

## Introduction

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This study sets out to examine the initial responses of Holocaust survivors to the tragedy that overtook them. It focuses on the history of *She'erith Hapleitah* – the Surviving Remnant – in the American Zone of Occupied Germany which, despite its inherent limitations as a group in transit, rose to temporary prominence in the immediate post-war years. While the term *She'erith Hapleitah* refers to all surviving Jews in Europe, it designates most particularly those who converged on Germany between 1945 and 1949.

As the impending defeat of Nazi Germany grew closer and the hope of possible liberation more tangible, the thoughts of the concentration camp inmates in Germany increasingly turned to the fate of those who would be lucky enough to survive. It is in this context that the term *She'erith Hapleitah*, the biblical concept of the saved or surviving remnant, comes to describe those who would survive to see the Allied victory. Apparently the first recorded reference to *She'erith Hapleitah* appears in the Channukah 5705 (November–December 1944) number of *Nitzotz* (The Spark), the underground organ of the *Irgun Brith Zion* in the Kovno Ghetto, which began to appear in Kaufering, a sub-camp of Dachau, to which the last remnants of the Ghetto had been deported five months earlier. In the five extant issues of the paper (two were lost) the term *She'erith Hapleitah* is freely used to describe those who would hopefully survive, suggesting that it was already an integral part of shared language in Kaufering even before *Nitzotz* was reissued. In certain cases the term refers to survivors throughout Europe and in others is restricted to those who would remain alive in Bavaria; sometimes the focus was on physical survival but at other times it was bound up with both personal survival and the rebirth of Jewish life in Palestine, a task for which they, “the generation of the desert,” needed to steel themselves.<sup>1</sup> With liberation this multivalent notion of *She'erith Hapleitah* gained immediate acceptance and wide

<sup>1</sup> See “D’var hamifkada” (A word from headquarters), *Nitzotz*, no.3(38) (Channukah 5705 – November 1944): 1.

currency. Indeed, when the young American chaplain, Rabbi Abraham Klausner, found himself in Dachau towards the end of May 1945 and began to help the liberated in their desperate search for family, the first in a number of volumes containing the names of thousands of survivors in Bavaria was entitled *Shearit Hapletah*.<sup>2</sup> From 1943 the leadership of Palestinian Jewry also, quite independently, began to refer to those who would hopefully survive as *Sh'erith Hapleimah*.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest mention of the term appears in Genesis 32:9 when Jacob, who was greatly distressed about his imminent reunion with Esau after so many years of estrangement, divided his people and property into two camps saying: "If Esau come to the one camp and smite it, then the camp [*hanish'ar lifleimah*] which is left shall escape." Already this enunciates in a preliminary way the themes of danger, destruction and the survival of a remnant that carries the promise of the future. The redemptive theme becomes central to Isaiah's usage as can be seen in his prophecy to Hizqiyahu regarding Sanheriv, King of Ashur: "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Yehuda shall yet again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards. For out of Jerusalem shall go [*She'erith Upleimah*] a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Ziyon" (Second Book of Kings 19:30–31). In First Chronicles 4:43 "And they smote the remnant of Amalek who had escaped [*She'erith Hapleimah le-Amalek*]" the term, as it attached to survivors of the Holocaust, appears in a quantitative, almost technical usage. A slightly different version but with the same connotation – *She'erith Yisrael* – the Remnant of Israel appears in Jeremiah 31:7 and from there found its way into the Verses of Supplication in the Daily Prayer Book.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust the term, in its broadest construction, connoted the saved remnant, that is to say, all European Jews who survived the Nazi onslaught including the hundreds of thousands of Polish, Baltic and Russian Jews deported to the interior of the Soviet Union for political reasons or as part of Stalin's "scorched earth" policy. In a more limited sense *She'erith Hapleimah* referred to the collective identity of some 300,000 displaced persons in Occupied Germany, Austria and Italy who turned their backs on their former lives and actively sought to leave Europe for Palestine and many other destinations. Having escaped the unavoidable constraints of rebuilding their former lives and now living temporarily under American protection in a land they despised, it

<sup>2</sup> See Alex Grobman, *Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry* (Detroit, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Dalia Ofer, "The Leadership of the Yishuv and She'erit Hapletah," in Yisrael Gutman and Adina Drechsler, eds., *She'erit Hapletah 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle* (Jerusalem, 1990): 306–310.

was primarily these survivors who publicly identified themselves as the Surviving Remnant. For some of the leaders of this unique community driven by a sense of historical responsibility, *She'erith Hapleitah* was also viewed as the saving remnant who were called upon to play a formative role in shaping the Jewish future. In the words of Samuel Gringauz, one of their prominent leaders:

The Sherit Hapleta sees as its task to symbolize the Jewish national tragedy zzz this task is viewed zzz as one laid upon it by destiny and history regardless of the strength of its bearers zzz The Sherit Hapleta must demonstrate to all Jews everywhere their involvement in a common fate zzz Jewish unity for them is no political program but an actual and living fact of experience. This is why they feel themselves prophets of a national rebirth zzz and of being the backbone of its realization zzz For international Zionism the Sherit Hapleta is an argument, a strength, a reserve zzz Without the situation of the DP's as a basis of appeal, American Jewry could not be mobilized so effectively for the upbuilding of Palestine, nor could the Jews of other lands be nationally awakened and united. Thus the Sherit Hapleta feels today that it is the dynamic force of the Jewish future.<sup>4</sup>

The discussion opens towards the end of 1944 as the Second World War is entering its final stages and in the concentration camps of Germany, the inmates take their first steps towards preparing for liberation. The narrative draws to a close in early 1947 when *She'erith Hapleitah* is well established and the major institutions that will accompany it to its dissolution in 1948–1949 are firmly in place. It has not been our intention, furthermore, to write a comprehensive history of this brief, albeit pregnant moment in history. We wish to focus on the internal history of a unique community that had abandoned its past and was yet to find its future. Much of what has been written to date looks at *She'erith Hapleitah* through the eyes of others and thus has often failed to disclose their richly complex inner life. Our concern is with this dynamic community of survivors itself, its people, movements, ideas, institutions and self-understanding, how it grappled with the unbearable weight of the past, the strains of the present and the shape of a different future. *She'erith Hapleitah* as subjects rather than as objects of history is what we seek to uncover.

Thus, a good few months before the war was over the seeds of survivor organization were germinating in Buchenwald, in the numerous satellite camps of Dachau and elsewhere. On the morrow of liberation of the camps in April–May 1945 we already witness a flurry of activity amongst the survivors that naturally focused on the pressing problems of

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Gringauz, "Jewish Destiny as the DP's See It," *Commentary*, vol. 4, no. 6 (December 1947): 501.

food, health, shelter, clothing, the search for family and a safe future but which, over the next few months, rapidly elaborated itself into a network of representative and camp councils, political movements, newspapers, youth groups, children's homes and schools, vocational training and a wide range of cultural pursuits. Amidst this remarkable effort at self-rehabilitation in the most unpromising of circumstances, we also find the first sustained public attempt to grapple with both the implications of the Shoah and some of the major questions of post-Holocaust Jewish life: who would lead the Jewish world with the demise of European Jewry? How would Jewish life and faith change in the aftermath? How should the Jewish people relate to those that turned on them or that stood by in their hour of need? How should they relate to the civilization that for so many Jews held out the promise of a more humane future? In a profound sense *She'erith Hapleitah* served as a formative bridge between the Holocaust and what was to come after.

Despite its importance and some early attention, the inner history of *She'erith Hapleitah* has suffered neglect and, until recently, was almost a forgotten history. In 1947 comprehensive reports were published by Leo Srole,<sup>5</sup> the social welfare officer of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in the Landsberg camp, by Koppel Pinson<sup>6</sup> the well-known historian who directed the Education Department of the Joint Distribution Committee in Germany and by Chaim Hoffman (Yachil)<sup>7</sup> who headed the Palestinian Delegation to Occupied Germany. In 1953 Leo Schwarz who served as director of the JDC in Germany from 1946 to 1947 published the first and to date the only full-scale history of *She'erith Hapleitah* in Germany.<sup>8</sup> It appears that initially only those who worked with the survivors in Germany saw the broader historical implications of their personal engagement.

Over the next twenty years very little was written on the subject and it was in 1970, twenty-five years after the liberation of the camps, that the picture begins to change: Zemach Zemarion who himself served with *She'erith Hapleitah* in Occupied Germany published his survey of survivor newspapers as an expression of their most pressing concerns<sup>9</sup> while Yehuda Bauer published his study on the *Brichah*, the illegal or semi-legal

<sup>5</sup> Leo Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait: Proposing an International Plan of Rescue," *Commentary*, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 1947): 13–24.

<sup>6</sup> Koppel S. Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's," *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 9 (April 1947): 101–126.

<sup>7</sup> Chaim Yachil (Hoffman), "Peulot ha-mishlachot ha-eretzt yisraelit le-she'erith hapleitah, 1945–1949" (Report of the Palestinian Delegation to *She'erith Hapleitah*, 1945–1949), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 30 (November 1980): 7–40, and no. 31 (April 1981): 133–176.

<sup>8</sup> Leo W. Schwarz, *The Redeemers: A Saga of the Years 1945–1952* (New York, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Zemach Zemarion, *Ha-itonut shel She'erith hapleitah ke-bitui le-ba'ayoteha* (The press of *She'erith Hapleitah* as an expression of its problems) (Tel Aviv, 1970).

movement of some 250,000 Jews from Eastern Europe primarily to the American Zones of Occupied Germany and Austria.<sup>10</sup> Bauer concluded that from mid-1944 to October 1945, when the first Palestinian emissaries were integrated into this clandestine activity, the *Brichah*, which quietly received financial help from the JDC, was entirely the initiative and work of survivors. This went against the grain of conventional wisdom and, in some quarters, is still looked at skeptically despite additional research that has confirmed Bauer's conclusions.<sup>11</sup> In a parallel study Bauer suggested that in the larger scheme of things this movement was also of critical importance in the creation of the State of Israel, a theme that will be addressed below.<sup>12</sup>

How, then, does one account for this seeming neglect when rich archival material was readily available to historians in both Israel and abroad? First, it was perhaps to be expected that the brief moment of *She'erith Hapleitah* on the stage of history would be overshadowed by the devastation of the Holocaust on the one hand and the revolutionary promise of Jewish statehood on the other. In addition the widespread sense, both secular and religious, that the move from Holocaust to Rebirth was ineluctable, almost preordained, meant that the stormy and uncertain progression of events from May 1945 to May of 1948 was lost from view. If what happened was inevitable, there was scant need to trace the detailed unfolding of events while carefully assessing the concrete contributions of those involved. This lack of attention to detail was reinforced in Israel by the widespread, close to axiomatic assumption that the underground fighting forces had pushed out the British and, in their military victory over the Arabs, achieved statehood.

If it became apparent that statehood was not a direct outcome of the Holocaust and that, in fact, the destruction of the human hinterland of the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe almost precluded the achievement of Jewish sovereignty, this might open the way to new interpretations of the move from Holocaust to Homeland. And, indeed, this is what has happened. A series of new studies tracing the interrelationship of British, American and Zionist diplomacy in the aftermath of the Second World

<sup>10</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> Shlomo Kless, *Bederech lo slulah: toldot habrichah 1944–1948* (On the unpaved road: a history of the *Brichah* 1944–1948) (Kibbutz Dalia, 1994); in this regard see also David Engel, *Bein shichrur le-brichah: nitzolei ha-shoah be-polin ve-ha-maavak al hanhagatam, 1944–1946* (Between liberation and flight: Holocaust survivors in Poland and the struggle for leadership, 1944–1946), (Tel Aviv, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Yehuda Bauer, "The Holocaust and the Struggle of the Yishuv as Factors in the Creation of the State of Israel," in *Holocaust and Rebirth: A Symposium* (Jerusalem, 1974), and "From the Holocaust to the State of Israel," in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2001).

War rendered the compelling story of the phoenix rising from the ashes somewhat suspect and suggested in its stead a story of turbulent ups and downs with no certain outcome.<sup>13</sup> Some historians of Zionism have gone so far as to suggest that Jewish statehood was achieved at the last moment in a political constellation that, in point of fact, did not favor the success of the Zionist endeavor. In his conclusion to *A History of Zionism* Walter Laqueur argues that: "The Jewish state came into being at the very time when Zionism had lost its erstwhile *raison d'être*: to provide an answer to the plight of east European Jewry. The United Nations decision of November 1947 was in all probability the last opportunity for the Zionist movement to achieve a breakthrough."<sup>14</sup>

Historians of the period, nonetheless, were slow to revise their estimate of the minor role allotted to *She'erith Hapleitah* itself in these developments. Part of the explanation might lie in the focus of these studies which unthinkingly cast the survivors into a subsidiary role of supplicants: their basic necessities were supplied by the US Army, their camps were administered by UNRRA, they were supported by the Joint, inspired by soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, guided politically by the Palestinian Delegation, led over the Alps and transported to Palestine by the *Mossad Le-Aliyah Bet* and their political fate was ultimately determined by the domestic pressure of American Jewry and the creation of the State of Israel. While this description is not without truth it does tend, without ill intent, to cast *She'erith Hapleitah* into a supine role and deprives them of a will of their own.

This image of passivity was rendered more plausible, moreover, by a pervasive stereotype that portrayed survivors as broken and helpless, ground to dust by unspeakable torture, a view that began to circulate

<sup>13</sup> See Amitzur Ilan, *America, britania ve-eretz yisrael: reishitah ve-hitpatchutah shel me'uravut artzot ha-brit be-mediniyut ha-britit be'eretz yisrael, 1938-1947* (America, Britain and Palestine: the beginning and development of the involvement of the United States in British policy in Palestine, 1938-1947) (Jerusalem, 1979); Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry and Israel* (New York, 1979); Shmuel Dothan, *Ha-maavak al eretz yisrael* (The Struggle for Palestine) (Tel Aviv, 1981); Michael J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers 1945-1948* (Princeton, 1981); Yosef Heller, *Be-maavak la-medinah: ha-mediniyut ha-ziyonit be-shanim 1936-1948* (In the struggle for statehood: Zionist policy in the years 1936-1948) (Jerusalem, 1984); Yoav Gelber, *Toldot ha-hitnadvut III: nosei ha-degel - shlichutam shel ha-mitnadvim la'am ha-yehudi* (A history of voluntary service III: the standard bearers - the mission of the volunteers to the Jewish people) (Jerusalem, 1983); David Sha'ari, *Geirush kafrisim 1946-1949: ha'apalah, ha-machanot ve-chevrat ha-ma'apilim* (Deportation to Cyprus 1946-1949: clandestine immigration, the camps and the social bonding of the illegal immigrants) (Jerusalem, 1981); Ze'ev (Venia) Hadari and Ze'ev Tzachor, *Oniyot o medinah: korot oniyot ma'apilim ha-gedolot "pan york" ve-"pan crescent"* (Ships or state: a history of the large "illegal" immigrant ships the "Pan York" and the "Pan Crescent") (Tel Aviv, no date); Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York, 1972): 594-595.

in the Yishuv (pre-state Palestinian Jewry) even before the war ended,<sup>15</sup> and that gained wider currency with the first photographs and newsreels of the liberation of the camps: suddenly the “walking skeletons” and “helpless heap of human wreckage”<sup>16</sup> were there for all to see. These images which were repeatedly used by Jewish fundraisers and in the Zionist campaign against British policies in Palestine became fixed in the public mind. The stereotype, in addition, was secretly fed by a dark account of survival which assumed that the virtuous went under while the less worthy survived. After all, even the survivors themselves spoke of a process of “negative selection.”<sup>17</sup> These expressions of survivor guilt were often taken at face-value without any sustained attempt to uncover their deeper meaning. Interestingly enough, even when Elie Wiesel, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Terrence Des Pres<sup>18</sup> succeeded in transforming “the survivor” into a culture hero in an age of mass death, it did not translate into a new understanding of *She'erith Hapleimah*. Their collective enterprise recorded primarily in Yiddish and bearing the profound stamp of East European Jewish life remained a closed book for most. Indeed, even as perceptive an historian as Tom Segev has little appreciation for how the people of *She'erith Hapleimah* organized themselves, fought for recognition and struggled to master their fate. From beginning to end he portrays them as little more than clay in the hands of Zionist envoys quite lacking a face of their own.<sup>19</sup>

Over the last decade or so this picture has begun to change and a slow but steady flow of studies have contributed richly to the brief but remarkably complex history of *She'erith Hapleimah*. In 1985 Yad Vashem devoted its International Historical Conference to the rehabilitation and political struggle of *She'erith Hapleimah*;<sup>20</sup> Juliane Wetzel and Angelika Königseder have written on Jewish life in Munich and Berlin respectively in addition to a general account of Jewish DPs in the aftermath of the war,<sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Giere and Ada Schein have written on education and culture

<sup>15</sup> Yechiam Weitz, “Ha-yishuv ve-she'erith hapleimah: 1944–1945” (The Yishuv and *She'erith Hapleimah*: 1944–1945), Master's Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 1981): 8, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Leo W. Schwarz, “The DP's: Fiction and Fact,” *American Zionist*, vol. 43, no.15 (June 1953): 16–17.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Shmuel Gringauz, “In tsaykhn fun martirertum hofnung un arbet” (Under the sign of martyrdom hope and work), *LLT*, no. 2 (14) (18 January 1946): 1.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After* (New York, 1972); Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York, 1963); Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York, 1976).

<sup>19</sup> Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Gutman and Drechsler, eds., *She'erit Hapleimah 1944–1948*.

<sup>21</sup> Juliane Wetzel, *Jüdisches Leben in München 1945–1951: Durchgangsstation oder Wiederaufbau?* (Munich, 1987); Angelika Königseder, *Flucht nach Berlin: Jüdische Displaced Persons 1945–1948* (Berlin, 1998); Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Lebensmut in Wartesaal: Die jüdischen DPs im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Frankfurt a.M., 1994).

in the DP camps in Germany,<sup>22</sup> Saul Touster has edited a survivors' Haggadah,<sup>23</sup> Yehudit Tidor Baumel has published her study of *Kibbutz Buchenwald*,<sup>24</sup> Yosef Grodzinski has written a critical left-leaning history of *She'erith Hapleitah*,<sup>25</sup> Joanne Reilly and Chagit Lavski researched the liberation of Belsen and Jewish DPs in the British Zone,<sup>26</sup> Irit Keynan has studied the work of Palestinian emissaries in Germany,<sup>27</sup> Nachum Bogner and Dalia Ofer have examined the Cyprus detainees,<sup>28</sup> Idith Zertal has published a wide-ranging study of Jewish illegal immigration,<sup>29</sup> Hanna Yablonka has traced the absorption and integration of survivors into Israeli society,<sup>30</sup> Yehuda Bauer has continued his research on the JDC with a study of the impact of American Jews on post-Holocaust European Jewry,<sup>31</sup> Haim Genizi has written up the history of the office of the Special Adviser on Jewish Affairs to the American Army,<sup>32</sup> *Yalkut Moreshet* devoted a special volume to *She'erith Hapleitah* and the establishment of the State of Israel,<sup>33</sup> while Aryeh Kochavi, Mark Wyman, Wolfgang Jacobmeyer and Michael Marrus have written about European

<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Giere, 'Wir sind unterwegs, aber nicht in der Wüste': *Erziehung und Kultur in den jüdischen Displaced-Lagern der Amerikanischen Zone im Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945–1949* (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), see also, "We're on Our Way, but We're not in the Wilderness," in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed and the Reexamined* (Bloomington, 1998): 699–715; Ada Schein, *Homeless Persons as Partners in the Zionist Enterprise: Survivors in German and Austrian Displaced Persons Camps and the Jewish National Fund* (Jerusalem, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Saul Touster, ed., *A Survivors' Haggadah* (Philadelphia, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Yehudit Tidor Baumel, *Kibbutz Buchenwald* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Yosef Grodzinski, *Chomer enoshi tov: yehudim mul tziyonim, 1945–1951* (Good human material: Jews versus Zionists, 1945–1951) (Tel Aviv, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London, 1999); Chagit Lavski, "The Day After: Bergen-Belsen from Concentration Camp to the Center of Jewish Survivors in Germany," *German History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1993): 36–59.

<sup>27</sup> Irit Keynan, *Lo nirga ha-ra'av: nitzolei ha-shoah ve-shlichei erez yisrael: germaniyah 1945–1948* (And the hunger was not stanchd: Holocaust survivors and the emissaries from Eretz Yisrael: Germany 1945–1948) (Tel Aviv 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Nachum Bogner, *I ha-geirush: machanot ha-ma'apilim be-kafrisin, 1946–1948* (The island of deportation: Jewish illegal immigrant camps in Cyprus, 1946–1948) (Tel Aviv, 1991); Dalia Ofer, "Holocaust Survivors as Immigrants: The Case of Israel and the Cyprus Detainees," *Modern Judaism*, 16 vol. (February 1996): 1–23, and "From Illegal Immigrants to New Immigrants: The Cyprus Detainees 1946–1949," in Berenbaum and Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History*: 733–749.

<sup>29</sup> Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Hanna Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War* (London, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Haim Genizi, *Yoetz u-mekim: ha-yoetz la-tzava ha-amerikani u-le-she'erith hapleitah 1945–1949* (The Adviser to the American Army and *She'erith Hapleitah* 1945–1949) (Tel Aviv, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> "She'erith hapleitah vehakamat hamedinah: leyovel medinat yisrael" (*She'erith Hapleitah* and the establishment of the State of Israel), *Yalkut Moreshet*, no. 65 (April 1998).

refugees in general and displaced persons in particular.<sup>34</sup> While much work remains to be done especially with respect to the internal history of the Jewish DPs in Occupied Germany, a body of research is now available that will help us better to tell and interpret the story of *She'erith Hapleitah*.

One of our guiding goals, therefore, has been to uncover and understand a small but significant chapter of contemporary history. This was also the task that Leo Schwarz set himself some forty-six years ago. He entitled his work *The Redeemers*<sup>35</sup> in order to underscore his reading of *She'erith Hapleitah* as the "saving remnant" that, as part of its own return to life, contributed richly to both Jewish life in general and the creation of the State of Israel in particular. His commitment to *She'erith Hapleitah* together with his dramatic Thucydidean reconstruction of historic occasions, conversations and speeches led Schwarz to a measure of romanticization that historians today find somewhat unsettling. Ironically, the people of *She'erith Hapleitah* themselves were far more open and critical about their own failings and, in truth, their achievements are best understood against the background of the persistent problems they had to overcome. Today, a half a century later with a plethora of rich materials in ready reach it is perhaps easier for the historian to achieve a more balanced perspective. Nonetheless, Schwarz's assessment a decade after publishing his book still rings true: "no matter how objective you attempted to maintain yourself, there was an unconscious identification with the people. You took their side even if you knew they were wrong. And this influenced zzz a great deal."<sup>36</sup>

The question of how to strike the right balance in the portrayal of *She'erith Hapleitah* persists. Like all those who approach this topic sympathetically, I have faced the same temptation and, I am sure, have unthinkingly succumbed to it more often than not. After all, these were ordinary folk who had lived through experiences that beggar description. In most cases they had lost everyone and everything, they were condemned to a protracted stay in grim conditions in the land of their oppressors, they were cast into a debilitating dependence on others and lived in perpetual

<sup>34</sup> Arieh J. Kochavi, *Akurim ve-politika beinleumit: britanya ve-ha-akurim ha-yehudim le-achar milchemet ha-olam ha-shniyah* (Displaced Persons and international politics: Britain and the Jewish Displaced Persons after the Second World War) (Tel Aviv, 1992); Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca, 1998); Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer: Displaced Persons in Westdeutschland 1945-1951* (Göttingen, 1985); Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1985).

<sup>35</sup> Schwarz, *The Redeemers*.

<sup>36</sup> Leo W. Schwarz, Interview, the Oral History Department of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 7(4) 3.

uncertainty about the future. Yet, despite their many failings that were all too human, they, by and large, held fast, they got on with their lives to the degree that circumstances allowed, they married, had children and prepared for the future. Most importantly, they did not surrender, as a rule, to the deformities of suffering and somehow managed to preserve their humanity intact. This is the story we seek to tell.