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*Be Strong and Brave! A small youth movement in a sea of history.
The Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp (1920-1948)*



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1. To begin with.

Before we start to relate the history of the Hashomer Hatzair movement in the city of Antwerp I would like to use this chapter to share with the reader some of the considerations and problems that I experienced during my research. History is never a given fact, a kind of fixed story lingering somewhere in the ether to be simply picked up by the historian when he reads the sources, but a carefully constructed literary work in which the author decides how the events are transmitted to the reader and thus determines the shape and outline of his work. It is therefore important to gain an understanding into how a certain work came into existence.

In this chapter I hope to give the reader an idea of the choices that I made in the writing of this thesis and of the consequences which resulted from these choices. This chapter will thus serve as a theoretical guideline for the rest of the thesis. It will be a blueprint of what I have tried to achieve and how I went about to achieve it. It will furthermore clarify some positions I have taken in regards to the writing of history.

The first question which needs to be answered is, why do this particular research at all? What is so special or interesting about the Hashomer Hatzair movement? Next to the normal historical reasons for doing research into a phenomenon like a personal interest in the time period and a certain subject, the Hashomer Hatzair movement provides the historian with a historical field much broader than at first would be expected from the study of a Zionist youth movement in Antwerp.

The history and the cultural heritage of the Hashomer Hatzair movement extends across the borders of Europe and reaches outside of the continent to all the corners of the world. There were Hashomer Hatzair branches from Yugoslavia to Cuba from Canada to Tunisia and all were imbedded within their local Jewish and Zionist communities. By the study of this youth movement in Antwerp we hope to gain insight into some major cultural and intellectual developments and traditions which were active in and outside the Jewish communities of Europe during the first half of the 20th century while not neglecting the particularities of the movement that operated within a specific Belgian context.

To a certain degree the history of the Hashomer Hatzair also has links with the two major ideological currents of the second half of the 19th century in Europe: Nationalism and Socialism. This micro study thus extends far beyond the scope traditionally reserved for micro history, an element which will continually be stressed in the thesis.

While there were several branches (*snifim*) of the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium (Brussels, Liège) I have opted to relate the history of the movement in Antwerp. There are several reasons for this choice. The city of Antwerp before the Second World War was the heart of Belgian Jewry and the stronghold of Zionism within Belgium and to a degree also of Western Europe. The *Ken* (name for a local branch of the Hashomer Hatzair) of Antwerp was the oldest in Belgium (and Western Europe) and counted the most members. The headquarters of the national leadership (*Hanhagah Rashit*) was located in Antwerp and some of the most influential members of the movement before the war came from this city. While the focus of this thesis will thus lay with the history of the movement in Antwerp it is impossible to relay the history of the movement without making reference to other

Kenim (plural Ken) in Belgium or the world leadership (*Hanhagah Elyonah*) in Warsaw. Many of the activities of the movement in Belgium were organized on a national scale and the movement received directions and guidance from the world leadership which makes it impossible to single out the movement in Antwerp. There will thus be a constant tension within this thesis between the history of the movement in Antwerp and the history of the movement as a whole in Belgium and the general history of Hashomer Hatzair.

Another reason for writing a work on the Hashomer Hatzair is that until now no extensive study has been written about the movement in Belgium. In fact the entire study of the Belgian Zionist scene is as of yet in its early stages and there is alas not a lot of literature available on the subject. There are some works however which give us a general overview of the Zionist youth movements in Belgium before the war. Dan Michman and Eve Wagman-Eshkoli in two separate chapters in the book *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans* give us a small but detailed account of the general history of the Zionist youth movement and their activities during the war.¹ Michman's article can also be found in a slightly different version in; *Zionist Youth Movements in the Holocaust*.² Both articles originated from a symposium on "the Holocaust in Belgium" organized by the Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan and the Belgian "Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes historiques de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (CREHSGM)". A collection of articles on the topics discussed in this symposium can be found in the work "*Les Juifs de Belgique de l'immigration au génocide 1925/1940*".³ The history of the religious Zionist youth movements and an early Zionist scouting movement can be found in the works of Sylvain Brachfeld which also give some information regarding the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium.⁴

The study of this movement also in part reexamines the role, layout and relations between the Zionist youth movements and the Jewish Community in the city of Antwerp. Antwerp, now regarded by many as a bulwark of *Khassidism* and religious Judaism, had a very different character prior to World War II with a much more heterogeneous community which was strongly influenced by Zionism.

I have chosen to write this work not only as a history of the movement itself but also as a history of the people who were active in it. Throughout the work I shall grant a number of people the "literary stage", on which they can talk for themselves through the various testimonies I have collected in the archives, the personal diaries I have found and other ego-documents I stumbled upon. Rather than only scoping up numbers, dates and hierarchical diagrams, personal anecdotes, feelings, doubts and reflections on the past will play an important part in this work as well. After all, this touches exactly upon the essence of a youth movement, a group of young people bound together by bonds of affection, a common purpose and dream, where emotions and feelings play an important part.

¹ Michman (D.) editor, *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998

² D. Michman, Zionist Youth movement in Holland and Belgium and their activities during the Shoah, In: *Zionist Youth Movements during the Shoah*, ed. Cohen (A.) and Cochavi (Y.), Peter Lang Publishing, 1995, p. 158-159.

³ Van Doorslaer (R.) red, *Les Juifs d e Belgique. De l'immigration au génocide, 1925-1945*, Brussels, CHREHSGM, 1994.

⁴ Brachfeld (S.), *Het grote Brabosh memorboek: twee eeuwen Joodse aanwezigheid in Vlaanderen /Antwerpen*, instituut voor het Onderzoek van het Belgisch Jodendom, 2012, p.800 ; and: Brachfeld (S.) *Uit vervlogen tijden: "wetenswaardigheden" uit het Antwerps Joods Historisch Archief*, Antwerps Joods Historisch Archief, 1987, p. 211

By relating the personal stories and inner thoughts of the persons involved and actually giving them a place to tell their stories we create a more human, personal understanding of the people who lived through these times. Instead of just understanding on an intellectual level the events which unfolded, we gain insight in the personal joys and sorrows of these persons; and thus recognize the historical actors as human.

Yet this also creates an important moral problem. Any history relating to European Judaism in the 20th century cannot be told without referring to the catastrophe that befell the Jewish People during the years of prosecution and annihilation under Nazi German rule. By introducing and relating the testimonies of former members of the movement, we undoubtedly bias history towards the living; for the dead don't speak, nor do they write down their stories. The personal diaries written at the time when these events unfolded give us some remedy but they are alas not numerous compared to the large corpus of testimonies written and recorded in the years after the war.

The sources furthermore exacerbate this bias. As I was not able to find a list of all the members of the movement in Antwerp, I had to make do by carefully reading and listening through all the documents, letters and testimonies and to write down any names that were listed in these documents. This gave me a list of about 77 names of which I am convinced that they were members of the movement and which can be traced in the archives. I also found another twenty names of people who were members of the movement but couldn't be corroborated with the data in the archives.

The majority of the people mentioned in the documents are the older members and the leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair, as they were the ones who wrote the letters and were most active in the movement. The names of the younger people and people outside of the leadership or administration thus remain unknown and are lost to history.

Next to the personal stories the hard numbers, facts and dates also play an integral part in this thesis. This is first and foremost a scientific historical work and not a hagiographic work of the movement or its members. It can't just be a narration of memories or loose anecdotes; the bigger picture must be upheld. Without the framework, carefully constructed by all the rules and considerations of scientific historical writing, the personal stories are just dry leaves shattered in the wind with no steady root connecting them to the larger picture and will inevitably lose all historical value they might possess.

At this point it becomes necessary to talk about the sources which were used in this study and the archives where I found them in. The bulk of the sources used in this thesis come from various archives in Israel and Belgium. They consist of letters, journals and publications of the movement, transcriptions of meetings, correspondence with other youth movements and Zionist organizations, interviews with former members recorded on audiotape or written down, files of members of the movement in the Belgium administration etc.

A lot of the material I collected comes from the archives of Yad Ya'ari, the research center for the Hashomer Hatzair movement located in Givat Haviva, Israel. This center contains a lot of material about all the Hashomer branches around the world. The documents were brought or sent to the archive by *Shlikhim* and members of the movement from Belgium or upon arrival in Israel. The various branches of the movement were expected to send their materials regularly to the

movements archive, then situated in Merkhavia. This happened early on in the history of the movement, at least from the 1930's onward.

The Moreshet archive, also located in Givat Haviva, holds a lot of material concerning the Second World War and the Holocaust. Established in 1961 by Holocaust survivors, Ghetto fighters and Jewish partisans this archive is dedicated to preserve the memory of the Jewish Resistance during the war. A special focus is placed on the role of the Jewish youth movements in the Resistance.⁵ Several documents relating to the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium can be found in the archives.

Next to the archives in Givat Haviva several other institutions in Israel contain material on the various Zionist movements in Belgium including Hashomer Hatzair. The Central Zionist Archives located in Jerusalem held some files on Zionist youth movements in Belgium. Also in Jerusalem the Oral History Department of the Hebrew University has some interviews with former members of various Belgian Zionist youth movements, including one of Hashomer Hatzair.

Furthermore the archive of *Kibbutz* Ein Hakhosh, where many Belgian members of Hashomer Hatzair immigrated to in the 1930's, contains a real treasure of information on members of the movements, particularly of those who made *Aliyah*.⁶

Beit Lohamei Haghetot, the Ghetto Fighters' House museum located in the Western Galilee is a museum and archive established by former members of the Jewish Resistance, partisans and camp inmates in 1949. The museum is dedicated to narrating the stories of the Holocaust, the Resistance and the renewal of Jewish life in the State of Israel. It contains a single but relevant document about the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Antwerp.

In Belgium the main archive I consulted was the "Antwerp Jewish Historical Archive (Antwerps Joods Historisch Archief) located in the Felix Archive in the city of Antwerp. This private archive belongs to Mr. Sylvain Brachfeld who collected a great number of documents, photo's, interviews and other materials and also wrote a number of books and articles regarding Jewish life in Antwerp- including various texts on the Zionist youth movements. He was kind enough to give me permission to consult his archive which proved to be a major help in writing the thesis especially on the chapter of Hashomer Hatzairs predecessor in Antwerp, *Bar Kokhba*.

For information on the individual members of the movement I used the files of the Belgian Foreign Police located in the National Archives of Belgium in Brussels. This allowed me to gain insight into their personal lives, the partners they married (in- or outside of the movement), their migration patterns, the professions they had and if they happened to be in trouble with the law.

The Kazerne Dossin, a museum, memorial and research center for the Holocaust in Belgium, situated in Mechelen held some information on the deportations and camps where individual members of the movement were sent to and sometimes perished.

While the files on the Hashomer Hatzair of the David Trotsky collection of the YIVO, of which a copy on microfilm is held in the Martin Buber house connected to the ULB in Brussels, did not contain a lot of interesting information about Hashomer Hatzair, a considerable amount of information can be

⁵ <http://www.moreshet.org/?CategoryID=297>

⁶ Aliyah: the immigration of Jews to the land of Israel, this is one of the cornerstones of Zionism.

found there on other Zionist organizations which were active in Belgium during this period. Especially the files of the Jewish National Fund (KKL Keren Kayemeth Le Israel) proved to be valuable as they gave us information on the different Zionist Youth movements and their collections for the KKL.

Before we begin this thesis in earnest I would like to make the reader aware of some of the choices I have made in writing this thesis and on how I have chosen to construct the outline- or in more post modernist terminology “plot”- of this thesis. Ever since the post modern critics of historiography have started raising some serious questions on some of the basic axioms of historiography the writing of history has been in turmoil and doubt.

While disagreeing with some of the conclusions of certain post-modernist authors in regards to the alignment of historiography and fiction literature, it stands beyond any doubt that the writing of a work of history like the writing of a work of fiction contains some editorial and literary choices which shape the identity and outline of the work loose from the historical reality. While leaving the theoretical discussions for what they are, they do not concern us here; this also has some practical implications.

I believe that it is important that an author or narrator should play an active role in a historical study, not for reasons of self aggrandizement or for casting himself on the historical stage but to clarify to the reader the choices which were made in his work and presenting the different options which were found in the sources or literature. When sources disagree with each other the historian often chooses the source which he finds most likely to correspond with the past historical reality and omits any mention of the sources stating otherwise.

I believe that instead of the author being the judge of what is right or wrong both sources should be listed and then carefully- in dialogue with the reader -an analysis should be made of which source is more likely to corroborate with historical reality.⁷

In this way a relation is established between the source, the author and the reader. This relationship of course isn't an even relationship; after all in most cases the historian will possess more background knowledge of the subject he or she is studying and will therefore be in a better position to decide on the likelihood of correspondence between source and reality. Another important notion this approach to sources gives to the reader is an understanding not just of the historical events the author is narrating but also of the crafting of history, of history as a discipline. This is a notion I find to be very important if history is not to become canonized and accepted without any reservations or misgivings.

As to the plot, the main building blocks on which any plot is constructed is the ordering of the various chapters. In official Zionist historiography the plot would most likely have been something like this; a) the beginning years of the movement in Belgium, b) the maturation of the movement, c) the destruction in the Second World War and d) subsequently the resurrection in the Land of Israel.

⁷ For more theoretical treaties on the role of the narrator in historical writings see the works of Wulf Kansteiner.

While this ordering of the events certainly bears some historical truth - after the atrocities in Europe and Belgium many former members of the movement found a new home in *Eretz Israel* and subsequently in the newly established State of Israel- in my eyes Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp was first and foremost a Belgium Jewish youth movement.

By this I don't mean to deny the central importance *Aliyah* and the *Yishuv* played in the lives of the members and the ideology of the movement as a whole - as will be discussed in an important chapter on life in *Eretz Israel*, the *Kibbutz* and the immigration- but the movement was established, operated and lived in a typical Belgian context.

The language which was spoken between the members in Antwerp was the Antwerp Flemish dialect of Dutch, the relations with others and life outside of the movement followed the rhythms and flows of the Jewish Community in Antwerp. Therefore I have chosen to end this work with a chapter on the war and the resurrection of the movement after the war in Antwerp.

Some notes on language and specific terminology.

One of the first things that struck me when I was first rummaging through the sources in the archives was the multitude of languages the sources were written in. Documents written in Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Yiddish and even some Polish could all be found next to each other and sometimes several languages were used in the same document.

In this thesis I have chosen to systematically use the English translation when quoting the sources except for names of institutions and for the specific terminology used by the Hashomer Hatzair movement.

Like most other movements in this time period the Hashomer Hatzair used a specific terminology for certain key concepts in the movement and for the names of the different age groups and specific positions within the movement. This terminology was used in all the branches around the world although there was some room for variation in the naming of the age groups.

We can see a similar usage of a specific terminology in other ideological movements in the same time period. In the Communist movement or on the other spectrum of the political landscape, the Fascist or other nationalistic movements a specific terminology was in use. The use of a specific terminology within a group strengthens the cohesion and gives the group a certain distinction from the outside world. Together with the symbols, flags and vestimentary codes they form part of the identity of a movement

I think it is therefore important that this specific terminology is maintained within the thesis. As Hashomer Hatzair was a Zionist movement it is only logical that their terminology consisted of Hebrew words. Instead of using their translation in the thesis I shall consequently use the original Hebrew terms.

These words will be written in italic and according to the rules of transliteration following the rules set out by YIVO. In the back of the thesis a list of the terms with their corresponding translation and meaning can be found.

2. *The lay of the land; European Judaism and the dream of Zion at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.*

It might be considered peculiar to start the history of a movement which began its life in 1913 in Galicia (Poland) and subsequently established a branch in Antwerp in 1924 at the end of 19th century. But this is nonetheless of vital importance if we are to understand the stimulus, influences and mentality of the movement. Like all other historical subjects a youth movement does not spring out of thin air but is connected by many strings to a whole array of historical elements which preceded it. The Hashomer Hatzair movement is no different to this historical reality than others. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the movement we must first take a look at the specific circumstances and the historical and intellectual climate in which it came to development.

In this chapter we shall therefore take a look at the bigger European picture. We shall give a summary of the state of European Jewish life and of the Zionist movement from the end of the 19th century up to the end of World War I and of the establishment of Hashomer Hatzair in Poland. In the next chapter we shall narrow our view to the history of the Jewish community in the city of Antwerp and to Belgium Jewry more generally.

As for most developments in contemporary European history the French revolution turned out to be a turning point in the history of European Judaism. From a marginal, barely tolerated, at times persecuted and often racially segregated section of society the Jews became citizens of a Nation with equal rights and obligations as the rest of their countrymen. While this process didn't move at the same pace in each country -often some restrictions were upheld, for instance Jews were restricted or banned from certain trades or professions- we can see a general tendency towards a policy of inclusion into the workings of society in Western Europe.

The majority of the Jews of Western Europe responded to these new opportunities with great delight and zeal leaving their ghettos to become prominent figures in the fields of science, medicine, art, industry and the many new professions that were opened to them.⁸ The majority of the community didn't rise into the highest strata of society but certainly prospered and found a newfound dignity for themselves in their political, social and material life.

Many shook off their distinct Jewish identity and now became German, French, Belgian citizens of the Mosaic confession. In Germany the *Haskalah* movement, the Jewish Enlightenment, which had started at the end of the 18th century inspired by people like Moses Mendelsohn tried to reform Judaism and bring it closer to the European culture and the customs of the nation they lived in. This was to the great dissatisfaction of the Orthodox leaders and later of the Jewish national movement who saw in it an attempt towards assimilation and thus disappearance of a distinct Jewish People.⁹

Although Jewish emancipation proceeded in the 19th century and the majority of Jews of Western Europe felt accepted and secure in their countries, dormant anti-Semitism persisted.

Most of the non-Jewish population in the towns and villages of Western Europe still regarded the Jews as outsiders, an alien in their countries and often negative stereotypes were attributed to the

⁸⁸ According to Walter Laqueur every fourth lawyer and every sixth physician was of Jewish origin after the First World War in Prussia. W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p.26

⁹ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 16-19.

Jews. While a Jew as an individual could from time to time be accepted and even respected, the idea of a Jewish people living as equal citizens amongst the non Jewish population seemed harder to accept. These feelings sometimes resulted in outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence or agitation.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, with the rise of a new sort of anti-Semitism, some Jews in Western Europe started to question the wisdom of assimilation in a society that at every turn seemed to reject them. Where formerly anti-Semitism had existed on religious grounds, from the end of the 19th century the anti-Semitic argument was stated more and more on racial terms. The Jews were seen as a separate race, foreign to the nations of Europe. While both forms of anti-Semitism continued to exist, and still exist into the present day, the latter sort drawn to its logical conclusion in effect meant the end of assimilationism. For while Jewish customs could be shaped and molded into a more European fashion and a Jew could adopt a European life style and integrate into modern society he could never change or rid himself of the racial segregation imposed on him by this new Judeophobia.¹⁰

It is in this period that we see the first breakthrough of a Jewish National Movement. While the idea of the return to the Promised Land is integrated into Judaism itself and has had many advocates throughout Jewish history - in the 19th century for instance people like *Moses Hess*, *Leo Pinsker* and various organizations like *the 'Hovevei Zion' (Lovers of Zion)* promoted the idea of a return to the land of Israel- it is only with Theodor Herzl that Zionism became an organized and serious political movement. In 1896 Theodore Herzl, a Viennese journalist and play writer published a small booklet called '*Der Judenstaat*' in which he proclaimed his ideas for a revival of a Jewish National Homeland.

Herzl, himself from a Jewish assimilated family, realized while working as a foreign correspondent in Paris that the Jewish question was still very much alive. In France he witnessed the beginning of the Dreyfus Affair and the blatant anti-Semitism in some sectors of French society. After much soul searching and some non realistic fantasies Herzl came to the conclusion that the only possible solution to the Jewish question was the establishment of a Jewish National Homeland.

Herzl started to work towards the realization of this idea by raising money and lobbying in the various courts and governments of Europe. While these attempts were not always successful Herzl's continuous labor eventually culminated in the first Zionist Congress organized in Basel in 1897. Here Herzl, the followers he had acquired and various Zionist organizations from all over Europe met and decided on a course of action. The Zionist Movement was established and the Basel Program was adopted in which the aims and aspirations of the Zionist movement were stated. Political Zionism had come into existence.

Before we take a further look at the history of the Zionist movement we must first turn our gaze towards Eastern Europe. Up to now mention has been made of the situation of West European Judaism only. In Eastern Europe the cultural, social, political and economical outlook of the Jewish population differed completely from that of their Western counterparts.

¹⁰ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 28-30.

The vast majority of the Jewish population of the world before the Second World War lived in Eastern Europe in cities, small towns and villages in the Russian Empire.¹¹ They lived in the Western part of the empire known as the Pale of Settlement to which they were restricted by law. While their Western counterparts formed a strong middle class the Jews of Eastern Europe were mostly small scale artisans and some were employed in agriculture. Others didn't have a set occupation living from day to day and relying on charity in appalling conditions. Outside of the Russian Empire the Jews living in West-Galicia, a remote corner of the Habsburg and later Austria-Hungarian Empire, Hungary and Romania faced similar conditions.

With the spread of Capitalism and modern industry into Eastern Europe their economic condition became even more precarious. The traditional economic and social structures of the Jewish population collapsed leaving them impoverished and in a state of existential crisis.

Next to these hard conditions the Jews had to cope with a very hostile environment. Anti Semitism was rampant in the Russian Empire and sometimes encouraged by the government who saw in the Jews an easy scapegoat for the many problems facing the country. Fierce pogroms were not uncommon and combined with the harsh economic conditions and a demographic growth of the Jewish population this resulted in mass emigration of East European Jews to America and Western Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century.¹²

Culturally the Jews of Eastern Europe differed from West European Jewry in that they kept and developed a distinct Jewish culture, and spoke their own language, Yiddish. While the relatively small numbers of Jews in Western Europe made it possible to assimilate into the larger non-Jewish society the presence of a large Jewish minority - in some areas and towns Jews even constituted an absolute majority – made this option impossible in the East. While the ideas of the *Haskalah* movement did spread into Eastern Europe in the more well educated and wealthier Jewish circles - and at certain moments even received the tacit support of the Russian government- the vast Jewish masses still adhered to the traditional Jewish orthodox faith or to the great Hassidic revival that had swept through Eastern Europe from the 18th century onwards.¹³ While wealthier and progressive Jewish circles favored Russification and similar developments to Western European Jewry the vast majority of impoverished Jews remained enclosed within their traditional spheres and the boundaries of their ghettos and shtetls.

But even in these walls cracks started to appear. The young generation of Jews grew restless, the economic deterioration and the breakdown of traditional social structures lead many to seek for alternatives to life in traditional Jewish society.

The pogroms of the 1880's and the anti-Jewish policy of the Tsarist government shattered the hopes of the educated and wealthier Jewish classes for the gradual integration into general society. Many turned to different solutions. Some argued for the national revival of the Jewish people and the establishment of a Jewish Nation, others proposed a cultural revival of the Jewish people and

¹¹ According to Laqueur 5 million Jews lived in the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century. This is about ten times the size of Germany's Jewish population which was the most populous of Western Europe. W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p.56

¹² From 1880 to 1930 Jews were the largest emigration nation in the World. R. Van Doorslaer, , *Joden en politiek in België. Een geschiedenis tussen de twee wereldoorlogen*, unpublished article (2012).

¹³ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 61-65.

demanded cultural autonomy within the motherland. Even others decided that the answer could not be found within the Jewish people itself and joined left wing revolutionary movements and later the Communist Party. Together with the young generation these intellectuals now turned to the new ideologies that had manifested themselves on the East European scene.

When Herzl thus began his mission he found ready allies in Eastern Europe many of whom were to attend the first Zionist congress and made a strong mark on the Zionist movement.

After the first Zionist Congress expectations ran high. They were soon to be tempered. The lack of progress in the years after the first Congress led to frustration amongst some of delegates. Although in the years following the first Congress important institutions were set up, like the Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet Le Israel – KKL*), progress was rather slow.

In the following congresses the atmosphere grew grimmer and Herzl's leadership grew tenuous. The various factions within the Zionist movement found it difficult to agree with each other and at the sixth Zionist congress in 1903 the question of whether a Jewish state should be established in Uganda almost drove the movement to a split. In the end it was decided that Africa was not suited for Jewish colonization.¹⁴ Herzl did not live to see the seventh Zionist congress and died in 1904 having spent most of his health, wealth and fortune on the movement he had established.

After Herzl's death the movement passed into new hands but the divisions within the Zionist movement remained deep. The main differences lay between the adherents of Political Zionism and of Practical Zionism. The Russians delegates argued that the emphasis of the movement must lay on practical measures, the establishment of agricultural settlements and strengthening of the Jewish presence in Palestine. The adherents of Political Zionism argued that without a legal recognition of the Jewish state by the powers of Europe the acquisition of land in Palestine would be void and precious resources would be wasted by allocating funds towards this goal. In the end a compromise was reached whereby the Zionist movement was to systematically work towards strengthening the Jewish position in Palestine while rejecting the earlier philanthropic small scale colonization.¹⁵

The Balfour declaration in 1917 saw the de facto recognition of Political Zionism as a political force on the World stage and was greeted by Zionists around the world with ecstasy. At long last the efforts of the Zionist Organization had borne fruit with what was perceived to be a written promise by the world's most powerful nation for a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine. In 1922 the League of Nations called for the establishment of a Jewish Agency in British Mandate Palestine which should represent the interests of the Jewish population. In the beginning the World Zionist organization acted as the Jewish Agency but in 1929 non-Zionist delegates were included within the organization so as to represent the entire Jewish people. Fifty percent of the delegates were to be Zionist with the other half chosen from non-Zionist organizations from over 26 countries presided over by Chaim Weizman as president of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency. Due to the economic crisis in the 1930's this arrangement however failed to materialize and after some years the Jewish Agency came to be synonymous with the Word Zionist Organization.

¹⁴ The ultimate decision was taken at the seventh Zionist congress in 1905.

¹⁵ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 136-137.

The Jewish Agency, with its efficient administration and the financial resources of the Zionist movement at its back, soon took the role of the unofficial government of the *Yishuv*. In the years after the First World War the Zionist movement was able to make significant advances in Palestine even in the face of restrictions imposed on immigration ordained by the British mandate government (the White Paper of 1922 and the White paper of 1930) and staunch Arab resistance.

Very early in Zionist history *Poale Tzion*, a Socialist Zionist party had been established which was a leading force in the settlement efforts in Palestina and would in the 1930's come to dominate the Zionist movement as its most important political force.

Around the same time when political Zionism first appeared upon the European stage Socialism spread throughout the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe. Many Jews joined the Russian Socialist Party while others felt the need to establish an autonomous Jewish Labour movement. In 1897 the *Bund* was established as a distinct Jewish non-Zionist Labour movement. It was to remain the largest Jewish socialist movement in Eastern Europe until the Second World War and was vehemently opposed to left wing Zionism which it accused of being in league with, or manipulated by the Jewish bourgeoisie which was only interested in the creation of Palestine as a profitable market for investment and speculation.¹⁶

Instead the Bund propagated political and cultural autonomy for the Jews within the boundaries of their own nations in accordance with the ideas developed by the Austro-Marxist theorists. It ridiculed the use of Hebrew which was seen as the language of the reactionary rabbis and of some misguided visionaries. Yiddish was seen as the language of the Jewish masses.

While the Bund was the strongest Jewish Labour movement it received strong competition from Labour Zionism, the *Poale Tzion*, which saw the attitude of the Bund towards the national question as naïve and nihilistic. Syrkin and Borokhov, the two main theorists of Labour Zionism felt that the establishment of Jewish state was an absolute necessity for the solution for the Jewish question. The state should however be established by a mass movement on a socialist model. While Syrkin accepted some of the doctrines of Marxism it was Borokhov who actively sought to develop a synthesis between orthodox Marxism and Zionism, an attempt in which he sometimes had to wriggle himself into awkward positions due to the inconsistencies which existed between the two movements.

To explain Zionism just by means of processes of production and scientific dialectical materialism like orthodox Marxism demanded would inevitably fail to explain the mystical romantic element which was inherent in Zionism and without which the Zionist movement could not exist. Why else would thousands of young men and women leave their homes and countries to build a new land with hard labour and selfless devotion if not for a myth, a vision of a new and better future looming over the horizon?¹⁷

Whatever inconsistencies there were, *Poale Tzion* saw their numbers rise sharply and in the first decade of the twentieth century centers were established all over Europe, Palestine and in the United states. In 1919 the movement split into a right and a left wing. The right wing generally

¹⁶ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 273-274.

¹⁷ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 276.

known as the right *Poale Tzion* or simply *Poale Tzion* developed into a reformist Social Democratic Party, for an important part due to the realities the movement experienced in Palestine. The undisputed leader of the Poale Tzion party – called *Mapai* in Palestine - became David Ben Gurion.

The left wing known as the *Linke Poale Tzion* kept their revolutionary Marxist character and sought to establish closer ties with the Soviet Union and the Comintern. It tried several times in vain to gain a seat in the Communist International but was each time rebuffed by this organization which regarded each form of Zionism with suspicion. When in 1920 the Poale Tzion returned to the Zionist World Congress, after the Socialist delegates had walked out of the 7th Congress in 1905, the *Linke Poale Tzion* refused to do so and would only rejoin the Congress 17 years later in 1937.

On the other side of the Political spectrum a right wing Zionist party was established under the leadership of Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky in 1924. Jabotinsky and his party known as the Revisionists openly pleaded for the establishment of a Jewish State in the whole territory of Palestine which should be established on both sides of the Jordan River. While in the 1930's the World Zionist Organization was still reluctant to call for the establishment of a Jewish state for fear of antagonizing the British and the Arabs, Jabotinsky and his followers expressed no such doubts. They therefore pleaded for mass immigration to Palestine and saw the strife with the Arab population as an inevitable consequence. To reach an agreement with the Arabs an iron wall of Jewish fighters should be built until the Arabs would reach the conclusion that Zionism could not be defeated and that they would have to live with it and accept it. The Arab minority in Palestine would be given full citizenship and equal rights.¹⁸

On economic matters the Revisionists at first didn't have a clear policy. They saw themselves neither as socialists nor as capitalists. Later on Revisionism grew more and more anti-socialist, partly in response to the policy Labour Zionism maintained in the *Yishuv*.

In 1935 the Revisionists split from the Zionist organization and formed the New Zionist Organization. Only in 1946, after the end of the Second World War were the Revisionists to come back within the fold of the Zionist organization.

Next to the various secular Zionist parties there was also a religious Zionist movement. While the roots of Orthodox Zionism can be traced to the Middle Ages and various Jewish rabbis and sages in later ages also proposed the rebuilding of Israel, the organization of Zionist Orthodox Jewry known under the common denominator *Mizrakhi* only took place in 1902, some years after Herzl and political Zionism had established itself on the European map. The *Mizrakhi* movement combined nationalism and religion. The core of Zionism had to be religion and the law of the land of Israel had to be derived from religious tradition.¹⁹

While the history of European Jewry and the Zionist movement and its different factions is a lot more complicated than the simple schematic summary given above, for our purpose here it suffices to give the general outline of its history and the four main tendencies within the movement namely General (liberal) Zionism, Labour Zionism, Revisionism and Religious Zionism.

¹⁸ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 347-349.

¹⁹ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 482-483.

It is important to bear in mind however that the Zionist movement was only a minority in the Jewish ideological landscape prior to the Second World War. It was by no means uncontested and the Jewish majority as a whole did not feel inclined towards the reestablishment of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. In Western Europe even with the rise of anti-Semitism most Jews felt at home in their countries and enjoyed the fruits they had gained with emancipation. In Eastern Europe the majority of the Jewish working class rallied behind the Bund and its ideas of cultural and political autonomy. Many others joined the Communist Party and were fierce opponents of Zionism believing that only with the world revolution and the abolishment of classes and the worldwide establishment of a Communist society would the Jewish question be solved.

Most of the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews in Eastern as well as Central- and Western Europe rejected Zionism and saw it as a blasphemous conspiracy against the House of Israel. The reestablishment of a Jewish State was the privilege of the Messiah not to be touched upon by mortal men. The secular outline of the Zionist movement furthermore enraged the ultra-orthodox leaders who saw religion as the bond that kept the nation of Israel together. The Zionist attempt at national revival left religion outside of the equation and would thus be void of any meaning.

While Zionism was thus by no means the biggest or most important section of Jewish society in Europe before the Second World War the movement was to have a major role in the future of Jewish and world history. The seeds, framework and institutions for the (re)establishment of a Jewish Homeland were laid at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.

If we now turn our attention towards the establishment of the Hashomer Hatzair in Galicia in 1913 the first thing which can be said is that the movement was a typical child of Eastern Europe. Both its outlook and mentality resulted from the specific East European conditions the Jewish youth were living in. Galicia at this time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with a population where Poles constituted the overwhelming majority with important Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Jewish and German minorities. With the breakdown of the Jewish economic and social structures during the spread of Capitalism in Eastern Europe the Jewish youth from the upper middle class -who had previously sought to find for themselves a place in Polish society- found itself in a state of perplexed anxiety.

On the one hand Polish society of whom they had tried to become a part rejected them and did not recognize the hard labor these Jewish intellectuals and upper section of Jewish society had fulfilled towards the goal of assimilation into Polish society. On the other hand the traditional Jewish society- which in itself was in crisis following the economic deprivation with the spread of capitalism- was unable to provide a clear alternative in which these intellectuals and students could find themselves.²⁰

They were stuck somewhere in the middle without a set identity to cling on to, an uprooted group of people who didn't feel at home in Polish nor in traditional Jewish society. As a result they started developing their own identity by turning to Jewish Cultural Nationalism. Zionism in the sense of a return towards the land of Israel was as yet not a practical choice before the First World War. Instead they emphasized the struggle against assimilationism and were engaged in scouting and sport activities.

²⁰ E. Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement", 1913-20, IN: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4(1969), 2, p. 28.

It is from this cultural and social environment that the two organizations which would later form the *Hashomer Hatzair* movement came into being. The *Hashomer* (The watchman) organization was a group of scouting and athletic societies who were formed on the model of the Polish scout movements. They emphasized physical activities and a return to nature to harden and discipline the young Jewish generation and to compensate for the intellectual overgrowth that traditionally was stimulated in Jewish society.²¹

The second organization, called *Tseirei Zion* (The Youngsters of Zion), consisted of student and secondary school societies who sought to improve their knowledge of Jewish matters. They continued the traditions of both the *Haskalah* and of the casuistic system of reasoning in the Talmudic tradition and were imbued by a strong Jewish national spirit. In 1913 both organizations merged under the name Hashomer Hatzair.²²

Although Hashomer Hatzair was established in Galicia in 1913 it is in Vienna during the years of the First World War that the movement grew to maturity. As Galicia was one of the main battlefields at the beginning of the First World War, thousands of Jews fled to Vienna and it is there that the character of the movement developed and a strong leadership emerged who would help to spread out the movement and define its outline and ideology. The first leaders came from well-to-do homes and had a wide intellectual background being familiar with *Haskalah*, *Khassidism*, and Jewish national literature. It is therefore understandable that the movement picked its ideas from a wide array of cultural sources. Vienna at the time of the war was a transit centre for all kind of Jewish groups, some of which came from Palestine from where they were expelled by the Ottomans. The leaders of the Hashomer Hatzair were thus able to meet with all kinds of people and to gain a familiarity with the ideas coming from both Palestine and the West European Jewish movements who were active in Vienna at the time.²³

In general the early Hashomer Hatzair ideology proposed a moral and spiritual revival of the Jewish Youth. The Jews should become whole and healthy men and women again. Not the broken, weak and decayed Jewish intellectual of the Diaspora but the Ancient Hebrew, strong in mind and body was to be the example for the Jewish youth. They studied the writing of Jewish revivalist intellectuals like Martin Buber and the writings of the ideologists of other non Jewish youth movements like those of Gustav Wyneken from which they took the idea of a society of Youth with its own morals and culture in opposition to those of adult society.

They spent a lot of time in contemplation and introspection and group discussions and public confessions were an integral part of the movement in addition to the more traditional scouting activities. The group functioned as a kind of family, a cell to which they were fully committed and devoted. They regarded themselves as an elite, a spiritual and moral vanguard.²⁴

While other Zionist youth movements were linked to a specific Zionist party, *Betar* for instance was the youth movement of the Revisionists, the Hashomer Hatzair was not linked to a specific Zionist party but formed a specific political platform of its own, largely drawn from the Kibbutz federation (*Kibbutz Artzi*) it had established in 1927.

²¹ E. Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer", p. 29.

²² E. Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer", p. 29.

²³ E. Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer", p. 32-33.

²⁴ E. Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer", p. 42-43.

In Palestine during the severe economic crisis in 1926-27 it had shed its initial spiritual romanticism and embraced left wing revolutionary Marxism, positioning itself between the Palestinian Communist Parties and *Mapai*, the Social Democratic party of David Ben Gurion. Historical Materialism, Class Struggle and social revolution were accepted albeit that they should be postponed until after a Jewish proletariat had been established along the shores of Palestine. The position of the Communist International towards Zionism was strongly denounced by the Hashomer Hatzair movement.²⁵

In 1946 it established its own political party known as the "Hashomer Hatzair Workers Party of Palestine" which in 1948 merged with the left wing *Akhdut Ha'avoda* to form *Mapam*.²⁶

At the eve of the Second World War Hashomer Hatzair had become a global youth movement, with branches active in Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Yugoslavia, France, Britain, Switzerland, Tunisia, Egypt, South Africa, U.S.A., Canada and the movement was starting to spread into Latin America²⁷ The movement counted around 70 000 members worldwide.

²⁵ E. Margalit, "Social and intellectual origins of the Hashomer", p. 45. ; The term Palestinian in this thesis can also refer to Jews or Jewish organizations in British mandate Palestine.

²⁶ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 332-334.

²⁷ M. Peretz and J. Israeli, "Ha-Shomer Ha-Za'ir.", In: M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik, eds, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. Vol. 8. Detroit, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 382-385.

3. Antwerp, and its Jewish Community from the end of the 19th century up to the Second World War.

At the end of the 19th century around 1880 Belgium's Jewish population consisted of a few small communities in the big cities of Belgium, mostly from Dutch, German or French background. They numbered around 5000 people and were well integrated into Belgian society, with a West European outlook and mentality.²⁸ They were officially recognized by the Belgian government and looked upon themselves as Belgian citizens' conform to the ideas of assimilationism which were current in many Jewish circles of Western Europe at that time. In Antwerp the number of Jews in 1867 was estimated between 800 and 1000 persons.²⁹

After 1880 with the pogroms and the dire socio-economic conditions in Eastern Europe a huge number of Jewish emigrants fled the Russian Empire to seek a better life somewhere else. Antwerp with its harbor served as an important transit centre towards the United States of America and in lesser degree some South American nations like Argentina and Brazil. Some of these emigrants however remained in Antwerp where they established new communities modeled on their East European background. In 1890 a new wave of Austro-Hungarian Jewish immigrants reached Antwerp. These immigrants had left their *shtetls* in West-Galicia as a result of the poor economic conditions and anti-Jewish riots committed by Polish and Ruthenian minorities in their home countries.³⁰

Next to these refugees there was a relatively large number of Jewish students from the Russian Empire who studied in Antwerp after the Russian authorities had imposed a *numerus clausus* on Jewish students at the Russian universities and institutes of higher learning. After the repression of the failed Russian revolution of 1905 around 300 Jewish political refugees settled in Antwerp.³¹

While the influx of East European Jews certainly added to the demographic rise of the Jewish population of Antwerp it appears that until a few years before the First World War the German and Dutch Jewish population remained dominant in Antwerp. This can also be seen in the use of German as the language of the first Zionist journal *Hatikva* until 1914.³²

At the outset of the First World War some 20.000 Jews resided in the city of Antwerp with some 40.000 living in Belgium as a whole.³³

²⁸ V. Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen, de heropbouw van de Joodse Gemeenschap in Antwerpen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog (1944-1960)*, Askant, Amsterdam, 2008, p. 27.

²⁹ E. Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Antwerpen; in woord en beeld*, De Vries-Brouwers, Antwerpen-Rotterdam; 1994; p. 99.

³⁰ L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad; een geschiedenis van Antwerpen en zijn Joodse bevolking (1880-1944)*, Lannoo, Tielt, 2000, p. 6-8.

³¹ L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 6-8.

³² L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 9-10.

³³ J.P. Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique du Moyen Age a la Première Guerre mondiale*, éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, Brussel, 1996. As seen in: L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p.10. ; It is important to point out however that exact demographic figures of the Jewish community don't exist partly due to the discussion with regards to the sources and the criteria of who should or shouldn't be included within the Jewish Community. The numbers given in this thesis are thus extrapolations by some authoritative authors on the subject.

With the outbreak of the First World War most Jews who were not Belgian citizens fled from Antwerp, or were expelled by the Belgium authorities. Most Jews living in Belgium were foreign residents from enemy countries and were regarded by the Belgian authorities with mistrust and suspicion. The Austro-Hungarian Jews mostly went to Holland where they regrouped around the town of Scheveningen. Many of those of Russian origin left for London.³⁴

As a result of the First World War the Jewish presence in Antwerp declined drastically; of the 20.000 Jews living in Antwerp in 1914, between 8.200 and 9.600 remained in 1920.³⁵ Soon however their numbers would swell again, partly as a result of a return of some of the refugees who had fled the war but mostly as a result of a massive new immigration wave from Eastern Europe. Because of the restrictions on immigration imposed by the United States in 1921 and 1924 and the stricter migration policy introduced in Great Britain, Germany and Holland, Belgium and France became a popular destination for the Jewish refugees of Eastern Europe due to their liberal migration policy.

Most refugees came from the reestablished Poland and fled the harsh economic conditions, overpopulation and anti-Semitic violence of their home country. The majority of those who settled in Antwerp came from the area of the former Austrian Galicia, from cities such as Cracow, Lwow and Tarnow and from the many smaller towns and villages of this area as well as from the central Polish provinces of Warsaw, Lodz, and Kielce, which had previously been a part of the Russian Empire.³⁶

In Antwerp they settled in the vicinity of the railway station and in these Jewish neighborhoods a distinctly East European character developed. Yiddish was the main language spoken in the streets, Jewish shops with Hebrew writings on the windowpanes adorned the streets and a minority of ultra Orthodox religious Jews wore distinct East European Jewish clothes. On Friday men in *Talit*, the Jewish prayer shawls, could be seen walking to and from the synagogue and from the windows the smell of typical East European dishes and the sounds of melodic *Klezmer* tunes could be discerned. In the coffee houses men studied and discussed the news from Yiddish newspapers and journals. In short a typical Yiddish culture had settled on the shores of the Scheldt in Antwerp.

Together with their cultural customs the Jewish religious and political institutions which had been established in Eastern Europe were transposed to their new homeland. The various organizations, Zionist, non-Zionist, religious or secular, progressive or traditional, were introduced by the immigrants and found fertile ground within the new community. The arrival of the new East European immigrants completely transformed the Belgian Jewish scene, creating a dynamic, heterogenic community where – notwithstanding the quarrels, fights and differences between the various subgroups, regional backgrounds and the cultural separation between new immigrants and the older already settled group of Belgian Jews - a strong sense of solidarity persisted.

From 1933 to 1940 a second immigration wave, this time refugees from Nazi Germany and later Austria, settled in Antwerp. They escaped the racial prosecution and anti-Jewish policies of the Third Reich. At the start of the Second World War the Jewish population in Antwerp reached about

³⁴ D. Dratwa, "The Zionist Kaleidoscope in Belgium", In: D. Michman, ed. *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 48.

³⁵ J.P. Schreiber, *L'immigration juive en Belgique du Moyen Age a la Première Guerre mondiale*, éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, Brussel, 1996. As seen in: L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 10.

³⁶ L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 16.

35.000, with some 70.000 to 75.000 in the whole of Belgium making it the biggest “Jewish” city of Belgium.³⁷

The socio-economic profile of the Antwerp Jewish population and in extension of Belgian Jewry was characterized by its specific position in the Belgian economy. Next to a small minority of rich Jews active in banking who were largely concentrated in Brussels, the majority of Jews in Belgium worked in small scale, artisanal ateliers producing luxury goods. The Jewish workers in the two cities with a substantial Jewish minority, Brussels and Antwerp, worked in the textile business, the leather and fur business and in Antwerp the diamond sector. These sectors had a low degree of industrial development which allowed small Jewish patrons to establish a business by employing cheap Jewish labour. They often worked in small ateliers or worked from home selling their labour at piece-wages.³⁸

This economic position made them particularly vulnerable when the economic crisis struck in 1930. The demand for luxury items dropped and many small scale businesses went bankrupt. As a result piece-wages and peddling increased. In the textile and diamond industries competition with the non-Jewish labour force increased which led to xenophobic reactions and anti-Jewish sentiment.

In Antwerp the food industry employed a significant number of people because of the need for kosher food. Trade in the form of small shops, vendors at markets or peddling in a wide array of products constituted the most significant economic activity. A parallel economical circuit developed in which the Jewish population supplied for their own needs next to those of the non-Jewish population of Antwerp. This led to friction with the non Jewish small shop keepers and the organizations representing them during the economic crisis. They pleaded to the authorities to adopt measures to what they saw as unfair competition from these Jewish peddlers and vendors. This friction in part helps to explain the rise in anti-Semitism during the second part of the 1930's.³⁹

As mentioned before the influx of a vast number of East European Jewish immigrants transformed the political and cultural landscape of Belgian Jewry. One of the significant changes was the emergence of a strong Zionist tendency within the Belgian Jewish community. By the time the Second World War erupted Zionism in its various forms had become the strongest political current in Belgium Jewish population.⁴⁰ This was in stark contrast to other West-European nations where Zionism before 1945 remained a rather marginal phenomenon.

Antwerp played a leading role in the Zionist movement in Belgium. It numbered the highest percentage of Zionist activists who had a right to vote and collected the most funds for the Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet LeYisrael*, KKL).⁴¹

In contrast to Brussels where the Zionist movement was characterized by a strong left wing orientation as seen in the election results for the various Zionist congresses, Antwerp's Zionist scene was dominated by General (Liberal) and Religious Zionist organizations which, when counted

³⁷ V. Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, p. 29.

³⁸ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België. Een geschiedenis tussen de twee wereldoorlogen*. Unpublished article (2012), p. 3.

³⁹ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België. Een geschiedenis.....*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ D. Dratwa, “The Zionist Kaleidoscope in Belgium, p.55

⁴¹ See: CZA; KKL-PR.1143.1; YIVO, Trotsky collection, Folder 17A, 17B (Keren Kayemeth, Keren Hayesod).

together, received an absolute majority of the votes in the elections to the Zionist Congress of 1927, 1929 and 1939.⁴²

As early as 1898 the first Zionist organization *Agudath Zion* was established in Antwerp. It was established by recent immigrants from Galicia, Russia and the Ottoman Empire and recruited from the Jewish middle class.⁴³ Politically it was aligned with the World Zionist Organization.

In 1905 the Belgian Zionist Federation was established in Antwerp after several Zionist circles; *Agudath Zion*, *Cercle des Dames Sionistes*, *cercle des Etudiants Sionistes* and *Tzeirei Zion* fused together.⁴⁴ The Belgian Zionist Federation sought to united all Zionist organizations in Belgium and in the same year a national religious *Mizrakhi* branch was established under the name '*Mizrakhi Verein-Bnei Zion*'.⁴⁵

Later in 1919-1920 two religious youth movements were established one for boys the other for girls, and in 1933 with the arrival of German refugees the religious youth movement '*Bne Akiva*' which had originated in Palestine was established. Later *Bne Akiva* founded other chapters in Brussels and Liège.⁴⁶

While at the end of the 19th century there had been substantial opposition towards Zionism from the Belgian Consistory, the communal organization of Belgian Judaism - which saw Zionism as unpatriotic and feared it would arouse anti-Semitic reactions - in the few years preceding the First World War some members of the consistory adopted a more positive attitude towards Zionism. This rapprochement would slowly continue after the war when some of the Zionist leaders became part of the establishment (they mostly came from the General Zionists with its middle class base).⁴⁷

The period before the First World War was the formative period in the history of the Zionist movement in Belgium and Antwerp. The impulse for the movement was given but it remained a relatively small movement within the educated Jewish middle class. Zionism as a strong political current and mass movement for the Jewish working class would have to wait until after the war and the arrival of a great number of East European immigrants.

During the First World War the Zionist activities in Antwerp came to a standstill. Most of Antwerp's Jewish population had left the country with the outbreak of the war. In Scheveningen the Belgian Zionist Federation continued some of its activities and a new Zionist scouting movement came into being. In 1920 former members of this youth movement who returned to Antwerp established one of the first Zionist youth movements in the city and adopted the name '*Bar Kokhba*'. This scouting movement would play an important role in the history of the Hashomer Hatzair of Antwerp as will be recounted in the following chapter.

⁴² V. Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, ... p. 227-228.

⁴³ D. Dratwa, *The Zionist Kaleidoscope....*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ R. Van Doorslaer, *Kinderen van het getto. Joodse revolutionairen in België, 1925-1940*, Antwerpen-Baarn/Gent, Hadewijch/AMSAB, 1996, p. 29.

⁴⁵ E. Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de joden in Antwerpen in woord en beeld*, De Vries-Brouwer, Antwerpen-Rotterdam, p. 129.

⁴⁶ D. Michman, "Zionist Youth movement in Holland and Belgium and their activities during the Shoah", In: A. Cohen and Y. Cochavi, eds. *Zionist Youth Movements during the Shoah*, Peter Lang Publishing, 1995, p. 158-159.

⁴⁷ D. Dratwa, "The Zionist Kaleidoscope....", p. 52-53.

After the war the Zionist activities continued. Next to General and Religious Zionism, Labour Zionism manifested itself for the first time on the Belgian scene.

In 1921 *Poale Tzion* was established in Belgium. This party maintained good contacts with the Belgische Werkliedenpartij (Belgian Socialist Workers Party) and some of its leaders after the party had joined the Socialist International in 1923.

In 1932 *Poale Tzion* merged with *Tzeirei Tzion*, a leftist pioneering movement, to form *Poale Tzion-Tzeirei Tzion*. The movement had considerable success in Antwerp and in the 1930's became an important party in Antwerp gaining 47,5% of the votes for the Zionist Congress in 1935, a score they would never repeat afterwards.⁴⁸ In 1933 they established a pioneering youth movement called *Dror*, the Hebrew name for freedom. *Dror* had been established in Poland in 1915 when the members of *Tzeirei Tzion* who had refused to merge with Hashomer to become Hashomer Hatzair, established a youth movement of their own (see previous chapter). It had further chapters in Brussels, Liège, Charleroi and a small one in Seraing.⁴⁹

In 1927 a branch of the *Linke Poale Tzion* was established in Antwerp. Unlike in Brussels the *Linke Poale Tzion* would never gain significant support in Antwerp. This is probably the reason why their youth movement '*Borochov Yugnt*' in short '*Yung Bor*' only had a branch in Brussels.⁵⁰

Next to Labour Zionism a branch of the Revisionist party was established in Antwerp. For a short time, during the beginning of the economic crisis in 1929-1931 they made significant inroads and became the dominant Zionist current in Belgium. After 1933 they lost most of their votes and the General (Liberal) and Labour Zionist parties dominated the Belgian Zionist scene.⁵¹ In 1929 a branch of *Betar* (the abbreviation of *Brit Trumpeldor* or Trumpeldor Bund), the Revisionist youth movement, whose origin lay in Latvia was established in Antwerp.

While some of the Zionist Youth movements which were active in Antwerp between the two World Wars have already been mentioned a few have thus far remained absent from this summary. The youth movement aligned with the General Zionist party *Hanoar Hatzioni* (The Zionist Youth) was organized in Antwerp in 1933, it had further branches in Brussels and Liège. *Gordonia* a social-democratic Zionist movement named after Aron David Gordon, one of the great Zionist ideologists, was established in 1929 and in 1931 *Maccabi Hatzair* (Young Maccabee) the youth section of the sport club *Maccabi*, a liberal organization from Central Europe, was established.

Tzeirei Ha'am (the Youth of the People) was a youth movement which, unlike the previously mentioned movements, which could be found all over Europe, was unique to Antwerp. It had a strong appeal in Antwerp and had no clear political affiliation but opened itself to all ranges of the Zionist spectrum. It was strongly orientated towards *Aliyah* to Palestine.

⁴⁸ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België. Een geschiedenis*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ D. Michman, "Zionist Youth movement in Holland and Belgium", p. 159.

⁵⁰ D. Michman, "Zionist Youth movement in Holland and Belgium", p. 158. ; it is also typical that the name of the youth movement of the *Linke Poale Tzion* was Yiddish instead of the Hebrew used by the other movements. The *Linke Poale Tzion* preferred the use of Yiddisch.

⁵¹ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België. Een geschiedenis.....* , p. 9.

Another Youth movement that was unique to Antwerp was 'Akhdut' (Unity) who like *Tzeirei Ha'am* had no specific political orientation but was more religiously inspired.⁵²

In 1937 most of the Zionist youth movements joined ranks in the 'Zionist Youth Federation'. Its headquarters were in Antwerp.⁵³

Zionism had thus made significant advances in Antwerp in the years preceding World War Two. It constituted the biggest political current on the Jewish street but its fragmentation made it sometimes difficult to organize coordinated political action. Especially on the left it received competition from the Jewish Communists in the appeal for the hearts and minds of the Jewish workers and laborers.

With the arrival of the East European immigrants in the 1920's Communism was introduced in the Jewish street. Unlike the anti-Zionist *Bund* which never gathered any solid support in Antwerp, the Jewish Communists in Antwerp organized themselves around some cultural centers (*Jidisjer Arbeter Koeltoer Farejn*) and established "mass organizations" like the sports club JASK and the propaganda club for Birobidjan 'Gezerd' (afterward its name changed to 'Prokor').

They established relations with the Belgian Communist Party but retained a distinct cultural identity which in part was a result of the conditions on the Jewish street, as there was no substantial industrial Jewish working class but small scale merchants and artisans dominated the Jewish scene. This specific Jewish identity was frowned upon by the Belgian Communist Party which regarded this as a deviation of official doctrine and accused the Jewish communists of nationalistic and petty-bourgeois tendencies.⁵⁴

The activities and policy of the Jewish Communists can be split into two periods following the official policy of the Communist International during the interwar years. In the years between 1928 and 1935 Communism waged a radical political struggle predominantly against the Reformist Socialists and in general a strategy of Class War. In Belgium the Jewish Communists fought a lonely uphill battle against all other ideological and political currents within Belgian Judaism. It strongly rejected the reactionary traditional religious circles and was opposed to all forms of Zionism, even those of the extreme left wing of the Zionist organizations. The Communist efforts met with little success except for some small victories against the extreme left fringe of the Zionist movement.

It is only during the economic depression and the reversal of the official Communist line- who with the rise of Fascism propagated cooperation with other Progressive and anti-Fascist parties and organizations to curb the Fascist movements, a policy know as the 'People's Front'- that the Jewish Communists in Antwerp gained influence. They dropped their rigid stance towards leftist Zionism and some modest cooperation between the Communists and other progressive forces in the Jewish Community ensued. Because of this more open and less sectarian approach the party was able to expand its base, becoming especially prominent in the various Jewish syndical organizations.⁵⁵

⁵² D. Michman, "Zionist Youth movement in Holland and Belgium", p. 160-161.

⁵³ D. Michman, "Zionist Youth movement in Holland and Belgium", p. 161.

⁵⁴ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België*...., p. 15-17. ; For a detailed account of the Jewish communists in Belgium see: R. Van Doorslaer, *Kinderen van het getto. Joodse revolutionairen in België, 1925-1940*, Antwerpen-Baarn/Gent, Hadewijch/AMSAB, 1996, 252 p.

⁵⁵ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België*...., p. 18-19.

While the Communists saw their influence expand in the 1930's in Antwerp, as a whole they weren't able to play a prominent role in Jewish life in Antwerp which remained dominated by the Zionists. In Brussels their fortunes were better, but the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in 1939 put an end to that. The cooperation between the Jewish Communists and other Jewish parties was broken, leaving the Communists once again totally secluded from the rest of Jewish society.⁵⁶

Next to Zionism and Communism, Orthodox Judaism was an important segment in the Antwerp Jewish community. Antwerp numbered more synagogues and prayer houses than Brussels and the influence of Orthodox Judaism was greater than in the capital.⁵⁷

At the end of the 19th century several Orthodox communities were established as result of the influx of new immigrants to Antwerp. Because of the demographic rise of the Jewish population in the city a significant number of – often small - new synagogues were erected and in 1883 the '*Adass Jeshurun*' (Community of the people of Israel) was established and united the Orthodox communities of Antwerp. Later it changed its name to '*Machsike Hadas*' (keepers of the faith).

The Sephardic Portuguese Jews, of whom many had come from Turkey and the Netherlands, established a community and a synagogue for themselves and gained official recognition by the Belgian authorities in 1910.⁵⁸

Two years later in 1912, the same year of its establishment in Eastern Europe, the Orthodox, strictly anti-Zionist '*Agudat Israel*' (Union of Israel) formed a branch in Antwerp. This movement had come into existence as a reaction against the secular Zionist organization which it saw as blasphemous. In 1937 their community numbered about 400 members.⁵⁹

Another religious community was established in 1920. '*Shomre Hadas*' (Guardians of the faith), a religious Orthodox community was a little bit more open to modern practices than the *Makhsike Hadas*.⁶⁰

Together these different communities formed a strong and very visible minority on the Jewish street in Antwerp. Due to their distinct vestimentary codes and appearance it is this minority in particular that came to shape the image of "the Jew" in the eyes of the non-Jewish population.

Antwerp prior to the Second World War thus had a large and diverse Jewish population. Its Jewish life was characterized by a highly politicized Community where different political and ideological currents vied for the loyalty its members. Zionism while being divided in to different currents constituted the strongest political force in the Jewish Community. But Communism, while never gaining the same strength as in Brussels, also made significant inroads. Next to these two currents a minority rejected both Zionism and Communism and instead kept to the traditional Jewish fate as it was known in the Diaspora.

⁵⁶ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België....*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ R. Van Doorslaer, *Joden en politiek in België....*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ E. Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de joden in Antwerpen in woord en beeld....*, p. 101.

⁵⁹ V. Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen,*, p. 292-230.

⁶⁰ E. Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de joden in Antwerpen in woord en beeld....*, p. 107.

4. From Antwerp Zionist Scout Movement to worldwide movement; Hashomer Hatzair and its predecessor Bar Kokhba.

The history of Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp can be traced back to the establishment of the Jewish National Scouting Organization *Bar Kokhba* (*Joods Nationale Padvinders Organisatie Bar Kokhba*) in Antwerp in 1920. This Zionist youth movement was the direct predecessor of the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp and most of the early members of the Hashomer Hatzair would come from this Zionist scouting movement. In this chapter we shall relate the history of this scouting organization until it changed into Hashomer Hatzair in 1924.

The history of the scouts movement Bar Kokhba has largely been written down by Mr. Sylvain Brachfeld in a chapter in his book *“Uit vervlogen tijden, wetenswaardigheden uit het Antwerps Joods Historisch Archief”*.⁶¹ We shall use his information combined with the original sources and some new information to relay and enhance the history of the movement.

While the Jewish National Scouting Organization *Bar Kokhba*, henceforth simply referred to as *Bar Kokhba*, was established in Antwerp in 1920 its beginnings can be traced to the town of Scheveningen in Holland where a vibrant colony of Antwerp Jewish refugees from World War One had found a safe haven. There a Jewish scouting organization with clear Zionist tendencies was established in 1915. Its members wore the typical scout's uniform and engaged in sporting activities. Part of Antwerp's Jewish youth residing in Scheveningen became members of the movement.⁶²

With the return of the refugees to Belgium after the war a Jewish scouting organization was established in Antwerp in 1920. The two leaders who initiated the movement were the brothers Kincler, Maurice (Monjek) and Jacob (Jakush). They had come from Kutno, which was part of the Russian administered Congress Poland, to Belgium in 1914 and resided in Antwerp during the war.⁶³

In an article in the journal of the Zionist federation 'HATIKWAH' on the 14th of May 1920 Maurice Kincler proudly announces the creation of the movement in Antwerp.

*“ It has been a few weeks since a group of Shomrim (Jewish Boy-scouts) has been established in Antwerp under the name “Jewish National Scouting Organization Bar Kokhba”. A dozen boys between 13 and 17 are taking part in the exercises that have already begun; every Sunday there is an excursion in the countryside for the whole day; Tuesday evening theory; Sunday afternoon intimate reunion. Lessons in Palestinian geography, National history and Hebrew are in preparation. (The commands are already given in Hebrew). We hope we'll be able to develop the organization in the weeks to come.”*⁶⁴

While the emphasis of the organization lay on scouting, the Jewish cultural and national education of its members also formed an integral part of the movement's activities. Hebrew songs were taught and sung by the members on the excursions and the commands in the movement were given in

⁶¹ S. Brachfeld, *Uit vervlogen tijden, wetenswaardigheden uit het Antwerps Joods Historisch Archief*, Antwerps Joods Historisch Archief, 1987, p. 93-111.

⁶² S. Brachfeld, *Uit vervlogen tijden, wetenswaardigheden*, p. 93.

⁶³ ARA, files of the Foreign Police, nr; 1080101 and 1.172.481

⁶⁴ HATIKWAH, 14-5-1920

Hebrew. The members of the movement were systematically referred to as '*Shomrim* (Watchmen)' in the publications.

The movement, though apolitical, had strong ties with the various Zionist organizations and other Jewish institutions in Antwerp. This can be seen in an article published in HATIKWAH where the organization announced its participation in a beneficial evening party of the "*Agudat Zion*" and "*Kadima*" for the Jewish National Fund (= KKL – short for *Keren Kayemet Le Israel*). Later on, from 1921 onwards, the movement collected funds for the Jewish National Fund, participated in cultural activities in the events organized by the KKL and had a stand in the bazaar it organized annually.⁶⁵

By 1921 the movement had become well established in Antwerp and became a successful Jewish scouting movement. Due to the lack of precise sources it is hard to tell how many members the movement had or to give precise information on the background of its members. My guess is that the movement could not have numbered more than 50 to 60 members including the leadership. The *Bar Kokhba* movement consisted of three groups organized by age (The first group "the Cubs" was for the youngest members 8-12 years of age, the girls of this age group were called the Brownies).⁶⁶ These groups were separated by gender and within these groups were different patrols each with each a leader.

All the groups were given names, both Hebrew (*Kfirim, Tsofim, Tsofot*) and English (Cubs, Scouts, Guides) were used at the same time. The English names give away the scouting legacy of Baden Powell. The patrols in good scouting tradition were given animal names (the Bulldog patrol, the Eagle patrol, the Swallow patrol, etc.). Hebrew terms were used for the leadership of the movement and the positions within the leadership. Most of the Hebrew terms were later also used by the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement.



Group picture of the Bar Kokhba movement around the flag. In the picture we can see the typical scouting uniforms. The youngest members wear the green caps while the older members wear khaki hats.

⁶⁵ AJHA-SB, Journal Bar Kokhba, 1st year (1923), N° 11, p.11

⁶⁶ AJHA-SB, Journal Bar Kokhba, 1st year (1923), N°3

The segregation of boys and girls can also be seen at the yearly summer camps the movement went to. In an interview an old member of *Bar Kokhba* tells us that the boys and girls camps were physically separated by 200 meters. Two boys guarded the girls section at night. During daytime the activities were communal with both boys and girls attending.⁶⁷

While the scouting organization was thus open for both sexes there remained some differences both in the organization and activities of the movement between girls and boys. This conforms to the norms of the time where the total abolition of these distinctions would certainly have created a stir and strong disapproval amongst the parents, as it later did with the Hashomer Hatzair movement in which there was a much freer relations between boys and girls .

With regards to the social background of the members of the *Bar Kokhba* movement a former member of the organization testifies that the early and thus oldest members of the movement (those who became members in 1920 and 1921) were largely second generation immigrants born and raised in Antwerp.

Later on with the influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe more and more children born in Poland joined the movement. The children came from all social backgrounds, with both poorer and wealthier kids joining the movement.⁶⁸

While the movement thus flourished in Antwerp it also seems to have experienced some setbacks. In July 1922 M. Kincler wrote a distraught letter in German to '*Agudat Zion*' urgently requesting funding for *Bar Kokhba*.

*"... have our financial conditions become such, that we are facing a catastrophe. This catastrophe would mean that our Hebrew course, our most important work, would be terminated. If this should happen, we would be forced to end this wonderful organization."*⁶⁹

Whether Mr. Kincler wrote such a dramatic letter in order to secure funding from *Agudat Zion*, which he subsequently got, or whether the organization was in real trouble we cannot know for certain. What the letter definitely does show is that the movement felt the need for extra funds and the central importance that was attached to the learning of Hebrew.

As the option of *Aliyah* from Belgium was as of yet not realistic, there were no established *Hakhsharah* centers and no real organization promoting *Aliyah*. Therefore the Zionist movements of the early twenties in Belgium mostly engaged in cultural work, raising funds for the Jewish National Fund and trying to raise awareness and new members for the plight of the *Yishuv* and the Zionist cause amongst the Jewish population in Antwerp.

The teaching of Hebrew was seen as a vital part of this education within all the Zionist movements and youth movements. Hebrew was to be the glue that bound all the Jews together with the revival of the National Home and represented the idea of the new strong Jew, whole in body and mind, as opposed to the poor, insecure 'Yid' of the Diaspora in his permanent state of anguish and insecurity.

⁶⁷ AJHA-SB, AUDIO#735 J.Scouts, Olei Belg, Maccabi, Joodse Padvindere (18011987 - 31121987)

⁶⁸ AJHA-SB, AUDIO#735 J.Scouts, Olei Belg, Maccabi, Joodse Padvindere (18011987 - 31121987)

⁶⁹ YAD YAARI, (1)1.11-2 (1921-1922), Folder 1.

It is therefore not surprising that M. Kincler attaches so much importance to the learning of Hebrew. The members of *Bar Kokhba* actively studied Hebrew. Courses in different levels of difficulty were given and at the end of each course an examination was taken.⁷⁰

While the option of immigration to Palestine was not yet plausible in Belgium in the first half of the 1920's the idea of *Aliyah* none the less played an important part in the ideology of the *Bar Kokhba* movement. This can be seen by some of the theatrical plays the organization organized - in a play called "*Hashomer Hatzair*" three acts recount the story of the migration of a group of youngsters to Palestine - and by talk of establishing a *Hekhalutz* center in Waulsort in the Province of Namur.⁷¹

As far as we know only one member of the *Bar Kokhba* actually made *Aliyah*. In an article in the journal of *Bar Kokhba* in April 1924 a farewell party is announced for *Rosh Plugah* Rosa Salzman who was leaving for Eretz-Israel.⁷² It seems however that this *Aliyah* was not organized by the organization but was done on individual commitment. Later on when *Bar Kokhba* had ceased to exist many former member would make *Aliyah*.

The main ideologist of the movement who wrote several articles in HATIKWAH about the goals and ideology of the organization was S. Churgel. He had previously been a member of Hashomer Hatzair in Poland. He emphasized a solid Jewish education with knowledge of the Jewish National Culture, Hebrew language, the Torah and the Books of the Prophets.⁷³

This also shows that in *Bar Kokhba* attention was given to religious tradition and education, a fact further demonstrated by the morning prayers each day at camp.⁷⁴

While Jewish national education was thus an important part of the identity of the movement, scouting activities were its most important aspect and took precedence over its Zionist activities. These activities consisted of marches in the countryside, orientation skills, games and in general a positive attitude towards nature and an emphasis on physical activities like sports and walks.

The *Bar Kokhba* movement also sought to engage with other Jewish and non-Jewish scouting movements. In 1921 M. Kincler and S. Churgel launched an appeal to all Jewish scouting organizations in Europe to unite under an umbrella organization. They tried to organize a World Congress for the Jewish Scouts where they would discuss the creation of a Jewish World Scouting Organization. The headquarters of this organization would be established in Palestine. Although there seems to have been some enthusiasm for this idea the new organization failed to materialize.⁷⁵

In 1923 representatives of *Bar Kokhba* attended a meeting of some Belgian Scout movements for the establishment of a Scouting federation. In an article some months later in the journal of the

⁷⁰ AJHA-SB, Journal Bar Kokhba, 1st year (1923), N° 11, p. 15.

⁷¹ AJHA-SB # 523 Bar Kokhba ; Journal Bar Kokhba, 1st year (1923), N° 11, p. 15. ; it seems that the attempt to create a Hechalutz center didn't come off the ground as we didn't find any further mention of this center in other literature. We didn't actively search for any information on the center in the archives though so the question remains.

⁷² AJHA-SB, Journal Bar Kokhba, 2nd year (1924), N° 4, p.19

⁷³ S. Brachfeld, *Uit vervlogen tijden, wetenswaardigheden*, p. 96-97.

⁷⁴ S. Brachfeld, *Uit vervlogen tijden, wetenswaardigheden*, p. 111.

⁷⁵ S. Brachfeld, *Uit vervlogen tijden, wetenswaardigheden*, p. 99.

movement the *Hanhagah* declared that it agrees in principle to the alignment of 'Bar Kokhba Club' to the National Scouts Federation (*Landelijke Scouts Federatie*).⁷⁶

The *Bar Kokhba* Club was an organization established in October 1923. It consisted of members older than 18 years who had left the Scouting movement *Bar Kokhba*, persons over 18 years old who hadn't been part of the scouting movement but paid the '*Shekel*' and subscribed to the Basel Program (First Zionist Congress) and people who had made a generous contribution to the Club and thus were admitted by the general council.⁷⁷

The Club operated autonomous from the scouting organization but was aligned with it. It engaged in cultural activities, organized lectures and also supported the scouting movement. Most of the leadership of the scouting movement became members of the Club, as to its success outside the movement nothing is known.

The transition from *Bar Kokhba* to Hashomer Hatzair in fact follows the same patterns the Antwerp Jewish Community as a whole experienced from 1922 onwards and can thus be seen as a microcosm for the whole of Antwerp's Jewish society.

Ithzak Aronowitz, a former member of *Bar Kokhba* and later of Hashomer Hatzair recounts that with the massive immigration wave of east European immigrants to Antwerp more and more Polish youth joined the movement. Many of them had previously been members of Hashomer Hatzair in Poland and started telling stories about the activities of this movement in Poland. In 1924 it was decided that the *Bar Kokhba* movement would send an emissary to Poland to see what Hashomer Hatzair was all about.⁷⁸

Emile Akkerman (Tarzan) went to Poland and returned to Antwerp full of enthusiasm. After his return some weeks of animated discussion followed after which the decision was made that *Bar Kokhba* would align itself with Hashomer Hatzair and become a local branch of this movement in Antwerp. The members of *Bar Kokhba* didn't have a clear picture of what exactly the Hashomer Hatzair was; they knew it was Socialist and Zionist and that it was developing into an important youth movement all over Europe.⁷⁹

The influx of the new immigration and the integration of East European Jewish youth in the organization with their own ideas and particular experiences changed and transformed the movement into a local branch of the youth movement they had known in their home countries. This, in parallel with the introduction of a whole new set of ideas, institutions and political parties in Antwerp, mirrored the Eastern European political and cultural landscape of the new Jewish immigrants as recounted in the previous chapter.

While the majority of the members stayed in the movement when it changed into Hashomer Hatzair, a minority of the members, centered around the figure of Dolf Neulinger, refused to become involved in politics and left the movement. They became an informal group without a name or

⁷⁶ AJHA-SB, Journal Bar Kokhba, 1st year (1923), N° 11, p. 15. ; Journal Bar Kokhba, 1st year (1923), N° 12, p. 13.

⁷⁷ AJHA-SB, Journal Bar Kokhba, 2nd year (1924), N° 1, p. 15.

⁷⁸ AJHA-SB, AUDIO#704 Familie Gunzig, Scouts Bar Kokhba, Israel

⁷⁹ AJHA-SB, AUDIO#704 Familie Gunzig, Scouts Bar Kokhba, Israel

uniforms or clear hierarchy but engaged in Zionist activities and went on camps. They were active in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg where they organized the Jewish Youth for Zionism with the help of the Rabbi Dr. Hertz. Later on this group went on *Hakhsharah* and most of its members immigrated to Palestine.⁸⁰

If we take a look at *Bar Kokhba* and the early Hashomer Hatzair movement in Poland as recounted in the first chapter we can see some remarkable similarities. Both movements emphasized physical education and attached great importance to the spiritual and Jewish national education of the youth. While the Hashomer Hatzair seems to have been more reflective and developed or borrowed clearer and more refined ideologies than *Bar Kokhba*, partly due to the specific East European context in which it operated, it nonetheless shared a lot of common ground with *Bar Kokhba* with regards to the general outlook and vision they had for the Jewish youth.

While some members of the *Bar Kokhba* movement refused to have anything to do with an organization with a clear political tendency, Hashomer Hatzair, while already showing socialist tendencies, had not yet transformed itself into a radical leftwing organization – This transformation which would only happen a few years later – which might have been a great stumbling block for the acceptance of the movement within the ranks of *Bar Kokhba* in Antwerp.

It is therefore not unsurprising that the Hashomer Hatzair found fertile grounds within the *Bar Kokhba* movement.

⁸⁰ AJHA-SB, AUDIO#735 J.Scouts, Olei Belg, Maccabi, Joodse Padvindere.

5. Hashomer Hatzair; structure, members and activities of the movement.

5.1. Structure.

With the decision of *Bar Kokhba* to align itself to the world wide Hashomer Hatzair youth movement the local scout movement in Antwerp became part of an organization which during the 1920's and thirties spread out over the whole of Europe and the rest of the world. The organization of such a big movement required an elaborate structure.

The central umbrella organization uniting the different organizations in all the countries was the *Hanhagah Elyonah* (world leadership) located in Warsaw, Poland where the movement had its origins and had by far the largest membership. From Warsaw instructions were sent to the branches in the various countries on how to run the organization and the kind of education the members were to receive. The local branches were expected to report on the conditions of the movement in their countries.

The *Hanhagah Elyonah* also sent out delegates called *Shlikhim* (singular: *Shaliakh*) to help the local movement in its organization and work. In Belgium the first *Shlikhim* arrived in the 1930's. Dan Michman reports that the first *Shaliakh* was Moshe Zilberthal, followed by Moshe Formanski. At the end of the 1930's Yeshayahu Austriak arrived who was more active in Brussels than Antwerp although he passed the beginning of the war in Antwerp and left some valuable sources behind concerning this period which will be discussed in one of the following chapters.⁸¹ In another source mention is made of a certain Schaschanah Ekhajzer, an envoy from Poland who was active in the movement in Belgium for six months in 1937.⁸²

Another important center of the movement lay in Palestine where the *Kibbutz* organization of the movement, *Kibbutz Artzi* had been established in 1927 and where Meir Ya'ari, the historical leader of the Hashomer Hatzair movement lived (in *Kibbutz Merkhavia*).

In each country the *Hanhagah Rashit* (Head leadership) formed the highest organizational body. It represented the various *kenim*, local branches, in the country and stayed in contact with the *Hanhagah Elyonah*, the local *Kenim* and other Hashomer Hatzair organizations from different countries. It was composed of the *Shaliakh*, a secretary called *Mazkir(a)* and a few older *Madrikhim* of the *Kenim* in Belgium and formed the leadership of the national branch of the movement. It wasn't a permanent body; instead the people who were seated in the *Hanhagah Rashit* came together a few times every month to discuss the progress of the movement. The office of the *Hanhagah Rashit* was situated in Antwerp.

⁸¹ See footnotes; D. Michman, "The Belgian Zionist Youth movements during the Nazi occupation", In: *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, ed.: Michman (D.), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 383-384.

⁸² L'Avenir Juif, N° 70 (8 oktober 1937)

In matters of educational policy and guidelines for the work in the *Kenim* there were two institutions in Belgium. The *Moetzet Menahalim Klalit* (general leader council) which was organized on the national level (combining the *Kenim*), while each *Ken* had a local *Moetzet Menahalim* (Leader council) which was tasked with the work of each individual *Ken* in their city.⁸³

In Belgium there were three *Kenim* (singular: *Ken*, literally: nest) one in Antwerp, one in Brussels established in 1926 and a small one in Liege established somewhere at the end of the 1930's.⁸⁴ The leadership of the *Ken* was called *Hanhagah Mekomit* and consisted of several *Madrikhim* (sometimes also called *Menahalim*). The *Ken* was presided over by the *Rosh Ken* (head of the *Ken*) who was most of the time also a member in the *Hanhagah Rashit*.

Some of the central figures in the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp during the different generations were; in the first period up to around 1930 Numa Eisenzweig, after him until around 1933 Moshe Lerner (Sheeta) and Benno Ausübel, followed by Mordechai Sercarz (Pitah) until right before the Second World War after which Nathan Dubinsky and David Donner seemed to have been two of the principal leaders of the movement in Antwerp.

The reason for the change in leadership was often due to the fact that the older generation made *Aliyah* to Palestine. Numa Eisenzweig arrived in Palestine in 1931 (although he subsequently left and returned to Belgium because of an attack of malaria), Sheeta Lerner also made *Aliyah* somewhere in the beginning of the 1930's and Pitah (M.Sercarz) made *Aliyah* at the end of the 1930's. There was therefore with certain intervals a constant renewal en rejuvenation in the leadership of the movement.

Each *Ken* was composed of different groups organized by age and size. The basic group where a *Khaver/Khavera* received his education and was formed into a respectable *Shomer* was a *Kvutsah* (literally: "group" or "team" from the Hebrew root *קבץ* – to bring together). These were small groups (8-10 members) of *Khaverim* of the same age and they were sometimes separated by gender. Each *Kvutsah* had a Hebrew name; for instance in 1942 we find a *Kvutsah* called '*Arazim (=Cedars)*' in Antwerp.⁸⁵

By the use of the masculine plural '*im*' and the femal plural '*ot*' in Hebrew we can derive that in the first period in Antwerp *Kvutsot* were separated by gender. In an internal report of the movement from 1933 mention is made of 3 *Kvutsot*, 2 *Kvutsot bachurim* (literally: boys) and 1 *Kvutsah Bakhurot* (literally: girls), which clearly indicates that the groups were separated.⁸⁶ Later on we don't find this distinction which might suggest that the *Kvutsot* became mixed.

Each individual *Kvutsah* had a *Madrikh* or *Madrikha* (plural: *Madrikhim*, sometimes the term *Menahlim*; singular *Menahel/Menahelit* is also used), a leader, who was in charge of the education and activities of the members. The *Madrikhim* received special training in pedagogical courses so they would be properly prepared for their role as leaders.⁸⁷

⁸³ YAD YAARI, (4)2.11-2

⁸⁴ In 1934 an attempt was made to establish a *Ken* in Charleroi but this seems to have failed (YAD YAARI, (3)2.11-2, Folder 2, letter March 1934)

⁸⁵ Moreshet. D.1.6326-03, *Kvutsah booklet*

⁸⁶ YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34 , *report of the Lishkat Hakesher*.

⁸⁷ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2 (1935-1937), Folder 3, *Journal of Hashomer Hatzair N°3 (1936)*, p. 14.

Above the *Kvutsah* were groups called *Plugot* (singular: *Plugah*). They consisted of all the members of one age, for instance all the members of twelve years old, and thus consisted of several *Kvutsot*. Each *Plugah* had a different name in 1933 in Antwerp for instance we find a *Plugah* called *Heatid* ("the future") and in Brussels two *Plugot* called *Hashakhar* ("the dawn") and *Kineret* (Hebrew name of the Lake of Tiberias).⁸⁸ Several *Plugot*, for instance the *Plugah* of the 12 year old and the *Plugah* of the 13 year olds formed a larger unit called a *Gdud* (plural: *Gdudim*, literally: battalion).

It must be said however that the use of the terms *Plugah* and *Gdud* seemed to have been dependent on the size of the Ken and often were used rather arbitrary. Sometimes they seemed to have been used as synonyms though linguistically they clearly indicate a different composition and form.

Each *Gdud* had a different name. It is however hard to give a survey of the different age groups as their names and composition changed during the course of time. As more members entered the organization more *Gdudim* were established and the name and composition of the age groups changed. In 1938 for instance there were 6 *Gdudim* while in 1933 there were only four. Some terms like *Bogrim*, *Tsofim-Bogrim*, *Tsofim* were also used more generally and were not exclusively tied to the specific name of a *Gdud* but were used as general terms for the age groups. These terms were used by all branches of Hashomer Hatzair all over the world. This causes some confusion as sometimes different terms are used in the same time period. I will thus give a summary of the most commonly used names in the sources.⁸⁹

The members of the youngest age group of the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp throughout the whole period were called *Kfirim* (Young Lions). They were 10-12 years of age.

The second age group was called *Tsofim* (Scouts) which members were around 14 years of age. In 1938 this group had been divided into *Gdud Tel Chai* (12-14 years of age) and *Gdud El Al* (14-15 years of age).

The next age group was the *Tsofim-Bogrim* whose members were around 16 and 17 years of age. In Antwerp in 1938 this group again was divided in two different groups, *Gdud Lapidim* (15-17 years of age) and *Gdud Hasneh* (17-19 years of age).

The oldest age group was called *Bogrim* (literally: adults) who in the early period were also referred to as *Kshishim*. From these members the leadership of the movement was formed and they were the *Madrikhim* in the *Kvutsot* of the younger members. They prepared for *Aliyah* and went on *Hakhsharah* (preparation), mostly in the form of agricultural training.

A group of *Bogrim* who were preparing to go to join or establish a *Kibbutz* in *Eretz Israel* was called a *Garin* (literally; "nucleus" or "seed"). Each year from 1928 onwards all the *Bogrim* from the different *Kenim* met in a conference known as *Kinus Bogrim* where they discussed the difficulties faced by the movement and the problems in *Hakhsharah* and *Aliyah*.

⁸⁸ YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34, *report of the Lishkat Hakesher*

⁸⁹ YAD YAARI, (5)3.11-2, folder 1. ; E.H. *hagarin habelgi, Hashlama Belgit 1932-1993*.

We have described above the official organizational structure of the movement. It is however important to bear in mind that next to this official structure another equally important unofficial structure existed. The personal ties and relations between the members of the movement formed an equally important part for the cohesion of the movement. The bonds of friendship which members of the different Hashomer Hatzair organizations struck on shared holiday camps served as an unofficial network where news and information was shared in addition to the official lines of communication. These bonds proved to be crucial later during the war years when the lines of communication of the movement collapsed.



A group picture of a Kvutza of the Ken Antwerp in 1934. To the left Mimi Salzman, one of the Madrikhim of the group.

5.2. Members.

5.2.1. Number of members, recruitment and defections, the relations with the parents.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of members throughout the whole time period of this study. We have found some concrete data in letters and internal reports of the organization and in some lists of the KKL for certain years. But for other years the information is scattered, incomplete or nonexistent.

For the first nine years of the movement (1924-1933) we have no specific information regarding the number of members of the movement. The movement was newly established and those years are characterized by turmoil and internal crisis and instability.⁹⁰ It is therefore not surprising that there is a general lack of information for this period.

The first concrete information we found is from the year 1933. It is a detailed list of the numbers of the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp and Brussels in a letter addressed to the Belgian *Garin* in Eretz Israel. The letter reports on the situation of the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium in its two *Kenim*.⁹¹ As the intent of the report was to relay information to members inside the movement the figures represented in the letter are to be considered as reliable information.

⁹⁰ YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34 , *report of the Lishkat Hakesher*

⁹¹ E.H. hagarin habelgi, Hashloma Belgit 1932-1993, *letter to the Garin in Eretz Israel*.

| 1933 | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Antwerp | | | | Brussels | | | |
| Kfirim (11-12 years) | Tsofim (13-14 years) | Heatid (16-18 years) | Kshishim (+18 years) | Kfirim (11-12 years) | Tsofim (13-14 years) | Heatid (16-18 years) | Kshishim (+18 years) |
| 25 | 27 | 19 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 11 | 27 |
| Total members Antwerp: 106 | | | | Total members Brussels: 107 | | | |
| Total members in H.H. Belgium: 213 | | | | | | | |

In the table I use the same terminology as in the letter. *Heatid* for instance is a *Plugah* of the *Tsofim-Bogrim*. In this case *Plugah* and *gdud* are used as the unit in the sources.

As we can see in the figures represented in the table both *Kenim* seem to have had about the same amount of members. Like most youth movements the younger *Gdudim* counted more members than the older *Gdudim* although there is a surprisingly high number of older members in the Ken in Antwerp. We can see that by 1933 the movement in Belgium counted 213 members.

The next information regarding the numbers of members in the movement cannot be dated exactly as the letter it was written in doesn't mention a date. It consists of a letter written by the *Hanhagah Harashit* to the *Hanagah Elyonah* in Warsaw about the progress and condition of the movement in Belgium. However we can be sure that the letter was written between 1935 and 1938 as the letter was found in a file in the archive ranging from these two dates. Furthermore as our next piece of information is from the year 1938 and the numbers given there are different from the ones in this letter we can presume that the letter was written somewhere in the beginning of this period (1935 or 1936).⁹²

In the letter the following numbers are given. The Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium as a whole, the two *Kenim* in Antwerp and Brussels, consist of 170 members, 110 in Antwerp and 60 in Brussels. When we look at the numbers we can see that the Hashomer Hatzair in Brussels lost a significant amount of members. The reason for this loss is unclear. Whether they lost members to the other Zionist youth movements or experienced serious defections to other Jewish organizations whether they were simply unable to recruit new members is unknown. The Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp on the other hand experienced a small growth.

The next concrete figures about the movement we have found come from a report from 1938 of the Zionist Youth Federation, an organization of various Zionist youth movements of which more will be told in a later chapter. In this report the Hashomer Hatzair movement states that it has more than 270 members in Belgium, 140 in Antwerp, 100 in Brussels and 30 in Liège.⁹³

We can see that in the three years since the previous numbers both the *Ken* in Antwerp and in Brussels expanded its base while a new *Ken* was established in Liège. All in all the movement made significant progress with another 100 members joining the movement.

⁹² YAD YAARI. (4)2.11-2 , *Handwritten report to Hanhagah Elyonah*

⁹³ C.Z.A. Z4/30352, *report of the Zionist Youth Federation*

The growth of the Kenim in Antwerp and Brussels can also be seen in an article in the journal of the Zionist Federation 'l'Avenir Juif' on 17th of June 1938.

*" ... considerable progress has been made in the nest [Ken] in Brussels. The number of members has doubled and both the internal and external work of the movement has developed remarkably. In the nest in Antwerp, the customary work has amplified: two new Plugot have been formed, although one of them still has to pass the definite admission exam of the movement. In the other Plugot the work continues intensively and the Hebrew lessons, which are subdivided in three courses, are regularly frequented by all the members."*⁹⁴

In an article from March 1940 in the journal of the Zionist Federation in Belgium 'l'Avenir Juif' we find that the Ken in Antwerp counts 160 members, the Ken in Brussels counts 90 members and the one in Liège counts another 20 members.⁹⁵ Strangely it seems that the journal made a mistake in adding up the numbers of the different Kenim as they sum up the total of the movement to 217 members, which is rather curious. Whether this is an honest mistake due to negligence or that the numbers are wrong we do not know. But the numbers are nonetheless consistent with the tendencies of the other concrete data we have. Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp has the highest number of members, while the membership of Brussels is significantly lower and fluctuates more. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the fault lies with the sum instead of the numbers.

The last concrete numbers we have found for the Ken in Antwerp date from January 1942, two years into the occupation of Belgium by the German Army. In a letter sent by the David Donner (Dougy) one of the leaders of the Ken of Antwerp to Arthur Rath, one of the leaders of Hashomer Hatzair Switzerland, he talks about the difficult situation in the Ken in Antwerp. He gives us the following information for the number of members in Antwerp:

*" The youngest factory counts about some 70 workers, the second some thirty and the oldest also counts some thirty. We are also following our course of Latin (Language)....."*⁹⁶

The reason why members are referred to as workers and groups as "factories" is due to the fact that in the letter exchanges between the Belgian and the Swiss movement code language was used to get the letters passed by the German censors. The "Course of Latin" refers to the Hebrew lessons the members were following. We can thus see that even during the war the membership in Antwerp counted some 130 persons although the conditions in which they operated had changed dramatically.

⁹⁴ L'Avenir Juif, N°106 (1938), p.5

⁹⁵ L'Avenir Juif, N°194 (1940)

⁹⁶ Moreshet, D.1.1171-75

When we put all the numbers for the different years in a table we can draw some interesting observations.

| date | Ken in Antwerp | Ken in Brussels | Ken in Liège | Total |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|-------|
| 1933 | 106 | 107 | / | 213 |
| 1935-1936 (?) | 110 | 60 | / | 170 |
| 1938 | 140 | 100 | 30 | 270 |
| 1940 | 160 | 90 | 20 | 270 |
| 1942 | 130 | ? | ? | ? |

When we look at the numbers we can see that except for the first period the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp was stronger than their counterpart in Brussels. If we recall that the Zionist movement in Brussels was more left wing than that of Antwerp where the General and Religious Zionists dominated the Zionist scene this observation is quite curious. It would make more sense that the Hashomer Hatzair with its radical left wing ideology would be stronger in Brussels than in Antwerp. The reason for these results is that while the Zionist scene in Brussels was more left wing it was also a lot smaller and less intense than in Antwerp. In a report of the *Hanhagah Rashit* to the *Hanhagah Elyonah* the leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair put it this way.

“Antwerp is the center of Judaism in Belgium and the Zionist life in this city is intensive and concentrates around it most of the Jewish youth..... The situation in Brussels is different. The general atmosphere is a lot different than in Antwerp. The distinct life in a big city and the economical life of the Jewish public which is generally not touched by the crisis lead towards assimilation. The Zionist public in Brussels is not very active in the area of Jewish action. Altogether there are two youth movements, Hashomer Hatzair and Gordonia but they too are touched by the ‘Brusselian’ character which shows itself by lack of concentration and is far from the vibrant and wakeful path which is felt in Antwerp.”⁹⁷

That the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp was the strongest *Ken* in Belgium stands beyond doubt; this fact was also confirmed by the various testimonies of former members.

While these numbers tell us something about the number of youngsters which were active in the movement they don’t tell us anything of the strength of Hashomer Hatzair vis-à-vis the other Zionist youth movements operating in Antwerp and Belgium. It is therefore important to compare the number of members of Hashomer Hatzair with the other Zionist youth movements in the country.

Because the Zionist youth movements in Belgium in general have received very little attention from historians and there is thus no substantial work of reference it is very hard to give an exact estimation of the exact number of the youth movement at any given time. It is therefore impossible to give the evolution of the strength of the youth movements.

⁹⁷ YAD YAARI, (4)2.11-2, *Handwritten report the Hanhagah Elyonah*

What we do have is a snapshot of the strength of the movements in the year 1938. In a report of the KKL (*Keren Kayemet Le Israel*) the number of members of the various Zionist youth movements in Belgium is given.⁹⁸

| Youth Movement | N° members |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Akhduth | 130 |
| Bne Akiva | 250 |
| Tzeirei Misrakhi | 75 |
| Tikwateinu | 50 |
| Dror | 250 |
| Gordonia | 75 |
| Jeunesse Etudiante Sioniste | 35 |
| Hanoar Hatzioni | 140 |
| Hapoel | 320 |
| Lapide Khanita | 100 |
| Maccabi Hatzair | 90 |
| Hashomer Hatzair | 270 |
| Brit Haknaim | 60 |

From these results we can see that the Hashomer Hatzair was one of the strongest Zionist youth movements in Belgium.⁹⁹ In various reports of the leadership towards the *Hanhagah Elyonah* the Hashomer Hatzair also attests that it is one of the strongest movements in Belgium and in Antwerp.

The competition between these various youth organizations for the hearts and minds of the Jewish youth was intense. We can see that attempts were made to recruit from members of other movements. In an internal report of 1933 mention is made of an attempt of the Hashomer Hatzair to recruit members from the sport club '*Maccabi*' to their ranks, although the attempt failed to deliver any concrete results to the great disappointment of the leadership.¹⁰⁰

In the early 1930's the movement's main competitor for the hearts and minds of the Jewish youth in Antwerp was '*Betar*', the youth movement of the Revisionist Party, and *Gordonia* in Brussels.¹⁰¹ That *Betar* was the biggest competitor in Antwerp during the early 1930's doesn't come as a surprise if we remember the strong election results the Revisionists achieved in this period.

Outside the Zionist movement the Hashomer Hatzair also struggled to keep members from defecting to the Communists. In a report on the movement from 1933 mention is made of some "rare elements" defecting to the Communists and Communism is described as "a serious obstacle for the development of the Belgian *Tnuah*".¹⁰²

⁹⁸ YIVO, David Trotsky files RG 235, Folder 17 A,B

⁹⁹ It must be said however that the list given by the Jewish National Fund isn't complete some youth movements like *Betar* or *Tzeirei Ha'am* are not included in the list, although the Revisionist splinter group *Brit Haknaim* is included.

¹⁰⁰ YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34 (1930-1933)

¹⁰¹ E.H. Hagarin Habelgi, Hashlama Belgit 1932-1993

¹⁰² YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34, report of the *Lishkat Hakesher*.

In another report, this time reporting on the situation of the Hashomer Hatzair in Brussels the Communists attempts at recruiting within the movement is described in the following way:

*"...already two elements have become gangrenous by the Communist infection [mérule]. Communist elements are trying to enroll them. We hope they will not succeed...."*¹⁰³

In fact we can see that a whole group of leaders of the first generation of Shomrim in Antwerp later turned towards the Communists. The brothers Emile and Israel Akkerman and J.Gunzig and Dov Lieberman, all of whom had been prominent members in the movement in Antwerp, later joined the Communists together with other members of the first generation of Shomrim at the turn of the third decade.¹⁰⁴

That the Hashomer Hatzair experienced defections to the Jewish Communists is not altogether illogical or surprising. The ideology of the Hashomer Hatzair in regards to the position of the working class and concepts such as Class Struggle and Scientific Materialism closely resembled the Communist line with the exception that these were all subordinate to and dependent on the establishment of a Jewish State. Some of the inconsistencies in the ideology of the movement and the reality on the ground, in Belgium but also in Palestine, led some members to become fully fledged revolutionaries in Belgium instead of pioneers in Palestine.

The economic crisis in 1930 probably also had something to do with some members opting to become involved in trying to organize and improve the situation of the "Jewish Proletariat" instead of spending all their time and energy towards the goal of establishing a homeland in Palestine.

While there were a number of defections towards the Communists, most defections did not occur because of ideological differences but because of the specific conditions within the movement itself.

That the Hashomer Hatzair found it sometimes difficult to recruit new members or keep them in the movement resulted from the high moral, social and political demands and expectations the movement required from its members. While the other Zionist youth movements also had ideologies and rules their members committed themselves to, the Hashomer Hatzair movement took this to extremes. The lives of the members of the Hashomer Hatzair were in a large part governed by the rules and guidelines set out by the movement. The relations between the sexes, the received education (even to the choice of institutes of higher learning the members were allowed to attend), the values, general worldview and political position of the members were all regulated by the movement. Members were expected to follow the instructions and commands the movement set out for them, like the call to go on *Hakhsharah*. The movement thus outlined the way in which its members were expected to operate and conduct themselves in their daily lives.

While it would be wrong to look at the Hashomer Hatzair as a kind of totalitarian movement, adherence to the ideology and rules of the movement was expected and enforced on the members, who were otherwise expelled from the movement.

¹⁰³ YAD YAARI, (2)א2.4-ה

¹⁰⁴ See: R. Van Doorslaer, *Kinderen van het getto, Joodse revolutionairen in België (1925-1940)*, p. 76-81.

In fact we can see that the movement was rather democratic. Its leaders were elected and while there was a strong emphasis on the communal aspect of the movement and the living as a collective, individual self education and reflection also formed a cornerstone of the movement. Discussions, of which there were many, were freely held –although when deviating too far from the ideology the members would be corrected by their *Madrikhim*- and there was room for criticism within the movement. It is also important to bear in mind that the period of the 1930's in general was characterized by a radicalization within parties and ideologies both inside and outside the Jewish Community so that the Hashomer Hatzair didn't form an exception.

All these considerations meant that the high level of commitment and intensive ideological work the Hashomer Hatzair demanded from its members sometimes served as a stumbling block for the integration of new members in the movement. Some of them left the organization and went to different Zionist youth movements who were not so politicized and did not set such high demands. This also demonstrates the elitist character of the Hashomer Hatzair who expected the full and unwavering commitment from their members in the struggle for the building of a new society in *Eretz Israel*.

In one of the hand written ' *Itonim*' a member rather smugly puts it in the following terms:

*"There are people who adapt easily in a community and others who have difficulties or are incapable to do so. There are people who are mentally more developed than others. Those who possess more capacities in general also possess more willpower and therefore can educate themselves better. The ones who are less developed in their minds cannot adapt to the community and this is the reason why they leave our community and go to another which suits them better."*¹⁰⁵

While there certainly were defections from the ranks most of the members remained loyal to the movement as can be seen by the growth and strength of the movement.

The Hashomer Hatzair movement for its part didn't have a high regard for the Belgian Jewish youth in general. They were said to be indifferent and easily lured by the trappings of city life and disconnected from their Jewish background.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 1, *Handwritten Itonim*.

¹⁰⁶ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, *Journal of Hashomer Hatzair*, N°2, p. 1,2.

*The Ten Commandments of the Histadruth Hashomer Hatzair.**

1. The Shomer is a man of truth and he guards it.
2. The Shomer is pioneer of the revival of his country, people and language.
3. The Shomer is laborious and lives of the yields he collected with his hands.
4. The Shomer is a champion for a life in freedom and justice for humanity.
5. The Shomer is helpful and devoted.
6. The Shomer is a loyal brother to the Shomristic family and obeys.
7. The Shomer loves nature and knows how to deal with it.
8. The Shomer is always faithful and happy.
9. The Shomer controls his will and strives for higher development.
10. The Shomer is pure in thoughts, deeds and words.

Like the Bar Kokhba movement before and most other scouting movements the Hashomer Hatzair had a set of commandments. In ten small sentences the basic identity and values of the movement are listed and the members are expected to adhere to these principles.

** Moreshet, D.1.6326-03*

Another reason why Hashomer Hatzair, especially in Antwerp, found it difficult to recruit members was its reputation in the Jewish Community. The organization was regarded as a radical movement and often identified as “Communist”. The very free atmosphere between boys and girls was also frowned upon in the more traditional circles.

This often led to frictions between the parents and their sons or daughters who, often against their will, had joined the movement. That some quarrels sometimes reached extreme proportions can be seen by the case of a certain Mr. Meyndel Linder who filed a police report against his son Abraham Linder for improper behavior resulting from the membership of the Jewish Communist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair.¹⁰⁷

These struggles between the generations were not uncommon. David Donner (Dougy) in an interview tells the story of a religious girl who had joined the movement and who together with some other members was having a discussion when by chance her mother walked by. The other members tried to hide the girl under the table but to no avail. The mother stormed into the room and slapped her daughter around the head. Later the girl wasn’t allowed to leave the house for several weeks.¹⁰⁸

While some of the parents thus had a very negative perception of the movement, the attitude of Hashomer Hatzair movement towards the parents can be described as dualistic. On the one hand it urged respect towards the parents who after all looked after their children, on the other hand its perception was that the parents and the schools failed in delivering and providing for the specific needs of the Jewish youth.

¹⁰⁷ ARA Beveren-Waas, PK Antwerpen 2001 C, 1781 (dossier “De Jonge Wacht)

¹⁰⁸ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N°00073 , 00074.

According to the Hashomer Hatzair the Jewish youth and the parents were engaged in a struggle because the latter ignored the aspirations of the youth who were suffocated and oppressed in the world of the parents. The youth intuitively felt the need to organize themselves according to their own values and ideas. The youth movement was seen as the basis for the education of the new generation.¹⁰⁹

This whole generational struggle is a part of the wider struggle between parents and their offspring in Jewish society at that time as recounted in a previous chapter. The youth movement served as a kind of alternative family, a community of likeminded people where the young generation found an answer and ideal to look up to in the face of what to them seemed the archaic and stagnant generation of their parents. The *Kvutseh* in particular served as the nucleus of this alternative family unit. In this small unit members were expected to share their material possessions and their inner thoughts, problems, doubts and aspirations. It was the basic cell in which communal life, a basic concept of the movement, was taught to the members.

5.2.2. Geographical and social background of the members.

Giving exact information on the background of the members is difficult. There are several problems and considerations. First of all our database consists of a list of 77 persons throughout the two decades and a half of the period we study (1925- 1948). This means that from the hundreds of members which were active in the movement in Antwerp throughout this time period we only have a small percentage for which we have data.

Furthermore as told in the first chapter, the majority of the people for which we have data are the older members of the movement, the people in the leadership and the administration and the members who survived the war and left records and testimonies behind in which some names of other members can be found. Another distortion in the statistics results from the fact that some of the persons came from the same family. This can alter the statistics, especially if we are dealing with such a small database. When 4 of the 77 people come from the same family this constitutes about 5,2 % of the database. As they all share the same background this can weigh heavily on the statistical results, especially if there are several families in the database which is the case.

It is thus safe to say that there is a serious bias in these calculations. It would be interesting if we could compare these results with a similar research for the Hashomer Hatzair Brussels for which a detailed list of 83 members of all ages does exist for the year 1934 and another list for the two youngest groups (40 members) for the year 1936.¹¹⁰

The reason I have opted to include these calculations, however limited they may be, is that I hope that they do give us some sort of picture of the ethnic and geographic backgrounds of the members of the movement in Antwerp, especially as the Jewish communities in Brussels and Antwerp differed in their composition.

¹⁰⁹ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, Journal of Hashomer Hatzair, N° 3-4, p.3

¹¹⁰ YAD YAARI, (3)2.11-2(1934); Folder 8 ; YAD YAARI (1)3. 11-2, folder 7. ; The advantage with the data of the HH Brussels is also that they consist of one time period (1934, 1936) and aren't spread out over 23 (1925-1948) years.

| Listed Nationality | Numbers |
|--|---|
| Second generation immigrants (born in Belgium) | Total: 25 |
| Polish | 18 (Galicia:2; former Russian empire: 12, unknown: 4) |
| Without motherland of Russian descent | 4 |
| Russian | 3 |
| First generation immigrants (born outside Belgium) | Total: 52 |
| Polish | 46 (Galicia: 13, former Russian empire: 18, unknown: 13) |
| Czechoslovakian | 2 |
| Austrian | 1 |
| Hungarian | 1 |
| Latvian | 1 |
| Ukrainian | 1 |

The data represented in the table comes from files of the Foreign Police in Belgium. Each immigrant had to register in the town where he lived where his details were meticulously written down by the authorities. I have used the nationalities of the persons as they were registered in these files. Some points must be borne in mind however. The second generation immigrants with a Russian nationality or those whom are registered as “without a motherland from Russian descent” often came from areas which became part of Poland after the First World War. The reason they are written down as Russian nationals or persons without a motherland in the administration is that their parents (the first generation immigrants) came from the Polish areas within the Russian Empire before the First World War and thus were Russian nationals.

If we thus assume that at least some of the people listed as Russian nationals or of Russian descent came from the Polish territories we can see a clear majority of Polish nationals with the vast majority coming from the areas of Poland which were formerly part of the Russian empire.

While not included in the table many of the second generation immigrants received the Belgian Nationality in the course of time. If we furthermore look at the timescale we find that a lot of the second generation members were mostly active in the early days of the movement (1920’s, early 1930’s) with a few exceptions.

The numbers of the first generation immigrants show similar results. The vast majority of the members came from Poland although the number of people whose origin lay in Galicia and those whose origin lay in the former Russian zones is more evenly spread (13 to 18). While the majority of these people were actually born in Poland a small minority (9) were born in other West European countries (Germany, The Netherlands, Great Britain). Those who were born in Holland (Scheveningen) and England (3) are for good measure included with the second generation immigrants although their parents probably resided in Belgium before the war.

Noticeably absent from the table are the German refugees who came to Belgium after 1933.¹¹¹ We know that the Hashomer Hatzair actively tried to recruit from these youngsters. The Hashomer Hatzair Brussels for instance wrote a letter in German addressed to the parents urging their children to join the movement and it seems highly unlikely that their comrades in Antwerp didn’t try to do

¹¹¹ The people included in the list who were born in Germany came to Belgium in the 1920’s and thus aren’t part of the immigration wave after 1933.

the same.¹¹² We certainly know of one German Refugee named Moshe Nadel, whose history will be recounted in a further chapter, who joined the movement in Antwerp in 1938 although we didn't find his file in the archives of the Foreign Police.¹¹³

A possible reason for the absence of German refugees in the list might be because most of the refugees were younger members in the movement for which we have a lack of sources. This again demonstrates the serious shortcomings of the results and highlights the need to approach these results with extreme caution.

If we take a look at the overall results we can see that the overwhelming part of the members of the movement had the Polish Nationality. The second generation in Belgium predominantly seemed to have come from the Russian Empire before the restoration of Poland. The first generation of immigrants seem to be more equally divided between Galicians and Poles. Yet again it must be stressed that these results are preliminary, further research in the archives is needed (to get rid of the "unknowns" in the table) and without a more inclusive and expanded database the results will always remain problematic.

As to the social background of the members it is even harder to give concrete data and we must rely on and the professions of the members listed in the files of the Foreign Police, some remarks about the economic life of the members in internal reports and the testimonies of former members

If we look at the professions listed in the files of the Foreign Police we can see that that they were employed in the traditional Jewish sectors of the economy as recounted in the previous chapter. A large portion worked in the diamond business as diamond cutters, the lower paid semi-industrial artisanal work in the sector; a few were merchants in diamonds which was better paid. Others worked as peddlers and merchants or in the tailor business.

That some of the early members came from a more affluent background can be seen in some of the testimonies. The Landau family, whose children were first in *Bar Kokhba* then in Hashomer Hatzair, lived in a nice apartment in Antwerp and had a very big art collection. The father made diamond inlaid tiaras for the rich and was often paid in masterworks of art. Their house looked like a museum according to the person who gave the testimony.¹¹⁴

It seems that in the first generation (up to 1930) members came from a more diverse background than in the period from the 1930's onward. With the influx of the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe the movement also appears to have become 'proletarianized'. In the aforementioned report to the *Hanhagah Elyonah* of 1938 the *Hanhagah Rashit* mentions that almost no *Khaverim* have finished primary school and that the educational and cultural level of the members has gone down compared to the previous period. The report further gives us a look at the occupation of the (older) members. The boys in Antwerp mostly work in the diamond industry and in Brussels in the leather bag production. The girls in both cities work as seamstresses and in factories.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Moreshet, D.1.5953

¹¹³ Hebrew University Oral History Department. File nr. (27)6, interview with Moshe Nadel.

¹¹⁴ AJHA-SB. AUDIO#735 J.Scouts, Olei Belg, Maccabi, Joodse Padvindere.

¹¹⁵ YAD YAARI. (4)2.11-2, *Handwritten report to the Hanhagah Elyonah*.

According to Jehudith Hase, a former member of the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp, the vast majority (96%) of the members came from working class families.¹¹⁶

Although the members mostly came from Poland or other countries outside of Belgium the language spoken in the youth movement amongst each other was the Antwerp dialect of Flemish. Lectures were sometimes given in Yiddish. Hebrew was hardly used as most members couldn't speak it properly. Some members who had studied at the *Takhkemoni* school in Antwerp were somewhat familiar with Hebrew but those who went to the non Jewish schools in the city had to start learning from scratch.¹¹⁷

5.3 Activities.

The activities of the Hashomer Hatzair consisted of two main components, scouting activities and educational activities. Both served the same purpose of transforming the youth into strong and healthy Jews in body and mind and to prepare them for the goal of establishing a new society in *Eretz Israel*. Next to these two main components the Hashomer Hatzair also engaged in activities for the benefit of the wider Zionist movement like collecting funds for the *KKL*, of which more will be told in the next chapter when we take a look at the ties of Hashomer Hatzair with the rest of the Zionist movements in Antwerp.

5.3.1 Scouting activities.

Every Sunday the members of the movement went on daytrips called *Tiulim* (singular: *Tiul*) and played games together. These *Tiulim* could be walks in the countryside outside the city or with bad weather cultural activities in the city.

All the members were instructed in the basic scouting skills like Morse code, reading maps, tying knots, first aid, orientating by the stars and compass, learning about the history of scouting.¹¹⁸

In the summer a *Makhaneh*, summer camp, was held for around two weeks. The camps were organized by age group and both Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp and Brussels and later Liege attended the same camps, sometimes *Kvutzot* from outside the country also joined the camps. The camps were held in the Ardennes, the Vosges, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Personal conversation (kibbutz Ein Hakhoresh March 2013)

¹¹⁷ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N°00073, 00074.

¹¹⁸ Moreshet, D.1.6326-03, *Kvutsah booklet*

¹¹⁹ YAD YAARI, (5)3.11-2, *Letter concerning the organization of summer camps.*



A group photo of members of Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp looking out of the tent during a Makhaneh in 1934.

During the camps scouting activities were held, day marches and cultural activities. The *Makhaneh* also served as a kind of experiment of communal life for the members next to being a welcome reprieve from the hard work conducted during the year. It was a period of fun where the members enjoyed games, marches and activities, sometimes to the chagrin of the more zealous members and leaders who lamented the lack of ideological and communal work amongst some of the members in the *Makhaneh*.¹²⁰

While up to now we have spoken of the goals, purposes and hard ideological work in the movement, all of which were real enough, it is obvious that another important aspect of the movement was simply that its members were having a good time with all that comes with it in being young; establishing strong friendships, falling in love (in fact we can see that a lot of the members in later life wed inside the movement) and engaging in mischief of which this small article in one of the communal newspapers (*Itonim*) testifies.

“ I want to describe which for me was one of the best memories of the Makhaneh. It was 11.30 when the whistle sounded for the last time to go to bed. After half an hour Tsvi, David and Mosheh came to me. We made a plan to smear somebody in. It was going to be easy because all the people were so tired. After the proposal was accepted and Tsvi had gotten a small tin of shoe shine we entered the tent and started executing our plan. Paulus suffered the most; I bound his shoes to the tent pole and woke him up by pulling hard at the laces of his shoes. After that we entered our tent and started to smear in Joels face. In the morning half his face was black the other half he had left on his sheets.”¹²¹

¹²⁰ YAD YAARI, (3)2.11-2, Folder 10, self written Plugah booklet.

¹²¹ YAD YAARI, (3)2.11-2, Folder 10, self written Plugah booklet.

5.3.1 Educational work and the principle of Hagshamah.

When we look through the sources of the Hashomer Hatzair in the internal reports, letters and diaries one thing that springs out and is repeated throughout the sources is the constant emphasis that is laid on “the work” of the movement. Members talk about the advancements they have achieved, leaders complain of the lack of work or the intellectual level of the members.

While this work consisted of various different elements for which we have used the common denominator ‘educational work’, this by all means was the intention of the movement. ‘The education’ of a new generation of *Shomrim* according to the ideals set out by the movement. In the sources it is often referred to as ‘cultural work’.

The principle closely related to this was the principle of *Hagshamah* (self realization), the individual commitment of each member to live according to the values and ideals of Hashomer Hatzair, with the ultimate goal of making *Aliyah* and living in a *Kibbutz* in *Eretz Israel*.

That this ideal was taken serious can be seen by the intense educational work the members engaged in. As mentioned before the topics and subjects of the education were carefully elaborated by the *Hanhagah Harashit* in cooperation with the *Hanhagah Elyonah* which made detailed lists organized by age groups of exactly which subjects the members were supposed to learn. Some of these lists can be found in the archives and in these we can see that the range of the studied subjects was very wide; Jewish National History, biographies of all the leading Zionist theorists (Herzl, Gordon, Weizmann, Pinsker, Ussishikin, Shapiro, Borokhov, etc.), Jewish writers, Palestineography, exact sciences (physics, biology, geography, astronomy, anatomy, meteorology, cartography); social sciences (sociology, psychology, pedagogy, political science) and the writings of Socialist ideologists.¹²²

The members were also expected to read books- one of the conditions of being a member of the Hashomer Hatzair was that he or she had to be registered in a library- and bibliographies of books to read were prepared for each age group.¹²³ These books were then discussed in a group activity known as *Sikhah* (plural: *Sikhot*, literally: conversation) and the member were also required to keep a *Sefer Hakria*, a small booklet where they wrote down a short summary and some criticism of the books they had read.¹²⁴

In this educational program we thus see reflected the intellectual history of the movement. The strong emphasis on knowledge and learning with the idea of *Hagshamah* (self realization) at its center mixed with a specific brand of the social scientific doctrines of Marx all with the goal of establishing a Jewish National State reveal the rich intellectual heritage of the movement. All the major intellectual currents of the last two centuries of European history are ingrained in the movement, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Nationalism, Socialism, all adapted and transformed to a specific Jewish context.

¹²² YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34 and YAD YAARI, (3)א2.4-ה

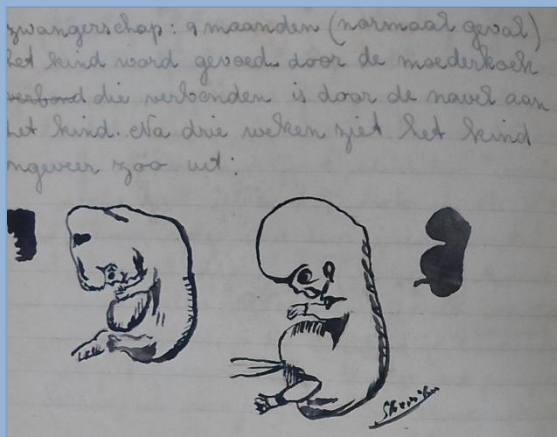
¹²³ YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34 and CZA, DD1\7112 ,p.26 (bibliography from the year 1945-1946 for the Tsofim 15-16 years)

¹²⁴ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, folder 1; *self written Iton*.

The basic educational unit was the *Kvutsah* and the *Madrikh* or *Madrikha* was responsible for educating the younger members. One of the nice remainders of these activities are the *Kvutsah* booklets of which several can be found in the archives of Yad Ya'ari and Moreshet in Givat Haviva, Israel.

The Kvutsah booklets

One of the most interesting sources I found when I was looking through the files in the archives in Givat Haviva were these curious little booklets filled with drawings, pictures and post stamps and small texts of the most various subjects. These little booklets were



In this *Kvutsah* booklet a *Sikhah* is given about the human reproduction system by a member called Rosse on 27/06/1941. (Moreshet D.1.6326-01)

the communal writings of the *Kvutsot* where all the subjects of their *sikhot* were written down. Each member had to prepare a small presentation after which a discussion followed and the *khaver* who had given the *Sikhah* would record it in the booklet together with some nice illustrations. It appears that these *Kvutsah* booklets were mostly used by the *Tsofim* (13-14 years), the older members had similar communal writings but they took on the form of diaries and self written *Itonim* (newspapers). At the back of the *Kvutsah* booklets there was a

special section for the scouting activities with illustrations of knots and Morse code signals and specific way marks on maps. The booklets were all written in Dutch which again shows that the language spoken by members amongst each other was the Antwerp Flemish dialect.

Another important educational activity all the members of the movement engaged in was the learning of Hebrew. The younger members were taught by singing Hebrew songs and learning basic sentences. The older members went to classes organized by the movement or by other Zionist institutions. While the learning of Hebrew was of central importance to the movement it was not really spoken between the members and the knowledge of Hebrew was restricted to a few *Bogrim*.¹²⁵

While the Hashomer Hatzair was a secular organization, at camps members didn't pray or eat kosher, and strict adherence to religious laws and customs was seen as something of the old generation, members were educated in certain aspects of Jewish religious culture and attached great importance to it.

¹²⁵ YAD YAARI, (4)2.11-2, *Handwritten report to the Hanhagah Elyonah*

The Hashomer Hatzair strongly rejected and reacted against the assimilated youth who had forgotten all about Jewish culture and tradition. Certain parts of the Bible, like the Books of Prophets were read and members learned about Jewish History from scripture. The religious holidays like Khanuka and Pessakh were celebrated by the movement although probably in a different form than that of the Orthodox Jews.

The Hashomer Hatzair movement saw itself as secular and approached Jewish religion as a cultural framework to help to create a form of identity and took from it the nationalistic aspects it could use within its ideology. Therefore the Prophets and the Jewish history as recorded in the Torah formed an important part in its educational program.

6. The relations within the Zionist Community in Antwerp and with Hashomer Hatzair branches outside of Belgium.

As the title suggests this chapter consists of two parts. The first part will deal with the relations of Hashomer Hatzair with the other Zionist organizations and youth movements in Antwerp and a small paragraph will be reserved for the relations of the movement with the non Jewish organizations in Antwerp. The second part will deal with the ties of the movement with other Hashomer Hatzair branches outside of Belgium and with the umbrella organization of all the French speaking Hashomer Hatzair organizations.

6.1 Relations within the Zionist and Jewish community

That the Hashomer Hatzair wasn't a sectarian organization secluded from the rest of Antwerp Jewish society can be seen by the lively correspondence with the other institutions and organizations of the Zionist Community in Antwerp.

One of the central institutions, and in fact an institution which bound the various movements together in a common goal transcending the party and ideological lines, was the *Keren Kayemet LeIsrael* (KKL), the Jewish National Fund. This organization together with the *Keren Hayesod* (Foundation Fund) was responsible for collecting funds for the establishment of Jewish settlements in *Eretz Israel* and was therefore one of the most important institutions of the World Zionist Organization in the Diaspora.

The KKL collected funds through various means; It sold honey and flowers before the Jewish holidays (*Rosh Hashanah, Shavuot*), it collected gifts in the synagogues, it had two Books in Jerusalem (The Golden Book, *Sefer Hazahav*, and the Children Book, *Sefer Haya'eled*) in which the names of people who paid a certain sum were inscribed. Another 'product' the KKL sold was trees. A person could buy a tree or a forest with his/her name attached to it which would be planted in Eretz Israel.

It was also customary in Zionist circles that at important moments like a *Bar Mitzwa*, a marriage, an engagement or a birth a certain sum would be donated to the KKL. The most popular form of donations was the famous blue moneybox which stood in every Zionist home and where members of the family contributed a small part of their income to the cause of the Zionist movement.¹²⁶

For some of these collections and other events the KKL relied on the help of the Zionist youth organizations. For the year 1937-1938 the Zionist youth of Belgium collected no less than 20% (155.203 Belgian Francs) of the total revenues of the KKL.¹²⁷

That the activities of the KKL were of central importance for the Hashomer Hatzair can be seen by the staunch commitment with which its members collected funds. In the various publications of the movement we can find reports on the progress and the land purchases by the KKL, together with handwritten advertisements and propaganda for the Jewish National Fund.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ ARA- Beveren Waas, PK Antwerpen 2001 C, Nr. 1997 (Keren Kayemet Israël)

¹²⁷ YIVO, David Trotsky files RG 235, Folder 17 A,B (Keren Kayemet, Keren Hayesod)

¹²⁸ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, *Journal of Hashomer Hatzair*

The KKL relied on the Zionist youth movements to help out in its activities as can be discerned in various requests from the KKL found in the correspondence of the Hashomer Hatzair.

If we take a look at the journal of the KKL and in some of the reports and documents of the organization we can see the extent of the work the Hashomer Hatzair did for the benefit of the KKL.¹²⁹ In the journal detailed lists are given of the contributions of the Zionist circles and the various Zionist youth movements.

Every couple of months the KKL issued a list in its journal in which all the Zionist youth movements were represented with the total sum of their collections and some comment on the work done by each youth movement. This was done in order to create some healthy competition amongst the youth movements and to encourage them to do even better. The Hashomer Hatzair almost always stood on top of the list and received praise from the KKL.¹³⁰ While this was in part due to the numerical strength of the Hashomer Hatzair it nonetheless indicates the zeal and commitment of the Hashomer Hatzair movement towards the collecting of funds for the KKL.

In the 'Bazaar', the yearly 'festival' of the KKL where activities such as folk dancing and sketches were organized, the Hashomer Hatzair (like all other youth movements) had a small stand and was also renowned for its plays and choir. In this yearly event the Zionist public came together and engaged in social activities. The 'Bazaar' ended in a grand ball and was the highlight of the Zionist calendar.

The KKL thus played a pivotal role in the activities of the Hashomer Hatzair and in the Zionist community as a whole. It was one of the institutions that cemented the social fabric of the Zionist community in Antwerp.

While the attitude of the Hashomer Hatzair towards the other Zionist youth movements was influenced by a feeling of superiority, a trait which admittedly can be found in most youth movements, the relations between the Zionist youth movements as a whole seem to have been rather cordial. In the correspondence of the Hashomer Hatzair in the archives of Givat Haviva we can find letters of invitation of various youth movements and circles to the Hashomer Hatzair asking its members to attend their festivities and celebrations. Likewise some invitations of the Hashomer Hatzair to other Zionist Youth movement can be found.¹³¹

Further proof of the cordial relations between the Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist Youth movements can also be seen by the attendance of the Hashomer in the various inter organizational activities. In 1932 for instance the sport club *Maccabi* organized a Jewish athletic day in which all the Zionist youth movements from Religious to Revisionist to Socialist attended.¹³²

¹²⁹ The Journal of the KKL for the years 1928-1933 are kept in the Central Zionist Archives, CZA, PR/1143/1 ; Some reports and documents of the KKL in Belgium from 1926-1940 are held in YIVO, David Trotsky files RG 235, Folder 17 A,B.

¹³⁰ CZA, PR/1143/1, *journal of KKL Belgium*

¹³¹ We found correspondence and invitations to the Hashomer Hatzair from the following youth movements: *Hanoar Hatzioni, Akhdut, Tzeirei Ha'am, Maccabi Hatzair, Bne Akiba.*

¹³² YAD YAARI, (3)11.11-2, Folder 4, It seems that while the first Jewish athletic day was attended by the Hashomer Hatzair the second and third were not. The reason for this was the apparent refusal by Hashomer Hatzair to attend a meeting in which a certain other movement (presumably Betar) also

While the relations between Hashomer Hatzair and most other movements were thus cordial or otherwise marked by benign indifference its relations with the Revisionists and its youth movement *Betar* was characterized by suspicion, revulsion and struggle. The Revisionists were seen by the Hashomer Hatzair, and by other Jewish leftwing parties, as a Jewish manifestation of Fascism. The Revisionist movement and its leader Jabotinsky were seen as the enemies of the Jewish Labour movement in Palestine and a detrimental force within the Zionist movement, full of talk but with no real achievements.¹³³

While this was the ideological position of the movement towards the Revisionists on the actual Jewish Street the movement's attitude towards the *Betar* was more nuanced. As we have seen members of Hashomer Hatzair attended sports events together with members of *Betar*. At a later stage members of Hashomer Hatzair and *Brit Haknaim*, a splinter group of *Betar*, sat together in the Zionist Youth Federation and went together on the daytrips the Federation planned. On the other hand Dougy Donner in his interview reports that there were street scuffles between the Hashomer Hatzair and *Betar* and that the organizations interrupted each other's meetings and events.¹³⁴ While there certainly was no love lost it seems that the Zionist Community in Antwerp was too small for both organizations to avoid each other or engage in all-out hostilities and some degree of cooperation or tolerance towards each other was unavoidable.

Until 1936 the contacts between the Zionist Youth movements were organized in an informal framework. In April 1936 on the impulse of four prominent members of the Zionist Community (H. Zwejer, Jul. Hollander, D. Machelson, Alexandrowitch) talks between various youth movements in Belgium began for the establishment of a Zionist Youth Federation. Delegates of *Akhdut*, *Hanoar Hatzioni*, *Hashomer Hatzair*, *Maccabi Hatzair*, *Bnei Akiva*, *Betar* (its splinter organization) and *Tzeirei Ha'am* came together to discuss this proposal and in principle agreed on the establishment of such an organization.¹³⁵

In March 1937 the establishment of the Zionist Youth Federation was announced in *L'Avenir Juif*. The new Youth Federation was an autonomous organization which included the various youth organizations and its federal council consisted of one delegate of each organization and city. The executive consisted of five representatives, three from Antwerp and two from Brussels.¹³⁶

Most Zionist Youth organizations took part in the Federation. In 1937 *L'Avenir Juif* reports that the following organization were members: *Akhduth*, *Bne Akiva*, *Dror*, *Hanoar Hatzioni*, *Hashomer Hatzair*, *Maccabi Hatzair*, *Tzeirei Ha'am* and *Gordonia*.¹³⁷ Strangely no mention is made of *Brit Haknaim*, the splinter group of *Betar* which was one of the organizations which was involved from the beginning.

attended the meeting as seen in 3 letters from Maccabi to Hashomer Hatzair in the third folder of the same box.

¹³³ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2 (1935-1937), Folder 3, *Journal of Hashomer Hatzair N°1*, p.8

¹³⁴ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074.

¹³⁵ YAD YAARI, (1)3.11-2, Folder 4

¹³⁶ *L'Avenir Juif*, N°42

¹³⁷ *L'Avenir Juif* N°53, N°73

In 1938 we find the following members in the year report from the Zionist Youth Federation; *Achduth, Bne Akiva, Brit Hakana'im, Dror, Hashomer Hatzair, Hanoar Hatzioni, Hapoel, Jeunesse Etudiante Sioniste, Lapidé Khanita, Maccabi Hatzair, Gordonia, Tikwatenu, Tzeirei Misrachi*.¹³⁸ In this report *Tzeirei Ha'am* is not included and four new organizations have joined the Federation: *Jeunesse Etudiante Sioniste, Lapidé Khanita, Tikwatenu* and *Hapoel*.

The Zionist Youth Federation organized lectures and educational excursions. The highlight of the activities of the Federation were the yearly excursion to Bonheiden where sporting activities and competitions were held. In 1937 more than 600 members of the different organizations attended and a year later this number reached more than 800. The Hashomer Hatzair from Antwerp and Brussels were strongly represented with 120 members attending the excursion in 1937.¹³⁹ One of the former leaders of the Hashomer Hatzair, Numa Eisenzweig played an important role in the leadership of the Zionist Youth Federation.

It is clear that contacts between Hashomer Hatzair and the other youth movements in Antwerp were as a whole not uncommon. While there certainly existed some contact and cooperation between the Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist Youth movements before the second half of the 1930's it is only from this period onwards that contacts became more intense and that they were organized within an official framework.

This rapprochement between the Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist organizations in Belgium can also be seen by the movement's decision to become affiliated to the Zionist Federation of Belgium in 1936.¹⁴⁰ The Zionist Federation was established in 1905 and sought to unite all the Zionist organizations and parties. Initially the Zionist Federation was primarily engaged in cultural activities and in promoting the Zionist cause. In a later stage with the growth of the organization it took on other responsibilities which included support for the *Hakhsharah* Center in Villers-la-Ville.¹⁴¹

While in 1905 the Zionist Federation had consisted of only of a few Zionist circles by the end of the 1930's it encompassed almost all the Zionist organizations in Belgium.¹⁴²

The Federation also issued a journal - the first journal was called *Hatikva* (The Hope) but in 1936 it changed its name to *L'Avenir Juif*- which brought the news of the *Yishuv* and the World Zionist organization into the homes of the Zionist public in Belgium and other countries.¹⁴³ The members affiliated with the Federation were asked to contribute small articles in the Journal of their news and special events and celebrations. From 1936 onwards we find several reports with valuable information about the Hashomer Hatzair in the journal.

¹³⁸ CZA, Z4/30352, *Year report of the Zionist Youth Federation*.

¹³⁹ *L'Avenir Juif* N°53 ; CZA, Z4/30352, *Year report of the Zionist Youth Federation*

¹⁴⁰ YAD YAARI, (1)3.11-2, Folder 4 ; YAD YAARI, (4)2.11-2, Folder 1

¹⁴¹ *L'Avenir Juif* N°136

¹⁴² In the year report for 1938 printed in *L'Avenir Juif* (N°136) the Zionist Federation counted amongst its ranks the following organizations; *Agudat Zion, Association of Jewish Zionist Women (WIZO) of Antwerp and Brussels, Agudat Misrakhi* and its youth movement *Bne Akiva*, The Jewish Socialist Party (Poale Tzion-Zeirei Zion) and its youth movements *Dror* and *Hapoel*, the *State Party [Le Parti d'état]* a splinter group of the Revisionists, the *circle of Misrakhi Women, The Federation of the circles of the Zionist youth movements in Belgium, The Zionist Union of Brussels* and the *Circle of Hashomer Hatzair*.

¹⁴³ Next to Belgium the journal was also distributed in a few small shops in certain cities in Holland, France, Poland and even Tunisia and Algeria.

The reason why the Hashomer Hatzair decided to join the Zionist Federation is unclear. Whether they received instructions from the *Hanhagah Elyonah* to participate in the official organizations of the Zionist community or whether it was on the initiative of the local leadership, the *Hanhagah Rashit* is not known.

The incentive for joining the Federation is also unclear. The sources remain silent about this subject but it is plausible that one of the reasons for the affiliation was that the Hashomer Hatzair wanted to have a voice in the Federation which was influential in the *Hekhalutz* organisation- as it sponsored the *Hakhsharah* center- and in the Zionist community as it drafted resolutions regarding various Zionist initiatives and problems.

The Hashomer Hatzair was represented in the Executive Committee of the Zionist Federation by its chairman and two delegates (one of which was Nathan Dubinsky).¹⁴⁴ As the Hashomer Hatzair was not affiliated with a political party or adult Zionist circle- the other Zionist Youth movements for instance were not directly represented in the Zionist federation but were represented by the parties they were affiliated with - it formed an independent organization which counted 80 members in 1939.¹⁴⁵ Who these members were isn't known; presumably it consisted of the older members of the movement, the *Bogrim*, the various *Hanhagot* and maybe some former adult members of the movement.

The Hashomer Hatzair also seems to have had cordial relations with the Socialist Zionist party, *Poale Zion-Tzeirei Zion*. In the correspondence of the movement we found a number of letters of the Jewish Socialist Party addressed to the Hashomer Hatzair, mostly regarding invitations to attend activities and special celebrations. If the Hashomer Hatzair responded to these invitations is not known but we did find evidence that on some occasion prominent members of the *Poale Zion-Tzeirei Zion* attended the celebrations of the Hashomer Hatzair. In a report in *L'Avenir Juif* from 1937 we can read that in one of the celebrations of Hashomer Hatzair for the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the *Kibbutz Artzi* organisation, M.S. Axelrod a prominent member of the Jewish Socialist Party gave a warm speech in the name of the Party.¹⁴⁶

The Hashomer Hatzair together with the Jewish socialist party (Poale Zion-Tzeirei Zion) and the labour Zionist youth movements (Dror, Gordonia) and Hekhalutz was also part of the 'League for laboring Palestine' (Liga voor het Arbeidende Palestina) a coalition of the Labour Zionist organizations of the country.¹⁴⁷

While there seemed to have been good relations between the two organizations, ideologically there remained a serious distance between the two organizations. Hashomer Hatzair rejected the reformist socialism of the *Poale Zion- Tzeirei Zion* and instead opted for a more radical Marxist approach closer in line with that of the Communists.

¹⁴⁴ Nathan Dubinsky was born in Sanak 15.08.1913, he arrived in Belgium in 1923 and was a member of the Hanahah Rashit in Belgium in the late 1930's, ARA, Foreign Police files, A112.112

¹⁴⁵ *L'Avenir Juif* N° 136

¹⁴⁶ *L'Avenir Juif* N °54

¹⁴⁷ R. Van Doorslaer, *Kinderen van het getto. Joodse revolutionairen*, p. 32.

That there were some tentative contacts between the Hashomer Hatzair and the Jewish section of the Communist Party in Antwerp can be discerned from a number of letters we have found in the archives. In a letter from 1933 sent by some ex-members of the Hashomer Hatzair- who presumably had defected to the Communists- a request is presented to the members for a meeting between the Communists and Hashomer Hatzair to discuss their ideological positions and differences. They mention that the *Hanhagah* of the Hashomer Hatzair had in principle agreed to such a meeting. It was also stated that as in the past there had been some problems in discussions because attempts were made to try to win over persons to one or the other organization, the meeting would be strictly regulated. Each party would pick out a delegate and have 75 minutes to lay out their position and the discussion would be led by a non partisan moderator.¹⁴⁸

We can see that at least in the early thirties there seems to have been some contact between the Hashomer Hatzair and the Jewish Communists. Next to this letter we have also found some letters of the Communists and other affiliated leftwing organizations calling for the Hashomer Hatzair to join the fight against Fascism.

In a letter from 1933 the Yiddish Language Group of the Communist Party addressed to the Hashomer Hatzair they call for the action against the 'Jewish Fascists' in Antwerp.

*"As you knew next week a meeting of the Revisionists will be held with Jabotinsky as speaker. It the duty of all honest class conscious workers and youth without difference of party allegiance to stand up against the leader of the Jewish Fascism in the whole world and his gangs, who do not even recoil from killing of workers and to greet them with a worthy reception."*¹⁴⁹

Whether or not the Hashomer Hatzair replied to this proposal we do not know but it does show us that besides the ideological differences at least from the Communist point of view, there seems to have been a recognition of the Hashomer Hatzair as a proletarian organization and a sense of mutual interests within the working class organizations in Antwerp.

An interesting question, on which alas we have found no definite answer, is whether Hashomer Hatzair was also involved in the various initiatives of the Antwerp community on the boycott of Germany.

The reason why this is especially interesting is due to Hashomer Hatzair's ideological policy of not engaging in any work in the *Galuth*, the Hebrew name for the Diaspora. The relation between Zionist ideology and Jewish life in the *Galuth* has always been difficult and has resulted in tensions which live on until the present day.

Even the early Zionist ideologists had different ideas about what exactly the position of the Zionist movement should be towards the *Galuth*.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ YAD YAARI, (4)11.11-2, Folder 6, letter from ex members to the Hashomer Hatzair

¹⁴⁹ YAD YAARI, (4)11.11-2, Folder 6, letter from Communists to Hashomer Hatzair.

¹⁵⁰ For a survey of the attitude of some of the most important Zionist ideologists see; E. Schweid, "The rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist Thought: Two approaches", In: *Studies in Zionism, an international Journal of Social, Political and Intellectual history*, 5 (1984), 1, pp. 43-71.

That this question was also very much alive in the Zionist Community in Belgium can be attested by a fierce discussion which was held on the pages of *l'Avenir Juif* between Mr. S. Stein, the Secretary-General of the KKL and Mr. I. Proujansky, the president of the Zionist Federation of Belgium in 1939. While Stein condemned the total rejection of work in the Jewish Communities in the *Galuth* he nonetheless felt that it was only a palliative for the real solution of the Jewish question, the immigration to Israel. Therefore the work for the Jewish Settlement in Palestine should be the priority of the Zionist Community and take precedence over the work in the Diaspora although this also shouldn't be neglected.¹⁵¹

Proujansky strongly rejected the vision of Stein and argued that the distinction between the *Galuth* and the settlement in Israel could not be so easily made.¹⁵²

In the next few editions of the journal the discussion raged on with Stein responding to the objections Proujansky had formulated and other persons also presented their opinion on the subject. For our purpose it suffices to conclude that the debate between the relation of the *Galuth* and the Zionist ideology was very much alive in the Zionist community in Belgium and that the opinions and discussions were quite intense.¹⁵³

This is also attested by the forced resignation of Joseph Schlussinger as a member of the Federal Committee of the Belgian Zionist Federation who disagreed with the position taken by the rest of mainstream Zionists in that he believed that the bulk of the resources and efforts should not be directed towards the *Galuth* and to the assistance of the refugees from Germany and Austria but towards the advancement of the Zionist cause in *Eretz Israel*.¹⁵⁴

The position of the Hashomer Hatzair was very clear; it totally rejected any work in the *Galuth*. The Hashomer Hatzair's sole ambition was for its members to fulfill their personal realization (*Hagshamah*) and to settle as pioneers in a *Kibbutz*; anything that distracted them from this cause was anathema to the movement.

It would therefore it would be interesting to see what position the Hashomer Hatzair took in the boycott against Germany. The main organization in Antwerp which was active in the boycott against Germany was called V.E.V.A (Verbond van Economisch Verweer Antwerpen, Union of Economic Resistance Antwerp). It was established in 1933 and urged the boycott of German products.¹⁵⁵ Jewish merchants and businessmen who broke the boycott and traded with Germans were subjected to public humiliation and shame, their names and address were written on pamphlets which were publicly displayed on the streets.

As mentioned before I was unable to reach a definite conclusion regarding the position of the Hashomer Hatzair on the boycott of Germany as the sources I could consult did not provide a clear answer.

¹⁵¹ *l'Avenir Juif* N° 182, N° 183

¹⁵² *l'Avenir Juif* N° 185

¹⁵³ *l'Avenir Juif* N°186, N° 187

¹⁵⁴ D. Dratwa, *The Zionist Kaleidoscope in Belgium*, In: D. Michman, *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 59.

¹⁵⁵ E. Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Antwerpen; in woord en beeld*, De Vries-Brouwers, Antwerpen-Rotterdam; 1994; p. 163.

While there is quite a lot of material, in the form of pamphlets and letters on the V.E.V.A in the YIVO archives none of it gives any information on the relationship of the organization with the Zionist youth movements and in particular with Hashomer Hatzair.¹⁵⁶ That there definitely were contacts between the two organizations can be seen in the correspondence of Hashomer Hatzair where we found five letters of V.E.V.A addressed to Hashomer Hatzair.¹⁵⁷

The letters all date from the autumn of 1935 (4) and one from 1936 (1). The V.E.V.A called on Hashomer Hatzair to send representatives to the organizations to discuss cooperation and in October of 1935 called upon all Youth movements to join the new Youth Resistance Corps [Verweerkorps der Jongeren] it was looking to set up.

While it seems likely that, if such an organization was indeed established, the other youth movements would have joined such an organization- as they were affiliated with political parties such as the Jewish Socialist Party, and the Revisionists , both of whom were members of the V.E.V.A- this cannot be said of the Hashomer Hatzair which was an independent organization.

We therefore do not know if the Hashomer Hatzair joined the organization but have some indications that they might not have done so.

In a short report of the Zionist Youth Federation from 1938 the chairman raised the question if the members wanted to participate in an evening against anti Semitism with the V.E.V.A. The delegate of the Hashomer Hatzair, Nathan Dubinsky, bluntly replied that he saw no reason why they should attend such an event.¹⁵⁸ This implies that the Hashomer Hatzair did not see the need to cooperate with the V.E.V.A. It furthermore indicates that the Youth Resistance Corps of the V.E.V.A. never actually got established; why else would the organization feel the need to request cooperation of the Zionist Youth Federation if it already had its own organization uniting the Zionist youth for its cause?

It is also peculiar that no other correspondence can be found after the year 1936. If there would have been a strong cooperation between the two movements we would expect to find some letters or other documents. We therefore must conclude that we do not have a definite answer as to the position the Hashomer Hatzair took in regards to the active boycott of Germany.

The Hashomer Hatzair movement certainly must have had a position in this question as its older members were all working in various trades. The question in effect didn't have any major implications for the youth movement as it was predominantly the concern of shopkeepers and manufacturers. Nonetheless it would have been interesting to know the position of the movement especially as it would give us an indication of how strict the rejection of work in the Galuth would have been applied.

We will return on the policy of the Hashomer Hatzair towards the rejection of work in the Galuth outside of its own educational framework in the chapter on the Second World War when the question became really relevant.

¹⁵⁶ YIVO, David Trotsky files RG 235, Folder 55 (boycott against Germany)

¹⁵⁷ YAD YAARI (4)2.11-2 ; YAD YAARI (3)2.11-2 ; YAD YAARI (5)3. 11-2 ; YAD YAARI (1) 3.11-2)

¹⁵⁸ YAD YAARI (5)3.11-2

When we look at the relations of Hashomer Hatzair in the Zionist and Jewish Community in Antwerp we can state that the movement was firmly integrated in the Zionist Community in Antwerp. Especially in the second part of the 1930's the cooperation with the other youth movements and the Zionist Community increased, once the Hashomer Hatzair joined official organizations which combined the different Zionist movements. This close and intensive cooperation between organizations with such a different background is largely due to the typical circumstances in the city of Antwerp.

Unlike in Poland where the Zionist organizations numbered in the hundreds of thousands and the Hashomer Hatzair movement itself had several ten thousands members, the organizations forming the substantially smaller Zionist Community in Antwerp did not have the option to ignore each other. While the ideological divisions in the Zionist community were real enough and often were characterized by small but intense conflicts or disagreements, at the end of the day in order to achieve some of the principle goals of the Zionist movement, some cooperation between the different movements was inevitable. This rapprochement in the community seems to have taken place in the second half of the 1930's. The reason why this occurred then and not earlier probably can be explained by the fact that by then most Zionist organizations had established themselves and found a place for themselves within the community. The rise of Fascism and anti-Semitism in neighboring Germany, but also in Belgium (REX, VNV, De Vlag) also must have had influence in this process leading the Zionist and Jewish Community to closer cooperation.

Outside of the Jewish community we found reports that Hashomer Hatzair on some occasions had contact with the Belgian Socialist youth movement, the Red Falcons [*De Rode Valken*]. David Donner (Dougy) in his interview recounts that the Red Falcons assisted them in a demonstration and scuffle with Betar.¹⁵⁹ Moshe Nadel in his interview reports that during the war the Hashomer Hatzair cooperated with the Red Falcons in translating certain documents and transferring letters and newspapers.¹⁶⁰

6.2. The relations with other Hashomer Hatzair branches outside Belgium

While something has already been said about the relations between the *Hanhagah Rashit* in Belgium and the *Hanhagah Elyonah* in Warsaw, Poland in the previous chapter, this wasn't the only organization with which the Belgian *Tnuah* retained strong contacts. Next to the regular contacts with the worldwide leadership the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium also had strong links with other *Histadrut* in other countries in Western Europe, especially with the French speaking countries. One of the reason for these links is that the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium, which was the oldest Hashomer Hatzair branch in Western Europe, helped to set up branches of the movement in France (Paris) and Tunisia (Tunis).¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N°00073, 00074.

¹⁶⁰ Hebrew University, Oral History Department. File nr. (27)6, interview with Moshe Nadel.

¹⁶¹ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, *Journal of Hashomer Hatzair N° 2*, p. 2.

In 1929 two members from the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp, Chaim Nussbaum and Yithzak/Jacques Gunzig (Dolly) completed their Hakhsharah and as they did not receive certificates for Aliyah decided to move closer to Eretz Israel without an immigration certificate.¹⁶² They passed through Paris, where in 1928 a *Ken* had been established by a certain Katz Verstiger. There had been earlier attempts to start a *Ken* when members of the movement in Poland came to Paris for their studies, and from there went to Marseille and sailed towards Tunis from where they wanted to go to Palestine overland.¹⁶³

Chaim Nussbaum and Jacques Gunzig arrived in Tunis in the summer of 1929 and sought to get in contact with the Jewish youth there and met with the local Jewish Scout Organization. They were received warmly and started to teach the Tunisian Jewish youth Hebrew songs and folk dances and told them about the Land of Israel, Zionism and the *Kibbutz*. A part of the Jewish Scouts wanted to learn more of the ideas of these young from Belgium. This created concern with the leadership of the Tunisian Jewish Scout movement and the local Jewish Community. Especially the insistence of the two Belgian *Shomrim* that boys and girls should be organized in mixed groups provoked the ire of the local Jewish scouts and the parents of the Tunisian youngsters. This resulted in the split of the Scout movement and on the 6th of February 1929 the Hashomer Hatzair organization in Tunisia was officially registered.¹⁶⁴

The contacts between the various branches of Hashomer Hatzair were strong and in 1930 an official framework was established between the different *Histadruyot* of Belgium, France, Holland and Tunis which was known by three names; 'Bureau de Liaison pour les Pays d'Occident (The liaison bureau for the countries of "l'Occident") or 'Le Bureau de Liaison pour les Pays de Langage Française (The liaison bureau for the French speaking countries) or under the Hebrew name 'Lishkat Hakesher' (Liaison bureau).¹⁶⁵

In 1933 an Egyptian *Ken* in Cairo also joined the *Bureau de Liaison*, after Hashomer Hatzair Tunisia had established contacts with a Jewish Scouts organization in Cairo in 1931 which later joined Hashomer Hatzair.¹⁶⁶

The headquarters of the *Bureau de Liaison* was situated in Brussels from where the organization kept in contact with the *Hanhagah Elyonah*, sent and received news and letters and gave instructions to the *Hanhagah Harashit* of the various countries.

¹⁶² Chaim Nussbaum; born 20/09/1909 in Charnow (Poland); came to Belgium somewhere after World War I, Yithzak/Jacques Gunzig (Dolly); born 02/09/1904 in Lostice (Czechoslovakia), came to Belgium around 1920, went to the communists in the beginning of the 1930's. (ARA, Foreign Police files, N°1595317; 1527092)

¹⁶³ R. Ben-Asher, *Toledot Tnu'at Hashomer Hatzair be' Tunisia* [History of the Hashomer Hatzair in Tunisia], Givat Haviva, 1980, p. 14-15.

¹⁶⁴ R. Ben-Asher, *Toledot Tnu'at Hashomer Hatzair be' Tunisia.....*, p. 14-15.

¹⁶⁵ Strangely Dan Michman in his survey of the Zionist youth movements in Holland (*Zionist Youth movements in Holland and Belgium and their activities*) does not mention a Hashomer Hatzair organization in Holland. Yet in the files of the Liasons Bureau in Givat Havia (YAD YAARI, (1)א2.4-ה , folder 4) we found a letter from the Lishka directed at ' *Organisation Hashomer-Hatzair de Hollande*' and in reports in the files mention of a ken in Holland is made several times it appears though that this organizations faced severe problems and that it may not have survived for long (YAD YAARI, (5)1.1-34). In fact in later report of the Lishkat Hakesher Hashomer Hatzair Holland isn't mentioned anymore.

¹⁶⁶ YAD YAARI, (2)א2.4-ה

The central figures of the *Bureau de Liaison* almost entirely came from the Belgian *Shomrim* (both from Brussels and from Antwerp). The Belgian Hashomer Hatzair appears to have been the focal point of the organization, it had the oldest and most experienced *Histadrut* and while Hashomer Hatzair Tunis had more members - 250 members in 1931 located in four *Kenim* (2 in Tunis, 1 in Beja and 1 in Sousse) compared to 213 members in Belgium in 1933- it was too far away geographically and too inexperienced to become the center.

The activities of the *Bureau de Liaison* consisted of distributing propaganda and educational material towards the different branches, translating texts, documents and books of Zionist ideologists and from the Movement in Palestine from Hebrew to French so that it could also be read in France and Tunisia. It also issued a journal in which the news in *Eretz Israel* and in the different *Histadruyot* could be found.

The *Bureau de Liaison* also organized summer camps where the members of the different organizations came together; The *Ken* in Egypt however never was able to attend due to the high cost of sending members overseas.¹⁶⁷ Members of Tunis, Holland, France and Belgium did join in the summer camps where they discussed the pedagogical, ideological and political questions of the movement in their countries and in Palestine and ways to further cooperate.¹⁶⁸

Furthermore the question was raised for the creation of a joint *Hakhsharah* center for all the members of "l'Occident". Hashomer Hatzair Tunisia in a letter dating from 1933 proposed that a center would be established in Tunisia as the climatologically conditions were similar to those in Palestine and the agriculture there closely resembled that in *Eretz Israel*. The *Bureau de Liaison* however rejected this proposal arguing that it would be too costly to send *Bogrim* to Tunisia and that anyway it was too late as in Belgium places were being organized for agricultural *Hakhsharah* and that at that particular moment the first *Hakhsharah Ironit* (see next chapter) was being established in Brussels.¹⁶⁹ While the plans for a joint *Hakhsharah* center in Tunisia thus did not proceed we do know that four members of the Hashomer Hatzair Tunis in the summer of 1933 joined the *Kibbutz* of the *Hakhsharah Ironit* in Brussels.¹⁷⁰

Next to the contacts with other Hashomer Hatzair organizations through the *Bureau de Liaison* the Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium went on joint summer camps with other *Kenim* from Switzerland, Germany and France. Members and leaders from different countries visited each other and from time to time members from Belgium went to Poland to attend big conferences of the movement where they met with *Khaverim* from all over Europe and visited the various *Kenim* in Poland and other countries in Eastern Europe.

¹⁶⁷ YAD YAARI, (4)א2.4-ה

¹⁶⁸ The locations of the camps we found were situated in Belgium in the rural part of the province of Antwerp known as ' *De Kempen*' (Bouwel, Herentals, Grobbendonk) and in the south in the Ardennes (Jambes).

¹⁶⁹ YAD YAARI, (2)א2.4-ה

¹⁷⁰ YAD YAARI, (2)א2.4-ה, The names of the four members from Tunisia were; David Victor Finzi (4/12/1914 Tunis), Rachel Hattab (6/11/1915 Tunis), Roger Emile Sion Gabison (1/05/1913 Kairouan), Abraham Itai Victor Besnaïnou (2/03/1911 Tunis).

We can therefore safely say that the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp and Belgium was part of a vast network that spanned over the European continent and beyond. While most activities and contacts between the members existed and were held within the country, strong relations between the various *Kenim*, both between the leadership and between the members, existed.

We have seen in the previous subchapter that each Hashomer Hatzair organization adapted itself to the local conditions which existed in each country. There was also a high degree of coordination between the headquarter of the movement in Warsaw, Poland and the local branches and the *Hanhagot Rashiot* in the various countries, which ensured the unity of the movement and set out the principal guidelines in the educational programs and ideological positions of the movement to which each branch had to comply.

7. *Hakhsharah and Aliyah; the fulfillment of the ideal.*

As has been mentioned before in previous chapters the central goal of the movement and of each member individually was to immigrate to Palestine and live a communal life in one of the *Kibbutzim* of the movement. In this chapter we will take a closer look at the various ways in which the members prepared themselves for their future life in *Eretz Israel*, how they made their way from Belgium to Israel and how they integrated in their newfound homeland.

7.1. The Preparation

In fact the entire activities and work of the movement in all age groups can be seen as a preparation towards life in the *Kibbutz*. The stress on communal life within the *Kvutsot* and the *Plugot*, the educational work with the aim to create a new Jewish consciousness and outlook with the emphasis on working the soil and on the physical and mental health of the new generation which would build the new homeland according to the socialist ideals set out by the movement, the free and equal relations between boys and girls; all of these aspects served to facilitate and prepare the members for their later life in the *Kibbutz*.

Although all the activities in the movement were thus directed towards the preparation of the youngsters for their future lives in *Eretz Israel*, in this chapter we shall exclusively recount the preparations undertaken by the older members, *the Bogrim*, as most of the former subjects have been mentioned in previous chapters. It was this group of older members, aged from 18 onwards who were expected and even obliged to fulfill their personal ideals and settle in the land of Israel according to the principle of *Hagshamah*.

We have previously spoken about the education received by the members within the movement but as of yet nothing has been said about the further fields of study outside of the movement. The subjects of education were strictly regulated by the movement which decided that studies at a university and other “bourgeois” studies were prohibited from attendance; instead members were to be educated in technical and agricultural studies.

Jacques Aronovitch for instance, one of the first generation members and leaders of the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp, attended the “Institut agricole de l’Etat” in Gembloux from 1927-1932.¹⁷¹ Others attended professional evening schools in electricity, carpentry, and mechanics. This emphasis on manual work closely corresponded with the ideology of the movement with its aim of establishing a Jewish working class in Israel and an agricultural base in the form of the *Kibbutzim*. Education thus was aimed at acquiring practical skills which met the goals of the movement and would be useful in the future.

While technical or agricultural studies were one way to acquire these skills not all of the *Bogrim* were sent to faculties of higher education. The way most members acquired these skills was by spending some time on *Hakhsharah* (preparation). At some point all of the older members were sent by the movement to *Hakhsharah* to prepare for their future life in the *Kibbutz*.

¹⁷¹ AJHA-SB, AUDIO#704

Hakhsharah could be done in different ways of which the most common was *Hakhsharah Khaklait* (agricultural *Hakhsharah*). Members individually (*Hakhsharah Bodedet*), in groups (*Hakhsharah Kibbutzit*) or later in specialized centers were sent to work on the land of Belgian farmers and learned to plough, sow and work with cattle and poultry. In 1927, three years after the establishment of the movement in Antwerp and one year after the establishment of the *Ken* in Brussels the first members from the organization went on agricultural *Hakhsharah*.¹⁷²

It seems that in the initial period members went on *Hakhsharah* in the Netherlands. In the correspondence of the Hashomer Hatzair movement from 1929 we found a letter from the 'Vereniging tot vakopleiding van Palestina-Pioniers' [*Association for the professional training of Palestine Pioneers*] which had its seat in Amsterdam but was based in Deventer giving a report to the *Hanhagah Mekomit* of Antwerp about the 7 members who went on *Hakhsharah* organized by this association.¹⁷³ If we recall the discussion with Hashomer Hatzair Tunis (previous chapter) about a *Hakhsharah* center in Tunisia and the refusal by the *Hanhagah Rashit* of Belgium which replied that places in Belgium where being found for agricultural *Hakhsharah* it seems likely that up to the 1931 there were no set places for *Hakhsharah* in Belgium and members received their agricultural training in the Netherlands.

This is also confirmed by the testimonies of former members of Hashomer Hatzair Belgium written down in a journal published in *Kibbutz Ein Hakhosh* called "Etzlenu" ("in our home") for the occasion of 50 years of pioneering migration from Belgium.¹⁷⁴

While initially the Hashomer Hatzair dealt with the issue of *Hakhsharah* by itself in 1929 it established the *Hekhalutz* movement in Belgium.¹⁷⁵ The *Hekhalutz* was the umbrella organization of Labour Zionism which was responsible for the work and training of the pioneers in the Diaspora. It was established at the end of the First World War and initially was strongest in Russia. After the Russian revolution and the subsequent suppression by the Soviet régime of all Zionist institutions the centre of the movement shifted to the West. *The Hekhalutz* was supported by all Labour Zionist parties and most of their youth movements.¹⁷⁶

In Belgium it seems that the Hashomer Hatzair, the oldest of all Labour Zionist youth movements in the country, was the main instigator to establish the *Hekhalutz*. At a later stage other Labour Zionist youth movements like *Dror*, *Gordonia* and *Maccabi Hatzair* together with non affiliated youth known as *Stam Khalutz* joined the organization which in 1939 counted 150 members in Belgium.¹⁷⁷ At the end of the 1930's *young Bor*, the youth movement of the *Linke Poale Tzion*, also joined the *Hekhalutz* after the *Linke Poale Tzion* had joined the Zionist Federation.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, Journal Hashomer Hatzair N°2, p. 2.

¹⁷³ YAD YAARI, (5)1.11-2, Folder 3

¹⁷⁴ E.H., Etzlenu, p. 22.

¹⁷⁵ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, Journal Hashomer Hatzair N°2, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ W. Laqueur, *The history of Zionism*, Tauris Parke Paperback, New York, 2003, p. 326-328.

¹⁷⁷ L'Avenir Juif, N° 175 (20/10/1939)

¹⁷⁸ H. Wagman Eshkoli, "The contacts between the World Hachalutz Center in Geneva and the Zionist-Pioneering Underground in Belgium", In: D. Michman, ed. *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 398. According to the author by 1940 the Hekhalutz in Belgium counted 215 members.

In 1934 a *Hekhalutz* center was established in Villers-la-Ville, close to Nivelles in the center of Belgium, where the members of the different organizations could go on *Hakhsharah*. The center was subsidized by the Zionist Federation in Belgium and the Organization of Zionist women (WIZO) and was located in the house of a Jewish couple Mr and Mrs Marocco. There was a rose and vegetable garden and members worked in the fields of farmers in the area.¹⁷⁹



Members of Hashomer Hatzair during Hakhsharah in Villers-la-Ville in 1934.

The *Hekhalutz* organization also occupied itself with the plight of the German and Austrian refugees who wanted to immigrate to Palestine and established a *Hekhalutz* group in the refugee center in Merksplas.¹⁸⁰

Several reports from the Hashomer Hatzair show the dominance of the movement in the *Hekhalutz* organization in Antwerp. In a report written to the *Hanhagah Elyonah* in 1935 the Belgian Hashomer Hatzair reports the following on the *Hekhalutz* in Belgium.

“In the Hekhalutz we form the biggest group. Especially in Antwerp our influence is very large. With the coming of Eliezer the work at the Hekhalutz has flourished. The branches work regularly, the Hebrew lessons function. The Hekhalutz Merkaz [Hekhalutz committee] is composed of 5 people; Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, (Young) Hekhalutz, and Dror each have a delegate and Eliezer. The Party has a delegate with advisory vote. The work at the Merkaz [committee] is difficult ; Gordonia for example shows unsupportable inertia. It is felt that defending the interests of the organization to which one belongs is so strong that the work of the Merkaz is almost impossible.”¹⁸¹

The report clearly indicates the strength of the Hashomer Hatzair within the organization. One could be skeptical and suggest that the local *Hanhagah Rashit* in Belgium wanted to put on a show of strength towards the *Hanhagah Elyonah* in Warsaw, but as this assertion is made several times in

¹⁷⁹ L’Avenir Juif, N° 55 , N° 175

¹⁸⁰ L’Avenir Juif, N° 55 , N° 175

¹⁸¹ YAD YAARI, (4)2.11-2

different reports of different years this seems unlikely. Furthermore one must not forget that the *Shlikhim*, the delegates sent out by the world organization, would quickly have seen through these exaggerations.

The report also gives an indication of the structure of the Hekhalutz. Every youth movement was represented by a delegate and a member of the party, we presume the Labour Zionist party *Poale Tzion-Tzeirei Tzion*, had an advisory function. It also seems that the relations between the different youth movements in the center at Villers-la-Ville didn't always go smoothly.¹⁸²

Work at the *Hakhsharah* could be very hard and intensive. All the members of Hashomer Hatzair came from the big cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Liege where they had led reasonably comfortable lives and were therefore not used to the hard and primitive conditions they experienced in the farms in the rural parts of Belgium in the 1930's. The *Hakhsharah* center, while being funded by the Zionist Federation and *WIZO* (*Women's International Zionist Organization*'), occasionally experienced lack of resources and especially in the winters when the farmers didn't need any help the conditions in the center became very harsh. When there was work the members on *Hakhsharah* often worked from dusk till dawn.

A vivid picture of the live at *Hakhsharah* is painted in a letter sent by one of the members (Yosef) to his friends in the *Garin* dating from March 1934. It was sent from Momalle, a small village close to Liège, where he and his friend Yekhiel were doing their *Hakhsharah* at a local farm.

*"Yekhiel works in the house, he helps with the washing and feeds the pigs. The Hiller girl takes care of the little calves and gives them to drink. There are even "Betar" pigs here and he himself has become half "Betar". I from my side have a much harder work on the land and have to plough the furrows and this will be even harder when the grass starts to grow. And then there is the following work; milk the cows (Yekhiel does this as well), clean animals and all the stables, this is the hardest work. Then I have to feed all the animals (cows); there are enough of them, 22 cows and oxen all together. Afterwards I have some work in the garden and the same in the afternoon; feed and milk the cows, you know that you need to milk them twice a day. The hours of work are as follows; we get up at 4:30 or ¼ to 5, we work until 12 and from 1 up to 6:30 or 7 PM in the evening..... Some words about milking the cows. Everyone thought, and I thought so as well, that milking cows is very easy, one simply gives a pull and milk comes out. But it is actually quite hard and when the cow is milked completely the hands hurt, those of Yekhiel even more than mine. But I already manage to completely milk two cows every time."*¹⁸³

While officially members were expected to stay one year on *Hakhsharah* this in fact did not always occur. Some members went for a couple of months, other decided to drop out after one month while others stayed up to two years.

¹⁸² In the report of Hashomer Hatzair from 1935 Maccabi Hatzair doesn't seem to have been a part of the Hekhalutz. In the article in *L'Avenir Juif* from 1939 M.H. is included in the Hekhalutz organization which seems to suggest that the movement joined the organization somewhere after 1935.

¹⁸³ YAD YAARI, (4)11.11-2, folder 6, report from *Hakhsharah* (document 48)

After the *Hekhalutz* center in Villers-la-Ville was closed down during the German occupation another *Hakhsharah* center for all youth movements was established in Bomal, close to Jodoigne. In the next chapter where we will talk about the Hashomer Hatzair movement during the Second World War, we shall take a closer look at the history of this center.

Besides agricultural *Hakhsharah* there was also a form of *Hakhsharah* known as *Hakhsharah Ironit* (City *Hakhsharah*). This kind of *Hakhsharah* consisted of a group of *Bogrim* living together as a commune in an apartment or house in one of the cities, sharing the income from the different jobs they worked at. This commune was also referred to sometimes as a *Kibbutz*. The first so called *Kibbutz Ironi* was established in Brussels in 1933.

It seems that *Hakhsharah Ironit* sometimes served as a substitute for collective agricultural *Hakhsharah* in times when the latter was impossible or very hard to organize. In 1933 for instance the *Kibbutz* was organized due to the fact that because of the economic crisis there were great difficulties in the organizing of a collective agricultural *Hakhsharah*. The farmers looked upon the Jewish youth as strangers and there were no possibilities for the establishment of new centers. Only individual agricultural *Hakhsharah* was possible which did not fulfill the need for communal life.

It was therefore decided to organize a *Hakhsharah Ironit* for the preparation for collective life of the members of the *Garin*.¹⁸⁴ The same occurred during the German occupation when a *Kibbutz* (commune) was set up in the apartment of one of the leaders of the movement in Antwerp (Mottek Adler) consisting of several *Bogrim*.¹⁸⁵

The *Hakhsharah Ironit* was supposed to intensively prepare members for communal life in the *Kibbutzim*. The leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair was aware however of the problems which could result from communal life in the cities. With the proximity of city life lured certain temptations that could distract the members. Furthermore the *Bogrim* who had to sustain the *Kibbutz* economically were still practicing their old “non proletarian” professions which were regarded by the movement as ‘luxury professions’ (note the high percentage of members working in the traditional Jewish sectors in Belgium which were for the most part the production of artisanal luxury goods such as the fur trade, the production of leather bags and purses, the cutting of diamonds) and were thus not really productive in the eyes of the movement. To counter this, in the winter period all the members were sent to professional evening schools to acquire technical skills and it was hoped that when the economic condition of the *Kibbutz* became better the members could leave their “luxury” trades to earn their income from more practical professions.¹⁸⁶

One very remarkable form of *Hakhsharah* and one, as far as we know, only undertaken in the first period in the late 1920’s was a form of industrial *Hakhsharah*. Members from both the Ken in Brussels and Antwerp wanted to familiarize themselves with the proletarian conditions and went to work in the heavy industries in the suburbs of Brussels and in the glass factories in Antwerp. A group

¹⁸⁴ YAD YAARI, (1)א2.4-ה, folder 2, report *Lishkat Hakesher to Hanhagah Elyona 10/04/1933*

¹⁸⁵ Moreshet, D.1462, letter *Austriak (Yeshayahu Ostri-Dan) to Kibbutz Artzi p. 5.* ; CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N°00073 , 00074

¹⁸⁶ YAD YAARI, (1)א2.4-ה, folder 2, report *Lishkat Hakesher to Hanhagah Elyona 10/04/1933*

of Bogrim from Antwerp even went to work for a month in the coal mines in the Borinage without the knowledge of their parents whom they had told that they were going on a vacation.¹⁸⁷

Moshe Lerner, one of the leaders of the first generation of Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp, was one of these *Bogrim* who went on *Hakhsharah* in the mines and tells us the following about the conditions in the mines and the influence it had on the members:

*"I was shocked by the inhuman conditions which were their share. In the morning they entered into the belly of the earth and left it at night – and their pay was low, really a "hunger salary". In this mine we were, as I already reminded, with several Bogrim of the movement; all except of myself took the conclusion that only the political class struggle with at its head the Communist Party would have the strength to tackle the evil and the injustice. These comrades went to activity within the Communist Parties. I was the only one among them who immigrated to the Land and realized the Zionist-Socialist vision."*¹⁸⁸

That this peculiar form of *Hakhsharah* took place in the early period of the movement in Belgium is not surprising. As we mentioned before, the first years of the movement in Belgium up to around 1930 was characterized by turmoil and instability.

The movement was still consolidating itself, not only in Belgium, but in Palestine as well where we recall that the shift towards a more full-fledged Marxism took place only around 1926-1927. It is also in this period that a large number of the early leaders of Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp left the movement and joined the Communist Party as we have recounted in an earlier chapter and again is attested by the testimony of Moshe Lerner.

7.2. The way to Eretz Israel.

The most common way for a member to make *Aliyah* was by obtaining an immigration 'certificate' which allowed the person in question to settle in *Eretz Israel*. These certificates were issued by the British Mandatory Government to the Palestine Office. The Palestine Office was an organization of the Jewish Agency, the de facto 'government' of the Jewish population in Palestine (the "*Yishuv*") which was responsible for the distribution of the certificates and the organization and regulation of Jewish immigration to Palestine. In most European capitals and also in some important transit centers (mostly ports) towards Palestine there was an office of this organization.¹⁸⁹ In Belgium there was a Palestine Office in Brussels.

These certificates however were scarce and limited. Because of the difficult political situation in Palestine, and in order to placate the Arab population of Palestine which was strongly opposed to further Jewish immigration and settlement in the country, the British government curbed Jewish immigration and issued quota's which only allowed a certain number of immigrants to enter the country. These quota's, issued in the so called White Papers' (there were several, issued between 1922 and 1939) were strongly resented by the Zionist Community.

¹⁸⁷ E.H., Etlenu, p. 22.

¹⁸⁸ E.H., Etlenu, p. 17.

¹⁸⁹ A. Zwergbaum, "Palestine Office.", In: M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik, eds. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. Vol. 15, Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 595. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 23 July 2013.

This meant that a limited number of certificates was issued to the Zionist Organization in Belgium each year, especially in the years after the Nazi takeover in 1933 and their anti Jewish measures when the Palestine Office preferred to provide certificates to German and after the “Anschluss” of Austria in 1938 Austrian refugees. In the year 1940 for instance only 79 certificates were issued to Belgium with the 23 of them reserved for Youth *Aliyah*, the rest of them went to students, the parents of children who were already in Palestine, people with certain specific professions or people with a certain amount of capital, in total this was good for 132 persons while the demand exceeded this number by far.¹⁹⁰

If we recall that Hashomer Hatzair wasn't the only youth movement grouped within *Hekhalutz* and that the 23 certificates had to be shared between all of them- as well as with other Zionist youth movements who weren't part of *Hekhalutz* but also were entitled to receive certificates like *Bne Akiva* or *Betar*- this in effect meant that the Hashomer Hatzair (Antwerp, Brussels, Liège) in 1940 could hope for 2-3 certificates maximum. In other years the number would have been similar.

The small number of certificates was a big problem for the movement and was a matter of serious discontent amongst its members. The leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair had to decide who would receive the certificates that were reserved for the movement and those who had gone on *Hakhsharah* had preference.

In the files in the archive of *Yad Ya'ari* we find several letters written by older members to the leadership pleading and demanding for a certificate and sometimes even threatening to leave the movement if they would again be passed by.

For the Hashomer Hatzair this situation wasn't sustainable and also totally against their ideology which required their members to fulfill the personal realization of their ideals and settle in a *Kibbutz* in Eretz Israel. Therefore they turned to other options and methods to make *Aliyah*.

One of the solutions the Hashomer Hatzair turned to in order to send more people on *Aliyah* was by organizing fake marriages between the members. When a male member of the movement received a certificate it was allowed for him to take a girl with him if he was married to her. In 1929 Ruchla Ekstein, a member of the movement in Antwerp for instance married Eliezer Reich in order to immigrate to Palestine. In her testimony she says that there were several arranged marriages such as theirs.¹⁹¹ Whether this practice continued later in the 1930's we do not know.

Another solution was illegal immigration known as “*Aliyah Beth*” in which the members left to Palestine without certificates and resided in Palestine illegally. From all over Europe *Khalutzim*, often with the help of the *Haganah* (the main Jewish militia in Palestine linked to the Jewish Agency), arranged for ships to transport them illegally to Palestine with the risk of being detected by the British Royal Navy and to be sent back to Europe or later after the second World War to detention camps in Cyprus.

The first group of *Shomrim* to make *Aliyah* from Belgium departed in 1929. Even before that a few individuals from the organization had settled in the *Kibbutzim* of the movement in Israel. This group

¹⁹⁰ L'Avenir Juif N° 194

¹⁹¹ CEGESOMA, interview with Ruchla Ekstein, N° AA 2268/337

however did not stay together as a *Kvutsah* in Israel but all went to different Kibbutzim. The group set out from the harbor of Antwerp and after several stops they landed in Beirut in Lebanon from where they crossed the mountains into Palestine.¹⁹²

In November 1932 the first group to clandestinely travel to Israel set out. It was preceded by three *Khaverim* who left in 1931 to serve as a base to direct the other members towards the *Kibbutz* in *Khederah* where they would join their Polish comrades. In total this group consisted of 18 members from the *Kenim* in Antwerp and Brussels and was known as *Garin Aleph*.

The illegal immigration was carefully planned and was not kept a secret in the Zionist community in Belgium. While the member's parents had certain reservations they seemed to have approved of the operation. In order to disguise their purpose one of the members organized through a friend in the Belgian scouts movement international scouting passports and uniforms so that they could pose as a Belgian scouts group touring the Middle East. They obtained a visa for French Mandate Lebanon and set out on their trip:

"The whole trip was organized until Beirut and I had a recommendation letter for the "Cook" branch in Beirut to arrange the tickets back to Belgium. Once everything was settled and we all had the regular uniform with ribbons, grades and symbols of the Belgian Scouts we decided on the 2nd of November of 1932 as the day of departure. We parted at the railway platform, after dancing a wild "Hora", from our parents, our friends, representatives of the Zionist organization and members of the Ken of the Shomrim and left on our way. It was an explicit order that due to the danger of informers we would not speak Yiddish or Hebrew, but only French.

We passed Switzerland at night and continued to Trieste. At the immigration office "Palestina Amt [Palestine office]" they tried to convince us not to immigrate in the illegal way due to the fear that they would send us back, they were sure of this. But our decision was firm. During our voyage on the ship "Carnero" I sent a telegram to the "Cook" branch in Beirut to tell them to wait for us at the harbor.

There were a lot of Jews on the ship, but we were careful and continued to speak only French. The trip took several days. We saw Haifa and the Carmel Mountain from a distance but could not get off the boat. In Yafo 3 comrades who had received certificates left the boat and we made contact with Numa, a comrade from Antwerp who was already in the Land. In my naivety I was sure that when we would arrive in Beirut a representative of the Kibbutz in Khederah would wait for us and we would pass the border with him. The reality obviously was different. "¹⁹³

After their arrival in Lebanon they received a telegram from Numa (Numa Eisenzweig) telling them to contact Mr. Pukhtshewski of the Anglo-Palestine Bank. Once there, accommodation with several Jewish families was arranged and a meeting was set up with a Jewish professor at the American University in Beirut.

¹⁹² CEGESOMA, *interview with Ruchla Ekstein*, N° AA 2268/337

¹⁹³ E.H., Etlenu, p. 3.

At the University a fee was negotiated for a smuggler who would guide them over the border to *Kibbutz* Kfar Giladi , in the Upper Galilee in the North of Palestine close to the border with Lebanon. From there the members travelled in small groups in order to avoid British patrols to the *Kibbutz* in Khederah.¹⁹⁴

The *Kibbutz* in Khederah was a temporary place within this town where the members of the *Garin* from Belgium and Poland lived together before moving to their permanent settlement.

In Khederah the members worked in the various work places assigned to them; in the orchards of the “*Moshava*” (agricultural settlement established during the period of the First Aliyah around 1882), in construction work, in road building and in the maintenance of the *Kibbutz*. The Belgian *Garin* decided to stay together and when the building of the permanent settlement at Wadi Khavarit started all the Belgian members moved to this *Kibbutz* called *Ein Hakhoresh*.¹⁹⁵

Meanwhile the immigration from Belgium continued slowly. In 1934 the first 5 members of the second Belgian *Garin* (*Garin Beth*) were in *Kibbutz* Mizra, in the North of Palestine between Afula and Nazareth.¹⁹⁶ More members followed and *Garin Beth* decided to search for a younger *Kibbutz* where they could adapt themselves better.

The first generation of Belgian immigrants in *Ein Hakhoresh* had previously tried to convince the new immigrants to join them in their *Kibbutz*, but the younger members rejected this because they felt they would not be integrated well and feared they could not act freely with their former youth leaders.¹⁹⁷

They searched for a younger *Kibbutz* and went from *Kibbutz* Mizra to Givat Hashomer which later became *Kibbutz* Dan.¹⁹⁸ In 1939 another 8 members from Belgium joined *Kibbutz* Dan. Most of them were however unable to adapt and integrate and left the *Kibbutz* and became scattered over the whole country.

Later, some of them made contact with members from *Ein Hakhoresh*, who worked in the diamond industry in Netanya. As a consequence many of the *Garin Beth* returned to the *Kibbutz* movement and settled in *Ein Hakhoresh*.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ In fact Hedera (Hadera) was not really a *Kibbutz* but a *Moshava* which is a kind of settlement which had been erected mainly in the first period of Jewish immigration after 1882 (Hadera was established by the lovers of Zion (*Hoveve Zion*) in 1891). Most *Moshavot* today have become towns and cities. In this *Moshava* there was a *Kibbutz* of Hashomer Hatzair.

¹⁹⁵ E.H., Etlenu, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ YAD YAARI, (4)2.11-2, *rapport to Hanhagah Elyona*

¹⁹⁷ E.H. Etlenu, p. 8.

¹⁹⁸ YAD YAARI, (1)3.11-2, Folder 2, *letter from Regina in Givat Hashomer to Pitah in Antwerp (17/11/1936)*

¹⁹⁹ E.H. Etlenu, p. 8. , For the role the Hashomer Hatzair played in the establishment of the diamond industry in Israel see: S. Brachfeld, *Belges en Israel, Belgen in Israel, 100 biographies et interviews - 100 biografieën en vraagesprekken*, Herzlia : Institut de Recherche sur le Judaïsme Belge, 1997, p 222-224. ; E.H. Etlenu, p. 17.

I was not able to find out whether most of the members after 1932 came to Palestine through the official way (certificates) or whether they immigrated clandestinely. Certainly each year a number of members who received certificates made their way to Palestine. We know that another Belgian group at the end of the 1930's, possibly the 8 members that arrived in 1939, went clandestinely. That illegal immigration still was a viable option for members of the Hashomer Hatzair movement can be seen in the story of two members of Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp who travelled to Palestine in 1939 in the clandestine voyage of the ship Dora to *Eretz Israel*.

'The Death Ship Dora'

The Dora was a ship carrying illegal immigrants from Holland and Belgium to Palestine in 1939. In Holland towards the end of the 1930's over a 1000 young Jews, mostly German and Austrian refugees, were doing their *Hakhsharah* in centers organized by Dutch Zionist organizations. Because the number of certificates for Holland was low the *Haganah* (Jewish militia in Palestine) decided to organize the illegal immigration from the Netherlands.



Abraham Goldenhaar and Hani Einhorn both members of Hashomer Hatzair were aboard the Dora. (ARA; Foreign Police files, A177.761)

The Dutch Zionist organizations responsible for the refugees and *Hekhalutz* and *Hakhsharah* rejected the illegal methods proposed by the *Haganah*. From Paris which was the center for illegal immigration by the *Haganah* a member received the order to organize

the illegal immigration of 300 *Khalutzim* from Holland, 150 from Belgium and another 100 from France. He set out to Copenhagen where he acquired an old coal ship, the Dora.

When the Dora arrived at the harbor in Amsterdam the commotion began. Members of the refugee committee all wealthy assimilated Jews were appalled by the condition of the ship and refused to let the *Khalutzim* go on board. This troubled relationship with the *Haganah* and the Dutch refugee commission was partly due to the fact that the commission was directly responsible for the plight of the Jewish refugees in the Netherlands. The Dutch government left it to the local Jewish community to look after the Jewish refugees from Germany or Austria but it also wanted to get rid of some of the refugees and thus secretly endorsed the operation and did nothing to prevent it.

Soon the press got wind of the affair and in the papers the ship came to be known as 'Het Dodenschip Dora' (the death ship Dora) and the 'plight' of the refugees could be read all over Holland and even reached the Parliament, where in a session the Communists addressed this issue.

The Dora in the meantime had sailed to Antwerp where another 150 *Khalutzim* boarded the already crowded ship. Among these were at least two members of Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp, we were able to identify Abraham Goldenhaar and Hani Einhorn. Possibly there were even more but as we have no list of all the members in Antwerp at this time it impossible to know for sure.

Eventually, after much delay, the Dora was allowed to leave and made her way into the Mediterranean. With an overcrowded ship, a morphine addicted doctor and a gun slinging captain the journey wasn't very pleasant but they were able to avoid detection by the British. After a short delay on the coast of Turkey where the ship resupplied, and a mutiny of the Greek crew and her captain who demanded more money from the *Haganah* the ship finally reached the coast of Palestine on the 11th of August 1939, three weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War.

While the history of the Dora is only indirectly related to the history of the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp it does give us a vital sense of the time just before the Second World War and the desperation amongst the young Palestine Pioneers to reach the Promised Land.

All the information regarding the Dora is derived from the article of Chaya Brasz - Brasz (Ch.). '*Dodenschip Dora; Een oude kolenboot redde honderden Joden ondanks Nederlandse tegenwerking*', In: *Vrij Nederland*, 1993, pp. 38-41. The connection with Hashomer Hatzair was found in the personal files of the Foreign Police in Belgium of Abraham Goldenhaar and Hani Einhorn- *ARA; Foreign Police files, A177.761*- where a list can be found of all the persons who boarded the Dora from the harbor of Antwerp. It may be that other members of Hashomer Hatzair or from other Belgian *Hekhalutz* movements were on board of the Dora, this needs to be established by further study.

7.3. The number of immigrants to Palestine

As for the number of immigrants of Hashomer Hatzair we were lucky to find two lists in the archive of *Kibbutz Ein Hakhoshesh*.²⁰⁰ The lists were written down by a member of the Kibbutz but regrettably the date of compilation is not mentioned. It probably has been written around the 1960's as the immigrants after 1948 are included in the two lists.²⁰¹

The first list gives the number of *Khaverim* which at the time of its writing were still members of *Kibbutzim*. These members immigrated in three time periods (1932-1939 ; 1945-1948; after 1948) and the list indicates the *Kibbutzim* in which they settled. The second list is organized according to the different *Kenim* (Ken Antwerp, Ken Brussels, Ken Holland) and the *Kibbutzim* in which they were members.

²⁰⁰ E.H. *hagarin habelgi, Hashlama Belgit 1932-1993*.

²⁰¹ In *Etzlenu* the journal issue on the 50th birthday (1982) of the Belgian Garin in Ein Hakhoshesh mention is made of 50 people of Belgium who in the course of time settled in Ein Hakhoshesh. This is significantly more than the 26 who are mentioned in the list. Therefore the list must have been compiled before 1982 probably in the 1960's possibly for the 50th anniversary of the movement.

As both lists have an equal number of 109 people and include the same *Kibbutzim* we know that they have the same immigrants as their subject. Both lists can be found in the back of this thesis (p.94) as they would otherwise occupy too much space.

The list only starts from 1932; members who immigrated previously are not included. Furthermore the list only includes the members who stayed in *Kibbutzim* of Hashomer Hatzair and thus does not include members of the movement who lived in a *Kibbutz* for a while but could not adapt and went to live elsewhere in the Land of Israel or left the country altogether and returned to Belgium. The total number of people who made *Aliyah* is therefore certainly higher than the numbers mentioned on these lists.

While it took some time to figure it out we can see that between 1932 and 1948 47 of the members mentioned immigrated to Palestine from Belgium from both Ken Antwerp and Brussels. All *Kibbutz* members from *Ken* Holland immigrated after 1948 (for instance we can see that *Kibbutz* Yaquim consisted only of members from Holland and that all members arrived in this *Kibbutz* after 1948).

Furthermore we can calculate that the majority of them came from *Ken* Antwerp (if we take a look at *Kibbutz* Nakhshonim for instance we see that from the total 19 of the 22 members arrived in Israel after the war of independence and that 12 members came from *Ken* Brussels, 4 from *Ken* Antwerp and 6 from *Ken* Holland, the same goes for Mishmar Ha'emek where six members arrived after 1948 all from *Ken* Brussels).

By ruling out certain possibilities we arrive at the following numbers. From the 47 persons who were members of a *Kibbutz* at the time the list was made and who made *Aliyah* before the war of Independence 31 of them certainly came from the *Ken* in Antwerp, 8 certainly came from the *Ken* in Brussels and for the other 8 we cannot be sure. This again clearly indicates that before the war the center of the movement in Belgium lay in Antwerp.

As we have said before, and assuming that the list is correct and inclusive, the number of immigrants from Belgium before 1948 would be significantly higher than 47 persons and it is highly possible that around double the amount of members (from both *Kenim*) made *Aliyah* from Belgium.

7.4. Adapting to the new homeland and the Arab question.

Life in the *Kibbutz* was characterized by hardship and often the members passed through a long period of difficult adaptation. The climatologic conditions and the new surroundings were totally foreign to the Belgian immigrants who were used to the temperate climate of Europe. The extreme heat in the summer and the marshlands surrounding Khederah - today only the Eucalyptus trees used to drain the marshes stand as a lonely reminder of these wetlands - took their toll and many *Shomrim* fell ill to malaria and other diseases.

Many members found it very difficult to adapt themselves to the *Kibbutz* life. In the *Kibbutzim* everything was communal, from the homes the people lived in until the clothes which the members wore. Meals were eaten communally in the dining room (*Khadar Okhel*) and decisions of the *Kibbutz* were taken in meetings where all the members could participate.

Later on, when the first children were born in the Kibbutz, they did not live at home with their parents but lived together in Children Houses with all the other children in communal fashion. They were taken care of by *Metaplot* (nurses) from the Kibbutz. The work on the soil, in the orchards, in the workshops and in the *Kibbutz* in general was very hard and the life the members lead was one of poverty compared to the relative welfare they had enjoyed in the big cities of Antwerp or Brussels.

On a psychological level the detachment of one's family and friends and all the other people they had left behind weighed heavily on the members.

Some of them could not find their way in this new communal life and left to live in the cities of Netanya, Haifa or Tel Aviv. Others grieved by homesickness or disappointed in life in the *Kibbutz* waved goodbye to the shores of Palestine and returned to Belgium. Even among those who stayed in the *Kibbutz*, Belgium and all that it stood for was still regarded as a paradise were they had known no anti Semitism or economic hardship.²⁰²

With the arrival in Palestine of the first Belgian *Garin* the Belgian *Shomrim* also came into contact with the Arab population living in Israel. While in Belgium an Arab or 'the Arabs' was a kind of strange and exotic bird, in Palestine the reality on the ground – where next to periods of peaceful coexistence also periods of intense violence, retaliation and killings between Jews and Arabs shook the country (there were Arab uprisings in 1921, 1929, and between 1936 and 1939) - makes it interesting to look at the ideology of Hashomer Hatzair in regards to the Arab population in Palestine, especially in the light of later history.

Conform to their Marxist ideology the Hashomer Hatzair movement argued for close cooperation between Arab and Jewish laborers of the country who were both being oppressed by the capitalists, feudal landowners and the British colonialist power. The Jewish working class in Palestine struggled against the Jewish bourgeoisie and the Arab laborers were oppressed and exploited by their feudal masters who manipulated them and sowed strife and violence between the workers of the soil of the two people.

Both the Jews and the Arab masses were therefore being duped by the reactionary forces of Capitalism and Feudalism. Nor did the Hashomer Hatzair see the Jewish immigration to Palestine as problematic. In an article in the journal of Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp the goals and the reason for Jewish immigration are stated as:

*"Zionism doesn't want to make Eretz [Israel] into a colony of planters, which would come to civilize the native population. Our task is not colonial, nor colonialist. We come to Eretz Israel to solve the Jewish Question and this will only be possible if Jewish labour creates new production areas for the Jewish masses."*²⁰³

That the immigration of the Jewish masses did in fact pose a direct threat in the eyes of the Arab population was not recognized by the Hashomer Hatzair who expected the Jewish and Arab masses and laborers to join together in the fight against Capitalism. They thereby totally disregarded the cultural and national aspirations of the Arab population.

²⁰² E.H. Etzlenu, p. 5., *speech written in 1942 for the ten year anniversary of the arrival of Garin A.*

²⁰³ YAD YAARI, (5)2.11-2, Folder 3, *Journal Hashomer Hatzair N°3-4*, p. 10.

The solution according to the Hashomer Hatzair was the creation of a bi-national constitutional regime that would ensure peaceful relations between the two people.²⁰⁴

With the hostilities during the Arab uprising (1936-1939) which was widespread and enjoyed the support of almost all layers of Arab society in Palestine this ideological position was hard to maintain and reaped a lot of criticism from the other Zionist parties and organizations. The Hashomer Hatzair argued however that that this agitation was caused by fascist infiltrators and by the policy of the British Mandate government which used the old strategy of divide and rule. In one of the self written *Itonim* of the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp of 1937, one year into the Arab uprising, this is put in the following words:

“for us it is clear that whichever the solution will be that England will impose on us that our position will, and cannot, change. The Jewish labour class shall try to tear the Arab labour class away from Fascism and in this way bridge the national discord. On the one hand the Fascist states are out to hurt the British interests and to create unrest in her possessions. On the other hand Imperialist England is out to sow division in the country in order to rule better. But once the Jewish and Arab laborers will be organized together it will be a blow to both the Fascists and England which will dethrone them in the future.”²⁰⁵

That the Hashomer Hatzair movement was unable or unwilling to see that Arab anger and resentment did not come from Fascist or British agitation but resulted from the Jewish immigration towards Palestine which posed a direct challenge to Arab national aspirations, is a result of the leftwing socialist ideology of the movement. It could not, as the Communists did, see the Arab rebellion as a progressive force as it went directly against their Zionist principles which called for unrestricted migration towards Israel. Therefore the Arab rebellion had to be instigated and the Arab labour classes had to be manipulated by the reactionary forces of Fascism and Imperialism.

While the Hashomer Hatzair thus propagated cooperation between the Arab and Jewish Labour organizations and peaceful relations between the two people it also formed one of the main groups from which fighters for the *Haganah* (Jewish Militia) and later the *Palmakh* (Elite strike forces within the *Haganah*) were recruited. The Kibbutzim of Hashomer Hatzair served as bases for the *Haganah* where weapons could be cached, fighters could be hidden and centers of operation could be established.

It is regrettable that the scope of this work did not allow us to look into the archives of the *Haganah* in Israel to search for the role Belgian *Shomrim* played in the *Haganah* or the *Palmakh* we do know for certain that some of them were active within these armed organizations.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ E. Margalit, Social an intellectual origins of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement,, p.46

²⁰⁵ YAD YAARI, (3)3.11-2, self written *Itonim* N°3, chapter ‘feiten en gebeurtenissen’

²⁰⁶ E.H., Etlenu, p.4

8. The Hashomer Hatzair during the occupation and the rebuilding after the war.

On the 10th of May 1940 with the outbreak of hostilities in Belgium we find the following report in the leadership log of Freddy Spielman, one of the members of the *Hanhagah Mekomit* in Antwerp;

“OUTBREAK OF WAR [KRIEGSAUSBERUCH]

I have written these notes after this afternoon the 10th of May when we had a large Moatzah [council] with all the khaverim of Hasneh and Bogrim where we have decided to continue our work notwithstanding [the war] and as much as possible. In all leading positions the Bakhurim [boys] were replaced by Bakhurot (girls) and for all institutions girls were appointed.”²⁰⁷

Ten days later the 20th of May the last note in the leadership log reads as follows;

“On Monday 13/05/1940 I have left the city of Antwerp. On my way southwards I received from Khaverim a message that all our work in the cities of Antwerp and Brussels had to be stopped and that all the older members have left the two cities.”²⁰⁸

With the start of the war and the subsequent occupation of Belgium the Hashomer Hatzair entered a turbulent period which would forever alter the movement in Belgium and the Jewish Community of the country.

Remarkably the history of the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Antwerp during the first two years of the occupation is very well documented considering the confusion and the necessity for secrecy during this period. While the archives with the correspondence and official documents of the movement were destroyed by members immediately after the occupation, several documents and letters written to the leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair branch in Switzerland and the leadership of Hashomer Hatzair in Palestine have been preserved and allow us to reconstruct the first two years of the movement in Antwerp in detail. Further personal testimonies of former members of the movement fill in some of the gaps and some publications of the movement and other documents like *Kvutsah booklets* written during this period give us a more personal look on the events during and after the occupation.

One of the most important documents on which this chapter is largely based is a letter written towards the end of 1941 by Yeshayahu Austriak (Ostri-Dan), the *Shaliakh* from the movement in Belgium, to the Executive Board of the *Kibbutz Artzi* in *Kibbutz Merkhavia*. In the letter- which he started writing in Bilbao, Spain, to where he initially escaped, but was finished and sent from Cuba where he had found refuge together with some other *Khaverim* of the *Ken* of Antwerp- a detailed description is given on the situation of the movement in Belgium from the beginning of the German occupation in May 1940 until the middle of 1941.²⁰⁹

The other main source, which closely corresponds with and further completes the account of Austriak, are the writings of David Donner (Dougy) one of the members of the *Hanhagah Rashit* at the time.

²⁰⁷ Moreshet, D.1.5024. *leadership log of Freddy Spielman*. Boys between 16 and 35 had to report as they were expected to the Belgian authorities as they were expected to fight on the front against the Germans.

²⁰⁸ Moreshet, D.1.5024, *leadership log of Freddy Spielman*

²⁰⁹ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*

Several of his letters towards Arthur Rath, one of the leaders of Hashomer Hatzair in Switzerland have been preserved as well as an account of the situation of the movement written by him in 1943 in Basel, Switzerland where he and other members of the movement in Belgium had found refuge.²¹⁰

The outbreak of the war in Belgium on the 10th of May 1940 caused a great stir in the Jewish Community in Antwerp and large part of the Jewish population decided to leave the city and head to France. As can be seen in the leadership log of Freddy Spielman and from reports from Austriak and Donner, the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp immediately organized a council of the oldest members to discuss the course of action the movement was going to take. It was decided that the *Histadrut* would continue to function and that the girls were going to take the leading functions as all the boys above 16 were about to be mobilized and that two days later on Sunday the 12th a second meeting was to be organized with all the members of the movement.²¹¹

Immediately after the outbreak of the war some of the leaders of the Ken in Antwerp destroyed the archives in the headquarters of the movement so that valuable information could not fall in German hands. Afterwards they went to the house of one of the leaders of the *Hanhagah Rashit*, Natan Dubinsky, where they archives of the *Hekhalutz* were kept and burned them as well.²¹²

The same morning Natan Dubinsky was arrested by the Belgian State Security. He was sent to the concentration camp of Argelès-sur-Mer where he would stay until his escape in 1941.²¹³ According to the testimony of Dougy Donner the Belgian State security possessed a list of members of the Hashomer Hatzair who had attended a Communist event for the remembrance of the fallen Jewish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.²¹⁴ Dubinsky was therefore probably arrested for Communist tendencies during the period immediately after the invasion when the Belgian State Security arrested all foreigners with questionable loyalties. This would also explain why he was sent to the concentration camp of Argelès-sur-Mer which was a camp in the south of France next to the Spanish border where the remnants of the international brigades of the Spanish Civil War were being interned.²¹⁵

In the second meeting, on Sunday the 12th, the members decided to formally dissolve the *Ken*. With the advance of the German army and the emptying of the city the leadership decided to take matters in their own hands instead of just watching the *Ken* slowly disintegrate. Many members had already fled the city with their parents towards the French frontier and the Belgian authorities arrested individuals with foreign nationalities which jeopardized the safety of the members.

Some *Bogrim* however still remained in the city discussing whether they would stay or not but by Tuesday all members of the movement had left the city.

²¹⁰ Moreshet, D.1.1171-75 and Ghetto fighters house (beit lohamei hegetta'ot), File: Belgium, N° 9, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah*.

²¹¹ Moreshet, D.1.5024, leadership log of Freddy Spielman, In Austriak's letter the second meeting supposedly took place on Saturday but as his account was written almost a year after the events while Freddy Spielman recorded during the actual events we place more trust in Spielman's account.

²¹² Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah* (see footnote above)

²¹³ Moreshet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 1.

²¹⁴ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074.

²¹⁵ Stephen (W.M.). *La retirada: sixty years on at Argeles*, Hills of Home, Edinburgh, 2001.

After the Ken was disbanded a group of older *Shomrim* from Antwerp gathered in Koksijde, a small town on the Belgian Coast, in the summer mansion of the parents of a member from a wealthy background. A group of 22 people from the Ken in Antwerp stayed there including David Donner and Yeshayahu Austriak who had travelled to Coxyde (Koksijde) from Brussels.²¹⁶ Initially the group attempted to cross the border from Coxyde into France but on seeing the situation on the border, where thousands of Jews were held up without any food, water and shelter and unable to pass the frontier, the members decided to return to Coxyde.

From there they attempted to find a way to cross the Channel into England where they hoped to be able to make *Aliyah*. They sent a telegram to London, presumably to the Zionist Headquarters, urgently requesting certificates. After they didn't receive a reply they started looking for a boat which would get them across the Channel but this plan had to be aborted at the last minute.²¹⁷ During their time in Coxyde they organized as a *Kvutsah* and engaged in cultural activities; they held discussions (*Sikhot*) talked about Zionist and Jewish history and current events and their implications for the movement.

After a while the Jews who were stuck at the French border started to trickle back into town which had been abandoned with the advance of the German troops. They had seen that it was hopeless to wait for the border to open. Some members from the Religious Zionist *Bne Akiva* movement joined the Hashomer Hatzair *Kvutsah* and participated in their cultural activities and some parents of *Shomrim* also joined the members in the summer mansion.²¹⁸

On the 28th of May the Belgian army surrendered and with the retreat of the British forces and the shell fire between the German and British troops the cultural activities were suspended. On Saturday the 30th of May German troops entered the town. To the great surprise and relief of the *Shomrim* the German army didn't harm any of the Jews and in some places even aided the refugees to return to their cities. The group therefore decided to return to Antwerp as well.

Immediately after their return to Antwerp the leadership of Hashomer Hatzair started to reorganize the *Ken*. On June the 5th a first assembly of the leadership came together in which 24 members attended. The next day on the 6th of June a second assembly gathered. By organizing the two assemblies the Hashomer Hatzair took a great risk of which they were well aware. If the German military command in Antwerp had been aware of such a mass gathering of a Zionist Marxist organization the consequences could have been dire. But in order to reorganize the *Ken* such a gathering was necessary.²¹⁹

In the meantime almost 90% of the members of the *Ken* had returned to Antwerp. At the assemblies it was decided to close the meeting hall of the movement in the Marinus Street in Antwerp. Members were not to gather in large groups. From now on all the activities would take part within each *Kvutsah* with its *Menahel* responsible for the education of the members.

²¹⁶ Moreshet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 2.

²¹⁷ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074.

²¹⁸ Moreshet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 3.

²¹⁹ Moreshet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 4.

Larger meetings within a *Plugah* let alone a *Gdud* were not longer possible for safety measures. The meetings of the *Kvutsot* were to be held in the houses or apartments of the older members of the movement or in the houses of parents who agreed to let the meetings take place there; even then it was difficult to find enough safe places for the different *Kvutsot* whose number reached 17.²²⁰

While the educational activities of the movements as a whole went rather well the atmosphere of meetings changed, especially when the occupation made itself more felt. As members only met in small groups of 4 to 6 *Khaverim* it was difficult for the youngsters to create a feeling of friendship among themselves on the one side and with their leader on the other side. This was especially felt by the younger members who were at the beginning of puberty (14-15). It was forbidden to sing in group during the meetings and the atmosphere was rather tense.²²¹

The seclusion and lack of news from other Hashomer Hatzair organizations in other countries and from Palestine was also felt by the members in the movement. The only contacts the Hashomer Hatzair had with another Hashomer organization was with the *Tnuah* in Switzerland, the only country in Europe which was not occupied by the German Army or their allies and where a branch of the movement existed. This correspondence between the leadership of Antwerp and Arthur Rath, a leader in Hashomer Hatzair Switzerland started somewhere at the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942. In the letters the *Shomrim* from Antwerp continually ask for news of other branches and stressed that the news and greetings from Belgium would be conveyed to 'Uncle Meir', 'Dan' and others.²²² There was also contact between Dougy Donner and Nathan Schwalb, one of the representatives of the World Hekhalutz Center in Geneva.²²³

The leadership tried to create an atmosphere of normalcy, continuing the activities of before the war which were still possible. *Bar Mitsva's* were celebrated within the *Kvutsot* and the Jewish holidays like the *Seder of Pessakh* were held in the apartments of members and the specific celebrations of the movement were also organized. All these activities were done with discretion and in secrecy.²²⁴ Small meetings of the leadership took place to develop work schedules for the education of their members, as information and literature from outside the country did not arrive anymore, and to discuss the problems in their groups. Every two weeks the board of leaders came together to discuss the problems of the *Ken* and to listen to the reports of the various groups.²²⁵

The emphasis of the work now lay on cultural and educational matters due to the specific conditions under occupation. *Tiulim* and *Makhanot* were not possible anymore.

²²⁰ Moreschet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 4. ; *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah*

²²¹ Moreschet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 4.

²²² Moreschet, D.1.1171-75, In the letters code language is used. 'Uncle Meir' for instance stands for Meir Ya'ari the leader of Hashomer Hatzair in Palestine. 'Dan' stands for kibbutz Dan where the Belgian Ga'rin B was staying.

²²³ Wagman Eshkoli (H.). The contacts between the World Hachalutz Center in Geneva and the Zionist-Pioneering Underground in Belgium, IN: *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, ed.: Michman (D.), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 400.

²²⁴ Moreschet D.1.6326-01, *Kvutsah booklet 1942* ; Moreschet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 8. ; Moreschet, D.1.1171-75, letter to Arthur Rath

²²⁵ Moreschet, D.1462, letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan, p. 5.

The *Hakhsharah* center in Villers la Ville was closed down some months after the occupation and members were thus unable to go on *Hakhsharah* during the first year of the occupation.

At a later stage, from the spring of 1942 until February 1943 a *Hakhsharah* center operated in Bomal, a small village in the province of Walloon Brabant (Waals-Brabant) close to the town of Jodoigne, for all the Zionist youth movements. More than 60 *Khalutzim* worked in farms in the surrounding area. According to Dan Michman most of the *Khalutzim* came from Hashomer Hatzair (at least forty).²²⁶ After the Germans started deporting the Jews of Belgium to the east the center was closed down as the members received information that the Germans were planning to deport them.

As mentioned before immediately after the reorganization of the *Ken* in Antwerp a *Kibbutz* (*Hakhsharah Ironit*) was set up for several *Bogrim* in the apartment of one of the leaders, Mottek Adler. This commune was of central importance as it also served as a meeting place for the movement. Meetings and assemblies were organized there and discussions were held and members simply came to pass some time as most of them were out of work. The *Kibbutz* functioned as a living proof for the rest of the organization of the possibility to realize the ideal of collectivity and it served as a moral and educational example in these difficult times.²²⁷

While the educational work moved to the center the activities of the movement the hope of making *Aliyah* still continued and always remained at the forefront of the minds of the older members. At the end of June and the beginning of July 1940, almost a month into the occupation, news started to arrive from some of the members who had fled to Marseille of possibilities for making *Aliyah* from there. The movement decided to send two leaders (Mordechai Adler (Mottek) and Numa Eisenzweig) to the South of France to explore these possibilities and to find a way to free Nathan Dubinsky from the concentration camp of Argelès-sur-Mer. They set out at the beginning of August. At this point in time the borders between Belgium and France were still open and the border between occupied France and Vichy France in reality did not exist which allowed the members to travel easily across the borders.²²⁸

In the meantime it was decided that there was a need for a *Bogrim* Conference (*Kinus Bogrim*) to discuss with all the older members of the movement the international situation and its influence on the Jewish question as their seemed to be uncertainty and discontent among the ranks. This meeting took place on the 28th of July at the house of one of the girls of the movement whose parents had agreed to leave for a day. Over 40 members attended, most of them from Antwerp.

During the whole day and evening lectures were given and discussions were held. A small minority of the members argued that in the current situation the Hashomer Hatzair should align itself with a revolutionary force in the International Labour Movement and that they should join the Comintern and the Communists.

²²⁶ D. Michman, *The Belgian Zionist Youth movements during the Nazi...*, p. 390. ; according to Wagman-Eshkoli however 120 *Khalutzim* (pioneers) were trained at Bomal.(see footnote above)

²²⁷ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p . 5. ; CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074.

²²⁸ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 5.

The majority of the members however argued that the current situation strengthened and proved the justness of the Zionist solution to the Jewish question. In the Diaspora there could be no normal life for the Jewish people and only Palestine could absorb the Jewish masses after the war. It was decided that possibilities for *Aliyah* should be found and that the movement should continue to follow its Zionist course.²²⁹

That some members sought nearer contacts with the Communists during the occupation can also be attested in the account of Dougy Donner.²³⁰ If we recall the earlier defections of the early 1930's which was also a period of great instability for the movement it seems that in these intense situations the members were particularly prone to defections or influence from the Communists. It was in these periods that the internal inconsistencies of the movement came to the fore which forced some of the members to make drastic decisions.

What is also clear from the decisions taken by the movement is that in the early phase of the occupation the Hashomer Hatzair still systematically continued its policy of refusal to work in the Galuth and devoted all its energy in preparing its members for their future life in *Eretz Israel* and took great risks in finding ways to get there.

The two members who were sent to France spent 5 weeks on the road. Mordechai Adler for a short while was incarcerated in a French concentration camp but managed to escape. Numa Eisenzweig in the meantime had returned to Antwerp with positive news on the possibility to make *Aliyah* from Marseille. Immediately after his return the movement began organizing a group to make *Aliyah*. There were debates over who would stay and ensure the continuation of the activities of the movement and who would go. Almost all the *Bogrim* and *Tzofim-Bogrim* were willing to go on *Aliyah*. It was decided that the group should travel in small numbers and that they would meet in Marseille. The first group left on the 24th of September 1940 and consisted of three people including Yeshayahu Austriak.²³¹

When this group arrived in Paris they were told by Mordechai Adler (Mottek) who had recently escaped from the concentration camp that the situation had changed during the last few weeks and that it would be impossible to go to Marseille without detection and that even if they would get there it would all be in vain as not a single ship had left for Syria from the harbor of Marseille and that the beaches were all guarded. After this the discouraging news the members decided to return to Antwerp.²³²

In the meantime the situation of the Jews in Antwerp started to deteriorate. From October 1940 onwards the first 'Jewish Decrees' were published in Antwerp. Ritual slaughter was prohibited, Jews had to register themselves and Jewish businesses had to be clearly recognizable with the sign 'Jewish Enterprise', Jews were prohibited to serve in public functions in education (except in Jewish education) and in legal professions.²³³

²²⁹ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 5,6,7.

²³⁰ Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah*,..... < Sie hatten Beziehungen zu den Schatfanim [Hebrew: communists]>

²³¹ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 7.

²³² Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 7.

²³³ L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 500-501.

The economic conditions of the Jews also started to deteriorate. Even in the first months of the occupation there were food shortages. Later the situation became even worse and assuring an income became problematic as many Jews were barred from certain professions by the new Jewish Decrees or were simply unable to get employment during these difficult times. Certain basic products could not be found on the regular market and could only be acquired at the Black Market at very high prices.²³⁴

This also affected the work of the Hashomer Hatzair as members had to find ways to support their families.²³⁵ Dan Michman reports in his article that the Zionist youth movements in Belgium also became active in social welfare matters initially to provide for their members and their families and later to assist the general Jewish Community. In 1941 and 1942 Hashomer Hatzair together with Bne Akiva went to work in the countryside collecting agricultural products and distributing them among the needy in the Jewish Community.²³⁶

We can notice that when the Occupation advanced in time Hashomer Hatzair became more and more involved within the Jewish Community and in practice, if not in principle, shed its rigid refusal to work in the *Galuth*.

The joint distribution of food of Hashomer Hatzair and Bne Akiva demonstrates the good relations that existed between the different Zionist Youth movements who had managed to reestablish themselves after the occupation. Early on in the occupation Hashomer Hatzair had helped reestablish some other Zionist youth organizations and had suggested greater cooperation between the different youth movements. This proposal however was rejected as the other movements were not yet ready for such a step. Later on in 1941 this cooperation did indeed develop. Especially the relations and cooperation between the Hashomer Hatzair and Bne Akiva were very close and productive.²³⁷

With the creation of the *Association des Juifs de Belgique* (AJB, Association of Jews of Belgium) on the orders of the German authorities at the end of 1941 all the Jewish movements were to be disbanded or to be merged with the AJB. Only sport clubs were allowed to continue to function independently by the authorities. In response all Zionist Youth movements continued operating under the cover of the 'Maccabi Hatzair Sports Club'. It seems however that the relations between Hashomer Hatzair and *Maccabi* soured. In Dougy Donner's report the relations with *Maccabi Hatzair* are described in the following way:

*"The biggest worry for us was Maccabi Hatzair, we always argued with them and were attacked by them in the meanest manner"*²³⁸

This might be the result of the tensions that evolved within the 'Maccabi Hatzair organization' because the youth movements which had joined *Maccabi* maintained their political orientations. Furthermore the AJB favored *Maccabi Hatzair* and gave it preferential treatment.

²³⁴ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 8.

²³⁵ Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah*

²³⁶ D. Michman, "The Belgian Zionist Youth movements during the Nazi...", p. 388.

²³⁷ D. Michman, "The Belgian Zionist Youth movements during the Nazi...", p. 389.

²³⁸ Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah*

This enticed some movements to leave the organization and continue their activities illegally in other locations.²³⁹ Whether this was the case for Hashomer Hatzair we do not know for certain.

The Pogrom of April 1941 in Antwerp came as a shock to the Hashomer Hatzair and the Jewish Community in Antwerp. Members of the Flemish SS and German soldiers rampaged through the Jewish neighborhood in Antwerp destroying and pillaging Jewish shops and setting alight the books and furniture of two local synagogues. The fire department and police of Antwerp were not allowed to intervene by the German authorities. The scene is vividly described by Yeshayahu Austriak in his report.

*"In the Jewish quarter shops were plundered, windows shattered and afterwards they turned on the main synagogue on the Van den Nest Lei. The tables and benches were broken to pieces, the prayer books were taken out, thrown and trapped upon and burned. Many of our comrades were on the street. It was the members of our movement which penetrated into the burning synagogue and saved the Torah scrolls while around them there was plunder, destruction and breaking whatever came into their hands."*²⁴⁰

That members of the Hashomer Hatzair saved the Torah scrolls is also attested in the testimonies published in the booklet for the 50th birthday of the Belgian migration to Ein Hakhoresh.²⁴¹ The pogrom made a deep impact on the members of the Hashomer Hatzair. In the immediate aftermath of the riots a curfew was declared and Jews were not allowed to leave their home after a certain hour. Even long after the riots this curfew was upheld and was reaffirmed on the 29th of August 1941 when the authorities decided that Jews were not allowed to leave their home between 8 in the evening and 7 in the morning.²⁴²

In the first few days after the pogrom all the educational work of the Hashomer Hatzair stopped. After a while, when things started to calm down, the activities within the *Kvutsot* were resumed but the situation remained difficult. Due to the curfew the members met at 5 in the afternoon and had to leave to get home before the curfew started. The situation of the older members, the *Bogrim*, was easier. When they had a meeting members organized bedding and food for themselves and spent the evenings and nights together.²⁴³

At the end of 1941 rumors reached the members of plans for the deportation of all the Jews of Belgium to Russia and Poland. At the same time from Switzerland rumors started to reach the leadership of the terrible fate of the Jews in Eastern Europe. In this period the mass murder of the Jewish population in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, Rumania and the Baltic States was in full operation.

²³⁹ Michman (D.), *The Belgian Zionist Youth movements during*, p. 389.

²⁴⁰ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 8.

²⁴¹ E.H. *Etzlenu*, p.11, testimony Willy Mohar.

²⁴² E. Schmidt, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Antwerpen; in woord en beeld*, De Vries-Brouwers, Antwerpen-Rotterdam; 1994; p. 190- 192.

²⁴³ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 8.

In Switzerland the Hashomer Hatzair arranged for the escape of Jewish children from Yugoslavia to the country. The Swiss branch of Hashomer Hatzair was therefore relatively well informed about the situation in Eastern Europe.²⁴⁴

In the course of 1942 the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp started to get interested in joining the Belgian Resistance. Dougy Donner who represented several Zionist youth movements contacted the Communists but they replied that while each individual was welcome to join the Resistance the joining of Hashomer Hatzair as a group was out of the question. On these terms the Hashomer Hatzair refused to comply and instead started organizing itself.²⁴⁵

Because the Communist refused to supply weapons to the Hashomer Hatzair they were acquired through a Catholic intermediary. The Hashomer Hatzair organized groups of *Bogrim* who were instructed in the use of arms by a member (Krator) who had been in *Kibbutz Dan* and probably had gained some experience in the use of weapons from the *Haganah* or the *Palmakh*.²⁴⁶ It seems unlikely however that any of these weapons were fired as the Resistance in Antwerp at this point in time was very weak and unorganized. Later with the departure of most of the *Bogrim* these weapons were transferred to the Communists.

The Hashomer Hatzair also engaged in sabotage and anti Nazi propaganda. They wrote pamphlets calling on the workers to stop aiding the German war effort by producing vests and uniforms for German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front. These pamphlets were secretly distributed in the workshops by the young members. They also translated newspapers and leaflets of what was happening in the Free World.²⁴⁷

The Hashomer Hatzair movement also tried to coordinate their resistance activities with other Zionist youth movements in Antwerp but these were not all too keen to participate. The Jewish Socialist Party, the *Poale Tzion*, urged the Hashomer Hatzair not to engage in any resistance activities probably for fear of harsh German retaliations.²⁴⁸

While these activities at first sight seem to be a total reversal of the policy of Hashomer Hatzair not to engage in any work in the *Galuth* the thought of finding a way to make Aliyah still remained a priority for the Hashomer Hatzair. When in 1942 Abusz Werber, the leader of the *Linke Poale Tzion*, contacted members from the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp to coordinate their resistance activities with the CDJ (Comité de Défence des Juifs), the Jewish Resistance in Belgium, he was rebuffed.

According to Werber the Hashomer Hatzair replied that they had to leave Belgium for Switzerland and that the *Galuth* was of no interest to them. Only Aliyah to Eretz Israel mattered.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p. 8. ; Hebrew University Oral History Department. File nr. (27)6, interview with Moshe Nadel.

²⁴⁵ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074

²⁴⁶ Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah* ; CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074

²⁴⁷ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074; Hebrew University Oral History Department. File nr. (27)6, interview with Moshe Nadel.

²⁴⁸ Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah* ; CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074

²⁴⁹ Sh. Kless, *Pe'ulot Hameri ve'Halechima Hayehudit be'Belgia bitkufat Hashoa*, Zion 47, 4, 1982, p.479, note 132, as seen in: Michman (D.), *The Belgian Zionist Youth movements during*, p.391

While this strong statement is rather strange considering all the efforts Hashomer Hatzair had done to acquire weapons and organizing their resistance activities it certainly is true that during the first half of 1942 the Hashomer Hatzair started organizing ways to escape from Belgium and head to Switzerland.

In 1942 the German authorities in Belgium started to prepare the liquidation and deportation of the Jews of Belgium. At the Wannsee Conference the fate of European Judaism was decided and soon the preparation towards the Final Solution for the Jewish question was in full swing. In a short period a whole new array of 'Jewish Decrees' were published. Jews could be deployed in forced labor (11th March 1942 and 8th of May 1942), The German nationality of Jewish refugees from Germany was taken away and their possessions were confiscated (22nd April 1942), Jews had to wear the distinct yellow star in public with the letter J in the middle. This star should be attached on the left side of their clothes (27th of May 1942).²⁵⁰

During this period it became impossible for the Hashomer Hatzair to continue their work within the previous framework. It was decided that all the work of the movement would continue totally underground. The *Kvutsot* now operated totally autonomously. When rumors started reaching members of deportation to forced labour- this must have been somewhere in the beginning of 1942 as seen above the first decree dates from 11th of March 1942 although the practice of transporting Jews to work at the Atlantic Wall only started in June 1942- the leadership decided to pull all the *Bogrim*, the oldest members who were eligible to be called up for forced labor, out of the educational work of the movement. All the work was laid in the hands of the younger members, most likely the *Tzofim-Bogrim*.²⁵¹

There were heated discussions and disagreements over what should be done. Some argued that the *Bogrim* should flee and try to reach Switzerland, others argued that they should be deported with the other Jews in order to keep the youth together in the camps. In the end it was decided that the *Bogrim* should escape and try to reach Switzerland. At this point in time only people over 18 years old were taken for forced labour so they argued that the younger members were in no immediate danger. Preparations were made for the organized escape to Switzerland. Money was the biggest issue; it was needed to bribe officials and to buy illegal documents. Scouts were sent ahead to look for routes into Switzerland. When they returned the older members were split up into small groups and were given false documents, instructions and meeting points and from June 1942 onwards until August small groups started to escape Belgium and head for Switzerland.²⁵²

The trip to Switzerland was very dangerous as all the trains and stations were checked by the Germans. Members had to endure hunger and hardship and had to be smuggled across the mountains, wade through ice cold rivers and walk through snowy meadows to reach safety. While many of the groups arrived safely in Switzerland, some were caught and sent to the Extermination Camps. When the members arrived in Switzerland they sent back messages on postcards to assure

²⁵⁰ L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p.499-504

²⁵¹ Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah*

²⁵² Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah* ; E.H. *Etzlenu*, p.11, testimony Willy Mohar.

their comrades in Antwerp of their safe arrival. When the members received no such letters they knew that the attempt had failed and that the group was apprehended.²⁵³

Two members of the *Hanhagah* stayed behind in Antwerp to continue the activities of the movement. In August the deportation of the Belgian Jews towards the East began. Raids to round up the Jews of Antwerp were held on the 17th of August, the 27th and 28th of August and again on September 11. People were taken from their homes and transported to the Dossin Barracks in Malines, from where they were deported to Auschwitz.²⁵⁴

From this moment on the history of the members of the Hashomer Hatzair is tied to the history and fate of the Belgian Jewish Community as a whole. The Hashomer Hatzair as an organization ceased to exist. All the *Kvutsah* booklets we found in the archive from 1942 end in July 1942, just before the deportations started.²⁵⁵

In the first weeks after the beginning of the deportations some members managed to escape. The two members of the *Hanhagah* also left Antwerp and later on a whole *Kvutsah* managed to escape towards Switzerland; these were the last youngsters who managed to flee.²⁵⁶

Numa Eisenzweig, Yeshayahu Austriak and other members of the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp had managed to leave Belgium even before the departure of the *Bogrim* to Switzerland and in the course of 1942 made their way to Cuba. 6 *Khaverim* from Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp made their way into Cuba where they found a local branch of the movement in Havana and started to help educate the Cuban Jewish youth.²⁵⁷

Of those who stayed behind a few found refuge within Belgium and went into hiding. Some of them in the course of time became active in the Resistance. Moshe Nadel and Max Ochodnizky for instance, both from the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp, were active in separate units of the White Brigade, the Nationalist Resistance movement of Belgium and both operated in the area around Bomal. They engaged in sabotage acts, trying to harm to German war economy by burning linseed used to produce oil and blowing up railways, and in acts of espionage, mapping German air fields and passing the information on to the British.²⁵⁸

Both were active within the Belgian Resistance where their Jewish identity only was known to their squadron commander, so as not to give the Germans any information if one of their comrades would have been captured.

It is possible that other members of the Hashomer Hatzair were active in the Jewish underground (CDJ) or the Communist Resistance which after all would have been more in line with the ideology of the movement but we do not have knowledge of any such persons.

²⁵³ Hebrew University Oral History Department. File nr. (27)6, interview with Moshe Nadel.

²⁵⁴ L. Saerens, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 592.

²⁵⁵ Moreshet, D.1.6326-01 ; Moreshet, D.1.6326-03

²⁵⁶ D.1.6326-03

²⁵⁷ Moreshet, D.1462, *letter Yeshayahu Ostri Dan*, p.9. The members in Cuba were: *Israel Adar, Ruth Richtiger, Numa Eisenzweig, Yashayahu Austriak, Nathan Dubinsky, David Weiss, Freddy Spielman.*

²⁵⁸ Hebrew University Oral History Department. File nr. (27)6, interview with Moshe Nadel.

Most of the members of the movement however, especially the younger ones, did not survive the war and were rounded up by the Germans or together with their parents reported at the Dossin Barracks where they were put on cattle trains and transported to Auschwitz. The vast majority of them did not return.

By the end of 1942 some 40 members of the Hashomer Hatzair (Antwerp and Brussels) had managed to reach Switzerland. They were interned in various refugee and work camps including the notorious Bellechasse prison.²⁵⁹ Life in these camps was often very hard but the members were at least safe from prosecution.²⁶⁰ Some of the members with Belgian passports were under the protection of the Belgian Embassy and received food parcels and clothes.

While it was impossible to organize the Belgian *Bogrim* under a single organization as they were scattered among various camps and only were in touch with each other through letters and postcards, in certain areas some of the *Shomrim* did manage to organize themselves. In the town of Sierre in the canton of Valais a group of 9 people formed a *Kvutsah* and even attempted to create a journal for the *Shomrim* in Switzerland. The first edition of this journal was published in December 1943 and was aimed at creating stronger contacts between the Belgian *Khaverim* throughout the country.²⁶¹

The conditions in the refugee camps and the loss of so many of their friends and family who did not manage to escape also took their toll on the members. Some of them felt dispirited and demoralized and some could not be interested in the further workings of the movement in Switzerland.²⁶²

The Belgian *Shomrim* were also in contact with the *Hanhagah Harashit* of Switzerland and received some help from them which made their life a bit easier. In the course of 1944 the participation with the activities of the movement in Switzerland increased. They helped out with the education of the children from Yugoslavia who had come with their leaders via Italy to Switzerland and also managed to integrate the children from Bergen-Belsen which were released as part of a prison exchange with the Germans after the payment of a large sum of money.²⁶³

After the war in May 1945 a large group of Belgian *Bogrim* made Aliyah from Switzerland, they passed through France and Spain and finally reached *Eretz Israel*; 15 of them joined *Kibbutz Ein Hakhoshesh*.²⁶⁴ In the meantime, immediately after the opening of the Second Front when Allied troops landed in Normandy, two members of Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp (Dougy Donner and his wife Jehudith Hase) prepared to return to Belgium to reestablish the movement. In Switzerland they had

²⁵⁹ E.H. *Etzlenu*, p. 11.

²⁶⁰ For the history of the condition of the Jewish refugees in Switzerland see: Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland, *Second World War: Switzerland and refugees in the Nazi Era*, Bern, 1999 <<http://www.uek.ch/en/publikationen1997-2000/fb-e.pdf>, last seen 18/06/2013>

²⁶¹ YAD YAARI, (8)3.11-2, Folder 3, *journal Hashomer Hatzair of 1943*

²⁶² Donner, *Bericht über die Belgische Tnuah* ; YAD YAARI, (8)3.11-2, Folder 3 ; YAD YAARI, (8)3.11-2, Folder 3, *journal Hashomer Hatzair of 1943*, article: *leHagshamah*.

²⁶³ E.H. *Etzlenu*, p. 11. In Bergen-Belsen Jewish prisoners known as exchange-prisoners were held who could be exchanged for German prisoners or for large amounts of money.

²⁶⁴ E.H. *Etzlenu*, p. 11.

received information from Nathan Schwalb, one of the representatives of the World Hekhalutz Office at Geneva, that after the war 50 *Shlikhim* would arrive in the *Galuth* from Palestine.²⁶⁵

They wanted to arrive before the *Shlikhim* so that they could reestablish the movement. They crossed the border of Switzerland into France illegally. Together with a female member of the Hashomer Hatzair of France they took the first train to Paris and arrived at the end of August 1944 just after the liberation of the city. After their arrival in the city they started reestablishing the Ken in Paris. In September after the liberation of Antwerp they travelled to Belgium and started to reorganize the Zionist Youth. In the beginning, because of the small number of Zionist youth who were still in Belgium, all the Zionist youth movements were organized under one single organization which called itself *Khalutz*. It was decided that later on all youngsters would choose which movement they wanted to belong to.²⁶⁶

At a later stage, somewhere in the course of 1945 this split occurred and the Hashomer Hatzair again became a separate organization. It maintained good contacts with *Gordonia* in Brussels and with *Dror* and helped to absorb the refugees who were returning to Belgium. Jehudith Hase remembered this period vividly.

*“The return of the Jews from the camps was the blackest period in my life. Drop by drop also some Shomrim started to return from Poland, everyone with his horrible story. They spoke a lot about revenge. Days and nights we stood at the train station and waited for our Shomrim from Belgium. To my deep regret – most of them did not return.”*²⁶⁷

The Jewish Brigade, a British army unit formed from Jewish volunteers from the *Yishuv*, was a great help in the reestablishment of the Zionist youth movements. With the help of the Brigade the Hashomer Hatzair organized a *Makhaneh* (summer camp) in the summer of 1945.

In the meantime the older members started to look for a way to make Aliyah. When 500 immigration certificates arrived, 350 were reserved for people who had been imprisoned in Buchenwald and 150 were reserved for *Khalutzim*. Among the different organizations a ship, the ‘Mataroa’, was organized.

The *Haganah*, which had been the leading force within the Jewish Brigade, arranged for a group of illegal immigrants to board the ship in addition to those who had received certificates.

These were mostly members of the *Poale Tzion*. 991 immigrants from Belgium, France, Holland and Switzerland departed from the harbor of Toulon towards Palestine. Among them were Dougy Donner, Yehudit Hase and other members of the movement, in total 35 from both *Kenim*. They were also accompanied by a group of youngsters who were not members of the Hashomer Hatzair but were to be educated in the framework of “Youth Aliyah” in the *Kibbutz*, most of them later went to establish *Kibbutz Nirim* in the Negev. The Mataroa arrived in the harbor of Haifa on the 9th of August

²⁶⁵ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074; For the history of Nathan Schwalb and his relations with the Belgium Zionist movements see: H. Wagman Eshkoli, “The contacts between the World Hachalutz Center in Geneva and the Zionist-Pioneering Underground in Belgium”, In: D.Michman, ed. *Belgium and the Holocaust Jews, Belgians Germans*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 397-417.

²⁶⁶ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074

²⁶⁷ E.H. *Etzlenu*, p. 9..

1945 where the Haganah quickly took most of the illegal immigrants of the boat and transported them to the interior of the country. The rest were taken by the English by train to the Atlit detainee camp, twenty kilometers south of Haifa.²⁶⁸



Members of Hashomer Hatzair Belgium dancing the *Horah*, the traditional Jewish Folk dance which was inspired by Folk dances from Turkey and the Balkans and which was very popular in the Kibbutz movement, on board of a ship on their way to Israel in 1948.

By 1946 a small *Ken* had been reestablished in Antwerp. Because of the small number of Jews who had survived in Antwerp the membership remained low. In Brussels where the Jewish Community had enjoyed greater protection from the Belgian authorities the membership of the *Ken* was larger. From now on the strongest *Ken* and the center of Hashomer Hatzair Belgium would be in Brussels. Even when a strong Jewish life returned to Antwerp in the decades after the war the sociological composition and outlook of this new Jewish Community differed remarkably from that of its pre war predecessor. It became much more religious with a strong and vibrant Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Community and it changed from a largely working class composition to a middle class composition. In Brussels a more left wing and secular Jewish life continued which allowed the Hashomer Hatzair to flourish until today. This being said the Hashomer Hatzair in Antwerp continued to exist until the 1980's and would continue with its left wing Zionist activities, although it would never regain its numerical strength and position it had before the war.

I would like to end this chapter with a very typical encouragement written by a *Madrikh* in one of the *Kvutsah* booklets of January 1946 almost a year after the war which in a way sums up the spirit and identity of the movement ;

“Concerning the Kvutsah:

To be able to call oneself a Kvutsah is certainly not easy especially as we are few in number. Because in order to be a Kvutsah, in the full sense of the word it is not enough that some khevre [Khaverim] work to make a Kvutsah a worthy group. NO! no one can stand on the side lines. All of you must help each other and not forget that the ‘all for one and one for all’ has always been are our call. And only in this way can and shall we

²⁶⁸ CEGESOMA, interview with Donner David, N° 00073, 00074 ; E.H. *Etzlenu*, p.9, testimony Jehudith Hase.

achieve our goals. The expression of this shall and must be this Sefer Kvutsah [Kvutsah booklet]. It will be the witness of our work. Therefore Khaverim we must do all that is possible to help each other and to gather all that is needed for us to direct this beautiful building that bears the name of 'Kvutsah Hagshamah' which means 'fulfillment'. So onwards to our first Hagshamah , the erection of a firm Kvutsah which will and must be the pride of our Ken here in Antwerp. Because Khaverim, it is you who are the future of our histadruth [organization]. So Khaverim to work! And good luck!

Khazak ve' ematz [be strong and brave]²⁶⁹!

²⁶⁹ Moreshet, D.1.6326-02, Kvutsah Booklet from 1946.

9. Conclusions.

With the immigration of a substantial number of immigrants to Belgium in the decades after the First World War a typical Eastern European Jewish culture developed in the City of Antwerp. With this immigration the institutions and political factions of Eastern European Judaism were also transferred into Belgium.

The arrival of Jewish youth from Poland, who in Belgium sought closer connections to Zionist Youth movements like they had known in Poland, gradually shaped and transformed the local Zionist youth in Belgium. Like in many other countries the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp had its origins within a local Zionist scouting movement where it could build further on the existing organization. The emphasis on scouting and cultural activities of the *Bar Kokhba* youth movement was redirected towards active pioneering Zionism integrated within a specific Marxist political vision for the outline of the Jewish National Home.

The immigration to Israel and the establishment of a Jewish proletariat of which the *Kibbutzim* would be the vanguard now became the central goal for the movement. The feeling of being on the edge of a new dawn, a new History for the Jewish People, was also characterized by how the members of the Hashomer Hatzair perceived themselves. They saw themselves as the pioneers of a new type of society which would be established on the shores of Palestine and would finally put an end to the Jewish Question.

The Hashomer Hatzair movement strongly rejected any work in the framework of the *Galuth*. All the energy of the members should be devoted to preparing for their future life in Palestine. While this policy remained active throughout the movement's history at some points the Hashomer Hatzair took a less rigid stance. During the occupation the movement became involved in organizing welfare for the Jewish community and organized pockets of resistance. The Goal of *Aliyah* and *Hagshamah* though always remained the focal point of the movement.

For this goal every member had the personal obligation to prepare himself both physically and mentally. *Hagshamah*, *fulfillment*, was the corner stone in the ideology and mentality of the members. The education of the members in all its aspects, morally, intellectually, socially and physically was all regulated and carefully guided by the movement both on a national and supra-national level and directed towards this goal.

This extreme focus on settling in a *Kibbutz* in *Eretz Israel* and the very politicized vision of the movement often deterred Jewish youngsters from joining the movement. It furthermore served as a barrier between the Hashomer Hatzair movement and other Zionist youth movements who were often regarded with a certain elitist disdain. The specific Marxist orientation of the Hashomer Hatzair also left the movement open to defections towards the Communists. Some of the inconsistencies within the movement which tried to combine an essentially nationalist ideology such as Zionism with the essentially internationalist doctrines of Marxism especially came to the open in periods of internal instability and outside pressure which forced the members to make difficult choices. Despite these setbacks and defections towards the Communists the Hashomer Hatzair became one of the most successful Zionist youth movements in Antwerp and Belgium.

Next to supplying a political and ideological framework for the members the Hashomer Hatzair also fulfilled another important role in their life. It served as a kind of surrogate family unit in which the members could socialize and establish strong friendships. It aimed to be a society of youth with its own values which set them apart from adult society which in their eyes did not understand the aspirations of the new generation. In a time of generational struggle the Hashomer Hatzair provided the youth with a place to develop themselves amongst their peers and a strong project in which these youngsters could fully commit themselves. The strong emphasis on collectivity combined with the need for individual fulfillment and self education resulted in that the movement, and especially the Kvutsot, became a new family.

While the whole life of the members of the *Tnuah* thus revolved around preparing and immigrating to Eretz Israel, their life in Belgium, and Belgium as a concept, cannot be seen as just a transitory phase before departing to Israel. The movement, especially from the second half of the 1930's, was very much a part of Antwerp's Jewish and Zionist community. Its members and its leadership had contacts with other Zionist parties and youth movements and from 1936 were affiliated with the overarching Zionist institution in Belgium, the Zionist Federation. Some of the leaders of the Hashomer Hatzair at the end of the 1930's occupied important positions within the Zionist Federation. This relatively close cooperation between the different factions in the Zionist Community from the second half of the 1930's is largely due to the relatively small size of the Zionist Community in Antwerp and Belgium which made cooperation necessary to achieve some of the common goals of the Zionist movement.

The members also had an emotional attachment to Belgium, or at least to their lives in Belgium. This can be seen by some of the members who after having made *Aliyah* returned because they could not settle in Palestine and also by the long periods of difficult adaption by the members who did stay in the *Kibbutzim*. Life in Belgium was regarded by many as a paradise and remembered fondly. The reason that they left and remained in *Eretz Israel* however is due to their strong belief that eventually life in the *Galuth*, however agreeable, could not provide an answer to the Jewish Question, an assessment which sadly proved to be true.

Paradoxically the Hashomer Hatzair also served to facilitate the integration into Belgian society of many of their first generation immigrant members. The language spoken on their activities was the Antwerp dialect of Flemish and their *Tiulim* and cultural activities in the Belgian countryside and cities thus also served to familiarize these new immigrants with the larger Belgian society.

While the Hashomer Hatzair was an organization which spanned across the globe and of which the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp in all aspects was certainly a part, it's also safe to say that the specific conditions of life in Belgium influenced the movement and shaped the mentality of its members. Therefore I believe that we can also safely say that the Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp was also a Belgian Zionist movement.

The Second World War dramatically changed Jewish life in the city of Antwerp. Most of its Jewish inhabitants were deported and did not return. Quite a number of the older members of Hashomer Hatzair Antwerp managed to survive the war by leaving the city and fleeing to Switzerland, most of the younger members however were deported to Auschwitz with their parents.

Immediately after the war the movement was reestablished, but due to the demographic decline and in later years the changed sociological constitution of the Antwerp Jewish Community the movement never managed to regain its numerical strength or importance. Brussels, where the Jewish Community had fared better during the war and which also remained a more secular and leftist Jewish Community now became the center of the movement in Belgium.

If we take a look at the legacy of the Hashomer Hatzair movement and the realization of its hopes and ambitions for their new society in *Eretz Israel* several observations can be made.

The movement, although always on the fringes of political society in the *Yishuv*, played an important part in the establishment and in the settlement of the State of Israel. Many new kibbutzim were established by the movement pushing the frontier further and creating defensive outposts and thereby directly influencing the future 'borders' of the country. The members also played an important part in the Jewish military organizations supplying them with highly motivated fighters. In the War of Independence many of its members fought as soldiers and senior commanders in the front lines and after the establishment of the State many of the recruits in the elite combat units came from the *Kibbutz* Movement (From the *Kibbutz Artzi* as well as from the other *Kibbutz* organizations like *Kibbutz Meukhad*, *Ikhud Hakvutzot* and *Kibbutz Dati*). The contribution and commitment of the movement towards the establishment of the state thus stands beyond doubt.

As for the political vision of the Hashomer Hatzair for a Jewish National Home we can say that most of its projects and ambitions did not materialize. A binational state always remained an elusive dream detached from political reality. After the war the movement and later the parties to the radical left to which it belonged kept advocating closer contacts and peaceful relations with the Arab citizens of the State of Israel, but with limited success.

The socialist vision and the establishment of a Jewish proletariat and the principle of class war of the Hashomer Hatzair also stayed confined to the doctrinarian pages of the movement and in effect never played a decisive role in political life in Israel. The *Mapam* Party (United Workers Party), which was established by Hashomer Hatzair together with other Leftwing parties was represented in the Knesset as an independent party until 1965 and as part of various electoral coalitions until 1997 and took part in several coalition governments. It also had some influence in the trade union movement.

The communal kibbutz model of the Hashomer Hatzair did manage to survive for a long time and in fact was the only place where the vision of Hashomer Hatzair was truly applied. While immediately after the war of independence up to the 1970's the kibbutzim were held in high esteem in the country and while consisting a very small portion of the population were able to play a much larger role in the politics of the country than their size would suggest this influence too faded away and in the late 1980's and 90's the kibbutz movement experienced a great crisis from which it has not recovered until today.

The legacy of Hashomer Hatzair in Belgium is a lot more difficult to point out. Jewish life as it existed before the Second World War was wiped out and never returned, and with it a lot of its institutions and organizations.

The Hashomer Hatzair youth movement did manage to reestablish itself after the war and while the movement over the course of time underwent many changes, the secular leftwing course of the movement- while miles away from the earlier radical Marxism - continues to be the core identity of the movement. Until the present day a Ken is active in Brussels which keeps the Belgian movement alive.

Perhaps the most important legacy of the Hashomer Hatzair of Antwerp can be seen in the stories of its members and their commitment to the movement and its goals.

This small group of highly motivated youngsters tried to realize their vision of a Jewish National Home through hard work and sacrifice in times of great upheaval and uncertainty in Europe.

One can therefore say that they truly became the embodiment of Theodor Herzl's famous lines: "If you will it, it is no dream".

If for nothing else one cannot help but to admire them for that.

TABLES of Olim of Hashomer Hatzair to Eretz Israel.

| Kibbutz | 1932 - 1939 | 1945 – 1948 | 1948 - |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| Ein Hahoreshe | 15 | 11 | - |
| Nachshonim | - | 3 | 19 |
| Dan | 9 | - | - |
| Mishmar Ha'Emeq | - | - | 6 |
| Ruhama | - | - | 4 |
| Nirim | - | 3 | - |
| Gvulot | - | - | 3 |
| Lehavot Habashan | - | 2 | 1 |
| Kfar Masaryk | 1 | - | 2 |
| Gazit | - | - | 1 |
| Ramot Menashe | - | - | 1 |
| Hama'apil | - | 1 | - |
| Ha'ogen | - | 1 | - |
| Gal'on | - | - | 1 |
| Yaqum | - | - | 20 |
| Bet Alfa | 0 | - | - |
| Idmit (Adamit) | - | - | 4 |
| Total: 109 | 26 | 21 | 62 |

| The Kibbutz | Total number | Ken Antwerp | Ken Brussels | Ken Holland |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ein Hahoreshe | 26 | 22 | 4 | - |
| Nahshonim | 22 | 4 | 12 | 6 |
| Dan | 9 | 7 | 2 | - |
| Mishmar Ha'emeq | 6 | - | 6 | - |
| Ruhama | 4 | - | 4 | - |
| Nirim | 3 | - | 3 | - |
| Gvulot | 3 | 2 | 1 | - |
| Lehavot Habashan | 3 | 1 | 2 | - |
| Kfar Masaryk | 3 | 1 | - | 2 |
| Gazit | 1 | - | 1(?) | - |
| Ramot Menashe | 1 | - | 1(?) | - |
| Hama'apil | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Ha'ogen | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Galon | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Yaqum | 20 | - | - | 20 |
| Bet Alfa | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Idmit (Adamit) | 4 | 2 | 2 | - |
| Total : | 109 | 41 | 39 | 29 |

List of Hebrew Terms.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <i>Agudat Israel</i> | (Society of Israel) ultra-Orthodox anti Zionist Jewish party, operating worldwide. |
| <i>Akhdut</i> | (Unity) Religious Zionist youth movement in Antwerp. |
| <i>Aliyah</i> | (Ascent) Immigration to the Land of Israel. |
| <i>Bakhur</i> | Boy |
| <i>Bakhura</i> | Girl |
| <i>Betar</i> | Brit Trumpeldor, the youth movement of the Revisionist Party. |
| <i>Bne Akiva</i> | (Sons of Akiva) Religious Zionist youth movement affiliated with Mizrakhi. |
| <i>Boger</i> | the oldest members of Hashomer Hatzair, aged above 18 years. |
| <i>Bund</i> | Socialist, non Zionist Jewish Labour Party, established in 1897, the largest Jewish socialist party in Poland before the Second World War, active all over the world. |
| <i>Dror</i> | (Freedom) Left leaning Zionist pioneer youth movement affiliated with the Poale Tzion party. |
| <i>Eretz Israel</i> | (The Land of Israel) as opposed to <i>Hamedinat Israel</i> (the state of Israel) is used to express the geographical area and also has a biblical connotation. |
| <i>Galuth</i> | Jewish Diaspora |
| <i>Garin</i> | (seed, nucleus) A group of Bogrim destined to make Aliyah and settle in a Kibbutz. |
| <i>Gdud</i> | (battalion) also "Shikhva", combining several Plugot of an age group. |
| <i>Gordonia</i> | Labour Zionist pioneer youth movement named after A.D. Gordon. |
| <i>Haganah</i> | (Defence) Semi-official Jewish defense organization in Palestine established in 1920 to protect Jewish settlements and towns against attacks by Arabs. |
| <i>Hagshamah</i> | (Fulfillment) Realisation of the goals of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Hakhsharah</i> | (Preparation) training where members of Zionist youth movements prepared for Aliyah by acquiring certain professional skills. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Hakhsharah Ironit</i> | Hakhsharah in the City, living together as a Commune |
| <i>Hakhsharah Khaklait</i> | Agricultural Hakhshara at farms in Belgium |
| <i>Hanhagah Elyonah</i> | Leadership of the World movement of Hashomer Hatzair (in Warsaw). |
| <i>Hanhagah Mekomit</i> | Leadership of the movement in a given Ken. |
| <i>Hanhagah Rashit</i> | Leadership of the movement in a given country. |
| <i>Hanoar Hatzioni</i> | (The Zionist Youth) Zionist youth movement affiliated to the General Zionists. |
| <i>Hashomer</i> | (The Watchman) One of the two youth organizations which were at the root of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Haskalah</i> | The Jewish Enlightenment which started at the end of the 18th century. |
| <i>Hekhalutz</i> | (The Pioneer) Network organization bundling the Pioneer Zionist youth movements affiliated with Labour Zionism. |
| <i>Histadrut</i> | (Organization) Term used by Hashomer Hatzair for their movement. |
| <i>Horah</i> | Group folk dance, one of the cultural activities of Jewish youth movements. |
| <i>Iton</i> | (Journal) newspaper. |
| <i>Ken</i> | (Nest) Branch of the Hashomer Hatzair movement in a given city. |
| <i>Keren Hayesod</i> | (The Foundation Fund) Central Zionist Fundraising organisation, responsible for the organisation of Jewish settlement in Palestine. |
| <i>Keren Kayemet Lelsrael - KKL</i> | (The Fund for the Construction of Israel) Jewish National Fund, a Zionist organization responsible for buying land for Jewish settlements in Palestine. |
| <i>Kfirim</i> | (Young Lions) Youngest Gdud of Hashomer Hatzair, aged between 10 and 12 years. |
| <i>Khanukah</i> | Jewish holiday, celebrated in late autumn, commemorating the liberation from the Greeks in the 2nd century BC. |
| <i>Khaver</i> | (Friend) Comrade, member of Hashomer Hatzair (or other Jewish organizations) |
| <i>Khederah</i> | Moshava (town) in Palestine, place where the first Garin of Hashomer Hatzair formed a Kibbutz before the creation of Ein Hakhoshesh |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Khovevei Tzion</i> | (Lovers of Tzion) 19th Century Zionist Organization in Eastern Europe before Political Zionism established itself. |
| <i>Kibbutz</i> | Collective Jewish settlements in Palestine. |
| <i>Kibbutz Artzi</i> | The Kibbutz movement of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Kshishim</i> | other term used for Bogrim. |
| <i>Kvutsah</i> | Smallest educational group of members of the same age. |
| <i>Lishkat Hakesher</i> | (Liaison Office) Framework for the Hashomer Hatzair branches in Belgium, Holland, France, Tunisia and Egypt. |
| <i>Maccabi</i> | Jewish sport club, affiliated with the General Zionists. |
| <i>Maccabi Hatzair</i> | youth movement of the Maccabi sport club. |
| <i>Madrikh</i> | Leader of a Kvutzah (also "Menahel"). |
| <i>Makhane</i> | Camp of Hashomer Hatzair (and other youth movements) both in summer and winter, mainly in nature regions. |
| <i>Makhsike Hadass</i> | (Keepers of the Faith) ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community in Antwerp. |
| <i>Mazkir</i> | Secretary of the movement. Part of the Hanhagah Rashit. |
| <i>Menahel</i> | Leader of a Kvutzah (also "Madrikh") |
| <i>Merkhavia</i> | Kibbutz established in 1929 by the first immigrants of Hashomer Hatzair from Galicia. Center of the Kibbutz Artzi movement, Kibbutz of Meir Ya'ari, leader of the world movement |
| <i>Mizrakhi</i> | Religious Zionist Party |
| <i>Moshava</i> | A Jewish settlement in Palestine established during the period of the "1st Aliyah" between 1881 and 1903, |
| <i>Palmakh</i> | (Strike Forces) Elite fighting groups within the Haganah, established in 1941. |
| <i>Pessakh</i> | Major Jewish holiday in the spring period, celebrating the exodus from Egypt, |
| <i>Plugah</i> | (Company) Age group combining several Kvutsot of the same age. Often used as a synonym for Gdud. |

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| <i>Poale Tzion</i> | (Workers of Tzion) Socialist Zionist Party, the main political force in the Yishuv where it was known as Mapaï. |
| <i>Shaliakh</i> | (Envoy)sent from Palestine or from Poland to a branch of the movement to guide and lead it. |
| <i>Shomer</i> | (Guardian) member of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Shomre Hadass</i> | (Guardians of the Faith) Traditional Orthodox Jewish Community in Antwerp. |
| <i>Sikhah</i> | Discussions within a Kvutzah about a specific subject. |
| <i>Tiul</i> | daytrip or short weekend trip. |
| <i>Tnuah</i> | Movement. |
| <i>Tzeirei Ha'am</i> | (The Youth of the People) non affiliated Zionist youth movement in Antwerp. |
| <i>Tzeirei Tzion</i> | (Youngsters of Tzion) One of the two youth organizations which were at the root of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Tzofim</i> | (Scouts) The age group between 14 to 16 years of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Tzofim-Bogrim</i> | the age group between 16 and 18/19 years of Hashomer Hatzair. |
| <i>Yishuv</i> | (Settlement) The organized Jewish settlement of Palestine, also used to describe the Jewish political entity in Mandate Palestine. |

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