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# The Efraim Berkovici Collection

## Poesiealbum *and Diary Writing in "Ilaniah" Children's Village*

## Abstract

In September 1947, a train traveling under the auspices of the Red Cross departed Romania carrying over 420 Jewish children, via Prague, to the Netherlands. The children, among them Holocaust survivors from Transnistria, had been gathered from different parts of Romania, including orphanages, and were taken to the "Ilaniah" children's village, located on the grounds of a former Jewish psychiatric hospital in Apeldoorn. A smaller group of over thirty Jewish child survivors from Germany arrived a few weeks later. In October 1948, these children boarded a ship, the *Negba,* and departed for Israel. Focusing on Efraim Berkovici's Collection at the Ghetto Fighters' House Archives, this article examines three ego-documents from 1947–1948 saved by Berkovici, one of the children in the Romanian group: a *poesiealbum,* a personal diary, and a diary cowritten with four other children. Based on recent research on children's and adolescents' writing during and after the Holocaust, this article shows how these three narrative forms mediate experiences of displacement, rehabilitation, and children's post-war reality.

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"You are leaving home for a *Bet-Eladim* [children's home], leaving the parental house where you were born, raised, and developed physically and spiritually. You are making a sacrifice, an effort, of course uncompelled by anyone, but only your great and beautiful soul."[1] These were the words Evelina-Hava Berkovici wrote to her son Efraim on 1 May 1947, just before he departed their home in Fălticeni, Romania.

Efraim Berkovici was born in 1936 in Romania. During World War II, the Berkovici family suffered under the racial laws and endured poverty and displacement. They were expelled from their home in the village of Păişeni in 1940 and forced to relocate to Fălticeni, but they were not deported to Transnistria. Zalman, Efraim's father, was conscripted into forced labor. In May 1944, an evacuation order was imposed on the civilian population of Fălticeni, prompted by the approach of the Soviet Army. The

1 Evelina-Hava Berkovici, 1 May 1947 [in Romanian], in Efraim Berkovici's *Poesiealbum* (hereafter Notebook 1), Ghetto Fighters' House Archives (hereafter GFH Archives), Holdings Registry, 33415. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Romanian and Hebrew to English cited throughout this article are the author's. Hebrew transliterations within quoted texts are retained, with English translations provided in square brackets where possible.

Berkovici family left on foot to Suceava, where they lived in harsh conditions.[2] They returned to Fălticeni in September 1944, only to find their home looted. Although the family managed to remain together for most of the war, they separated in the post-war period to facilitate the children's emigration from Romania.[3] Four of the Berkovici children, including Efraim, left for Zionist training camps to prepare them to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine. The parents and the two younger children left for Israel in the early 1950s.[4]

Efraim, who was eleven years old in 1947, left his parents to join a HaNoar HaTzioni youth movement training camp. In September 1947, together with his sister Dina, he was among 421 Romanian Jewish children who – accompanied by youth counselors from various Zionist movements as well as teachers – departed Romania by train under the auspices of the Red Cross. The initiative was coordinated by Youth Aliyah, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and Dutch Jewish organisations, with the approval of the Dutch government. The children, among them Holocaust survivors from Transnistria, had been assembled from different parts of Romania, including orphanages, and were taken to the "Ilaniah" children's village, which was located on the grounds of a former Jewish psychiatric hospital in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. A smaller group of more than thirty Jewish child survivors from Germany arrived weeks later. A year later, in October 1948, the children boarded a ship, the *Negba*, and departed for Israel.[5] Upon their arrival, the children were dispersed. Efraim and his sister Dina were sent to the Alonei Yitzhak youth village.

Evelina-Hava's words were written in a notebook she gave Efraim to take with him on his journey. Taking the form of a *Poesiealbum*, the notebook includes short farewell messages from family and friends and records his journey in real time from May 1947 (Fălticeni) to October 1949 (Israel). It is part of a family collection that Efraim's daughter, Idith Gal, donated to the Ghetto Fighters' House Archives (GFH Archives) in several stages between 2013 and 2015, following her father's death. The collection contains two additional notebooks documenting Efraim's separa-

2 On the persecution of Jews in Fălticeni during World War II, see "Falticeni", in *Pinkas Hakehillot: Rumania* [in Hebrew], vol. 1, ed. Theodor Lavi (Yad Vashem, 1969), 191–192.

3 The Berkovici family's difficult decision to separate was rooted in the doubts many Holocaust survivors had about rebuilding their lives and communities in post-war Romania. These doubts were fueled by economic difficulties, traumatic experiences of the Holocaust, the realities of the emerging communist regime, antisemitism, and hope for a better future in a Jewish State. See Stefan Cristian Ionescu, *Justice and Restitution in Post-Nazi Romania: Rebuilding Jewish Lives and Communities, 1944–1950* (Cambridge University Press, 2025); Gaëlle Fisher, "Between Liberation and Emigration: Jews from Bukovina in Romania after the Second World War", *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 62 (2017): 115–132.

4 "Hava Berkovici-Schechter (1906–1991): Diary of Letters" family booklet [in Hebrew], ed. Irit Aharony, GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, 33415.

5 "The Children's Home in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands: 'Ilania' Children's Village", in *Children's Homes for Holocaust Survivors: My Lost Childhood*, Yad Vashem online exhibition, accessed 9 May 2026, https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/childrens-survivors-homes/apeldoorn.asp.

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tion from his family and his experiences in the "Ilaniah" children's village: a personal diary written between August 1947 (Fălticeni) and March 1948 (Apeldoorn), and a collective diary co-written by Efraim and four other children from the HaNoar HaTzioni group in the summer of 1948.[6]

The "Ilaniah" village has been examined by some historians already. Sarah Rosen, for instance, gathered and analysed survivors' testimonies to provide a general framework of the village and reconstruct the children's experiences during their year in the Netherlands.[7] Additionally, Pepijn Roos addressed the "Ilaniah" village from an institutional perspective, focusing on the roles of Dutch NGOs and the IGCR/IRO in post-war refugee relief in the Netherlands,[8] while Katarzyna Person mentioned "Ilaniah" in the context of ORT activities organised to facilitate the rehabilitation of Holocaust survivors.[9] The institutional context was also documented within the ORT DP camps online project[10] and the JDC online archive.[11] However, although ego-documents produced by the children during their stay in "Ilaniah" are included in several exhibitions,[12] they have largely escaped scholarly attention. This remains the case for the Efraim Berkovici Collection.

This study provides a close reading of Efraim's notebooks, focusing on how displacement, rehabilitation, and children's post-war experiences are revealed in three different narrative forms: the *Poesiealbum*, the personal diary, and the collective diary. To this end, the analysis examines several aspects of each notebook such as form, authorship, purpose, and language. This article argues that the structural conventions of the three notebooks shaped the expression of Efraim's identity and his experiences of post-war displacement, oscillating between the reconstruction of an individual self and the construction of a collective self.

6 I would like to express my gratitude to Idith Gal and the other members of the Berkovici family who made the difficult decision to part with materials of profound personal and family significance, depositing them at the GFH Archives to ensure their preservation and accessibility. See GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, 33415.

7 Sarah Rosen, "'The Fascinating and Happy Year in Our Lives': A Case Study of Refugee Children from Romania, in the 'Ilania' Children's Village Near the Town of Apeldoorn in the Netherlands", presentation at Future of Holocaust Testimonies V international conference, Western Galilee College, Israel, 11–13 March 2019, accessed 9 May 2026, https://youtu.be/Fyww1waGNy8?si=FuwVbcq9U6yC2mYJ.

8 Pepijn Roos, "Post-war Refugee Relief: Dutch NGOs and the IGCR/IRO, 1945–1952" (MA thesis, Leiden University, 2022).

9 Katarzyna Person, *ORT and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors: ORT Activities 1945–1956* (World ORT, 2012), 63.

10 "Ilaniah", World ORT and the Displaced Person Camps website, accessed 9 May 2026, https://dpcamps.ort.org/camps/netherlands/ilaniah/.

11 "Netherlands: Apeldoorn & Elsewhere", American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives (hereafter JDC Archives), accessed 9 May 2026, https://archives.jdc.org/project/netherlands-apeldoorn-elsewhere/.

12 Extracts from two souvenir albums made by children in "Ilaniah" for the village director Binyamin Suessmann are included in the exhibition "Here Began My Childhood" at the Yad Layeled Children's Museum, and in the exhibition located in the Research Room at the Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan Archive. An excerpt from the log diary of the "Bar Kochba" children group of HaShomer HaTzair in "Ilaniah" is featured in "The Children's Home in Apeldoorn", Yad Vashem online exhibition.

Existing scholarship on child Holocaust survivors in the aftermath of the war provides a general framework for this research. Specifically, this study relies on the work of Joanna Michlic, who points out that Jewish youth suppressed core aspects of their identity during World War II in order to survive.[13] She argues that when the pressure abated, they had to "comprehend and interpret their early-childhood experiences, rebuild their social identities, and fashion new relations with adults and peer groups".[14] When applied to the Berkovici Collection, Michlic's theoretical model helps reveal the voices of Efraim and other child Holocaust survivors from Romania, highlighting their emotions and reactions to their post-war displacement. Equally relevant is Avinoam Patt's analysis of the absorption of Jewish youth in Zionist kibbutzim after the war.[15] Patt's framework is used to examine how the Zionist youth movement shaped Efraim's identity in the aftermath of the war, examining the oscillations between the individual "I" and the communal "we".

Analysing diaries[16] and autograph books (*Poesiealbum*) requires distinct methodological lenses. Dalia Ofer provides a general framework for texts written by Jewish youth during the Holocaust across various narrative forms (personal diaries, poems, collective diaries, *Poesiealbum*, etc.), viewing them as expressions of the young writers' voices, ways of life, environment, and immediate struggles and desires.[17] She also notes Zionist youth movements' tradition of encouraging members to write private and group diaries for psychological and pedagogical purposes.[18] Furthermore, several case studies focus on *Poesiealbum* and collective diaries as distinct forms. Hanna Herzog and Rina Shapira observe that youth exchange autograph books during transition periods to create continuity and belonging; in doing so, they leave a personal imprint and convey their attitudes toward society.[19] Ryan Sun distinguishes between a diary, which is a private object, and a *Poesiealbum*, which functions as a semi-private, commemorative palimpsestic object.[20] The collective diary is the focus

13 Joanna Michlic, "Jewish Child Survivors in the Aftermath of the Holocaust", *Polin* 36 (2024): 390–398. See also Joanna Michlic, "Mapping the History of Child Holocaust Survivors", in *No Small Matter: Features of Jewish Childhood*, ed. Anat Helman (Oxford University Press, 2021), 79–102.

14 Joanna Beata Michlic, *Through the Eyes of Jewish Child Survivors from Poland: Family, War, Identity, and Nationhood* (University of Nebraska Press, 2026), 15.

15 Avinoam Patt, "A Zionist Home: Jewish Youths and the Kibbutz Family after the Holocaust", in *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939–Present: History, Representation, and Memory*, ed. Joanna Beata Michlic (Brandeis University Press, 2017), 131–152.

16 Alexandra Garbarini, "Diaries and Chronicles", in *The Cambridge History of the Holocaust*, ed. Marion Kaplan and Natalia Aleksiun (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 117–131.

17 Dalia Ofer, ed., *Youth in the Shadow of the Holocaust – Diaries, Poetry, Reflections* [in Hebrew] (Moreshet and Ghetto Fighters' House, 2023), 7–14.

18 Ofer, *Youth in the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 8.

19 Hanna Herzog and Rina Shapira, "Will You Sign My Autograph Book? Using Autograph Books for a Sociohistorical Study of Youth and Social Frameworks", *Qualitative Sociology* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 109–125.

20 Ryan Cheuk Him Sun, "Between Viennese Childhood and Shanghai Survival: Gerda Gottfried's *Poesiealbum* as a Palimpsestic Object", *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 39, no. 1 (2025): 1–23.

of Lilach Naishtat, who points out the communal documenting practice of this narrative form,[21] and Patt, who views it as a historical source that can be used to explore young survivors' motivations for joining Zionist collectives in the aftermath of World War II.[22]

Finally, Monja Stahlberger uses a translingual model to examine the personal diaries of Kindertransport refugees, exploring how language and linguistic practices employed by the children (such as code-switching and borrowing of words and phrases) reflect negotiations of identity and belonging.[23] Stahlberger's method provides a lens for analysing the language of Efraim's notebooks as a linguistic reflection of Efraim's ongoing negotiations of identity and belonging in the post-war period.

## *The* Poesiealbum: *Rhetorics of Separation*

Efraim Berkovici's *Poesiealbum* documents his journey from his departure from his home in Romania in the summer of 1947 to the autumn of 1949, a year after his arrival in Israel. This is the only one of the three notebooks in the collection that covers the entire period of his post-war displacement. The notebook contains over thirty entries written in Romanian, signed by family members and friends. While not all entries are dated, most appear to have been written in chronological order, with dates ranging from 1 May 1947, to 11 October 1949. They include a mixture of personal messages, poems, and drawings.

On the cover page, the words "Book of Memories" appear; beneath them, the name "Froim" is inscribed. The notebook opens with Evelina-Hava's abovementioned farewell, in which she gives her son her blessing to leave the family home. In fact, she had already written similar messages to three of her daughters.[24]

Evelina-Hava's message is not merely a farewell. She makes an explicit request, defining the notebook's main function:

> Save this notebook (album), which I give you as a gift, for friends [boys and girls] to write to you and, in this way, you will imprint on these pages memories that cannot be erased and around which the smallest details you are living now will awaken, and when the years have passed, you will revisit these memories by looking at these pages again.[25]

Efraim honors his mother's request. He chooses contributors along his post-war journey, perhaps hoping to one day to share these accumulated memories with her.

21 Lilach Naishtat, ed., *Rebuilding Together: The Story of Kibbutz Buchenwald Diary 1945–1948* [in Hebrew] (HaKibbutz HaMeuchad and Yad Tabenkin Press, 2025).
22 Avinoam Patt, "A Zionist Home".
23 Monja Stahlberger, "Across Language Borders: Writing Integration and Belonging in Kindertransport Diaries", *German Life and Letter* 79, no. 2 (April 2026): 129–147.
24 Evelina-Hava Berkovici, 1 May 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 1.
25 Ibid.

According to Herzog and Shapira, the exchange of autograph books among youth typically occurs during periods of transition when they "seek ways to create continuity and a sense of belonging",[26] such as on the eve of separation from a place or friends. They argue that these texts reveal the writers' attitudes toward society: "Each individual uses it and makes it her or his own, consciously or not, by putting the stamp of her or his personal expression upon it."[27]

Efraim's *Poesiealbum* reveals several transition phases. Amid preparations for his departure from Fălticeni, messages from family and friends are deeply nuanced, personal, and intimate. His mother admits the difficulty of parting from her children and urges Efraim to show the same bravery during his travels that he showed when he decided to leave home. She encourages him to embrace the beauty of the journey and asks for his patience until they can reunite.

A second transitional phase is the group's temporary stay in Bucharest, before the children departed for the Netherlands. Between August and September 1947, extended family members wrote to Efraim, offering blessings with prescriptive values and teachings that bridged familial intimacies and Zionist ideals. Written predominantly by adults, these entries emphasise Efraim's present responsibilities, framing resilience, joy, and duty as paths to a better future. For example, his aunt reminds Efraim of his parents' love for him and instructs him to reread her words when he is homesick to overcome his anguish: "When you feel a longing for them [his parents], be strong and say to yourself out loud: Soon they will come to *Eretz* [Land of Israel] too. I must bring them joy. I have no time for longing, I will work, I will learn so that I may go far."[28] Another entry alludes to the Holocaust and the power of a future governed by universal values: "Humanity will get well only when there no longer exist distinctions between man and man, between nation and nation, but all are equal in work and in life. Fighting for the good of all humanity must be the ideal that guides you."[29] But contrasting voices are present too. Undated entries in this section, likely written by children, use rhymes and metaphors to reflect on broader existential themes, such as love[30] and the transitory nature of human existence.[31]

The "Ilaniah" village is the third documented phase in the *Poesiealbum*. Familial entries are replaced by messages from fellow children, which fall into three sub-periods: the initial arrival at "Ilaniah" in the autumn of 1947, a middle phase in April 1948,

26 Herzog and Shapira, "Will You Sign My Autograph Book?", 109.
27 Ibid., 110.
28 Rachelica B., 23 August 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 1.
29 Filica, 29 August 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 1.
30 Zenva: "Love is an ocean / That everyone wants to / Cross, but before they reach / The shore, almost all / Drown" [in Romanian], Notebook 1.
31 Zenva: "Like a passing flower is / man on earth, today / He sings and celebrates, Tomorrow he lies / in the grave" [in Romanian], Notebook 1.

and the departure from the village in October 1948. These entries indicate the formation of new emotional bonds among the children – bonds encouraged and forged by educational, cultural, and social activities undertaken in the children's village.

After the organisation of "Ilaniah", a school was established. Despite some logistical problems, the curriculum included Hebrew, mathematics, Jewish history, and Zionism, as well as vocational training in carpentry, sewing, gardening, and bookbinding.[32] The youth movements maintained autonomy over their internal affairs in the village; nonetheless, joint cultural and social activities among the groups were encouraged (for example, choral and theatrical performances, sport competitions, Shabbat dinners, and trips). The sense of "togetherness"[33] fostered by these activities is recounted by many former "Ilaniah" residents in the commemorative jubilee volume.[34] This feeling was amplified by the perception of "Ilaniah" as a transit station; educational and social activities focused on the children's future lives in the Land of Israel, while their assimilation into the transit country (the Netherlands) was discouraged.[35]

Against this backdrop, the exchange of *Poesiealbum* functioned as an educational and social tool in the village. For example, before the departure of the village director, Binyamin Suessmann, for Mandatory Palestine in March 1948, the children compiled two autograph books for him filled with memories, drawings, and photographs. Efraim himself contributed to one of the albums.[36]

The dominant rhetoric of the "Ilaniah" transitional phase focuses on the children's shared goal of immigrating to the Land of Israel, their ideological loyalty to the HaNoar HaTzioni movement, and the friendships forged at "Ilaniah". This is linguistically expressed through code-borrowing and code-switching: the use of transliterated Hebrew words and Hebrew script within the Romanian text. Transliterated Hebrew words such as *Ereț/Eretz* (Land of Israel) become more frequent alongside Zionist youth movement vocabulary, such as *alia* (immigration to the Land of Israel), *hazak* (strong), *haver* (comrade), *pluga* (company), and *siman* (emblem). Moreover, two children sign their names in Hebrew script, and one entry includes the youth movement's name in Hebrew. These linguistic choices reflect the children's responses to their environment and signal a narrative shift: from family

32 Binyamin Suessmann, the village's director, reported inadequate teaching staff, textbook shortages, and challenges arising from the children's diverse backgrounds – some had never studied at all, while others had their education interrupted by the war. See Reports written by Binyamin Suessmann, 1946–1948, GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, 41393 [in Hebrew].

33 Patt argues that children's kibbutzim in post-war Europe placed in the care of Zionist youth movements provided the child Holocaust survivor with a sense of belonging to a group and a surrogate family. Patt, "A Zionist Home", 147.

34 Shimon Schechter, ed., *The Ilaniah Children's Village – Aliyah Stories* [in Hebrew] (Privately printed, after 1999), 21, 22–23, 42–44.

35 See the report by E. Mendes, Foundation of Five Hundred Jewish Children, 12 October 1948, Messuah Archive, AR-NZ-00025-010, 8174.

36 GFH Archives, Album 195 and 196.

duty to duty to their peers and the Zionist youth movement. They serve as shared linguistic codes, illustrating how the children from Efraim's *Poesiealbum* adopt Zionist rhetoric to express friendship and belonging. This aligns with the scholarship of Monja Stahlberger, who argues that "even without conscious intention, the alternation between scripts may reflect the ongoing processes of negotiating belonging and evolving self-perceptions."[37]

The newfound Zionist collective did not erase the underlying trauma of the war and displacement; rather, the two coexisted in entries in the album. Fear of abandonment surfaces as several youths look back on their time in "Ilaniah" and express uncertainty about the future. They fear that the friendships they forged might end with their departure.[38] This tension is especially visible in an entry by a girl named Dida, who turns to metaphor to voice her uncertainties: "Man appears upon the stage, / performs the role of life, / and then vanishes."[39]

The *Poesiealbum* concludes with a few entries written after Efraim's arrival in Israel. Most poignant is the entry of Batia S., a former pupil from Efraim's HaNoar HaTzioni group in "Ilaniah". Most likely written in the Alonei Yitzhak youth village, where Efraim was sent after he arrived in Israel, Batia records a variation of Dida's entry: "Life is a stage, / On which man appears, / Plays the role of life, / And then vanishes."[40] To this, she adds: "To love is well, / But know whom you love, / Do not place your trust / In just any being" and "When you go over these lines, remember a former *havera* [comrade] with whom you spent days both beautiful and sad."[41] Batia felt comfortable expressing to Efraim, a fellow child with whom she shared the experience of displacement, the profound erosion of her trust in adults. Many child survivors expressed such distrust in the post-war period.[42] In the end, leaving "Ilaniah" and the "togetherness" forged there to navigate the complex realities of newly established Israel meant yet another dislocation for the children.

These children's entries suggest that vulnerability and complex emotions surfaced during their time at "Ilaniah" and persisted even post-immigration. Their voices subvert the adults' sentimentalised narratives of child survivors as smiling and resilient – representations which, as Michlic notes, "emerged in the early postwar period to fulfill the needs and expectations of various public audiences".[43]

37 Stahlberger, "Across Language Borders", 137.
38 See, for example, Hana T., 30 April 1948, and Şaul I., undated entry [in Romanian], Notebook 1. Hana T. left "Ilaniah" for Mandatory Palestine in May 1948. Messuah Archive, AR-NZ-00025-009, 8173.
39 Dida, undated entry [in Romanian], Notebook 1.
40 Batia S., 11 October 1949 [in Romanian], Notebook 1.
41 Batia S., 11 October 1949 [in Romanian].
42 Michlic, "Jewish Child Survivors in the Aftermath of the Holocaust", 394.
43 Michlic, *Through the Eyes of Jewish Child Survivors from Poland*, 16.

Drawing on Ryan Sun's terminology, Berkovici's notebook can be understood as a palimpsestic object. Ryan Sun notes that the *Poesiealbum* originally functioned as a semi-private commemorative object for remembering family and friends during the transition from childhood to young adulthood: "Unlike a diary, which was a private object that gathered the owner's thoughts on paper, a *Poesiealbum* was semi-private: individuals were invited to contribute to it and were permitted to view others' contributions."[44] In the case of the *Poesiealbum* of a young Jewish refugee who fled Vienna for Shanghai, childhood memories from close friends were overlaid with physical elements and entries from her new location.[45] Similarly, Efraim's *Poesiealbum* is not merely a notebook of farewell messages from family and friends collected during his transition to adulthood. In times of mobility and disruption, the *Poesiealbum* conveys social actors' attempts to make time stop and hold together a community fated to disappear. Efraim created continuity and a sense of belonging by asking those with whom he had forged bonds to write in his notebook. Passed from hand to hand throughout his journey, the *Poesiealbum* allowed each contributor to leave their own distinct imprint. This palimpsest of voices conveys the pressures, feelings, and needs experienced by child Holocaust survivors in the post-war period.

## *The Personal Diary: Displacement and Negotiated Identity*

Efraim Berkovici's personal diary is a first-person account of daily events and experiences written between 7 August 1947 (Fălticeni) and 4 March 1948 (Apeldoorn). Unlike the *Poesiealbum*, it also covers the intermediate stages of displacement omitted from the former notebook. These include his departure from Fălticeni, his time at the children's home in Vatra Dornei, the HaNoar HaTzioni training camp in Borșa, the train ride to Bucharest, and his journey from Romania to the Netherlands. It appears that the fragile relationships he formed en route lacked the trust required to share a semi-private object such as the *Poesiealbum*. Instead, Efraim turned to his personal diary, a private space, to document these fast-shifting realities.

Efraim meticulously documented daily life. He details his schedule, HaNoar HaTzioni activities, routine changes, the food situation, school and extracurricular activities, and his interactions with teachers, youth counselors, and children. Efraim also describes his separation from his family, noting his longing and mentioning their correspondence. In fact, many contributors to the *Poesiealbum* are mentioned in the personal diary.

44 Sun, "Between Viennese Childhood and Shanghai Survival", 7.
45 Ibid., 20–21.

The entries are chronological and written primarily in Romanian. The diary ends abruptly on 4 March 1948, without explanation, despite the remaining blank pages. Efraim opens his diary with a "preface" that clarifies its purpose and function:

> With the desire to leave for *Eretz* [Land of Israel], I became a *haver* [member] of a *hevra* [group] of *Hanoar Hazioni* together with my sister. And I thought about what could be the best memory from a *hevra* who *aliază* [immigrates] to *Eretz* Israel. And I decided to keep an *ioman* [diary]. I will be truthful and write only the truth in this *ioman*. I will keep it as a memory. It is a beautiful souvenir for a person to have something like this from childhood, so I want to have one too.[46]

Efraim's view of the diary as a "beautiful souvenir" is rooted in an established cultural tradition of diary writing.[47] Efraim's mother, Evelina-Hava, was an active participant in this phenomenon. She kept a diary in the 1930s and continued the practice throughout her life, including after she immigrated to Israel.[48] She wrote mostly in Romanian. Her diary was not meant to be a solitary experience. She wrote her life story for those she loved, her children, so they could read and understand her when they grew up.[49] Moreover, from 1945 to 1946, she kept a notebook with unsent letters to her sister Rachelica that combined memories of wartime persecution with notes about her family and their postwar struggles.[50] Her granddaughter Irit Aharony, reflecting years later, explained that Evelina-Hava's diary serves as a "life guide", a testament to education, values, and ways of life that should be passed down from daughter to daughter. Irit also recalled that during childhood visits to her grandmother's house in Israel, Evelina-Hava would take the notebooks from her wardrobe, show them to her granddaughter, and occasionally read aloud passages she had written.[51]

Evelina-Hava's dedication to diary writing and its place within the family home left a mark on Efraim.[52] His decision to keep a

46 Efraim Berkovici's personal diary, undated [in Romanian], (hereafter Notebook 2), GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, File 33415.

47 European Jews' turn to diary and memoir writing was part of a widespread cultural practice, accepted and encouraged among various circles before World War II. Adults and youth alike kept diaries. Garbarini, "Diaries and Chronicles", 124.

48 My sincere thanks to Idith Gal and Irit Aharony for answering my questions about the Berkovici family and the materials still found in the family's private collections. Irit (Evelina-Hava's granddaughter) and her mother, Anuța-Hana (Evelina-Hava's eldest daughter), translated portions of these diaries from Romanian and Yiddish into Hebrew. Irit compiled these translations, along with other materials, into a family booklet. See "Hava Berkovici-Schechter (1906–1991): Diary of Letters" [in Hebrew].

49 See Evelina-Hava's personal diary, 1931–1934. In the opening entry, written on November 19, 1931, Evelina-Hava notes that she is writing her life story for her daughters to read, so they can understand her when they grow up. At that time, she had only two children: Hana-Anuța and Coca. See "Hava Berkovici-Schechter (1906–1991)", 9–14.

50 "Hava Berkovici-Schechter (1906–1991)", 80–104.

51 Irit Aharony, "My Grandmother and Writing Women" [in Hebrew], in "Hava Berkovici-Schechter (1906–1991)", 3–6.

52 Diary writing was a common practice in the family; Evelina-Hava wrote late at night or during the day at the family table while her husband and children were immersed in their own activities. See "Hava Berkovici-Schechter (1906–1991)", 95, 102.

personal diary was perhaps even encouraged by his mother.[53] His explicit mention of keeping the diary as a "souvenir," a commemorative object from his childhood, echoes his mother's words from the beginning of his *Poesiealbum*. From this angle, diary writing can be understood as an enduring connection to his mother and his family at home – an alternative, familiar safe space he could carry with him during his journey. A portable space where, in the absence of loved ones, he could express some of his emotional and physical needs, thereby revealing his intimate perspective on the transformations in his life during displacement. For instance, Efraim mentions crying on two distinct occasions, both of which were tied to his departure: once when he decided to leave the children's home in Vatra Dornei for Bucharest without saying goodbye to his parents, and again after parting with his mother in Bucharest before he left for Apeldoorn.[54] His distress also surfaces when the train passed through Germany on its way to the Netherlands, the only entry in which Efraim voices his thoughts on the war.[55] Examples from "Ilaniah" include recurring references to food,[56] anxiety expressed about a carbon monoxide poisoning incident of young girls from "Ilaniah" in the sewing workshop,[57] and his constant longing for his family.[58]

Contextualising Efraim's diary requires examining diary-writing practices within Zionist youth movements. Movements such as HaShomer HaTzair encouraged members to keep both private and group diaries. The practice had a dual psychological and pedagogical purpose; in the case of the latter, diary writing was promoted to encourage young members to write in Hebrew.[59] The HaNoar HaTzioni movement, which Efraim joined after the war, was no stranger to this practice. Its official regulations explicitly required members to keep a "journal",[60] and, according to internal policies, there was a designated role of "diary writer" for group diaries.[61] Group and personal notebooks were expected to be carefully maintained and updated regularly. Along with per-

53 Efraim mentions receiving a package from home containing a new diary notebook. See Efraim Berkovici, 10 February 1948 [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

54 Efraim Berkovici, 17 August 1947, and 4 September 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

55 "Ruins and again ruins I saw here", 21 September 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

56 Efraim comments on insufficient food in "Ilaniah" shortly after arrival: "Many times we got up from the table the exact same way we sat down (meaning, hungry)." 20 October 1947 [in Romanian]. He later notes an improvement in the food situation: "Time passes, and food is plentiful from day to day." 11 December 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

57 Efraim Berkovici, 9 February 1948 [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

58 This is inferred by repetitive mentions of their correspondence. For example, Efraim Berkovici, 9 February 1948, [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

59 Ofer, *Youth in the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 8.

60 *Tekanon. Regulamentul Mișcării Hanoar Haționi* [in Romanian] (Mahleket Hatarbut șel Hanoar Haționi, 1945), Messuah Archive, AR-PT-00016-012, 12872, 36–37. The HaNoar HaTzioni policies booklet stated the movement's educational and Zionist principles, detailing its structure, activities, membership procedures, dress code, equipment, expected behavior, symbols, and penalties.

61 S. Avni, *The "Hanoar Hatzioni" in Romania: 1939–1949* [in Hebrew] (Amutat Yotsei HaNoar HaTzioni in Romania and Reshafim, 1992), 225.

sonal information, members had to include weekly schedules, the rules and regulations of the movement, songs, etc.[62]

As a HaNoar HaTzioni member, Efraim was expected to adhere to its guidelines. He documented the youth movement's activities in which he participated in 1947–1948. He even included, toward the end of his diary, a weekly schedule for HaNoar HaTzioni members at "Ilaniah", a chart of the movement's structure in the children's village, and a list of members organised by age group. Efraim recorded all this, in his own words, "to keep as a memory",[63] making his role as the movement's chronicler an inherent part of his personal journey. Although this role often led him to record dull lists of daily routines, the diary remains an inherently personal space. It captures Efraim's emotional responses to the new collective framework:

> Today, as soon as I woke up, my thoughts went to *cabalat şabat* [Kabbalat Shabbat]. At school today we had arts and crafts. In the afternoon, I helped Haler prepare colors and posters for the device. We covered the window in the attic, set up the radiator, arranged the device ... In the evening, with great excitement, *şihva* "ג" [gimel/third group age] began. It got dark, and the curtain opened. On a white bedsheet, just like in a movie, you could see "*Sihva* 'ג' Presents!" The curtain closed and immediately opened again, and in the dark a radio could be seen, followed by a radio journal. Several sketches were performed, and I acted in two of them. ... It was a rich program. And at the end, I felt relieved of a heavy burden and responsibility.[64]

During the Shabbat evening activity, a recurring cultural and educational event in "Ilaniah", Efraim moves from initial identification with the collective's excitement to anxiety about his responsibilities and ultimately to relief and pride upon fulfilling his duty to the collective. The entry shows his struggles and desire to be part of the group, hinting at the formation of emotional bonds to the environment. Thus, one must ask: was his duty solely to the collective, or did he view success as an extension of his duty to his family, as conveyed in the *Poesiealbum*?

The influence of Zionist ideology is evident in the language Efraim uses. Although mainly written in Romanian, the diary encompasses frequent linguistic borrowing, as seen in the preceding quotations. Efraim embeds transliterated Hebrew words (such as *Ioman*, *hevra*, *şihva*, *Eretz Israel*) in the Romanian text, occasionally integrating them directly into Romanian grammatical structures. For instance, in the phrase "the best memory from a *hevra* who *aliază* [immigrates]",[65] the transliterated Hebrew word "*aliază*" receives Romanian verbal conjugation. Most of the Hebrew vocabulary used belongs to the HaNoar HaTzioni

62 *Tekanon*, 36–37.
63 Efraim Berkovici, 28 February 1948, [in Romanian], Notebook 2.
64 Efraim Berkovici, 20 February 1948, [in Romanian], Notebook 2.
65 Efraim Berkovici, undated [in Romanian], Notebook 2.

glossary of Hebrew terms,[66] which Efraim adopts to narrate his new reality. However, a clear linguistic change occurs when he shifts focus from his Zionist environment to his family. Hebrew terms become less frequent or disappear entirely:

> All *şihvot* [groups according to children's age] stayed in Hana's *hadar* [room]. Only *şihva* "ג" [gimel/third group age] had a *siha* [discussion] with Pânina about *Biluim* [fun activities] ... today was Papaia's birthday. I was joyful and thought about the time at home when we used to celebrate this day, and I thought even more about a time when we will be together and celebrate this holy day for our whole family.[67]

Similar linguistic practices define his diary writing throughout the notebook, but code-switching occurs only in the "Ilaniah" section. In the Kabbalat Shabbat entry, Efraim switches codes by inserting the Hebrew letter Gimel into the Romanian entry. This reflected an educational practice encouraged in "Ilaniah". Though Hebrew was the language of instruction for children under ten, Romanian for older students, and Yiddish for religious instruction, the aim of the administration was to transition fully to Hebrew within months.[68] To realise this goal, on designated days, children were required to use Hebrew exclusively.[69] On one of these days, Efraim made the conscious decision to write a full diary entry in Hebrew.[70]

These linguistic practices mirror the phenomena observed by Stahlberger in the personal diaries of Kindertransport refugees in which "language use is linked to feelings of belonging or non-belonging to a community or a specific group and that it can foster or maintain connections between people".[71] In Efraim's case, his code-switching and borrowing similarly function as a "translingual expression, where languages intertwine and blend to create hybrid forms of communication".[72]

Efraim's response to institutional efforts to instill Hebrew and Zionist values in children's inner worlds is evident in the hybrid language patterns he adopts. Entries he wrote in the HaNoar HaTzioni training camp reveal a deliberate, almost mechanical use of Hebrew. For Efraim, this part of the diary functions like a vocabulary workbook through which he filters his new surroundings. In "Ilaniah", his code-switching suggests a mixture of conscious and subconscious linguistic practices. In the Kabbalat Shabbat entry, Efraim used the Hebrew expression "*şihva* ג" twice – once subconsciously, to show his belonging to the group, and

66 *Tekanon*, 157–161.
67 Efraim Berkovici, 12 February 1948 [in Romanian], Notebook 2.
68 Suessmann's December 1947 report, GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, 41393.
69 Another method was to name the children's surroundings using Hebrew terms. For example, the village's name "Ilaniah" comes from the Hebrew word *ilan* (tree), a reference to the place's forested surroundings.
70 Efraim Berkovici, 26 February 1948 [in Hebrew], Notebook 2.
71 Stahlberger, "Across Language Borders", 138.
72 Ibid., 137.

once consciously, to describe the actual sign on the stage. When he refers to his family, Romanian alone serves as a medium for emotional connection. Hebrew is a mark of the present, of the new collective, whereas Romanian connects him to his familial past and to his desire for a shared future. Moreover, Dutch words are absent from the text. The only clues about the location of "Ilaniah" in the Netherlands are place names, which emphasises the village's seclusion. This hybrid Romanian-Hebrew language reveals Efraim's negotiated identity during his post-war displacement, as he navigated between his struggle to maintain ties to his family and his emerging bonds with the "Ilaniah" collective.

Efraim's personal diary is not the only diary from "Ilaniah". We know of three more diaries written by children from the HaNoar HaTzioni group. For example, Itzhak Ciobotaru, who was deported to Transnistria during the war, noted that he recorded the life he "spent together with o *chevra* [group] of Hanoar Hazioni in the Netherlands"[73] as he could not describe his experiences to anyone but his "simple notebook".[74] Similarly, Gideon Hofman saw in his diary "a close friend" with whom he shared his pain, disappointments, and joys, and to whom he could acknowledge his "emotional wounds".[75] Iosef Rozentzvaig intended for his diary to capture daily happiness and sadness, viewing it as a mirror to the past for his future self: "In the years of my old age, I will reread it, and 'The Past' will present itself to me."[76] The youths' opening words, similar to Efraim's, show how the diaries of the children living in "Ilaniah" simultaneously served as records of a collective experience and as confidants.

## *The Collective Diary: "I", "We", and the Forging of a Zionist Identity*

According to HaNoar HaTzioni's internal regulations, youth groups had to maintain their own chronicles to record the minutes of members' meetings and the group's "history". Group members were allowed to add drawings, photographs, and signed memories, and were encouraged to write entries collaboratively, ensuring the chronicle was a collective effort rather than penned by a single member.[77] The collectively written diary functioned as a social structure through which the youth movement sought to

73 Itzhak Ciobotaru, born in Mihăileni, Romania in 1932, was deported to Transnistria during World War II. See the diary of Itzhak Ciobotaru, 28 February–29 March 1948 [in Romanian], Yad Vashem Archives, O.33 - Various Testimonies, Diaries and Memoirs Collection, 13068.

74 Itzhak Ciobotaru, 28 February 1948.

75 Gideon Hofman's diary, 31 December 1947 [in Romanian]. His diary covers a longer period: December 1947–June 1951 [in Hebrew and Romanian], GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, 35796.

76 Iosef Rozentzvaig, personal diary, opening entry [in Romanian]. His diary was written between September 1947–March 1948 [in Romanian], Messuah Archive, AR-A-00409-076, 12962 and AR-A-00409-077, 12957.

77 *Tekanon*, 37.

construct the group's identity. In practice, this allowed the diary to capture expressions of the group's genuine sense of "togetherness."[78]

Efraim's collective diary covers a brief period in the summer of 1948 (15 July–4 August), when the HaNoar HaTzioni children's group in "Ilaniah" temporarily split. Some members attended a summer camp in Zandvoort, while other members remained in the children's village and joined the camp later. Efraim belonged to the latter group.

The notebook's purpose, form, and limited chronology are outlined in its foreword. Efraim, together with four other children, decided to keep a collective diary to replace the official Hebrew diary that had been taken to Zandvoort by the other members of HaNoar HaTzioni:

> This diary belongs to 5 *haverim* [comrades] from the *mahne Nâţarim* [Netzarim camp]. ... The 5 of us *haverimi* [comrades], Arie, Sender, Iudit, Aharon, and I, stayed here with our *menaelul* [group leader], Ghidon. *Iomanul mahneului* [the camp's diary] was taken by the other *haverimi*, and so we decided to keep this *ioman* for ourselves until the other *haverimi* return. Even though the *iomanul mahneului* is written in *ivrit* [Hebrew] and this one is in Romanian because the *haverimi* don't know *ivrit* that well, we will still keep this one as a memory for the future.[79]

The collective diary consists of forty-two pages, mostly written in the first-person plural. A stamp bearing Efraim's name and the date 16 July 1948, appears on the first page. The handwriting indicates that Efraim wrote most of the entries. Using the collective "we", he maintains a dry, observational style, recording the daily life of the HaNoar HaTzioni group: chores, members' activities (such as swimming, going to the cinema, playing football), group meetings, and collective decisions. The "I" emerges in his writing only in relation to the group, when he refers to his assigned purpose within the collective. For example, this occurs when he refers to correspondence with members who have already left for the summer camp or to his role in the group as the "diary writer".[80]

Efraim signed many of the entries with his first name written in Hebrew script. The single exception is an entry written by another child named Arie, who offers a secondary recollection of the group's trip to Zandvoort. In his entry, Arie alternates between the first-person singular and first-person plural – shifting be-

78 Discussing the HaShomer HaTzair collective diary of youth from the Marysin training camp in Ghetto Łódź, Ofer highlights how it captured "experiences of togetherness" that helped youth preserve their human dignity. Ofer, *Youth in the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 11. See also Patt, "A Zionist Home".

79 Efraim Berkovici's collective diary [in Romanian] (hereafter Notebook 3), GFH Archives, Holdings Registry, File 33415.

80 During one of the group's meetings, the members delegated responsibilities. It was decided that Efraim would be both the group's secretary and keeper of the collective diary. Efraim Berkovici, 17 July 1948 [in Romanian], Notebook 3. See also Efraim Berkovici, 24 and 29 July 1948 [in Romanian], Notebook 3.

tween "I" and "we". Like Efraim, Arie signed his entry in Hebrew. The linguistic code-switching from Romanian to Hebrew shows how authorship of the entries is used to claim the writers' affiliation to the youth movement and its Zionist ethos, and thus to the group.

This linguistic transition from "I" to "we" mirrors a broader phenomenon observed in Zionist children's kibbutzim in post-war Europe. As Patt notes in his analysis of a collective diary written by youth and child Holocaust survivors from a HaShomer HaTzair kibbutz in post-war Europe, such texts provide "a glimpse of what life was like for young survivors who chose to join the kibbutzim after the war".[81] They reveal the subtle process of "transition from individual to collective thinking".[82]

Whereas the personal diary offered an intimate space of expression, the collective diary allowed only mediated versions of introspections. Naishtat points to this social mediation in her analysis of the collective diary of Kibbutz Buchenwald, the name chosen by a group of Jewish survivors after their liberation from the Buchenwald concentration camp. She notes that the process of collectively documenting included "discussion, writing, reading (both silent and aloud), listening, theatrical performance and rereading the journal, in a back-and-forth movement".[83]

Any emotions or needs recorded in Efraim's collective diary had to be filtered through the communal lens and aligned with the group's ideological norms. The group officially designated Efraim as one of those responsible for the chronicle; nevertheless, the members had to reach a consensus on the narrative. The entries had to reflect the group's unified identity and needs rather than merely an individual's internal state. Thus, it is not surprising that entries focus mainly on the group's success in extracurricular activities and the children's boredom, fueled by the desire to join the group that left to go to the summer camp and the lack of activities and events in "Ilaniah" in the summer. The diary portrays the children as resilient and happy, thereby downplaying their personal stories of loss and the war's underlying traumas.

Furthermore, according to Patt, the communal settings of children's kibbutzim after the war created "a sense of family and tended to emphasize the positive potential of a Jewish future, despite the dark Jewish past".[84] The children in "Ilaniah" village, including Efraim Berkovici and those in the HaNoar HaTzioni group, came from diverse backgrounds. Some were orphans, whereas others came from families that lacked the economic means to care for them – many of whom had survived the deportations to Transnistria. Despite their backgrounds, a collective "we" emerges genuinely in the collective diary at least twice: in

81 Patt, "A Zionist Home", 135.
82 Ibid., 140.
83 Naishtat, *Rebuilding Together*, viii.
84 Patt, "A Zionist Home", 148.

the restless excitement over the group's correspondence with their comrades in Zandvoort, and in the two entries describing their reunion in Zandvoort at the end of the summer camp. As Arie notes, the faces of the group's members "lit up"[85] at the prospect of reuniting, and Efraim, too, explicitly recorded the profound happiness of that day.[86] It seems that these children developed an attachment to their "displaced" community, which had been forged through camaraderie and given purpose by the youth movement.

## *Conclusions*

Efraim's three notebooks serve as complementary primary sources. Their form, language, and purpose offer distinct perspectives on his identity and his experiences during his post-war displacement. The *Poesiealbum* serves as a commemorative object, providing Efraim with continuity and a sense of belonging to his family, friends, and the youth movement. Passed from person to person throughout Efraim's journey, it captures his post-war displacement and identity from the perspective of the Other. Its entries produce a palimpsest of voices – expressed in diverse linguistic patterns – that conveys the pressures, emotions, and needs of child Holocaust survivors in post-war Europe.

Efraim's personal diary offers an intimate, child's perspective on his post-war displacement. The notebook served as a portable "safe space" where, in the absence of family, he could express emotional and physical needs that surfaced after leaving home. The hybrid Romanian-Hebrew language captures both the institutional efforts to implant Hebrew and Zionist ideology into children's inner worlds and Efraim's personal response to these expectations. The diary shows the negotiation between his ties to his family and to the "Ilaniah" collective.

Finally, the collective diary frames the identity model constructed by the Zionist movement: the shift from the individual "I" to the collective "we". It acts as a group chronicle in which personal emotions and introspections are filtered through a communal lens aligned with the group's norms. Language practices, such as signing in Hebrew script, enforced a conscious narrative of belonging. When viewed alongside the other notebooks, the collective diary downplays the children's individual traumas, focusing only on the attachments they forged within their surrogate "family" in "Ilaniah".

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85 Arie, 26 July 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 3.
86 Efraim Berkovici, 26 July 1947 [in Romanian], Notebook 3.

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