

Tauber Institute Newsletter - Author Spotlight

Homecoming: Holocaust Survivors and Greece, 1941-1946

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Could you describe this book in your own words?

The book explores the multifaceted nature of “homecoming” for Jews from Greece in the aftermath of the Holocaust, understood not simply as a return to a geographic location, but as a deeply cultural, emotional, and political process. I argue that the notion of return begins not with liberation, but already during the period of persecution, when the longing for home is activated through forced displacement (be it deportation, exile, resistance fighting, or hiding). This longing, often fragile and shaped by fear and uncertainty, becomes a powerful psychological mechanism for survival.

Over time, the hope of homecoming accumulates layers of expectation, shaped by memory, imagination, and changing political circumstances. These expectations do not always align with postwar realities, contributing to a sense of rupture rather than resolution. In this light, homecoming emerges as a temporally extended and psychologically complex process. Drawing on microhistorical analysis and transnational archival research, the book traces how Jewish identity in postwar Greece was reconstructed in the shadow of trauma, fragmentation, and ideological dislocation.

Could you describe your research process as you wrote this book?

The research underpinning this book was methodologically diverse and transdisciplinary. It drew on oral histories, unpublished correspondence, memoirs, administrative archives, and communal records in several languages, but predominantly in Greek, English, and German. I conducted archival research in multiple countries—including Greece, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany—and collaborated closely with several survivor families, whose generosity in sharing personal materials proved invaluable.

Importantly, the argument of the book began to take clearer shape in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, which brought renewed public attention to themes of displacement, borders, and the emotional geographies of return. This contemporary lens sharpened my awareness of the ethical stakes of historical research and underscored the relevance of the (post)Holocaust experience for understanding contemporary patterns of forced migration. The integration of these heterogeneous sources enabled me to reconstruct the granular textures of individual lives while simultaneously illuminating broader structural dynamics. A microhistorical approach allowed for the excavation of marginal voices often absent from dominant historiographical narratives.

In your opinion, why has there not been much previous research into these bodies of work?

The relative scarcity of scholarship in this field can be attributed to several factors. First, the history of the Jews from Greece has often been marginalized within the broader landscape of Holocaust studies, which has historically focused on Central and Eastern European experiences. Second, the immediate post-liberation period has tended to receive less scholarly attention than the wartime years, despite its critical significance for survivor recovery and community reconstruction. Third, the linguistic diversity of the sources—encompassing Greek, German, French, and Judeo-Spanish—has posed significant methodological challenges, as very few researchers possess sufficient command of all these languages. I myself faced limitations, particularly in navigating sources in Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish, which constrained access to some important materials and highlighted the need for more collaborative, multilingual scholarship. Finally, the emotionally charged and politically sensitive nature of postwar memory has likely deterred sustained engagement.

Did any particular text or author fundamentally change your own understanding of testimony as a historical source?

Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual framework, particularly his notion of the "horizon of expectations," fundamentally shaped my thinking about narrative, temporality, and historical consciousness. His work encouraged me to understand life writing not only as a repository of memory but also as a forward-looking discourse shaped by imagined futures, deferred hopes, and unrealized possibilities. This temporal dimension was crucial in helping me grasp how survivors articulated meaning in the aftermath of atrocity, not solely in relation to what had happened, but to what might still be possible.

Within this conceptual lens, the works of Sarah Abrevaya Stein (*Family Papers*) and K.E. Fleming (*Greece: A Jewish History*) were particularly influential in broadening my understanding of the Jewish experience in Greece and its archival traces. I was also deeply informed by Hannah Pollin-Galay's and Elisabeth Anthony's research on survivor testimony, which attends to the nuances of affect, narrative structure, and the ethics of listening. Together, these scholars helped me reframe the capacity of literature and life writing in times of rupture as both historical evidence and as dynamic, affective engagement with loss and continuity.

What projects have you embarked on since finishing this book?

Since completing the book, I have expanded my research into the fields of memory studies and forced migration. As part of the collaborative European HERA–CHANSE-funded project on polycrises, I investigate displacement in the context of the war in Ukraine. In parallel, I am involved in the Czech-Polish research initiative "Displacement and (Post)secular Memory: Contemporary Crises and Historical Legacies in Southeastern and East-Central Europe" (MEMCRIS). Beginning in January 2026, our international team will conduct a three-year investigation into how societies in Poland, Serbia, and Greece confront their histories of displacement while navigating current migration-related challenges. The project focuses particularly on memory practices in museums, memorial sites, and religious institutions, examining how these spaces mediate between historical legacies and contemporary crises.

At the same time, I remain deeply committed to Holocaust studies. I intend to return to this core field through a new book project: a biography of a Holocaust survivor from Greece. But I will leave the details of that forthcoming work as a surprise for readers.