

International Jewish Humanitarianism in the Age of the Great War

In 1914, seven million Jews across Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean were caught in the crossfire of warring empires in a disaster of stupendous, unprecedented proportions. In response, American Jews developed a new model of humanitarian relief for their suffering brethren abroad, wandering into American foreign policy as they navigated a wartime political landscape. The effort continued into peacetime, touching every interwar Jewish community in these troubled regions through long-term refugee, child welfare, public health, and poverty alleviation projects. Against the backdrop of war, revolution, and reconstruction, this is the story of American Jews who went abroad in solidarity to rescue and rebuild Jewish lives in Jewish homelands. As they constructed a new form of humanitarianism and redrew the map of modern philanthropy, they rebuilt the Jewish Diaspora itself in the image of the modern social welfare state.

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Preface

When I began this research, I was seeking to discover what Jewish international politics looked like under the Minorities Treaties regime after the First World War. My archival research took me from Geneva to New York, Jerusalem, Washington, London, and Cincinnati. In governmental and privately held archives, I read papers in English, French, and Yiddish, though I frequently came across documents in Russian, German, and Hebrew. No researcher who is serious about transnational perspectives can content herself with a narrow archival approach, but as a historian facing Jewish archives, this problem is compounded. There are historic and ongoing questions about who and what creates and owns Jewish cultural production – the modern states presiding over places once populated by Jews, descendants of the creators, privately owned Jewish archival centers, or the State of Israel. Particularly after the targeted destruction and unmooring of this property in World War II, followed by the founding of Israel, a Jewish historian must traverse layers, or centuries, of geographical, cultural, political, and linguistic complexity. One must, in effect, retrace the multiple identities and contexts in which every actor, his predecessors, and his legacy lived.¹

It is to sit in an unheated temporary building in Jerusalem over Christmas as wet snow falls outside, a room where rules and language change every day, depending on which archivist is in charge and whether they hail from (and catalog the papers of) French, Soviet, British, or MENA Jews. It is to greet security apparatuses placed at the door to deter antisemitism on one day, to look out over a placid Lake Geneva ringed with Alps on another; to sit in a bland cubicle at the offices of the Joint Distribution Committee with a microfilm reader posing as a computer the next, and to search for Jews and a reading spot in the immense holdings of the US National Archives. It is to struggle to learn a language known only in diaspora, whose accessible speakers are mostly over ninety years old. It is to feel one's heart drop when acquaintances are murdered in Pittsburgh by a gunman blaming Hias, wondering if things have come full circle, and are coming for me. It is to weep with despair in a library

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upon realizing that the whole world under one's study was completely destroyed within the lifetimes of its actors.

I approached these archives with humility, curiosity, and skepticism. If I was impatient, the papers revealed their nuances very slowly. I let myself get lost in the archives, ordering boxes and reels of material, choosing folders based on a name, a place, or year, and reading carefully, taking notes I did not yet understand. I never read enough, wrenching myself from each collection. If my plans were to write chapters as I traveled from archive to archive, finding correspondence split into collections across the globe made this impossible. As time went on, I began to understand the conversations occurring over telegram, letter, and minute notes. I knew the characters, understood their motivations, and saw their connections. My task was now to impose a narrative structure. As I sat down to write, piecing together the fragments of conversations a century old, I derived new questions as I realized that no conversation before me had taken place in isolation; each belonged to larger historical currents, and I would have to learn about these, too.

Thank you to my closest mentors, Professors Davide Rodogno, Pierre-Yves Saunier, Abigail Green, and James Loeffler, for working with me and your invaluable guidance and support along the way. Thank you to my many other dedicated professors, teachers, and mentors who encouraged me or otherwise prepared me to undertake and finish this project. I mention Tobias Brinkmann, Alexandra Garbarini, Marshall Ganz, Julia Irwin, Mara Keire, Rebecca Kobrin, Lisa Leff, Eli Lederhendler, Stephen R. Porter, David Rechter, Amalia Ribí Forclaz, Eszter Szendroi, Balazs Szendroi, Stephen Tuffnell, and Steven Zipperstein in particular. To my peer humanists, especially Sam Baltimore, Mary Cox, Anca Cretu, Nathan Kurz, Alice Little, Anat Mooreville, Francesca Piana, Rachel Rothstein, and Britt Tevis: You have all been crucial in shaping my thought and keeping me running. Thank you to Michael Watson and my team at Cambridge University Press, to my editors Daniela Blei and Jess Farr-Cox, and to my anonymous reviewers.

My thanks go to Seth Flaxman, my parents, sister, in-laws, grandfathers z"l, so many friends, and Ruben, for providing an indefatigable support network and loving nudges. I hope my children will read this book when they are grown and acknowledge their teachers.

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I had wonderful librarians and archivists who helped me find my way and many hospitable people who played host nearby over years of research. Thank you; it has been a pleasure. Of particular note, I mention Yochai Ben-Ghedalia, Hadassah Assouline, and David Assouline at the CAHJP; Fruma Mohrer, Gunnar Berg, Leo Greenbaum, and Ettie Goldwasser at YIVO; Richard Peuser at NARA II; Susan Woodland at AJHS; Melanie Meyers, David Rosenberg, Zachary Loeb, Christopher Barthel, and Judith Siegel at the Center for Jewish History; Linda Levi, Shelley Helfand, Misha Mitsel, Jeffrey Edelstein, and Naomi Barth at the JDC; and Kevin Proffitt, Gary Zola, and Dana Herman at the AJA. Thank you, Tamar Amsterdamer and Aleksandra Jakubczak, for archival assistance.

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“The First American Organization in Soviet Russia: JDC and Relief in Ukraine, 1920–1923.” In *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism*. Edited by Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Linda Levi, and Maud S. Mandel, 61–93. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019.

Needless to say, this is hardly my work alone. I am humbled and awed by the significant investments in me made by my so many mentors, friends, and family, well beyond the aforementioned list. I do, however, take responsibility for any errors or faulty interpretations.

Terms, Acronyms, and Abbreviations

AEF	American Expeditionary Forces
AFSC	American Friends Service Committee, Quakers
Agro-Joint	The Joint Agricultural Corporation of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (in Russia)
AJRC	American Jewish Relief Committee
Alliance Israélite	Alliance Israélite Universelle
Allianz	Israelitische Allianz zu Wien
ARA	American Relief Administration
ARC	American Red Cross
AZMU/HMO	American Zionist Medical Unit, Hadassah Medical Organization
CENTOS	Federation of Orphan Welfare Organizations in Poland, Centrala Związku Towarzystw dla Opieki nad Żydowskimi Sierotami, Farband fun di Tsentrales far Yesoyimim-Farzorgung in Poyln
Central Relief chalutz(im)	Central Relief Committee Zionist pioneer(s)
CRB	Commission for Relief in Belgium
EKOPO	Evreiskii komitet pomoshchi zhertvam voiny, Central Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims
Emigdirect	joint migration organization of Ica, Hias, Werelief
Eurexco	Joint Distribution Committee's European Executive Council
Evobshchestkom	All Russian Jewish Public Committee, Jewish Social Committee for Relief among the Victims of Pogroms and Counterrevolution, Yidgeskom

Terms, Acronyms, and Abbreviations

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Hadassah	Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America
Haskalah	the Jewish enlightenment movement, whose partisans were known as maskilim, related to the European Enlightenment, but centrally concerned with Jews' status and relationship to Europe
HC (The)	High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen
Hias	Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society
Hicem	joint migration organization of Ica, Hias, Emigdirect
Hilfskomite	Jüdische Hilfskomite für Polen
Hilfsverein	Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden
HMO/AZMU	Hadassah Medical Organization, American Zionist Medical Unit
Ica	Jewish Colonisation Association, JCA, EKO
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IUSE	International Save the Children Union, l'Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants
JDC or Joint	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
JFC	(Con)Joint Foreign Committee of British Jews
kassa	also known as a credit cooperative or a loan and saving society
kehile	traditional, organized, corporate Jewish community in a given Eastern European locality
KKS	Central Credit Kassa(s)
landsmanshaft(n)	Jewish hometown association and mutual aid society
LCRS	League of Red Cross Societies
League	League of Nations
Nansen Action	Fridtjof Nansen's International Committee for Russian Relief
NCJW	National Council of Jewish Women
NER	Near East Relief, American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, American Committee for Relief in the Near East
NEP	New Economic Policy (Soviet Union)
OPE	Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, Obshchestvo dlia

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	rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhduevreami v Rossii
ORT	Society for Artisanal and Manual Labor, Organization for Rehabilitation of Jews through Training, Obshchestvo remeslennogo zemledel'cheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii
OZE/OSE	Obshchestvo Zdravookhraneniia Evreev, Society for the Preservation of the Health of the Jewish Population, Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants
PAKPD	Central Committee of Help to Children, Polish-American Children's Relief Committee
Pale	Pale of Settlement, the territories of the Russian Empire in which Jews were permitted to settle
PEC	Palestine Economic Corporation, Palestine Cooperative Company
People's Relief	People's Relief Committee
PZC	Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, Provisional Zionist Committee
RF	Rockefeller Foundation
shtetl(ekh)	small market town with a large Jewish population in the Pale
TOZ	Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce, The Society for the Protection of Health of the Jewish Population in Poland
Tsisho	Tsentrale Yidishe Shul Organizatsye, Central Jewish School Organization
Werelief	World Jewish Relief Conference, Carlsbad Committee, Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours, Yidisher Velt Hilf Konferents, Jüdische Welthilfskonferenz
Yiddish	vernacular language of most Jews in Eastern and Central Europe before World War II, a Germanic language written in the Hebrew alphabet
Yishuv	the Jewish community in Palestine
ZOA	Federation of American Zionists, Zionist Organization of America