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**Ten Thousand Children: Rethinking  
Childhood Experiences of Family Life  
Among Kindertransportees**

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## Ten Thousand Children: Rethinking Childhood Experiences of Family Life Among Kindertransportees.



**Figure 1.** Left, 'Jewish refugee children, part of a Children's Transport from Germany, soon after arriving in Harwich. Great Britain, December 2, 1938', photo courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Right, 'Jewish refugee children, who are members of the first Kindertransport from Germany, arrive in Harwich, England, 1938', photo also courtesy of USHMM.

This study would not have been possible without the testimonies of *Kinder*, which I was lucky enough to access. I send my heartfelt gratitude to them for sharing their often-traumatic life stories.

Thank you to my wonderful tutor, Dr. Andy Flack, for his continual encouragement and guidance.

The staff at the Wiener Library, London, deserve special thanks, for their help and patience whilst I looked through hundreds of documents.

To my family and friends, I appreciate your support and patience enormously.

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## Introduction:

*Then there was the trauma of re-establishing some infrastructure of normality in a strange land, with new families, however sympathetic and kind, with the child enjoying a dubious status, neither a temporary guest, nor adopted, a sort of twilight world of not knowing where he or she belonged, which was a state of being that was to last, for some, all their lives.<sup>1</sup>*

The above extract is written by Fred Barschak, expressing his feelings on arriving in Britain from Germany in 1938. He was one of approximately ten thousand (mostly Jewish) children who were brought to Britain in 1938-39 from territories under Nazi control, under the Kindertransport scheme.<sup>2</sup> Anthony Grenville posed the question of how the Kindertransport scheme came to be taken by Britain, 'a country not always known for its generosity to asylum-seekers in the twentieth century?' Jewish immigration was greatly limited before 1938, with fewer than ten thousand Jewish refugees admitted to Britain from Germany between 1933 and 1938.<sup>3</sup> British historian Tony Kushner has offered an answer, suggesting that the explosion of the November 1938 pogroms in Germany created a far-reaching 'repulsion amongst the public as well as at a parliamentary level.' This did not eliminate the 'anti-alienism sections of the press and society' completely, but 'there were few who could justify the open viciousness of this night of terror and the Nazis' subsequent actions against the Jews.'<sup>4</sup> Approximately a week after the pogroms, Sir Samuel Hoare (British Home Secretary) announced the government's new refugee policy; that all children whose maintenance could be guaranteed by charitable organisations or private individuals could be admitted to Britain 'without the individual checks used for older refugees.'<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Barschak, "Personal Accounts of the Kindertransport", quoted in Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport* (New York: Plume, 1995), xix.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Laquer, *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001), pp.189-191.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Grenville, 'The Kindertransports: An Introduction' in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowitz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspectives, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, vol.13 (2012), p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.147.

<sup>5</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.104.

unaccompanied minors ranged from 1 to 17 years-old, boarding trains from Greater Germany to Britain between December 1938 and the outbreak of war in September 1939.<sup>6</sup> It was within this context that over ten thousand children were uprooted and brought to an alien country, a place now expected to be called 'home'.

This dissertation aims to carry out an in-depth analysis of *Kinder* experiences. It will argue that the experiences of those who arrived on the Kindertransport in 1938-39 were experiences that cannot, and must not, be homogenized. There was no single Kindertransport experience, they were decidedly individual and must be understood in all their diversity and complexity. It will also reveal that the carer-child relationship had a significant influence on the shaping of *Kinder* experiences. As of yet, little academic study has been devoted to the custodians of Jewish refugee children, and the carer-child relationship. As parental substitutes, they exerted great influence on *Kinder* lives and experiences, making an understanding of their role and influence a pre-requisite to understanding Kindertransportees' experiences.

Kushner has claimed that Kindertransportees are the most documented group of refugees in recent British history, arguing that 'of all refugee movements in twentieth century Britain' the Kindertransport scheme has produced 'the largest number of histories, memoirs, exhibitions, plays, documentaries, films...and memorials.'<sup>7</sup> Its enduring resonance may owe much to its key position within British public narratives of the Holocaust, offering a 'celebratory' and 'heroic' narrative of Britain's past.<sup>8</sup> The British have come to see the scheme as evidence of their altruism and generosity, constituting one of their finest hours in the war against National Socialism. This narrative should not be entirely undermined; these children were undoubtedly protected from the atrocities to which many of their families were later subjected, and several of them went on to live happy and successful lives in Britain. However, such scholarship fails to recognise the complex reality and deeper meaning of these experiences, and the historical reality of the Kindertransports is at risk of

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<sup>6</sup> Frances Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees: The Scottish Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p.xxxi.

<sup>7</sup> Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, p.141.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Sharples, 'The Kindertransport in British Historical Memory' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*, p.20.

becoming 'somewhat obscured by this largely ahistorical mythology that has grown up around it.'<sup>9</sup>

Only more recently has scholarship become more sceptical of this narrative, adopting a more critical assessment of *Kinder* experiences. Historians such as Kushner and Louise London have led the way in asking more awkward questions about the flaws of the Kindertransport and the difficulties that children had in adapting to British life.<sup>10</sup> This has developed alongside a growth in written and oral testimony by former *Kinder* themselves. Dorit Bader-Whiteman has claimed that the lack of memory literature by former Kindertransportees in the immediate post-war period can be attributed to feelings amongst *Kinder* that their stories were 'less important or dramatic' compared to survivors of Nazi concentration camps.<sup>11</sup> However, since the late 1960s, and particularly since the first Kindertransport reunion in 1988, memoir collections such as Karen Gershon's *We Came as Children* (1966) and Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn's *I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports* (1990) have been influential in bringing to the forefront the more painful reality of many experiences and the former Kindertransportees' longing to narrate their childhood.<sup>12</sup> These developments have been central to a deepening understanding of the experiences of this group of child refugees, encouraging historiography to view events through a more critical lens. It also speaks to issues in other historiographies, which I will deal with later in this dissertation. Kindertransport scholarship has largely overlooked the influence that British custodians wielded in shaping the experiences of *Kinder* in Britain. Whilst Jennifer Craig-Norton and Andrea Hammel have recognised the impact of the carer-child relationship on these children, this relationship has largely been disregarded in Kindertransport literature; this is something which this dissertation hopes to rectify.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Grenville, 'The Kindertransports: An Introduction' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> See Kushner, *Remembering Refugees* and London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948*.

<sup>11</sup> Dorit Whiteman as found in Andrea Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View: Martha Blend's *A Child Alone*, Vera Gissing's *Pearls of Childhood* and Ruth L. David's *Ein Kind unserer zeit*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 49, Issue 2 (2013), p.202.

<sup>12</sup> Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View', p.202.

<sup>13</sup> See Jennifer Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport: History and Memory' (B.A. Australian National University, 1976); Craig-Norton, 'Polish *Kinder* and the Struggle for Identity' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*; Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View'; Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*.



Similarly, whilst gender and exile studies have developed in recent years, little has been done on the narrower scholarship of gender in the Kindertransport context. As this dissertation will discuss in Chapter Three, gender deserves greater attention in studies of the Kindertransport, and should be a key concern for future historical research on the subject.

I employ the structure of three chapters to make up my dissertation, based upon three themes which I have found to be most central to the oral and written testimonies of former *Kinder*. Broadly, Chapter One is an analysis of the difficult process of adapting to British life, struggling with issues such as language barriers, alien hostility and cultural norms. It will argue that *Kinder* faced a range of difficulties on arrival in Britain, many of which contributed to their feelings of isolation and alienation. Chapter Two focuses on the reception and treatment of *Kinder* by foster families, revealing the emotional and physical abuse and exploitation that many children were appallingly subjected to in their new homes. It aims to depart from the 'perfected' narrative of the Kindertransport scheme and, like Chapter One, reveals that the experiences of many *Kinder* were far more traumatic, and painful, than this narrative has portrayed. This chapter is a particularly sensitive one, and emphasises the importance of shedding light on the darker, as well as the more positive, experiences of life in Britain under the scheme, again reinforcing that these experiences cannot be homogenised. Finally, Chapter Three outlines the significance of gender in shaping *Kinder* experiences, which has largely been disregarded previously. This chapter will assert that it played a central role in shaping the contemporary experiences of *Kinder*, as well as influencing the later recording and recollection of these experiences by male and female Kindertransportees. It will argue that gender was a significant factor in influencing the ability to adapt to British life (as in Chapter One) together with the challenges of the carer-child relationships (as in Chapter Two). Each chapter will continually focus on the role of the foster parents in influencing these experiences, recognising that they were in fact crucial actors in determining the experiences of this group of child refugees; whether positively or negatively. These three chapters combine to seek to show a more nuanced understanding of Kindertransport experiences in Britain in 1938-9, stretching beyond typical narratives of the children who were 'saved' from Nazism, and emphasising that each of these experiences was distinctly individual.

My evidence is largely derived from a combination of testimonies from the USC's online Visual History Archive and other oral testimonies, letters and memoirs held at the Wiener Library special collections, and collected memoirs such as *We Came as Children*, *I Came Alone* and *Into the Arms of Strangers*. Although these sources are extremely useful, inevitably each one also has its limitations. The most obvious of these is that many of the sources were written or recorded in retrospect, years after the Kindertransports. This raises questions of the reliability of memory; critics of oral history have often insisted that these sources have a distance from events, and thus 'undergo the distortion of faulty memory.' However, Alessandro Portelli has countered this with his claim that these sources might 'compensate distance with a much closer personal involvement.'<sup>14</sup> This is to argue that memories are more reliable than we may expect. However, the question of what former *Kinder* remember (particularly in relation to Chapter Three and gendered memory), is a valuable research question in itself in this study. Another potential issue is that I did not have the opportunity to conduct the oral history interviews used in this dissertation myself, and so I was unable to ask explicit questions regarding their experiences, particularly in relation to the carer-child relationship. However, these limitations can also be a strength: testimonies often point to relations with foster parents and the trauma of experiences without any specific direction from the interviewer.

Similarly, the sources used in this dissertation are from former German *Kinder*, fostered at aged 13-17 when they arrived in Britain in 1938-39. The sources for children falling within this specification were the most abundant, most developed, and thus best-suited for the purposes of this study. Thus, this dissertation recognises the importance of, but does not claim to represent, the experiences of thousands of children who fell outside this age and nationality bracket, or who were placed in other accommodation (such as hostels or boarding schools) in the absence of a guarantor. The final methodological issue which I have discovered in researching *Kinder* experiences is the relative lack of sources regarding the influence of foster parents; most of whom have now died and so cannot be interviewed or record their experiences. However, I hope to turn this weakness into a strength: this lack of

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<sup>14</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), p.53.

correspondence in sources between carer and *Kinder*, and lack more broadly of archived material from foster parents, inspired this dissertation in recognising the importance and the need to focus on familial influence in *Kinder* experiences, and the need for greater consideration of it.

The *Kinder's* stories deserve to be understood in their entirety and individually in their own right, without forcing our own meaning onto them. This also highlights the dangers of homogenising experiences; there is no such thing as 'the' Kindertransport experience, and this dissertation hopes to emphasise the importance of understanding this throughout. This too is seminal in analysing current refugee crises as well, as this dissertation will later discuss. The Kindertransport scheme and the individual experiences of *Kinder* must be understood in all their complexities, in helping to inform our approach to and understanding of the rescue of child refugees today. Historians, politicians and wider society can reach a deeper understanding of the Kindertransport by acknowledging this diversity of experience and the impact that forced migration had on children, as well as the influence of actors such as the foster parents who have hitherto not been focused upon.

## Chapter 1: Becoming British:

An elderly woman sits in front of a camera. A voice from outside the frame asks her the question, 'Did you experience any Anti-Semitism or discrimination in England?' She replies, 'from being a Jewish refugee, I became a Jewish refugee evacuee, and then I became a German enemy alien...and they let you know it...you became the enemy alien.'<sup>15</sup>

When watching individual interviews with former *Kinder*, like Eva Abraham-Podietz's, it becomes clear that whilst each of these children underwent the emotional journey from Germany to their new homes in England, their experiences and circumstances were decidedly individual. Edward Timms proposes that the decades long time lapse between the arrival of *Kinder* in Britain and their reflection and recording of their experiences is strongly suggestive of their struggles to adapt 'both socially and psychologically to an alien environment.'<sup>16</sup> Grenville supports this, suggesting that although some *Kinder* found the transition into British life less painful, it is inevitable that the pain of familial separation, growing up in an alien environment, and in some cases adopting a new 'British' identity, had an impact.<sup>17</sup> However, whilst literature has focused on the initial separation and long-term impacts of the scheme on children, the struggles of adapting to British life in the early stages of arrival deserves more attention. As Jennifer Norton asserts, the separation from parents and the discovery of their fate were only the 'bookend moments' between which the children 'endured other shocks'; such as 'the loss of language, separation from siblings, blighted educational opportunities, alienation from religion, and most significantly, lack of parental guidance and love.'<sup>18</sup> This chapter will argue that these aspects were fundamental in shaping *Kinder* experiences, and were largely influenced by foster parents who determined how closely connected *Kinder* could stay to their former lives.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Eva Abraham-Podietz, (Interview 321), USC Visual History Archive (1994).

<sup>16</sup> Edward Timms, 'The Ordeals of *Kinder* and Evacuees in Comparative Perspective' in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspectives, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, vol.13, p.134.

<sup>17</sup> Grenville, 'The Kindertransports: An Introduction' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*, p.12.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport: History and Memory' (B.A. Australian National University, 1976), p.30.

Being unable to communicate in their mother-tongue is a theme which is present in the majority of *Kinder* accounts. Language acted as a troubling barrier between the German-speaking children and their English-speaking foster families; many *Kinder* were unable to express their fears of being in a strange place, heightening feelings of isolation and homesickness. Tamara Sessler conveyed issues of language in her account, recognising that ‘family Stanton meant well’, but they ‘had no common language and could not communicate with each other.’<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Inge Sadan recalls being separated from her brother and taken into a home where ‘the natives were not going to learn German...[and she] would have to make the supreme effort of learning English.’<sup>20</sup> Being unable to communicate with their new families put many *Kinder* under a great deal of stress, greatly increasing feelings of loneliness and alienation. Unwillingness on the part of foster parents to communicate in any other way than in ‘perfect English’, as in Inge’s experience, is also common in many *Kinder* stories. Ingrid Jacoby confided in her diary on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1939 that her foster father said he’d send her away if she didn’t learn to speak English, and that he listened at her door so that she and her sister Lieselotte did not communicate in German.<sup>21</sup> These feelings of isolation were exacerbated by the considerable lack of affection that many *Kinder* recall experiencing, compared to the warmth many of them described in family life at home. Gerti Urman expressed her sadness that ‘since coming to England’ she had been given ‘neither a hug nor a kiss.’<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Inge Sadan recalled how ‘in England everybody seemed very reserved. There were no hugs and no kisses. Everything was cold.’<sup>23</sup> For many Kindertransportees, being denied even the smallest gestures of affection made the pain of parental separation and inability to communicate far worse. Lorraine Allard had tried to greet her new foster mother by hugging her, following her mother’s advice that whoever fostered her, she ‘must treat as a temporary mother.’ Yet, Lorraine’s gesture was met with the words ‘that’s sissy’; words that lingered in her memory for years after.<sup>24</sup> This pressure

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<sup>19</sup> Tamara Sessler in Inge Sadan (ed.), *No Longer A Stranger in a Strange Land* (Jerusalem: Inge Saden, 1999), p.84.

<sup>20</sup> Inge Sadan in Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn (eds.), *I Came Alone: Stories of the Kindertransport* (Brighton: Book Guild Publishing, 1990), p.285.

<sup>21</sup> Ingrid Jacoby, *My Darling Diary: A Wartime Journal: Falmouth 1939-44* (England: United Writers Publications Ltd, 1998), p.29.

<sup>22</sup> Gerti Urman in Inge Sadan (ed.), *No Longer a Stranger*, p.130.

<sup>23</sup> Inge Sadan in Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer (eds.), *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), p.207.

<sup>24</sup> Lorraine Allard as found in Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, p.123.

on *Kinder*, not only to adapt to British life but to leave their native language behind, only added to the psychological and emotional disturbances that many children experienced on arrival in Britain.

For some *Kinder*, their adoption by Jewish guardians allowed them to adapt to British life more seamlessly. Yet, even those fortunate enough to be taken in by Jewish foster parents sometimes encountered struggles caused by the difference between German-speaking Jews from Central Europe, who were 'often middle-class, assimilated, prosperous and unreligious', and British Jews in the East End of London, who were 'still much closer to the traditional Jewish practices of Eastern Europe, religiously observant and poor.'<sup>25</sup> Werner Rosenstock described how a Jewish couple who had taken a refugee child complained to him that 'they expected a downtrodden and impoverished child' but instead the child was 'not only well clad but also brought with her several cases with beautiful new dresses and other articles.' When the family later sat down for the Friday Night Dinner, it turned out that the 'girl had never heard the Sabbath blessings...the family were outraged.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Edward Mendelsohn recalls how his foster family were Jewish, but 'there was a cultural chasm between [them] – they were immigrants from Romania, spoke Yiddish and ran a successful clothing business. [His] school was rough, totally different from what [he] was used to.'<sup>27</sup> Thus, although it is commonly perceived that all *Kinder* in Jewish homes were perfectly happy, for some it provided no relief from the pain and isolation.

On the other hand, an insufficient number of Jewish families offering to foster Kindertransportees meant that some children were unable to be placed with a Jewish family. As Amy Gottlieb comments, 'while there was generous financial support from the Jewish community for the rescue of the children, the same spirit of benevolence was not manifest when foster families were needed.'<sup>28</sup> This claim is supported by the Association of

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<sup>25</sup> Grenville, 'The Kindertransports: An Introduction' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished autobiography of Werner Rosenstock, typescript, Part II, p.7f as found in Grenville, 'The Kindertransports: An Introduction' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*, p.11

<sup>27</sup> Edward Mendelsohn memoir, 'they took the children away', Wiener Library Archives, (1368/2/9).

<sup>28</sup> Amy Gottlieb as found in Vera Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p.44.

Jewish Refugees' survey, 'Making New Lives', which reveals that out of the 1036 respondents for the main survey, only 255 of them were adopted by Jewish families.<sup>29</sup> The possibility of being taken in by a non-Jewish family often came as a huge shock when *Kinder* arrived in their new homes. Bertha Leverton arrived in Britain aged 15; when she was offered a home by a Christian family in Coventry (where her brother had been moved to), she 'jumped at the chance.' She described how she did not even think to ask about their religious preferences, but that 'people who are not brought up in Orthodox families don't realise the trauma for a child to be taken completely out of its Jewish environment and having to adjust to a Christian home.' Many accounts portray similar sentiments, and the struggles of being unable to express yourself whilst not wanting to appear ungrateful. 'How dare you say you would rather be in a Jewish home when there wasn't a Jewish home for you to go to?'<sup>30</sup> This created significant conflict for *Kinder*, who thought they should show gratitude but struggled to adapt to life in a non-Jewish household. However, one *Kind*, Ilse, was taken in by a Church of England clergyman and his wife. At her funeral in 2001, her son Leonard explained how they 'never put any pressure on her to convert' and 'facilitated [her] to get continuing Jewish instruction by correspondence course' from their local synagogue. This shows that some children were able to maintain their religious practices, even in a non-Jewish household. Leonard noted how 'in view of the many unhappy experiences of so many 'Kinder' in their foster homes, this is well worth emphasizing.'<sup>31</sup> Accounts such as this are rare in the body of *Kinder* testimony, and most express the difficulties of adapting to non-Jewish, and even Jewish (but non-Orthodox) homes. Nonetheless, religion was an important part of *Kinder* experiences, and it influenced these experiences in different ways.

It was not just language and religion which were factors in the reception of *Kinder* and their experiences of adapting to British life. The reception of Kindertransportees in Britain has often been presented as an 'emblem of the altruistic nature of British philanthropy.' This narrative has often ignored the relevance of anti-Semitism or 'alien hostility' from the host nation to the children, overlooking the discrimination that many *Kinder* were faced with on

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<sup>29</sup> Association of Jewish Refugees, 'Making New Lives' survey, 2009. <<https://ajr.org.uk/kindertransport-survey>> [accessed 05/02/18]

<sup>30</sup> Bertha Leverton Interview Transcript, Wiener Library Archives (1368/2/2/95), pp.12-13.

<sup>31</sup> Leonard Haas letter to Bertha Leverton (18 July 2001), Wiener library Archives, (1368/2/2/118).

arriving in Britain.<sup>32</sup> While previously it had been the Jewish part of their identity which had been attacked, they now faced substantial 'devaluation of the German aspects of their selves' as well.<sup>33</sup> Eva Abraham-Podietz's interview extract at the start of this chapter is a useful embodiment of this hostility, as she recalled being labelled the 'enemy alien.'<sup>34</sup> Memoirs indicate that Kindertransportees were often bullied by British children and often by their foster parents, who by the outbreak of war in 1939 associated being German as being synonymous with being a Nazi.<sup>35</sup> This created huge confusion amongst many *Kinder* about their national and religious identities, and even encouraged some children to detach themselves from their German-Jewish roots entirely. Ingrid Gassman explains how her 'confusion was threefold.' She was not sure if she was German or English, Jew or Gentile, and admits to saying she 'got sore from sitting on the fence.'<sup>36</sup> This is common of many *Kinder* accounts, which portray struggles with identity, often made worse by the encouragement of foster parents to adopt a wholly British identity. The character of Eva in Diane Samuel's *Kindertransport* echoes the testimonies of Kindertransportees who experienced a major identity crisis. After establishing a strong bond with her foster mother in England, Eva wished to dissolve her bonds with her Jewish parents and heritage; changing her name from Eva to the more Anglicized Evelyn, and even changing her birthday on her papers to the day she arrived in Britain.<sup>37</sup> So too for many others the pressure to conform and the desire to often culminated in a rejection of their own nationality. This is further exemplified in one *Kind's* saddening account of his struggle with his German nationality arriving in Britain, aged sixteen:

*My attitude towards Germany was complex, tortured and muddled. From within I had dissociated from everything German. I no longer regarded myself as German and I strongly resented that others should still do so. I cursed my accent which prevented*

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<sup>32</sup> Frances Williams, *The Forgotten Kindertransportees: The Scottish Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.1.

<sup>33</sup> 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), p.26.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Eva Abraham-Podietz, (Interview 321), USC Visual History Archive (1994).

<sup>35</sup> Guske, *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context*, p.26.

<sup>36</sup> Ingrid Gassman in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p.117.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Sterling, 'Rescue and Trauma: Jewish Children and the Kindertransports during the Holocaust' in James Marten, *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), pp.65-66.



*me from hiding my German origin. Nothing enraged me more than to be told, 'once a German, always a German.'*<sup>38</sup>

These struggles often resulted in the children feeling that they 'did not belong', another common thread in the oral and written testimonies of former *Kinder*. Ingrid Jacob confided in her diary on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1939 that 'these people are strangers...this is not your country. You weren't born here and consequently you don't belong here.' These feelings stemmed largely from her relationship with her 'frosty' foster parents, who made her feel as if she would 'die with misery.'<sup>39</sup> This sense of alienation and isolation, whilst not by any means present in all *Kinder* accounts, is evidenced in many accounts of *Kinder* experiences. Whilst a prevalent theme for many, the underlying reasons *for* such alienation were many and varied. Although all *Kinder* shared the common experience of arriving in a strange new country, these experiences were distinctly individual, and each and every *Kinder* faced their own set of challenges adapting to life in Britain.

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<sup>38</sup> One *Kind* (anonymous) in Karen Gershon (ed.), *We Came As Children: A Collective Autobiography*, (London, 1989), p.131.

<sup>39</sup> Jacoby, *My Darling Diary*, p.28.

## Chapter Two: Celebrating Safety?

*I left a wonderful, lovable, cultured family and was taken in by a wonderful, lovable and cultured family...from the minute I walked in, I felt at home, I felt the warmth in that family, I felt the love that oozed out.<sup>40</sup>*

This extract comes from Steffi Segerman's account of her time in Britain as a Kindertransportee. She describes the warmth and affection she felt from her new foster family, making her transition into British life as seamless and welcoming as possible. This contrasts to Bertha Leverton's unsettling account of her emotionally and physically abusive carers, Auntie Vera and Uncle Billy:

*She tormented us in many different ways, little unkindnesses, things which hurt me very much at the time...but Auntie Vera's spitefulness and her torment was nothing compared to Uncle Billy's 'trying to be friendly-ness', which I successfully managed to avoid for five years.<sup>41</sup>*

These extracts demonstrate the stark contrast and variation between *Kinder* experiences, further emphasizing that these experiences cannot, and must not, be homogenised. There was not one but many Kindertransport journeys, extending beyond the physical journey itself. Due to the need to place children into homes quickly, an alarming number of *Kinder* were sent to entirely unsuitable homes.<sup>42</sup> One former *Kind*, Henry Kreisel, recorded that 'because of the pressure of the moment they weren't asking were these qualified people or were they not...their goal had to be to put children into homes to save lives.'<sup>43</sup> Only in recent years has a more critical analysis of the Kindertransport emerged, with instances of such ill-treatment and abuse being recorded. Caroline Sharples suggests this is potentially due to two key reasons: firstly, foster carers are increasingly passing away, and secondly, society has become more willing to discuss cases of child abuse.<sup>44</sup> This has important

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<sup>40</sup> Steffi Segerman, 'Two letters discuss her warm family in Liverpool', Wiener Library Archives, (1368/2/2/134), p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Bertha Leverton Transcript, Wiener Library Archives, (1368/2/2/95), p.18.

<sup>42</sup> Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport', p.43.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Henry Kreisel, VHA 16930 (1996) as found in Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport', p.44.

<sup>44</sup> Sharples, 'The Kindertransport in British Historical Memory' in Hammel and Lewkowicz (eds.), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39*, p.23.

implications for former *Kinder*, who are finally able to reveal these darker experiences, and for society, who can gain a deeper insight into their complex and traumatic experiences. Here, the carer-child relationship is of utmost importance; mistreatment unavoidably shaped their experiences in Britain, and in many cases stayed with them for life. This chapter argues that *Kinder* experiences in foster homes were diverse, and often a great deal more traumatic than has been previously suggested. Yet, whilst we must not deny that these things happened, they did not happen in all cases and it is important to assess both sides of *Kinder* experiences in order to fully understand their complexity and diversity.

A number of memoirs and testimonies imply that custodians were not always altruistically-motivated in their decisions to adopt a Kindertransportee. Some record unusual reasons for acceptance into a home: fourteen-year-old Lorraine Allard was chosen to break up a romantic relationship between her foster parents' seventeen-year-old child, and his non-Jewish girlfriend.<sup>45</sup> More common was the adoption of children to provide free domestic labour or monetary gains. Harry Bibring's 1997 oral history interview is suggestive of this, admitting that his foster family 'were being paid [his] wages, so it was more or less a straightforward transaction.' Many foster families reaped the financial benefits of fostering a child and viewed the process as a 'commercial transaction.' Harry revealed that the day his sister arrived in their home, the family fired their maid, expecting her to look after their baby instead.<sup>46</sup> This created conflicting and confusing feelings for children such as Harry; on the one hand, they were being taken in by a family who showed genuine kindness, yet on the other, they were being exploited. Bernard Grunberg had a similar experience, immediately being put to work in charge of building an extravagant greenhouse in his foster father's garden. Although it was something he'd never done before, he was forced to 'plan the whole thing' down to the smallest details.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, it was reasonably common for unmarried women and elderly couples to take in children to work as carers. These homes were not necessarily inhospitable, but were often unsuitable, with many *Kinder* recording their foster parents' inexperience or inability to care for them.<sup>48</sup> Paula Hill was placed with a

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<sup>45</sup> Lorraine Allard in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Harry Bibring, USC Visual History Archives, Interview 32914 (1997).

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Bernard Grunberg, USC Visual History Archives, Interview 40678 (1998).

<sup>48</sup> Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport', pp.48-49.

Jewish couple of 'advancing years', declaring that they were 'neither prepared nor equipped for the traumatized child who entered their lives.'<sup>49</sup> Living with foster families who were ill-equipped to cope with their needs resulted in further emotional disturbances, making *Kinder* experiences in Britain more troubling, and at times psychologically damaging.

Some testimonies reveal shocking instances of explicit emotional and physical abuse. This involved some foster parents telling Kindertransportees how they 'deserved' to be treated in a similar manner to the horrific treatment of fellow Jews in Germany at that time. Alfred Traum emotionally recalled in his interview that his foster mother told him that 'the best thing she thought that had happened in a long time was what Hitler was doing to the Jews.'<sup>50</sup> Sixteen-year-old Ilse Rosenduft's foster parents manipulated her into doing all the housework, often telling her that if it wasn't for them, 'Hitler would have had [her] and that the only good German were dead German.'<sup>51</sup> Being told such awful things resonated with many of these *Kinder* throughout their lives; such comments bringing children to the realisation of both how they were being truly viewed by their carers and, even worse, as to the reality of their true parents' fate in Germany.

Beyond this deprivation were the cases of *Kinder* being physically harmed by their custodians. These stories are both shocking and heartbreaking; yet it is so important to acknowledge that they happened. Alfred Traum recalled how his foster mother occasionally struck him. He explained that looking back now, with the 'realisation' that if he had spoken out those three years could have been far more bearable, the memory is even *more* painful. Food deprivation is also a recurrent theme in many of the accounts of Kindertransport experiences - many former *Kinder* recall being deprived of food whilst their foster family indulged. Some children were not allowed food until they had developed their English enough to 'deserve it'; Ruth Barnett is 'haunted by a memory of not being given any food at the meal table until [she] asked for it in perfect English.'<sup>52</sup> One sixteen-year-old *Kind* was denied sufficient food altogether. He emphasised the discrimination he experienced in only

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<sup>49</sup> Paula Hill in Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport*, p.52.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Alfred Traum, USC Visual History Archives, Interview 24397 (1996).

<sup>51</sup> Ilse Rosenduft in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p.268.

<sup>52</sup> Ruth Barnett, *Person of No Nationality: A Story of Childhood Separation, Loss and Recovery* (London: David Paul, 2010), p.21.

being allowed one slice of bread whilst the rest of his foster family indulged endlessly in bread and jam. He found himself 'somewhere between...a poor relative and a domestic servant, without the privileges of the one or the rights of the other.'<sup>53</sup> Alongside feelings of helplessness and vulnerability and a lack of parental love and guidance, children were being denied the basic right to eat. These memoirs and interviews indicate instances of guardians' behavior that crossed the line from indifference to cruelty; often leaving deep emotional scars.

Narratives explicitly outlining *sexual* abuse do exist, but are very rare. This is partially, as Hammel notes, due to the self-selecting nature of memoir-writers and interviewees. We are less likely to find those with exceptionally traumatic experiences prepared to share them, especially not in such a public format.<sup>54</sup> Some former Kindertransportees who have alluded to emotional, physical and sexual abuse in their accounts have chosen to withhold their name or their foster parents' names. The suffering that comes from these memories means that many former *Kinder* prefer to retain a degree of self-censorship.<sup>55</sup> However, a few accounts explicitly describe horrific situations where *Kinder* came close to sexual abuse. One *Kind* sadly recalled being dramatically evicted from her foster home, after 'the husband made mildly amorous advances' one evening. This created a significant amount of trauma for this *Kind*, who was previously 'very happy both in the foster home and in the school' she attended.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Bertha admitted in one interview that although she was 'terrified of being sexually abused' by her Uncle Billy, she chose to remain with the family due to fears for her younger sister's safety.<sup>57</sup> Her sister was 'fourteen and in danger, not only for the housework...[but] of Uncle Billy.'<sup>58</sup> Her account is indicative of not only the fears of many children of being sexually abused themselves, but also of the fear for their siblings' safety. These experiences were often emotionally-scarring and extremely traumatic for the children, who already had a tumultuous transition into British life. These stories and the

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<sup>53</sup> A *Kind* (anonymous) in Gershon (ed.), *We Came as Children*, p.63.

<sup>54</sup> Andrea Hammel, 'Gender and Kindertransport memoirs' in Brinson and Hammel, *Exile and Gender I*, p.30.

<sup>55</sup> Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport', pp.10-11.

<sup>56</sup> Karen Gershon (eds.), *We Came as Children*, p.62.

<sup>57</sup> Kindertransport Play Documents, 'They Took the Children Away' by Georgina Brown, Wiener Library Archives 1368/2/9.

<sup>58</sup> Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, p.230.

influence of the foster parents on *Kinder* need to be given more prominence, in order to provide further insight into the complex experiences of the children affected.

For a small number of children, the pain of separation, compounded by the abuse they received from foster parents, proved too much for them to handle. Some *Kinder* have recalled experiencing suicidal thoughts during their time in Britain. In his interview, an emotional Bernard Grunberg admitted that he was 'in a terrible state', remembering exclaiming that if he wasn't moved within twelve months 'they would have to carry [him] out of there.' He doesn't know if he would have gone through with it, but he 'certainly had the intention.'<sup>59</sup> The minutes of the Refugee Children's Movement's (RCM) October 1943 Executive Committee meeting reveal the upsetting reality of a few *Kinder* who were pushed to their limit, and did end their lives. It notes that 'it was very much regretted that there were three deaths to report':

'Fritz Kopstein has been found gassed in his room

Hans Schmier had thrown himself from a building.

Martin Schmitz had died at Miss Essinger's school as a result of an accident in which he had been playing with a rope hanging from a tree.'<sup>60</sup>

This displays the tragic, and heartbreaking, reality that many children simply could not cope with the trauma of familial separation and struggles of being forced to start a new life in a foreign, alien culture separated by language, custom and often by religious beliefs; and often with the absence of the much-needed love and guidance they required from foster parents.

The stark reality of these accounts, far removed from the 'happy' public narrative of the Kindertransport scheme, cannot and must not be overlooked in analyzing the spectrum of experiences faced by the *Kinder*. However, the bleaker accounts go hand in hand with individual stories of benevolence and warmth which also need to be recognised, reinforcing

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Bernard Grunberg, Interview 40678, USC Visual History Archive (1998).

<sup>60</sup> Minutes of RCM Executive Committee Meeting, October 1943 as found in Craig-Norton, 'The Kindertransport', p.67.

that each *Kind* had a unique experience of coming to Britain on the Kindertransport in 1938-1939. Some former Kindertransportees claim to have only realised the love they were shown on reflection, decades later. Laura Selo wrote in a recent letter that when a 'lady dressed rather shabbily' approached her and her sisters at the station, they were 'quite frankly, disappointed', and even more so when they saw her 'dingy home.' She admits that 'it is only now, after all these years later, that [she] quite understands what a truly kind, wonderful and courageous woman Miss Harder was...having taken three unknown children into her home, given them love and understanding.'<sup>61</sup> Bertha Leverton's collective autobiography *I Came Alone* contains a multitude of positive stories of *Kinder*. In Laura Gabriel's case, she praised her 'wonderful generous' foster parents for taking her in, proclaiming her sincerest gratitude for obtaining her parents a permit to come to England.<sup>62</sup> Ruth Kagan's testimony is also uplifting, recording that 'although, of course, [they] still longed for [their] parents...by their examples of kindness, caring, and highest ethical standards' her foster parents gave her 'a renewed sense of hope in mankind.'<sup>63</sup> This is not to suggest that the lives of those children who were received by loving foster families were easy, with all their pain and trauma forgotten. The pain of separation and the emotional disturbance of beginning a new life in a strange country remained ever present. Yet, the love of these families and their hospitality went some way to ease their pain. The contribution of these benevolent foster parents should not be overlooked.

Thus, the experiences of *Kinder* at the hands of foster parents prove hugely diverse. Whilst some children were lucky enough to be received by a loving household, others were subject to emotional and physical abuse and exploitation; which in rare instances resulted in the loss of life. These stories reveal the dark, more complex reality of Kindertransport experiences, which often is overlooked in favour of a more positive narrative. Ten thousand children experienced ten thousand individual emotional and physical journeys, and each one deserves to be addressed. This chapter has aimed to reveal this diversity, while focusing on the significant role that foster parents played in shaping the early arrival of child refugees in Britain.

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<sup>61</sup> 'Thank You, Miss Harder' Letter by Laura Selo, Wiener Library Archives (1368/2/2/36), pp.1-2.

<sup>62</sup> Laura Gabriel in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p.114.

<sup>63</sup> Ruth Kagain in Leverton and Lowensohn, *I Came Alone*, p.163.

### Chapter 3: The Influence of Gender:

Historian Mary Gallant insightfully suggested: ‘scars from loss and displacement had multifaceted effects that are only just coming to light as research on the Kindertransport grows. Variables of age, gender, and class configured these scars in different ways.’<sup>64</sup>

The first two chapters of this dissertation have sought to show that *Kinder* experiences were both diverse and complex, and that the relationship between foster parent and child refugee was central to the unique experience and recollection of each *Kinder*. Gender is also a theme which, although often disregarded in Kindertransport literature, runs through many oral and written testimonies. The purpose of this chapter is to both bring to prominence and show that gender had a two-fold significance. Firstly, being male or female influenced the experiences of child refugees in their arrival, fostering ‘selection process’ and, arguably, in the treatment they later received in their new homes. Secondly, that gender has been central to shaping how these experiences have been remembered and recorded by Kindertransportees in the decades following the Kindertransport.

Gender was not always regarded as central to Holocaust studies, and it is only in recent years that gender differentiated experiences and memories have received greater attention. In the 1990s the importance of gender in experiences of the Holocaust was reconsidered, suggesting that women and men experienced National Socialist persecution differently.<sup>65</sup> It is now becoming more widely accepted that gender played an important role in shaping the experiences of child refugees and that gendered memory has influenced the body of literature and testimony we now have access to on the Kindertransport. Scholarship to date however in this area is still very narrow, and under-researched. Hammel, Craig-Norton and Gallant have posed important questions of the relevance of gender in the Kindertransport, but it still remains an important area for further historical research.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mary J. Gallant, ‘The Kindertransport: Gender and the Rescue of Jewish Children, 1938-39’ in Myrna Goldenberg and Amy Shapiro (eds.), *Different Horrors, Same Hell: Gender and the Holocaust* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013), p.208.

<sup>65</sup> Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel (eds.), *Exile and Gender I: Literature and the Press*, pp.19-22.

<sup>66</sup> See Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel (eds.), *Exile and Gender I*; Jennifer Craig-Norton, ‘The Kindertransport: History and Memory’ (B.A. Australian National University, 1976); Craig-Norton, ‘Polish *Kinder*



Gender provides an interesting lens through which to analyse *Kinder* experiences, as there has been suggestion that at different times one gender was given preference on the scheme over the other. Gallant suggests that a greater number of those leaving on the first transports were teenage boys, due to their circumcision making them vulnerable to discovery by the Nazis. These boys were seen to be at the greatest risk, and thus were given priority on the initial transports. She also suggests that later transports included an increasing number of girls because of factors relating to the host country.<sup>67</sup> However, Hammel points out that there is no absolutely reliable evidence for this, and many academic studies of the Kindertransport have concluded that there was no extensive preference given to either gender.<sup>68</sup> The papers of the Councils of German Jews evidence suggest that 48.8 per cent of those emigrating on a Kindertransport from Germany were male, and a greater 51.2 percent were female.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, of the respondents of the Kindertransport Association's 'Making New Lives' survey, 43.6 per cent were male, whilst 56.4 per cent were female.<sup>70</sup> These statistics therefore show that if there was any gender differentiation in numbers of *Kinder* arriving in Britain, these were not overwhelming. There may, as this Chapter will explore, have been a *preference* for one gender over the other, but statistics suggest that this did not largely influence who was granted access to Britain in 1938-39. It was in fact once *Kinder* arrived in Britain that gender played a significant role in shaping experiences.

This leads us to ask the question: how is gender relevant to the carer-child relationship, which this dissertation has thus far argued was central to shaping *Kinder* experiences? Trevor Chadwick writes about the wishes of British foster families to foster younger girls, suggesting that 'attention had to be paid to the wishes of the guarantors.'<sup>71</sup> It seems that potential foster families worried about the difficulties and cost involved in looking after an older boy, and they were seen as more troublesome. This is evidenced by an article in The

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and the Struggle for Identity' and Gallant, 'The Kindertransport: Gender and the Rescue of Jewish Children' in Goldenberg and Amy Shapiro (eds.), *Different Horrors, Same Hell*.

<sup>67</sup> Gallant, 'The Kindertransport' in Goldenberg and Shapiro (eds.), *Different Horrors, Same Hell*, p.202.

<sup>68</sup> Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View', p.203.

<sup>69</sup> Papers of the Council of German Jews as found in Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View', p.?

<sup>70</sup> Association of Jewish Refugees, 'Making New Lives' survey (2008), <<http://www.ajr.org/uk/kindersurvey>> [accessed 03/03/18]

<sup>71</sup> Trevor Chadwick in Gershon (ed.), *We Came as Children*, p.23.

Manchester Guardian in February 1939, titled 'Homes Wanted for Boys.' The article claims that there were still 550 boys 'of thirteen and over' at Dovercourt camp, 'for whom homes have to be found.' On the contrary, 'all the girls brought from Germany and Austria' had already been fostered.<sup>72</sup> This preference was undoubtedly influenced by contemporary media portrayals; it was important to create empathy with the children, painting an image that presented Kindertransportees as innocent and harmless.<sup>73</sup> This narrative tended to center particularly around girls - the British Pathe film clip which was broadcasted in Britain in 1938 zooms in and out of scenes populated entirely by young, smiling girls with their suitcases.<sup>74</sup> Although media broadcasts such as these may have encouraged more foster parents to take in children, it almost 'by implication' meant that male refugees, especially aged thirteen to seventeen, were seen as a 'threat to the ordered functioning of British society and the employment prospect of British people.'<sup>75</sup>

The oral and written testimony of former *Kinder* similarly present evidence for gender differentiated experiences of the Kindertransport. This is realised firstly in recollections of the 'selection process' of children by foster parents, often termed the 'cattle market' by *Kinder*; these accounts suggest a preference for girls over boys amongst foster families. Vera Fast described how foster parents firstly chose young children and then, when these were no longer available, they chose older girls. She suggests that this was most probably due to their ability to provide domestic work in the household.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Fred Durst suggested that on arriving in Britain, people 'invariably took girls because to be a little unfair to them, they were cheap domestic servants.' Fred had first-hand experience of this; his sister was taken by a family for this purpose and he claims that 'she was exploited and so on.'<sup>77</sup> As argued in Chapter Two, not all foster parents were altruistically motivated; some families took in children for the purpose of providing free domestic labour or childcare. Amongst the Kindertransportees, it is probable that girls were seen as the most suitable and capable for

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<sup>72</sup> 'Child Refugees in England: Homes Wanted for Boys', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 Feb 1939.

<sup>73</sup> Brinson and Hammel, *Exile and Gender I*, p.24.

<sup>74</sup> 'Jewish Child Refugees 1938', Film ID 3480.03, < <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/jewish-child-refugees> > [accessed 02/04/18]

<sup>75</sup> Brinson and Hammel, *Exile and Gender I*, p.24.

<sup>76</sup> Fast, *Children's Exodus*, p.42.

<sup>77</sup> Sue Read (ed.), *The Children Who Cheated the Nazis: The Complete Transcript of the TV Documentary* (The Kinder Archive Project Ltd, 2012), p.30.

this job (as well as the most desirable in the British media), and thus were often chosen before boys. Gallant supports this, arguing that ‘differences in the worlds of women and men cast a long shadow.’ Whilst boys were far more likely to be trained for paid jobs in the labour force, girls were more likely to be fostered for domestic service to their foster families.<sup>78</sup> Gender informed how quickly children were ‘chosen’ by foster families, and for what purpose; thus, influencing their experiences in Britain.

Similarly, gender informed how *Kinder* experienced separation and trauma, impacting on their early experiences in Britain following parental separation in Germany. Gallant concludes that ‘gender differences were important to understanding the experience of traumatic loss and its impact on survival in boys and girls’, and that separation anxiety often affected girls more than boys of similar ages.<sup>79</sup> She suggests that ‘gender is a prism through which boys and girls in exile experience separation differently’, with boys focusing on careers, whilst girls (‘following the gender modes of the times’) focused on relationships and values.<sup>80</sup> When looking at the *Kinder* accounts used throughout this dissertation, this argument is strengthened; female Kindertransportees often emphasised the affection and warmth (or lack of) they received on arrival, and the relationships they forged with the people they met. As explored in Chapter One, Gerti Urman placed emphasis on her feelings that ‘since coming to England’ she had been given ‘neither a hug nor a kiss.’<sup>81</sup> Lorraine Allard’s account similarly placed emphasis on how being called ‘sissy’ by her foster mother, after trying to hug her, haunted her memory for years.<sup>82</sup> This is absent from much of the testimony produced by male Kindertransportees, which tends to place less emphasis on relationships, and more on what they *did* in Britain. Bernard Grunberg’s experience (as mentioned in Chapter Two) of being put to work in charge of building his foster father’s greenhouse occupies a large fragment of his oral history interview; he rarely alludes to the tense relationship between him and his foster father, and instead focuses on the practical process of his building tasks.<sup>83</sup> By returning to the accounts already used in this dissertation,

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<sup>78</sup> Gallant, ‘The Kindertransport’ in Goldenberg and Shapiro (eds.), *Different Horrors, Same Hell*, p.205.

<sup>79</sup> Goldenberg and Shapiro (eds.), *Different Horrors, Same Hell*, p.131.

<sup>80</sup> Gallant, ‘The Kindertransport’ in Goldenberg and Shapiro (eds.), *Different Horrors, Same Hell*, p.209.

<sup>81</sup> Gerti Urman in Inge Sadan (ed.), *No Longer a Stranger*, p.130.

<sup>82</sup> Lorraine Allard in Harris and Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, p.123.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Bernard Grunberg, USC Visual History Archives, Interview 40678 (1998).

but with an added consideration of the influence of gender, the discoveries already made can be further nuanced. This then reveals that gender could not only impact experiences of separation, but the treatment they received by foster families, shaping their early experiences of life in Britain.

Finally, looking at Kindertransport stories through a gender lens encourages us to ask the question of whether *Kinder* experiences were actually gendered, or whether male and female Kindertransportees simply *remember* these experiences differently instead.<sup>84</sup> It is important to acknowledge that memories of the Kindertransport are also gender differentiated; how female and male Kindertransportees *recall* the foster-child relationship, and their experiences, differs. Hammel stresses that, contrary to the higher proportion of male authors in Holocaust and exile literature, the field of memory literature by former Kindertransportees is largely dominated by women.<sup>85</sup> For example, 23 out of 38 of the memoirs listed on the Kindertransport Association website are by female authors.<sup>86</sup> There are two key potential reasons for this; there were, as previously mentioned, potentially slightly more girls than boys on the original Kindertransports, and that women tend to have a higher life expectancy (thus there may have been more women alive at the time most memoirs were published, from the 1980s onwards).<sup>87</sup> How male and female Kindertransportees have recorded their experiences is important, and Marion Kaplan discusses the issue of gender and memory in her work. She suggests that 'women and men concentrate on different recollections', with women's memories centering on familial ties and friendships, education and social aspects, whilst men focus more on business and politics.<sup>88</sup> This is supported by the extracts from *Kinder* above, which reveal that the nature of the topics *Kinder* have prioritised in recording accounts is also gender differentiated. Thus, gender is important both in understanding the experiences of *Kinder* when they arrived in Britain, and in how these experiences have been remembered and recorded.

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<sup>84</sup> Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair. Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.8.

<sup>85</sup> Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View', p.203.

<sup>86</sup> The Kindertransport Association, 'Kindertransport Resources' <<http://kindertransport.org/resources.aspx>> [accessed 05/03/18]

<sup>87</sup> Hammel, 'Authenticity, Trauma and the Child's View', p.203.

<sup>88</sup> Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, p.8.

Gender mattered. Gender differences were important to understanding the experience of traumatic loss and its impact on survival in boys and girls; and to how they have remembered and recorded these experiences since. As argued, *Kinder* accounts have suggested that gender played a role in the fostering of children, with teenage boys often chosen last in the selection process. This may have been due to the perception that girls were 'more innocent' and 'less troublesome', or unfortunately that they were deemed more suitable to provide the free domestic labour that sadly motivated many families to foster. Gender was also central to how this group of child refugees viewed their own experiences, both at the time and in the decades after. As argued, whilst girls placed the most importance on relationships and values on arrival in England, boys focused on other aspects of their experiences. Thus, gender is an important lens through which to study the experiences of those who arrived on the Kindertransports in 1938-39, and must be given weight in order to fully understand the experiences and recollections of these children.

## Conclusion:

Reflecting on his own experience of the Kindertransport, Fred Barschak explained his feelings as a child arriving in Britain:

*Then there was the trauma of re-establishing some infrastructure of normality in a strange land, with new families, however sympathetic and kind, with the child enjoying a dubious status, neither a temporary guest, nor adopted, a sort of twilight world of not knowing where he or she belonged, which was a state of being that was to last, for some, all their lives.<sup>89</sup>*

It is useful to return to this extract once again, as Fred's comment summarises the difficulties of the Kindertransport scheme. On the one hand, the Kindertransport was an act of British kindness. It saved many children from the fate of their parents, but this does not mean that its complexities should go unnoticed. By drawing attention to the struggles and emotional disturbances that *Kinder* faced on arrival in Britain, this dissertation has sought to further our understanding of the Kindertransport and identify key areas for future research. It has shown that the experiences of *Kinder* were diverse and complex, with children having both positive and negative experiences in Britain. It has also aimed to highlight some of the bleaker and starker issues which have often been passed over in celebratory narratives of the Kindertransport; namely, that many children suffered dramatically in adapting to British life, and were also subject to horrific emotional and physical abuse within the walls of their new foster houses. This strengthens the assertion that the experiences of the Kindertransport cannot, and *must* not, be homogenised, so that the individuality and importance of each and every experience is not undermined or overlooked. This dissertation has also argued that there are further areas of historical research to be undertaken in relation to *Kinder* experiences, specifically that the influence of both the foster parents and gender need to be considered to further develop our understandings of child refugees' experiences at the time. The carer-child relationship played a significant role in shaping the experiences of these child refugees, particularly in relation to the reception and treatment these children received by their foster parents. This dissertation has aimed to rectify this

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<sup>89</sup> Barschak, "Personal Accounts of the Kindertransport" in Samuels, *Kindertransport*, p.xix.

lack of scholarship on the custodians' roles, by giving consideration to their importance. Similarly, it has aimed to recognise the role of gender in both influencing the reception of foster families, with a perceived preference for girl *Kinder*, and in shaping the memory and recording of these experiences by male and female Kindertransportees themselves. This is an area of *Kinder* experiences which has not yet been given sufficient attention, and which deserves further consideration in historical research on the Kindertransport and child refugee movements more broadly.

The Kindertransports encourage us to acknowledge that these migrations had, and still have, huge impacts on refugees. The Kindertransports were not just a fleeting event in these children's lives; they shaped both their experiences and identities, at the time and often for the rest of their lives. Understanding this impact on child refugees is also seminal to understanding current refugee crises today. In October 2016, Lord Dubs' campaign, encouraging the government to accept responsibility for some of the child asylum-seekers in European refugee camps, saw the first child asylum-seekers granted entry to the UK.<sup>90</sup> The campaign's reliance on the legacy of the Kindertransport and media portrayals of the innocence of childhood aimed to highlight Britain's history of protecting child refugees, presenting the Dubs scheme as a 'modern-day Kindertransport.' Yet, in aiming to use Britain's history to appeal to a 'common humanity', it rendered individual lives and narratives silent, and has resulted in an unwillingness to confront the actual moral and political confusion of schemes such as the Kindertransport.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, in September 2015, David Cameron announced the target to 'resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees', in Britain by 2020; with a further commitment to helping unaccompanied child refugees.<sup>92</sup> Thus, even within current refugee crises, the Kindertransport has been presented as an idyllic 'solution' for the British government; but it must be understood in its own historical context with its own complexities and shortcomings. Before we suggest the same means of rescue for child refugees today, we must understand these experiences, and the impact they have had on the lives of those who have experienced them. Recognising, through the testimony of

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<sup>90</sup> Carly McLaughlin, 'They don't look like children: child asylum-seekers, the Dubs amendment and the politics of childhood', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2017), p.3.

<sup>91</sup> McLaughlin, 'They don't look like children', pp.4-5.

<sup>92</sup> 'Migrant Crisis: What is the UK doing to help?', BBC News (January 2016) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34139960>> [accessed 02/04/18]

*Kinder*, the suffering that many of these children experienced in coming to Britain emphasises not only that each of these stories was distinctly individual, but also that each of these experiences is a formative part of that individual's emotional and psychological journey.



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