



Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Britain

Community and Belonging

Ellis Spicer

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*Dedicated to all those women in my family who put their passions on hold
for practicality.*

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Introduction

I could end my story of survival at this point. We had arrived. Germany and the years of persecution lay behind us. A new, entirely different life stood before us, and we were young and healthy enough to devote ourselves to it entirely. But everything that has since happened has had to do with our experiences during the persecution.¹

-Regina Steinitz

It is tempting to fall into a false, idealistic linear narrative of progress when it comes to the experiences of Holocaust survivors in the postwar period. While, as Regina Steinitz, survivor of multiple concentration camps echoed above, it is easy to stop in 1945, where the years of persecution under Nazism stop. But what of the lives that Holocaust survivors have led in the years since their liberation?

This book is broadly situated in the post-Second World War experience of Holocaust survivors, the associations they formed and wider debates about the attention and status given to survivors. Within the many archived oral history interviews conducted with Holocaust survivors, it is their postwar experiences and current reflections that have received markedly much less attention. There is a vast body of literature on the Holocaust; it can arguably be defined as the most prominent theme within twentieth-century historical study, with many books and articles devoted to the subject. There is such a preoccupation with writing about the Holocaust years that the postwar period can often seem like an afterthought. This became

particularly apparent during the course of my research with archived interviews in the oral history collections of the British Library, the Wiener Library and the Imperial War Museum. Within the interviews I consulted as part of this research, approximately 10% of the conversations were based on the pre-war lives of survivors, examining their families and experience of schooling and Jewish life before occupation, 80% was focused on deportation, ghettoisation and the concentration camp experience and roughly 10% covered the postwar lives of individual survivors and their community relations with other Holocaust victims.

Too often, I found a five-minute summary at the end of these interviews of 'I met my husband/wife in... (year) and we had (number) children'. Yet survivors' postwar lives were undoubtedly so much more varied than these brief biographical sentences suggested. Their subjectivities in the postwar period, revolving around how they adapted to cope with their traumatic histories with detail on how they raised their families and built new lives, are mostly missing. In very few instances did I find in archived interviews survivor perspectives of adjusting to the UK, how they felt they were received, their experiences finding work or educating themselves and how they integrated into the Jewish community already resident in the UK. When it did occur, there was often a lack of specificity, depth and focus.

In addition to the postwar period for Holocaust survivors being overlooked, Britain is a lesser discussed haven for survivors compared to other countries of settlement such as Israel and the United States. This book aims to expand on these stories of community and what survivors have experienced collectively and individually in their postwar lives in the UK. More recent historical and cultural output has been produced surrounding this topic in recent years, particularly the activities of the '45 Aid Society and the representation of the Holocaust and the survivors who settled here through dramatisations such as the *Windermere Children* and associated documentaries. This book will contribute to a narrative that is sensitive to the role these different ecologies play, as highlighted by Hannah Pollin-Galay.² In terms of contemporary British history, it cements the place of these survivors in British culture, their assimilation and the lives they have gone on to lead as successful citizens. Therefore, this work contributes a key discussion to the history of the settlement of British Holocaust survivors and their place in British society. Survivors have settled all over the world, but their experiences in Britain are a more recent phenomenon in academic work concentrating on the postwar lives of Holocaust survivors. This has also expanded into media platforms, such as

the popularity of programmes made by Robert Rinder and his mother Angela Cohen surrounding the Holocaust, giving an increased centrality and public focus to the theme of the Holocaust and its survivors who settled in Britain.³

The relationship between Britain and the Holocaust is a complex one, which Caroline Sharples deems as having been ‘hindered by an initial post-war preference to speak in universalist terms about the victims of Nazi persecution, and a struggle to comprehend the complexity of the concentration camp system’.⁴ Sharples and Jensen have referred to a developing Holocaust consciousness in Britain as extremely politicised and complicated by ‘state-sanctioned commemoration’.⁵ This is especially evident within the context that the Holocaust was a ‘distant event’ for Britain, whereby the nation has not had to endure the ‘same painful, soul-searching questions as Germany, Austria or the former occupied territories’.⁶ It is especially complicated by Britain’s relationship to its own past brutality, with a focus on the crimes of the Holocaust as a way to distract and absolve from other historic cruelties. Therefore, the Holocaust is not an omnipresent feature of the living memory of the British people in the same way as the European continent, leading to a complicated relationship between the Holocaust and the ‘Blitz spirit’ familiar to all of Britain during the Second World War. This provides a framework that could be understood, but risked equating suffering and lacking empathy, which could lead to survivors feeling marginalised.

There is a growing Holocaust consciousness within the UK that this book is founded upon. This is exemplified in the creation of a new Holocaust memorial and education centre next to the Houses of Parliament, public commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day and emphasis on the arrival of the Kindertransport in 1938 and 1939 as a key example of British generosity to young refugees. The Holocaust is, then, a firm aspect of ‘Britain’s story’, whether for noble reasons or distractive ones, and it is important to situate the role of survivors and their communities in such a consciousness. Survivors have become public figures, respected and consulted with their views holding weight and contributing towards Holocaust memory within Britain more broadly. However, the narratives of those children and young people who had direct experience of concentration camp internment are only recently coming to the fore of academia surrounding Britain and the Holocaust. The contemporary resonance of the stories of these refugees endures with current political debates surrounding offering asylum to Syrian refugees and survivors of

other atrocities worldwide. These are topics that survivors actively speak about publicly and within which they situate their own trauma.

Joy Trindles, a nurse who spent nine weeks working in a makeshift hospital in Belsen post-liberation, directly counteracts the idea of the Blitz spirit and the Holocaust. She challenges the notion that the British people had truly known what it meant to struggle in the Second World War:

We thought we had seen it all.
 The London Blitz, bombs, fires, headless corpses,
 Screaming children: Yankee Doodle Dandy!
 We thought we had seen it all...
 Then France.
 Day followed night and then another day
 Of mangled broken bous.
 Irish, Welsh and Scots
 Jerries, Poles and French –
 They cried in many tongues as needles long and sharp
 Advanced
 Their blood ran very red and so they died.
 We thought we had seen it all...

 Until Belsen
 There are no words to speak.
 We hid within our souls, deep and silent....
 We had seen it all.⁷

Trindles' words directly contrast the relationship between the Blitz spirit and the Holocaust, specifically Belsen. Therefore, we can see that there *is* a relationship between the Holocaust and Britain, both in the example of Belsen, its general 'lessons' against hatred, intolerance and human behaviour 'that give the Holocaust a continued relevance for all nations'⁸ and the aid offered to refugees and survivors both during the war and in the immediate postwar period. The liberation of Bergen-Belsen by the British has become a central focus point whereby Britain confronts the Holocaust and has a more frontline role in the concentration camps through witnessing the horrors present upon liberation. This has led Dan Stone to assert, 'we still reel at the images captured by the military photographers and film-makers at Bergen-Belsen'.⁹

While the horrors conducted at Belsen were extensive, it has been argued by Stone that 'British culture misused Belsen as a symbol of Nazi

“atrocities” without considering the humanity or specificity of the victims’.¹⁰ Andrew Ernest Dossetor, who was a British civilian medical student who treated inmates of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp following liberation, remarked upon how there were doubts surrounding whether any of the survivors would fully recover both physically and psychologically following their experiences.¹¹ This had broader implications for a project such as this which is grounded in the postwar experiences of survivors, how they cope with the weight of their traumatic experiences and how they move forward with their lives in the twentieth century. Because, clearly, they did recover physically and many went on to live successful lives free from psychological disorder, but this book will unpack to what extent the past and their traumas remained resonant for Holocaust survivors and how their traumatic experiences could either hold them back or provide strength and resilience across their life spans.

Britain differs in its initial relationship to Holocaust survivors, as passage to Britain was intended to be a temporary stopgap to secondary countries of emigration, such as Israel and America, which were harder for survivors to initially access. This then informed the survivors’ relationships with these countries, with Britain being considered as a place that took them in at first, formulating an interesting cult of gratitude that endured throughout the twentieth century.¹² Similarities can also be formulated with the international experiences of other survivors who settled in other countries. For instance, the challenges to identity are similar, struggling to decide whether they feel allegiance to their previous nationality or their acquired one remains present wherever they settle.

Themes explored within this book such as how survivor identities are validated by their close-knit communities and how the communities interact can be considered across international perspectives. However, geographies need to be considered, as countries such as the United States have a huge geographic reach that prevent survivor intimacy in a physical sense by living in close clusters of community. Additionally, Israel as an example can be considered different for survivors as they represent more of a Jewish homeland with narratives such as emphasising resistance, as seen in Hannah Pollin-Galay’s discussion of the different ‘ecologies’ that make up interview dynamics that are sensitive to national and international discourses surrounding how the Holocaust is remembered transnationally.¹³ Therefore, Holocaust survivors in Britain developed a different relationship with their host nation to other countries, owing to the smaller

geography of Britain as a nation and the relative distance between Britain and occupied Europe during the war.

The survivors interviewed for this study were mostly based in London and the South East England, but the spread of geographies within Britain throughout the chronology is particularly intriguing, with the Windermere groups, Southampton, and a group that came through Millisle in Northern Ireland. There were survivor hostels and important locations across the nation including Scotland which this book will expand upon. There are also marked divergences in geography affecting engagement with these social groups and communities for survivors, which can be as simple as a North/South London divide to a North/South divide across the whole country. The book will also engage in the broader field of British Holocaust memory and consciousness and the problems that it may provoke about Holocaust memory in the localities where survivors stayed within these hostels, covering the entirety of Great Britain.

My study retrieves those fragments from the archived interviews while placing the postwar lives of survivors centre stage in newly conducted interviews alongside archived interviews to provide comparisons and context. By giving space to the period following their arrival in Britain in late 1945 and early 1946, I was able to reconstruct their lives after their trauma, focusing on the lives they had led since. The interviewees relished being more than just a Holocaust survivor in interviews that discussed their family lives, their work, both paid and voluntary, and their role in the community, confirming that these were of interest and importance in tandem with their Holocaust survivor identity. Individuals took up the opportunity to reflect and emerging themes included hierarchy, family, the second generation and the impact of current events on their perception and indeed reawakening of their memories. The focus within my interviews became that of inner peace and looking forward to a brighter future but interspersed with worries and concerns.

Organisations such as the '45 Aid Society and the Child Survivors' Association of Great Britain (CSAGB) were instrumental in facilitating personal composure or equilibrium within this vital postwar context. Graham Dawson's oral history theory work on composure has reflected on the dual meaning of the term, where an interviewee 'composes' their narrative, quite literally they structure their experiences into a narrative and this gives them a sense of wellbeing, providing composure.¹⁴ Lynn Abrams notes that 'a respondent, in order to retain composure, will find a way to talk about a difficult experience in order to avoid dealing with the

emotions the recall might bring forth'.¹⁵ This can happen in a variety of different ways and demonstrate how there are a variety of coping strategies that individuals use in conversation to discuss what they feel comfortable with, and how they structure talking about trauma to make recounting these narratives more bearable.

Dawson has reflected on how composure is an 'inescapably social process', highly dependent on the audience and social recognition, where versions of the self and world 'figured in a narrative correspond to those of other people'.¹⁶ In short, this means that these narratives are nothing without an audience, and how the narrative of a survivor corresponds to other people's attitudes and perceptions of what it means to be a Holocaust survivor is extensively relevant. Therefore, a range of experiences can be gleaned from the same interviewee, depending on how their narrative corresponds or indeed interacts with the perceptions and assumptions of the interviewer, referred to as intersubjectivity. Ways to achieve composure can differ between individuals, but the narrative structure in an interview is usually significant, so how an individual tells their story in their own words, such as beginning with a complication and ending with a solution or using familiar narrative models and tropes from film, literature or history.¹⁷ And indeed with a key event such as the Holocaust, there is a high degree of cultural material to aid in shaping an interview and pre-existing knowledge to draw on.

This sense of coherence, wellbeing and wholeness feeds into notions of kinship and belonging within these groups and provides validation for survivors, not just of their memories but their identities as survivors, and manifests within the oral history interviews conducted for this research. It is, as Sanjay Srivastava has written: 'that most intimate and most staunchly defended of our senses: the sense of attachment and belonging'.¹⁸ Karyn Hall, writing for *Psychology Today* in 2014, focused on a broad definition of validation as 'the language of acceptance' and 'the acknowledgment that someone's internal experience is understandable and helps you stay on the same side, with a sense of belonging, even when you disagree'.¹⁹ This term is applicable to the survivor community in that whether these survivors feel as if this belonging is to a family or quasi-familial group, a gathering of peers or a coming together of friends—whilst disagreement occurs, the general consensus is unity. But as we have seen, this consensus of unity is not perceived by all.

Survivors' interpersonal relationships with other survivors provide a secure framework for their sense of belonging and allows individuals to

feel secure in their identities as a survivor. This allows them to pursue testimony as confident witnesses, assured of the message they desire to impart. And composure runs deeper for Holocaust survivors, allowing their concept of themselves, their past, present and future to align. We can see this in Michael Etkind's poem:

Have you really
 Made peace with the world
 As you near
 The end of the line
 Will you leave
 With a sigh or a smile
 Will you cling
 To the remnants of time.²⁰

The above poem, published in the *Journal of the '45 Aid Society* in 2009, evokes the sentiment that as survivors grow closer to the end of their lives, they evaluate their experiences, identities and histories. For many survivors, coming to the UK was the start of a new life, in which they forged community networks and ties that helped them come to terms with the trauma they had experienced. In the absence of a family, they created groups to support each other, with bonds that began to resemble familial relationships, what can be considered 'experiential kin'. Through reconstructing a sense of unity represented by a family, survivor and refugee associations played a vital role in the slow process of recovering from the traumas they had experienced during the Holocaust. However, in many written accounts, the story ends in 1945 with liberation, whereas for many survivors, 1945 was a new beginning and this provided a developed feeling of composure, of equilibrium and building a strong life from rocky foundations.

In addition to composure and overall sense of equilibrium, discomposure as its opposite has been defined as when survivors do not feel a sense of equilibrium, where they do not feel listened to or that their experiences form part of a recognisable framework that we would define as a 'Holocaust survivor' whether this is through media outlets such as the depiction of the Holocaust in television or film. Discomposure can manifest itself 'through irritation, tears, inconsistency and silence' and provides a real challenge for the interview, not just for the wellbeing of the interviewee and rapport but also the depth and flow of information that is recounted.²¹

Discomposure can sometimes be the direct responsibility of the interviewer, where an insensitive interviewer can lead to an interviewee's failure to achieve composure and bring about discomposure, as Hannah Pollin-Galay has noted when discussing moments of tension that can arise in an interview setting with Holocaust survivors.²² She found that culture shaped the interviewing style, with Israeli interviewers generally having a much stronger presence in interviews, offering comments, corrections, reactions, interpretations and follow-up questions.²³ This more aggressive stance was noted as more likely to produce instances of tension or discomposure when interviewing survivors.²⁴ This places the theoretical frameworks of oral history and the behaviour of the interviewer in preventing discomposure for their interviewees as paramount, especially in instances where individuals have survived trauma and are at risk of retraumatisation. Holocaust survivors are a key group that risk retraumatisation when they recount their experiences to oral historians, and therefore it is the job of the interviewer in these instances to journey with the interviewee and to ensure a comfortable and understanding setting.

The question of discomposure in the interview and ensuring a survivor/interviewee is psychologically comfortable within the interview setting raises the issue of the framework of psychological study and how it can be applied to a project such as this. It is grounded in historical events and individuals moving through a chronological time period and its accompanying life stages. It would be impossible to compose a monograph on how Holocaust survivors have interpreted their experiences in the survivor associations they form without considering the chronology of survivor psychology and responses to their trauma. The early stance of survivor psychology is an interesting topic to engage with from the perspective of this project as it lies in the interdisciplinary plain between history and the psychological effect of survivorship on the individual. After all, this project interacts with how survivors have interpreted their survival and its impact on their emotions and self-concept.

Immediately following the end of the Second World War, French researchers began examining survivors and deeming them to suffer from 'post-concentration camp asthenia', with the term 'KZ-syndrome' [*konzentrationslager*: concentration camp] being introduced by Danish physicians shortly afterwards.²⁵ Paul Friedman, in his 1948 article on displaced persons with particular reference to concentration camp survivors, considered the emotional numbing and detachment that was already starting to take place, with surface-level resilience masking deep emotional

trauma and encouraging experiences to be repressed.²⁶ The symptoms convey the development of what we now recognise as post-traumatic stress disorder, covering physical, somatic complaints to suicidal ideation, sleep difficulties and the disruption of social and interpersonal functioning.²⁷ This theorisation developed further in 1961, where psychiatrist William G. Niederland coined the term ‘survivor syndrome’.²⁸ Niederland’s thesis extended the previous notion of ‘KZ-syndrome’ by elaborating further on the experience of the survivor in their postwar lives such as the inability to experience pleasure, apathy, extreme survivor guilt and feelings of worthlessness.²⁹

The accepted view of the aforementioned symptoms was that survivors were merely depressed, but Niederland foregrounded the acute trauma experienced by those who had survived and their concomitant guilt for having survived when their relatives perished.³⁰ Paul Chodoff, a psychiatrist writing in the 1990s, drew on the nature of a syndrome affecting survivors and how it mimicked an organic disease, ‘as if nothing of importance had happened in their lives since’—conveying the reverberating impact of the nature of traumatic memory and the consistency with the symptoms described.³¹ These are broadly grouped within a PTSD framework that psychology has contributed to the historiographical understanding of trauma, leading scholar Cathy Caruth to suggest that PTSD has become ‘a symptom of history’, in the sense that the traumatised ‘carry an impossible history with them’, or they ‘become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess’.³² This perspective contrasts with the notions of post-traumatic growth as investigated by psychologists Rachel Lev-Wiesel and Marianne Amir, where survivors ‘bounce back’ from trauma in response to social support and convey an absence of depressive symptoms.³³ This therefore raises the discussion of the dichotomy between survivor vulnerability and resilience. This dichotomy was evident within the interviews I conducted as survivors proved themselves to be resilient in overcoming the difficulties associated with their trauma but did not shy away from their vulnerabilities, including moments where they felt excluded from the community or triggered by topics of conversation or lines of questioning.

And it is within this dichotomy of survivor vulnerability and resilience that oral history with Holocaust survivors, particularly that taking place within the twenty-first century, becomes a much more marked methodological standpoint that needs extensive introductory attention. Dan Bar-On asserts that listening to and conducting oral history interviews has

become an auditory challenge for the historian, it is harder for us to listen to, to interpret due to the detailed recounting of traumatic events.³⁴ This stems from the openness that has developed from survivors and their responses, where ‘ten or fifteen years ago, we would not have received such varied, detailed testimonies’.³⁵ Bar-On uses the examples of the interviews his students undertook to convey the sense that ‘something is changing’, both within the survivors and those who interview them.³⁶ It can be argued that this perceived change reveals itself in timing and chronology—Bar-On, writing in the 1990s, expressed how the timing of his work was indicative of its breadth and depth of responses, citing likely refusal from many survivors in the earlier years but concern that in the years that followed, it would be ‘too late’ to extract this knowledge, perspective and experience.³⁷

Yet my study reveals that Bar-On was too pessimistic that ‘a few years from now it would be too late’ as there are still survivors alive today who actively bear witness to their traumatic experiences, 12 of which were interviewed for this project.³⁸ Approaching two decades on from Bar-On’s assessment of the field, this really is the last possible time to conduct oral history interviews with survivors; in a few years, there will be nobody left who can testify first-hand to the horrors of the Holocaust. Consequently, interviewing the last remaining survivors about their lives after the war is both timely and crucial. This provides a sense of urgency and the answer to the question ‘why now?’ It is within this context that the interviewees were approached. Fuelled by an awareness of their advancing age and encouragement from ‘societal interest in the Holocaust’, they often agree to be interviewed, as part of the practice of ‘engaging en masse in the task of leaving a record’.³⁹ And this task of preserving their histories can indeed have its own limitations—oral testimonies can provide ‘conflicting accounts and disparate opinions’, but its subjectivity and examination of individual selfhoods is a key strength and allows empathy into the multitude of ways events can unfold and affect individuals.⁴⁰

Interviewing survivors is not a recent phenomenon, Joanne Rudof has highlighted that David Boder’s 1949 work ‘I Did Not Interview The Dead’ is an early example of this type of work, with interviews taking place in displaced person camps in France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany.⁴¹ A key aspect to a broader discussion of evolving testimony contexts is the changing chronology and emphasis in survivor oral history. Institutional priorities at organisations such as Yale can be seen as responding to a dwindling survivor community. As a response, these institutions have had to

‘expand their missions’ to include not just collecting testimony but preserving and circulating it for future generations in ‘socially relevant’ ways for ‘those who will have had no exposure to living witnesses’.⁴² Therefore these organisations need to think about pre-existing Holocaust knowledge and whether it will remain as present in a world without Holocaust survivors to impart their messages. As a result, it is a pedagogical mission as much as a mission to record testimony.

Furthermore, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman found that many interviewers for the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale were psychotherapists, with survivors recounting their stories often for the first time in these settings across the 1990s.⁴³ By contrast, survivor subjects in the interviews newly conducted for this project had imparted their stories in an oral history setting multiple times over the decades before the interviews with the author took place. Consequently, the psychological burden of recounting their stories for the first time was not a factor. Therefore, what emerges is a comparative difficulty between the two chronologies and differing interview contexts as survivors have reached a certain level of equilibrium regarding their experiences as their life course has advanced and as they have attained confidence within the interview setting.

Furthermore, it is difficult to compare institutionally gathered testimony against interviews conducted by myself due to ‘a divergence in aims, method and practice’.⁴⁴ Shoah Foundation interviewers were trained ‘not to engage in discussion’ but to work as guides by asking questions to facilitate the survivor telling their story ‘in their own words’.⁴⁵ Noah Shenker has found this methodology problematic due to a lack of consideration of ‘how the interviewer was to select and present questions to a witness without necessarily serving as an active partner in dialogue’.⁴⁶ This presents a tension in aims: whether to prioritise rapport and the interviewees’ psychological comfort, or chronology, accuracy and the limited appearance of the interviewer in recorded data. Within this project, the interviewer is present in recorded data as a partner in the oral history interview and exchange, with their identities being on display as much as the interviewees. Questions were asked to unpack how survivors felt within their communities; therefore it was important that they felt comfortable in the presence of the interviewer, could ask follow-up questions and did not view the interviewer as a silent partner in the narrative.

The development of rapport between interviewer and interviewee cannot be understood, indeed Henry Greenspan has advocated for survivors being interviewed multiple times across a wider chronology, to address the

feature of ‘the unsaid’ in testimony. The unsaid is referred to by Greenspan as ‘the largest category of silences’ and highlights the ‘extent to which survivors are deliberate about how and what they recount’.⁴⁷ Interviewees therefore have a high level of agency within the interview setting, and through sustained conversation, interviewers can witness ‘how survivors explain their lives...over the course of multiple interviews’.⁴⁸ The ‘unsaid’ became demonstrably present in the interviews undertaken for this project. This is due to questions that may not be asked on issues felt to be off limits, a rapport or ‘chemistry’ between interviewer and interviewee, and the anonymity promised to individuals if they so choose which can provoke free discussions surrounding potentially difficult to navigate topics. This becomes more evident in non-institutional oral history, whereby the focus is on rapport and composure more than objective, consistent data-gathering. As a result, tensions between survivors can be observed more poignantly in more personalised modes of oral history that divert from institutional conventions.

The interviewees for this project consist of 68 archived interviews from a variety of institutions such as the British Library, Imperial War Museum and USC Shoah Foundation (otherwise known as the Visual History Archive). Nine interviews were conducted with Holocaust survivors who formed membership of two main groups of the Holocaust survivor community within the UK, the Child Survivors’ Association of Great Britain (CSAGB) and the ‘45 Aid Society.

The sensitivity of the subject matter and some of the individual topics led to a desire to have exclusion and inclusion criteria for interviewees that prevented discomposure and encouraged an open and honest exchange, but also the confidence of survivors in answering questions and addressing tensions they felt present within their communities. For instance, Holocaust survivors who had never spoken about their wartime experiences were unable to be consulted as part of the interview sample, positing that these sorts of recollections were best placed for psychological professionals who could support survivors in their initial testimony journey. Therefore, confidence was a key attribute of these survivors; they had an ability to challenge the line of questioning, ask follow-up questions of the interviewer and to end the interview if they did not feel happy. This feeds into the vulnerability and resilience dichotomy. Having such criteria in place ensured that the interviewees were less likely to experience retraumatisation from being interviewed.

Natan Kellermann, a clinical psychologist heavily involved with the AMCHA project in Israel, which assists survivors with the impact of their traumatic memories, has written a five-period chronology of ‘post-war adjustment’.⁴⁹ These periods begin with an ‘emotional crisis’ (Stage 1) directly after the war, where survivors recover from physical ailments caused by the camps, search for surviving relatives and attempt to come to terms with their experiences.⁵⁰

He summarises it as the ‘surviving survival’ period and marks it as the beginning of a new journey.⁵¹ This work will begin with this initial stage of how survivors physically recover and what the challenges were to their immediate emotional and psychological recovery, undertaken with the support of external individuals and organisations.

The ‘surviving survival period’ then gives way to the ‘immigration and absorption period’ of the 1950s (Stage 2) and the ‘social adjustment and reintegration’ period of the 1960s and 1970s (Stage 3) dominated by the idea of ‘building’—families, communities, cultures and finances.⁵² In these periods, there is a concerted effort to ‘move on and leave the tragic past behind’.⁵³ Survivors crave distractions from their traumatic memories and go on to build successful lives through the lens of family and work ethic but maintain these strong bonds with each other. It is important to examine how they do both, and whether they manage this successfully or with difficulties.

Social adjustment and reintegration as the third stage of the postwar lives of survivors’ feeds into the fourth of Kellermann’s stages, which he defines as ‘ageing and regression’ in the 1980s and 1990s, where a survivor ages and their repressed memories begin to emerge. This can coincide with the retirement of these individuals where they were less busy and therefore had more capacity to think about their past experiences.⁵⁴ Kellermann’s fourth stage also overlapped with many of the interviews undertaken by the USC Shoah Foundation and the Imperial War Museum, where survivors recounted their testimonies to trained psychotherapists and interviewers and began to process memories they had been avoiding in the second and third stages of Kellermann’s assessment.

As a result, we now find ourselves in the fifth and final stage of Kellermann’s, where survivors receive public recognition for their experiences, where they are consulted and utilised as an educational resource. Survivors are active, respected voices within the country and their communities, and this will be addressed in a chapter dedicated to survivor activism and their outspokenness on current events. This is a by-product

of their recognition and allows them to confidently pursue educational initiatives via their testimony and speaking out in media outlets.

In line with Kellermann's timeline, this monograph will address the differing stages of the postwar lives of survivors, covering an initial rehabilitative stage focusing on physical and sometimes psychological healing, how they distract themselves from their traumatic pasts, how they acculturate into British society and how they raise children within British culture and what this can mean for their own identities. This book will trace a chronological shift through the twentieth-century lives of survivors but also is sensitive to the themes that emerge from within, such as the identity of survivors and how they distract themselves from their traumatic histories through their children, occupations and personal lives. Further themes include how they embrace their survivor status and identity and become active within education, current events and media coverage surrounding the Holocaust, showcasing their confidence in the story they have to tell.

The story of the Holocaust did not end with the liberation of Nazi concentration camps in 1945. Survivors continued to face significant challenges such as adjusting to a new country and finding a sense of belonging in postwar Britain without their relatives who had perished in the Nazi genocide. The most well-known of these survivors were the so-called Windermere Children, a group of some 300 orphaned Jewish youngsters who came to the Lake District in the summer of 1945 under the auspices of the Central British Fund (CBF). Other groups supported by the CBF followed, leading to 732 unaccompanied child refugees living in hostels across the UK. In addition, there were other groups that followed such as the Wintershill group of similar size to the Windermere children. Overall, around 5000 came to Britain through schemes such as these and other ad hoc initiatives. This book will follow these groups and other survivor groups from their arrival in Britain to their present-day lives in twenty-first-century Britain.

This book adopts a thematic and chronological approach that is sensitive to how these groups evolve across a wider span of time hitherto unexplored in the literature. It opens with the liberation of survivors from camps, emigration processes, initial experiences upon arrival in the UK and the first steps towards rehabilitation. It then proceeds to consider the former refugees in early adulthood, a period characterised chiefly by a focus on building careers and families, as well as the development of survivor communities themselves. While some people restricted interactions to small friendship groups, others sought to form alternative support

groups, often as a result of tensions or a continual struggle to ‘belong’ to wider survivor networks. The final section of this book examines the process of retirement and how this affected Holocaust survivor activism, whether in terms of sharing stories to school audiences, speaking out in the media in response to current events, or lobbying politicians for social change.

Ultimately, this book demonstrates the need to recognise the complexity of survivor identity and emphasise their self-reflection and evolution of their self-concept. The uniting theme of this project is the validation of survivor identity and how this theme crosses from their arrival in the UK, the development of these communities and how survivors interact with each other. This is not always a primary aim of survivor actions, but there are many examples of how survivors seek to belong to these communities and can face an identity crisis when they are not welcomed or treated differently based on a hierarchy of suffering. This book emphasises the need to stop treating survivors as hagiographical figures with identities reduced solely to the heroism of survival. This project represents survivors from these communities, in their own words, outlining what they have gained and potentially lost through interactions with others. This book will consider how survivors journey separately and together to a form of composure, where they feel equilibrium and a sense of coping with their past traumas, that they belong and are able to move forwards.

NOTES

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