

‘A CONSTRUCTIVE FORM OF HELP’:
VOCATIONAL TRAINING AS A FORM OF REHABILITATION
OF JEWISH REFUGEES IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1939–1948

Katarzyna Person*

ABSTRACT: On 9 May 1945 the unconditional surrender of Germany signified the end of World War II in Europe. One of the greatest challenges faced by the international community was the fate of the refugees, those people who for various reasons could not or did not want to return to their pre-war homeland. An especially significant place within this category was taken by the Holocaust survivors – the last remnants of the ten million strong pre-war Eastern and Central European Jewish community. The relief effort undertaken in helping this group, by mid-1947 numbering around 250,000 people, was a task of unprecedented scale and difficulty. Among the challenges of that time, the education of children and adolescents was of particular importance. Military authorities, non-governmental organizations (both Jewish and non-Jewish) and finally the survivors, all devoted themselves to helping those who lost their childhood and youth in concentration camps, forced labour and in hiding. This article will discuss this issue through the case-study of the Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT) and its undertakings among Jewish refugees in Great Britain.

ORT was set up in Russia in St. Petersburg in 1880 as the Society for the Promotion of Trades and Agriculture among the Jews in Russia, a philanthropic organization designed to assist Jewish artisans, workers and cooperatives, by providing them with cheap credit and establishing vocational schools.¹ After World War I, ORT expanded into Eastern Central Europe, France and Germany and by the mid-1930s, despite growing anti-Jewish legislations, organized a comprehensive network of trade schools responding to the needs of the Jewish community. The British branch of ORT, set up in 1921, focused for the first years of its existence on fundraising and propaganda. This situation changed abruptly on 29 August 1939, two days before the outbreak of World War II as 104 teenage students and seven teachers from the ORT school in Berlin left Charlottenburg Station on a train heading for London.

The school in Berlin (Private jüdische Lehranstalt für handwerkliche und gewerbliche Ausbildung auswanderungswilliger Juden der ORT Berlin), located at Siemensstrasse 15, was one of ORT’s most significant undertakings in the interwar period and a major centre offering vocational training to Jewish youth.² The school was opened in 1937 as an answer to

* Awarded her PhD in history at Royal Holloway, University of London in 2010. Email: Katarzyna.person.2007@live.rhul.ac.uk

¹ On the history of ORT see Leon Shapiro, *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980) and Jack Rader, *By the Skill of Their Hands* (Geneva: World ORT, 1970). I would like to thank Rachel Bracha and colleagues from the World ORT Archive in London for their help with gathering material for this article.

² For more on the ORT school in Berlin, see Monica Lowenberg, “The Education of the Cologne Jawne Gymnasium Children and the Berlin ORT School Boys in Germany and England”, *German-speaking Exiles in Great*

the rapidly escalating anti-Semitic Nazi policy limiting educational opportunities for young German Jews.³ The Nazi authorities allowed for it to open on the understanding that it would train only Jews who were planning to emigrate, and could confirm that, in order to safeguard its equipment from confiscation, all machinery and tools used in the school officially would belong to the British ORT. Under the protection of the British Government the school remained the only Jewish institution which functioned unaffected by the Kristallnacht, and indeed by late 1938 had enrolled 215 students, offering 3-year courses to adolescents aged 15 to 17 and 18-month training courses to adult students. Yet with the persecution intensifying and the spectre of war looming on the horizon, the leadership of the school decided to ensure the safety of the students by relocating to Great Britain. After negotiations with the British Ministry for Labour and the Home Office, as well as the Gestapo, it was agreed to move the school, together with all its equipment, to Leeds. The transfer, carried out by Colonel J.H. Levey of British ORT, was prepared by ORT together with OSE (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants – the Organization to Save the Children). As already mentioned, the first group of students (without the equipment, which at the last moment was confiscated by the Nazis) left Berlin on 29 August. The second group, headed by the director of the school, Werner Simon, was scheduled to leave on 3 September 1939. Neither Simon, nor the boys, ever made it out of Berlin. Almost all of them were later murdered in the Holocaust.

The 104 teenage boys who reached London on the outbreak of the war could not have anticipated the fate that awaited their families left behind in Germany. Most of those who were in the transport recalled their relocation as a great adventure. It is clear however that parents saying their goodbyes at the station and those who welcomed them in Great Britain were fully aware of the gravity of the situation and, as one of the boys remembered, the group was met in London by weeping Jewish women from the East End.⁴ As the school in Leeds was not yet prepared for their reception, the boys and their teachers were first accommodated in the Kitchener reception camp at Sandwich, Kent, which housed about 4,000 German and Austrian refugees. Already in November, however, the first group was transferred to Leeds. ORT's leaflet 'From Despair to Hope: A Constructive Form of Help', devoted to the work of the Technical Engineering School in Leeds, recalled its beginnings:

A technical school should first be planned and then constructed. In the case of the ORT school there was no time, no money, and no material available for such a project. After a long and arduous search, the most suitable building that could be found, with a floor area of about 12,000 square feet, was rented. It is situated about a mile from the residential hostels. Tools, equipment, and machinery were purchased, and the students, under the guidance of the instructors (all from Berlin), installed the machinery, connected it with the electric power supply, and made all fittings possible in the workshop of the school. The students of the plumbing and sanitary section of the school erected lavatories, wash-houses etc., and within a short time the school was at work.⁵

Britain: The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies 2 (Amsterdam; Atlanta, G.A.: Rodopi, 2000), 82–83.

³ For more on this, see Solomon Colodner, *Jewish Education in Germany under the Nazis* (New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1964).

⁴ World ORT Archive (WOA) D04a010, Hans W. Futter (interviewed by Sarah Kavanaugh), *Memories of ORT Old Boys* (12 March 2007).

⁵ WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE. From despair to hope: a constructive form of help*, 2–3.

The school began functioning full time in December 1939. It was divided into five departments: (1) Welding, Turning and Fitting, (2) Sanitary Engineering, (3) Electrical Engineering, (4) Mechanical Engineering, (5) Carpentry and Joinery. There was also a market-gardening section, which organized six-month courses under the supervision of an agricultural director from Palestine. All lessons in school were to be conducted in English, even though, as one of the students remarked on leaving the school, ‘as the Masters are really too busy and old, they cannot be expected to pick up the language as easily as young people.’⁶ One day of the five day school week was allotted to theoretical classes in mathematics and science. More advanced students also attended classes in the Leeds School of Technology.

Students who arrived from Berlin, referred to as the ‘old boys’, continued the studies which they had begun in Germany, but in time the school also began admitting new students, both girls and boys, aged fifteen to eighteen. These were mainly teenage refugees from Eastern and Central Europe who arrived as part of the *Kindertransport*.⁷ The majority of students resided in one of five hostels in the school vicinity, each housing 25 to 30 students and staff members of the school. In charge of each hostel was a hostel master responsible for the discipline and conduct of the students. There were two to six students in each room sleeping on bunk beds, with a room leader responsible for rules and regulations being carried out. The school was run by its director, Colonel Levey, with military precision. Students woke up at 6.00 am (6.30 in the winter), and classes lasted from 8.30 am till 12.30 pm and again from 1.30 pm till 4.00 pm. All students had to be back in their rooms by 10.00 pm. Most equipment in the school was constructed by the students, who also did all the redecoration in the building and took turns cleaning the school premises on Sunday mornings.⁸

The school had a decidedly Jewish character. It was closed on all Jewish holidays and on Sabbath and all food served was strictly kosher. However, as the ORT booklet made clear, the institution was ‘a Technical School and not a religious educational establishment’⁹ and students were free to carry out whatever religious observance they wished. Attendance in the synagogue was not compulsory and while students were able to participate in Jewish education classes, these were also not compulsory. There was no religious instruction held in the hostels.¹⁰ At the same time, the small group of Orthodox students from among the school community was given full support in religious observance and allowed to build a small synagogue on the school’s premises.¹¹

There is no doubt that the leadership of the school placed great importance on the well-being of the students. Students were provided with facilities to practice indoor and outdoor sports; there was a student theatre, orchestra and a choir, a study circle and a debating

⁶ WOA D10a019, *Letters from past and present students of the ORT technical engineering school, Leeds*, 5.

⁷ The transfer of refugee Jewish children from Nazi Germany and German-annexed territories to Great Britain between 1938 and 1940 (the *Kindertransport*) has recently been a subject of numerous monographs. For a general account, see Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of the Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000). See also *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23:1 [Special Issue: “Kindertransporte 1938/39 – Rescue and Integration”] (2003).

⁸ WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE*, 9.

⁹ WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE*, 11.

¹⁰ WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE*, 11.

¹¹ D10a019, *Letters from past and present students of the ORT technical engineering school, Leeds*, 4.

society. Lectures and concerts were also arranged 'as far as war conditions permitted.'¹² Yet, even with the best will and dedication of ORT teachers and counsellors, not all problems faced by young refugees could be solved.

The main issue troubling boys in Leeds was the fate of their families left behind in Germany.¹³ Some reflection of their experiences can be found in a collection of letters from former students published by ORT in 1942, where one boy remarks that 'for the first time since I left Austria, I was able to feel and enjoy the comforts of a real home,'¹⁴ while another refers to a female ORT employee treating the boys 'like a mother.'¹⁵ The boys were allowed to send one letter a month to their real families, but with the progress of the war even such communication became impossible. One of the boys recalled: 'Communication with our parents became very scarce and difficult. We wrote via the Red Cross or through relatives in the U.S.A. or South America. [. . .] I think it was only after four or six months that we missed our parents very badly, but as war developed in earnest we had to tell ourselves that millions of others were in no better position.'¹⁶

The boys in Leeds were also seriously affected by the way that the Anglo-Jewish organizations perceived the attitude towards refugees prevalent in British society at the time, especially towards those from German-speaking countries. In each room of every hostel students could find a printed copy of rules and regulations prepared by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the German Jewish Aid Committee, which they were to follow or else face immediate expulsion from the school. A copy of these rules, preserved in the ORT Archive, reveals the everyday reality of life for Jewish refugees in wartime Great Britain. Students were above all encouraged to avoid any actions that might stir anti-refugee emotions from both the authorities and the wider population of the city.¹⁷ Boys were informed: 'DO NOTHING at any time to arouse the slightest hostility, and do not attract attention. [. . .] Never speak German in the streets, so that you can be heard. Try not to speak German at all if you can help it, and if any speak very quietly. [. . .] Do not have any conversations in trains, cars, or buses. Do not, at any time in the streets, discuss the war situation.'¹⁸ The rules underlined that Britain was not to be perceived as a place of permanent settlement and that students were to consider themselves to be temporary guests in Leeds.

After arrival the boys automatically became 'enemy aliens' – refugees from states with which Britain was at war – and as such were examined by the Aliens Tribunal set up at the outbreak of the war. Even though, like the vast majority of the 78,000 refugees screened, they were categorized as no threat to the state, the boys were reminded in the opening paragraph of the rules and regulations: 'Although you have all passed the Tribunal, you are, in the eyes of the Leeds Christian people, members of an enemy country at war with

¹² WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE*, 11.

¹³ For more on that see Ute Benz, "Traumatization through Separation: Loss of Family and Home as Childhood Catastrophe", *Shofar* 23:1 (2004), 85–99.

¹⁴ WOA D10a019, *Letters from past and present students*, 7.

¹⁵ WOA D10a019, *Letters from past and present students*, 7.

¹⁶ WOA D04a010, Futter, *Memories of ORT Old Boys*.

¹⁷ On the 'invisibility' of German-speaking refugees in Great Britain, see Tony Kushner, Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 126–216. See also Claudia Curio, "Die Fürsorgepolitik des Refugee Children's Movement: Ein Instrument der Integration deutsch-jüdischer Flüchtlingskinder in der britische Gesellschaft", *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 10 (2001), 287–308.

¹⁸ WOA D07a154b, *Regulations of the Leeds ORT Technical and Engineering School*.

England.’ The situation deteriorated further in the spring of 1940, when, in the panic following the invasion of France, Winston Churchill ordered the mass internment of all refugees. Among the wider society the fear of potential spies – ‘fifth columnists’ and the ‘enemy in our midst’ – bordered on mass hysteria. By June 1940 around 27,000 refugees had been detained. 7,000 were shipped off to camps in remote areas of Canada and Australia, among them about 40 boys from the ORT school in Leeds, some of whom lost their lives after SS ‘Arandora Star’, heading for Canada with a transport of German and Italian internees, was sunk by a German U-boat on 2 July 1940.¹⁹ Even boys who were not interned still had to comply with the ‘limited internment measures’, which, after May 1940, were to be applied to enemy aliens between the ages of 16 and 70. For example, students over 16 had to report to the Leeds Police for permission to change their address.²⁰

As a large portion of the school maintenance was paid by the American Joint Distribution Committee, the school in Leeds lost its funding after the United States entered the war in 1941 and as a result was closed down. Those of the boys who were already trained found jobs and while some were interned as enemy aliens, others went on to serve in the British armed forces, and fought with them in the later stages of the war.

We do not know how much information about the events that were taking place in Europe at the time reached the boys who were training in Leeds. There is no doubt, however, that the school’s leadership had a relatively clear picture of the Holocaust since, alongside other relief and welfare organizations, ORT’s activists continued their work in the Jewish communities after the outbreak of the war. The school in Berlin functioned until 10 June 1943, when SS squads occupied its premises and ordered the deportation of almost all students to Auschwitz. The school’s director, Werner Simon, who masterminded the relocation of the boys to Leeds, was deported to Theresienstadt, and from there to Auschwitz in October 1944, where he was murdered. ORT courses were also being conducted in a number of Eastern European ghettos. The two ghettos where ORT was the most active were Warsaw in Poland and Kovno in Lithuania, where they contributed to the idea of ‘rescue through work’ – that is utilizing work projects to make as many Jews as possible indispensable to the German war economy, thus delaying the destruction of the ghettos. The workshops in Warsaw continued to work until 4.00 pm on 18 April 1943, the last day before the heroic but doomed Warsaw Ghetto Uprising started, and the ghetto ceased to exist. Simultaneously, ORT courses for refugees were being established in the countries where Jews were forced to flee: in the internment camps in France and among Jewish refugees in Switzerland, Shanghai, Cuba and New York.²¹

The second phase of British ORT’s work with Jewish refugees began at the end of World War II with vocational courses, which were organized in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Germany, Austria and Italy.²² Straight after liberation, a handful of veteran ORT workers

¹⁹ WOA D04a010, Futter, *Memories of ORT Old Boys*. For more on the internment of Jewish refugees in Great Britain and the ‘Arandora Star’, see, for example, Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939–1945* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 78–98. On the ideological factors behind 1940 alien internment, see Tony Kushner, ‘Clubland, Cricket Tests and Alien Internment, 1939–1940’, in D. Cesarani, A. Robin, J. Kushner, eds., *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 79–101.

²⁰ WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE*, 7

²¹ For more on ORT’s wartime work, see Rader, *By the Skill of Their Hands*, 50–64.

²² For more on ORT’s work in DP camps, see Sarah Kavanaugh, *ORT, The Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

who were in the camp at Landsberg, near Dachau, established the first vocational course in the American occupational zone of Germany. In December 1945, the first training centre in the British Zone was instituted at Bergen-Belsen by another group of former ORT instructors. Machines and equipment were brought in. Hundreds of instructors were recruited from among surviving ORT personnel, DP engineers, educators and craftsmen. Classes and workshops were set up wherever there were groups of survivors and by the end of 1947 ORT had become a network of over 700 courses located in the DP camps of Europe. 22,620 people were enrolled that year, almost one-tenth of the DP population of the time. 934 teachers taught more than fifty trades, including metal machining, shoemaking and carpentry – traditional Jewish trades – but also automobile motor repairing, dental mechanics, millinery designing, typesetting, gold-smithing, watch repairing and such relatively complex fields as optics and surveying. ORT's work was also conducted among survivors outside DP camps, both in Eastern and Western Europe. In Great Britain ORT ran three projects: a training farm, a training ship where maritime classes were conducted, and a trade school in London.

The first project, ORT's training farm, was set up in October 1946 in Bedfordshire. It followed the organizational framework of agricultural training farms (*Hachsharot*), usually associated with socialist Zionist youth groups and provided vocational training aimed directly at preparation for emigration and the establishment of *kibbutzim* in Palestine.²³ Their goal was to create the first generation of Jewish farmers who would be ready to prepare Palestine for settlement. The Goldington ORT centre was established in association with a Zionist group *Hechalutz B'Anglia* and provided practical training in general farming, poultry keeping and market-gardening. Set up within the farm was also an ORT workshop where students learned to do their own repairs of farming equipment. The training course lasted two years, and due to limited facilities was based on the premise of short, three to four month courses, enabling pupils to get training in various branches of agriculture. The practical course was supplemented by nine hours of theoretical classes a week and additional lectures in general science. There is no doubt that as in similar establishments in DP camps, the educational task was taken very seriously. Students attended various extra-curricular classes and lectures. For example, towards the end of 1947 they had a lecture organized for them at the Institute of Animal Pathology at Cambridge University.²⁴ Aside from vocational training, all students at Goldington received classes in general topics, with a clear focus on Jewish studies. The curriculum included English and Hebrew language, mathematics, general science, Jewish history and, according to ORT materials, 'such cultural activities as Oneg Shabbath, discussions of current affairs, music lessons, excursions, social gatherings etc.'²⁵ ORT's undertaking in Goldington was strongly influenced by the fact that, unlike the Leeds boys, the youth in Goldington came from a wide variety of backgrounds, both in terms of previous education as well as wartime experiences. Among them were both Nazi camp survivors, youth who arrived in Great Britain as part of the Kindertransport and young British Jews.²⁶ Their schooling was therefore a very complex undertaking, often

²³ For more on such training see, for example, Yehudit Baumel, *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

²⁴ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* II:5, 2.

²⁵ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* I:38, 5.

²⁶ See, for example, the story of David Jedwab from the Kindertransport, in Susan Kleinman and Chana Moshenska, "Class as a Factor in the Social Adaptation of the Kindertransport Kinder", *Shofar* 23:1 (2004), 28–40.

slowed down by students' language difficulties as well as a shortage of contract work and material.²⁷

As of December 1947, there were seventeen pupils enrolled in Goldington: six training in mechanics and eleven in agriculture.²⁸ Twenty-three others who were preparing to resettle to Palestine did not attend regular classes, but only received partial training and were engaged in work, both in and outside the centre. As groups of students left they were immediately replaced with new trainees. As a result in 1947 alone, altogether six students were trained in poultry farming, three in cow-shed maintenance, two in rabbit rearing, four in gardening, five on the tractor and agricultural machines, three on the truck, twelve in the fields and agricultural machines and three in administration and management.²⁹ Six ORT employees ran classes: five instructors and one supervisor.³⁰

Another form of training aimed directly at preparing students for future life in Palestine was training young men for careers as merchant navy officers and navigators. ORT's Marine Training Scheme was set up in agreement with its subsidiary, the Jewish Marine League, in 1946 with the aim of supplying the growing merchant army of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine under the British mandate) with qualified sea officers. T[raining] S[hip] 'Joseph Hertz', the ship used for the training scheme, was built in 1920 as a destroyer and was originally called 'The Cutty Sark'. Between 1925 and 1939 it belonged to the Duke of Westminster and served as a 'Floating Gin Palace'. During World War II it was taken over by the Royal Navy and employed first as an anti-submarine vessel and later as a submarine escort out of the Holy Loch base. After the war, the ship was acquired by ORT, and converted into a training ship capable of accommodating sixty boys. It was renamed the 'Joseph Hertz', in memory of the chief rabbi of the British Commonwealth between 1913 and 1946 and moored off Grays, Essex. Describing the training on board the 'Joseph Hertz', *ORT Chronicle* reported:

The director of the school and commanding officer of the 'Joseph Hertz' is Captain N.F. Israel D.S.C., who has made several cruises around the world and who distinguished himself in the last war in the Pacific and the Battle of the Atlantic as well as in the invasion of Europe. Lately, the boat went on a rather extensive voyage in the course of which the pupils proved themselves fit for all the hardships of a sailor's and diver's life and observed the strictest discipline.³¹

Most of the students on the TS 'Joseph Hertz' were aged sixteen to eighteen. They were all displaced persons, mainly concentration and labour camps survivors. The first intake of twenty-one boys included seventeen former inmates of the Bergen-Belsen. During their training the boys wore Royal Navy uniforms with a Star of David badge attached to their sleeves. The scheme proved highly successful and a number of qualified officers were trained on board. Many of them ultimately left for Israel where they served both in the merchant navy and later in the newly created Israeli navy.

The third undertaking, the ORT school at 24/36 Roland Way in Kensington in London, opened in July 1946 in order to train young refugees – former inmates of the concentration camps in Germany – who were lodged in London hostels for refugees. The majority of

²⁷ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* II:5, 2.

²⁸ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* II:5, 2.

²⁹ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* I:38, 4.

³⁰ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* II:11, 2.

³¹ WOA D07a007, *Chronicle ORT* (ORT Union Geneva), 18.

students came originally from Eastern and Central Europe and were aged between fifteen and twenty-five. In the first year students were given all-round engineering training and in the second they received specialized tuition in a particular branch of technology. The specializations offered included general engineering, tool making, electrical work, woodwork and radio technology. A dressmaking section was opened for the girls. According to an ORT publication, the director of the school, Mrs. Wilkinson, was able not only to guide the trainees in their work, but also to help them to acquire a working knowledge of the English language, 'the lack of which was a great hindrance to the understanding of English measurements and technical terms, and would have been a serious obstacle in finding employment [. . .] – a fact which gives encouragement to the refugee girls themselves, who at first found it somewhat difficult to adapt themselves to the conditions of a country formerly quite unknown to them.'³² Aside from technical training, students also attended classes in general education subjects such as mathematics and history as well as in English. On finishing the school they were provided with a set of tools to practice their trade. Alongside full time projects, the school also ran refresher courses for students whose studies were interrupted by the war or those who used to practice their trade before the war. There were also short intensive courses for students preparing for emigration. In October 1947 there were fifty-seven students enrolled in the school: forty-eight boys and nine girls. During that month fourteen students left the school and fifteen new ones were accepted.³³ Throughout its existence the Kensington School trained around 200 students.³⁴

All of ORT's undertakings were to be only temporary measures aimed at enabling refugees to immediately begin to support themselves in a country in which they should eventually settle. Training on the TS 'Joseph Hertz' was terminated on 10 October 1947 after difficulties in finding new trainees and jobs on merchant ships for foreign Jewish boys proved to be impossible to overcome, and Commander Israel gave up his position. The Kensington School in its initial form was closed in July 1949 when it was decided that the vast majority of refugees had already found employment in industries. From August 1949 the London centre was reopened at Belsize Lane in Hampstead in order to conduct evening classes, mainly in tailoring, for older refugees. The school ceased operating in April 1954. The activities of the Goldington training centre also gradually declined after the establishment of the state of Israel, even though it continued (in a much-reduced form) until the early 1960s. As Monica Lowenberg pointed out in a discussion of the lives of former ORT students, whether for financial reasons or lack of qualifications, access to university, and thus liberal professions, remained out of reach for the majority of ORT graduates. Their vocational training allowed them, however, to secure employment amidst the uncertainties of the post-war years and many of the young refugees found work in commerce, retailing, industry and engineering.³⁵

Though the immediate positive results of work undertaken by ORT among Jewish refugees were clear, its approach towards young Holocaust survivors was not free from controversy. ORT, like many Jewish and non-Jewish philanthropic organisations operating at

³² WOA D04a012, *British ORT Annual Report 1946 and 1947*, 2–3.

³³ WOA F326015, *Report on the ORT activities August 1946–July 1947*, 4.

³⁴ WOA D05a011, *British ORT Second Post-War Report 1948–1949*, 7.

³⁵ Lowenberg, "The Education of the Cologne, Jawne Gymnasium Children and the Berlin ORT School Boys", 91–92.

the time, believed that in order to overcome the trauma of the Holocaust their students had to be immersed in a Western Jewish community. In a report from its work in Goldington, ORT observed:

It must be remembered that we faced the difficult task of fusing two entirely different groups of people; the youth group of boys and the girls from the camps, and the *Hehalutz* group consisting of Anglo-Jewish youth and the continental youth who came over from the continent before the war. The fundamental idea of this scheme was the belief that it is vital for this type of youth who have suffered the horrors of the concentration camps, to live together with other Jewish youth and not to be isolated in closed societies amongst themselves. This scheme has gained the praise of many people and has proved to be successful. During this time the common life between the groups has resulted eventually in the establishment of one social group to the benefit of both sides.³⁶

This view stood in clear contrast to the official policy of the Zionist leadership of Holocaust survivors, who claimed that the place of young people who were not yet granted permission to go to Palestine or did not yet undertake this journey through illegal channels was with their own people in the camps. Contrary to the Jewish organizations in the West, DPs often believed that the best way for adolescents and children to process trauma was to work through their experiences. As Margarete Myers Feinstein explained:

Remaining with other survivors provided the children with opportunities to work through their past experiences. They did not stand out as oddities as they would in a normal environment. In the DP camps survivors talked about their experiences almost incessantly, and they wrote and performed plays about the ghettos, the partisans, and the concentration camps. DP's poetry, music, and art worked through the horrors of the Holocaust. In DP schools they were not the only children who were too old for their grade level, and survivor teachers understood their outbursts, their silences, their difference. Group bonding between child survivors facilitated their adaptation to post-war life. The Belsen Committee wisely recognized that the children could best work through their issues not isolated in a comfortable British home, but in the difficult conditions of post-war Germany, where they were together with others who shared their background and their language.³⁷

As a result of this, in 1945 the DP leadership rejected the offer of 1,000 visas for Jewish children and adolescents, which were lobbied for by the British-Jewish agencies. DPs believed that the children would find adjustment to life in England too difficult, justifying their decision with the experiences of children who arrived there as part of the *Kindertransport*.³⁸ To explain its stance, the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria passed a resolution in October 1945 stating that ‘they have no confidence in the intentions and hospitality of the Public of Great Britain who wish to accept Jewish children from the camps, and that they protest strongly against sending the children to England. The meeting instructs the Central Committee to ensure that not one single child should, under any circumstances, be allowed

³⁶ WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary* I:38, 5

³⁷ Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany 1945–1957* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 175. On the conflict over the idea of young Holocaust survivors ‘working through’ their traumatic experiences, see also Boaz Cohen, “The Children’s Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21:1 (2007), 73–95.

³⁸ These are further discussed in Iris Guske, *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context: German-Jewish Children Refugees’ Accounts of Displacement and Acculturation in Britain* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009).

to emigrate to any other country than to the only possible haven for them – Palestine.³⁹ In the end, only children with immediate family members in England were allowed to leave the camps.

At the same time, young people themselves often made independent decisions to take up the opportunities of British entry visas, even if it went against the opinion of the Zionist leadership. It can be assumed that the majority of those who came to England saw it as a way of reaching Palestine and it was Palestine that they would put as their final destination when filling in the documents upon entering Britain.⁴⁰ In reality however, by the time of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the majority was rooted strongly enough in Britain to decide to remain there. The fears of DP authorities were therefore justified. Yet there is no reason to believe that attendance in vocational courses had a negative influence on the young people's Jewish identity.⁴¹ On the contrary, it can be claimed that collective living within a Jewish environment provided adolescent survivors with a sense of belonging and re-enforced their Jewish identity. As a result, the vocational schools were not only equipping students with new skills but above all with the confidence to imagine a future in which they could use them. Discussing the role played by the vocational courses in the life of the DP community, Samuel Gringauz, President of the Congress of Liberated Jews in the U.S. Zone, explained: 'The importance of these schools is not explained by the fact that they supplied valuable vocational training to thousands of uprooted people. The importance of the school centers in the fact that they gave a valuable ideology to thousands of young people; that they helped thousands of young people in a heroic self-assertion; that they created the spirit admired by the whole world'.⁴² This sense of hope that was instilled in those who lost their childhood and youth in the Holocaust alone makes the vocational courses for Jewish refugees, however briefly they may have lasted, one of the significant undertakings in the educational history of Europe immediately after the end of World War II.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Baumel, Yehudit. *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Colodner, Solomon. *Jewish Education in Germany under the Nazis*. New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1964.

³⁹ S. Adler-Rudel, "Evacuation of Jewish Children from DP Camps in Germany to England", quoted in Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany*, 173. The most comprehensive study to date of the attitude of DPs towards Great Britain is Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States and Jewish Refugees, 1945–1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ See Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: Triumph over Adversity* (London: Phoenix, 1996), 293. On the attitude of DPs towards Palestine among Jewish Refugees in DP camps, see, for example, Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 143–148.

⁴¹ On the identity of Jewish refugees in post-war Britain, see Anthony Grenville, *Jewish Refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933–1970: Their Image in AJR Information* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), 187–214.

⁴² Samuel Gringauz, "The Only Bright Rays in the Gloomy Existence of the D.P.", *ORT Bulletin* 2 (March, 1948), 3.

- Feinstein, Margarete Myers. *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany 1945–1957*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Gilbert, Martin. *The Boys: Triumph over Adversity*. London: Phoenix, 1996.
- Grenville, Anthony. *Jewish Refugees from Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933–1970: Their Image in AJR Information*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010.
- Guske, Iris. *Trauma and Attachment in the Kindertransport Context: German-Jewish Children Refugees' Accounts of Displacement and Acculturation in Britain*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009.
- Harris, Mark Jonathan, and Deborah Oppenheimer. *Into the Arms of the Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000.
- Kavanaugh, Sarah, *ORT, The Second World War and the Rehabilitation of Holocaust Survivors*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008.
- Kochavi, Arieh J. *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States and Jewish Refugees, 1945–1948*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Königseder, Angelika, and Juliane Wetzel. *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Kushner, Tony. 'Clubland, Cricket Tests and Alien Internment, 1939–1940', in D. Cesarani, A. Robin, and J. Kushner, eds., *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*. London: Frank Cass, 1993, 79-101.
- Kushner, Tony, and Katharine Knox. *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century*. London: Frank Cass, 1999.
- Lowenberg, Monica. 'The Education of the Cologne Jawne Gymnasium Children and the Berlin ORT School Boys in Germany and England', *German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain: The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies* 2. Amsterdam; Atlanta, G.A.: Rodopi, 2000.
- Rader, Jack. *By the Skill of Their Hands*. Geneva: World ORT, 1970.
- Shapiro, Leon. *The History of ORT: A Jewish Movement for Social Change*. New York: Schocken Books, 1980.
- Wasserstein, Bernard. *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*. London: Leicester University Press, 1999.

Articles

- Benz, Ute. "Traumatization through Separation: Loss of Family and Home as Childhood Catastrophe", *Shofar* 23:1 [Special Issue: "Kindertransporte 1938/39 – Rescue and Integration"] (2004), 85–99.
- Cohen, Boaz. "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21:1 (2007), 73–95.
- Curio, Claudia. "Die Fürsorgepolitik des Refugee Children's Movement: Ein Instrument der Integration deutsch-jüdischer Flüchtlingskinder in der britische Gesellschaft", *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 10 (2001), 287–308.
- Gringauz, Samuel. "The Only Bright Rays in the Gloomy Existence of the D.P.", *ORT Bulletin* 2 (March, 1948).
- Kleinman, Susan, and Chana Moshenska. "Class as a Factor in the Social Adaptation of the Kindertransport Kinder", *Shofar* 23:1 (2004), 28–40.

World ORT Archive (WOA) Material

- WOA D04a010, Hans W. Futter (interviewed by Sarah Kavanaugh), *Memories of ORT Old Boys* (12 March 2007).

WOA D04a012, *British ORT Annual Report 1946 and 1947.*

WOA D05a011, *British ORT Second Post-War Report 1948-1949.*

WOA D07a007, *Chronicle ORT* (ORT Union Geneva).

WOA D07a154b, *Regulations of the Leeds ORT Technical and Engineering School.*

WOA D07f236, *ORT Weekly Summary.*

WOA D10a019, *Letters from past and present students of the ORT technical engineering school, Leeds.*

WOA D10a020, *The ORT and OSE. From despair to hope: a constructive form of help.*

WOA F326015, *Report on the ORT activities August 1946-july 1947.*