Robinson specifically chose Weizmann as an example because his criticism of Baron’s testimony incorporated history, ideology, and national outlook. Further support for the claim that Robinson’s critique did not limit itself to historical inaccuracies appears in the concluding paragraph of his memorandum to Gideon Hausner on the subject of Baron’s testimony: “What concerns me at this time is whether there is any possibility of correcting the mistakes (in the broad sense of this word)?”[[398]](#footnote-398) Robinson, a legal scholar trained to choose his words carefully, opted to conclude by emphasizing a far broader and more significant issue than the matter of historical mistakes and imprecisions, be they of greater or lesser significance.

Baron’s work as a historian focuses mainly on the Jewish Diaspora. He has published groundbreaking studies, and many in the field view him as the most prominent historian of Diaspora Jewry. Baron objected to the Lachrymose Conception, which holds that Jewish life in the Diaspora entailed only persecution and suffering. He posited a more balanced and optimistic outlook, emphasizing the achievements and successes of Jewish communities generally, and in the realm of spirituality in particular. Yet these were precisely the points on which Robinson chose to attack Baron’s testimony.[[399]](#footnote-399) Robinson criticized what he considered excessive nationalism in Baron’s testimony. In his view, despite overstating Jewish achievements, Baron had actually misrepresented Diaspora Jewry and ignored complex manifestations of Jewish nationality. Robinson was essentially claiming that Baron had not presented Diaspora Jewish life as a realistic possibility and had overlooked the rich, dynamic Jewish life in Europe. Likewise, he had neglected to describe points of interface and cooperation with the non-Jewish world. In other words, Baron’s testimony challenged the foundations of Robinson’s worldview. Robinson, like the other figures examined in this book, was a Zionist, but he did not regard the Zionist enterprise and the founding of Israel as the quintessential and exclusive expression of Jewish life. He sought also to sustain Jewish life in its diasporic format. In Robinson’s worldview, Jews would continue to lead rich, intensive Jewish lives, but as individuals and a community they would constitute an inseparable part of the non-Jewish world in their countries of residence. He himself followed such an approach in practice. In his efforts on behalf of Israeli statehood he had worked through and with its various institutions, yet New York remained his place of residence.

It was specifically on Baron’s areas of expertise in relation to the Jewish Diaspora that Robinson focused his criticism. Why Baron chose to emphasize elements that in effect clashed with his approach to research and departed from his own way of life in New York is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps the powerful combination of factors at work – the Holocaust, the founding of Israel, and the fact that he, a Jewish historian residing in New York, had been invited to provide the historical testimony for the Eichmann trial – had the effect of intensifying national sentiments surrounding Zionism and the State of Israel while downplaying the significance of Jewish life in the Diaspora.

Several months after the trial, Baron sent Robinson a conciliatory letter acknowledging the latter’s important contribution to the Eichmann trial. Perhaps this meant that Baron himself saw some validity in Robinson’s arguments. Not confining himself to the formal letter accompanying the book Robinson had lent him in preparation for the trial, Baron added, “Now that your arduous labors are over and you can relax, I wish to congratulate you upon your part in the historical trial.”[[400]](#footnote-400)

In concluding his observations about Baron’s testimony, Robinson referred to “correcting mistakes.” As discussed, Robinson was well aware of the historical and public significance of the Eichmann trial. From his perspective, “correcting mistakes” was not only part of the trial itself but also part of the public awareness effort that followed. In 1965 he published And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative in response to Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.[[401]](#footnote-401)

Arendt covered the Eichmann trial on behalf of The New Yorker. Her reports were published in five issues of the magazine and eventually collated and published as a book in 1963, which was translated into Hebrew in 2000. Arendt’s coverage was harshly critical of the trial. She objected to its being held in Jerusalem, arguing that an international tribunal would be more appropriate.[[402]](#footnote-402)
Moreover, she attacked elements of the proceedings themselves, such as the defense team’s inability to summon German defense witnesses for fear they would be arrested under Israel’s 1950 Nazi and Nazi Collaborators Law. According to her, this was a show trial that exceeded the boundaries of legitimate judicial proceedings.[[403]](#footnote-403) Her book devoted a great deal of attention to analyzing Eichmann’s activities during the Holocaust. Although she did not release him of responsibility for these atrocities, she argued that he was merely a bureaucratic product of the German murder machine. She tried to sum up her complex attitude towards Eichmann with an observation about the final moments of his life, before being hanged: “It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us – the lesson of the fearsome word-and-thought-defying banality of evil.”[[404]](#footnote-404) This phrase and her general approach to the figure of Eichmann have drawn extremely fierce criticism.

Arendt used her analysis of the Eichmann trial as a means of examining other salient themes relating to the Holocaust. Of particular significance is her criticism of European Jewish community leaders, especially the Judenräte (Jewish councils), during the Holocaust. She depicted them as Nazi collaborators who had contributed substantially to the Nazis’ success in implementing the final solution.

Robinson’s book is essentially a powerful indictment of Arendt’s publication. Yet a closer examination of both books and of Robinson’s papers points to a far more complex reality. A key theme of Arendt’s criticism of the Eichmann trial focused on its use as a “show trial” and a tool for Ben-Gurion to shape the
political and ideological character of Israel. In her view this invalidated the trial.[[405]](#footnote-405) Robinson’s papers from the preparatory phase and the trial itself indicate that he had similar concerns. He acknowledged the public and educational significance of the trial but wanted to avoid a show trial and insisted on maintaining proper, orderly proceedings. In his view, any other procedure would undermine the historical significance of the trial and result in strong, public international criticism. Naturally, Robinson did not share these concerns in his book. Instead he strongly criticized the framing of Eichmann’s trial as a show trial. He pointed out that “according to Miss Arendt, the prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion ‘had in mind’ a ‘show trial’ in Jerusalem. She also says that he was the ‘invisible stage manager of the proceedings.’ She offers no support for these serious accusations.”[[406]](#footnote-406)

Robinson was aware that holding the trial in Jerusalem would create an uproar in the international community. In the second chapter of his book, titled “War Crimes Trials and International Law,” he expressed full support for holding the trial in Jerusalem, in an Israeli court and subject to the laws of Israel.[[407]](#footnote-407) In his words, Arendt’s objections to trying Eichmann in Jerusalem were baseless, and international law in fact lent support for Jerusalem as the venue. Here too, a review of Robinson’s papers indicates that he realized this issue was not self-evident and that the prosecution team and government of Israel would have to give serious thought to this issue and prepare a suitable legal foundation in advance. He aimed to develop a coherent set of arguments in support of trying Eichmann in Jerusalem. Recognizing the difficulty of this undertaking, he had also stressed the need to involve public relations figures to help frame the media campaign.[[408]](#footnote-408)

Robinson and Arendt strongly disagreed on other aspects of the trial as well. Robinson particularly objected to Arendt’s criticism of Jewish community leaders in Europe. He argued that her designation of them as Nazi collaborators reflected a complete lack of understanding concerning the realities of the Holocaust, which in turn was probably attributable to her having only been exposed to German sources regarding the machinery for exterminating European Jewry. According to him, Jewish documents tell a completely different story. He viewed her theory of Eichmann’s activities during the Holocaust in the same spirit, terming it imaginative and bizarre. Robinson argued that she demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of Eichmann’s central role in the systematic mass slaughter of European Jewry and was essentially minimizing the significance of his murderous role.[[409]](#footnote-409)

Robinson’s book, written in English, was intended for both Jewish and non-Jewish readers in the United States, particularly in New York.[[410]](#footnote-410) Even during preparations for the trial, and during the proceedings themselves, Robinson was most concerned about how it would be received by intellectual elites in the United States. In this context he had written, “It will be necessary to pay special attention to that upper echelon of the enlightened world that is interested in this issue from a historical, legal, or moral perspective, and to meet its needs in a manner suited to those types of individuals.”[[411]](#footnote-411) Notably, although Robinson was active in Israel and held important positions in Israeli institutions, his life was centered in New York. Even before the Eichmann trial he was aware of the tremendous impact that the memory of the Holocaust would have on the shape of the post-World War ii Jewish world. The trial therefore carried tremendous weight in this respect.

Robinson wanted to be sure that the Eichmann trial would not undermine the American Jewish community’s ability to preserve the complex tapestry of Jewish life in the United States while also maintaining meaningful ties with the State of Israel. Towards this end it was important that non-Jewish intellectual, social, and cultural circles regard the Eichmann trial as legitimate. It goes without saying that any perception of the trial as a show trial beyond the scope of international law would undermine this objective, which is why Robinson was so intent on challenging Arendt on these issues despite his own awareness of the problems they posed. He believed that criticism of the Jewish leadership during the Holocaust stemmed from a profound misunderstanding of history but also had extremely destructive potential in terms of the global Jewish community’s ability to use the memory of the Holocaust as a means of rebuilding the worldwide Jewish community in its aftermath.[[412]](#footnote-412) Robinson believed that if Arendt’s book were to receive a positive reception in the United States, it would threaten, or at the very least disrupt, the integration of Jews as a community in American society. In his view it was imperative to respond appropriately to the book. In the context of the Eichmann trial Robinson had strong criticism of both Baron’s testimony and Arendt’s book. In both cases much of his criticism focused on their approach to the Jewish Diaspora and his own assessment that their observations threatened the existence of Jewish communities in the aftermath of World War ii and the Holocaust. According to Robinson, the Jewish fortitude during the Holocaust and Jewish responses to the Nazis’ horrific acts of murder attested most decisively to the strength of Diaspora Jewish life across the generations and to the fact that it would continue to exist and flourish.[[413]](#footnote-413)

In practical terms, Robinson’s support for Diaspora Jewish life after World War ii is evident in his achievements as a representative of the State of Israel at the United Nations. He sought to create a series of international agreements that would ensure the continued existence of Diaspora Jewish communities. A salient example is his contribution to the Refugee Convention, a treaty intended to address the post-World War ii refugee problem. The issue of post-war Jewish refugees received special attention during the deliberations leading up to the treaty’s adoption and opening for signature. Robinson wanted to guarantee that Jewish refugees would be accepted in their new countries or be able to return to their countries of origin if they so chose. As a delegate acting on behalf of Israel, he naturally supported Jewish statehood in Palestine as part of the post-World War ii political order. At the same time, however, he aspired to formulate a series of international agreements that would provide Jews with the option of pursuing life as part of Diaspora communities, rather than immigrating to Israel, should they choose to do so. He strove to formulate a set of international treaties that would provide a remedy for the refugee problem generally, as well as international recognition of the unique status of Jewish refugees specifically. In contrast to most of the Israeli establishment of the early 1950s, Robinson did not believe that Israel was the only place for Jewish refugees. Reciprocally, he did not view the State of Israel as the only means of protecting the world’s Jews. Jewish communities throughout the world should, in his view, enjoy the protection of UN-backed international treaties. Another means of protecting Jewish interests around the world, as he saw it, was via international Jewish organizations. Robinson did not regard the activities of such groups as a threat to Israeli sovereignty, but rather as a positive factor that enables Jews to live as individuals and as part of a community outside of Israel’s borders. His support for Jewish organizations working on behalf of Jews worldwide was part of his overall worldview, which was strongly supportive of involvement by non-governmental organizations, including Jewish groups, in UN activities as a means of promoting peace and international cooperation. Robinson’s worldview was distinctly evident in his approach to the inclusion of representatives of the Jewish Agency and the Arab Higher Committee (the main Mandate-era body representative of Palestine’s Arabs) in deliberations leading up to the UN vote on the 1947 Partition Plan resolution. Robinson was convinced that the appearance of Jewish and Arab representatives before UN bodies was important not only as part of the struggle for Jewish statehood, but also because it set an important precedent for involvement by non-governmental organizations in UN activities. In this spirit he observed, “Thus the decision of the General Assembly to grant a hearing to two non-governmental agencies before one of its main Committees suggestive of hitherto unformed potentialities for the furtherance of peace by means of the United Nations.”[[414]](#footnote-414)

In publishing his book, Robinson’s aim was to reach a wide readership and publicly present his arguments opposing Arendt’s conclusions about the Eichmann trial. The structure of his book, however, did not serve this purpose. Robinson’s book is a very detailed manuscript that dissects Arendt’s claims with the aim of highlighting mistakes and contradictions as well as the author’s lack of knowledge. The main complaint voiced by critics of the book was that Robinson’s decision to focus on the finer details rather than the big picture greatly undermined the book’s potential to serve as a fitting response to Arendt. Robinson was aware of this critique but asserted that it had no factual basis. According to him, he was thoroughly addressing all the significant issues in dispute between himself and Arendt, such as the Jewish resistance, its role in the Holocaust, and Eichmann’s part in the final solution. He considered this detailed examination of her mistakes essential in order to convey her lack of knowledge and, accordingly, the shaky foundations of her perspective on the Eichmann trial specifically and the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust more generally.[[415]](#footnote-415) Indeed, Robinson’s book offers an extremely detailed analysis that poses a challenge for readers who are neither historians nor jurists already familiar with the facts. Even if one concedes Robinson’s point – that he was addressing all aspects of Arendt’s broad arguments – the thrust of his argument was lost in the vast assortment of details. Robinson indisputably had extensive, in-depth knowledge of the Holocaust of European Jewry, but his training as a legal scholar and the fact that a substantial portion of his historical writing was official in nature (such as for the Institute of Jewish Affairs) resulted in a meticulously legalistic text that was not particularly accessible to the general public.[[416]](#footnote-416) Robinson’s responses to his critics indicate that he was aware of this fact yet sought to present it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage of the book, while also underscoring the broad reach of his arguments. Likewise, he referred to the praise his book had drawn for its use of a diverse range of sources – far greater than Arendt had used – and because on the whole his book was historically more accurate than Arendt’s.[[417]](#footnote-417)

Arendt’s book differed in several respects. Because it was based on the series of articles she had written for The New Yorker, the writing style was far more accessible to a wide readership. This probably contributed to the fact that her book received significantly more attention. It took center stage in the discourse on the Eichmann trial and the Holocaust, and to this day it continues to occupy a central place in the intellectual and public discourse surrounding these events. Robinson’s book, in contrast, has been almost completely sidelined from discussions of the Eichmann trial and the Holocaust.

The discourse on the social and cultural aspects of Arendt’s book is extensive, beyond the scope of this book. It is reasonably safe to assume that her book, too, was intended for the social, political, and intellectual circles in New York in which she herself was active. Notably, before immigrating to the United States, Arendt had been active in Europe’s Jewish and Zionist networks, yet there is no evidence that she engaged in similar activities after settling in New York.[[418]](#footnote-418) Thus, both of these important books, which contributed so decisively to framing the public memory of the Eichmann trial, although written about proceedings that took place in Jerusalem, were ultimately intended for an audience based in New York.

Discussion and Conclusions

In his memoirs, Benjamin Akzin wrote as follows regarding the offer of a senior position in the American Zionist Emergency Council: “In early 1945 I received a visit from Dr. Jacob Robinson, and then from Dr. Kubowitzki [Kubovy] and Dr. Tartakower. All three, speaking on behalf of Dr. Wise, extended an offer to head the Emergency Council office in Washington.”[[419]](#footnote-419) These brief remarks refer indirectly to a vast network of contacts that linked the protagonists of this book. Tartakower, Kubovy, Akzin, and Robinson did not operate as a distinct, consolidated group within the United States, but they were acquainted with one another, moving in the same social, political, and philanthropic circles and sharing a common fate. All four had arrived in the United States as refugees, worked with Zionist organizations in the American arena, and relocated to Israel around the time it attained statehood. Tartakower, Kubovy, and Akzin immigrated to the State of Israel, whereas Robinson opted for a more complex way of life in which, although he spent a great deal of time in New York, Israel and its institutions became the focus and the most important aspect of his professional life after 1948.

There are many similarities in the inter-continental journeys taken by the book’s four protagonists. The first is the public and professional sphere in which they chose to operate in the United States. Tartakower, Kubovy, Akzin, and Robinson held key positions in the Jewish world and the Zionist movement in Central and Eastern Europe, yet they were also intensively engaged with the non-Jewish world. Kubovy, for example, worked as a lawyer, and his work in the Belgian socialist movement led to his election to Antwerp’s city council. Tartakower, likewise, served as a member of the city council for Łódź. Akzin was involved in a diverse range of activities within European academia. Robinson served as a member of the Lithuanian parliament and a legal advisor to the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, in addition to working at the League of Nations. Their status as refugees in the United States limited the range of professional work available to them, essentially directing them towards exclusively Jewish and Zionist circles. Even Benjamin Akzin, the only one of the four with a network of contacts in the United States prior to immigrating, ended up working for an American Zionist organization. All four arrived in the United States as destitute refugees with very little knowledge of American society. They could not afford to embark on a lengthy search for employment, and most of their personal and professional contacts in the United States were concentrated in different sectors of Jewish society and the Zionist movement. Conversely, however, their European origins made Kubovy, Tartakower, and Robinson invaluable to Jewish philanthropies that were striving to save European Jewry, and these groups were more than happy to enlist each of them. Similarly, Akzin’s familiarity with international law and its institutions in Europe and the United States was an important asset for the American Zionist movement and its leaders as they intensified their struggle in the US for the cause of a Jewish state. The decision of each of the four to work within the American Jewish and Zionist organizational network that had taken up the cause of world Jewry during the 1940s may also be attributable to the brief span of time that elapsed between their emigration from Europe and their entry into public activity in the United States. All four maintained a vast network of contacts with European Jewry and felt a strong sense of obligation to their cause, as reflected in Tartakower’s observations about Polish Jews in the United States during World War ii: “Broad sectors of American Jews of Polish background, who had never been concerned with their ‘Polishness’ previously, with the exception of certain issues, have also come to the realization that their heritage necessitates political action for the sake of Poland’s Jews. This conclusion was shared by a large number of Jewish institutions, including, first and foremost, the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress.”[[420]](#footnote-420) Tartakower’s remarks express the feelings of all four protagonists of this book. They did not claim that the American Jewish leadership was failing to act on behalf of European Jewry, but they did believe that their own sense of commitment ran deeper and that they had a better understanding of the catastrophic circumstances of European Jews during World War ii. From their perspective, working for Jewish philanthropies and the Zionist movement in the United States offered an excellent way of combining their need for employment with the cause of European Jewry that was so dear to them.

In contrast to a decisive majority of US Jews, Tartakower, Kubovy, Akzin, and Robinson chose to tie their fate with that of the State of Israel immediately upon its establishment, in 1948. Notably, although they had successfully integrated into Jewish and Zionist circles in the United States, the array of employment options available to them was limited. Their relocation to the State of Israel, on the other hand, opened up a range of opportunities for employment and public activity in the world of academia and as part of the budding Israeli bureaucracy. Tartakower and Akzin found their place at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, while Kubovy first entered the Israeli Foreign Ministry and later served as chair of Yad Vashem. Robinson, too, worked for the Foreign Ministry, in addition to his vital contributions to the Eichmann trial and to the formulation of the reparations agreement with West Germany. He also continued to work at the United Nations as a delegate for the State of Israel. Having a residence in New York, near the UN headquarters presumably, facilitated his work there. The European origins of each of the book’s protagonists, alongside the rich experience they gained through intensive public activity in United States, offered a rare combination for the newly emergent State of Israel and made them important assets for its academia and bureaucracy.

Importantly, the decision taken by each one of the four to immigrate to Israel at some point in the late 1940s did not stem from purely economic or employment-related considerations. A review of their personal histories reveals that they had arrived in the United States after many years of Zionist activism, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe. Immigration to Israel had been a core element of their own and their associates’ ideology and efforts well before they left for the United States. Tartakower was the only one of the four who had previously tried to actualize Zionist ideology by settling in Palestine, where he resided for about two years in the early 1920s before reasons of health compelled him to return to Europe.

Tartakower, Kubovy, Akzin, and Robinson’s exposure to American Zionist ideology had a strong impact on their worldview but did not completely alter it. In contrast to American Jewry generally and to American Zionists specifically, they continued to believe in the imperative of implementing the Zionist worldview at the personal level in the format that was prevalent in Europe and the Yishuv – that is, immigrating to Palestine or the State of Israel as soon as the political circumstances in the land permitted them to do so.

Notwithstanding their decision to immigrate to Israel, in all four cases their documents and deeds after immigrating indicate that American Zionism had an impact on their worldview and public activism, thus differentiating their efforts from customary practice in Israel during its first decades. Their years in the United States and engagement with American Zionist organizations exposed them to the unique nature of the American Jewish community and to the significance of a Jewish Diaspora in the world generally and in the United States specifically. Their conception of Jewish nationalism essentially underwent a dramatic shift as a result of their time in the United States. They remained supportive of Jewish statehood, which they saw as the most important development in the Jewish world during the modern era, but once they encountered American Zionist ideology, they did not view the establishment of a Jewish state as the sole and ultimate approach. Rather, they supported the existence of a Jewish Diaspora alongside the State of Israel. For them, the Jewish Diaspora represented not the surplus of Jewish life in a sovereign Land of Israel, but an organizational and ideological political entity engaged in reciprocal relations with the State of Israel. In the reality of 1950s and 1960s Israel, their position was exceptional at the ideological, public, and scholarly levels. In effect, they represented an alternative to the prevailing Zionist and Israeli outlook of the time.

The concept of a Jewish Diaspora alongside the State of Israel is a consistent theme in all the public activities and academic or public writings of the book’s protagonists. It is also reflective of the difficulties that Diaspora communities face in the modern world. In order to preserve their identity as a community, both the members and the leaders of the community must develop a complex ethnic identity that is simultaneously national and universal. The national element is aimed at preserving the community’s distinct diasporic identity, while the universal aspects enable members to continue living as part of a community in their countries of residence.[[421]](#footnote-421) This state of affairs is not unique to the American Jewish community, but it undoubtedly has special significance in the United States because of the importance and dominance that community has enjoyed among the Jewish People since the mass immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States that began in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. A decisive majority of American Zionists and their leaders have adopted this worldview. So too did the protagonists of this book, as evidenced in their ideology and deeds, initially in the United States and later in Israel. They chose to align their fate with that of the State of Israel, yet they also accepted the fundamental principles of American Zionism, outlined in earlier chapters. In this spirit, Kubovy worked to include the world’s Jewish communities in shaping the memorialization of the Holocaust. Tartakower founded and oversaw a social workers’ training program in New York that was intended to ensure the existence of Jewish communities in Europe alongside the State of Israel. Akzin sought to create a legal and bureaucratic foundation for the continued existence of the American Zionist movement as a significant and effective political and ideological force after the emergence of the State of Israel. Robinson established the Institute of Jewish Affairs, which gave practical expression to the existence of a Jewish Diaspora, in addition to his international efforts to establish a legal basis for the existence of Jewish as well as non-Jewish minority diasporic communities.

Often a conception of diasporic life that combines nationalism and universalism generates resistance in the diaspora community’s homeland. Leaders in the country of origin might be inclined to view the universalist outlook and diaspora way of life as a threat to the state and a challenge to their own authority. Importantly, in order to maintain a diasporic way of life, communities must have an organizational bureaucratic system, which in turn requires that substantial philanthropic resources remain in the diaspora rather than being transferred to the motherland. This goes some way towards explaining Ben-Gurion’s concerns about American Zionist leader Abba Hillel Silver entering the inner sanctum of Zionist politics in the Yishuv. Upon the attainment of Israeli statehood, Ben-Gurion sought to create a political and administrative system that would categorically exclude American Zionists from engaging in the Israeli arena and ensure Israel’s dominance over US Jewry in general and US Zionists in particular.[[422]](#footnote-422)

Diaspora communities may identify a certain country as their homeland even if they themselves or earlier generations of their community have emigrated elsewhere. A country becomes an external homeland for an ethnic diaspora when members of that diaspora and its economic and political elite, on the one hand, and the leadership of the imagined motherland, on the other hand, define the bond with the homeland as such even for members of the diaspora community who did not personally emigrate from the homeland. Often the motherland or imagined homeland will take action on behalf of its diaspora, such as providing assistance for returning expatriates or taking political action to protect the ethnic and civil rights of diaspora communities in their countries of residence.[[423]](#footnote-423)

Jews in the United States have chosen the Land of Israel, and later the State of Israel, as their homeland, but theirs is a different story. A decisive majority of American Jews emigrated from countries that had expelled them and to which they have no interest in returning. Moreover, the crisis that befell European Jews beginning in the 1920s and culminating with the Holocaust, resulted in overwhelming support among US Jews for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as part of the post-World War ii political order. Yet, as previous chapters discussed, American Jewish support for the Yishuv in Palestine and later for the State of Israel as the Jewish homeland did not result in substantial immigration there. On the other hand, US Jewry, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century, did provide economic and political support for the Yishuv and the State of Israel, rather than the reverse. The Israeli leadership under Ben-Gurion opposed the universalist worldview that American Zionism advocated. Nor was universalism the only issue that concerned Ben-Gurion, who also objected to other aspects of the worldview held by most American Zionist leaders during the first half of the twentieth century. They supported United Nations involvement in the Middle East, compromise with the Arabs, and neutrality on the part of the young state with respect to the escalating inter-bloc rivalry.

Studies on homeland-diaspora relations highlight the desire of the homeland’s leadership to secure the economic and political benefits that the diaspora can provide while preventing its leadership from intervening in the affairs of the homeland. The homeland’s needs for resources from the diaspora are particularly important in times of crisis or during the early stages of nation building, when the homeland’s own resources are especially limited.[[424]](#footnote-424) Ben-Gurion and most of the Yishuv leadership adopted a similar policy towards the American Jewish community during the years of hardship that preceded Israel’s founding and in the early years of statehood. For these reasons, Ben-Gurion took pains to ensure that all the organizational bodies of the Zionist movement in which American Jewish leaders had clear dominance were subordinated to the government of Israel, and to try to turn US Jewry into a community whose involvement is limited to the provision of economic and political support for the State of Israel. The protagonists of this book opposed that policy and attempted to establish a different state of affairs, as examined in the preceding chapters.

Scholars who have examined homeland-diaspora relations point out that in order to remain engaged with the homeland and provide assistance to other diaspora communities from the same ethnic group, it is necessary to have a network of philanthropies dedicated to these aims.[[425]](#footnote-425) Such a philanthropic network has indeed existed in the United States since the end of World War i, and it is within this framework that the book’s protagonists operated during the 1940s. The American Zionist organizational infrastructure in the context of which they worked in the United States is known today as “civil society.” These organizations’ philanthropic and political activities were based on volunteerism. Governments and official international organizations, such as the League of Nations during the inter-war period or the United Nations after World War ii, were not obliged to acknowledge their efforts or accept their advice. Likewise, their ability to influence the Jewish public in Europe or the United States derived only from the Jewish communities’ willingness to accept their authority. Yet during the critical years of existential threat to Jewish life, in the first half of the twentieth century, the impact these organizations were able to have actually exceeded that of other philanthropic organizations at the time. The financial power they represented and their close ties with governmental and media figures, especially in the United States, meant that they had the ability to sway the Jewish public, beyond the regular influence of philanthropic activity. This fact, in turn, also affected the nature of their relations with officialdom. The latter’s assessment that they had the power to influence the public generally and the Jewish community specifically, particularly in the United States, in combination with their economic strength and the close ties their leaders had with the US administration, significantly buttressed their political power as well as their status in the eyes of the Jewish public. Thus, there emerged a mutually reinforcing network of relations. Their influence over the Jewish community galvanized their relations with officials in the US administration and European governments, and, reciprocally, their ties with government officials enhanced the status and leadership potential of these Jewish organizations.[[426]](#footnote-426) This dynamic was characteristic of other organizations in the Jewish world as well, such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews in Britain, but it was particularly salient in the context of Jewish organizations in the United States, where the assessment that they had the power to influence the Jewish vote played a crucial role. Akzin’s work in the context of the Zionist Emergency Council starkly illustrates this dynamic.

As the efforts of Kubovy, Tartakower, Akzin, and Robinson exemplify, the American Jewish philanthropic network was of tremendous importance for Jewish life in Europe and Palestine during the critical years of the first half of the twentieth century.

However, its importance had another dimension as well. Although these organizations were founded as a means of supporting the homeland, history’s craftiness is such that they may be capable of generating a dynamic of their own in the diaspora, thereby reinforcing its independence. The processes of establishing organizations, mobilizing the necessary resources, and ensuring their smooth operation necessitate the formation of a complex network of community relations that, in turn, substantively reinforces the unique character of the diaspora and its ethnic identity even though the original purpose of the network was to support the homeland. As a consequence, the role of the homeland as a component of the diaspora community’s ethnic identity gradually becomes less central. Working through Jewish philanthropies in the United States, the protagonists of this book were active during the peak formative years that characterized the development of the philanthropic and organizational infrastructure of the Zionist movement and the Jewish community in the United States. This created a work environment that contributed significantly to shaping their personal worldview and the nature of their public activity outside the United States.

Expanding on this issue, it should be noted that the practice of creating community-based philanthropies aimed at preserving and developing a group’s ethnic identity is not unique to the American Jewish community. In fact, it characterizes a decisive majority of diaspora communities. In many cases, these community-based organizations have extended their activities beyond the borders of their countries of residence. Their aim in doing so is to preserve relations with their homeland and, when necessary, support and assist it as well as other communities identified with the same ethnic group.[[427]](#footnote-427)

The gravity and acuteness of the existential threat to Jewish life during the first half of the twentieth century greatly catalyzed the formation of a philanthropic Jewish network in the United States – far outpacing other communities – during the years in which this book’s protagonists were active. US Jewry mobilized itself in an effort to save European Jews during World War ii and to provide assistance for Jewish refugees and survivors in post-war Europe. In the early 1940s they also began actively, and increasingly, to support the cause of Jewish statehood in Palestine as part of the post-World War ii political order. These efforts necessitated expanding and further developing the philanthropic and organizational infrastructure of American Jewry both within the United States and beyond its borders. The American Jewish activism that took place in Europe and within the framework of international organizations, as described in this book, required the formation of fundraising mechanisms and the enlistment of activists in the United States, in order to create a human and financial infrastructure for activities outside United States. The papers of Kubovy, Tartakower, Akzin, and Robinson give voice to the exceptional intensity of American Jewish philanthropic activities during the first half of the twentieth century. Although the book’s four protagonists resided in United States only briefly, they operated there within an organizational network that was unique in its intensity and impact in comparison with the philanthropic efforts of other communities. As a result, those years were to have a dramatic influence on their worldview in the future.

Importantly, the American Jewish leadership was able to engage in the philanthropic efforts described here because the status of Jews within American society had changed. Despite some degree of increased anti-Semitism and the impact of the Great Depression, the socio-economic status of Jews in the United States improved significantly during the first half of the twentieth century as American society grew increasingly willing to accept and accommodate ethnically based activism, including that of the American Jewish community during those years.[[428]](#footnote-428)

The personal stories of Kubovy, Tartakower, Akzin, and Robinson give practical expression to the international nature of American Jewish history after World War i. American Jews operated within the framework of Jewish organizations based in the United States, but a major portion of their work took place outside of US borders, particularly in Europe and Palestine. Many organizations, such as the World Jewish Congress, Hadassah, and the Joint Distribution Committee, focused primarily on efforts beyond the United States. Thus, the chronicles of US Jewry during the past century convey an international story. One cannot fully appreciate the developments that took place in the Jewish world in Palestine, Israel, and Europe unless one examines the American Jewish perspective and draws on American sources. By the same token, one cannot understand the history of US Jewry during the past century unless one incorporates diverse archival source material from Europe and Israel.

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1. Regarding Tartakower, see Alexander Manor, Arie Tartakower – the Jewish Sociologist (Tel Aviv: I.L. Peretz, 1962), 17–62 [Hebrew]; Interviews with Tartakower, 19 January 1971, 8 March 1971, Record Group C6, File 734, Central Zionist Archives (henceforth C6/734, cza), Jerusalem. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to Tartakower, after the 1939 Zionist Congress he remained in Paris, where he pursued the cause of Poland’s Jews. Because of these efforts, his ties with the World Jewish Congress, and particularly with Stephen Wise, deepened. Moreover, his activities on behalf of Polish Jewry necessitated developing stronger ties with the Polish Government-in-Exile, which was stationed in Paris at the time. Tartakower’s relations with the World Jewish Congress and the Polish Government-in-Exile facilitated his immigration to the United States, allowing him to circumvent the legal and bureaucratic restrictions that other European Jews had to face when seeking entry to the United States. The personal papers of the book’s other protagonists reveal a similar pattern. Although they did not have substantial ties with any government in exile, the relations they had formed with American Jewish organizations facilitated their immigration to the United States. See interview with Tartakower, 19 January 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For further information, see the introduction to the record group containing his papers at the Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, Record Group P4, File 7894223 (henceforth P4-7894223, Yad Vashem Archives). After he immigrated to Israel, Kubowitzki changed his surname to Kubovy, which is the name I have elected to use throughout this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See the article by Shabtai Rosenne, professor of international law and an Israeli diplomat, “The Great Advocate of the Jewish People – in Memory of Jacob Robinson,” Gesher 4, no. 3 (1978): 91–101 [Hebrew]; Press release issued by the wjc following Robinson’s appointment as a consultant to the UN Human Rights Commission in 1947, n.d., Bin 14C, File 16, Record Group 361, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati OH (henceforth 14C/16, 361, aja). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs was established on September 19, 1939, in response to concerns about contact being separate among Zionist centers, and with the aspiration of concentrating political activity in the United States. In practice the Emergency Committee operated primarily as a political pressure group aimed at persuading the American government to promote Zionist objectives. In July 1943 it changed its name to the American Zionist Emergency Council. Regarding Akzin, see Benjamin Akzin, From Riga to Jerusalem, a Memoir (Jerusalem: Zionist Library, 1986), 347–354 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Henry L. Feingold. The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938–1945 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hasia R. Diner, The Jews of the United States (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 205–304. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rogers Brubaker, Ethnicity without Group (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 22–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For an extensive discussion of the activities of American Jewish organizations generally, and the World Jewish Congress specifically, in Europe between the two world wars see my book, Zohar Segev, The World Jewish Congress during the Holocaust: Between Activism and Restraint (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, Oldenbourg, 2014), 1–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Erica B. Simmons, Hadassah and the Zionist Project (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006); David Farrer, The Warburgs, the Story of a Family (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1974), 93–120; Ionel Rosenthal and Baruch Rosen, “Nathan Straus’ Contribution to the Dairy Industry in Palestine,” Journal of Israeli History 15, no. 1 (1994): 91–99. The emigration of political activists and ethnic leaders to the United States in the nineteenth century onward is not unique to the Jews, a similar phenomenon occurred among Irish, Polish and many other immigrant comunnities. But in my opinion, the intensity of the crisis of the Jewish existence in Europe has made this phenomenon especially significant in the Jewish context. For examples of discussions about the migration of other ethnic groups and the development of the United States as a political and philanthropic center for these communities, see: Kerby A. Miller, Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Janusz Cisek, Polish Refugee and the Polish American Immigration and Relief Committee (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland & Company, Publisher; 2006). George Kalouis, Modern Greek and the Diaspora Greeks in the United States (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shmuel Yavin ed., The Book of Raphael Mahler: A Collection of Studies on the History of Israel, Presented to Him on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1974) [Hebrew]; Gur Alroey, “Demographers in the Service of the Nation: Liebmann Hersch, Jacob Lestschinsky, and the Early Study of Jewish migration,” Jewish History 20, no. 3–4 (2006): 265–282. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Except from Ben Guruon and Ben Zvi we can mention: Pinhas Rutenberg, Zevv Jabotinsky, Chaim Arlosooff, Hill Kook. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Anita Shaira, Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 43–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mark A. Raider ed., Nahum Goldmann, Statesman without a State (Albany: suny Press, 2009), 3–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. On Ben-Gurion’s remarks and his relations with Hadassah’s leadership, see Zohar Segev, “From Philanthropy to Shaping a State: Hadassah and Ben Gurion, 1937–1947,” Israel Studies 18, no. 3 (2013): 133–157. A survey of the extensive literature on Hadassah is beyond the scope of this book. See, for example, Mary McCune, “Social Workers in the Muskeljudentum: Hadassah Ladies, Manly Men and the Significance of Gender in the American Zionist Movement, 1912–1928,” American Jewish History 86, no. 2 (1998):
135–165. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Meron Medzini, Golda Meir: A Political Biography (Munich: De Gruter, 2008). For a new research regarding Szold please see, Dvora Hcohen, To Repair a Broken World: The Life of Henrietta Szold, Founder of Hadassa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021). Shulamit Reinharz & Mark A. Raider, eds., American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, Joseph B. Glass, From New Zion to Old Zion: American Jewish Immigration and Settlement in Palestine, 1917–1939 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Michael Brown, The Israeli-American Connection: It’s Roots in the Yishuv (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1996). On the figures mentioned here, see Daniel P. Kotzin, Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010); Baila, Round Shargel, “American Jewish Women in Palestine: Bessie Gotsfeld, Henrietta Szold, and the Zionist Enterprise,” American Jewish History 90, no. 2 (2002): 141–160; Melvin I. Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise (Albany: suny Press, 1982); Marc Lee Raphael, Abba Hillel Silver: A Profile in American Judaism (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989). A great deal of biographical information on Silver is available in the guide to the microfilm edition of his archival papers, A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Papers of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver (Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Naomi W. Cohen, The Americanization of Zionism, 1897–1948 (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 15–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Herzl did not pay much attention to the American Jewish community, although he did appoint Jacob de Haas as his representative in the United States. For his interest in this community related mainly to fundraising efforts on behalf of the Zionist movement, see Theodor Herzl to Stephen Wise, 18 April 1904, A243/164, cza. Regarding the massive Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States, see, for example, Jeffrey S. Gurock, ed., East European Jews in America, 1880–1920: Immigration and Adaptation (New York: Routledge: 1998). In his memoirs, Wise recounted that American delegates to the 1898 Zionist Congress remained silent because they were not fluent in Yiddish or Hebrew; see Stephen Wise, Challenging Years, (New York and London: East and West Library, 1951), 6–7. Language limitations impeded correspondence between US Zionists and Herzl, who required translation services to communicate with them; see Theodor Herzl to US Zionists, 25 April 1902, A243/164, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For an analysis in this spirit, examining the role of Zionism among the first generation of East European immigrants, see Ofer Shiff, “The Integrative Function of early American Zionism,” Journal of Israeli History 15, no. 1 (1994): 1–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. On American Zionism, see, for example, Melvin I. Urofsky, American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1975); Marnin Feinstein, American Zionism 1884–1900 (New York: Herzl Press, 1965); Evyatar Friesel, “Brandeis’ Role in American Zionism Historically Reconsidered,” in Jeffrey S. Gurock ed., American Jewish History, vol. 8 (New York: Routledge, 1988), 92–117; Samuel Halperin, The Political World of American Zionism, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961); Mark A. Raider, The Emergence of American Zionism (New York: New York University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. David H. Shpiro, From Philanthropy to Activism, The Political Transformation of American Zionism in the Holocaust Years 1933–1945, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Wise, Challenging Years, 1–2. On Wise, see, for example, Melvin I. Urofsky, A Voice That Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise. (Albany: suny Press, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For more on these issues, see Robert D. Shapiro, A Reform Rabbi in the Progressive Era: The Early Career of Stephen S. Wise (New York: Garland, 1988), 18–19, 57–58. In 1907 Wise founded the Free Synagogue in New York, after declining the position of rabbi at the prestigious Reform synagogue Temple Emanu-El because he objected to the demand that his sermons be reviewed in advance by the synagogue’s board of trustees. Wise’s Zionist worldview, which clashed with the anti-Zionist outlook that prevailed in the Reform movement until at least the mid-1930s, was among the factors that motivated him to found an independent rabbinical seminar – the Jewish Institute of Religion (jir) – alongside his synagogue in New York. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Wise, Challenging Years, 1–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 1–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. A discussion of the modern outlook on the Jewish past is beyond the scope of this study. See, for example, David N. Myers, Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, Zionism, and the Creation of a New Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Stephen Wise, lecture, Herzl memorial conference, New York, 18 July 1929, A246/164, cza (henceforth “Wise, Herzl lecture, 1929”). For another lecture by Wise in this spirit, see “The Epochal Herzl,” n.d., n.p., A243/163, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Wise, Herzl lecture, 1929. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Wise delivered remarks in this spirit in the context of a report he presented to the wjc conference in February 1940. Stephen Wise, lecture, 11 February 1940, A243/71, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For more on the wjc, see Leon A. Kubowitzki, Unity in Dispersion: A History of the World Jewish Congress (New York: wjc, 1948). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Stephen Wise to Herzl, 26 October 1898, A243/163, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On anti-Semitism in American society, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, ed., Anti-Semitism in America (New York, Routledge: 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See, for example, Wise’s objection to ethnically based Jewish voting patterns, and his remarks in favor of voting based only on overall American domestic and foreign issues, rather than on narrow Zionist interests. Stephen Wise, lecture, The Free Synagogue, New York, 1 November 1946, A243/42, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Richard J. Gottheil, Zionism (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1914), 103–104. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., 104–105. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 198–200. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., 201–208. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For a discussion of this issue, see Zvi Ganin, An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish Leadership and Israel 1948–1957 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For an interesting discussion of the difficulties arising from political Zionist activism in the United States, see the memoirs of one of the initiators of political activity among US Zionists in Washington, Leon I. Feuer, “The Birth of the Jewish Lobby, A Reminiscence,” American Jewish Archives 28, no. 2 (1976): 107–118. On Jewish and ethnic politics in the United States, see also David Howard Goldberg, Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Edward Tivnan, The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Gottheil, Zionism, 209–216. For a discussion of efforts by American immigrant groups on behalf of their countries of origin and the significance of such activity for their status and identity in the United States, see Oscar Handlin, Race and Nationality in American Life (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 193–200. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For a report on Gottheil’s remarks, see American Zionist News, 1 January 1900, A243/2, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Philippa Strum, Brandeis: Beyond Progressivism (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 114–115. Regarding Brandeis’s outlook on Jewish and Zionist matters, see Louis D. Brandeis, Brandeis on Zionism: A Collection of Addresses and Statements (Washington,DC: Zionist Organization of America, 1942). Brandeis maintained contact and had meetings with de Haas, but there appear to be no records of significant statements he made regarding Herzl; see Melvin I. Urofsky, Louis D. Brandeis, A Life (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009), 399–401. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Urofsky, Wise, 17–18. On the founders of American Zionism not mentioned in this study, see Henry L. Feingold, Zion in America: The Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1974), 194–207. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. For more on Szold, see Marvin Lowenthal, Henrietta Szold: Life and Letters (New York: Viking, 1942). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Michael Walzer, Edward T. Knatowicz, and John Higham, The Politics of Ethnicity, a series of selections from the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 95–102. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. On the adaptation of Zionism to American reality, see Yonathan Shapiro, Leadership of the American Zionist Organization 1897–1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 8–76. For a historiographic survey of the academic discourse on sociological aspects of Jewish integration into American society, see Marshall Sklare, Observing America’s Jews (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1993), 159–180. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Chaim Weizmann to Felix Frankfurter, 27 August 1919, in Chaim Weizmann, The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann, vol. 15 (Jerusalem: Rutgers University Press and Israel University Press, 1977), 204–206. Evidently Weizmann did not send the letter to Brandeis, presumably in order to avoid creating an absolute rift between them at this early stage of their acquaintance. His reasons for not sending the letter do not have a bearing on our discussion because, in any event, what he describes is the difference between his and Brandeis’s outlooks. For more on the struggle between Weizmann and Brandeis, see Ben Halpern, A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Draft autobiography, unpublished, Microfilm Reel No. 2, File 211, Archives of Abba Hillel Silver, Cleveland Ohio (henceforth 2/211 Silver Archives). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See the following sermons on Herzl by Silver: “One Hundred Years of Jewish History,” 6 November 1949, 4/803, Silver Archives; “Dr. Theodor Herzl,” 1 May 1960, 4/1036, Silver Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Abba Hillel Silver, “Herzl and Jewish Messianism,” in Meyer W. Weisgal ed., Theodor Herzl: A Memorial (New York: Zionist Organization of America, 1929), 254–257. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. On Ahad Ha‌ʾam, see Steven J. Zipperstein, Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha‌ʾam and the Origins of Zionism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Silver, “Herzl,” 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. For a comprehensive survey of the sources of universalism and morality in American Reform Judaism, see Michael A. Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism, chapters 7 and 8 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Lecture by Abba Hillel Silver, “A Return Visit to Israel,” 20 May 1951, 4/850, Silver Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Lecture by Abba Hillel Silver, National Conference of the United Jewish Appeal, 15 January 1951, 5/817, Silver Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Emanuel Neumann, lecture on the occasion of Herzl’s birthday, 9 May 1955, A123/528, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Emanuel Neumann, lecture to the American Zionist Federation conference, 12 September 1957, A123/528, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ben Halpern, The Idea of the Jewish State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 139–142. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Neumann, lecture to the American Zionist Federation Conference, 12 September 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Simon Rabinovitch ed., Jews and Diaspora Nationalism (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012); James Loefler, “Between Zionism and Liberalism: Oscar Janowsky and Diaspora Nationalism in America,” AJS Review 34, no. 2 (2010): 289–308; Noam Pianko, Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983), 101–109. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid., 140–141. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. On the interest in shaping a Jewish world based on diaspora nationalism after the Holocaust, see Zohar Segev, “Remembering and Rebuilding: The World Jewish Congress in the Shadow of the Holocaust,” Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 14, no. 2 (2015): 315–332: Noam Pinko, Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Jasmin Habib, Israel, Diaspora, and the Routes of National Belonging (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Eliezer Ben Rafael, Judit Bokser Liwerant and Yosef Gorny, eds., Reconsidering Israel Diaspora Relations (Leiden: Netherlands, Brill 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Dubnow’s study, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, was translated into English and published in the United States, where it received much acclaim. See Simon M. Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times until the Present Day (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916–1920). On the book’s reception in the United States, see Robert M. Seltzer, Simon Dubnow’s “New Judaism”: Diaspora Nationalism and the World History of the Jews (Boston: Brill, 2014), 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. For a discussion of these issues, see Seltzer, Simon Dubnow’s “New Judaism,” 166–203. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Isaac I. Schwarzbart, 25 Years in the Service of the Jewish People: A Chronicle of Activities of the World Jewish Congress, August 1932–February 1957 (New York: wjc, 1957). Other key figures who participated in founding the organization include the Zionist leader Leo Motzkin and former chairman of the American Jewish Congress Louis Lipsky. For an example of the central role played by the United States, see Nahum Goldmann to Eliezer Kaplan (Jewish Agency treasurer), 11 January 1943, Z6/2755, cza. Regarding the absolute financial dependence on the United States, see Nahum Goldmann to Stephen Wise, 17 December 1936, A1/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Nahum Goldmann to Stephen Wise (sent from Paris), 30 May 1939, A9/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. World Jewish Congress, official announcement, 1 August 1940, New York, A5/2, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. World Jewish Congress, “The Program of the World Jewish Congress,” New York, November 1946, A5/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Founding Committee of the World Jewish Congress, open letter to the American Jewish public, 26 October 1933, A40/4, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Founding Committee of the World Jewish Congress, Questions and Answers, pamphlet, 1934 (no precise date), A40/4, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. For a comprehensive study of the Jews within the US political system, see Peter Y. Medding, “Segmented Ethnicity and the New Jewish Politics,” Studies in Contemporary Jewry 3 (1987): 26–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Wise’s inaugural address to the wjc congress in Montreux, Wise returned to this theme in an article in Congress Weekly, 20 August 1948, A29/1, 361, aja. For the complete resolutions adopted at the Montreux conference, see the Collected Resolutions, aja, 6–27 June 1948, A3/12, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Wise’s inaugural address, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Action plan of the WJC’s Israeli wing, 4 November 1949, A28/8, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. This suggests that the integration of Jews with the new world order was a touchstone of the capacity to realize a policy of reconciliation and peace in the post-war. See Wise, 27 June 27 1948 (note 6). For a further example of the necessity for a worldwide representative organization for the Jewish people, see the resolutions on the post-war action plan adopted by the executive committee (undated), A1/8, 361, aja. Beginning in 1948, the wjc placed concern for the fate of the Jewish communities in Arab countries at the top of their agenda. See, for example, the letter written by Charles Malik, head of the UN consultative committee with non-governmental organizations, to Leon Kubowizki regarding the WJC’s application to UN bodies. The letter refers to a prolonged correspondence between the organization and UN departments that handled NGOs regarding the fate of the Jews in Arab lands. The writer concludes that no emergency action is required on this issue, despite the wjc demand to undertake such steps. See the letter from Charles Malik to Leon Kubowizki, 2 June 1946, B104/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See, for example, Allon Gal, David Ben-Gurion and the American Alignment for a Jewish State (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Minutes, Jewish Agency Executive Committee meeting of 16 February 1971, reading room (filed by date), cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. The growing strength of the American Zionist movement manifested in practical terms at the August 1943 conference of the American Jewish Congress. Delegates to the conference, who were democratically chosen, represented American Jewish Zionist as well as non-Zionist organizations. The Congress adopted decidedly pro-Zionist resolutions. On the Congress, and the growth of American Zionism more generally, see Halperin, The Political World of American Zionism, 189–280. For a general discussion of the changes and developments among US Jews during this period, see Henry L. Feingold, A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Keren Hayesod, the United Palestine Appeal (later the United Israel Appeal), was established in 1920 to provide the Zionist movement with the resources needed to implement the Balfour Declaration of 1917. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. On the importance of US Jewry’s financial support for East European Jews and the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, see the discussion in Ernest Stock, Partners Pursestrings, A History of the United Israel Appeal (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. A substantial portion of my earlier research was devoted to these issues, a full discussion of which would exceed the scope of this book. See, for example, Zohar Segev, “American Zionists’ Place in Israel after the Establishment of the State: From Involved Partners to Outside Supporters,” American Jewish History 93, no. 3 (2007): 277–302. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. See, for example, the discussion in Zohar Segev, “Struggle for Cooperation and Integration: American Zionists and Arab Oil, 1940s,” Middle Eastern Studies 42 (2006): 819–830. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. David Ben-Gurion, Mapai Secretariat meeting, 17 December 1945, Labor Party Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. For a discussion of this issue, see Segev, “American Zionists’ Place in Israel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Golda Meyerson, Mapai Central Committee meeting, 9 January 1947, Labor Party Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Stephen Wise, lecture to the European Division of the World Jewish Congress, n.p., 19 August 1945, 9A/10, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid. His view regarding the combined missions of the World Jewish Congress – focusing on both Palestine and Diaspora Jewry – was evident even earlier. See Memorandum of the Board of the World Jewish Congress to the League of Nations, 16 December 1936, A1/2, 361, aja, which clearly lays out this combination. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Stephen Wise, opening remarks at the World Jewish Congress plenary assembly, 27 June 1948, Montreux, Switzerland, A9/10, 361, aja. See similar remarks by Wise in an article in the Congress’s bulletin (Congress Weekly), 20 August 1948, A29/1, 361, aja. For all the resolutions of the Montreux plenary assembly, see the compilation, 6–27 June 1948, A3/12, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Stephen Wise, opening remarks at the World Jewish Congress plenary assembly, 27 June 1948, Montreux, Switzerland, A9/10, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. One may infer from this that the integration of Jews in the world order is a touchstone for assessing the viability of a policy of conciliation and peace in the post-World War ii world. Ibid. For another expression of the need for a global representative Jewish organization, see the resolutions on a post-war plan of action adopted by the wjc executive committee, n.d., A1/8, 361, aja. Beginning in 1948, wjc bodies placed the concern about the fate of Jewish communities in Arab countries at the top of their agenda. See, for example, the letter from Charles Malik, president of the UN Economic and Social Council (which grants UN consultative-status affiliation to non-government organizations), to Leon Kubovy in response to the WJC’s appeals to UN bodies that handle relations with non-governmental organizations, regarding the fate of Jews in Arab countries; the writer concludes that, despite WJC’s appeals, there is no need to take urgent measures on the issue. Charles Malik to Leon Kubovy, 2 June 1946, B104/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Regarding these financial transfers and the efforts to save Jewish children in France, see Segev, The World Jewish Congress, 144–168. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Aryeh Tartakower, report on visit to Britain during 6 January–15 March, 1944, (no precise date) 1944, C6/387, cza. He delivered the report immediately upon his return. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Aryeh Tartakower, report on political activity on behalf of Polish Jews in the US during World War ii, C6/646, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Interview with Aryeh Tartakower, 15 March 1971, C6/734, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. See the following studies: Arie Ben-Tov, “The International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Jewish Congress: The Rescue of Jews during World War II from a Legal Perspective,” Gesher – Journal of Jewish Affairs 119 (1989): 67–72 [Hebrew]; Meir Dvorzetsky, “The International Committee of the Red Cross and Its Attitude to Jews in Nazi-Occupied Countries, Ghettos, and Concentration Camps,” in Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, ed., Israel Gutman, 56–87 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974) [Hebrew]; Monty Noam Penkower, “The World Jewish Congress Confronts the International Red Cross During the Holocaust,” Jewish Social Studies 41, no. 3–4 (1979): 229–256; Gerald Steinacher, Humanitarians at War: The Red Cross in the Shadow of the Holocaust (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For a different approach, which presents the difficulties faced by the icrc during World War ii, see Jean Claude Favez, The Red Cross and the Holocaust (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Kubovy, in his capacity as head of the Department of European Affairs, is a signatory to the letter, but Tartakower was the principal author, as also evidenced by the response (discussed below), which was sent to him. Aryeh Tartakower to Marc Peters, 10 December 1943,
C6/400 cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Ibid. Emphasis in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. See, for example, Nahum Goldmann’s meeting with the Polish ambassador to the United States, n.p., 19 January 1939, A1/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Marc Peter, letter dated 17 December 1943, C6/400, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Chairman of the American Red Cross to President Roosevelt, 19 September 1944, Official file, American Red Cross files, July-December 1944 folder, Box 124, fdr Library, Hyde Park, NY. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Minutes of wjc-icrc meeting, 27 January 1944, C6/400, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Minutes of meeting between Kubovy and Peter, 5 January 1944, C6/400, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Minutes of meeting between Kubovy and Burckhardt, 20 February 1945, C6/404, cza. Regarding other efforts by the wjc in this context, see Penkower, “The World Jewish Congress.” [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Minutes of meeting between Kubovy and Burckhardt, 20 February 1945, C6/404, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Aryeh Tartakower, article in the wjc bulletin, Congress Weekly, May 1946 (no precise date and no title; Tartakower wrote his article after the publication of an article by Edouard Chapinsat, vice chairman of the icrc, describing at length the activity of the Red Cross at the camps), C6/400, cza. For icrc publications on the issue, see Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on Its Activities during the Second World War, 3 volumes (Geneva: icrc, 1948); Bulletin International Des Societes De La Croix-Rouge, 1939–1945; Documents Relating to the Work of the International Committee of the Red Cross for the Benefit of Civilian Detainees in German Concentration Camps between 1939 and 1945 (Geneva: icrc, 1975); International Review of the Red Cross, 1939–1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Tartakower, article in Congress Weekly, May 1946. On the activities of the Red Cross in Hungary, see Arieh Ben Dov, Facing the Holocaust in Budapest: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Jews in Hungary, 1943–1945 (Dordrecht: Henry Dunant Institute Geneva and Martinus Nijhoff Publisher, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Press Conference, Jerusalem, 9 September 1949, C6/812. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See also Aryeh Tartakower, lecture, January 1948, n.d., n.p. C6/812, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Proposal for a training program for social workers, submitted to the emergency war conference of the wjc in Atlantic City, 16 November 1944, C69/1, 361, aja. An assessment of the need for a professional training program for aid workers to assist refugees after the war had been prepared in 1942. See Advisory Committee on European Jewish Affairs, 6–7 June 1942, D104/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Proposal for a training program for social workers, submitted to the war emergency conference of the wjc in Atlantic City, 16 November 1944, C69/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Memorandum by the program organizing committee (no precise date) 1944, D12/2,
361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Ibid. See the notice of rejection because the quota of accepted applicants had been reached, 21 May 1945, D12/9, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See the minutes of the preparatory meetings, 23 June 1944, 22 November 1944, D12/2,
361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Information sheet on the program, 19 March 1945–14 June 1945, D12/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Examination forms, 20 June 1945, D13/11, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Ibid. For additional courses in this spirit, see D13/4, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Examination forms, 20 June 1945, D13/11, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See Tartakower’s description of the profile of the applicants, 25 January 1945, D13/1,
361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Sylvia Markowitz, letter of application, 30 April 1945, D13/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Ruth Stone, letter of application, 24 January 1945, D13/2, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Interim Report, 20 April 1945, D12/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Preparatory meeting, 22 November 1944, D12/2, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Tartakower to Cramer, Assistant Personnel Director, UN, 25 January 1945, D13/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Social work program documents, 25 January 1945, D13/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Aryeh Tartakower, Memorandum on unrra, (no precise date) 1946, C6/646, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Ibid. On the unrra and deliberations regarding its modes of operation, see Anna Holian, “Between Nationalism and Internationalism: Displaced Persons at the UNRRA – University of Munich, 1945–1948,” in Diaspora Identities: Exile, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Past and Present, ed. Susanne Lachenicht and Kirsten Heinsohn, 109–129 (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. His research on Jewish socialism and the Jewish labor movement was published as a book, Aryeh Tartakower, History of the Jewish Labor Movement (Warsaw: Brit HaNoʾar Executive Committee, 1929–1931) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. The following are important works by Tartakower that are not mentioned elsewhere in this book (for a complete bibliography of his work, see Manor, Tartakower, 233–244): Aryeh Tartakower, Jewish Society (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Masada, 1957) [Hebrew]; Israeli Society (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Masada, 1948) [Hebrew]; Klal Israel: Chapters in the Sociology of the Jewish People, ed., Benzion Dinur, Aryeh Tartakower, Jacob Lestchinsky (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1954) [Hebrew]; The Wandering Man: On Emigration and Aliyah in the Past and the Present (Tel Aviv: M. Newman, 1954) [Hebrew]; Aryeh Tartakower, The Problem of Jewish Immigration in the World Jewish Congress (Paris: World Jewish Congress Executive Committee, 1936) [Yiddish]. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. For an in-depth discussion, see Ariel Lionard Feldestein, Ben Gurion, Zionism and American Jewry, 1948–1963 (London: Routledge, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Aryeh Tartakower, Megillat HaHityashvut [The Scroll of Settlement]: The History of Settlement in the World and Its Main Problems Today (Tel Aviv: M. Newman, 1958) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Ibid., 7–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. See Aryeh Tartakower to the editor of Davar, (no precise date) C6/619, cza; statement of opinion January 1948, C6/812, cza; “The Birth of the Modern Jewish Nation,” unpublished manuscript, (no precise date) 1950s, C6/344, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Aryeh Tartakower, editorial, Congress Weekly (wjc bulletin), 26 June 1951, C6/632, cza; letter to the editor of HaRa‌ʾayon, [The Idea] (no precise date) 1967, C6/733. Other remarks in this spirit appear in Aryeh Tartakower, editorial, Davar, 24 June 1968, C6/811, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. On Rawidowicz, see David N. Myers, Between Jew & Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008). Rawidowicz had died in 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Aryeh Tartakower, remarks about Simon Rawidowicz on the occasion of the Hebrew publication of his book, no precise date, 1969, C6/655, cza. Presumably Tartakower was referring to Rawidowicz’s book Iyunim BeMahshevet Israel [Studies in Jewish Thought] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1969) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Aryeh Tartakower, The Face of the Gola, (no precise date) 1954, C6/619, cza. Along these lines, see also Aryeh Tartakower, Remarks on the occasion of Wise’s seventy-fifth birthday, (no precise date), 1949, C6/650, cza; Lecture at a conference on Jewish education in the Diaspora, 15 August 1955, C6/797, cza; Letter to the editor of HaRa‌ʾayon, (no precise date) 1967, C6/733, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Aryeh Tartakower, “On the Fundamental Problems of Bi-Culturalism around the World and for Us,” in Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume, ed., Moshe Davis (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1953), 95–108 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Ibid., 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Aryeh Tartakower, The Jewish People in Our Time: A Textbook for High Schools and Youth Groups (Łódź: Society for the Establishment of Hebrew High Schools, 1934) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ibid., 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. See, for example, ibid., 58–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Ibid., 136–138. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Aryeh Tartakower, “Our Position in the Life of Jewish Society,” HaAtid [The Future] (bulletin of the worldwide HaHalutz movement, 30 September 1930, C6/639, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. See, for example, Aryeh Tartakower, Article in HaAtid, October 1930, C6/369, cza; On the Question of the Jewish Community in exile, see the monthly Tkufateinu [Our Time] 1, no. 1 (1931) [Hebrew]; “Palestine’s Eintritt in die Moderne Weltwirtschaft,” Der Jude 10 (1922): 588–601 [Yiddish]. For additional articles, see Manor, Tartakower, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Aryeh Tartakower, History of the Jewish Labor Movement, Part II (Warsaw: Brit HaNoʾar [Youth Alliance] Executive Committee and the Global HeHalutz Center, 1930), 82. A very brief discussion of the American arena, even in the context of the socialist movement, appears in Aryeh Tartakower, History of the Jewish Labor Movement, Part I (Warsaw: Brit HaNoʾar Executive Committee and the Global HeHalutz Center, 1929), 9, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Diner, The Jews of the United States, 194–196. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. See Aryeh Tartakower, “The Making of Jewish Statehood in Palestine,” Jewish Social Studies 10, no. 3 (1949): 207–222. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Leon A. Kubowitzki, Unity in Dispersion: A History of the World Jewish Congress (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1948), 124, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Regarding the sources of information on Kubovy, see the relevant section in the Introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. A clear example is David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, A Race against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust (New York: New Press, 2002), 29–30, 230–231. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. See, for example, Rafael Medoff, The Deafening Silence (New York: Shapolsky, 1987). For a comprehensive listing of such studies, see Gulie Neʾeman Arad, “Cooptation of Elites: American Jewish Reactions to the Nazi Menace, 1933,” Yad Vashem Studies 25 (1996): 32–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. The records vary as to the precise date of the first convoy from Hungary to Auschwitz. The Holocaust Museum in Washington cites this date as May 2, 1944, whereas the museum at Auschwitz cites the date as May 16, 1944, and Martin Gilbert writes that “the first train to reach Auschwitz from Hungary arrived at the camp on May 17.” Martin Gilbert, Auschwitz and the Allies (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. There is a rich body of scholarship on the Holocaust of the Hungarian Jewry, beyond the scope of the present study. See, for example, David Cesarani (ed.), Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944 (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. The discussion below follows the customary practice of using only the term “Auschwitz.” [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Shlomo Aronson, Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 290–297. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. David S. Wyman, “Why Auschwitz Was Never Bombed,” Commentary 65 (May 1978): 37–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. David S. Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Gilbert, Auschwitz and the Allies, 190–198. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Ibid., 231–234. The complexity of this topic is well expressed by Henry Feingold, who stressed that discussion of American Jewry and the Holocaust should take into account the broad context of these leaders’ exceptional awareness of the fate of Jews in other cases, as well as the constraints and difficulties they faced during World War II. Henry L. Feingold, Bearing Witness, How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 14–16, 205–76; Henry L. Feingold, “Was there Communal Failure? Some Thoughts on the American Jewish Response to the Holocaust,” American Jewish History 81 (1993): 60–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Michael J. Cohen, “Churchill and Auschwitz: End of Debate?,” Modern Judaism 26, no. 2 (2006): 127–140. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Danny Orbach and Mark Solonin, “Calculated Indifference: The Soviet Union and Requests to Bomb Auschwitz,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 27, no. 1 (2013): 90–113. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Kevin A. Mahoney, “An American Operational Response to Request to Bomb Rail Lines to Auschwitz,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 25, no. 3 (2011): 438–446. See also Richard Breitman and Allan Lichtman, FDR and the Jews (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 282, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. As an illustration of strong support for Wyman’s thesis, see, for example, Rafael Medoff, “New Evidence Concerning the Allies and Auschwitz,” American Jewish History 89, no. 1 (2001): 91–104. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. These issues are closely examined in previously referenced studies by Aronson and Gilbert. For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), The Bombing of Auschwitz, Should the Allies Have Attempted It? (New York: St. Martin’s Press and United States Holocaust Museum, 2000); Richard H. Levy, “The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited: A Critical Analysis,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 10, no. 3 (1996): 267–298; Richard and Lichtman, FDR and the Jews, 181–294; Yehuda Bauer, “Holocaust Rescue Revisited,” Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs 7, no. 3 (2013): 127–142. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see Michael Fleming, Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Gerhart Riegner, telegram to Aryeh Kubovy, C6/402, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. World Jewish Congress Rescue Department, strictly confidential report prepared by Leon Kubovy, 26 November 1944, A2/68, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. The quote is taken from a wjc report prepared by Leon Kubovy, on the difficulties entailed in the organization’s rescue efforts, ibid. For additional information about the wjc rescue efforts during World War ii, see ibid. See also the document submitted by the wjc office in New York to the War Refugee Board regarding rescue efforts that were vitally needed in Europe, 3 March 1944, A2/68, 361, aja. Kubovy was also in contact with the Swiss ambassador to the United States. The ambassador relayed that following his discussion with Kubovy he reported to the Swiss government, and he was informed that the Swiss ambassador to Budapest was instructed to take all possible measures for the sake of Hungarian Jews; the ambassador was operating through open as well as clandestine line channels and in cooperation with the Swedish emissary to Budapest (Wallenberg). Ambassador of Switzerland to Aryeh Kubovy, 1 November 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. The correspondence is cited in Neufeld and Berenbaum, The Bombing of Auschwitz, 273–274. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Aryeh Kubovy to John W. Pehle, 1 July 1944, C6/401, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Dina Porat, The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David. The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939–1945 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 212–220. Tuvia Friling, Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership and Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust, vol. 2 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 78–85; Richard H. Levy, “Did Ben Gurion Reverse His Position on Bombing Auschwitz?,” Journal of Genocide Research 3, no. 1 (2001): 89–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Neufeld and Berenbaum, The Bombing of Auschwitz, 259–260. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Richard H. Levy, “The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited: A Critical Analysis,” in Neufeld and Berenbaum, The Bombing of Auschwitz, 105–106; Gilbert, Auschwitz and the Allies, 256; Medoff, The Deafening Silence , 158–160; Medoff, New Evidence, 102–104. In his book, Wyman mentions only Kubovy’s request to bomb Auschwitz. Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews, 295–296. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Aryeh Kubovy to Lawrence S. Lesser, 1 July 1944, C6/402, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Gilbert, Auschwitz and the Allies, 302–303. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Aryeh Kubovy to John W. Pehle, 24 August 1944, C6/402. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Aryeh Kubovy to John McCloy, 30 August 1944, C6/402, cza (emphasis in the original). Kubovy raised the possibility of voluntary action on another occasion as well, when he wrote to McCloy about an Australian operation that had resulted in the liberation of French prisoners who were essentially awaiting slaughter by the Nazis. In a newspaper interview, the Australian captain who led the operation said that he and his men were willing to pay with their lives to secure the liberation of these prisoners. Regarding the liberation of Jews, Kubovy expressed confidence that “enough volunteers would be found to participate in such an adventure.” Aryeh Kubovy to John McCloy, 30 October 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Aryeh Kubovy to John McCloy, 30 August 1944, C6/402, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. John McCloy to Aryeh Kubovy, 30 August 1944, C6/402, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. It is evident from the manner in which Kubovy’s files were arranged that he intended to write a book about his efforts during the Holocaust, although he never completed the task. His wife Miriam Kubovy (1898 to 1990), herself a Zionist activist, was his partner in the writing process. See the note by Miriam Kubovy in the margins of McCloy’s letter to Kubovy, 30 August 1944, C6/402, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Advisory Council on European Jewish Affairs and European Representative Committees, minutes of meeting, 17 October 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Aryeh Kubovy to Yitzhak Gruenbaum, 16 October 1944, C6/401, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. See Aryeh Kubovy, telegram to Ignacy Schwarzbart, Member of the Polish National Council in London, 17 August 1944, C6/402, cza. For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see David Engel, Facing a Holocaust, The Polish Government-in-exile and the Jews, 1943–1945 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 138–178. For an interesting discussion regarding earlier requests by the Polish government-in-exile to bomb Auschwitz, at a time when most of the prisoners being held or exterminated were Polish, see Engel, Facing a Holocaust, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Advisory Council on European Jewish Affairs and European Representative Committees, minutes of meeting, 17 October 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Aryeh Kubovy to the ambassador of Czechoslovakia to Washington, 17 October 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Aryeh Kubovy to Yitzhak Gruenbaum, 16 October 1944, A127/1855-39, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. War Refugee Board, document dated 25 October 1944, A127/1855-32, cza. See also the letter from Kubovy to Gruenbaum regarding mobilization of the Polish underground, 16 October 1944, A127/1855-39, cza. Although the present article addresses the struggle surrounding Auschwitz in the American arena rather than in Palestine, the focus on a ground operation in Gruenbaum’s papers is noteworthy: Yitzhak Gruenbaum, telegram to the Jewish Agency office in London, 30 May 1944, A127/1856-54; another telegram in the same spirit dated 19 June 1944, A127/1863-4; a request for preliminary consultations on the possibility of bombing Auschwitz, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, telegram to the Jewish Agency office in London, 23 June 1944, A127/1863-20, cza; an expression of support for the bombing of Auschwitz and the railway lines leading to it, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, telegram to the Jewish Agency office in Geneva, 1 September 1944, A127/1856-10, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Aryeh Kubovy to John McCloy, 9 August 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. The telegram from Switzerland was conveyed verbatim to the State Department, with no words of explanation or interpretation, telegram of 19 June 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. wjc Executive Committee, minutes of meeting, 6 October 1944, cza. For more in this spirit, see Ignacy Schwarzbart to the Polish prime minister in exile, 27 June 1944, C6/403, cza. The opposition by US Jewish groups to an aerial operation against Auschwitz is also mentioned in the minutes of a meeting that American Jewish Congress representatives held with Pehle and other high-ranking War Refugee Board officials on August 16, 1944. See the letter cited in Neufeld and Berenbaum, Bombing of Auschwitz, 274–275. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. wjc Executive Committee meeting, 20 October 1944, C6/403, cza. The meeting also considered alternative possible actions on behalf of Hungarian Jews, other than bombing, such as using the radio to appeal to gatekeepers at buildings in Budapest not to turn Jews over to authorities, and instead to help hide them; delivering a personal message of warning to Himmler; and appealing to the government of Ireland to help Hungarian Jewry. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. See Benjamin Akzin, memorandum, 29 June 1944, in the appendix to Neufeld and Berenbaum, The Bombing of Auschwitz, 258–259. See a second memorandum in the same spirit by Akzin, 2 September 1944, ibid., 275–276. For a discussion of these issues, see Martin Gilbert, “The Contemporary Case for the Feasibility of Bombing Auschwitz,” in Neufeld and Berenbaum, The Bombing of Auschwitz, 66–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Aryeh Kubovy, speech, Tel Aviv Cultural Center, in Aryeh Leon Kubovy, If I Forget Thee, Holocaust (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1967), 19 [Hebrew]. Similarly, “the calls for retaliatory action and for bombing the camps were met with the argument that such operations would require the diversion of significant Air Force power that is needed frontline hostilities.” Aryeh Kubovy, speech, closing ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Date, 9 May 1964, in Kubovy, If I Forget Thee, Holocaust, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Aryeh Kubovy, response to article, Davar, 21 February 1963, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Aryeh Tartakower, letter to the editor, Herut, no precise date (the newspaper was published during 1948–1965), C6/646, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. The description of the WJC’s activities during 1944 in the following survey, for example, contains no mention of opposition to an airstrike against Auschwitz: Yitzhak Schwarzbart, 25 Years in the Service of the Jewish People: A Survey of the Activities of the World Jewish Congress, August 1932–February 1957 (New York: World Jewish Congress 1957), 15–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. The documents of the War Refugee Board have been studied extensively, especially as regards the issue of bombing Auschwitz, and another examination of these papers would not alter the picture that has emerged here. The appendix to Neufeld and Berenbaum, The Bombing of Auschwitz, 240–280, reproduces many documents from the wrb archives. Regarding efforts to urge the Polish underground to take action against Auschwitz, see Leon Kubovy to John W. Pehle, 29 August 1944, Records of the War Refugee Board, 1944–1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Series 1, Box 35, Document 164. For a compilation of information on documents relating to Kubowitzki in the wrb archives, see ibid., Series 9, Box 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Regarding the wrb, including examples of wjc leaders’ involvement in its establishment, see Rebecca Erbelding, Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America’s Efforts the Save the Jews of Europe (New York: Doubleday, 2018), 25–32. For a fascinating account of wjc rescue activists’ tremendous efforts to secure the necessary permission from American administration officials to transfer funds to occupied Europe, see, for example, Tartakower’s report on a meeting with Captain Foulis of the Office of Economic Warfare, August 2, 1943, B1/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Erbelding, Rescue Board, 289–294. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. See, for example, the report on a meeting, and the subsequent agreement, at the American Embassy in Lisbon attended by delegates of the wrb, wjc, and jdc (the Joint), 13 July 1944, 361, H296/4, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Nahum Goldmann, remarks, minutes of Atlantic City Conference, 26–30 November 1944 (no precise date), A67/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See, for example, a summary of the wjc rescue efforts for 1940–1944, submitted by Leon Kubovy to the wjc, Atlantic City, 26 November 1944, A68/2, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Olivier Zunz, Philanthropy in America: A History (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. In addition to previously referenced documentation of Kubovy’s efforts to urge action against the Auschwitz death camp, see the letters from Kubovy and Tartakower to the icrc delegate to the United States, 10 December 1943, C6/400, cza. Regarding the meeting with the Pope, see the letter of invitation and summary of the meeting in his journal, 20 September 1945, C6/400, cza. See also the compilation of telegrams to ambassadors, papal representatives, and members of the British parliament regarding the rescue of Hungarian Jewry, 25 October 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Minutes of meeting between the Pope and Kubovy, 21 May 1945, C6/400, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. An overview of the manifold studies on Pope Pius xii would be beyond the scope of this book. See, for example, David Bankier, Dan Michman, and Yael Nidam Orvieto eds., Pius XII and the Holocaust (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, The International Institute for Holocaust Research, 2012). For an extensive discussion of Kubovy’s meeting with Pius xii and the issue of Jewish children in the convents, see Michael R. Marrus, “The Vatican and the Custody of Jewish Child Survivors after the Holocaust,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 21, no. 3 (2007): 378–403. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. See the following documents among Kubovy’s papers: letter to Jacques Maritain, future French ambassador to the Vatican, 8 June 1944, C6/400, cza; appeals to the ambassadors of Spain, Ireland, and Switzerland, 16 October 1944, C6/400, cza; letter to the papal delegate to the US, 21 November 1944; memorandum to the papal delegate to the US, 16 December 1944, C6/400, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. See Claude Lanzmann’s documentary film, Le rapport Karski. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Yehuda Bauer, Jews for Sale? Nazi -Jewish Negotiations (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Aryeh Kubovy, notes on meeting with Jan Karski, 19 September 1943, C6/399, cza. The scholarship on Karski is too extensive to present here. See his own book, Jan Karski, Story of a Secret State (Boston: Houghton, 1944). Interestingly, Kubovy’s description of his meeting with Karski was completely devoid of any critique of the Polish underground and government-in-exile for their conduct vis-à-vis Poland’s Jews. He did, however, voice criticism regarding the non-bombing of Auschwitz. For a critical analysis of Karski’s mission and the policies of the Polish government-in-exile and underground with respect to Polish Jewry during the Holocaust, see David Engle, “Jan Karski’s Mission to the West,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 5, no. 4 (1990): 363–380. The record of Kubovy’s meeting with Karski was just one of many documents in his files about the developments in Europe. Of particular interest are documents that reinforce and clarify what we know about the Riegner telegram; see Kubovy’s summary of his meeting with Riegner, in which Riegner describes the telegram incident, 16 September 1945, C6/404, cza; see also the letter from the US consul in Geneva regarding the refusal to convey the telegram to Wise in New York, Paul C. Squire to Gerhart Riegner, 24 August 1942, C6/399, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Aryeh Kubovy to Stephen Wise, 4 December 1942, C6/399, cza. A similar impression emerges from remarks Tartakower made during an interview in the 1970s, when he stated that in his assessment Polish immigrants to the United States did more during the 1940s on behalf of East European Jews than others in the American arena. See interview with Tartakower, no precise date, C6/646, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Aryeh Kubovy to Stephen Wise, 3 December 1942, C6/399, cza (emphasis in the original). [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Aryeh Kubovy, notes on meeting at the office of Stephen Wise, 10 April 1943, C6/399, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Aryeh Kubovy, journal entry, 30 October 1943, C6/399, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. See Stephen Wise to Henry Monsky, 15 February 1943, Bʾnai Bʾrith Organization Collection, cmrh/1, aja. The files of Bʾnai Bʾrith remained inaccessible to researchers for many years. During the writing of this book, these files were transferred to aja, where the tremendous work of classification undertaken by the archives’ staff has made this vast body of documents accessible to researchers. A discussion of Wise’s efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust would stray from the scope of this study. For an examination of Wise’s conduct during the Holocaust, see Segev, The World Jewish Congress, 23–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. See the press release on the conference, November 1944, no precise date, A68/4, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Aryeh Kubovy, speech, Atlantic City Conference, November 1944, no precise date, C6/402, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Minutes of the Atlantic City Conference, 26–30 November 1944, A3/67, 361, aja. Other conference delegates asserted that responsibility for the terrible loss also lies with the wjc as a whole, especially its leadership. See the remarks by an additional Polish delegate, ibid., A5/67. In contrast, Nahum Goldmann, one of the most prominent wjc leaders in the US, spoke out in defense of the leadership. He expressed understanding for the anger and rage but emphasized the differences between political activity by the wjc leadership, including his and Wise’s efforts, and the activity of rank-and-file wjc members. He noted, “Certainly it is easier for them to let their feelings come forward here since they are not in a political activity [sic]. It is easier for them to indulge themselves by releasing their emotions than for Dr. Wise, the Presidium or me.” See Nahum Goldmann, remarks, minutes of the Atlantic City Conference, 26–30 November 1944, A3/67, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Aryeh Kubovy, Zionist Review, 12 January 1945, C6/404, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. The “Bergson Boys” were a group of Revisionist Zionist activists who operated in the US during the 1940s under the leadership of Hillel Kook, whose assumed name – Peter Bergson – was the source of the group’s moniker. Using extra-institutional means and clashing fiercely with the American Jewish establishment and the Jewish leadership in the United States, they waged an intensive public campaign calling for the rescue of European Jews, the creation of a Jewish army to fight Nazi Germany, and the establishment of a Jewish state. Historians are divided as to the significance of the group’s contribution to Jewish and Zionist activity in the US during the 1940s. See, for example, Noam Monty Penkower, “In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys,” American Jewish History 70, no. 3 (1981): 281–309. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Aryeh Tartakower, “Political Efforts for the Cause of Poland’s Jews Taken on American Soil during World War II,” undated, C6/646, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Aryeh Kubovy, meeting of the Yad Vashem management, 23 June 159, in Kubovy, If I Forget Thee, Holocaust, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Aryeh Kubovy, transcript of radio broadcast on Kol Yisrael, 4 May 1959, in Kubovy, If I Forget Thee, Holocaust, 17, 18. For expressions of similar sentiments, see Aryeh Kubovy, speech, Tel Aviv Cultural Center, in ibid., 19. In 1959, at a meeting of the Yad Vashem management, Kubovy stated that “research on the Jewish People’s response has been completely neglected, and in this area too the number of living Jews is steadily decreasing. Shall we all be deemed guilty in the eyes of history?” Aryeh Kubovy, remarks, Yad Vashem management meeting, 23 June 1959, in ibid., 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Aryeh Kubovy, closing ceremony for Holocaust Remembrance Day, n. p., 9 May 1964, in Kubovy, If I Forget Thee, Holocaust, 39–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Benjamin Akzin, Proposal for a Consititution for the State of Israel (Tel Aviv: Bnei Brit Order, 1965) [Hebrew]; Benjamin Akzin, ‘The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel’. In The Jubilee Book for Pinchas Rosen, Haim Cohen, ed., (Jerusalem: The Publishing House of the Student Union of the Hebrew University, 1962) [Hebrew]; Dror Yehezkel, “Bnjamin Akzin: A Tribite,” Israel Law Review 13, no. 2 (1978): 129–137. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Akzin, From Riga to Jerusalem, 347–350. The discrepancy between this position as defined and as implemented may be attributable to its political importance and consequently to concerns about placing someone identified with the Revisionist movement at the forefront of Zionist activities in Washington. The chapter explores this issue in greater depth. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. On the Emergency Council, see Doreen Bierbrier, “The American Zionist Emergency Council: An Analysis of a Pressure Group,” American Jewish Historical Quarterly 60, no. 1 (1970): 82–105. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. For a rich source of information about Akzin, see his autobiography, From Riga to Jerusalem, 254–354. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Hillel Kook was known in the United States by the pseudonym Peter Bergson. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. See Isadore Breslau, acting director of the Zionist Organization of America, memorandum regarding a conversation with Brandeis, 15 September 1940, P-501/1, American Jewish Historical Society Archives (“Breslaw memorandum”). [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. The phrase “to some extent” suggests that even on international issues, the Jewish Agency did not have absolute authority and that its decisions were subject to review by US Zionists – a pattern that became increasingly evident towards the end of the memorandum. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Ibid., para. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Ibid., para. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Ben-Gurion to Wise, 15 January 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, limited collections from abroad, from the American Jewish Historical Society Archives. For additional examples of the intense struggle between Ben-Gurion and the American Zionist leadership over Ben-Gurion’s right to engage independently in political activity in the United States, see Ben-Gurion’s Diary, 10 January 1941, 6 January 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Ben-Gurion noted that the information was published in the Jewish Chronicle Standard. See Ben-Gurion to Wise, 15 January 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. The reference to “malicious rumors” was emphasized. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Ibid. The information about opposition to his efforts among Hadassah leaders was particularly troubling given the organization’s power and the close political ties that had formed between Ben-Gurion and some of the leaders. See Ben-Gurion, Mapai Central Committee, minutes of meeting, 19 February 1941, Labor Party Archives, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Ben-Gurion to Nahum Goldmann in London, Ben-Gurion’s Diary, 20 January 1939, Ben-Gurion Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Ben-Gurion’s Diary, 21 December 1941, Ben-Gurion Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Emergency Council, minutes of meeting, 29 December 1941, 5/1, 203 aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Bierbrier, Emergency Council, 84, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Goldmann’s departure to Palestine during this period provides further evidence that he was not managing the office in practice. See Emanuel Neumann to Jacob Richman, 20 September 1944, A123/304, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Jewish Agency Executive, minutes of meeting, 29 October 1944, Z6/2755, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Akzin to Wise, 29 May 1945, A401/13, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. The meeting took place in March 1935 in Boston. Akzin participated and took detailed minutes, which were published in Jewish Observer and Middle East Review, 4 November 1966, A401/3, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Ben-Gurion, report to Jewish Agency Executive, 16 February 1941, S-100, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. In 1939 Ben-Gurion spent nineteen days in the United States as a prelude to a much longer visit, from October 1940 to January 1941. Then, after an absence of about ten months, Ben-Gurion returned to the United States for an even longer stretch of time, from late November 1941 through mid-September 1942. Prior to these prolonged visits to the United States beginning in the late 1930s, Ben-Gurion had stayed in the United States during World War i, one of the most important periods in his life and in his political development. For a comprehensive discussion of Ben-Gurion’s visits to the United States and the role of the United States in his political plans, see Zohar Segev, From Ethnic Politicians to National Leaders: American Zionist Leadership, the Holocaust and the Establishment of Israel (Sede Boqer: Ben-Gurion Research Institute, 2007), 1–6 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. See, for example, Henry L. Feingold, A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. On US Jews’ choice of Zionism as a core element of their ethnic identity in the context of the Holocaust, see Jonathan D. Sarna, American Judaism, A History (New Haven: Yale University 2004), 263–264. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. See Zvi Ganin, Truman, American Jewry and Israel, 1945–1948 (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979). On his opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state as part of the post-World War ii order, see Michael J. Cohen, Truman and Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. For more on this topic, see Haim Genizi, America’s Fair Share: The Admission and Resettlement of Displaced Persons, 1945–1952 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993); Mel Schiff, “President Truman and the Jewish DPs, 1945–46: The Untold Story,” American Jewish History 99, no. 4 (2015): 327–325. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. See the following correspondence: Wise to Akzin, 20 May 1946, A243/41, cza; Wise to Sumner Welles, 20 May 1946, A243/201, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Akzin to Harry Shapiro, American Zionist Emergency Council, 20 March 1946, A123/432, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. See Mary M. Stolberg, Fighting Organized Crime, Politics, Justice and the Legacy of Thomas E. Dewey (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 262–263. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Regarding this meeting, see Akzin to Shapiro, 14 March 1946, A123/432, cza. McGrath pointed out that similar measures could be employed among Democratic candidates to the House of Representatives. In this case the American Zionist movement would have to work with several Democratic candidates who would need to approach the president as a unified group. The impact of such a move would be very significant because the struggle for control of the House of Representatives was, in his view, the main issue of the 1946 elections. During their conversation, Akzin raised the possibility of McGrath running for Senate in the upcoming elections, and indeed, McGrath ran and was elected as a Democratic senator from Rhode Island. In the future he would also serve as head of the Democratic National Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Information about this meeting also appears in a letter from Akzin to Shapiro, 20 March 1946, A123/432, cza. Senator Brewster, a high-ranking Republican Party member, was also a former governor of Maine and member of the House of Representatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. A discussion of this issue appears in Zohar Segev, Struggle for Cooperation and Integration, 819–830. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. The book was published in 1947. Bartley Crum, Behind the Silken Curtain: A Personal Account of Anglo-American Diplomacy in Palestine and the Middle East (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947). [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Akzin to Shapiro, 29 March 1946, A243/41, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Benjamin Akzin, report, 15 January 1947, A123/345, cza. Crum’s close ties with the Zionist movement were again evident when he approached Clark McAdams Clifford, Truman’s advisor, to suggest that he consult with Silver, as leader of the Zionist movement in the US, regarding the appointment of Henderson’s replacement as Director of Near Eastern Affairs. The significance of an appointee who enjoyed Silver’s support is self-evident. See Crum to Clark Clifford, 16 July 1948, 1/848, Silver Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. For further information, see Crum to Silver, 6 September 1946, 2/368, Silver Archives. See also a report on Henderson’s attacks against Crum, Silver Archives 2/391. Henderson’s attacks were probably a response to Crum’s public campaign against State Department policy generally and its Near Eastern division specifically. See the short article about a lecture by Bartley Crum in this spirit, written by the foreign news editor of the New York Times, 22 August 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Akzin to Silver, 29 September 1948, Silver Archives, 1/167. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Regarding Silver’s leadership, see for example James G. Heller “More on Abba Hillel Silver,” American Jewish Archives 2 (1968): 128. On ethnic groups in the American political system, see, Goldberg, Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups, 1–13. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. A notable example of ethnic political activity that did not make use of the Jewish vote was the campaign by US Jews on behalf of Soviet Jewry. See Henry L. Feingold, “Silent No More”: Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish Effort, 1967–1989 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007). Pinhas Medding has described a new model of Jewish politics in the United States that operates on the basis of power within the American political system. See Peter Y. Medding, “Segmented Ethnicity and the New Jewish Politics,” Studies in Contemporary Jewry 3 (1987): 26–48. On US Jews’ involvement in the civil rights movement, see Diner, The Jews of the United States, 265–274. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. A survey of the vast literature on ethnic groups, including Jewish groups specifically, in American politics is beyond the scope of this study. On the voting patterns of Jews in support of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, see Henry L. Feingold, “From Equality to Liberty: The Changing Political Culture of American Jews,” in The Americanization of the Jews, ed. Robert M. Selter and Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 114–116. For a general discussion of voting patterns, including ethnic voting patterns in the United States, see Angus Campbell, The American Voter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Ira N. Forman, “The Politics of Minority Consciousness: The Historical Voting Behavior of American Jews,” Jews in American Politics, ed., Sandy L. Maisel (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 141–160. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Leon Uris, Exodus (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958). Matthew Mark Silver, Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization Of Israel’s Founding Story (Detroit: Wyne State University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. The account of the Exodus incident draws on Aviva Halamish’s important book, The Exodus Affair, Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 15–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Silver to Secretary of State Marshall, 30 July 1947, K14/155, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Silver mentioned the names Bernard Marks (Ohio), Arthur Ritzer (New York), and Cyril Weinstein (New York), as well as William Milman (Massachusetts), the crewmember deported by the British. There is some lack of clarity surrounding the names of the American crewmembers. State Department documents produced different sets of names, presumably as a consequence of communication problems and the challenges of conveying information. See, for example, the letter from the acting director of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs to Silver, 6 August 1947, K14/155, cza. What is notable for the purposes of the present discussion is how the fate of American citizens was used as a political resource, rather than the accuracy of the information about their names. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Silver to Secretary of State Marshall, 30 July 1947, K14/155, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Acting Director of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs to Silver, 6 August 1947, K14/155, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Akzin to Acting Director of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs, 12 August 1947, K14/155, cza. Later John Stanley Grauel wrote directly to the State Department, stressing two points: First, American citizens aboard the Exodus had witnessed the circumstances surrounding the killing of an American citizen. Second, it was through his efforts that information about the condition of American citizens involved in the Exodus affair reached the consulate in Jerusalem, because the British had prevented these American citizens from contacting the consulate. This assertion contradicts the State Department’s claims. See John Stanley Grauel to Acting Director of the Division Near Eastern Affairs, 13 August 1947, K14/155, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Akzin to Assistant Legal Advisor of the State Department, 3 September 1947, K14/155, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Akzin to Assistant Legal Advisor of the State Department, 3 October 1947, K14/155, cza. See additional correspondence with the State Department: Akzin to Acting Director of the Divsiion of Near Eastern Affairs, 3 September 1947; the State Department’s response, 10 September 1947; and Akzin to the Assistant Legal Advisor, 27 October 1947,
K14/155, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Emanuel Neumann, untitled article, New Palestine, 16 December 1947, Silver Archives, 1/886. In early July 1947 Neumann was elected to succeed Silver as president of the Zionist Organization of America. Neumann’s decision to lead the Zionist Organization in the United States, when it was clear that a Jewish state would emerge, indicates that he believed that American Zionists would continue to play a key role even after statehood. Neumann’s appointment sparked a fierce barrage of accusations that he was working against state institutions. This propaganda sheds light on another angle of the division between Neumann and Silver, on the one hand, and Ben-Gurion, on the other, regarding the standing of US Zionists after the emergence of a state. See Charles Rosenblum to Neumann, 10 December 1948, A243/44, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Akzin to Silver, 13 September 1948, 1/267, Silver Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Akzin, “Prelude to the Jewish State,” 1 December 1948, A401/37, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Akzin, “Lord Melchett Speaks on Problems of Anglo-Jewish Relations,” 23 January 1936, A401/37, cza. Interestingly, while contemporaries and historians have charged that Wise’s loyalty to President Roosevelt compromised his commitment to Zionism, Akzin did not raise similar accusations although he was critical of Wise in other areas. See, for example, Akzin to Wise, 29 May 1945, A401/13, cza. In his autobiography, Akzin voiced criticism of Wise’s attitude towards Jabotinsky, but not in the context of the former’s relations with Roosevelt. Akzin, From Riga to Jerusalem, 348–349. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Benjamin Akzin, “America’s Role in Israel’s Independence,” 1949 (no precise date), A401/36, cza. For a discussion of the significance of US Jews’ political efforts within the American arena on behalf of Jewish statehood, see Zohar Segev, “Myth and Reality, Denial and Concealment: American Zionist Leadership and the Jewish Vote in the 1940s,” Israel Affairs 20, no. 3 (2014): 347–369. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Akzin, “International Law and the Jewish Question,” answer, 15 July 1944, A401/36, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Akzin’s remarks indicate that he was referring solely to Jewish communities in Europe and North America, and not to Jewish communities in the Islamic world and South America. At the time, American Jewish organizations lacked information about Jewish communities in the Islamic world, and it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that they began to engage actively with these communities. The dearth of information about Jewish communities in North Africa is evident in preparatory discussions regarding the exhibition on European Jewry. See the minutes of a staff meeting in preparation for the exhibition, 1 March 1944, C89/2, 361, aja. For further discussion, see Nadia Malinovich, “The American Friends of the Alliance Israelite Universelle: A Study in American-Jewish Interethnic relations, 1947–2004,” American Jewish History 98, no. 4 (2014): 315–349. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Akzin, “Organization and Politics of the Jewish Community,” 3 December 1944, in The Jews: An Encyclopedia in One Volume, World Encyclopedia Institute, A401/37, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Benjamin Akzin, The Principles of International Politics (Jerusalem: Academon, 1984), 154–156 [Hebrew]. The contemporary discourse on relations between emigrants and their country of origin is far more complex and places emphasis on the many benefits of this relationship for the motherland as well as its involvement in emigrant communities. See, for example, Ioanna latiotou, Transatlantic Subject, Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism between Greece and America (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Benjamin Akzin, Nations and States (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1980), 80–81 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Ibid., 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Akzin to wfuna president, 27 July 1971, A401/26, cza. Akzin’s interaction with a UN-affiliated organization and his general support for the organization is interesting from another perspective, stemming from his time in the United States. Support for the United Nations and international associations affiliated with it was very widespread among the American Jewish community after World War ii. Akzin was presumably exposed to this worldview, and it had an impact on his future political activity in Israel. On Akzin’s support for the United Nations, see his letter to the Nobel Peace Prize committee advocating, in his capacity as president of the Israeli United Nations Association and a proponent of its goals, that the prize be granted to the wfuna, 28 July 1968, A401/23, cza. On American Jewish support for the UN, see Segev, The World Jewish Congress, 208–209. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Benjamin Akzin, The Political Status of Diaspora Jewry (Jerusalem: Shazar Library, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, 1966), 20–22 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Ibid., 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Benjamin Akzin, “The Likud Government and Diaspora Jewry,” Gesher – A Quarterly for Questions on the Life of the Nation 23 no. 3–4 (1977): 118–119 (emphasis in the original) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Ibid., 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Akzin, though aware of the tension between Ben-Gurion and Silver, never claimed that the latter supported or had close ties with the revisionist movement. See, for example, Akzin, From Riga to Jerusalem, 347–353. Akzin objected to the act of terror that took place in Palestine during the late 1940s. See his article in the Hadassah newsletter, October 1946, A401/37, cza. According to Silver he personally supported Zionist nationalism along the lines of Weizmann’s thinking – namely, that the construction of Jewish nationhood should not take place at others’ expense. Abba Hillel Silver, lecture in honor of Weizmann’s birthday, New York (no precise location), 10 June 1942, 4-2382, Weizmann Archives. Weizmann regarded Silver as a partner in the struggle against anti-British terrorism. Weizmann to Silver, 18 October 1944, 17-2525, Weizmann Archives. Weizmann to Silver, 8 November 1944, 10-2530, Weizmann Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Letter from the Secretary of the Progressive Party to Akzin regarding his membership, 18 April 1951, Akzin papers, Jabotinsky Institute. Letter from the Progressive Party executive committee to Akzin regarding his admission to the committee, 15 March 1959, ibid.
A memorandum of principles drafted by Akzin in preparation for meeting with journalists reveals that he had not ruled out the possibility of seeking election as a Knesset member on behalf of the Progressive Party. See his handwritten manuscript of September 1959 (no precise date), ibid. (The collection of Akzin’s papers located at the Jabotinsky Institute has not been categorized. The above references therefore provide a description of the document, its date, and the name of the collection.) [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Egle Bendikaite and Dirk Roland Haupt, “Jacob Robinson: Elements of His Curriculum Vita and Aspects Exemplifying His Continued Relevance in Our Times,” in The Life, Times and Work of Jacob Robinson, ed., Egle Bendikaite and Dirk Roland Haupt (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2015), 39–66. For a wealth of biographical information, see the introductory chapter to the Jacob Robinson Collection, file 0.65, Yad Vashem Archives. For further information, see Avraham Tory, “In Memory of the Missing: Dr. Jacob Robinson, RIP,” HaPraklit [The Advocate]32 (1978):125–126 [Hebrew]; Avraham Tory, “Dr. Jacob Robinson,” in The Contribution of Jews from Lithuania to the Construction of the Land and State of Israel, ed., Avraham Tory (Tel Aviv: Association of Academics from Lithuania, 1988), 43–54 [Hebrew]; “Robinson, Jacob Ben-David,” in Lithuanian Jewry, vol. 3, book 1 – Personalities, eds., Natan Goren et al. (Tel Aviv: Am Hasefer, 1966–1967), 231 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Jacob Robinson, Oscar Karbach, Max M. Laserson, Nehemiah Robinson, and Marc Vichniak, Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure? (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1943). [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Mark A. Lewis, “The World Jewish Congress and the Institute of Jewish Affairs at Nuremberg: Ideas, Strategies, and Political Goals, 1942–1946,” Yad Vashem Studies 2008 (36): 181–210. Robinson was extremely critical of the Jewish Agency’s efforts in relation to the Nuremberg Trials. See, for example, Robinson’s secret report to the team at the Institute of Jewish Affairs engaged in the Nuremberg Trials, 6 December 1945, C14/16, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. See Loeffler’s important, in-depth discussion of Robinson’s efforts in these areas at the UN. James Loeffler, Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 147–151. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. See the wjc press release following Robinson’s appointment as advisor to the UN human rights commission in 1947. wjc press release, 1947 (no precise date), C14/26, 361, aja. See also Loeffler, Rooted Cosmopolitans, 178–179. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Jacob Robinson, Congress Weekly, 21 February 1941, C86/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Although the American Jewish Committee had its own research institute, it only collected data on the American Jewish community. David Rosenstein, “The Conference on Jewish Relations: An Appraisal by a Participant,” Jewish Social Studies 17, no. 3 (1955): 239–241. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Jacob Robinson, confidential memorandum about the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 29 April 1939, A9/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Jacob Robinson, Congress Weekly, 21 February 1941, C86/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Anthony Smith has described the importance of national symbols and representations and images of the nation, which infuse the spread of nationalism with concrete, tangible effects. Anthony D. Smith, The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 52–76. Tartakower emphasized the “national character” of the Institute. See Aryeh Tartakower, unpublished draft manuscript of a book on the wjc, undated, C6/352, cza (page 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Jacob Robinson, Work Plan for the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1941 (no precise date), A5/3, 361, aja. See also Institute of Jewish Affairs, founding document (delineating positions and departments), 1941 (no precise date), C68/1, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Jacob Robinson, Work Plan for the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1941 (no precise date), A5/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Jacob Robinson, memorandum in response to Louis Lipsky’s assertion that their identification as a group is a sufficient condition for the inclusion of Jews in the post-World War ii world order, 3 August 1943, B95/8, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Minutes of meeting, Wise, Goldmann, and Welles, 17 February 1941, D16/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Jacob Robinson, Work Plan for the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1941 (no precise date), A5/3, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Jacob Robinson to Stephen Wise, 25 June 1947, Jacob Robinson Collection, Record 0.65, file 37 (hereinafter 0.65/37), Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. A summary of the vast information that reached the wjc offices in New York from Europe is beyond the scope of this book. For an in-depth discussion, see Zohar Segev, “What Did the World Jewish Congress Know about the Fate of European Jewry at the End of 1942? Sources and Interpretations,” in The End of 1942: A Turning Point in World War II and in the Comprehension of the Final Solution, ed., Dina Porat and Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017), 339–360. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Jacob Robinson, summary of activities of the Institute of Jewish Affairs during the 1940s, December 1946 (no precise date), A5/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Jacob Robinson to Stephen Wise, 25 June 1947, 0.65/37, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Jacob Robinson, summary of activities of the Institute of Jewish Affairs during the 1940s, December 1946 (no precise date), A5/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Jacob Robinson to Salo Baron, 14 October 1946, 0.65/37, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Robert Liberles, Salo Wittmayer Baron, Architect of Jewish History (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 266–282, 322–337. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. The term “catastrophe” was customarily used in the United States and Britain to describe the fate of the Jews during World War ii. See David Cesarani, “The Appearance of the Term ‘Holocaust’ as a Cultural Concept in Israel and the Diaspora after World War II,” Israel 9 (2006): 65–86. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Jacob Robinson to Salo Baron, 14 October 1946, 0.65/37, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. See the minutes of the following meetings of the Institute of Jewish Affairs under Robinson’s directorship: 28 March 1943, 24 September 1943, 12 October 1943, C68/6,
361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. For information on judicial measures in Allied states, see the minutes of an undisclosed meeting at Kubovy’s home, 5 January 1944, C68/6, 361, aja. For another discussion of this issue, see the minutes of the second meeting of the WJC’s War Crimes Committee, 28 March 1944, C68/6, 361, aja. For a comprehensive study on the international preparations for the Nuremberg trials, see Ariel J. Kochavi, Prelude to Nuremberg: Allied War Crimes Policy and the Question of Punishment (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina, 1998). On the resistance to inclusion of wjc delegates in the United Nations War Crimes Commission, see ibid., 150–151. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Institute of Jewish Affairs, minutes of staff meeting, 20 December 1944, C68/6, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Notable in this context is the discussion presented in Hasia Diner’s book, where she observes that Israel’s wish to maintain exclusive control over the design of Holocaust museums and memorial centers was one of the reasons for the delayed construction of such centers in the United States. Hasia R. Diner, We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962 (New York and London: nyu Press, 2009), 24–44. Domestic factors also contributed to this delay. See Rochelle Saidel, Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics behind New York City’s Holocaust Museum (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Institute of Jewish Affairs, minutes of staff meeting, 13 March 1944, C98/2, 361, aja. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. For a comprehensive discussion of this issue with attention to its complexity and the prominent studies in the field, see Lawrence Baron, “The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945–1960,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 17, no. 1 (2003): 62–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History (Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, US: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 205–278. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Robinson made these remarks in response to criticism leveled against him following the Eichmann trial, 11 November 1965, 0.65/38, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Preparatory meeting for an international convention titled “A Conference on the History of the Jewish Catastrophe,” 1964 (no precise date), 0.65/76, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. The conference, which took place on April 7–9, 1968 marked the first international gathering convened by Yad Vashem under the heading “Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust.” The term used in Hebrew, amida, translates as “stance” or “steadfastness.” Boaz Cohen, Israeli Holocaust Research: Birth and Evolution (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 208–225. Robinson also took a clear stance in support of enhancing research at Yad Vashem in his statement to the evaluation committee appointed in 1964 to examine future directions for the museum. Ibid., 165–179. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Robinson’s attempt to broaden the scope of Holocaust research reflects a more extensive and ongoing debate on this issue. For an in-depth discussion, see David Engel, Facing the Volcano: Historians of the Jews in the Holocaust (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2009), 206–257 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Institute of Jewish Affairs, minutes of staff meetings in preparation for the Chronology of Jewish History under Nazi Impact, no precise date, 0.65/4, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. See Jacob Robinson and Philip Friedman, eds., Guide to Jewish History under Nazi Impact (New York: Yad Vashem and yivo, 1960). In this context, see also Jacob Robinson and Yehuda Bauer, eds., Guide to Unpublished Materials of the Holocaust Period (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1970); Jacob Robinson, ed., The Holocaust and After: Sources and Literature in English (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973); Jacob Robinson, ed., Holocaust: The Nuremberg Evidence (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and yivo, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. The book was published in several editions. See, for example, Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. On the difficulties Hilberg faced trying to have his book published, and its rejection by Yad Vashem, see Engel, Facing the Volcano, 157–161. In 2012 Yad Vashem published a Hebrew edition of the book: Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, ed. David Bankier and Bella Gutterman (Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion Institute for the Study of Zionism, Yad Vashem, and the International Institute for Holocaust Research, 2012) [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Engel, Facing the Volcano, 158–183. For positive observations of Hilberg’s work by Robinson, see ibid., 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Nahum Goldmann to Jacob Robinson, 6 June 1960, 0.65/59, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Hanna Yablonka, The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. On the Kastner affair, see Ways Yehiʾam, “Was Israel Kastner a Hero? Israel Kastner and the Problematics of Rescuing Hungarian Jewry during the Holocaust,” Studies in Jewish Civilization 6 (1995): 269–277. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. On Ben-Gurion in the context of the Eichmann trial, see Michael Keren, “Ben-Gurion’s Theory of Sovereignty: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann,” in David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel, ed., Ronald W. Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 38–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. The summary of the Eichmann trial presented here is based on Yablonka, Eichmann, 3–29. For more on the trial and its repercussions, see Richard J. Golsan and Sarah M. Misemer, eds., The Trial That Never Ends: “Eichmann in Jerusalem” in Retrospect (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Jacob Robinson, “Eichmann and the Question of Jurisdiction,” Commentary 30 (1960): 1–6. The magazine Commentary, founded by the American Jewish Committee, was focused on the key issues surrounding the post-Holocaust world generally, and in the Jewish context specifically. During the 1960s, under the leadership of Norman Podhoretz, the magazine came to represent a neo-conservative worldview. For further information, see John Ehrman, “Commentary, the Public Interest, and the Problem of Jewish Conservatism,” American Jewish history 87, no. 2 (1999): 159–181. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. All references to Robinson’s arguments are based on Robinson, “Eichmann and the Question of Jurisdiction.” [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Jacob Robinson to Minister of Justice Pinchas Rosen, classified as highly confidential, 6 November 1960, 0.65/75, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Amin al-Husseini, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and a supporter of the Nazi regime. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Jacob Robinson to Minister of Justice Pinchas Rosen, classified as highly confidential, 6 November 1960, 0.65/75, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. See Salo Baron, testimony at the Eichmann trial, in Ministry of Justice of the State of Israel, The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Notes of the Attorney General for the State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann, vol. i (Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 2003), 143–162 [Hebrew]. Official English translations of the Eichmann trial transcripts are available at The Nizkor Project, “The Trial of Adolf Eichmann,” <http://www.nizkor.com/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Gideon Hausner to Jacob Robinson, 21 January 1961, 0.65/41, Yad Vashem Archives. See also Consul General of Israel, New York, official invitation to Professor Baron to testify at the Eichmann trial, 7 February 1961, 0.65/41, Yad Vashem Archives. Regarding other potential “historian witnesses” for the Eichmann trial, and additional critics of Baron’s testimony who emphasized the same points as Robinson, see, for example, Yablonka, Eichmann, 100–106. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Jacob Robinson to the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General regarding Baron’s testimony, 14 May 1961, 0.65/41, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Ibid. His reference was probably to a sermon by Rabbi Kalman Shapira of Piaseczno on the weekly Torah portion of Chukat, delivered on June 20, 1942, before his followers at the Warsaw Ghetto. The sermon included words of encouragement interspersed with strong religious doubts. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. For studies that support the inclusion of historians in judicial proceedings, while recognizing and understanding the inherent difficulties and challenges, see Rebecca Gidlel and Matthew Turner, “Judicializing History: Mass Crimes Trials and the Historian as Expert Witness in West Germany, Cambodia and Bangladesh,” Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal 12, no. 3 (2018): 52–67; Eric Harberer, “History and Justice: Paradigms of the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 19, no. 3 (2005): 487–519. For an argument opposing the inclusion of historians in judicial processes, see Henry Rousso, The Haunting Past: History, Memory and Justice in Contemporary France (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See also Lawrence Douglas, The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Baron, testimony at the Eichmann trial, 161 [Hebrew], available in English at The Nizkor Project, “The Trial of Adolf Eichmann – District Court Sessions, vol. I,” [http://nizkor.com/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-013-02.html](http://www.nizkor.com/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/). See examples of critical comments about Baron’s testimony by the judges, at ibid., 145, 146, 150, 153, 154 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. All quotes from Jacob Robinson to the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General regarding Baron’s testimony, 14 May 1961, 0.65/41, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. On Robinson’s historical works, see Robert Liebereles, “Salo Baron as a Jewish Historian,” Zion 55, no. 3 (1990): 333–340 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Salo Baron to Jacob Robinson, 6 July 1962, 0.65/41, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: *A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Harmondsworth, 1963). Jacob Robinson, And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative (New York: Macmillan, 1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Ibid., 240–241. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Ibid., 114–115. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Ibid., 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Ibid., 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Robinson, And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Ibid., 60–100. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Jacob Robinson to Minister of Justice Pinchas Rosen, classified as highly confidential, 6 November 1960, 0.65/75, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Robinson, And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight, 58–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. In this context, see Robinson’s responses to American press reviews of his book, 24 October 1965, 12 September 1965, 11 November 1965, 0.65/38, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Jacob Robinson to Minister of Justice Pinchas Rosen, classified as highly confidential, 6 November 1960, 0.65/75, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. On Robinson’s objection to criticism of the Zionist leadership during the Holocaust, see his exchange of letters with Professor Henry Feingold, an American Jewish historian. Jacob Robinson to Henry Feingold, 20 October 1969; Henry Feingold to Jacob Robinson, 28 October 1969, 0.65/39, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Jacob Robinson, “On the Jewish Catastrophe – Where Does It Stand Today?,” Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies 1 (1965): 15–20. Regarding the Eichmann trail, the American Jewry, and the status of Diaspora Jews see, Francoise S. Ouzan, “The Eichmann Trail and American Jewry: A Reassessment”, Jewish Political Studies Review 19, 1/2 (2007): 25–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Robinson’s efforts to secure the status of Jewish refugees are evident in his reports to the Foreign Ministry regarding his own activities to promote the Refugee Convention and general developments related to the Convention. See Jacob Robinson, Mission of Israel to the UN in Geneva, reports to the Foreign Ministry of Israel dated 23 January 1950, 30 January 1950, 6 February 1950, 21 February 1950, file Het Tzadi-18/4, Israel State Archives (the Israeli Military Censor refused to grant access to additional files that were requested for the purposes of examining this issue). For a discussion of the differences of opinion between Robinson and relevant officials in the Israeli government regarding the Refugee Convention, see Rotem Giladi, “A ‘Historical Commitment’? Identity and Ideology in Israel’s Attitude to the Refugee Convention, 1951–1954,” The International History Review 22, no. 3 (2015): 745–767. For the source of the quote, see Jacob Robinson, Palestine and the United Nations: Prelude to Solution (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1947), 103. For an in-depth discussion about the obligation to include non-governmental organizations in the activities of the United Nations, see ibid., 88–105. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. See Robinson’s response to critical reviews of his book in New York Herald Tribune, 24 October 1965, 0.65/4, Yad Vashem Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. The same writing style also characterizes Robinson’s criticism of Baron’s testimony at the Eichmann trial. He produced a detailed document that painstakingly examined Baron’s testimony and meticulously listed what he regarded as mistakes. This style of writing makes it very difficult to identify the central themes of Robinson’s critique beyond the specific historical inaccuracies he names, important as they may be. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. See Robinson’s response to critical reviews of his book in New York Review of Books, 11 November 1965, 0.65/4. For an additional response in the same spirit, see ibid., 12 October 1965. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. A review of the extensive scholarship on Arendt would exceed the scope of the present study. See, for example, Elisabeth Young-Brueh, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Akzin, From Riga to Jerusalem, 348. For further evidence of contact among the book’s four protagonists, see World Jewish Congress, minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 20 April 1944, C6/403, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Aryeh Tartakower, “Political Action on Behalf of Poland’s Jews on American Soil during World War II,” undated, C6/646, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. See Susanne Lachenicht, Kirsten Heinsohn, eds., Diaspora Identities: Exile, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Past and Present (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2009), 7–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Regarding Ben-Gurion’s activities in the contexts discussed here, see the previous chapter, pages 37–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Rogers Brubaker, Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57–67. For another discussion of various types of diaspora nationalism, see Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and Misconception in the Study of Nationalism,” in The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism, ed., John A. Hall (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272–306. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Myra A. Waterbury, “Bridging the Divide: Towards a Comparative Framework for Understanding Kin State and Migrant-Sending State Diaspora Politics,” in Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concept, Theories and Methods, eds., Rainer Baubock and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 131–148. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. For a discussion of this issue as it relates to the Greek diaspora in the United States, see Latiotou, Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism between Greece and America, 71–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. This situation was particularly evident in relation to Jewish organizations in the United States and in light of the assessment that they could influence the voting patterns of the Jewish public. On the importance of Jewish votes for the Democratic Party, from the presidential election of 1944 onward, see the letter from Bartley Crum, a lawyer close to President Truman and one of the American members of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, to Robert Hannegan, a leading Democrat, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and President Truman’s right-hand man. The letter comprised part of a prolonged discussion between the two concerning the administration’s policy on the Palestine question and the effect of this policy in the American arena. Bartly Crum to Robert Hannegan, 1 October 1946, Z5/ 1154, cza. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. See Gabriel Sheffer, Diaspora Politics at Home Abroad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Diner, The Jews of the United States, 205–258. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)