



# WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on  
Resistance in Europe during  
World War II

Edited by

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# From a Zionist Dream to a Transnational Rescue Network for Jewish Children: Youth Aliyah, 1932/3-1945

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Jewish resistance against Nazism, antisemitism, persecution and the Shoah had many faces: Among the best-known examples is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. Less known is the participation of Jews in different resistance movements throughout Europe. They fought as national citizens and also in separate ranks, since resistance groups were not free of antisemitism.<sup>1</sup> Besides armed resistance, there were many forms of civic resistance, most notably active attempts to help and rescue fellow Jews.<sup>2</sup> Among the general public the rescue of Jews is mostly associated with non-Jews, such as Oskar Schindler, many of whom have been honoured as “Righteous among the Nations” by Yad Vashem.<sup>3</sup> Much less known is how Jews, whether individually, in groups or through networks and with varying degrees of support of non-Jews, actively organised their own survival and that of other Jews.<sup>4</sup>

One of these networks was Youth Aliyah, an educational left-wing Zionist movement created in 1933 in Germany by Recha Freier to offer Jewish youth from Germany a way of reestablishing their lives in Palestine.<sup>5</sup> During the second half of the 1930s, the organisation developed into a network of Jewish organisations in other European countries affected by antisemitism, under threat or already annexed by Nazi Germany. From 1939 on, Youth Aliyah became a rescue organisation for Jewish youth in which a number

1 See for Jewish resistance: Arno Lustiger: *Zum Kampf auf Leben und Tod! Das Buch vom Widerstand der Juden 1933–1945* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994).

2 See for example Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen and Gideon Botsch, eds., *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933–1945): Formen und Facetten* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 89–105.

3 See the website of Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, located in Israel. <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed 15 October 2023.

4 Some cases are for example dealt with in Schoeps et al., *Jüdischer Widerstand*.

5 Aliyah is a Hebrew term for immigration to then-Palestine and today to Israel, meaning ascent.

of European countries were involved, among them Great Britain, Denmark and Yugoslavia. With the support of other mainly Jewish organisations on the ground, Youth Aliyah organised the training and flight of young Jews to Palestine or transit countries. Youth Aliyah is an illustrative example of how Jewish resistance cannot be defined only as armed resistance in national or Jewish groups. In Jewish history, rescuing the young generation was always important to start anew after persecutions and massacres – Youth Aliyah is therefore defined in Jewish historiography as resistance.<sup>6</sup>

The Youth Aliyah network can be seen both as a national and transnational movement. It encompassed various political tendencies from socialist to religious and was active in various European countries and in Palestine, developing links that stretched beyond the European continent. The people involved in Youth Aliyah were not a homogenous group, but most of them saw no future in Europe for Jewish people and had one aim: the creation and upholding of a Jewish state in Palestine. At the same time, especially once the war began in 1939, they were divided about where to set the priorities, whether to focus on developing Jewish society in Palestine or the rescue of as many Jewish juveniles as possible.

### **Recha Freier: Youth Aliyah's creator**

Youth Aliyah is closely connected to the personality and biography of Recha Freier. She was born in 1892 in Norden in northern Germany. Her father, Menasse Schweitzer, was a rabbi and her mother Bertha was a teacher. Very early in her life, Freier was confronted with antisemitism. When she was five years old, the family was strolling through Norden when they saw a sign forbidding the entrance of Jews to a public park. Decades later, she wrote a poem on this antisemitic incident that had an enormous impact on her:

Earthquake: The city garden  
The golden lattice  
closed  
A large white cardboard sign  
A frame made of black paper

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6 Arno Lustiger, *Rettungswiderstand. Über die Judenretter in Europa während der NS-Zeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011).

Entry for dogs  
and Jews forbidden!<sup>7</sup>

After the family moved to Glogau, Freier transferred from a public school there to a private one in Breslau, because as the only Jewish pupil she had been repeatedly insulted by her teacher. In 1897, the family moved to Glogau in Silesia and after graduating high school in 1912, Freier studied philology, pedagogy and ethnography in Breslau and Munich. She earned money teaching German, French and English and also gave piano lessons. In 1919, she married Rabbi Moritz Freier (1889-1969), who she had met in Breslau. After living in Eschwege and in Sofia, Bulgaria, the family moved to Berlin in 1925, where Freier's husband was appointed as rabbi. Between 1920 and 1929, Freier gave birth to four children.<sup>8</sup>

Freier became a devoted Zionist through her childhood experiences and her exchange with Jewish communities beyond Germany: "That meant that I understood that the existence of the Jew, both the individual and the existence of the whole people, depends on one thing, that they must free themselves from slavery and from being tolerated ... To do that, they would have to go to Palestine."<sup>9</sup> Her deep bonds with Judaism and Zionism were reflected in the names of her children. When her first son was born, in 1920, she did not follow the usual custom of giving the child a German first name followed by a Hebrew name. Instead, the newborn was named Shalhevet (flame). The subsequent three children were named Ammud (pillar), Zerem (thunderstorm) and Maayan (source).

Following historian Hagit Lavsky, Freier belonged to the second generation of German Zionists, who experienced antisemitism from an early age and therefore were less convinced of a future in Germany and that

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7 Recha Freier, *Auf der Treppe* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1976), 62.

8 For more information on Recha Freier's life: Shalhevet Freier, "Alijath haNo'ar: Recha Freier und Testimonium", <https://www.hagalil.com/israel/deutschland/freier.htm>; Elizabeth Hudson, *Recha Freier and the Youth Aliyah, The Holocaust and European Mass Murder* (HGS 51, 20 October 2020), [https://www.academia.edu/46923582/Recha\\_Freier\\_and\\_the\\_Youth\\_Aliyah](https://www.academia.edu/46923582/Recha_Freier_and_the_Youth_Aliyah); Gudrun Maierhof, "Recha Freier – Zwischen Zionismus und Widerstand", in *Wege von Pädagoginnen vor und nach 1933*, eds. Inge Hansen-Schaberg and Christian Ritzi (Hohengehren: Schneider Verlag, 2004), 139-150.

9 Monika Ogorek, *Recha Freier – Die Gründung der Jugendaliya und das Portrait einer ungewöhnlichen Frau*, Radio Broadcast: Sender Freies Berlin, 1986, Typoscript, no page numbers.

assimilation was a means of securing that future.<sup>10</sup> The third generation, born after World War I, turned in significant numbers away from their parents' attitudes and joined Zionist organisations which developed significantly after 1933.<sup>11</sup>

The decisive moment that prompted Recha Freier to launch activities to help Jewish youth came in spring 1932.<sup>12</sup>

When in 1932 some young people came to me and told me that Jewish youth had been expelled from their workplaces only because they were Jews, I felt two things: on the one hand, there was this overwhelming sense of despair in the face of the young people who stood before me so helpless and lost, and on the other hand, there was a joyful inner voice that told me ... the dream began to become reality. I first founded an organisation to settle disadvantaged Jewish youth on the soil of Erez Israel ... I realised that the movement grew out of the experiences of my own past ...<sup>13</sup>

For Recha Freier, the incident was not connected to economic and social problems in the decaying Weimar Republic, but rather an antisemitic act. "With an almost uncanny sense of things to come, Recha Freier concluded – [...] before Hitler came to power – that there was no future for Jews in Germany. Against the wishes of their parents and the Jewish community, one of the most solidly anchored in the entire world, she began to organize what was to become Youth Aliyah" wrote her son decades later.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Hagit Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe: The Distinctive Path of German Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 27 f.

11 Jehuda Reinharz ed., *Dokumente zur Geschichte des deutschen Zionismus 1882-1933* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981); Stefan Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen: Der deutsche Zionismus im Feld des Nationalismus in Deutschland 1890-1933* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016).

12 See also the testimony of Nathan Höxter: Nathan Höxter, "70 Jahre Jugendalijah: Als Pionier in Palästina", interview by Iris Noah, 2003, <http://www.berlin-judentum.de/kultur/hoexter.htm>. Höxter recalls that for him, Recha seemed "like the prophetess Debroah".

13 Recha Freier, "Wurzeln schlagen: Die Gründung der Jugend-Alija und ihre ersten Jahre", in *Aus Kindern werden Briefe: Die Rettung jüdischer Kinder aus Nazi-Deutschland*, eds. Gudrun Maierhof, Chana Schütz and Hermann Simon (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2004), 268.

14 Freier, "Alijath haNo'ar".

## The first steps toward Youth Aliyah (1932)

When Freier developed her plans to bring young Jews from Germany to Palestine after spring 1932, she faced various obstacles: the Zionist movement preferred trained professionals to develop the Kibbutzim<sup>15</sup> and villages in Palestine. Representatives of the Jewish community declared that the homeland of German Jews was Germany. Parents hesitated to let their children leave. Moreover, they often insisted that antisemitism and the Nazis would eventually be overcome.<sup>16</sup> Nathan Höxter recalled: “Recha Freier had many difficulties in her struggle to organize Youth Aliyah, since many leaders of Jewish organizations in Germany were against her plans. In addition, Henrietta Szold, an American Jew who already lived in Palestine and was a member of the ‘Va’ad Leumi’,<sup>17</sup> also acted to scupper Freier’s plans. She thought it was inappropriate to send Jewish children from Germany to kibbutzim.”<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, Recha Freier organised her first Youth Aliya group in late 1932. She travelled back and forth between Berlin and Palestine to find the resources to bring her plans to fruition and started to seek out people who later would become her allies.<sup>19</sup> In Berlin, Freier met educator Siegfried Lehmann (1892-1958), director of the children’s village Ben Shemen. After Kibbutz Ein Harod withdrew its commitment to take in the first Youth Aliyah group, Lehmann approved Freier’s plans. As a next step, financial guarantees and certificates for entry to the British Mandate of Palestine had to be obtained. Ben Shemen also needed assurance that the children’s living expenses would be covered for two years.<sup>20</sup> Money came from the Zionist organisation in Königsberg, Wilfrid Israel (1899-1943), owner of a well-known department store in Berlin (Kaufhaus N. Israel) and an

15 A Kibbutz is a collective rural settlement with common ownership and grassroot-democratic structures.

16 Recha Freier, *Let the Children Come* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), 10-21; Freier, “Wurzeln schlagen”, 271-275.

17 Official representation of the Jewish citizens of Palestine.

18 Höxter, “70 Jahre Jugendalijah”.

19 For instance, she met Enzo Sereni: Ruth Bondy, *The Emissary: A Life of Enzo Sereni* (Boston: Little, 1977).

20 Beate Lehmann, “Die Jugend-Alija als Herausforderung für das Kinder- und Jugenddorf Ben Shemen”, in *Hachschara und Jugend-Alija. Wege jüdischer Jugend nach Palästina 1918-1941*, eds. Ulrike Pilarczyk, Ofer Asjenazi and Arne Hofmann (Gifhorn: Gemeinnützige Bildungs- und Kultur GmbH des Landkreises Gifhorn, 2020), 165-194, <https://doi.org/10.24355/dbbs.084-202104201055-0>.

acquaintance of Recha who sold her jewellery. Over the course of successive years, Wilfrid Israel provided the young pioneers with clothing, suitcases, backpacks, boots and other items, as many parents could not afford to buy them.<sup>21</sup> On 12 October 1932, the first group of seven boys from Berlin and five boys from Königsberg left the German capital.<sup>22</sup>

Members of all the various youth movements lined the platforms at Anhalter Bahnhof singing Hebrew songs. Many adults were there as well, and everyone present was excited. Wilfried Israel whispered to me: "This is a historic moment!" The platform seemed to tremble under my feet. Now the work had begun: No one could interfere with it anymore; it would progress and develop ... The children rejoiced as the train departed. The parents cried.<sup>23</sup>

On the organisational level, in late 1932, Freier founded first Jewish Youth Aid (*Jüdische Jugendhilfe*) in order to have a legal basis for her initiative and to act as a serious partner for other institutions. On 30 January 1933, when the NSDAP took power, Freier founded the Youth Aliyah Consortium (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendaliyah*) and the legal process was formally completed in May. In September 1933, Freier became a board member of Jewish Youth Aid, which came into being within the newly founded Reich Representation of German Jews (*Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden*).<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the American Jewish Congress, as one of the predecessor organisations of World Jewish Congress (established 1936), had approved the aims of Youth Aliyah. Within one year, Freier had built up an impressive organisational structure. Youth Aliyah was placed under the Department of Migration of the Reichsvertretung which included:

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21 Naomi Shepherd, *Wilfrid Israel* (Berlin: Siedler, 1985).

22 The Jewish Community in Königsberg agreed to support the group, dependent that five boys would be sent from their community. Girls were part of the Youth Aliyah scheme without any distinction to boys after it was institutionalised.

23 Freier, *Let the Children Come*, 17

24 Created in reaction to the increasing antisemitic measures by the NSDAP government, the aim of the Berlin-based *Reichsvertretung* was to represent the interests of the Jewish population in Germany, with all movements under one roof. Cf. Otto Dov Kulka, ed., *Deutsches Judentum unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, Volume 1: *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden 1933-1939* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997). On the importance of the year 1933 as turning point for the Jews in Germany see: Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

- Palestine Agency (*Palästina-Amt*),
- Jewish Migration Aid (*Jüdische Wanderfürsorge*),
- Aid Committee for Other Countries (*Hilfsverein für andere Länder*) and
- Youth Aliyah Consortium (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendaliyah*), which consisted of three more subdepartments:
  - Ahawah Children's Home (*Kinderheim Ahawah*),<sup>25</sup>
  - Jewish Orphans Aid (*Jüdische Waisenhilfe e.V.*) and
  - Jewish Youth Aid (*Jüdische Jugendhilfe*).<sup>26</sup>

Youth Aliyah was financed by the Reichsvertretung, Hadassah, Jewish communities and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

For the development of Youth Aliyah, it was indispensable to also have someone on the ground in Palestine. That task was taken over by Henrietta Szold (1860-1945). Born in Baltimore, she founded Hadassah in 1912 in the United States. Hadassah was a Zionist women's organisation dedicated to health care in Palestine, where she had lived since 1920.<sup>27</sup> Szold had rejected assistance for the first Youth Aliyah group in 1932 and even though she and Freier met in June 1933, she remained sceptical because so many poor Jewish children lived in Palestine. But she was finally won over because official Jewish organisations confirmed the importance of Youth Aliyah and asked her to fulfil the work started by Chaim Arlosoroff (1899-1933).

In the spring of 1933, Arlosoroff, who represented the Jewish Agency, travelled to Berlin to discuss the immigration of German Jews to Palestine with officials of the Zionist Movement there. He visited the Youth Aliyah office and spoke with the staff, as Freier was in Palestine at that time. Arlosoroff was enthusiastic and promised to provide several hundred immigration certificates. The newspapers in Palestine reported about his visit. Revisionist Zionists accused Arlosoroff of collaborating with the Nazis<sup>28</sup>; he was shot dead on the Tel Aviv beach in June 1933. Henrietta Szold was devastated, as were many Jews. Szold took over where Arlosoroff had left, obtaining the first 500 certificates for Youth Aliyah children and in November 1933 agreed to head the office of Youth Aliyah in Jerusalem.

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25 Ayelet Bargur, *Ahawah heißt Liebe: Die Geschichte des jüdischen Kinderheims in der Berliner Auguststraße* (München: dtv, 2006).

26 Lehmann, *Die Jugend-Alija als Herausforderung*, 166.

27 Joan Dash, *Summoned to Jerusalem: The Life of Henrietta Szold* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

28 On Revisionist Zionism, see: "Zionism: Revisionist Zionism", Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/revisionist-zionism>.



Many documents and personal accounts make clear that a conflict was smouldering between Szold and Freier. Szold focused on working according to the regulations within a functioning administration. Tasks were divided: Freier was networking and collecting money, while Szold prepared the papers and lodging.

## From Hachshara to emigration

If a Jewish boy or girl decided to join Youth Aliyah, they first had to be registered through their parents or a guardian. The age of acceptance was 15 to 16 – a regulation based on British rules for certificates and for pedagogical reasons. The sum of RM 2.000 Mark (130 Palestinian Pound, in 1933 ca. USD 350) per individual had to be secured and covered Hachshara,<sup>29</sup> travel, equipment, housing, food and more, for a period of two years. Additionally, the British mandatory asked for an annual financial guarantee for each candidate. Many parents applied for funding because of impoverishment of Jewish families linked to the antisemitic politics in Germany. Hadassah and other organisations helped.

More than 40 Hachshara centres offered training in Germany until 1939. After 1938, 16 centres opened in Austria. Youth Aliyah and Hechaluz<sup>30</sup> ran most Hachsharot together. Youth Aliyah training lasted four to six weeks and consisted of four hours each day of agricultural work such as ploughing, seeding, breeding animals and housework. Four hours a day were dedicated to lessons in Hebrew, Jewish history and Zionism. Hachshara was also a time to redevelop self-esteem. Esther Deutsch wrote on Hachshara in Ahrensdorf: “We felt like we were on an island, far away from all the terrible events that were happening in this country at the time.”<sup>31</sup>

After Hachshara, the children had to pass an exam and a medic had to testify to their physical and psychological fitness. When confirmed and materially equipped, Youth Aliyah members needed certificates for immigration to Palestine. To obtain these from the British authorities, a kibbutz or another Youth Aliyah institution had to request the immigration

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29 Hachshara = training.

30 Hechaluz = Pioneer; it was the umbrella organisation of all Zionistic Youth Organizations.

31 Herbert Fiedler, “*Träume und Hoffnungen*”; Vol. 1: Ein Kibbutz in Ahrensdorf (Nuthe-Urstromtal: Förderverein Begegnungsstätte Hachschara-Landwerk Ahrensdorf, 2000), 18.

of these youths and confirm the guarantees. The Jewish Agency, the operative branch of the World Zionist Organization established in 1929 was part of these organisational procedures. After Henrietta Szold received the Kibbutz requests, she ordered the certificates. The British also demanded a questionnaire from the parents on income, health and more, with a special paragraph in which they promised to support their child. They had to attest through signature that their child would stay in the settlement in which he or she was placed and that they as parents did not expect to get to Palestine through their child's request or help.<sup>32</sup>

The young Jewish pioneers travelled in groups through Italy and across the Mediterranean to Palestine, settling together after their arrival. Nearly all Youth Aliyah groups were welcomed personally and accompanied to their destination by Henrietta Szold, until her death in February 1945. The great majority of the young immigrants were sent to kibbutzim, while others went to moshavim<sup>33</sup> or other vocational training centres.<sup>34</sup>

On 19 February 1934, the first official group of 43 (mainly boys) from Germany arrived.<sup>35</sup> The number of young Jews who desired to register with Youth Aliyah increased steadily until 1937.<sup>36</sup> Beginning in 1934, Georg (Giora) Josephthal (1912-1962), was employed by Youth Aliyah and in 1936 served as secretary general of Hechaluz in Germany. In January 1936, he underlined in a letter to Szold that Youth Aliyah seemed to be the only truly successful Zionist emigration organisation.<sup>37</sup> Relations between the offices Berlin and in Jerusalem remained tense.

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32 Regarding topics such as social structure, age, percentage of girls and boys etc: Susanne Urban, "Die Jugend-Alijah 1932 bis 1940: Exil in der Fremde oder Heimat in Erez Israel?" in *Kindheit und Jugend im Exil: Ein Generationenthema*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 34-61, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112422960-003>.

33 A Moshav is a cooperatively organised form of rural settlement.

34 More detailed: Axel Meier, "Die Jugend-Alija in Deutschland 1932 bis 1942", in *Aus Kindern werden Briefe. Die Rettung jüdischer Kinder aus Nazi-Deutschland*, eds. Gudrun Maierhof, Chana Schütz and Hermann Simon (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2004), 70-95; Brian Amkraut, *Between Home and Homeland: Youth Aliyah from Nazi Germany* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 47-60.

35 After the founding of the State of Israel in May 1948, this day was declared "Children's Day".

36 Central Bureau for the Settlement of German Jews in Palestine, Report to the Twentieth Zionist Congress and to the Council of the Jewish Agency in Zurich (Jerusalem, 1937). The report shows a figure of 1.650 for 1935-37 compared to 612 for 1933-35. The document was shown to the author by Ella Freund (1909-2012) in Tel Aviv in 2004. Freund was a Youth Aliyah Emissary in the 1940s.

37 Giora Josephthal to Henrietta Szold, 23 January 1936, Central Zionist Archive, S75/116.

## Networking in Europe (1935-1939)

In 1935, Recha Freier proposed expansion of Youth Aliyah to Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, as she sensed Nazi Germany's aggressive intentions and the burgeoning threat to Jewish life in Europe. Jüdische Jugendhilfe agreed and connections were made with Jewish representatives in the other countries. Szold, however, rejected the idea. According to Freier, she said: "We do not yet know the results of Youth Aliyah from Germany, whether good or bad, and already you want to plan ahead?"<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, in May 1938, Youth Aliyah was extended to Austria, in the fall of 1938 to the Sudeten territories and in March 1939, to Prague, all of which had been seized by Germany. "Now functioning from three organizational centers, Youth Aliyah leaders from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia established a joint council."<sup>39</sup>

In September 1938, a fundraising office was opened in England. It was headed by Eva Michaelis-Stern (1904-1992)<sup>40</sup> who had been employed in the Berlin office before her emigration. Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)<sup>41</sup> worked for Youth Aliyah France after having fled Germany in 1933 and secured transit centres in France for Jewish youth from German-occupied Czech lands.

By 1938-1939, Youth Aliyah was active in Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Recha Freier was critical of the idea of establishing transit camps in countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, as only few children were billeted in Jewish homes and *Hachshara* was not provided everywhere. She feared that war was looming and in 1939 negotiated vainly with Zionist and Jewish organisations to establish transit camps closer to Palestine, in Turkey, Cyprus or Greece.<sup>42</sup>

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38 Freier: *Wurzeln schlagen*, 293.

39 Amkraut, *Between Home and Homeland*, 116.

40 Sara Kados, *Eva Michaelis Stern*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/stern-eva-michaelis>.

41 Thomas Meyer, *Hannah Arendt. Die Biografie* (München: Piper-Verlag 2023); Stephen J. Whitfield, *Hannah Arendt*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/arendt-hannah>.

42 Freier, *Wurzeln schlagen*, 300 f.

## 1939-1940: Turning points

After 1933, the worsening situation of Jews in Germany also affected Recha Freier's family. Between 1937 and 1939, her husband and sons emigrated to England, while Recha decided to remain in Germany with her daughter Maayan. Maayan later described her mother as "a woman either with her head in the clouds or with her head through the wall".<sup>43</sup> From autumn 1938 on, Recha Freier made no secret of the fact that she was prepared to support or set up illegal activities for rescuing children. She found allies such as Nathan Schwalb (1908-2004), head of Hechalutz Geneva and Aron Menczer (1917-1943), who took the post of Youth Aliya director in Vienna in September 1939.<sup>44</sup> After Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, several thousand Youth Aliyah members, youth counsellors (*madrichim*) and office staff were spread all over Europe. From October 1939, the Mandatory authorities no longer issued certificates to German Jews, as Germany and Britain were at war. The British, however, still granted Youth Aliyah certificates for children from Germany and Nazi controlled lands who had been in transit before September 1939.

Because of insecurity regarding the departure of Youth Aliyah groups in war, Recha Freier convinced the Palestine Agency to set up Special *Hachshara*/SH (*Sonder-Hachashara*) for clandestine immigration to Palestine. Between November 1939 and November 1940, seven SH transports were organised,<sup>45</sup> mainly financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.<sup>46</sup> For example, trainees from Ahrensdorf arrived in Palestine with SH in March 1939, November 1939 and in May 1940. Around 1.800 Jews arrived with SH in Palestine, travelling to Vienna, on the Danube to Yugoslavia and onward to Palestine; about 20 percent of the passengers were Youth Aliyah members.<sup>47</sup> Szold argued vehemently against these transports, out of legal reasons.

43 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

44 Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, ed., *Trotz allem! Aron Menczer 1917-1943* (Wien: Böhlau, 1993).

45 Clandestine immigration was named "Aliyah Beth," meaning "B-immigration". Artur Patek, *Jews on Route to Palestine 1934-1944: Sketches from the History of Aliyah Bet - Clandestine Jewish Immigration* (Krakow, Jagiellonian University Press, 2012).

46 Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1939-1945* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry/Hebrew University, 1981).

47 Ferdinand Kroh, *David kämpft. Vom jüdischen Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Reinbek: Rowohlt 1988), 22-33.

In the meantime, Freier was active on behalf of Polish Jews who remained in Berlin after more than 5.000 men had been arrested and taken to concentration camps (Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen) in 1938-1939.<sup>48</sup> Their wives and children were left behind. Freier's request to help them fell on deaf ears at the central council, now named *Reichsvereinigung*.<sup>49</sup> The *Reichsvereinigung* did not feel responsible for Jews of Polish nationality and feared attracting the attention of the Nazi authorities. Freier knew that release from concentration camps was possible if a permit issued by the *Reichsvereinigung* indicated that the person would leave Germany within 24 hours. Together with Rudolf Pick from the Palestine Office, she stole 100 permits and Pick signed them. Polish-Jewish men were released and rescued through SH.<sup>50</sup>

The *Reichsvereinigung* rejected Freier's methods. In January 1940, the SH Commission demanded her exclusion. On 9 February 1940, the Palestine Office and the board of the Jewish Youth Aid suspended Freier from all her responsibilities. Edith Wolff (1905-1997), a colleague and supporter of Freier, was also dismissed. Wolff later joined an underground group around Yizchak Schwersenz, a Youth Aliyah teacher.<sup>51</sup> After the war, Schwersenz wrote:

Alfred Selbiger, and Dr. Paul Eppstein, as the person in charge of the *Reichsvereinigung*, accused Recha Freier of endangering our work by "stepping out of line:" ... Today I ask myself: What could have endangered us more at that time than what happened and what affected us all a short time later? What did "legality" mean when thousands were torn apart and deported under the arbitrariness of a political system?<sup>52</sup>

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48 On the expulsion of Polish Jews, see: Alina Bothe and Gertrud Pickhan eds., *Ausgewiesen! Berlin, 28.10.1938: Die Geschichte der "Polenaktion"*, (Berlin: Metropol 2018).

49 On 4 June 1939, all Jewish associations and Jewish communities were forcibly merged into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. This marked the end of the *Reichsvertretung* and an elected Jewish representation in Germany. Nazi authorities used the *Reichsvertretung* to control the Jewish population.

50 Many of them joined *Sonder-Hachshara* No. 6 and boarded the unseaworthy *Pentcho*. "The refugee ship 'Pentcho'", United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/index.php/content/en/photo/the-refugee-ship-pentcho>.

51 Jizchak Schwersenz, *Die versteckte Gruppe. Ein jüdischer Lehrer erinnert sich an Deutschland* (Berlin: Wichern, 2000).

52 Schwersenz, *Gruppe*, 62.



Fig. 1: Recha Freier and her daughter Maayan, around 1939.  
(© Private, Courtesy of Freier Family.)

Freier's daughter Maayan recalled:

When the Reichsvereinigung was informed of what my mother had done, she was suspended from all positions. She was summoned to Adolf Eichmann, Head of 'Reichszentrale für jüdische Auswanderung'<sup>53</sup> in Berlin. Her passport had already been withheld ... Eichmann took my mother's passport, stamped it invalid and threw it in her face. We assume, she was denounced, and then left right- and defenceless, completely on her own.<sup>54</sup>

After several warnings, Recha Freier fled Berlin in July 1940 with her 11-year-old daughter. She first went to Vienna and from there to Zagreb, arriving in Jerusalem in June 1941.<sup>55</sup>

Parallel to this dramatic development in Freier's life, transportation routes, visas and the travel costs were the main obstacles to keeping Youth Aliyah going. Until June 1940, Youth Aliyah candidates could cross the

53 Reich Headquarters for Jewish Emigration, see: Gabriele Anderl, Dirk Rupnow and Alexandra-Eileen Wenck, *Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution* (Oldenbourg: München, 2004).

54 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

55 At the same time, Rudolf Pick resigned from all positions in the Palestine Office in Berlin. He was deported to the Riga Ghetto on 27 November 1941 and murdered there.

Mediterranean to Palestine. After Italy's entry into war in May 1940, groups had to travel through the Soviet Union, Turkey, Greece, Syria and Lebanon. It took months to receive Soviet and Turkish transit visas. Youth Aliyah candidates stuck in Denmark, Sweden and Lithuania failed to leave Europe because no route was open after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

After 23 October 1941, the Nazi regime forbade emigration. The remaining *Hachshara* institutions were closed. Youth Aliyah members were sent to the "Jewish labour camp Paderborn" from which they were deported to Auschwitz on 1 March 1942.<sup>56</sup>

### **Transnational escape routes: The role of Yugoslavia after 1938**

Szold underlined in mid-1940 that Youth Aliyah was not a rescue organisation but meant to contribute to the upbuilding of the Jewish Community in Palestine.<sup>57</sup> This was seen differently by Freier and her supporters, who knew that they were continuing the work and that it had transformed to a rescue mission. Historian Sara Kadosh wrote:

Youth Aliyah administration, like the rest of the Yishuv in Eretz Israel, failed to comprehend the situation in Europe during the early years of war, and did not adapt its policies and procedures to war conditions. In many cases, rescue activity succeeded only because Youth Aliyah leaders in Europe ignored the rules and structures of the Jerusalem office.<sup>58</sup>

Yugoslavia played an important role in organising the escape routes. Youth Aliyah rescue activities in Yugoslavia started in 1938. Recha Freier had done outreach work with the Jewish communities there because she recognized their political awareness. Emissaries from kibbutzim were sent

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56 Correspondence and lists (Gestapo files) on the "Jewish retraining and work camp" in Paderborn (1941-1943), Arolsen Archives, Doc-ID: 11199809-16; Correspondence and telexes concerning the deportation of prisoners and the planned dissolution / sale of the camp, 27 February to 15 March, 1943: Arolsen Archives, Doc-ID: 11199827/8.

57 Henrietta Szold to Youth Aliyah London, 28 May 1940, Central Zionist Archive, A125/94.

58 Sara Kadosh, "Youth Aliyah Policies and the Rescue of Jewish Children from Europe", *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1997): 95-103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23535811>, 97.

to support the activities there. Zionist ideas were widespread in the Jewish community in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Zionist organisations had called since the 1920s to oppose the rising antisemitism in Germany and Europe. They also actively helped Jewish refugees from Germany and elsewhere during the 1930s.<sup>59</sup>

In July 1940, Freier, along with her daughter, was smuggled from Vienna to Zagreb and realising that this was a viable escape route, developed plans to rescue more children. They first travelled to Vienna, where Aron Menczer prepared their way to Yugoslavia. Josef Schleich (1902-1949) was a crucial person in this plan. Schleich had a chicken farm that was used at request of the Jewish community after 1938 for agricultural training and issued training certificates. After 1940, he used his network of smugglers to organise thousands of Jews' journeys from the Styrian-Slovenian border to Zagreb. This was tacitly and strategically tolerated by the Gestapo until Jewish emigration was forbidden in October 1941. In 1941, Schleich was arrested for foreign exchange offences, probably on the grounds that he was paid by agencies or individuals for each Jew he accompanied.<sup>60</sup>

Between summer 1940 until February 1941, small groups reached Yugoslavia from Germany and Austria with the help of Freier, Menczer and Schwalb. Maayan Freier recounted her experiences:

We arrived in Zagreb and the same day my mother met representatives of the Zionist Association and the Jewish community. She said, "My daughter and I crossed the border illegally together, then others can do it too. I want to get children out of Germany, and especially children whose fathers have already died in concentration camps." The Jewish community in Zagreb was immediately on fire. There was talk of taking in 100 children. Local families were willing to house them in their homes. My mother sent the list of names to the Reichsvereinigung and asked that the children be sent to her. It went back and forth, but the children were stuck. My mother sent a telegram to

59 Marija Vulesica, "Formen des Widerstandes jugoslawischer Zionistinnen und Zionisten gegen die NS-Judenpolitik und den Antisemitismus", in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten*, eds. Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen and Gideon Botsch, (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 89-105.

60 Hannelore Fröhlich, *Judenretter – Abenteurer – Lebemann: Josef Schleich. Spurensuche einer Tochter* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2007); Walter Brunner, *Josef Schleich. "Judenschlepper" aus Graz, 1938-1941: eine Dokumentation* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2017).



Berlin. It said something like, “I have Palestine certificates by name for 100 children, and if you don’t send the children right away, I’ll make a huge scandal.” The Reichsvereinigung knew my mother and it was impossible in 1940 to let 100 certificates expire. She didn’t have a single certificate, of course. But she didn’t care about that. Anyway, the first group came and then the second. Both groups were boys. The last group consisted of 16 girls. They were caught at the border by Yugoslav border guards and taken to Maribor. After the inspector of Maribor questioned the girls and learned what happened in Nazi Germany and Austria, he was desperate. He informed newspapers about their fate and brought them to a hotel for accommodation. In the end, the mayor of the city decided not to send the children back but informed the Jewish community in Maribor.<sup>61</sup>

From Maribor, the girls were brought to Zagreb in early April 1941.<sup>62</sup> The Jewish community in Zagreb took responsibility for the more than 120 children. Most of them came in organised groups, some on their own, psychologically devastated after having experienced atrocities in Poland. Regarding schooling and other activities, the socialist-Zionist Hashomer Hazair partly took over. Freier taught Hebrew classes. Despite the harsh policies on refugees in Yugoslavia, these children were relatively free and the police even warned the community about raids.

My mother had brought them to Yugoslavia and moved heaven and hell to get certificates. Henrietta Szold didn’t want to do anything illegal and said, “These children of Recha Freier will never see Palestine.” One version is that Hans Beyth, Szold’s associate, sent my mother 90 certificates to Yugoslavia. When my mother met him in Palestine, he told her that Henrietta Szold did not know that. Another version says that Szold did know about the certificates and that they were sent on their way by the Jewish Agency representative in Turkey and not by Beyth. To this day, it is not known for sure.<sup>63</sup>

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61 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

62 Klaus Voigt ed., *Joškos Kinder: Flucht und Alija durch Europa. Josef Indigs Bericht* (Berlin: Arsenal Verlag, 2006), 25 f., 40 f.

63 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

Recha Freier left with Maayan in March 1941, after certificates were secured for 90 children. They left a month later, after the German invasion of Yugoslavia began on 6 April 1941. Kalman Givon recalled: "Of course, we feared falling into German hands again and Recha Freier ... managed to get our whole group from Zagreb to Belgrade by train." In Belgrade, they were hosted for some days by the Jewish community. "At that time, we heard that Germans had invaded Zagreb. Shortly thereafter, we managed to leave Belgrade on the last train bound for Greece and Turkey."<sup>64</sup> The group arrived by train in Beirut via Aleppo.

However, the number of certificates was insufficient; more than 30 children remained in Zagreb. Given that the newly established Croatian fascist Ustasha regime collaborating with the Germans was a willing helper in the persecution and murder of Jews, another escape route had to be found. Youth Aliyah leader Joseph Itai Indig (1917-1998), born in Osijek, Croatia, organised the group's flight in July 1941 to the Italian-annexed part of Slovenia, where they spent a year in an old derelict hunting lodge near Ljubljana. "From Recha Freier ... I took over in Zagreb the children she had rescued from Germany and Austria. From her I learned unconditional faithfulness in service to them. It was this faithfulness that made me persevere alongside the children."<sup>65</sup> Freier assisted Indig whenever possible in the following months.<sup>66</sup> He succeeded in obtaining an entry permit from the Italian authorities for the 43 girls and boys and their adult companions. He was also helped by Nathan Schwab and different Jewish aid organisations while he spent three weeks travelling across Slovenia in an attempt to secure housing.<sup>67</sup> Everything was financed by the Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants (*Delegazione per l'Assistenza degli Emigranti Ebrei* – DELASEM), the aid organisation of Italian Jews.<sup>68</sup> As partisan struggle expanded, the group found itself in the middle of the combat zone in 1942. Indig again turned to DELASEM and the group was allowed to move to

64 Kalman Givon, "Die Flucht von Deutschland nach Palästina (Eretz Israel) über Jugoslawien: Ich wurde von Recha Freier gerettet", *HaGalil*, 30 November, 2004, <http://www.schoah.org/zeitzeugen/givon.htm>.

65 Voigt, *Joškos Kinder*, 15.

66 "Letters and documents regarding the 'Villa Emma' children, 1940-1944", Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/3699087>.

67 Voigt, *Joškos Kinder*, 46-170.

68 Laura Bava, "Aiding gli Ebrei' – Delasem under fascism, 1939 to 1945", M.A. thesis (University of Notre Dame Australia, 2016), <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1129&context=theses>.

Nonantola near Bologna in July 1942, where they were accommodated in Villa Emma and later joined by Jewish refugee children from Croatia. After Germany invaded Italy in summer 1943, with the help of the Swiss Zionist Federation, Schwalb arranged the entry of the entire group to Switzerland, where they were assembled in the Youth Aliyah Home in Bex. On 29 May 1945, after the end of the war in Europe, the “Villa Emma group” left for Palestine with official certificates in their pockets.<sup>69</sup>

While these attempts by Youth Aliyah and other organisations to rescue young Jews were successful, others were not. One dramatic example is the fate of the SH 5 transport, which got stranded at the Yugoslav river port of Kladovo.<sup>70</sup> In November 1939, the SH 5 passengers, a third of whom were Youth Aliyah-trainees, left Berlin and boarded the boat in Vienna. When they reached Bratislava, the emigrants were interned and guarded by the fascist Slovak Hlinka Guard. The local Jewish Community provided the refugees with food. As more refugees streamed in, additional 280 Jews from Germany joined SH 5. The boat was eventually released and reached a village near Budapest, where, with the help of the Association of Jewish Communities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (AJCY) and of Mossad Aliyah Bet, those aboard were transferred to three smaller vessels flying the Yugoslav flag.<sup>71</sup> After two weeks on the Danube, going back and forth between Romania and Yugoslavia, SH 5 was finally denied entry by Romanian authorities. The boats reached Kladovo near the Romanian border at the end of December 1939. All efforts to continue the journey failed. The Danube froze and

69 Cp. Sonja Borus, *Sonjas Tagebuch. Flucht und Alija in den Aufzeichnungen von Sonja Borus aus Berlin, 1941–1946*, ed. Klaus Voigt (Berlin: Metropol Verlag 2014); Voigt, *Villa Emma – Jüdische Kinder auf der Flucht*; Voigt, *Joškos Kinder*. See also Jakob “Jakica” Altaras, “Crossing the Adriatic with the children”, in *We Survived: Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust*, vol.1 (Belgrade: Jewish Historical Museum of Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, 2005), 167–174.

70 See for details: Zeni Lebl, *Tragedy of the Kladovo-Sabac Transport Refugee Relief Board*, 467–531; Chaim Schatzker, *The Kladovo-Sabac-Affair* (two books and a third reflection), in *Kladovo Transport: roundtable transcripts*, Belgrade, October, 2002 (Belgrade: Jewish Historical Museum of Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia/Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije = Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia), CC BY-NC-ND, 559–585; Mordecai Paldiel, “Toward Palestine, the Land of Israel: Boat People on the Danube with the Connivance of the Nazis”, in *Saving One’s Own: Jewish Rescuers during the Holocaust*, ed. Mordecai Paldiel, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017): 316–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1mtz4tx.17>.

71 *Mossad Aliyah Bet* was created to bring Jews from Europe to Palestine; it organised a network of offices throughout Europe, bought ships and brought clandestinely around 20.000 Jews to Palestine, using ca. 50 cruises. See: Dalia Ofer, “The Rescue of European Jewry and Illegal Immigration to Palestine in 1940. Prospects and Reality: Berthold Storfer and the Mossad Le’Aliyah Bet”, *Modern Judaism* 4, no. 2 (1984): 159–81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396459>.



Fig. 2: A group of the youth movement “Akiva” on the immigrant ship “Tzar Dushan” in Kladovo, 1940. (© Yad Vashem, 4531/66.)

the Yugoslav authorities did not let them pass. The boats, anchored in the winter port, were internment camps more than anything else. The people on the ships dealt with poor, crowded shelter and very harsh living conditions.<sup>72</sup>

As there was no Jewish Community in Kladovo, AJCY emissaries had to travel back and forth under difficult conditions. In spring 1940, the number of refugees had grown to 1.200. In September 1940, they were finally able to leave, but they were unable to continue the journey towards the Black Sea. Instead, they headed 300 kilometres up the Sava River to Šabac. After their arrival, the AJCY, the Women’s Zionist Organization (WIZO) and the small local Jewish Community worked together in an “Action Committee”

<sup>72</sup> See for example the testimony by Herta Reich, “Zwei Tage Zeit, um zwanzig Jahre meines jungen Lebens zurückzulassen”, in *Zwei Tage Zeit. Herta Reich und die Spuren jüdischen Lebens in Mürz-zuschlag*, ed. Heimo Halbrainer (Graz: CLIO Verein für Geschichts- & Bildungsarbeit, 1999), 41.



Fig. 3: Luggage of the Youth Aliyah group in Šabac, 1940.  
(© Yad Vashem, 4531/20.)

that raised money and provided the refugees with clothing, food, books etc.. Living conditions improved, there was more freedom of movement and the Zionist youth movements kindled the flame of hope again. “Even in dire circumstances like these, they had strength for culture, education and music. Some wrote poetry, others wrote music (‘The Refugee Song’, ‘Aliyat Hanoar March’, ‘Thank you, Yugoslavia’).”<sup>73</sup>

Shortly before the German invasion in April 1941, a small number of the Kladovo refugees were able to escape. About 200 certificates were sent for members of Youth Aliyah and around 50 for accompanying adults, obtained through WIZO or guarantees of relatives. In addition, passports were needed as well as transit visas for Bulgaria, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon.

<sup>73</sup> Lebl, *Tragedy*, 510.

Since Bulgaria had joined the Axis in February, transit through Bulgaria was blocked and the refugees had to go through Greece. Many travelled on interim passports issued by Yugoslavia. Among the rescued was Chaim Schatzker (\*1928) who had been compelled to leave his mother behind. As a renowned historian, his judgement on Youth Aliyah Jerusalem – not Recha Freier – is adamant: “... deliberating the need and justification to transform Youth Aliyah into a rescue enterprise become not only utterly irrelevant, but also categorically immoral, stupefying and hard-hearted.”<sup>74</sup>

More than 1.100 Jewish refugees stayed behind: adults and those over the age of 17. The men from the Kladovo group were murdered in early October 1941 as retribution for a Partisan attack on Germans. 805 Jews and Roma were taken from Šabac and shot in Zasavica. In January 1942, the women were transferred, as were Serbian Jewish women, to the Sajmiste concentration camp near Belgrade. Many were killed in gas vans, among them Schatzker’s mother.

### **“Let the children come...”: Commemorating Recha Freier and her work**

Between 1933 and 1939, Youth Aliyah had rescued over 5.000 children and young Jews from Europe. Between autumn 1939 to the end of the war, an additional 9.000 children were rescued.<sup>75</sup> It can be estimated that by May 1945, a few hundred had still not reached Palestine, but remained in transit countries, having survived the Shoah there. During the war, two groups reached Palestine and were absorbed by Youth Aliyah, the Teheran Children<sup>76</sup> and Children from Transnistria.<sup>77</sup> After the end of the war, Youth Aliyah cared for thousands of Jewish children who had survived.

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74 Schatzker, *Kladovo-Sabac-Affair*, 581.

75 Child and Youth Aliyah Bureau, Jerusalem, *Monthly Statistical Statement*, March 1, 1945, Central Zionist Archive, S75/1364; Jewish Agency for Palestine, Child and Youth Immigration Bureau, *Statistical Statement for the period February 19, 1934 to September 30, 1944*, in *Statistical Bulletin*, Central Zionist Archive, S25/2542.

76 Mikhal Dekel, *Tehran Children: A Holocaust Refugee Odyssey* (New York: Norton 2019); Dvorah Omer, *The Teheran Operation: The Rescue of Jewish Children from the Nazis* (Washington DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1991); Jutta Vogel, *Die Odyssee der Kinder. Auf der Flucht aus dem Dritten Reich ins Gelobte Land* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2008).

77 Dana Mihăilescu, “Early Postwar Accounts on Jewish Orphans from Transnistria”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 36, no. 3, Winter 2022, 353–371, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcac056>.

After she reached Jerusalem in Spring 1941, Recha Freier was ready to continue her work for Youth Aliyah. Shockingly, the office in Jerusalem refused to take her on. Freier never stopped following the Jewish concept of “Tikkun Olam” (“repairing the world”<sup>78</sup>) and that same year founded the “Agricultural Training Center” for neglected Jewish children. In 1958, she created “Testimonium” to inspire compositions on the history of the Jewish people. Recha Freier died in Jerusalem in 1984. During the war, Freier’s role in Youth Aliyah was already being marginalised and a narrative developed that Szold was the founder of Youth Aliyah. It had been Szold who was in Palestine to greet the arriving groups, while Freier operated behind the scenes and had been cast aside both in Germany and in Jerusalem. The debate continues – who is the “mother” of Youth Aliyah<sup>79</sup> and whose approach was the right one. Albert Einstein, acquainted with Freier, “proposed Youth Aliyah for the Nobel Peace Prize ... before his death in 1955. He wrote: ‘I have the honor to propose for the next Nobel Peace Prize the international organisation known as the Youth Aliyah. Through it, children from 72 countries have been rescued and incorporated into Israel.’ The Nobel Committee decided otherwise.”<sup>80</sup>

From the mid-1970s, Freier started to gain her well-deserved recognition. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Hebrew University in 1975. In 1981 she received the Israel Prize, Israel’s highest cultural honour. After her death in 1984, a square in Jerusalem was named for her. Outside of Israel, Recha Freier’s deeds remained largely unrecognised. One of the rare tributes was a commemorative plaque at the Jewish Community Center in Berlin, which was put up in 1984 for “Recha Freier, the Founder of Youth Aliyah”.

Youth Aliyah remained widely unknown, especially in comparison with the *Kindertransporte*, another transnational rescue initiative. Nearly 10.000 Jewish children from Germany and Austria were brought to Britain and the United States through the *Kindertransporte* in 1938 and 1939.<sup>81</sup> That rescue

78 Levi Cooper, “The Assimilation of Tikkun Olam”, *Jewish Political Studies Review* 25, no. 3/4 (2013): 10–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43150877>.

79 The Hadassah Website recounts the story as such: “At the dawn of the Holocaust in Europe, in the 1930s, Henrietta Szold and a German colleague organised the rescue of thousands of Jewish children to safety in Palestine through Youth Aliyah.”

80 Freier, “Alijath haNo’ar”, <https://www.hagalil.com/israel/deutschland/freier-recha.htm>.

81 Amy Williams and William Niven, *National and Transnational Memories of the Kindertransport. Exhibitions, Memorials, and Commemorations* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2023).

operation better reflects the generally more accepted narrative and image of non-Jews helping Jews (although Jewish organisations were involved in the *Kindertransporte* as well).

Another reason could be the explicit connection of Youth Aliyah to Zionism. For the wider public in Europe, a mainly humanitarian and non-national operation is more palatable than a Zionist one. In modern-day Europe, there is little sympathy for Zionism or the Jewish State that emerged from it.



# WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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