

“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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SOURCES, METHODS, AND THE VHA	8
3. HOMELANDS AND FLIGHT TO ENGLAND	13
4. IDENTITY AS “AUSTRIAN” OR “CZECH”	31
5. POSTWAR AND MEMORY OF THE <i>KINDERTRANSPORT</i>	43
6. CONCLUSIONS	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	58

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of violence following *Kristallnacht*, the Refugee Children's Movement¹ 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

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

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.⁶ Similarly, Claudia Curio's *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung*, focuses specifically on the German and Austrian refugees,⁷ 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.⁸ 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.

⁶ Rebekka Göpfert, *Die jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39: Geschichte und Erinnerung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005).

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.

⁸ Christiane Berth, *Die Kindertransporte nach Grossbritannien 1938/39: Exilerfahrungen im Spiegel lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews* (Munich: Dölling und Galitz, 2005).

These individuals often had a somewhat ambivalent and complicated relationship to nationalism and the newly created nationalities.⁹ 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

⁹ Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

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.”¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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 Holocaust¹², mostly in English, Hebrew, and German, but also in Czech and several other languages.¹³ Of the interviews in the VHA data base, 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 interviews¹⁴ and a comparable sample of twenty-three interviews with Austrian *Kinder* of similar gender, age ranges, and religious backgrounds.¹⁵ 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).

¹³ The languages in which the 658 *Kindertransport* testimonies in the VHA database are conducted break down into these categories: 597 English, 20 German, 13 Hebrew, 8 Czech, 6 Dutch, 5 Portuguese, 4 Spanish, and 1 Italian. This language breakdown demonstrates that after the end of World War II, the majority of the *Kinder* identified themselves most closely with either British, American, or Australian nationalities, rather than their nationality of birth. For further information on identity and identity construction in *Kindertransport* memoirs, see: Rebekka Göpfert, “Kindertransport: History and Memory,” trans. by Andrea Hammel, special issue, *SHOFAR: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, no. 1 (2004): 21-27. Ruth Barnett, “The Acculturation of the Kindertransport Children: Intergenerational Dialogue on the Kindertransport Experience,” special issue, *SHOFAR: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 100-108. Claudia Curio, “‘Invisible’ Children: The Selection and Integration Strategies of Relief Organizations,” trans. Toby Axelrod, special issue, *SHOFAR: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23:1 (Fall 2004): 41-56. Iris Guske, *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context: German-Jewish Child Refugees’ Accounts of Displacement and Acculturation in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

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.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.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.

¹⁶ See: Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community of Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ See: Ute Benz, "Traumatization through Separation: Loss of Family and Home as Childhood Catastrophes," trans. Toby Axelrod, special issue, *SHOFAR: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 85-99.

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.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.¹⁹ However, since the *Kinder* all volunteered to give

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.

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”²⁰ 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

of the Witness, trans. by Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 111. For another critique of the VHA, see also: Zoë Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁰ 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 Although many *Kinder* may have had complex

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.²² 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

²² For an excellent discussion of the ways in which Nazi laws imposed a sense of racialized Jewishness and excluded Jews from the national communities see: Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume 1: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997), 113-173.

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,

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 Elliott, 1997).

²⁹ VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliott, 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*.

³¹ See: Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume I*, 241-245.

³² VHA 12715 (Gerta Ambrozek, 1996).

The *Anschluss* additionally legally excluded Austrian *Kinder* from the national community.³³ 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.³⁴ 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."³⁵ 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."³⁶ 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 Friedländer, *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.”³⁷ 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.”³⁸ 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."³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.”⁴³ She further described the relationship between Czechs and Jews in

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.”⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵ 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?”⁴⁶ 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

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 Gymnasium.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.

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*.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.⁵²

⁵¹ Claudia Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung: die Kindertransporte 1938/39 nach Grossbritannien* (Berlin: Metropol, 2006).

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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶ Those who were chosen went with their adoptive families or to boarding schools,

VHA 29830 (Deborah Morrison, 1998); VHA 42377 (Alice Litzi Smith, 1998); VHA 36336 (Elizabeth Cook, 1997); VHA 20856 (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 Friedenfeld, 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 (Miriam 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.”⁶⁰ While not all Czech *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 *Kinder* did not exist.

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

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

⁶¹ “Friendly Aliens’ Plight—Further Cases of Hardship—Mental Suffering” *The Times* Aug. 12, 1940, 9.

⁶² “Austrian Refugees—Appeal for Revised Treatment” *The Times* Aug. 12, 1940, 9.

England *Kinder* were “commonly stigmatized as German.”⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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”

⁶³ Rebekka Göpfert, *Die Jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland Nach England 1938/39: Geschichte und Erinnerung* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1997), 13.

⁶⁴ See: Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*, second edition (London: Leicester University Press in association with the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 1999), 73-119.

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 “detectiving 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).

⁶⁶ Ingrid Jacoby, *My Darling Diary: A Wartime Journal – Vienna 1937-39, Falmouth 1939-44* (Cornwall: United Writers Publications, 1998), 144.

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 Austrianness, 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 Internees* (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.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.”⁷² Gerta Freimark also met her husband, another refugee from Germany, at an Austrian night club in Vienna near the end of the war.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.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.⁷⁵ The pain with which Jacoby

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

⁷² VHA 34872 (Elli Adler, 1997).

⁷³ VHA 47110 (Gerta Freimark, 1998).

⁷⁴ Jacoby, *My Darling Diary*, 272. Jacoby’s classmates generally call her “I” or “Inky” instead of Ingrid.

⁷⁵ Jacoby, *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?”⁷⁶ 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.”⁷⁷ 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.”⁷⁸ 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.”⁷⁹ 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

⁷⁹ VHA 32245 (Herbert Elliott, 1997).

people.”⁸⁰ Like Spenser, Vera Gissing felt initially unwelcome in England. Both *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.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.”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.”⁸³ Rather than remembering persecution for being Czech, the Czech *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 *Kinder* by their legal classification in England allowed them greater movement in Britain than the restrictions placed upon Austrian refugees. Czech *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, *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

⁸⁰ VHA 11600 (Anita Spenser, 1996).

⁸¹ VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).

⁸² VHA 21626 (Vera Gissing, 1996).

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.⁸⁴

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.”⁸⁵ 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.”⁸⁶

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.⁸⁷

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

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

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.⁹³ 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*.⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ 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

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*.⁹⁶ 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

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.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸ 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.”⁹⁹ 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

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.”¹⁰⁰ 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.”¹⁰¹ 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.”¹⁰² 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).

¹⁰⁷ The Kindertransport Association, “Kindertransport and KTA History,” The Kindertransport Association, http://www.kindertransport.org/history06_London.htm (accessed November 2, 2009).

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.”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.”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.”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

¹⁰⁸ Rebekka Göpfert, “Kindertransport: History and Memory,” trans. by Andrea Hammel, special issue, *SHOFAR: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 25.

¹⁰⁹ The Kindertransport Association, “Kindertransport and KTA History: Frequently Asked Questions,” The Kindertransport Association http://www.kindertransport.org/history09_FAQ.htm (accessed October 31, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Phyllis Lassner, *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust: Displaced Witnesses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

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 Zimble 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).

¹¹² The Kindertransport Association, “The Kindertransport and KTA History,” The Kindertransport Association, http://www.kindertransport.org/history07_KTAoverview.htm (accessed October 31, 2010).

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.¹¹³

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 Zimble 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.”¹¹⁴ 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!”¹¹⁵ 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

¹¹³ Ruth Zimble, “Topic: Should Kinder of the Kindertransport be considered Holocaust survivors and why?” in *An Anthology of Essays by Kindertransportees*, compiled for the Kindertransport Association Conference, October 15-17, 2010, unpublished, 40-41.

¹¹⁴ Eva Kollisch, “Essay: What the Kindertransport Association Meant to Me: 9/1/2010” in *An Anthology of Essays by Kindertransportees*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Kollisch, “Essay, What the Kindertransport Association Mean to Me” in *An Anthology of Essays by Kindertransportees*, 18.

its gatherings, the KTA has provided a spiritual shelter for its children; for many it has cauterized a hidden wound.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.”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

¹¹⁶ Kollisch, “Essay: What the Kindertransport Association Mean to Me” in *An Anthology of Essays by Kindertransportees*, 19.

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.¹¹⁸ 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

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.¹¹⁹

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.”¹²⁰

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

¹²¹ Association of Jewish Refugees, “Kindertransport Survey” Association of Jewish Refugees <http://www.ajr.org.uk/kindersurvey> (accessed Oct. 31, 2010).

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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