THE KAZET THEATRE:

A BRIDGE FROM DEATH TO LIFE

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

Drew University in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Letters

Lindsay M. Warren

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

May 2017

Copyright © 2017 by Lindsay M. Warren
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

The Kazet Theatre:
A Bridge from Death to Life

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

Lindsay M. Warren

The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
Drew University May 2017

Within the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp, a Yiddish theatre group emerged from the shadow of the Holocaust. Led by an experienced actor, writer, and director named Sami Feder, the Kazet Theatre continued a theatrical legacy established in the concentration camps and brought Yiddish performances to the DP camp. Feder first began the theatre when he was a prisoner in the Nazi camp system and named the troupe for the abbreviation for K-Z (a shortened form of concentration camp). In Belsen, the Kazet Theatre performed adaptions of traditional Eastern European plays and also featured members' original, often highly emotional songs, poetry, dances, and dramatic scenes based on their experiences during the Holocaust.

Among Belsen's Jewish displaced persons community, the Kazet Theatre provided several important functions that helped DPs transition from victims to survivors. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, survivors struggled to process the deprivation, inhumane treatment, and immense loss they endured. With few other viable options, survivors remained in displaced persons camps until they regained a sense of their humanity and emigrated. As the largest group of displaced persons in many of the DP camps, Jews quickly forged communities in these temporary settings.

In Bergen-Belsen, the Kazet Theatre helped to reestablish social bonds and create a sense of community, which psychologists and trauma experts believe are essential steps for traumatic recovery. For the performers and crew members, the Kazet Theatre provided the opportunity to physically work through their trauma as they rehearsed, designed sets, and performed for eager audiences. The theatre's original works also allowed Holocaust survivors in the audience to safely access and begin to process their traumatic memories. Sami Feder's adaptations of classic Yiddish stories brought pre-war Jewish culture into the DP camps and introduced new messages designed specifically to raise the DPs' spirits. The Kazet Theatre performed a therapeutic function by bridging the survivors' memories and their potential futures.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Architect of the Kazet Theatre	11
Chapter 2: After Liberation: the Displaced Persons Camps	28
Chapter 3: The Struggle of Surviving: Psychological Response to the Holocaust	54
Chapter 4: Bergen-Belsen: A Thriving Jewish Community	80
Chapter 5: The Concentration Camp Theatre Re-emerges in Belsen	118
Chapter 6: A Bridge from Death to Life: The Kazet Theatre's Therapeutic Value	151
Conclusion	183
Bibliography	191

Introduction

Even after decades of Holocaust scholarship, from a variety of disciplines, a common misconception about survivors persists—that Holocaust survivors did not speak out and did not want to discuss their traumatic experiences. While this was the case for many survivors, others took advantage of opportunities to share their stories as soon as they emerged in the days and weeks after liberation. In the immediate post-war period, Holocaust survivors shared their experiences with one another, gave interviews to the press, and began efforts to commemorate those who perished. In several unique ways, the Kazet Theatre represents another strong example against the belief that survivors simply wanted to forget and move on. Sami Feder,[1] a Polish Jew who survived a dozen Nazi-controlled labor and concentration camps, created a displaced persons Yiddish theatre troupe that directly confronted the horrors of the Holocaust. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Sami Feder and the Kazet Theatre did not shy away from the death and devastation they survived, instead they recreated those horrible experiences and, at times, reimagined them, on stage.

Established in the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp,[2] Feder's Kazet Theatre gave voice to the experiences of Holocaust survivors. In the two years following Bergen-Belsen's liberation, the Kazet Theatre performed original works with overt links to Nazi

[1] In source material, Sami Feder's name takes on a variety of spellings, including Samy, Zami, and Samuel. For clarity and cohesion, I used the most common spelling of his name in English translations, Sami.

[2] Although Jewish DPs generally referred to the DP camp as "Belsen," documents from the era referred to the camp as both "Bergen-Belsen DP camp" as well as the "Belsen DP camp." The names have been used interchangeably throughout this text.

atrocities as well as classic works from various Yiddish playwrights. Their audience always included significant numbers of Jewish Holocaust survivors as they performed in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp and traveled to other displaced persons camps throughout Western Europe. Not only did Feder's theatre provide a mechanism for survivors to speak about their experiences, the Kazet Theatre also helped survivors recover from the trauma of the Holocaust.

In 1946, the *New York Times* ran an article by Joseph Wolhandler, an American member of the Joint Distribution Committee at Bergen-Belsen, which highlighted the Kazet Theatre's emotional effect. Wolhandler witnessed how the Kazet Theatre impacted their audience and reported on the "therapeutic value" of the "Bergen-Belsen Players."[3] In a more current article on Sami Feder and the Kazet Theatre, Zlata Zaretsky, a historian of theatre and an expert on Jewish theatre, described the Kazet Theatre as a "weapon against oppressors and therapy for the oppressed souls."[4] The theatre's healing power kept appearing as a central theme of the Kazet's significance; it was an aspect of the Kazet Theatre that begged for further exploration.

Sami Feder's Kazet Theatre affected the theatre's actors and crew members as well as the survivors who witnessed their performances, but was it truly therapeutic? Did the Kazet Theatre provide conscious, or at times unconscious, mechanisms for Holocaust survivors to cope with their individual and collective trauma? If the Kazet Theatre did have

---

[3] Joseph Wolhandler, "On a Concentration Camp Stage," *New York Times*, June 30, 1946, accessed October 1, 2011, *Historical New York Times*.

[4] Zlata Zaretsky, "The Story of Sami Feder – Producer for the 'Kazet' Theatre," All About Jewish Theatre, 2002-2011, accessed October 15, 2011, www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/ article_display.aspx? articleID =3533.

this effect, how did their performances help to heal emotional and mental wounds? Since the beginning of my journey in studying the Kazet Theatre, these questions have fueled my research. After four years of studying this topic from various disciplines, I can now answer many of these questions.

Whether those participating in the performances or viewing them were aware at the time or not, the Kazet Theatre helped Holocaust survivors, particularly troupe, crew, and audience members, confront their personal memories and shared experiences as victims of the Nazi regime. Additionally, the Kazet's Yiddish language productions provided an essential communal bond that united Eastern European Jewish DPs through a shared history and culture – one the Nazi regime attempted to obliterate. In the aftermath of the war, the Kazet Theatre reclaimed the Yiddish language and culture through their performances. Within the context of the Belsen DP camp, the Kazet Theatre also fostered a safe environment for the community of survivors to begin healing. Ultimately, the Kazet Theatre bridged the realms of the survivor's pre-war memories and their hope for the future.

An examination of the Kazet Theatre must be situated within the larger field of Holocaust Studies, which began to take shape soon after liberation. In the years following the Second World War, historians dominated the subject and published impressive tomes that attempted to "unlock the mystery of the massacre of European Jewry"[5] The early works often focused on key themes, such as Lucy Dawidowicz's *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (1975), which closely examined antisemitism during the Third Reich; Hannah

[5] Michael R. Marrus, "Reflections on the Historiography of the Holocaust," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 6 (March 1994), JSTOR, 93.

Arendt's study of the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951); Raul Hilberg's magnum opus, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961); and survivor Philip Friedman's comprehensive study of Auschwitz, *This Is Oswięcim* (1946). These studies exemplified the first few decades of Holocaust scholarship, in which "a few grand visions" served as building blocks for future scholars.[6]

Academic examination of the Holocaust shifted in the 1970s and 1980s as scholars narrowed their focus, incorporated more primary sources as well as survivor testimony, and at times, challenged widely held views. Holocaust Studies became more specific with investigations on Nazi eugenics, the role of women, the persecution of Sinti and Roma, specific Nazi programs, the topography of genocide, the after-effects of the Holocaust, and the memorialization of the Holocaust.[7] This second wave of Holocaust historians also argued as to whether "The Final Solution" was an intention of the Nazis from the start or merely a function of the Nazi Party's policies and programs (intentionalism versus functionalism).[8] A new generation of Holocaust scholars, often with very personal ties to the topic, spurred the "maturing of the historiography" as they desired to dig more deeply into the available material and uncovered previously unknown resources. Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli-born scholar and historian, and Saul Friedlander, who survived the Holocaust as a hidden child, emerged as influential scholars whose works broadened the field with their investigations that ranged from Bauer's studies of rescue and resistance to Friedlander's

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Dan Stone, introduction to *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 3-5.

[8] Ibid., 3.

focus on the importance of representation and memory. Christopher Browning, an American Holocaust historian, shook up traditional notions of perpetrators with his 1978 study *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* and, most notably, his 1992 work, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. Reflecting the discipline's evolution as well as the extensive contributions of historians, Lucy Dawidowicz's 1981 critique of Holocaust histories, *The Holocaust & Historians* encapsulated the arguments and theories of many late 20th century scholars.

Although historians remained dominant in the field, Holocaust scholarship attracted those in literature, the fine arts, and psychology, beginning in the final decades of the 20th century. Holocaust and English literature scholar, Lawrence Langer began analyzing the Holocaust and survivor testimony through a literary lens in the 1970s. Robert Skloot's *The Theatre of the Holocaust, Volume 1: Four Plays* (1982) and *The Darkness We Carry* (1988) along with Elinor Fuch's *Plays of the Holocaust: An International Anthology* (1987) comprise some of the earliest studies of Holocaust related drama. Michael Meyer bridged history and fine arts with his 1991 publication, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich*. *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust* (1999), edited by Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb, continued the trend of blending historical insights and performing arts by including scholarly articles alongside primary sources.

Psychologists further diversified Holocaust Studies with numerous studies on the role of perpetrators, the responses of bystanders, and the coping of survivors. Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist, not only included his personal tale of survival, but also his psychological analysis of how he and others survived such horrific conditions in *A Man's Search for Meaning* (1946). Henry Krystal, also a survivor of the Holocaust, compiled various studies

within *Massive Psychic Trauma* (1968) to examine varied responses to trauma. Holocaust survivor, Bruno Bettelheim added to these texts with *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (1979), a psychoanalysis of the human experience that further shed light on the psychological wounds plaguing survivors. Early influential psychological studies of survivors and trauma include: Joel E. Dimsdale's *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators*; Leo Eitinger, Robert Krell, and Miriam Rieck's *The Psychology and Medical Effects of Concentration Camps and Related Persecutions on Survivors of the Holocaust: A Research Bibliography*; and Randolph L. Braham's *The Psychological Perspectives of the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (1988). More recently, psychologist Aaron Hass' *The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust* (1996) comprehensively examined the resilience of Holocaust survivors through interviews with fifty-eight survivors to discover their concerns and their efforts to cope in the wake of the Holocaust.

Although Holocaust Studies grew tremendously in the late 20th century and continues to grow in the twenty-first century, the discipline remains mainly fragmented and disconnected. As Marrus argued when reflecting on the 1970s shift within Holocaust studies, "We have passed from a historical literature conditioned by a few grand visions to a body of writing shaped by discrete, not necessarily interconnecting perspectives."[9] Surely, the field of Holocaust Studies contains numerous sub-disciplines, but these divergent works often lack true inter-disciplinary connections. Some studies may bring together one or two disciplines, but few marry several sub-categories into one text. Friedlander explained that "most historians do not work at the level of global interpretations but at that of the concrete interpretation of facts within their immediate

[9] Marrus, 93.

context," which often limits cross-disciplinary connections.[10] In order to fully examine the Kazet Theatre, history, psychology, and fine/performing arts must be brought together in a nuanced and sophisticated fashion. Up until this point, no study of Bergen-Belsen's displaced persons camp, nor of the Kazet Theatre has done so.

Holocaust survivors crafted the best, most comprehensive sources on the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp. Two works written and edited by the Jewish DPs, initially intended to preserve post-war experiences for their family members, provide the basis of the historical record (from the survivor's perspective) on the DP camp. The first, *Belsen*, was published in 1957 with the second, *Holocaust and Rebirth: Bergen-Belsen 1945-1965*, in 1965 for the 20th anniversary of the camp's liberation. The second work, *Holocaust & Rebirth* contains general overviews of the Nazi camp, liberation, and the displaced persons camp, but is most significant as a massive commemorative photo album with upwards of eight hundred photographs. Nearly a dozen of the photographs feature the Kazet Theatre troupe—performances and behind the scenes shots—and include captions in Hebrew, Yiddish and English.

Belsen lists no editor, but includes detailed testimony and extensive information on Bergen-Belsen's history as a Nazi concentration camp, the camp's liberation by British soldiers, relief efforts to help survivors, and the creation of as well as day to day activities of the displaced persons camp. It was within this commemorative text that the first retrospective article on the Kazet Theatre appeared. Written by Sami Feder, "The Yiddish

---

[10] Saul Friedländer, "From Anti-Semitism to Extermination: A Historiographical Study of Nazi Polices Toward the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation," *Yad Vashem*: 16, accessed May 8, 2016, http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/Documents/studies/Saul_Friedlander.pdf.

Theatre of Belsen" tells of the theatre's origins during the Holocaust and re-creation of the Kazet Theatre in the displaced persons camp. Although published in Yiddish and English, *Belsen* has become an obscure text, relegated to archives and family collections. Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb brought Feder's words into the contemporary study of Holocaust theatre when they included an edited version of "The Yiddish Theater of Belsen" in their previously mentioned anthology *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust* (1999). Apart from these two works, Feder's testimony on the Kazet Theatre in English remains extremely limited; Feder wrote and published after settling in Israel in the 1950s, but those texts remain in Yiddish, with no translations published.

The most recent and specific secondary text on the Kazet Theatre, featured in Tina Frühauf and Lily E. Hirsch's anthology *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music and Postwar German Culture* (2014), is Sophie Fetthauer's "The Katset-Teater and the Development of Yiddish Theatre in the DP Camp Bergen-Belsen," translated by Hirsch. Fetthauer, a German scholar of history and musicology, provides an in-depth examination of the Kazet Theatre's cabaret programs, musical performances, and productions of two of Sholem Aleichem's traditional Yiddish plays. Fetthauer, although extremely detailed in her study of the Kazet's performances, does not delve into the theatre's therapeutic qualities, only including passing references to the theatre's "therapeutic function" as well as two excerpts from Wolhandler's aforementioned article.[11] While Fetthauer's work furthered scholarship

[11] Sophie Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater and the Development of Yiddish Theatre in the DP Camp Bergen-Belsen," trans. Lily Hirsch, in *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture,* edited by Tina Frühauf and Lily E. Hirsch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102.

on the Kazet Theatre significantly, it did not seek to discover how and why the Kazet Theatre functioned as a therapeutic mechanism for Belsen's survivors.

My investigation of the Bergen-Belsen DP camp Kazet Theatre fills this gap in the literature and furthers the existing scholarship by examining the Theatre from an interdisciplinary lens that will add to the canon of Holocaust Studies. Additionally, my examination of the Kazet Theatre will contribute to the scholarship on trauma and coping in the aftermath of extreme conditions by showing how the theatre played an essential role in such a recovery. By approaching the Kazet Theatre from multiple disciplines, my work will link together primary sources with existing psychological, historical, and theatrical studies to show the therapeutic significance of the Kazet Theatre.

References to the Kazet Theatre often credit it with therapeutic qualities, but none have specifically considered the ways in which the Kazet Theatre actually provided a therapeutic means for individuals or a community of survivors. A thorough examination of the Kazet Theatre, drawing on the fields of psychology, history, and theatre studies, will illuminate specific coping methods utilized by Jewish survivors involved with the theatre. Those within the Kazet Theatre's troupe and crew, as well as members of the audience, credited the Theatre with aiding in their recovery. For such individuals, the Kazet Theatre aided their ability to transition from Holocaust victims to survivors.

An examination of the Kazet Theatre must begin with the man who first created the theatre under the extreme conditions of Nazi concentration camps and continued staging productions in the displaced persons camps; therefore, the first chapter "The Architect of the Kazet Theatre" explores the life of Sami Feder from his birth to his liberation from Bergen-Belsen. The second chapter, "After Liberation: The Displaced Persons Camps,"

provides important historical context on the realities of life immediately after liberation when displaced persons camps emerged to house the war's refugees, including hundreds of thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors. "The Struggle of Surviving: Psychological Response to the Holocaust," the third chapter, uses decades of psychological research to examine responses to trauma, especially Holocaust-specific trauma.

The final three chapters all hone in more specifically on the elements that contributed to the Kazet Theatre's therapeutic qualities. In the fourth chapter, "Bergen-Belsen: A Thriving Jewish Community," the focus narrows to the Bergen-Belsen DP camp and the resourceful, supportive community of Holocaust survivors that created distinctly Jewish institutions in this transient environment. The Kazet Theatre, its repertoire, and its performances in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp constitute the fifth chapter, "The Concentration Camp Theatre Re-emerges." The final and sixth chapter, "A Bridge from Death to Life: The Kazet Theatre's Therapeutic Value" incorporates scholarship on the healing power of the arts and ties each of the previous chapters' individual threads together to show how Sami Feder's Kazet Theatre provided a therapeutic outlet for Holocaust survivors who participated in or witnessed their performances. This text is only the beginning of what I hope will be continued research into the Kazet Theatre and its therapeutic value.

Chapter 1

The Architect of the Kazet Theatre

Sami Feder, the founder of Belsen's Kazet Theatre, discovered a love for theatre during his youth, began an anti-fascism theatre to resist the rise of the Nazis, and utilized the power of theatre to help himself and others endure the Holocaust. With a firm belief in theatre's ability to spread political beliefs and unite individuals, Feder cemented himself as a key figure in restoring Jewish culture after the Holocaust. In order to understand the influences of the Kazet Theatre, the story of the theatre's chief architect must be uncovered.

Feder's journey to organizing one of the most important Jewish cultural outlets after the Holocaust began in a small Russian village in the early 20th century. Eliezer Dov Feder and his wife, Rivka-Golda, welcomed their only son, Sajnwel, on December 5, 1909.[1] At the time of Sami's birth, the Feders, a textile worker and a seamstress, lived in Zawiercie, Poland (then controlled by Russia).[2] The Feder family grew to include three daughters, but sadly, Sami's father died when he was still a boy.[3]

After his father's death, Sami began living with his maternal grandfather in Sosnowiec, Poland. In 1918, when Sami was nine-years-old, he and his grandfather moved

---

[1] Sami Feder, "Interview Notes," interview by Zlata Zaretsky (Herztlya, Israel: 1994), emailed to author March 19, 2016.

[2] Leah Wolfson, ed., *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context,* Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 179.

[3] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky. Tragically, Sami's mother and three sisters all perished during the Holocaust.

to Frankfurt, Germany—a place Sami came to love.[4] Unfortunately, the political upheaval of inter-war Germany showed Sami that his adopted country did not always love him in return. In the mid-1920s, Feder first encountered anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda when he noticed a copy of *Der Stürmer*, the newspaper published by Julius Streicher. Feder later recalled that the anti-Semitic images and publications "called out my inner bitterness and vigilance."[5] Feder's anger over Semitism propelled him to join Germany's growing Zionist movements.

In response to his growing "bitterness and vigilance," Feder joined the *Blau-Weiss* (Blue-White), one of the oldest Zionist youth groups in Germany; later, Sami became active with *Poale Zion*, the Zionist Workers Party founded in the early 20th century.[6] As a member of Zionist organizations, Feder found a community of fellow Jews with whom he discussed the principles of Zionism, particularly the desire to resettle Palestine.[7] As a young member of the Zionist organizations, Sami met Berl Lucker, Melech Noishtadt, and Daniel Chorny who served as his "first Yiddish spiritual leaders" and "with whom Feder published the weekly magazine *Di naye tsayt* (*The New Times*) in Yiddish."[8] Sami Feder's

---

[4] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky; Wolfson, 179.

[7] Ido Bassok, "Youth Movements," trans. by Anna Barber, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2010, accessed February 18, 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Youth_Movements; Samuel Kassow, "Poale Tsiyon," YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2010, accessed February 18, 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Poale_Tsiyon.

[8] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

experiences as a young Jewish man in inter-war Germany formed the basis of his political views that later heavily influenced his theatrical contributions.

As a teenage member of the Zionist movement, Sami first discovered the political power of theatre. His curiosity and natural talent for the art form drew him to join Germany's Yiddish theatre community. At seventeen, Feder moved to Berlin to attend art school where he studied Jewish Classics.[9] Sami's course of study introduced him to Yiddish writers and playwrights that later became an important part of his theatrical repertoire.

While in Berlin, Sami's acting skills grew as he studied under Zvi Friedland, a founding member of the *Habimah* theatre.[10] Seemingly due to Friedland's connections, Feder was invited to join the city's *Yiddisher-Teater-Studye*, where Max Reinhardt,[11] a highly regarded theatre and film director, supervised instruction.[12] The *Yiddisher-Teater-*

---

[9] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[10] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky. The Habimah theatre was a Hebrew theatre company founded in 1918 in Moscow and later reestablished in Tel Aviv in the 1930s. The Habima has served as the national theatre of Israel since 1958. For more information on its history see: Vladislav Ivanov, "Habimah," trans. by I. Michael Aronson, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2010, accessed February 23, 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Habimah.

[11] Max Reinhardt is often credited by theatre scholars with revolutionizing the role of the theatre director. Reinhardt, who was born Maximilian Goldmann in Austria in 1873, became a force in Berlin's theatrical world in the early 20th century. As a director, Reinhardt transformed the role from administrative to artistic and established a new standard that transcended Berlin. For more information see: Rachel Beaumont, "Max Reinhardt: The Man who 'Invented' Modern Theatre Direction," Royal Opera House Covent Garden Foundation, June 26, 2014, accessed March 28, 2017, http://www.roh.org.uk/news/max-reinhardt-the-man-that-invented-modern-theatre-direction.

[12] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

Studye's participants also included Raphael Klachkin, another Habimah founder; theatre director and producer Erwin Piscator; Alexander Granovsky, founder of the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre; and Yiddish writers David Bergelson, Leib Ziskind, and Moshe Lifshiz.[13] Feder understandably described his time learning from and working with such giants in Europe's theatre scene as "a wonderful time."[14]

In addition to receiving formal training alongside some of the most influential Yiddish writers, directors, and performers at the time, Feder also befriended some of Berlin's most well-known celebrities of the stage and screen. Sami's circle grew to include Leopold Jessner, Alexander Granach, and Bertold Brecht.[15] Jessner, a world renowned director and producer, served as director of the Berlin State Theatre until 1930.[16] During the interwar years, Granach transitioned from a leading actor on the stage to a star in Berlin's burgeoning film industry.[17] Perhaps the most well-known, Brecht developed several successful productions with composer Kurt Weill and created his own dramatic form: epic theatre.[18] Brecht's "epic theatre" invited the audience to reflect on contemporary

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Britannica Academic, s.v. "Leopold Jessner," accessed February 18, 2017, http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Leopold-Jessner/43577#.

[17] Dartmouth College, "Granach, Alexander," Film 42/German 43: Continental Strangers, January 10, 2001, accessed February 18, 2017, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~germ43/resources/biographies/granach-a.html.

[18] Britannica Academic, s.v. "Bertolt Brecht," accessed February 18, 2017, http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Bertolt-Brecht/16316.

moral and social problems through the stage performance, which often utilized emerging technical effects.[19] Living and working in Berlin during the 1920s provided Feder with access to some of theatre's greatest talents of the era.[20]

Through his work at the *Yiddisher-Teater-Studio* and the other friendships he developed, Feder honed his craft by learning from those at the forefront of German Dramatic Expressionism. Reinhardt and Piscator, in particular, infused inspiration from expressionist painters into set design, staging, and directing to create a less realistic and more emotional theatrical experience.[21] The dramatic lessons, both formal and informal, that Sami learned in Berlin heavily influenced his approach to theatrical productions. After his training, Feder understood not only Yiddish classics, but also the power of incorporating elements of expressionism into his plays and productions.

Feder finished his education in 1927, but stayed in Berlin and remained an active member of the city's Jewish theatre.[22] Sami became a member of Berlin's actors' union, which afforded him the chance to publish articles in the *Berlin Arts Pages* magazine. He also organized his first dramatic circle called "Yiddish Cultural Laborers," participated in Berlin's Sholem Aleichem Club, and helped publish the Jewish newspaper *Die Judische*

---

[19] Encyclopedia Britannica (2000), s.v. "Epic Theatre," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 18, 2017).

[20] Working alongside the great theatrical minds of 1920s German theatre, Sami Feder likely encountered some of the early theoretical work exploring the link between theatre and psychology. At this time, no known sources confirm that Feder studied any of this scholarship in the 1920s, but it is a possibility. See Chapter 6 for a brief history of the various theories that linked theatre and psychological benefits.

[21] Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia (2016), s.v. "Expressionism," *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 18, 2017).

[22] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

Rundschau.[23] Additionally, Sami crossed over into Berlin's robust film industry as an actor with the Berlin Cinema Company.[24]

Feder's career as an actor, writer, and director of the German stage ended abruptly in 1933. With the takeover by the Nazis, Sami feared for his safety in the German capitol.[25] Although his career in the German theatrical world was cut short, Germany provided Feder with the political and cultural outlets he needed to develop his talents as an organizer of politically motivated theatre.

When the Nazis took over control of Germany in 1933, Sami Feder knew that as a Jew with a foreign passport, who was also involved with Jewish theatre and publications, he would become a target.[26] After witnessing the violence and turmoil following the Reichstag fire, Feder decided to return to Poland.[27] Sami relied on his acting skills to help him escape from Germany and safely enter Poland. When his temporary hiding place was discovered in Breslau, Germany, Sami pretended to be a naïve youngster who was concerned about his Polish mother, which convinced authorities to let him proceed.[28] Then at the German-Polish border, Feder portrayed a Catholic man who was hurrying to pray at a church just inside Polish territory, and again, Sami's clever ruse allowed him to safely

---

[23] Zaretsky.

[24] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[27] Wolfson, 179.

[28] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

cross into Poland.[29] Zlata Zaretsky, a performing arts scholar, recognized that Sami's escape from Poland marked a shift in the purpose theatre served in his life; she asserted, "Theater became the essence of his life as a way for influence and control over danger."[30]

After successfully escaping to Poland, Feder, now twenty-four, settled in Warsaw. Sami quickly became involved in Warsaw's Jewish community, but he was taken aback by their nonchalance over Hitler and the Nazis. He recalled, "I saw, that the Jewish life in Warsaw is ordinary, as if nothing happened. Everybody thought that it is only [a] German problem. Nobody could imagine that the same can happen in Poland."[31] Much to Feder's dismay, his Jewish friends in Warsaw did not believe his warnings, and instead, "looked at me with pity, as if it was my own tragedy."[32] Sami decided that if no one listened to his warnings that "Hitler soon will come and kill Jews,"[33] then he needed another vehicle for his message.

Feder organized a Yiddish Theatre in Warsaw called "Orpheus" in homage to Ida Kaminska's troupe *Yiddisher Arbeiten Teater Orpheus*.[34] Sami saw theatre as the way to convince his fellow Polish Jews to be wary of Hitler. He later described how he attempted

---

[29] Ibid.

[30] Zaretsky.

[31] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky. Ida Kaminska, a Yiddish performer and theatre manager, founded her Warsaw-based theatre in 1921. She later became a stage and film actress in the United States. See: Encyclopedia Britannica (1998), s.v. "Ida Kaminska," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 18, 2017).

to encourage his community to join his troupe: “Friends, I said: ‘We need a Jewish Anti-Hitler Theatre, because it is the way to survive—not to submit. I need 100 people!’ They said: ‘You are crazy!’”[35] Although his initial efforts at recruiting did not succeed, Feder eventually put together a troupe of nearly one hundred individuals.

Feder described himself at twenty-four as having “enough strength” to organize a political theatre troupe. Sami, along with Jakub Rotbaum[36] and David Licht,[37] organized thirty actors, forty singers, and thirty musicians at the venue where the Warsaw circus performed. Armed with extensive skills from his time in Berlin, Feder, aided by Rotbaum and Licht, organized a group capable of performing “musical entertaining theatre.”[38] Although the troupe set out to entertain, Sami firmly believed that the theatre should maintain a political edge, so he “inserted anti-Hitler texts where I could.”[39]

---

[35] Ibid.

[36] Born in Żelechów, Poland in 1901, Jakub Rotbaum was a theatre director, actor, and painter. In 1925, Rotbaum began directing Yiddish theatre in Warsaw, four years later he began working with the Vilna troupe, and in 1940, he traveled to the United States to participate in various productions. For more information see: Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, “Rotbaum, Jakub” trans. by Anna Grojec, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2010, accessed February 27, 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Rotbaum_Jakub.

[37] David Licht, born in Lvov, Poland in 1904, became a well-known director and actor of the Yiddish stage. Early in his career, Licht was an actor with the Polish State Theatre and the Vilna Yiddish Troupe. Later, Licht acted and directed in Poland, Romania, and France. In 1935, he settled in Buenos Aires, but continued working in the Yiddish theatre in Argentina and the United States. “David Licht 71, of Yiddish Stage,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1975, accessed February 27, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/1975/08/02/archives/david-light-71-of-yiddish-stage-director-and-actor-is-dead-long.html.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

One of those “anti-Hitler texts,” *Hitleriada*, Feder and Yiddish writer Shmuel Volman wrote together. The play, a satire about a day in Hitler’s life, used dark humor to discuss the growing death toll under the German Führer.[40] Feder’s troupe performed *Hitleriada* throughout Poland until the police told him to shut it down or face prison. Despite the warning, Feder and the troupe continued performances of the anti-Hitler play, under the title *There is Nothing New under the Sun*, until the summer of 1939, just months before the German invasion.[41] For Sami Feder, theatre functioned as a means of warning his countrymen and fellow Jews about the dangers of Hitler and the Nazi regime, and soon the art form would sustain Sami during the most arduous years of his life.

For over a year and a half after the invasion of Poland, Sami Feder avoided arrest and imprisonment. Sami’s ability to avoid the Nazis ended abruptly in May 1941 when he was arrested and imprisoned in Schemishitz, Poland. On May 13, 1941, Feder was sent to the Derflas labor camp in the Sudeten region.[42] Over the next four years, Sami was imprisoned in a dozen different ghettos and camps, including the Bedzin ghetto, the Bunzlau concentration camp, and the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; Feder later deemed his experiences the “twelve portals of hell.”[43] In nearly every ghetto, forced labor

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky; Arnold Zable, “Sonia Lizaron – Frontline Art: The Theatre of Resistance,” Meajin Quarterly (Summer 2016), accessed February 7, 2017, https://meanjin.com.au/essays/sonia-lizaron-frontline-art-the-theatre-of-resistance/.

[42] Zaretsky.

[43] Sami Feder, *Durkh 12 gehenem-fayern* (Amherst, MA: National Yiddish Book Center, 1985) accessed February 26, 2016, https://archive.org/details/nybc20950.

camp, and concentration camp that Feder was imprisoned in, he used theatre to help himself and his fellow prisoners.[44]

Even in Derflas, Sami created theatre among the camp's prisoners, selecting roles based on their age and strength. Feder later recalled, "Inside myself awakened a theatre director… I distributed 'roles,' that everybody was obliged to 'embody.' I placed those who were weaker and older [to the back] and put forward the strongest and youngest."[45] Even in what he described as "hell," Sami found solace in theatre and brought a temporary escape to his fellow performers and the audience.

In Bedzin, located in southwestern Poland, Sami first met his future wife Sonia Boczkowska. Sonia, a skilled Yiddish cabaret performer from Łodz, Poland, became an integral member of Feder's ensemble in the ghetto.[46] At first, Sami's Bedzin ensemble encountered resistance from the ghetto's *Judenrat* (Jewish council) who worried it would negatively affect the ghetto's inhabitants if the Gestapo found out about their rehearsals and performances.[47] Sami fiercely resisted the council's assessment and argued that "the terror and exhaustion inspired by these places did not kill the will to perform."[48] In Feder's view the ability to perform within the ghetto far outweighed the potential consequences. Sami Feder's efforts in Bedzin again revealed how he held onto his love of theatre and

---

[44] Zaretsky.

[45] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[46] Zable, "Sonia Lizaron."

[47] Ibid.

[48] Zaretsky.

continued to create ways to clandestinely lead performances within the Nazi ghetto and camp system.

By 1942, Feder was moved to the Bunzlau concentration camp, a sub-camp of Gross Rosen located in southwestern Germany.[49] In the Bunzlau camp, Sami formed another theatre group, and with the other participants, including Berl Friedler who later became an integral member of Feder's Belsen troupe,[50] this theatre became known as the German abbreviation for concentration camp (*Konzentrationslage*): K-Z Theatre.[51] When pronounced aloud the K-Z Theatre eventually morphed into the Kazet Theatre. In Bunzlau, many of the Kazet's initial performers were amateurs, but over time, Sami's troupe came to include artists and performers from Warsaw, Sosnowiec, and Bedzin. Despite transports and deportations that led to frequent fluctuations in Bunzlau's population and left the theatre without consistent participants, Sami later stated that at least 52 people participated in the concentration camp theatre.[52] The vast uncertainly of the Nazi camp system undoubtedly took a toll on Feder and the others who attempted to practice and perform within unimaginable circumstances. In order to counter their horrendous reality, Feder's

---

[49] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky. The Bunzlau concentration camp is now within Poland's borders, near the town of Bolesławiec.

[50] Sophie Fetthauer, "Music in the Bergen-Belsen DP-Camp," *Music and the Holocaust*, accessed October 15, 2011, http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/memory/dp-camps/belsen-dp-camp/.

[51] Wolfson, 179.

[52] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

Kazet Theatre developed a powerful motto: "Our duty is to bring light and culture."[53] Under Feder's direction, the Kazet Theatre brought temporary relief the awful reality of the concentration camps through their Yiddish performances.

In the concentration camps, scripts came from memory, rehearsals happened after grueling work days, and performances often occurred in secret or with tacit approval of guards. In a 1947 *Variety* magazine article, Feder's concentration camp theatre was credited with helping prisoners overlook "14 hours of work on a starvation diet, undergoing filth, inhuman floggings, [and] the expectancy of death." [54] Feder described the theatre's work as the "Art of Clenched Fists." Feder explained that in Bunzlau the "theatre was born in the night, hours after starvation and sufferings… After all we created our hope through the theatre. Our strength was only in hearts and feelings—we had nothing: no pencil, no paper."[55] With nothing but their desire spread hope through acting, the Kazet Theatre gathered their strength, clenched their fists, and performed for their fellow prisoners.

The performances in Bunzlau began secretly under the cover of night. Feder described the Kazet Theatre's performance conditions: "When Gestapo dogs left us alone, we moved together tables and set to work. Then we forgot that we were in the concentration camp. From mattresses we pulled out ties, did wings-side-scenes from them. Then we were

---

[53] Thomas Rahe, "Social Life in the Jewish DP Camp at Bergen-Belsen," ed. by Eric Somers and René Kok, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004, 76.

[54] "Concentration Camp DP's Carry on Legit Activity to Keep Their Tale Alive," *Variety*, February 4, 1947, 18, Archive.org, accessed July 6, 2016, https://archive.org/stream/variety165-1947-02/variety165-1947-02_djvu.txt.

[55] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

making up with ashes from burning matches."[56] The theatre also pushed aside bunks and used blankets to block off light from windows.[57] At one point, the performance's only backdrop was a "huge sign warning the dangers of typhus—'*Erne Laus*, *Dein Tod*.'"[58] The ingenuity of Feder and the fellow Kazet Theatre members ensured that their severely limited resources never prevented a performance and an opportunity to spread hope. For many of the performances in the camps, the Kazet's grateful audience paid for their attendance in cigarette butts—a precious commodity in a concentration camp.[59]

At times, the Bunzlau performances were completed under the watch of the camp's guards. Feder explained what happened at one such performance:

> Once I saw a face, high in the doorway, as the Kazet began a scene. I shouted to my friends, "Today our patron permits us to perform. But if you dogs perform badly, you will be whipped!" The face departed, satisfied, and we continued to rejoice noiselessly. There was no difficulty in killing a man, but survive and to smile – that was theater![60]

Unfortunately, Feder explained to *Variety* magazine that the theatre could not always rely on guards departing so easily: "Not every day in any camp was the same. One day a guard would come in to watch a performance. The next day he might send some of the actors to the ovens. One day the SS commandant would keep the children around for his amusement. The following week he would order them all burned. A good day was when you got a piece

---

[56] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[57] "Concentration Camp DP's," *Variety*.

[58] "Concentration Camp DP's," *Variety*.

[59] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[60] Zaretsky.

of bread and were still alive whenever night came."[61] The uncertain conditions made Sami even more resolved to continue acting and performing. Later he explained, "Sometimes we paid for it with casualties, but we never gave it up."[62]

In Bunzlau, Sami became a camp *Vorarbeiter* (foreman) and leveraged his position to eventually bring theatre to the community more broadly.[63] During Hanukkah in 1943, the Kazet Theatre performed for the camp's Jewish prisoners.[64] Feder later described his fears about the performance: "I was afraid of nothing, because in any case—with staging, or without it we would be 'eternally guilty.'"[65] Feder saw the public performance as part of the larger struggle to maintain Jewish dignity in the camps. The show began with an introduction from Feder welcoming everyone in German, then the Yiddish performances commenced. To celebrate the holiday, the Kazet Theatre reenacted portions of the ancient story of Hanukkah when Jews overcame unimaginable odds to rededicate the Holy Temple. For the Jewish audience, the performance allowed them to remember their past, briefly escape the present, and hope for a better future. In Feder's estimation, the Kazet's show was so powerful that he believed the audience experienced spiritual renewal.[66] With the

---

[61] "Concentration Camp DP's," *Variety*.

[62] Samy Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 136.

[63] Bella Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*, trans. by IBRT (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 176.

[64] Fettahuer, "The Katset-teater," 102; Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[65] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[66] Ibid.

Hanukkah performance a hit among Bunzlau's Jewish prisoners, German officials invited Feder and the Kazet Theatre to put on another version of the production in the winter of 1944 for all of the camp's prisoners.[67]

During the Holocaust, the Kazet Theatre's repertoire was pulled from memory or written in the camps. Despite the horrendous conditions in the concentration camps, Feder and the other members of the Kazet Theatre did everything in their power to gather material for performances. Sami explained, "We wrote our texts with ashes on paper, (if we found paper!), and in secret learned them by heart. In Bunzlau we published a handwritten magazine and hid it inside the roof."[68] The "magazine," as Sami referred to it, later served as the basis for his 1946 book, *Zamlun fun katset un geto lider* (*A Collection of Camp and Ghetto Songs*). In the book's introduction, Feder explained the difficulty of maintaining such a text in the camps: "While still in the concentration camp, I began to collect *katset* [concentration camp] and ghetto songs by known and unknown poets. Each time, I had to destroy the songs due to the frequent changes of clothing and the inspections."[69] Despite utterly inhuman conditions, Sami exhibited amazing foresight in realizing that these songs should be preserved and worked tirelessly to preserve them.

Feder's classic Yiddish literature education and training in Berlin's Yiddish theatre heavily influenced the Kazet's repertoire; Feder provided the majority of the troupe's

---

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Sami Feder, foreward to *Zamlung fun katset un geto lider*, ed. by Sami Feder (Bergen-Belsen DP Camp, Germany: January 1946), in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 182.

scenes from his memory or his pen. Sami drew inspiration from his educational and cultural background and explained, "I wrote first of all by myself… I performed only for Jews, about Jews and in Yiddish."[70] The concentration camp theatre's repertoire included a mix of classic Yiddish stories, such as I.L. Peretz's *The Moon Tells* and Sholem Aleichem's *The Bewitched Tailor* and *200,000*—Feder knew each play by heart from his years of experience in Yiddish theatre. His training also encouraged Sami to write his own material for the Kazet Theatre, including the poem "The Shadow" and the plays *Klezmers in the Ghetto* and *Partisans*.[71] In the concentration camps, Feder defied the odds as he led a Yiddish theatre troupe to perform a combination of well-known and original scenes in an effort to spread light amidst darkness.

In the most extreme conditions, Sami overcame fear because as he explained, "I couldn't be silent."[72] Feder believed that theatre inherently helped sustain concentration camp prisoners. Sami described wanting to "help everybody" through theatre.[73] Feder recalled inspiring others by proclaiming, "If we are not killed, we will perform being free!... You will see. I promise you, I swear, that I will lead you into the largest cities in the world, where Jews still live, and there we will play in Yiddish!"[74] Sami led concentration camp prisoners as they performed "being free" for several years during the Holocaust, and in the

---

[70] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[71] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky. See Chapter 5 for more information on many of the plays.

[72] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

end, his promise came true for a small number of his fellow survivors in the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp.

On April 15, 1945, the British army liberated Sami Feder, Sonia Boczkowska, and sixty thousand others at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.[75] Just months after liberation, Feder again joined forces with Boczkowska to recreate the Kazet Theatre among Belsen's Jewish displaced persons.

---

[75] Erik Somers and René Kok, "Introduction," ed. by Eric Somers and René Kok, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 10.

Chapter 2

After Liberation: the Displaced Persons Camps

Located outside the major German city of Hannover, the Bergen-Belsen camp began as a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in 1940 when the *Wehrmacht* (German army) repurposed a military base near the town of Belsen.[1] In July 1943, the Nazis established an "exchange camp" in addition to the POW camp at Bergen-Belsen. Intending to use prominent European Jews and Jewish citizens from neutral countries in exchange for German citizens detained by the Allies, the "exchange" Jews were to work, but "were to be well treated."[2] These prisoners, who were generally well-connected Jews, experienced vastly different treatment from Jews throughout the Nazi camp system.[3] Until March 1944, the majority of Bergen-Belsen's Jewish prisoners wore their own clothes, remained in family units, and did not have to work.[4]

The camp's purpose and population changed drastically after the spring of 1944 when Bergen-Belsen officially became an *Ehrholungslager* (Recovery Camp) and transports from other camps began arriving by the thousands.[5] In an effort to liquidate their

---

[1] Christian Römmer, ed. *Bergen-Belsen Historical Site and Memorial* (Celle, Germany: Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation/Bergen-Belsen Memorial, 2011), 8.

[2] Paul Kemp, ed., *The Relief of Belsen, April 1945: Eyewitness Accounts* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1991), 4.

[3] Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, "DP Camp 1945-1950: The British Section," in *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950*, ed. by Eric Somers and René Kok (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 42;

[4] Kemp, 4.

[5] Ibid.

camps in the East and out maneuver the advancing Allies, the Nazis forced prisoners into crowded cattle cars or on death marches into the heart of Germany. With scores of starved, exhausted, and often gravely ill prisoners arriving daily and no additional medical facilities, conditions in Bergen-Belsen quickly deteriorated.[6]

In December 1944, Bergen-Belsen came under the command of SS *Hauptsturmführer* Josef Kramer, former commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau,[7] and within months, the population of the camp swelled from fifteen thousand prisoners to over sixty thosuand.[8] Bergen-Belsen's exploding population led to horrendous conditions within the camp and diseases, including typhus, tuberculosis, and dysentery, were rampant.[9] Throughout the spring of 1945, over thirty-five thousand prisoners succumbed to death from disease, malnutrition, and exhaustion shortly after arriving in the camp.[10] Although Bergen-Belsen was not designated by the Nazis as an extermination camp,[11] the over-crowding, poor sanitation, and lack of food led to devastating death tolls in the final months before liberation.

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Römmer, 9.

[8] Königseder and Wetzel, 42.

[9] Kemp, 6.

[10] Königseder and Wetzel, 42.

[11] Kemp, 4-6; Römmer, 8-10.

Liberation & Rebirth

> April 15, 1945, was like any other day—but not for us. We were reborn on that day…. It is a strange feeling being reborn at a mature age. Normally, people do not remember details of the day of their birth, of course. But we do—all the details of that April 15…. A new life sprang from the filth and ashes of the liberated camps.[12]
>
> —Paul Trepman[13]

Despite the Nazis' best attempts to evade the Red Army in the East and the Allies in the West, the armies surrounded Nazi strongholds in 1945. As the armies defeated the German army on the fronts, they also discovered the Nazi camp system. Appalled by what they found in the abandoned camps, the Allies' infantry soldiers became liberators and learned how to help the survivors of the camps. Allied forces first encountered the remnants of the Nazi camps in July 1944 when the Red Army moved into Lublin, Poland and surprised the Germany military and guards at Majdanek. The Soviets reached Auschwitz in January 1945 and in the following months, liberated camps throughout Poland and the Baltic region, including Gross-Rosen in February 1945 and Stutthof in May 1945.[14] During the spring of 1945, American and British troops liberated camps throughout Greater Germany, including Buchenwald, Dachau, and Sachsenhausen, all liberated in April

[12] Paul Trepman, "On Being Reborn," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 133.

[13] Liberated from Bergen-Belsen by the British military, Paul Trepman remained in the displaced persons camp at Bergen Belsen. He also recalled meeting U.S. representative Earl G. Harrison during his visit in the summer of 1945. He later served as co-leader of the Central Committee's Cultural Department and as one of the three editors of the Yiddish newspaper, *Unzer Sztyme* (*Our Time*).

[14] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Liberation of Major Nazi Camps, 1944-1945," accessed February 23, 2017, https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10007724&MediaId=381.

1945.[15] The soldiers' arrival marked a momentous occasion for those who endured unfathomable suffering in the years prior, officially ending the oppression of the Nazis and beginning a new period of uncertainty for those lucky enough to survive.

The British arrived at Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945, and the troops found over sixty thousand emaciated individuals at the camp.[16] British soldiers in tanks of the 11th Armoured Division first approached the camp with Derrick Sington, a major from the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment, driving a truck with a loud speaker at the lead. Sington explained that he was ordered to announce to Belsen's inmates that "although they were liberated from the Germans they must not leave the camp because of the danger of spreading typhus."[17] After confronting the German and Hungarian troops that remained to guard Belsen, the first British troops entered the camp and were met with unimaginable horror.

The British soldiers quickly became overwhelmed by the devastating reality they encountered. Brigadier Daniell, Commanding Officer of the 13th Regiment of the Royal Horse Artillery, described the horrific sight as one of the first soldiers to investigate the camp: "Inside (one of the huts) a sight revealed itself that daunted even a battle-experienced man like myself. Inside there were tiers of bunks containing one and sometimes even three completely naked human beings, the stench was appalling."[18] Lieutenant Colonel Taylor, Commanding Officer of the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment of the Royal Artillery, recalled that the prisoners were cheering when the troops first arrived, but "a great number of them were

---

[15] Ibid.

[16] Somers and Kok, 10.

[17] Derrick Sington, "April 15, 1945," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 69.

[18] Kemp, 9.

little more than living skeletons" without adequate clothing.[19] Taken aback by the site before him, Lieutenant Derek Sington, described fighting back tears as he assessed the difference between the prisoners of Bergen-Belsen and the towns and villages they had previously liberated in France, Belgium, and Holland.[20] For these soldiers, freeing the prisoners of Bergen-Belsen marked a shift in their role as soldiers; from this point forward, the war meant something different and their role shifted from mere soldier to liberator.

The liberated prisoners comprised a combination of Jews, political prisoners, and Sinti and Roma. Belsen was littered with the corpses of those who perished in the concentration camp's final weeks. Belsen survivor, Norbert Wollheim, described the state of those clinging to life when the British arrived: "Most of us were far too weakened by the privations, the hunger and the constant fear of death to give loud expression to the joy which we felt during those forever unforgettable hours of liberation."[21] Despite their inability to fully express their relief and happiness at being free from the Nazis, Belsen's survivors welcomed their liberators and began the slow journey to recovery. For some survivors, particularly Jews, the road to regaining some semblance of their humanity resided in cultural connections; Josef Rosensaft specifically recalled the three Jewish soldiers among the British ranks who were their "first contact with free Jews" and in many cases chief communicators.[22] Efforts to transition Bergen-Belsen from a Nazi

---

[19] Ibid., 10.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Norbert Wollheim, "Belsen's Place in the Process of 'Death-and-Rebirth" of the Jewish People," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 53.

[22] Josef Rosensaft, "Our Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 25.

concentration camp into a place where the former inmates could recover required overcoming logistical challenges and considerable time.

In addition to helping the thousands of survivors, the British faced the arduous task of burying an estimated ten thousand unburied corpses that had been left by the retreating Nazis.[23] The massive typhus outbreak that began in February 1945 further complicated efforts to manage the unsanitary conditions at the camp.[24] In the weeks after liberation, an additional thirteen thousand former prisoners died despite medical intervention. To curb the spread of disease, British troops burned the site of the former concentration camp on May 19, 1945.[25] With the remaining occupants moved to another portion of the camp, the British moved forward with efforts to help the Holocaust victims and refugees of the Second World War.

---

[23] Königseder and Wetzel, 43.

[24] Kemp, 6.

[25] Königseder and Wetzel, 43.

Relief and Reality in the Wake of War

> From a psychological viewpoint the years 1945 and 1946 were very bitter. In an ironical sense they were more oppressive to our souls than the years in the hell of *Auschwitz* and *Belsen.* Before liberation, a hope kept us alive. We dreamed about the day of liberation…. And then the day came, and we saw before us a new kind of world, cold and strange.[26]
>
> —Josef Rosensaft[27]

Although many felt jubilation at the moment of liberation, the freedom understood in the term did not come without complications. With militaries controlling the liberated camps, freedom initially came with armed guards, limited movement beyond designated sites, and disorganized relief efforts. Survivors of the Holocaust were "free" but also facing a search for relatives, displacement from their homeland, and an uncertain future.[28] In her anthology *Jewish Responses to Persecution*, historian Leah Wolfson, poignantly asks, "How does one move from the now iconic image of the malnourished concentration camp inmate to survivor?"[29] The answer lies in the days, weeks and years following liberation and the displaced persons camps where the vast majority of Europe's Jews bridged the gap between death and survival.

For Jews rescued from the Nazi camp system, liberation also meant coping with physical ailments as well as practical and psychological questions. The emotional toll of

---

[26] Rosensaft, 25.

[27] Josef Rosensaft played a prominent role in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp and in the Jewish DP leadership that developed after the war. Rosensaft served as the chairman of the British sector of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, which advocated on behalf of Jews throughout the DP camps.

[28] Leah Wolfson, ed., *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context,* Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 54.

[29] Ibid., 82.

enduring the Nazi regime, coupled with the reality that life would never be as it was before the war, left many liberated Jews struggling with anxieties and fears. Dora Apsam, who survived Auschwitz and Weisswasser (a sub-camp of Gross-Rosen), expressed in a May 12, 1945 diary entry, “I don’t want to remain alive alone” as she struggled to locate any surviving family members after the war.[30] As Apsam’s stark statement reveals, the psychological impact of survival cannot be overlooked or discounted. For those Jews able to remain alive, experiencing liberation was an amazing feat, but the experience did not merely wash away the trauma of what they experienced nor did it eliminate emotional difficulties in the coming months and years.

The term “survivor” soon became mired in confusion and controversy as it became apparent that hundreds of thousands of European Jews survived the Holocaust in a wide variety of ways. Liberated concentration camp victims were joined by those who emerged out of hiding, those who fled deeply into Soviet territory, and those who sought refuge in the wilderness. Relief workers and government officials, as well as Jews themselves, sought to determine who precisely constituted a “survivor,” since the term held legal and cultural importance in the immediate postwar years.[31] Bureaucrats created the official designation of “displaced person,” while Jewish survivors began identifying themselves as *she’erit hapletah* (also *sheerit hapleita* and שארית הפליטה, in Hebrew), or surviving remnant.[32] Survivors likely adopted the Hebrew term since it appears in the Bible, with a

[30] Dora Apsan, “Diary of Dora Apsan,” in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 84.

[31] Wolfson, 81.

[32] Wolfson, 77.

particularly poignant passage from Second Kings 19:30-31, "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they that shall escape; the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall perform this."[33] In the Holocaust's shadow, the *she'erit hapletah* aimed to reassert their Jewish identity and form a strong Jewish community in the displaced persons camps.

Creation of a "Displaced Person" & DPs Camps

In the months following liberation, the Allies were faced with an unparalleled refugee crisis. Countless refugees, including prisoners of war and over seven million civilians, were displaced in Western Europe at the war's end.[34] An additional seven million, including concentration camp survivors, eastern European forced laborers, partisan fighters, and those in hiding, moved throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.[35] Displacement was only temporary for many millions who returned home at the war's end; however, this was not possible for significant portions of refugees who could not simply return home. The war destroyed towns and communities for many civilians, and for survivors of the Holocaust, homes were often destroyed or occupied by new residents, anti-Semitism continued (particularly in Eastern Europe), and fragmented families meant "home" held little significance. For the homeless, and often stateless refugees, the war's end brought relief but also great need. With Allied troops taking charge of Europe in the

---

[33] 2 Kings 19:30-31 (Jewish Publication Society Bible, 1917).

[34] Mark Wyman, *DPs Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 17.

[35] Wolfson, 161.

wake of the war, the most desperate refugees turned to the militaries to meet their most basic needs.

Even before the war's conclusion, government officials from the Allies anticipated the impact of the war's destruction on Europe and its people. In 1943, the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China donated funds to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was tasked with providing social and economic aid as the Allies regained control of the continent.[36] Particularly in Western Europe, as the Allied troops liberated cities, towns, and concentration camps, the UNRRA followed swiftly after with food, medical supplies, and other basic necessities. As the war progressed and the extent of the refugee crisis became more apparent, the UNRRA worked in conjunction with the military to set up camps for those displaced.

With the Nazis' use of cattle cars and death marches to move hundreds of thousands of prisoners in the final weeks of the war, the majority of the stateless, displaced refugees remained in Austria (1.4 million) and Germany (1.5 million) after liberation.[37] In order to determine those who were most in need, the Allied officials and the UNRRA created the category of "displaced persons" (DPs). Technically, "displaced persons" referred to civilians found outside their countries of origin at the end of hostilities; however, the parameters for consideration as a displaced person met serious debate as relief organizers aimed to identify those most in need.[38] According to historian Anna Holian, author of

---

[36] Wolfson, 524.

[37] Ibid., 46, 68, and 161.

[38] Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism; Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 3.

Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany, "The displaced person was an invention of the war years, a categorical novelty intended to distinguish between those who deserved Allied assistance and those who did not."[39] Displaced persons status became a social and legal label after liberation, with official designation resulting in housing and ration privileges.[40] Jewish displaced persons, ultimately, benefitted greatly from the DP label, but the process to recognize Jewish DPs as a distinct group took several months.

Housing persisted as the most pressing need for the vast majority of those displaced during the war's final weeks, when temporary structures often sufficed, and well into the immediate post-war period, when more permanent housing solutions became necessary. Initially, there were hundreds of various refugee housing arrangements employed by the military and UNRRA to serve the displaced persons population. After liberation, these structures officially became known as DP camps. Historian Mark Wyman, author of *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*, identified three main types of DP camp structures: (1) Casern camps, which were usually former German or Italian military bases with large permanent structures; (2) Barracks camps, including former forced-labor and concentration camps; and (3) Dwelling-house camps that were made of entire villages or towns.[41] Since the military and UNRRA established relief camps wherever they were needed, refugee camps (and later DP camps) often did not neatly fit into one of Wyman's

---

[39] Ibid., 42.

[40] Wolfson, 161.

[41] Wyman, 43-44.

three categories. No matter their architectural design, the DP camps emerged as essential components in the rehabilitation and recovery of displaced persons.

In the fall of 1945, as the military's direct role in rebuilding and rehabilitating Europe began to wane and as the DPs pushed for administrative changes, the UNRRA officially took over sole responsibility for the DPs on October 1, 1945. At the height of the organization's relief efforts in 1946, the UNRRA functioned with over twenty-five thousand staff members to care for nearly one million individuals.[42] The relief organization continued to expand as more emigrants flooded into Western Europe, where the majority of the DP camps had been established. By June 1947, the UNRRA oversaw 762 DP centers, including 8 in Italy, 21 in Austria, 45 in the French zone of Germany, 272 in the British zone, and 416 in the U.S. zone.[43] The size and scope of the DP camp system required significant organization and administration to meet even the most basic needs of the DPs.

Initial Conditions in the DP Camps

Although the DP camps became relatively stable structures, the displaced person population fluctuated as refugees moved throughout Europe in search of family, to avoid anti-Semitism as well as political persecution, and to seek relief offered by the UNRRA. As DPs flooded into camps, administrators focused on the most immediate dangers to stabilize the vulnerable population—preventing the spread of infectious disease and providing appropriate nourishment to each displaced person. Those admitted into the DP camps were registered, then quickly evaluated by medical staff (including delousing), fed,

[42] Wolfson, 524.

[43] Wyman, 47.

and provided rations of basic items, including soap, blankets, and utensils.[44] Infections could spread quickly among the DPs, and the UNRRA put considerable resources into preventing infectious disease from spreading throughout the vulnerable population.

Administrators attempted to maintain significant supplies of vaccines and medications and carefully monitored the living conditions at the camps, but with each camp's transient DP population, the task remained daunting. Examinations for infectious disease were designed to prevent outbreaks, but some of the methods frustrated the DPs. Efforts to prevent the spread of typhus included regular "dusting" with DDT powder, which the DPs dreaded since the powder eventually found its way into every area of their living quarters and person. Despite the distaste for "dusting," in the spring of 1946 the UNRRA believed infectious diseases no longer posed a serious threat.[45] Unfortunately, conditions in the displaced persons camps underwent few improvements in the first few years after the war.

Malnutrition posed nearly as serious a risk to the welfare of the DPs as disease, especially in the weeks after liberation. With thousands of patients who needed very carefully monitored diets, doctors and nurses faced a daunting task. Muriel Knox Doherty, an Australian nurse with the UNRRA at Bergen-Belsen, recalled, "Feeding the victims of starvation and disease was in itself a colossal and oft times heartbreaking undertaking."[46]

---

[44] Ibid., 49.

[45] Ibid., 50-51.

[46] Muriel Knox Doherty, *Letters from Belsen: An Australian Nurse's Experiences with Survivors of War*, edited by Judith Cornell and R. Lynette Russell (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 62.

At the Bergen-Belsen DP Camp, several UNRRA officials decided to rely on a mixture used in the 1943 Bengal famine consisting of dried milk, flour, sugar, salt, and water to treat the most malnourished DPs.[47] As displaced persons gained strength, more substantial food was introduced to their diet. Unfortunately, food scarcity often resulted in limited options for the DPs and relief workers.

Even though food remained scarce, the military and UNRRA prioritized the displaced persons to ensure they received between 2,000 and 2,500 calories a day during the summer of 1945. Unfortunately, these robust totals could not be maintained with food shortages plaguing Europe, and as late as 1948, DPs could only expect an average 1,600 calories per day.[48] The most frequent complaints UNRRA officials received from the DPs revolved around food, including: meatless split-pea soup, bland cabbage soup, and too many beans or corn bread. Latvian and Yugoslavian DPs commented, "The corn bread would be weeks old; we had to soak it to use it. We would get nothing but cornbread for months; then all split pea."[49] The black market provided some relief for DPs when the UNRRA and relief shipments failed to fill bellies.

Displaced persons, often frustrated by uneven living conditions, nutrition, and amenities, recorded their day to day realities in a variety of ways. Julius Lewy practiced his developing English in a letter to his "Liberators!" while in the DP camp in Linz, Austria; Lewy wrote, "Here, in the hospital, all is lacking, all is failing. Medicaments as well as eating (quality and quantity!) treating as well as nursing. Example: a daily ration: 1/3 of

[47] Doherty, 49.

[48] Ibid., 52.

[49] Wyman, 54.

brown bread; never any butter or jam."[50] Michal Kraus, echoed Lewy's assessment of the lacking quality of the meals in the DP camps in correspondence with his American liberator, Dr. David L. Filtzer, "As you know, the rationes [s*ic*] here are till now not sufficient but for me it's enough."[51] Although the UNRRA generally worked to maintain a quality standard of living in the DP camps, the scope and size of the DP camp system made the task difficult.

In a similar manner to Lewy and Kraus's letters, supply shortages featured prominently in Bergen-Belsen DP camp resident Reuben Lipszyc-Green's take on a repetitive drinking song, "Ten Railroad Cars 'UNRRA,'" which was originally written and published in Yiddish in 1946. The song criticized the UNRRA's efforts to fully stock the DP camps "with things everyone loves," including "clothing, coffee, and crackers," "with unlimited quantities of wine," and "with all sorts of canned goods."[52] Lipszyc-Green's song ends with only one UNRRA railroad car reaching the DP camp and the displaced persons being "cheerful, joyful," but upon opening the car "it was, alas, empty."[53] In a humorous

[50] Julius Lewy to his liberators, May 30, 1945, in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 66-67.

[51] Michal Kraus to David L. Filtzer, December 4, 1945, in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 88.

[52] Reuben Lipszyc-Green, "Ten Railroad Cars 'UNRRA,'" in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 184-186.

[53] Ibid.

way, Lipszyc-Green captures the day to day struggle DPs faced with limited resources and seemingly, extensive promises from the agency charged with their welfare.

Perhaps more worrisome than supply issues, DP camps were initially guarded by soldiers. When the Allies liberated portions of Europe, the military continued to closely control the region for some time. As military and UNRRA officials established formal procedures for displaced persons, designated structures suitable for DP camps, and began administering relief to those in need, the military took a prominent role in securing and protecting the camps. For Jewish DPs, many of whom survived the Nazi camp system, this strong military presence proved troubling, especially when many of the DP camps were located within or near former Nazi camps.[54] Additionally, Jewish DPs faced challenges far greater than their non-Jewish DP counterparts, including finding a new home and forging a place within a community.[55] At first, the DP camps did not provide many opportunities for Jewish DPs to begin the process of finding a new home, nor did they provide a space safe enough for Jewish DPs to create much in terms of a community.

The UNRRA faced many administrative problems upon establishing camps, but the most challenging aspect was often each camp's diverse population. Initially camps consisted of those refugees who were nearby, which meant a single camp could house Europeans with diverse nationalities and who spoke a wide variety of languages. As the camps became more organized, the displaced persons were registered and placed into DP camps based on nationality.[56] This method of categorization meant that Jewish DPs from

[54] Holian, 61.

[55] Wolfson, 82.

[56] Wyman, 44.

throughout Europe fell into the same nationality-based groups as political prisoners, prisoners of war, forced laborers, and at times, even collaborators and perpetrators of the Holocaust. Instead of recognition as a separate nationality, the UNRRA identified Jewish DPs as “stateless” and “unrepatriable” since such significant numbers of Jewish DPs could not return to their pre-war homes.[57] Jewish displaced persons took issue with several aspects of the UNRRA’s relief efforts as they felt the relief efforts were inadequate for their needs.

Shortly after the earliest displaced persons camps were established, Jewish DPs organized representative bodies to voice concerns and needs to the Allies. The Central Jewish Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Zone formed on April 25, 1945 with Josef Rosensaft as its director. On July 1, 1945, forty-one Jewish displaced persons met at Feldafing DP camp in the American Zone to discuss DP camp conditions; although conflicting political, economic, linguistic, and religious differences led to much debate, the committee determined the representation and protection of Jewish DPs as its principle concern.[58] The first Conference of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews met in the St. Ottilien DP Camp on July 25, 1945 with ninety-four delegates representing some forty thousand Jews living in forty-six DP camps across Germany and Austria.[59] These representative committees provided the Jewish DPs a platform to voice concerns for all Jewish DPs and served as a basis of future Jewish self-government in the displaced persons camps.

---

[57] Wolfson, 112.

[58] Ibid., 164-5.

[59] Ibid., 165.

The Harrison Report Ushers in DP Camp Changes

Complaints about the DP camp conditions, particularly the statements issued by Jewish DPs' representative committees, drew the attention of the American government. During the summer of 1945, U.S. President Harry S. Truman appointed Earl G. Harrison to investigate the state of the DP Camps. Prior to his appointment, Harrison was Dean of Law at the University of Pennsylvania and the American representative to the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees.[60] Harrison's instructions included paying attention to the condition, treatment, and needs of the Jewish DPs during his travels throughout the American zone. Over the course of several weeks, Harrison traveled throughout the occupied territory investigating the post-war camps and interviewing DPs as well as those charged with aiding them.[61] Although Harrison originally received an itinerary from the U.S. military, he changed his travels after meeting with Jewish representatives in Europe. Ultimately, Harrison spent weeks visiting over two dozen camps in Germany and Austria in both the American and British zones.[62]

Harrison's travels required him to face the realities of the DP camps and their uneven, often horrendous living conditions. As a representative for the American government, he was charged with issuing an official report on the status of the DP camps and the displaced persons, but Harrison became increasingly affected by what he witnessed as he traveled war torn Europe. Paul Trepman, of the Bergen-Belsen DP Camp,

---

[60] Wyman, 135.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Earl G. Harrison, *Report of Earl G. Harrison*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1945), http://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/displaced-persons/resourc1.htm.

remembered Harrison's emotional reaction to the camp's conditions; Trepman recalled, "[Harrison] was so shaken he could not speak. Finally, he whispered weakly: 'But how did you survive, and where do you take your strength from now?'"[63] Harrison's interactions with Jewish Holocaust survivors affected him personally, and in many ways, this emotional response underlies Harrison's report to President Truman.

Harrison's initial findings were documented in a report sent to President Truman in August 1945 and later published as "A Report to President Truman: The Plight of the Displaced Jews in Europe" but is more commonly referred to as "The Harrison Report."[64] Harrison's report brought to light the deplorable conditions of many DPs, emphasized the special position of Jewish DPs as the primary focus of the Nazi-led genocide, and was the first public document to argue that the Jewish DPs needs differed from other displaced persons.[65] Although a few segments of Harrison's findings often appear among texts on the displaced persons camps, Harrison's entire report sheds tremendous light on the status of DP camps in the summer of 1945.

Harrison laid out his task in his opening paragraph: report on the conditions of the displaced persons, determine the needs of such persons, evaluate how those needs are being met by various groups, and investigate the "non-repatriable" individuals' future destinations. Additionally, Harrison noted that he was specifically charged with paying particular attention to Jewish refugees, since they were "the first and worst victims of

---

[63] Trepman, 134.

[64] Wolfson, 162.

[65] Ibid., 163.

Nazism."[66] Harrison also dedicated a significant portion of his report to highlighting the post-war situation of German civilians. Likely, Harrison was drawn to this topic through his interviews with DPs and those caring for them. Harrison often cited comparison between the Jewish refugees and that status of Germans, particularly in rural areas. Several times, Harrison expressed frustration that months after liberation many DPs still donned concentration camp uniforms. In one instance, Harrison stated, "The internees feel particularly bitter about the state of their clothing when they see how well the German population is still dressed. The German population today is still the best dressed population in all of Europe."[67] Clearly, Harrison developed resentment toward the German civilian population during his investigation.

Harrison's critique of the German civilian population, though significant, should not overshadow his condemnation of the conditions in the DP camps and the meager relief provided to refugees. Echoing the sentiments of Jewish DPs, Harrison took issue with the military's role in guarding the DP camps, by asserting, "Up to this point [the DPs] have been 'liberated' more in a military sense than actually."[68] Noting that the war created difficulties requiring "certain control measures," Harrison argued for a change: "There seems little justification for the continuance of barbed-wire fences, armed guards, and prohibition against leaving the camp except by passes, which at some places are illiberally granted." Harrison continued, "Beyond knowing that they are no longer in danger of the

---

[66] Harrison.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

gas chambers, torture, and other forms of violent death, they see-and there is-little change."[69] In his concluding remarks, Harrison reasserted this problem with biting prose:

> As matters now stand, 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 our military guard instead of S.S. 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.[70]

Harrison's scathing assessment of the military's presence in the DP camps officially captured the Jewish position and frequent complaint of the Jewish DPs representative bodies.

Food scarcity also featured prominently in Harrison's testimony; he noted improvement since the war's end among Holocaust survivors but found "many pathetic malnutrition cases both among the hospitalized and in the general population of the camps."[71] Harrison joined the DPs in their criticism of the average caloric intake of DPs:

> One must raise the question as to how much longer many of these people, particularly those who have over such a long period felt persecution and near starvation, can survive on a diet composed principally of bread and coffee, irrespective of the caloric content. In many camps, the 2,000 calories included 1,250 calories of a black, wet and extremely unappetizing bread.[72]

In addition to food shortages, Harrison also reported on a "serious lack of needed medical supplies" and clothing deficiencies across all of the DP camps. Harrison testified to the disturbing consequences of the clothing scarcity:

> Although some [DP] Camp Commandants have managed, in spite of the many obvious difficulties, to find clothing of one kind or another for their charges, many of the Jewish displaced persons, late in July, had no clothing other than their

---

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

> concentration camp garb-a rather hideous striped pajama effect-while others, to their chagrin, were obliged to wear German S.S. uniforms. It is questionable which clothing they hate more.[73]

Despite the shortages of necessary supplies, food and amenities, Harrison noted that the Jewish DPs' struggles ran far deeper.

Tasked with paying "particular attention" to the Jewish displaced persons, Harrison delivered and dedicated an entire section of his report to the "Needs of the Jews." Immediately, Harrison identified the Jewish DPs' desire for recognition and separation from non-Jews in the DP camps; Harrison argued this request must be granted because so many Jewish DPs were Holocaust survivors who endured great loss. He noted, "Their present condition, physical and mental, is far worse than that of other [nationality] groups."[74] Supporting this notion, Harrison provided additional reasons to separate Jewish DPs: a majority wanted the change and "it is the only way in which administratively their special needs and problems can be met without charges of preferential treatment."[75] After years of Nazi oppression, Harrison believed that separate Jewish DP camps would greatly improve morale, hasten efforts to locate family members, and embolden immigration efforts. Harrison closed his report by again commenting on the unique position of Jewish DPs, "The civilized world owes it to this handful of survivors to provide them with a home where they can again settle down and begin to live as human beings."[76]

---

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

Although the Harrison Report revealed what many military and relief officials knew, the document succinctly captured the most pressing issues within the Allies' DP camp system, proposed immediate as well as long term changes, and helped educate the public about the on-going realities in post-war Central Europe. Harrison's clear, and at times emotional, writing drew the Allies' attention and led to significant improvements in the DP camps and in the treatment of DPs. President Truman shared the document with Clement Atlee, Great Britain's Prime Minister, and ordered General Eisenhower to implement Harrison's suggestions. In the fall of 1945, the Americans created separate spaces for Jewish DPs with Landsberg, Wolfratshausen, and Feldafing becoming the largest Jewish DP camps in the American zone. The British more gradually implemented Harrison's suggestions, and by the summer of 1946 established Bergen-Belsen as a solely Jewish DP camp. These camps operated under the UNRRA with military guards replaced by displaced persons.[77] Harrison's report remained important in the final months of 1945 as Jews from Eastern Europe continued to seek refuge in the DP camps. Harrison's report clearly identified Jews as victims of Nazi persecution and helped ensure that American and British DP camps continued to accept new waves of Jewish displaced persons.

The Harrison Report ushered in what many Jewish DPs referred to as the "humanitarian period" in which their conditions improved greatly in separate DP camps that allowed Jewish DPs more autonomy and self-governance.[78] As a follow up to Harrison's findings, in the fall of 1945, the American government appointed Rabbi Judah Nadich as its first advisor on Jewish affairs and sent him on a follow-up tour of the

---

[77] Wyman, 136-7.

[78] Ibid., 137.

predominantly Jewish DP camps in the American and British zones. On October 22, 1945, Nadich reported to General Eisenhower that significant improvements had begun, including efforts to reduce overcrowding in housing and solve supply issues to secure more clothing, blankets and fuel.[79] Nadich also chronicled the opening of a Jewish DP hospital in Feldafing, food rations that increased to between 2,000 and 3,000 calories per day, and extensive cultural and religious activities occurring in the now exclusively Jewish DP camps.[80] Efforts to put in place Harrison's suggestions, appeared to be solving many of the Jewish DPs' most pressing concerns.

After Harrison's report, the displaced persons camps improved in their organization and efforts to meet the most basic needs of the DPs, but they were far from perfect. During his trip to the Jewish DP camps, Nadich noted progress, but he also offered several suggestions for increasing morale, including: "placing more responsibility upon local DP camp committees" to solve problems of camp management, increasing work and leisure time programs, and creating a mail service between the DP camps to allow relatives to communicate.[81]

Indeed, Jewish DPs were desperate to connect with their surviving loved ones, but initial efforts to find their families proved daunting. Stressing the importance of familial connections, Nadich added, "A great humanitarian work could be wrought by the establishment of a procedure whereby these remnants of families could be reunited within

---

[79] Judah Nadich, "Report on Conditions in Assembly Centers for Jewish Displaced Persons," in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 167-8.

[80] Ibid., 168.

[81] Ibid., 170.

our DP camps."[82] The UNRRA and other relief agencies recognized the need among all displaced persons, particularly Jewish DPs and began putting in place structures to help unite surviving relatives. In July 1945, the European Tracing Office created a Central Index of Jewish Survivors and by 1947 contained information on 566,505 survivors.[83] The UNRRA also created a Central Tracing Bureau that received more than fifty thousand inquires in its first four months of operation. The International Tracing Service (ITS), a permanent organization, emerged out of these various organizations to help Jewish survivors locate family members.[84] Even with organizations designed to foster connections, efforts to locate family members took upwards of months and often did not result in happy news. To support one another, displaced persons often forged strong support networks in the DP camps by creating surrogate families or marrying and giving birth to the next generation of their families.

Jewish displaced persons also sought greater control over the day-to-day management of the DP camps as well as more employment and leisure opportunities. As previously mentioned, in July 1945 Jewish DPs in the British sector organized into the Central Jewish Committee of Liberated Jews and began urging government and relief officials to address their concerns. By the fall of 1945, changes requested by the DPs began improving morale in the DP camps. Nadich noted the need for additional cultural activities in his report, and UNRRA representative Harry Lerner, a Jewish American, echoed those sentiments in correspondence to his parents. Lerner hoped establishing a Cultural Center

[82] Ibid., 171.

[83] Wolfson, 244

[84] Wyman, 57.

at the Stuttgart DP camp would help Jewish DPs "move forward;" he believed that the Stuttgart DPs would unite around the Cultural Center's library, school, and practice space for choir and dramatic groups.[85] In reality, both Nadich and Lerner's assessments of what Jewish DPs needed from continued improvements within the displaced persons camps proved accurate. Over time, Jewish displaced persons worked with the UNRRA and other relief agencies to locate family members, establish DP-based communities, and return to some sense of "normalcy."

While Jewish DPs helped to re-create their lives in the wake of tragedy, they also dealt with the psychological and emotional fallout of their experiences. The events they endured prior to liberation—as well as the reality of a post-Holocaust world—left an indelible mark on the displaced persons. Although many did not have access to psychological care or formal therapy, the DPs found ways to cope with the immense trauma of the Holocaust and began a path toward healing.

---

[85] Harry Lerner to his parents, January 11, 1946, in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 173.

Chapter 3

The Struggle of Surviving:

Psychological Response to the Holocaust

In the wake of the Holocaust, survivors struggled physically and emotionally to cope with their experiences. Allied military leaders and health care workers prioritized displaced persons' physical health and put tremendous energy into curbing disease, providing nutritious food, and nursing the sickest back to health. Less emphasis was placed on the DPs' mental health, but the majority of survivors still discovered ways to cope with their mental anguish individually and as a community. Building on coping skills they obtained during the Holocaust, survivors developed important strategies to help emotionally after the war. Although the vast majority of survivors managed to keep moving forward despite the incredible terrors they suffered, some never fully integrated the horrifying experiences and did not mentally recover. The displaced persons camps played an intricate role in helping some survivors initiate the strategies that helped them begin an emotional path toward recovery.

In order to understand the unimaginable emotional strain Holocaust survivors dealt with, examinations of general trauma as well as trauma generated by extreme stress are necessary. What Holocaust survivors endured went far beyond typical notions of stress, but their experiences reveal similarities with the study of general trauma. Since the 19th century, psychological experts have sought to understand the roots of and best methods for recovery from trauma. In the decades after the Holocaust, scholars attempted to understand

how Holocaust survivors' experiences furthered psychological understandings of trauma and extreme stress.

Shortly after the war, scholars assumed that in order to survive such harrowing events, Holocaust survivors must carry clinical evidence of trauma. For Aaron Hass, a psychiatrist and member of the Second Generation,[1] the assumption that all Holocaust survivors suffered from "survivor syndrome" or "concentration camp syndrome" was highly flawed.[2] Although studies throughout the latter-twentieth century reported that survivors suffered from attachment difficulties, social withdrawal, and apathy, Hass' findings contradict these studies and assumptions. According to Hass, "The Holocaust survivors whom I interviewed presented quite a different profile in many respects, one which, contrary to the descriptions…reflects their significant success at coping with a traumatic past."[3] For Hass, the research on Holocaust survivors did not reflect the flexibility, assertiveness, and tenacity necessary for survivors to move forward after liberation. In the last few decades, researchers have begun studying a broader array of responses to trauma than the assumed adverse reaction. This chapter will explore general trauma theory, provide insight into recovering from extreme stress, and show how many

---

[1] The "Second Generation" refers to the widely accepted concept that the children of Holocaust survivors represent group who can also be considered survivors. Numerous studies attest that Holocaust survivors passed aspects of their trauma, as well as resilience, on to their children. For more information see: Aaron Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[2] Aaron Hass, *The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

[3] Hass, 6.

Holocaust survivors employed effective coping strategies during the Holocaust and after liberation.

Trauma & its Effects

Trauma is about devastation and resilience.[4]
—Karen W. Saakvitne, Howard Tennen, and Glenn Affleck

Throughout a lifetime, individuals experience various forms of pain. Mental and emotional anguish can be routine and typical in nature, but experiences that are particularly shocking may leave lingering damage. Trauma can stem from one significant event or repeated acts over a longer duration, including (but not limited to): child abuse, sexual assault, torture, witnessing a murder, and surviving a horrific accident. The list of possible traumas is infinite, each leaving an indelible mark. When an experience is so terrible that the mind cannot fully comprehend it, a trauma has occurred. Distinguishing traumatic experiences from everyday stressors requires an exploration of the psychological concept of trauma.

Psychologists have attempted to understand trauma and its effects for centuries. Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, early pioneers in the study of psychology, treated patients who suffered from events that could not be integrated, understood, or spoken about because their experience was completely foreign.[5] The pioneering work of Freud and Janet

---

[4] Karen W. Saakvitne, Howard Tennen, and Glenn Affleck, "Exploring Thriving in the Context of Clinical Trauma Theory: Constructivist Self Development Theory," *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, no. 2, Summer 1998, 281.

[5] Cathy Caruth and Arthur S. Blank Jr., "Apocalypse Terminable and Interminable: An Interview with Arthur S. Blank Jr.," in *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 288.

continues to serve as the basis for describing traumatic events and differentiating trauma from other negative experiences. Cathy Caruth, a literary scholar who specializes in the intersection of trauma and narrative, describes traumatic events as those that “are not immediately assimilated.”[6] Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist and founder of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts, explains, “Trauma does not simply result from the fact that something bad happens, because bad stuff happens all of the time. Instead, in trauma you get overwhelmed by the experience—you cannot put it together.”[7] By not integrating the traumatic experience, an individual struggles with trauma on a much deeper level than typical unfortunate events. A psychiatrist specializing in the aftermath of war, Robert Jay Lifton, describes traumatic events as so shattering to an individual that “one struggles to put together the pieces, so to speak, of the psyche, and to balance that need to reconstitute oneself with the capacity to take in the experience.”[8] According to social worker and therapist Lois Carey, “Trauma covers any situation where one’s psyche is overwhelmed to the point that the person is unable to use his or her usual psychological defenses, or to

---

[6] Cathy Caruth, introduction to *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xii.

[7] Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: A Conversation with Bessel van der Kolk,” in *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 154.

[8] Cathy Caruth and Robert Jay Lifton, “Giving Death its Due: An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton,” in *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 11.

function in the usual fashion."[9] Over time, unprocessed traumatic memories severely impact the body and psyche.

Often, traumatic situations leave remnants and scars for years after the original event occurred. Stephen Levine, an expert in expressive arts therapy, notes, "Trauma is defined by repetition; the original event recurs as flashback or intrusive memory."[10] With trauma, the pain can manifest in a variety of ways—often affecting someone's well-being for the rest of her or his life. Judith Herman, a psychiatrist and expert on trauma recovery, asserts, "Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory."[11] Those dealing with trauma may suffer from nightmares, hallucinations, or outbursts, and often, unprocessed trauma causes an individual to retreat inward creating distance from the emotional event.[12] Experiencing trauma forces incredible changes upon an individual. Saatvitne, Tennen and Affleck, in their study "Exploring Thriving in the Context of Clinical Trauma Theory: Constructivist Self Development Theory," explain, "It is widely accepted that trauma is transformative and that in the aftermath of a traumatic event nothing is again the same."[13] For those

---

[9] Lois Carey, "Introduction" in *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma Survivors.* Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 15.

[10] Stephen K. Levine, *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 50.

[11] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 34.

[12] Jeanette R. Malkin, *Memory-theater and Postmodern Drama*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999, 29.

[13] Saakvitne, Tennen, and Affleck, 281.

suffering from trauma, their struggle may be lengthy and exacerbated by other difficult realities.

Many who experience trauma may also simultaneously suffer great personal loss. When an individual suffers from trauma that also includes loss of loved ones, the impact is even more pronounced and devastating. In such instances, the trauma is compounded with grief. Acclaimed psychologist Richard S. Lazarus describes grief as an emotional process that requires the "bereaved person [to] accept what has occurred and reconcile the meanings attendant on the lost relationship with meanings derived from the struggle to evolve a new identity and way of life."[14] Unfortunately, if those dealing with trauma cannot cope well, a typical grieving process is less likely to occur. Nancy Boyd Webb, a professor of social work and therapist, explains, "Losses such as [the death of family members] generate extreme anxiety about how survival will be possible without the security and comfort of the beloved persons considered essential to physical safety and psychological well-being."[15] Those struggling concurrently with trauma and grief face greater obstacles to recovery and healing.

After experiencing trauma, many individuals and professionals begin referring to the person as a survivor. Use of the term "survivor" solidifies that the experience is in the past while also indicating the profound impact of the event. For Lifton, the terminology holds an even deeper meaning; he argues, "Focusing on survival, rather than on trauma,

---

[14] Richard S. Lazarus, "Hope: An Emotion and a Vital Coping Resource Against Despair," *Social Research* (1999): 653, *JSTOR Journals*.

[15] Nancy Boyd Webb, "Crisis Intervention Play Therapy to Help Traumatized Children" *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma Survivors.* Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 39.

puts the death back into the traumatic experience because survival suggests that there has been death, and the survivor therefore has had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience."[16] Survivor is an appropriate term since, most traumatic events involve a life or death situation or may leave individuals wishing for death to ease their pain. Herman describes this as the "threat of annihilation" that defines the traumatic experience.[17] Recognizing one's status as a survivor may help a trauma sufferer work toward rehabilitation.

In the wake of trauma, a complex series of emotions emerges that can hinder, but also help an individual navigate an entirely new reality. By studying patients who have suffered trauma, experts have discovered that trauma manifests in a variety of ways. In a study of adolescent girls who suffered from trauma, Dina Carbonell and Ceil Parteleno-Barhmi describe several responses to trauma: self-blame and shame; sense of loss and betrayal; sense of powerlessness or helplessness, or of diminished power and personal competence; a fragmentation of the bodily experience; destructiveness and rage; disassociation; and attachment disorders.[18] These seven responses to trauma involve a wide range of mental, emotional, and physical responses, each with considerable consequences. Similarly, Herman notes, "In the aftermath of traumatic events, as survivors review and judge their own conduct, feelings of guilt and inferiority are practically universal."[19]

---

[16] Caruth and Lifton, 3-4.

[17] Herman, 50.

[18] Dina M. Carbonell and Ceil Parteleno-Barehmi, "Psychodrama Groups for Girls Coping with Trauma," *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, Jul. 1999, 49, 3, ProQuest, 287.

[19] Herman, 53.

Despite the obvious destructive emotional and physical effects of trauma, some trauma experts have discovered glimmers of hope in the despair.

Some trauma survivors may experience an intense negative response, others might begin to adapt relatively quickly, but the majority generally find that their experiences include a combination of sorrow and resourcefulness. According to Saavitne, Tennen, and Affleck, "Those who physically survive trauma begin to recover even as its full horror is still registering. In our biologically mandated struggle to survive, we adapt to seemingly impossible circumstances. Adaptation stems from our attempts to survive and to heal in the midst of our suffering."[20] Even as survivors begin to comprehend how their lives had been changed, they often simultaneously begin a process of healing. Unfortunately, the devastating consequences of trauma typically do not resolve themselves, and instead require a lengthy recovery process.

In an effort to better understand how individuals respond to trauma, scholars continue to examine trauma from various angles. Erin Martz and Jacob Lindy, in their article "Exploring the Trauma Membrane Concept," use a powerful metaphor to explain how individuals begin the healing process in the aftermath of trauma. Martz and Lindy credit the *trauma membrane*, "a temporary psychosocial structure, a buffer zone or covering that protects traumatized people," with helping to protect individuals after trauma. For Martz and Lindy, the trauma membrane encompasses "the potential healing space – both social and psychological – that permits naturally occurring healing processes over

---

[20] Saavitne, Tennen and Affleck, 281.

time."[21] The trauma membrane may include joining a survivor network or seeking therapy, but these steps only occur when an individual is ready to begin trauma recovery.

Trauma Recovery & Coping

> In the course of a successful recovery, it should be possible to recognize a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatized isolation to restored social connection.[22]
>
> —Judith Herman

Since trauma deeply affects an individual mentally and physically, trauma recovery aims to help restore normal functioning by providing sufferers with skills that help them feel safe, make sense of their traumatic memories, and eventually, move on. Lifton describes the ultimate goal of recovery as "reconstitut[ing] the self into the single self;" although it may sound simple, reintegration requires considerable effort and time, with the process differing for every person.[23] Despite the individual nature of trauma recovery, Herman identifies three fundamental stages that most seeking recuperation will experience: (1) establishment of a safe environment, (2) remembrance and mourning, and (3) reconnection with ordinary life.[24] Isakson and Jurkovic echoed Herman's stages in their study of torture survivors finding that "participants described a complex process involving invocation of beliefs and values, restoration of safety and stability, and reestablishment of

---

[21] Erin Martz and Jacob Lindy, "Exploring the Trauma Membrane Concept," in *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict*, edited by Erin Martz (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2010), 27-28.

[22] Herman, 155.

[23] Caruth and Lifton, 12.

[24] Herman, 155.

emotional support and sociofamilial connection."[25] Through these steps, recovery—although often long and difficult—is possible for many trauma survivors.

As indicated by Herman, Isakson, and Jurkovic's explorations of the trauma recovery process, one of the most important components for an individual's recovery is their support system and the strength they gain from others. According to Saakvitne, Tennen and Affleck, "Traumatized individuals draw not only upon their inner resources, but also upon the relational and community resources made available to them."[26] Similarly, Jose Parapully, Robert Rosenbaum, Leland van dan Daele and Esther Nzewi, in their study focusing on the parents of murdered children, explain, "Survivors were sustained by the support of the community. The warmth and caring from the community helped to heal wounds and re-establish faith in the goodness of people."[27] The support may come in the form of friends, family, or other community services, such as support groups. In the case of support groups, Parapully, et al. conclude,

> Shared grief provided a strong bond at a time when survivors felt alone and not understood. There they could be with people who were experiencing the same kind of emotions that they were experiencing, who understood them, and who gave them freedom and opportunity to vent their feelings without inhibition, embarrassment, or pre-tense. They provided opportunity to repeatedly retell their stories. Survivors found guidance and insights for themselves from the coping experiences of others.[28]

---

[25] Brian L. Isakson and Gregory J. Jurkovic, "Healing after Torture: The Role of Moving On," *Qualitative Health Research*, 23, 2013, 753.

[26] Saakvitne, Tennen and Affleck, 293.

[27] Jose Parapully, Robert Rosenbaum, Leland van dan Daele and Esther Nzewi, "Thriving after Trauma: The Experience of Parents of Murdered Children," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42, 2002, 56.

[28] Parappully, et al., 56.

Ultimately, survivors need a support system in order to recover in the wake of trauma, and community support, especially involving those with similar experiences, is essential to recuperation.

Although each stage of recovery differs for every individual, important progress toward healing can happen shortly after trauma. In their article "Positive Change Following Trauma and Adversity: A Review," Alex P. Linley and Stephen Joseph assert the importance of seeking recovery quickly after experiencing trauma:

> Positive changes in self and spirituality were generally established by 2 months following the event. The period between 2 weeks and 2 months accounted for most changes in growth, with reported levels remaining fairly consistent through 1 year. Overall reported benefits were stable over extended periods of 3 years."[29]

Based on Linley and Joseph's research, early intervention shows significant promise for long term successful healing. Psychologist S. Rachman, who explores positive adaptation and emotional processing, explains that "successful processing can be gauged from persons' ability to talk about, see, listen to or be reminded about the significant events without experiencing distress or disruptions."[30] With successful processing, the traumatizing symptoms cease and normal functioning returns. Ultimately, trauma recovery may require considerable time and energy, but if the process begins shortly after the traumatic event ends, positive adaptation and healing can be achieved.

Since traumatized individuals struggle with comprehending their experiences, reintegration requires acquisition of new skills. Coping—the way people manage stress—

---

[29] Alex P. Linley and Stephen Joseph. "Positive Change Following Trauma and Adversity: A Review," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17, no. 1, February 2004, 17.

[30] S. Rachman, "Emotional Processing, with Special Reference to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *International Review of Psychiatry* 13 (2001): 165. *Academic Search Premier*.

is one of the most important skills necessary for dealing with and healing from trauma.[31] According to Susan Folkman and Richard S. Lazarus, "Coping is defined as learned behaviors that contribute to survival in the face of life-threatening dangers."[32] Some individuals face traumatic circumstances and immediately begin to employ coping strategies, but for others, these skills must be developed during recovery.

Fortunately, if effective coping strategies do not occur automatically, they can be learned in the aftermath of trauma. Similar to Linley and Joseph's findings on the importance of quickly initiating recovery, Rivka Tuval-Masiach, et al. conclude, "Traumatic literature is in agreement that the immediate period after trauma is crucial, and most coping happens within the first few weeks and months following the traumatic event."[33] By working with a trained professional, an individual can begin to explore coping strategies and utilize these new skills to comprehend their trauma. Folkman and Lazarus identified eight types of coping that individuals utilize to mitigate stress: confrontive coping, distancing, self-control, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving, and positive reappraisal.[34] Depending on the individual, more than one strategy may be necessary for effective coping and recuperation.

---

[31] Patricia Benner, Ethel Roskies, and Richard R. Lazarus, "Stress and Coping under Extreme Conditions," in *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators: Essays on the Nazi Holocaust*, edited by Joel E. Dimsdale (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1980), 220.

[32] Susan Folkman and Richard S. Lazarus, "Coping as a Mediator of Emotion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, no. 3, March 1988, *PsychARTICLES,* EBSCO*host*, accessed 19 Sept 2012, 466.

[33] Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, Sara Freedman, Neta Bargai, Rut Boker, Hilt Hadar, and Arieh Y. Shalev, "Coping with Trauma: Narrative and Cognitive Perspectives," *Psychiatry*, Fall 2004, 67, 3, ProQuest, 280.

[34] Folkman and Lazarus, 468.

If successful coping does not occur, trauma may linger and cause long term damage, including severe mental health conditions often referred to as *trauma-related disorders*. In their article, "The BE SMART Trauma Reframing Psychoeducation Program," Mary D. Moller and Michael J. Rice explain,

> Unresolved trauma can generate feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and entrapment. When the emotional devastation created by traumatic wounds is not healed, psychiatric disabilities such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), borderline personality disorder, dissociative identity disorder (DID), substance abuse, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, eating disorders, and psychotic disorders can develop.[35]

In addition to the trauma-related disorders identified by Moller and Rice, trauma that goes unresolved can lead to difficulties with employment, relationships, and child-rearing.[36] Clearly, trauma-related disorders and other long-term consequences of trauma reveal how unresolved traumatic experiences create lingering psychological problems.

Thankfully, recovery is possible for many who undergo the necessary steps and develop effective coping skills. In their study "Stress and Coping under Extreme Circumstances," Patricia Benner, Ethel Roskies, and Richard S. Lazarus, assert that "coping in general makes a difference to health, morale, and social functioning, either by helping the person transcend problems psychologically or by increasing the chance of mastering, overcoming, or mitigating a damaging person-environment relationship."[37] Isakson and Jurkovic found that once survivors began moving on, they regained a sense of

---

[35] Mary D. Moller and Michael J Rice, "The BE SMART Trauma Reframing Psychoeducation Program," *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, Volume 20, Issue 1, February 2006, 21.

[36] Moller and Rice, 21.

[37] Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus, 220.

control over their lives, were responsible for their growth and healing, and were better able to use coping strategies.[38] Although the impact of trauma is often devastating to individuals, recovery can be accomplished and coping strategies can be learned. Survivors often must rely on their communities to help them recover, and often, communities face a shared trauma that requires additional steps toward communal healing.

Events that impact regions, ethnicities, religions, towns, those with minority standing, or any other signifier of group status, require not only individual recovery, but also communal healing. Trauma that impacts groups, particularly those of considerable size and scope, often involve many layers of complexity. Trauma scholar Cathy Caruth delved into the layers of community trauma in her interview with members of the Grady Nia Team, clinicians and researchers at the Grady Health System in Atlanta, Georgia. The Grady Nia Team primarily serves at-risk women, but their insights apply to many instances of communal trauma. The program's chief psychologist, Nadine Kaslow, stresses the importance of recognizing cultural trauma among the patients she treats; she explains, "So we need to understand these individual women's traumas, which then occur in the light of cultural trauma. It's multi-layered, and trauma that occurs in the context of racism and oppression, I think, involves another trauma layer."[39] Trauma does not occur in a vacuum, and for groups, societal standing, or lack thereof, may complicate response and recovery.

---

[38] Isakson and Jurkovic, 754.

[39] Cathy Caruth and the Grady Nia Team, "A Revolutionary Act—The Video Testimonies of the Nia Project: An Interview with Members of the Grady Nia Team," in *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 255.

Just as individuals employ a trauma membrane to protect themselves after trauma, Martz and Lindy argue that "communities can re-invest themselves with new, healthy energy to repair the wounds of trauma."[40] Scholars overwhelmingly believe that group trauma must be countered with restoring communal identity and bonds. In their study "Emotional Reconciliation: Reconstituting Identity and Community after Trauma," Emma Hutchinson and Roland Bleiker assert, "Emotions play a particularly central role in constructing a sense of identity and solidarity that can emerge despite – or, rather, as a direct response to – the feelings of pain, solitude and fragmentation that are engendered by the trauma. Traumatic events can pull people together, giving them a common purpose."[41] Marissa Petersen-Coleman, of the Grady Nia Team, explains, "When there's a group trauma, it's really helpful for there to be group healing."[42] During mass trauma, individuals and communities feel the destructive impact of trauma, so recovery must involve efforts to help individuals as well as the collective.

---

[40] Martz and Lindy, 28.

[41] Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, "Emotional Reconciliation: Reconstituting Identity and Community after Trauma," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (August 2008): 390, *Business Source Elite*, EBSCOhost.

[42] Caruth and the Grady Nia Team, 252.

The Trauma of the Holocaust

> Out of the ashes, at times literal ashes of loss and death…a phoenix-like process of internal restructuring may be set in motion which can have a liberating, regenerative effect upon the survivor.[43]
>
> —David Dietrich and Peter Shabad

General trauma can emerge from an endless number of circumstances, but trauma may also manifest from events of mass proportions. The Holocaust created trauma on an immense scale that impacted millions of European Jews and devastated whole communities. Individuals endured harsh physical treatment, starvation, torture, exposure to extreme weather, medical experiments, displacement from their homes and families, a fractured social structure, and extreme psychological strain from all that they witnessed and experienced.[44] Entire communities, including synagogues, homes, businesses, and a way of life, were decimated and left survivors facing a world where "all of the roots of their former existence were literally destroyed."[45] Dan Bar-On, et al. in their study "Multigenerational Perspectives on Coping with the Holocaust Experience," note that the Holocaust included a wide array of highly traumatic events, such as: "imprisonment, death, the confrontation with a radical reversal of norms and values," and tremendous loss of loved ones, with most survivors enduring more than one of these terrible realities.[46] Due to

---

[43] David R. Dietrich and Peter Shabad, eds., *The Problem of Loss and Mourning* (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, Inc., 1989), quoted in Jose Parapully, Robert Rosenbaum, Leland van dan Daele and Esther Nzewi, "Thriving after Trauma: The Experience of Parents of Murdered Children," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42, 2002, 34.

[44] Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus, 224.

[45] Ibid., 222.

[46] Dan Bar-On et al., "Multigenerational Perspectives on Coping with the Holocaust Experience: An Attachment Perspective for Understanding the Development

the prolonged oppression and genocide promulgated by the Nazis and their allies, the trauma of the Holocaust far exceeded typical notions of trauma and its impact.

The events of the Holocaust created pervasive trauma, or extreme stress, that has significant distinctions from every day stressors. Peter Suedfeld, et al., in their article "Coping Strategies in the Narratives of Holocaust Survivors," explain,

> Such situations of extreme stress differ from 'normal' stress in that they disrupt all aspects of life, place the person in a life-threatening, temporally open-ended, and incomprehensible environment, and severely restrict his or her ability to change or escape the situation. Previous experience and the conventional social structure become irrelevant, the result being a high level of perceived arbitrariness and unpredictability and the shattering of the assumptive world.[47]

Extreme stress during the Holocaust forced individuals into a world that previously would have seemed unimaginable. The Nazi camp system was particularly unfathomable for most who experienced it, and those within the camps experienced a reality that stripped prisoners of their humanity and dignity. Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus identify three aspects of the extreme stress experienced within the camp system:

> First is the pervasiveness and persistence of the hostile forces… There was no area of mental and physical activity that was left unassaulted in the camps and almost no respite from the assault… [Second] the opportunity for fighting back was severely limited. Problem-solving actions could be applied only to small segments of the environment… [Third] the most severe trauma of the concentration camps, however, lay in the fact that the suffering experience there could not readily be given life-supporting meaning.[48]

Sequelae of Trauma across Generations," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 22, no 2 (June 1998): 320, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

[47] Peter Suedfeld, et al., "Coping Strategies in the Narratives of Holocaust Survivors," *Anxiety, Stress & Coping* 10, no. 2 (April 1997): 158, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

[48] Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus, 223-224.

The stressful and highly traumatic nature of the Holocaust varied for each person who experienced it, but overall the events overwhelmed individuals' capacity to understand and process. Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus explain, "While the extremity and pervasiveness of the Nazi persecution ensured vulnerability for all victims, the content and sources of vulnerability varied among individuals. A particular individual's vulnerability to a particular threat was co-determined by situational, personal, and transactional characteristics."[49] Each person's experiences dictated their response to extreme stress and their ability to cope.

The extreme stress of the Holocaust left little room for hope, yet individuals still managed to find ways to persevere. Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus note how remarkable coping skills were under the extreme stress of the Holocaust:

> Although the victims found no reasons, benefits, or ultimate purposes in their suffering, they were strengthened and sustained by their personal reasons for survival or for existence. Survivors report that they endured the suffering rather than give up for varying reasons: for the sake of their close relatives, in order to bear witness, in order to seek revenge, and so on.[50]

Those who managed to live under the oppression of the Nazis turned to a wide variety of coping skills, often tapping into different strategies over time. Eva Kahana, Boaz Kahana, Zev Harel, and Tena Rosner, in their analysis of several significant studies of coping methods during the Holocaust, identified seven major coping categories: self-preservation behaviors, compliance with persecutors, manipulation or outwitting the system, retaliation

---

[49] Ibid., 222.

[50] Ibid., 223-224.

and resistance, altruistic behavior, social integration or affiliation, and aggression.[51] Each manner of coping served to help victims deal with their unimaginable circumstances, but overwhelmingly survivors cited the importance of social networks and relationships in their survival.[52] The extensive traumatic nature of the Holocaust forced individuals and communities to tap into survival strategies and coping mechanisms while they endured oppression, torture, and murder as well as after liberation.

Coping after Liberation

> After such a test what we went through, everybody was happy to be alive, even though that life had not too much meaning without families. But we had so many friends who were in the same situation, and we somehow lived together and got close… Then this is how we got back on the track of living.[53]
>
> —"Judah"[54]

In the spring and summer of 1945, survivors faced an unrecognizable world: decimated families, destroyed homes and communities, post-war anti-Semitism, and vast uncertainty. Upon liberation, most survivors, as long as their health was stable, sought to locate family members, return home, and establish a "normal life." Unfortunately, survivors quickly realized that considerable obstacles impeded their goals. Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus point out, "Only after they left the camps did most survivors become

---

[51] Eva Kahana, et al., "Coping with Extreme Trauma," in *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*, edited by J. Wilson, Z. Harel, and B. Kahana, (New York: Springer Press, 1988), 62.

[52] Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus, 240.

[53] Jennifer Goldenberg, "'I had no family, but I made family', Immediate post-war coping strategies of adolescent survivors of the Holocaust," *Counseling and Psychotherapy Research*, March 2009, 9(1), 21.

[54] Judah's name is a pseudonym selected by Goldenberg.

aware of the full impact of what had befallen them in terms of destroyed families, wiped-out material possessions, lost vocational and educational opportunities, and permanently damaged health."[55] This post-war reality required survivors to develop new coping skills to help them manage immense loss and an uncertain future.

The coping strategies that helped so many persevere during the Holocaust continued to be vital after liberation, but those survival skills did not automatically ensure recovery. Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus explain, "Having achieved a sense of survival-related purpose and meaning during the concentration camp period, however, did not ensure that it would hold up in the destroyed, uprooted world after the Holocaust."[56] New coping skills became necessary as survivors' circumstances changed significantly with liberation. The hope that many clung to during their most trying times faded as an unimaginable reality became clear. As Lazarus states, "Hope is never merely a wishful fantasy about how good things will be, but is a mixed state of mind that also entails underlying distress about what the present might imply for the future."[57] With the reality of a post-war world becoming clearer, survivors struggled to maintain hope. In his study of child survivors of the Holocaust, Robert Krell explained, "Until 1945, children had some hope of finding their families alive. For the majority, this hope was dashed with the news from eyewitnesses at the death camps. It was after 1945 that they knew they were

---

[55] Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus, 247.

[56] Ibid., 224.

[57] Lazarus, 655.

orphaned."[58] In the days, weeks, and months after the war's end, survivors realized their post-war reality was often drastically different than what they hoped for during their darkest times.

In order for survivors to cope with the trauma of the Holocaust and ultimately begin to heal, they needed a stable environment in which to recover. Dori Laub, a child survivor of the Holocaust, uses a wound metaphor to explain the importance of environment for those healing from trauma: "If you allow the appropriate conditions of sterility and temperature, the wound heals. But you have to create the conditions in which it can heal."[59] As previously noted, Herman identifies the "establishment of a safe environment" as one of the fundamental stages of recovery, and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, many survivors found the necessary conditions to heal in the DP camps.[60] In her study of adolescent Holocaust survivors' post-war coping strategies, Jennifer Goldenberg notes, "Those who transitioned through the DP camps had more time to recover, regain their health, make new friends, begin relationships and start families, without the pressure of survival and making a living."[61] Within the DP camps, survivors' coping skills helped them begin a path to recovery.

---

[58] Robert Krell, "Child Survivors of the Holocaust—Strategies of Adaptation," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* Volume 38 (August 1993): 386.

[59] Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub, "A Record that Has Yet to be Made: An Interview with Dori Laub," in *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*, by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 48.

[60] Herman, 155.

[61] Goldenberg, 22.

Once the DP camps no longer featured armed guards, became better organized, and recognized Jewish survivors' unique status, as noted in Harrison's report, the Displaced Persons camps became a place of healing. Relying on social and community support is an essential step for traumatic recovery, and the DPs provided opportunities for forging social networks in what Goldenberg terms "communities of sameness."[62] "Ruth," one of the women interviewed by Goldenberg, described attempts to forge connections: "What happens when you have no family, you form families. And a lot of people started eating together. It's not a normal life but it's the best you can [do]."[63] Ultimately, the DP camps served "as holding environments, transitional living where many survivors began their process of recovery among their own people and the social support provided," according to Goldenberg.[64] Within these supportive communities, Jewish survivors slowly began to regain a sense of normalcy: worshipping, learning and working, marrying and starting families, and starting cultural groups, including Yiddish theatre troupes.

In the war's aftermath, survivors placed considerable emphasis on bearing witness, sharing their experiences, and memorializing those who did not survive. Lifton explains the power of remembering,

> When one witnesses the death of people, that really is the process of becoming a survivor… The witness is crucial to start with because it's at the center of what one very quickly perceives to be one's responsibility as a survivor. And it's involved in the transformation from guilt to responsibility.[65]

---

[62] Goldenberg, 24.

[63] Ibid., 21. "Ruth" is a pseudonym selected by Goldenberg.

[64] Ibid., 22.

[65] Caruth and Lifton, 12.

Although many believe that Jewish survivors did not speak out about their experiences, the years immediately following the war prove otherwise. Laub asserts, "In the years after the war, 1946, '47, '48, there were about twenty thousand testimonies that were given."[66] Jewish DPs spoke to journalists, historians, government officials, and fellow survivors about their experiences. They recorded their memories in writing, songbooks, artwork, performances, and plays. They constructed memorials to those who perished, and they created commemorative texts so that future generations would always have these records. According to Laub, "In a way the pressure to testify is like an instinct. There's an urgency to deal with the experience, to shape it, to make it happen, and it's like something is born. And survivors definitely have the pressure to do so."[67] In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, Jewish survivors responded to the trauma they endured by memorializing the dead and providing their testimony for the historical record.

Each of the instances of remembering, whether formal or informal, helped survivors recover. Lifton argues that this "survivor mission," the act of bearing witness, is therapeutic because it "is a way of transmuting pain and guilt into responsibility."[68] Through her work with the Nia Project, Kaslow observes "tremendous power, healing power, in the storytelling" of trauma survivors; her colleague, Shane Davis believes in the significance of survivors crafting "their own stories, to tell their own stories in the manner in which they see fit for themselves."[69] For survivors, testimony often results in claiming power over

---

[66] Caruth and Laub, 51.

[67] Ibid., 48.

[68] Caruth and Lifton, 12.

[69] Caruth and the Grady Nia Team, 240 & 242.

experiences that were inherently powerless, asserting agency over traumatic memories, and reshaping the memories into a narrative for others, perhaps for an entire community. Although scholars overwhelmingly agree that sharing testimony and bearing witness provide therapeutic value, van der Kolk cautions that talking may not be enough for true reintegration. According to van der Kolk, "Many Holocaust survivors led satisfying lives without turning back. Trauma is stored as physical sensations, in the body. You can talk all you want, and testify all you want, but until the internal wounds inside you have healed, that testimony may just tear you up."[70] By sharing their testimony, survivors at the very least, began to take ownership over their traumatic memories in powerful ways, a crucial step in healing from trauma.

In addition to relying on social support and bearing witness, survivors coped in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust in other ways. Many survivors relied on their problem solving skills to help them navigate the post-war world. Suedfeld, et al. ascertain that every age group in their study (child, adolescent, and adult) of Holocaust survivors "engaged in high levels of planful problem-solving."[71] Survivors put their problem solving skills to work quickly by filling leadership roles within the DP camps, organizing educational programs for children, and establishing cultural outlets for their fellow DPs. Krell also asserts that Holocaust survivors drew strength from their "strong traditions and happy memories of pre-war life," which occurred in mourning academies and many cultural components of the DP camps.[72] Additionally, Benner, Roskies and Lazarus, note

---

[70] Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, 167.

[71] Suedfeld, et al., 172.

[72] Krell, 385.

the importance of survivors finding “purpose in what had happened and thereby reestablish[ing] a viable belief system.”[73] Often, survivors achieved this greater purpose through creative outlets, including memoirs and artistic expression, citing a need to educate the world about the Holocaust.

Despite the horrific trauma of the Holocaust, the majority of survivors went on to lead relatively normal, functional lives. Trauma experts initially anticipated that the majority of survivors would suffer from “severe, if not disabling, and permanent psychological damage,” but studies conducted from the 1970s to the present conclude that most survivors “are in fact well-adjusted and productive, essentially normal people leading essentially normal lives.”[74] In their article, “Rational and Irrational Beliefs and Coping Strategies Among Transylvanian Holocaust Survivors,” Ioana Cosman, et al., credit social bonds and support “as having an essential role” in the post-traumatic growth of Holocaust survivors.[75] During the Holocaust as well as in the aftermath, survivors relied on varied methods of coping to help them endure unimaginable trauma, and ultimately, the coping skills proved essential in survivor’s ability to lead relatively normal lives.

For Holocaust survivors who resided in the displaced persons camps, the environment played a role in their ability to emotionally and mentally recuperate. The DP camps eventually became safe places for Jewish survivors to heal as individuals and as a community. Survivors turned to one another to look for family members, to mourn, to

---

[73] Benner, Roskies, and Lazarus, 224.

[74] Suedfeld, et al., 154.

[75] Ioana Cosman, et al., "Rational and Irrational Beliefs and Coping Strategies Among Transylvanian Holocaust Survivors: An Exploratory Analysis," *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 18, no. 2 (March 2013): 181, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

commemorate, and to form new families. Jewish DPs forged highly-functional Jewish communities throughout the DP camps that boasted schools, religious institutions, athletics, weekly newspapers, and public performances. In particular, Bergen-Belsen, the largest Jewish DP camp in the British sector, featured a thriving Jewish community that drew on pre-war Eastern European traditions and helped survivors to begin living again. Ultimately, the displaced persons camps and their vibrant Jewish communities served as a bridge to help DPs recover in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Chapter 4

Belsen DP Camp: A Thriving Jewish Community

> The Belsen story is the immortal epic for immemorial veneration of brave men and women who lived with death but survived to stand valiantly for freedom and right.[1]
>
> —Alex L. Easterman[2]

Despite the death and sorrow surrounding them, Jewish displaced persons immediately turned to one another for support, leadership, and community building in the late spring and summer of 1945. Survivors reminisced and grieved with one another, representative bodies lobbied military officials and relief officials to recognize their needs and improve conditions in the camps, and still other DPs recognized the importance of establishing schools and other cultural components. With the vast majority of Jewish DPs unable to return to their pre-war homes, Zionism spread and Jewish DPs emphasized the importance of a Jewish homeland in Palestine through this political and cultural activism. For Jewish survivors, the DP camps became the place where their lives were began to be rebuilt and a Jewish identity was reclaimed.

The influx of post-war Eastern European refugees and the transient nature of displaced persons created difficulties in keeping exact population statistics for the DP camps. Estimates suggest that the American Zone housed over 140,000 Jewish DPs, while the British Zone's Jewish population was significantly smaller, with approximately 15,000

---

[1] Alex L. Easterman, "They Were Liberated—But Not Free," *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 93.

[2] Alex L. Easterman was a resident of the Bergen-Belsen DP Camp and Political Director of the World Jewish Congress's British sector.

Jews residing at the Bergen-Belsen DP camp.[3] Despite the smaller total, the Belsen DP camp was home to the largest number of Jewish displaced persons in the British occupied zone and became an important center of post-war Jewish life in Germany.

For Bergen-Belsen's Jewish DPs, embracing life was crucial to their post-liberation existence. In order to lead fulfilling lives, Jewish displaced persons established several essential structures, including schools, a police department, a court system, news outlets, and cultural and religious activities. With the pall of the Holocaust ever present in their lives, many of Belsen's DPs merged their grief with optimism and, at times, even joy, as they created new families, gave life to the next generation, and forged a Jewish community that provided a glimpse of normalcy.

Reasserting Jewish Identity in the DP Camps

In the months after liberation, improvements in the DP Camps provided opportunities for Jewish DPs to inch toward a new sense of normalcy. Paramount among their needs was asserting their Jewish identity in the post-Holocaust world. Some individuals reaffirmed or increased their religious beliefs, while others struggled to maintain their faith. Ultimately, the majority of Jewish DPs took steps to assert their Jewishness, which included mourning loved ones, rabbi-officiated wedding ceremonies, circumcising their sons, efforts to immigrate to Palestine, celebrating holidays, performances steeped in cultural and religious traditions, and efforts to record their experiences for future generations. Many within the *she'erit hapletah* (surviving remnant) believed it was their duty to continue traditions to honor those who did not survive. Due in

[3] Königseder and Wetzel, 50.

large part to their desire to connect their post-war lives to their pre-war families and traditions, survivors created distinct Jewish communities within the displaced persons camps.

Gradual improvements in the DP camps led to increased recognition of the Jewish DPs and their needs. During his October 1945 trip, Rabbi Judah Nadich reported to the American government about the successful establishment of important Jewish institutions in the DP camps.[4] Nadich reported on the first Yiddish newspaper started in the DP camps; the creation of a "People's University" in Landsberg; the establishment of schools, including several religious schools, and training programs for adults in all of the camps; kosher kitchens that had been erected in four camps; and the formation of a Rabbinic council within the larger Central Committee of Liberated Jews that consisted of twelve DP rabbis.[5] As Nadich's report indicated, Jewish DPs rather quickly pursued a wide variety of cultural, educational, and political activities. Viewing their survival as a "life reborn," Jewish DPs set out to reestablish Jewish culture in communities and camps where its existence was to be extinguished.[6]

In the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, the Jewish DPs wasted no time in organizing and creating political, cultural, and educational outlets. Unfortunately, the Jewish DPs' efforts in the months after liberation, at times, created conflict with the British military and government officials overseeing the camp. As Muriel Knox Doherty, an Australian nurse deployed to Bergen-Belsen by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation

---

[4] See Chapter 2 for more information on Nadich's report.

[5] Nadich in Wolfson, 169-170.

[6] Wolfson, 178.

Administration[7], explained that the British changed the DP camp's name to Hohne, a nearby town, because the British believed it would help the Jewish DPs move on. According to Doherty, the name change was psychologically "a very good move, particularly as so many DPs who were never in Belsen Concentration Camp are coming in at present."[8] Despite this well-intended decision, the Jewish DPs never accepted the name change and instead continued to refer to the camp as Belsen, a place where so many of their brethren perished.

Tension with Bergen-Belsen's administrators was due, in part, to the British implementing changes far more slowly than their American counterparts. Historian of Jewish history, Hagit Lavsky asserted, "The British…stubbornly held to the principle of nonsegregation,[9] only implementing reforms at the end of 1945—a process that took several months."[10] The slow pace of change frustrated Jewish DPs in Belsen, so much so that an editorial in the Yiddish DP newspaper, *Unzer Sztyme* (*Our Voice*), captured many of the Jewish community's dissention. The editorial declared, "Life is approaching normality. Our problem still exists. We the ashes, the clinkers, the residuum of the furnace of War… We are small in numbers, a remnant of a great people, and we live here in silent,

---

[7] Henceforth referred to as "UNRRA."

[8] Doherty, 148.

[9] British authorities initially adhered to a "policy of nonsegregation" where they refused to fully separate Jewish DPs from the broad displaced persons' population. Finally in 1946, the British formally allowed Jewish liaison officers and advisers. Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 53.

[10] Lavsky, 53.

futile contemplation, and we see no Nirvana this side of Belsen!"[11] Although the editorial's frustrations were shared by many Jewish DPs in Belsen, their position was far from silent. Belsen's Jewish community organized within days of liberation and the leadership often brought their people's concerns to the camp's chief decision-makers. In an essay written after the DP camp closed, Josef Rosensaft, the principal Jewish leader in Belsen, candidly explained his view of the British:

> Yes, we did have our differences with the British. They did not always understand us. Nor did we always understand them. Sometimes the arguments were heated and even violent. But all said and done, it must be admitted that the British did, on the whole, show much good will, deep human sympathy and even friendship. Looking back, I have come to the conclusion that the British did everything in their power, both materially and administratively, to help and to ease the physical suffering and mental anguish.[12]

Rosensaft, as the chairman of the British Zone's Central Committee, interacted with the British far more often than the vast majority of the thousands of Jewish DPs he represented.

When Bergen-Belsen, the Horror Camp,[13] was liberated by the British military approximately thirty thousand Jews, nearly half of the camp's population, came under their control. Within two months of liberation, Belsen's Jewish population dwindled with over ten-thousand dying, small numbers repatriating to their home countries, and approximately four thousand moving to the nearby towns of Celle and Lingen.[14] While migration out of

---

[11] "Editorial: January 1, 1946," *Unzer sztyme: Organ of the Sharith Hapletah in the British Zone*, in *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context*, Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946*, ed. Leah Wolfson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 78-79.

[12] Rosensaft, 31.

[13] "Horror Camp" was the term used by Muriel Knox Doherty and other relief workers to distinguish the Nazi concentration camp from the displaced persons camp.

[14] Lavsky, 59.

Belsen occurred, movement into the displaced persons camp contributed to fluctuations in the camp's Jewish DP population. In the final months of 1945, Belsen's Jewish inhabitants swelled in numbers with DPs settling there from other regions, particularly the East. The shifting numbers made it difficult to pinpoint the exact number of Belsen's Jews, but the DP camp eventually established itself as the largest Jewish displaced persons camp in either the British or American zones. By 1946, the British Zone boasted 18,800 Jews, almost all inhabitants of Belsen or connected to Belsen's Jewish community.[15]

The demographics of Belsen's Jewish population significantly shaped the Jewish community that emerged in the DP camp. The majority of Belsen's Jews were Eastern European, with those from Poland and Hungary comprising the largest percentages. Since Bergen-Belsen "served as a 'waiting' camp for exchange Jews, there were relatively many children there," [16] and others arrived shortly before liberation from Buchenwald and Theresienstadt.[17] Lavsky explained, "Most of the survivors were young men and women who had lost all their relatives, and hence the drive to reestablish family units was very strong."[18] Belsen's DPs also strongly believed in reaffirming their Jewish identity through creating a distinctly Jewish community within the camp. "After life became normalized (in the narrow sense that normalcy may be applied to camp life), people resumed many of the

---

[15] Ibid., 51 & 62.

[16] "Relatively" in comparison to other concentration and death camps. As a "waiting" or exchange camp, Bergen-Belsen's prisoners consisted of entire families, a rarity in the Nazi camp system. Lavsky, 59.

[17] Lavsky, 60.

[18] Ibid.

activities that are found in a vibrant Jewish community," according to Lavsky.[19] Although they dealt with sorrow and setbacks, Belsen's Jewish DPs took extensive measures to create continuity with pre-war Jewish Europe.

Jewish Leadership and Representation

Establishing Jewish communities within the displaced persons camps began with efforts to organize Jewish DPs. Leaders within the DP camps generally participated in political and community groups prior to or during the war, including religious organizations, Zionist and Bundist movements, as well as underground and partisan units.[20] Representative bodies formed throughout the occupied zones but Bergen-Belsen's Jewish leaders moved more quickly than most. Belsen's first Jewish Provisional Committee formed on April 25, just ten days after liberation, and aimed to liaise with the British officials on behalf of all of the Jewish DPs. The first two elected chairmen repatriated to Holland and Czechoslovakia, respectively, but the committee's third chairman, Josef Rosensaft, remained a leader throughout the DP camp's existence.[21] In describing the committee's formation, Rosensaft explained,

> The beginning of our political activity in Belsen dates back to the days when hunger and death were still raging… We concentrated on four main tasks: the physical rehabilitation of the survivors; the search for relatives, if any; the political fight for our rights; spiritual rehabilitation… The search for relatives was one of the most poignant and tragic episodes in this story… It became clear to us from the beginning that the political struggle took precedence over other tasks, even though people were still dying all around us.[22]

---

[19] Ibid., 142.

[20] Feinstein, 252.

[21] Lavsky, 63-64.

[22] Rosensaft, 26-27.

Joining Rosensaft in the task of ensuring that Jewish DPs basic needs were met included several individuals with pre-war political and organizing experience. Rosensaft and his fellow members of the Provisional Committee functioned until the First Congress of the *She'erit Hapletah* met in Belsen in September 1945.

While Belsen's Provisional Committee worked with the British to improve conditions, forty-one Jewish DPs in the American Zone met on July 1, 1945 at the Feldafing DP[23] camp. Although the representatives differed religiously, linguistically, economically, and politically, "the committee struck a compromise that defined its principle concern as the representation and protection of Jewish DPs, with a clause that allowed for cooperation with the Zionist movement in Bavaria."[24] A week later, fifty-four DP representatives from the American and British zones met with officials from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the British Jewish Relief Unit (JRU) in Bergen-Belsen. This joint conference aimed "to discuss the present and the future of the Jewish people in the camps" and resulted in the formation of a committee designed to represent the Jewish DPs with military officials and the UNRRA. The July 8 conference also determined three demands: "unrestricted emigration for those who refused to be repatriated; the provision of necessary infrastructure for cultural, educational, and vocational centers in the camps that would operate until emigration became possible; and

---

[23] The Feldafing DP camp, located 20 miles southwest of Munich, was the first all-Jewish displaced persons camp. The DP camp, within the confines of the American Zone, was well known for its post-war survivor community. For more information see: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Feldafing," Holocaust Encyclopedia, https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007030.

[24] Wolfson, 164-5.

recognition of the committee as the authorized representative of all Jews in the American and British Zones."[25] Just over a week after the joint conference, representatives from within the British sector met to discuss how their needs differed from those of their counterparts in the American-controlled regions. Such conferences continued with great frequency during the final months of 1945.

The first formal Conference of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, held in the St. Ottilien DP[26] camp on July 25, 1945, involved ninety-four delegates representing nearly forty thousand Jewish DPs living in forty-six distinct locations. Next, the Council of Liberated Jews in Bavaria met on August 8 to select representatives for a new central committee.[27] The first meeting of the newly elected Central Committee occurred from September 25-27 at Bergen-Belsen, despite not obtaining permission from the British beforehand.[28] Jewish DP leadership purposely circumvented protocol to ensure British officials did not bar foreign invitees, including delegates from the World Jewish Congress. In addition to those attending from abroad, the three-day conference included 210 DPs who represented forty thousand Jews living in over forty camps and communities. Although the conference was intended as a general assembly of all Jewish DPs, the American Zone

---

[25] Lavsky, 71.

[26] St. Ottilien, a Catholic monastery, functioned as a Jewish hospital and DP camp from April 1945 to November 1948. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Photograph #58545," Photo Archive, http://digitalassets.ushmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=1151646&search=&index=1.

[27] Wolfson, 164-5.

[28] Rosensaft, 37. According to Rosensaft, the Jewish DPs first petitioned the British to hold the conference from August 15-17, 1945, but military authorities denied their request. Therefore, they did not seek permission prior to the September conference.

representatives did not attend, and the meeting was run by leaders from the British sector.[29] Josef Rosensaft, the committee's newly appointed chairman, called the conference "not only an important political event, but also an unforgettable emotional experience," and he also noted that "Jews all over the world took note of the first congress."[30] The Central Committee's multi-day conference brought together Jewish DP delegates with Jewish leaders from around the world to discuss the particular needs of Jewish DPs.

At the September conference, a committee of seventeen was selected to represent Jewish DPs in the entire region, though it would be based in Bergen-Belsen. In addition to Rosensaft's selection as chairman, Norbert Wollheim was appointed as deputy chairman and representative of the communities; Berl (Dov Bernhard) Laufer as organizational secretary; Hadassa Bimko, later Rosensaft, as head of the Health Department; Israel Moshe Olvesky, Paul Trepman, and David Rosenthal as heads of the Culture Department and editors of *Unzer Sztyme* (*Our Voice*); Sami Feder as Theatre Director; and Rabbi Zvi Helfgott represented the Orthodox sector.[31] Due to the heavy involvement of Belsen DPs, the members of the Central Committee also comprised Belsen's leadership committee, with Rosensaft serving as chairman of both groups.[32] After the formation of the Central Committee, this highly centralized group asserted itself as the sole governing body of Jews in the occupied territory, but they remained committed to representing all, regardless of

[29] Lavsky, 75.

[30] Rosensaft, 37.

[31] Lavsky, 75-77.

[32] *Belsen*, 195.

social, political, or cultural differences.[33] Rosensaft recalled that the leadership committee was charged with addressing the most pressing needs of the Jewish DPs:

> The first congress gave the new Jewish Central Committee three main assignments, all of which were fully implemented: firstly, to help in the up-building of the Jewish State; secondly, to fight for full freedom for the Jews in the camps and in the communities; thirdly, to centralize all Jewish activities in one body until the last of the camps shall be liquidated.[34]

Although those goals were met as Rosensaft indicates, the Central Committee took years to see progress when dealing with military and government officials. In order to achieve those aims, members of the committee frequently met with international Jewish organizations and became savvy political activists and diplomats.[35] The leadership team selected in September 1945 served until July 1947 when a new committee was elected, though many representatives continued to fulfill their same roles.[36]

The Central Committee continually worked to influence the decisions of the DP camp authorities, particularly the British, who were slower to implement changes they suggested. Belsen's Jewish leadership convinced officials to allow Jewish DPs to serve as police within the camp. At first they were denied weapons, but the force nonetheless "was a source of Jewish pride and self-esteem."[37] In June 1946, when the camp's last Polish, non-Jewish DPs were evacuated and Belsen became a wholly Jewish camp, the Jewish police gained their full authority and status. British officials also took until April 1947 to

---

[33] Lavsky, 110-111.

[34] Rosensaft, 38.

[35] Lavsky, 111.

[36] *Belsen*, 195.

[37] Lavsky, 118.

fully recognize Rosensaft's position, officially referring to him as "spokesman of the Jewish committee in the Hohne Camp."[38] Even though the leadership's goals took time to achieve, their efforts and influence secured a better, safer environment where Jewish culture could once again flourish.

Mourning and Commemoration

Once their health stabilized, the majority of displaced persons sought out their families. Norbert Wollheim, the deputy chairman of the Central Committee and Belsen DP, explained, "In this isolation and loneliness, we did the only thing that could possibly bring us help, saving us from the despair and the emotional abyss: we began to search for our brethren."[39] Belsen DP Josef Fraenkel echoed Wollheim's sentiments, "Everyone in Belsen looked for members of the family and the slightest hope was cherished… Whenever anyone in Belsen received good news, the whole community rejoiced."[40] As mentioned in Chapter 2, the European Tracking Office's Central Index of Jewish Survivors, the UNRRA's Central Tracing Bureau, and the International Tracing Service aided in those efforts. Pearl Benisch, who was liberated in Bergen-Belsen, described her reunion with her brother: "My little brother, still in tatters, drawn and tired from the long trip from the notorious Mathausen concentration camp in Austria, had heard that I was alive and came to see me. Mendek. I was not alone in the world; I had someone to live for, to care for."[41]

---

[38] Feinstein, 258.

[39] Wollheim, 53.

[40] Josef Fraenkel, "The Cultural Liberation," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 167.

[41] Pearl Benisch, *To Vanquish the Dragon* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1991), 407-408.

Those who located loved ones were lucky and often left the DP camp to reunite with family. The majority of Belsen's Jewish DPs struggled with long periods of uncertainty when the tracking services provided few updates. Being unable to find surviving relatives often led DPs to form close connections within the displaced persons camps.

For some Jewish DPs, communal grieving through mourning academies helped them to connect with their past, reflect on what they endured during the Holocaust, and remember those they lost. Inspired by prewar literary groups commemorating the death of famed Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem, "mourning academies brought together survivors from a particular town or region to exchange stories of life under the Nazis and of the liquidation of the ghettos.[42] Through mourning academies, which emerged in Jewish enclaves in the American and British sectors, Jewish DPs formed bonds despite their varied experiences from before the war and during the Holocaust. By sharing their stories about conditions in the ghettos and camps, interactions with Nazis and their allies, and events that led to their survival, the DPs began claiming agency over their traumatic memories. Within the safety of the mourning academies, among those who underwent similar horrors, Feinstein discovered that Jewish DPs took the first steps toward sharing testimony and realizing how their personal experiences fit into the larger narrative of the Holocaust.[43]

The Central Committee and other Jewish DPs quickly identified Holocaust commemoration as an important task of the surviving remnant. Belsen's first commemorative event, the presentation of a monument erected by the Jewish DPs,

---

[42] Feinstein, 75.

[43] Ibid., 77.

occurred on September 25, 1945.[44] Muriel Knox Doherty, an Australian nurse with the UNRRA, described the ceremony in a letter dated September 27:

> I was invited to Camp 1 to the unveiling of a Jewish memorial to the thousands of Jews who are buried there and the hundreds of thousands more who perished elsewhere. I think it was the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur]. Thousands of Jewish survivors (and there are about 9,000 present in this camp) and other DPs marched from the present camp carrying banners of blue and white with various mottoes. The granite memorial is erected near one of the immense graves holding thousands of nameless people who were either dead or died soon after liberation, before the British were able to evacuate them.[45]

Doherty went on to explain that the ceremony was conducted in Yiddish by a rabbi and the participants were visibly emotional throughout the event.[46] In their first effort to commemorate those lost in the horror of the Holocaust, of course the Jewish DPs wept throughout the ceremony. As Feinstein explained, "The dead had tremendous influence on the living. They were omnipresent in both private and public spheres. DPs dedicated themselves to acting in the name of the dead."[47] Throughout the DP camps, the anniversary of liberation became one of the most important commemorative days.

Belsen's first anniversary of liberation, April 15, 1946, was marked by a several mile-long march and ceremony in the former concentration camp. On Liberation Day, as it became known, displaced persons of all nationalities came together to commemorate the joy of freedom and honor those who did not survive. For Jewish DPs, the ceremony, which

---

[44] "Monuments," Bergen-Belsen Memorial, accessed December 26, 2016, http://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/en/memorial/grounds-of-former-camp/monuments.html.

[45] Doherty, 141.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Feinstein, 65.

fell on the eve of Passover, provided an opportunity to grieve as a community and to unveil a permanent stone monument that replaced the provisional monument in place since September. According to an UNRRA European Regional Office memo dated May 4, 1946,

> In a special ceremony attended by visiting British Army and Military Government officers and personnel from UNRAA, and some half dozen cooperating volunteers and agencies, the Jewish DPs unveiled a monument commemorating the 30,000 Jews who had been slaughtered at Belsen. Standing on the site of the old camp, the granite and marble stone base [of the monument bore an] inscription, chiseled in English and Hebrew, [which read] 'Israel and the world shall remember 30,000 Jews exterminated in the concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen, at the hand of the murderous Nazis. Earth conceal not the blood shed on the first anniversary of liberation April 15.'[48]

Speeches and prayers accompanied the monument's debut with Jewish leaders reminding the crowd of those they lost and their mission as members of the surviving remnant. Belsen's Central Committee organized many key elements of the event recognizing that commemorative events bolstered their legitimacy with British officials.[49]

On the second anniversary of liberation in 1947, twenty Jewish DP police officers led four children from Belsen's secular and religious schools at the head of the march to the concentration camp and memorial. Highlighting the police and children, Belsen's leadership aimed to show discipline, strength, and promise for the future. The march also featured representatives from Zionist and ultra-Orthodox groups, which showed the unity of the Jewish DPs. The 1947 commemoration drew on the traditional mourning of Liberation Day by starting with the parade and ceremony, but also embraced a more

[48] "Belsen Liberation Anniversary Marked by Ceremonies," extract from UNRRA Regional Office, 4 May 1946, in Muriel Knox Doherty, *Letters from Belsen*, eds. Judith Cornell and R. Lynette Russell (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 205-206.

[49] Feinstein, 82.

celebratory tone by concluding the day with a party attended by two thousand people.[50] By the second anniversary Belsen's Jewish DPs still recognized the importance of mourning the dead, but also looked to a brighter, more hopeful future.

As Muriel Knox Doherty noticed during Belsen's first Liberation Day, commemorative events acted as a powerful force for Jewish DPs to mourn and reminisce as a community. Religious and political leaders urged the DPs to grieve, but also to "honor the memory of the dead by leading Jewish lives."[51] As a community, the commemorative events enabled Jewish DPs to begin a new tradition of coming together and collectively remembering the Holocaust.[52] Belsen's leadership also sought to commemorate the Holocaust by creating a historical committee tasked with recording eye witness accounts for the YIVO archives; the committee also encouraged survivors to testify at the Nazi war crimes trials.[53] Mourning academies and commemorative events, in the months and years after liberation, provided survivors with safe, communal spaces to grieve, despair, remember, and reflect. Jewish DPs also recognized another component of their role as the surviving remnant by forging new families and welcoming the next generation into the world.

---

[50] Ibid., 83-84.

[51] Ibid., 65.

[52] Ibid., 73.

[53] Lavsky, 120.

Forming New Families

> It has often been asked during the post-war years, where we found the strength to rebuild the life of our community after such a period of indescribable experiences and extreme physical and emotional stress. The answer is precisely the need for overcoming the danger of seclusion and mental isolation by establishing new human contacts through the device of finding ourselves and others on grounds of common task.[54]
>
> —Norbert Wollheim[55]

While displaced persons organized into political committees and planned commemorative events, they also began forming deep bonds within their communities. Living in close quarters with one another, displaced persons often formed friendships and romantic bonds quickly. Aid workers and military personnel reported shock and dismay that so many DPs "engaged in high levels of sexual activity" soon after regaining their health. Although deemed promiscuous by observers, many DPs simply explored sexual freedom that had been denied for years. For many DPs, "sexual contact represented a physical manifestation of freedom and an affirmation of life."[56] Connecting intimately with other survivors, Jewish DPs found comfort and understanding in others who experienced similar sorrow. As Lavsky explained, "Young widowers met widows and shared their grief, grievances, and fears. Psychologically it was easier for a woman who had lost her husband and children to find an open ear and heart in a man who had suffered the same tragedy."[57] Feinstein agreed that "sexual activity could serve as an emotional catharsis and

---

[54] Wollheim, 53.

[55] From September 1945 to July 1947, Norbert Wollheim served as vice-chairman of the First Central Committee. Wollheim was elected to the Second Central Committee in 1947 and continued as vice-chairman.

[56] Feinstein, 126.

[57] Lavsky, 149.

as a way to feel connected to another human being."[58] Emotional support and understanding deepened romantic relationships among the displaced persons, and especially within Jewish DP communities, marriages occurred with great frequency.

Within Jewish DP communities, stable couples formed quickly and rabbis encouraged young couples to marry.[59] Josef Fraenkel simply explained that those "who had lost their families and youngsters who could not remember family life were anxious to marry and rear a family."[60] Practical reasons also influenced couples to quickly wed since DPs received better housing as married couples. Samuel Weintraub, who represented Belsen's *Mizrachi* political party, provided insight into how marriages impacted housing in Belsen:

> Housing was another problem which beset us from the outset. The camp was by far not big enough to hold all its inhabitants. And then there were many ailing people who required much more than healthy persons in the way of accommodation. On top of it all there was a wave of weddings in the camp, and the new couples needed at least a room to live in.[61]

Often housing shortages encouraged couples to formalize relationships since married couples more easily obtained private living quarters.

Weddings in the DP camps were joyous occasions, but also brought reminders of extensive loss. Erna Rubenstein, a Jewish displaced person, recalled the grief surrounding her sister Pola's marriage, "Pola said that to celebrate her marriage without our parents and

[58] Feinstein, 126.

[59] Feinstein, 108.

[60] Fraenkel, 167.

[61] Samuel Weintraub, "Daily Life in Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 129-130.

without our little brother was very sad, but she and Dolek [her fiancé] felt they had to go on, to hold onto their Jewish heritage and to build a better future for themselves and their children."[62] Pola's combination of loss and hope echoed through many DP wedding ceremonies. Wedding invitations revealed the pale of sorrow when they were signed by the bridge and groom or the name of an uncle or cousin, rather than the couple's parents; ceremonies also often commemorated those who did not survive.[63] An Orthodox woman described the sorrow hanging over mass weddings at Belsen: "The souls of parents who had not survived to lead their children beneath the wedding canopy hovered in the air of the camp… After the ceremony each couple went to their own corner, to commune with their sorrow, and there was no sound of rejoicing, singing or dancing, as is customary."[64] Despite the immense loss surrounding weddings, brides and grooms demonstrated resourcefulness to hold weddings with limited supplies and few luxuries.

When planning for marriage, most Jewish DPs preferred a religious wedding ceremony to honor family and cultural traditions of the past.[65] Organizing a rabbi-approved ceremony proved difficult with little supplies in the DP camps. Hadassah Bimko (later Rosensaft) came to the aid of an engaged couple who reunited as DPs and wanted to marry

---

[62] Erna Rubinstein, *After the Holocaust: The Long Road to Freedom* (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1995) quoted in Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 129.

[63] Lavsky, 149.

[64] Bertha Ferderber-Salz, *And the Sun Kept Shining* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1980) quoted in Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133.

[65] Feinstein, 128.

shortly after liberation. The couple found a British rabbi to officiate at their June 1945 ceremony, but the rabbi refused to marry the couple without a mikvah. Bimko reminded the rabbi "that Jewish law permitted any Jew to perform a marriage ceremony and that the wedding would go on with or without him," which caused the rabbi to relent and perform the ceremony in Belsen's Freedom Square.[66] Jewish DPs, through their ingenuity and desire to wed, overcame various religious requirements that proved difficult to meet in the DP camp setting. Rivers served as acceptable mikvahs for brides, women often made wedding dresses out of any fabric available, and generally one dress appeared in numerous ceremonies.[67] Despite limited resources, displaced persons married one another with impressive frequency.

Urgency to marry was influenced by the loss of loved ones, improved housing, and a desire to form new families. The act of marriage also served as a form of revenge in the post-war era. As historian Mark Wyman noted,

> The Third Reich had forbidden weddings in forced-labor camps and concentration camps, but—as one writer put it—'even the Germans could not prevent the young people from falling in love and waiting impatiently for the day when they might wed.' The result was 'wholesale weddings' in many camps, often with the couples' children standing by. The Belsen DP camp recorded twenty weddings a day after the initial months.[68]

In fact, Belsen's impressive marriage rates continued, and less than two years after liberation, displaced persons at Belsen had partaken in 1,438 marriages.[69] American Vida

---

[66] Feinstein, 130.

[67] Feinstein, 130; Lavsky, 149.

[68] Mark Wyman, *DPs Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 111.

[69] Rahe, 72.

Kaufman, who visited Belsen, recalled, "During the time I spent in Belsen I was invited to attend more weddings than ever before in all my life."[70] The significant marriage rates quickly resulted in a baby boom throughout the DP camps, particularly in Belsen.

Just as marriages marked an important stage in restoring Jewish family life, bearing children also took on added meaning in the post-war era. As Feinstein asserts, "Reproduction served as a form of revenge, an assertion of survival… DPs welcomed the arrival of children as symbols of continuity and the survival of the Jewish people."[71] Pregnancies among a malnourished DP population and childbirth with inadequate medical supplies presented real challenges, but Jewish DPs along with camp doctors and nurses did everything in their power to attend to the welfare of mothers and babies.[72] As the health of adult DPs improved, baby booms occurred throughout the camps.

Along with the significant number of marriages, Belsen experienced increasing birth rates. In the spring of 1946, it was established that Belsen had nearly 200 births and Belsen's hospital registered 555 births throughout the year. The baby boom impacted Belsen's demographics significantly with infants up to two years old comprising 1.7 percent of the camp's total population by the end of 1946. From the fall of 1946 to the summer of 1947, four hundred babies were born in Belsen.[73] On average, fifteen babies were born each week in Belsen in 1947, and the camp celebrated the birth of its one-

---

[70] Vida Kaufman, "An American in Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 155.

[71] Feinstein, 108.

[72] Ibid., 134.

[73] Lavksy, 150.

thousandth child in February 1948.[74] Fraenkel claimed that "over two thousand children" were born during Belsen's years as a DP camp.[75] Despite the Nazis' attempts to extinguish European Jewry, the surviving remnant's efforts to rekindle family bonds and give birth to a new generation asserted the continuation of Europe's Jewish population.

Just as Jewish DPs asserted their continuity with Jewish traditions during their marriage ceremonies, many DPs chose to circumcise their sons. By physically marking their sons as Jewish, survivors embraced a practice that had nearly been eradicated by the Nazis, but also potentially left them vulnerable to anti-Semitism.[76] Muriel Knox Doherty, in a letter dated December 14, 1945, described the first circumcision ceremony performed in the Glyn Hughes Hospital[77] at Belsen on December 12; Doherty wrote,

> They told me that the Jewish son is always called after a deceased member, usually the mother's father or grandfather. As there was no trace of [the mother's] father since he was sent to a concentration camp, they had to decide on some other deceased [relative]… The religious ceremony [of circumcision] was so important to these oppressed and persecuted people… Jewish history was made at Belsen that day.[78]

Similar to wedding ceremonies, giving birth and circumcision combined hope and sorrow with so many relatives deceased or with unknown fates. The emotional pain that accompanied forming new families proved difficult for many DPs, but a desire to live and give life to the next generation kept the vast majority from succumbing. Lavsky argued,

---

[74] Rahe, 73.

[75] Fraenkel, 167.

[76] Feinstein, 148 & 158.

[77] Rahe, 75. The Glen Hughes Hospital was named to honor one of Bergen-Belsen's British liberators.

[78] Doherty, 198-200.

"Family life in itself proved to be a vital asset for mental and social rehabilitation ."[79] Historian and academic director at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Thomas Rahe explained survivor's motivations, "Many DPs regarded these children as living proof of the collective will to survive and the vitality of the *she'erit hapleita.*"[80] Throughout the DP camps, Jewish DPs reasserted Jewish identity by engaging in political organizations, commemorating the Holocaust, and creating new family bonds. Within DP camp Jewish communities, key aspects of Jewish culture including religion, education, publications and performances reemerged as well.

Reviving Jewish Culture in DP Camps

In the months following liberation, Jewish DPs took steps to revive European Jewish culture to infuse bits of normalcy in the displaced persons camps. Building off efforts to politically organize as a group, Jewish DPs also quickly began to embrace important aspects of Jewish culture, including religious services, educational opportunities, and performances. In Bergen-Belsen, the Jewish community put considerable energy into cultural activities designed to educate, entertain, and link the DPs to their Jewish heritage. On November 18, 1945, Muriel Knox Doherty reported that Belsen's DPs were "moderately comfortable with good food, clothing and warm beds" and enjoyed a wide array of activities that included "picnics in the woods, moonlight walks, open-air

---

[79] Lavsky, 152.

[80] Rahe, 73.

dances,…concerts, cinemas, costume plays, [and] sports."[81] After her visit to Belsen, Vida Kaufman wrote,

> I had not expected to find an organized community. I found a city, governed democratically by the people, a city with its institutions and responsibilities of a community-living on behalf of its people. Was it a school, a yeshiva, a children's home, a hospital, a synagogue, police department, sanitation department, anything and everything that belongs to a community—all were there, organized and functioning.[82]

Kaufman observed many of the central components of Belsen's thriving Jewish community during her visit. Survivor Josef Fraenkel explained, "The quest for culture had become wide-spread. Everyone was anxious to learn, to help to create. They had begun these activities because they felt isolated and lonely, without family or relations."[83] By reviving Jewish culture, Jewish DPs further proclaimed their Jewish identity and established institutions that helped pass traditions on to the next generation.

---

[81] Doherty, 181.

[82] Kaufman, 152-153.

[83] Fraenkel, 167.

Religion and Education

> Belsen which was once a symbol of Nazi monstrosity became a symbol of Jewish spiritual revival, of the victory of the book over the sword.[84]
>
> —Dr. Michael Lubliner[85]

Many displaced persons tried to reconcile what they had been through with the present and an uncertain future. For many, religious faith became an important aspect of their post-war identity, so much so that religious centers were some of the first formal structures established in many DP camps. After Jewish DPs carved out their own spaces within the DP camp system, synagogues were erected, often in whatever buildings were available.[86] Within Jewish DP communities, displaced persons practiced "a broad spectrum of religious observances and beliefs from secular to ultra-Orthodox."[87] Despite religious differences, Jewish DPs emphasized unity within the camps. In Belsen, secular and Orthodox Jews asked not to be separated in a letter to camp officials:

> Although some of our comrades are not orthodox, they always respected our feelings and definitely *could not have any demoralizing influence on us* [original]. After long years of suffering we went through together and trying continuously not to be separated!!! We cannot justify a slightly different attitude towards religion as a reason to part us from our friends.[88]

---

[84] M. Lubliner, "Jewish Education in Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 161.

[85] P. Warszawski, "Pupils and Teachers at Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 163; Lavsky, 171. Dr. Michael Lubliner served as headmaster of Belsen's Hebrew School, a secondary school, beginning in May 1947 and also taught Jewish history at the school.

[86] Wyman, 109.

[87] Feinstein, 202.

[88] Judith Tydor Baumel, *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), quoted in Margarete Myers Feinstein,

This plea revealed the importance of communal unity among Jewish DPs, despite religious distinctions. Not all religious differences among the DPs were so easily overcome, but Feinstein asserts that "even as they argued about levels of observance, rituals and holiday celebrations allowed DPs to express their Jewish identity and to join in community building."[89] The Jewish rituals and holidays that reemerged in the DP camps provided opportunities for secular and religious Jews to unite as a community.

Nearly all Jewish DPs chose to celebrate Jewish holidays in one form or another. According to Feinstein, "Most DPs did engage in a least some rituals of Sabbath observance. On Friday nights DPs welcomed the Sabbath by lighting candles, blessing the wine, and singing songs."[90] Both observant and secular Jews participated in these rituals, though often for different reasons. For Orthodox Jews, they expressed their faith and fulfilled their obligation to God; for secular Jews, they felt connected to lost loved ones and traditions from pre-war life. Orthodox and secular DPs came together to celebrate Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover—religious holidays that emphasize tales of Jewish oppression, liberation, and survival—were recognized as especially relevant in the post-war era.

Belsen's first Hanukkah celebration in December 1945 featured various performances by children and survivors. Held in the camp's theatre, Doherty attended the festivities and remarked at the large "appreciative audience" that enjoyed a performance

---

Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 204.

[89] Feinstein, 205.

[90] Ibid., 207.

by the junior class, the "Dance of Liberation" by Lola Kuschenblatt, and the choir singing the Zionist anthem "Hatikvah."[91] "Hanukkah gave the survivors the opportunity to teach Jewish tradition to the few remaining children and to understand their present circumstances within the context of Jewish history," according to Feinstein.[92] In the DP camps, Purim plays emphasized the victory over the Nazis and their allies; in Landsberg,[93] DPs performed a skit where Hitler, a survivor in costume, was arrested by DP police, the story of Esther was read by a man in a concentration camp uniform, and DPs burned Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.[94] Wyman surmised, "Camp leaders saw an opportunity to turn Purim week at Landsberg into rehabilitative activity that would spruce up the camp, help its Jewish residents to shake off their despair and celebrate their joy at having survived."[95] As previously mentioned, Belsen's first liberation anniversary fell on the DP camp's first Passover observation in April 1946. Belsen's Passover celebrations included readings from a new Haggadah written by survivors from the British and American Zones that "compared the exodus from Egypt with the survivors' hopes for an exodus from Europe and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine."[96] The first celebrations of Hanukkah, Purim, and

---

[91] Doherty, 198.

[92] Feinstein, 210.

[93] The Landsberg DP camp, located southwest of Munich, was the second largest Jewish DP camp in the American zone. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Fohrenwald," Holocaust Encyclopedia, https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007059.

[94] Feinstein, 210.

[95] Wyman, 153.

[96] Feinstein, 211-212.

Passover in the DP camps united secular and religious Jews as they rekindled old traditions and used the festivities reflect the needs of the surviving remnant.

Education, much like religion, served as a vehicle to teach the younger generation about Jewish customs and history. Throughout the DPs camps, secular and religious schools were established shortly after liberation. With Belsen's significant number of children at liberation, there was even more need to establish formal schooling quickly, so the DPs from varied professions (teachers, doctors, nurses and other professionals) organized schools.[97] According to Dr. Michael Lubliner, who taught Jewish history and later became headmaster of Belsen's secondary school, "Educational work began immediately… Only six weeks after liberation a large educational institution was established, with regular classes and teachers."[98] Josef Fraenkel captured how swiftly schools were created when he wrote, "Death still haunted Belsen but a Kindergarten was established and for the first time children played in Belsen and sang songs in Hebrew and Yiddish."[99] At first the elementary school and kindergarten were established in the nearby town of Celle, but later both moved to the Belsen DP camp; Belsen's secondary school opened in December 1945.[100] Josef Rosensaft, chairman of the Coordinating Committee, believed creating Belsen's schools marked an important chapter in the DP's spiritual rehabilitation and stated, "We established the first school; our children re-learned laughter and play; our own teachers devised a curriculum for the children and improvised

---

[97] Lavsky, 169.

[98] Lubliner, 157.

[99] Fraenkel, 166.

[100] Lavsky, 171.

textbooks."[101] Hadassa Bimko, who married Rosensaft, echoed his sentiments, "We, on our part, did everything in our power to teach the children to laugh and play again. Gradually they returned to normal."[102] Educating Belsen's children proved quite a feat with limited supplies and few professional educators.

Belsen's schools suffered from extremely minimal resources, but still managed to educate the camp's children and teens. Dr. Lubliner described difficulties establishing the secondary school, "In the beginning they drafted educated laymen, converting them into teachers. It was an arduous task. They had to teach from memory, without books. But the teachers became creative, inspired by the indescribable enthusiasm and the immense eagerness of the pupils."[103] During her visit to Belsen, Vida Kaufman visited the camp's schools and later wrote,

> I recall the special pleading of one of the teachers, not for any of the physical amenities, not for more clothing or food or warmth for the school, all of which were desperately needed, but for special equipment for a physics laboratory… It seemed incredible to me at the time, that under conditions as difficult as they were, a teacher could be so concerned with learning and teaching material, and above all with the educational welfare of his pupils… I wish I could write a paean of praise to the teachers and supervisors of the schools, for it was their goal to bring normalcy into the lives of the children, to do everything possible to make them forget the horrors and travails of the preceding years.[104]

Despite severely limited supplies, by March 1946 Belsen boasted an impressive network of schools, including the kindergarten and primary school, the Hebrew secondary school,

---

[101] Rosensaft, 33.

[102] Hadassa Bimko-Rosensaft, "The Children of Belsen," in *Belsen* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957), 101.

[103] Lubliner, 160.

[104] Kaufman, 153.

two Beth Jacob Talmud Torah schools (one Polish, the other Hungarian), a yeshiva, a vocational school, and a university.[105]

In addition to valuing education for Belsen's children, the camp also featured extensive employment training to help adult DPs. With few work opportunities, relief workers and camp officials worried that displaced persons would become idle. The DPs also yearned to lead more productive days, and along with support from the British Jewish Relief Unit, the Jewish Agency, and the Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT), vocational training courses began. The vocational courses included carpentry, electromechanics, automobile mechanics, and sewing and dressmaking. According to Lavsky, the courses "not only prepared people for the future but also provided them with a job to earn a living, either by paying students during their studies or by marketing their products in the camp or to the British."[106] Belsen's educational offerings—both those designed for children as well as adults—helped transition survivors to life after the Holocaust. Pearl Benisch described the importance of Belsen's Orthodox Beth Jacob schools for the camp's most religious young, female DPs: "The girls flocked to us, to learn, to strengthen their faith, to renew their hope for a better future. They drew encouragement from each other and helped each other cope with the problems of their new reality."[107] In a powerful summation of the impact of education, Fraenkel wrote, "These pencils and books were the symbol of the real liberation, the cultural liberation of the Jews of

[105] Lavsky, 170.

[106] Ibid., 145-147.

[107] Benisch, 412.

Belsen."[108] With schools, universities, and vocational courses in place, Belsen's cultural outpouring continued through publications, performances, and athletics.

Yiddish, Publications and Performances

Within the DP camps, language served as a divisive as well as unifying force. With diverse Jewish populations, Jewish DP camp leaders sought to elevate Yiddish and Hebrew above national languages. Yiddish, the language of Ashkenazi Eastern European Jews, gained support from many leaders because so many Jewish DPs had familiarity with the language and because of its long-term association with Jewish literature and culture.[109] Although Hebrew remained an important part of Jewish DP camp culture, particularly among Zionists, Yiddish dominated many facets of Jewish life in the DP camps. Many Jewish DPs who previously lacked fluency learned Yiddish because the language served "a practical function of permitting communication between Jews of different national origins" within the camps.[110] Even though dialects may have differed, "Yiddish was the language that bound the majority of the DPs together linguistically," Feinstein explained and added that for many DPs "Yiddish could serve as a bridge between the Polish of the past and the Hebrew of the future."[111]

Among Jewish DPs, Yiddish served as the primary language of classroom instruction, publications, and theatrical performances. Within the Kazet Theatre, Yiddish

---

[108] Fraenkel, 165.

[109] Feinstein, 220.

[110] Ibid., 221.

[111] Ibid., 222.

created an especially strong connection to pre-war Jewish culture. Yiddish was also the language of the mourning academies and the DP courts.[112] Over one hundred DP Yiddish newspapers, published between 1945 and 1950, "greatly shaped the collective memory and identity of the Jewish survivors by providing forums for commemoration of the recent past, expression of DP concerns and activities, and debates about the future."[113] In addition, the Yiddish press supported literary and cultural pursuits by dedicating at least one page per issue to the creativity of their fellow DPs. In this environment, Yiddish literary works flourished in late 1947 and during 1948.[114] Tamar Lewinsky, a historian and scholar of Jewish studies, surmised that the writers saw themselves as "heirs of East European Yiddish cultural tradition" who "tried to reintegrate themselves into the contemporary international literary discourse" during their time in the DP camps.[115] The outpouring of Yiddish literary works throughout the displaced persons camps was perhaps most impressive at Bergen-Belsen.

Similar to the DP camps in general, Yiddish featured heavily in Belsen's remarkable literary and cultural contributions. Josef Fraenkel boasted,

> Among the people of Belsen there were excellent editors, fine journalists and talented writers and artists. Belsen became an example for Jews all over the world. It was almost as if the men and women were trying to make up for lost time. Belsen

---

[112] Ibid., 222.

[113] Wolfson, 179; Feinstein, 224.

[114] Tamar Lewinsky, "Dangling Roots? Yiddish Language and Culture in the German Diaspora," in "*We are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, eds. Avinoam J. Patt and Michael Berkowitz (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 314.

[115] Ibid., 328.

> printed newspapers, brochures and books, Talmud-folios and religious works and sent them to Jews living in all four corners of the earth.[116]

Belsen's inhabitants included fifteen Yiddish authors who continued writing and publishing in the DP camp; they went on to form the Association of Jewish Journalists and Writers in the British Zone of Germany—Bergen-Belsen in 1947.[117] For Belsen's Jewish DPs, their Yiddish newspapers became one of their proudest accomplishments.

First published on July 20, 1945, Belsen's *Unzer Sztyme* (*Our Voice*) was one of the first Yiddish publications in post-war Germany. Three of Belsen's Provisional Committee leaders David Rosenthal, Paul Trepman, and Rafael Olvesky handwrote and mimeographed the publication's first edition in the village of Celle, near Bergen-Belsen.[118] Josef Rosensaft remembered the newspaper's significance:

> I shall never forget how our first newspaper was brought out (for the record: it was the first publication of the *Sheerit Hapleita*). We had no printing plant, no typewriter, no duplicator, no newsprint, not even ordinary paper. Yet, the three *Chaveirim*[119] who undertook to implement the fantastic idea of a Jewish newspaper in Belsen, of all places, and produced it! They worked day and night: one of them wrote the whole paper in longhand; another went off to look for paper; and the third went to some place near Brunswick where he hoped to find a duplicator… We took the first issue of the paper in our hands and our eyes filled with tears.[120]

---

[116] Fraenkel, 167.

[117] Lavsky, 156.

[118] Ibid., 73.

[119] *Belsen*, 198. According to *Belsen*'s glossary, "Chaveirim means comrade, colleague, or collaborator" in Hebrew.

[120] Rosensaft, 34-35.

Fraenkel credited the newspaper with helping "to bridge the gulf between the camp-inmates and the outside world."[121] *Unzer Sztyme*, a weekly periodical, served as the primary communication of Jewish DPs in the British zone until December 1947 when *Wochenblatt* (*Jewish Weekly*) replaced it; *Wochenblatt* continued with weekly or bi-weekly issues until Belsen's DP camp closed.[122] *Unzer Sztyme* and *Wochenblatt* functioned as the official newspapers of Belsen's Central Committee and helped the committee to disseminate information to the entire DP camp.[123] Belsen's remarkable periodicals often covered the numerous celebrations and public performances at the DP camp.

Performances in the DP camps began shortly after liberation as displaced persons became healthy and foreign performers visited post-war Europe. The majority of performers from abroad were Jewish who "felt it their personal duty as Jews to bring what comfort and pleasure they could to the Jewish DPs and to show their solidarity."[124] In July 1945, composer and pianist Benjamin Britten and violinist Yehudi Menuhin performed throughout the British zone, including two concerts at Bergen-Belsen. American singer Emma Lazaroff Schaver performed throughout the DP camps over six months in 1946. Herman Yablokoff, a Yiddish entertainer, performed a variety of songs and dramatic skits

---

[121] Fraenkel, 166.

[122] Lavsky, 155.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Shirli Gilbert, "'We Long for a Home': Songs and Survival among Jewish Displaced Persons," in "*We are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, 291.

in Bergen-Belsen in August 1947.[125] In addition to the famous acts from abroad, survivors took it upon themselves to entertain one another as well.

Jewish DPs tapped into their cultural roots and also created wholly new works in the displaced persons camps. Singing served to unite and entertain as the DPs "sang prewar Yiddish folk songs, songs from the wartime ghettos and camps, Yiddish theater songs, excerpts from operas and operettas, and other preexisting repertoire."[126] The first formal musical group of DPs, the St. Ottilien Orchestra, performed on May 27, 1945 at the St. Ottilien Camp's liberation concert and was comprised of former members of the Kovno Ghetto orchestra. In Belsen, Sami Feder collected songs from the ghettos and concentration camps and memorialized them in *Zamlung fun katset un geto lider* (Collection of Camp and Ghetto Songs) in 1946.[127] Original songs also emerged in the DP camps and captured a wide variety of topics, including "recounting the horrors of the war years, chronicling mourning and loss, and relating illegal immigration to Palestine."[128] Shirli Gilbert, a scholar of Jewish history, concluded, "Musical activities among the DPs—both those organized by outsiders and those motivated by the survivors themselves—seem consciously to be centered around the need for comfort, strength, and regeneration at this critical transitional moment and to recognize the constructive role that music could play in the process."[129]

---

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid., 292.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 298.

[129] Ibid., 300.

Functioning in a similar manner to music, theatrical groups swiftly emerged among Jewish DPs. Troupes featured a few professionals, but mostly involved amateurs, many acting for the first time. Some survivors performed in the ghettos and concentration camps, like Feder; while others were thankful to finally have creative outlets in the DP camps.[130] In the American Zone, Föhrenwald[131] featured several theatre and music ensembles. In Belsen, with the British sector's largest concentration of Jewish DPs, the Kazet Theatre, *Arbeter Biene* (Jewish Workers' Theatre), and *Amatoren Gruppe* (Amateur Group) all performed at various points.[132] Belsen's theatrical groups typically performed in the theatre tent, featuring approximately one thousand seats, located alongside Liberty Square in the heart of the camp. Belsen's theatre tent also held the camp's holiday celebrations and school performances.[133] Dr. Lubliner reported that Belsen's students performed plays "imaginatively produced by the children [that] were attended by excited crowds as well as by distinguished personalities from all over the world."[134] Theatrical performances featured prominently in Belsen and outsiders often noted the power of these performances. After attending the Hanukkah celebrations in December 1945, Muriel Knox Doherty hoped the Jewish DPs "might find some relief from their mental sufferings and live without fear

---

[130] Feinstein, 226.

[131] The Föhrenwald DP camp was the third largest Jewish DP camp in the American zone. Located southwest of Munich, the camp was established by the U.S. army shortly after liberation. For more information see: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Fohrenwald," Holocaust Encyclopedia, https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007059.

[132] Gilbert, 292; Lavsky, 159.

[133] Lavsky, 158.

[134] Lubliner, 158.

of further persecution."[135] The performances played an important role in helping Belsen's Jewish DPs—both children and adults—reconnect with their Jewish heritage and freely express their creativity.

Athletic events also helped entertain and rehabilitate displaced persons after the war. With DP camp officials and welfare workers encouraging sports, regular games, matches, and races were held on Saturdays often pitting teams from different camps against one another. For Jewish DPs, sports were "considered the definite proof of the Jews' ability to overcome not only the degenerating impacts of the Holocaust but also the traditional stigma of Jewish weakness."[136] Zippy Orlin, who worked in Belsen as a social worker with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, recalled Belsen's various athletic opportunities in an essay penned in March 1949: "There were many football, ping-pong, boxing and athletic teams, and inter-kibbutz competitions were held regularly. Many visiting teams came to Belsen from the American Zone and were always given a grand reception by the local sports enthusiasts."[137] The various cultural components throughout the DP camps allowed Jewish DPs to reassert their Jewish identity and experience moments that resembled normalcy—both of which contributed to the DPs ability to enjoy life in the shadow of despair.

Determined to reestablish Jewish life in post-war Europe, the surviving remnant looked to their Jewish heritage to lead them as they created political and cultural

---

[135] Doherty, 198.

[136] Lavsky, 161.

[137] Zippy Orlin, "What it's Really Like in a DP Camp. A South African Girl in Belsen," in *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen, 1945-1950*, 158.

institutions in the DP camps. Their traditions also guided them as they created new families with other survivors, often choosing wedding ceremonies officiated by rabbis and circumcising their sons. Jewish DPs formed bonds as Holocaust survivors through shared grief expressed in the mourning academies and commemoration ceremonies, especially annual liberation events. Religious holidays joined religious and secular DPs together in unified observance; representative bodies were comprised of leaders from different regions, political views, and religious sects. Jewish DPs expressed their differences by establishing secular and religious schools, through their regular and literary publications, and with musical and theatrical performances. Through these cultural outlets, Jewish DPs forged new communities and reaffirmed a strong Jewish identity within the camp.

In Bergen-Belsen, the camp's Kazet Theatre held particular significance as a popular Yiddish theatre group. Performing new, original works as well as adaptations of traditional Yiddish works allowed Jewish DPs to connect to their Jewish heritage while also safely reliving traumatic elements of the Holocaust. The small troupe of professional and amateur actors, led by Sami Feder, brought to life stories vitally important for post-war Jewish identity. For the players and the audience, the performances of the Kazet Theatre helped them to build a bridge from their life before the war to life after the Holocaust.

Chapter 5

The Concentration Camp Theatre Re-emerges in Belsen

> In fact much of the story of Jewish theatre—and, more specifically, Yiddish theatre—is the story of extraordinary individuals who attempt to transpose general theatre into a Jewish key for a Jewish audience, for both polemic and aesthetic purposes.[1]
>
> —Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber

Shortly after liberation, Sami Feder set to work establishing his Kazet Theatre in the displaced persons camp at Bergen-Belsen. Feder joined Belsen's other Jewish leaders as they formally organized into representative committees in the spring and summer of 1945. Just as he had in the Nazi-run camps, Feder wanted to share his creative energies with his fellow Jewish survivors, so he urged the committee's Culture Department leaders, Israel Moshe Olvesky, Paul Trepman, and David Rosenthal,[2] to allow him to form a theatre in Belsen. Feder later remembered, "One of the first things we did by way of organizing our temporary existence in Belsen was to create a cultural unit with various branches. I was charged with the organization of a theatre."[3] In addition to starting a theatre in Belsen in mid-July 1945, Feder also established a drama school that he envisioned would help educate survivors who had no prior acting experience.[4] Joining Feder in launching the

---

[1] Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber, eds., introduction to *Landmark Yiddish Plays: A Critical Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 6.

[2] See Chapter 4.

[3] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 135.

[4] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 99.

theatre school was Sonia Boczkowska,[5] who performed alongside Sami in the Będzin ghetto prior to her deportation to Annaberg (a sub-camp of Gross-Rosen). Sonia also was imprisoned in Mauthausen and later Bergen-Belsen, where she was liberated.[6] Boczkowska and Feder reunited shortly after liberation, and the two worked together to bring Yiddish theatre to Belsen.

With a clear vision in place, Feder set out to recruit more survivors to join his theatre and help educate amateurs in his acting school. Feder described how he connected with other performers:

> Our first move was to publish an announcement that a theatre troupe was being formed in the camp. Some of my old friends, who appeared in my shows in the concentration camps, turned up and applied to be included in the troupe. There were even one or two who worked with me on the Jewish stage in pre-war Poland. It was a great reunion. Alas, not all of them were well enough to start rehearsals.[7]

Feder's announcement recruited performers and theatre technicians from throughout the occupied territory and invited them to Belsen. The majority who responded to Feder's call originated from Poland and were well versed in Yiddish theatre.[8] The advertisement helped Feder and Boczkowska join forces with Berl Friedler, an actor and stage designer who

---

[5] Sonia Boczkowska was born on May 1, 1919 in Łódź, Poland to parents who were active in the Jewish Labor Bund. Sonia's theatrical training began as a child when she trained with theatre director and poet, Moyshe Broderson. Broderson provided Sonia her first training in Yiddish cabaret that became a staple of the Kazet Theatre. Arnold Zable, "Sonia Lizaron – Frontline Art: The Theatre of Resistance," Meanjin Quarterly (Summer 2016), accessed February 7, 2017. https://meanjin.com.au/essays/sonia-lizaron-frontline-art-the-theatre-of-resistance.

[6] Arnold Zable, "A Tribute to Sonia Lizaron," Digital Yiddish Theatre Project (January 2016), accessed July 6, 2016. https://yiddishstage.org/a-tribute-to-sonia-lizaron.

[7] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 136.

[8] Feinstein, 227.

began working with Feder in the Bunzlau concentration camp,[9] and Dolly Kotz,[10] a choreographer and dancer originally from Łódź, Poland.[11] Feder became the troupe's principal director and writer as well as an occasional actor, and Boczkowska "performed with the ensemble as a singer, reciter of poems, and lead actress."[12] Together the four served as the primary creative forces behind Belsen's Yiddish theatre.

With their official formation in the summer of 1945, historian Hagit Lavsky cited the group as the "earliest theatrical program" in the displaced persons camps.[13] At first Feder's Belsen-based theatre was called *Dramatishe Studye*, or Dramatic Study, reflecting the group's efforts to educate novices. According to music historian, Sophie Fetthauer, the troupe's name changed when journalist and Belsen DP Marian Zhid recommended that they reclaim their previous moniker, the Kazet Theatre, since a number of the actors had performed together in the concentration camps.[14] Feder and the others agreed, and the

---

[9] Sophie Fetthauer, "Music in the Bergen-Belsen DP-Camp." During his time in the Belsen DP camp, Friedler also created an illustrated booklet entitled *Back from Hell: Sketches by Berl Friedler* that chronicled the horrors of the Holocaust through Friedler's drawings. The text was published with help from the camp's Jewish Central Committee in 1947. See the USHMM's collection for more information: https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/bib49684.

[10] Dolly Kotz-Friedler wrote a short autobiography *Das Theater hinter dem Stacheldraht* (Dance behind Barbed Wire) in 1993. In the brief text, Kotz-Friedler tells the story of her survival during the Holocaust from the Łódź Ghetto and acting in ghetto theatres to her liberation from Bergen-Belsen. Dolly Kotz-Friedler, *Das Theater hinter dem Stacheldraht.* Berlin: Dolly Kotz & Joachim Höret, 1993.

[11] Zable, "A Tribute to Sonia."

[12] Ibid.

[13] Lavsky, 158.

[14] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 99.

Kazet Theatre was re-born in the Belsen DP camp. Although their name changed, the acting school remained important to the troupe and helped Feder and the others turn amateur performers into those capable of holding their own with professionals. The Kazet's acting school helped students develop performances skills, such as enunciation and controlled breathing, through exercises while also educating them on dramaturgy and the history of Yiddish theatre.[15] Experienced performers joined those who had never performed and soon the Kazet Theatre troupe boasted thirty members from among Belsen's Jewish population.[16]

The Kazet Theatre thrived in Belsen despite tremendous difficulties and supply issues. As Feder summarized, "There was no danger in putting on shows in Belsen after liberation, but our difficulties were immense."[17] Initially, beginning a theatre in the DP camp proved nearly as difficult as creating a theatre under the Nazis due to supply shortages, which Feder recalled as "pretty chaotic."[18] Even though the troupe was now free, Feder explained, "These were no ordinary rehearsals. We had no book, no piano, no musical scores. But we could not wait for supplies from outside. There was a need to play, and an eager public."[19] In order to overcome supply shortages, the members of the Kazet Theatre participated in what became known as "organizing" in the DP camps. According

---

[15] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[16] Shirli Gilbert, "'We Long for a Home': Songs and Survival among Jewish Displaced Persons," in "*We are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, 292.

[17] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 136.

[18] Ibid., 135.

[19] Ibid., 137-138.

to historian Margarete Feinstein, "'organizing' involved stealthily acquiring needed items from the oppressive authorities, and it had a moral quality that ordinary theft did not."[20] In one story of "organizing" for set materials, Feder procured drapes from a British officer's room to create a costume for one of the theatre's early productions.[21] "Organizing" helped the Kazet Theatre pull together costumes and sets when little to no resources existed within the DP camp.

The Kazet troupe also dealt with the lack of scripts and scores in inventive ways. Feder explained, "Somebody remembered parts of a play; somebody remembered a song which we could write down—text and music."[22] In a eulogy given shortly after her death, Sonia Boczkowska's friend Arnold Zable, recalled a story Sonia told him about her role in collecting material for the theatre; Zable explained,

> She told me she rode a bicycle round the camp in search of people with theatre skills who could join the troupe. Sonia went from bed to bed in the camp's hospital, collecting testimonies, poems, and songs from survivors, which were used in the writing of original texts performed by the theatre. She also helped retrieve Yiddish songs. She sang them so that they could be written down and adapted for performance.[23]

With the help of those throughout Belsen's Jewish community, the Kazet Theatre compiled a collection of scripts, songs, and sketches to use as the basis for their earliest performances. The collection of songs also served as the basis for the songbook Feder published in 1946.[24]

---

[20] Feinstein, 228.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 138.

[23] Zable, "A Tribute to Sonia."

[24] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 138; Wolfson 179. Feder's songbook, *Zamlung fun katset un geto lider* (*A Collection of Camp and Ghetto Songs*), was published in 1946 by Belsen's Central Jewish Committee and *Unzer sztyme* (*Our Voice*).

Eventually, international Jewish communities, particularly those based in Britain, organized materials, including makeup and costumes, for the Kazet Theatre.[25]

Despite their meager supplies and resources, the members of the Kazet Theatre supported one another in profound ways. In particular, those who had performed together before and during the war found comfort in the troupe; Feinstein explained, “Their biological families lost to them, the reunions of these prewar colleagues took on tremendous significance. They came together not only to practice their craft in freedom but also for companionship.”[26] Several members of the Kazet Theatre married during their time at Belsen, including the group’s chief choreographer, Dolly Kotz, who wed their main stage designer, Berl Friedler, and the troupe’s lead actress, Sonia Boczkowska, who married the Kazet’s founder, Sami Feder.[27]

As a group, the Kazet Theatre also viewed their role as essential within Belsen’s Jewish DP community. The Kazet’s members “viewed their mission as waging a battle to reclaim the Jewish heritage, to revive the Jewish soul, and to imagine the Jewish future” through their performances.[28] The Theatre also “represented an immediate continuation of cultural activities that had taken place, secretly or with the approval of the SS guards, during the imprisonment of Jews in the ghettos and concentration camps,” which linked

---

The book contains song lyrics, poems, music, photographs, and drawings depicting ghetto and camp life in graphic detail.

[25] Feinstein, 228-229.

[26] Ibid., 227.

[27] Fetthauer, “The Katset-Teater,” 99; Zable, “A Tribute to Sonia.”

[28] Feinstein, 228.

survivors to the recent horrors of the Holocaust.[29] Under Feder's direction, the Kazet Theatre's performances continued Yiddish theatrical traditions that helped Belsen's DPs reconnect with their Jewish identity.

The Kazet Theatre Maintains "The Golden Chain"[30]

> Wherever Yiddish-speaking Jews travelled, they took their performance traditions with them.[31]
>
> —Joel Berkowitz

As someone who learned the power of theatre at an early age, Sami Feder used theatre for a variety of means. Feder understood how a play could help an oppressed people resist their oppressors, he knew that theatre could allow those living in inhuman conditions to cling to their humanity, and at Belsen's DP camp, he grasped the significance theatrical productions could play in benefitting his fellow Jewish survivors. The Kazet Theatre, as noted by performing arts scholar Zlata Zaretsky, "was based on all the aesthetic principles of Feder's previous productions: political satire couched in openly metaphoric texts, using mask-images, provoking a dialog about the cultural codes of the public subconscious, and designing an art in which Jews are universal human archetypes."[32] Feder used his twenty

---

[29] Fetthauer, 97-98.

[30] "The Golden Chain," or *Di goldene keyt*, is a Yiddish phrase used by Ashkenazi Jews to refer to the continuation of cultural, particularly literary, traditions. In 1907, I.L. Peretz published a play entitled *Di goldene keyt* that was regarded as one of his finest scripts. The phrase also served as the title of a postwar Yiddish literary journal based in Israel. See Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language: Volume 1* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[31] Joel Berkowitz, ed., introduction to *Yiddish Theatre: New Approaches* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), 5.

[32] Zaretsky.

years of performance, directing, and writing experience to help the Kazet players perform engaging, powerful Yiddish theatre.

Leading the Kazet Theatre in Belsen provided Feder an opportunity to harness the power of theatre to spread important messages in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In an interview with Joseph Wolhandler, a member of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Feder revealed an important aspect of the Kazet Theatre's purpose:

> As artists, it is our duty to present to the world some inkling of the real meaning of fascism. Who is in a better position to do this than we who have survived concentration camps? In our theatre there is the appeal never to allow such atrocities to occur again.[33]

The Kazet Theatre fulfilled Feder's "artistic duty" by performing heartfelt and moving original works and adaptations of early twentieth century Yiddish favorites. Through their performances, Feder and the Kazet Theatre explored the themes of death, loss, and survival during the Holocaust as well as hope for a brighter future in its aftermath.

In several ways, the Kazet Theatre served as a valuable tool for the troupe's members and the DPs in the audience. At Belsen, "Feder wanted to help his people overcome the past" through survivor-created productions that recreated terrors of the Nazis, horrors of the camps, and the attempted destruction of European Jewry.[34] In doing so, the Kazet's performances created "porous borders separating acting and reality: the survivors were not necessarily acting but rather recreating lived experience. For the audience, there was a similarly subtle distinction between theater and life," according to

---

[33] Joseph Wolhandler, "On a Concentration Camp Stage: Bergen-Belsen Players Depict Horrors of Their Internment Stark Realism Audience Reaction Therapeutic Value," *New York Times,* New York, NY: June 30, 1946, p. XI, accessed via *Historical New York Times* powered by *ProQuest*.

[34] Zaretsky.

Fetthauer.[35] By facing these atrocities in the relative safety of the displaced persons camp, the Kazet Theatre provided opportunities to remember and to reimagine the trauma of the Holocaust.

The Kazet Theatre's use of Yiddish also factored into the troupe's ability to foster a connection with Belsen's Jewish DPs. In keeping with the leadership of the DP camp's aim to re-establish Jewish culture, the Kazet Theatre's productions built on traditions of Yiddish theatre. Historian Thomas Rahe explained, "The plays, which were performed largely in Yiddish, derived in part from the tradition of Jewish popular theater and depicted the revival of the East-European Jewish *shtetls* destroyed in the Holocaust."[36] The Kazet's repertoire heavily followed Yiddish theatrical conventions that included singing and dancing.[37] Drawing from the Yiddish cabaret, the earliest Kazet performances included a mixture of singing, dancing, poetry, and dramatic performance. Many scenes re-enacted by the Kazet performers would have been familiar to Belsen's survivors from the prewar Yiddish theatre. "When DP theaters performed classic Yiddish works, they emphasized the connections to the persecution the DPs had experienced and to the importance of Jewish ethnic identity," according to Feinstein.[38] Although the majority of Belsen' Jewish population knew Yiddish, Feder and the Kazet Theatre helped those without fluency but still wanted to perform. Feder fondly recalled,

> I was deeply moved when several Jewish girls came to see me and begged me with tears in their eyes to let them join the troupe. They could speak no Yiddish at all,

---

[35] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 114-115.

[36] Rahe, 76.

[37] Feinstein, 229.

[38] Ibid., 236.

> but they were stage struck. When I told them that we were going to produce our plays in Yiddish, they promised to learn Yiddish in a very short time. How could I send them back? So we started by teaching the girls Yiddish while rehearsing at the same time.[39]

Through their use of the Yiddish language and Yiddish theatrical traditions, the Kazet Theatre continued the "golden chain" of Yiddish literary works in the Belsen DP camp. After months of education, planning, and rehearsals, the Kazet Theatre gave their first public performance in September 1945.

September 1945: The First Post-Liberation Performances

Over what Feder described as "several months of hard work," the Kazet Theatre began preparing for their first show after liberation.[40] As theatre director, Feder selected the majority of the troupe's material from the collection he and Boczkowska compiled, but he also wanted to incorporate original works in the performance. Several members of the Kazet troupe, including Feder and poet Moses Shulstein, penned original poems, sketches, and plays that appeared in the Theatre's repertoire.[41] More often than not, the survivors wrote about what they or their fellow Jews experienced during the Holocaust. Feder also adapted classic Yiddish plays and poems to connect with the circumstances facing Belsen's Jewish DPs.[42]

On September 10, 1945, with Belsen's Jewish DPs preparing to host the first meeting of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, the Kazet Theatre gave their first

---

[39] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 136-137.

[40] Ibid., 138.

[41] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 100-101.

[42] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 102.

public performance.[43] After overcoming supply shortages, the Kazet troupe seemed poised to take the stage, but Feder reported that a last minute summons almost caused a scene before the show even began. Feder recalled,

> Just before the curtain was to go up there was an urgent summons for the producer. I came out and was faced with a score of Russian officers, who had come to the show and could not get in. I tried to explain to them that there was simply no room, but they would have none of it. One of them suddenly spoke to me in plain Yiddish: "Look here comrade, we drove two hundred miles to see your show, are you going to turn us away?" I took them behind the stage and they watched the show from the wings.[44]

Feder's explanation that the venue had "simply no room" understated the scope of the audience which he estimated at three thousand spectators—far exceeding the one thousand seats in Belsen's theatre tent.[45]

In addition to the sudden appearance of demanding Russian officers, Feder described the last minute arrival of British Chaplain Major Isaac Levy and Joseph Wolhandler, a member of the Joint,[46] who brought a chest of makeup for the performers.[47] Prior to applying the real makeup provided by Levy and Wolhandler, the Kazet players used colored chalk to highlight their features; a look that made them resemble "children in a Purim play," according to Feder.[48] Without ample time to wash their faces and apply the

---

[43] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[44] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 138-139.

[45] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[46] The American Joint Jewish Committee was often referred to as the "Joint."

[47] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 139.

[48] Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (Syracuse: First Syracuse University Press, 1996), 355.

real makeup, the first act performers went out with the chalk applied. Those performing in the second act applied makeup from the chest, but the tradition of the first act using rudimentary materials continued after the first performance each time the Kazet Theatre performed in Belsen and beyond.[49] Feder's choice to continue the makeup routine served as a symbolic reminder of the desire to perform despite few resources and reflected the gradually improving conditions in the DPs.

Following a traditional Yiddish theatre-style cabaret format, the Kazet Theatre's premiere show included dance, singing, poetry, and adaptations from classic Yiddish plays. Specifically, the evening featured portions of prewar Yiddish plays, including: the first act of Emil Bernhard's *Der goel* (*The Redeemer* or *Messiah*), Aaron Lutzki's *Eyns, tsvey, dray* (*One, Two, Three*), and Moshe Kulbak's *Shnayderlekh* (Tailors). Two dances, "*Der muter tants*" ("The Mother's Dance") and "*Tfiln tants*" ("Tefillin Dance"), were original contributions choreographed by Dolly Kotz. Feder also provided three of his own works to round out the evening: "*Der shotn*" ("The Shadow"), *Di Katerinke* (*The Hand Organ*), and *Katset-Teater* (*Kazet Theatre*).[50] In summarizing the night, Feder wrote, "Despite all the difficulties and improvisations, it was all right on the night, as it always is with good actors."[51] Feder lauded the efforts of Sonia Boczkowska, lead actress, and Dolly Katz,

[49] Ibid. Feder maintained this tradition in a spirit of "that ye shall remember" their first performance and how the troupe was poised to perform with meager materials.

[50] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 117.

[51] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 138.

dancer and choreographer, who he called "among the first and keenest" of the Kazet's members.[52]

Although extremely proud of his performers, Feder was most touched by the audience's response:

> I have never played to such a grateful audience. They clapped and laughed and cried. When we gave, as our last item, the famous song "Think not you travel to despair again," the thousand people in the hall rose to their feet and sang with us. Then Hatikvah.[53] Never was Hatikvah rendered with such verve as on that first night.[54]

The "famous song" used to conclude the performance was commonly referred to as "The Partisan's Song" or "*Zog nisht keynmol az du geyst dem letsn veg*."[55] The song, written by Vilna partisan fighter Hirsh Gilk in 1943, included powerful lyrics that highlighted the strength of Jews in the face of the Holocaust's unimaginable circumstances.[56] Gilk's third verse referred to the song's enduring message:

> The morning sun will tinge our today with gold,
> And yesterday will vanish with the enemy,
> But if the sun and the dawn are delayed –
> Like a watchword this song will go from generation to generation.

---

[52] Ibid.

[53] The Zionist Anthem, later adopted by Israel as its national anthem.

[54] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 139.

[55] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 105.

[56] Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71 in "Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg," Music and the Holocaust (2002-2017), accessed February 19, 2017, http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/vilna/zog-nit-keynmol.

In the Belsen DP camp, the Kazet Theatre ensured that Gilk's words were passed onto the surviving remnant and would be transmitted to future generations. In the final verse, "The Partisan's Song" also spoke to hope after liberation:

> So never say that you are walking the final road
> Though leaden skies obscure blue days.
> The hour we have been longing for will still come –
> Our steps will drum – we are here![57]

By performing "The Partisan's Song," the Kazet Theatre led their audience in a communal reminder that they all had reached "the hour" they longed for, and finally, they could proclaim: we have survived and "we are here!"[58] The audience's overwhelming response galvanized the Kazet Theatre to continue performing and expanding their repertoire, and with each performance, the troupe served an instrumental role in the lives of the Jewish DPs.

Only five nights after their initial performance, the Kazet troupe returned to Belsen's stage once again. On September 15, 1945, in celebration of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), Kazet's original cabaret was performed once again. This time, UNRRA nurse Muriel Knox Doherty was in attendance after receiving an invitation from the Central Jewish Committee's Cultural Department. In a letter written on September 18th, Doherty described the performance as "although tragic, it was very well done" and went on to explain several of the acts:

> Most of the scenes and plays depicted episodes from the Concentration Camp Life and their persecution. *The Goel* (Messiah), by Emil Bernhard, was depicted by a Jew hiding in a cellar, and *The Mother's Dance*, by Dolly Kotz, showed a mother in a Concentration Camp after the death of her baby. *The Tailors*, by Kulbak, with eight performers, told a tale of past and future, and the entire company produced

---

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

> the Kazet Theatre—showing how the inmates of a Concentration Camp kept their spirits up with music after the SS guards had left them without food or light. We knew it was all so real—and what suffering![59]

As Doherty noted, the Kazet Theatre's earliest performances heavily featured works that conjured powerful memories of the Nazi camp system. Over time, the Theatre's repertoire continued to rely on original work from Feder and other survivors, but the troupe also increased prewar Yiddish pieces as time passed and more scripts became accessible.

The Kazet Theatre's Repertoire

> Despite having survived the worst, fresh memories of the past colored their visions of the future.[60]
>
> —Bret Werb

In the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, Sami Feder and the other members of the Kazet Theatre took advantage of the camp's relative safety to freely communicate about the recent past via their performances.[61] Although others contributed original pieces to the Kazet's repertoire, Feder served as the group's primary creative force. For the Kazet's initial cabaret, Feder penned "*Der shotn"* ("The Shadow"), *Di Katerinke* (*The Hand Organ*), and *Katset-Teater* (*Kazet Theatre*).

In "The Shadow," Feder, who originally wrote the poem in the Bunzlau concentration camp, created a protagonist "who travels through life like a shadow after

---

[59] Doherty, 121.

[60] Bret Werb, "'Vu ahin zol ikh geyn?' Music Culture of Jewish Displaced Persons," in *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture,* edited by Tina Frühauf and Lily E. Hirsch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 80.

[61] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 115.

losing her family in a concentration camp."[62] Performed by Sonia Boczkowska, Feder's poem addressed the extreme loss that Belsen's Jewish DPs felt: "Like a shadow I lie on my bed… I am a shadow upon the world, existing in a dream, everything that was, everything that I once knew is gone, mutilated, burned… I cannot cry nor laugh."[63] Ultimately, Feder's poem touches on themes many Jewish DPs struggled with: "the futility of life, feelings of having been left behind, coping with terrible health conditions, coping with one's own guilt, and feelings of hope and forgiveness as well as meditations on revenge."[64] With "The Shadow," the Kazet Theatre reminded Belsen's Holocaust survivors that they were not alone in their grief and provided an opportunity for communal grieving.

The Kazet Theatre's other original works also drew on Feder's experiences during the Holocaust. Notably, Feder's scene *Katset-teater* closely resembled the concentration camp theatre Feder created during the Holocaust. The scene featured the DP theatre's ensemble as a group of concentration camp prisoners who find solace and freedom through music and singing.[65] In between musical performances by the ensemble, Feder included several short scenes that addressed the DPs present concerns.[66] Appearing at the end of the show, *Katset-teater* presented a clear message that if the members of the concentration camp theatre could sing to forge their troubles, then the DPs could try this method as well.

---

[62] Ibid., 101.

[63] Arnold Zable, "Sonia Lizaron – Frontline Art: The Theatre of Resistance," Meajin Quarterly (Summer 2016), accessed February 7, 2017, https://meanjin.com.au/essays/sonia-lizaron-frontline-art-the-theatre-of-resistance/.

[64] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 101.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 105.

After the Kazet's earliest performances, Feder continued to write and add his pieces to the troupe's repertoire. For a later iteration of the Kazet Theatre's cabaret, Feder included four of his contributions: from the earlier performances "The Shadow" remained and was joined by new creations: *It Started like This*, *Existing in a Dream*, and *The Partisan*, according to a February 1947 *Variety* magazine article.[67] Feder's scene *It Started like This*, or *Azoy hot es zikh ongehoybn* (also translated to *This is How it All Began*), emphasized the emotional turmoil of Germany's Jews when the Nazis turned violent and began round ups throughout the country.[68] *The Partisan*, sometimes recorded as *Partisans*, became one of the Kazet Theatre's most famous plays.

Also referred to as *Di shvartse Sonya-Toytnkolone*, *The Partisan* focused on Jewish resistance, a powerful theme among Holocaust survivors. According to Fetthauer, the scene "traces the actions of a few partisans who have made it their mission to rescue a convoy of concentration camp prisoners. A partisan disguised as a German singer goes to Warsaw and infiltrates the German occupation forces, for whom she performs, thereby gaining access to weapons and ammunition."[69] In one scene, the undercover cabaret singer, played by Sonia Boczkowska,[70] wore a dress made out of the "organized" fabric Feder procured from a British officer.[71] The play concludes with "the head of the ghetto's Judenrat joining

---

[67] "Concentration Camp DP's Carry on Legit Activity to Keep Their Tale Alive," *Variety*, February 4, 1947, 18, Archive.org, accessed July 6, 2016. https://archive.org/stream/variety165-1947-02/variety165-1947-02_djvu.txt.

[68] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 101.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 104.

[71] Feinstein, 231.

the partisans," which emphasized Feder's message "that the partisans expressed the will of the entire Jewish people, even those cautious community leaders who initially feared the reprisals that resistance could, and did, bring down on the Jewish community."[72] Through his writing, Feder revealed the difficult memories and emotional struggles that many survivors continued to bear, but he also celebrated the Jewish resistance that occurred. With plays such as *The Partisan*, Feder and the Kazet Theatre provided a story about armed Jewish resistance—something that the largely powerless Holocaust victims may not have experienced for themselves. By performing such plays, the Kazet troupe became an important instrument for helping survivors cope with their memories of the Holocaust.

Choreographer Dolly Kotz and poet Moses Shulstein continued in this vein by adding deeply moving original works to the Kazet's cabaret performances. Kotz's "The Mother's Dance" became a Kazet mainstay that began on the troupe's opening night and continued to be featured through 1947.[73] Kotz performed the dance in "a striped dress reminiscent of concentration camp uniforms in front of a swastika flag."[74] *Variety* remarked that the dance captured "the tragedy following on the Nazi practice of snatching children who were too young to work and destroying them."[75] Shulstein penned the poem "Shoes from Majdanek" that was performed by Sonia Boczkowska who wore a striped dress, similar to Kotz's in "The Mother's Dance," and performed in front of a mountain of

---

[72] Ibid., 80.

[73] "Concentration Camp DP's," *Variety.*

[74] Feinstein, 229.

[75] "Concentration Camp DP's," *Variety*.

shoes.[76] Shulstein drew inspiration from the stock piles left behind in the Majdanek concentration camp, writing:

> Hear the shuffle of shoes left behind—that which remained
> From small, from large, from each and every one
> Make way for the rows—for the pairs—
> For the generations—for the years
> The shoe army—it moves and moves
> We are the shoes, we are the last witnesses.[77]

Shulstein's words evoke the desire of so many survivors to bear witness and share their experiences. Overall, the Kazet Theatre's original works primarily focused on survivors' war time experiences and difficulties they faced as DPs; taken together these plays, poems, and dances captured a significant period and provided an important outlet as Jewish displaced persons began to process the impact of the Holocaust on their lives.

The Kazet's repertoire also featured adaptations of well-known Yiddish plays that aimed to take themes common in Yiddish theatre (including depictions of life in the *shtetl*, love and family, social-political issues, and persevering through difficulties) and apply them to the lives of Holocaust survivors. Sami Feder served as the primary writer who took beloved stories, from writers such as: Emil Bernhard, Moshe Kulbak, Aaron Lutzski, Moyske Nadir, Isaac Leib (I.L.) Peretz, and Sholem Aleichem,[78] and turned them into scenes that deeply resonated with Jewish DPs. As Feder explained in Belsen's *Unzer Sztyme* (*Our Voice*), the updated scripts helped maintain Jewish cultural continuity for the

[76] Feinstein, 229.

[77] Zable, "Sonia Lizaron."

[78] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 101.

DPs.[79] Feder later described the productions as "the lasting 'golden chain' of national life in the 'valley of tears.'"[80] As Jewish DPs gradually processed the impact of the Holocaust on their lives, Feder's Kazet Theatre provided a bridge linking them to their pre-war Jewish communities.

The Kazet's first cabaret included three adapted works: Bernhard's *Der goel* (*The Redeemer* or *Messiah*), Lutzski's *Eyns, tsvey, dray* (*One, Two, Three*), and Kulbak's *Shnayderlekh* (*Tailors*). Feder first became familiar with the Yiddish version of Bernhard's play while performing studying and performing in Germany in the 1920s and later adapted it while in the Bunzlau concentration camp.[81] For the Kazet's initial repertoire, Feder selected *The Redeemer's* first act, which focuses a group of Jews, who after being threatened by Cossacks, falsely believe they meet the Messiah. For the Bunzlau version, Feder added the phrase "*Yidn halt zikh meshiekh muz un vet kumen*!" ("Jews, preserve, the Messiah must and will come!").[82] In the Belsen performance, Feder included Mordechai Gebirtig's pre-war song "*S'brent*" ("It's Burning") and replaced the call to the Messiah with a message for Jews to free themselves.[83] Feder's selections, both during the war and after liberation, reflect his desire for the Kazet Theatre's material to connect deeply with

---

[79] Ibid., 102.

[80] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[81] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 102.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 102; Zable, "Sonia Lizaron." According to Arnold Zable, "It's Burning" is "a song that moves from anger at the townsfolk's passive reaction, to calls for resistance."

their performers and audience. As the Kazet Theatre kept performing, Feder continued to add more meaningful adapted works to their shows.

The Kazet's second cabaret lineup included adaptations of I.L. Peretz's *Mekubolism* (*The Kabbalists*), *Di levone dertseylt* (*The Moon Tells*), and *Der shabes goy* (*Sabbath Goy*) and Moyshe Nadir's *20 Dolar* (*20 Dollars*). Peretz's *The Kabbalists*, written in the 1890s, opens with the narrator declaring, "When times are bad, even Torah—that best of merchandise—finds no takers."[84] The story then follows the last student at a failing yeshiva who fasts in order to "reach the highest level of union with God before starving to death."[85] Peretz's tale pits the materialistic beliefs of the narrator against the faith of the student, and ultimately, highlights the faith-based sacrifice of the young man.[86] In Feder's variations of Peretz's plays, he emphasized the "themes of hunger, the value of culture in difficult times, and responses to anti-Semitism—all issues confronting DPs."[87]

In addition to the two cabarets the Kazet performed, the troupe also staged adaptations of two of Sholem Aleichem's most famous plays: *The Bewitched Tailor* and *200,000* also known as *The Jackpot*. Aleichem, best known for his stories about Teyve the Dairyman (which inspired the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*), wrote prolifically in the late ninetieth and early twentieth century. Irving Howe and Ruth Wisse, literary scholars and translators of Aleichem's work, described his stories as "drawing upon traditional Jewish

---

[84] Ruth R. Wisse, introduction to *The I.L. Peretz Reader*, edited by Ruth R. Wisse (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 10.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 102.

past and touching upon the problematic Jewish future."[88] By revising Aleichem's plays, Sami Feder sought to build on Aleichem's effort to draw on the past and touch upon the future, and Feder helped bring new meaning to Aleichem's classic tales.

Feder began updating *The Bewitched Tailor* immediately after the Kazet troupe finished their first cabaret show. As Feder recalled, "We did not…rest on our laurels. Soon there were preparations to produce 'The Bewitched Tailor,' an ambitious play by any standards and in any place. I worked on the book in hospital [after] having been run over by a military lorry after our first night." Aleichem's play focuses on a poor tailor who feels pressure to buy a goat to ensure that his children have milk to drink, inadvertently ends up with a male goat, and ultimately, the tailor dies and leaves his family to starve.[89] Feder selected the play to help remind survivors of the "richness of Jewish life" prior to the war's outbreak.[90] Again, Feder took a play from pre-war Jewish culture and updated it to connect more deeply with the current struggles facing Jewish DPs.

Feder changed *The Bewitched Tailor* by introducing two new characters, Khaveke and Vasil, a couple who confuse the goat-seeking tailor and changing the ending to send a more uplifting message. After interviewing Feder, Zaretsky concluded that "Feder wanted to help his people to overcome the past – so he created the roles of two young

---

[88] Irving Howe and Ruth R. Wise, ed., introduction to *The Best of Sholom Aleichem* (New York: New Republic Books, 1979), xiii.

[89] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 106.

[90] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

lovers…[who] presented the main lesson: it is now not dangerous, but wonderful to be a Jew!"[91] In Feder's version,

> The tailor complains of his suffering to the 'author' Sholem Aleichem in a dream, whereupon the 'director,' played by Feder, appears on stage to argue about the outcome of the play. Vasil and Khaveke again exchange the billy goat and the female goat, and the tailor and his family can finally live in peace.[92]

Feder's addition of the young couple provided Sonia Boczkowska the opportunity to sing love songs and reflected the romantic feelings among many young DPs.[93] By revising the ending, Feder changed "The Bewitched Tailor" from a somber warning to an uplifting, hopeful promise to Jewish DPs that life can have a happier end. The Kazet Theatre performed *The Bewitched Tailor* in honor of the theatre's first anniversary in the summer of 1946.[94] Feder's adaptation allowed the Kazet Theatre to again combine the past, the present, and a potential future on the DP stage.

The Theatre's second full-length play, Aleichem's *200,000* or *The Jackpot*, a four-act comedy, premiered as the troupe's final production in February 1947. Aleichem's play again focuses on the life of a tailor, but this time one who believes he won first prize in a lottery: 200,000 rubles. In response to his winnings, he quits his trade and adopts a rich man's lifestyle, but in the end, his fortunes truly improve when it's discovered that he did not win the lottery.[95] For *200,000,* Feder kept the play mostly intact with set and costumes

---

[91] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[92] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 106.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 108.

that reflected early twentieth century Jewish life in the shtetl. Feder added a few musical components, sung by Boczkowska and Friedler, as had become the Kazet's custom. This time Feder chose not to rewrite portions of the script or make overt connections to the reality of life in the DP camp.[96] With *200,000*, Feder stayed true to the play's "nostalgic return to eastern European Jewish culture" and reflected "the DPs' increasing attempts to approach normality."[97] The Kazet's diverse array of acts required considerable ingenuity and skill not only from the troupe's director and actors but also from those responsible for set design, props, and costumes.

The Kazet Theatre's Scenic Design & Performances

Initially, Feder and the Kazet's other members used "organizing" and timely donations to help them construct a full cabaret show. With the creation of Belsen's Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT), the quality of Kazet's sets, props, and costumes increased significantly. Since the ORT trained DPs in vocations that included carpentry, sewing, and dressmaking,[98] the school and the Kazet Theatre entered into a natural partnership. Feder credited the ORT with enhancing the troupe's productions with beautiful scenery and a sophisticated wardrobe.[99]

Heavily influenced by Feder's years learning and performing in inter-war Germany, nearly every backdrop used by the Kazet Theatre included expressionist artwork

---

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Lavsky, 146.

[99] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 139.

to set the scene.[100] In an article that appeared in *The New York Times* in June 1946, Joseph Wolhandler described the Kazet's scenic design:

> Most striking to American correspondents, who have witnessed a performance of the displaced persons' theatre, is the stark realism and sheer drama that these ex-internees portray in their show. Scenes with flames reaching out onto the stage depicting Jews being led to the crematoria, or showing Germans crushing the skull of a child, are commonplace. What strikes home is that this is not acting, but factual reproduction of what they have endured.[101]

Sami Feder documented the Kazet's expressionist style scenery with a camera he acquired shortly after liberation with the intention to record life in the Belsen DP camp.[102] Feder's photographs reveal numerous painted backdrops that provided the scenery for Kazet's plays, dances, and songs.

For *The Partisan*, Feder and set designer, Berl Friedler, created a backdrop from painted panels, placed side by side creating a single landscape, to bring the audience into the world of the ghetto. The backdrop, which heavily relied on Feder's German expressionist influences, featured houses painted overlapping one another to depict close quarters and also included a sign warning "*Typhus Gefahr*!" (Typhus Danger!).[103] The expressionist style of the artwork gave the backdrop as less than realistic feel. At least one scene from *The Redeemer* utilized a single-panel backdrop that again relied on expressionistic style to depict a rabbi, with his back to the stage, and varied symbols,

---

[100] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 101.

[101] Wolhandler.

[102] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 101.

[103] Sam E. Bloch, ed., *Holocaust & Rebirth: Bergen-Belsen, 1945-1965* (New York: Bergen-Belsen Memorial Press, 1965), 138.

including a lion, perhaps the Lion of Judah, and the Star of David.[104] I.L. Peretz's *The Moon Tells* featured buildings painted in a style similar to *The Partisan's* backdrop, but this time, the painting consisted of a continuous canvas. During her performance of "Shoes from Majdanek," Sonia Boczkowska performed in front of a painted backdrop depicting a heaping triangular mountain of shoes—that looked as if it could topple over at any minute.[105] The expressionist artwork used by the Kazet Theatre provided visually fascinating scenery and enhanced the actor's performances.

The combination of engaging performances and thoughtfully designed sets helped the Kazet Theatre gain recognition and popularity throughout the Belsen DP camp and beyond. According to Sami Feder's testimony, the Kazet's first show was free to all who attended, but after that initial performance, an entry fee was required. Feder remembered, "We had to charge for tickets to our second show, and the proceeds astonished us—8,255 marks. We donated the money to the Keren Kayemeth[106] and to a relief fund. I still treasure a receipt for this amount, signed by Dr. Hadassa Bimko."[107] The Kazet Theatre's success continued, and they were invited to play in hospitals and other displaced persons camps in

---

[104] Ibid, 139.

[105] Ibid, 140.

[106] Keren Kaymeth LeIsrael Jewish National Fund was founded in 1901 and continues to support development efforts in Israel. See the Keren Kaymeth LeIsrael Jewish National Fund website for more information: http://www.kkl-jnf.org/about-kkl-jnf/.

[107] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 139.

the occupied zones. Feder reveled in the theatre's success and proudly remarked, "Soon we were on the road, like all good Yiddish theatres."[108]

Feder leveraged contacts in Britain and the United States to help spread news of the Kazet Theatre's performances, and soon the world responded.[109] The Kazet Theatre received invitations from numerous European counties, so Feder put together a tour that intended to travel to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, England, the United States, and Palestine.[110] Unfortunately, difficulties with visas and work permits prevented the troupe from traveling to many of the destinations as they had intended. In the summer of 1947, the Kazet Theatre embarked on a performance tour to Brussels, Antwerp, and Paris.[111] During the tour, Feder gave an interview with a Belgium newspaper in which he explained motivations for taking the Kazet on the road:

> I ask you not to consider our theater as a regular theater. We have a political goal. We went on tour to prove to the world that it's simply not true that concentration camp prisoners are demoralized people, something like the waste of the ghettos. We are human beings, and as such as have a right to a fair and free life.[112]

Clearly, the Kazet Theatre aimed to do far more than merely entertain on their European tour; as Feder alluded, their performances asserted their Jewish identity and support for the creation of the state of Israel. With their European tour, the Kazet Theatre's evolution from

---

[108] Ibid.

[109] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 109.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Feder, interview by Zaretsky.

[112] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 110.

a hodge-podge group of Holocaust survivors relying on "organized" materials to a highly-regarded traveling Yiddish troupe was complete.

For just over two years, the Kazet Theatre staged numerous performances for diverse audiences. To keep from stagnating, Feder chose to update the Kazet's repertoire approximately every six months. They performed their original cabaret until the winter of 1946 when they introduced their second cabaret, and then came the two adaptations of Aleichem's plays.[113] Overall, fifty individuals took part in the Kazet Theatre as actors, set designers, costumers, and writers.[114] Although Feder and the Kazet Theatre understood the political nature of their performances, their very first show cemented the troupe's legacy: its powerful connection to audiences full of survivors.

Audiences Respond to the Kazet Performances

> Because the Yiddish theatre tacitly said to its audiences 'Whither thou goest, I will go,' it provides a running commentary on the lives of central and eastern European Jews and their descendants. Everything they experienced was played out, in one way or another, on the stage.[115]
>
> —Joel Berkowitz

In Sami Feder's recollections on the Kazet Theatre, he commented that the troupe's first post-liberation performance "remains engrained in my memory" because of the powerful audience reception. When the show concluded, Belsen's overflowing audience "clapped and laughed and cried," according to Feder.[116] From that moment, the Kazet's

[113] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 99.

[114] Fetthauer, 99; Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[115] Berkowitz, 6.

[116] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 139.

members understood that their shows held greater significance for their fellow Holocaust survivors. Belsen's Jewish DPs loved the Kazet Theatre's performances and frequently attended the same show several times.[117] In describing the power of DP camp theatre, Feinstein explained,

> Theater could alleviate the monotony of life in the camps, transporting the audience from Germany to one of three places: the world of their childhood, the Shoah itself, and their future in Palestine. The first offered the comfort of the prewar past and a momentary connection with parents and community. The second expressed the torment of loss but also rewrote the immediate past into a story of partisan resistance to Nazi power, giving the former victims a sense of control over their destiny. The third enacted the Zionist dream of redemption in Palestine.[118]

The Kazet Theatre's performances proved to be a powerful tool that provided Belsen's survivors an entertaining escape, reminders of their prewar lives, opportunities to reflect on their experiences during the Holocaust, and glimmers of hope for the future.

By performing starkly realistic scenes, the Kazet Theatre allowed Holocaust survivors to begin to cope with what they had survived. "At a time when UNRRA workers and other international observers discouraged survivors from discussing their recent past, accusing them of an unhealthy obsession with it, these productions acknowledged the survivors' experiences in the concentration camps and validated their preoccupation," according to Feinstein.[119] In the safety of the DP camps, often surrounded by hundreds of others who understood their experiences, survivors expressed immense sorrow as the performers reenacted events that triggered traumatic memories. Jacob Biber, head of the cultural department at the Föhrenwald DP camp, further explained, "Denied the luxury of

---

[117] Wyman, 162.

[118] Feinstein, 238.

[119] Ibid., 236-237.

expressing, or even of feeling, emotion during the Shoah, the performances permitted survivors to weep and grieve."[120] *Variety* magazine commented on how the Kazet's performances affected the audience: "All the productions are starkly realistic – so vividly recalling the fate of Jews in Europe that the audience of ex-concentration camp internees frequently burst into tears instead of applauding the performance."[121] The intense realism depicted by the Kazet Theatre allowed Holocausts survivors to remember some of their most haunting memories.

The performances transcended traditional theatrical experiences for the survivors by taking them back to moments of extreme stress and anguish. In an article for the *New York Times*, Joseph Wolhandler described the Kazet performers' impact on the audience:

> When one of the child actors pathetically sobs, "Mother, I'm hungry, I'm hungry," a shudder passes through the entire audience. When the leading lady, Miss Sonia Botshkowsha [*sic*]…recites, "I am a dream, everything that was, everything that I once knew is gone, burned, mutilated," it is not fancy and imagination at play. It is the utilization of the theatre to project actual experience.[122]

By portraying the horrific events of the Holocaust alongside scenes from traditional Yiddish theatre, the Kazet's cabarets took their audiences through a journey that helped survivors remember the joy of the pre-war years while also facing their recent trauma. Belsen DP and journalist, Marian Zhid, responded to a Kazet performance with awe:

> They played it as written: with tears and blood, with…self-sacrifice and love. They had no need to play-act their roles; they had lived them in the reality of Nazi camps, ghettos, and forests, pursued like homeless dogs. This was a new universe, a new

[120] Jacob Biber, *Risen from the Ashes: A Story of the Jewish Displaced Persons in the Aftermath of World War II* (San Bernardino, CA: The Borgo Press), quoted in Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 237.

[121] "Concentration Camp DP's," *Variety*.

[122] Wolhandler.

> theatrical reality. They pulled me with them into a valley of tears, death, mud, and illness…and a minute later they lifted me up to their hopes and dreams. Never was there such art in the history of our theatre.[123]

As Zhid explained, the performances of the Kazet Theatre allowed Holocaust survivors to tap into their darkest emotions, but also helped them to find laughter and hope again.

In forming the Kazet Theatre, Sami Feder understood the transformative power of theatre, and in particular, Feder hoped to lighten the emotional toll on Belsen's Jewish DPs. Zaretsky noted that Feder's post-liberation performances were designed "to brighten mental darkness, to warm the hearts of his public." [124] For Feder, when the audience did not applaud a performance, he believed they were processing what they had witnessed and tapping into "hope of a renaissance."[125] Although not specific to the Kazet Theatre, Ruth Minsky Sender recalled her brother's response to performing in a Yiddish theatre group in the Leipheim DP camp: "We bring them the voices of the past, the good and the evil. We remind them that we, the remnants of our people, must carry on… It is up to us to rise from the ashes and build a new life." By helping survivors express their emotions—both despair and optimism—the Kazet Theatre provided a therapeutic outlet for Jewish DPs.

In fact, the Kazet Theatre was first identified as having "therapeutic value" in Joseph Wolhandler's 1946 *New York Times* article. Wolhandler noted that it was "not uncommon to see the audience of over 3,000 persons burst into tears and hysterical sobbing" during a Kazet performance, and the Kazet Theatre symbolized survivors "will

[123] Zable, "A Tribute to Sonia."

[124] Zaretsky.

[125] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

to live."[126] In the article, Wolhandler asked, "Why do people come to such a theatre when their scars are still so deep?" and answered his own question by asserting that the "Kazet Theatre serves a therapeutic value in providing a great emotional release."[127] As a relief worker at Belsen, Wolhandler observed the need among survivors to "'talk out' their experiences, to get it out of their systems."[128] Wolhandler concluded his article by arguing that the Kazet Theatre "assumed a unique role—the role of healer, the physician."[129]

Although the first, Wolhandler was far from the last to argue that the Yiddish theatre provided emotional, even therapeutic support to Holocaust survivors. Feinstein echoed his sentiments by stating, "Audience reactions to the graphic portrayal of Holocaust experiences within the relative safety of the DP community suggest that DP theater functioned as a form of therapy."[130] Up until this point, scholars have agreed that the theatre served a therapeutic purpose but have not explored what precisely enabled the Kazet's performances to alleviate the trauma of the Holocaust.

Within the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camps, Jewish Holocaust survivors experienced a safe environment as they formed bonds among one another. In the community of sameness that emerged, especially after Belsen became predominantly a Jewish DP camp, survivors were able to turn to one another to begin the healing process. They participated in mourning academies, held commemorative ceremonies, and attended

[126] Wolhandler.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Feinstein, 237.

performances by the Kazet Theatre, which all allowed survivors to bear witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust. In this place of safety and among those with similar experiences, the Kazet Theatre helped survivors move from a position of powerlessness to one of power.

Under the direction of Sami Feder, the Belsen DP Camp's Kazet Theatre flourished for two years and performed for thousands of Holocaust survivors. From their inception as a theatre troupe and drama school referred to as *Dramatishe Studye* to their final performances on a tour of Europe, the Kazet Theatre provided entertainment and escape for Belsen's Holocaust survivor community. By interspersing their earliest productions with "stark realism" inspired by their own experiences, the Kazet troupe also created a space for survivors to revisit and reimagine devastating experiences. In the relative safety of the Belsen DP camp, surrounded by hundreds of other Holocaust survivors in the audience, their trauma was reenacted by fellow survivors. The Kazet Theatre proclaimed that the survivors' traumatic memories were significant and should be remembered. The performers claimed power of the most painful memories, often reimagined events to end in triumph rather than despair. With their performances, the Kazet Theatre acted as a form of therapy for the performers, crew members, and audiences at Bergen-Belsen. Through the power of storytelling, the Kazet Theatre began to build a bridge from the death of the Holocaust to a life after.

Chapter 6

A Bridge from Death to Life:

The Kazet Theatre's Therapeutic Value

> Added to its role of the preserver of a decimated culture, the Kazet Theatre, in an abnormal situation, has assumed a unique role—the role of the healer, the physician.[1]
>
> — Joseph Wolhandler

Ritual, ceremony, and performance have served significant roles throughout human history. Religious rites help forge bonds within communities, ceremonies mark important dates and milestones, and performances—both informal and formal—provide escapism as well as a mirror into the values of each society. In many cultures, dramatic performance lies at the heart of traditional observances and celebrations. With such a prominent role across cultures, theatre occupies a place of reverence and regard. In particular, theatre has historically been regarded as capable of emotional release, or healing.

In Ancient Greece, Aristotle recognized that tragedies created "a spiritual state of catharsis – a release of deep feelings that originally had a connotation of purification of the sense and the soul."[2] Aristotle based his findings on observations of how dramatic reenactment of real life events "purged" powerful emotions.[3] Phil Jones, a scholar who specializes in drama therapy, credits Aristotle's work with establishing the basis of a

---

[1] Wolhandler.

[2] Phil Jones, *Drama as Therapy: Theory, Practice, and Research, Volume I* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 24.

[3] Tian Dayton, *The Drama Within: Psychodrama and Experiential Therapy* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1994), 14.

common thread of theatre studies: "the theme can be characterized as drama having a unique and direct relationship with human feelings, and as being able to produce change in people's lives."[4] Building on the foundational work of Aristotle, contemporary psychologists and theatre scholars assert the vast healing properties of theatre. Scholars, such as Jones and Bessel van der Kolk, argue that the underlying elements of theatre, including visual storytelling, role playing, improvisation, and witnessing, provide trauma sufferers with important physical and emotional outlets for their trauma.

For Sami Feder and the Kazet Theatre, the therapeutic value inherent in their productions was not their primary impetus for performing. Feder and the Kazet's performers utilized their own cultural traditions to bring theatre to the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp. The Kazet Theatre developed out of the cultural roots of Ashkenazi Eastern European Jews where prior to the 19th century, the majority of performances were relegated to the home due to religious restrictions. Within Eastern European Jewish communities, public performance developed out of religious Purim plays, known as *purimspiel*, from a long-held tradition of performance at weddings, and 19th century traveling bards, known as Broder singers[5]—all of which gave birth to Yiddish theatre.[6] Yiddish theatrical performances often included music, dance, poetry, comedic sketches, and dramatic scenes.

---

[4] Jones, *Drama as Therapy,* 24.

[5] In the 1860s, Broder singers began traveling through Eastern Europe performing humorous skits in town squares and marketplaces. Their name likely derives from Brody, Poland that was home to a significant 19th century Jewish community. Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 23.

[6] Veidlinger, 23; Berkowitz, introduction to *Landmark Yiddish Plays,* 22.

When the Kazet Theatre formed among Belsen's displaced persons in the summer of 1945, they built on the cultural traditions of Yiddish theatre and applied it to meet the needs of Belsen's Jewish DPs. Although the Kazet Theatre did not function under the direction of a trained therapist, contemporaries, such as Joseph Wolhandler, noted that the troupe's performances carried healing properties. When Wolhandler credited the Kazet Theatre with fulfilling "the role of the healer,"[7] he recognized the impact of the troupe's performance on the Holocaust survivors in their audience. With such a powerful influence over their audience, surely the members of the Kazet Theatre also experienced emotional benefits from their creation of material, rehearsals, and performances. By applying psychological and theatre-based studies, this chapter will examine ways in which the Kazet Theatre exhibited therapeutic value for Holocaust survivors at Bergen-Belsen.

The Arts as Healing

> Celebration and mourning are both part of human existence; they have found expression in song, dance, drama, visual art, and poetry since human beings have existed on this earth.[8]
>
> —Stephen K. Levine

After experiencing trauma, individuals and communities struggle to fully comprehend what they experienced. Psychologists describe this phenomenon as overwhelming to the point where the mind cannot integrate or process the trauma.[9] Often, individuals struggle to explain their traumatic experiences, lacking the words or ability to communicate on the matter. One important step in the process of recovery involves

---

[7] Wolhandler.

[8] Levine, 19.

[9] See Chapter 3.

"remembrance and mourning,"[10] which may involve survivors writing or speaking about their trauma for the first time. Trauma experts identify testimony and trauma-based storytelling as essential coping skills; van der Kolk asserts, "If you write about your trauma, your overall functioning improves dramatically."[11] Articulating trauma helps individuals claim power over powerless experiences, but van der Kolk cautions that oral or written expression may not be enough. In his research van der Kolk discovered that "talking won't make it go away."[12] In addition to speaking or writing about trauma, experts recommend other forms of expression to help fully integrate traumatic memories.

Many trauma specialists recognize the importance of helping trauma victims go beyond traditional forms of therapy. Often, trauma specialists encourage their patients to express themselves and their traumatic experiences through artistic means, including playing, singing, dancing, acting, and more. Art therapy has gained wide recognition as a useful tool for helping traumatized individuals tap into deeply buried memories and feel at one with their bodies again. According to van der Kolk, one of the most effective ways to help survivors recover from trauma is "by allowing the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage, or collapse that result from trauma."[13] By utilizing art therapies, trauma victims can overcome many of the negative effects of trauma and emerge as more wholly integrated survivors.

---

[10] Herman, 155.

[11] Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, 166.

[12] Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, 163.

[13] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 3.

Expressive Arts Therapy

> The capacity of art, music, and dance to circumvent the speechlessness that comes with terror may be one reason they are used as trauma treatments in cultures around the world.[14]
>
> —Bessel van der Kolk

The link between artistic expression and stress reduction is as old as humanity, according to Judith Rubin. The psychiatrist and professor explains, "From time immemorial, people of all ages have turned to play and to the arts to deal not only with the stresses of everyday life, but also to cope with trauma-experiences that are too overwhelming for the ego to assimilate."[15] Stephen K. Levine agrees with Rubin's assertion and writes, "Artistic expression has always been a fundamental way in which human beings have tried to discover meaning in their lives. The arts are ways of shaping experience, of finding forms that make sense of life through imaginative transformation."[16] Through the arts, individuals can release stress and experience a therapeutic healing—essential components of traumatic recovery.

In what has become known as Expressive Arts Therapy, mental health professionals utilize creative outlets to aide in trauma recovery. Levine calls the artistic renderings of trauma sufferers "the art of trauma," which he believes have great potential to heal.[17] Rubin

---

[14] Van der Kolk, 245.

[15] Judith Rubin, foreword to *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma Survivors*, ed. by Lois Carey (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 9.

[16] Levine, 18.

[17] Levine, 42-43.

explains that the arts help individuals "to adequately express that which is unspeakable."[18] She also notes, "The arts help both to *express* and to *contain* otherwise overwhelming emotions," which are important to the recovery process.[19] For these reasons, therapists have explored using various art therapies with their patients.

Utilizing the creative process to help victims of trauma, therapists guide their patients through the stages of coping and work toward healing. With both child and adult patients, therapists encourage drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, singing, writing, and drama. Levine writes, "In expressive arts therapy…the body speaks, dances, sings, and enacts scenes not in order to deny its fragmentation but to reveal it."[20] Through these revelations, individuals can work through their trauma more effectively. Susan Hansen, a social worker, believes that play and expressive arts therapy can help trauma victims "access, process, and integrate traumatic material in a manner that allows for appropriate resolution."[21] P. Gussie Klorer, a social worker and professor of art therapy, explains, "In situations of prolonged trauma, nonverbal approaches to treatment will be most appropriate because the memories may be stored in nonverbal portions of the brain and are not necessarily activated as declarative verbal memories."[22] Utilizing artistic expression can

---

[18] Rubin, 12.

[19] Rubin, 10.

[20] Levine, 126.

[21] Susan Hansen, "An Expressive Arts Therapy Model with Groups for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," in *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma* Survivors, ed. by Lois Carey (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 76.

[22] P. Gussie Klorer, "Art Therapy with Traumatized Families," in *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma* Survivors, ed. by Lois Carey (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 126.

help traumatized individuals access memories that conventional therapy may not reach. Through expressive arts therapies, experts have found success helping trauma victims work through the impact of their trauma and emerge as survivors more adept at coping and moving forward.

Expressive arts therapies have proven especially useful for those struggling with PTSD as well as trauma combined with loss. In their study of the Combat Trauma Art Therapy Scale, R. Gregory Lande, et al. determined art therapy to be a beneficial treatment for veterans suffering from PTSD. They explain,

> Artwork creates a physical representation of the trauma story, one that the individual can literally externalize and hold safely at distance while they process the emotional content. Externalization contributes to a safety zone that reduces anxiety and less the hyper-arousal associated with the emotionally charged subject. The ultimate consequence of safely expressing a traumatic event is a renewed sense of emotional self-efficacy."[23]

Art therapy provided the emotional distance necessary for veterans to recall their experiences, which is a crucial step in traumatic recovery. Lande et al.'s findings also reveal that many combat veterans find art therapy's silent, yet tactile nature "particularly helpful in their early attempts to confront the emotional traumas of war."[24] By doing, rather than only talking, trauma sufferers find release of painful and difficult to express emotions.

Trauma victims who experience loss as a component of their trauma also experienced success with expressive arts therapies. In their article, "Examining Traumatic Grief and Loss among Holocaust Survivors," Eliezer Witztum and Ruth Malkinson, explore effective treatments for patients suffering from traumatic loss. According to their

---

[23] Gregory R. Lande, et al., "Combat Trauma Art Therapy Scale," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 37, no. 1 (February 2010), accessed September 19, 2012, 43.

[24] Ibid, 44.

study, "The creative process can become the cornerstone in dealing with feelings of emptiness engendered by the loss... There is a special kind of creativity associated with loss and bereavement, and in this form, creative work plays an important role in coping with loss, especially traumatic loss."[25] Amy Clements-Cortés, a music therapist, echoed Witzum and Malkinson's findings, particularly with Holocaust survivors. After utilizing art therapy with Holocaust survivors, Clements-Cortés found her patients better equipped to cope with grief and loss.[26] Artistic expression provides a safe, effective outlet for trauma victims to confront unspeakable feelings associated with trauma and progress toward long-term healing.

---

[25] Eliezer Witztum and Ruth Malkinson, "Examining Traumatic Grief and Loss among Holocaust Survivors," *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, 14, no. 2 (March 2009), accessed 17 October 2012, 136.

[26] Amy Clements-Cortés, "Music to Shatter the Silence: A Case Study on Music Therapy, Trauma, and the Holocaust," *Canadian Journal of Music Therapy* 14, no. 1 (2008): 9-21, accessed February 7, 2017, 18.

Performance as Healing

> Translating testimony into artistic language as video, movies or theatre makes the witnessing active… The artistic medium captures historical facts and events in an expanded level; it adds the dimension of nonverbal interpersonal communication—facial expression and gestures, pauses, and vocal intonations.[27]
>
> — Miri Peleg, Rachel Lev-Wiesel, and Dani Yaniv

> Theater is about finding ways of telling the truth and conveying deep truths to your audience. This requires pushing through blockages to discover your own truth, exploring and examining your own internal experience so that it can emerge in your own voice and body on stage.[28]
>
> —Bessel van der Kolk

One form of expressive arts therapy, drama therapy, distinguishes itself from the other artistic approaches. As a term, "drama therapy" encompasses a wide variety of theories and approaches, all based around the belief that traumatic healing can be achieved through movement and performance.[29] Through drama, reenactment, or improvisation, trauma survivors physically work through difficult emotions and memories. Experts, such as Bessel van der Kolk, emphasize the importance of movement in response to trauma in order to reach the areas of the brain where trauma resides. According to van der Kolk, "Once you realize that trauma is most of all imprinted in the spatial/emotional part of the brain, then therapy should involve moving in space, which, of course, traditional

---

[27] Miri Peleg, Rachel Lev-Wiesel, and Dani Yaniv, "Reconstruction of Self-identity of Holocaust Child Survivors who Participated in "Testimony Theater,'" *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 6, no. 4 (July 2014): 411-419, accessed February 2, 2017, 413.

[28] Van der Kolk, 337.

[29] Hod Orkibi, Naama Bar, and Ilana Eliakim, "The Effect of Drama-based Group Therapy on Aspects of Mental Illness Stigma," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 41, no. 5 (November 2014): 458-466, accessed February 2, 2017, 459.

psychotherapy completely ignores."[30] Drama therapy challenges trauma victims to reconnect with their bodies and utilize their movements to unearth traumatic memories.

Theatre encompasses many components seen as essential for helping individuals to overcome the speechlessness brought on by trauma. Stephen Snow, Miranda D'Amico, and Denise Tanguay, in their article "Therapeutic Theatre and Well-being," explain,

> Theatre is the most integrative of all the arts: it can and often does, include singing, dancing, painting, sculpture, storytelling, music, puppetry, poetry, and of course, the art of acting. It can be argued that there is an innate *healing function* in theatre that goes all the way back to its origins in human culture. It is the art from closest to life, an 'imitation' of life.[31]

The varied components of theatre help trauma sufferers more easily face painful emotions. Van der Kolk asserts, "Traumatized people are terrified to feel deeply. They are afraid to experience their emotions, because emotions lead to loss of control. In contrast, theater is about embodying emotions, giving voice to them, becoming rhythmically engaged, taking on and embodying different roles."[32] For van der Kolk, when traumatized individuals take on a role, it gives the body and mind "a chance to experience what it's like to be other than [their] habitual frozen self."[33] By stepping into someone else's shoes, trauma sufferers can tap into feelings and emotions that had been inaccessible. Modern theories and approaches to using dramatic techniques as a form of therapy began taking form in the early twentieth

---

[30] Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, 164.

[31] Stephen Snow, Miranda D'Amico, and Denise Tanguay, "Therapeutic Theatre and Well-being," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 30, no. 2 (2003): 73-82, accessed February 2, 2017, 73.

[32] Van der Kolk, 337.

[33] Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, 170.

century with three men: one from the U.S., another from Austria, and the third from the Soviet Union.

A Brief Overview of Drama Therapy

> Participating in drama and theatre allows connections to unconscious and emotional processes to be made. Participation is seen to satisfy human needs to play and to create. The festive act of people coming together through drama and theatre is seen to have social and psychological importance. Theatre is both an activity set apart from everyday reality, while at the same time having a vital function in reflection upon and reacting to that reality.[34]
>
> —Phil Jones

In 1917, Stephen Finis Austin published the first text on drama therapy, *Principles of Drama-therapy*. Austin's text, which he described as "a handbook for dramatists," defined drama-therapy as "the art or science of healing by means, or through the instrumentality of the drama, or by means, or through the instrumentality, of dramatic expression."[35] Throughout his text, Austin asserted that drama-therapy combined the power of art and science to create a "curative drama."[36] In his analysis of Austin's text, Phil Jones finds that Austin's approach connected actors and the audience "through a process of emotional engagement."[37] For Austin, the audience's power resided in its reception to the performance.[38] Austin also asserted, "Since the drama deals primarily with

---

[34] Jones, *Drama as Therapy*, 7.

[35] Austin, x.

[36] Austin, x; Phil Jones, "An Analysis of the First Articulation of Drama Therapy: Austin's 'Principles of Drama-Therapy: A Handbook for Dramatists' (1917)." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 40, no. 3 (July 2013): 352-357, accessed February 2, 2017, 354.

[37] Jones, "An Analysis of the First," 356.

[38] Austin, 36.

human character, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the therapeutic play must occupy itself with a constant transition, or with a *becoming*, of character."[39] Although Austin's work may not have directly influenced later theories on the therapeutic nature of theatre, his ideas remain central to drama therapy concepts.

As a psychological term, "drama therapy" gained renewed popularity after Peter Slade's 1939 lecture to the British Medical Association where he explained the benefits of drama therapy with children.[40] The clinical practice of drama therapy continued to evolve and expand during the late twentieth century. In his recent text, *Drama as Therapy*, Jones explains that the "term 'dramatherapy' refers to drama as a form of therapy."[41] Within the umbrella of drama therapy, facilitators (often therapists) utilize drama "with a healing intention" to "facilitate change."[42] In order to heal, dramatherapy features many core processes, including: dramatic projection, dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing, role playing and personification, interactive audience and witnessing, embodiment, playing, life-drama connection, and transformation.[43] Drama therapy, although often conducted with a therapist, builds on the historic notions of therapeutic qualities of acting, role playing and performance.

During the early twentieth century, Austrian psychiatrist Jacob Levy Moreno coined another term and technique that combined drama and psychology: psychodrama.

---

[39] Austin, 51.

[40] Jones, *Drama as Therapy*, 24.

[41] Ibid., 3.

[42] Ibid., 8.

[43] Ibid., 81.

The Viennese-based doctor discovered his theory while watching children play in a park. Tian Dayton, a psychologist who specializes in psychodrama, explains that Moreno "recognized that acting out situations about which [the children] had strong feelings and taking on the roles of authority figures in their lives had great therapeutic value for the children."[44] Moreno then applied these insights to treatment of his adult patients, who also benefitted from "the freedom to play out roles and scenes relevant to their lives."[45] Moreno formally introduced psychodrama on April 1, 1921 in Vienna and later established the Moreno Institute in the United States. Group therapy became an important feature of Moreno's treatment plan; he believed "that in a group, each person becomes a therapeutic agent of the other. He viewed the group as rich in healing potential."[46] Moreno's work continues to serve as the basis for psychodrama treatment today.

Similar in many ways to drama therapy, psychodrama aims to use elements from theatre in a therapeutic manner. Dayton describes psychodrama as "inherently corrective: It creates an opportunity to do and say in the here-and-now what we could not do and say then, when it was too threatening or dangerous."[47] Much like other forms of expressive arts therapy, psychodrama aims to create a safe opportunity to express traumatic memories. Dayton elaborates, "Psychodrama allows an interior problem to surface, releasing the long-held feeling on both the psychic level and the cellular or body level."[48] During

---

[44] Dayton, 5.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 6.

[47] Ibid., xix.

[48] Ibid.

psychodrama, trauma sufferers delve into their trauma in a specifically designed reenactment. Psychodrama involves five roles: the protagonist, whose story is being portrayed; the double, who serves as the inner voice of the protagonist; the director, who directs the action (usually a therapist); auxiliary egos, who play other characters in the narrative; and the audience, who is made up of the other members of the group.[49] Through this portrayal trauma sufferers give voice to and gain perspective on their experiences.

A contemporary of Austin's and Moreno's, Vladimir Iljine, a Soviet psychiatrist, developed the term "therapeutic theatre" in the early twentieth century. Similar to Austin's assertion that drama therapy combined art and science, Iljine described therapeutic theatre "as trying to combine sciences such as biology and medicine with the humanities, music and theatre."[50] According to Jones, "Iljine was developing his techniques through activities with psychiatric patients in hospitals, with students who had emotional problems, and in the theatre."[51] Iljine's therapeutic theatre focused on techniques related to improvisation and could be enacted with individuals or groups.[52] Iljine's approach to therapeutic theatre continues to influence therapists and trauma researchers.

Therapeutic theatre evolved to encompass somewhat broader techniques than Iljine's emphasis on improvisation, but still retains the essence of his vision. In their 2003 article, Snow, D'Amico, and Tanguay explain that therapeutic theatre "signifies the actual

---

[49] Dayton, 8.

[50] Jones, *Drama as Therapy*, 35.

[51] Ibid., 34.

[52] Ibid., 35.

employment of theatrical performance as a method of therapy."[53] This version of therapeutic theatre "involves the therapeutic development of a play and its presentation in front of an audience."[54] Developed at the Centre for the Arts in Human Development at Concordia University in Montreal, this method of therapeutic theatre aims to help patients through the steps of a traditional theatrical production: rehearsal, performance, and post-performance debrief.[55]

The Centre's approach to therapeutic theatre differs from other forms of drama therapy because it emphasizes the "ritual of public performance."[56] In order to prepare for public performances, group cohesion plays an important role in the therapeutic process. Based off of the group dynamics found in any play production, Snow, D'Amico, and Tanguay assert, "It is, in fact, this process of a group working together on therapeutic goals as they develop a theatrical production that truly begins to set the parameters of *therapeutic theatre*."[57] In their research, Snow, D'Amico, and Tanguay discovered that since the rehearsal and performance "are intense and deeply communal," "the greatest therapeutic gains for the clients often occur during this period."[58] In the Centre's version of therapeutic

---

[53] Snow, D'Amico, Tanguay, 73.

[54] Susan Pendzik, "Drama Therapy as a Form of Modern Shamanism," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 20, no. 1 (June 1988), quoted in Stephen Snow, Miranda D'Amico, and Denise Tanguay, "Therapeutic Theatre and Well-being," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 30, no. 2 (2003): 73-82, accessed February 2, 2017, 73.

[55] Snow, D'Amico, Tanguay, 74.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 76.

theatre, the strict adherence to public performance causes their model to stand out among a wide variety of theories. No matter the technique or theory employed, therapists and trauma experts affirm the significant benefits from drama-based therapy.

Benefits of Drama Therapy

> When we are fully present in the drama, we are no longer watching ourselves, but rather experiencing ourselves. We enter the moment, and the moment has the power to transform us—a moment of catharsis and transformation, a true spiritual awakening.[59]
>
> —Tian Dayton

Drama therapy, psychodrama, and therapeutic theatre all rely on similar principles of integrating drama-based theatrical components into therapy. By encouraging patients to utilize elements from theatre, therapists have seen a wide variety of benefits, including important steps toward traumatic recovery. Savneet Talwar, a professor of art therapy, echoes van der Kolk's belief that movement aides in traumatic recovery: "Studies have shown that trauma sufferers process their trauma from the bottom up – body to mind—and not top down – mind to body. In order to treat trauma effectively therapists must move beyond words and language to integrate the cognitive, emotional and affective memory."[60] Through the movement inherent in acting and dramatic expression, individuals access important physical and mental components necessary for coping and healing. Judith Glass, a drama therapist, credits drama therapy with providing relief of traumatic symptoms that include: "intrusive memories of the traumatic event, efforts to avoid stimuli associated with

---

[59] Dayton, 58.

[60] Savneet Talwar, "Accessing traumatic memory through art making: An art therapy trauma protocol (ATTP)," *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 34, no. 1, 2007, accessed September 19, 2012, 25.

the trauma, restricted range of emotion, detachment from others, and generally increased arousal."[61] Part of this relief comes in the form of activating key areas of the brain. Talwar notes, "Dance and drama work directly with the body through movement, activating the right hemisphere and limbic material."[62] The processes employed during drama therapy also have proven to lessen the effects of PTSD.

Clinical processes that include role playing, dramatic projection, witnessing, and embodiment provide trauma sufferers with experiences that help to unlock their traumatic memories. Peter Felix Kellermann, a clinical psychologist, explains, "Such a process of re-enactment is assumed to be therapeutic insofar as it may help the protagonist to re-integrate emotionally and to process cognitively (re-cognize) his or her overwhelming loss and thus to enable growth of spontaneity that may alleviate the psychological impact of trauma."[63] By remembering, repeating, and working through trauma, psychologists such as Kellermann believe a patient can begin to recover. Kellermann also notes, "Getting the traumatic experiences out in the open is in itself a liberation from the earlier tendency to repress the emotional impact of the event."[64] Therapists who utilize drama therapy believe that theatre and dramatic reenactments can provide those suffering with an important outlet.

---

[61] Judith Glass, "Working Toward Aesthetic Distance – Drama Therapy for Adult Victims of Trauma," in *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma* Survivors, ed. by Lois Carey (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 57.

[62] Talwar, 26.

[63] Peter Felix Kellermann, in "The Therapeutic Aspects of Pyschodrama with Traumatized People," eds. Peter Felix Kellermann and M.K. Hudgins, *The Pyschodrama with Trauma Survivors: Acting Out Your Pain* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), 26.

[64] Kellermann, 28.

Under the direction of a therapist, drama therapy encourages individuals to engage with their traumatic memories and create a semi-theatrical rendition of the traumatic event. With a group of adolescent girls, Dina Carbonell and Ceil Parteleno-Barhmi utilized psychodrama to help the girls overcome sexual trauma. In their study, they explain:

> Psychodrama provides an opportunity for group members to tell a story or describe a situation in a manner that illustrates, verbally and through physical movement, the emotions it elicits, the dilemmas it poses, and the solutions it suggests. In addition to telling the story, psychodrama provides an opportunity to retell and to enact one's story. Through such portrayals, traumatized individuals can begin to reframe victimization as survival, helplessness as limitations to one's sense of agency, and the future as potentially hopeful rather than inevitably a painful continuation of the past or present.[65]

Through their study, Carbonell and Parteleno-Barhmi found psychodrama useful as it "restores to the victim the sense of control and hope that were robbed by the trauma."[66] Ultimately, therapists note the increased coping techniques, social support, and ability to relate to other trauma survivors as the most beneficial outcomes of drama therapy.[67] By allowing their patients to physically and emotionally work through their suffering via the dramatic arts, therapists tap into mechanisms for coping and healing.

In order to achieve positive results, drama therapy aims to create an environment that will cultivate growth and recovery. One of the most important components of the traumatic recovery process is establishing safety. Therapists seek to create a safe, comforting environment for individuals as well as groups to being working through their trauma. According to Dayton,

---

[65] Carbonell, 289.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 303.

> Psychodrama offers the protagonist a safe stage on which to re-experience a traumatic event with safety and support enough to avoid freezing, so that he can feel, understand and know it, and thus comes to closure. Then the traumatic event can be reintegrated into his being in a reconstructed form—given a context and meaning—and he can move on.[68]

Van der Kolk asserts that drama therapy groups become communities that provide "safe places to express the pain of trauma" that makes recovery possible.[69] In addition to providing a sense of safety, dramatic therapy groups help trauma sufferers overcome difficulties connecting to others.

Trauma creates a "detachment from others"[70] making it difficult to maintain relationships and feel connected to society. Van der Kolk explains, "Trauma devastates the social-engagement system and interferes with cooperation, nurturing, and the ability to function as a productive member of the clan."[71] Groups help provide a sense of safety, and they also help trauma victim feel connected again. Judith Herman eloquently describes how groups aid in healing: "Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes; the group restores her humanity."[72] In their study, Snow, D'Amico, and Tanguay found that "participants were very motivating and encouraging towards one another, which provided the group with a supportive,

---

[68] Dayton, 28.

[69] Van der Kolk, 246.

[70] Glass, 57.

[71] Van der Kolk, 351.

[72] Herman, 214.

environment in which they became more confident with themselves and their roles."[73] Van der Kolk believes that joining a community theatre group helped his adolescent son overcome depression; he wrote, "Being a valuable contributor to a group gave him a visceral experience of power and competence."[74] In significant ways, drama therapy groups provide social support and allow trauma survivors "a chance to connect with one another by deeply experiencing their humanity."[75]

In addition to providing benefits to participants who reenact their own or another's traumatic memory, drama therapy has proven effective for those who fulfill the role of the audience. Audiences may be composed of other members of the drama therapy group, as in psychodrama or may be composed of a community-based audience. Drama therapists place significance on the role of observing or witnessing during group sessions. According to Jones, "Witnessing within a facilitated environment can offer healing properties relating to the situation of people who cannot have, or have not had, their experiences witnessed in life outside the opportunities offered within the creative space."[76] Dayton also finds value in audience members who may not originate from the drama therapy group; she explains, "Though drama is not a spontaneous event for the actors who have practiced it again and again, it is a spontaneous event for the spectator, who experiences a mental and emotional catharsis as a result of being a member of the audience."[77] Although the audience may not

---

[73] Snow, D'Amico, and Tanguay, 78.

[74] Van der Kolk, 333.

[75] Ibid., 337.

[76] Jones, *Drama as Therapy*, 104.

[77] Dayton, 14.

be physically working through trauma in the same manner as the actors, members of the audience may still experience therapeutic benefits from witnessing the performance.

Drama therapy, psychodrama, and therapeutic theatre help various groups develop coping skills and experience therapeutic release. Often, drama therapists will organize therapy groups around specialized populations with the aim to meet the group's particular needs and create a cohesive community. Van der Kolk began working with traumatized Vietnam veterans in the late 1970s as a psychiatrist at the Boston Veterans Administration Clinic.[78] After years of working with military veterans, van der Kolk discovered the impact of theatre on his patients. In 1988, van der Kolk was treating three veterans with PTSD when he noticed "a sudden improvement in their vitality, optimism, and family relationships."[79] Van der Kolk initially attributed their progress to his therapeutic techniques, then he discovered that all three were participating in a theatrical production. Van der Kolk's patients had joined forces with Al Pacino, Donald Sutherland, and Michael J. Fox for an event called "Sketches of War" to raise money for the VA clinic. After going to the performance, van der Kolk remarked, "Standing on stage with professional actors, speaking about their memories of the war, and reading their poetry was clearly a more transformative experience than any therapy could have offered them."[80] Although the production was not under the direction of a trained therapist, van der Kolk's patients still experienced benefits from their involvement in the performance.

[78] Van der Kolk, 7.

[79] Ibid., 333.

[80] Ibid.

The Possibility Project, a New York City-based non-profit, has worked for twenty years to help children and teens in the city. In 2010, the group's founder, Paul Griffin began a new project to help youth in the foster care system develop coping skills through creation and performance of a full-length musical. Designed to help participants build trust and comradery, Griffin created a group that meets for three hours a week over a nine-month period.[81] Initially, the program focuses on group building, which includes singing and moving in sync. The next phase involves sharing life stories and participants listen to one another to identity themes that unite their stories.[82] The youths' stories come to life with the help of professional actors, dancers, musicians, script writers, scene designers, and choreographers, but the group members' stories drive the process. Once rehearsals begin, the group spends considerable time preparing for their roles, which helps to shift their focus away from their troubles. Throughout the process, Griffin observes considerable changes in the group's participants; he explains, "You cannot help, fix, or save the young people you are working with. What you can do is work side by side with them, help them to understand their vision, and realize it with them. By doing that you give them back control. We're healing trauma without anyone ever mentioning the word."[83] For those suffering from trauma, dramatic groups—whether led by a therapist or not—help individuals feel safe enough to share their trauma, embody other roles, form social bonds, and transform from victim to survivor.

---

[81] Van der Kolk, 342.

[82] Ibid., 343.

[83] Ibid., 344.

Impact of the Arts on Holocaust Survivors

> The art of trauma is neither a pure reproduction of the memory of an event nor a completely free rendering of it… We could say that the art of trauma is not an imitation of the past but an opening to the future, an attempt to find a new path beyond the eternal recurrence of the same.[84]
>
> —Stephen K. Levine

The arts and artistic expression played an integral role in the lives of many Holocaust survivors. While the arts helped sustain many during the horrors of the Holocaust, artistic outlets also proved beneficial in the aftermath. In the displaced persons camps, survivors turned to cultural activities to regain their individual humanity and connect as a Jewish community. Bergen-Belsen's Jewish Committee quickly organized cultural leaders, citing the importance of providing a sense of normalcy for the DPs. Sami Feder's Kazet Theatre emerged as a key component of Belsen's post-war Jewish community. Although they were not under the direction of a trained therapist, the Kazet performers delved into the essential "doing" component of expressive arts and drama therapy with their singing, dancing, poetry, and wide variety of dramatic sketches. Ultimately, the artistic ventures of the Kazet Theatre, though initiated among themselves, played a vital role in helping the members of the troupe as well as their audience cope in the wake of the Holocaust.

Throughout the displaced persons camps, many Jewish DPs took steps to self-direct their recovery from the trauma of the Holocaust. Typically, this "self-therapy"[85] occurred

---

[84] Levine, 42.

[85] Atarah Fisher and Avi Gilboa. "The Roles of Music amongst Musician Holocaust Survivors before, during, and after the Holocaust," *Psychology of Music* 44, no. 6 (November 2016): 1221-1239, accessed February 7, 2017, 1222.

without a therapist or medical professional, occurring instead from a place of need within the DPs. Despite lacking the direction of a therapist, countless DPs, including the members and audiences of the Kazet Theatre, harnessed the arts to help them cope with all they had endured. In his study on the emotional impact of music, Ruud Even, a professor of musicology, posits that "everyday health musicking" can be used by individuals and groups to "enhance their health and well-being independent of a music therapist."[86] Even's findings can be applied to survivors' artistic expression after the Holocaust.

In an effort to return to their humanity and a sense of normalcy, numerous Holocaust survivors turned to the arts. Atarah Fisher and Avi Gilboa, in their study "The Roles of Music amongst Musician Holocaust Survivors before, during, and after the Holocaust," discussed the importance of musical "self-therapy" among survivors. Even though formal music therapy did not yet exist, Fisher and Gilboa discovered that music served a rehabilitative function, and for the survivors in their study, "music was the main force that prompted them to get on with their lives."[87] Similarly, Joseph Moreno, a scholar of music therapy, found music to be effective in helping Holocaust survivors "to directly confront and work through such feelings as fear, grief over the loss of loved ones, anger, guilt at having survived when so many others perished, loss of confidence in one's personal autonomy, loss of trust in others and so on."[88] Margarete Feinstein also discovered the

---

[86] Ruud Even, "Can Music Serve as a 'Cultural Immunogen'? An Explorative Study," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health & Well-being*, Vol. 8 (2013): 1-12, accessed February 7, 2017, 2.

[87] Fisher and Gilboa, 1226.

[88] Joseph J. Moreno, "Orpheus in Hell: Music and Therapy in the Holocaust," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 3-14, accessed February 7, 2017, 13.

importance of music and performance among survivors: "Survivors were drawn to artistic expressions of their suffering that enabled them to work through their traumatic past."[89] In many of the same ways, the Kazet Theatre utilized the dramatic arts as an outlet for their recent trauma.

The Kazet Theatre: A Bridge from Death to Life

> The [Kazet] theatre represents their will to live. It represents a culture that survived a systematic attempted extermination, and throughout the camps the people talk with great pride of their theatre. They are anxious to demonstrate, despite the destruction of their libraries, the banning of Jewish actors and musicians, that now amid the ashes and mass graveyards of Europe they are starting to rebuild their culture.[90]
>
> —Joseph Wolhandler

Members of the Kazet Theatre utilized dramatic expression to help them remember, confront, and cope with the trauma of the Holocaust. Although they did not perform these actions under the direction of a therapist, the survivors' use of creative expression was no less significant or valuable to their eventual healing. In a safe environment, the Kazet Theatre troupe began the process of mourning for lost loved ones as they used their art to honor and remember those who died. As Levine notes, "Mourning is said to be a way of coming to terms with the past, of freeing ourselves from it. Proper mourning, then, would be a form of working through."[91] Indeed, the Kazet Theatre's performances functioned as a means of "working through" loss and trauma.

---

[89] Feinstein, 229.

[90] Wolhandler.

[91] Levine, 186.

A central component of the Kazet Theatre's early cabaret performances also served as a crucial coping mechanism: testimonial scripts, dances, and poetry. By sharing their personal, as well as collective, experiences of the Holocaust, the troupe participated in the important coping process of bearing witness and commemorating the dead.[92] In her study of youth survivors of abuse trauma, Katrina Jenmorri explains the power of testimony: "Developing stories 'based on strengths, hopes, dreams, preferences, and new possibilities' can be an empowering experience…such stories may be particularly transformative when they make room for the presence of struggle, fear, and despair and the existential questions that arise in that landscape."[93] By creating, rehearsing, and performing original works, especially *The Partisan* and *Katset-teater*, the Kazet troupe physically worked through their recent trauma.

For those that wrote scripts based on their experiences, an important step in the coping process was initiated. In their article, "Coping with Trauma: Narrative and Cognitive Perspectives." Rivka Tuval-Masiach, et al. assert, "Creating a trauma story through information, reconstruction, or cognitive processing helps the individual to charge the event with personal meaning and to place it as part of the rest of his life, as opposed to being its focus."[94] Therefore, the Kazet's original works provided a path to integrating the trauma of the Holocaust.

---

[92] See Chapter 3.

[93] Katrina Jenmorri, "Of Rainbows and Tears: Exploring Hope and Despair in Trauma Therapy." *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 35, no. 1 (February 2006): 41-55 accessed February 2, 2017, 43.

[94] Rivka, Tuval-Mashiach, et al., "Coping with Trauma: Narrative and Cognitive Perspectives," *Psychiatry* 67, 3 (Fall 2004), accessed September 19, 2012, 291.

Although the majority of those involved with the Kazet Theatre did not turn their own experiences into scripts, poems, or dances, those that did created a shared opportunity for the group. By acting out various aspects of the Holocaust, members of the Kazet experienced a very powerful step toward recovery. According to Van der Kolk, "Physically reexperiencing the past in the present and then reworking it in a safe and supportive 'container' can be powerful enough to create new, supplemental memories."[95] The Kazet's early repertoire allowed the performers to re-examine their traumatic memories in the safety of the troupe's rehearsals and eventually replay those events on stage. Feinstein determined this process to be particularly beneficial: "The reenactment of the traumatic past with new coping strategies and new endings had therapeutic value for the survivors' recovery, aiding the integration of Holocaust experiences into the survivors' life stories. Through the characters on stage, they, both men and women, became heroes rather than victims."[96] For those who did not craft the original material, even acting in, assisting with, and viewing the Kazet's productions contained therapeutic value.

In particular, Sami Feder's *Di shvartse Sonya-Toytnkolone* (also known as *The Partisan*), which followed a group of partisans as they attempted to rescue concentration camp prisoners,[97] provides insight into how Feder and the Kazet troupe reimaged new endings to their own horrific experiences. Surely, many within the Kazet troupe (and their audiences) desperately wished for partisans, or anyone, to rescue them from the torturous conditions of the Nazi camp system. By performing Feder's script, the Kazet Theatre

---

[95] Van der Kolk, 302.

[96] Feinstein, 233-234.

[97] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 101.

breathed life into this outcome and likely merged their own memories with this more triumphant tale.

Music also featured prominently within *The Partisan* as Feder specifically selected songs to enhance the scene's plot. One such song was Hirsh Glik's "*Shtil, di nakht iz oysgehternt*" ("The Silent Night is Filled with Stars"), which Feder used to emphasize the scene's themes of resistance.[98] Written in 1942 after partisan fighters successfully sabotaged troops near Vilna, Glik's lyrics featured a woman who learned to fight so she Glick, who died fighting with the resistance,[99] provided the Kazet performances a chance to not only portray active, Jewish resistance to the Nazis, but also to sing about it. Singing and acting about resistance could serve as powerful tools for survivors who generally felt powerless during the Holocaust.

In Feder's recreation of the wartime Kazet Theatre, *Katset-teater*, singing also accompanied the actors' portrayal of a concentration camp theatre group. Performed at the end of troupe's first cabaret shows, *Katset-teater* showed the prisoners trying to forget their troubles by singing.[100] Likely, this scene resonated deeply with the Kazet troupe as well as their audience. Music historian, Sophie Fetthauer, identified the Yiddish love song "*Lomir beyde a libe shpiln*" ("We Want to Fall in Love") as a song likely selected for this scene.[101] In the song, lovers say goodbye before the young man joins the Russian army, but the

---

[98] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 103.

[99] "Hirsh Glik," Music and the Holocaust, accessed February 7 2017, http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/vilna/glikhirsh/.

[100] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 105.

[101] Fetthauer, "The Katset-Teater," 105.

woman is afraid that when he returns, he'll no longer love her. She promises to wait for him for two, three, "even four" years and to continue to "work hard at [her] seamstressing trade" while he's away.[102] By incorporating a traditional Yiddish folksong, the Kazet Theatre created an opportunity for the performers, crew members, and the audience to remember life before the trauma of the Holocaust. Ending with such a powerful scene, full of pre-war music, no wonder Joseph Wolhandler observed "an audience of over 3,000 persons burst into tears and hysterical sobbing."[103] Songs, such as "*Lomir beyde a libe shpiln*," allowed all of the Holocaust survivors present at a Kazet Theatre performance to come together as a community united by trauma and grief.

In the Belsen DP camp, the Kazet Theatre created an environment where survivors could collectively mourn the loss of their loved ones and remember the trauma they experienced. Robert Skloot, a scholar of Holocaust theatre, asserted, "The best Holocaust drama, acknowledging the tension between recollection and forgetting, between performance and audience, confronts with skill, memory and courage the darkness we carry in ourselves into the future."[104] The productions of the Kazet Theatre encompassed the essence of Skloot's theory because the performances helped survivors' bridge the gap between memory and the future. As Wolhandler discussed, "The Kazet Theatre serves a therapeutic value in providing a great emotional release. The need to 'talk out' their experiences, to get it out of their systems is satisfied by witnessing the brutality of the

---

[102] Ruth Rubin, *Voice of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 408.

[103] Wolhandler.

[104] Robert Skloot, *The Darkness We Carry – The Drama of the Holocaust* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 127.

Germans acted out on stage."[105] Creating, rehearsing, and performing allowed the Kazet's members to begin the healing process and start on a path to recovery.

In addition to the Kazet Theatre's members, numerous survivors relied on theatre after the Holocaust. George Tabori, a Hungarian Jew who escaped Nazi Europe to become a British citizen, became a well-known playwright who confronted the past through his plays. For Tabori, acting out trauma was the most effective means of healing; Tabori explained, "It is impossible to confront the past without reexperiencing it through the skin, the nose, the tongue, the buttocks, feet and stomach."[106] Tabori found a deeper connection to his body through acting, and only then could he finally confront his trauma. Charlotte Delbo, a French political prisoner who was imprisoned in Auschwitz-Birkenau, wrote poetry and plays about her time in Auschwitz because she believed that it was essential for her to bear witness to the atrocities she experienced. Delbo credited her writing with helping her recover from her time spent in the camp: "We all testify with our own weapons… I consider the language of poetry as the most effective—because it stirs the reader [and, of course, the spectator] deep down in their soul—and as such, it is the most dangerous weapon against the enemy it fights."[107] Skloot summarized the need for Holocaust survivors to create theatre: "To do nothing, to keep silent, is an option rejected by these playwrights (and others like them) who struggle to make sense of the Holocaust experience and to draw from it some kind of truth which, whatever shape it takes, can

---

[105] Wolhandler.

[106] Malkin, 222.

[107] Claude Schumacher, "Charlotte Delbo: Theatre as a Means of Survival," in *Staging the Holocaust: the Shoah in Drama and Performance*, edited by Claude Schumacher (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 217.

inform our present and future lives."[108] For these survivors, creating theatrical productions about the Holocaust helped them to individually cope with their memories and move forward.

Recently, theatre played a role in helping Holocaust survivors share their experiences through an innovative project in Israel. "Testimony Theater" brings together Holocaust survivors and members of the third generation (of Holocaust survivors) to allow survivors to share their stories, which the younger generation ultimately performs.[109] In their article, "Reconstruction of Self-Identity of Holocaust Child Survivors Who Participated in 'Testimony Theater,'" Miri Peleg, Rachel Lev-Wiesel, and Dani Yaniv explain, "In this model, traumatic memories of survivors are brought into a collective group of actors, who transfer the traumatic memories from bodies of testifiers into their bodies."[110] After the performance, survivors remarked on the importance of passing on their stories. One survivor, Hasia, remarked on the importance of sharing her testimony: "It is a sacred mission because they told us to forget."[111] Peleg, Lev-Wiesel, and Yaniv, ultimately found that the Holocaust survivors found the program a "source for comfort, support, closeness, empathy, and identification."[112] Even years after the trauma of the Holocaust, these survivors found theatre to be a therapeutic outlet.

---

[108] Robert Skloot, *The Theater of the Holocaust* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 37.

[109] Peleg, Lev-Wiesel, and Yaniv, 411.

[110] Ibid., 413.

[111] Ibid., 414.

[112] Ibid., 415.

In numerous ways expressive and dramatic arts, even without a therapist guiding the process, help trauma sufferers recover. The ability to act out traumatic experiences helps victims overcome speechlessness, helplessness, rage, and loss, and through theatre the traumatized become survivors capable of feeling safe, forming social bonds, accessing the catharsis inherent in drama, and transform. Through re-enactment of the Holocaust, the Kazet's members wrote the stories, dances, and poems; controlled the story-lines; took on the roles of others; distanced themselves from the memories, and began to heal. Dramatic expression allowed the members of the Kazet Theatre to move forward from their traumatic experiences and devastating loss. The trauma of the Holocaust did not fade away after their performances; instead, the Kazet Theatre and its therapeutic benefits helped Holocaust survivors transition from the horrors of the Holocaust to a new chapter of their lives.

Conclusion

The Power of the Kazet Theatre: Continuing the Golden Chain

In the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, Sami Feder's Kazet Theatre combined stories from pre-war Yiddish theatre, starkly realistic portrayals of the Holocaust, and optimistic messages of hope for the future on stage. Established in the relative safety of Belsen's displaced persons camp, the theatre provided an important cultural, emotional, and psychological outlet for Holocaust survivors. Through their performances, the Kazet troupe helped survivors build a bridge from the trauma of the Holocaust to the possibility of healing and recovery in its aftermath. With its roots in Nazi-controlled concentration camps, the Kazet Theatre re-emerged in Bergen-Belsen in the summer of 1945. Within the newly formed displaced persons camp, the theatre became an important component of Belsen's Jewish DP community.

In the weeks and months after the Holocaust, Jewish DPs experienced many changes important to traumatic recovery, including shifts "from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatized isolation to restored social connection."[1] Within the Belsen DP camp, Holocaust victims found the reliable safety necessary to access their traumatic memories and reestablish relationships. As a group, the *she'erit hapletah*, or surviving remnant, formed a support

[1] Herman, 155.

system that drew strength from one another. In their "community of sameness,"[2] Jewish victims transformed into survivors as they began to heal as individuals and as a community. Belsen's Jewish DPs also utilized important coping skills, such as problem solving strategies, to help them in the post-war period. In Belsen, survivors quickly created representative bodies, educational programs, and cultural activities that formed the basis of a thriving Jewish community.

Facing immense grief, loss, guilt, and confusion, survivors countered their trauma through restoring their Jewish identity and forming lasting bonds with one another. The surviving remnant married one another and extended families by giving birth to the next generation. They also relied upon religious and cultural institutions to help them assert their Jewishness. Among Belsen's mostly Eastern European Jewish population, the Yiddish language became an important bridge that tied survivors to their pre-war lives and served as a vehicle for news, literature, and theatre within the DP camp. In Bergen-Belsen, the surviving remnant firmly re-established Jewish life in post-war Europe.

The Kazet Theatre became a cornerstone within Belsen's thriving Jewish community with Sami Feder recognizing that "there was a need to play and an eager public."[3] Relying on the memories and experiences of their fellow survivors, Feder and Sonia Boczkowska gathered testimonies, poems, and songs that heavily influenced the Kazet Theatre's repertoire and also served as the basis for a commemorative songbook. The Kazet's members, which also included Dolly Kotz and Berl Friedler, provided important social support for one another. Seasoned performers educated novices in various

---

[2] Goldenberg, 24.

[3] Feder, "The Yiddish Theatre of Belsen," 138.

aspects of dramaturgy, costumes and set design required varied artistic skills and cooperation, and rehearsals challenged the troupe to continually work through scenes that closely reflected their Holocaust experiences. By working together, the Kazet Theatre helped one another cope during the months immediately following liberation—the time most crucial for traumatic recovery.

Sami Feder's training in Germany's Jewish theatre community heavily influenced the Kazet's performances. Feder brought knowledge of Yiddish classics as well as an awareness of the power of political satire to the Kazet Theatre and created performances where Jews and Jewish experiences were the heart of every scene. By performing original poems, dances, songs, and scenes based off their experiences, the Kazet troupe blurred lines between acting and reality. The Kazet's earliest shows heavily focused on wartime experiences and difficulties the DPs encountered. In particular, the Kazet Theatre's performances addressed feeling left behind, coping with illness, survivor's guilt, and feelings of hope. Utilizing rudimentary materials, the Kazet Theatre created powerful performances that brought the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust to life on stage.

The Kazet's performances provide insight into how some survivors initially dealt with the trauma of the Holocaust. Their earliest performances paired numerous references to the Holocaust alongside smatterings of scenes from before the war, but as time went on, widely-known Yiddish tales became the troupe's focus. Feder's in-depth knowledge of classic Yiddish stories allowed the Kazet Theatre to truly maintain the cultural continuity referenced by the metaphor of the "golden chain." Through adaptations of famous Yiddish tales, especially Sholem Aleichem's *200,000* and *The Bewitched Tailor*, Feder made the stories even more poignant to audiences full of Holocaust survivors. Feder's updates

brought messages of young love and hope to Jewish DPs and truly bridged the past, the present, and the future.

By playing out their Holocaust memories on stage, the Kazet troupe created an emotional connection to survivors in their audience. Seeing the "stark realism" of the Holocaust acted out allowed survivors to relive their traumatic experiences within the safety of a Jewish theatrical community and experience a sense of validation that their suffering was significant and worthy of consideration. Through viewing the Kazet's shows, survivors began to process their experiences, an important first step toward recovery. During a Kazet performance, the audience traveled to their childhood, revisited elements of the Holocaust, and glimpsed into a potential future. In the end, the Kazet Theatre accomplished what Feder set out to do: lighten the emotional toll on survivors.

As an art form that is truly interdependent, theatre is perfectly suited for helping individuals and groups cope with trauma. By helping survivors "to *express* and to *contain*"[4] their overwhelming emotions, the Kazet Theatre played a crucial role in enabling survivors to begin healing. Those within the Kazet troupe used movement to reconnect with their bodies and access deeply-stored trauma. Through taking on different roles and acting out various emotions, the Kazet's members tapped into the cathartic and curative properties of theatre. The Kazet's audience also experienced catharsis via the powerful spontaneity of witnessing the performance for the first time. In these ways, the Kazet Theatre fulfilled Joseph Wolhandler's assertion that the theatre functioned as a healer or physician for individuals as well as the entire Jewish DP community.[5]

---

[4] Rubin, 10.

[5] Wolhandler.

Following the Kazet Theatre's tour of Europe, many members of the troupe decided to settle in Paris, the tour's final stop, rather than return to the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. Feder returned to Belsen, but without the full ensemble, the Kazet Theatre officially disbanded in the summer of 1947.[6] A few months after the Kazet's final performance, Sami and Sonia married and joined the troupe's other members who settled in Paris. In Paris, Sonia studied humanities at the Sorbonne and performed with Yiddish theatres.[7] Sami distanced himself from Yiddish theatre, and instead established himself as a typesetter and writer.[8] As part of a Yiddish song tour, Sonia returned to Bergen-Belsen in 1950, shortly before the DP camp disbanded.[9]

After disagreements about where they would emigrate, Sonia and Sami separated in 1962. Sonia asked him to immigrate to America with her, but Feder chose Israel instead. He later reasoned, "I couldn't forget my theatre for Jews."[10] Despite his statement, after moving to Israel, Feder didn't stage another production.[11] Instead, he dedicated much of his life to writing about his life, career, and his Kazet Theatre. Once he settled in Israel,

---

[6] Lavsky, 159.

[7] Zable, "Sonia Lizaron."

[8] Wolfson, 179.

[9] Zable, "Sonia Lizaron." The majority of Belsen's Jewish DPs began emigrating from the DP camp in 1947 and 1948. In the fall of 1948, with fewer displaced persons, Belsen became a transit camp for those immigrating to the newly established State of Israel. In May 1950, Belsen's remaining Jewish DPs were moved to Jever, near the Dutch border, and by July 1950, the Belsen DP camp officially closed. For more information see: Lavsky, 210-211.

[10] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[11] Zaretsky.

Feder published several Yiddish books, mostly autobiographies, including: *Gebaylte foystn* (*Acting with a Clenched Fist*) (1974), *Durkh 12 gehenem-fayern* (*My Life: Through Twelve Portals of Hell*) (1985), and *Mayn lebn* (*My Life*) (1995).[12] On April 12, 2000, at the age of ninety, Sami Feder died in Herzliya, Israel after a lifetime dedicated to acting, directing, and writing about the importance of Yiddish theatre.[13]

Throughout the displaced persons camps, various theatre troupes and theatre directors emerged in a similar fashion to Sami Feder and the Kazet Theatre. In Föhrenwald, Jacob Biber used his pre-war knowledge of Yiddish theatre to lead performances in the DP camp. Jewish displaced persons also organized performances in Feldafing, Leipheim, and Deggendorf.[14] With the Kazet Theatre disbanding in 1947, two additional theatre troupes emerged in Bergen-Belsen during its final years as a displaced persons camp. The Jewish Workers' Theatre of Poale Zion filled the void left by the Kazet Theatre by Yiddish plays with a socialist message, and Belsen's Orthodox community formed the Amateur Group which united untrained actors.[15] Since theatre played such an important role in many pre-war Jewish communities, it is no wonder Holocaust survivors in the DP camps turned to the stage for comfort.

The Kazet Theatre's therapeutic value highlights the power of performance and speaks universally to those recovering from trauma as a potential method to recovery. The success of various expressive arts and dramatic therapy techniques shows the healing

---

[12] Feder, interviewed by Zaretsky.

[13] Zaretsky.

[14] Feinstein, 226-228.

[15] Lavsky, 159.

potential of the arts under the direction of trained professionals. Therapists working with traumatized groups, from military veterans to sexual assault survivors to genocide survivors, have shown improvements when using artistic and performance-based outlets to work through their trauma. By accessing the trauma held deeply within their bodies, trauma survivors can more fully integrate their painful memories and return to a sense of normalcy.

In order to fully examine the Kazet Theatre, history, psychology, and fine/performing arts must be brought together. Throughout this text, I wove together historical sources and psychological studies to show to, for the first time, how Sami Feder's Kazet Theatre functioned to help Jewish DPs in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. My work here is merely a starting point for future research into not only theatre utilized by Jewish displaced persons in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, but also in how theatre can be leveraged as a therapeutic tool in other traumatic circumstances. Scholars should continue to apply an interdisciplinary lens to this research and look for other historical as well as contemporary instances of theatre's application in trauma recovery.

Around the world, theatre continues to be used to help trauma victims recover. In the developing world, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often introduce theatre in order to alleviate a wide variety of ailments. In the 1970s, the Integral Literacy Operation used theatre to spread literacy skills to the most oppressed and disadvantaged in Lima and Chiclayo, Peru.[16] Theatre has also been utilized in Rwanda as part of a larger reconciliation process launched a decade after the country's brutal genocide. In Rwanda, grassroots theatre efforts, such as *Ongera Ureba* (See Again) and

---

[16] Augusto Boal, "Theatre of the Oppressed," trans. by C. and M.-O. Leal McBride, in *The Applied Theatre Reader*, ed. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (New York: Routledge, 2009), 130-131.

Umuhanzi w'u Rwanda (Rwandan Performer), proved the most effective in helping individuals on both sides of the conflict truly find reconciliation.[17] Despite its effectiveness, the yearning to perform must come from within the traumatized group themselves. When outsiders attempt to utilize theatre in culturally inauthentic ways, the theatre's therapeutic value is severely limited.[18] When theatre is applied as a tool in authentic and culturally appropriate ways, such as with the Kazet Theatre or the grassroots reconciliation theatres in Rwanda, the therapeutic value of the theatrical process increases tremendously. Scholars from various fields should continue to examine instances when theatre is most effectively employed as well as when it is not.

Ultimately, the Kazet troupe, functioning as a self-directed dramatic therapy group, helped individuals feel safe, enabled survivors to access their traumatic memories, encouraged performers to embody new roles, created social bonds, aided in re-creating a post-war Jewish community, and played a role in transforming Holocaust victims into survivors. Although the trauma of the Holocaust stayed with survivors for the rest of their lives, the Kazet Theatre helped many start to process their traumatic memories, begin to work through their trauma, and carry the "golden chain" into the next chapter of their lives. In this way, the Kazet Theatre functioned as a bridge from death to life for a portion of the Holocaust's surviving remnant.

---

[17] Ananda Breed, "Participation for Liberation or Incrimination?" in *The Applied Theatre Reader*, ed. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (New York: Routledge, 2009), 151.

[18] David Kerr, "'You Just Made the Blueprint to Suit Yourselves': A Theatre-based Health Research Project in Lungwena, Malawi," in *The Applied Theatre Reader*, ed. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (New York: Routledge, 2009), 100-101.

Bibliography

Ali, Alisha, and Stephan Wolfert. "Research Article: Theatre as a Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress in Military Veterans: Exploring the Psychotherapeutic Potential of Mimetic Induction." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 50 (September 1, 2016): 58-65. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Austin, Stephen Finis. *Principles of Drama-therapy*. Sopherim, New York: Blanchard Press, 1917.

Bar-On, Dan, et. al. "Multigenerational Perspectives on Coping with the Holocaust Experience: An Attachment Perspective for Understanding the Development Sequelae of Trauma across Generations." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 22, no 2 (June 1998): 315-338. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCOhost. Accessed July 6, 2016.

Baumel, Judith Tydor. *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Belsen. Tel Aviv, Israel: Irgun Sheerit Hapleita Me'Haezor Habriti, 1957.

Benisch, Pearl. *To Vanquish the Dragon*. New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1991.

Benner, Patricia, Ethel Roskies, and Richard R. Lazarus. "Stress and Coping under Extreme Conditions." In *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators: Essays on the Nazi Holocaust*, edited by Joel E. Dimsdale, 219-258. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1980.

Bennett, Susan. *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Projection and Reception*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Berkowitz, Joel, ed. *Yiddish Theatre: New Approaches*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003.

Berkowitz, Joel and Jeremy Dauber, eds. *Landmark Yiddish Plays: A Critical Anthology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.

Biber, Jacob. *Risen from the Ashes: A Story of the Jewish Displaced Persons in the Aftermath of World War II.* San Bernardino, CA: The Borgo Press.

Blatter, Janet and Sybil Milton. *Art of the Holocaust*. New York: Rutledge Press, 1981.

Bloch, Sam E., ed. *Holocaust & Rebirth: Bergen-Belsen, 1945-1965*. New York: Bergen-Belsen Memorial Press, 1965.

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space.* New York: Penguin, 1990.

Burns, Elizabeth. *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life.* Harper & Row, 1972.

Carbonell, Dina M. and Ceil Parteleno-Barehmi, "Psychodrama Groups for Girls Coping with Trauma," *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, Jul. 1999, 49, 3, ProQuest.

Carey, Lois, ed. *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma Survivor*s. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009.

Caruth, Cathy. *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

———, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Carver, Charles S. "Resilience and Thriving: Issues, Models, and Linkages," *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, no. 2, Summer 1998.

Clements-Cortés, Amy. "Music to Shatter the Silence: A Case Study on Music Therapy, Trauma, and the Holocaust." *Canadian Journal of Music Therapy* 14, no. 1 (2008): 9-21. Accessed February 7, 2017.

"Concentration Camp DP's Carry on Legit Activity to Keep Their Tale Alive." *Variety*. February 4, 1947. Archive.org. Accessed July 6, 2016. https://archive.org/stream/variety165-1947-02/variety165-1947-02_djvu.txt.

Cosman, Ioana, et al. "Rational and Irrational Beliefs and Coping Strategies Among Transylvanian Holocaust Survivors: An Exploratory Analysis." *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 18, no. 2 (March 2013): 179-194. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost. Accessed July 6, 2016.

Dayton, Tian. *The Drama Within: Psychodrama and Experiential Therapy*. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1994.

Dietrich, David R. Dietrich and Peter Shabad, eds. *The Problem of Loss and Mourning*. Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, Inc., 1989.

Doherty, Muriel Knox. *Letters from Belsen: An Australian Nurse's Experiences with Survivors of War*. Edited by Judith Cornell and R. Lynette Russell. Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000.

Douglas, Michele, ed. *György Kádár: Survivor of Death, Witness to Life*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1988.

Epel, Elissa S., Bruce S. McEwen and Jeannette R. Ickovics, "Embodying Psychological Thriving: Physical Thriving in Response to Stress," *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, no. 2, Summer 1998.

Esslin, Martin. *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen*. London: Methuen, 1987.

Even, Ruud. "Can Music Serve as a 'Cultural Immunogen'? An Explorative Study." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health & Well-being*, Vol. 8 (2013): 1-12. Accessed February 7, 2017.

Feder, Sami. *Durkh 12 gehenem-fayern*. Amherst, MA: National Yiddish Book Center, 1985. Accessed February 26, 2016. https://archive.org/details/nybc20950.

———. *Gebaylte foystn*. Amherst, MA: National Yiddish Book Center, 1974. Accessed February 26, 2016. https://archive.org/details/nybc204622.

———. "Interview Notes." Interview by Zlata Zaretsky. Herztlya, Israel: 1994. Emailed to author March 19, 2016.

Feder, Sami, ed. *Zamlung fun katset un geto lider*, ed. by Sami Feder (Bergen-Belsen DP Camp, Germany: January 1946),

Feinstein, Margarete Myers. *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Fetthauer, Sophie. "The Katset-Teater and the Development of Yiddish Theater in the DP Camp Bergen-Belsen," translated by Lily E. Hirsch. In *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture,* edited by Tina Frühauf and Lily E. Hirsch. 97-120. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Music in the Bergen-Belsen DP-Camp." Music and the Holocaust. Accessed October, 15 2011. http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/memory/dp-camps/belsen-dp-camp/.

Ferderber-Salz, Bertha. *And the Sun Kept Shining*. New York: Holocaust Library, 1980.

Fisher, Atarah, and Avi Gilboa. "The Roles of Music amongst Musician Holocaust Survivors before, during, and after the Holocaust." *Psychology of Music* 44, no. 6 (November 2016): 1221-1239. Accessed February 7, 2017.

Fishman, David E. *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2005.

Folkman, Susan and Richard S. Lazarus. "Coping as a Mediator of Emotion." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54, no. 3 (March 1988), PsychARTICLES EBSCOhost. Accessed September 19, 2012.

Frühauf, Tina and Lily E. Hirsch, eds. *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Fuchs, Elinor, ed. *Plays of the Holocaust: An International Anthology*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gilbert, Shirli. *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Goldenberg, Jennifer. "'I had no family, but I made family', Immediate post-war coping strategies of adolescent survivors of the Holocaust." *Counseling and Psychotherapy Research* (March 2009). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Gutterman, Bella. *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940-1945*. Trans. by IBRT. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008.

Harari, Michal Doron. "'To Be On Stage Means To Be Alive' Theatre Work with Education Undergraduates as a Promoter of Students' Mental Resilience." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 209, no. The 3rd International Conference "Education, Reflection, and Development," 3th - 4th July, 2015 (December 3, 2015): 161-166. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Harrison, Earl G. *Report of Earl G. Harrison.* August 24, 1945. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed February 5, 2016. http://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/displaced-persons/resourc1.htm.

Hass, Aaron. *The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Hirsch, Joshua. *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.

Holian, Anna. *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Howe, Irving and Ruth R. Wise, eds. *The Best of Sholom Aleichem.* New York: New Republic Books, 1979.

Hutchison, Emma and Roland Bleiker. "Emotional Reconciliation: Reconstituting Identity and Community after Trauma." *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (August 2008): 385-403. *Business Source Elite*. EBSCOhost. Accessed November 14, 2016.

Isakson, Brian L. and Gregory J. Jurkovic. "Healing after Torture: The Role of Moving On." *Qualitative Health Research* 23 (2013). Accessed April 10, 2014.

Jenmorri, Katrina. "Of Rainbows and Tears: Exploring Hope and Despair in Trauma Therapy." *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 35, no. 1 (February 2006): 41-55. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Jones, Phil. "The Active Self: Drama Therapy and Philosophy." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 35, no. 3 (2008): 224-231. Accessed February 2, 2017.

———. "An Analysis of the First Articulation of Drama Therapy: Austin's 'Principles of Drama-Therapy: A Handbook for Dramatists' (1917)." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 40, no. 3 (July 2013): 352-357. Accessed February 2, 2017.

———. *Drama as Therapy: Theory, Practice, and Research, Volume I.* New York: Routledge, 2007.

Katz, Dovid. "Language: Yiddish." *YIVO Institute for Jewish Research,* last modified 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Language/Yiddish.

Kahana, Eva, et al. "Coping with Extreme Trauma." In *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*, edited by J. Wilson, Z. Harel, and B. Kahana, 55-79. New York: Springer Press, 1988.

Kellermann, Peter Felix. "The Therapeutic Aspects of Pyschodrama with Traumatized People." In *The Pyschodrama with Trauma Survivors: Acting Out Your Pain*, edited by Peter Felix Kellermann and M.K. Hudgins. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000.

Kemp, Paul, ed. *The Relief of Belsen, April 1945: Eyewitness Accounts*. London: Imperial War Museum, 1991.

Kotz-Friedler, Dolly. *Das Theater hinter dem Stacheldraht.* Berlin: Dolly Kotz & Joachim Höret, 1993.

Krell, Robert. "Child Survivors of the Holocaust—Strategies of Adaptation." *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* Volume 38 (August 1993): 384-389. Accessed November 14, 2016.

Landau, Judith, Mona Mittal, and Elizabeth Wieling. "Linking Human Systems: Strengthening Individuals, Families, and Communities in the Wake of Mass Trauma." *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy* 34, no. 2 (April 2008), 193-209. *Education Research Complete,* EBSCOhost. Accessed November 23, 2016.

Lande, Gregory R., Vanita Tarpley, Jennifer L. Francis, Rebecca Boucher. "Combat Trauma Art Therapy Scale." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 37, no. 1 (February 2010). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Landy, Robert J., and Avi Hadari. "Stories of Destruction and Renewal: A Drama Therapy Experience." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 47, no. 3 (July 2007): 413-421. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Lavsky, Hagit. *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002.

Lazarus, Richard S. "Hope: An Emotion and a Vital Coping Resource Against Despair." *Social Research*, 1999, 653. *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost. Accessed November 14, 2016.

Levine, Peter A. *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2010.

Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009.

Lévy-Hass, Hanna. *Diary of Bergen-Belsen: 1944-1945.* Translated by Sophie Hand. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009.

———. *Inside Belsen*. Translated by Ronald Taylor. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982.

Linley, Alex P. "Positive Adaptation to Trauma: Wisdom as Both Process and Outcome." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 16, no. 6 (December 2003). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Linley, Alex P. and Stephen Joseph. "Positive Change Following Trauma and Adversity: A Review." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 17, no. 1 (February 2004). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Malkin, Jeanette R. *Memory-theater and Postmodern Drama*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999.

Martz, Erin and Jacob Lindy. "Exploring the Trauma Membrane Concept." In *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict*, edited by Erin Martz, 27-54. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2010.

Marvin, Carlson. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008.

Moeller, Mary D. and Michael J Rice. "The BE SMART Trauma Reframing Psychoeducation Program." *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* Volume 20, Issue 1 (February 2006). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Moreno, Joseph J. "Orpheus in Hell: Music and Therapy in the Holocaust." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 3-14. Accessed February 7, 2017.

Orkibi, Hod, Naama Bar, and Ilana Eliakim. "The Effect of Drama-based Group Therapy on Aspects of Mental Illness Stigma." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 41, no. 5 (November 2014): 458-466. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Parapully, Jose, Robert Rosenbaum, Leland van dan Daele and Esther Nzewi. "Thriving after Trauma: The Experience of Parents of Murdered Children." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 42 (2002). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Patt, Avinoam J. and Michael Berkowitz, eds. *"We Are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010.

Peleg, Miri, Rachel Lev-Wiesel, and Dani Yaniv. "Reconstruction of Self-identity of Holocaust Child Survivors who Participated in 'Testimony Theater.'" *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 6, no. 4 (July 2014): 411-419. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Peretz, I.L. *The I.L. Peretz Reader*. Edited by Ruth R. Wisse. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Pendzik, Susana. "Drama Therapy as a Form of Modern Shamanism." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 20, no. 1 (June 1988): 81-92. Accessed February 7, 2017.

———. "Dramatic Resonances: A Technique of Intervention in Drama Therapy, Supervision, and Training." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 35, no. 3 (2008): 217-223. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Pennebaker, James W., Michelle Colder, and Lisa K. Sharp. "Accelerating the Coping Process." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 3 (March 1990). *PsychARTICLES* EBSCOhost. Accessed December 10, 2012.

Prentki, Tim and Sheila Preston, ed. *The Applied Theatre Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Rachman, S. “Emotional Processing, with Special Reference to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.” *International Review of Psychiatry* 13 (2001): 164-171. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCOhost. Accessed November 14, 2016.

Römmer, Christian, ed. *Bergen-Belsen Historical Site and Memorial*. Celle, Germany: Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation/Bergen-Belsen Memorial, 2011.

Rosten, Leo. *The Joys of Yiddish*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1968.

Rovit, Rebecca and Alvin Goldfarb, eds. *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Rubin, Ruth. *Voice of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Rubinstein, Erna. *After the Holocaust: The Long Road to Freedom.* North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1995.

Saakvitne, Karen W. Howard Tennen, and Glenn Affleck. “Exploring Thriving in the Context of Clinical Trauma Theory: Constructivist Self Development Theory.” *Journal of Social Issues* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1998). Accessed September 19, 2012.

Sajnani, Nisha. “The Body Politic: The Relevance of an Intersectional Framework for Therapeutic Performance Research in Drama Therapy.” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 40, no. 4 (September 2013): 382-385. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Sandrow, Nahma. *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater*. Syracuse: First Syracuse University Press, 1996.

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 3rd ed. 2013.

Schumacher, Claude. “Charlotte Delbo: Theatre as a Means of Survival,” ed. by Claude Schumacher, *Staging the Holocaust: the Shoah in Drama and Performance*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Shean, Nava. *To Be an Actress.* Translated by Michelle Fram Cohen. New York: Hamilton Books, 2010.b

Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Skloot, Robert. *The Darkness We Carry: The Drama of the Holocaust*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

———. *The Theater of the Holocaust*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.

Snow, Stephen, Miranda D'Amico, and Denise Tanguay. “Therapeutic Theatre and Well-being.” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 30, no. 2 (2003): 73-82. Accessed February 2, 2017.

Somers, Erik and René Kok, eds. *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945-1950*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004.

Suedfeld, Peter, et al. “Coping Strategies in the Narratives of Holocaust Survivors.” *Anxiety, Stress & Coping* 10, no. 2 (April 1997): 153-179. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCOhost. Accessed July 6, 2016.

Talwar, Savneet. “Accessing traumatic memory through art making: An art therapy trauma protocol (ATTP).” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* Volume 34, Issue 1 (2007). Accessed September 19, 2012.

“Theater at the Bergen-Belsen DP Camp.” Museum at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. 29 303 Lohheide Anne Frank’s Place Lunegburg Heath, Germany. Accessed July 13, 2011.

Tuval-Mashiach, Rivka, Sara Freedman, Neta Bargai, Rut Boker, Hilt Hadar, and Arieh Y. Shalev. “Coping with Trauma: Narrative and Cognitive Perspectives.” *Psychiatry* 67, 3 (Fall 2004). ProQuest. Accessed September 19, 2012.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.

Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *The Moscow State Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Weinreich, Max. *History of the Yiddish Language: Volume 1.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Witztum, Eliezer and Ruth Malkinson. “Examining Traumatic Grief and Loss among Holocaust Survivors.” *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 14, no. 2 (March 2009), 129-143. Accessed October 17, 2012.

Wolfson, Leah, ed. *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context.* Volume 5, *Jewish Responses to Persecution: Volume V, 1944-1946.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Wolhandler, Joseph. “On a Concentration Camp Stage.” *New York Times*. June 30, 1946. *Historical New York Times*. Accessed October 1, 2011.

Wyman, Mark. *DPs Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Zable, Arnold. "Sonia Lizaron – Frontline Art: The Theatre of Resistance." Meanjin Quarterly. Summer 2016. Accessed February 7, 2017. https://meanjin.com.au/essays/sonia-lizaron-frontline-art-the-theatre-of-resistance.

———, Arnold. "A Tribute to Sonia Lizaron." Digital Yiddish Theatre Project. January 2016. Accessed July 6, 2016. https://yiddishstage.org/a-tribute-to-sonia-lizaron.

Zaretsky, Zlata. "The Story of Sami Feder – Producer for the 'Kazet' Theatre." All About Jewish Theatre. 2002-2011. Accessed October 15, 2011. http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article_display.aspx?articleID=3533.

VITA

Full name: Lindsay M. Warren

Place and date of birth: Somers Point, NJ, February 23, 1985

Parents Name: Richard E. Warren, Jr. and Gloria J. Warren

Educational Institutions:

School	Place	Degree	Date
Secondary:			
Egg Harbor Township High School	Egg Harbor Township, NJ	High School diploma	June 26, 2003
Collegiate:			
The College of New Jersey	Ewing, NJ	B.A. History	May 18, 2007
Graduate:			
Drew University	Madison, NJ	M. Litt.	May 12, 2012
Drew University	Madison, NJ	D. Litt.	May 13, 2017