

# Victims, Villains, and Survivors: Gendered Perceptions and Self-Perceptions of Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Postwar Germany

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AS WE WRITE the history of the post-1945 years, we are only now rediscovering what was amply obvious to contemporaries: that in the immediate postwar period occupied Germany was the unlikely, unloved, and reluctant host to hundreds of thousands of its former victims, housed in refugee camps in the U.S. and British zones and in the American sector of Berlin. Of course, at war's end, millions of people, including ethnic Germans expelled from Eastern Europe as well as former soldiers, forced laborers, and survivors of death and work camps, were on the move. The available statistics, both those collected at the time and those calculated by historians, are highly variable and surely inaccurate, itself a sign of the chaos that accompanied peace and the speed with which conditions changed. Some twenty million people clogged the roads, straggling from East to West and West to East. Astonishingly, between May and September 1945, the victors had managed to repatriate about six million of the seven million persons defined as "displaced" and eligible for return to

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their homelands, hence not including the Germans expelled from occupied areas. A significant number of those who remained uprooted and on western Allied territory as displaced persons (DPs) were Jewish survivors of Nazi genocide and involuntary migration, primarily from Poland to the Soviet Union; precisely the people that both the Allies and the Germans had least expected to have to deal with in the aftermath of National Socialism's genocidal war.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of displaced persons and the "DP problem" in postwar Europe are certainly not new topics for historians. Yet it has been particularly difficult for historians to chronicle or understand adequately the Jewish DP experience. For both scholars and survivors, the transitional years of the displaced persons have generally been bracketed and overshadowed by the preceding tragedy of war and holocaust and the subsequent establishment of new communities and the state of Israel. The problem is certainly not one of available sources. Yet, despite the very recent proliferation of publications, conferences, films, and exhibitions, spurred in large part by the efforts of the "second generation" born in DP camps or communities, the social history of Jewish DPs remains a topic for which there are many more contemporary sources than good current work that mines them.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, some of the most important studies have been written either for

<sup>1</sup>The wide range of figures cited depends on who is counting whom and when and how they were defined: Zorach Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted: Jewish Refugees and Displaced Persons after Liberation, from War to Peace*, No. 5, Institute of Jewish Affairs for the American Jewish Congress and World Jewish Congress, New York, November 1946, estimated that the Allied Armies had to cope with over seven million DPs in occupied territories, plus some twelve million ethnic German expellees. Robert G. Moeller, in *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley, 1993), 21, refers to ten million ethnic German expellees plus "another eight to ten million 'displaced persons'—foreigners forced to come to Germany as workers during the war and others removed from their homelands by the Nazis for racial, religious, or political reasons, including survivors of concentration camps." Donald L. Niewyk, *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 21, notes that in 1945 Jews were "less than one percent of the fourteen million refugees from Hitler's War, although by 1947, they made up a far larger proportion—perhaps as much as one third—of the approximately 700,000 unrepatiated displaced persons in Europe." It should be noted that, especially in the case of liberated Soviet prisoners of war, some of these repatriations were forced.

<sup>2</sup>See the archives of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) relief organization, and the East European Jewish Historical Archive (YIVO) in New York City, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and Yad Vashem and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem (to name just a few of the most prominent), Allied government and military reports, American Jewish organizational records, local German records, the DP press and institutional papers, memoirs and diaries, and oral history collections. Recent popular and historical interest in the Jewish DP experience is reflected in several exhibitions, conferences, and publications. A conference in Munich in 1995, convened in part by scholars and writers who had been born or raised in Föhrenwald or other DP camps near

a German-speaking audience interested in the postwar history of Jews in Germany<sup>3</sup> or as part of an Israeli historiography focused on the history of Zionism and the role of Holocaust survivors in the founding of the state.<sup>4</sup>

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Munich, launched the German exhibit *Ein Leben aufs Neu—Jüdische “Displaced Persons” auf deutschem Boden 1945–1948*. See also *Rebirth after the Holocaust: The Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons Camp, 1945–1950*, exhibit at the B'nai B'rith Klutnick National Jewish Museum, Washington, D.C., 2000. On a larger scale, see *Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945–1951. Conference Proceedings*, ed. Menachem Z. Rosensaft (Washington, D.C., 2000), which accompanied the exhibit *Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945–1951* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the museum's 2001 calendar with photographs and text from that exhibit, as well as the documentary film *The Long Journey Home*, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Los Angeles, 1997. Basic political histories include Yehudah Bauer, *Out of the Ashes* (New York, 1989); Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted* (New York, 1985); Abram L. Sachar, *Redemption of the Unwanted* (New York, 1983); and Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951* (Ithaca, 1998).

<sup>3</sup>Among a recent flood of German-language publications, after Wolfgang Jacobmeyer's pioneering article “Jüdische Überlebende als ‘Displaced Persons’: Untersuchungen zur Besatzungspolitik in den deutschen Westzonen und zur Zuwanderung osteuropäischer Juden 1945–1946,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 9 (1983): 421–52, see Susanne Dietrich and Julia Schulze-Wessel, *Zwischen Selbstorganisation und Stigmatisierung: Die Lebenswirklichkeit jüdischer Displaced Persons und die neue Gestalt des Antisemitismus in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1998); Angelika Eder, *Flüchtige Heimat: Jüdische Displaced Persons in Landsberg am Lech, 1945 bis 1950* (Munich, 1998); Angelica Koenigseder, *Flucht nach Berlin: Jüdische Displaced Persons 1945–1948* (Berlin, 1998); Angelica Koenigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Lebensmut im Wartesaal: Die jüdischen DPs (Displaced Persons) in Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994); and Juliane Wetzel, *Jüdisches Leben in München, 1945–1951: Durchgangsstation oder Wiederaufbau?* (Munich, 1987). Two excellent unpublished German theses are Nicholas Yantian, “Studien zum Selbstverständnis der jüdischen ‘Displaced Persons’ in Deutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” master's thesis, Technical University Berlin, 1994; and Jacqueline Dewell Giere, “Wir sind unterwegs, aber nicht in der Wüste: Erziehung und Kultur in den jüdischen Displaced Persons-Lagern der amerikanischen Zone im Nachkriegsdeutschland, 1945–1949,” Ph.D. diss., Goethe Universität, Frankfurt, 1993.

<sup>4</sup>Indeed, the liveliest (and most controversial) discussions about Jewish DPs have been conducted in the context of Israeli debates about the treatment of Holocaust survivors in Palestine and Israel and the general revision of the Zionist historiographical narrative. Much of this material is only slowly being translated from Hebrew (which I do not read). See the review essay by Yfaat Weiss, “Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten: Das jüdische Siedlungsgebiet in Palästina (Jischuw) und die Holocaustüberlebenden in der israelischen Historiographie,” *Babylon: Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart* 18 (1998): 139–47; also Anita Shapira, “Politics and Collective Memory: The Debate over the ‘New Historians’ in Israel,” *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (spring/summer 1995): 9–40. In Hebrew, see, for example, Yosef Grodzinsky, *Chomer enoshi tov* (English translation, *Human Material of Good Quality—Jews versus Zionists in the DP Camps, Germany, 1945–1951*) (Tel Aviv, 1988); Arieh Kochavi, *Displaced Persons and International Politics* (Tel Aviv, 1992); David Engel, *Between Liberation and Flight: Holocaust Survivors in Poland and the Struggle for Leadership, 1944–1946* (Tel Aviv, 1996); Irit Keynan, *Holocaust Survivors and the Emissaries from Eretz-Israel: Germany 1945–1948* (Tel Aviv, 1996); and Tuvia Friling, *Arrow in the Dark: David Ben Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership and Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust* (Kiryat Sedeh-Boker, 1998). In English, see Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., *She'erit Hapletah, 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle*, Proceedings of the 6th Yad Vashem International

To add to the confusion, the history of the Jewish DPs, perhaps like that of any community that had endured overwhelming losses and lived in transit, is not only their own but that of many other interested (and more or less powerful) parties. It involves Allied occupation policy, which evolved from unconditional surrender and de-Nazification to Cold War anti-Communism and cooperative reconstruction in western Germany; the British policy toward Palestine; the U.S. policy on immigration in general and American Jewish pressures in particular; the Zionist demands and actions to deliver Jews to Palestine for the establishment of a Jewish state; the politics of the Soviet Union and the newly Communist Eastern European nations from which many of the survivors came; the emerging mandates of the United Nations and the international relief organizations; and finally the varied experiences of the by no means monolithic Jewish survivor community itself. In my previous work, I have juxtaposed German and Jewish postwar history, insisting (as I would still, despite some highly skeptical responses) that the story of the Jewish DPs (and other survivors) needs to be firmly inserted into our ever more sophisticated narrative of postwar German history.<sup>5</sup>

In this essay, however, I want to jettison for the moment the relative safety net of a more familiar German history approach and focus upon a few aspects of the specifically Jewish experience. In particular, I want to discuss three linked points: first, the contradictory and ambivalent perceptions and self-perceptions of Jewish DPs as survivors, victims, and, indeed, villains (or, at least, disturbers of the new, fragile peace) and, more cursorily, how those perceptions changed over time and entered into our present debates about trauma, memory, and memorialization; second, the remarkable baby boom among Jewish survivors, which, while duly noted, has until very recently escaped the serious attention of current researchers;<sup>6</sup> and third, some ways of thinking about notions of revenge and memory in relation to sexuality and reproduction.

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Historical Conference (Jerusalem, 1990); Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: Israel Confronts the Holocaust* (New York, 1993); Shabtai Tevet, *Ben Gurion and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996); Idit Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley, 1998); Aviva Halamish, *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine* (Syracuse, 1998); and Hanna Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War* (Basingstoke, 1999). A translation of Ze'ev Mankowitz's important study *Between Memory and Hope: Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany 1945–1946* is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press. See his English language articles, "The Formation of *She'erit Hapleita*: November 1944–July 1945," *Yad Vashem Studies* 20 (1990): 337–70 and "The Affirmation of Life in *She'erit Hapleita*," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5 (1990): 13–21.

<sup>5</sup>See Atina Grossmann, "Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1949," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): 215–39.

<sup>6</sup>The two outstanding exceptions are Judith Tydor Baumel, "DPs, Mothers and Pioneers: Women in the *She'erit Hapleita*," *Jewish History* 11, no. 2 (1997), and Margarete L.

## PERCEPTIONS: "MIR SZEINEN DOH"

As difficult as it was to comprehend that European Jewry had been subjected to systematic extermination and that the "Final Solution" had indeed been put into operation, at times it was almost more difficult to grasp that there were in fact survivors—several hundred thousand—who required recognition and care. American officer Saul Padover's early description of the "veritable *Völkerwanderung*" of refugees is telling in its assumption that the Jews had all been murdered: "Thousands, tens of thousands, finally millions of liberated slaves were coming out of the farms and the factories and the mines and pouring onto the highways. . . . They were all there, all except the Jews. The Jews, six million of them, the children and the women and the old men, were ashes in the incinerators and bones in the charnel houses."<sup>7</sup> But, in fact, not all European Jews had turned to ashes. Between 1945 and 1948, the U.S. and British zones of occupied Germany became a temporary home for approximately—and again, the numbers are rough and constantly changing—a quarter of a million Jewish survivors (some recent estimates are higher, up to 330,000).<sup>8</sup> Some were German Jews who had emerged from hiding or returned from exile or the camps; most were Eastern European survivors who had been liberated by the Allies on German soil (some 90,000 were liberated alive, but many died within three weeks, leaving about 60,000 or 70,000). Their ranks were soon swelled by tens of thousands of Jews who poured in from Eastern Europe. These mostly Polish Jews comprised three distinct groups: concentration and labor camp and death march survivors who had been freed in Germany but initially returned to their hometowns hoping, generally in vain, to find lost family members or repossess property; Jews who had survived among the partisans or in hiding; and, beginning in spring 1946, a large cohort of over 100,000 Jews who had been repatriated to Poland from their difficult but life-saving refuge in the Soviet Union and

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Myers [Feinstein], "Jewish Displaced Persons: Reconstructing Individual and Community in the U.S. Zone of Occupied Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 42 (1997). See also Baumel, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* (London, 1998), and Myers Feinstein, "Domestic Life in Transit: Jewish DPs," paper presented at the workshop "Birth of a Refugee Nation: Displaced Persons in Postwar Europe 1945–1951," Remarque Institute, New York University, April 2001.

<sup>7</sup>Saul K. Padover, *Experiment in Germany: The Story of an American Intelligence Officer* (New York, 1946), 343. Many survivors recount their problems in convincing Soviet soldiers that they were Jews and not Germans; "Ivrey [Jews] kaputt," they were frequently told.

<sup>8</sup>Statistical data are inexact and bewildering, largely because of change over time, inconsistencies in categorizations among those collecting data, and the difficulties of counting a highly mobile and sometimes illegal population. Giere, 102, cites Joint Distribution Committee figures of 145,735 Jewish DPs officially registered in the U.S. zone (alone) in November 1946, with 101,614 in DP camps, 35,950 "free livers" in German towns and cities, 4,313 in children's homes, and 3,858 in *Hachschara* (agricultural kibbutzim). Yosef

who then fled again, this time in a western direction, when postwar anti-Semitism convinced them there was no future for Jews in Communist-occupied Eastern Europe. This last group, which had escaped the Holocaust, included virtually the only Eastern European Jews to enter the DP camps in family groups that included young children.<sup>9</sup>

In August 1945 Earl G. Harrison, dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a former U.S. immigration commissioner, submitted to President Truman a report on his fact-finding tour of the DP camps in the U.S. zone. It declared: "We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them. They are in concentration camps in large numbers under military guard, instead of the SS troops. One is led to wonder whether the German people, seeing this, are not supposing that we are following or at least condoning Nazi policy."<sup>10</sup> The passionate outrage of this highly publicized report was hyperbolic and unfair to the substantial efforts that had been made by the U.S. military, but

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Grodzinsky lists figures that now seem to be commonly accepted: an estimated 70,000 in late summer 1945, 220,000–260,000 Jewish DPs altogether at the height of Jewish flight west in late 1946, and 245,000 in the summer of 1947. However, by looking at migration patterns to target countries (rather than trying to establish figures in Europe), he comes to a remarkably high total of 330,000 Jewish DPs altogether between 1945 and 1951. The higher figures for 1946 and 1947 include the influx into the American zone of Jews who had been repatriated from the Soviet Union. Given the conflicts with British authorities over immigration to Palestine and recognition of Jews as a special separate group, those "infiltrates" were steered or themselves migrated to the U.S. zone.

<sup>9</sup>It should be stressed that these tens of thousands of mostly Polish Jews who had fled from the Nazi occupation to the Soviet Union, often ending up in Soviet Central Asia, constituted a distinct, numerically large group among the DPs. Although the postwar situation in Poland is well covered, there is to my knowledge remarkably little published material on the Soviet period, at least in English. See Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the U.S.S.R., 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polansky (New York, 1991), 227–39; L. Dobroszycki, "Restoring Jewish Life in Post-war Poland," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 3, no. 2 (1973): 58–72; the Dr. Jerzy Glicksman Collection at YIVO archives in New York; and (in Hebrew) Benjamin Pinkus, *Yahadut Mizrah Eropah ben Sho'ah li-tekumah, 1944–1948* (Eastern European Jewry from Holocaust to redemption, 1944–1948) (Kiryat Sedeh-Boker, 1987). One compelling unpublished memoir is Regina Kesler, M.D., *A Pediatrician's Odyssey from Suwalki to Harvard*, ed. Irving Letiner and Michael Kesler. Joseph Berger, *Displaced Persons: Growing up American after the Holocaust* (New York, 2001), conveys very well how murky this history still is; see especially the vivid segments from his mother, Rachel Berger's account of her experiences in the Soviet Union, postwar Poland, and German DP camps (276–312).

<sup>10</sup>Among many sources, see Michael Brenner, *Nach dem Holocaust: Juden in Deutschland 1945–1950* (Munich, 1995), 18; also in English, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, 1997). For an excellent analysis of the Harrison Report and the international politics of the DP issue, see Dan Diner, "Jewish DPs in Historical Context," paper presented at the workshop "Birth of a Refugee Nation: Displaced Persons in Postwar Europe 1945–1951," Remarque Institute, New York University, April 2001. The full text of the report and Truman's response are available online at <[www.ushmm.org/dp/politic6.htm](http://www.ushmm.org/dp/politic6.htm)>.



it did push military authorities and especially General Eisenhower to appoint an advisor on Jewish affairs and meet Jewish demands for separate camps with improved conditions and rations and some internal autonomy. As a result, by 1946 American-controlled DP camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy became magnets for Jewish survivors fleeing renewed persecution in the homelands to which they had briefly returned and for Zionist organizers seeking to prepare them for *Aliyah* to Palestine, especially after the pogrom in Kielce, Poland, on July 4, 1946.<sup>11</sup>

It seemed, to both Germans and the Allied Military Government, that Jews in Germany were more present than ever before, increasing in number and demands daily. The Military Government and local German officials as well as overwhelmed American Jewish and United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) relief workers in the camps, Zionist Palestinian emissaries, and DP teachers and leaders themselves often saw the DPs as “beaten spiritually and physically,” hopeless, depressed, afflicted with “inertia” and “an air of resignation,” unsuited to any kind of normal life. Both sympathetic and hostile witnesses regularly and graphically bemoaned the “uncivilized” state of the survivors. They seemed oblivious to the most elementary rules of hygiene, uninhibited in regard to the opposite sex, unwilling to work or take any sort of active initiative. At the same time, they were labeled “jittery, excitable, anxiety prone.”<sup>12</sup> All these reports cited symptoms that today are clearly associated with posttraumatic stress disorders. Already in 1946, social workers and psychiatrists were defining pathologies that the psychiatrist William Niederland, himself a refugee from

<sup>11</sup>On the Kielce pogrom, in which a charge of ritual murder led to the massacre of at least forty Jews who had tried to return to their hometown, see Abraham J. Peck, “Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust in Germany: Revolutionary Vanguard or Remnants of a Destroyed People?” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 19 (1990): 35. On the Bricha network, which transported Jews into the American zone of Germany and Italy for eventual *Aliyah* to Palestine, see, especially, Yehudah Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Bricha* (New York, 1970), and Zertal. In May 1947 the American zone housed 60 assembly centers, 14 children’s centers, 38 *Hachscharot*, 17 hospitals, 1 convalescent home, 3 rest centers, 3 sanatoria, 1 transit camp, 1 staging area, and 139 recognized groups of “free-living” DPs in German communities. Additionally, there were two assembly centers in the American sector of Berlin and eighteen camps in the U.S. zone of Austria. By comparison, there were only two assembly centers and two children’s centers in the British zone and one children’s center in the French sector of Berlin. See Abraham S. Hyman, *The Undefeated* (Jerusalem, 1993), 146–47. There were also camps and *Hachscharot* in Italy. Jacobmeyer counts sixteen small sites for Jewish DPs in the French zone and notes that German Jews were concentrated in communities in the north of the zone. On the British zone, see, for example, Jo Reilly et al., eds., *Belsen in History and Memory* (London, 1997).

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Alex Grobman, *Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry, 1944–1948* (Detroit, 1993), 57. See also Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982). For examples of such basically sympathetic but highly unsentimental and critical views of survivors, see the remarkable letters home to wives in the United States by two American Jewish officials, one military and the other from the American Joint Distribution Committee: Jacob Rader Marcus and

Nazi Germany, would later explain as a particular “survivor syndrome”—which, painfully, would become both a stigmatizing label for people who, in most ways, eventually became ultrafunctional citizens of their new homelands and a necessary diagnosis for claiming restitution from the future West German government.<sup>13</sup>

Given our own inflationary romance with the language and theory of trauma and memory and its corollary valorization, one might even say sacralization, of Holocaust survivors, it is salutary to recall how very unromantic, unappealing, and alien the DP survivors appeared, even to those who meant to aid them.<sup>14</sup> In his autobiographical novel, Hanoach Bartov recalled the reaction of tough Jewish Brigade soldiers from Palestine who entered Germany determined to “hate the butchers of your people—unto all generations!” and fulfill their mission of “the rescue of the Jews, immigration to a free homeland,” with “dedication, loyalty and love for the remnants of the sword and the camps.” But despite these “commandments for a Hebrew soldier on German soil,” the Brigade men were not prepared for what they found once they actually encountered the remnants they had pledged to avenge and rescue: “I kept telling myself that these were the people we had spoken of for so many years—But I was so far removed from them that electric wire might have separated us.”<sup>15</sup>

The Israeli historian Idith Zertal has characterized the painful, shocking encounter of the Yishuv with the survivors, “between the Jews of Europe and the ‘reborn Israel,’” as a kind of “return of the repressed” that provoked the fear and anxiety Freud diagnosed when something that had once been *heimlich*, familiar and homelike, becomes *unheimlich*, frightening and inexplicable.<sup>16</sup> Today, immersed in our highly politicized memorial cultures, we have mostly repressed the powerful contemporary consensus among Allies, Germans, Zionists, and Jewish observers that the survivors were “human debris,” at best to be rehabilitated and resocialized

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Abraham J. Peck, eds., *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust 1945: The Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont*, Monographs of the American Jewish Archives, vol. 10 (Cincinnati, 1982), and Oscar A. Mintzer, “*In Defense of the Survivors*”: *The Letters and Documents of Oscar A. Mintzer, AJDC Legal Advisor, Germany, 1945–46*, ed. Alex Grobman (Berkeley, 1999).

<sup>13</sup>See William G. Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung: Das Überlebens-Syndrom Seelenmord* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), based on his pioneering article in *Hillside Hospital Journal* (1961). On the trauma and trauma diagnoses of Jewish survivors, see, among many other sources, Aaron Haas, *The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1995); and Israel W. Charny, *Holding on to Humanity: The Message of Holocaust Survivors: The Shamai Davidson Papers* (New York, 1992).

<sup>14</sup>For a smart critique, see Michael André Bernstein, “Homage to the Extreme: The Shoah and the Rhetoric of Catastrophe,” *Times Literary Supplement*, March 6, 1998, 6–8.

<sup>15</sup>Hanoach Bartov, *The Brigade*, trans. David S. Segal (New York, 1968; originally published in Hebrew, 1965), 56, 148.

<sup>16</sup>Zertal, 8–9.



into good citizens (and soldiers) of a future Jewish state, at worst to be marked as “asocial” and beyond human redemption.<sup>17</sup> I. F. Stone, the American Jewish leftist journalist who covered as a “participant observer” the underground route to Palestine, noted briskly about his first impression of the DPs in the camps, “They were an unattractive lot.”<sup>18</sup> As one survivor ruefully stated, “The concentration camp experience is nothing that endears you to people.”<sup>19</sup>

Paradoxically, however, the reverse side to the stigmatization of Jewish DPs as both incorrigible and pathetic was a kind of romantic vision, heavily influenced by the Zionist ethos that dominated DP life, of the tough survivor who had emerged like a phoenix from unimaginable devastation. Kathryn Hulme, an adventurous young American wartime welder turned UNRRA worker, described her reaction to the Jewish DPs assigned to her camp. They were hardly the “ashes of a people” announced by so many reporters; on the contrary, they were indeed survivors, “charged with the intensest life force I had ever experienced.” They were—at least their toughened leaders—entirely unlike either the docile, well-behaved defeated Germans or the “professional” non-Jewish Polish and Baltic DPs with whom she had previously worked; rather, they were “contrary, critical, and demanding.” Resorting to nonetheless admiring stereotypes, she described “their wiry bodies . . . smoldering eyes . . . voices unmusical and hoarse . . . their hands moved continuously.” In fact, she concluded, “They didn’t seem like DPs at all.”<sup>20</sup>

Hulme vividly recorded the indignities of the “strange half world of the DP camps,” “a small planet adrift from earth like a raft in space” where the war’s uprooted lived, “bracketed between the two liberations,” first from the Nazis in 1945 and then finally from the DP camps after 1947 and into the 1950s. She worried that DPs had nothing else “to do than sit around and produce babies at such a frightful pace that soon the per capita birth rate of DP land would exceed that of any other country except possibly China.” Jews, she explained, were less than one fifth of the U.S. zone’s DP population, but “they were such an articulate minority that if you only read the newspapers to learn about occupation affairs, you gained the impression that they were the whole of the DP problem.” Jews made headlines with arrests for black market activities and not infrequent violent confrontations with local Germans and American GIs; they staged angry demonstrations and

<sup>17</sup>Phrases such as “human debris” or “living corpses” were ubiquitous in contemporary reports (indeed, there is a remarkably consistent and repetitive language in most documents describing Jewish DPs). For one example, see the accounts in Karen Gershon, *Post-script: A Collective Account of the Lives of Jews in West Germany since the Second World War* (London, 1969).

<sup>18</sup>I. F. Stone, *Underground to Palestine and Reflections Thirty Years Later* (New York, 1978), 24. In general, see Bauer, *Out of the Ashes* and *Flight and Rescue*.

<sup>19</sup>Haas, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Kathryn Hulme, *The Wild Place* (Boston, 1953), 71, 212–13.

dramatic hunger strikes denouncing anti-Semitic acts by occupation authorities and Germans and demanding emigration to Palestine. They were inspected by U.S. officials and journalists on high-level inspection tours who, Hulme thought, handled them with “kid gloves.”<sup>21</sup>

Eleanor Roosevelt dramatized her efforts to draft an International Declaration of Human Rights with her 1945 tour of Zeilsheim camp near Frankfurt. In September 1946, at a ceremony conducted in the War Room of the U.S. headquarters in the I. G. Farben Building in Frankfurt, General McNarney extended full recognition to the Central Committee of Liberated Jews as official representatives—at least on matters of social welfare and self-governance—of Jewish DPs. Indeed, while survivors who had expected to be treated as allies by the occupiers bitterly protested the lack of attention to their plight (especially the devastating fact that their German victimizers were running around free in their own country while Jews sat in camps waiting for emigration permits), it was also true that “the Jewish DPs were on exhibit to visitors from the moment of their liberation.” Moreover, the DP leadership knew very well how to manipulate these displays and stage their calls for better treatment and entry to Eretz Yisrael.<sup>22</sup> To their sullen and resentful German neighbors, the DP camps appeared as a kind of Schlaraffenland of “sugar and spam, margarine and jam, plus cigarettes and vitamized chocolate bars,” as well as centers of black market activity fed by privileged access to the cigarette and food supplies of the occupiers. As Hulme conceded, “They sounded like the prima donnas of the DP world, but I thought that perhaps they deserved the rating.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite the overcrowding, the unappetizing rations, the lack of privacy, the smells, the sheer hopelessness of idle waiting, the sometimes humiliating and uncomprehending treatment by military and relief workers who “looked down on us . . . as if we were some kind of vermin or pests,”<sup>24</sup> the DP camps and the new families they housed provided a makeshift therapeutic community for survivors who had “been liberated from death” but not yet “been freed for life.”<sup>25</sup> The Americans, in cooperation with the UNRRA, had indeed made the commitment that “reasonable care be taken of these unfortunate people.”<sup>26</sup> But they did so with great reluctance and resentment; as Irving Heymont, the American (and, as he later revealed, Jewish) commander of Landsberg DP camp, confessed in his memoir, “When I raised my right hand and took the oath as an officer, I never dreamed that there were jobs of this sort.”<sup>27</sup> In the characteristic

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>22</sup>Hyman, 250ff.

<sup>23</sup>Hulme, 211–12.

<sup>24</sup>Jacob Biber, *Risen from the Ashes* (San Bernardino, 1990), 14.

<sup>25</sup>Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, 86.

<sup>26</sup>Lt. Col. Mercer (U.S. Army), February 5, 1946, OMGUS 4/20–1/10. See also Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, 39.

<sup>27</sup>Marcus and Peck, eds., 38.

rapid turnaround of sentiment in the postwar years, it was the victims of Nazism, still displaced and unruly, who soon came to be seen, even by the victors, as the disreputable villains, while the Germans, with their “clean German homes and pretty, accommodating German girls,” came to be viewed as victims, pathetic but appealing, and later, with the Airlift in Berlin, even heroic.<sup>28</sup> As the impact of the Harrison Report faded into Cold War politics, it seemed to many that “the guilt of the Germans was forgotten,” and that, as a depressed Jewish observer, Zorach Wahrhaftig, put it: “Eighteen months after liberation . . . the war is not yet over for European Jewry. They are impossible to repatriate and almost as difficult to resettle. No one wants them now just as no one wanted them before and during the war.”<sup>29</sup> When it came to the Jewish DPs, disgust and fear were mingled with, and often outweighed, admiration and sheer awe at the fact of their survival. Moreover, support for the Jewish DPs, sympathy for their Zionist vision, and outrage at their treatment were often linked to left-wing sentiments, anger at weakening de-Nazification, and the rejection of the politics of vengeance and justice in favor of reconciliation with the former enemy in the service of the Cold War, a process daily reinforced by the omnipresent fraternization with German *Fräuleins*.<sup>30</sup> Only a day before the moving ceremony at the I. G. Farben headquarters, Secretary of State Byrne’s conciliatory speech in Stuttgart on September 6, 1946, signaled these shifts in policy and the upcoming end of the brief relative “golden age” for the Jewish DPs under U.S. occupation.

By 1948 DP leader Samuel Gringauz stated sourly in the American-Jewish journal *Commentary* that “Jewish survivors in German DP camps are an obstacle to Cold War reconciliation with Germany. . . . They are still in acute conflict with the nation which Allied occupation policy wants to make into an ally.”<sup>31</sup> For antifascists involved in postwar reconstruction and relief efforts, such as Bartley Crum of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, which investigated conditions in the DP camps, and Ira Hirschmann, Fiorello La Guardia’s personal UNRRA representative, who

<sup>28</sup>Samuel Gringauz, “Our New German Policy and the DPs: Why Immediate Resettlement Is Imperative,” *Commentary* 5 (1948): 510. In general, see also Dinnerstein.

<sup>29</sup>Zorach Wahrhaftig, “Life in Camps 6 Months after Liberation,” November 27, 1945, in *Archives of the Holocaust*, 9:134; Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, 39. For case studies of relations between Jewish DPs and the local German population in Landsberg, see Angelika Eder, “Jüdische Displaced Persons im deutschen Alltag: Eine Regionalstudie 1945–1950,” *Fritz Bauer Jahrbuch* (1997), 163–87; and D. Kohlmannslehner, “Das Verhältnis von deutschen und jüdischen Displaced Persons in Lager Lampertheim 1945–1949,” paper, Fritz Bauer Institut Archives, Frankfurt am Main.

<sup>30</sup>Contemporary critics regularly blamed American GI and officer contact with German women for the conciliatory policies and antipathy toward Jewish DPs. This is a complicated theme that deserves much more analysis; German women did exercise real influence in the early postwar years not only through their sexual relationships with the occupiers but also in their positions as translators and clerical workers.

<sup>31</sup>Gringauz, 508–14, esp. 508. He sees the period from the fall of 1945 until the summer of 1947 as a “golden age” (509).

distrusted the Germans and mourned the demise of the alliance with the Soviet Union, the poor treatment of the DPs and denial of emigration to Palestine and elsewhere were just another aspect of a dangerous policy that coddled the Germans and corrupted the occupiers. Especially liberal and leftist Americans, including a significant number of former German-Jews now stationed in Germany, saw the turn toward reconciliation and recovery for Germany as a source of future fascism. The new agenda of “business before democracy” persecuted former resisters and punished the victims by keeping them locked away in DP camps rather than supporting their desire to begin a new life in Palestine, which many officials had discovered on official tours to be a “miracle of orange groves and olive trees.”<sup>32</sup> Outrage at the treatment of Jewish DPs and pro-Zionism were thus frequently linked to bitterness over the Cold War and the sacrifice of de-Nazification and real democracy in the name of anti-Communism and rebuilding Germany.

Clearly also, these perceptions shifted over time, from the initial sympathetic shock of liberation, to frantic irritation at the mass influx in 1946 combined with enthusiastic or reluctant admiration, especially for Zionist commitments (which, not incidentally, relieved the Americans of having to worry about large-scale Jewish immigration) in 1947–48, and finally, the well-known disdain for the “hard core” of DPs who had either integrated into German economic life (generally via the black or gray market) or were simply too sick or exhausted to move and therefore remained in Germany after 1948. In any case, at least between 1945 and 1949, Jewish DP life in occupied Germany, which was centered around the large camps near Munich and Frankfurt, had generated a unique transitory society: simultaneously, a final efflorescence of a destroyed Eastern European Jewish culture, a preparation for an imagined future in Eretz Yisrael, and a “waiting room” in which new lives were indeed—against all odds—begun.

#### *Maschiachskinder*: THE BABY BOOM

In some kind of supreme historical irony, Jewish DPs in occupied Germany, after the war and the *Shoah*, produced a record number of babies. In 1946 occupied Germany, far from being *judenrein*, counted the highest Jewish (some, pointing to the unusually skewed young and fertile population of survivors, say the highest overall) birth rate in the world.<sup>33</sup> The “steady rush of weddings”<sup>34</sup> in the DP camps united, sometimes within days, neighbors in the next barrack or distant kin or friends from what had

<sup>32</sup>Ira A. Hirschmann, La Guardia’s inspector general for the UNRRA, in his passionate book, *The Embers Still Burn: An Eye-Witness View of the Postwar Ferment in Europe and the Middle East and Our Disastrous Get Soft with Germany Policy* (New York, 1949), 149, 45.

<sup>33</sup>See, among numerous sources, Peck, 38; Brenner, *Nach dem Holocaust*, 36; Myers, 306–8.

<sup>34</sup>Biber, 49.

once been home who did not necessarily know each other very well or love each other very much. There were, as a young woman survivor recalled, “so many marriages, sometimes really strange marriages that never would have happened before the war.”<sup>35</sup> Certainly they did not, could not, produce “normal” domestic life. The young mothers in the DP camps were in many ways utterly unsuited for motherhood and domesticity (in any case, limited in the camps). They had come into Nazi ghettos and death camps, or joined partisan groups, or gone into hiding, or fled their homelands as teenagers and had been given no time in which to grow up. Their own mothers were generally dead (often killed or selected for death before the survivors’ eyes). Some of the women had once had children, now lost and murdered, sometimes hidden with Christians and very hard to repossess.<sup>36</sup> Reading postwar accounts, it seems that so many young survivors told their interviewers, “The hardest moment was when they took my mama away.”<sup>37</sup> As a shocked U.S. Army rabbi reported back to Jewish agencies in New York: “Almost without exception each is the last remaining member of his entire family. . . . Their stories are like terrible nightmares which makes one’s brain reel and one’s heart bleed.”<sup>38</sup> No one knew how to respond to people who had survived the unimaginable. When Saul Padover finally encountered the Jewish survivors he had thought no longer existed, he wrote, “I never knew what to say to these people. What sense did words make?”<sup>39</sup>

The veritable baby boom of 1946–47 was, however, a phenomenon much more complicated and remarkable than the “manic defense” against

<sup>35</sup>Edith Horowitz in Brana Gurewitsch, *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa, 1998), 73.

<sup>36</sup>See Deborah Dwork on the contest over hidden children in postwar Netherlands in Peter Hayes, ed., *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World* (Evanston, 1998), and the paper by Marion P. Pritchard on Jewish DP children for the conference “Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World,” Dartmouth College, 1994, revised, 1997 (I am grateful to Marion Pritchard for sending me a copy of her paper). In a fascinating article based on numerous memoirs by women survivors, Fionnuala Ni Aolain, a law professor at the Hebrew University, has attempted to identify the specific gender-based harm caused to women by forcible separation from their children as experiences that are “sex-based” even if they are not categorizable within what we generally understand as sexual violence. See Fionnuala Ni Aolain, “Sex-Based Violence and the Holocaust—A Reevaluation of Harms and Rights in International Law,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 12, no. 1 (2000): 53.

<sup>37</sup>Edith Z. in Niewyk, 171.

<sup>38</sup>Letter to Stephen S. Wise, June 22, 1945, in Abraham J. Peck, ed., *The Papers of the World Jewish Congress 1945–1950: Liberation and the Saving Remnant, Archives of the Holocaust*, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati (New York, 1990), 9:30. On the important role of U.S. military rabbis in dealing with Jewish DPs, see Grobman; and Louis Barish, *Rabbis in Uniform: The Story of the American Jewish Military Chaplain* (New York, 1962). Note again that Jewish DPs who had been in the Soviet Union and did not begin to arrive in the U.S. zone in large numbers until the second half of 1946 were more likely to have survived in intact families.

<sup>39</sup>Padover, 359.

catastrophic experience and overwhelming loss diagnosed by contemporary psychoanalytically oriented psychiatrists and social workers.<sup>40</sup> And the perceptions of this drive for marriage and children, among both DPs and those who dealt with them, were multilayered, strongly felt, and contradictory. “In the midst of the depressed desert life” of the DP camps (the recurring Exodus metaphors were of course not accidental), one male survivor wrote in a memoir titled *Risen from the Ashes*, “a noticeable change occurred: people who had survived singly in all age groups were struck with a strong desire to be married.”<sup>41</sup> The American Jewish journalist Meyer Levin also sensed that, for all the Jews’ immediate preoccupation with the barest necessities of survival, their primary need was “to seek some link on earth. . . . This came before food and shelter.”<sup>42</sup>

The rapid appearance of babies and baby carriages in the dusty streets of DP camps throughout the American and British zones served as a conscious and highly ideologized reminder that “mir szeinen doh” (Yiddish for “we are here”). Despite everything, women who only weeks or months earlier had been emaciated, amenorrheic “living corpses” became pregnant and bore children.<sup>43</sup> A *She’erit Hapleitah* (surviving remnant, or, more literally, leftover remnant of a remnant) had survived the Nazis’ genocide and seemed determined to replace the dead at an astonishingly rapid rate.<sup>44</sup> Attempting to dramatize survivors’ desperate determination to emigrate to Palestine, Bartley Crum of the Anglo-American Committee claimed, “In many camps I was told that Jewish women had deliberately suffered abortions rather than bear a child on German soil.”<sup>45</sup> Remarkably, however, the opposite was more common. Survivors were not deterred even

<sup>40</sup>For a fine analysis of this literature, see Isidor J. Kaminer, “‘On razor’s edge’—Vom Weiterleben nach dem Überleben,” *Fritz Bauer Institut Jahrbuch 1996*, 146–47, 157.

<sup>41</sup>Biber, 37.

<sup>42</sup>Meyer Levin, *In Search: An Autobiography* (New York, 1950), 183–84.

<sup>43</sup>See Zalman Grinberg, “We Are Living Corpses,” in *Aufbau*, August 24, 1945. For a strong argument against the view of survivors as “living corpses” and for the agency, and what Peck has called “the revolutionary ideology,” of the *She’erit Hapleita* (which focuses on political organization rather than reproduction), see Ze’ev Mankowitz, “The Formation of *She’erit Hapleita*: November 1944–July 1945,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 20 (1990): 337–70, and “The Affirmation of Life in *She’erith Hapleita*,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 1 (1990): 13–21.

<sup>44</sup>See Juliane Wetzel, “Mir szeinen doh: München und Umgebung als Zuflucht von Überlebenden des Holocaust 1945–1948,” in Martin Broszat, ed., *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland* (Munich, 1988). See also Koenigseder and Wetzel, 104–5, 187; Peck, 35–38. The term *She’erit Hapleitah* derives from reworkings of biblical references to the survivors of the Assyrian conquest.

<sup>45</sup>Bartley C. Crum, *Behind the Silken Curtain: A Personal Account of Anglo-American Diplomacy in Palestine and the Middle East* (Jerusalem, 1996; originally published, New York, 1947), 90. There is, not surprisingly, little information on the number and experience of Jewish women DPs who considered, sought, and/or underwent abortions at a time when they were widespread among German women. This is a topic for which careful research with memoirs and oral histories is particularly important.



by the knowledge that for purposes of *Aliyah* to Palestine and emigration elsewhere, pregnancy and young children were only an obstacle.<sup>46</sup> David P. Boder, the American psychologist whose interviews with survivors conducted shortly after liberation have recently been edited and published by Donald L. Niewyk, described a young woman who had lost her entire family. Now, “recently married and visibly pregnant, she eagerly awaited her turn to emigrate to Palestine” and “was perhaps the most cheerful and open of the survivors.”<sup>47</sup> The dominant U.S. relief agency, the American Joint Distribution Committee, found itself having to scramble to build Jewish ritual baths for brides (*Mikveh*) and to produce gold wedding rings as well as wigs for Orthodox wives.<sup>48</sup> Major Heymont noticed in Landsberg that “the use of contraceptives is highly frowned upon by the camp people. They believe it is everyone’s duty to have as many children as possible in order to increase the numbers of the Jewish community.”<sup>49</sup> Whatever the surely highly variable nature of individual experiences, there is no doubt that for the DPs themselves and for those who managed and observed them, the rash of marriages, pregnancies, and babies collectively represented a conscious affirmation of Jewish life. This was true for both men and women. But women especially were determined to claim domestic reproductive roles that they had once been promised in some long ago and now fantastic past. Women survivors of the death camps, sometimes of medical experiments, were anxious to reassure themselves of their fertility, as well as to prove male potency (which, it was widely rumored, had been subjected to emasculating potions and experiments in the camps). Pregnancy and childbirth served as definitive material evidence that they had indeed survived.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Levin notes, “And the urge to arrive in time for the birth of the child in *Eretz* was real on every vessel that left for Palestine with its host of pregnant women, some of whom were smuggled onto the ships in their ninth month despite the *Haganah* regulation making the seventh month the limit.” See also Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, 52–54.

<sup>47</sup>Niewyk, 94.

<sup>48</sup>Baumel, “DPs, Mothers and Pioneers,” 103. See also her *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers* (New Brunswick, 1997).

<sup>49</sup>Marcus and Peck, eds., 44.

<sup>50</sup>An American relief worker reported that a Belsen survivor describing medical experiments “believes that well over the majority of Jews alive—certainly 90% of those the Nazis could get at, will not have children—including himself and his wife.” Mintzer, letter to his wife dated February 17, 1946 (166). It is worth noting how many “Holocaust memoirs” actually include (or conclude with) time in the DP camps and experiences of marriage, pregnancy, and childbearing. See, among many memoirs, Sonja Milner, *Survival in War and Peace* (New York, 1984); and Sala Pawlowicz with Kevin Klose, *I Will Survive* (London, 1947). In general, see Lenore Weitzman and Dalia Ofer, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven, 1998); also Sybil Milton, “Gender and Holocaust—Ein offenes Forschungsfeld,” Sara R. Horowitz, “Geschlechtsspezifische Erinnerungen an den Holocaust,” and Atina Grossmann, “Zwei Erfahrungen im Kontext des Themas ‘Gender und Holocaust,’” in Sigrid Jacobeit and Grit Philipp, eds., *Forschungsschwerpunkt Ravensbrück: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Frauen-Konzentrationslagers* (Berlin, 1997), 124–46.

Observers were shocked by a kind of “hypersexuality” among the mostly youthful inhabitants of the DP camps who had been denied the usual processes of adolescent sexual and romantic experimentation. They noted with a certain astonishment, both impressed and appalled, that “the appearance of numbers of new-born babies has become a novel feature of the Jewish DP camps.”<sup>51</sup> Abraham S. Hyman, a legal affairs officer attached to the U.S. Jewish Adviser’s Office, observed unsentimentally, as did virtually everyone, that “the overpowering desire to end the loneliness and to establish or reestablish family life led to marriages of men and women who patently had nothing else in common and were acknowledged as ‘marriages of desperation’ by the people themselves.” He cited an explanation by a DP in Zeilsheim camp near Frankfurt to a member of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry: “I was lonely; she was lonely. Perhaps together we will be half as lonely.” At the same time, however, Hyman—again, like virtually everyone who came into contact with the DP survivors—was moved and impressed by their “amazing recuperative powers” and apparently irrepressible “zest for life.”<sup>52</sup> As many survivors have articulated, they were young and finally freed from constant fear; they wanted to taste the pleasures of youth long denied: “Our young bodies and souls yearned to live.”<sup>53</sup> Yet sexual longing was mixed with a painful sense of inexperience, of having missed out on some crucial youthful socialization and pleasures. The quick marriages—“Hitler married us,” DPs wryly noted<sup>54</sup>—promised some sense of comfort and stability to people who possessed neither but were often also cause for more anxiety and insecurity. Buried deeply were stories of rape and sexual assault at the hands of Soviet liberators and other protectors as well as Germans and local fascists (and also in the forest partisan encampments, where women were subject to sexual coercion and assault by both Red Army soldiers and Jewish partisans).<sup>55</sup> It is worth noting in this context that the experience of liberation (and the prospect of future heterosexual relations) may have been profoundly different for women and men precisely because so many

<sup>51</sup>Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, 54. Occupation and relief officials, as well as Germans, were often caught between disbelief at the horror and magnitude of the extermination and incomprehension of the fact that there remained, after all, hundreds of thousands of survivors who resisted repatriation and for whom there had to be found not just “relief” but a new life (what was still called a “final solution”) outside of Europe. See Wahrhaftig, “Life in Camps,” 130.

<sup>52</sup>Hyman, 246, 270, 17.

<sup>53</sup>Biber, 46.

<sup>54</sup>Berger, 291.

<sup>55</sup>See especially Nechama Tec’s treatment in *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans: The Story of the Largest Armed Rescue of Jews by Jews during World War II* (New York, 1993), 126–70, and her forthcoming book *Resistance and Courage: Jewish Women during the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2002).

women found themselves having to fear or, indeed, undergo renewed attack, this time from those whom they had welcomed as liberators.<sup>56</sup>

Nonetheless, over and over again, relief workers and interviewers heard the same message: "All I wanted right away was a baby. This was the only hope for me."<sup>57</sup> By the winter of 1946, reports claimed that "a thousand [Jewish] babies were born each month" in the American zone.<sup>58</sup> A 1946 American Joint Distribution Committee survey recorded 750 babies born every month just in the official U.S. zone DP camps and perhaps even more dramatically that "nearly one third of the Jewish women in the zone between 18 and 45 were either expectant mothers or had new-born babies."<sup>59</sup> The recorded Jewish birth rate in Germany for 1948, right before the proclamation of the state of Israel on May 16, 1948, and the easing of U.S. immigration regulations eventually reduced the Jewish DP "problem" to small but highly visible proportions, was a whopping 35.8 per 1,000.<sup>60</sup> All of these striking demographic markers can, of course, be related to empirical data such as the youthful age cohort and 3:2 (or even 2:1) male/female sex ratio among Jewish survivors,<sup>61</sup> as well as the higher rations (up to 2,500 calories a day) and guaranteed (if primitive) housing granted Jews by the American occupiers. Having sex and making babies

<sup>56</sup>Haas, 98–99. I am indebted to Michael Brenner for formulating this point about the particular experience of female survivors based on his mother, Henny Brenner's unpublished memoirs. In fact, if one rereads Holocaust memoirs with this issue in mind, the fear of rape by Red Army liberators comes up frequently. Brana Gurewitsch notes in her introduction: "After liberation, when chaos reigned and all women were considered fair game by Soviet liberators, women survivors took extraordinary measures to avoid rape" (xviii).

<sup>57</sup>Haas, 102. See also the numerous examples in the testimonies collected by the American psychologist David P. Boder right after war's end in Niewyk.

<sup>58</sup>Grobman, 17. This baby boom is well portrayed in the American documentary film *The Long Journey Home*, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Los Angeles, 1997.

<sup>59</sup>Cited in Hyman, 247. In January 1946 the AJDC counted 120 children between the ages of one and five; in December 1946, 4,431. Not all these babies had been conceived in the DP camps; the high birth and young child numbers also reflected the many new arrivals from Poland who had survived with their families in the Soviet Union. In some cases, children who had been born in the Soviet Union were registered, for political or bureaucratic reasons, as having been born in Poland or in DP camps. See Joseph Berger's story (276–81). (Given the current revival of historiographical debate about [neo]totalitarianism, it may be not incidental to point out that this too was a major difference between Nazism and Stalinism; Jews survived in Stalin's Soviet Union, albeit under difficult conditions.)

<sup>60</sup>See Brenner, *Nach dem Shoah*, 36. For 1946 figures in Bavaria (29/1,000 for Jews, 7.35/1,000 for Germans), see Jacobmeyer, 437. For comparative purposes, the German birth rate in 1933 stood at 14.7 (9.9 in Berlin); in the aftermath of the First World War it had reached 25.9 in 1920. Some two thirds of Jewish DPs eventually ended up in Israel; altogether about 100,000 went to the United States and 250,000 to Israel. For differing views of the reaction in Israel, see Segev; Yablonka.

<sup>61</sup>Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, 54 (and in numerous other sources). By comparison, in Berlin at war's end, approximately the opposite (over 60 percent female) ratio applied.

was also a way to deal with the frustration and loneliness of leading a waiting life (“auf dem Weg”) in the transit camps and the disappointment at the reality of the long-yearned-for liberation.

Still, the high birth statistics require attention. For Jewish survivors, fertility and maternity worked as a mode of reidentifying and reconstructing. It provided a means both of claiming personal agency and an intact individual body and of constructing a viable new community after extraordinary trauma and even in transit. Let me be clear: the baby boom among the *She'erit Hapleita* could not offer any redemptive meaning to the catastrophe (*Churban*) that had been experienced.<sup>62</sup> But it did offer a possible means to “redeem the future”<sup>63</sup> or at least to begin the regenerative work of making and imagining one. We can draw here on Dominick La Capra’s insistence that “one be attentive as well to the efforts of victims to rebuild a life and to make use of counterforces that enable them to be other than victims, that is, to survive and to engage in social and political practices related to the renewal of interest in life (for example, having children).”<sup>64</sup> Having babies—the most normal of human activities under normal circumstances and indeed precisely what would have been expected by Eastern European Jewish religious and social tradition—now became both miraculous and an entry into “normal” humanity, even if it often seemed to offer only a kind of make-believe normality, a “parallel life” to the memories of the preceding trauma. New babies and families provided a means of bridging the “radical discontinuity” of the life cycle that the survivors had endured. If, as many psychologists and psychiatrists have now argued, Holocaust survivors’ loss of “basic trust” had fundamentally and permanently damaged their faith in themselves and the outside world, caring for an infant could perhaps initially offer the most direct and primal means of reaffirming the self.<sup>65</sup>

#### REVENGE AND MEMORY

In that sense, the quick construction of new families could also be interpreted as a kind of genealogical and biological revenge in a situation where the possibilities (and, indeed, the motivation) for direct vengeance were

<sup>62</sup>The most insistent critic of any attempts to lend “meaning” to the Holocaust has been Lawrence L. Langer. See his most recent book, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York, 1995). On this theme also there is a huge literature, ranging from the theological to the psychoanalytic and political.

<sup>63</sup>Mankowitz, “The Formation of *She'erit Hapleita*,” 351.

<sup>64</sup>Dominick La Capra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, 1998), 204–5.

<sup>65</sup>On the problem of destroyed trust and the influence of psychiatric work done with Holocaust survivors on later treatment of refugee trauma, see the essays in *Mistrusting Refugees*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen (Berkeley, 1995), especially the introduction (4). On the relationship between survivors and their children, see, among many studies, *Generations of the Holocaust*, ed. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy (New York, 1982), and the pioneering work of Judith Kestenberg and Henry Krystal.

very limited.<sup>66</sup> Jewish infants, born on territory that had been declared *judenrein* to women who had been slated for extermination, were literally dubbed *Maschiachskinder* (children of the Messiah).<sup>67</sup> Marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth clearly represented a possible reconstruction of collective or national as well as individual identity for the Jewish DPs. The baby boom was the counterpart, indeed, was closely linked, although in ambivalent ways, to the passionate political Zionism that gripped (in one form or another) virtually all survivors. It offered a means of establishing a new order and a symbolic sense of “home,” even and especially in the refugee camps.<sup>68</sup>

It is also crucial to keep in mind that this Jewish baby boom did not simply go on behind the gates of the DP camps, unnoticed by Germans. Jewish interaction with Germans was certainly not limited to the oft-cited arenas of black marketeering or bar ownership. Jews gave birth in German hospitals where they were treated by German physicians and nurses; Jews hired German women as housekeepers and nannies; they sometimes, especially given the surplus of men, dated, had sex with, and even (in a much stigmatized minority of cases) married German women (by 1950, one thousand such marriages had been registered, and surely there were many more relationships).<sup>69</sup> DP mothers crisscrossed the streets of German towns with their baby carriages; the many Jewish marriages and births in the DP camps were registered in the German *Standesämter* (marriage bureaus).<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, the much photographed parades of baby carriages proudly steered by DP parents were intended as conscious displays of self-assertion, for themselves and also for others. They clearly communicated the politics of “we are here” to politicians debating Palestine and immigration policy, relief organizers adjudicating rations and housing, and German citizens confronted with their discomfiting former victims. Just as historians have expanded their definitions of resistance during the war and Holocaust to encompass actions that did not rely on weapons, perhaps we

<sup>66</sup>We might consider this gendered view of “revenge” in light of current discussions about the relative lack of vengeful actions by survivors and a newer focus on a few dramatic actions (such as the scheme to poison German wells recently portrayed in a German documentary). See John Sack, *An Eye for an Eye* (New York, 1993), among other texts. For an interesting analysis of discussions about revenge among German-Jewish survivors, see Jael Geiss, *Übrig sein-Leben “danach”: Juden deutscher Herkunft in der britischen und amerikanischen Zone Deutschlands 1945–1949* (Berlin, 2000), 207–38.

<sup>67</sup>I am grateful to Samuel Kassow of the History Department at Trinity College for this reference.

<sup>68</sup>Comparative anthropological literature is useful in this context. See especially Lisa Malkii’s analysis of the ways in which refugee camp settings encourage “construction and reconstruction of [their] history ‘as a people’” and the importance of children in that process in *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, 1995), 3.

<sup>69</sup>Figure from Yantian, 43.

<sup>70</sup>See Eder, “Jüdische Displaced Persons.”

too should think about broadening our notions of “revenge” when analyzing the DP experience. Jewish survivors in Germany, it should be stressed, saw their presence on that “cursed soil” not only as a perverse historical “irony” but also as a kind of justice and “payback.” The Germans, Jews contended, owed them their space, their former barracks and estates, their rations, and their services. There was a kind of “in your face” quality to Jewish mothers brandishing their babies, just as there was to the banners flying from former German official buildings or the posters carried in processions and parades through German towns; a pleasure in rousing a village baker and insisting that he bake *challah* for Shabbes or ordering a grocer to supply pounds of herring for a holiday feast.<sup>71</sup>

Significantly, there is very little record of what might be construed as the most obvious form of bodily “revenge,” namely, rape or sexual possession of German women by Jewish survivors or soldiers. The Red Army had engaged in mass rape as it fought its way west into Nazi Germany; the Soviet Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg was widely believed to have incited Red Army soldiers to “take the flaxen-haired women, they are your prey,” an accusation never proven and that he vigorously denied.<sup>72</sup> Those assaults had been interpreted—and anticipated—as acts of revenge, but they had, in fact, been relatively indiscriminate. Jewish survivors relate multiple stories of having to flee rape by their Soviet liberators, even as others (or sometimes the same women) talk of the Russians’ kindness.<sup>73</sup> Certainly, Germans complained about rapes and pillage by DPs, but the villains are generally identified as non-Jewish Eastern European former slave laborers. In the early Yiddish edition of his memoir, Elie Wiesel referred to nights of rape and plunder by liberated Buchenwald survivors: “Early the next day Jewish boys ran off to Weimar to steal clothing and potatoes. And to rape German girls” [un tsu fargvaldikn dayshe shiksas], but the passage is not central to his account and is revised and then expurgated in

<sup>71</sup>Interestingly, Theodor W. Adorno makes a point in his *Soziologische Schriften II* (Suhrkamp, 1975), 258–60, of discussing the *Rachesucht* (lust for revenge) attributed to DPs and Jews by Germans after their defeat (*Zusammenbruch*).

<sup>72</sup>Ilya Ehrenburg, in his memoir *The War: 1914–1945*, vol. 5 of *Men, Years—Life*, trans. Tatiana Shebunina in collaboration with Yvonne Kapp (Cleveland, 1964), 32, explicitly denied longstanding accusations that he, a Soviet Jew in the Red Army, had been “urging the Asiatic peoples to drink the blood of German women. Ilya Ehrenburg insists that Asiatics should enjoy our women. ‘Take the flaxen-haired women, they are your prey.’” Ehrenburg insisted, however, that despite “isolated cases of excesses committed in East Prussian towns that had aroused our general indignation . . . the Soviet soldier will not molest a German woman. . . . It is not for booty, not for loot, not for women that he has come to Germany” (175).

<sup>73</sup>See, for example, the accounts by women survivors in Gurewitsch, ed. On the rape of German women by Red Army soldiers, see Atina Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” in Robert G. Moeller, ed., *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor, 1997), 33–52; and Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 69–140.



later editions.<sup>74</sup> Hanoch Bartov's autobiographical novel contains a riveting description of his Palestine Brigade unit's efforts to contain and come to terms with the rapacious actions of some of their comrades while also insisting on understanding and protecting the violators. The protagonist recognizes that even the "unwritten law of the Red Army," granting a twenty-four-hour free zone for acts of vengeance, could not "help my sick heart. I could not shed innocent blood, I would never know peace."<sup>75</sup> The American Jewish journalist Meyer Levin included in his account of his journeys across devastated liberated Europe a tormented analysis of his own fantasies about raping "blond German" women and how they wilted in the face of the women's abject surrender. He and a buddy steered their U.S. Army jeep, imagining their revenge: "The only thing to do was to throw them down, tear them apart" on "a wooded stretch of road" with "little traffic, and a lone girl on foot or on a bicycle." But when they finally encountered the perfect victim, alone on a bike, "young, good looking and sullen . . . her presence was a definitive challenge," they finally realized that while her fear was "exciting," "it wasn't in us."<sup>76</sup> There was little sympathy to be found among survivors for the women victimized by the Red Army but also little appetite for joining in. Larry Orbach, a young Jewish survivor, recalled with bitter satisfaction his trip home to Berlin from Auschwitz and Buchenwald after a three-week quarantine for typhus:

I wore the dark blue Eisenhower jacket the Americans had given me on which I had sewn my number, B.9761, and my yellow prison triangle on the lapel pocket so that any Nazis I might meet could appreciate the dramatic reversal in our relationship. The other travelers tried to avert their eyes from me, but they could not. Beyond the trauma, they were now compelled to confront the living reminder of the monstrous horror they had so long ignored, or from which they had at least managed to blind themselves. . . . As the train chugged on under the night sky, a drunken Russian soldier raped a young German girl in full view of everyone. No one raised a hand to help her; there was no sound but her screams. So much for the Master Race, who, in Auschwitz, I had watched slam the head of a Jewish baby into the wall of a shower room. The baby had died instantly, his brain protruding and his blood spurting; they had laughed, full of triumph and swagger. Now they were too meek even to protect one of their own children. Nor did I intervene; these were people who had set me apart, told me I could not be one of them.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup>See Naomi Seidman's careful study of Wiesel and the various versions of *Night* in "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage," *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (fall 1996): 1-19, esp. 6.

<sup>75</sup>Bartov, 117, 245; see also 46-47, 224-29.

<sup>76</sup>Levin, 278-80.

<sup>77</sup>Larry Orbach and Vivien Orbach-Smith, *Soaring Underground: A Young Fugitive's Life in Nazi Berlin* (Washington, D.C., 1996), 330-31.

Revenge took other forms. One of the most striking features of the DPs' presence was the calculated appropriation of former Nazi "shrines" and German terrain for their own symbolic purposes. Representatives from the first DP conference at St. Ottilien in July 1945 chose to announce their demand for open emigration to Palestine in the Munich Brau Keller, from which Adolf Hitler had once launched his 1923 attempted putsch. When the Central Committee of Liberated Jews of Bavaria moved into a "bombed out floor" of the Deutsches Museum in Munich, Abraham Hyman of the U.S. Theater Judge Advocates Office pointed out with a certain amount of glee that "Hitler once prophesied that the time would come when a person would have to go to a museum to find a Jew." In January 1946 the Congress of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews met in the Munich City Hall, center of the former *Hauptstadt der Bewegung* (capital of the Nazi movement), festooned for the occasion with a banner that read, "So long as a Jewish heart beats in the world, it beats for the Land of Israel." The Council of the Central Committee convened its September 12, 1946, meeting in Berchtesgarden, right near Hitler's Eagle's Nest redoubt, already richly adorned with the autographs of many GIs and survivors. Examples of such resignifying abound; perhaps the most famous was the Streicherhof, a socialist Zionist kibbutz on the former estate of the notorious Bavarian *Gauleiter* (Nazi regional leader). It "became a prime attraction for journalists and others," where "all the visitors were treated to the experience of seeing the dogs on the farm respond to Hebrew names that the trainees had taught them, as their salute to Streicher."<sup>78</sup>

Historians who have recognized such public actions as "symbolic revenge" have generally not problematized the "baby boom" in those terms, situating it, rather, as a "personal" response on an individual or familial level, naturally linked to the effort to restore a sort of normality to traumatized disrupted lives.<sup>79</sup> I would suggest however, that Jews—very clearly in the published record and in political representations—perceived pregnancy and maternity as another form of this resignifying, indeed, of a certain kind of revenge, marking that they were more than just "victims" and precisely did not dwell obsessively on the traumatic past. DP culture did place a premium on collecting personal histories, on bearing witness for the future. Almost immediately after liberation, the first memorials were raised, and a day of remembrance was proposed; the latter was set for the anniversary of liberation as a deliberate representation of the inescapable link between mourning the catastrophe and hope for renewal.

<sup>78</sup>Hyman, 35, 393.

<sup>79</sup>For example, Ze'ev Mankowitz, author of *Between Memory and Hope: Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany 1945–46* (forthcoming in English). Personal conversation, Jerusalem, Israel, January 2001.

The DPs quickly set up their own Central Historical Commission, headquartered in Munich, and charged it with collecting eyewitness accounts of persecution as well as any cultural artifacts such as art and songs that could be recuperated from camp and partisan life. In fact, the very first DP Congress in St. Ottilien, Bavaria, in July 1945 had called on survivors to collect the names of all the exterminated. At the same time, with the help of the legendary rogue U.S. Army chaplain Abraham Klausner, lists of survivors were quickly published. By summer 1945 five volumes with over 25,000 names had already been published; in December the army printed the sixth volume of this *She'erit Hapleitah*. Theater, music, cabaret, and press in the refugee camps directly addressed the horrors of the war years, so much so that Jewish relief workers were both shocked by the matter-of-fact treatment of extreme horror in DP culture and irritated by what they deemed obsessive remembering. The DP orchestra in the U.S. zone performed its premiere in striped pajamas with a piece of "barbed wire fence" marking the stage.<sup>80</sup> Koppel S. Pinson, the educational director of the Joint Distribution Committee in Germany, complained: "The DP is pre-occupied almost to a point of morbidity with his past. His historical interest has become enormously heightened and intensified. He is always ready to account in minutest detail the events of his past or the past of his relatives."<sup>81</sup> But in its preoccupation with the mundane everydayness of camp life and political association, with all its customary factionalism and bickering, daily life in the DP camps also fostered a kind of productive forgetting. Especially the young Zionist survivors were too consumed with planning their future to spend time recording a painful past. As Israel Kaplan, the Riga historian who headed the Commission, noted with some chagrin, "In such a period of instability and living out of suitcases, and given the background of dramatic events, it is possible to make history, but not to write history."<sup>82</sup> In another example of the paradoxical expectations and images attached to Jewish survivors, they were simultaneously berated for remembering too much and not enough.

<sup>80</sup>Hyman, 252. Hyman offers marvelous examples of Jewish occupation of German space and is especially eloquent about interpreting memorialization as a "step into the land of the living."

<sup>81</sup>Koppel S. Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (January 1947): 108, cited in Yantian, 29. Similarly, the British were highly irritated by the insistence of Jewish DPs in their zone on still calling their DP camp in Hohne, near Bergen Belsen concentration camp, Bergen Belsen—a conscious maneuver by their leader, Josef Rosensaft. See Hyman, 78.

<sup>82</sup>For a fine analysis of the debates about remembering, see Yantian, 27–42. Interestingly, the DP proposed Day of Remembrance, on the date of liberation, the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Ijar, was never accepted either in the Diaspora or in Palestine. The state of Israel declared Yom HaShoah for the 27th Nissan because it fell right between the remembrance of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the establishment of the state of Israel, thus safely bracketing Holocaust remembrance between two markers of resistance and rebirth.

Let me interject at this point that, along with noticing how our perceptions of survivors have radically changed, it is also useful to note how much our current obsession with memorializing is a product of our own late-twentieth-century and turn-of-the-millennium preoccupations. It is perhaps our own panic about the loss of individual and collective memory that shapes our conviction that memory is crucial for recovery and reconstruction.<sup>83</sup> Directly after the war, both for survivors and those who worked with them (albeit in different ways), remembering was not necessarily considered the optimal way to deal with trauma. Indeed, one of the most powerful forces driving the quick marriages among survivors was surely the need to be with someone who required no explanation or rehearsal of the traumatic recent past, who recognized the many references that were invoked, and who understood, at least on some level, the lack of words or the inadequate words that were available.

At the same time, it is clear that the conventional impression of “silence,” of the inability to speak, that constitutes the very essence of trauma, as formulated by current psychoanalytic and literary theory, has to be relativized. Memorialization and commemoration commenced, as we have seen, virtually immediately. Survivors, buffeted between their assigned roles as founts of moral authority, bearers of new life, and asocial self-pitying wrecks, were keenly aware of their role as guardians of memory and eye-witnesses to the indescribable as well as their obligation, often repeated, to “find revenge in existence.” In a sermon on September 17, 1945, the first Yom Kippur after liberation, DP leader Samuel Gringauz exhorted the young, “the carriers of our revenge”: “You must show the world that we live. You must create and build, dance and sing, be happy and live, live and work.”<sup>84</sup>

The most powerful metaphor for “life reborn” was the dream of a new Jewish state, physically and emotionally cut off from the traumatic history of European Jewry. In the powerful DP film *Lang ist der Weg*, filmed in the camps in 1946, the young heroine tries to tell her handsome partisan veteran lover about how damaged she is; he cuts her off, telling her that he doesn’t want to know, she must not remember. He pledges to spirit her away to Eretz Yisrael because she will not be able to forget as long as she remains on bloodied and cursed German soil. In the final scene of the

<sup>83</sup>The literature on trauma and memory is, by now, enormous. Among many examples, see LaCapra; Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, 1995). On the relationship between our memory panic and memory boom, see Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, 1995); on the “fetishizing” of memory, see Marita Sturken, “The Remembering of Forgetting,” *Social Text* 16, no. 4 (winter 1998): 102–25; for a critique of our fascination with (and confusion of) individual and collective trauma, see Pamela Ballinger, “The Culture of Survivors: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Memory,” *History and Memory* 10, no. 1 (spring 1988): 99–131.

<sup>84</sup>Dr. Samuel Gringauz in his Yom Kippur sermon at Landsberg DP camp on September 17, 1945. Cited in Hyman, 16–17.

film, the young couple have resolved the problem: while they have not yet reached Palestine, they are lounging on the grass of a kibbutz (*Hachschara*, agricultural settlement) in Bavaria, preparing for their *Aliyah* and playing with a newborn child—the most eloquent statement of survival and the ability to start anew.<sup>85</sup>

Bearing children worked to mediate the continuous tension between remembering and forgetting. Babies, in their names and in their features, bore the traces of the past, of those who were dead and lost. Indeed, in some significant ways, the bearing of new life was not only a signal of survival and hope but also an acknowledgment of the losses that had gone before. Jewish DPs were continually accused of manically “acting out” rather than “working through” their mourning. Since the Jewish religion (in Ashkenazi practice) prohibits naming children after the living, survivors did, in their naming practices, recognize the death of loved ones, whom they had, for the most part, not been able to bury or even to confirm as dead. Certainly, however, imaginatively and in their ever-present demandingness, children also represented futurity. As the first issue of the DP newsletter *Unzre Hoffnung* stated, employing the language of health and hygiene that remained dominant after the war: “We must turn to today and prepare a better tomorrow, a beautiful and a healthy tomorrow.”<sup>86</sup>

Jewish women survivors, living in a kind of extraterritoriality on both German and Allied soil, were prefiguring on their pregnant bodies a kind of imaginary nation which they hoped—at least that was the public message—to realize in Palestine/Eretz Yisrael. Their babies had “red hot” political valence not only for the Allies but also for the Zionists, who dominated political and cultural life in the DP camps. The DP press and political actions demanding open emigration from Germany to Palestine invariably foregrounded images of babies and baby carriages.<sup>87</sup> The DP camp newsletters drove their message home with pages of marriage and birth announcements, always juxtaposed to ads searching for lost relatives or details on their death, business and death announcements, and immigration notices.

<sup>85</sup>*Lang ist der Weg*. German/Polish coproduction, 1947. Available from the National Jewish Film Center, Brandeis University. For a critical analysis, see Cilly Kugelmann, “Lang ist der Weg: Eine jüdische-deutsche Film-Kooperation,” *Fritz Bauer Institut Jahrbuch 1996*, 353–70.

<sup>86</sup>Dieter E. Kesper, *Unsere Hoffnung: Die Zeitung Überlebender des Holocaust im Eschweger Lager 1946* (Eschwege, 1996). The newspaper of the UNRRA camp in Eschwege, no. 1, June 4, 1946, discovered in Heimatachiv. The published German text is a translation of the original Yiddish.

<sup>87</sup>Maj. John J. Maginnis referred to the DP influx in Berlin as a “red hot” political crisis in his *Military Government Journal: Normandy to Berlin* (Amherst, 1971), 326. For the ubiquitous babies and baby carriages, see, for example, the extraordinary photo collection in *Ein Leben aufs Neu: Das Robinson Album. DP-Lager: Juden auf deutschen Boden 1945–1948* (Vienna, 1995). See also the photographs in the 2001 calendar of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, culled from the recent exhibition *Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945–1951*.

In sharp contrast to women's often prominent (and heroized) roles in the anti-Nazi resistance, women did not fill important public positions in the DP camps and were not part of the DP leadership. Indeed, when David Ben Gurion attended the first Congress of Jewish DPs, convened at the Munich Rathaus in January 1946, he asked with some bewilderment and genuine "censure" why there were no women delegates. Contrasting this glaring absence with the resistance heroines celebrated in Palestine, he demanded (according to at least one observer): "Don't the women . . . who endured so much and showed so much courage have anything to say here? In Palestine I met women who fought in the ghettos. They are our greatest pride. Isn't it sad enough that you lack children? Must you in addition artificially eliminate the women and create a population of men only?"<sup>88</sup> Ben Gurion's early admonition about the lack of children contained, of course, at least part of the answer to his own question about women's apparent nonparticipation in the active and often rancorous political life of the DP camps; very soon most women survivors would be preoccupied with the bearing and raising of new families.<sup>89</sup> That activity in turn was desperately overdetermined because it occurred in the aftermath of a Nazi Final Solution that had specifically targeted pregnant women and those with young children for immediate and automatic extermination. Problematizing and not merely noting the privileged place of motherhood in DP women's lives, on the one hand, and in DP politics in general, on the other, is all the more crucial, because for Jewish women during the Holocaust, motherhood was, in Judith Baumel's words, literally "lethal."<sup>90</sup> Afterward, so many felt—as so many memoirs attest—"an eagerness to get our lives under way, . . . to create new families and bring Jewish children into the world."<sup>91</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

For the Jewish DPs, then, the personal and the political aspects of survival were linked: in the birthing of babies and the social glue of fervent Zionism. Current critical, especially Israeli, historiography has decried the cynical instrumentalization of Jewish survivors (the "seventh million," in Segev's terms) by the Yishuv, the contempt that Zionist leaders felt, more or less openly, for the many traumatized survivors, the manipulation of media and officials to create the impression that every Jew was desperate to go to

<sup>88</sup>Quoted by Leo W. Schwarz in *The Redeemers: A Saga of the Years 1945–1952* (New York, 1953), 87.

<sup>89</sup>On the image of women in the Resistance and their valorization in Palestine and early Israeli society as well as their simultaneously central and marginal roles in the DP camps, see Baumel's essays in *Double Jeopardy*. Baumel writes of a "biological deterrent towards female organizational activism" (24). On women in the DP camps, and especially the drudgery of makeshift housework in the camps, see Myers and Myers Feinstein.

<sup>90</sup>Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*, ix.

<sup>91</sup>Berger, quoting his mother, 306.



Palestine, and the harsh determination with which the “reservoir” of “human material” in the DP camps was recruited by Zionists to populate the land and man its military.<sup>92</sup> Still, it seems to me that the dream and the passionate commitment were genuine and intense. Especially young people who had lost their entire families (the majority, except for families who had survived in Soviet Central Asia) found self-affirmation and community in the Zionist peer culture and, perhaps, the utopian vision that sustained survival.<sup>93</sup> As one impressed American-Jewish Zionist GI noted admiringly about the young survivors he encountered at Kibbutz Buchenwald, “the recuperative powers of the average human being, physical and mental, are remarkable, provided only that there is something to recuperate for.”<sup>94</sup>

And so, to continue the theme of paradoxical perceptions: the same observers who were horrified by the depressing culture of a remnant community-in-waiting and angered by its “villains,” the idle and the criminal, the “bedraggled” and “abject,” caught in “a continuation of the war—not the destructive war of mortars, but the despairing war of morale”—were also deeply impressed by its dynamism and stubborn survival. As Ira Hirschmann, La Guardia’s personal representative to UNRRA, reported, DPs’ dignity was continually assaulted by the “insufficient tasteless food, . . . broken-sized shoes and clothing, their self-respect crushed, with no prospect of a normal life ahead of them.” Wondering that they did not “tear them limb from limb,” he was both impressed and aghast at the “incredible self-restraint” Jews observed toward German POWs in a nearby camp and the surrounding placid German farmers who were better treated by the American victors. Clearly, revenge is an important theme to follow, and it took multiple forms. But despite some dramatic stories, actual plans and actions of violence were few. The evidence is quite contradictory: on the one hand, many Jews did not even want to engage with Germans enough to violate them; on the other hand, Military Government officials grouched that “they love getting into fights with Germans.”<sup>95</sup> Revenge operated on complicated (surely also gendered) levels in everyday interactions with Germans and, most importantly, internally. It meant proving that there was a future, expressed both in terms of Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state where Jews would no longer be a vulnerable minority and in the birth of babies and the formation of new families. Indeed, “revenge” may very well be an insufficiently pliant term to convey Jewish DPs’ excruciatingly complicated mix

<sup>92</sup>See, for example, Segev; Zertal; Grodzinsky.

<sup>93</sup>It is important to keep in mind that many of the Zionist groups in the DP camps had arrived together via the Bricha and traced their origins back to the ghettos, partisan groups, and camps. In fact, much of the early DP leadership in Bavaria came from the same workcamp, Dachau Kauffering, which had received many Jews as they arrived on death marches from the East.

<sup>94</sup>Kieve Skiddel, unpublished letter, Ober Peissen, June 21, 1945.

<sup>95</sup>Mintzer, 301.

of overwhelming loss, satisfaction at surviving against all odds, urgent desire to reclaim “normality,” and finally determination to demonstrate—to Germans, Allies, and other Jews—that “we are here.” Angered at the denial of free immigration to Palestine and the United States, Hirschmann suggested that the Jewish DPs should properly be called not DPs but BPs, “Betrayed Persons.” Nonetheless, he insisted, “These people who had cheated the death chambers had emerged physically scarred and beaten, but spiritually triumphant.”<sup>96</sup> Today, we might argue differently, understanding the baby boom and DP culture as expressions of a parallel life, a living on when one had, in a sense, as the philosopher Susan Brison has put it, outlived oneself; surviving in a life that did not replace or displace the horrors that had been experienced but existed alongside and with it in a highly vibrant form.<sup>97</sup>

DP experience suggests important questions about the intersection of the personal and the political and definitions of mourning, trauma, and revenge. It poses questions about the place of sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood in defining survival and victimization as well as furnishing possible reconstructions of ethnic or national identity in the wake of Nazism and World War II (or other violent trauma, either individual or collective). Precisely because, as legal scholar Fionnuala Ni Aolain has pointed out, during the Holocaust, “established conventions of motherhood are deliberately ravaged and assaulted,” the emphasis in DP culture and politics on “life reborn” raises issues about how to recognize the centrality of maternity without reproducing in our analysis conventional gender assignments.<sup>98</sup> We are confronted with the “stubborn question” of how, as Denise Riley has memorably put it, to “assert a category without becoming trapped within it.”<sup>99</sup> The baby boom in particular challenges us to conceptualize historically the entangled levels of individual and personal, familial and cultural, and collective and national experience and representation of the body, gender, and sexuality. It points finally to the simultaneous human “normality” of the survivors—even as they were categorized by others as victims, villains, or survivors—and to the tragic mystery that still shadows and blocks our understanding of what they endured and how they continued to live.

<sup>96</sup>Hirschmann, 72, 75, 81, 101.

<sup>97</sup>See Susan Brison, “Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity,” in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed. Diana T. Meyers (Boulder, 1997), 12–39.

<sup>98</sup>Ni Aolain, 52. The article takes this question very seriously from the point of view of feminist and legal theory. On “the fantasy of maternal love” as a force in feminist theory and women’s activism, see, most recently, Joan W. Scott, “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* (winter 2001): 284–304, esp. 303–4.

<sup>99</sup>Denise Riley, “Some Peculiarities of Social Policy concerning Women in Wartime and Postwar Britain,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Higonnet et al. (New Haven, 1987), 269. See also her *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis, 1989).