“TEMPORARY” EXILE: NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE KINDERTRANSPORT EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY OF CHILDREN FROM AUSTRIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT

LAURA BRADE: “Temporary” Exile: National Differences in the Kindertransport Experience and Memory of Children from Austria and Czechoslovakia
(Under the direction of Christopher R. Browning)

This thesis examines national differences in the experience and memory of the 10,000 unaccompanied children sent to England to escape Nazi persecution by the Kindertransport rescue mission in 1938 and 1939. To do so, I focus on comparing the exile experiences of Kinder from Austria and Czechoslovakia through the use of oral testimonies. I argue that national differences—comprised of national origins, nationality, national identity, and the political distinction of friendly or enemy alien—uniquely affected Kindertransport experiences. To trace the effects of national differences, I explore three periods in the lives of the Kindertransport refugees: in Czechoslovakia or Austria, in England, and after 1945. I examine the evidence of national differences in Kinder’s relationship to their countries of origin and national communities, how the labels of “Austrian” or “Czech” in England affected the Kinder’s sense of national identity, and how Kinder forged non-national identities in postwar Kindertransport memory communities.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of violence following Kristallnacht, the Refugee Children’s Movement\(^1\) organized Kindertransporte (Children’s Transports) in late 1938 to temporarily bring “non-Aryan” children to the safety of England until their parents could retrieve them. The British never meant for the Kindertransport movement to be a permanent solution: England only intended to be a way-station for émigrés fleeing Nazi persecution on their way to other countries or elsewhere in the British Empire. Between December 1938 and August 1939 approximately 10,000 children under the age of eighteen left their families in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, or Poland and travelled to England. With the outbreak of World War II, the transports stopped. If parents had not found a way to escape the continent before the war, the Kinder\(^2\) were extremely unlikely to be reunited with their family. While some Kinder did see their parents again after the war, the majority lost their entire family to the Holocaust.

Beyond this tidy narrative of the rescue mission, however, ten thousand individual stories emerge. Although it is relatively simple to explain the Kindertransport as a series of shared events involving traumatic separation from families and the journey to England, the

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\(^1\) The Refugee Children’s Movement was an organization founded and run primarily by the Society of Friends in England. As the transports increased in size and frequency, the RCM began cooperating with the Jewish communities of England, Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to bring more children out more quickly.

\(^2\) The terms “Kinder” (singular Kind) and “Kindertransport” are the terms that this group of survivors continues to use to describe themselves and the manner in which they were rescued (including those that did not grow up speaking German).
experiences of the *Kinder* varied greatly. Numerous categories of difference—including religious background, age, class, and gender—influenced the exile experiences of the individual *Kinder*. For this paper, I will focus on national differences, and in particular, I will ask how the various conceptions of “the national” differentiated *Kindertransport* experience. By examining “the national” I seek to refocus the popular narrative of the *Kindertransport* constructed through recent media and popular attention and to illustrate the uniqueness of individual experiences of childhood exile. Conceptions of the national fundamentally changed the refugees’ legal status in England and influenced the *Kinder’s* ability to continue identifying with the national community of their country of origin. Refugees not only fled persecution, but also came out of specific contexts, which affected their opportunities in exile and how they made decisions, lived their lives, raised their children, and remembered their experiences.

In the last two decades the rescue mission has become increasingly well-known, beginning with the first *Kindertransport* reunion in 1989. Recent popular attention—the creation of *Kindertransport* monuments, the production of the Academy Award winning documentary *Into the Arms of Strangers* in 2000, the so-called “Winton Train” journey in 20093 (a recreation of the Czech transports)—has brought new awareness to the *Kindertransport*. Such popular attention has also, however, homogenized *Kindertransport* narratives in order to create a manageable, linear retelling, in effect creating a master

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3 As a part of the Seventieth Anniversary of the *Kindertransports* from Prague, Czech *Kinder* and their families travelled by train from Prague to the Dutch coast, where they sailed to Harwich, England, and boarded a final train to Liverpool Street Station, London. The man credited with organizing these Czech transports, dubbed “the Czech Schindler,” Sir Nicholas Winton, was on hand to greet the *Kinder* and to participate in the anniversary celebration. Winton celebrated his 100th birthday the previous May.
narrative without acknowledging individual experience. However, differences abound in
*Kindertransport* experience and memory.

In the *Kindertransport* context, “the national” is comprised of four related categories. First, *national origin* refers to the *Kinder*’s place of birth based on the contemporary borders. While most *Kinder* describe experiences of exile, differences are evident in their narratives based on national origin. These children were not only Jewish by Nazi definition; they describe themselves as having been Czech, Austrian, and German.\(^4\) The *Kinder* spoke different dialects and languages, had different accents, and grew up in different cultural contexts from one another, thus affecting how the British perceived them. Second, *nationality* has both legal and social aspects that a government can either ascribe or deny: the legal component of nationality in regards to citizenship (i.e. passports and rights) and the social component of inclusion in the national community (which the Nazis denied to Jews in Austria and the Czechoslovakia after the *Anschluss* and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia). The third category, *national identity*, refers to the individual’s subjective feeling of belonging to a particular national community. German and Austrian *Kinder* disassociated from their national communities because they could not identify with the Third Reich or the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. On the other hand, Czech *Kinder* could continue to identify with the Czech national community as fellow victims of the Third Reich. In contrast to German and Austrian Jews, continued inclusion in the Czech national community allowed the many Czech Jews to maintain their Czech identity. Whereas the first three categories of “the national” are relatively permanent or stable concepts, the final

\(^4\) Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the *Kinder* as being “Czech *Kinder*” or “Austrian *Kinder*.” These labels do not necessarily reflect national identity, but are used because in England the refugees were categorized based on national origins. As we will see, national origins will play a large role in shaping *Kindertransport* experiences and thus Czech or Austrian *Kinder* serves as a useful shorthand in this thesis.
category, the dichotomous political distinction of friend/enemy is not. Closely related to nationality and national origins, this category reflects a political distinction the British made concerning all refugees during World War II that had the potential to restrict a Kind’s freedoms in England. The British imposed different policies on refugee groups based on national origin, separating the experiences of German and Austrian Kinder from those of Czech Kinder.

In order to examine this complex subject, I utilize the video testimonies found in the Visual History Archive (VHA). I specifically focus on the experiences of two groups, the Czech and Austrian Kinder, in order to understand through comparison how national differences shaped the experience of the Kindertransport.5 While some scholars have criticized the mass-produced quality and interviewer-driven nature of the VHA testimonies, they are nonetheless useful for understanding the lived experience of individual survivors – including the Kinder in England – whose lives are otherwise relatively un-documented. By using the VHA testimonies, I am able to examine the individuality of each Kind’s experience and the commonalities and differences in these experiences through the comparative lenses of “the national.”

The choice to focus on the children from Austria and Czechoslovakia has historiographical and historical reasons. In terms of historiography, the scholarship on the Kindertransport has in the last ten years focused primarily on German Kinder. The thrust of historical interest in the Kindertransport is due in part to the collaborative effort of the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung of the Technische Universität Berlin and the Centre for

5 I have chosen not to include those who came from Poland in this study in part because this group was relatively small, but primarily because most of the Kinder who left Poland were actually German refugees and the British therefore also considered them to be “enemy aliens.”
German-Jewish Studies at the University of Sussex, Brighton. Much of the scholarship demonstrates the usefulness of using memory and oral testimony to access individual Kinder experiences. German historian Rebekka Göpfert expertly demonstrates the relationship between experiences and memory of the Kindertransport, but focuses primarily on a group of Kinder from Hamburg. Similarly, Claudia Curio’s Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung, focuses specifically on the German and Austrian refugees, but focuses more than Göpfert on the importance of differences in the Kindertransport exile experience. Finally, Christiane Berth also worked with interviews to understand the individual experiences of the Kinder, but again focuses primarily on those from Germany. Despite almost exclusively discussing only German Kinder, these works do comment on the heterogeneity of the Kinder, suggesting that differences in Kindertransport experiences need to be further explored.

Historically, the choice to focus on Austria and Czechoslovakia in this paper comes from these countries’ common heritage in the Habsburg Empire. When the Treaty of Versailles dismantled the Empire in 1918, the map of Central Europe drastically changed with the emergence of several newly independent nations. In the interwar period, these states struggled to both define and create a sense of national identity in an age where the “nation” was of prime political importance. Even in VHA testimonies from the late 1990s, Austrian and Czech Kinder, who themselves were the first generation born into this new post-war national framework, describe their parents as coming from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.


7 Claudia Curio, Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung: Die Kindertransporte 1938/39 nach Großbritannien (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2006). Curio’s primary interest lies in the structures of the government offices in Germany, Austria, and Britain. The Czechoslovakian transports, and the limited number of Polish survivors, are outside the purview of her inquiry.

These individuals often had a somewhat ambivalent and complicated relationship to nationalism and the newly created nationalities. Although the Kinder of Austria or Czechoslovakia had only recently been ascribed Czech or Austrian nationalities, in nation-conscious Western Europe “nationality” was a defining trait in their exile.

In order to discuss the importance of national difference, I have organized this paper in five sections. Following the introduction, in Chapter Two I address the inherent difficulties and concerns associated with oral testimonies and how the methods I utilize to analyze these sources allow me nevertheless to arrive at important conclusions. The following three chapters follow a loosely chronological organization based on the structure of the VHA testimonies, discussing life in the Kinder’s countries of origin and the Kindertransport journey, life in England, and postwar life. In the third chapter, I address the “pre-departure” phase of the Kindertransport to examine how the Kinder were legally defined in their homelands, how they related to their neighbors, and what this meant in each national context. This chapter asks how escalation of Nazi persecution, the relationship between the Kinder and their non-Jewish neighbors, preparations for leaving, and the journey to England were experienced and remembered. In the fourth chapter, I turn to experiences in Britain, focusing specifically on the legal status of Austrian and Czech Kinder and their designation as friend or enemy alien. I ask how this political act of categorization created a particular legal status and how this affected the Kinder’s identification with their national origins and the real restrictions placed upon them. The fifth chapter of the paper will address the lasting effects of “the national” on the Kinder after 1945 and examine how experiences, shaped by national

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differences, affected—and continue to affect—how the *Kinder* remembered their “temporary” exile.
CHAPTER 2
SOURCES, METHODS, AND THE VHA

A small woman in her seventies sits alone in front of the camera. Although visibly slightly nervous, she remains very composed. A voice from outside the frame says, “Tell me about the Kindertransport. What do you remember? How did you feel?” The woman, Eva Hayman (b. 1924), shifts her weight in her seat, sighs, and responds:

“Sad. There were some people who were crying, but most of the parents from memory were trying to put on brave faces…I know I was determined not to cry and I could see that my father was too…Mother said they will send their love by the moon and the stars if the time came that they could not write anymore…They both wanted me to look after my sister…I remember very little about it. I just remember Vera [my sister] next to me, and holding a baby and trying to comfort a few…I tried to think of the trip as more of an adventure than a parting, because that’s the only way I could cope with it.”

After a brief pause, the voice off-screen comments, “Thank you, that’s the end of this tape. We need to take a break.” The woman appears somewhat surprised that she has already filled another thirty minutes, the length of the tape, with a retelling of her experiences during the Holocaust. Nevertheless, she smiles slightly and nods in agreement.

When watching individual interviews with the Kinder, like Eva Hayman’s, it becomes clear that while these children each went through the emotional journey from their countries of origin to England, their experiences, personalities, and situations were decidedly individual. In order to engage with these individual experiences, I utilize the video testimonies from the Visual History Archive in conjunction with published sources—

10 Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California (hereafter VHA) interviews: 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997).
memoirs, diaries, collective biographies, and letters from parents—that the Kinder have published since the 1980s. These published sources supplement the information that the Kinder give about their own Kindertransport experience in the VHA testimonies.

Established in 1994 as the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation by Steven Spielberg, the Visual History Archive collected approximately 52,000 video testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust, mostly in English, Hebrew, and German, but also in Czech and several other languages. Of the interviews in the VHA database, 669 are given by Kinder, including 120 interviews with Austrian Kinder and twenty-seven with Czech Kinder. For this paper, I examine twenty-three of the Czech interviews and a comparable sample of twenty-three interviews with Austrian Kinder of similar gender, age ranges, and religious backgrounds. Although I cannot isolate the “variable” of national

11 These are produced primarily by German Kinder, but several also are by Austrian and Czech children.

12 USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, “About the Institute,” University of Southern California College of Arts and Sciences, http://college.usc.edu/vhi/aboutus/ (accessed May 1, 2010).


14 Four of these interviews are in Czech and my knowledge of that language is insufficient at this time to be able to utilize this source.

15 The age of most of the Kinder whose testimonies I have utilized was between ten and sixteen at the time of their arrival in England. The majority of these survivors were between thirteen and sixteen. I do include a few survivor testimonies from Kinder who were under the age of ten, but these interviews are generally significantly shorter than testimonies given by Kinder who were a few years older at the time of their arrival. This trend reflects the difficulty in remembering early childhood experiences in the type of linear narrative that the VHA testimonies represent. Therefore, for the younger cohort of Kinder who were interviewed for the VHA project,
difference, the chosen sample of Austrian testimonies maximizes similarities in gender, class, age, and religious background to compare Austrian and Czech experience. By minimizing other categories that differentiated Kindertransport experience, I can best explore the effects of national differences.

In Holocaust scholarship, the traumatic nature of the experience makes the study of these horrific events even more difficult. Both the existing sources and missing materials pose significant challenges, especially because most Holocaust victims perished, leaving few records. Often scholars are unable to corroborate or cross-check the survivor testimonies that do exist. Those who did survive and recounted their experiences, as historians Christopher Browning and Jan Gross have demonstrated, have endured persecution so traumatic that the memory of the event is often hazy, sanitized or repressed, and colored by later experiences and knowledge.\(^\text{16}\) The nature of the testimony given by Kinder is similar: the trauma of leaving home at a crucial stage in their personal, emotional, and psychological development is reflected in Kinder testimonies.\(^\text{17}\)

The VHA testimonies are unquestionably formulaic. To create a video, a briefly trained interviewer conducts a structured interview divided into three sections: one quarter addresses pre-war life, one half generally covers life during the war, and one quarter these testimonies are generally short, with a greater emphasis placed on postwar experiences. For interviews given by the younger generation of Kinder and the effects on length and areas of focus of the interview, see: VHA 20856 (Kurt Fuchel, 1996), VHA 38760 (Eva Holzer, 1998), VHA 13251 (Dave Lux, 1996), VHA 47838 (Eva Paddock, 1998). Of the interviews included in the VHA, 59% are given by female Kinder. For the Czech Kinder, 59% of the interviews were given by female survivors, while 54% of the Austrian Kindertransport testimonies are given by female survivors.


addresses post-war life. The first questions the VHA interviewer asks the survivor are biographical: name, birth date, and place of birth. In the case of the Kinder, this structure is often somewhat modified. The interviewers tend to deemphasize the time during the war that the Kinder spent in England, focusing the testimonies instead on the time when they were still living under Nazi domination and life after the war.\textsuperscript{18} Even in the structure of the testimonies, then, the importance of national differences is clearly evident as the Kind’s life in their country of origin is the focus of much of the interview.

There are certainly issues that arise for a researcher when using video testimonies. The interviewers asked the Kinder to recall traumatic childhood memories, which they often remembered in a nonlinear manner. Among other points, in retelling their experiences, Kinder often repeated the dates of a particular event with minor inconsistencies. Rather than constructing a chronological narrative—especially in recounting pre-war experiences—Kinder described life in particular episodes or by generalities. However, the events that the Kinder explained in great detail are typically the ones that had the most significant impact on their lives. In addition, while some survivors were eager to discuss their experiences, others were not, and if the interviewer did not question the Kind about specific experiences or certain periods, especially periods of trauma and exile in England, his or her responses were significantly condensed and abbreviated.\textsuperscript{19} However, since the Kinder all volunteered to give

\textsuperscript{18} Other scholars who have utilized survivor testimony from video archives have also commented on the effects that the interviewer has on directing the interview. While occasionally helpful in persuading survivors to talk about experiences that were important, interviewers often interrupt the survivor if the interviewer interprets a certain topic as unimportant or tangential. See: Lawrence L. Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), ix-xv; Christopher R. Browning, Remembering Survival, 4-5.

\textsuperscript{19} French historian Annette Wieviorka was especially critical of the interviews conducted for the VHA because of the “industrial,” mass-produced quality of the interviews, the inexperience of the interviewers, the optimistic tone with which the interviews end, and because “the person of the survivor is no longer at the center of the enterprise. The survivor has been replaced by a concept, that of transmission.” See Annette Wieviorka, The Era
testimonies for the VHA, the majority were willing and able to broach painful subjects when asked to by the interviewer.

For this thesis, the VHA is not only a source that addresses the memory of the Kindertransport, but also the experience of this exile. In using oral testimonies to understand Holocaust experiences, I follow the example set by Christopher Browning and Jan Gross. In his most recent publication, Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp, Browning argues that by collecting a “critical mass of testimony” the historian can establish an authentic recreation of the emotional experience of the Holocaust and determine factual accuracies in the individual accounts. As with Browning’s investigation of the Starochowice slave labor camp, few archival sources exist to describe the living conditions of the 10,000 Kinder after their arrival in England. While using survivor testimony does not give a broad overview of the experience of the Kindertransport, these accounts do allow for an in-depth analysis of individual experience.

I approached each interview in the same manner. First, I examined the background information provided by the VHA on each survivor, in order to maximize the similarities between the Austrian and Czech Kinder. As I watched the first interviews in their entirety, I began to note a number of key topics and experiences that the Kinder discussed in relationship to national differences. The more interviews I watched, the more evident these key points became. I was then able to focus my efforts on drawing connections between these key points, taking note of how talkative the interviewee was; the role of the particular interviewer, the way that the interviewee presented the chronology of events; the relationship

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Browning, Remembering Survival, 9.
of the *Kind* to his or her family prior to departure; whether the *Kind* was reunited with his or her parents before, during or after the war; whether the *Kind* came to England accompanied by siblings; and where the *Kind* settled in the postwar period. Rather than simply recording what the *Kind* said, I was also interested in *how* the *Kind* describes his or her experiences; thus, I often listened to key moments or important experiences multiple times in order to fully grasp how that individual understood, remembered, and retold the event. How the *Kindertransport* stayed with the individual after fifty years often reflected the effects of national differences as much as the experience of the event itself.
CHAPTER 3
HOMELANDS AND FLIGHT TO ENGLAND

The interviewer asks the man in front of the camera to please state his name. “Herbert Elliott” he replies in a British accent. “And what was your name at birth?” the interviewer presses him further. Herbert Elliott (b. 1924) smiles, “Herbert Eisenthal,” he responds, switching naturally from a British to a German accent. Without pause, the interviewer moves to the next question, “Where were you born?” Like so many other Austrian Kinder, Herbert Elliott replies, “Vienna, Austria.”

Every interview in the VHA begins in this fashion: the interviewer asks the Kind to state his or her name and place of birth, marking the importance of location for the VHA. The interviewer then asks the Kind to describe his or her hometown and family life in his or her country of origin. Location and places, specifically national origins, feature prominently in the structure of the VHA interviews. For any place the Kind lived, particularly while still in Austria or Czechoslovakia, the interview prompts the Kind to describe the physicality and the atmosphere of the town. When examining the pre-war life of the Kinder in Austria and Czechoslovakia, to which a significant portion of most Kindertransport interviews is devoted, it becomes evident that Austrian and Czech Kinder understood their lives at “home” in very different ways.

This chapter discusses the pre-Kindertransport life for both Austrian and Czech Kinder, in particular examining the Kinder’s interaction with the national community of their
country of national origin and how Nazi antisemitic laws restricted Jewish legal claim to their nationalities. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on how the place that the Kinder inhabited during the Anschluss or the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and their awareness of intensified antisemitism affected their experiences. Many of the differences that existed at this time were not due to being Czech or Austrian. These early differences were rather a reflection of the Kinder being in Czechoslovakia or Austria at the time of their departure. Having different national origins combined with an imposed racialized Jewish identity and the loss of claim to nationality, thus affected how the Kinder experienced the beginnings of the Kindertransport. To describe these early experiences, I will trace pre-war life of the Kinder chronologically, first examining Austrian and then Czech pre-war experiences, followed by a discussion of the actual transports, and concluding with early experiences in England.

In the pre-war context, the national identity of the Kinder is particularly challenging to determine. A Kind’s attempt to remember his or her pre-war sentiments of national identity is affected by the knowledge of what came later: Nazism and the Holocaust. Additionally, recent scholarship on Austria and Czechoslovakia has complicated our understandings of national identity in these two successor states of the Habsburg Empire. For individuals living in these areas, the process of identifying with a particular national group in the interwar period often resulted in a national identity that was amphibious, indifferent, or opportunistic and quite often ambiguous.  

21 These terms discuss specifically the unclear or changeable nature of nationality at this time. For interesting discussions of nationality in the Bohemian Lands and in the border regions of late imperial Austria see especially: Bryant, Prague in Black; Tara Zahra, Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Pieter M. Judson Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
national identities in their pre-war life, these experiences rarely manifested themselves in the VHA testimonies. In the process of retelling and remembering their pre-war experiences, Kinder often simplified the complexity of national identity in their country of national origin. Therefore, due to the ways memory has intruded upon an individual’s interpretation of national sentiments and obscured the complexity of pre-war national identity, I will primarily limit the scope of my discussion to national origins and nationality in this section.

In focusing on the relationships of nationality and national origins to Austrian and Czech Kinder’s experiences of the arrival and escalation of anti-Jewish Nazi policy, we must ask how the Kinder related to the national community in their country of origin. Following the destruction of Austrian and Czech independence and sovereignty, Nazi laws dictated that Jews were no longer legal “Austrian” or “Czech” citizens and circumscribed their legal access to nationality and social access to the national community. Prior to the arrival of Nazi troops, Kinder often had a multiplicity of identities: religious (orthodox Jew, assimilated Jew, Christian), family heritage (coming from different parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire meant that families often ended up in different nation-states after 1918), and nationality—Czech, German, Austrian, or some combination of the three. Although the Kinder gave primacy to different aspects of their identities prior to Nazi occupation, the Nazis imposed a sense of racialized Jewishness and changed the Kinder’s relationships to their nationalities.

Betrayal and rejection dominated the pre-war experiences of Austrian Kinder. In the VHA testimonies, the central event for Austrian Kinder in the period leading up to their departure was the Anschluss. Not only did the Anschluss change the Kinder’s awareness and

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understanding of antisemitism, but *Kinder* also interpreted the arrival of the Nazis as the impetus for change in their relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors. Some Austrian *Kinder* experienced small, but painful incidences of rejection, as Elizabeth Cook (b. 1927) did when a former close friend “practically spit” in her face.\(^{23}\) The Austrian *Kinder*’s sense of betrayal by Austrian neighbors went deeper than just the childhood playmate, however. Jack Altbush’s (b. 1925) father owned a haberdashery, which lost significant business after the *Anschluss*. For most of Altbush’s childhood, his father only ever had one employee, who had been with the family a long time. Altbush explained how the employee “turned out to have one of these buttons [supporting the Nazis]. And he didn't change much overnight, except for this button.” This employee would later become the Aryan manager of the store, taking over the store’s business affairs and eventually the majority of its income.\(^{24}\) Although the employee was not initially overtly antisemitic, for Altbush, the employee’s button represented the superficiality of Austrian-Jewish relationships prior to the *Anschluss*. Though the Nazi state ousted Jews from the national community through legal means, the *Kinder*’s realizations that Austrians quickly turned their backs on their Jewish friends and neighbors left a lasting impression.

Based on experiences recounted in *Kindertransport* testimonies, antisemitism in Austria left deep emotional scars. Schools were one of the primary sites where *Kinder* experienced exclusion from the national community and loss of civil rights in the process of being denied their nationality. Jack Altbush noted that the “atmosphere in the environment was always one of caution, warning. The Jewishness of a person was made known to you by,  

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\(^{23}\) VHA 36336 (Elizabeth Cook, 1996).

\(^{24}\) VHA 26558 (Jack Altbush, 1996).
let's say, kids in class or general attitudes that I was aware of.” 25 Rejected from the social community by their classmates, Kinder like Altbush acutely felt the volatility of pre-war antisemitism. Particularly in Austria, Kinder remember a sense of antisemitism prior to Nazi arrival. Alfred Broch (b. 1924), also of Vienna, commented that “this antisemitism crept in quite a while before Hitler came.” 26 Yet, with Nazi arrival and the Anschluss, there was an abrupt change in the way he remembered being treated at school. “Suddenly, from one day to the other, we the four Jewish people became the outcasts...And so overnight, I became a bloody Jew, a pig Jew.” 27 Once socially included and members of the national community, Kinder experienced rejection, betrayal, and a loss of legal rights. Herbert Elliott remembered that before the Anschluss, “there was nothing,” but “as soon as the Anschluss came, everything was different.” 28 Elliot’s world, like so many other Austrian Kinder, rapidly changed. No longer allowed to attend grammar school, Elliot remembered that “you get to know where it was dangerous and where you can go” and that his aunt’s hat shop was suddenly “under Aryan management.” 29 Strong Austrian sentiments of antisemitism also had the potential to divide families. Elli Adler’s (b. 1925) maternal grandparents, who were Catholic, were very antisemitic, and Adler recalled a “tension” when her grandmother was around her father because of the remarks her grandmother made about Jews. 30

25 VHA 26556 (Jack Altbush, 1996).
26 VHA 26833 (Alfred Broch, 1997).
27 VHA 26833 (Alfred Broch, 1997).
28 VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliot, 1997).
29 VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliot, 1997).
30 VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997).
Many others experienced a much greater change in the attitudes and interactions with their Austrian neighbors, as an indicator that they no longer belonged to the social Austrian national community.\(^{31}\) Most often *Kinder* remember this rejection as a sudden realization of difference or separation from their neighbors. “Loyal Austrians” turned into “Austrian Nazis” overnight. Gerta Ambrozek (b. 1925), also of Vienna, remembered that Austrian Nazis suddenly “sprung up” out of the Austrian population when the German Nazis marched in. After the *Anschluss*, she recalled, “Suddenly we were ostracized. Suddenly we were different. Gradually every day there was a new thing…that would be forced on us.” She remembered watching Jews wash the streets and that “people would come out and jeer at you,” but it was clear that these people weren’t in “the military, it was the people of Vienna. Who suddenly put on these shirts and suddenly felt they had this power.”\(^{32}\) In her retelling, Ambrozek clearly emphasized that the German Nazis were not responsible for the persecution of Jews, but rather ordinary Austrian citizens. Former friends and neighbors did not unite with Austrian-Jewish neighbors against a common German enemy, but instead easily adopted the veneer of power and closed off the Austrian national community to Jews. The *Kinder* perceived their Austrian neighbors not only as failing to defend their rights as Austrians but also as betraying the Jewish community as a whole. For *Kinder*, Austrians elected to unite with Germans against a Jewish Other rather than with their Jewish neighbors against an invasive Nazi Other. This ostracism from the rest of Austrian society and deep sense of betrayal would mark later experiences on the *Kindertransport*.


\(^{32}\) VHA 12715 (Gerta Ambrozek, 1996).
The Anschluss additionally legally excluded Austrian Kinder from the national community. For many Kinder, their home lives changed, and increasingly they became aware of their loss of rights as Austrian citizens. Kinder often described legal exclusion in regards to the arrest and imprisonment of adult male family members. In the fall of 1939, the Nazis arrested Jack Altbush’s father. When the father returned home several weeks later, he was “just a gray apparition coming through that door.” Elli Adler’s father was similarly arrested after the Anschluss. Upon his return, Adler remembered that the Nazis forced her mother, a Catholic, to divorce Adler’s Jewish father. Although the Nazis pressured couples in mixed marriages to divorce, no law existed banning such marriages. Adler’s memory is an example of a “sanitized,” memory, a cleansed recollection of an experience that preserves the image of her mother as a “victim,” and glosses over the fact that her mother succumbed to antisemitic pressure. However, Adler’s memory does demonstrate the lengths to which Austrian Kinder, denied Austrian nationality, would later go to distance themselves from an Austrian national identity.

Internalization of the Austrian betrayal of the Jewish community forced the Kinder and their families to distrust and fear the intentions of non-Jewish Austrian neighbors. Kinder came to be “very much aware that [they were] different” and that “presumably, antisemitism is so ingrained for generations [in Austria], in some ways more than in Germany.” As the Austrian national community both legally and socially rejected Jews, some Kinder and their

33 For an excellent discussion of the legal and social implications for Jews in Austria after the Anschluss, see: Saul Friendländer, Nazi Germany and the Jews: Vol. I: The Years of Persecution.

34 VHA 43138 (Alice Hubbers, 1998).

35 VHA 26558 (Jack Altbush, 1996).

36 VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997).
families sought alternate methods to rejoin the national community by concealing their Jewishness through baptism. Both Elli Adler and Gerta Freimark (b. 1923) attempted to avoid Nazi persecution and, at least on a superficial level, rejoin the national community. This proved to be not only ineffective but also painful for Kinder. Freimark described the experience of baptism as a “very traumatic” one “that produced quite some nightmares.”

It was the first time she recalled seeing her parents cry. By converting to Christianity through baptism, these individuals rejected their Jewishness publicly in the hopes of avoiding Nazi persecution and regaining Austrian nationality.

Further rejection from the national community resulted in the disruption of schooling and a growing sense of general uneasiness, something almost all Austrian Kinder described in their testimonies. Beatrice Clegg (b. 1927) explained in her testimony that “nobody knew” about her Jewishness, because she was raised in a secular household and was only half Jewish. Able to hide her Jewish heritage, which Clegg said she did by joining the Hitler Youth, Clegg continued attending school after the Anschluss. Although allowed to continue her education, participating in Nazi activities only increased Clegg’s fear of persecution. She commented, “So little Berta had to join the Hitler Youth. And children were asked to go around the houses, go around the localities to find out where Jews lived. And I would try and get hold of some of these details and pass them on [because male Jews were being put into vans and taken away] and I knew that before very long, somebody would come to my house. And the fear just grew and grew and grew.”

As fear of Austrian neighbors increased, the family of Kinder eventually realized that attempts to rejoin the national community would be insufficient to keep their children safe from persecution.

37 VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998).

38 VHA 34855 (Beatrice Clegg, 1997).
Throughout 1938, refugees from Austria sought safety in exile. Prior to the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, many refugees from Nazism fled to Czechoslovakia. For Jewish individuals from the Bohemian lands who were in close contact with these refugees, this often meant that tales of Nazi antisemitism preceded the experience of persecution by several months. A few Czech Kinder experienced the Anschluss vicariously: as refugees left Austria and came to Czechoslovakia, Czech Kinder heard the stories describing antisemitism and the sudden appearance of Austrian Nazis after the German arrival in Austria. Particularly for Kinder living in Brno, only 80 miles from Vienna, Austrian refugees alerted Czech Jewish families to the growing antisemitism in Central Europe. Karel Gross’ (b. 1925) family took on a “Viennese houseguest” who had spent time in a concentration camp. Gross credited this man for encouraging his father to send him and his brother away because, “there was no place for the boys in Europe.” Refugees such as the “Viennese houseguest” foreshadowed what was to come if the Nazis ever marched into Czechoslovakia.

Unlike Austrian Kinder, while many Czech Kinder recalled significant anti-German sentiment, others expressed a sense of unity with their Czech neighbors. Kind Herbert Holden (b. 1926), who came to Czechoslovakia as a German refugee with his family in 1937, compared German antisemitism to antisemitism in the Bohemian lands in his testimony. In contrast to Nazi Germany, Holden distinctly remembered a lack of antisemitism in Czechoslovakia, “No, I would have been very surprised if there would have been [antisemitism], because after all the Czechs were very anti-German. And this was in a Czech place, although it was a German speaking school. But, uhh, I don’t think the Czechs were

39 VHA 9991 (Karel Gross, 1996).
antisemitic, certainly anti-German…so to some extent, we were accepted.” In contrast to Austrian Kinder, who almost always recalled some small instance of antisemitism in their testimonies, Kinder born in the Czechoslovakia more commonly commented on the lack of antisemitism. John Sommer (b. 1925), from the Sudetenland, had mostly Jewish friends but went to a Czech Gymnasium (and he further said most of the other Jews in his town went to the German-speaking Gymnasium). He described his relationship with other Czechs as being “always top class.” Other Kinder, like Eva Holzer (b. 1929), born in the Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia, did not express having any experiences of antisemitism. Despite observing the Sabbath, Holzer and her family interacted with Jewish and non-Jewish friends, and her father’s business partner was a non-Jew.

Czech Kind Vera Gissing (b. 1928) went even further in describing her sense of unity with her Gentile neighbors and her sense of being Czech. Throughout the interview, Gissing referred to the Czechs as “we” and “us,” demonstrating her continued identification with this nationality at the time of her testimony, almost sixty years later. Gissing stated, “I was fiercely proud of being a Czech and fiercely patriotic and it matter much more than religion…I was a believer in that it matter how you lived, not how and where you worshiped.” She further described the relationship between Czechs and Jews in

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40 VHA 35952 (Herbert Holden, 1997). There is, of course, an element of sanitized memory to this. Since Jews in the Bohemian lands were often German speakers, anti-German sentiment and antisemitism often went hand in hand. Additionally, the Bohemian lands were, like most of Europe at this time, quite antisemitic. Nonetheless, what is important for the Czech Kinder is the lack of memory of an experience of antisemitism. The presence of an external enemy in the invading Nazis and the Western Allies sacrifice of Czechoslovakia allowed Czech Kinder to remember an untied Czech front against the German invaders. See: Bryant, Prague in Black.

41 VHA 37787 (John Sommer, 1998).

42 VHA 38760 (Eva Holzer, 1998).

43 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
Czechoslovakia, saying “It had a lot to do with Czechoslovakia being a new state. We had a wonderful president….and he was a friend of the Jews…it was a wonderful environment.”

Gissing’s older sister, Eva Hayman did not recall many instances of antisemitism either, only that some classmates called her a “Jew” once when walking home from school. Otherwise, she noted, “We were united in…probably hatred about what was going on around us.” For the majority of Czech Kinder, then, either some sense of unity with the Czech national community or at the very least an absence of feeling rejected marked pre-war experiences.

The affinity that Gissing expressed for her Czech homeland demonstrates the lasting effects of continued national identity in the memory of Czech Kinder. Gissing’s memory of her continued inclusion in the Czech national community is particularly evident in her retelling of her feelings of patriotism. As the German troops marched into Prague in March 1939, Gissing remembered, “The streets were lined with people and there was utter silence. And one person started singing the Czech national anthem, which starts with the words, ‘Where is my home?’ and all the people joined in and my family joined in…I couldn’t help but wonder what is happening to my dear home?”

Gissing’s remembrance of her homeland as “dear” demonstrates that although she had been forced to leave, Czechoslovakia remained her home. Czech Jews like Gissing felt persecuted by the Nazis not only as Jews but also as Czechs, and they worried about the future of their homeland.

However, not all Czech Kinder remembered their Gentile neighbors as fellow patriots. Anita Spenser (b. 1926), who remembered that Czechs and Jews got along “pretty

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44 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
45 VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997).
46 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
well,” recalled that after March 1939, “the Czechs were very patriotic. And so were we…we could speak German perfectly well, but we only spoke Czech” in Gymnasion.\(^{47}\) Spenser’s testimony is an example of ambiguous nationality in pre-war Czechoslovakia, but also of the unity that Jews felt with Czechs against Germans. Accordingly Spenser commented that after the arrival of the Germans, there were “psychological changes…some of the Czechs turned German. Some children left for German schools…the atmosphere changed very, very much.”\(^{48}\) Czechs who betrayed their Jewish neighbors, in Spenser’s testimony, “turn German,” while loyal Czechs stood united with Jews against the German oppressors.

Similar experiences of Czechs “turning German” are evident in other Czech Kinder’s testimonies. A refugee from Germany, Miriam Darvas (b. 1926) attended a German speaking boarding school outside of Prague. There she had a history teacher, who “had written on the blackboard what describes an Aryan…he made it clear who an Aryan was and I remember that to this day. An Aryan is a human being, a superior human being of the human race.”\(^{49}\) Darvas called this teacher a Nazi, saying that “everyone knew that he was” and that, although he was Czech, he joined the Nazi party once the school dissolved.\(^{50}\) When Czech Kinder spoke about Czechs becoming Nazis, they clearly implied that Czech Nazis were few and far between and considered by the rest of the Czechs as national traitors. The complete ostracism from the national community that Austrian Kinder recounted is significantly absent in comparison with Czech testimonies.

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\(^{47}\) VHA 11600 (Anita Spenser, 1996).

\(^{48}\) VHA 11600 (Anita Spenser, 1996).

\(^{49}\) VHA 43860 (Miriam Darvas, 1998).

\(^{50}\) VHA 43860 (Miriam Darvas, 1998).
Despite the differences in national origin and nationality in pre-war experiences, the journey from countries of origin to England is the unifying event across all Kindertransport experiences. There are key points of the journey that most of the testimonies agreed upon: the initial emotion upon leaving, crossing the German-Dutch border, the journey by boat across the English Channel to Harwich, and the final journey by train to London. Specific details about these particular events stand out in Kindertransport experience because of the intense emotional release connected to the event. The earliest transports from Austria left in December 1938, as quickly as they could be organized following the escalation of violence evidenced by Kristallnacht.\textsuperscript{51} Transportations of Czech children did not begin until after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939.

*Kinder* explained the key points of the journey by associating them with specific emotional responses that transcended national differences. Excitement and trauma clouded the day of departure, crossing the border into the safety of Holland expressed a combination of relief and worry, and the ferry journey across the English Channel was connected to curiosity and the onset of homesickness. Upon crossing the Dutch border between Holland and Germany, all *Kinder*, regardless of national origins described similar experiences and feelings of fear and animosity towards Germans:

> There was an enormous relief on the train that we had left the Third Reich. It was incredible elation. And at the first station in Holland, there were hundreds of people on the platform, ordinary Dutch people, and they came into the compartment and they give us lollies and chocolates and there was tea…and they would ask us if they could they tell our parents that we had arrived safely in Holland. And they asked us to give [them] our parents' addresses and they would send a message.\textsuperscript{52}


\textsuperscript{52} VHA 26833 (Alfred Broch, 1997).
The universality of these emotional responses and astonishment at the kindness of the Dutch people accentuated the similarities in the initial Kindertransport experience between Austrian and Czech Kinder across national boundaries. This shared experience of trauma and separation later formed the basis for a unified narrative of the Kindertransport and became a point of common ground for the Kinder.

Once in England, however, national origins directly affected the divergence of these experiences. In part because Czech Kinder left continental Europe later than most Austrian Kinder, Czech experiences in England were significantly different. After arrival in London, the testimonies diverged into separate experience groups, primarily based upon who retrieved the Kind from the train station and the Kind’s housing situation. Once the Kinder disembarked from the trains in London and established a new life in England, the experience of exile became increasingly entrenched in a narrative of national difference.

Austrian Kinder were significantly more likely to be placed in a foster home, which could either provide the child refugees with individual attention, or contribute to their feelings as outsiders. In contrast, Czech Kinder were often placed in hostels or boarding schools with other refugees. Refugee hostels, which often lacked the individual attention of a foster family, often created a kind of surrogate family with others in a similar situation. These differences were not so much a function of nationality, as they were circumstances arising out of time of arrival due to differing national origins. Although Austrian children who arrived after March 1939 had more similar living experiences to Czech Kinder than the Austrian Kinder who arrived in the first few months of the transports, there were experiences that were unique to each group.53 The starkest contrast in living situations was between the

53 For Austrian Kinder who spent most of their time in foster families, see: VHA 34855 (Beatrice Clegg, 1997); VHA 43138 (Alice Hubbers, 1998); VHA 12715 (Gerta Ambrozek, 1996); VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998);
temporary housing for the earliest *Kindertransportees* and the specifically Czech refugee home. Austrian *Kinder* who arrived in December 1938 and early 1939 and did not have pre-arranged living situations spent time at Dovercourt, a summer camp that acted as temporary housing for the overflow of child refugees. In contrast, a number of Czech *Kinder* had the opportunity to attend a Czech school and live in a Czech refugee home. While these two experiences did not universally affect either group, these instances demonstrate how national origins differentiated *Kindertransport* experiences through living situations.

The *Kinder* who arrived in England in the first months of the transports spent time at Dovercourt summer camp because guardians had not been arranged prior to their departure. The camp was ill-equipped to house children in the dead of winter, and *Kinder* who spent time at Dovercourt remembered shivering in the cold dining hall after breakfast as “the shoppers came in” to choose a refugee to foster. Austrian *Kind* Beatrice Clegg recalled watching “the people who had come, good people who had come, all that way in the middle of winter, to that forlorn place to select one or two of these poor little creatures that might be suitable.” Those who were chosen went with their adoptive families or to boarding schools,

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VHA 29830 (Deborah Morrison, 29830); VHA 42377 (Alice Litzi Smith, 1998); VHA 36336 (Elizabeth Cook, 1997); VHA 45854 (Kurt Fuchel, 1996). For Austrian *Kinder* who spent most of their time in refugee hostels, see: VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliot, 1997); VHA 26833 (Alfred Broch, 1997); VHA 43138 (Alice Hubbers, 1998); VHA 46664 (Laszlo Goldberger, 1998); VHA 41363 (Ruth Jacobs, 1998). For Czech *Kinder* who spent most of their time in foster families, see: VHA 35250 (Alexander Horn, 1997); VHA 47838 (Eva Paddock, 1998); VHA 10544 (Marianne Wolfson, 1996); VHA 23372 (Laura Selo, 1996). For Czech *Kinder* who spent most of their time in refugee hostels, boarding schools or work camps, see: VHA 38760 (Eva Holzer, 1998); VHA 9991 (Karel Gross, 1996); VHA 26558 (Gerard Friedenberg, 1997); VHA 37787 (John Sommer, 1998); VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996); VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997); VHA 13251 (Dave Lux, 1996); VHA 22608 (Alice Masters, 1996); VHA 11600 (Anita Spenser, 1996); VHA 48625 (Robert Wasserberg, 1998); VHA 43860 (Miriama Darvas, 1998); VHA 35925 (Herbert Holden, 1997).

54 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996) and VHA 48625 (Robert Wasserberg, 1998).

55 VHA 34855 (Beatrice Clegg, 1997).

56 VHA 34855 (Beatrice Clegg, 1997).
while those who were not stayed at Dovercourt for the following day’s “shoppers.”

Dovercourt and the experience of being selected by visiting “shoppers” was uniquely confined to the earliest transports; thus, only Austrian Kinder recounted such experiences.57

In contrast, both Austrian and Czech Kinder described living conditions in youth hostels or refugee camps. Although these Kinder did not have individual attention from family members, children in these situations were nevertheless able to associate and commiserate with other Kindertransport refugees about homesickness and the experience of assimilation. The support networks that developed were often still in place when the Kinder gave their testimonies, demonstrating how hostels could provide a surrogate family based on common experience. Although Austrian Kinder often lived in hostels, only Czech Kinder described living in a hostel specifically for Czechs. Vera Gissing, a Czech Kind who was originally placed with a foster family, decided to attend this Czech refugee school, where she was able to continue speaking Czech and express sentiments of Czech national identity. Gissing described the experience of being part of a group of other refugee children, saying, “I realized what happiness in exile meant, because I was surrounded by kids who…shared my predicament, by teachers who knew…what the war meant for children like myself…we were like a large extended family…Most of us had lost all our families and we are each other’s families and that is a wonderful blessing.”58 In contrast, Gissing’s older sister Eva Hayman was the only refugee child at her “very posh boarding school.”59 Eva Hayman expressed a sense of alienation at her school and noted the difference between her experience and her sister’s: “She wasn’t different, whereas I was. I didn’t want to be, but I was different, she was

57 Although not included in this study, German Kinder also experienced the winter at Dovercourt.

58 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).

59 VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997).
among her own.\textsuperscript{60} While not all Czech \textit{Kinder} were able to attend this school, those who did could continue to associate with the Czech national community and express their national identity while abroad. As we will later see, a similar opportunity for Austrian \textit{Kinder} did not exist.

Although the effects of national identity would later play an important role in the wartime experiences of the \textit{Kindertransport}, national origins and nationality more significantly impacted the pre-war experiences described by \textit{Kinder}. National origins not only determined how and when \textit{Kinder} and their families were absorbed into the Nazi legal structure, but also reflected differences in the ways \textit{Kinder} continued to relate to their nationality after the arrival of the Nazis. Although both Czech and Austrian \textit{Kinder} were legally denied access to civil rights as Austrian or Czech citizens, Austrian \textit{Kinder} as a whole remembered greater persecution by their non-Jewish neighbors and social ostracism from the national community. Thus, while Austrian \textit{Kinder} internalized the betrayal of their non-Jewish Austrian neighbors, Czech \textit{Kinder} more often recalled a sense of unity with the non-Jewish neighbors against invading German oppressors. Later in \textit{Kindertransport} experiences, the differences between rejection and betrayal for Austrian \textit{Kinder} and continued acceptance and unity for Czech \textit{Kinder} had significant implications for the \textit{Kinder}’s national identity and experiences in England.

\textsuperscript{60} VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997).
CHAPTER 4
IDENTITY AS “AUSTRIAN” OR “CZECH”

On August 12, 1940, two articles appeared side-by-side in *The Times*. “Friendly Aliens’ Plight—Further Cases of Hardship—Mental Suffering” featured in the column adjacent to “Austrian Refugees—Appeal for Revised Treatment.” In “Friendly Aliens’ Plight” *The Times* recognized that “letters from readers daily draw attention to the suffering and hardship which have been caused by the wholesale interment of aliens of enemy nationality even though they may be convinced opponents of Hitlerism and Fascism.”61 In the next column, the “Austrian Refugees” article states that “the Council of Austrians in Great Britain appeal in a statement that they have issued for discrimination between civilian internees (personas under the protection of the German Government) and refugees (persons who are proved not to enjoy in law or fact the protection of the German Government).”62

Once the war began, the British government considered refugees from Germany and Austria to be of enemy nationality and therefore of suspect loyalty. For *Kinder*, national origins and their previous nationality became determining factors for the British in assigning the categories of friend/enemy.

In her book *Die Jüdische Kindertransporte*, German historian Rebekka Göpfert, who includes Germans, Austrians, and Czechs in her study, notes in her introduction that in

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England *Kinder* were “commonly stigmatized as German.” This demonstrates two key factors: first, even scholars who have included non-German *Kinder* in their studies tend to focus the weight of their evidence and analysis on the German *Kinder*. Second, Göpfert’s observation and *The Times* articles demonstrate that, despite the fact that the *Kinder* were refugees and had lost their right to nationality in their home countries, the British defined and regulated the *Kinder* based on national origin. The *Kinder* were thus shaped by their experiences in exile in Britain as *Austrian* or *Czech* refugees.

This section will explore the British legal categories of friend/enemy and their effects on the *Kinder*, both in terms of experience and of national identity. First, I will discuss the ways in which the British emphasized the *Kinder*’s national origins. The importance of national origins in determining friend/enemy legal categorization additionally circumscribed or undergirded opportunities for Austrian and Czech *Kinder* to reclaim their national identity. Secondly, I will turn to opportunities, or lack thereof, for national pride. By emphasizing national origins in creating legal codes for refugees, the British either strengthened allegiance to an acquired British nationality, primarily in the case of Austrian *Kinder*, or for the Czechs, fostered a sense of rescuing their homeland.

The British determined the *Kinder*’s classification as either “enemy” or “friendly” alien by linking them legally to their national origins and nationality. Particularly after the British retreat from Dunkirk, the British homefront became increasingly suspicious of Nazi spies. As part of the Third Reich, the British considered Austria to be an enemy combatant, and all Austrian *Kinder*, after they reached the age of sixteen, were classified as “enemy”

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aliens. Austrian Kind Alfred Broch remembered the British having three different types of classifications for foreigners. “If you were A, you were interned straightaway. If you were B, you were alright but you were restricted to a five mile radius and if you wanted to go outside of that radius you had to go to the police. And if you were C, you were considered a friendly alien and you were regarded as British, as everybody else.”65 Consequently, all Austrian refugees age sixteen and over had to register with the police, were restricted in where they could travel and live, and faced discrimination and sometimes deportation by the British who were worried about the presence of Nazi spies.

In her wartime diary, Austrian Kind Ingrid Jacoby (b. 1927) described a detective game she played with one of her British friends, in which they followed neighbors around and took notes on the movements of their “suspects.” One day, Jacoby’s father discovered the notebook containing the reports of Jacoby’s “detecting expeditions.”66 Her father, “was furious. ‘Do you realise that you could go to prison if this is found?...Have you forgotten that we are foreigners here, and there’s a war on?’ he shouted.”67 Although Jacoby confided to her diary that no English person would take the notebook as seriously as her father did, she did recognize that her father worried that the English would think the detective notes “the work of a professional spy.”68 The concern displayed by Jacoby’s father suggests that Austrian refugees in England were constantly aware of the ways in which their nationality made them suspect as “secret Nazis.”

65 VHA 26833 (Alfred Broch, 1997).


67 Jacoby, My Darling Diary, 144.

68 Jacoby, My Darling Diary, 144.
Other Kinder had more direct experiences of difference as enemy aliens of Austrian nationality. Once Alfred Broch turned sixteen, the British government interned him at the Isle of Mann. Broch recalled one instance when British soldiers returning from Dunkirk came to the internment camp, thinking that all the internees there were German prisoners: “to them we were Huns, enemies! A frightening situation…here we were anti-Nazis, victims of fascism, behind barbed wire and on the other side there were soldiers, also victims of Nazis, but a defeated army.”\(^{69}\) Later in the interview, Broch described his internment and deportation on the *Dunera* in 1940, \(^{70}\) in which the ship full of Austrian and German internees expecting to be deported to Canada, sailed instead to Australia. Broch’s internment and deportation demonstrate how Kinder experienced negative treatment and prejudice from the British because of their former Austrian nationality.

Because Austrian émigrés struggled with accusations of being Nazi spies and faced prejudice due to their Austrianess, establishing sentiments of Austrian national pride in England was quite difficult. The lingering effects of the sense of betrayal by Austrian neighbors further hindered the Kinder from forming connections with the Austrian national community. Instead of forming bonds based on a shared national identity, Austrian Kinder tended to unite with other Austrians in social events organized by refugee communities.

\(^{69}\) VHA 26833 (Alfred Broch, 1997).

\(^{70}\) In July of 1940, 2,732 male internees, mostly refugees from the Nazis, were deported from England to Australia. Although other internees were deported to Canada, the *Dunera* was unique, not only because it was the only transport to reach Australia, but also for the mistreatment of the deportees by the crew on the *Dunera*, a lengthened interment upon arrival in Australia, and because most of the deportees later joined the Australian Army and remained in Australia after the war. The *Dunera* affair was made into a documentary mini-series by Ben Lewin in 1989, called *The Dunera Boys*, in Richard Dove, “Totally un-English”? : Britain’s Internment of “Enemy Aliens” in Two World Wars (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005). For further reading on the *Dunera* affair, see: Cyril Pearl, *The Dunera Scandal: Deported by Mistake* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1983); Benzion Patkin, *The Dunera Internes* (Stanmore, N.S.W.: Cassell Australia, 1979); Paul R. Bartrop with Gabrielle Eisen, eds, *The Dunera Affair: A Documentary Resource Book* (Melbourne: Jewish Museum of Australia, Schwartz and Wilkinson, 1990).
because of their common experiences of exile and persecution.\textsuperscript{71} However, only a select few of the Austrian Kinder mentioned involvement in these refugee communities during the war in their testimonies, in part because the organizations were generally active only in large cities. Only Kinder who spent time in London later in the war mentioned attending events organized specifically for Austrian youth. Elli Adler met her ex-husband, a fellow refugee, at functions organized by Young Austria, a group that had “social evenings, organized trips, and had a choir.”\textsuperscript{72} Gerta Freimark also met her husband, another refugee from Germany, at an Austrian night club in Vienna near the end of the war.\textsuperscript{73} Rather than creating a sense of national pride, these refugee organizations focused on establishing connections between young people as refugees and not as Austrians.

As we shall later see, unlike Czech Kinder, who were often extremely proud to be from Czechoslovakia, Austrian Kinder rarely expressed a sense of a lasting connection with their country of national origin even when participating in these refugee organizations. Ingrid Jacoby describes her gradual dissociation from her Austrian identity in her diary. Particularly in the entries in 1943, Jacoby begins to despise her “horrible, foreign, unpronounceable” first name Ingrid and her relationship to Austria.\textsuperscript{74} Despite her attempts to be English, the legal restrictions placed upon enemy aliens constantly reminded Jacoby of her “foreign blood” when her application to live in Portsmouth was refused.\textsuperscript{75} The pain with which Jacoby

\textsuperscript{71} See: VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997) and VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998).

\textsuperscript{72} VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997).

\textsuperscript{73} VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998).

\textsuperscript{74} Jacoby, \textit{My Darling Diary}, 272. Jacoby’s classmates generally call her “I” or “Inky” instead of Ingrid.

\textsuperscript{75} Jacoby, \textit{My Darling Diary}, 201. The British government strictly controlled the presence of refugees in port cities like Portsmouth, due to the strategic value of ports and the suspect loyalty of enemy aliens.
described her unfortunate circumstance of being an Austrian refugee is a testament to the emotional effects of being classified as an enemy alien. In the later diary entries, Jacoby continually tried to distance herself from her Austrianness. Throughout the course of the diary, she became increasingly aware of “foreignness.” After a walk with an elderly Austrian gentleman with a strong accent, Jacoby told her diary, “I didn’t want anyone to see me with him. How could I have anything in common with someone so un-English?” To combat her insecurities as a foreigner, Jacoby attempted to become more British by changing her name, converting to Christianity, and showing disdain towards anything “foreign.” Although Jacoby perhaps unconsciously rejected an Austrian national identity, she was nonetheless of conscious of the fact that the British classified her as enemy alien and that she was therefore not British because of her former Austrian nationality.

The Austrian Kinder’s rejection of an Austrian national identity is further evidenced by the relatively low numbers of Austrian Kinder who returned to their national origins after the end of the war. The experience of rejection and betrayal from the Austrian national community left many Kinder with the impression that they did not—nor did they seem to want to—belong in Austria. Elli Adler expressed at the end of her interview: "I've imposed an exile on myself…it's a beautiful country, it's just the people that aren't very good." Some Austrian Kinder, like Gerta Freimark, expressed their sense of loss of belonging as an increased attachment to their adoptive British homeland: “English [sic] was my home, English was my language. I think in English.” Herbert Elliott, who did return to visit Austria, first in 1956 and several more times before he gave his video testimony, shared in

76 Jacoby, My Darling Diary, 268.
77 VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997).
78 VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998).
his interview that he had recently begun to dream about his childhood in Austria in English, rather than German. Elliott further explained the process of separating himself from his former Austrian identity: “I find it difficult to realize that several of the people that I knew went voluntarily back to Vienna to live or back to Germany to live. Which at the moment I could not do.”

The pre-war experiences of the Austrian Kinder of antisemitism and rejection from their homeland caused many of these exiles to form an attachment to their adoptive homelands and to additionally reject their Austrian nationality.

In a twisted irony, Austrian Kinder, rejected legally and socially from the Austrian national community before the war, came to be defined by their Austrian nationality in England. Classified as enemy aliens on the basis on national origins, Austrian Kinder gradually rejected the national community that had persecuted them and had caused them to be different in England. In rejecting their national origins and Austrian nationality, Austrian Kinder came to accept a national identity that was clearly un-Austrian in a country that ironically had categorized them as “enemy.”

Also defined by their national origins, Czech Kinder were considered by the British to be friendly aliens. In stark contrast to the restrictions of movement placed upon the Austrian Kinder, none of the Czech Kinder whose testimonies are included in the Visual History Archive recounted experiences of discrimination as “German spies” or internment because of their national origin while in England. Nevertheless, Czech Kinder often felt a sense of isolation and of being different from their British peers. Anita Spenser recalled “being asked by one of the kids [in the British school] where I come [sic] from and I said Czechoslovakia and she said, ‘Is that in Africa?’ And I wrote to my parents that they were very ignorant

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79 VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliott, 1997).
Like Spenser, Vera Gissing felt initially unwelcome in England. Both \textit{Kinder} described experiences where they felt misunderstood by their English hosts. When Gissing’s Czech school moved to Llanwrtyd Wells in Wales, she remembered how the town initially looked upon them “with a mixture of curiosity and resentment,” but after the school held a concert for the townspeople, all of the Czech children at the school received citizenship to Llanwrtyd Wells.\textsuperscript{81} Gissing remembered, “We the Czech children sang the Welsh national anthem in Welsh and there wasn’t a dry eye in the audience and from then on they were our friends and all their doors were open to us and they couldn’t do enough for us.”\textsuperscript{82} Gissing remembered being very happy and accepted in Llanwrtyd Wells, describing the relationship of the children to the townspeople as a “love story [which] goes on to this day.”\textsuperscript{83} Rather than remembering persecution for being Czech, the Czech \textit{Kinder} emphasized instead an initial feeling of isolation due to their experiences as refugees and the good relationships they subsequently developed with the British people with whom they had contact.

The freedoms afforded to Czech \textit{Kinder} by their legal classification in England allowed them greater movement in Britain than the restrictions placed upon Austrian refugees. Czech \textit{Kinder} were able to consider Czechoslovakia—and their Czech neighbors—to be the first victims of the Third Reich, the sacrifice the Allies made to Hitler in the name of appeasement. Czech exiles, \textit{Kinder} included, thus often had special privileges in England, opportunities to engage in acts of national pride, and were able maintain a greater sense of identity with their national origins than Austrian refugees. Vera Gissing and her sister Eva

\textsuperscript{80} VHA 11600 (Anita Spenser, 1996).
\textsuperscript{81} VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
\textsuperscript{82} VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
\textsuperscript{83} VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
Hayman brought Czech flags with them when they came from England and hung them above their beds. At the time of their interviews, both Gissing and Hayman still had their flags.  

Gissing also recalled writing a letter to Czechoslovak President-in-exile Edvard Beneš while in England, in which she “expressed my faith in him that he would lead us to a free Czechoslovakia.” The presence of a Czechoslovak government-in-exile gave Gissing and many other Czech Kinder the feeling that, in Gissing’s words, “I shall have Czech soldiers fighting, at the side of the British, you know for our freedom.” She continued, saying, “It seemed a very important role that [the soldiers] had to play.”

The Czech exile community, in contrast to the Austrian one, had a much larger presence in the lives of the Czech Kinder. Besides the presence of Czech government in England, Czech refugees seemed to be a much more cohesive group than Austrian refugees. Some Kinder relied on their fellow Czechs for support during the war. Eva Holzer was involved in a Czech club during her short time in London. The Czechs she met at the club meetings would eventually accompany her to Ecuador, where her parents had escaped and were establishing a new home for themselves.

The legal status of “friendly alien” allowed the Czech Kinder not only greater freedom in England, but also the opportunity to fight for the liberation of their country. Many of the male Kinder who came of age during the war were able to serve in the Czech Brigade (an exiled section of the Czech Army) in conjunction with the British Armed Forces. For many Kinder, particularly for males, this opportunity allowed for a greater cultivation of

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84 See: VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997) and VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
85 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
86 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).
87 VHA 38760 (Eva Holzer, 1998).
national pride, the ability to return to continental Europe, and the chance to potentially liberate and find their parents. Of the nine male Czech Kinder whose interviews are included in this study, only five reached the came of age in time to serve in the war, and three of the five did serve in the Czech Brigade. Of the two who did not serve, Alexander Horn (b. 1925) left England for New Zealand in late 1939 because his parents and sister were able to leave Czechoslovakia before the war began.\(^{88}\) The other Czech Kind who was eligible to serve, Peter Miles (b. 1925), attended school during the war and trained for the reserve forces as a mandatory part of his schooling and would have entered the army upon graduation.\(^{89}\) By the time he finished his schooling, however, the war was over. Based on this admittedly small sample, it was certainly common for Czech Kinder to enter the armed forces not only to find their parents, but to demonstrate national pride and fulfill a sense of duty to Czechoslovakia, if they were eligible and able to serve.\(^{90}\)

The Kinder who did join the Czech Brigade expressed feelings of duty both to families and to nation. Gerard Friedenfeld (1924), eighteen when he joined the army in July 1943 as a tank driver, said that, “the time came to do [his] share.”\(^{91}\) Karel Gross, who also volunteered for the Czech forces when he turned eighteen, was not called up to actually join until the following year, due to a large influx of volunteers, suggesting that many Czech refugees were eager to join the Czech Brigade.\(^{92}\) Gross’ older brother had already joined the

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\(^{88}\) VHA 35250 (Alexander Horn, 1997).

\(^{89}\) VHA 36901 (Peter Miles, 1997).

\(^{90}\) This conjecture is based on only the sample I have access to through the VHA. To my knowledge, no statistical data has yet been gathered regarding the number of Czech males who entered the Czech Brigade during the war. Further research will hopefully yield more conclusive results as to how many Czech Kinder served in the exiled Czech Army.

\(^{91}\) VHA 26558 (Gerard Friedenfeld, 1996).
army, which Gross cited alongside his desire to return to Czechoslovakia, as a motivating factor to enlist. John Sommer, who joined the Czech Brigade in 1944, remembered several other Kinder in his unit, further suggesting that volunteering for the army was a fairly common shared experience for Czech male Kinder. When describing his reason for joining, Sommer explained, “I had discussions with various people and I felt I wanted to get back and see where my parents were… I felt that I wanted to take part in what was happening.”

Sommer’s sentiments reflect the dual motivations many of the Kinder had for volunteering in the Czech Brigade: while finding and helping their family was certainly a priority, Czech Kinder who enlisted felt a sense of loyalty to Czechoslovakia, in part because they continued to identify themselves as Czech.

Experiences during the war were greatly affected by national origins and nationality. These two categories affected the abilities and degrees to which Kinder chose to participate in national refugee groups as well as to demonstrate and cultivate a sense of national pride. Designation as either friend or enemy alien additionally impacted the Kinder’s opportunities in England, often increasing their sense of alienation (in the case of Austrian Kinder) or strengthening (for Czech Kinder) ties to their former national communities. Furthermore, the distinction of friend/enemy contributed to the development of the Kinder’s national identity, which continued to be impacted by pre-war experiences of either betrayal or unity with the non-Jewish members of the Austrian and Czech national communities. The ability to identify with their nationality, liberate their homeland, and fight against the Germans—either through

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93 VHA 9991 (Karel Gross, 1996).
93 VHA 9991 (Karel Gross, 1996).
94 VHA 37787 (John Sommer, 1998).
95 VHA 37787 (John Sommer, 1998).
force or by helping the war effort in some supplementary function—significantly impacted how the Kinder remember their experiences abroad.
CHAPTER 5
POSTWAR AND MEMORY OF THE KINDERTRANSPORT

In the years after 1945, lingering national differences continued to affect a Kind’s postwar choices and available options. However attempts to assimilate into other national contexts and lingering feelings of displacement, eventually led Kinder to accept an identity not rooted in “the national” but in shared experiences of exile, as refugees, and ultimately, as Kinder. Nationality not only affected the ways in which the Kinder experienced the nature and cause of their exile, but also the ways in which they memorialized and internalized those experiences. In this section, I will first discuss the role of “the national,” particularly national identity, in determining where the Kinder lived in the immediate post-war years. I will then ask how the Kinder’s ambiguous understandings of their own national identity and self-understanding as Holocaust survivors have affected the memory of the Kindertransport and the establishment of memory communities.

For the majority of Austrian Kinder, returning to Austria to live and rejoining the national community was an unthinkable prospect. Rejected by their fellow Austrians in 1938 and aware that their family members had been persecuted and betrayed by their former friends and neighbors, Austrian Kinder generally began a search for a new identity in the

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96 This conclusion is drawn primarily through research into the American organization, the Kindertransport Association and less thorough exploration of the sister British organization in the Association for Jewish Refugees. I have not included in this study individuals who chose to live in Israel in the postwar years. Although I would argue that the Kind identity is present for Kinder living in Israel, I do not believe the sense of not entirely belonging to the national community in which the Kind chose to live their postwar life would be as strong, because of the greater percentages of Holocaust survivors in Israel and the unique situation of experiencing the forming of Israeli national identity.
postwar period. The search for belonging manifested itself for the majority of Kinder in relationship to national identity, as most sought to gain citizenship rights and become “normal” citizens of their adopted country. For the majority of Austrian Kinder, this search resulted in joining a new national community, generally by means of acquiring a new—usually American or British—citizenship and attempting to live their lives as normal American or British citizens.  

Czechs in the initial postwar years were far more likely to return to their national origins than Austrian children. Volunteers from the Czech Brigade fought their way back to Prague and other Kinder volunteered to return. Czech patriotism fostered during the war proved to be a prime motivator for Kinder to return to Czechoslovakia. Vera Gissing, along with her classmates from the Czech school in England, returned to Czechoslovakia soon after the end of the war. Gissing recalled, “I was brought up in the Czech school. We were brought up to go back to our homeland, to rebuild it. There was no thought of me staying [in England]…there was no other thought in my head than to go back.” The patriotism instilled in the Czech Kinder at this school demonstrates how national differences during the war had lingering effects for the postwar period and on the decision to return. Others felt pressure to return, because of their involvement in the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, like Kind Miriam Darvas. Darvas, who was working in the Czech Embassy in London as the war

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97 See: VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997); VHA 12715 (Gerta Ambrozek, 1996); VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliot, 1997); VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998).

98 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996); VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997); VHA 37787 (John Sommer, 1998); VHA 9991 (Karel Gross, 1996).

99 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996). See also: VHA 48625 (Robert Wasserberg, 1998). Although Wasserberg did attend the same Czech school as Gissing, he did not spend all of the war years there. His parents also escaped the continent and Wasserberg was reunited with them in the early 1940s. Nonetheless, Wasserberg did discuss the Czechness of this school in his testimony, however. He remembered that Czech officers and the Czech embassy greeted his transport upon their arrival at the school and that the school was run specifically for and by Czechs.
ended, remembered a conversation she had with the president-in-exile Edvard Beneš in which he told her that it was “pretty unpatriotic for you not to return to Prague.” Whatever the reason, a significant number of Kinder elected to return to Czechoslovakia in the initial postwar years; however most did not stay long.

Changed by their lives in England, most Czech Kinder who returned came to feel that Czechoslovakia no longer had anything to offer. Karel Gross, who arrived with the Czech Brigade, tried to reclaim his grandfather’s property in Ostrava. When the manager of the property refused to return Gross’ land, Gross realized, “I can start from scratch anywhere in the world…You know, I don’t owe them anything. I don’t owe them my allegiance and I applied to return to England.” Lacking physical ties to Czechoslovakia and denied his property rights—in a sense, this parallels the betrayal by non-Jewish neighbors that Austrians felt in the pre-war years—many returnees applied to go back to their adopted homeland. For Vera Gissing and her sister Eva Hayman, the missing ties were emotional. “My visit there made me aware that I didn’t belong anymore,” Gissing stated in her interview, and her sister Eva “could not take the harshness of the postwar and she also could not cope with the void left by my parents.” Like Austrian Kinder, Czech Kinder sought to join a national community, either in England or in other (generally English-speaking) countries. Zionist Kinder also expressed the importance of national identity in the early postwar period. Czech Kind Robert Wasserberg told his father that in order for Jews to be safe from further persecution and enjoy the benefits of being “first class citizens”, the Jews of the world needed to create their own national identity. Wasserberg continued by emphasizing the

100 VHA 43860 (Miriam Darvas, 1998). Darvas, however, did not return to Prague,

101 VHA 9991 (Karel Gross, 1996).

102 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996); VHA 38765 (Eva Hayman, 1997).
importance of the nation-state and belonging to a national community in the postwar period, “We are a nation amongst nations. And a nation with no homeland is no nation.”103

An awareness of a void left by loss of family and loss of homeland and the search for a new national identity is, in general, true for most Kinder, both Czech and Austrian, in the postwar period. In order to cope with the loneliness and isolation left by these two losses, Kinder tried to be as “normal” as possible and to assimilate into their adopted homelands. Of her postwar life, Czech Kind Liesl Silverstone (b. 1927) commented, “I tried to be normal, to live a normal suburban life…I must have been like a performing flea in those days. I did my best to do what I was supposed to be doing.”104 Like Silverstone, the majority of the Kinder married and had children. Kind Herbert Holden again emphasized normalcy when he described his parenting style, “[my children] had what I call a normal, English upbringing.”105 Most chose not to speak about their experiences as refugees and subsequently felt isolated. As Beatrice Clegg explained, “I don't have anyone to belong to. I don't have anywhere to belong. My experiences have made me an outsider in life.”106 Not until the first reunions of the Kindertransport did the Kinder begin to feel as though they belonged, as one of 10,000 with similar experiences of loss, exile, and the sense of being an outsider.

In June 1989, approximately 1,200 Jewish refugees and their families, returned to London for the fiftieth-anniversary of the Kindertransport.107 The reunion was the first time many of the refugees had any contact with other Kinder since 1939, when the last boats from

103 VHA 48625 (Robert Wasserberg, 1998).
104 VHA 32124 (Liesl Silverstone, 1997).
105 VHA 35952 (Herbert Holden, 1997).
106 VHA 34855 (Beatrice Clegg, 1997).
Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia arrived in Harwich, England. For many of the Kinder, this was the first time they were able to “[come] out from under the shadow of Auschwitz survivors.”\textsuperscript{108} In comparison to the gas chambers, death camps, and Nazi brutality that survivors on the continent faced, the Kinder felt for many years that their own experiences were relatively unimportant in a “scale of Holocaust suffering.” Today on their website, the Kindertransport Association defines a Holocaust survivor as, “a person who was displaced, persecuted, and/or discriminated against by the racial, religious, ethnic, and political policies of the Nazis and their allies. The Kindertransport children are child Holocaust survivors.”\textsuperscript{109}

Although today many, though not all, Kinder consider themselves to be Holocaust survivors, coming to a understanding of “survivor” that would encompass their own experiences was a long and difficult process. In the immediate postwar years, a survivor was generally considered to be a survivor of the camps. Only as the definition of “survivor” expanded and evolved could the Kinder could be included in this definition. For many Kinder, the difficulty in self-identifying as a survivor was in part because “so many refugees were treated kindly by individual host families and those Jewish and non-Jewish organizations responsible for their rescue,” that the former “refugees were infinitely grateful for a safe haven and many became eager to be acculturated.”\textsuperscript{110} In comparison to those who experienced the concentration camps and roving killing squads, the Kinder considered their experiences of trauma, separation from family, and loss of childhood to be minor. Yet, as

\begin{enumerate}
\item Phyllis Lassner, \textit{Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust: Displaced Witnesses} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.
\end{enumerate}
discussed in previous sections, however kind their caretakers, these refugees suffered immense emotional trauma and feelings of isolation. For many of the Kinder, the Kindertransport reunions were the first time they recognized that they were not alone in their experiences of exile. The reunion provided many of the Kinder with a sense of family and of shared experience.111

Established in 1990 by a small contingent of Kinder in the United States after the initial reunions in Britain, the U.S. based Kindertransport Association (KTA) states its mission as to provide “an opportunity for its members to finally express and share feelings often long suppressed; to form new friendships; to enhance understanding between Kinder and their families; and to give meaning to a common historical experience – shaped by the comradeship of our own dramatic escape and by the inescapable sense of loss and trauma we share with all Jews of the Holocaust generation.”112 In order to achieve these goals, the organization first had to overcome the Kinder’s long-standing rejection of using the word “survivor” when referring to themselves.

Through the work of Kindertransport Association, most Kinder have come to consider themselves survivors. An anthology compiled for the 2010 Kindertransport Association Reunion, reflected on many of the Kinder’s coming to terms with the label “survivor.” In the anthology, Kinder answered a call for essays on a variety of topics, one of which addressed the issue of Kinder as Holocaust survivors. Austrian Kind Ruth Zimbler responded:

I never considered myself a survivor – I just thought I had and [sic] interesting life. I didn’t talk about much about my experiences – I just wanted to be a REGULAR

111 VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).

AMERICAN...People have said that I was lucky and for years I believed them. Now I think, was it lucky that my childhood was cut short? That I lived without a hug, a kiss or even a parental reprimand for one of my formative years? Was it fair that I was made to feel like an outcast? There is no doubt that the Holocaust had an effect on the person I am today. Maybe it made me stronger, more flexible and more tolerant, but it also took something away from me and others like me. Yes, I now know that I am a Holocaust survivor.  

Grateful to be rescued and faced with the horrors of concentration camps where their families either survived or were murdered, Kinder often responded to the “survivor question” in the pattern that Zimbler did: at first deeming themselves unworthy of being labeled a survivor, but gradually coming to terms with their own suffering and recognizing that the story of the Kindertransport was a Holocaust “story worth telling.” As the extent of suffering associated with the Holocaust broadened throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, Kinder came to realize that their emotional trauma also made them survivors.

Austrian Kind Eva Kollisch credited the Kindertransport Association largely for helping her to answer the question, “who were we? Refugees! Survivors!” In her contribution to the anthology published for the Association’s 2010 Conference, Kollisch remembered the first Kindertransport reunion she attended:

For endless hours, we talked and ate, laughed and cried. A weight that we had never allowed ourselves to pay attention to was slowly being lifted from our souls. The KTA gave us back part of our childhood! No wonder we are called Kinder! Here we are allowed to speak of what belongs to us and what might so easily have been submerged in this world of endless uprooting and forgetting. But they are our stories and we tell them to each other, we tell them to ourselves, and to our children. The testimony that the KTA has gathered over so many years belongs to the history of suffering...specifically of the Nazi era. But on a more personal note I can add that in


its gatherings, the KTA has provided a spiritual shelter for its children; for many it has cauterized a hidden wound.\textsuperscript{116}

As Kollisch suggested, the Kindertransport Association and its sister organization in England, the Association for Jewish Refugees, have acted as surrogate family communities and sites of memory for many of the Kinder since 1989.

Christopher Browning describes the process of establishing and unraveling the “various layers of memory of that event” that the survivor experienced: “the deepest layer is ‘repressed’ memory…there are ‘secret’ memories…there are ‘communal’ memories…and finally there are ‘public’ memories—those that are openly shared.”\textsuperscript{117} While the testimonies in the VHA are memories that the Kinder share with an international community, the establishment of the Kindertransport Association in 1990 allowed the Kinder the opportunity to develop ‘communal’ memories, which could be later transformed into the public memories documented in the VHA. The establishment of “memory communities,” as Browning terms them, in the Kindertransport Association and the Association for Jewish Refugees, has created spaces in which the Kinder can share their experiences. For many of these child exiles, the experience of survival in England was extremely isolating, but these spaces for discussion have allowed them to find commonalities with other refugees. The process of sharing memories and of overcoming feelings of isolation has created a memory community that has often decreased the importance of national differences over time, in order to establish a sense of belonging as a member and participant in the Kindertransport.

In many cases, it seems as though the memory community created by the Kindertransport Association has offered an alternative identity for Kinder not rooted in terms


\textsuperscript{117} Browning, Remembering Survival, 9-11.
of nationality or national origins. These meetings have additionally revived memories previously forgotten. *Kind* Gerard Friedenfeld mentioned early in his testimony the importance of the organization for reconnecting him to friends and a cohort that he had almost forgotten. Additionally, this community has served for Friedenfeld and other *Kinder* as a way to establish a collective memory of their experiences. Friedenfeld described how the Kindertransport Association reunion of 1993 reconnected him with several friends with whom he had travelled to England but subsequently lost contact. By talking with these other *Kinder*, Friedenfeld was reminded of a story regarding his day of departure for England, when the Nazis moved the trains from the platform before parents had finished saying their goodbyes, which he would not have otherwise remembered. The Kindertransport organizations represent a new ‘home’ for many of the *Kinder*, a space in which to relive their experiences, discuss their memories, and articulate their emotions regarding their shared and individual experiences.

The majority of *Kinder* now no longer consider themselves Austrian or Czech, but rather primarily as British, American, Australian, or various other nationalities. Yet, in the interviews *Kinder* tended to refer to themselves as *having been* Czech or Austrian when discussing their early childhood prior to departure on the Kindertransport. The inherent break in identity that comes from exile experiences is unique from case to case and further demonstrates that the Kindertransport was not a homogenous experience. Austrian *Kinder* often felt betrayed by their neighbors and closest friends, while the Czech *Kinder* generally felt as though the Nazis were primarily an external rather than internal threat. This is evidenced by the fact that many of the Czechoslovakian *Kinder* returned after Germany’s surrender, while most of the Austrian *Kinder* refused to go back in the first years after the

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118 VHA 26558 (Gerard Friedenfeld, 1997).
war ended. Many, even at the time of the VHA testimonies, continued to disparage the Germans and a small minority still would not travel to Germany and Austria.

Internalization and remembrance of the Kindertransport is often most clearly evident in the final moments of the VHA testimonies. By way of concluding the interviews in the Visual History Archive, the interviewers asked the survivors to leave a “message for the future.” These messages often sound contrived, but sometimes these statements offer insights into how the Kinder have memorialized their life histories. Austrian Kind Beatrice Clegg memorialized her experiences poetically:

Enter in consciousness, penetrating, becoming clearer, the sound of marching feet, and the roll of a single snare drum accompanying it. In the middle of my practical occupation the years start to drop away from me, like the bits of orange peel stripped away leaving bare flesh exposed to the grip of teeth. The acid injection has entered the brain. And once again I find myself sitting on the balcony on the fifth floor of our house in Vienna, trying to derive solace from the sun. Groping for an anchor among the woods and hills of the surrounding countryside, but trapped by the grins of insecurity and fear which say, 'You cannot escape! You are marked! And the shadow of the swastika hangs over you, ready to descend at any time and pound you and yours into the slime from which you came!' I twist away to encounter the canine eyes of the nice Italian green rows in Notting Hill. It was only a piece of chicken you tasted madam. Are you alright? The sun is shining and the boy cadets are enjoying it.  

Czech Kind Liesl Silverstone, who became a therapist in her later professional life, remembered her experiences through the symbolic meanings of her parents’ possessions, specifically her father’s tallis: “It almost symbolizes me honoring my past. And here I stand, a woman, a Jewish woman, a survivor wearing my father’s tallis. That’s it really. It’s a nice note on which I’d like to end. Here I stand.”

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119 VHA 34855 (Beatrice Clegg, 1997).

120 VHA 32124 (Liesl Silverstone, 1997).
Memory not only affected interpretations of the experience, but also reflects upon the survivors’ present: the lingering effects of trauma, acceptance of the past, and recognition of life history. Complicating the narrative of the Kindertransport is not simply a project of memory, but also of illuminating aspects of human and exile experience.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Although a simple, homogenous narrative of the Kindertransport is a satisfying demonstration of human goodness in the face of the Holocaust, it is nonetheless important to recognize key differences in Kindertransport experiences. The centrality of the differentiating factors of “the national”—national origins, nationality, national identity, and categorization as friend or enemy alien—for Kindertransport experience manifests itself in a 2008 survey from the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR). A British organization founded in 1941 by Jewish refugees from central Europe, the AJR sent questionnaires to 1,500 Kinder asking demographic questions. Four of these questions were in some way related to the national: “Country of Birth,” “Original Nationality,” “Current Location (country)” and “Current Nationality.” 121 While Kinder themselves are today willing to collapse differences in their individual experiences to create a common “Kind” identity, the AJR survey demonstrates that Kinder remain aware of the differences that created “ten thousand unique stories” and that “the national” remains a prominent differentiating factor.

Throughout this paper, I have used the testimonies in the Visual History Archive as indicative of the reality of Kindertransport experience. But these interviews are also a retelling of experiences based on how the Kind remembered them: these are testimonies of memory. In examining the Kindertransport from a perspective of difference rather than

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homogeneity, we have discovered that national origins significantly impacted how Kinder experienced and remembered life in England.

Significant differences separated pre-war experiences in countries of national origin. While Austrian Kinder were legally and socially excluded from the Austrian national community and thus denied access to Austrian nationality, Czech Kinder predominantly felt united with their non-Jewish neighbors against an invasive Germany. Czech Kinder thus often felt socially included in the Czech national community and resented Germans for legally stripping them of their rights as Czech nationals, while Austrian Kinder felt abandoned by their non-Jewish Austrian neighbors. Despite these differences, Kinder generally described similar experiences of the Kindertransport journey to England. In part because Austrians and Czechs travelled along similar routes and because of the intense emotions associated with leaving family and homeland behind, most Kinder described the journey to England with relative similarity.

However, upon arrival in England, national origins and nationality significantly impacted Kindertransport experiences and memories. Austrian Kinder experienced winter in Dovercourt, but were more likely to be placed with a foster family than Czech refugees. Nationality and national origins further separated the experiences of Czech and Austrian Kinder in their relationships with the British and in their legal status in England. While the British considered Czech Kinder to be “friendly aliens,” Austrian Kinder were classified as “enemy aliens.” As enemy aliens, Austrian Kinder were restricted in their movements and often interned or deported. Pre-war experiences and legal classification further affected the Kinder’s sense of national identity in England. Czech Kinder did not feel betrayed by their homeland and therefore discussed sentiments of national pride and a desire to fight for the
liberation of Czechoslovakia and the ability to return to their homeland in their testimonies. In contrast, Austrian Kinder, who felt betrayed by their neighbors, more often described continued animosity towards their former homeland and pursued inclusion in the British national community earlier than Czech Kinder. Austrian Kinder tended to remain in Britain or emigrate to the United States, Canada, or Israel, rather than return to their homeland in the initial postwar period.122

In the fifty years between the transports and the first reunions, most Kinder, both Austrian and Czech, established residence in English speaking countries and struggled to define their identities in a culture where nationality mattered. Although most Kinder attempted to become “normal” citizens of their chosen homelands, the majority felt like outsiders in the national community. Not until the reunions did Kinder realize their similar experiences of exile. The sense of community that the Kindertransport Association provides has created a non-national identity for these survivors. Nonetheless, the fifty year struggle to find a national identity further demonstrates the extent to which “the national” affected Kindertransport experiences.

Besides national differences, there are certainly other factors that caused differentiation in Kindertransport experiences and memory. These factors include: gender, living arrangements in England, age cohort, the survival of family members, class, and understandings of religious identity. All of these differences interact with one another. Some have been alluded to throughout this paper because of their interaction with national differences, but these differences deserve further research. As we have discovered through an examination of national differences, the Kindertransport was not a homogenous experience. Further explorations into other areas of difference will further complicate the

122 See: VHA 32124 (Liesl Silverstone, 1997); VHA 38760 (Eva Holzer, 1998); VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997).
Kindertransport narrative and will reflect upon the nature of broader trends of emigration and exile from Central Europe.

Furthermore, the Kindertransport is reflective of the experiences of emigration that many Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia faced in the late 1930s and 1940s. Although significant research has been done on emigration from Germany and Austria, emigration from Czechoslovakia has been relatively less studied. The ways in which the Kinder left their homeland is just one example of a successful emigration strategy out of Central Europe. Nonetheless, the Kindertransport demonstrates the difficulties that families in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia faced in emigrating together, as the parents of Kinder made the painful decision to send their children ahead unaccompanied. The Kindertransport further demonstrates the ways in which national differences affected emigration strategies and experiences and suggests that emigration from each country needs thorough examination. Like the Kinder, other emigrants faced unique challenges, circumstances, and consequences stemming from the effects of “the national.”
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