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# Narratives of Loss

## Childhood, Education, Families, and Homes in Jewish Child Survivors' Testimonies after the Second World War

### Abstract

This article analyses Jewish child survivors' meaning-making strategies and how they addressed the loss of their childhood, families, and homes, including physical and national homes, after the Second World War. Using age and gender as analytical lenses, it draws upon oral history interviews with refugees from Western, Central, and Eastern Europe whose childhood or adolescence were interrupted – or defined – by displacement, and who came of age during or shortly after the war. In addition to comparing refugee perspectives with the expectations of American and British social workers for resettling displaced children, this paper will demonstrate the role of age categories and the life cycle in shaping how child survivors processed and formed strategies for moving on.

### Introduction

In January 1946, a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) Zone Welfare Specialist estimated 45,182 children under age 14 in DP (Displaced Persons) centres in the U.S. Zone, with 100,000 boys and girls under age 18. As for unaccompanied children, the Welfare Specialist reported approximately 4,800, with Jewish children comprising about 3,600 of that number, though nearly half of those children were age 17 or over.<sup>1</sup> Voluntary agencies and international organisations aimed to resettle (or 'reclaim') these displaced children and youth along national lines after the Second World War, and to reunite children with their family members.<sup>2</sup> As Tara Zahra has shown, policymakers and relief agencies saw the family and the nation "as the very basis for European reconstruction and as the recipe for individual psychological rehabilitation".<sup>3</sup> While children generally served as visible symbols of destruction and broken families after the Second World War as well as the prospects of reconstruction in Europe, the role of Jewish children and youth as

- 1 Brief Statement about Child Welfare in U.S. Zone, To Mr. J.H. Whiting [Zone Director] from Cornelia D. Heise [Zone Child Welfare Specialist], U.N.R.R.A. Zone Headquarters, 24 January 1946/6.1.2/82486977/ITS (International Tracing Service) Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen; also see: Summary of the Unaccompanied Children Situation in the U.S. Zone, Office of Reports and Statistics UNRRA, U.S. Zone of Occupation, 23 January 1946/6.1.2/82486979/ITS Digital Archive, Bad Arolsen.
- 2 Tara Zahra, *Lost Children. Displacement, Family, and Nation in Postwar Europe*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (2009) 1, 45-86, here 46; Anna Wylegała, *Child Migrants and Deportees From Poland and Ukraine After The Second World War. Experience and Memory*, in: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 22 (2015) 2, 292-309. For the origins of the International Social Service and international adoption; see: Heide Fehrenbach, *From Aid to Intimacy. The Humanitarian Origins and Media Culture of International Adoption*, in: Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford/ New York 2016, 207-233.
- 3 Tara Zahra, *Lost Children*, 45-86; Tara Zahra, 'The Psychological Marshall Plan': Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II, in: *Central European History* 44 (2011) 1, 37-62; Sara Fieldston, *Raising the World. Child Welfare in the American Century*, Cambridge 2015.

the next generation carried particular significance in light of the Holocaust and the survival of European Jewish communities.<sup>4</sup>

Plenty of source materials reveal the agendas of international and national voluntary agencies and child welfare organisations to achieve these ends, such as the papers of the Central British Fund for Jewish Relief, the German-Jewish Children's Aid, and American Jewish Distribution Committee.<sup>5</sup> Whether the end goal was to address the survivors' individual psychological needs, politicise the next generation of Europe's children, restore Jewish life in Europe, or have broader societal impact on post-war family life, British and American social workers aimed to restore child survivors' health, families, homes, national affiliations, and religious communities. By including the voices of child survivors who were affected by the decisions being made by these agencies, I aim to add another layer to the narratives that were being circulated at the 'official' level about what aid was achieving for Jewish children and youth.<sup>6</sup>

This paper will draw upon two oral history collections that contain children's post-war testimonies: the Association of Jewish Refugees' (AJR) *Refugee Voices* collection and the Wiener Library's *The Girls* collection. It will focus on the accounts of "1.5-generation" survivors who were babies or children during the war (born between 1928 and 1945) and who came of age during or after the war.<sup>7</sup> These retrospective accounts offer insights into how social workers' efforts to shape refugee children's understandings of certain terms and concepts – such as 'home', 'democracy', and 'national identity' – were received by the refugees themselves. Child specialists had various definitions amongst themselves of what it meant for refugee children and youth to move on, as well as multiple definitions of childhood, family, and national identity. At times refugee children and youth adopted these definitions and were influenced by the adults around them, but in other cases had their own definitions that contrasted with those of social workers. For example, although social workers and policymakers stressed the importance of the family unit to rebuilding post-war societies, some refugees sought alternative, non-traditional relationships to replace their missing family relations.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to broadening our understanding of the post-war resettlement process, this paper will contribute to our understanding of how the child survivor iden-

4 For literature on Jewish children as the "next generation"; see: Emunah Nachmany-Gafny, *Dividing Hearts. The Removal of Jewish Children from Gentile Families in Poland in the Immediate Post-Holocaust Years*, Jerusalem 2009; Avinoam J. Patt/Michael Berkowitz (ed.), "We Are Here". *New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, Detroit 2010.

5 As for organisations working in Austria, the Staatsarchiv's Jugendfürsorge collection offers insights into agencies' projects on the ground, which included feeding programs, the distribution of clothing and toys, youth programs, and children's summer programmes led by the Austrian Red Cross, Mennonites, Caritas, and the American Friends Service Committee, among other organisations. I have also consulted the Child Tracing Services of UNRRA and the IRO, which aimed to repatriate and register unaccompanied children.

6 Because I focus on young refugees who stayed in the DP camps in the US-American and British zones, I am interested in how the refugees viewed and interacted with the personnel and funds for relief and resettlement programs that came largely from US-American and British sources. Foreign voluntary societies were working there under the umbrella of SCAEF-UNRRA; the U.S. funded 73 per cent of UNRRA; see: War Cabinet Offices, *Relations between UNRRA and Voluntary Welfare Societies*, January 20, 1945, WR 128, UK National Archives in Kew.

7 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The 1.5 Generation. Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust*, in: *American Imago* 59 (2002) 3, 277-295; Sharon Kangisser Cohn/Eva Fogelman/Dalia Ofer (ed.), *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, New York 2007, 99-117.

8 Tara Zahra has also noted the differences between Western social workers' and Eastern European refugees' ideas about childhood and child development, which do emerge in the interviews I am analysing between the mostly Eastern European girl refugees and the British educational or social service settings they encountered; see: Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II*, Cambridge 2011.

tity developed in the post-war years. By the time *The Girls* and the AJR interviews were conducted in the early 2000s, there were already well-known oral history projects, as well as child survivor and *Kindertransport* reunions. These two collections are distinctive due to the interviewers' objectives in recording the testimonies and the nature of the interactions between the interviewers and interview subjects. The stated purpose of *The Girls* Collection from the Wiener Library was to ensure that girl refugees were recognised as distinctive historical actors. *The Girls* oral history project was in response to a book by British historian Martin Gilbert, who has written about a group of 850 refugee boys and girls who were resettled in the U.K. after the war. Although ten per cent were girls, the entire group was referred to as "the Boys", thus subsuming the identities and experiences of the girl refugees under those of the boy refugees.<sup>9</sup> *The Girls* consisted of a group of Jewish girls, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, who immigrated to the U.K. after the war under a resettlement scheme for unaccompanied minors that was co-funded by the US and the U.K.<sup>10</sup> Some of the interviewed girl refugees, when put on the spot, did not identify differences between the experiences of boys and girls, at least not as many significant differences as the interviewers had hoped. But others immediately pointed to the issues of sexuality, pregnancy, and expected gender roles in the DP camps and their post-war environments. According to child survivor Nelly W., who had been in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, a labour camp in Silesia, and Belsen, "the hunger, the cold and the beatings were the same" regardless of gender, but "you worried about your body more" as a girl in a camp and "then the liberation with the rape, these were things the boys didn't have to go through".<sup>11</sup> In terms of the life cycle, there were also clearly differences between their post-war options and choices, particularly their paths in education, marriage, and childrearing. Whether the refugees noticed these differences, or whether the interviewers pointed them out, a focus on gender helps us understand the particularities of young refugees' experiences when receiving aid, finding homes, and dealing with adolescence after the war.

The AJR *Refugee Voices* project was conducted for the purpose of collective memory and documenting the AJR members' family histories. The refugees knew the interviewers on a personal level, which influenced how much they were willing to share and the dynamics of the conversations. This approach contrasts from that of collections such as the Kestenbergs Archive, whose researchers believed that anonymity would ensure that the survivors would feel more comfortable sharing personal details with the interviewers.<sup>12</sup> While the AJR interviewers also asked establishing questions at the beginning of the interview, they would at times fill in details or silences during the interview with their personal knowledge of the survivor's family history and life experiences. Of the 150 interview subjects, the majority was from Germany and Austria, but also included survivors from other Central and Eastern European states (especially Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary) who eventually migrated to Britain. This paper will focus on the testimonies of *Kindertransport* children and children in hiding during the war, as well as children who remained with their parents during the war with the aid of Jewish community networks and relief

9 Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: The Untold Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors*, New York 1997.

10 In particular, the Jewish Welfare Board and the American Joint Distribution Committee funded the resettlement and education of these girls.

11 Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 15: Nelly W., 14/05/2007.

12 Cohen/Fogelman/Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath*. Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenbergs Archive, New York 2007, 3.

committees.<sup>13</sup> This set of interviews highlight the particularities of the 1.5 generation's memory-making processes: for those who were not in concentration camps or were too young to recall their wartime experiences, they had to rely on external sources of information or their imagination. At the same time, while their narratives may have primarily relied on acquired or mediated memories, and some may have struggled with the "absence of memory"<sup>14</sup> regarding their childhoods, they could also recall with vivid detail the effects of those wartime experiences and losses on their post-war lives as adolescents and young adults.

### The Significance of Documenting Child Survivors' Voices

Historians are increasingly paying more attention to children's voices, both contemporaneous and retrospective.<sup>15</sup> Scholars who have written about child welfare programs and humanitarianism after the Second World War have used children's testimonies to compare with the perspectives of social workers. Other scholars who have extensively analysed child survivors' testimonies focus on the psychological aspects – for instance, Dori Laub, Rita Horváth, Sharon Kangisser Cohen, and Eva Fogelman – or questions about generational memory.<sup>16</sup> Before these projects that focused on collecting child survivors' testimonies, young survivors did not think of themselves as "survivors".<sup>17</sup> One child survivor, Bela R., similarly explained why she thought it was an important project to document the child's voice: as she was often told, children could take these experiences in their stride or they simply did not re-

13 In total, I am working with about 67 interviews with both boy and girl refugees, though I focus on selected interviews in this paper. While I consider various factors in their backgrounds – including nationality, class, whether they were Orthodox – I focus on the survivors' reflections on their migratory and resettlement experiences.

14 Stephenie Young highlights these characteristics of 1.5-generation survivors' testimonies from the Kestenberg Archive; see: Stephenie Young, Performative Memory-making and the Future of the Kestenberg Archive, in: Sharon Kangisser Cohen/Eva Fogelman/Dalia Ofer (ed.), *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath. Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, New York 2007, 107-108, 114.

15 For examples of contemporaneous interviews conducted immediately after the war; see: David P. Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, Champaign 1949; Maria Hochberg-Mariańska/Noe Grüss (ed.), *The Children Accuse*, London 1996; and the testimonies collected by Benjamin Tenenbaum, who visited children's homes in Poland and DP camps in Germany in 1946–1947, and Genia Silkes, a former teacher who collected testimonies from Polish children. The intentions of these social workers, psychologists, and teachers who collected children's testimonies varied. For example, psychologist David P. Boder wanted to understand the impact of suffering on child refugees' personalities and to use the testimonies to educate American audiences and advocate on behalf of DP immigration to the US; see: Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices. The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder*, New York 2010.

16 Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children*; Joanna Beata Michlic (ed.), *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939–Present: History, Representation, and Memory*, Waltham 2017; Joanna Beata Michlic, *The Aftermath and After. Memories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust*, in Sarah Horowitz (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies X. Back to the Sources*, Evanston 2012, 141-89; Shoshana Felman/Dori Laube (ed.), *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York/London, 1992; Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies. The Ruins of Memory*, New Haven 1991; Cohen/Fogelman/Ofer (ed.), *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath. Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, New York 2007.

17 Psychologist and child survivor Robert Krell highlighted the importance of developing this identity as individuals and as a group in a talk he gave at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1997: "No child survivor thought of himself or herself as a child survivor. We knew we had gone through and survived the Holocaust, but for the most part we considered this an insignificant experience compared with the real Holocaust survivors, those from concentration camps. In addition, adults reminded us that we really had no story of survival worth noting and that we were to get on with life and be normal. And that we did."; see: Robert Krell, *Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the Lives of Child Survivors*, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Monna and Otto Weinmann Lecture Series, 5 June 1997 [reprinted in 2002].

member what they experienced.<sup>18</sup> This rubbed her the wrong way, since she saw this response as contributing to a “hierarchy of suffering” (or the impression that this hierarchy existed):

“[T]his issue particularly of how people view the child survivors in particular. Not only the fact that we were girls, but also that we were children. And so often we get: ‘What do you know, what do you recall, can you remember what have you suffered? It’s *nothing* compared to ‘we the older ones’ have been through.’ And this lack of recognition has been a great problem until – I suppose more recently, maybe – there’s been more tolerance. [...] they can’t understand that there’s different types of suffering, different types of need.”<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, most child survivors, much like their older counterparts, did not talk about their experiences until years after the war and after they had formed their own families and careers. This silence was related to their wartime experiences: children who had been hidden and *Kindertransport* children were particularly reluctant to speak because they had not been in a concentration camp and felt that they were at the bottom of that ‘hierarchy of suffering’. As their childhood or adolescence had not been discussed or acknowledged for most of their adult lives, these oral history interviews gave child survivors an opportunity to narrate their formative years in a way they had not done before. For some, it was their very first time speaking about their childhood and adolescence, while for others it was another opportunity to present a relatively coherent narrative that they had previously narrated, but this time in a more reflective and therapeutic way. In addition to offering glimpses of how children and youth came of age and were politicized during and after the war, child survivors’ accounts reflect how their understandings of the life cycle shaped their narratives about displacement, humanitarian aid, and survival, as older refugees acquired more historical and personal knowledge about their family pasts and the war. To pursue these questions, I will organise this paper into four themes of loss identified by the refugee women, as well as by the social workers and adults around them who wanted to address these losses: childhood, education, family, and national homes. By focusing on these four areas of loss, we can see how refugee children and youth’s testimonies can both confirm and destabilise the categories that social workers understood to be, or hoped would become, the bases of Jewish child survivors’ individual and collective identities.

## Lost Childhood

In public appeals to American and British audiences and social workers’ reports, there was constant emphasis on how young refugees lacked a childhood, whether they lost their ability to play, their educational opportunities, or their chance to have a family life and home. After the war, relief workers and publicity materials thus emphasised the need to teach children how to be children again, or for the first

<sup>18</sup> Some refugees who were interviewed also shared this view of children, such as Mirjam F.: “Children take things as it is and they are usually quite excited by events because they don’t understand the importance of it. But that something terrible was happening I did understand.”

<sup>19</sup> Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006.

time,<sup>20</sup> and they placed emphasis on restoring this aspect of refugee children's lives. Refugees themselves affirmed this view, for they felt that they had grown up too fast for their age group.<sup>21</sup> When an interviewer asked Rivka R., who was only four years old when she went into hiding with her family, what she often did in her spare time in the years after the war, she described how she and the other refugee children "did a lot of playing. I think we had to play ourselves out from that time when we couldn't play..." At the same time, they were "half adults already, we became adults before our age... All the children did, because I wasn't the only one."<sup>22</sup> Along these lines, Bela R. recalled how in the children's home in Lingfeld, England where she temporarily resided after the war, donors from abroad tried to make up for this loss: "We had lots of interest. Both from the media and from... the American Parents Plan, or... a group of Americans that had particularly taken an interest." However, these efforts were based on the donors' assumptions about childhood and children's needs: "[T]hey sent people over to, you know, see us. Photograph us, bring us sweets. I don't know, whatever. So there was always constant coming and going." Yet the donations – mostly of toys and items that American donors thought children needed to compensate for the childhood they never had – were not really what the refugee girls wanted: "[W]e never really were that interested in those things."<sup>23</sup>

Self-sufficiency and independence as a child survivor was also a way to explain why refugee children and youth resisted or were wary of charity. Marlene A., as a 17-year-old adolescent after the war, expressed her dislike of being pitied, for she wanted belonging more than detached charity: "I didn't want anything out of the ordinary, I didn't want... I just wanted to be accepted, as a normal human being... They thought by bringing you a box of chocolate or throwing you a few words at you that they have done their duty..." It was not so much the donations she disliked, but rather "the way it was given..."<sup>24</sup> Older youth also referred to their independence and survival skills to explain why they clashed with the adults around them after the war. For example, Marlene also encountered tensions with her surviving father because she had been "all on my own" in the camps, "making my own decisions... unless the Germans made it... the decisions for me". And now "here [my father] was suddenly

20 Letter from Tatiana S. Weller to Ernst Papanek (Unitarian Service Committee), 19 December 1947, in: Ernst Papanek Papers, Box 5, New York Public Library (NYPL) Special Collections, New York; Letter from Selma B. Jones (Engerode Children's Home) to Ernst Papanek, 10 April 1947, in: Ernst Papanek Papers, Box 5: Refugee Children – Correspondence with Organization, 1947–1948, NYPL Special Collections; Associated Press report and letter from Paul Comly French, in: CARE Records, Box 899, Folder 12/7/47–1/30/48, NYPL Special Collections.

21 Susan P., who was in Auschwitz and liberated in Belsen at age thirteen, provides another perspective on the role of play and imagination to sustain her in a concentration camp: "the ability to survive came through actually from an ability that I could [fantasize] during the camps and we often practiced that as young kids... What are you having for breakfast? We were starving but we fantasized in Auschwitz: 'I had some eggs... and a little bit of toast'... going to the next girl and the next girl and we whisper to each other." By playing this game, she did not necessarily have to "relearn" how to play after the war; she "learned that fantasy from that moment, maybe before, and used that and in my way, in my mind I could transport myself somewhere else... and that was so good because I had a different world to go to..."; see: Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 11: Susan P., 28/12/2006.

22 Interview 113 with Rivka R. in Manchester, 19 December 2005, Refugee Voices: The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

23 Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006. For more on children and play; see: George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust*, Amherst 1988, and Patricia Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust. Documenting Life and Destruction (=Holocaust Sources in Context)*, Lanham 2011.

24 The adults around them also resisted how aid recipients were associated with dependency. Marlene, who reunited with her father after the war, explained how when it came to receiving donations her father "made that quite clear: thank you very much but I can provide for my daughter"; see: Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 1: Marlene A., 19/01/2007; Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview with Rachel O.

telling me mainly what I couldn't do..." Marlene's reaction resembles the reports by relief workers and educators in children's homes that children and youth were sceptical of adults, especially authority figures, due to their experiences during the war.<sup>25</sup> In Marlene's case, this emphasis on child agency was related to how she took on the status of a 'survivor' as an adolescent.<sup>26</sup>

### Lost Education

The interviewers for *The Girls* project noticed that girls whose education was interrupted at around age eleven to 14 were driven to make up for their 'lost education' rather than their childhoods. Nelly W., whose education had been interrupted in 1938 and who became an academic, expressed a sense of urgency to catch up on her lost years: "I wanted to at least be educated to my age..." Nelly observed that the boarding school she attended in England, which was run by two refugee women after the war, introduced her to English life, but she also had difficulty adapting because "it [the school] emphasized entirely the difference between me at the age of 14 and 15 and the other children. I found them all very giggly and almost to the point of being ridiculous. You know, they laughed about things which I just couldn't understand. And, I wanted to get on with my education. I wanted to get on..."<sup>27</sup> Yet in her efforts to fit in with her classmates, she also began to participate in this childlike behaviour: "I objected to the girls giggling, but in the end I picked up some of the giggling. You know, so, it made me young. But it held me back."<sup>28</sup>

Nelly also recalled how the doctors and social professionals around her talked about the gaps in her childhood education throughout their various stages of life. When she attempted to apply for a job as a laboratory assistant at a university, she had several blanks in her curriculum vitae. When the job interviewer asked sarcastically, "Oh, you didn't go to school", she had to explain her past, after which he "dropped all his sarcasm... treating me absolutely with kid gloves... afraid to say anything". Nelly noted that this was a common reaction: people were "horrified by the fact that you had no normal life".<sup>29</sup> The blanks on application forms were, in a way, markers of the blanks in her narrative about childhood – or, much like the narrative presented by relief organisations, that she had a 'missing' childhood.

Younger children had a higher chance to return to school, with financial support from the Jewish Welfare Board or the Joint Distribution Committee. But adolescents who were age 14 and older often had to choose between education and work, especially those who were from Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>30</sup> This was the case with

25 See, for example: Ernst Papanek, Initial Problems of a Children's Home and Experimental School for Refugee Children. *The Refugee Children's Homes in Montmorency, France*, 4, in: Ernst Papanek Papers, Box 8, Folder 8: Articles by E.P., Folder 8, NYPL Special Collections.

26 Other child survivors resisted the notion that they played an active role in their survival, insisting that it was simply a matter of luck or the actions of their parents; see, for example: Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 11: Susan P., 28/12/2006.

27 For Nelly, her education was also about resisting the Nazi agenda: "educating the young was an absolute essential for all the youth leaders [in the ghetto]... because they didn't want us to grow up as fools as it were, because this is what the Nazis wanted that the children and the young people would not be educated, would be ignorant..."

28 Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 15: Nelly W., 14/05/2007.

29 Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 15: Nelly W., 14/05/2007.

30 This was also the case for Madeleine H., who was from Hungary, and Marlene A., who was from Czechoslovakia; see: Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 4: Madeleine H., 24/07/2007; Interview 1: Marlene A., 19/01/2007.

15-year-old Claire P. from Hungary; once reunited with her father, they both discussed her options and she decided to choose work because they were struggling financially. However, Claire did not want to return to school due to the antisemitism she had experienced before the war: “The kids were throwing stone at me, last days before I – before the war, when we was stopped to go to school. The children were shouting, too... [STARTS TO CRY] So I said I don’t go to school ever again.”<sup>31</sup> For Claire, she had to deal with her real fears about post-war antisemitism in Europe, as well as continuing to deal with the childhood trauma of experiencing antisemitism at school and associating the moment of her displacement with the interruption of her education.

For Marlene A., whose schooling in Czechoslovakia was interrupted at age ten or eleven in 1940, catching up on her education was not an option. She described the reaction her father received when he tried to get her access to a university education in England after the war: “I remember my father going to the authorities and saying, what my daughter really wants to do, is study medicine...” However, the authorities laughed at him and said: “you know, how many soldiers are coming back from overseas and they are our priority... there is nothing left for refugee children, certainly not for your daughter... there was no question of going to university or anything, it was not.”<sup>32</sup> Other interviewees (and the interviewers for *The Girls* project) further pointed to the different approaches to boys’ and girls’ educational opportunities. Lydia T. recalled how the boys who were resettled in the U.K. were encouraged to obtain apprenticeships and employment training, for “the achievement was them having jobs, rather than them addressing their feelings”.<sup>33</sup> Bela R., who was adopted, observed that with the emphasis on marriage for girl refugees, her adoptive parents expected her to follow this route but otherwise “weren’t that interested in my future [...] you know, they weren’t thinking of a career”.<sup>34</sup> Young refugees, their relatives, social agencies, and authorities thus held different ideas about their futures and what it meant to move on with their lives after the war, especially along gender lines.<sup>35</sup>

Henry K., a German boy whose parents had sent him to live on a farm in England in 1937/1938, pointed out that he did not have the same opportunities for an education or a career path as his parents and his daughters did, since his education was constantly interrupted, and he had to find ways to adapt his skills and fragmented educational background to his surroundings: “I am conscious of being unable to equal the status in education and culture that my parents enjoyed through that growth, unbelievably energetic growth of imagination and talent that they were the climax of.” Henry’s remark highlights some of the particularities of refugees who were coming of age during or after the war. While it was never too late to make up for their lapses in education, these child survivors felt not so much that they were start-

31 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 10: Claire P., 25/07/2007.

32 Others, such as Marlene A. and Madeleine H., also felt that they could not fulfil their educational ambitions, whether it was due to an early marriage or the communist state. Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 1: Marlene A., 19/01/2007; Interview 4: Madeleine H., 24/07/2007.

33 Lydia T. and Bela R. also noted that boys were “discouraged from talking about their feelings”, though Bela felt that the boys in her group were more vulnerable than girls, who were “able to hide [the damage by their experiences] better than the boys” – or at least, they were able to form informal networks to discuss those needs.

34 Nelly W. observed how many refugee girls she knew in England felt insecure about their appearances because they were thinking about marriage prospects: “this is generalization, but, perhaps they were more sensitive to what was happening to them ... um, the way they looked. Um, would they ever get married? [...] Ah, that sort of thing. Of course a boy wouldn’t have really. [Interviewer: Why wouldn’t a boy have that?] Ah, because he takes the first step, as it were.”

35 Within the two sets of interviews (*The Girls* and the AJR), most of the refugee girls became social workers, academics, secretaries, teachers, and housewives.

ing with a “blank slate”<sup>36</sup> with endless possibilities, as social workers had encouraged them to think, but rather that they were starting with blanks in their resumes and backgrounds they had to work harder to fill in as adults.

### Lost Families

Social workers emphasised the importance of rebuilding family units in order to restore social stability as well as meeting the refugees’ emotional needs.<sup>37</sup> However, for some refugee children and youth, this aspect of their life could not be restored. For Bela R., the missing family unit, as well as the concept of a ‘lost childhood’, was significant because child refugees lacked a sense of grounding for their identity that older refugees might have had. Orphaned at a very young age, she had been placed in a children’s home in England and was adopted by an English Jewish couple after the war. Although she did have a family, she did not feel fully at home with her adoptive parents and identified a sense of rootlessness because she did not know who her birth family was: “I think this connection with the past is more important than people realize... it’s not denying that they suffered terrifically, the older survivors, but they had their families...” Child refugees might not “remember exactly what happened but we were deprived of our childhood... of food, of toys, of companionship, of our families”.<sup>38</sup> Due to her Jewishness and her status as an orphan, Bela felt like an outsider in her new home: “Wherever I went, I never felt like I belonged. In my school with other English girls, [I] didn’t really belong. First of all, I was Jewish. And then I was adopted. And then, my background.” In addition to lacking a sense of “where I belonged in life,” she also did not know “what I was going to do when I was an adult... Or idea of the sort of person I wanted to be as an adult... and where I wanted my life to go”.<sup>39</sup>

Older unaccompanied or orphaned youth also identified the significance of their families’ absence in their development as adolescents. Susan P., a Hungarian girl who was sent to Auschwitz at age thirteen, liberated in Belsen, and migrated first to Canada as an unaccompanied minor before settling in England as an adult, explained:

“it’s coming to me now, what I have missed is that sort of inter-relationship, daily inter-relationship: the arguments and the make ups and the this and the that, and it’s all part of a daily relationship. I have missed that in the most formative years of my life... you don’t even think about being a part of a family – it’s a normal thing. You see – I did not have that feeling.”<sup>40</sup>

Lydia T., who became a child psychoanalyst as an adult, held a similar view, defining adolescence as the time when “a person crystallize[s]... you know when does their personality shape, it’s usually sometime during adolescence”. Reflecting on her own experience, she stated that “what happened before the war must have been the soil in which the rest of me developed”.<sup>41</sup> Lydia was ten years old when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and was sent to an orphanage in Prague (her parents were still alive

36 Doctors, social workers, and parents urged Claire P., Madeleine H., and Bela R. to forget their traumatic pasts and to focus on their futures. Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 10: Claire P., 25/07/2007; Interview 4: Madeleine H., 24/07/2007; Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006.

37 Tara Zahra, *Lost Children*, 46; Sara Fieldston, *Raising the World*.

38 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006; Interview 5: Zdenka H., 20/01/2007.

39 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006.

40 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 11: Susan P., 28/12/2006.

41 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 14: Lydia T.

but unable to take care of her). She survived Auschwitz, where she found her sister but lost her mother. Having migrated to England at age 16 as an unaccompanied minor, Lydia recognised that she had “a very unusual adolescence... in the sense that it was in a concentration camp”, and that she lacked a period in her life when she rebelled against her parents “because your parents weren’t there to rebel against”. Most refugee interviews divide their narratives about family life and upbringing into the before and after the Holocaust; for Susan and Lydia, their notions of family and home did not have a sense of what came “before”, or as Bela R. described it, “the lack of my own background”.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, their adult understandings of ‘normal’ adolescence and family relationships shaped how they understood the missing elements in their formative years.

While some were old enough to remember their pre-war family life, younger refugee children who did not grow up with a family were constantly in search of one after the war. Susan P., whose father had been taken away before the war and her mother was gassed in Auschwitz, described how meaningful it was when a doctor related to her as a daughter figure. When this doctor took her out for a walk during a therapeutic session and said to her, “I’ve got a little girl like you. I’ve got a daughter like you”, it was “earth-shaking... you know, he kind of raised my self-image, because we were terribly humiliated, I was terribly humiliated and feeling very... you know, I was nobody...” Susan’s desire to be identified as a child who could belong to a family is interesting to compare with the reactions of older refugee youth, who often identified the ability to make their own choices as more important to restoring their self-confidence.<sup>43</sup> In fact, some refugee women were not convinced that foster families were necessarily the solution to unaccompanied or orphaned children’s needs. To return to Bela’s story, she did not have a warm relationship with her adoptive parents, especially her adoptive mother, who kept reminding her that she was “rescued” by them. Yet Bela did not feel like she needed a mother figure in her life. In fact, she had become a mother figure or ‘carer’ to her group of refugee friends in a children’s home, though she was the youngest in the group.<sup>44</sup> Bela’s account illustrates the complicated notions of the family unit and who took on the maternal roles in these refugee children and youth’s lives after the war (if not the older girls, a social worker or doctor usually took on these maternal roles<sup>45</sup>), as well as Bela’s insistence that she was independent even at age three: “I was very much my own person.” Lydia T. had a similar sense of self-sufficiency as a 16-year-old: “I don’t think there was anybody who acted as substitute parent [...] in fact I remember when I came, I think what happened was that I almost as a reaction I sort of thought – Sod you lot, I don’t need anybody, I’m my own parent...”<sup>46</sup> Bela and Lydia thus addressed their lack of parental guidance by highlighting their self-sufficiency.

Children who lost a parent (especially their mothers) at a young age recognised the lingering effects of the ‘missing family’ on their experiences growing up after the

42 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006.

43 When asked by the interviewers whether she wanted a foster family, she admitted to feeling embarrassed for wishing for one. She imagined the interviewers were thinking: “how can you accept that? How can you want it? You know... [But you were only 14... Because your loyalty to your parents?] Not loyalty to my parents, ... I think maybe, maybe it’s a residue of this humiliation, a residue of this humiliation. [That you felt like you didn’t deserve it.] Maybe so.”; see: Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 11: Susan P., 28/12/2006.

44 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 12: Bela R., 26/12/2006 and 31/12/2006.

45 For example, Hannah L. considered her psychiatrist her “surrogate mother.”; see: Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview: Hannah L.

46 Older children who were adolescents after the war and reunited with their family members had strained relationships, especially teenage girls who were reunited with their surviving fathers, though it was for a variety of reasons; see: Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 14: Lydia T.

war and experiencing various life stages. Hannah L., who had witnessed the shooting of her own mother by the Einsatzgruppen as a child, described her envy of a friend who still had her mother after the war: “I was jealous because she had her mother and father and though they all lived in one little room... and Shoshana never had to have her hair shaved off because of lice, because her mother kept it clean.” As a nine-year-old Hannah developed ‘mother-envy’ of other children and youth, which continued into her marriage as an adult. As she described herself, Hannah was “always a girl in search... if not a mother, a mother-in-law...”<sup>47</sup>

For other refugee girls, this sense of rootlessness similarly persisted into their adulthood, whether it was in personal relationships or in finding a home.<sup>48</sup> Rita K., who was taken to Theresienstadt with her mother in 1942 and was eleven years old when she was separated from her mother, explained how her childhood shaped her overprotectiveness toward her children: “Because my own life was shifted about from one place... my family went... my father went... I was separated at a vulnerable age... I can’t stand not knowing where people are, even now... there’s still that fear in me of, of loss... of anybody I know.” But she also recognized that this was a general effect on Jewish survivors: “I think really and truly it’s an insecurity in all Jewish people.”<sup>49</sup>

The interviewees also recognised the long-term effects on their own family formation and childrearing decisions. Hana E. had a different reaction: she chose *not* to have children, though she in fact liked children. After realising what had happened to her family as well as other Jewish families, and after imagining herself in her mother’s place, she decided: “it must have been so terrible to say goodbye and to know that it was probably forever. And I don’t know why, but I just felt that history could repeat itself. And I couldn’t even bear to think of having children.” When asked if this was a conscious decision, she affirmed: “Yes, yes, it was.” Her reaction deviates from the “baby boom” trend among Jewish DPs identified by Atina Grossmann,<sup>50</sup> but perhaps highlights the effects on a refugee who had experienced loss at a young age.<sup>51</sup>

Other refugees longed to make up for these losses with their own family formation. Adolescents who got married a few years after the war longed for older relatives around them. For example, Etta L., who was born in Czechoslovakia and was almost 16 years old at liberation, realised that no older adults were at her wedding to celebrate with her and her husband: “I mean an older generation, not anybody at all. And there were no babies, young children.” This absence of relatives and extended family also had an impact on her children. She recalled one argument with her son, during which she promised her son that he could make more decisions on his own when he

47 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview: Hannah L.

48 Just as a point of comparison with a refugee boy from Germany, Peter D. had difficulties maintaining stable relationships in his life, especially with father figures. As a child he was in Theresienstadt with his mother; both survived and emigrated to the U.S. after the war. Peter ran away as a 14-year-old from his home due to a strained relationship with his abusive mother, though he recognized that the war had taken a psychological toll on her. He expressed his sense of being a constant loner and outsider: “I have never been ‘one of the boys.’” As an adult, he not only struggled with the absence of his birth father and a hands-off stepfather, but also with assuming his role as a father figure to his son and stepchildren; see: Peter D. Holocaust testimony (HVT-319), Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Special Collections.

49 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 6: Rita K., Summer 2006.

50 See: Atina Grossmann, *Mir Zaynen Do. Sex, Work, and the DP Baby Boom*, in: Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, Princeton 2009, 184-235.

51 For other refugees, this experience of losing family members made them accustomed to coping with death and loss as an adult. See, for example, Interview 47 with Renee M. in Manchester, 29 January 2004, Refugee Voices. The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

reached age 16. He responded: “When I’m sixteen – you will be dead when I’m sixteen!” So I said: ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Well, all parents are dead when their children are grown-up.’” She discovered that her two other children were convinced this was also the case.<sup>52</sup> This interaction once again highlights how the refugee women understood the absence of a ‘normal’ family life, as well as what became normal for them and their families.

### Lost Homes Ending Statelessness

These interviews also offer glimpses of the refugees’ attitudes toward a national home and national identity at a particular moment in their lives. The definition of home was complicated for child refugees, who may or may not have had a childhood or memories that made them attached to their countries of birth. Some of the older girl refugees associated their native countries with negative experiences of antisemitism and thus took the initiative to avoid returning to their countries of birth. Nelly W., who was born in Vienna, wanted to avoid returning to Austria at all costs. Theresienstadt seemed safer to her after the war: “Theresienstadt [sic] was in a way ‘home’ to me. You know, I had no home [in] Vienna. I didn’t know anybody in France. Ah, there was Palestine, where my brother was, but I didn’t know where he was. So... the nearest home was Theresienstadt.” She felt relief to be back in the camp because she could reunite with a community of mostly Jewish women refugees and “we could be as it were ourselves”. But the question of repatriation still hovered over their heads.

Unaccompanied refugee youth, as well as social workers, recognised some of the limitations built into the post-war legal and institutional policies that prioritised the child victim and was difficult for adolescents who were on the brink of adulthood. For example, Sylvia C. recalled how she was forced out of a children’s home in London once she reached age 19, though the home had not prepared her for transitioning into supporting herself as an adult.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the ambiguity of age categories could be used to the refugees’ advantage. Relief workers reported that older boys and girls often faked their age in order to qualify for child-centred emigration programs.<sup>54</sup> Etta L., who was almost age 16 at the end of the war, explained how she and her two older brothers heard about the British resettlement scheme to bring 120 orphans under age 18: “So we went immediately to Prague to register. And I was accepted without a problem. My brother, who was older than I, falsified his birth certificate and mine so that he should only be seven months older than I in order to get in. So he was also allowed; so the two of us were allowed to come to England.”<sup>55</sup> Lydia

52 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview: Etta L.; see also: Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 6: Rita K., summer 2006. Rita, who had been taken to Theresienstadt with her mother but was separated from her and placed in a girls’ barrack, also expressed her desire for “a large family to surround me, because I never did have that...”

53 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 3: Sylvia C., Summer 2006.

54 Letter from Ruth Fellner [Jewish Refugee Committee Secretary] to I. Jacobson, Esq. [American Joint Distribution Committee, Prague], 13 June 1946, in: Archive of the Central British Fund for Jewish Relief, Wiener Library.

55 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview: Etta L.; The Jewish Refugee Committee aimed to bring 150 orphaned or abandoned children between ages 16 and 18 from Czechoslovakia to the U.K. under this “1,000 Permit Scheme.”; see: Letter from Ruth Fellner [Jewish Refugee Committee Secretary] to Harold C. Gibson, Esq. [British Embassy (Visa Section)], 26 April 1946; Letter from Otto M. Schiff [Chairman of the Central British Fund], to the Czechoslovak Consulate General, 2 May 1946, in: Archive of the Central British Fund for Jewish Relief, Wiener Library.

T. also pointed out the fluctuating age categories during and after the war: “in fact the boys were already most of them were over the age of 16... I mean even I had to – ahh, this is quite ironic, in Auschwitz I had to make myself... – older, because I wasn’t 16 yet, in order to survive. And, then to come here [to the U.K.] I had to pretend that I wasn’t 16... You know, absolutely ridiculous.”<sup>56</sup>

Judith S., who was born in Hungary in 1929, had lived in a ghetto, and was separated from her mother in Auschwitz, described this continued search for a home as “postponed grief for your family which you, as you had to survive one part of your journey, you had to survive your next”. She recalled the difficulties of trying to emigrate to Israel and the U.S., especially the latter due to the legal obstacles (such as acquiring multiple affidavits) as well as her status as an Eastern European and a Jew. Although social workers had encouraged refugee children and youth to think of their futures as a blank slate on which they could write anything they wanted, Judith felt that “[t]here was no future for us, our family and home were destroyed, most of our relatives were missing, died. And we all had plans, where could we go? You know, nowhere to go.”<sup>57</sup>

Rivka R. remained with her family during the war, but she too faced perpetual statelessness and displacement after the war: “We never knew where we were going to go next, and where we were going to get a passport to, and which countries would let us in... truthfully no country wanted us. Even in the countries that later on let you in, they let you in under duress, people suffered a lot.” Not only had they suffered during the war, but also “afterwards for being unwanted...” Rivka finally found an end to her statelessness through marriage: “I was stateless until I got married, and then I became British. It was a new world, some country wants me. It was a very good feeling... it is an awful thing, you don’t belong to any country.”<sup>58</sup> Rivka also emphasized the gendered obligations imposed on the boys in her family; her parents based their emigration decisions on whether or not her brothers would have to serve in the army. Other child survivors similarly recognised the family-centred paths to citizenship. Nelly W. acquired French citizenship through a marriage with a soldier to get out of a DP camp in Germany, while Marlene earned British citizenship as a 17-year-old through her father because she was underage. Trude S. recognised that this procedure was gendered when she pointed out: “So I actually became a British citizen by the time I was 16, so I’m British in my own right, without having to get married.”<sup>59</sup>

In their pursuit of ending statelessness, child survivors may have been able to acquire physical and national homes, but some nevertheless identified a perpetual sense of displacement. The absence of a home continued to haunt Françoise R., for she had constantly been on the move as a child with her mother during the war when they left Belgium for Britain, even recalling how she slept in drawers, boxes, and whatever shelter her mother could find for her. As an adult Françoise continued to have nightmares about being displaced from her home: “Not being turned out physically, but a dream of having to move on, which results in the dream is a longing to get back to my base, to my home, and being horrendously...” This reoccurring dream of displacement “doesn’t end correctly for me unless I can get back to the house, that

56 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 14: Lydia T.

57 Interview 100 with Judith R. in Manchester, 2 August 2005, Refugee Voices. The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

58 Interview 113 with Rivka R. in Manchester, 19 December 2005, Refugee Voices. The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

59 Wiener Library/“The Girls” Project/Interview 15: Nelly W., 14/05/2007; Interview 1: Marlene A., 19/01/2007; Interview 42 with Trude S. in Leeds, 20 November 2003, Refugee Voices. The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

I've been forced to leave, that I've been pushed into selling the house and moving into one that doesn't feel right for me".<sup>60</sup> For other child survivors, their resettlement did not necessarily mean they felt "at home" in their sites of resettlement. Refugee women such as Francoise R., Madeleine H., and Bela R. felt like an outsider in the U.K., even after years of building a life there. Madeleine, in particular, preferred to identify as a "patriotic Jew," but not a patriotic Hungarian or British, her old and new homes.<sup>61</sup>

Along the lines of identifying with a national or global Jewish community, child survivors expressed their desires to be sent to Palestine/Israel after the war in both contemporaneous and retrospective accounts. Relief agencies in the U.S. and U.K. thus aimed to accommodate refugee children's preferences after the war, as well as placing orphaned Jewish children in Jewish households, in an effort to find homes in which these children finally felt safe.<sup>62</sup> These sentiments also contributed to child survivors' political leanings and their support of Israel in their adult years, or at least their identification of a Jewish state as the solution to refugees' perpetual displacement.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the resettlement options for Jewish children and youth after the war also played a role in shaping the political consciousness of refugee children as they transitioned into young adulthood, as social workers in the early post-war years had hoped.<sup>64</sup>

### Lost Languages

Language loss, or acquisition, was also central to the child survivors' narrations of their early post-war experiences and their ability to feel 'at home'. The acquisition of multiple languages was key to their ability to adapt to their surroundings, and as children, they were able to absorb languages faster. Some interviewees saw their multilingual abilities as enabling them more freedom, whether it was to alternate between the cultures around them or between the multiple identities and statuses they occupied. Henry K., who left Germany at age nine for England, identified adaptability as the key quality that enabled him to continue living after the war: "If you're being chased from pillar to post you have to adapt to the new environment be it language, surroundings, treatment, inquisition or otherwise. And wherever you are, you make your home."<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Eva F. felt at home regardless of her surroundings because she was able to switch between the multiple languages she acquired as a child and as a refugee who had to move around frequently. Her mother had urged her and her brother to learn English because "You cannot go out in the street and be

60 Interview 40 with Francoise R. in Edinburgh, 17 November 2003, Refugee Voices. The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

61 Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 4: Madeleine H., 24/07/2007.

62 For contemporary writings; see: Excerpts from Children's Letters, Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad files, 146/16, Wiener Library; Ernst Papanek Papers, Box 11: Questionnaire Responses 1943–1947, New York Public Library; see also: Erica B. Simmons, *Hadassah and the Zionist Project*, Lanham 2006; Avinoam J. Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland. Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, Detroit 2009.

63 For example, Nelly W. describes her Zionist teacher in Theresienstadt who encouraged her group of 18 girls to embrace Zionist ideals. Other refugee women described their involvement in Zionist projects and efforts. Avinoam J. Patt has also explored how Jewish DP youth consciously built their post-war identity around Zionism; see: Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/Interview 15: Nelly W., 14/05/2007; Avinoam J. Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland. Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, Detroit 2009.

64 This politicisation was not only envisioned as Zionism; social professionals who conducted interviews and interacted with child and youth refugees also encouraged young refugees to adopt definitions of democracy and become more aware of their rights and civic duties as citizens and global actors.

65 Interview 135 with Henry K. in London, 2 November 2006, Refugee Voices. The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

heard speaking German". But she also continued to study languages, and as she grew older, she realised: "of course the asset of having to change languages when you are young enough to do it fairly easily is that you know it's something special. And each language has its own qualities. And I was quite intoxicated by this. Of course it was a sense of freedom, too, because I wasn't anymore thinking, 'What does she mean?'" Unaccompanied refugee children had similarly been encouraged by social workers or ex-concentration camp inmates not to speak German, first to immerse themselves in their English surroundings and secondly to avoid drawing attention to themselves as foreigners.<sup>66</sup>

For other child survivors, the loss of a mother tongue or their inability to communicate once they returned to their countries of birth made them feel like strangers in their countries of birth. Trude S., who left Czechoslovakia at age nine to stay with her relatives in England, expressed how she felt both at home and a stranger when she visited Bratislava as an adult: "I felt at home, and I felt quite happy walking round, I knew my way, you could have put me there blindfolded", though the Slovak street names had been changed under post-war occupation. Yet Trude identified a paradoxical feeling: "I felt at home but I didn't feel at home because I lacked the language. You can't go back home if you don't speak the language." She also noted that despite having lived in England since she was a child, she did not feel like she belonged, not even to the Jewish community in England: "I do not feel my roots here."

In contrast, Henry K., who had been born in Berlin, welcomed this feeling of not identifying with his first language and home: "[T]his is something that has nothing to do with Nazism but you have to remember that, if I were to live in Germany today, I would be constantly reminded of things that I would rather forget, things that don't happen to me in the same way in England."<sup>67</sup> As he explained during a school talk in Berlin in response to a thirteen-year-old German girl who asked why he did not want to return to Germany, he recalled his father's encounters with 17-year-old guards in a concentration camp who had been raised in the Hitler Youth and reinforced adolescence as a formative period not just for young refugees but also the perpetrators: "How old are those seventeen year olds today? [...] if I walked through the streets of Berlin or anywhere in Germany today and I meet someone of approximately the age, 77, 78, 80, I do not wish to look into their eyes for fear of what I might see." Because of these reasons, Henry made a deliberate decision to identify with his adopted home of England via language: "Firstly, I came to England as a refugee speaking no English. I've spent the last fifty, sixty, seventy years improving my English, becoming English. I'm now a British citizen, married an English girl having two English daughters, working for the BBC, serving in the British Army..." After years of building a life and identity in England, he stated: "I'm British. There is nothing about me that is German any more."<sup>68</sup> As demonstrated by these examples, language was connected

66 Others, such as Nelly W., were warned after the war not reveal that German was their native language. Nelly learned some Czech words during her time in Theresienstadt, so she and other refugee children and youth "took on Czech nationality... we made ourselves out to be Czech."; see Wiener Library/"The Girls" Project/ Interview 15: Nelly W., 14/05/2007. For more on the connection between language and children's nationality, especially in the pre-war and wartime years; see: Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls. National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948*, Ithaca 2008.

67 For others, such as Hana E., it was not so much about feeling at home, but rather about reconciling with Germany and its past. Spending months in Germany learning and teaching German was a way for Hana to address the differences in generations: "I was suspicious of anybody who was older, two or three years older than myself and above that, you know, what they might have been guilty of. But, on the other hand, you can't blame everybody for what a section of the people do."

68 Interview 135 with Henry K. in London, 2 November 2006, Refugee Voices: The AJR Audio-Visual Testimony Archive.

to how the survivors understood their relationship to their old and new homes, and the interviewees used their loss or acquisition of languages to express what it meant to move on with their lives after the war and the Holocaust.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to think about how child survivors have constructed narratives about their post-war experiences, as well as how historians can use them in deconstructing narratives about aid. First, the ways in which refugees understood childhood and child agency shaped their assessments of aid distribution and the resettlement process after the war, as well as how they narrated their roles as aid recipients, witnesses, and survivors. Secondly, these retrospective narratives offer glimpses of how child survivors saw the role of gender and age categories in influencing their efforts to cope with life after the war. Identifying these factors served as one way for the survivors to make sense of how the war, the Holocaust, and their experiences of displacement disrupted or shaped their life trajectory. In most cases, they strove to make up for certain losses in their lives (education, families of their own, language), while they recognised that they could not make up for other types of losses (a sense of rootedness in a family or home). We not only can see the lingering effects of refugees' losses and their search for an end to displacement or insecurity, to which they had become accustomed at a young age; we can also see how the interview setting itself served as a forum for the refugees, providing them with the language and terminology for discussing their conceptions of family and belonging in relation to their former and new homes. For some survivors, their childhoods, education, family, and homes may have seemed non-existent or absent in their lives, but these losses were still very much present in their testimonies.

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<sup>69</sup> Other refugees struggled not so much with the loss of a specific language, but rather the loss of language in itself – or the inability to communicate their traumatic stories, whether they broke down at certain moments in their story or were overcome by deep memory. Finally, there were the differences in generational languages and the refugees' desires to communicate with younger generations. While most survivors participated in school programs, like Henry K., or were able to discuss it with their grandchildren, they found it difficult to discuss their experiences with their own children due to the emotional burden they wanted to avoid.

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