The Story is Everywhere: Polish Jewish Children and Adolescents in Soviet Central Asia during the Second World War

Marie-Odile Samson

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By: Marie-Odile Samson

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Matthew Penney

_____ Examiner
Dr. Anna Sheftel

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Erica Lehrer

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Barbara Lorenzkowski

Approved by

_____ Graduate Program Director
Dr. Matthew Penney

29 August 2024

_____ Dean of Faculty
Dr. Pascale Sicotte

ABSTRACT

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Close to 80 percent of all Polish Jews still alive in 1945 survived *outside* Poland, either deported to or exiled in Soviet territories, yet their life stories have been overlooked in much of Holocaust historiography (Goldlust, 2012). This thesis examines young survivors' intimate experiences of exile and deportation in the Soviet Central Asian Republics during the Second World War. Anchored in oral testimonies from the Montreal Holocaust Museum by survivors who were children or adolescents during the war, I explore youths' journeys to and within the region as well as their relationships with local populations and family members during this period. In the first chapter, I argue that children and youth faced particular dangers of displacement specific to their age groups, and examine the impact of famine, illness, and interrupted education on their experiences, as well as the psychological consequences of these movements. The second chapter holds that children and youth connected with local populations in a manner different from adult refugees, often forging close bonds and friendship and displaying a notable sense of solidarity with local residents. The third chapter, finally, turns to the presence and absence of family members during young people's wartime displacements, directing attention to the role of age in shaping family dynamics and highlighting the divergent experiences of children and adolescents. Overall, this work aims to bring attention to young people's unique and distinct experiences of deportation and exile in the Soviet Union.

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Thank you to the Montreal Holocaust Museum for granting me access to their oral history archive, and for the many volunteer and work experiences throughout the years, which ultimately led to this thesis. More specifically, thank you to Eszter Andor for the ease with which she coordinated my access to interviews and to survivors' files, our helpful meetings, and the many e-mails exchanged and time spent working with me on questions of anonymity.

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Finally, thank you, merci, to the survivors who graciously offered their testimonies to the Montreal Holocaust Museum, whose stories I was touched and inspired by, and to whom I hope this work does justice. This thesis is dedicated to them. Thank you as well to the descendants of these survivors with whom I was in contact with, for taking the time to discuss with me, and for their support of this project.

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NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

Re-using previously recorded testimonies inevitably comes with the task of transcribing narrators' stories. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli once likened transcription to the art of translation.[1] In following his footsteps, I have chosen to remove filler words such as "um" and "uh," and have similarly removed part-words and word repetitions. I have kept repetitions anchored in narrator's desires to highlight a point. While some scholars choose to remove "crutch" words like "you know" or "like," I have chosen to keep these as is in order to be as faithful to the oral source material as possible; as Francis Good holds, such distinct patterns of oral speech constitute "fertile ground for analysis and potentially valuable inference of meaning."[2] I use punctuation to indicate pauses and breaks, meaning there may be commas or dashes used in ungrammatical ways.[3]

I have tried to maintain the integrity of narrators' speech, including any grammatical mistakes, syntax errors, or wrong word choices, without correcting them, unless the reader's understanding is severely impacted by such errors. My aim is to respect the narrator and their manner of speaking, all the while providing a transcript that is legible and that they might have approved of. That being said, readers should be aware that they are "consuming a constructed artefact," in which orality has experienced layers of mediation through recording, transcription, and editing.[4] Interviewer interventions are placed in [*brackets*] during single quotes or identified as such during longer conversational excerpts. Cities are spelled in English as narrators addressed them, and their contemporary name is placed in brackets at their first mention.

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[1] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," *The Oral History Reader, Third Edition*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 49-50. See also Francis Good, "Voice, Ear and Text. Words, meanings and transcription," *The Oral History Reader. Third Edition*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 459.
[2] Good, "Voice, Ear and Text," 459.
[3] *Ibid.*, 460.
[4] Ibid., 466, see also 462-463. And Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," *The Oral History Reader,* 49-51.

It took me years to step back far enough to capture the whole picture, to gain the lateral vision that allowed me to see the centrifugal movements - flight (to points all over the globe) from the center (Nazi Europe) - as strands in a larger history. [...] Fleeing does not write refugees out of the story; it simply takes the story elsewhere. Indeed, it takes it everywhere.[1]

PROLOGUE

In the summer of 2019, I began working at the Montreal Holocaust Museum for a summer internship as an oral history cataloguer, a position I had also been a volunteer for since 2018. My role was to listen to newly collected survivor testimonies and create documentation for the Museum's database, including writing a summary of the survivor's experiences, writing the names of the various locations they relocated to during and after the war, and time stamping the interviews. I was also tasked with reviewing previously catalogued interviews in order to standardise the database. While I was reviewing the database, I stumbled upon the name of a city I had never heard of and was intrigued: Dzhambul, which the previous cataloguer had written somewhat phonetically, as Djambyl. After a lengthy Google search, I finally found what I was looking for: the city, now called Taraz, is situated in the south of Kazakhstan by the Kyrgyzstan border. Yet, the original question remained: *what was the relationship between a Holocaust survivor and Kazakhstan?* I began searching for Kazakhstan in the database, then for other neighbouring countries, finding a number of similar wartime trajectories. I was confused; I considered myself well-versed in Holocaust history, having taken a number of university-level courses on the subject and read many books and articles. And yet, I had never heard of Jewish survival in Soviet Central Asia.

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[1] Debórah Dwork,"Refugee Jews and the Holocaust. Luck, Fortuitous Circumstances, and Timing," in *Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre, vielleicht sein Leben: Deutsche Juden 1938-1941*, ed. Susanne Heim, Beate Meyer and Francis R. Nicosia (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), 281-282. This quote is the inspiration for the title of my thesis; I first came across it in Eliyana R. Adler, *Survival on the Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 284-283.

I knew then that this would be the topic of my Master's thesis, before I even applied to the program. In the winter of 2023, I returned to the Museum and sourced the database once more. Searching for all the Soviet Central Asian Republics, I looked for the large cities of Taraz (Dzhambul), Bukhara, Tashkent, Samarkand, Almaty (Alma-Ata), Dushanbe (Stalinabad). I found close to forty testimonies from Jews of all regions of Eastern Europe who spent at least part of the war years in Central Asia and eventually landed in Montreal. From these, I narrowed down my research to testimonies from Polish Jews, and eventually, to Polish Jewish children and adolescents, hoping to explore the intricacies of youth in exile in Central Asia. This paper is a collective history, deeply anchored in the lives of these young survivors, which aims to illuminate larger historical processes and explore the diversity of experiences across ages and genders, from their perspectives.

These pages are their stories, and I would like to profoundly thank, in no particular order, Paula, Ilona, Judith, Mark, Henry, David, Henia, Rywka, and Morris, as well as the numerous narrators whose stories did not make their way directly into my thesis, yet profoundly shaped my understanding of Polish Jewish exile in Central Asia.

INTRODUCTION: THE STORY IS EVERYWHERE

In 1941, six-year-old Paula and her mother, Bella, were released from a labour camp in Siberia, where they had been deported to in the winter of 1939-1940. The pair relocated to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, where they remained until 1945. In a lengthy oral history interview conducted in 2016 at the Montreal Holocaust Museum, Paula explored a number of elements that would affect her youth, both positively and negatively, during exile in Central Asia:

> My mother would go in the morning to work, and I would stay in this hut all by myself, and we had nothing so we slept on the mud floor, and we didn't have any food. [...] Eventually, my mother met somebody who also worked in the fields, and in his other life he was a doctor, and she told him about me, that, you know, I stayed in this dark, damp mud hut all day, that I can't walk. So he said to her that what she should do is, before she goes to work, she should take me outside and leave me outside. And the sun is going to cure me. [...] So my mother would put me outside. But sometimes, when the sun disappeared earlier and I had to wait until my mother is going to come and take me back inside, the children that were there in this yard, playing, they, you know, they would come over and they would talk to me. And they realised what was happening, so when the sun disappeared, very often they would take me inside. And eventually they would play with me, and well, I got better. [...] Once I got well, they included me in their group of kids, I became one of the village kids.[1]

Like Paula, the other narrators of this study – Ilona, Judith, Mark, Henry, David, Henia, Rywka, and Morris – were all Polish Jewish children and adolescents who were forcibly displaced to or exiled in Soviet Central Asia during the Second World War.[2] Like her, they were

[1] Paula, interview by Betsy Pomerantz and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*. 16 August 2016, Montreal, QC, 00:42:43.

[2] The decision to use survivors' real names was taken in collaboration with the Montreal Holocaust Museum, as well as with the survivors and their descendants themselves. The Museum did not have an official policy regarding anonymity for research projects using interviews, and I brought along concerns, which Rebecca Clifford has expertly discussed in her work *Survivors: Children's Lives After the Holocaust*, surrounding the erasure of names. Names denote not only identity, Clifford explains, but also "ownership of the life story." Many children were given false names during the war, were adopted, or were separated from their families, with their names sometimes fading "from their consciousness." To use real names was an important step in maintaining identity in the face of the losses associated with war, with names being the "most fundamental part of their identity." Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors: Children's Lives After the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), *xv-xvi*.
Similarly to her process, I suggested the use of only first names as a compromise for a pseudonym, and reached out to the narrators (or their descendants) of this thesis for whom the Museum had contact information. I explained my project to them, and those who responded did so very positively. After discussion with the Museum coordinator, we agreed that I could also use the first names of those who had not responded, or those for whom no contact information was available.
It also bears mentioning, as Henry's son explained in our e-mail exchange, that these names are often anglicized versions of their birth names: Henry was called Chaim, or Chaim Leb during his youth in Poland, and only adopted the name Henry after he arrived to Canada, although his family still refered to him by his birth name.

at risk of facing isolation, illness, famine, and a lack of material goods. In addition to these dangers discussed by Paula, displaced youth could also be at high risk of seeing their education interrupted, of being separated from their families, and of lacking proper access to healthcare. They were also prone to suffering from a number of psychological effects of displacement, and many could experience long-lasting stress due to the prolonged uncertainty surrounding their exile.[3] At the same time, Paula's childhood memories speak to the various relationships that were formed and maintained in Central Asia, both within families, with other deportees, and also with local inhabitants who lived and worked alongside them. The proximity of family played a major role in helping youth handle the impacts of displacement, both physically and psychologically. While not all refugee youth found themselves connecting warmly with local populations, such connections often proved crucial in getting through the war years.

This study turns to the experiences of nine Polish Jewish children and adolescents, born between 1922 and 1935, who lived in exile in Soviet Central Asia during the Second World War. It seeks to examine the ways in which relationships, both pre-existing and newly forged, affected their experiences of displacement in the area. While their lives in Central Asia cannot be isolated from prior or subsequent events, focusing on this locality allows me to examine what *this* place meant to young survivors, and how this specific phase of their wartime experience affected their personal development and their identities.[4]

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[3] Urszula Szmygiel, "'The past is never dead. It's not even past.' Exploring Lived Experiences of Deportation: A Counseling Psychology Portfolio Including an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis Study on Polish Civilian Survivors of the Deportation to the Soviet Union During World War II." PhD diss., University of London, 2020, 102, 30-31. See also David Bürgin, Dimitris Anagnostopoulos, the Board and Policy Division of ESCAP, Benedetto Vitiello, Thorsten Sukale, Marc Schmid, and Jörg M.Fegert, "Impact of war and forced displacement on children's mental health – multilevel, needs-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches," *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 31 (March 2022): 846-847.

[4] There are numerous debates surrounding the exact definition of who constitutes a "Holocaust survivor." After the war, the term "survivor" itself was usually only used in English in relation to specific concentration camps (as an "Auschwitz survivor," for example), but the more common term was "displaced person" or "unaccompanied children" for younger individuals. Terms used to denote survivors were more likely to focus on their current state - as in, "displaced, stateless, parent-less." As explains Rebecca Clifford, these terms lacked the "backwards-facing focus of 'survivor', which rooted identity in the past, in the act of survival." The uncertainty as to *what* they were was certainly consuming for *anyone* who had survived without being in a concentration camp, but, as Clifford suggests, *particularly* for children: "it complicated [their] relationships with their own pasts, for the terms

Using testimonies from the Montreal Holocaust Museum, I aim to answer the following questions: how did Polish Jewish children and adolescents experience forced displacement and exile in Soviet Central Asia? In what ways were their experiences *different* from their adult counterparts? I argue that attention to youth's experiences transforms our understanding of Polish Jewish exile in Central Asia in important ways, revealing young people's unique concerns, connections, and responsibilities. Many had to learn to live without parents or parental figures, were integrated into the Soviet workforce, and were left to face hunger and illness on their own. Finally, a number developed close connections with locals, which influenced their values and their identity in the aftermath of the war.

The past decade has seen a small boom in publications dealing with the stories of Polish Jews deported to or in exile in the Soviet Union.[5] While Central Asia is discussed in new publications, the area represents only a fraction of the content of this emerging scholarship, and day-to-day experiences of young people are rarely deeply explored. The subjects in these works

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that were used to refer to their experiences made less and less sense as they aged." The term "child survivor" began to emerge as of the 1980s, allowing those who had been children during the war to reframe their paths as part of a larger framework. See Clifford, *Survivors*, 200-202.

Today, Holocaust institutions weigh into these debates, with Yad Vashem defining Holocaust survivors as any "Jews who lived for any amount of time under Nazi domination, direct or indirect, and survived." They also include Jews who fled their homes, "including those who spent years and in many cases died deep in the Soviet Union, [who] may also be considered Holocaust survivors." Yad Vashem, FAQs, https://www.yadvashem.org/archive/hall-of-names/database/faq.html. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum expands this definition, considering Holocaust survivors "any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to" Nazi policies "between 1933 and 1945 [... including] people who were refugees or were in hiding." USHMM, FAQs, https://www.ushmm.org/remember/resources-holocaust-survivors-victims/individual-research/registry-faq#11-how-is-a-holocaust-survivor-defined. Eliyana Adler suggests that deported Jews should be considered victims in historical narratives, but addressed by a different qualifier, naming them "Holocaust refugees." Adler, *Survival on the Margin*, 4, 284-285. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann challenge the placement of individuals who survived in this manner into classifications like "indirect" survivors or "flight" survivors, but similarly question their inclusion in the "survivor" category. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Atina Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 1-2, 8. Such discussion regarding terminology aims not to equate or compare persecution and suffering, but rather to overcome "barriers of national narratives of remembrance," as explains Aleida Assmann, cited in Mikhal Dekel, *In the East: How My Father and a Quarter Million Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 369.

[5] Cited above: Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust* (2017); Adler, *Survival on the Margins* (2020); Dekel, *In the East* (2019, 2021). And Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt, eds., *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959) and History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival* (Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2021) and Albert Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath. Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Interior* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2022).

are most frequently adult Polish Jews. Scholars might mention age as an important factor, but mostly treat experiences of younger survivors in cursory fashion only.[6] I aim to contribute to the field of the history of childhood, and particularly the study of children and youth in relation to war, by representing children not as innocent victims of war but rather as historical agents who made individual decisions throughout the war. To this end, this study explores narrators' *own* concerns in their *own* words. I hold their experiences to be inherently different from those of adults, but equally valid.[7] In a similar vein, I aim to expand the study of Holocaust displacement by including deportees to, and refugees, in the Soviet Union as an integral part of the many "strand[s] of Holocaust history,"[8] which ultimately transforms our understanding of postwar survivor demographics, the idea of survivorship itself, and the geographical scope of the Holocaust. To my knowledge, the specifically *Polish*, *Jewish*, and *youthful* experience of displacement in Central Asia has never been studied in depth in English; this thesis offers an intersectional study of these overlapping exclusions.[9]

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After the German and Soviet invasions of Poland in 1939, Polish citizens who found themselves on the Soviet side were at risk of being deported to labour camps or isolated settlements in Siberia, northern Russia, or Kazakhstan, depending on the cause of their arrest. These reasons varied, but Soviet authorities arrested and deported citizens due to their

[6] Adler addresses youth across *Survival on the Margins*, but it is not a defining feature of her monograph. As she explains, she seeks "to reflect the varied experiences of different groups within the larger community of exiled Polish Jews: older and younger refugees, men and women, [etc…]." [p.8]. Only a handful of books in English centre children's experiences of deportation to the Soviet Union including Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzinska-Gross, *War Through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939-1941*, Dorit Bader Whiteman, *Escape via Siberia: A Jewish Child's Odyssey of Survival*, and Henryk Grynberg's collection *Children of Zion*. Adler penned a chapter, "Children in Exile: Wartime Journeys of Polish Jewish Youth," in Friedla and Nesselrodt, *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union*, while Katharina Friedla wrote an article for the *Journal of Modern European History* in 2021. None of these works on children and youth focus exclusively on Central Asia.
[7] See Clifford, *Survivors*, 7-8, 270n9.
[8] Dwork, "Refugee Jews and the Holocaust," 281.
[9] Several authors in fact note the lack of scholarly research on specific topics relating to life in exile. In *In the East*, Dekel addresses the lack of scholarly research surrounding the "post-amnesty Polish refugee experience." Dekel, *In the East*, 117. Edele, Fitzpatrick and Grossmann declare that there has yet to be a study on the relationships between refugees and Soviet citizens. Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 2.

employment, their political affiliations, their social status, and a slew of other motives, such as being classified as a capitalist or an enemy of the people.[10] Deportees were forced to remain in these locales until the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Subsequently, a general amnesty referred to as the Sikorski-Maisky agreement was signed between the Soviet and Polish governments, which liberated detained Polish citizens.[11]

Poles who had been deported were to be released from their labour camps and were allowed to relocate within the Soviet Union.[12] Many other Polish Jews, who had avoided Soviet deportations, also travelled east following the advance of the Germany army, and similarly found refuge from the Nazi threat deep in Soviet territory. Soviet Central Asian Republics became a common destination for many Polish Jews.[13] Following the German attack, displaced Polish Jewish youth heading towards Central Asia found themselves integrated into a vast network of displacement, as the Soviet evacuation led to the movement of "at least 10 million Soviet citizens [...] from 'European' into 'Asian' areas of the USSR."[14] At the same time, troops were headed towards the front, which led to terrible overcrowding of railway lines and roads, both of which overflowed with individuals fleeing in all directions.[15]

Given this context, the first chapter traces the trajectories of the nine Poland-born narrators, who entrusted their life stories to the Montreal Holocaust Museum between 1994 and 2016. Ilona

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[10] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 110. See also Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-1948* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), 13-14; Edele, Fitzpatrick and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 2-4; and Bernard Weinryb, "Polish Jews Under Soviet Rule," in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, ed. Peter Meyer et al (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 348-349. For more information on deportation, categorization, and transports, see Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 15-17.

[11] Four major points were ratified in the Sikorski-Maisky Agreement: the invalidation of Soviet-German treaties with regards to Polish territory, the re-establishment of Soviet-Polish diplomatic relations, the creation of a Polish Army, and the promise to fight against Nazi Germany together. Tomasz Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR, 1939-1989* (London: Gryf Publications, 1990), 72-73. It should also be noted that the term "amnesty" was heavily debated, especially amongst the Polish faction, where most officials were against its use, which brought forward its historical usage in Tsarist Russia against Poles and the question of the "guilt" of the deported Poles. Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 76-77. Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 31.

[12] John Goldlust, "A Different Silence: The Survival of More Than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union During World War II as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia," *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 21, no. 1 (November 2012): 30.

[13] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 156, 152, and Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 30.

[14] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 34.

[15] *Ibid*., 34.

was born in Miedzeszyn in 1930 and lived with her parents in the Uzbek SSR until 1945. Judith was born in 1930 in Jarosław and, following a year and a half of exile in Siberia, moved to the Uzbek SSR with her parents and grandmother before boarding a transport to Tehran, likely in 1942. Mark, also born in Jarosław in 1933, relocated to the Uzbek and Kazakh SSRs with extended family after their release from eighteen months of forced labour in the Ural region; they would stay in Central Asia until June 1946. Henry, born in 1933 in Sławatycze, was released alongside his parents and extended family from a labour camp in Tomsk before settling in the Kazakh SSR until 1946. David, born in 1924 in Równe, fled home alone in 1941, and found his way to the Uzbek SSR where he remained until the end of the war. Henia, born in Tomaszów Mazowiecki in 1924, was deported to the Tajik SSR with her father after several months in Siberia, and remained in its capital until the end of the war. Rywka, born in Lublin in 1924, was freed from a labour camp in Sukhoy Log in 1941 and headed first to the Uzbek SSR, before relocating to the Kazakh SSR where she remained until 1945 with her brother. Morris, the eldest of the narrators, was born in Warsaw in 1922, and was liberated from a labour camp in Arkhangels, after which he headed for Tashkent and the Kyrgyz SSR. He would stay there until the end of the war with his brother. Their age rendered children and adolescents particularly vulnerable to famine and illness during and after these journeys. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the psychological impact of such forced displacement.

Their youth also allowed them to develop deep and meaningful connections with local residents of the region. Indeed, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, these children and youth often connected with local populations in a manner different from adult refugees, sometimes forging close bonds and friendships, and displaying a sense of solidarity with local residents. Age played a significant role in the webs of relationships developed and maintained while in exile, and these relationships were crucial to how youth handled the pressures of displacement discussed in the

previous chapter. This argument builds on David Nasaw's contention that children at the turn of the century "were able to carve out social spaces of their own," creating a world "in the midst of but distinct from the adult worlds around them."[16] In a similar way, the narrators in my study discuss how they forged relationships anchored in their new environments.[17] While tensions with locals existed, and many Poles looked on Central Asians with distrust, I document areas of shared experience and positive inter-group connection. These include the ways in which Polish Jews and Central Asians suffered similarly under the Soviet regime, and the importance of food as a domain of acculturation, mutual respect, and establishing positive social dynamics. I also explore the influences that may shape the gaze that these now-adult survivors cast on their memories of locals, as well as how how these memories shed light on young people's ways of knowing during transformative periods.

The third and final chapter turns to the presence – and absence – of family members during the narrators' exiles, directing attention to the impact of youth's ages on family dynamics, and highlighting the unique experiences of children and adolescents. For the youngest children in this study, who were displaced with at least one parent, the proximity of family was crucial to their physical survival. Parents eased the struggles of exile by providing food, material aid, and emotional support. Adolescents, who were more often separated from their parents during their time in Central Asia, had to provide for themselves and handle exile's risks on their own. The physical absence of their parents in this period – often deported to their deaths in faraway places – led to meaningful interruptions in their narratives that testify to the weight of the loss of parents as lived both during and in the aftermath of the war.

[16] David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and At Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), *vii-viii*.
[17] Thank you to Barbara Lorenzkowksi for drawing attention to this consideration.

The objective of this thesis is to highlight the individual experiences of nine Polish-Jewish narrators in order to explore the importance of age not only in the physical aspects of survival, but also in its associated emotional aspects and impacts. The result is a collective and polyphonic story, which aims to "grasp the complexity of the process and approach an understanding of what happened to the victims."[18] I forefront childrens' and adolescents' experiences in their own words, as their adult selves have framed them, to express their own sense of what it meant to be a Polish Jewish youth displaced in Central Asia.

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The stories of displaced Polish Jews have been mostly absent from national historiographies about the Second World War. Yet of the approximately 300,000 Polish Jews who survived the war, close to 80 percent had been deported to or exiled in the vast territories of the Soviet Union, including Soviet Central Asia.[19] Polish historiography about the war more traditionally presents Soviet deportations as a symbol of exclusively *Catholic* Polish suffering

[18] Donald Niewyk, ed. *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1. Cited in Tony Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 287-288. See also Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 25 and Dekel, *In the East*, epilogue, notably pp. 358-359.

[19] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 14. Clifford, *Survivors*, 22. Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 8-9. – Estimates regarding the demographics of survival of Polish Jews in exile in the Soviet Union have varied based on *whose* numbers were observed and underwent revision once more upon the opening of various archives in the 1990s. Numbers came from different sources: the Polish government, Jewish organisations, as well as the Soviet government, which became accessible only as of the early 1990s. The numbers varied immensely between these groups, for many factors. For political reasons, the Polish government benefited from augmenting the number of deportees, whereas the Soviet government preferred lowering these numbers. Jews were often *not* considered "Polish citizens" because they were not considered "ethnic" Poles, and, therefore, were often excluded from Soviet numbers regarding the deportation of Polish citizens. See Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 25-27; Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 14-15; Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik, "Saved by Stalin? Trajectories and Numbers of Polish Jews in the Soviet Second World War," in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 27-28, 110-111; and Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile & Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2002), 9-11.

In 2017, Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann argued that figures of Polish Jewish survival in the Soviet Union ranged from 146,100 to 384,600 individuals. This number was estimated using data on deportation, Red Army drafts, the number of volunteers for relocation and Jewish Polish citizens who fled east after 1941. According to the authors, historians have recently been using a range between 200,000 to 230,000 exiled Polish Jews. See Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 14-15. Another monograph published in 2021 argues that an exact number of Polish Jewish survivors in the Soviet Union will never be attainable, while another estimates the number of Polish Jews who survived in the Soviet Union to be between 350,000 and 425,000. See Friedla and Nesselrodt, eds., *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union*, *xxvii*, 214. In 2022, Albert Kaganovitch placed the number of exiled Polish Jews in the Soviet Union in 1942 at 282,000. See Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 202.

and part of a "centuries-old conflict [...with] its eastern neighor," in which Jews were either absent or complicit.[20] These stories are similarly absent from Soviet historiography, which frames wartime displacement as an exclusively Soviet experience, rather than a "transnational Eurasian" event, and which depicts the war as *the* "Great Patriotic" event, despite the traumatic victimisation of its population and refugees.[21]

The stories amplified in this text are thus particularly significant, as the history of Polish Jews deported to the Soviet Union have, since the end of the war, "gradually receded further into the background and, therefore, much of the complexity and detail surrounding these experiences is no longer widely known or coherently understood."[22] The silences surrounding stories of deportation stem from profound and deeply imbricated social, political, and historiographical concerns in diverse national contexts: guilt, shame, political repression, linguistic ability, the desire to move on, limited archival access, and memorial hierarchies. Until the past few decades, these concerns made sharing stories deportation particularly dificult, especially for those who were children during the war, as I will explore below.

Until the late 1970s, there was originally little scholarly interest in the Soviet deportation of Polish Jews, and the handful of articles on the topic focused mostly on the experiences of Jews in Soviet-occupied Poland before 1941.[23] More comprehensive monographs and detailed chapters on Soviet deportations began to emerge in the 1990s.[24] Yet, despite the opening of Soviet archives and the publication of these works, a general scholarly silence surrounding stories of Polish Jewish survivors of deportation to the Soviet Union persisted. Scholars Mark Edele, Sheila

[20] Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 13. See also Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, chapter 6, particularly pp. 204-205.
[21] Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 9-12.
[22] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 15.
[23] *Ibid*., 51n9
[24] See Tomasz Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR, 1939-1989*; Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-1946*; Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-1948*; Yosef Litvak "Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939-1946."

Fitzpatrick, John Goldlust, and Atina Grossmann clearly state the issue: no one wanted to be "in charge" of these complex histories. Scholars typically focused on discrete domains, such as the Soviet Union or Poland, or were historians of wartime migration, or were Holocaust scholars who focused on individual countries or concentration camp experiences. Yet these stories were multinational, multilingual, and entangled within difficult bodies of historiography.[25] Writing in 2017, these authors note that the study of experiences of exile had yet to be integrated into broader histories of the Second World War.[26]

According to Goldlust, memories of the Holocaust are enveloped in several layers of silence, the first of which is constituted by "feelings of grief, loss and guilt."[27] In the immediate postwar context, most survivors were unable to prioritise sharing their wartime experiences, as they were confronted with more pressing issues such as finding housing and employment, returning to school, migrating to new countries, learning new skills, looking for their family members, and raising children. Immediately after the war, returning Polish Jews were further faced with a resurgence of antisemitism, and pogroms led many to leave for Displaced Persons camps in Germany, Italy, or Austria.[28] Survivors who relocated to new countries also faced the challenge of translating into new languages their wartime experiences, which contained complicated details and trajectories.[29]

[25] Edele, Fitzpatrick, Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 1-2, 8. These arguments are corroborated by Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt in their 2021 volume on the topic, where they explain the struggles of using primary sources which are both multilingual and physically spread across the world. The discipline of Holocaust studies, they argue, had a smaller scope before the 1990s, making the development of a clear approach to study deportation on such a scale and to integrate it into the discipline difficult. Friedla and Nesselrodt, *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union*, *xix-xxii*.
[26] Edele, Fitzpatrick, Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 8.
[27] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 47.
[28] *Ibid*., 47, and Yad Vashem, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland After Liberation," accessed 26 July 2024, https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/anti-jewish-violence-in-poland-after-liberation.html. And United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,"Displaced Persons," Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed 26 July 2024, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons.
[29] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 47.

The end of the war did not lead to a return to normal or a "sense of closure" for survivors. For those who survived the war as children or youth, argues Rebecca Clifford, "the true moment of disorientation and shock was not the period of the war, but the months and years immediately afterwards."[30] Children and youth dealt with feelings of loss and grief in ways different from the adults around them: "[w]hat children did do was to construct their own chronologies of the war through key events; the moment when *their* war became real. When exactly their secure world collapsed became a defining moment, dividing the war from a previous 'golden age'."[31] At the same time, their experiences were silenced. In the aftermath of the war, due to a prevailing belief that children would more easily forget and move on from their wartime experiences, adult survivors were often unwilling to see them as equal survivors, and, thus, excluded them from this developing identity category.[32] Some child survivors also asserted that their parents, and not themselves, were "the 'real survivors'."[33] This assumption that younger children would simply forget what happened to them was accepted until the 1980s and 1990s.[34] Thus, both wartime losses *and* the belief that children would *forget* these losses, formed a dual layer of silence around the experiences of the youngest refugees.

Goldlust calls the second layer of silence surrounding memories of deportation a "politically motivated silence": survivors of deportation were left to deal with complicated emotions regarding the Soviet Union.[35] The country that had saved them – inadvertently and haphazardly – from an almost certain death under Nazi occupation had nonetheless also

[30] Clifford, *Survivors*, 16.
[31] Nicholas Stargardt, "Moments of Rupture: The Subjectivity of Children in the Second World War," in *Children and War: Past and Present*, ed. Helga Embacher, Grazia Prontera, Albert Lichtblau, Johannes-Dieter Steinert, Wolfgang Aschauer, Darek Galasinski, and John Buckley (Solihull: Helion & Company Ltd, 2013), 46-47.
[32] Clifford, *Survivors*, 9-10.
[33] Katharina Friedla, "'From Nazi Inferno to Soviet Hell': Polish-Jewish Children and Youth and their Trajectories of Survival During and After World War II," *Journal of Modern European History* 19, no. 3 Special Issue: 1919, 1945 and 1989: Childhood in Times of Political Transformation, Part II (2021): 289.
[34] Clifford, *Survivors*, 160.
[35] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 47.

brutalised them and left them with little agency to change their situations. Thus, "a certain level of ambivalence was inevitable."[36] The context of the Cold War made it increasingly challenging to address the Soviet Union both in Eastern Europe, where the imposition of Communist rule had rendered criticism of the Soviet Union and its wartime policies difficult, and in America, where any *praise* of the Soviet Union for assistance in survival was deemed suspect.[37] The context of the Cold War made access to Soviet archives all but impossible until the 1990s, further obscuring the stories of deportees.[38]

Goldlust's third silence, which he calls a "relative silence," is connected to this political context and to the idea of a "hierarchy of victimhood" prevalent among survivors in DP camps after the war.[39] As Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky note, a hierarchy "prevailed in survivors' thinking," placing those who survived concentration camps at the very top of the hierarchy, and those who survived in the Soviet Union at the opposite end.[40] The silences surrounding stories of deportation were, they suggest, implicated in "processes of identity formation and commemoration": to have survived "in the Soviet Union did not lend itself to ritualization to the extent that other Holocaust experiences did."[41] Camp leadership was more focused on remembering specific anniversaries, like those of ghetto uprisings, for example. This kind of commemorative narrative aimed to unify Jews, creating an "increasingly Zionist" sense

[36] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 47-48. While some survivors of deportation and exile in the Soviet Union *did* share their stories immediately after the war, either in the form of testimonies, poetry, or memoirs, most of these were pushed aside in Holocaust historiography. See also Markus Nesselrodt, "'I bled like you, brother, although I was a thousand miles away': Postwar Yiddish Sources on the Experience of Polish Jews in Soviet Exile During World War II," *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2016): 47-48.
[37] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 48. See also Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 373, 377, 386-387.
[38] The Communist government in Poland was known to silence scholars who wished to study the Soviet deportation of Poles. The lack of access to archives inevitably limited historiography on the topic. See Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, *xi-xiii*. Mikhal Dekel similarly mentions the suppression of evidence by Soviet authorities, and the challenges of accessing archives in former Soviet regions. Dekel, *In the East*, 358.
[39] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 48 and Jockusch and Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," 383-384.
[40] Jockusch and Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," 383.
[41] *Ibid*., 383-384.

of Jewish national identity.[42] On the other hand, the experiences of deportees in the Soviet Union had neither common places nor shared dates to unify their wartime displacement in a single narrative. "In the perception of the "survivors," the story of the "refugees" was one of survival through hardships that did not seem directly related to the Holocaust."[43]

This "hierarchy of suffering" meant that stories of survival in the Soviet Union fell "outside the memory and memorialization work", not only of individuals, but also countries.[44] While Jews understood that they were, collectively, the victims of Nazi Germany, survivors exiled in the Soviet Union began to perceive themselves as *not* the "real Jewish victims."[45] Their narratives, Goldlust explains, "remain[ed] a private and family affair."[46] In the Soviet Union, the silence surrounding these stories has been attributed to discrimination against Jews under Soviet rule in the immediate after-war period, which had significant repercussions on the *public* Jewish sphere: it "moved the discussion of Jewish suffering during World War II into the private venues of homes and whispered conversations."[47] While some survivors of deportation and exile publicly shared their stories in the immediate aftermath of the war, most did not.[48] When they returned to Poland after repatriation, they were faced with the terrible realisation that the majority, if not all, of their loved ones had been murdered at the hands of the Nazis. These returning refugees felt as if their struggles had been minor in comparison to those who had spent their war years in Poland

[42] Jockusch and Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," 384-385 and Edele, Fitzpatrick, Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 12.
[43] Jockusch and Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," 384.
[44] *Ibid*., 385. And Dekel, *In the East*, 10.
[45] John Goldlust, "Neither "Victims" nor "Survivors": Polish Jews Reflect on Their Wartime Experiences in the Soviet Union During the Second World War," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, ed. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 216-217.
[46] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 49.
[47] Anna Shternshis, Ze'ev Levin, and David Shneer, "Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II: German Occupation, Soviet Evacuation, and the Imagined Relationship Between These Two Experiences," *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2016): 2.
[48] See Nesselrodt, "'I bled like you, brother'," 50. See also Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 48-49; Jockusch and Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," 385; Aleida Assmann, "The Holocaust – a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community," in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, edited by Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97-100.

and became, as Dekel remarks, "the lucky ones" in retrospect.[49] In a way, the ritualization of commemoration made its way into survivors' own understanding of their survival in exile.

Children usually survived in one of four ways: "in hiding, in flight to a neutral country or Allied territory, in ghettos and transit camps, and in concentration camps."[50] Young children who survived the war were also frequently told they were "lucky" to have survived: children, who were one of the primary targets of directed mass killings by the Nazis, had, as Clifford explains, "the slimmest chance of survival of any age group [...] (save the very elderly)."[51] For the young survivors who found themselves displaced to the Soviet Union, the denomination of "lucky" was placed on them in two ways: they were "lucky" both to have been outside of the geographical range of concentration camps and to have survived *as* children, who, at the time, were believed to suffer no long-term consequences from the war: "they should consider themselves lucky to be alive, lucky to be young enough and resilient enough to be able to shed the weight of unbearable memories, lucky to be the objects of reconstruction efforts, rather than the subjects [...]."[52]

The exclusion of Polish Jewish deportation and exile to the Soviet Union from traditional Holocaust historiographies reverberates in the survival statistics of Jewish youth. Of the 1.5 million European Jewish children alive in 1939, only 150,000 survived.[53] Yet this statistic fails to include the 30,000 Jewish children who returned from the Soviet Union, an exclusion which Clifford argues most historians have failed to revise to this day.[54] Returning children were similarly excluded from the "survivor" group identity being shaped in DP camps, then referred to as the *Sh'erit Ha Pletah*, or "surviving remnant," and their experiences were put aside in the

[49] Nesselrodt, "'I bled like you, brother'," 50. Dekel, *In the East*, 358.
[50] Clifford, *Survivors*, 17-18.
[51] *Ibid*., 3.
[52] *Ibid*., 2-3, 9 and chapter 7, "Trauma."
[53] *Ibid*., 5-6, 3. This number was established by the Joint Distribution Committee in the aftermath of the war.
[54] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

process: to "tell a child that she was lucky to have survived, that she should put the past behind her and focus on the future," explains Clifford, "was to dismiss her efforts to make sense of her own history."[55] While in the 1980s child survivors began to challenge earlier silences and the belief that they had been "lucky" to survive, by then, this belief had already done its damage, serving to dismiss their experiences for decades.[56]

As Clifford asks, "which children were visible to aid organizations [...]? Which children counted as Jewish? Which children counted as survivors?"[57] Indeed, just who counted as a child? Many former deportees who were adolescents during the war did not "count" as children in the eyes of many aid organisations, who generally established the cut-off age at seventeen or eighteen years old at the time of their postwar counting. "What is thus masked by these post-war estimates, and further obscured by the aid agencies' use of images of babies, toddlers and young children in their fundraising literature," explains Clifford, "is the fact that the majority of child survivors were adolescents" during the war.[58]

For the purposes of this project, I consider any individual nineteen or younger at the outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet conflict in 1941 to be a youth. It must be said that the boundaries of childhood have historically been quite fluid, both the lived experiences of childhood and childhood as a historical and socio-cultural category of analysis.[59] Whereas today individuals eighteen and under are protected as "children" under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, teenagers in the 1940s were not *necessarily* considered children. Polish Jewish adolescents may have attended school or received religious education, but they were often

[55] Clifford, *Survivors*, 2-3, 201.
[56] *Ibid.*, 196-197.
[57] *Ibid.*, 6.
[58] *Ibid.*, 6.
[59] Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 114-124. See also Clifford, *Survivors*, 6-7. Thank you also to Barbara Lorenzkowksi for drawing attention to this consideration.

expected to begin contributing to the family and to take on responsibilities determined by their gender, environment, social class, and their family's economic status.[60] If the term "adolescence" was coined in the early twentieth century by an American psychologist[61], it bears mentioning that these considerations are culturally specific. Childhood, as explains James Marten, "is a social *construction*, shaped by local conditions, beliefs, and needs, as well as time. [...] The age at which a child becomes a youth and a youth becomes an adult has varied by class, religion, ethnicity, place, and individual families' economic needs."[62] Experiences of youth, in other words, were heterogenous and cannot be captured by rigid age categories.

Young people experienced the war in different manners, yet many were forced to mature quickly and shoulder heavy responsibilities. At the same time, it has been argued that historians who study childhood and war have struggled to move beyond the perception of children as victims with little agency, says Clifford.[63] While vulnerable, as she explains, children were also "actors and agents in their own right in the history of war. [...] if we see them exclusively as victims, we miss the fact that they could also be creative evaders, negotiators, manipulators, and even perpetrators of retributive violence."[64] The trope of childhood innocence is indeed similarly "historically located," as explains Robin Bernstein: this perception has been "raced white" for

[60] See, for example, Marek, who began working in a tailor's office after his *bar mitzvah*, and whose older sister also held responsibilities at home. This job would contribute to his survival – after fleeing to the Soviet side of Poland, he registered for work as a tailor and was sent to Balkhash, Kazakhstan at around nineteen years old. Marek, interview by Betsy Pomerantz and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 1 April 2016, Montreal, QC, 00:47:43, 00:24:25.
[61] Luke I. Leppanen, "The Changing Perspective on Adolescence," *Conspectus Borealis* 6, no. 1 (2020): 1.
[62] James Marten, *The History of Childhood: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.
[63] See Clifford, *Survivors*, 7-8, 270n9. In terms of recent examples, she names Daniella Doron's *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France*, Simone Gigliotti and Monica Tempian, eds., *The Young Victims of the Nazi Regime*, Tara Zahra's *The Lost Children*, where the focus is adults' concerns for children rather than the children themselves.
[64] Clifford, *Survivors*, 7.

centuries, and "has been used simultaneously to protect some children while justifying the denial of rights to [e.g. non-White] others."[65]

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The silences and "hierarchy of victimhood" linked to histories of deportation and survival in exile have impacted the demographic reach of Holocaust oral history archives. Individuals who survived the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, "were they to be attributed, or feel themselves as 'deserving' of, 'full' survivor status, [...] *should* constitute the majority of testimonies," argues Goldlust. Yet, as evidence proves, they do not.[66] In the archives of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, a word search of all Soviet Central Asian Republics yielded thirty-five results out of more than six hundred interviews, dropping to twenty-nine when looking specifically at Jewish survivors from Poland.

While I have not studied the complete demographics of this archive, considering that statistics of Polish Jewish survival indicate that up to eighty percent of Polish Jews survived through deportation, these stories *should* constitute a much larger percentage of the total archive, rather than the current six percent.[67] Of course, many reasons could explain this discrepancy – perhaps Polish Jewish survivors of deportation relocated elsewhere than Montreal, or they simply did not want to publicly share their life story for other reasons. Still, as Clifford notes, "where an individual's story resists attempts to conform to the dominant model, that person will often insist

[65] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 4. Cited in the introduction of Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander and Andrew Paul Burtch, eds, *Small Stories of War: Children, Youth, and Conflict in Canada and Beyond* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 16.

[66] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 49. My emphasis. In his analysis of oral history collections in Australia, narratives from former Polish exiles account for less than 15 percent of all interviews by Polish survivors.

[67] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 14. Their stories are also absent from the Montreal Holocaust Museum permanent exhibition. It bears mentioning that I was given access to the Museum's archives in the winter of 2023 through the Visual History Archive portal, which I was told contained their entire collection. However, according to the 2022 Annual Report, the collection now holds at least 871 interviews. A conversation with the oral history coordinator also clarified that new testimonies of survivors of deportation to the Soviet Union were recorded in the spring and summer 2024. These numbers are thus indicative of a general understanding of the database demographics, although far from 100% accurate. See "Annual Report 2021-2022," Montreal Holocaust Museum, accessed 1 August 2024, https://museeholocauste.ca/app/uploads/2022/11/annual-report-2022.pdf, 10.

that her story is not worth telling or hearing, because it is not what she assumes the interviewer wants to hear."[68]

Historical scholarship on the experiences of children, in turn, has mostly focused on what Clifford calls "constructions of childhood," meaning the ways in which adults observe and construct an idea of childhood.[69] Inevitably, the testimonies of Polish Jewish adults recounting their youth in exile will be "subject to mediation, translation, and interpretation."[70] Beyond the fact that stories are usually not recorded in survivors' maternal languages, "post-war and contemporary memory culture" can also have an influence on what is shared by narrators.[71] Yet, as Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander, and Andrew Burtch explain, it remains possible to "unearth young people's experiences of war as they were entangled with cultural narratives."[72] This is one of my goals.

In addition, *how* these survivors share and narrate their life stories is just as important as what they contain. I observed differences across decades of interviewing that display the importance of interviewer-narrator dynamics and institutional aims in the co-creation of interviews. In order to consider the *manner* in which narrators share their stories, and the ways in which these are imbricated into broader and collective memory processes, a brief look at the Montreal Holocaust Museum oral history collection is in order.

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[68] Clifford, *Survivors*, 244. While the Montreal Holocaust Museum has been collecting stories since 1994, only two of the nine testimonies used in this paper were collected that first year, while five were recorded after 2010. The implications of this are clear: the understanding of *whose* stories are worth recording and who gets to be considered a Holocaust survivor is changing, and the silences surrounding narratives of exile in the Soviet Union are slowly being filled. While many personal considerations may also come into play with regards to why, or when, someone may share their story, this is an important one.
[69] Clifford, *Survivors*, 7. See also Lorenzkowski, Alexander and Burtch, eds, *Small Stories of War*, 7-8.
[70] Lorenzkowski, Alexander and Burtch, eds, *Small Stories of War*, 8.
[71] Anna Wylegała, "Child Migrants and Deportees from Poland and Ukraine after the Second World War: Experience and Memory," *European Review of History* 22, no. 2 (2015): 303. See also Clifford, *Survivors*, 234.
[72] Lorenzkowski, Alexander and Burtch, eds, *Small Stories of War*, 8.

The collection of oral histories began in 1994 at the Montreal Holocaust Museum (MHM) through a project named "Witness to History." By 2017, the museum's oral history collection held over 800 testimonies, and new testimonies continue to be recorded with survivors.[73] All interviewers are volunteers trained by the MHM and are given guidelines and lists of potential questions to follow, and interviewees are generally asked to do a pre-interview and answer a pre-interview questionnaire. The methodology has stayed fairly consistent since the onset of the project, although a new set of questions and training were developed in 2011, and the MHM employs a life history format that touches on all periods of survivors' life.[74]

The 1994 pre-interview questionnaire (which was used as the list of interview questions until 2011)[75] featured prewar questions relating to schooling, languages spoken at home, participation in youth groups (political or religious), and parents' and siblings' backgrounds. The period of the war included various subsections, like ghettos, camps, forced labour, death marches, hiding, and liberation, while the postwar period looked at DP camps, family reunions, migration, and coming to Canada.[76] I observed little differences between these early questionnaires and those from the 2010s, although some of the latter ones included extra documents. Mark's file, for example, contained a "Refugee" document that asked about fleeing, conditions, assistance, personal documents, destinations, sponsors, and whether or not they were interned. Paula's pre-

[73] Montreal Holocaust Museum, "A Year of New Beginnings: Annual Report 2016-2017," accessed 12 March 2024, 10, https://mhmc.ca/app/uploads/2017/12/2017rapport-annuel_eng-2.pdf.
[74] "Montreal Holocaust Museum," Partners, Visual History Archive, accessed 12 March 2024, https://vha.usc.edu/partners/mhm.
[75] "Montreal Holocaust Museum," Visual History Archive.
[76] Many questions were repeated across interviews: how religious was your family? Did you celebrate holidays? Were any family members part of political groups or affiliations? Did you ever experience antisemitism? Do you recall seeing "gypsies"? Do you recall Kristallnacht? Did you have access to newspapers or radio to learn about politics? Did you see the black market? Did you see soldiers? Did you know about what was happening to your family / to Jews in Poland? When/how did you hear the war was over?

interview questionnaire, dated from 2016, now included a subsection in the wartime period that had been absent from earlier iterations, titled "Inside the Soviet system."[77]

In this way, the MHM collection resembles those of other large institutional memory conservation projects developed since the 1990s, such as Steven Spielberg's Visual History Archive, also founded in 1994. As Rebecca Clifford explains, these interviews "typified the 'redemptive' or 'cathartic' approach to building an interview narrative," and "asked set questions that encouraged interviewees to give a linear account of their experiences," breaking the interview into three parts: the first 20 percent delt with the pre-war period, 60 percent on the war, and the final 20 percent on post-war experiences.[78]

Beyond the fact that the nine narrators of this study had similar trajectories as children and adolescents during the war, the common denominator between them is that they were all further displaced to Montreal in the years following the war, and that all participated in an oral history project at the Montreal Holocaust Museum. It bears mentioning that while their stories travel across many national and linguistic contexts, moving from Poland, further east to Russia and Central Asia, back to Europe, and eventually to Montreal, they were shared *in* a specific place, within a specific context, which has an impact on both *what* is shared and *how* it is shared.[79] In a chapter on Jews from Arab countries who settled in Montreal, authors Yolande Cohen, Martin Messika, and Sara Cohen Fournier claim that Montreal is an "ideal "neutral space" in which to analyze this group – a "third" place remote from the initial settings of both colonizer and

[77] Based on my research in survivors' interview files, including the following: David, "Witness-to-History." Morris, "Witness-to-History," September 18, 1996. Mark, "Witness to History. Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. Holocaust Survivors Video Documentation Project." Paula, "Witness to History. Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. Holocaust Survivors Video Documentation Project. Pre-Interview Questionnaire," July 25, 2016.
[78] Clifford, *Survivors*, 231.
[79] Thank you to Erica Lehrer for drawing attention to this consideration.

colonized."[80] Yet this ignores the very political nature of the place of the interview and of interviewing itself: the MHM, in this case, is anchored in a mostly anglophone, formally multi-cultural, settler North American point of view, in which particular definitions, preconceptions, and goals co-exist. At the same time, many of the narrators experienced very different post-war and commemorative contexts – in Poland, in DP camps, in Palestine, and in North America – which would come to influence what they would share *now*, decades later in Montreal.

Emily-Rose Baker and Isabel Sawkins suggest that various "cultures of remembrances" in Central and Eastern Europe have impacted the ways in which stories, and particularly Holocaust stories, have been told.[81] This is also true in North America. "Post-communist states performatively adopted the established Western memory canon while rejecting much of its focus on the uniqueness of Jewish suffering," transferring this focus on national majorities instead.[82] In Poland, for example, little discussion surrounding the Holocaust as a unique event distinct from the broader suffering of the country's brutal Nazi occupation existed in the aftermath of the war. It would not be until the 1980s that discussion of Poland's distinct Jewish wartime history began to emerge.[83] In the past decade, Christian Poles and Jews have also been placed "upon an equal level of victimization" under a right-wing government that pushed a specific "historical policy" aiming to reshape the conceptions of "Polish heroism and victimhood."[84] In North America, as

[80] Yolande Cohen, Martin Messika, Sara Cohen Fournier, "Memories of Departures: Stories of Jews from Muslim Lands in Montreal," in *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Violence*, ed. Steven High (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 313.
[81] Emily-Rose Baker and Isabel Sawkins, "Introduction to the Issue: Coloniality and Holocaust Memory in Central and Eastern Europe," *Journal of Culture and History* 29, no. 4 "Decolonial Cultures of Holocaust Memory" (2023): 496.
[82] Jelena Subotić, "Holocaust Memory and Political Legitimacy in Contemporary Europe," *Holocaust Studies* 29, no. 4 (2023): 502.
[83] Erica Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage tourism in Unquiet Places* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 5-6. The Soviet Union had a tendency to universalize the history of the victims of the war. See also Olga Baranova, "Politics of Memory of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. XXXIV, Vienna, 2015, https://files.iwm.at/jvfc/34_2_Baranova.pdf. And Tomasz Lysak, "'The Barn is Burning': Polish Popular Music and Memory of the Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century," *Holocaust Studies* 29, no. 4 (2023): 635.
[84] Lysak, "'The Barn is Burning'," 635. And Jörg Hackman, "Defending the "Good Name" of the Polish Nation: Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015-18," *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 4 Special issue on the Holocaust/Genocide Template in Eastern Europe (2018): 587.

Diane L. Wolf explains, the methods of collecting oral histories of Holocaust survivors ended up contributing "to the creation of a partial and simplistic Jewish post-memory and Jewish identity, reflecting more of a Hollywood ending than the complexities confronted by these survivors."[85] In other words, the history of the Holocaust does not exist as an "unchangeable constant."[86]

The commemoration practices connected with the "hierarchy of suffering" have, as Baker and Sawkins argue, "an enduring tendency toward 'universalizing' the legacy of the Holocaust."[87] In utilising a method like the one at the MHM or the VHA, however, survivor accounts have also "been distorted," contends Tony Kushner, "ironed out and rearranged so as to provide narrative cohesion."[88] This is particularly visible in the selection of questions asked by MHM interviewers at the end of each conversation – most notable in recent interviews – that ask for a message for future generations, or what survivors would say to Holocaust deniers.[89] These attempts at collective narrative cohesion in such projects aim to create a linear view which clearly establishes a redemptive arc: "from obliteration to regeneration, from destruction to redemption, and from destitution to success."[90] Yet this has a clear impact on the way Jewish identity itself is perpetrated in North America, suggests Wolf.[91]

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[85] Diane L. Wolf, "Holocaust Testimony: Producing Post-Memories, Producing Identities," in *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diasporas*, eds. Judith M. Gerson and Diane L. Wolf (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 155.
[86] Judith M. Gerson and Diane L. Wolf, eds., *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 28.
[87] Baker and Sawkins, "Coloniality and Holocaust Memory," 490.
[88] Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," 288.
[89] See the following interviews: Henia, interview by Shauna Wolchock and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*. 21 March 2013, Montreal, QC, Video, clip 15, 00:06:55. Ilona, interview by Yvonne Bensimon and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 16 October 2013, Montreal, QC, Video, clip 7, 00:02:25. Rywka, interview by Stephen Strauber and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 6 August 2014, Montreal, QC, Video, 01:00:12 and 01:03:05. Mark, interview by Lizy Mostowski and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 6 November 2013, Montreal, QC, Video, 01:27:45 and 01:28:52. Paula, interview by Betsy Pomerantz and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 30 August 2016, 01:17:26. Judith, interview by Alex Cherney and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*. 19 December 2001, Montreal, QC, Video, 01:10:19. These interviews range from 2001 to 2016, and absent are the three interviews done in the 1990s. See also chapter by Eliyana Adler in Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust*, "Crossing Over: Exploring the Borders of Holocaust Testimony."
[90] Wolf, "Holocaust Testimony," 171.
[91] *Ibid*., 155-156.

Despite the set questionnaires, I observed very different interview dynamics, which must be understood in the context of the time period during which these interviews were recorded. Interestingly, the interview process appeared more fluid earlier on; the narratives I listened to recorded between 1994 and 1996, especially those in 1994, were slightly less structured than later ones. Interviewers posed fewer questions as the interview went on, and generally let their narrator freely speak, formulating questions such as, "Tell us about …" rather than yes or no questions. These observations corroborate Clifford's argument that early child survivor interviews "were paradoxically both more and less free, more and less circumscribed by internal and external notions of what a child survivors' interview *should* be, than were interviews conducted later."[92] Mark and Henry's testimonies, both recorded in 1994, unfold in freeform, with the form itself being decided *by* their memories and narrative choices: what they choose, or not, to share, and how they do so.

Morris' narrative, recorded in 1996, features clearer questions from the Museum's guide, which fill the first minutes of the interview: his place of birth, the language spoken at home, his schooling, his parents' and siblings' names, etc. That being said, while the beginning of the interview is crafted in this way, the period of the war remains more fluid and, again, features significantly less questions. By 2001, with Judith's interview, tensions between the Museum's aims and survivors' personal goals in sharing their story were clearly noticeable within the first minutes of the interview:

> **Judith**: My grandmother, Franceska [...] lived with us all this time, and was with us all through the war. And if I may say now some words about how it all started, how the war started, so –
> **Interviewer**: Before we get to the war, I'd like to explore just a little more about your family, set up in Jarosław…first of all, did you have brothers or sisters?

[92] Clifford, *Survivors*, 217-218.

Judith: No, I was an only child.[93]

By the 2010s, the interview style had become more rigidly structured, with interviewers often interrupting narratives for clarifications related to the MHM's archival goals. Indeed, each interview is catalogued in a database which includes family details, including the parents' and siblings' full names. If one of the key elements of a successful and ethical interview is to be "attentive to and tolerant of silences, pauses, and the flow of emotions," some interviewers lack sensitivity in this regard, often interrupting narrators for clarifications.[94]

> **Interviewer**: So I'd like to go back and focus on your father a bit and your mother and what was life like, and see where that goes.
> **Paula**: So my, my mother's [interrupted]
> **Interviewer**: So j…your mother, let's give your mother's name [speaking over each other] and birth [unclear]
> **Paula**: [speaking over each other] Ok, so my mother's name was Bella, and she was named after my, after her grandmother, which was my great-grandmother, and how I know this is because she's buried in the Warsaw cemetery, and I have the picture of her grave. And [interrupted]
> **Interviewer**: And her maiden name?[95]

While institutional goals are clearly visible in such interruptions, which were much more frequent in interviews recorded in the 2010s, these are also absolutely dependent on the interviewer. Some, like Mark's interviewer, are particularly skilled at deep listening, avoiding interruptions, and allowing the narrator to speak freely all the while guiding them through subsequent follow-up questions that probe details and simultaneously guide the narrator throughout their life story.

The ritualization of public commemoration *and* the institutionalisation of the interview process simultaneously created conditions that had crucial consequences on all survivors, but particularly on younger ones. First, individuals interviewed this late in oral history projects generally *had* to be children during the war. Yet this interview process, which, it appears, has

[93] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stahlman,19 December 2001, 00:03:57.
[94] Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 42.
[95] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:20:41.

become more heavily structured since its inception, is often unadapted to their stories. As Clifford explains, many lacked the pre-war knowledge to establish a clear narrative of their young life, while others struggled with structuring their memories in a coherent story that fit the mould of what was expected of them. This led to frustrations and tensions, which I observed in several testimonies, as the "questionnaire-style" discouraged deep listening and encouraged both a standardisation and quantification of answers.[96]

Understanding these complexities surrounding the narratives used in this thesis, the following chapters aim to explore the experiences of Polish Jewish children and adolescents in exile in Central Asia, as well as the manners in which these are shared. The first chapter will address narrators' movements across territories, and examine the particular dangers children and youth were faced with in exile in Central Asia.

[96] Clifford, *Survivors*, 227, 231-233. And Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," 277-278.

CHAPTER 1. "EXILE FROM CHILDHOOD"[1]: JOURNEYS ACROSS CENTRAL ASIA

"[...] I was a child, and I really didn't know where I was and what was happening. [...] Eventually we came to a village in Uzbekistan."[2]

Human geographer Marcus Doel argues that displacement is not only a physical (or geographical) transposition, but also an emotional experience that happens within the displaced individual. He examines not only the "place of displacement," or the location where displacement *takes place*, but also the "displacement of place," or what he calls the *taken* place.[3] With regards to displaced children, Doel suggests that "what matters is perhaps not so much whether children are here or there, (*em*)placed or (*dis*)placed, but whether they are *in place* (fitting, settled, suited, reposed, etc.) or *out of place* (unfitting, unsettled, ill-suited, disturbed, etc.) […] and whether they are accounted for as integral and wholesome or as remainders and exceptions […]."[4] Displaced children can be "damaged by place," although Doel emphasises that displacement is more so about a missing place that cannot be returned to.[5] Displacement is, I would argue, *both* a longing for, or recollecting of, a known home or place of safety, a "right place" in other words, as well as the unsettling physical experience of the uncomfortable, forced, and sometimes violent inhabiting of unknown spaces, taking place conjointly in both the physical and sensory realms.

For the young refugees of this study, the generally chaotic movement towards Central Asia was only one stage of a years-long journey from Poland, across Soviet territory, back to Poland, and beyond. They experienced the 1941 amnesty in different ways, and all had different reasons for heading south. Despite their varying trajectories, Polish Jewish youth experienced similar

[1] Patricia Heberer uses the phrase "exile from childhood" to address the experiences of youth in ghettos and concentration camps, noting the loss of their homes and belongings. I argue this can be extended to deported and refugee Jewish youth as well. See Patricia Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust* (Lanham: AltaMira Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2011), 295.
[2] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:33:53.
[3] Marcus A. Doel, "Placed. Displaced," *Children's Geographies* 18, no. 5 (2020): 558.
[4] Doel, "Placed. Displaced," 560.
[5] *Ibid*., 560, 564.

challenges and were faced with similar dangers, both physical and psychological, which resulted from such forced displacements.

This chapter aims to explore the varying ways in which children and adolescents dealt with, and manoeuvred, the risks specific to their age group as they made their way to Central Asia in the early 1940s, and to uncover the meaning of these journeys and of forced displacement for Polish Jewish youth. I will begin by describing the various motives for relocation to and the trajectories within Central Asia of each of the narrators of this study, then turn to an analysis of Polish Jewish youth's experiences of displacement on two levels. First, I will explore three specific risks of displacement that are most likely to plague children and adolescents: lack of food and its long-term impact, vulnerability to illness, and interrupted education. These will be integrated into broader observations regarding the various movements, both coerced and self-motivated, which youth enacted in the region. Secondly, I seek to broaden the idea of displacement, as conceptualised by Doel, by analyzing psychological, internal, and felt experiences of displacement.

I. Arriving in Central Asia

"By being together, we helped each other, you know."[6]

Following the July 1941 amnesty between the Soviet and Polish governments, heading towards Central Asia was as much an individual choice by survivors as it was a political repercussion of Soviet decision-making. As most refugees had spent the majority of the past years in labour camps in Arctic conditions, heading south was a natural consequence of these experiences. The significantly milder climate in Soviet Central Asian Republics was attractive to

[6] Mark, interview by Lizy Mostowski and Barry Stahlman (videographer), Montreal Holocaust Museum, 24 October 2013, 00:32:46.

refugees who did not necessarily possess warm clothing, and there were rumours of an abundance of food, potential health benefits, and work opportunities in newly relocated Soviet industries, along with better protection against potential German assaults.[7]

It should be said that while all Polish citizens who had been amnestied were physically exhausted by labour camps and struggled to adjust to the Soviet system, Polish Jews *specifically* found themselves at the very bottom of a refugee hierarchy. Catholic Poles enacted their own hierarchy of the deported, where they were at the very top, followed by Polish Byelorussians, with Polish Ukrainians and Polish Jews at the bottom. Jews were, however, disproportionately accounted for amongst all Poles, totalling somewhere around 20 to 30 percent of the deported of Polish origins.[8] Some also describe conflict amongst Polish Jews themselves, depending on their region of origin or their preference for speaking Polish or Yiddish, while also observing that as a group, they were looked down upon by Russian, Lithuanian, and Bessarabian Jews.[9]

After the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941, the nine narrators of this study made their way to Central Asia for a variety of reasons. In this decision-making process, children and adolescents were both subject and object: they were subjected to their parents' wishes, fears, and concerns, but also shaped family decisions. The roles they played in such displacements and the reasons for these movements will be examined below.

Paula and her mother, Bella, were swayed by reports regarding the Central Asian climate. "There were two places where we could go to," Paula explains. "It was either Uzbekistan, or Kazakhstan, I think it was. And so this whole group from our camp decided that we were going

[7] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 30; Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik, "Saved by Stalin? Trajectories and Numbers of Polish Jews in the Soviet Second World War," in *Shelter from the Holocaust*, ed. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 114; and Henryk Grynberg, *Children of Zion* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 124-125.
[8] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 212; Dekel, *In the East*, 125, 179; Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 43; Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 159; and Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 208.
[9] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 32.

to go to Uzbekistan. Well, it sounded very good, it's Asia, and it's warm, and if it's warm, things are growing, and so we won't be suffering from the cold anymore, and we won't be suffering from hunger anymore."[10] After more than a year in Siberia, where she described the air as looking "frozen" and where her mother had to work double shifts to feed them, the promises of this land appeared wonderful. The move towards Central Asia was not the five-year old's first journey: she and her mother had slipped from German-occupied Warsaw to Soviet-occupied Baranavichy in the winter of 1939-1940. The two were quickly uncovered and deported to a labour camp in Siberia. She recalls the amnesty in the words a young child would understand: "one day an order came that people like us should be let out. And that we don't have to stay."[11]

Mark, around seven years old at the time, does not explicitly use the word "amnesty" in his narrative, but simply declares that they heard they were free and that their families could choose where to live. He, his parents, and his brother had fled German-occupied Jarosław along with a few other families towards Lwów [Lviv] and Tarnopol [Ternopil], from which Soviet soldiers deported them to the Ural region. While they tried to remain in Asbest after the amnesty, they eventually left towards Kattakurgan in the Uzbek SSR to find work, along with his cousins, aunt, and uncle.[12]

For many Polish Jews, the proximity of Central Asia to Iran, India, and Palestine was a motivating factor, as many hoped to break out of the Soviet Union to head towards these areas.[13] The 1923 novel *Tashkent, City of Bread* by Alexandr Neverov also frequently features in

[10] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:33:53.
[11] *Ibid*., 00:32:57
[12] Mark, interview by Lizy Mostowski and Barry Stahlman (videographer), Montreal Holocaust Museum, 3 October 2013, 01:27:10.
[13] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 30-31. The Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an American Jewish relief organisation, had established wartime headquarters in Tehran and worked alongside a number of Jewish organisations in the area. There were also a few Jewish refugees from Europe in the Iranian capital, which became, according to Atina Grossmann, "the center of a major Jewish relief effort." British forces also relocated thousands of Polish refugees towards their colonial possessions, including in India. See Atina Grossmann, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India: Lost Memories of Displacment, Trauma, and Rescue," in *Shelter from the Holocaust*, ed. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 188-189, 192, 194, 195.

secondary literature as inspiration for heading towards the region. In this book, which was widely translated, including into Yiddish and Polish, the protagonist makes his way to the capital of Uzbekistan in a hopeful story to find grain seeds for his family.[14] This novel was key in Ilona's family's wartime relocations. The amnesty itself does not figure in her testimony, as she and her parents had avoided deportation to labour camps in 1940. Her father had ended up in Vilna [Vilnius] after the outbreak of the war, and had succeeded in bringing his family over, where they remained until the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941. Ilona explains that they did not require permissions to travel, and the family fled further east at her request, reflecting children's agency and active participation in stories of survival.[15]

> **Ilona**: Ils étaient pas sûrs si ils veulent ou non partir –
> **Interviewer**: Mais ils comprenaient que c'était probablement dangereux de rester, non?
> **Ilona**: Finalement c'est moi qui a commencé à pleurer, en disant "Mais les Allemands sont si terribles, moi je veux pas rester avec les Allemands." Parce qu'on avait les nouvelles de la famille à Varsovie. [...] On savait qu'est-ce qui se passe là-bas, c'était déjà le ghetto, c'était la famine.[16]

The eleven-year-old headed towards Minsk with her parents, and they eventually travelled south towards Tashkent as her father had read *Tashkent, City of Bread*. Jews from Lwów helped the family embark on a train, but an evident class distinction existed between the two families: "c'était long, y'avait rien à manger. Et on avait faim. Les gens, les autres juifs qui nous ont laissé entrer, ils avaient plein de nourriture [chuckles], finalement ils nous ont donné quelques morceaux de sucre," she recalls tensely when asked what she remembered of the train journey.[17]

Two diplomatic consequences of the 1941 amnesty also played a large role in Polish Jews' experiences of displacement towards Central Asia: the creation of a Polish Army in the USSR,

[14] Dekel, *In the East*, 113. And Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 148.
[15] See Clifford, *Survivors*, 220. In her memoir, Ilona clarifies that the confusion and chaos of the war allowed them to travel without being caught. Ilona Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre* (Montréal: Leméac Éditeur, 2016), 74.
[16] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 2, 00:05:06.
[17] *Ibid*., clip 3, 00:05:46. Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 76.

also known as the Anders Army, and the establishment of Polish delegations across the USSR, which served to provide assistance to Polish citizens and to monitor Polish refugees.[18] The Anders Army was established through the Polish-Soviet Military Agreement, whose goal was to create a Polish armed force to fight alongside the Soviet Army, consisting exclusively of Polish citizens living in the Soviet Union, led by General Wladyslaw Anders.[19] A Polish Embassy was established near the Kazakh border in Kuibyshev [Samara] and was responsible for aid delegations, which became an additional motivator, as refugees could directly benefit from welfare assistance in the area.[20] As Tomasz Piesakowski suggests, the Embassy *tried* to arrange a "planned resettlement movement [of Poles] to specified areas, but the Soviet authorities opposed this scheme."[21]

At least two children, Judith and Henry, note that their travels were influenced by the creation of the new Polish Army. Judith, whose family was, similarly to Mark, deported to the Ural region after escaping to Lwów and registering to return to German-occupied Jarosław, explains that they were told about an amnesty and grew close to other Poles who were also interested in joining Anders' Army: "at that point we also heard that the Chief of Staff, by the name of Anders [...], he started organising the remains of the Polish Army. [...] Here we are, knowing that we can go, we know that there are [a] few Christian people who are very excited over it, and we talked to them, and they said 'You know what? Join us, let's go to this next little

[18] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 192.
[19] Recruitment and military centres were organised in various cities across the Soviet Union, and army headquarters were originally set up in Buzuluk, close to Kuibyshev [Samara]. In December 1941, the army was completely transferred to Central Asia, and stations were spread across all Central Asian Republics by infantry divisions. Close to 70,000 Poles were recruited into this army, which was eventually scheduled to leave the USSR through Iran, and an additional 50,000 family members were to move alongside them in 1942. See Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 32, 34; Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 35; and Dekel, *In the East*, 200. And Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 80, 119. For more information on the Polish Army's evacuation to Iran, see Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 115-127.
[20] Edele and Warlik, "Saved by Stalin?," 114. And Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 99-100.
[21] Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 95.

town and think what we will do.' We became friendly with them."[22] Henry, on the other hand, crossed the Bug River with his mother in November 1939 to meet his father and brother, who had already fled to the Soviet-occupied side of Poland. All were deported a few months later to Asino, near Tomsk, almost five thousand kilometres from their hometown of Sławatycze. After the amnesty, they remained in the area for a few months until they heard of the new Polish army, for which his father registered (but was later rejected from) and they were sent to Bukhara where they heard a battalion was forming.[23] Judith and Henry were around eleven and seven years old by the time they arrived in Central Asia.

As these stories indicate, there appeared to be a relative freedom of choice with regards to relocation after the amnesty. According to Goldlust, released Poles "were to be freed and permitted to resettle in other parts of the Soviet Union, with the exception of the large cities in the west."[24] However, relocation also depended on the type of settlement they had originally been deported to: "in accordance with Soviet policy," explains Mikhal Dekel, "those released from gulags and prisons received a free railway pass and a stipend of fifteen rubles a day, but former inhabitants of special settlements, who technically "had not been shut away in camps or prisons," received no pass and no stipend once they were outside their settlement."[25]

Other interviewees, like Henia, were unable to choose where they went. She crossed the new German-Soviet border towards Białystok from Tomaszów Mazowiecki to join her father with her aunt, and had originally planned to return to her hometown, where her mother remained. However, her father found work in Białystok, and the two were deported to Kotlas together, where they stayed until the amnesty. Unaware of the pact at the time, seventeen-year-old Henia

[22] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stalhman, 19 December 2001, 00:38:17.
[23] Henry, interview by Elliot Kramer and Evan Savelson, Montreal Holocaust Museum, 17 October 1994, 00:21:45 to 00:45:40.
[24] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 30.
[25] Dekel, *In the East*, 115. See also Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 144. These release documents were called *udostovierenya* and confirmed that the holder could freely travel within Soviet territory, with certain restrictions. They were, however, only valid for three months, and had to be eventually traded in for a passport. Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 41.

and her father were placed onto a train by Soviet authorities as part of an organised movement of ex-prisoners: "the train stopped in couple of places, and they must have a list of people who are going out [...]. All was supervised."[26] They had no idea where they were sent to, until a few hours after their arrival in Stalinabad [Dushanbe].[27]

Such restricted experiences have also been indicated in historiography on the topic: "you are talking about the Soviet State. No one had freedom of choice, not even the most prominent evacuees," states Sergey Kim.[28] According to him, all refugees were in fact deported, *again*, to Central Asia, and did not freely make their way there, contradicting much of the testimonial evidence.[29] It may be that amnestied Poles *felt* a sense of freedom or liberation following the amnesty. Piesakowski corroborates Kim's statement, explaining that the Polish Embassy in Moscow would receive, as early as September 1941, a number of complaints declaring that incarcerated Poles were prevented from "choosing and changing their place of residence."[30] It was also not uncommon for authorities to reroute trains containing recently freed Polish citizens towards Central Asian collective farms.[31]

Gendered familial dynamics are present in these narratives; fathers frequently made their way across the new Soviet border first, before being followed by their wives and young

[26] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 9, 00:00:06.
[27] *Ibid*., 00:01:26.
[28] Sergey Kim, cited in Dekel, *In the East*, 127.
[29] Dekel, *In the East*, 128.
[30] Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 78, 96. Historian Meir Korzen argues that the Soviet government may have had specific motives for encouraging refugees to relocate south: it was believed that refugees from Western Poland had had a negative influence on the Soviet citizens in eastern Europe after the Soviet invasion in 1939. They were "outspoken in their appreciation of the Western way of life and did not hide their contempt for living conditions in Soviet Russia." Officials hoped that due to cultural and linguistic differences, refugees would have more superficial contacts and less of an influence on local Central Asian populations, given the cultural and linguistic differences between Polish exiles and local populations. Meir Korzen, "Problems arising out of Research into the History of Jewish Refugees in the USSR During the Second World War," *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1959), 121-125. Piesakowski also states that the NKVD provided released Poles with incorrect information, specifically that the new Polish Army was assembling near Bukhara, therefore encouraging them to head south where thousands had already died of hunger. Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 87. Whichever way Soviet authorities may have encouraged Poles to head towards the Central Asian Republics, no plan existed for the thousands of refugees amnestied. Keith Sword, in fact, explains that "beyond the expectation that some thousands of able-bodied males would travel to join the Polish Army [...], no thought had been given to the possibility of the spontaneous movement that might erupt," with the expectation that many would choose to remain where they were. See Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 45.
[31] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, *xv*.

children.[32] This was the case for Ilona and her mother, who were reunited with her father across the Bug in Vilnius, while Henry and his mother were reunited with his father in Klevan. Indeed, familial dynamics were key to the decision-making process, and often dominated the entire experience of displacement.[33] Parents often made decisions for their children, but these could also be taken as a family, sometimes leading to reunions across borders, but frequently to long-lasting, if not permanent separation. The belief that women would be safer than men under German occupation led a majority of young men to cross over.[34]

There were important differences between children and adolescents during these early displacements towards Central Asia. As the stories above demonstrate, younger children were displaced with at least one parent, whereas adolescents commonly experienced at least a partial separation from immediate family members, especially their parents. Parents were more likely to encourage their older children to flee on their own, as David's story exemplifies. Born in Równe [Rivne], he notes that the city was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1939, and explains that "the *real* war started for us in June 22nd [1941] [...]. Równe was bombarded for four days. [...] So on the 26th, my mother took me out to the main road, and she said, 'Go east'."[35] As he had Soviet citizenship, the then sixteen-year old explains he was able to cross Ukraine, where his uncle lived, towards Stalingrad [Volgograd], eventually taking a boat on the Volga River and ending up alone in Tashkent.

Similarly, Rywka, born in Lublin, had two older brothers, one of whom already lived in now Soviet-occupied Poland. Whereas her parents chose to remain in their hometown in case one of her brothers were to return, they encouraged the sixteen-year-old to flee with a friend's family. She was eventually reunited with her brothers Zalman and Mordecai in Volodymyr. She explains

[32] See Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 29-35.
[33] *Ibid*., 282 and Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 20.
[34] *Ibid*., 29.
[35] David, interview by Musia Schwartz and David Hirshhorn [sic], Montreal Holocaust Museum, 24 May 1994, 00:06:10.

that she was arrested by Soviet authorities in the summer of 1940 for not taking a Soviet passport – a decision which ended up saving her life – and was deported to Sukhoy Log in the Ural region along with Zalman. Indeed, those who took on Soviet passports often remained on occupied Polish territory as the war progressed and were thus at the mercy of German forces as of June 1941, unlike those deported for refusing to cooperate with Soviet authorities.[36] As a safeguard, given the rumours, she and her brother pretended to be a couple to avoid being separated.[37] After the amnesty, they left for Tashkent: "in '41, they took us, they said we are…we were not criminals, but we were not legally there, so there was some kind of amnesty for people in the '41s. [...] So we were free to leave, so where we decided, we'll go somewhere where it's warm […]."[38]

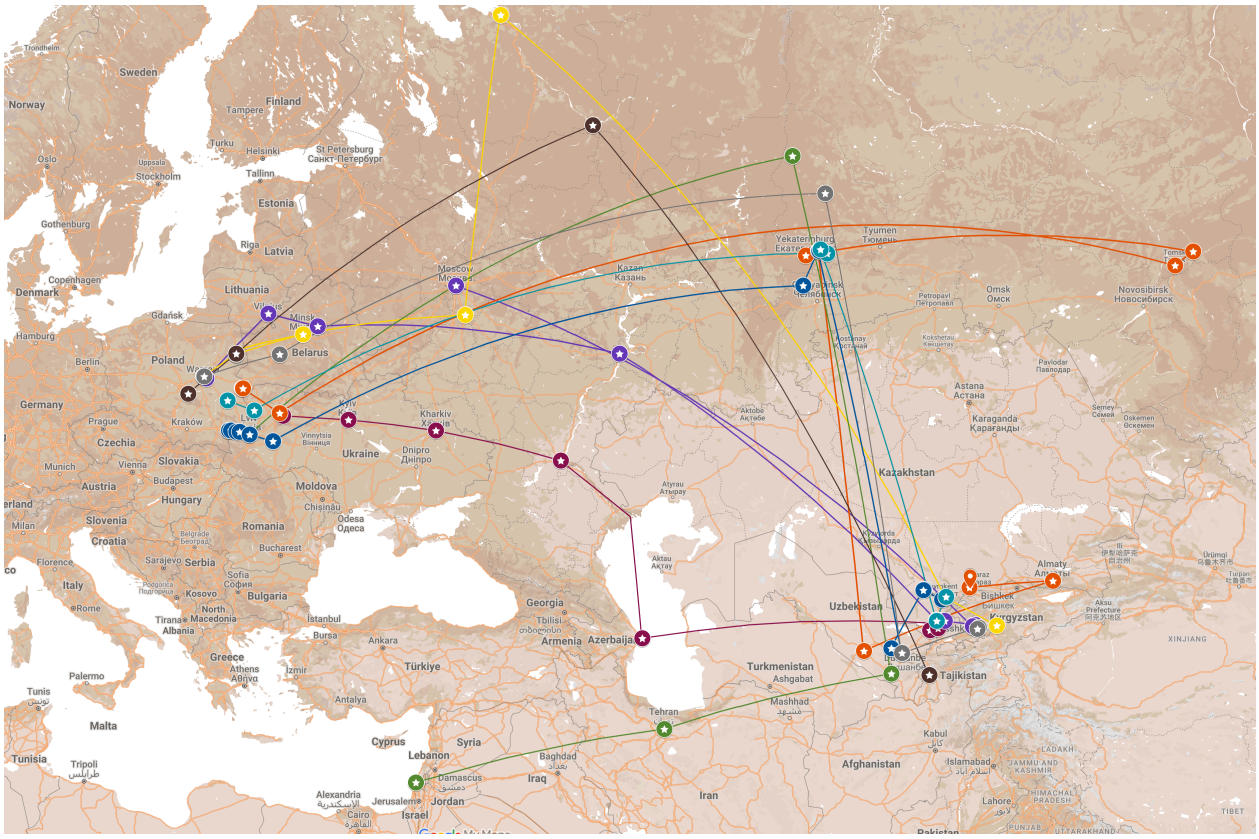
Such heartbreaking decisions made early in the war to flee without parents involved painful farewells. Seventeen years old at the outbreak of the war in 1939, Morris was at risk of being drafted into the Polish Army, but chose to run away with a friend to the Soviet side of Poland, a decision that left his father bereft.[39] He headed for Białystok, where his brother eventually joined him, and the pair headed for Minsk, returning to Białystok only to be deported together to Arkhangelsk. "A year and four months, we were there, something like that. And then, we've been free […] and we went, we look […] where to go. [...] I decided to go to Tashkent, first we've been talking about Tashkent. It's warm there, it looks good. We're going to Tashkent."[40] These young Polish Jews who left without their parents were, at least partially, agents of their own fates,

[36] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 147. And Edele, Fitzpatrick, Grossmann, eds, *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 5.
[37] Rywka, interview by Stephen Strauber and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 30 July 2014, Montreal, QC, Video, 01:16:17.
A few testimonies discuss the rumours surrounding Soviet policies and separation of families during deportation. Older siblings, like Rywka and her brother, would have been separated as "single individuals," but married couples would have remained together. See also Sara, interview by Gerry Singer, Montreal Holocaust Museum, 12 July 1994, 00:31:52. She registered as "married" with her boyfriend at the time to avoid being separated.
[38] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 00:50:06.
[39] Morris, interview by Alex Cherney and Betty Malamud-Blumstone, Montreal Holocaust Museum, 24 September 1996, 00:24:05.
[40] Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 00:58:34.

yet their decisions were, as Adler explains, "often made under pressure and always taken with no access to accurate information."[41] As these stories, and as Debórah Dwork and John Goldlust demonstrate, a broad set of conditions came into play with regards to survival: personal agency, age, physical condition, stamina, luck, chance, geopolitical maneuverings, military contingencies, shifting national interests, and security concerns.[42]

[41] Adler, "Crossing Over," 248. Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 282.
[42] John Goldlust, "Neither "Victims" nor "Survivors," 215; Dwork, "Refugee Jews and the Holocaust. Luck, Fortuitous Circumstances, and Timing," 282, 292, 296; and Edele and Warlick, "Saved by Stalin?," 111. See also Edele, Fitzpatrick, and Grossmann, eds, *Shelter from the Holocaust*, 3.

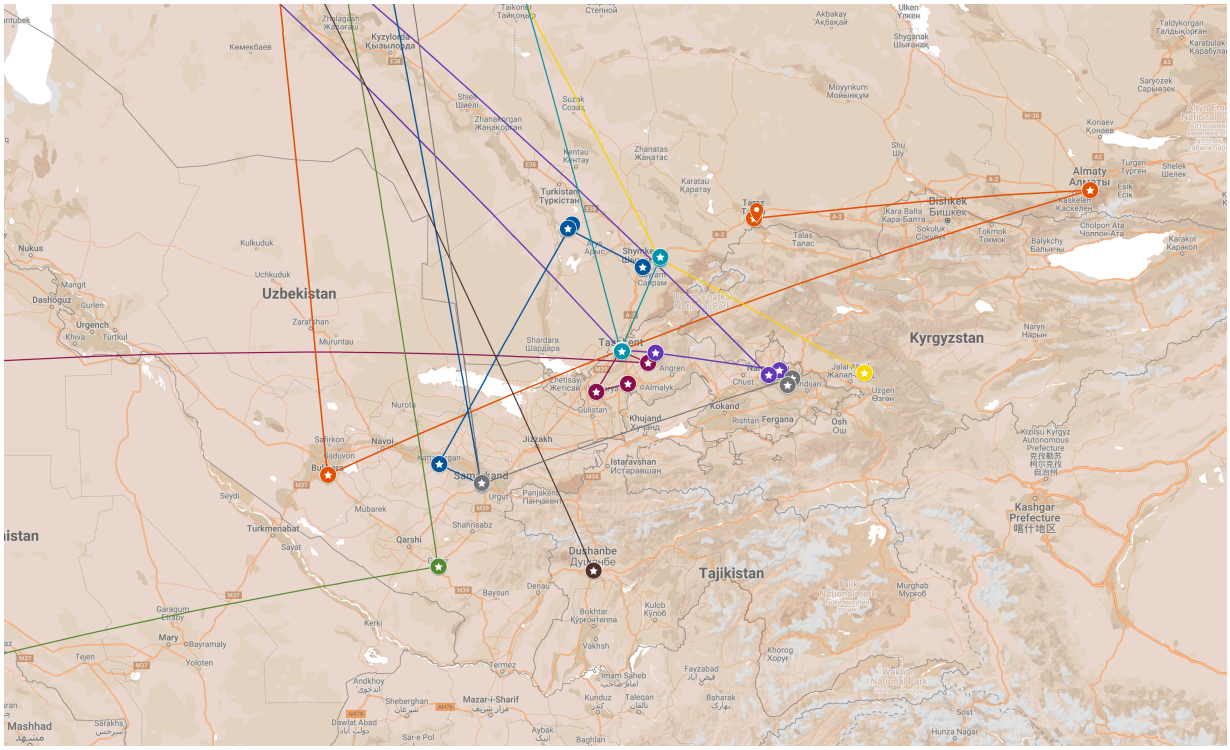
Map 1. Overview of wartime trajectories [43]



Map 1. Overview of wartime trajectories of the nine narrators, beginning from their hometowns in Poland, and including their deportations to labour camps in Siberia or northern regions of the Soviet Union and other travels east, and ending with their final destinations at the end of the war.

[43] These maps are as precise as I could make them. While I respect all cities and villages specifically mentioned or found in documents at the Montreal Holocaust Museum, some survivors only describe locations in Russia and Central Asia as "a village in X country", rendering exact mapping impossible. The goal of these maps was rather to simplify visualisation of the distances travelled and to expand the conceptual map of the Holocaust. One could imagine, for example, similar trajectories of deportation from France, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, expanding from the West towards Germany and Poland. Legend: David – burgundy; Henry – orange; Morris – yellow, Judith – green; Mark – blue; Ilona – purple; Henia – brown; Rywka – teal; Paula – grey.

Map 2. Locations in Central Asia



Map 2. Close-up of the various locations that the narrators relocated to in Central Asia.

Interviewers play an important role in how these stories of displacement are shared. While some narrators discuss their wartime experiences in a chronological manner, others do not. Interviews recorded in the early years of the Montreal Holocaust Museum oral history project seem to be freer of structural elements more present in the 2010s, and interviewers appear less anxious about constructing a linear story. David, for example, interrupts his narrative in Kiev to answer a question surrounding rumours about Germans before the war, to then turn to his perception of his identity as a survivor and his work in the immediate after-math of the war. "I can tell you about how I survived in USSR," he offers after this intervention.[44] In interviews recorded more recently, interviewers often demonstrate a more urgent desire to remain "on

[44] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:34:24.

track." Rywka, for example, sees herself rerouted after discussing her arrival on the Soviet side of Poland:

> **Rywka**: After a while, my brother Mordecai sent another somebody for my parents.
> **Interviewer**: Okay, but take us right now – you just crossed the river, it's Sunday, what happens next?[45]

This happens again after she explains her decision to leave for Tashkent:

> **Rywka**: […] we go somewhere where it's warm, since we're not equipped for the cold weather.
> **Interviewer**: But before – okay before you make that decision, can you just talk to us about that year of '41?[46]

While these stories of displacement are not necessarily recalled or felt in chronological ways, a desire for structure on behalf of the museum institution plays a role in *how* they are told, especially in interviews conducted in the 2010s.

Due to the young age of some of these survivors at the time of exile – as well as the fact that they did not necessarily speak Russian or any local languages and were rarely told where they were headed – testimonies surrounding exile often lack clear details regarding the specific cities or villages to which they were directed. Temporal orientation was similarly vague, and often given in the form of seasons or weather, signifying not only the young survivors' ages, but also the lack of reference points available to them. These absences of dates were, in fact, particularly noticeable during the war, in comparison to periods of peace, where months were more easily recalled.[47] "We were deep in Siberia, and when we came out of the train it was already in the middle of the winter," says Paula of her arrival to a labour camp,[48] while Mark

[45] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 00:31:56.
[46] *Ibid.*, 00:50:39.
[47] David, for example, clearly recalls the 1941 bombing in June, and his return at the end of the war, but offers no temporal indications between 1941 and 1946. Henry's testimony is similarly temporally unclear between 1941 after the German attack and 1943. Judith clearly recalls her arrival in December 1943 in Palestine, but discusses her deportation, for example, as taking place in "late fall."
[48] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:24:59.

describes the "very rainy and wet period"[49] during which he arrived at the Nogina [sic] *kolkhoz* in Kazakhstan. Children who went to school, like Ilona who attended a Russian school in September 1941 in Namangan, were sometimes able to more clearly delineate events based on the academic calendar. Despite the argument that young children perceive time differently than older individuals, even adolescents in exile, for whom the concept of time had likely long been assimilated, lacked necessary points of reference:

> **Interviewer**: What - where are we, we're in '41, we're in the fall now?
> **Rywka**: Pardon me?
> **Interviewer**: We're in the fall, in the fall months, now, in '41?
> **Rywka**: In '41, yeah [...] This was then in the summer, was in Kazakhstan. This was already '42, probably.
> **Interviewer**: Okay, so a full year later! So now we're talking the summer of '42 that you're in Kazakhstan.
> **Rywka**: Yeah this was already '42, yeah.[50]

Similar observations were made by Adler in her study of children's accounts, noting that dates and durations were less clear for children, but seasons or days of the week (especially when events took place on days or months related to Jewish traditions) were more clearly recalled.[51]

As Adler remarks, it also appears that survivors of deportation tend to "spend less time describing this train trip than they did their original deportation."[52] While I made similar observations, these young survivors clearly remember key features of life on the move towards Central Asia. Ilona recalls the hot water faucets in train stations, an "ever-present feature of Russian life" called *kipyatok*[53]: "d'ailleurs on sortait dans le gare seulement pour acheter quelque

[49] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:33:55. A *kolkhoz* was a collective farm, while a *sovkhoz* was a "state-owned farm […] paying wages to the workers." "Kolkhoz," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed 4 August 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kolkhoz. "Sovkhoz," Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed 4 August 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovkhoz.
[50] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:01:51. See also "Time Is Not what It Used to Be: Children and Adults Shown to Experience Time Differently," Neuroscience News, published 3 February 2023, https://neurosciencenews.com/time-perception-age-22432/. It bears mentioning that time is also culturally and socially perceived.
[51] Eliyana Adler, "Children in Exile: Wartime Journeys of Polish Jewish Youth," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union 1939-1959: History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, ed. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 32, 48.
[52] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 154.
[53] George Kish, "Railroad Passenger Transport in the Soviet Union," *Geographical Review* 53, no. 3 (July 1963): 376.

chose à manger et pour prendre…y'avait partout l'eau bouillante, *kipyatok*, ça on pouvait avoir partout. Alors on prenait ça, on buvait l'eau chaude à la place d'une soupe."[54] She explains that they sometimes received soup from authorities, "parce que ça c'était une évacuation, comme officielle."[55] Mark rather recalls that he witnessed people trading and selling items in exchange for food at train stations.[56]

Conditions on the train were difficult. Whether refugees had the choice to decide or faced a second deportation, their travels generally took "weeks rather than days in crowded unheated cattle wagons with no food."[57] Mark, Ilona, and Morris describe the train ride as lasting several weeks before they reached one of the Central Asian Soviet Republics. This was notably the case because of the manner in which Soviet authorities managed the wagons: "the way it works, that, whenever there is a train, they attach you and they take you and they drop you off [*Wherever.*] Wherever, and then somebody else attaches you, and takes you there," explains Mark.[58] Judith's wagon was also detached like this from the rest of her train, landing her and her family in a small Uzbek village instead of Samarkand, where they were originally headed.[59] Witnessing death during these transports was inevitable. Keith Sword in fact argues that despite its mostly "voluntary" nature, more Poles died during this mass relocation than during their original deportation to labour camps. Children were particularly at risk, and bodies were frequently removed from trains, with deportees dying of disease, thirst, or hunger.[60]

[54] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:07:15.
[55] *Ibid.*, 00:07:39.
[56] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:33:23.
[57] Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 96.
[58] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:31:25. See also Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 01:00:25. Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:06:22.
[59] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stalhman, 19 December 2001, 00:41:06.
[60] Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 44-45 and Dekel, *In the East*, 125.

II. Displacement

"We came there*, we couldn't* stay. *They took us - they always supplied us, let's say, passage. The trains. And that time they said, "You can't live here, because there's no place." We stayed, maybe a month or so."*[61]

To be displaced to Central Asia meant to be displaced to a region rather than a specific location. Of the nine narrators in this study, it appears only Henia spent her years of exile in a single place. Instead, most refugees moved around the Central Asian Republics and beyond for a variety of reasons. They tried to live closer to schools, sought out settlements of larger European refugee communities, or simply tried to escape from the Soviet Union. As Dekel argues, *movement*, rather than displacement, was a key component of exile in Central Asia. These experiences, she holds, resembled less a "transfer between two steady geographical points" and rather a wandering flux.[62] For young children, decisions were again often taken by their parents, with children following in tow.

Newly released refugees were forbidden from leaving stations in major towns after the amnesty. A State Defense Committee decree only permitted "those who had been earmarked for evacuation by the state and subsequently dispatched to a specific place" to remain in a selected thirty-five cities, most notably the Uzbek capital, Tashkent.[63] In addition, those released from labour camps and settlements received restrictive travel documents, where "border regions were ruled out, as were forbidden zones and towns considered strategically important."[64] Soviet authorities and governmental rulings thus played an important role in these relocations. Indeed, authorities are present in testimonies as principal instigators of organised displacements from

[61] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, Montreal Holocaust Museum, 30 July 2014, 00:59:02.
[62] Dekel, *In the East*, 126. See also Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 165.
[63] Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 150-151.
[64] Sword, *Deportation and exile*, 41.

labour camps to Central Asia, as in Henia's experience, but also as implementers of local, internal movements within the Central Asian Republics.

Many mention that they arrived in larger cities, such as Tashkent, but were made to relocate and ended up in smaller villages. Ilona and her parents originally arrived in Tashkent but were immediately sent to a *kolkhoz* in the mountains near the Kyrgyzstan border. They quickly relocated to a larger village, Chartak, due to its proximity to a school, where the living environment was simple: one room, with an earthen floor.[65] Rywka was sent to a *sovkhoz* about three kilometres from Mankent after spending about a month in the Uzbek capital, where she was forbidden to remain due to overcrowding. Morris also arrived in Tashkent, but explains he quickly made the decision to head towards the town of Kök-Janggak in the Kyrgyz SSR, where he found work in a hospital.[66]

Henry experienced these kinds of relocations as well: he and his family originally landed in Alma-Ata, but were placed on a *kolkhoz* by Soviet authorities. "After a couple of weeks, my father organised an escape from there. We hired an ox-driven, a wagon driven by oxen [...] to make this quick escape from this *kolkhoz*. And these three families got out of this *kolkhoz* and we wound up in Dzhambul [Taraz]." They settled fifteen kilometres outside the city in a small village.[67] Mark and his family briefly lived in the town of Kattakurgan before being removed by Soviets and transported to the Kazakh SSR, due to a lack of employment and overcrowding. They were then sent about 150 kilometres away from the city of Mankent to Shaulder to work on the Nogina [sic] collective farm.[68] He recalls that "many things were very strange to" him now that

[65] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:08:51.
[66] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 00:59:13 and Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 01:01:14.
[67] Henry, interview by Kramer and Evan, 17 October 1994, 00:45:32.
[68] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:36:59. See also Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:33:27.

they were in a rural area.[69] They moved to a larger town, Shymkent (Kaz.) towards the end of the war.

Only David, who describes himself as a citizen of the Soviet Union (likely forced to accept a Soviet passport after the Soviet invasion of Poland), and Henia, who also possibly accepted a Soviet passport while living in Białystok, appear to have been free from such restrictions. Indeed, Soviet authorities deported her and her father to Stalinabad, the capital of the Tajik SSR, and the two were allowed to remain there for the duration of the war.[70] David was able to find work as a porter directly in the Tashkent train station, but still decided to make his way, rather tumultuously, towards a smaller town called Pskent.

Other refugees do not mention arriving in larger cities, but rather being directly taken to small villages or towns. This was the case for Judith and her parents, as well as Paula and her mother, both of whom arrived in small Uzbek villages. Paula depicts a gendered environment that segregated men from women: she and her mother resided in an enclosed, exclusively female space consisting of four mud huts, called *kibitkas*. Three were occupied by an extended family: two women, both wives of one man, their female children, and the husband's sister. Paula and her mother moved into the fourth one.[71]

Moving around was also a clear way to assure survival in exile, notably for Jews. Indeed, Jews were more likely than other refugee groups to move around Central Asia in order to find better living conditions.[72] Mark remarks of his time in Shymkent that "the system is such that you have nothing available, [...] in one town, they have one product, now this product is then

[69] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:38:55.
[70] It is unclear whether Stalinabad was included in the forbidden cities discussed above, but the fact that it was the capital of the country leads me to believe it may have been considered as one of these exclusive, "strategically important" cities. See p.42n63.
[71] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:38:12. See also Dekel, *In the East*, 135.
[72] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its aftermath*, 192.

abundant in this town, but next door, in the next town, they don't know anything about it, they don't have it, and there's nobody who, officially tries to make sure that this is being distributed, because nobody cares."[73] Moving around thus afforded the possibility of subverting Soviet limitations, as well as of finding new products and better living conditions. Ilona's move from Chartak to Namangan, where they shared an apartment with a Jewish couple they had met on the train, allowed her and her family to be closer to schools and work opportunities, before her mother found work on a *kolkhoz*.[74] They remained there for sixteen months before returning to Namangan.

Paula and her mother also eventually moved to a larger village with a well-organised Polish community, while Rywka and her brother moved from their *sovkhoz* to the town of Mankent towards the end of the war. Others found themselves living life constantly on the move like David, who eventually made it to Pskent. He lived nomadically in the mountains with a brigade of about twenty people, composed of two old Uzbek men as well as Turk, Russian, and Ukrainian individuals, for the remainder of the war. "For four years I didn't sleep in a bed," he explains. "We just lied down, and we slept."[75]

That being said, the teenagers of this study moved around significantly less than these larger families. Some were assigned jobs and remained in these positions for extended periods of time like Rywka in her *sovkhoz*, or Morris in the hospital. Others, like Henia, settled in place to attend university. Still, both children and adolescents observed the differences between living in villages or larger towns, and the impact of residing on collective farms, as astute observers and commentators on the consequences of their displacements.

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[73] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:32:16; Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 192.
[74] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:10:54; Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 85-86.
[75] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:57:47.

It bears mentioning that very few narrators directly place blame on the Soviet system itself, something which Adler notes was more common for adults, who were more likely to hold "an agenda, political or otherwise, to vilify either the Soviets or the Poles."[76] As she continues, children were more likely to remark "unfair treatment" or being singled out, but as Stalinist repression targeted all groups, they tended to "accept the situation."[77] It appears these testimonies of now-adults have maintained the more youth-like distance from such denunciation, and are perhaps less tainted by potentially negative post-war perceptions of the Soviet Union. While they generally depict being aware of their position in Soviet society and recall manoeuvring the system and interacting with authorities, they speak of these many displacements more matter-of-factly, as part of their wartime experiences, but not necessarily as consequences of negligent and inadequate living conditions crafted by the political context. Many narrators, like David, Ilona, and Henry, even recall positive elements of the regime that provided them assistance throughout their journeys: organisations for refugees in Kiev, hot soup in train stations during official evacuations, or schools set up for children in labour camps.[78] These memories clarify what was significant for youth during exile and what remained important in their minds in later years.

Such frequent movement was not without its risks, particularly for children and youth. Young individuals are significantly more vulnerable to a number of dangers of forced displacement, both psychological and physical, including insufficient healthcare, disease, infection, distress, malnutrition, disrupted schooling, isolation, abandonment, and prolonged levels of stress.[79] Udo Breyer has argued that the psychological toll of distressing events can lead to "a numbed responsiveness to the external world, as well as a variety of other symptoms such

[76] Adler, "Children in Exile," 55.
[77] *Ibid*., 54.
[78] *Ibid*., 54. David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:34:39; Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:07:46; Henry, interview by Kramer and Evan, 17 October 1994, 00:38:18.
[79] Bürgin, Anagnostopoulos, the Board and Policy Division of ESCAP, Vitiello, Sukale, Schmid, and Fegert, "Impact of war and forced displacement on children's mental health," 846-847.

as pains, dizziness, insomnia, or moodiness."[80] Subsequently, experiencing such events during childhood can lead to a variety of long term effects, which differ from those lived by adults, in part because of the developmental stages during which these children experienced exile.[81] Although the narrators of this study mentioned many of these effects, the following section will consider the impact of three of them: illness, interrupted education, and hunger.

> "*We survived. The whole family had typhus, during a typhus epidemic. Except my father, who claimed that drinking a shot of vodka every day kills all bugs, and he did it all his life."*[82]

At least twenty-five percent of all Polish Jewish refugees died of hygiene and starvation related illnesses while in exile in Central Asia.[83] Henia, who was seventeen years old at the time, explains the difficulty of evading illness and the fear surrounding train travel, where conditions imposed by Soviet authorities made sickness impossible to avoid: "people, *inside* [the train] were talking, 'Stay away,' because you know, if there is a sickness or something you try to stay away. So, when you sit one near each other, and you are glad that you have [the chance] to sit down, who thinks about 'stay away'?"[84] Here, she acknowledges the exhaustion and the challenges of the journey south from labour camps and questions if the possibility of getting sick would prevent someone from sitting down on a trip that may have lasted days or weeks at a time.

As refugees were forbidden from settling in large cities, many simply remained at railway stations until they could find a new place of residence, while others stayed there in the hopes of

[80] Udo Breyer, "Living in a Vacuum: Psychological Problems of Refugees and Asylum Seekers," in *Refugees – The Trauma of Exile: The Humanitarian Role of Red Cross and Red Crescent*, ed. Diana Miserez (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1988), 89.
[81] Szmygiel, "'The past is never dead. It's not even past'," 30.
[82] Henry, interview by Kramer and Evan, 17 October 1994, 00:50:58.
[83] Dekel, *In the East*, 143. Other sources note this number as much higher. Albert Kaganovitch, for example, remarks that Litvak's estimation of a 35-40% death rate amongst Polish Jews, is a moderate assumption. See Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 116.
[84] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, clip 8, 00:06:45.

finding relatives on the move.[85] The atmosphere in train stations in the southern part of the USSR was one of chaos. Thousands came and went each day as crowds of people moved and hurried together, often sleeping on the floor or outside stations until they could embark on a new train or find a place to live. Mark and his family were part of those who lived in this manner, hidden under stairs in a station until they could finally board a train heading towards Central Asia.[86] Some, like Morris, describe a massive encampment or tent-city that stood along the train lines all the way to Tashkent: "You never saw so many people sleeping in the railway station we saw over there. [...] People haven't got where to sleep, so we were sleeping there too," he explains.[87]

Overcrowded wagons and the deplorable sanitary conditions both on the trains and at the stations along the way turned these into "hotbeds of epidemics," offering a breeding ground for typhoid fever, typhus, dysentery, and other infectious diseases as well as the ubiquitous lice.[88] Other illnesses, like scarlet fever, malaria, and brucellosis are also mentioned by the narrators. A study by Albert Kaganovitch adds meningitis, depression, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and pneumonia to the list of leading causes of death among Jewish refugees.[89]

Stories surrounding illness often appear in similar places in young refugees' testimonies, with narrators often describing themselves or their families falling ill during their travels or soon after arriving in Central Asia.[90] Paula brings up her experience of typhoid fever during her train journey towards the Uzbek SSR:

> On the train, one day, they came around, they were selling boiled eggs, so my mother bought one egg to feed me, and after that I became very ill. So my mother thought that maybe the egg wasn't fresh, so that's why I became sick, but that wasn't it. [...] I kept being more and more seriously sick, so

[85] Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 150-152. Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 107.
[86] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:25:00. See also Grynberg, *Children of Zion*, 127-128, 133-135.
[87] Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 150. Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 01:00:02.
[88] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 107.
[89] *Ibid.*, 113.
[90] Although Henry discusses his family contracting typhus during an epidemic in the region, it is unclear based on his narrative when exactly this took place.

> finally somebody found a doctor who was also on the train, and he came over and he looked at me, and said, well, that I have typhoid fever. And this is a very contagious disease, so we had to get off the train. And I believe we ended up in Samarkand, and my mother took me to the hospital there, and I don't know how long I was there. I mean that's a disease that you're delirious and I was a child, and I really didn't know where I was and what was happening. [...] Eventually we came to a village in Uzbekistan.[91]

Typhoid fever was one of the illnesses described in greatest detail by survivors.[92] Based on their testimonies, typhoid fever frequently occurred either during or immediately after their journeys towards Asia; the irrigation canals and water sources from which deportees could drink from during these travels were likely contaminated, facilitating the spread of such disease.[93] Typhoid was a cruel disease that left children incapacitated and alone: Paula was isolated in a hospital for weeks and separated from her mother, and she temporarily lost the use of her legs.

Mark similarly had his travel experience towards the Uzbek SSR interrupted by illness, and both their journeys stopped, at least briefly, in Samarkand, where over twenty evacuation hospitals were set up during the war.[94] He recounts how his father took him off the train to get fresh air in Samarkand. There, he remembers seeing "other men carrying sacks with children inside, you know. [*Dead children?*] With dead children, yes," he clarifies.[95] Few children received proper medical care or had access to medication: "you either lived, or you died," says Paula.[96] Local authorities were suspicious of exiles and reluctant to share scarce resources. There was also a noted shortage of doctors and medical staff in the region, and local hospitals were

[91] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:33:53.
[92] Typhoid fever is caused by *Salmonella Typhi* bacteria, and those infected can easily spread the disease to others. "This typically happens," explain the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "when an infected person uses the bathroom and does not wash their hands. [...] In countries with poor sanitation, the water used to rinse and prepare food and beverages, including tap water, can also be contaminated with these bacteria." "Typhoid Fever," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed 16 October 2023, https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/typhoid.
[93] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 108.
[94] Hodjaev Negmat Isomovich, Raximova Shafoat Hakimovna, Hodjaev Baxouddin Javoxirovich, "The State of Medicine in Samarkand in the Middle of the XIX and XX Centuries," 4th Global Congress on Contemporary Sciences & Advancements, 30 April 2021, Rome. Mark clarifies he is unsure about what illness he had, but assumes it was typhoid fever, or something similar.
[95] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:32:42.
[96] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:36:31. See also Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 58.

simply unable to care for the now colossal number of individuals needing their assistance.[97] This scarcity is noticeable in Henry's description of his experience of typhus, as he explains that his father provided for him and his family, who were all ill, in a "makeshift hospital."[98]

In 1944, Mark was diagnosed with brucellosis, which he got from cows while working on the collective farm. "And this lasted with me for about five or six years. And very strong pains, you cannot move […], and anything you move hurts very, very much, and then, what it does is affect your – I was walking with my foot like, like this [arches back, makes movement off camera] for a while."[99] Others similarly suffered from various illnesses later on in their exile – in Paula's case, malaria. Such susceptibility to illness due to travel and living conditions particularly targeted children: the mortality rates for children, who accounted for approximately 30 percent of deported Poles in Central Asia, were close to 40 percent until the summer of 1942, almost double that of adults.[100] In general, mortality rates were in fact much higher for refugees in "free exile" in Central Asia than they had been in labour camps, where the demand for labourers implied continuous and regular access to food provided by authorities.[101]

New environmental conditions also had the potential to undermine refugees' health. As historian Rebecca Manley explains, the climate was "a source of seemingly endless misery,"[102] and accidents could be caused simply by the changing weather. Henry, who found himself near Dzhambul, recounts a troubling wintertime story when his family tried to protect his aunt's newborn baby from freezing during the night due to the cold climate and the lack of proper infrastructure. "So they put him on the stove, figuring that it'd be warm there, and the stove was not burning anymore, the, the wood had gone out [...], it was just mildly warm. Well the baby

[97] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 161. Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 84, 109.
[98] Henry, interview by Kramer and Evan, 17 October 1994, 00:51:28.
[99] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:27:19.
[100] Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 100.
[101] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its aftermath*, 113.
[102] Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 165.

cried all night, figured it was colicky or something, in the morning, they take the baby to change [...] the baby was cooked, actually, on the stove. When they removed the diaper, pieces of flesh from his backside came off."[103] The family was more fearful of placing him on bed sheets, which froze overnight, and had no other way to keep him warm.

Still, Henry recalls the incident matter-of-factly, and in fact jokingly explains that "to this day, my cousin [...] I always kid him that he's got two big holes in his back side [laughing], that he nearly was cooked."[104] Emotions associated with a major incident can in fact diverge from the substance of a narrative, perhaps due to a process of dissociation, or isolation of affect.[105] Laughter can also be used as a coping mechanism by survivors.[106] Beyond such incidents, babies were also prone to stunted growth and illnesses, as their mothers lacked milk and could not properly feed them, leading to long-term physical consequences, as well as psychological impacts on their mothers.[107]

"At least we had a school."[108]

Beyond the fear of illness, the interruption of schooling was another major consequence of forced displacement discussed by the youth of this study. Although almost all narrators were of school-age in exile, only a few address their experiences with regards to education. A number of challenges rendered schooling difficult, including, first and foremost, the lack of institutions in the region. For Paula, Mark, and Ilona, there were either no schools set up in the small villages where they first settled, or only schools taught in local languages, and not in Russian or Polish.

[103] Henry, interview by Kramer and Evan, 17 October 1994, 00:55:22.
[104] *Ibid*., 00:56:02.
[105] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 94-95. Szmygiel, "'The past is never dead. It's not even past'," 96.
[106] As discussed by Philippine d'Halleine, "Le Rire Post-Génocide: Une exploration des mécanismes émotionels des survivants du genocide rwandais à travers les Histoires de vie de Montréal," (Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling 11th Emerging Scholars Symposium, Concordia University, Montreal, QC, 21 March 2024).
[107] Testimonies by adult survivors address these issues. See, for example, Sara, interview by Singer, 12 July 1994, 00:46:38.
[108] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:54:15 - 01:03:55.

Living on the collective farm, Mark, for instance, originally only had access to a Kazakh school nearby.[109] Ilona's experience was similar, where the village she first settled in only offered education in Kyrgyz.

Other young interviewees, like Henry, spent crucial years of their childhood in Central Asia, but never addressed education in this portion of their testimonies. In fact, neither Paula, nor Ilona or Henry were asked about their education in exile. Henry brings up education *later* in his interview, when discussing his arrival in Canada, testifying to the ways in which the *absence* of education in exile could reverberate or be felt later. Henry explains that as he made his way to Montreal, he was faced with lacunae resulting from his years of displacement. "I don't know any language, the language spoken at home was Yiddish, I never went to Polish school, I had three grades of Russian and some Hebrew that started in the DP camps, all was interrupted."[110] The three grades of Russian he refers to took place in the labour camps he was deported to in Asino and Asbest between 1940 and 1941, but also perhaps unmentioned schooling in Central Asia. In this way, Henry's narrative is crafted in a manner that makes sense to him: his education, or lack thereof, in Central Asia was made sense of as it affected his new life in Montreal. At that moment, his aunt told the principal he was twelve, and he was registered in the sixth grade at fifteen years old, instead of heading to high school.

For the teenagers in this study, there was generally little discussion about furthering their education while in exile; they were swiftly integrated into the Soviet labour force. "Seventh grade. That's my education," answers Rywka, shaking her head, when asked about her schooling, demonstrating in few words the large impact of the war and her deportation to the Soviet

[109] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:44:58.
[110] See Henry, interview by Kramer and Evan, 17 October 1994, 01:07:02.

Union.[111] Only Henia was able to pursue a higher education in Central Asia: at seventeen years old when she arrived in the Tajik SSR, she was likely one of the first students at the Tajik State Medical University, which was founded in Stalinabad in 1939. She explains that she was accepted into medical school after passing external exams, and finished her studies in exile during the war.[112] "I think that I was lucky, one of the luckiest," she explains, "because you know, they acknowledge all the answers which I gave because I couldn't give them in [good] Russian, so I was giving them, how much I knew [in broken] Russian […]. It was exciting."[113] The examiners accepted her. Having attended school briefly while she was deported to Kotlas, she likely had the chance to pick up Russian basics. For many others, as in Mark and Ilona's stories above, language was a major barrier blocking access to education.

The lack of schools was difficult not only for children, for whom the delay in education had long-term consequences, but also for their parents, who regarded education as a stepping stone to advancement and social mobility. "Et là, c'était la tragédie, vraiment. Il n'y avait pas d'école. Il y avait une école kirghiz, mais il n'y avait pas d'école russe, alors ma mère a trouvé que sa fille sans école, c'est pas possible. [*Elle voulait une éducation pour vous, c'est sûr.*] Oui, oui, elle voulait, ça c'était la chose la plus importante pour, dans les yeux de ma mère, l'éducation."[114] Interestingly, what Ilona recalls is the impact of the absence of schools on her mother, rather than her own *perception* of the lack of education, or her *desire* to attend school. This stands in contrast to Mark's account, in which he turns to other activities that filled his time when asked if he

[111] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 00:11:40.
[112] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, clip 9, 00:03:52. While she does not specify that she attended *this* university, very few higher education institutions existed in the Tajik capital during the war. Only two other, pedagogical institutes, existed which to my understanding, did not offer courses related to medicine. Given the medical nature of this institution and her specialty, I assume this is where she attended. For more information see "The History of University," Avicenna Tajik State Medical University, accessed 25 April 2024, https://www.tajmedun.tj/en/university/history. See also "Dushanbe Encyclopedia," Executive Body of the State, Dushanbe City Authorities (Dushanbe: Main Scientific Editorial Office of Tajik, 2004), 69, [in Tajik] accessed 25 April 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20101028115236/http://dushanbe.tj/img/ENS.doc.
[113] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, clip 9, 00:04:15.
[114] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:09:08.

attended school upon arrival: "No! No, we didn't go to school. Our main preoccupation was standing in line, trying to get some food."[115] Ilona's narrative thus demonstrates the collective nature of memory, with family itself acting as the "original collective in which our early memories are shaped," helping us organise which events hold significant meaning.[116] Her education in exile was given importance through the memory of her mother's fight for her education.

It was this desire for an education for her child that led Ilona and her family to relocate to Chartak and eventually to the city of Namangan, where she began school in Russian in the fall of 1941: "elle a supplié le président de *kolkhoz*, qui était le patron là-bas, qu'il nous laisse partir. Et finalement, probablement il a demandé au comité du parti si c'est possible de nous laisser partir, ils ont donné la permission."[117] Here again, Soviet authorities were key players in enabling movement across the territory, yet Ilona's experiences demonstrate the agency with which some refugees were able to alter their fate. Luckily, Ilona had learned Russian during her family's earlier travels from Vilnius to Syzran after the German invasion of Russia. Although her schooling was interrupted a second time when the family moved to another *kolkhoz*, she eventually returned to Namangan and reached eighth grade before returning to Europe at the end of the war.[118]

Eventually, both Mark and Paula were able to attend school in Polish. Mark recalls that the Polish government-in-exile set up a centre for Poles near his collective farm and opened a Polish school. Indeed, one of the Polish Embassy's primary goals was to boost education.[119] A 1942 Embassy report recommended the promotion of Polish music concerts, an emphasis on national

[115] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:36:05.
[116] Clifford, *Survivors*, 109.
[117] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:09:30.
[118] *Ibid*., clip 4, 00:11:39, and clip 3 00:11:59.
[119] Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 105.

literature and the Polish language in schooling, and most importantly, highlighted the spiritual and religious, hereby understood as Catholic, needs of the exiled Polish population.[120] According to Magdalena H. Gross, such directives aimed to "unify the local population, restore social bonds, and work toward reconstituting the Polish national identity" in exile.[121] Many Polish Jewish youth, like Mark, were thus unwittingly included into the Polish Catholic national project, all the while receiving an education in a language they could understand.

In his Polish school, Mark describes that "classes were such that we had rooms with wooden floors, but that's about it! No chairs, or anything like that, no, not school benches, you know. And we were sitting on the floor with our backs against the walls, and there was a small table where the teacher was sitting, and he had only [a] Polish book."[122] He attended this school for about six months and made it to the second grade. He explains that the creation of the Polish Army had an impact on his school's demographics and overall existence: as Jews were generally excluded from this army's transports to the Middle East in 1942, eventually the Polish school contained only Jewish students.[123] "We still had a Polish school, but there was only Jews, you

[120] Magdalena H. Gross, "Reclaiming the Nation: Polish Schooling in Exile During the Second World War," *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (August 2013): 247, 253.
[121] Gross, "Reclaiming the Nation," 247-248.
[122] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:52:15.
[123] The Anders Army did not *originally* discriminate against Jews. Yet, who was to be accounted for as *Polish* came to be significant. Polish Jews saw themselves as complete Polish citizens, while their country's general staff did not consider Jews in this manner. In addition, the Soviet government saw Jews and all other ethnic minorities from Poland as *Soviet* citizens, who were thus barred from joining the new Polish Army, imposing on them Soviet passports and forcing them to join the Red Army instead. Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 192-193. See Godlust, "A Different Silence," 33 and Ryszard Terlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army in the USSR and the Near East, 1941-1944," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Basingstoke: MacMillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1991), 162-163. – Despite this, approximately forty to sixty percent of the first formed units in the Uzbek SSR were in fact Jewish. According to Adler, the overwhelming presence of Jews at the onset of the Polish army had much to do with the fact that Jews accounted for an exceedingly large number of deportees. However, their early efforts were ill-received by Polish military leaders. On the other hand, Stanislaw Kot, the Polish ambassador to the USSR, worried both about "Soviet claims on Polish territory and citizens," as well as how the rejection of Jews would be perceived internationally. Dekel, *In the East*, 198 and Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 192-193. – An official statement in November 1941 by Anders guaranteed equal treatment for Polish citizens, but in practice, and given his previous statements claiming Jews were bad soldiers and did not wish to serve, there remained numerous challenges for Jews to join his army. Jews were automatically "graded type 'D'," or were rejected after a bodily exam revealed they were circumcised. Even former soldiers were refused, while the few who were accepted were often treated poorly: they faced insults or attacks from other soldiers, they struggled to receive rations, or were left behind during evacuations. Dekel, *In the East*, 199-201; Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 193-194; andTerlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army," 162-163.

know. And came Christmas, and we had to sing the carols."[124] By then, the school was run by a single Polish man who had stayed behind. Conditions, both at home and in school, were quickly deteriorating. Mark moved into the school because his parents could no longer feed him: "at least we had a school, and we had some minimum of food," he reflects on what was provided by the Polish government.[125] Still, much of the food earmarked for Polish schools and orphanages was diverted towards state officials or the black market.[126]

Eventually, Russian women replaced the Polish teacher who remained, and Mark remembers that they taught the children songs to forget their hunger.[127] "And then even that was gone," he says. "And one day I remember we were left, and we went out, and we picked grass, and we cooked it and ate, and fed the kids ourselves, you know. And afterwards we all went home."[128] This change in leadership in Mark's school likely occurred in late 1942 or early 1943, as Mark describes that the "Polish government was thrown out."[129] Tensions and an eventual rupture between the Polish and Soviet governments led to changes in the management of welfare organisations at this time. After the evacuations of the Polish Army in March and August 1942, Soviet authorities began to slowly shut down Polish welfare institutions, which had been set up as

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Some exceptions existed, and an "all-Jewish Anders Army battalion" was even created (although Anders was averse to the group, which eventually disbanded). This unit was created, at least in part, due to rumours of poor treatment. Both Dekel and Adler clarify that while Jews understood this rejection from Polish forces as exclusively *Polish* discrimination and antisemitism, Soviet manipulation was also key in limiting Jewish recruitment. See Dekel, *In the East*, 202 and Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 192-194.

[124] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:02:38 and Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 141. Mark's testimony is not the only one that talks about how Jews were excluded from these transports of Poles from the USSR to Iran. See also Judith, interview by Cherney and Stalhman, 19 December 2001, 00:43:06. Also discussed in Albert Kaganovitch, "Together and Apart: Poles and Polish Jews in the War-Torn Soviet Union," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, ed. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 67.
[125] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 54:15 - 01:03:55.
[126] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its aftermath*, 128.
[127] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:04:49.
[128] *Ibid*., 01:05:00.
[129] *Ibid*., 01:04:25.

of 1941. Employees were arrested and files were confiscated by Soviet authorities.[130] During this diplomatic rupture, formerly Polish schools, like Mark's, were "absorbed into the Soviet school system."[131] It was likely around this time that Paula was finally able to attend a Polish school. She and her mother relocated to a larger village, still in the Uzbek SSR, which had a significantly larger Jewish and Polish community. The newly established Union of Polish Patriots (Zwiazek Patriotów Polskich, or ZPP), a Soviet organisation which slowly took over welfare work from Polish aid delegations as of early 1943, had set up a Polish school.[132]

Material limitations intimately linked to displacement also had an impact on education in exile. Paula was registered by her mother at around six years old to attend the ZPP school in her new town, yet problems with her footwear, which were not uncommon at the time in the Soviet Union, prevented her from pursuing an education:

> In order to go to school, you have to wear shoes. You couldn't go bare feet. But I had no shoes, so my mother went to this organisation, who did supply you with clothes and with shoes, so she went and I got a pair of shoes. But of course they weren't children's shoes; in the time of war I don't think anybody is concerned with children. So they were just a pair of adult shoes. And so my mother stuffed paper into the toes, and she wrapped my feet with rags, no socks, and off I went to school. But my school career was very, very short, because school begins in the fall, and in Uzbekistan, the fall, the winter consists of rain. And there are no sidewalks, no roads, and it's all mud, and one day on my way to school, I got stuck in the mud. And as much as I tried to pull my foot out of the mud, I couldn't. Eventually my foot came out, but the shoe remained in the mud, and I couldn't pull it out. So there I was, with one shoe on and one shoe off, and when I went back with my mother to the place where I, where the shoe was stuck, it was no longer there. So I had no shoes again and my mother went back to ask for another pair of shoes, but of course I wasn't gonna be given another pair of shoes. So that was the end of my schooling, very, very short.[133]

[130] Terlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army," 164 and Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 100. For more information on the evacuation of the Polish Army, see Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 60-87 and Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 149.
[131] Dekel, *In the East*, 215.
[132] Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 167, 129.
[133] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:56:49. See also Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 49 on footwear in the Soviet Union.

This excerpt provides a wealth of information on Paula's life: the quality of her relationship with her mother, which will be discussed in a later chapter, as well as the bureaucratic, environmental, and material struggles of wartime. Paula never had the chance to begin school until the age of twelve, when she moved to Sweden in 1947. Like many of the children of this study, her education was profoundly affected by the consequences of forced displacement.

"The Polish School (Szkola Wandy Wasilewskiej) in Uzbekistan, 1945." Courtesy of Paula and the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

"In Asia, we were always*, always hungry…"*[134]

A third, and particularly severe impact of displacement was widely addressed by the young narrators of this study: malnutrition and famine. It is difficult to depict the scale and severity of the famine in Central Asia during the Second World War, which peaked in 1942.[135] For young children, access to food was generally dependent on their parents' employment and capacity to

[134] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 01:38:57.
[135] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 104.

provide, although many contributed in the ways they could. Adolescents, most of whom settled in Central Asia alone, were often left to consider the intimate connections between food, location, and employment by themselves, as Rywka explains matter-of-factly: "the hardest part…I don't know, there was not enough food unless you stole it. Because even, you made, I was making, [...] comparing to other people, made a lot of money. But, [...] first of all you couldn't buy nothing, you had to go to Mankent which was...three kilometres away, walking, on the bazaar, you know, and the market, you pick up something if you had the money, and carry it on your back. And that's…it was a hard life."[136]

Hunger and malnutrition left lifelong scars and were experienced by all who remained in the region. After being forced into exile for years, youth's "perception of hunger would have been most likely weakened by the partial atrophy of their stomachs," describes Dekel of her father's experience. "Their body fat and muscle mass would have been used in the service of their vital heart muscle and nervous system. They would have been too weak to feel much thirst and therefore were most likely severely dehydrated; their cracked dry skin and muscle atrophy would have made movement painful"[137] For children specifically, such severe hunger can have long-term psychological effects: increased anxiety and hostility, and decreased social abilities, even in comparison with children who were comparatively "minimally nourished."[138]

Here again, many survivors testify that moving around was necessary in order to find food. Refugees did have relative freedom to travel around the region, which was aided by their "growing mastery of Soviet conditions."[139] Indeed, Adler notes that after about a year in Central Asia, refugees began to adapt to these conditions and it often felt as if things were improving,

[136] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:04:04 and Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 165.
[137] Dekel, *In the East*, 168.
[138] *Ibid*., 214.
[139] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 164.

although all refugees did not experience these changes steadily.[140] On a small scale, many who lived in farms or outside villages travelled to nearby towns to find food, as Rywka described earlier. By moving to larger towns, refugees could more easily acquire nourishment.[141] This may appear contradictory, given the proximity of animals, grains, and various fruits and vegetables on farms. That being said, most of what *kolkhozes* produced was redirected by the state, as Mark recalls. Their *kolkhoz* grew wheat, grains, cotton, watermelon and sweet melon, and although they were *supposed* to be compensated with food, they received nothing.[142] There was also "a store, an official store," he continues, "but there was no rations given out to anybody, you see, so I don't know what they expected, we would live out of fresh air."[143] Indeed, "peasants were not provided with rations on the assumption that they had direct access to food and did not need to be provisioned by the state," explains Wendy Goldman.[144] For Ilona's family, working in a *kolkhoz* meant to have escaped starvation, but only because they were able to steal some of the food that was destined for the farm's pigs and could benefit from the farm's other animals.[145]

Famine clearly affected intra-familial dynamics, as Mark's story demonstrates. His experience bears witness to the necessity of moving around to survive, with or without family. When he and his family first arrived in Kattakurgan, his main preoccupation, as discussed above, was not school, but rather waiting in line for food: "there was a bakery that would have some bread in the morning, but you would have to line up about 3 o'clock in the morning to stand

[140] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 164.
[141] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:30:45. See also Grynberg, *Children of Zion*, 138.
[142] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:45:16. See also Jadwiga, interview by Elliot Kramer and Myra Segal (videographer), Montreal Holocaust Museum, 14 October 1997, 1:03:00. Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 164. Adler corroborates that all food from farms was usually taken over by the Soviet Army. According to Goldlust, each *kolkhoz* established its own particular rules regarding payment for agricultural labour. See Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 35. See also Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 98, for more information on the various systems used by collective farms for payment.
[143] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:10:15.
[144] Wendy Z. Goldman, "Not by Bread Alone: Food, Workers, and the State," in *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II*, ed. Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 56.
[145] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:05:06, 00:06:52. She also mentions that they were able to grow a garden, which appears to have been exceptional.

there. And when it came the time that bakery was opening up, you know all the ruffians would get there and they would push me out."[146] After being transferred to their *kolkhoz* in the Kazakh SSR, he was then sent to boarding school as his parents could no longer feed him.

It is important to note that some of the youngest survivors recall key moments or events in a repetitive manner. When Mark eventually returned to his parents, when the school no longer had the resources to feed him, they had been able to grow their own garden in his absence, where they harvested watermelon and corn.[147] "In the villages what was the problem, that you were sated during the summer, when there was food, and came just the early spring before new crops came in, that was the starving time, that's when people were dying."[148] Mark repeats this statement on the challenges of springtime in a later interview session, underscoring the devastation of this season for those who lived on farms, who could only hope to survive until summer crops came in: "[...] everybody depended very much on the seasons, especially in the spring, it was a time of great hunger every year."[149] If repetition may be used as a storytelling device to "keep the listener's attention,"[150] it may also be more than that: in this case, it serves to reiterate the struggle to feed one's family and the impact of such migrations onto the land. After moving to the larger town of Shymkent, he explains that he and his family were no longer hungry, could finally afford to buy some food, and, indeed, had the *opportunity* to buy food.[151]

No matter if refugees moved around or remained in one area, theft became necessary for survival. Many now had to depend on coping behaviours most would have rejected under pre-war

[146] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:36:14.
[147] In some regions, the Soviet government allotted such gardening plots to evacuated families, which, according to Kaganovitch, saved a large number of refugees. It remains unclear if Mark's family was the recipient of such measures. Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 118.
[148] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:06:45, 01:31:05.
[149] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 6 November 2013, 00:02:53.
[150] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 151.
[151] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:30:31.

circumstances, "which included smuggling, stealing, bribery, manipulating the system, and even escaping."[152] As "Soviet regulations were designed to make life impossible, the only hope of survival lay in the deportees' resistance," explains Urszula Szmygiel.[153] The collective risks associated with such rule-breaking were serious, and the communal fear of consequences from Soviet authorities was severe, as there existed a very real threat of punishment. Kaganovitch describes that those caught stealing food could be sentenced to years in prison, which served to instil fear in others and discipline citizens.[154] Young Polish Jews thus found themselves in a difficult political environment which they had to learn to manoeuvre.

This political context transformed the responsibilities taken on by youth and, for younger children, ultimately transformed their roles and positioning in broader family dynamics. Despite the associated threats, theft and dealing on the black market were part of everyday life for refugees, even children. If they generally depended on their parents for access to food, some shared this responsibility by selling items on the black market or by stealing. Mark's parents made caps, which he would take to the local market to try and sell in order to buy food. He would also attempt to pick up leftover grains where he could: "we would go into the fields, and try to glean, you know…When they cut with the combines, everything was done automatically on machines, there would be always left some grain on the side standing, so, we would try to get some of this, you know, and sometimes they would take it away from us, and sometimes they would let us keep it."[155] The black market was simply necessary to survive.[156]

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[152] Szmygiel, "'The past is never dead. It's not even past'," 93. See also Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:04:05.
[153] Szmygiel, "'The past is never dead'," 93. While such resistance was everywhere, a distinction was understood to exist amongst citizens between "acceptable" stealing from common property, such as factories or other governmental industries, and private property, "which was considered morally wrong." Goldlust, "A Different Silence,"35.
[154] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 99.
[155] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:01:24. This is not without recalling young Jewish children in ghettos across eastern Europe, who were able to sneak in and out of ghetto walls in order to steal food for their families.
[156] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 167. See also Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 166.

The way children and adolescent deportees discuss the black market in itself is notable. Adler explains that youth interviewed immediately after the war often depicted the black market as "a norm of Soviet life," whereas adults more frequently felt the "need to justify their actions and put them in a better light."[157] Ilona's testimony highlights these differences, explaining that such illegal activities caused tensions between her parents: "Il disait à ma mère, "Mais qu'est-ce que tu veux, que je vole?" Ben ma mère, elle voulait qu'il vole, peut-être, mais elle n'a jamais dit ça. [...] Mon message, c'est ça, il faut faire tout pour survivre."[158] She subtly remarks that her mother clearly wished, although would have never said so aloud, that her husband had done more for them. At the end of her interview, when asked to give a message to future generations, she urges the need to do whatever necessary to survive, including stealing. She does not share the sense of propriety that her parents, and particularly her father, upheld in exile. Her testimony, as well as those of the other youth who discuss theft and the black market, offers an interesting point of view on the differences between adults and children in exile: "children are less aware of the decline in status" that such actions would entail[159], and are thus less burdened by the socially imposed restrictions that could impact survival.

The young interviewees in this study who address the black market or other illegal activities generally did not justify these actions. Most referred to the black market and "illegal" activities as a necessity. Theft was seemingly not as severely reprimanded as was dealing on the bazaar, as it was considered less dangerous than "'capitalist' crimes such as speculation," with merchants or people who sold on the market denounced as "'parasitical' middle-m[en]".[160] Yet

[157] Adler, "Children in Exile," 55.
[158] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 7, 00:06:09.
[159] Adler, "Chilren in Exile," 55.
[160] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 35-36.

the youth of this study who discuss stealing and dealing note little difference between the two, regarding both as acts necessary for survival.

Henry's father created an entire shadow industry to survive. When they settled near Dzhambul, he became a tanner, which was considered a "necessary trade" unlike his prior occupation as a furrier. He taught the local Dungan population how to manufacture leather and opened a legal trade school under the guise of the Soviet government[161], however this was not enough to survive:

> Of course, in order to survive one had to do things in the black market, because his salary wasn't enough to, to buy maybe a loaf of bread. So he would buy hides from the farmers, illegally, who would slaughter the cattle illegally because they weren't allowed, the cattle was to be taken for the war effort. [...] He had his own hides, his students would work them, and then uh… this was for hard leather, like for soles of shoes, he'd cut them up into pieces, and I would carry them, I was at that time ten, eleven years old, I would carry 'em through the fields, fifteen kilometres into Dzhambul, to the city to sell them to the shoemakers - *illegally*, I mean, he would sell them illegally. He would make shoes illegally, and sell it on the black market illegally. So it was a whole, a whole industry, an underground industry for people to survive.[162]

While Henry does not clarify how his father felt about the legality of his work, the way he speaks recalls Adler's argument that children generally saw little shame in these actions.[163] He does, however, evoke the dangers of such illegal work, noting that his father was arrested and sentenced to prison for a year in 1942. His story brings to mind not only the ways in which the Soviet system limited employment and the development of specific industries, but also the risks refugees faced in order to survive, as well as the severe consequences of both real and perceived transgressions.

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[161] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:47:33.
[162] *Ibid.*, 00:48:20. Kaganovitch discusses similar stories of Jewish entrepreneurs who created their own modes of survival and clarifies that these behaviours "often ran counter to the Soviet legal norm." Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 79.
[163] Adler, "Children in Exile," 55.

Adler's contention that younger people who experience exile are less likely to "explicitly plac[e] blame" is, here again, accurate. While most of the children and adolescents address the lack of food, few directly point the finger to the Soviet system for their hunger.[164] That being said, testimonies "convey not only their individual stories, but also their distinct interests. Hunger plagued all of the children, but they discuss it in different words."[165]

Such stories of hunger also highlight the arduous necessity of eating whatever one could find. Indeed, many of these young survivors recall that they kept a kosher house in Poland. Yet, in exile, many had to push aside their religious beliefs in order to survive.[166] Mark, for example, explains that the first time he had pork was in the Kazakh SSR, as peasants were trading meat for clothing.[167] Henry discusses the ways in which Jewish families in his Kazakh village tried to follow kosher rituals: "we didn't have kosher meat per se, but one of the Jewish families that was with us, he was a *katsef* [butcher], he was a butcher. So he was acting as a *shohet* [an individual licensed by rabbinic authority to slaughter animals], so when we slaughtered something for ourselves, he would do it and make the whole, the whole procedure, the whole *bracha* [blessing], as if he was a *shohet*. But he wasn't, let's say trained as a *shohet*, he knew the way to do it."[168] Jewish identity was key in making useful contacts early on in exile, in this case to pursue religious traditions, which allowed Henry and his family to eat as kosher as possible while in Central Asia.[169] Yet, the butchering of cows was done illegally, Henry specifies again, as the

[164] Adler, "Children in Exile," 45.
[165] *Ibid*., 54.
[166] Kashrut [Jewish dietary laws] orders the ways in which food should be not only eaten, but also stored and prepared. See "Kashrut," Jüdisches Museum Berlin, accessed 23 October 2023, https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-kashrut.
[167] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:21:02.
[168] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 01:12:44. "Shohet," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed 23 October 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shohet.
[169] See Natalie Belsky, "Contested Memories: Soviet and Polish Jewish Refugees and Evacuees Recount Their Experiences on the Soviet Home Front," in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939-1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, ed. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021).

Soviet government forbade killing cattle. Religion, food, and politics were thus intimately connected.[170]

Finally, for some of the youngest interviewees, the "war years were a time of sensory and emotional intensity."[171] Childhood experiences of hunger in Central Asia became anchored in sensorial memories that expressed themselves both physically and psychologically later in life. Henry's experiences of childhood hunger, for example, reappeared when he met his wife. He describes challenging times after his father's arrest, and the little that they had to eat in their village in the Kazakh SSR marked him. To survive, they were given potato peels by neighbours, and foraged for frozen potatoes or corn in already ploughed fields. "To this day, I cannot eat sweet potatoes, because it reminds me of that sickening, sweet taste that frozen potatoes – because the starch turns into sugar when it freezes. And it tastes very, very sweet, acrid sweet. [small chuckle] When I met my wife, one of the first things she did was cook me sweet potato pie with marshmallows [chuckles, shakes head]. I reacted," he concludes softly.[172] Henry's testimony is overall steady and without hesitation, displaying the narrative capacities of someone who may have previously repeated these stories frequently or shaped their experiences into a tellable life story.[173] In this moment, however, the listener feels a break from his narrative; his voice shifts to a more intimate tone before pausing and jumping back into a chronological and historical tale with a steady voice. This small moment between him and his wife was significant, bringing to mind Marcel Proust's sensorial exploration of madeleines in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.[174]

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[170] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 01:13:57.
[171] Barbara Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War: Childhood Memories of the Wartime Atlantic, 1939-45," in *Small Stories of War: Children, Youth, and Conflict in Canada and Beyond*, ed. Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander, and Andrew Burtch (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 74.
[172] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:49:56.
[173] See Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors. Beyond Testimony* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2010), 2-3.
[174] The "Proust effect," as inspired by Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* and the narrator's experience of re-tasting madeleines, is described as an "involuntary, sensory-induced, vivid and emotional reliving of events from the past." Alexandra

III. Exile from childhood

The impacts of deportation and forced displacement reverberated across young people's lives in various ways. The feeling of having lost one's youth is present not only in testimonies of young children, as one might more readily expect, but also in the life stories of adolescents. This feeling of loss associated with wartime displacement is expressed in a variety of emotions, as well as what some describe as a lack of emotional capacity. For David, it presents itself in profound anger:

> As one who survived the Holocaust in a different way, I say that what it did to me [points to his heart. Long pause, tearing up] is, it gave me *hate*. I'm a very well educated person, I come from a wonderful, warm home, I'm an intellectual, I embrace all the world. And yet, I hate. [long pause, tearing up]. I cannot understand that I don't have the strength to rebuild my feelings. [...] I cannot conquer my feeling. That it took me away, at *sixteen* [points to the camera]. From a wonderful, wonderful home, where I had a possibility of a wonderful future. My brother Bayba [sic] was a lawyer at 22, with *all* the problems that Jews had in Polish universities, you know, and all this, he *still* managed. [...] And it's a pity. Because *hate* takes a lot away [pause]. A lot of energy. Hate is a killer [crying, wipes tear].[175]

David expresses not only the loss of life's possibilities, but also the disruption of his most fundamental emotional capacities. The destruction of home, including the destruction of the opportunities he observed in his childhood, is still present, despite his extensive postwar education and fulfilling career. "I belonged to a cultured, intelligent, well-educated Jewish family, where education was very much important. Where father would read to us Sholem Aleichem in the evenings [...]," he says in the final minutes of his interview, returning to these

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Ernst, "Review: The Proust effect: The senses as doorways to lost memories by C van Campen," *Perception* 43 (2014): 1404. See also Crétien van Campen, *The Proust effect: the senses as doorways to lost memories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[175] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:22:11.

themes.[176] The loss of the richness of his family life and the opportunities robbed from him are crucial, presenting themselves at many moments across his interview.

Discontent or resentment could manifest itself in different ways for young survivors. Poland could become the target of such resentment, particularly after facing antisemitism and confrontation with Christian Poles in the aftermath of the war, leading to a permanent exile from their homes:

> **Interviewer**: Have you ever returned to your birthplace, and why or why not?
> **Mark**: No! I did not.
> **Interviewer**: Why not?
> **Mark**: There's nobody there that…. And my memories from there are not something that, you know, I cherish.[177]

If home was "traditionally perceived as [a] female space," as explains Katherine Jolluck, it was also a space of childhood, a space of family, and generally, a place of safety for these youth.[178] Paula clearly explains this when discussing the destruction of her home: "my bed was very, I remember it being very beautiful, with a lot of these cushions with their frills all around, and it was a place of comfort. I had my dolls there, and I had my stuffed animals in the bed, it was a place of comfort and security, and warmth. It was my sanctuary [...]. And after that, I never, never had a bed of my own. [...] I considered that as the end of my childhood at the age of four."[179] The destruction of her safe space, and the subsequent inhabitation of *unsafe* spaces was, for her, the end of her childhood.

Henry's house, which his father had built himself in 1938, was seized by German officers to establish their headquarters, and was moved by Christian Polish residents of the village after the war. Neither Henry nor his father were able to return to their house: "All his life, he wanted to

[176] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:58:58.
[177] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 6 November 2013, 01:22:33.
[178] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, *xx*.
[179] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:12:20.

go back to that shtetl; he had this urge, which I have now, that he wanted to see his house. [...] I wanted to take him back, and other circumstances were such that we couldn't go back to see it."[180] The impact of such a disruption of home on identity was likely compounded for children: home became "a place of battle" – both in the act of destruction, deportation, and displacement, but also in the *lieu* of exile and in the moment of return.[181] Beyond their physical homes, Poland itself, as Mark's story above denotes, could later become another signifier of what was lost in terms of "home."

Yolande Cohen, Martin Messika and Sara Cohen Fournier argue that forced displacement, or a forcible removal from home, is particularly damaging for youth as it affects not only a "loss of national identity," but also personal development, leading to "an internal schism."[182] These struggles are described by Judith, who expresses the challenges she continues to face due to her exile:

> **Interviewer**: Looking back on all this…turmoil in your early years, and the subsequent events, how would you...what *message* would you like to leave with the...
> **Judith**: Well this is a very good question. I must say that there is lots of things that are not as solved in my life, I still have lots of memories and I'm not a *relaxed* person, because things have been so hectic, you know, that I can't even feel that all these years I didn't accomplish a normal childhood, I didn't do the things that normal children do, and even now in education, I can feel that these years... I missed the childhood. [...] There are left over holes in the heart, but they are healing. And now I'm seventy-one years old, and I look at it in perspective that we have achieved a lot, and I'm happy.[183]

First, this interaction demonstrates the questions utilised by the Montreal Holocaust Museum in order to pursue a redemptive narrative. At the same time, however, we understand that her *expectations* of what childhood should be were disrupted, impacting not only her upbringing, but

[180] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 01:21:19, 00:20:25.
[181] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, *xx*, 280.
[182] Cohen, Messika, and Cohen Fournier, "Memories of Departures," 317.
[183] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stahlman, 19 December 2001, 01:10:19.

also her sense of self. Interestingly, Judith's answer works against what Tony Kushner has described as the standardisation and quantification of responses following the standardisation of questionnaires.[184] Former child survivors' perceptions of such questions can prompt new reflections on *why*, and *for whom*, we collect life stories.[185]

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The journeys that Polish Jewish youth undertook across the Soviet Union towards Central Asia and within the region were distressing and dangerous. These journeys not only carried physical risks, but also had long-lasting psychological impacts. Children and adolescents were left to face a myriad of consequences of forced displacement, including threats to their health, their education, and their access to food. Yet themes such as these were not necessarily easily integrated into the chronological wartime narratives that the museum's interviewers were working towards. Broadly speaking, it bears mentioning that all children who experienced illness brought up these difficult moments of their own volition. I observed a similar absence of questions surrounding wartime schooling for children, where Paula, Ilona, and Henry all brought up their own struggles with education in exile, with only Mark being asked about school. The resulting narratives thus highlight what stands out in youth's memories of exile, but at the same time, says much about the museum collection's aims and the fact that many interviewers appear less comfortable with histories of deportation.

Displaced either with their families or alone, the refugees of this story found themselves far from home – both physically and psychologically. Still, these narratives demonstrate the impact of the proximity of family on *what* stories are shared as well as the collective nature of memory-

[184] Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problems of Representation," 277.
[185] See Henry Greenspan, "On Testimony, Legacy and the Problem of Helplessness in History." *Holocaust Studies* 13, no. 1 (2007): 44-56. And *ibid*., 275-295.

making. In addition, they highlight clear differences between adults and youth both in the kinds of actions undertaken while in exile, as well as the manners in which they speak of these, with youth generally placing less blame on authorities and demonstrating a certain freedom from established social norms. Relationships with family members or with local populations would play a major role in how they would face the adversities of the war years to come. The following chapters will explore these relationships in more detail, with Chapter 2 focusing on social dynamics with local citizens.

CHAPTER 2. "MUTUAL INCOMPREHENSION" OR "DEEP BROTHERHOOD"?[1]

Shortly after we arrived, the neighbour came to say hello...[2]

Upon their arrival in Central Asia, young Polish Jewish refugees were thrust into the already complex dynamics between local populations and Russian émigrés, with the war further straining these relationships. Central Asia in the 1940s was not only a war front, "with victories and victims," as suggests Albert Kaganovitch, but also a heavily colonised territory.[3] By August 1941, the Soviet government had relocated the majority of the Soviet economy to the regions of Central Asia, Western Siberia, the Volga, and the Urals.[4]

This wartime movement of industries should be understood in the broader framework of Russian imperial conquests and colonisation, with expansion into these territories begining as early as the 17th century.[5] In the aftermath of the First World War, administrative changes were made to Central Asian territories according to the concept of autonomous republics within a central federation, with the goal of dividing territories based on ethnicity and common language: the "national principle," under Stalinist terms.[6] Imposing these transformations was difficult in many regions of Central Asia, as populations "had normally defined [themselves] not on the basis of language [...], but on the basis of religion and of belonging to a specific geographical region or even a local community.[7]

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[1] Rebecca Manley uses the phrase "mutual incomprehension" to discuss relationships between Central Asians and newcomers. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 229 while Mula Ben Hayyim called relationships between locals and other Polish Jews a "deep brotherhood." See Dekel, *In the East*, 142.
[2] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:44:01.
[3] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 10.
[4] Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer, *Fortress Dark and Stern: The Soviet Home Front During World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 16.
[5] Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (New York and London: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), 19-20 and Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2003), 62.
[6] Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 31, 46 and Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, 94.
[7] Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, 94.

The consequences of these changes were dramatic, leading to a "Russification" of Central Asian society, including the introduction of new languages, the banning of many religious practices, and the collectivization of farms.[8] With this project, ancient traditions of nomadic tribes were destroyed, resulting in widespread famine and death, and massive migration campaigns. Collective farms were formed from individual villages and clans, which implied that "feudal social relations were thus grafted onto a socialist system of production," leading to complicated hierarchies into which refugees were unwittingly integrated as of 1941.[9] The territory on which Polish Jewish youth arrived was thus heavily politically charged.

Upon listening to testimonies of Polish Jewish deportees, both adult and young, what stands out are the relationships that youth specifically developed with local populations and the social dynamics within which they were integrated. Testimonies of older Polish Jews rarely addressed the relationships they developed with locals: of the eleven testimonies I listened to of young adults, only a single one discussed relationships with local populations, while a second testimony makes mention of the presence of Kazaks. The others do not address local populations at all.[10] These youths' discussion of Central Asians also contradict much of the secondary literature on the topic of refugees' social dynamics in exile, which often paints relationships between these groups as distant, tense, and even violent.[11] These testimonies display not only much more frequent discussion of local groups, but also almost overwhelmingly positive ones.

Children and adolescents had complex interactions with others in exile, connecting with peers in schools, workforce or universities, while playing or handling tasks for the villages or

[8] Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, 94 and Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 49-53, 56.
[9] Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 52-53.
[10] See Sara, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013. See also Marek Lewkowicz, interview by Betsy Pomerantz and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 1 and 11 April 2016. It bears mentioning that both Sara and Marek were quite young adults, both born in 1921, and thus around nineteen, twenty years old when they arrived in Central Asia.
[11] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 168-170; Adler, "Children in Exile," 43-44; Grynberg, *Children of Zion*, 129-131; Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 220-244. Some paint a more balanced picture, including both negative and positive relationships such as Dekel, *In the East*, 139-148, 156, 226; Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 36-37; Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 143-145, 153; Grossmann, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India," 187, 201; and Manley, *To The Tashkent Station*, 227-229.

collective farms they lived in. Indeed, Aleida Assmann describes that "unpredictable, forced movements through geographical space give rise to changing constellations of people and places, constellations in which different worlds cross and collide."[12] These relationships with locals hold considerable weight in young survivors' memories. As Marcus Doel has suggested, it matters whether children are "*in place* (fitting, settled, suited, reposed, etc.) or *out of place* (unfitting, unsettled, ill-suited, disturbed, etc.) […] and whether they are accounted for as integral and wholesome or as remainders and exceptions."[13] Displacement can be disrupted or worsened by the "wrong" relationships, those who make one feel out of place, but also eased by the "right" ones that make one feel safe. For many of the young refugees, these interactions were complex and left a long-lasting impact, frequently helping them feel *in* place while being displaced.[14]

According to Mikhal Dekel, the absence of knowledge of the "other" could allow Polish Jews and Central Asians to befriend each other.[15] I would argue this rang particularly true for young people, who make sense of the world differently from adults; the developmental stages during which they experienced exile allowed them to connect with others in special ways. In her study on French children during the First World War, Manon Pignot explores the idea of "lieux de guerre," or "places of war," which can be both metaphorical and geographical spaces in which children experience war.[16] "The *place* where the war was experienced - not the *country* or the nationality - was essential," she concludes.[17] While these young narrators were physically distant from battlefields, they experienced first-hand the "emotional intensity" that came from the war as

[12] Aleida Assmann, "Afterword," in Dekel, *In the East*, 369.
[13] Doel, "Placed. Displaced," 560.
[14] See *ibid*., and discussion of Marcus Doel in the previous chapter.
[15] Dekel, *In the East*, 145-147.
[16] Manon Pignot, "French Boys and Girls in the Great War: Gender and the History of Children's Experiences, 1914-1918," in *Gender and the First World War*, ed. Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger, and Birgitta Bader-Zaar (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 163-164. As cited in Lorenzkowski, Alexander, and Burtch, eds., *Small Stories of War*, 5-6.
[17] Pignot, "French Boys and Girls in the Great War," 173.

they were taken from their homes and their families.[18] Where Central Asia became the geographical place of war, so too did childhood and youth become the metaphorical place where war and displacement were experienced. As Barbara Lorenzkowski notes, spaces of childhood are "borne of habitual activities, emotional encounters, and sensory experiences." Relationships with locals both forged childhood places and were simultaneously forged by place.[19]

This chapter aims to answer the following questions: how did Polish Jewish children and adolescents recall interacting with local groups in exile and in what ways did these relationships (and the ways in which they speak about them) differ from those of adult refugees? I will observe how these connections helped youth to adapt to the challenges of their new territories, exploring more deeply the risks of displacement discussed in the previous chapter, and the ways in which surviving displacement was in many ways possible due to a growing solidarity, and sometimes even friendship, between the two. I will also address the tensions between youth and locals, as well as the particular gaze with which many narrators discuss the presence of indigenous groups. Finally, I aim to show the ways in which youth's perceptions of and experiences with locals differs from older Polish Jewish deportees and from much of the existing secondary literature on the topic.

I. Tensions and solidarity

When asked if she experienced antisemitism on behalf of local citizens, Ilona recalls how a young Uzbek boy would throw stones at her and call her a "sale Juif" while walking the three

[18] See Lorenzkowski, Alexander, and Burtch, eds., *Small Stories of War*, 5.
[19] Inspired by conversation with Barbara Lorenzkowksi. Lorenzkowski, "Childhood Memories of the Wartime Atlantic," 85. See also David Nasaw's *Children of the City*, in which he explores the relationship between the early twentieth century urban city and children's experiences.

kilometres between her *kolkhoz* and her school.[20] This kind of experience of antisemitism is reminiscent of the secondary literature on the topic of relations between Polish Jewish refugees and locals, which often presents strained relationships between the two. Refugees who made their way to Central Asia were imposed onto locals' working and living quarters: one of Dekel's interlocutors, a Korean Uzbek researcher, explains that "everybody was forced. The Hebrew people were forced to go to the *kolkhozes*, and the Uzbek people were forced to take them."[21] Local populations were generally displeased with the arrival of refugees and evacuees of all sorts, Soviet and Pole alike. Kaganovitch attributes this belief at least partially to the fact that many newcomers to the region frowned upon working on collective farms.[22] The irritation by locals was also supported by growing food insecurity, infinite line-ups for goods, and the fact that these large groups of refugees were perceived as a threat to traditional lifestyles, no matter their country or region of origin: "all refugees were, to varying degrees, unwanted aliens," he explains.[23] More specifically, he attributes a rise in antisemitic crimes by Central Asians to the growing proximity of the front and the spread of Nazi propaganda, now reaching the region.[24]

Such tensions arose not only from locals' frustrations surrounding newcomers, but also from refugees' own social preferences: Adler clarifies that most Polish Jews prioritised their families or other Polish Jews in exile. Jewish identity was primordial, with Soviet Jews thus becoming the second closest social group for Polish Jewish refugees. She makes a point of noting that Polish Jewish children were no different from their adult counterparts, and in fact uses the

[20] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:08:55. Mikhal Dekel and Maciej Wąs note an increase in crimes or antisemitic actions towards Polish Jewish refugees during the war. Dekel observes such an increase due to the acute rise in disease and famine in 1942, while Wąs attributes a similar unfavourable turn in locals' attitudes due to lack of food, illness, and overcrowding. See Dekel, *In the East*, 214 and Maciej Wąs, "Как воспринимались другие: некоторые наблюдения в отношении воспоминаний польских евреев о пребывании в Средней Азии в годы войны," in *Jewish Refugees and Evacuees in the Soviet Union, 1939-1946: Studies, Documents and Testimonies*, ed. Zeev Levin (Jerusalem: Hazit ha'Kavod, 2020), 100-101.
[21] Sergey Kim, cited in Dekel, *In the East*, 130.
[22] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 143-144, 153.
[23] *Ibid*., 153, 145.
[24] *Ibid*., 170, see also pp. 165-171.

testimony of Esther Hautzig, a girl around ten years old, to explain the atypicality of refugee children joining the local social world and "becoming" like them.[25] Most Polish Jews viewed locals "from a great distance," she continues, arguing that cultural and linguistic differences prevented profound interactions from taking place.[26] Put simply, as Rebecca Manley states in her study of Soviet evacuees in Tashkent, "the relationship between Uzbeks and newcomers was marked by mutual incomprehension."[27]

Ilona cleverly observed such tensions as a child. According to her, there existed "une sorte de solidarité entre les gens blancs contre les Uzbeks," she says, chuckling, recalling the time an Ukrainian veterinarian falsified a pig's death certificate in order to help them and provide them with food:[28]

> Il y avait un vétérinaire. Une fois, une de nos cochonnes est morte, et il fallait avoir le certificat de décès fait par un vétérinaire. Et le vétérinaire est venu, puis il a dit qu'elle est morte probablement d'une crise cardiaque, il faut pas l'enterrer ni la jeter, mais il va nous donner un certificat qu'elle est morte d'une maladie contagieuse et qu'on l'a enterré immédiatement, mais nous on peut la manger. Alors c'était la seule fois où on mangeait la viande pendant la guerre.[29]

While social dynamics may have been more complex than the twelve- or thirteen-year-old remarked, as relations between Poles and Ukrainians in exile were likely also influenced by prewar preconceptions and national differences, she keenly observed the "us vs. them" attitude

[25] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 168-170.
[26] *Ibid*., 169.
[27] Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 229 and Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 145.
[28] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:07:36.
[29] *Ibid*., 00:07:45.

that nonetheless arose among refugees towards locals, which many other refugees address in secondary literature, and the solidarity that could arise among refugees in exile.[30]

These observations by Ilona are imbricated in a broader narrative of fear surrounding local populations. In her study on Christian Polish women in exile, Katherine Jolluck explains that these women generally considered locals as inferior, depicting them in testimonial literature as "animal-like [...] physical beings lacking both cleanliness and culture. [...] Poles demonstrate almost no knowledge of or sensitivity to feelings of allegiance, expressions of indigenous culture, or even adherence to Islam. [... To them, locals] are simply devoid of culture and civilization."[31] For Polish children, she specifies, Central Asians were the "bogeymen," the embodiment of "children's most terrible nightmares."[32]

In her narrative, Ilona explains how political tensions between locals and Russians in the area were not only motivations for their relocation, but were also frightening for young children: "on a parlé à un moment donné, quand la guerre a tourné très mal pour les Russes, et en Uzbekistan on disait que les Basmachis – Basmachis c'était ceux qui se sont battus contre les Russes pendant la révolution – ils vont déterrer leurs armes et qu'ils vont commencer à tuer les, les Russes et tous les blancs avec. Alors c'était un peu inquiétant."[33] She clarifies that locals hated Russians[34], yet the fear of being included as part of the "white" occupying forces was

[30] See Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 169-170. Jolluck observes that Catholic Polish women perceived a hierarchy in exile - Polish Ukrainians only "won the approval of Polish women when they joined in solidarity with Poles and exhibited similar patriotism." On the other hand, *Soviet* Ukrainians were seen in a more sympathetic light, as they did not "play a part in the tragedy of the Polish nation." Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 216. It is unclear in Ilona's testimony where this individual was from or how her family perceived him.
[31] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 227, 225.
[32] *Ibid.*, 233.
[33] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 5, 00:03:56. The Basmachi movement was a guerrilla peasant group rebelling against and resisting Soviet colonisation between 1918 and 1948. The movement surged particularly in the 1920s and early 1930s as connected to the imposed collectivization by the Russians. For more information, see Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chapter 9 (pp.189-199) and Kirill Nourzhanov, "Bandits, Warlords, National Heroes: Interpretations of the Basmachi Movement in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 2 (2015): 177-189.
[34] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 5, 00:04:39.

deeply felt by refugees, and their children, who internalised such divisions. Along with political pressure on her father, who was threatened with being sent to Siberia if he did not cooperate with the NKVD, these concerns were enough to warrant relocating outside of Central Asia, pushing the family to leave for Moscow, where they stayed until the summer of 1946. Still, of the nine narrators of this study, only Ilona appeared to share the fear of locals depicted by Jolluck.

Ilona's experience with the veterinarian also brings to mind the possible frictions that could arise with regards to food and religious traditions while in exile. Certain animals, like pigs, are defined as non-kosher, but are similarly prohibited by Halal, or Islamic law.[35] Locals' religious beliefs thus influenced the ways in which exiled Jews experienced their own faith. A few narrators of this study recall that Jews were forced to deal with the pigs on their collective farms, notably because locals refused to do these tasks. "Il y avait combien, vingt quelques cochons, mais les Uzbeks sont musulmans, donc ils mangent pas le porc. Mais c'était un ordre du gouvernement que chaque *kolkhoz* doit avoir les cochons," explains Ilona, laughing at the mystifying rules of Soviet collective farms.[36] She was placed in charge of handling the pigs with her mother: "moi je travaillais aussi," says Ilona, "il fallait, je me souviens comme si c'était hier. [...] Il fallait sortir seize seaux de, de [*de nourriture?*] de leur merde [small laugh]. [*Ah, ok* [laughs]] Pour nettoyer, [*de leurs crottes, oui*], oui, et apporter seize seaux d'eau et seize seaux de nourriture. Alors c'était tout un travail."[37] While her family did not keep kosher before the war, refugees' personal beliefs were rarely considered when assigning such physical labour.

[35] According to Islamic Law, a number of elements of both animal or plant origins, notably pigs, are considered unlawful. Similarly to Kashrut, the slaughter of lawful animals has to be done according to certain rules and regulations by a Muslim who has been trained according to these beliefs. For more information, see "General Guidelines for Use of the Term "Halal"," CAC/GL 24-1997[27], Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, https://www.fao.org/3/y2770e/y2770e08.htm, accessed 19 March 2024.
[36] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:03:08.
[37] *Ibid*., clip 5, 00:03:53.

Mark also explains that he and his family began catching turtles to eat and make turtle soup with. "First it was the [Christian] Poles were doing it, you know, and we were just 'boy, how can you think of something like that?'" While their hunger eventually overcame their hesitation, they had to practise such actions in secret due to their Kazakh neighbours' religious beliefs.[38] "We had to hide it from them, so not only we had to bring them in a sack, we had to kill them inside the house, and afterwards with the shells, which we had to break up, we had to go out and bury them. Because otherwise they would be very much against us, you know, for eating… unkosher foods."[39] Not only were Polish Jews frequently constrained to forgo their own religious dietary restrictions in exile, as Mark's family had kept a kosher home before the war, but they also had to pursue these unkosher actions in secret in order not to offend their new neighbours.

As these stories demonstrate, refugee Jews were integrated into pre-existing social dynamics. As many of these *kolkhozes* were created from already existing clans or villages, long-established social dynamics in the region were likely to impact who was responsible for such tasks. Soviet authorities also frequently appointed locals responsible for overseeing the newly arrived refugees on the collective farms.[40] These new leaders were likely able to hand off tasks that did not align with their personal beliefs, creating friction between locals and refugees, who were forced to adapt and sometimes forgo their own faith to appease others. Similarly to Ilona, Mark recalls that Kazakhs did not want to take care of the pigs on their collective farm, which led to their care being handed to an observant Jewish man.[41] Still, such difficult relationships with locals are far from ubiquitous in the narratives of this study, whereas positive experiences are much more frequent.

[38] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:09:13.
[39] *Ibid*., 01:20:48.
[40] Dekel, *In the East*, 136, 142. Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 53.
[41] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:23:50.

For Polish Jewish children and adolescents, connections with locals served a primary function of acculturation and adapting to their new environments. Mark lived in close proximity with Kazakh men and women, who worked and bathed, albeit reluctantly, alongside them in the Nogina [sic] *kolkhoz*. Although they did not share living quarters, they did work together to prepare meals and were swiftly welcomed into local traditions, as Mark's experience demonstrates:

> Shortly after we arrived the neighbour came to say hello, and – some of them spoke Russian, but they spoke poorly – and he just was sitting on a horse, he just reached down, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me up on behind him, you know, and I had to - he went to the gallop you know, and I had to hold on not to fall off. But this is…they learn as a baby practically, because they strap them to a horse, and you know, that is part of them.[42]

He recalls the gendered dynamics of life in the Kazakh SSR, and does not place disapproving judgments on these, something which Adler suggests was rather common for refugees.[43] If men, like the one in Mark's story, were often identified as dangerous and menacing in Polish survivor accounts, these sentiments are absent from his retelling.[44] He rather observes simply that Kazakh men rode horses and were responsible for hunting, while women handled tasks at home. Male children as young as five were taught to ride horses, and Mark was perhaps integrated into one of the many familial traditions in Kazakhstan, called "atka otyrgyzu," or the "first mounting of a horse, intended to prepare a boy for the nomadic life."[45]

Considering locals as victims alongside them is not an uncommon theme in the studied testimonies of young Polish Jewish refugees. Mark clarifies that locals suffered alongside

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[42] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:44:01.
[43] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 170.
[44] See Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 232-233.
[45] Zhasulan Nauryzali, "The Horse Is the Soul of the Kazakh People," Adyrna, published 6 July 2020, https://adyrna.kz/en/post/40713. And "Family Traditions in Kazakhstan," Advantour, accessed 11 June 2024, https://www.advantour.com/kazakhstan/traditions/family.htm. Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:43:45.

refugees under the Soviet regime and had very little, describing them as "quite friendly."[46] Kazakhs had indeed suffered under the Soviets for decades before his arrival, and tensions between the two groups were, without a doubt, exacerbated by the famine suffered in the country in the 1930s following collectivization, in which close to twenty-five percent of the Kazakh population perished.[47] Despite his young age in exile, Mark keenly observed the tensions between both groups and the similarities between refugees and Kazakhs. Much like the refugees, locals ate whatever "they were able to hide and steal," he recalls.[48] This solidarity is echoed in the only testimony by an adult refugee, Sara, who addresses relationships with Uzbeks: "We befriended, we lived with the Uzbeks. We had a place with them, and we befriended them. She treated me like I would be her daughter, and they would do anything for us. [...] They hid our men all the time, because they [the Soviets] were arresting all the time. [...] We befriended them, they loved us, they hated the Russians. And then, this was our luck."[49]

Positive dynamics between young Polish Jews and locals manifested themselves in a profound solidarity between the two, which could take a variety of forms. Religious traditions, notably those related to food, including Kashrut and its similarities to Halal, played a similarly important role in maintaining bonds between certain groups. For Henry, relations with Dungans in their small village near Dzhambul were eased by the fact that they felt like religious "long-lost cousins":

> The principal people were Dungans; they were Chinese nationals with Chinese passports, but they were not Chinese, they were originally, I believe, and I researched this subsequently, from Afghanistan. [...] And since we observed Kashrut, they adopted us. We became their long-lost cousins.

[46] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:07:58.
[47] Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018) 1-2.
[48] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:08:12.
[49] Sara, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, 01:03:57. To be clear, Sara was also quite young – she would have been between 20 and 24 years old during her exile in Central Asia, and only eighteen when the war began in 1939.

> My Hebrew name Chaim, they had Haim too, names, Musa, Moshe my younger brother, they had Musa. And Isaac, that was Isaac, so we were long-lost cousins and we were like, adopted over there, and we were accepted. The Russians and Chinese were not because they were pork eaters.[50]

Henry makes clear that religious beliefs played a significant role in the types of relations one could develop in exile. He lived intimately with the locals in this village, for whom his father created a trade school.

As discussed in the previous chapter and in the introduction, illness shaped refugees' life-course in unexpected ways. In her narrative, Paula explores how typhoid fever led to close encounters with Uzbek children. Once they had settled in the Uzbek SSR, her mother met a doctor who suggested that the sun might cure Paula's leg paralysis. Left outside in the sun during the day as her mother went to work, Paula found herself surrounded by groups of local children, who began talking with her, taking care of her, and eventually, playing with her: "once I got well, they included me in their group of kids, I became one of the village kids."[51] Having to leave children alone was a common experience among deportees; Polish mothers often feared that they could not properly care for their children.[52] For Paula, these early interactions led to important friendships with Uzbek families during her time there, which would transform her experience of displacement and have a lasting impact on her life.

On a local scale, these friendships led to Paula being integrated into the village economy, where age often played a role in the types of tasks imposed on young people:

> Children have jobs, they are part of the economic unit, and everybody has very defined jobs there. Let's say women, young women go to, their job is to get water from the well, that's drinking water. [...] The kids have jobs, and one of the jobs is to prepare the rice when it comes in from the fields, which is like a kernel, and you have to get the rice out of this kernel. [...] So I was taught how to do that, and also another job that children had was running in the morning

[50] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:46:34.
[51] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:44:25.
[52] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 116-118.

> after the herds of cattle that were taken to be, to the fields, to, you know, to eat, to pick up their, to pick up their *caca*. And we would run after them with a pail and pick it up, and bring it home. And spill it onto the ground [...] and then you kneaded it with your feet and you made little balls, and then you took these balls and you threw them against the mud hut and they would stick. And when the sun dried them, it was easy to take them off, and this is what was used for fuel. So this was another job that children had.[53]

Mark similarly describes the small jobs he did as child on his collective farm, which resemble those detailed by Paula: gathering grass and water, helping to prepare meals, finding leftover grains, and either trying to buy food from locals or selling items made by his parents.[54] Young children were included in the Soviet economy not only through forced labour, but also local infrastructures.

Integration into Kazakh and Uzbek lifestyles in exile allowed some refugee children to learn and embrace local gastronomy and traditions. Many describe traditional meals and preparation techniques. In the Uzbek SSR, Paula discovered pilaf: locals ate a single meal every day, composed of lamb meat, vegetables, and rice, which was cooked throughout the day. She was invited to her young friends' huts for dinner and embraced their customs: "they eat with their hands, so the pot is sort of tilted to each person that sits around, and you take out some of the food with your hand, and you sort of push it in with your thumb [gestures motion], you push it into your mouth. Um, of course it sounds, it sounds terrible, but it really isn't."[55] Learning to eat as Uzbeks did was a simple choice, which allowed the young girl to more easily integrate into her new society. Her need to justify that such practices were not in fact "terrible" is suggestive of the ways in which refugee children and adolescents had to unlearn prior perceptions and ways of being while in exile.

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[53] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:45:35.
[54] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:00:42
[55] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:41:22. See also Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:00:12.

Mark describes that although they never had enough food, two Kazakh women still laboured all day to make their small meal. In order to make bread, they had to learn the local techniques: "they would put a sheepskin on the ground, and the bottom stone was on it, the top stone above it, and the women would put into a hole, which was dug in the stone, a big stick, and with this thing she would turn it with her right hand, and with her left hand she would throw grain into the centre hole, you know, where there was a piece of metal and [gestures turning motion]."[56] They eventually adapted the method from its traditional seated position to standing when they realised they needed to follow these traditions to survive, much to the amusement of Kazakh women who found humour in seeing men partaking in typically female tasks.[57] Food thus occupied an important place in refugees' relations with others, and their acculturation to local traditions perhaps allowed locals to more warmly embrace their new neighbours.

While Dekel mentions the use of antisemitic slurs by locals, and Uzbeks chasing refugees out of their *kolkhozes*, she also describes what Mula Ben Hayyim calls a "deep brotherhood" between Polish Jews and Uzbeks.[58] This group was welcoming and friendly: they invited refugees to eat with them, they adopted refugee orphans, and buried Polish Jews in their own cemeteries and prayed for them. Polish Jewish refugees discovered further similarities in traditional mourning practices when locals brought food after a family member's death.[59] Historian Atina Grossmann similarly notes that while most Central Asians were "bewildered by, and often resentful and suspicious of" all evacuees and refugees, they were "sometimes, however, also astonishingly generous given their own poverty and deprivation."[60] Locals and refugees would take part in wedding celebrations, share meals, visit sites together in large cities, or spend

[56] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:42:17.
[57] *Ibid.*, 00:42:55.
[58] Dekel, *In the East*, 136, 142-143.
[59] *Ibid*., 142-143, 156, 139-140, 226, 147-148.
[60] Grossmann, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India," 187.

afternoons in *chaikhanas* [teahouses]. Polish Jews would even sometimes adapt their names to be more easily integrated and understood.[61]

Food was a particularly important element in developing social dynamics in exile, playing a vital role in bonding with locals, as Henry explained when discussing the similarities between Halal and Kashrut. As famine, hunger, or starvation were mentioned by most of these young survivors, and represented some of the most distressing elements surrounding their exile in Central Asia, it bears mention that these struggles were sometimes eased by relationships with others. Both children and adolescents understood their own role in helping others through food, and many received such assistance from Uzbeks and Kazakhs. Refugee children depended on the help of others, but also sought to help where they could.

Mark and Ilona were conscious of both their own precariousness and their capacity to help other refugees survive famine, and recall their role in helping others. Mark explains that the garden they were eventually able to grow saved their lives, as they were able to use the corn to make flour for bread and could sell their watermelons for extra income. He recalls other deportees' struggles:

> We suddenly started having these people steal our produce. You know, like for example they would, we would have watermelons this size [opens arms wide], and somebody would come at night, you know, and cut a hole and taste if it's good, you know, and then go to the next one and find, try to find a ripe one [...]. But you couldn't blame them because they were so hungry and, they had nothing [...]. You could see them starving [gestures thin face].[62]

Ilona similarly recalls that her mother gave food to a family of Polish Jews, as they were the ones who had access to it.[63]

[61] Grossmann, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India," 201.
[62] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:06:43 and 01:53:36.
[63] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:05:44.

Giving and receiving aid, specifically in the form of food, was a recurrent theme in testimonies like Rywka's, who experienced Kazakhs' generosity after falling ill. She was faced with malaria alone in a hospital in the Kazakh SSR. "I was more dead than alive," she says somberly, recalling the lack of tests available to diagnose her, and that her nurse would pray for her to live only because she did not want to deal with her corpse.[64] When she finally returned home, she found herself the recipient of a thoughtful surprise: "my neighbour, when I came back, they were bringing food, we couldn't finish it, the two of us!"[65] While she explains that her neighbours likely did so because they wanted her to return to work, which would in turn help them make more money, their generosity is notable given the wartime context and the scarcity of food, as well as the fact that Kazakhs had experienced severe famine during collectivization only a few years earlier.[66] "I'm telling you, they were exceptional good," she says. "Not only at that, in general, they were good. Very respectful, for myself and also for my brother."[67] Paula similarly encountered everyday hospitality from her Uzbek neighbour, who would bring her a bowl of fresh milk every morning, letting her take what was leftover from their contribution to the communal farm, and this before feeding her own family.[68]

These many forms of solidarity were often born out of the political context in which refugees and locals found themselves in. Since 'working the system' was necessary to make ends meet in the Soviet Union, some created illegal industries to survive, like Henry's father, while others provided illegal help to friends and neighbours through their employment. Indeed, Rywka discusses a specific type of illegal activity: data fraud. Though work quotas had to be fulfilled,

[64] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:13:22.
[65] *Ibid.*, 01:12:36.
[66] See Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*. And Bruce Pannier, "Kazakhstan: The Forgotten Famine," RadioFreeEurope, published 28 December 2007, https://www.rferl.org/a/1079304.html. See also Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, chapter 9, 190. As Conquest posits, the Kazakh famine, an "enormous human and economic disaster," is "impossible to match in the annals of any other colonial power."
[67] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:13:00.
[68] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:00:32.

some refugees would alter data in their reports to make their own or others' lives easier. Rywka had initially worked with animals in the fields, but was eventually able to obtain a less physically arduous position, tasked with preparing the payroll and bookkeeping in her *sovkhoz*.[69] This position allowed her to make a difference in other workers' lives: Rywka, who proclaims herself a rebel, describes how she would alter numbers in her books in order to get the workers more money, putting her life at risk: "I made a lot of trouble. [...] At the time when I was taking account of whatever somebody was making, there was let's say a price, if you made so much of so much, you getting this much and this much. But I start figuring out, they made *bupkis* [nothing]! I felt sorry for those people. So I made some *shmeydrey* [?], they made [...] a few rubles more."[70]

Rywka's assuredness, her lack of fear towards Soviet soldiers and the NKVD, and her refusal to obey orders were key in helping her fellow workers, some of whom were locals. Similarly to Adler's observations on youth, shame, and illegal market activities discussed in the previous chapter, Rywka does not feel the need to justify her actions. Interestingly, it is her *interviewer* who asks her to explain them:

> **Interviewer**: What made you so confident that you wouldn't get caught?
> **Rywka**: I don't know.
> **Interviewer**: You, I guess like you said, [speaking over each other]
> **Rywka**: …*chutzpah* [gall, nerve]! [speaking over each other]
> **Interviewer**: You were just a rebel, yes, you were just daring…
> **Rywka**: … *Chutzpah*! ...*Chutzpah*![71]

There is something of a brazen confidence, charm, and lack of consideration of consequences in this excerpt that can easily be associated with adolescence. At the same time, Rywka carries such

[69] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:00:58. See also Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:40:01.
[70] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:05:10, 01:08:31.
[71] *Ibid*., 01:09:39.

confidence throughout her interview, unafraid of speaking her mind and challenging her interviewer. These illegal actions appear in line with her natural convictions and courage.

While this position was less physically demanding than field labour, it was not without its hazards. Just as the quotas of those who worked manually were verified, her work was checked by inspectors who claimed they could "smell a rat," though authorities were unable to find proof of her manipulations.[72] Although she laughs when talking about making trouble, with hindsight, Rywka is aware that she risked her life and that she might not have survived had she been caught. Still, helping others was what motivated her: "I did such things…just [*Tell us some other things*], no, no, just helping, not for myself, [...] but for the people which didn't make [enough]."[73] Her neighbour's care for her when she was ill and her desire to help those who had less are a poignant example of solidarity between Polish Jewish refugees and locals.

Solidarity could also take the form of respect for others' beliefs and sensibilities. Mark explains that although there was a communal bathhouse in his village, residents of the collective farm were forbidden from using it until a typhoid epidemic broke out, when it became mandatory for everyone to wash themselves.[74] Mark mentions that Kazakh women found this imposed act of public washing more challenging: "the ladies did not like it, especially the Kazakh ladies, you know, and so [my uncle] used to pour a little water on their heads, and give them a piece of soap, and they would be happy, because this way they could show that they had a bath - wet hair - and they didn't have to, they preferred washing at home."[75] Such descriptions counter other scholars' observations that Poles perceived Central Asians as "physical beings lacking both cleanliness and

[72] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:10:30 and Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:40:01.
[73] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:05:00, 01:08:23, 01:09:48.
[74] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:39:34. Kaganovitch in fact estimates that refugees likely could only wash themselves approximately once a month, depending on the region. Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 110.
[75] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:40:06

culture," as dirty, inferior beings with no hygiene.[76] Refugee women, as well, resented the lack of privacy in communal facilities that offended their sense of propriety.[77] Forced to interact in such intimate manners, some refugees and locals found ways to adapt together to their specific needs.

This respect for others' beliefs and ways of living could go both ways, as David's story demonstrates. His wartime experience also reminds us how religious practice depended on location and environment: those who lived in towns or on collective farms did not always enjoy the freedom of others living in more remote areas, where they were freed from the watchful eye of Soviet authorities.[78] Living nomadically in the mountains with his brigade, David is the only survivor who recalls openly praying in front of others and being encouraged to do so by locals. The absence of the threat of retribution allowed him to freely practise Judaism:

> When I came to the mountains, the only thing that I had in my bag was still a piece of soap, you know from Tashkent, and the tefillin. And the next morning, when I woke up in the field, [...] I put on the tefillin. And they asked me in pidgin Russian, like Uzbeks talk, they asked me, and I said this is showing respect to my parents. And of course, through the days and months, not always did I remember in the morning. There were more important things for a young man [...]. And the old Uzbek Yissa Akka [sic] would come over [...], and he would say "David, what is it with you, you have no respect from your parents?" [*Interviewer laughs*] I had to jump, put on the tefillin and they will all watch. There are no secrets.[79]

[76] See Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 225-227.
[77] See also Lee, interview by Elliot Kramer and Jeff Cheran (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*, 9 September 1996, 00:40:45.
[78] Scientific atheism was one of the principal tenets of Soviet ideology. While religion itself was not completely banned in Central Asia, where the population was overwhelmingly Muslim, antireligious efforts had been widespread before the war. Judaism was not absent from the region, yet many actions specifically targeting synagogues, torah scrolls, and rabbinic figures had taken place in the decades before the war, leading to a certain effacement of Judaic practice in the public sphere. See Mordechai Altshuler, *Religion and Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union, 1941-1964*, 1 and Dekel, *In the East*, 123, 161. While some scholars, like Adler, argue that refugees found relative freedom from such religious persecution in exile in Central Asia, there was a noted growth in antisemitism in the region during the war, and repressive measures were not uncommon, most notably "intimidation by warning." Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 171 and Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 176-177, 179.
[79] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:41:56.

His proximity with the two Uzbek men who formed his brigade allowed him the freedom to outwardly perform his religion, a rarity for those in exile, as all others who discuss practising religion in their narratives recall doing so secretly.[80]

Locals appear in narratives of young survivors in a variety of ways. Still, such overwhelming positive experiences cannot erase the depictions of difficult, sometimes even violent relationships between Polish Jewish refugees and locals, but these allow for a more complex and nuanced understanding of these social dynamics. There may also be differences between what Kaganovitch describes as "childhood memories and the real situations": the author attributes good memories of exile to a certain "childhood nostalgia" and to "poor knowledge of the everyday "adult" problems" of the period.[81] Using the story of adolescent refugee Nina Notkin, he explores the ways in which her *memories* of the evacuation are positive, but that archival documents testify to a much harsher situation for her family than depicted by the girl.[82] He describes her memories as "the result of corrections and self-censorship formed under the influence of the myth [...] about the successful absorption of the evacuees," explaining that her individual memories were repressed and replaced by the collective experience, or the social memory of the event.[83]

Could these youth's perceptions of locals have been affected in a similar manner? The fact that many discuss awareness of life's difficulties in their exile – the death of family members, famine, challenging illnesses, family separation, and even Soviet repression – allows me to argue

[80] Paula explains that while Jews were not allowed to practise, those who were religious did so in secret. Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:04:16. Mark describes that the men of his family held religious services "in somebody's house," and that there was no synagogue. He also recalls celebrating the High Holidays in secret. Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:22:33. Henry recalls that his butcher, a Jewish man also in exile in his village, would *doven* with *tefillin* every morning, and that *minyans* were organised, but does not mention how secretive these acts were. Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 01:14:33.
[81] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 172, 12.
[82] *Ibid.*, 172.
[83] *Ibid.*, 172-173.

that these positive perceptions are reflective of their lived experience, especially considering the overall lack of collective "social memory" surrounding deportation.[84] When relationships with locals are discussed, secondary literature rarely paints an overwhelmingly positive picture. To be sure, the social context of the interview *could* play a role – these stories are told in contemporary Canada, a country with a multicultural policy that promotes equality and respect amongst all, which could encourage narrators to review these memories through a new lens.[85] The redemptive arc of oral history projects discussed in the Introduction similarly cannot be dismissed: the "moral function" of the interview – what Henry Greenspan explains as the insistence "that something tangibly meaningful *must* be salvaged from the destruction" – could also affect how memories of exile are shared.[86]

II. "The East," or perceptions of "The Other"

The gaze with which children and youth observed others in exile unveils their own complex social, political, and religious backgrounds. Although Mark lived in a rural setting in Poland he himself described as "primitive," for example, he also notes that he and his family thought they were "back in the Stone Age"[87] when learning to make bread like Kazakhs. Paula's repetition that eating with your hands is "not as terrible as it sounds"[88] similarly highlights her own urban upbringing. Indeed, "young people's political sensibilities were often nurtured in, and entwined with, the political culture of their families and communities."[89] For the children of this study who were deported or displaced with family, their presence could have had an impact on their

[84] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 173. As discussed in the Introduction.
[85] See "About the Canadian Multiculturalism Act," Government of Canada, accessed 5 August 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/about-multiculturalism-anti-racism/about-act.html. Thank you to Erica Lehrer for drawing attention to this consideration.
[86] Greenspan, "On Testimony, Legacy and the Problem of Helplessness in History," 52.
[87] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 00:22:47 and Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:42:55.
[88] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:42:15.
[89] Lorenzkowski, Alexander, and Burtch, eds., *Small Stories of War*, 17.

perceptions of others. It should also be said that Polish Jewish refugees arrived in a region where many traditional ways of living still remained. While conditions were evidently rudimentary, with little living space and often a lack of hygienic facilities, depictions of living conditions as "primitive" by refugees reflect both the differences in social organisation between Europe and Central Asia and pre-existing beliefs held by Polish citizens of "the Orient," reverberating on Central Asia and its peoples.

As Katherine Jolluck has noted, a "dismissive attitude toward the peoples of Central Asia as a primitive race remains a constant in Polish wartime writings," with references to local residents usually being "comments on their physical appearance and hygiene."[90] She clearly explains the ways in which Poles experienced the "dread of Asia," and feared not just its population, but also their ways of existence and their lands as the "antithesis of Europe."[91] In a similar vein, John Goldlust and Eliyana Adler have observed shared patterns in survivor narratives of life in Central Asia including "'ethnographic' descriptions" of local lifestyles. As Goldlust states, "when these groups do appear in the narratives, it is often in terms of their Muslim or, more frequently, their Asiatic 'exoticism'," with lengthy descriptions of clothing and living quarters being most frequent.[92] Adler similarly mentions an "anthropological lens," which survivors often brought along in exile, noting that refugees were generally less aware of their own cultural and social biases and quick to comment negatively on certain traditions they observed.[93]

[90] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 225.
[91] *Ibid*., 220.
[92] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 36.
[93] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 169-170.

Many of these youths' depictions of life in Central Asia recall, on the surface, the ethnographic and anthropological lenses described by the authors above.[94] However, the authors are using these lenses to depict the pejorative, exoticizing manner in which refugees observed local ways of existing and rarely account for age in their analysis of the *meaning* of such observations. The youth of this study, on the other hand, appear to be doing something different. Instead of *othering* locals, they are mobilising the ethnographic method as a way to closely observe their existence without judgment, seeking to understand both their own culture and those of local residents. In doing so, they explore what makes people connect and what it means to exist, or belong, in a society.

To begin, young children's descriptions of living quarters recall the detailed curiosity with which they explored new ways of living. Mark brings forward very specific information regarding their new living environments in Shaulder. Two families, for a total of nine individuals, were given one house to share and all houses were identical:

> They were made of adobe bricks, they had no floor, earth floor, they had a roof, which was slanted a bit, but it was mostly flat made out of bundles of reeds which were put side by side, and clay on top of it. And it was supported by a sort of a post in the middle, and since wood is very scarce there, and, you don't have anything that is very straight, so this was sort of a [moves hand in a wavy motion], like a very primitive and twisted column, and all the beams on the roof which were sort of supporting these bundles of reeds were the same. There was some plaster inside to close the leaks, and I think there was one small window. And there was an entrance and a room, that was it. And I remember we had one small table, no beds, or anything like this.[95]

[94] Anthropology, a discipline which "grew out of the intersection of European discovery, colonialism, and natural science," is the study of societies, cultures, and ways of life. While it has greatly evolved since the nineteenth century, it "continues to be firmly rooted in the descriptive richness that comes out of the specific encounters anthropologists have with particular peoples and places." Monaghan and Just, *Social & Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction*, 1-2. Ethnography, on the other hand, is a method – "an approach to learning about a culture, setting, group, or other context by observing it yourself and/or piecing together the experiences of those there." Paff, "What Is the Difference Between Anthropology and Ethnography?," Medium, accessed 30 May 2024, https://ethno-data.medium.com/what-is-the-difference-between-anthropology-and-ethnography-a9edba23c08b.

[95] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:35:29.

To cook, there was a built-in cast-iron wok, which they fed with a fire made of cotton branches or grass. Mark and his family also made their own dried grass blankets on which they slept "side by side, from wall to wall," which were rolled up and turned into benches during the day.[96] There were no sanitary or water facilities either inside or outside, meaning no bathrooms, outhouses, or wells. Instead, they would gather their water in pails at the irrigation canals about five hundred metres away, or wash themselves directly in the canal in summertime.[97] "Things were very primitive," Mark concludes matter-of-factly, without judgement, bringing to mind the manner in which he described his own life in Jarosław before the war as similarly "primitive," with neither running water nor indoor facilities.[98]

Paula describes the mud hut in which she lived as a space divided into two sections: one for sleeping and the other for meals with a fireplace: "everything is mud," she describes, "the floor is mud and everything. And it only has a little window and a door. Uzbekis [sic] don't have any furniture, their life revolves on the floor, and they have on the floor piles of rugs that they inherit and that they weave themselves, and their whole lives revolve around the floor, there [is] no furniture, there are no beds, there's no tables, there's nothing," she concludes simply.[99] Similarly to what Mark depicted above, they slept on the floor, and, adapting to their new neighbours' traditions, her mother Bella was eventually taught to collect dried grasses and branches from the foot of the local mountain to create a small mattress. When they moved to a larger town, they continued to live in mud huts, but were able to furnish it with a table and a bed. This hut also featured a stove in the centre of the room.[100]

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[96] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:49:23
[97] *Ibid.*, 00:38:08.
[98] *Ibid.*, 00:38:49. And Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 00:22:47.
[99] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:40:25.
[100] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:51:03 and 00:59:35 and Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:58:11.

Other young survivors, similarly to Mark above, used the word "primitive" to describe their new living environments, a lack of facilities, or the manner in which they had to do certain daily tasks. Still, they did so *without* judgment of these groups' essential traits. Henry, for example, describes the ways in which locals handled going to the bathroom:

> Things were very primitive over there, in this small village. The water was taken from a little stream. Sanitary conditions were you went on the back of the fence, and made it. They didn't even use outhouses over there, the Muslims, they were Muslim, and they used a stone to wipe their behind, and then washed it, well they always went with a little can of water. Or a leaf, if…So, one can survive without perfume toilet paper.[101]

In a way, this excerpt highlights the trust and proximity between Jewish refugees and the local Dungans, who shared such intimate experiences with newcomers. In fact, Henry places more judgement in this last sentence on Europeans who prefer unnecessary extravagant toiletries, displaying the impact Dungans had on his perception of needs and wants.

Dekel shrewdly observes the "European colonist's sensibility" when discussing observations made by Polish writer Aleksander Wat, who was exiled in the Uzbek SSR during the war. She addresses the "inversion of this sensibility by the powerlessness of the refugees: arrogance mixed with eagerness, desperation even, and closed-mindedness mixed with curiosity and openness toward a people whose "exclusion from the context of their place and time [...] exacerbated the acuteness with which [newcomers] perceived the world.""[102] Certainly, refugees' chances of surviving exile depended on their capacity to interact with locals.[103]

These tensions were deepened by the Soviet, or Russian, environment in which refugees found themselves in exile. As explains Maciej Wąs, the fact that many refugees were integrated

[101] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:56:15.
[102] Dekel, *In the East*, 146. Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo, "Certificate of Birth, Certificate of Survival," American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies, accessed 5 August 2024, http://aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=192.
[103] Wąs, "Как воспринимались другие," 85.

into a Russian environment "built a certain world of understanding of the East and perception of the other (and this despite the fact that not all Poles spoke Russian)."[104] The consequences of this were such that Poles' understanding of "the other" was mediated by Russian sensibilities, which were themselves imbricated in a colonial mindset. Russia's conception of "the East," or "the Orient," was profoundly impacted by its geographical positioning: Europe, having been divided along East and West lines by Enlightenment philosophers, led Russia to be positioned in the eastern sphere, thus "identified and described by the same dichotomy of East and West, of civilization and barbarism, of Europe and Asia."[105]

The Russian colonial project aimed to transform the idea of the "Orient," growing from the 17th century to include not only the Steppe, but also parts of the Ottoman Empire, Crimea, Siberia, and eventually Central Asia.[106] The latter two "played similar functions in the Russian concept of the East – they were supposed to give the Russian Empire the opportunity to display strength and colonial power."[107] Such beliefs reverberated in the arts, notably in painting and literature, with Fyodor Dostoevsky writing in 1881: "In Europe we were Tatars, while in Asia we are the Europeans."[108] Russia was thus able to paint an "Orientalist image" of its subjugated territories across Europe, while at the same time pursuing a "self-proclaimed civilizing mission" of locals in Central Asia anchored in its ignorance of the region.[109]

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[104] Wąs, "Как воспринимались другие," 85. My [Google] translation.
[105] Dominik Gutmeyr, *Borderlands Orientalism or How the Savage Lost his Nobility: The Russian Perception of the Caucasus Between 1817 and 1878* (Vienna: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2017), 14.
[106] Gutmeyr, *Borderlands Orientalism*, 65, 67.
[107] *Ibid.*, 83-84.
[108] Cited in *ibid*., 83.
[109] *Ibid.*, 83, 85. The Polish gaze towards Central Asians could be further contextualized by studies on Polish "easternness" in Europe. See Simon Lewis, "East Is East? Polish Orientalisms in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Central Europe* 19, no. 2 (2021): 135-152 and Edward Manouelian, "Invented Traditions: Primitivist Narrative and Design in the Polish Fin de Siècle," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 391-405. See also Jacek Kochanowicz, "Poland and the West: In or Out?," Institute for Human Sciences, accessed 5 August 2024, https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/poland-and-the-west-in-or-out. And Aleksandra Szczepan, "Terra Incognita? Othering East-Central Europe in Holocaust Studies," in *Colonial Paradigms of Violence: Comparative Analysis of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Mass Killing*, ed. Michelle Gordon and Rachel O'Sullivan, pp.185-214 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022).

Such "colonist's sensibility" as depicted by Dekel above, can be observed in the discussion of not only living environments, but also locals themselves, in the accounts of young survivors. When addressing his brigade, which was composed of twenty individuals from various backgrounds, David only names one Uzbek man, Yissa Akka [sic], and makes little mention of his relationships with other groups of refugees in the group. "As primitive people they have a warm heart for a stranger who is ready to accept their ways," he says of Uzbeks. "To eat with your hand, to wash in the cold water in *aryk* – is a canal of the cold water that comes down from the mountain – you know, to observe their rules of survival."[110] He spent his years of exile living in nature, following local knowledge: in colder months, they would dig holes in the ground to rest in, which they covered in branches. They lit fires at the entrance of these dugouts to keep the underground area warm, and Uzbeks taught them how to direct the smoke. At around sixteen years of age, this experience was transformative for David, allowing him to mature in a supportive and exciting environment: "it's the best that can happen to sixteen year old young man – young *boy*. They made a man of me."[111]

David focuses this part of his testimony on his relation with Uzbeks. "Primitive people are unusually nice people," he says. "And eventually, if I today sit here, not only who survived physically, but a person who really survived mentally, and finished universities, and worked all his life, it's because, I would say, of the injection of humility that the Uzbeks gave me."[112] The manner in which David speaks of Uzbeks is filled with admiration and respect, attributing his survival, his career and personal development, and almost his entire existence, to them: "the way the group received me in the mountains of Uzbekistan; they really, they were for me a family," he

[110] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:44:07.
[111] *Ibid.*, 00:57:48 – 00:58:28, also 00:41:15.
[112] *Ibid*., 00:43:19.

says.[113] Still, his expression of indebtedness brings to mind the trope of the "noble savage," or the belief that non-Europeans were "living in a 'pure state of nature' – gentle, wise, uncorrupted by the vices of civilization."[114]

While youth's perceptions of locals unveil their own complex social backgrounds, they also speak to the impact of age on such discourses. If these observations may appear similar to the "lengthy 'ethnographic descriptions" discussed by Goldlust, the manner in which youth mobilize these observations is far removed from the exoticisation or judgment of Muslim local residents he and Adler refer to.[115] These observational memories appear from survivors who belonged to very specific age groups and who found themselves in transformative periods in exile; they were among the youngest children (Paula, born in 1935, Mark and Henry, both born in 1933) and older adolescents (David, born in 1924). While childhood and adolescence are periods socially and culturally defined, and Uzbek or Kazakh youth, for example, likely experienced these moments in ways different from Polish Jews, they remained important moments of development for the youth of this study.

Recent historical studies have identified the ages of six and seven ("The Age of Reason") and thirteen and fourteen ("Discernment and Consent") as important development markers across cultures.[116] In Poland, these young children would have begun to attend school and, thus, have

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[113] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:57:37.

[114] "Noble Savage," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed 23 April 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/noble%20savage.
According to Ter Ellingston, the ideas of the "Savage" and the "Oriental" were "the two great ethnographic paradigms developed by European writers during the age of exploration and colonialism; and the symbolic opposition between "wild" and "domesticated" peoples, between "savages" and "civilization," was one constructed as part of the discourse of European hegemony, projecting cultural inferiority as an ideological ground for political subordination." See Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), *xiii*. See also Angela Aleiss, cited in Ellingston, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, 1.

[115] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 36. Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 170.

[116] Ann M. Little, "'Keep Me with You, So That I Might Not Be Damned': Age and Captivity in Colonial Borderlands Warfare," in *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 23-46. See also Jacquelynne S. Eccles' assertion that middle childhood constitutes a "time when children

grown their social circle, potentially joining clubs and other activities. Those from religious families could have been integrated into cheders to learn "Jewish religious and cultural values."[117] Because they lacked these traditional academic and social frameworks, I argue that relationships with locals served as informal social schooling. It is during this period that children would "come to understand that others have a different point of view and different knowledge than they have, [...] that these differences have consequences for their interactions with other people."[118]

The "ethnographic" memories, or the clear observational memories surrounding the ways in which locals lived, were significantly less present in the testimonies of adult survivors I listened to. I would argue this corroborates young people's ways of knowing: to observe the way others lived allowed them to explore who they were, what it meant to belong, and the meanings that places, both their homes and their new living environments, could hold. Mark's detailed depiction of the Polish classroom in the previous chapter finds its counterpart in his vivid evocation of the material culture and social dynamics of adobe houses. Connecting with "place" (through such observations, and through the *relationships* they developed in these places) can have the power to shape how children view their position in the world, and more broadly the world itself.[119] For Mark, his Polish school was a place of exclusion – from a certain identity, from transports to safety, and from friendship, as he recalls experiencing antisemitism from

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move from home into wider social contexts that strongly influence their development." See Jacquelynne S. Eccles, "The Development of Children Ages 6 to 14," *The Future of Children* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 32.

[117] "Heder," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, accessed 6 August 2024, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/heder.

[118] Eccles, "The Development of Children Ages 6 to 14," 32-33. The National Library of Medicine also declares that "as an age group, 6- to 12-year-olds are less obviously set apart than infants, adolescents, and even preschool children are in most Western societies. Nevertheless, the implicit grouping of ages 6-12 appears to be neither an idiosyncratic invention of Western cultures nor merely a category by default among arbitrarily defined periods of human development. Rather, these years mark a distinctive period between major developmental transition points." See "Development During Middle Childhood: The Years from Six to Twelve," National Library of Medicine, accessed 6 August 2024, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK216770/. See also Lillian Comas-Días, Hector Y Adames, and Nayeli Y Chavez-Dueñas, *Decolonial Psychology: Toward Anticolonial Theories, Research, Training, and Practice* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2024).

[119] Holly Weir, Matluba Khan and Alexi Marmot, "Displaced Children's Experiences of Places and Play: A Scoping Review," *Children's Geographies* (2022): 2, 8.

Christian Polish children. It was a chaotic environment, where figures of authority rotated, and in which he even became responsible for children younger than himself.[120] The adobe house appears as a very different place in his recollections: he was welcomed in Kazakh society from the moment of his arrival, and over time, embraced a number of Kazakh traditions.

As for David, he specifically addresses this period in his life as transformative, and as a key step in his maturing into adulthood. For him, Uzbekistan was a place of importance, of growth, and of self-discovery.[121] If adolescence, defined by Western psychologists, is a period of "greater autonomy and independence," Gerald R. Adams has argued that social connections are key for identity formation in this period, particularly with regards to the "development of moral reasoning, judgments, and values."[122] Relationships and friendships might also be more "intense and intimate."[123] David found himself in exile at an age where he was impressionable to new ways of being, and where he could be profoundly affected and transformed by new relationships.

As Kaganovitch observed, Jewish refugees who saw locals as "backwards" usually recalled specific events without "hints of arrogance."[124] David, who was between seventeen and twenty-one in exile, could have inherited and interiorized similar prejudices before the war that materialised in his use of the term "primitive." Yet he appears unaware of his own biases, something which Adler notes as common for refugees.[125] Still, there is no judgmental tone in his narrative, nor, in fact, in any narratives of youth who speak of locals. Youth, especially young children, appeared to be unburdened by some of the conceptions held by their adult counterparts. Younger children like Mark, Paula, and Henry had been displaced from their homes since the

[120] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:51:10 – 01:05:20.
[121] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:41:15.
[122] Adams, "Adolescent Development," 13.
[123] *Ibid*., 13.
[124] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its aftermath*, 145.
[125] See Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 170.

begining of the war, meaning that they were somewhere between four and six years old when they left Poland, and had had little time to be fully integrated into Polish society.

Scholars have differing opinions regarding the ways in which Polish Jewish children and youth specifically interacted with locals, as well as their role in facilitating relationships between their adult counterparts and local populations. Dekel believes that children could play an important role in easing relations between Uzbeks and refugee adults as they were often able to adapt and learn local languages more quickly: "newcomer children appeared to make easier, more immediate contact with local children."[126] According to Ewa Stańczyk, who studied Christian Polish children, what stood out was children's "curiosity and courage in exploring foreign lands. Far from being passive and unresponsive, it was in fact children who readily embraced the sounds, the smells, and the colours of their temporary homelands."[127] On the other hand, Adler rather explicitly explains that children were no different from adults in keeping their distance from locals, and this despite the fact that "one might expect [children] to be less aware of distinctions between people."[128] In a chapter on Polish Jewish children in exile, she depicts difficult relations between deportees and locals, with the latter physically pushing refugees out of food lines, stealing their possessions, as well as using antisemitic slurs.[129]

What remains unexplored are the ways in which youth's relationships served different purposes to those of adults in exile, and how these relationships were crucial to their well-being and social education. It was not only formal education that was lacking for children in exile, as discussed in the previous chapter. Playing, an elemental component of childhood education which "contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of children," is

[126] Dekel, *In the East*, 145-147.
[127] Ewa Stańczyk, "Exilic Childhood in Very Foreign Lands: Memoirs of Polish Refugees in World War II," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 11, no. 2 (2018): 143.
[128] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 168-170.
[129] Adler, "Children in Exile," 43-44.

rarely discussed by the youngest interviewees.[130] And yet, while observing play in children in ghettos and concentration camps, Patricia Heberer notes that "play in every place and time is an instinct of childhood."[131]

One of the few exeptions of such absence is Paula, who lived in close proximity to Uzbek children and connected with them almost immediately upon her arrival in the region. The same children who played with her when she was sick and could not move later included her in their group. They taught her the responsibilities she held in the village (and did them together) and showed her how to eat as they did. "I guess children don't need the language to communicate," she explains. "They spoke Uzbeki, I spoke Polish."[132] They were her first friends: they invited her to their huts for dinner and they fished her out of the water after they jumped off cliffs together, since she was the only one who did not know how to swim. "Eventually I learned to speak Uzbeki, and, but it's really amazing how … they just took me in, and I became part of them [...tearing up]."[133] The importance of play in her experience is heightened by her experience of years of silence and hiding in Siberia prior to arriving in the region.

These playful friendships were of the utmost importance for her psychological well-being in exile. Heberer clearly explains that "to run and frolic with their playmates, to act out their fantasies, and to explore the world about them gave children a powerful way to escape the harsh realities that surrounded them. Play also represented a way for youngsters to adapt to the difficult circumstances they confronted and to reshape their environment through daydream and imagination."[134] Playing could also be used to develop social and other skills needed for survival

[130] Weir, Khan, and Marmot, "Displaced Children's Experiences of Places and Play," 2. See also Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, 283.
[131] Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, 291. See also Marten, *The History of Childhood*, 6.
[132] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:44:50.
[133] *Ibid*., 00:47:58.
[134] Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, 292.

and adulthood.[135] Its absence in most testimonies of child survivors is thus notable: it speaks to the difficult experiences of childhood for many of the younger refugees, the opportunities that were lost in exile, and the limits of social integration.

Paula's friendships did not develop in a vacuum and very much had an impact on others. Paula, who learned Uzbek, likely acted as a translator for her mother, which was not uncommon among children in exile.[136] Still, Paula's mother, like many Polish adults, had a clear attachment to Poland, and became afraid of having what she called an "Asiatic child" who would no longer belong in "sophisticated" Warsaw.[137] As Adler explains, for adults, "exile meant leaving Polish territory. Many of them use patriotic language in their testimonies [...]."[138] For women specifically, losing one's "Polishness" was a common fear, and many mothers would covertly give Polish and historical lessons to their children.[139]

Indeed, the absence of formal institutions sometimes led to informal schooling, managed either by survivors' parents or through local organisations. This could lead to the development of special bonds between parents and their children, who tried to convey a sense of social and cultural identity to their children. Paula's mother was concerned about the impact of their time in Central Asia on her young daughter and took care to provide an informal education:

> She made me repeat the poems and the rhymes that I knew from before, I remember I had little books, very colourful and each book was a story. And not unlike the Dr. Seuss books that we know today, because each story had a message, was a teaching lesson. [...] So she started to make me repeat these stories that I remembered off by heart of course, like all children do. And she started telling me stories about what life was like in Warsaw, about the theatres, and the opera, and the schools, and my mother had a very, a very beautiful

[135] Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, 292.
[136] Dekel, *In the East*, 145 and Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:48:22.
[137] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:48:41.
[138] Adler, "Children in Exile," 56.
[139] See Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 120. Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:49:05.

singing voice, so she would sing songs from the opera for me.[140]

Ironically, her friendships with Uzbek children led to a deeper relationship with her mother who sought to nurture a profound sense of Polish identity in her daughter. Particular sensory memories of childhood are vividly recalled by Paula, for whom the colours of the books, rhythms and rhymes, and her mother's voice stand out. Henry also explains that his education in Central Asia was quite informal: "All through the war, all through these years, my father always found somebody, any itinerant person coming by for a bowl of soup or a piece of bread, they would teach us either davening, or teach us math. Whatever they wanted to teach us! To coach my brothers, and me. That's how I learned to daven, by private tutors during the war."[141] For Henry's father, it was rather their Jewish identity he wished to nurture in exile.

The fear of losing one's Polishness was not mentioned by other Polish Jewish youth when discussing their parents. It was not geographical distance from Poland which made some Polish Jews feel more (or less) Polish in exile, but rather pre-war social dynamics and status, as well as cultural attachment. The fact that few children and adolescents discuss this feeling also brings to mind their postwar experiences: most faced violence and discrimination upon their return to Poland, and all left their home country rather quickly, once again, in the aftermath of such events. By the time narrators shared their stories in the 1990s and 2000s, attachment to the homeland or the idea of their "Polishness" was likely not only a distant thought, but also a painful one. David, Mark, and Rywka clearly state that they chose to never return to Poland after leaving the country in the aftermath of the war.[142]

[140] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:48:51, 00:49:06.
[141] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 01:08:04.
[142] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:26:45. Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 6 November 2013, 01:22:36. Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 6 August 2014, 00:54:45.

The comments by Paula's mother can therefore be understood in the light of the fear of a *déclassement social*, or an intragenerational lowering of social status.[143] The social status of Jewish refugees frequently shifted while in exile. Kaganovitch, on the one hand, argues that Jewish refugees' social status usually decreased, especially with regards to the type of work they were able to find. On the other hand, Goldlust notes a frequent "status inversion" in the Soviet Union and more possibilities of advancement specifically for *Polish* Jews.[144] While Paula's time in the Uzbek SSR was "very colourful," her mother's experience was vastly different: "when we got to the village, for my mother this was the worst time. Because the culture, and the language, and everything was so different than she thought, "How are we going to survive?" [...] She was, you know, a city person. [...] It was a very, very tragic time."[145]

Jolluck explains that crossing the border between Europe and Asia was, for Christian Polish women refugees, like "leaving behind their entire civilization," and these women consistently "refused to fit in, rejecting any blurring of the boundaries they perceived between themselves (Westerners) and the Central Asians (Easterners)."[146] To maintain these borders was particularly of interest for Polish *women*, as their identity was more traditionally related to the idea of the nation and the "properness of the collective" as represented within the home – transmitting proper behaviour to children was intimately linked to one's personal and national identity.[147] These concerns likely influenced women's experiences with locals.

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[143] "Déclassement social," Pour l'Éco, last modified 25 November 2020, https://www.pourleco.com/le-dico-de-l-eco/declassement-social. Thank you to Karl Ponthieux Stern for bringing this consideration to my attention.
[144] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 82, 4. Kaganovitch's inclusion of all Jewish evacuees and refugees under the same "refugee" banner implies a broad variety of pre-war social statuses, which could explain this perspective. John Goldlust, "Identity Profusions: Bio-Historical Journeys from "Polish Jew" / "Jewish Pole" through "Soviet Citizen" to "Holocaust Survivor," in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, ed. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 224.
[145] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:54:46, 00:56:45.
[146] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 221.
[147] *Ibid*., 282, 140-141.

A few young survivors emphasize that Central Asians had a profound impact on their personal values and life, which they maintain to this day. If age affected their memories and depictions of life in Central Asia, so, too, did it inflect relationships. Youth's relations cannot be compared to adults' relations with the same groups; age did matter.[148] Their experiences highlight the ways in which displaced youth's "experiences of place impacts place attachment and identity": such attachment to place is *key* in the development of self-identity.[149]

"Certainly our life in Uzbekistan is something that remains with me, I hope forever," Paula says at the end of her second interview; "I remember it with very, very good feelings."[150] She clearly notes throughout her sessions the impact of her friendships with Uzbek children in her childhood, and how special it felt to be included in their lives. Paula was only four years old when her Warsaw apartment was bombed; having spent most of 1940 and 1941 in a labour camp, where she had to hide or play by herself. Her time in the Uzbek SSR stands out as fun and colourful, no doubt because of these friendships.[151] This moment in her long exile was a notable one: "I became part of them," she repeats in her third interview session, "and their acceptance was so, so enjoyable to me and so great because before that I, I really had to practically be invisible."[152] This was a moment where she felt she mattered, a feeling heightened by her solitude in previous displacements during the war.

Paula's Uzbek neighbours' well-meaning assistance and generosity, and the way they reached out to those in need, are anchored in her mind to this day: "this outgoing of these people

[148] Some scholars argue that the topic of relationships in exile requires further research. See Atina Grossmann, "Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India," 187, who suggests a further *gendered* analysis of such relationships is necessary. See also Friedla and Nesselrodt, *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union*, *xxiv-xxvi*. Literature on the topic of relations in exile varies depending on the group involved, though the topic remains unexplored in detail.
[149] Weir, Khan, Marmot, "Displaced children's experiences of places and play," 11, 2.
[150] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 01:41:06 and Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:59:09.
[151] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:54:46 – 01:00:03.
[152] *Ibid*., 00:59:40.

[...] was so great that really it taught me a lesson for the rest of my life," she explains. "It taught me a lesson to be accepting, not to be judgmental, to have empathy for people who have less [tearing up], and um, these are the qualities that I live by."[153] Moments of such emotional resonance in Paula's testimony come to the fore when she recalls important relationships, the desire to connect with others, and the impact of forced displacement on her childhood. Indeed, similar emotions arise when she discusses her mother's many sacrifices and constant presence, the manner in which Canadian immigration agents welcomed her to Canada, and her exclusion from lunch plans by a young girl in Montreal who was ashamed to be seen with her.[154]

Things were different for David in the Uzbek SSR, although he recalls coming home from exile with a similar impression of local residents. "It was wonderful," he says. "It wasn't the suffering. It was really the making of a strength in my developing personality."[155] The ways in which he experienced closeness with Uzbeks was based on both profound, mutual respect and the acceptance of certain "life lessons" that recall those described by Paula: to have empathy for others and to show humility.[156] These would have a long-lasting impact on David: "I left Uzbekistan with a sense of strength [...], I was ready for any duty," he explains.[157] After the war, he worked with an organisation called *Brihah* [*Bricha*, escape, flight], and searched for Jewish orphans and accompanied them to Palestine. He attributed his strength in this endeavour to his time in the Uzbek SSR.[158]

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[153] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:00:56.
[154] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 01:35:19, 01:06:07, 01:30:34.
[155] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:57:48 – 00:58:28.
[156] *Ibid*., 00:43:19. Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:00:56.
[157] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:44:55.
[158] "Brihah," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia, accessed 18 June 2024, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/brihah.

In short, Polish Jewish children and youth matured during their exile in Central Asia; their evolving sense of identity was forged in relationship with and in proximity to others. Although he does not explicitly state this as a "bright side" of exile, Henry's proximity with Dungans and with other Jewish refugees allowed him to more deeply assert his religious identity in exile. If David's remarks about locals at least partially seem to stem from a certain reverence for the "primitive," his, Paula's, Rywka's, and Henry's depictions of such experiences with locals nonetheless come from deep and profound connections built during formative moments in their lives. Such long-lasting impact resulting from these youthful connections truly counters and complicates much of the secondary literature on relationships with locals and conceptions of the "primitive" amongst European, here unwilling, settlers in Central Asia. Relationships with Central Asians also had an impact on intrafamilial dynamics: Paula, for example, explains that her mother's fears over her daughter's acculturation to local mores led to the two of them spending more time together.[159] Familial relationships could be intertwined and even redefined by those with locals. The following chapter will explore such family dynamics in greater depth.

[159] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:48:51.

CHAPTER 3. "ON YOUR OWN, YOU HAVE A VERY HARD TIME…"[1]: MOTHERS, FATHERS, AND FAMILIES IN EXILE

"This story is a love letter to your mother."[2]

When studying the First World War, social historian Michael Roper argued that it was "in lived relationships within the home, as much as in public rhetoric or political action, that the war's deepest emotional effects were played out."[3] The stories of young exiles in the Soviet Union are no exception to this observation. Like experiences of childhood and adolescence, the idea of family itself is a concept that should be understood as fluid across societies and cultures: it is hard to speak of family "as if it were a definable structure in the lives of children," explains Alastair Ager.[4] Still, the global health expert clarifies that while "societal structures and institutions" may vary, the family more universally serves an important role in children's socialisation process within these varied structures, acting as a mediator with regards to values, morals, and behaviours.[5] In addition, "social dynamics significant for agency and social action begin to be established in childhood," explains Mary Jo Maynes.[6] The proximity of parents in exile could therefore be crucial not only in questions of survival, but also in processes of identity formation, education, religion, and other developmental considerations.

Deportation or forced migration did not *necessarily* reorganise family dynamics, as families were not always separated. Yet displacement can, as Anna Wylegała explains, "deprive children

[1] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:54:38.
[2] Pomerantz, in Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:17:04.
[3] Michael Roper, cited in Kristine Alexander and Ashley Henrickson, "Children, Soldiers, and Correspondence in Canada's First World War," in *Small Stories of War: Children, Youth, and Conflict in Canada and Beyond*, ed. Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander and Andrew Burtch (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 136.
[4] Alastair Ager, "What Is Family? The Nature and Functions of Families in Times of Conflict," in *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones*, ed. Neil Boothby, Alison Strang, and Michael Wessells (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc., 2006), 43-44.
[5] Ager, "What Is Family?," 45, 53.
[6] Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," 121.

of the sense of security which is essential for proper development."[7] The experiences of the youngest deportees of this study, the majority of whom were displaced with at least one parent, underscores this argument. Despite the fact that most of the nuclear families of these young narrators were not divided in displacement, the conditions for their intellectual, social, and emotional development were severely impacted by such movement. The war reverberated within home life: some saw their fathers leaving for the front, while the fathers of other narrators were interrogated, arrested, and sometimes imprisoned by Soviet authorities. At the same time, certain family relations were emotionally heightened or rendered more complex due to the nature of parental responsibilities in exile. Family dynamics were thus profoundly transformed, and this *despite* the fact that many were exiled as part of large family groups.

The adolescents of this study were more frequently separated from their families in exile. The challenges of displacement thus affected these groups differently. First, the youngest, as explains Rebecca Clifford, rarely had a developed "pre-war self" to return to, while adolescents usually had had more opportunities to make sense of their youth and develop a clearer identity before the war erupted. In addition, these older narrators faced physical separation from their parents and were left to face the struggles of exile without their, or other family members', support.[8] They were responsible for their own survival, and were themselves at the mercy of Soviet authorities, quickly forced to grow up. Although differently, the rupture of the idea of "home" was experienced by all.[9] As explains Tara Zahra, by the end of the war, "the breakdown of the family was more than a social problem of the highest magnitude. Many European children

[7] Wylegała, "Child Migrants and Deportees from Poland and Ukraine," 296.
[8] Ager, "What Is Family?," 45, 53.
[9] Clifford, *Survivors*, 16-17. See Adams, "Adolescent Development," 8-15 for identity formation and development in adolescents.

had experienced the total collapse of the values and hierarchies that had traditionally structured family life."[10]

These family dynamics would inevitably affect the ways in which memories of exile were both remembered and shared. Scholars have argued that all memories are social constructions. With regards to early memories, it is "our parents, families and communities, the collective and social context in which we live, [who] provide the details that we cannot remember or explain, and help us to contextualise memories that we hold in our mind's eye but might otherwise struggle to interpret," explains Rebecca Clifford.[11] According to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, it is the *family* which shapes our early memories, feeding these back to form the basics of our identity, and perhaps more importantly, instilling meaning into them.[12] For young children exiled with family, some of their early memories were likely familial ones. This was not the case for adolescents, who were generally exiled alone and for whom the communal social context that was *supposed* to help them interpret events and memories was more frequently absent.[13]

As the previous chapters demonstrate, "families played a major roles in decisions to flee" and in experiences of being displaced from Poland.[14] Yet parents, siblings, and extended family were also important players in children and youth's experiences of illness, famine, education, and other risks of displacement. Such proximity with loved ones was not only decisive for physical survival, but also for emotional safety. For young children, the idea of a "missing place" that cannot be returned to could have been eased by the proximity of a caretaking family, who would account for them as "integral and wholesome," and not as "remainders and exceptions."[15] For

[10] Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 5.
[11] Clifford, *Survivors*, 4.
[12] *Ibid.*, 109.
[13] *Ibid*., 5.
[14] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 282.
[15] Doel, "Placed. Displaced," 557-558. See also discussion of Doel in the first chapter.

those separated from loved ones, the family unit could also become the "missing place", or a place of rupture.

This chapter seeks to explore the role of family in exile and the effects on narrative of both the presence and absence of family during displacement. It aims to answer the following questions: how did the presence or absence of family affect children and adolescents' experiences of displacement and exile in Central Asia, and how are these family dynamics discussed in life narratives? I will begin by observing the role that parents played in younger children's experiences in Central Asia, including materially surviving the hardships of displacement by providing food and material aid, as well as surviving illness and helping to ease the psychological toll of exile. I will then turn to the general absence of parents and family in oral history narratives of those who were adolescents, and the various ways in which they discuss, or avoid discussing, their families.

I. Together in exile: children and their families

> *"I missed the childhood, but this is the story of many Holocaust survivors, and maybe mine is not so* bad*. Because I arrived with my* parents*."*[16]

Most of the young children of this study made their way to Central Asia with both their parents. Paula, the only exception, found herself exiled only with her mother, as her father had been drafted into the Polish Army in 1939. Still, Paula, Mark, Henry, Judith, and Ilona all left Central Asia with at least one parent, and all, in different ways, experienced "being a family" after the war. Paula, whose mother remarried in 1945, clearly explains the uniqueness of their situation: "at that time – there were no families per se [...]. We were really unique, most of the

[16] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stahlman, 19 December 2001, 01:11:14.

people were just single people who survived."[17] In a study on Polish Jewish youth based on twelve testimonies recorded as early as 1942-1943, Eliyana Adler indeed found that children's "experience of exile was separation from their families."[18] It bears mentioning that these were Polish Jewish children who had been evacuated to Iran alongside the Anders Army – the famous Tehran Children – and who, as Adler's chapter explores, were usually orphaned or placed in orphanages as their parents could no longer care for them.[19] Luck, or chance, specifically with regards to *where* refugees ended up, the kind of employment their parents undertook, their parents' health, and the availability of food were crucial in how children experienced exile in Central Asia, specifically with regards to separation from their parents. This section will examine younger children's memories of family in exile and explore the risks of displacement discussed in earlier chapters, as well as the ways in which they both remember and share these memories.

For Mark, the possibility of surviving displacement and exile was anchored in being part of a large group: "I think the fact that we, we were together, this is what saved us, because… on your own, you have a very hard time."[20] Testimonies from older survivors similarly mention the importance of being displaced as a group. Sara, for example, attributes her survival to the fact that they were a group of six individuals.[21] Indeed, Rebecca Manley argues that connections and contacts were decisive in surviving evacuation, especially when it came to finding shelter, food, and employment.[22] This argument can be extended to surviving deportation: survival depended on the composition of the family as well as its "economic situation [...], the professions of able-bodied members, the ability to acquire useful connections, and personal initiatives."[23] Simply put,

[17] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 00:23:50.
[18] Adler, "Children in Exile," 56. 31-33.
[19] *Ibid*., 43-47 and Dekel, *In the East*, 222.
[20] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:54:38.
[21] Sara, interview by Singer, 12 July 1994, 01:02:59.
[22] Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 172, 180. See also Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 84.
[23] Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its Aftermath*, 105.

the larger a refugee group, the better the chances of surviving. As Henia explains: "we tried to live as helpful to each other, because that was the only way to survive."[24]

It is important to note that some of the memories of the children of this study appear to be family memories. This is particularly noticeable with regards to interactions with Soviet authorities, where the younger survivors more frequently detail their family members' experiences rather than their own. Ilona, for example, explains that her father was summoned by the NKVD in Namangan:

> Ils lui ont demandé de, de rapporter ce que les gens de son milieu, de quoi ils parlent. Puis tout ça c'était des *bundistes* qui parlaient très mal des communistes. Alors mon père a dit [...] que il, il aimerait beaucoup aider, bien sûr, mais qu'il a un tel visage qu'ils vont tout de suite savoir que, qu'il dénonce. Qu'il est pas capable de faire semblant. [*D'accord.*] Alors ils lui ont dit, "Tout le monde est capable, et vous aussi, vous serez certainement capable." Alors il a dit "Non, non, je peux pas, je peux pas, je peux pas faire ce travail." Alors ils ont dit "Mais vous savez qu'on a la Sibérie, nous?" [...] Ils l'ont relâché, mais ils ont dit "On va vous convoquer encore."[25]

The manner in which Ilona recalls this story testifies to the memory processes and the isolation of effect described by Urszula Szmygiel and Lynn Abrams in Chapter 1 – her memories are clear and rich with details, but lack emotional consideration of how she felt about these events.[26] That being said, the restrained emotional impact of this memory could also be due to the fact that this is not a personal memory, but rather a family one, which her father shared with her much later, after the war, leading to a certain emotional distance from the recounted events.[27]

By contrast, as Henry recalls how his father was arrested for running his illegal leather business, his demeanour is solemn and his tone is sombre. "My father was arrested, for doing that," he says. "And I remember he was given a year in jail, and these were 1942, it was hard

[24] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:04:38.
[25] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 5, 00:00:30.
[26] See Szmygiel, "'The past is never dead'," 96. And Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 94-95.
[27] Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 162.

times for us."[28] In this sentence, he addresses both his father's experience and its impact on his own exile, and testifies to the role Soviet authorities played on his time in Central Asia.

It bears repeating that some of the youngest survivors recall key moments or events in a repetitive manner. Mark's repetition of the devastation associated with springtime in Central Asia, as discussed in Chapter 1, or Henry's repetition that he clearly remembers the layout of his hometown, three times in the first ten minutes of his interview, or that Russians treated children well when discussing his time in Asino, are significant.[29] These repetitions of events across multiple interview sessions led me to a few observations. First, these stories often revolve around a particularly difficult event or memory. The repetition could become a mechanism by which survivors process the memory itself.[30]

It would also appear that some of these stories have likely been repeated and consolidated in young survivors' minds in a specific way, perhaps after multiple retellings of their story for various interview partners. Finally, these individual memories are also situated, as Maurice Halbwachs proposed, "within a collective or group consciousness of an event or experience. Memory might feel personal to us, but it is always influenced by shared memories, whether at a family, community or even national level."[31] If events became of greater importance within the family narrative of survival, like seasonal hunger, for example, this would influence how a single narrator reccounts his life. Henry, for example, mentions that his "older brother, who is five years older, is amazed that I can spot where things were" when recalling the layout of Sławatycze.[32]

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[28] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:49:41. Some described a particularly difficult famine in 1942, which coincided with his father's arrest, likely making the situation much more difficult. See Sara, interview by Singer, 12 July 1994, 01:02:45.
[29] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:01:55, 00:04:42, 00:08:48, 00:38:24, 00:42:43.
[30] Repetition could be a way to attain "composure," to come to terms with what happened. See Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 93.
[31] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 96.
[32] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:01:59.

Young children's memories are inherently collective ones, shaped by surviving family members, especially due to their ages in exile.[33] Wylegała explains that for "small children, who remember only basic facts and whose memory was subsequently influenced by familial memory transfer [...], we are most likely to be dealing with post-memory - individual memory developed under the strong influence of other personal (mainly familial) memories."[34] Rebecca Clifford similarly argues that adult figures help young children to make sense of individual experiences, rendering *all* memories social constructions.[35] "However fragmentary and dim" early memories might be, these have a long-lasting influence on how one's early life is recounted.[36]

Parents played an important role in children's stories surrounding illness. Paula, for example, was removed from her transport in Samarkand after being diagnosed with typhoid on the train, and was taken to a hospital where she was isolated from her mother. To this day, retelling the story of her separation from her mother is difficult: "One day, two nurses came in and they took me over to a window. Well I was so weak I couldn't stand up, so they took me over to a window and when I looked out the window I saw my mother [long pause - smiles, tears up, then drinks water]. And… after that they moved my bed to the window, and so I would be able to look out and see my mother [holds back tears]."[37] This particularly emotional display of mother-daughter bond testifies to intimate connection between the two, anchored in their conjoined experience of deportation, as well as to her mother's care and need to create a safe and special place of childhood for her daughter.

There also appears to be a gendered component to the ways that young children speak of illness and family in Central Asia. For Henry and Mark, it is their fathers who are present in

[33] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
[34] Wylegała, "Child Migrants and Deportees from Poland and Ukraine," 294.
[35] Clifford, *Survivors*, 4.
[36] *Ibid*., 161.
[37] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:36:36.

narratives of survival. Henry's experience with typhus recalls the role his father played in his physical and psychological survival in exile: "he had to provide for us in this makeshift hospital, when my mother, my two brothers and I, and the rest of the family, and even my uncles. [...] And we made it. After the fifteen days of high fever, and then there was recovery, and insatiable hunger afterwards, because you couldn't eat for the first fifteen days, and there was nothing really to eat. And my father was trying to provide not only for us four, but for my three uncles."[38] He speaks of his father with pride, noting that he lived until the age of eighty-nine. Mark's father also helped him when he was ill on the train towards Kattakurgan, taking him out to get fresh air in Samarkand. When he got brucellosis, he recalls that his parents had to move him around as he could no longer walk: "when we had the flood, I was in the middle of being ill. And, they would put me on a slight higher ground, and I could stand there, but I couldn't do any movement, I would just stand there. The waters would come, and they would take me to another spot, you know. I couldn't walk at the time. [*So your parents had to take care of you all the time?*] Yes [chuckles], yes."[39] As evidence shows, parents played a major role in helping children survive various maladies.

The proximity of parents was also an important factor for youth's wellbeing when it came to finding food and other material goods. In order to assist the released Polish population now resettled across the Soviet Union, the Polish government-in-exile established an Embassy and a number of delegations across Soviet territory, which were tasked with receiving, storing, and distributing goods to all Polish citizens. Polish regional leaders, known as "men of confidence" were recruited in order to assist delegations in these tasks.[40] Henia's father was hired to supervise an aid office in Stalinabad, where he was responsible for overseeing the reception of shipments of

[38] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:51:27.
[39] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:28:17.
[40] Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 99-100.

clothes, supplies, and food. This led to close encounters between Henia and other Polish refugees, including a manager in the aid office who tried to give her special privileges:

> There was a dress. It was [...in] my size and [my] blue colour, and what I understand, I looked terrific in it. But it wasn't my time for getting clothes. But the manager put it away, and he said, in Polish, "I have something good for you." When my father found out, guess what? The dress went back to the warehouse, and [...] I felt it wasn't fair, but I know it was fair. [*He wanted to not have special treatment.*] Definite. And he was right. And I still remember the colour of the dress, it was an angora dress in a beautiful blue colour. So everyone said, "What, the dress got from your eyes, or your eyes got from your dress?"[41]

She explains that refugees had to wait for their turn to receive items from delegations. Aid was to be "distributed according to need," moving from orphaned children, to those unemployed, then to large families. Workers, like Henia's father, often had to make decisions "on the spot" regarding such priorities.[42]

This memory stands apart in Henia's testimony, and is anchored between statements describing her father as the most honest and fair man she knew, allowing us to understand the role he played in her moral upbringing both before and during the war. When asked about the provenance and nature of these shipments, she says: "it was, in a way, very well supplied, very well," seemingly unaware of the unusual nature of being "well supplied" during exile.[43] Although she acknowledges that life was not easy and that she and her father lived as people did during wartime, Henia is one of the only young refugees of this study who does not describe actively suffering from deprivation. Her story highlights the way parental employment was crucial for

[41] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:03:35.
[42] Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 95, 102.
[43] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:00:49.

youth's well-being.[44] Adult's occupations had a direct impact on youth's survival, and this kind of proximity to material aid likely played a large role in getting through the long years of exile.

Contrary to Henia's father's experience, the most common depiction of labour in Central Asia in the young narrators' life stories was working the land on a *kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz*, which made providing for families a challenge. One example is Paula's mother, who was sent to work on a cotton-picking *kolkhoz* at the beginning of their exile.[45] Paula recalls her mother's constant fear of being accused of sabotage: "there was a certain amount that you had to pick, and they weighed your pickings every single day, and if you didn't pick enough they would accuse you that you're, that you were doing a sabotage, and you get punished for that of course."[46] This type of employment profoundly limited how parents could provide for their children: by the end of the 1930s, argues Peter Kenez, agricultural "labor was reduced to something resembling slavery. The state [...] took a large share (usually a third) of the fruit of the peasants' labor for almost nothing in the form of compulsory deliveries."[47] He explains that quotas on collective farms were already high during the first Five-Year Plan, sometimes close to three times more than what farm workers were able to sell before collectivization. In the 1930s, discipline was increased and workers could be punished for transgressions with forced labour, prison, or removal of their ration cards.[48] The

[44] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:02:55.
[45] Whereas older survivors worked in offices, hospitals, sanitation departments, politics, or doing white collar and factory work, children were usually deemed too young to enter the labour market and engaged in informal labour instead. Some exceptions appear, like Mark, who worked in a factory knitting socks for the Red Army before the opening of the Polish school. See Mark, Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:59:37.
[46] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:39:59. Of the five youngest children, four were sent to farms and most of their memories relating to work are set in these collectives. It should be noted that Imperial Russia had focused on extensively developing cotton fields during its expansion into the region in the nineteenth century, at the expense of other forms of farming or agricultural projects. By the early 1900s, Central Asia had become Russia's biggest supplier of cotton, with two-thirds coming from Uzbekistan. This agricultural development was only a single element of a larger colonial project, whereby at least a million Russians had been sent to Kazakhstan to take on farming and other types of skilled labour. This prevented other types of important agricultural projects from taking place, like growing cereal, in turn affecting food availability. In Uzbekistan specifically, Stalinist policy demanded the replacement of almost all food production by cotton. See Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 26, 29. Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, 90, 96. Dekel, *In the East*, 136-137, 169.
[47] Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 113.
[48] *Ibid.*, 99, 113-114, 168.

war exercised severe pressures on collective farms, and the Soviet army expropriated the majority of crops for the war effort.[49]

Paula recalls severe hunger during this time, and observes that this type of labour was not only physically challenging and exhausting, it was also often far removed from refugees' prior lives and experiences. While some children and adolescents had grown up in shtetls or rural villages, many were from larger cities like Lublin or Warsaw. The socioeconomic backgrounds of refugees thus shaped how both they and their parents experienced their new environments, and the ways in which parents could provide for their children. "She was, you know, a city person," Paula says of her mother. "Just to give you an example, she worked on the fields, and one day they were working in the field of potatoes, and they were told to pull out the plant. And so my mother pulled out a plant and there were so many potatoes around, she didn't know, she thought that one plant was one potato [...]!"[50] Their struggles were eased when Paula's mother was able to find a new job for the Union of Polish Patriots after they relocated to a larger town, likely around 1943. This job was more in line with her pre-war education and skills as a seamstress, and she took over the creation and sewing of uniforms for the Berling Army, the new Polish Army in the Soviet Union.[51]

> They were given uniforms to wear, they were like Russian kind of uniforms, with the shirt without a collar, and they were long [...]. For a Polish officer to wear a shirt without a collar, at least with some of the nuances, the Polish nuances, was a terrible, terrible thing. And so my mother [...] came on this idea

[49] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 164. See also Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:08:06.
[50] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:57:17.
[51] This army, known as the 1st Tadeusz Kosciuszko Division, was established in Ryazan (Rus.) as a Polish division of the Red Army and created by the ZPP in April 1943, commanded by Colonel Zygmunt Berling. The creation of a second Polish Army with no ties to the government-in-exile had been in the works since the evacuation of Anders' army in the summer of 1942, and while its Polish characteristics were emphasised, it was officially under the command of the Red Army and guided in its actions by the ZPP. Polish Jews were sometimes discriminated against in recruitment processes, similar to the situation in Anders' Army. Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 122 and Klemens Nussbaum, "Jews in the Kosciuszko Division and First Polish Army," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Basingstoke: MacMillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1991), 185. For more information, see Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 113-142; Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 166, 129; Nussbaum, "Jews in the Kosciuszko Division and First Polish Army."

> that – she borrowed a sewing machine from an Uzbeki [sic] woman – [...] she would cut off the piece of cloth from the [bottom of] the shirt and she would make them a collar. And then she became more creative, and she cut off a piece from the back as well and she made them a tie.[52]

This job came with food rations from England, which granted them special items such as chocolate, honey, and cookies: that is when "things started going good" for them, Paula explains.[53]

It was not only parents who could provide for or educate children. Younger siblings were sometimes able to glean a better understanding of the political context surrounding their exile through older siblings. For example, Mark's brother Henry plays the role of an informant in his narrative. Approximately ten years his elder, Henry and their cousins worked for a governmental irrigation office in Shaulder, which granted them unprecedented access to information. This allowed Mark to develop a clearer understanding of the war and world news, through the constant stream of Soviet propaganda:

> In this office they had not a radio, but they had a speaker. What was done since there was no electricity as such, that was just a central place where they had a receiver and they would be connecting speakers to different offices. At that time yet, we could not get a speaker in the house, but the office had a speaker so, when they would come to the office, they would, everyday there were reports, you know, how the army has retreated, or how the army has advanced, whatever you know, so they would make a note. And we had a dog, and they would take the dog with them, and then they would put the note on his collar, and send him home. And he would eventually come, and we would take out this piece of paper and see what happened today, according to the Russian newspapers, you know *Pravda* or *Izvestia*.[54]

Mark also has memories of a speaker that ran twenty four hours per day with news and music after relocating to Shymkent: "well, we certainly heard a lot about Stalin. You couldn't…everything around you that was good was from him, and he was the Father, and

[52] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:52:31.
[53] *Ibid.*, 55:13.
[54] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:57:47.

looking after everyone."[55] Such memories recall the ways in which children experience war not only visually, but perhaps more viscerally, in an auditory manner that is "rooted in place, dynamic and action oriented, immediate, and resonant with emotions," as Barbara Lorenzkowski describes.[56] Mark associates the political context with specific sounds of the regime.

Despite his role, Henry only rarely appears in Mark's testimony. As their irrigation office was located in the town centre, his brother and cousins were likely less present in Mark's day-to-day life. Yet, he repeats their occupation a number of times throughout his narrative, emphasising in this manner the importance of his employment for the family: "the government was taking away most of [the *kolkhoz*'s] food, and very soon they were not giving us anything. So we had to turn – they didn't turn us out of our homes, but we were just living there and trying to find means of existing by doing other jobs."[57] His brother is depicted as a provider early upon their arrival in Central Asia: "You're on your own. We were lucky, I think my brother started talking to somebody, and these were Bukhara Jews [...]. They, when they realised that we are Jews, they said "Well, we have a room that you can have." So we lived there, about nine people in one little room."[58] Henry's appearance in Mark's narrative testifies to the ways in which older siblings were often expected to provide for their families and younger siblings in gendered ways;

[55] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 01:45:13
[56] Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War," 65.
[57] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 24 October 2013, 00:45:24.
[58] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 3 October 2013, 01:34:07. Bukharan Jews are some of the earliest residents of Central Asian territories, finding their way there across the Silk Route as early as the sixth century BCE. Historian Albert Kaganovitch notes this group reacted rather ambiguously towards Jewish refugees, but were more open to helping religious Hasidim Jews, though non-observant Jews also sometimes received assistance. Cooper, *Bukharan Jews and the Dynamics of Global Judaism*, *ix*, *xiv*. Kaganovitch, *Exodus and its aftermath*, 181-183. See also Dekel, *In the East*, 125. Jewish identity played, for many Polish Jews, an important role in their first contacts during their journeys towards Central Asia. For more information on Jewish identity in exile, see Belsky, "Contested Memories" and Natalie Belsky, "Fraught Friendships: Soviet Jews and Polish Jews on the Soviet Home Front," in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, ed. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017).

adolescent boys could be expected to contribute financially.[59] Henry, around eighteen when they arrived in Central Asia, appears to fit this role in Mark's narrative.

In a different vein, Ilona's story reminds us about what absences in testimonies may mean. In 1999, she penned a memoir detailing her wartime experiences. In the first few pages, she begins by introducing those she refers to as the most important people in her life: her two cousins and her two dogs. She discusses being profoundly affected by the loss of her cousin, who moved to the United States at the beginning of the war: "j'étais très, très triste," she writes. "Ma vie était bouleversée, rien ne serait plus jamais comme avant [...]."[60] Yet while these individuals are briefly mentioned early in her testimony – she explains that she was raised, "comme une soeur jumelle" with her cousin Halina – their presence, and more specifically, their importance in her life are never truly discussed.[61]

Ilona's family dynamics are also discussed differently in her memoir as compared to her oral narrative. In her book, she depicts a very challenging relationship with her mother before the war, which she rarely alludes to in her testimony: "je me rends compte à quel point il m'est difficile de parler de ma mère," she writes early in her memoir. "Notre relation était beaucoup plus compliquée, et même aujourd'hui, alors qu'elle est morte depuis plusieurs années, je ne m'en suis pas totalement libérée. Je l'aimais beaucoup, mais j'avais contre elle beaucoup de griefs et de rancunes. [...] je n'ai jamais réussi à m'en départir totalement."[62] She saw her mother as authoritarian and overly anxious, someone who was often angry or worried when Ilona played too excitedly. She addresses a particularly difficult moment in the fall of 1939, when her mother

[59] Alexander, "Agency and Emotion Work," 124-125 and Tim Cook, ""He was determined to go": Underage Soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 41, no. 81 (May 2008): 43. See also Marek, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 1 April 2016, 00:47:22.
[60] Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 8-13, 54-55, 57.
[61] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 1, 00:05:28. Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 8.
[62] Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 17-19, 30, 34.

decided that taking care of two dogs was too challenging given the war, and asked a German soldier to kill one of them: "ce fut pour Hala [her cousin] et pour moi une expérience très pénible, qu'il m'a été très difficile de pardonner ma mère."[63]

In her interview, however, these early tensions with her mother are generally absent, and the difficulty regarding speaking of her mother that she wrote about is not perceivable. The ways in which Ilona narrates her life revolve around the family dynamics, and in particular, the efforts of her mother. Her mother begged the *kolkhoz* director to let them leave so Ilona could have an education in a larger town, and found new jobs that provided the family with more food. Famine led to seeing her parents in a new light, highlighting the ways in which women played indispensible roles in survival: "mon père s'est fait engager comme comptable, mais c'était impossible de vivre de son salaire. C'était vraiment la famine. Alors ma mère a commencé à chercher quoi faire pour, pour trouver à manger, puis c'est elle qui était active. C'est elle qui, qui faisait *tout* pour qu'on, pour qu'on meurt pas de faim, c'est les *femmes* qui…[speaking over each other] *Souvent, oui, souvent oui*.]"[64] Her mother found work doing laundry in an orphanage and brought home an additional small portion of soup daily.[65]

Later, as her interviewer is wrapping up the interview, Ilona interrupts her to say "il faut que je dise que ma mère était vraiment une femme très forte, et c'est *elle* qui nous a sauvé, finalement. [*Vous pensez que c'est grâce à ses…*] C'est grâce à elle."[66] She finds herself needing to clearly define who was responsible for her survival before the end of her narrative. The impact of strong women in her life is also made clear by her discussion of her paternal great-grandmother's life, whom she wrote a book about and whose life story she found inspiration in,

[63] Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 19, 30, 34.
[64] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:00:25. See also Grynberg, *Children of Zion*, 133-39.
[65] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 4, 00:00:56.
[66] *Ibid.*, clip 7, 00:06:24

and who she speaks of in the final minutes of her interview.[67] These efforts by her mother – and many other efforts not discussed in her testimony – are similarly laid out in her memoir as the war progresses.

The absence of tensions with her mother in her oral testimony, in comparison to her memoir, bring forward questions regarding what may be easier to write, in opposition to what is more easily said. The interview context plays a significant role in what someone may feel comfortable sharing, or what emotions someone may feel comfortable bringing to the surface. While Ilona's interviewer is friendly and conversational, she also makes assumptions and frequently formulates questions in a "statement" manner that leaves little room for Ilona to freely speak of her childhood. The first question she asks about her father, for example, is a rather assertive "votre père a été élevé dans une famille religieuse ou pratiquante?" This closed statement-question leaves little room to explore other ways of living, and at the same time, forces Ilona to have to explain her father's complicated childhood, as his mother died early, and he was sent to live with an aunt.[68]

The conversational dynamic between Ilona and her interviewer feels casual – yet, at the same time, the latter is almost *too* present in her narrative. This dynamic could, at least partially, explain a certain reticence by Ilona to share what the interviewer may *not* be pointing to. At the same time, other difficult events – such as illness, sexual aggression, being sent to an orphanage, and German bombings – are similarly absent from her oral testimony, yet discussed in her

[67] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 7, 00:00:10.
[68] Many examples of this occur in the first ten minutes of the interview. Her interviewer states: "Alors vous étiez enfant unique, pas très content d'être enfant unique, mais quand même. Vos parents travaillaient en dehors de la maison?" And again, a few minutes later: "donc c'était un peu comme une soeur pour vous." When talking about her first school, she says "Est-ce que, donc vous aviez des contacts avec des enfants, surtout Polonais?" Ilona then answers, "Non, il y avait beaucoup d'enfants juifs dans cette école." This manner of formulating questions in a declarative manner leads to some tensions, despite the fact that her interviewer is not always *wrong* about what she says. Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 1, 00:05:54; 00:07:04; 00:08:25; 00:09:01.

memoir. The emotions associated with these moments, like fear, shame, guilt, or pain, were perhaps too challenging to bring forth in this context.[69] In a way, the presence of certain tensions with her mother in her memoir reveals much about the ways in which the written form allows for a deeper analysis of relationships and, perhaps more importantly, about the impact of the interview setting and the limits of oral testimony.[70]

Knowing that their parents did what they could in order to help them survive could be a balm on children's wounds both during and after the war. For young girls specifically, exile in Central Asia appeared to have a strong impact on their perception of certain family members, particularly their mothers. This was also notable in Paula's narrative, where her mother often took centre stage. Like Ilona, the impact of famine also shaped Paula's relationship with her mother. She describes how profoundly she suffered from hunger during her time in Asia, and explains how her mother did what she could to keep her mind off the pain and create a "children's world" for her:

> In Asia, we were always, always hungry, and one day I woke up in the middle of the night, and I woke her up that I was hungry. And we had nothing to eat, but my mother wouldn't tell me there was no food, so she says, "Well, at night you're not allowed to eat." She says, "Because when you eat at night, there are invisible people who come and join you, and they'll make a lot of noise [...]. I heard noises, and the noises were the mice that were coming out at night and, and you know, scratching the walls [...]. So she says, "You see, those are the invisible people that at night you're not even allowed to talk about food, because they heard you talk about food so they already think that there's a party here, and, and they're trying to get in." [...] So now, when I wake up at night and I can't fall asleep again [...] I go into the kitchen, I make myself a cup of coffee with a couple biscuits, [...] and I think of my mother and her invisible people. So it stays with you, I mean these things always come up in your life.[71]

[69] See Flutsztejn-Gruda, *Quand les grands jouaient à la guerre*, 153, 167, 111-112, 64, 155.
[70] Thank you to Barbara Lorenzkowksi for drawing attention to this consideration.
[71] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 01:35:40, 01:38:57.

This episode recalls Henry's experience with sweet potato pie discussed in Chapter 1, and the *longue durée* of memories of childhood hunger. For Paula, her mother's presence and support during her exile was essential not only to her physical survival, but also her emotional well-being; it allowed her to feel special and cared for throughout her life. The creation of a "children's world" is particularly meaningful – Bella created for her child an illusion of reality, a magical world, to help her tolerate famine.

The ways in which Bella appears in Paula's narrative demonstrate how she fought to create a safe childhood space in which Paula could develop and maintain a clear sense of identity. Beyond maintaining a connection to her Polish roots by singing songs and telling her stories of life in Warsaw, Bella would care for Paula's toys and foster a sense of play:

> My mother was always very concerned of making some kind of a childhood life for me, so I remember when we left Warsaw, of course it was the fall and I was wearing a sweater. And that's all I…you know, we escaped with what we had on, and eventually this sweater became too small for me. So what my mother did is she took out the sleeves, and then I was sleeveless, I was able to wear the sweater a little bit longer, and she made me a doll from one sleeve, it was one of these Raggedy Ann dolls, and she was also able to make me an outfit for the doll from the other sleeve. And she always tried to, somehow, maintain some kind of childhood life for me.[72]

Bella did this, and so much more. She continuously planned one step ahead, taking the time to consider where the safest place would be for Paula, and eventually, her other children, until they reached Canada in 1951.[73] If a parent's ability to adapt and cope with the war is the "best predictor" of a child's resilience, as Adlair explains, Paula likely found herself in the best situation to handle the challenges of displacement she was faced with.[74] Similarly to Ilona, Paula also speaks of the importance of her great-grandmother, whom her mother was named after,

[72] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:55:22.
[73] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 01:36:53-01:40:07 and 00:19:08.
[74] Ager, "What Is Family?," 48-49.

discussing her grave in Warsaw and the photograph she has of it, highlighting the lineage of strong women in her family.[75]

In a different vein, Judith's story is unique among the child survivors in my study. It highlights the importance of trustworthy personal contacts in survival, which led to her family's escape from the Soviet Union, something which very few Polish Jews were able to achieve before 1945. When her wagon was detached from its original train, as she and her parents were headed to join the Anders Army, they landed in a small village in the Uzbek SSR, "which was in a way our luck," she explains. "Because in this place there was a brigade organisation, [...] they wanted to get organised to join the bigger brigade, and we settled there with all these Polish people and then we were few Jews together."[76] Her group aimed to attach itself to the Anders Army, and they expected to head towards the Middle East, where the army was evacuating.[77]

Yet Jewish and Christian Poles did not have the same opportunities when it came to the Anders Army and its evacuations towards Iran. General Anders believed Jews to be bad soldiers, and claimed that they did not actually wish to serve.[78] Rumours across Central Asia promoted these beliefs, with many soldiers arguing that Jews were trying to evade service and were hiding in warm climates.[79] The belief that Jews had welcomed Soviet soldiers with open arms in September 1939, now spreading in the region, similarly augmented preexisting antisemitic beliefs.[80] Jewish soldiers who had enlisted early during the Army's creation were later

[75] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 00:20:41 and Paula, interview by Betsy Pomerantz and Barry Stahlman (videographer), *Montreal Holocaust Museum*. 6 September 2016, Montreal, QC, 00:58:05.
[76] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stahlman, 19 December 2001, 00:41:42.
[77] *Ibid*., 00:42:58
[78] See Chapter 1, 55n123.
[79] Fitzpatrick, "Annexation, Evacuation, and Antisemitism in the Soviet Union," 142. somewhere else ?
[80] Kaganovitch, "Together and Apart," 57-59 and Terlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army," 162-163. "Zydokomuna", or the myth of "Judeo-Communism", was one of the contemporary iterations of Polish antisemitism, defined as the belief that communism was a Jewish plot, blaming therefore not only the 1939 invasion, but also the subsequent communist government in Poland after 1945, on Jews. This belief was revived under Soviet occupation. Friedla and Nesselrodt, *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union*, *xxvi*. For more information on the relationship between Christian and Jewish Poles, see Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's*

discharged, and further recruitment of Jews was limited.[81] As Anders' Army was to be evacuated to the Middle East for further preparations, the British government wished to prevent a large evacuation of Jews into Iran (then towards Palestine, for training), fearing "exactly what did in fact transpire," explains Atina Grossmann: "that many of the Polish Jewish recruits, once arrived at their goal in Palestine, would desert."[82]

Judith and her family remained in the Uzbek SSR for a few months, and were told they would be sent to Iran. "There was a problem, because there were lots of Christian families and not very many Jews, and here comes again the preference," she explains.[83] While there, her father ran into a Catholic Polish officer from their hometown, who did what he could to get the family aboard the transport: "And he said 'Well, I'm not the highest in command here, but I'll see what I can do.'"[84] He invited other Polish officers to their home, and recommended that Judith should pretend to pray, in a Christian way, as she prepared herself for bed. "I did exactly what my parents told me, and it was a whole show, and this Jurek Poznański [sic] really managed to put us on a transport, which left to Middle East."[85]

Judith and her family were thus among the few Polish Jewish refugees, approximately 2,500 in number, who managed to leave Central Asia alongside 47,500 non-Jewish civilians and 70,000 military staff.[86] Jewish evacuees managed to join the transport – much like Judith's family

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Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). See also Goldlust, "Neither "Victims" nor "Survivors"," 226n28 and Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 50-54.

[81] Adler, *Survival on the Margins*, 192-193. Dekel, *In the East*, 202.
[82] Grossmann, "Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India," 187. Rywka's husband, who she met in the late 1940s in Palestine, had in fact evacuated with the Anders army, pretending to be a Christian Pole, and deserted once he reached the area. See Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 6 August 2014, 00:31:26.
[83] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stahlman, 19 December 2001, 00:43:04.
[84] *Ibid*., 00:45:05.
[85] *Ibid*., 00:46:06.
[86] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 34. Jews accounted for 3,500 soldiers of the 70,000. Dekel's counts for the total evacuated are closer to 75,000 military staff and 42,000 civilians. See Dekel, *In the East*, 239.

had – through bribery, actual conversion, or subterfuge.[87] This would prove beneficial in the long run. As Goldlust explains, "for the small number able to take advantage of the circumstances, the alliance between the Soviets and the Polish Government-in-Exile, and the formation of the Anders Army, provided them with both an escape route from the USSR and an opportunity to bypass the British Mandate restrictions designed to severely limit further Jewish immigration into Palestine."[88] Gaining entry into the army was a matter of grave urgency for both military staff as well as their families, allowing them better chances of survival thanks to access to food and medication, as well as refuge from the USSR.[89] Thanks to her father's connections and her deception of Polish officers, Judith's family first made it to Tehran, and eventually settled in Palestine in 1943.

While parents and older siblings played an important role in helping the younger narrators of this study handle both the emotional and physical trials of displacement, narrators who were adolescents during the war were usually left to provide for themselves. They were swiftly integrated into the Soviet workforce, and few had opportunities to pursue a higher education, focusing rather on finding food and surviving the long years of exile.

II. Becoming an adult: adolescence and absence in exile

"And I left it, and I never saw him anymore. That's it."[90]

Contrary to younger children, adolescents' experiences in exile in Central Asia were marked by the absence of family; parents were absent both in the physical experience of exile in Central Asia, and also often within the narratives of displacement they would share decades later.

[87] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 33-34. See also Dekel, *In the East*, 360.
[88] Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 34.
[89] *Ibid*., 32-33. Dekel, *In the East*, 199-200.
[90] Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 00:25:24.

Most adolescents fled Nazi-occupied Poland without their parents in the first weeks of the war to escape to the Soviet-occupied side. For Morris, David, and Rywka, exile meant a complete separation from parents. Henia, who was originally deported to Stalinabad with her father, was eventually separated from him, as he left for the army and perished on the front.

Such separation during exile had clear consequences on adolescents' experiences of the risks of displacement discussed in the previous chapters. First, narrators who lived in Central Asia as children commented on the ways in which parents helped them to overcome the challenges of illness. By contrast, Rywka, aged seventeen in 1941, experienced malaria in a hospital in the Kazakh SSR, and makes no mention of any familial support, and this despite the fact that she was exiled with her brother. Hers is the only testimony that addresses illness where parents do not play a role.[91] When it comes to schooling, only Henia was able to further her education by attending university in exile. Adolescents without parents were forced to advocate for themselves with regards to finding food and other material aid, leading them to become their own providers. The absence of parents exacerbated the psychological toll of displacement[92]; adolescents were left to handle new languages, political environments, and mature responsibilities on their own. In comparison with the children of this study, the absence, and eventual loss, of parents was a distinguishing feature of their experiences.

Soviet authorities treated older youth mostly *as* adults during their exile, for all intents and purposes. Yet, their youth was profoundly interrupted and disturbed, not least by the realisation that their parents had been murdered as they returned to Poland after the war. While their stories differ from those of children in exile, they also stand apart from adults. "For adults," explains Adler, "exile meant leaving Polish territory. Many of them use patriotic language in their

[91] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:12:04.
[92] Doel, "Placed. Displaced," 560.

testimonies to discuss decisions about Soviet citizenship, deportation, and their desire to return."[93] Similarly, Jolluck argues that identity, through the lens of nationality, was one of the main concerns for Polish women who discussed their exile.[94] Yet the impact of the discovery of their parents' murder distinguishes them from adults: it was *not* the loss of the Polish nation or a loss of identity that shaped their memories of exile, as was the case for many Polish adults, but rather the loss of their family.[95]

David speaks of being taken from his "wonderful home" and family, and of never returning to Równe after the war.[96] Rywka similarly chose to never return to Poland after migrating to Canada and highlights the loving, tight-knit bond she had with her family.[97] Experiencing the beginning of the war as teens, many had found refuge in eastern Poland because their *parents* suggested they did so, as discussed in Chapter 1. This was the case for both David and Rywka, whose parents encouraged them to flee. Morris' father eventually realized the importance of fleeing, and sent Morris' brother across the border to be with him as the war progressed. As Adler notes in her study of children's experiences of exile, "some of the most emotional passages depict leaving their family members behind."[98] The impact of exile for adolescents was felt not only in the everyday challenges of manoeuvring the Soviet system by themselves, but also in returning to the devastating loss of their parental figures who had done what they could to save them until the very end.

This loss also marked adolescents' narratives of exile in different ways. One of the main characteristics of these narratives is that interactions with their parents are more frequently

[93] See Adler, "Children in Exile," 56. See also Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*.
[94] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, *xx-xxi*.
[95] It should be said that I rarely observed patriotic language in the Polish Jewish adults' testimonies I listened to. I would argue that their narratives were rather marked by post-war experiences in Poland and their desire to leave the country.
[96] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:22:40.
[97] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 00:03:10 and Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 6 August 2014, 00:54:45.
[98] Adler, "Children in Exile," 56.

discussed in key moments that both shape and surround adolescents' time in exile: their departure and their return. Morris, for example, explores his final moments with his father, as he went against his father's wishes and headed east early in the war:

> I didn't want to go without telling my father, I'm not going to run away. So I came to my father, and I told him [...], he said [shaking his head] "No, what's going to happen to me is going to happen to you. Don't go, don't go nowhere." [...] I told my friend my father didn't want me to go. He said, "Are you going to listen to him? You want to die like everybody here?" So I went back to my father, and I told him, "Look, I decide now, I go." and I put my hand to say goodbye [puts hand out to shake]. He don't give me back his hand. I said "You don't want me to go? I'm going." [...] And I left it, and I never saw him anymore. That's it. That's what's happen. [...] This I can never forget.[99]

Such difficult moments of separation in the beginning of the war were similarly discussed by David, who headed towards Kiev at his mother's request to "go east"[100] as well as Rywka: "My parents," she explains, "once they received the letter from my brother, they said 'We can't go. If he's [Zalman] gonna come to an empty home…' So they pushed *me* out. 'You go, and maybe it's gonna be some occasion for next time, so we'll go all together.' Unfortunately, it didn't work out this way. And my brother was able to cross. [*So he never came back for them, and they waited for nothing.*] [Rywka nods]."[101]

While this separation marks the beginning of her journey east, the hope and devastating loss of hope surrounding a possible reunion with her parents bookend her time in Central Asia:

> On the way, and I was always "Ah! Gonna see my parents! Ya da ya." We stopped, the train stopped in, I think Lwów, was it, and then people were coming into the train, everybody, for survivors, they were looking, maybe they find some, meet somebody. And we hear the horror stories from them. That it was not a propaganda, it was true. I said, "If I'm not gonna meet the

[99] Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 00:24:03.
[100] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:06:10.
[101] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 00:31:24.

> parents, I have no way of living. I don't wanna live anymore." But you know what, you are… human being is stronger than iron. You live [pause].[102]

In a similar vein, Henia concludes her narrative surrounding Central Asia by discussing the death of her father, wounded and killed on the front, and the deaths of her mother and brother, both murdered at Treblinka.[103] She then turns, at her interviewer's request, back to her studies in Stalinabad and her continuation of her studies in Wroclaw after her return to Poland.[104]

For David, his final farewell with his parents and their death are addressed at the very beginning of his wartime narrative. A few minutes after mentioning his mother's request for him to go east, his interviewer asks him: "Could you tell us something about what you found out later about what happened to your family that was left behind?"[105] He describes their murder in the Sosenki Forest massacre, stating: "So this was the end of the family in 1942. The end of the family."[106]

Paula is the only child narrator who discusses a lengthy separation from a parent, as her father was conscripted into the Polish Army in the fall of 1939 before she and her mother fled Warsaw. Similarly to the adolescents of this study, her father is discussed immediately, in the first few minutes of her interview: "my father was moving away from us this way [gestures forward], and his silhouette was getting smaller and smaller, we waved goodbye and his silhouette was getting smaller and smaller, and I never saw my father again [...]," she says, before he almost disappears from the next four hours of conversation.[107] At the tail end of her third interview session, her interviewer attempts to conclude the interview:

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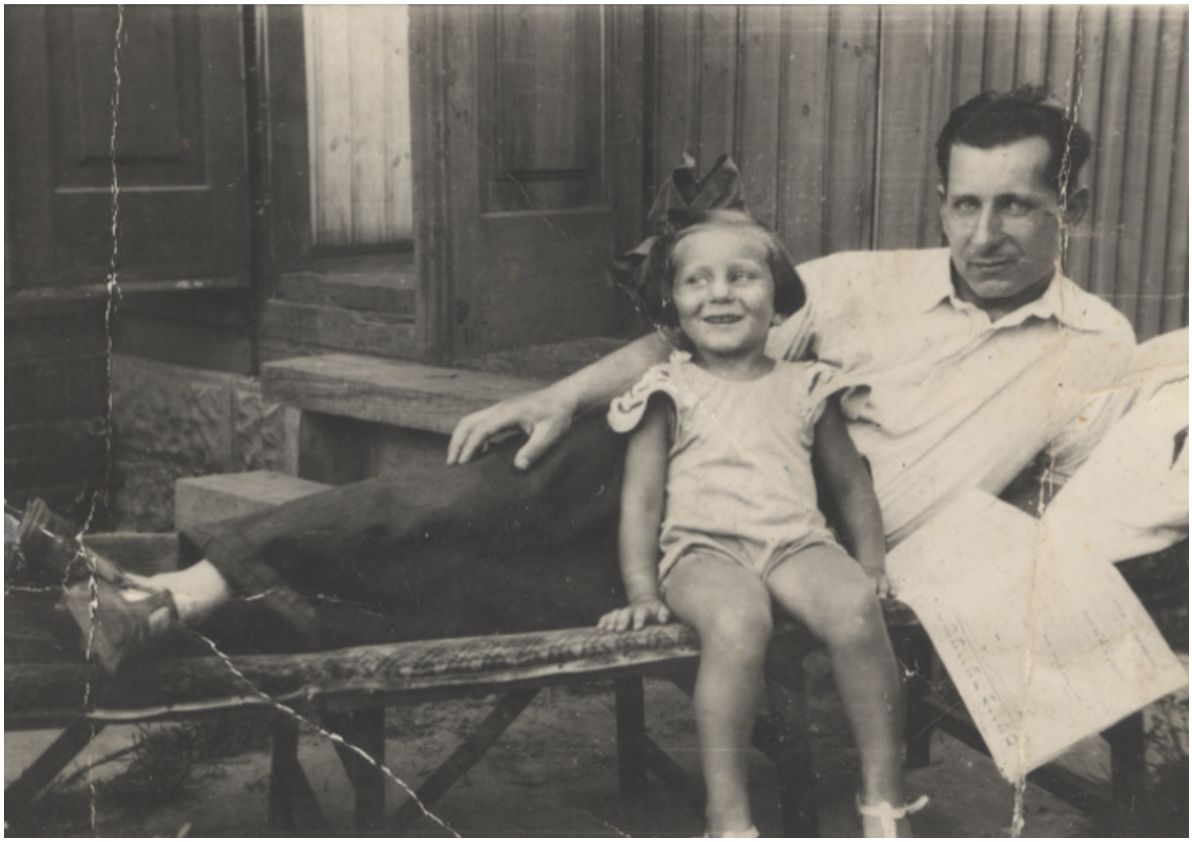
[102] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:31:08.
[103] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:06:47.
[104] *Ibid.*, clip 11, 00:06:06.
[105] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn [sic], 24 May 1994, 00:07:32.
[106] *Ibid.*, 00:09:50.
[107] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 00:06:50.

> **Interviewer**: Well thank you so much for sharing your story with us and we look forward to seeing all those photos.
> **Paula**: Yeah, and – do we still have some time?
> **Interviewer**: Yes.
> **Paula**: Also, another thing that is stuck in my mind is that when my father left, he said he'll be back for my birthday - my birthday is November 24, which is, you know towards the end of the year, and of course my father never came back, and I never had a birthday. And you know, I grew up I grew up not even knowing that, what a birthday is, like that it's important. I didn't know that a birthday is like a *rite de passage* [...]. Today when, you know, when we go out when it's my birthday, we celebrate my birthday, we go out with my family and that's like, a lot of fun and it's good, and, but [...] I don't feel, inside of me, any celebration. I, I almost feel like there is an outer me, and an inner me [...]. I feel as my heart is a rock [...]. I feel that this is also part of losing my childhood, is that [shrugs], not knowing what a birthday is, not only *celebration*, but just, the *process* of, of getting a year older. So yes, I got older, I got taller, and …
> **Interviewer**: Did you have a sense of time through all those years, did you know when it was November 24th, or time was just one big continuum?
> **Paula**: No, no, no, never, nobody ever talked about it.[108]

The consequences of the disruption of time caused by exile remains almost insurmountable. Such discussion brings back to mind the "internal schism" discussed through Judith's experiences in Chapter 1. While Paula does not explicitly connect the loss of her father and her lack of birthday celebrations, these words exchanged with her father as he left appear to be some of the last reminders of a childhood and life that "could have been and should have been," as she says, with birthday celebrations being a crucial element of this life.[109] The repetition in her testimony of his disappearance also brings to mind the importance of certain repetitions in young children's narratives earlier in this chapter. Despite the positive associations she establishes with her time in Central Asia, the overall impact of displacement is compounded by the familial loss associated with the Holocaust more broadly: "I grew up not knowing what it means to be hugged by a grandparent, not being surrounded by aunts and uncles, not being surrounded by cousins."[110]

[108] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 30 August 2016, 01:20:07.
[109] *Ibid*., 01:15:47.
[110] *Ibid.*, 01:11:24.



"*Paula and her father, Chaim Cukier, Warsaw (Poland), around 1939."* Courtesy of Paula and the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

Interestingly, the *absence* of parents *while* in exile is seldom addressed by the youth of this study. To be clear, the "boundaries between reticence and silence are not very clear": it is almost impossible to know the reasons for a narrator exercising their authority and choosing, or not, to include certain details, individuals, or events in their narratives.[111] Decisions surrounding what to include or exclude in narratives can illuminate broader meanings, and narratives surrounding parental absence appear to be constructed, intentially or not, in different ways. I observed two manners in which narrators process the loss of their parents. First, there can be a marked absence of parents in their (generally linear) narratives, which the interviewer is more likely to interrupt in order to return to the home and the absent family members. In other cases, there can be an overflow, or abundance of discussion surrounding lost parents, defying the interviewer's attempts

[111] Messika Cohen and Cohen Fournier, "Memories of Departures," 321.

at chronology. As Alessandro Portelli notes, "the organization of the narrative reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationships to their history."[112] In either case, the story becomes disrupted *because* of the disappearance of their parents.

The *absence* of parents in their narratives can testify to the feeling of loss addressed in Chapter 1 and the destruction and rupture of the family in the aftermath of the war. The feelings they may have felt – the hope that their parents might survive or the sadness associated with missing them – are generally absent from testimonies. In addition, rather than addressing their parents' absence in the aftermath of the war, many of these narratives feature a rupture during their time in Central Asia. This moment is interrupted to discuss what happened to their families back home, before returning to life in Central Asia. Nicholas Stargardt suggests that rupture is "critical to memories of war and the Holocaust."[113] Survivors' stories are fragments, in which some events become imbued with importance. As Henry Greenspan suggests: "to recount the Holocaust means [...] to try and employ the terms of one world (the world survivors share with all of us) to describe the terms, and the negation of terms, of the other."[114]

David's discussion of feelings of hatred and loss stemming from his wartime experiences, as discussed in Chapter 1, takes place in the middle of his journeys across the Soviet Union. He speaks of heading towards Kiev and meeting with an uncle, then interrupts himself to speak not only about this loss and anger, but also about how his story is not like those of concentration camp survivors, and about its impact on his postwar work. Only then does he return to Kiev and his further travels towards Central Asia. This kind of narrative disruption testifies to the ways in which testimonies, particularly those of survivors, are narrative creations: Holocaust survivors

[112] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?," 52.
[113] Stargardt, "The Subjectivity of Children," 43.
[114] Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*, 18 and Stargardt, "The Subjectivity of Children," 43.

must find, according to Greenspan, "what is both tellable and hearable."[115] Testimonies are rarely accurate depictions of their wartime experiences, but rather a compromise, a selective process of narrative construction created with an interviewer.[116] There are, he continues, two "sets of memories": those of the "normal circumstances of life," and those of the "reduction and finally dissolution of those meanings" in destruction.[117] While the latter may be tainted by the former, discussions of their parents (or in the case of David, of survival and the impact of the war) come to be included in the second category, and are far removed from the chronology of experience.

This interruption also illustrates the manner in which his perception of displacement is tainted by the impact of the postwar discovery, recalling what Clifford describes as the "exclusionary politics of memory surrounding the very concept of a 'survivor'."[118] The jarring contrast between his positive experience and what he uncovered afterwards continuously disrupts his life experiences. In doing so, his own dismissal of his survival brings forth that "child survivors," the majority of which were adolescents, "had to fight not only against the external criticism of older survivors, but also an internal voice that suggested that they were not really survivors but merely fortunate kids [...]."[119]

These interruptions or narrative ruptures result both from survivor's own narrative choices and from interruptions by the interviewer. Following Rywka's discussion on her and her brother Zalman pretending to be a couple, for example, Rywka's interviewer asks: "let's just go back for a second to Mordecai and the last time that you received letters from him. [...] Before we continue with your story, do you know how his story ended?"[120] Her descriptions of exile in

[115] Greenspan, *On listening to Holocaust Survivors*, 2.
[116] *Ibid*., 2-7.
[117] *Ibid*., 4-5.
[118] Clifford, *Survivors*, 10.
[119] *Ibid.*, 10, 6.
[120] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:23:28.

Central Asia, whose chronology her interviewer painstakingly attempted to clarify earlier, is thus interrupted to address her brother's and parents' experiences back in Poland, in the midst of her exile. These kinds of interruptions can testify to expectations placed on Holocaust survivors, and to the prevalence of the "hierarchy of victimhood," borne in the aftermath of the war, which I discussed in my introduction[121]:

> **Interviewer**: Did you ever make an attempt to try and find out [what happened to her brother]?
> **Rywka**: How?
> **Interviewer**: Through records, through Yad Vashem, through...
> **Rywka**: Looking up the names, there was no name...
> **Interviewer**: Looking up the town [speaking over each other]
> **Rywka**: [speaking over each other] Nobody had – Pardon me?
> **Interviewer**: Looking up the town and the ghetto, and what happened?
> **Rywka**: Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. [...]
> **Interviewer**: Okay. Do you know what happened, the fate of your parents?[122]

The interviewer plays a key role in how such beliefs are propegated and contributes to these narrative interruptions. As Eliyana Adler explains when exploring the testimony of Ann Benjamin-Goldberg: "just as [she] begins to describe the conditions under which she both worked and studied in Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan, the interviewer asks her whether she was receiving information about the situation back in her hometown. [She] quickly realizes that her premedical courses, loneliness, and hunger in Soviet exile are not of interest to the interviewer. She truncates her own story to answer the interviewer's more insistent questions about the death of her family members back in Poland [...]."[123] As the author suggests, "it is, of course, impossible to know" how Benjamin-Goldberg, or here Rywka, may have shaped their life stories had they not been

[121] Jockusch and Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," 383. Goldlust, "A Different Silence," 48. See also Kushner, "Holocaust, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," 285-287, and Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*, for more about expectations placed on survivors.
[122] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:26:20.
[123] Adler, "Crossing Over," 264.

interrupted.[124] Rywka's interviewer then asks about the fate of her parents, before turning back to her story and the end of the war.

When stemming from survivors' own volition, these interruptions accentuate the impact and weight of their loss, as David's story above illustrates. Henia, whose father had joined the Berling Army, learned from a letter by a Polish soldier that he had been wounded and had disappeared from the battlefield, receiving this news during her exile. After sharing this story, she immediately turns to the rest of her family, while interrupting her interviewer: "no one heard from him. By then I knew that he must have got killed or so, and I didn't want to admit it, because you know, there is always hope, I always…but unfortunate. [*And did you* –] – And my mother and my brother, and I remember the place - to Treblinka - they were sent."[125] She explains that she learned of their fate only when she arrived in Canada in the 1940s, before her interviewer attempts to steer the conversation back to Central Asia:

> **Interviewer**: So if we're back now to your studies at university, have you finished your studies already?
> **Henia**: When I came to Montreal –
> **Interviewer**: But, if you don't mind, you finished your studies, and how did you even get to Montreal?"[126]

The interviewer's interruption testifies to the conflicting aims of both participants, and the potential desire to avoid certain stories; the end of the war is likely painful for Henia given the uncertainty surrounding her parents' survival. "First, I had hope for my father," she explains. "I had hope, maybe my mother, maybe, maybe, maybe, and you live with the maybe. It's terrible."[127] The interviewer's insistence on proceeding chronologically appears to stem from concerns of clarity borne of the Museum's aims for a legible narrative, which may be impacted

[124] Adler, "Crossing Over,"265.
[125] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 11, 00:01:30.
[126] *Ibid*., 00:04:10.
[127] *Ibid.*, 00:05:32.

by a less standard spoken English and the limits of Henia's memory: "I don't remember – there are things I'm trying to escape," she explains when asked of her husband's death. At the end of her interview, she adds: "I don't remember *exactly*, because I didn't think it's necessary."[128] Such insistence on linearity may do more harm than good, as Clifford has observed, but this does not appear to be the case for Henia, who hopes for a sense of relief after sharing her story: "I don't know how long we are here but, it was, it's – every minute, I feel that... I don't know how I feel, but I feel good."[129]

In comparison with other adolescent testimonies, Henia's father is omnipresent in her narrative. His presence in her testimony appears to stem from his disappearance during the war, which she struggles to make sense of. Her story illustrates the second manner in which adolescents discussed their parents: an abundance, or an attempt to fill the void left from their absence. The two were deported to Kotlas together, then liberated, and again taken to Stalinabad. She spends more time talking about his work in the Tajik SSR than she does exploring her own experiences at university or of being an adolescent in exile. Stories that focus on her own desires, such as the blue dress discussed above, are in fact used to clarify the importance of her father in her life: he taught her valuable lessons. Henia's narrative of her time in Central Asia is continuously ruptured in this way by her father's presence, and eventual absence, and we learn relatively few details of her personal experience. When discussing her time at university in Stalinabad, her interviewer asks:

> **Interviewer**: People were speaking Russian there?
> **Henia**: I…I learned very fast, I did. You mean in university?
> **Interviewer**: Mmhm, it was all in Russian?

[128] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 14, 00:04:33, clip 15, 00:04:17. She places a lot of pressure on herself to remember and mentions a few times throughout the interview that she cannot place certain details, see for example clip 8, 00:00:14, 00:00:52.
[129] *Ibid*., 00:04:45. See Clifford, *Survivors*, 231-237.

> **Henia**: They all spoke Russian. And how did I right away? I was asking even my father - because he was chosen before to be the *deviere nevitsa* [sic], it's called *deviere nevitsa* [sic] in Russia, it's like a person that you trust. And he was the one who was supervising all the group of the people who were from Poland and had papers [...].[130]

Here, her time at university becomes less important than her father's prestigious position. Later, her interviewer tries to explore the potential for community-building during her exile:

> **Interviewer**: So did you feel a real sense of community with the people that were there?
> **Henia**: There was no *community* community, maybe there were, I was absorbed with my university.
> **Interviewer**: So you went everyday to university?
> **Henia**: Oh yes.
> **Interviewer**: But you lived still with your father?
> **Henia**: My father already left - I lived with my father but my father applied to Wanda Wasilewska [the Berling Army], and I already had to do decisions on my own. One decision was what my father said - never, never in life sign a paper unless…there should be no space to sign a paper. When you sign, you sign just above the last sentence, whatever was written.
> **Interviewer**: Why do you think he told you that?
> **Henia**: [...] To protect yourself, that's what you do.[131]

Here again, her own experience is pushed aside to bring forward a lesson her father imparted before his death.

In contrast to the younger children who discuss their families' interactions with Soviet authorities, Henia was herself questioned with regards to her father's whereabouts after he left for the front with the Berling Army, and she associates the above lesson to this dangerous experience. Her questioning may be connected to the 1942 arrest of Polish *delegatura* employees, like her father, who were accused of "spying."[132] "I was called a couple of times late at night, and

[130] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 9, 00:04:38.
[131] *Ibid*., clip 10, 00:04:49. Wanda Wasilewska was one of the leaders of the Union of Polish Patriots. "The establishment of another Polish Army on Soviet soil," the Berling Army previously discussed, "went in tandem with the formation and growth of the ZPP." See Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 120.
[132] Dekel, *In the East*, 224. Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 99.

ask[ed] questions about my father [*Who was asking you these questions?*] The, the Russian. But this - [*so they still didn't trust your…your father?*] Oh they - oh yes, yes," she confirms.[133]

This event can also be related to Soviet authorities' manipulation of deported women, their traditional familial roles, and their attachment to family members in order to gain access to information.[134] In her interview, however, this anecdote is subsumed into a larger narrative of her father. The way she may have felt about her interactions with Soviet authorities is absent, and indeed overshadowed by the presence of the values her father taught her while in exile. She explains that their survival depended on each other, and describes the pain stemming from the fact that his letters from the front eventually stopped.[135] At this moment in her narrative, she is both adult and child, at the mercy of the Soviet system, yet engulfed by the absence and disappearance of her father.

In the last moments of her interview, the loss of her father, who died at the front, resurfaces. This repetition highlights the impact of this moment not only on her experiences of exile, but on the rest of her life, during which she both hoped he was alive, yet simultaneously refused to speak of such hopes:

> **Interviewer**: And your grandchildren here, what are their names?
> **Henia**: Ryan, Jonathan, and David.
> **Interviewer**: And they're all in Montreal?
> **Henia**: They are all in Montreal. Except the one from Calgary. And, so we are looking the wedding, we are looking who will come from Calgary. And so, the life goes on. Is it the right thing or no? But it goes on. You know, we…anyway. For a while, I was thinking that still I was fooling myself that my father is alive. But then I gave in, even this.
> **Interviewer**: So you never got any news about your father?
> **Henia**: No, in a way I was afraid that they gonna tell me what he [the soldier who

[133] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:06:08.
[134] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 111.
[135] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 10, 00:04:40 – clip 11, 00:01:51.

> told her about her father's death] told me. To be honest, that's what it was. [...] If my father would be alive, he would let us know.[136]

The loss of her father dominates her life narrative, highlighting the ways in which "specific moments shaped children's overall chronology of the war, establishing when the 'safe' or 'intact' world of childhood was destroyed," explains Nicholas Stargardt. "Critical to how this chronology ran was its *future* trajectory: [...] where the family itself was destroyed [...], that shaped the tale."[137] The death of her father *was* the destruction of the family, and shaped the way the story of her life came to be shared.

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Forced displacement and exile would transform children and youth's family life and sense of identity.[138] Young children clearly recall the roles their parents played not only in helping them survive the physical hardships of displacement, but also the psychological support they received. Parents supported their children through illness, and their employment and personal contacts served to greatly ameliorate children's living conditions. Older siblings could play an important role in children's lives, in Mark's case with regards to providing political information. The memories of these narrators were also shared in notably gendered ways – those who were young boys recalled the presence of their fathers, while young girls discussed at greater length the crucial role of their mothers in helping them survive.

Adolescents, on the other hand, were most usually displaced alone or with a sibling. They were left to handle the risks of displacement alone: none mention family support while falling ill, and only Henia had the chance to continue her studies *and* had a parent who could, at least

[136] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 14, 00:00:57.
[137] Stargardt, "The Subjectivity of Children," 48.
[138] Jolluck, *Exile & Identity*, 280.

initially, support her. Others had to work and feed themselves, and make decisions on their own concerning their future.

Both children and adolescents' experiences bring forth the constructed nature of testimonies and the impact of the presence and absence of family on narratives. Some of the youngest children's memories may have been family memories integrated as individual ones. In addition, repetitions in these narratives highlight some of the more challenging moments of exile. For those who were adolescents, the absence, and eventual loss, of their parents led to particular disruptions of narrative. Parents were frequently integrated into their stories at key moments of departure and return from exile. At the same time, narratives of exile were also interrupted to address what happened to their parents. Still, by the end of the war, youth "returned home full of curiosity," explains Katharina Friedla, "but were also unsettled by the uncertainty and fears regarding the relatives and friends they had left behind [...]."[139] I will be exploring the return to Poland, usually referred to as "repatriation," and its impacts in my concluding thoughts.

[139] Friedla, "'From Nazi Inferno to Soviet Hell'," 285.

EPILOGUE

"So pick where you want to go!"[1]

Repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union officially began in 1944, although some scholars, like historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, argue that the 1942 evacuations of the Anders Army should be considered the first wave of repatriation.[2] Judith and her family were the first of my study's subjects to leave Central Asia, in 1942, on a ship bound for Tehran. Continuing on to Palestine in December 1943, Judith remained there until 1952, when she moved to Canada with her husband, whose uncle helped them relocate for her husband's education.[3]

In June 1944, an order by the Supreme Soviet allowed members of the Polish Army to obtain Polish citizenship. Two months later, an official pardon was given to prisoners of Polish origins. By September, various agreements dealing with population transfers and evacuation were signed between the Polish, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Lithuanian, and Soviet governments, giving both Christian and Jewish Poles the right to relocate from the Soviet Union to Poland.[4] The Polish Repatriation Bureau was created in October 1944, and was responsible for supervising transports and giving aid to Polish repatriates once they reached Polish grounds.[5] Approximately 30,000 Jews found their way back to Poland through these early repatriation agreements, including a number of refugees from the Soviet interior "who had no patience to wait for the possibility of organised repatriation from these regions," as explains Yosef Litvak.[6]

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[1] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 01:02:35.
[2] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Annexation, Evacuation, and Antisemitism in the Soviet Union, 1939-1946," in *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, eds. Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Atina Grossmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 146.
[3] Judith, interview by Cherney and Stalhman, 19 December 2001, 01:07:58.
[4] Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46*, eds. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Basingstoke: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1991), 227-228.
[5] Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 177.
[6] Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union," 230.

The larger movement of deportees from Central Asia towards Poland took place between 1945 and 1946 as an agreement signed between the Polish and Soviet governments in July 1945 gave "members of the Polish nationality and the Polish Jews living in the Soviet Union [the right] to renounce their Soviet citizenship and to be evacuated to Poland."[7] This agreement also "extended the geographical scope" of the earlier decrees by incorporating those who had been deported in 1939-1941.[8] Few Polish Jewish survivors wished to remain in the Soviet Union, though some did. Beyond the desire to return home and reunite with family members either in Poland, Palestine, or North America, many were afraid of living under Stalin's oppressive regime.[9] Around 175,000 Polish Jews arrived in Poland by July 1946. The ZPP, which was put in charge of the repatriation project, dissolved the following month, though further waves of repatriation continued into the late 1950s.[10]

Paula and her mother left for Poland in 1945, although likely not as part of an official repatriation order. Their story highlights the ways in which authorities could play a role in individual requests. Similarly to Ilona's mother, who had been given permission by their *kolkhoz* director to move to a larger town, Paula's mother requested permission to return to Poland from her town's mayor, after fulfilling his request for a dress for his wife. While he originally refused to send her to Poland, he did agree to give her a permission to leave the Uzbek SSR, which they did the following day.[11] Such bargaining does recall some of the other coping behaviours, sometimes painted negatively, which were necessary for survival, as discussed in Chapter 1. Her mother was likely granted a *propusk*, an emergency travel permit usually only issued by the

[7] Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union," 231.
[8] Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 177.
[9] Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union," 234.
[10] *Ibid*., 233, 235, 238.
[11] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 3, 00:09:31 and Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 01:00:26.

NKVD for urgent family matters, for which a black market quickly appeared.[12] Paula's discussion on the details of their repatriation also recalls the collective nature of memory-making for children at the time of exile, as well as a form of post-memory, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Paula explains that the agent's hesitation was due to their time spent in Siberia: "They didn't know what to do with us, here we were people who were in Siberia, and that time Siberia was a big secret, and nobody ever came out of Siberia and all this that we went through," she explains.[13] Her understanding of the silence surrounding Siberia was accurate: the amnesty has been described by Polish general and historian Marian Kukiel as a miracle, being the first time in the history of the Soviet Union that individuals incarcerated in labour camps and prisons were liberated.[14] Some argued that Stalin's antisemitic perception of the Polish Jewish presence on the black market during the war was also motivation to remove them, or that "Polish Jews were needed in Poland to help the new Communist state get on its feet."[15] No matter the reasoning, Paula and her mother underwent what she calls a "trip from hell" in a cattle car with no roof, seats, or toilets, to first arrive in Lwów. Paula, her mother, who remarried after the war, her new stepfather, and eventually her baby brother briefly lived in Krakow, then Łódź, then fled Poland towards Heidenheim DP camp in Germany in 1946, before migrating to Nassjö, Sweden in late 1946, early 1947. The family finally made it to Montreal in 1951, as her mother wanted to be as far away from Europe as possible.[16]

Although some scholars argue that conditions were "relatively satisfactory," repatriation resembled other Soviet deportations experienced by refugees, who were, once again, taken in

[12] Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union," 232.
[13] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 01:02:04.
[14] Marian Kukiel, cited in Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 75.
[15] Fitzpatrick, "Annexation, Evacuation, and Antisemitism," 148.
[16] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 16 August 2016, 01:03:29 and Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 01:02:30.

cattle cars towards Poland.[17] Mark, whose family left Shymkent in June 1946, describes trains similar to those which brought them to Central Asia: wagons held about thirty people and featured "large sliding doors," which remained unlocked for the duration of the two to three week trip, unlike their earlier deportation. These cars were divided into two levels by a shelf, with people either on the higher level or on the ground, and had a toilet in the centre of the wagon. He notes that there were no tickets, but that authorities had a list and returnees were assigned to a specific wagon.[18] Rywka corroborates this statement: "you couldn't just go, pick yourself and go."[19] She explains how she had to register for return, and was taken by train with her brother to Szczecin. They crossed Czechoslovakia towards Bavaria, where they remained together in the Deggendorf DP camp until 1947. They made their way to Palestine in the summer of 1948, where she met her husband and remained until 1951, when the couple left, through sponsorship, for Canada, due to political tensions in Israel.[20]

Mark also recalls the tense social context surrounding their return to Poland: "they attached a car in front of our train with soldiers and machine guns to protect us … because that is one of the things we noticed once we crossed into Poland, people were all very unhappy to see all these Jews coming back, you know. As a matter of fact, I remember the station in Jarosław we passed, we stopped there, and you know people were showing us, like this [mimics slicing his throat], on the railway station."[21] He first made his way to Katowice, then Bitum, before joining a kibbutz with his brother in Czechoslovakia, and finally moving to Salzburg until late 1947, when he

[17] Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union," 234.
[18] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 6 November 2013, 00:11:28, 00:08:53.
[19] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 30 July 2014, 01:30:46.
[20] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 6 August 2014, 00:37:05.
[21] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 6 November 2013, 00:14:27.

moved to Canada with his family, as his father's brothers had settled in Montreal after the First World War.[22]

Henry's post-war experience denotes the attempts of the Polish government to transform the newly acquired city of Szczecin into a Jewish centre after the war.[23] He describes that he and his family were given permission to return to Poland in 1946 and were taken, by the Polish government, to the city by cattle train[24]: "they evicted the German population and put in Poles, Polish citizens, those who returned from Russia, be it Poles or Jews, and settle them. [...] We were given their apartments. [...] We had their linen, we had their china, we had their pots and pans, everything, they were not allowed to take anything with them except what they can carry, similar to the way *we* were arrested by the Russians in 1941. I guess that's the way the Russians did it."[25] He remained in Szczecin for three months before joining a kibbutz in Berlin with his brother. He and his family then moved to the Bamberg DP camp until September 1948, when they made their way to Canada, sponsored by his mother's siblings.[26]

Some of the older adolescents had crossed into young adulthood by the time the war ended. Henia turned twenty-one in the summer of 1945, and had actually met her husband, who was a Polish refugee like her, in Stalinabad, where they were married. She was pregnant with their first child by the time they returned to Poland. She decided she did not want to raise her children in Poland, and she and her husband left for Germany from where they headed to Montreal, where

[22] Mark, interview by Mostowski and Stahlman, 6 November 2013, 01:00:21.
[23] Close to 28,000 Polish Jews repatriated from the Soviet Union were sent to Szczecin, formerly German city Stettin, and incorporated into Poland in July 1945. Due to its proximity to the German border and the "western sectors," the city was also a targeted location "for illegal Jewish emigration." The government's efforts were unsuccessful, as only a few thousand Jews remained in the city by 1951. See Achim Wörn, "Jews in Szczecin, 1945-1950: At the Crossroad Between Emigration and Assimilation," *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 6, no. 1 (2017): 55-85.
[24] Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 00:57:07.
[25] *Ibid*., 00:57:49.
[26] *Ibid*., 01:04:30.

she had family residing.[27] Similarly, Morris was married in exile in December 1945, and recalls the cattle trains they were placed in: "Well, also the same, we've got the same train. Not like… [*Not the cattle cars, a regular train?*] Not a regular train, no, also the same [*Freight cars*] Freight cars. Not so *packed*, over there we got packed. On the way back, we got a little more comfortable. [...] I think we came back to Szczecin in May [1946], if I'm not mistaken. Took us about three months to come back, to travel."[28] His brother left for Berlin after a few weeks, while he and his wife remained in Szczecin until June 1959, when they migrated to Montreal through sponsorship from his wife's family. He mentions that they chose Montreal because this sponsorship was easier to get than one from his brother, who had moved to New York in 1952.[29]

In a similar way, Ilona's story signals the maturing of those who were children at the beginning of their exile in Central Asia. She had moved to Moscow with her parents before the end of the war, and remained there until the summer of 1946, when all returned to Łódź. Yet just as she had encouraged her parents to flee Poland only a few years later, so too did her desire to return home manifest in further relocations. "Mes parents aussi planifiaient d'aller en Suède et aux États-Unis après [*D'accord*], mais ça n'a pas marché à cause de moi, parce que j'ai décidé de rentrer, parce que - [*Vous vous vouliez retourner à Varsovie.*] Oui, parce que j'avais déjà mon amoureux là-bas, et des amis, et finalement je me sentais chez moi. Alors quand j'ai dit que je vais rentrer, ma mère est rentrée avec moi."[30] Sixteen years old when she returned from exile, she had met her future first husband, Victor, in Łódź, and the two were married in Warsaw in 1951. Years later, she continues, "on a profité du fait que notre premier secrétaire [Wladyslaw]

[27] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2024, clip 13, 00:00:04. She does not remember the year in which she left; she suggests it may be 1946, but is uncertain.
[28] Morris, interview by Cherney and Malamud-Blumstone, 24 September 1996, 01:17:59.
[29] *Ibid*., 01:23:21.
[30] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 5, 00:08:16.

Gomulka a dit que si quelqu'un se sent juif, il n'a qu'à aller en Israël."[31] She, her mother, her second husband, and their children took passports to Israel with no intention of heading there. Instead, they used their transit visas to head to France in 1968, and they migrated to Canada a year later at her husband's request, who saw Canada as a multicultural society in which they would be better received.[32]

David does not discuss his return to Poland in great detail, and simply mentions that he left Uzbekistan after getting arrested, without recalling these events. He spends much more time discussing, with both pride and reflection, his postwar occupation in the *Bricha*, a Zionist organisation with which he worked to locate Jewish orphans across Europe and bring them to Palestine, work that engaged him until 1948.[33] Pursuing his higher education in Israel, he met a professor who pushed him to move to New York for work, which he left a year later for Toronto to pursue his doctorate, after which he found a job in Montreal.[34]

These testimonies illustrate important differences between the youngest children and the eldest adolescents of this study, as well as their personal growth throughout the war. Henia and Morris were both recently married, Ilona was continuing her studies and beginning a new life, and David found purpose in his assigned task. For young children, the struggles surrounding education and growing up they experienced in Central Asia often continued for years. Paula, the youngest refugee, had yet to *ever* attend school until reaching Heidenheim at ten years old. Still, for all of these young survivors, whether children or adolescents, returning to Poland did not mark the end of their "wartime" struggles and displacements.

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[31] Ilona, interview by Bensimon and Stahlman, 16 October 2013, clip 6, 00:05:26.
[32] *Ibid*., 00:09:44.
[33] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn, 24 May 1994, 00:44:44 and 00:29:29. "Habricha," Bricha Legacy Association, accessed 29 April 2024, https://www.habricha.org.il/?page_id=25&lang=en.
[34] David, interview by Schwartz and Hirshhorn, 24 May 1994, 01:01:01.

As Mark described above, the return to Poland was difficult and often dangerous for Jews. When Paula lived in Łódź, after relocating there for fear of being uncovered as Jewish in Krakow, she was bullied by Catholic children at school: "At that point, my mother said 'Well, this is not a place for us to be,' that Poland is no longer her country, because she considered Poland her country [...], and my parents started making plans on leaving Poland."[35] Henia describes the post-war violence that took place in Chelm, and how it similarly motivated her to leave the country, while Henry clearly explains that "the people from the forest [... were] hunting down Jews. This was the AK, the Armia Krajowa, the Polish underground, that fought the Germans, fought the Russians, and killed Jews whenever they found them during the war."[36] Others, like Rywka, describe their detachment from Poland as connected to loss:

> **Interviewer**: How do you go about deciding that you would like to try and go to Israel?
> **Rywka**: You know what it was? We came, we had nobody. So people cling to each other. Without even thinking what's ahead. This became like family, because this is the only family we had. [...]
> **Interviewer**: Did you all consider yourselves Zionists?
> **Rywka**: I don't know if we considered us Zionists. It was a place, somewhere to go away from Europe.
> **Interviewer**: And you knew for sure you wanted to leave Europe?
> [Rywka shakes her head]
> **Interviewer**: You wanted to leave - you *didn't* - you *did* want to leave.
> **Rywka**: Of course. All of us. Nobody wants to stay there.[37]

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"The young poet M. Man did not witness the great massacres and the horrifying inhuman events. He returns from far away to this home - but who is going to wait for him? Who is searching for him? Who is left to visit him? The home that was long yearned for, imagined in dreams is no longer a home; everything has disappeared!"[38]

[35] Paula, interview by Pomerantz and Stahlman, 23 August 2016, 00:19:33.
[36] Henia, interview by Wolchock and Stahlman, 21 March 2013, clip 11, 00:04:57 and Henry, interview by Kramer and Savelson, 17 October 1994, 01:16:57.
[37] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 6 August 2014, 00:10:15.
[38] Nakhman Blumental, cited in Nesselrodt, ""I bled like you, brother"," 54.

The impact of displacement took different forms for young children and adolescents.[39] Displacement to and within Central Asia disturbed and perturbed the idea of youth physically, interfering with their health, their growth, and their steady access to food, material aid, and necessary medical care. The younger children in this study typically fled with their families, whereas adolescents more often experienced separation from their parents. Once in Central Asia, adolescents were more likely to stay in place once they found a job, whereas the younger children recall more frequent relocation with their families in pursuit of better living conditions.

Illness could compound young exiles' challenges, leading to physical ailment, fear, and hospitalisations. Children were more vulnerable and at risk of death from illness[40], but many, like Paula, Henry, and Mark, also describe the role their parents played in helping them handle both the physical and emotional impacts of disease. Older adolescents, on the other hand, make no mention of familial support during their convalescence. Hunger plagued all of the subjects in this study, though only adolescents were responsible for finding their own food and providing for themselves. Children who were accompanied by family usually depended on their parents for material resources. Still, both children and adolescents participated in fulfilling their own needs by stealing or bartering for food, or waiting in lines for their rations. Both, too, felt the acute lack of institutionalized education, while material deprivation sometimes prevented them from attending school. One of the main difficulties, particularly for children like Mark and Ilona, was the lack of schooling in a language they spoke and understood. Many child refugees were eventually able to attend school either in Polish or Russian and thus to continue their education to some extent. Adolescents, on the other hand, less frequently spoke of school, as they were

[39] See Wylegała, "Child Migrants and Deportees from Poland and Ukraine," 301-302.
[40] Piesakowski, *The Fate of Poles in the USSR*, 100.

already integrated into the Soviet workforce. Only one adolescent, Henia, was able to pursue higher education during her exile; the others were forced to wait for the end of the war.

For many of the children and adolescents in this study, the feeling of a yearned for, imagined, or *missing* place, a place that has been disturbed yet which lingers, as geographer Marcus Doel describes[41], was their defining experience of youth. The psychological effects of exile, including the consequences of physical privation and separation from loved ones, were often felt for years to come. If childhood and adolescence have been understood differently given both the historical time and the cultural context in which they are experienced, what many of these Polish Jewish refugees had envisioned as a typical childhood or youth was disrupted and displaced by their exile. The impacts of deportation and forced displacement reverberated across young people's lives in various ways, yet if the "displacement of place" led these youth to travel away from Poland and across the Soviet Union, the "place of displacement," on the other hand, was their youth itself.[42] Many narrators would come to define this displacement of their youth, in their own terms, throughout their interviews.

Relationships with family members and local citizens had a profound impact on emotional and psychological experiences of displacement. While tensions with locals were noted by some narrators, many young survivors recount the deep connections forged with local residents in a transformative period of their lives. Young children, like Paula, developed new friendships through play, which transcended linguistic boundaries. Their testimonies also highlight the ways in which solidarity was established with locals, whether Dungans, Kazakhs, or Uzbeks. These relationships served to help them better integrate new cultures and religions, and to support each other against in the challenging circumstances of wartime. Adolescents of this study, like Rywka

[41] Doel, "Placed. Displaced," 564.
[42] *Ibid*., 558.

and David, note the respect with which they cohabited with their new neighbours and the importance of giving and receiving aid in various forms.

At the same time, those who were lucky to have family members – especially parents – exiled alongside them frequently highlight the importance of family in surviving both the physical and emotional hardships of displacement. If adolescent siblings exiled together developed a particular bond, many parents displaced with their young children were described to have done everything they could for their children, taking extra jobs, finding schools for them, providing as much food as they could, and supporting them through illness.

In a way, both of these group dynamics demonstrate Marianne Hirsch's contention that "relationship becomes the place of relocation [...]."[43] As she explains, relationships can become a form of displacement: in some cases, relationships or new connections can be developed in order to avoid assimilation or acculturation.[44] In other cases, relationships, friendships, and new bonds can become a place to alleviate, at least temporarily, the pain of feeling *out* of place. Post-war connections with others who also experienced exile, for example, could serve a similar purpose. In either case, relationships are an important site in which displacement can *take place*.

Rywka's discussion surrounding surviving exile touches on a number of considerations brought forward by narrators and clarifies the ways in which their survival should be considered as just that: survival.

> **Interviewer**: Do you identify *yourself* as a survivor?
> **Rywka**: You know what, I *did*. But when I came to our group, they said [interrupted]
> **Interviewer**: Myra's group?
> **Rywka**: Myra's group. Not, not for Myra, but for other people: "you were in

[43] Marianne Hirsch, "Pictures of a Displaced Girlhood," in her *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997), 236.
[44] Hirsch, "Pictures of a Displaced Girlhood," 236, 238.

Russia, you're not a survivor." You heard already about that, right, Barry? [laughs], it's nothing new.
Interviewer: There's always politics amongst everything right, so...In the survivors, too, there's a hierarchy and politics.
Rywka: There were different ways people survived.
Interviewer: And that's what makes everybody a survivor.
Rywka: [nods] so then, that's why I never [interrupted]
Interviewer: So you feel in the last few years they've put doubt in your head that you really *are* a survivor? They have made you feel that way.
Rywka: I am not a survivor! That's why I never gave an interview saying any kind of stories. I was thinking, what is my story comparing to them. It was a *vacation*.
Interviewer: But it's still your story, and it's still a story of survival.
Rywka: Ok, you see it this way. But a lot of people still don't see it that way.
Interviewer: Does that bother you?
Rywka: In the beginning it did. Ok, I was not afraid, never for my life, I was never mistreated. [pause] But also, I suffered. I was away from my parents, uprooted, barefeet, barely have something to wear or to eat. I suffered! In a different ways. The only difference is I wasn't afraid for my life.
Interviewer: What do you think when you meet the other survivors and, they make you feel this way, or put this on you that you're not a survivor?
Rywka: I…
Interviewer: Do you resent them for it? Do you feel that they're justified to say that?
Rywka: In their eyes, they're justified. But not in mine. I did, I survived in a *different* way.[45]

[45] Rywka, interview by Strauber and Stahlman, 6 August 2014, 00:6:41.

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"Paula and her father, Chaim Cukier, Warsaw (Poland), around 1939." Courtesy of Paula and the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

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APPENDICES

Guidelines for Video Testimony Virtual Use, Publication and Reproduction

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Subject of the agreement

Description of project

For my Master's thesis, my goal is to use testimonies of Holocaust survivors who found themselves exiled in the Soviet Union during the war, more specifically in Soviet Central Asia. I am hoping to explore the ways in which Jewish refugees built new communities in this region during the war through a number of themes, such as community building, establishing roots, relations with locals, living conditions, challenges of displacement, gendered elements of survival, etc. My goal is to focus specifically on oral histories in order to uncover more human emotions and reflections that testify to this experience of survival, displacement and exile.

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I am not certain at this point what the reach of this project will be. While I am using the testimonies only for academic purposes to begin, I may participate in conferences with the material, or publish my thesis once it is completed. It is however very unlikely that the videos themselves will be reproduced publicly.

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I, Marie-Odile Samson, state that I have read and understand the above conditions and agree to comply with the stipulations stated.

Marie-Odile Samson — 17/11/2022

Signed — Date

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Marie-Odile Samson

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