

## Introduction

On October 13, 2023, a cohort of child Holocaust survivor-volunteers at the United States Holocaust Museum (USHMM) issued an open letter about the October 7, 2023, Hamas atrocities perpetrated against the civilian population of southern Israel, including the gruesome and indiscriminate killing and burning of Israeli children. The letter constitutes a powerful statement in which its authors have voiced their concerns for Israeli children, families, and communities, as well as for the future memorialization of the Holocaust:

In our youth, we were proud Jews in our communities throughout Europe. Eventually, that meant escape or certain death. We wanted to flee, but no one would take us. We longed for freedom and security, but there was no Jewish state. Today, the State of Israel is the guarantor of a Jewish future, but it is under horrific assault by Hamas terrorists. Today, men, women, and children are again targeted as Jews. Today, we witness the worst killing of Jews since the Holocaust.

Today, as we see the murderous destruction in Israel, that hope is dimmed. All our lives we mourned for our loved ones lost to the genocidal actions of the Nazis and their collaborators, but we hoped the lessons of the past could shape a different future. Today we mourn for Israel that holds such special meaning for us.

This is not what we expected in this final chapter of our lives, as we contemplate our legacy, the future of Holocaust memory and education, and the future of our people. We write this letter to humanity in sorrow but also in hope. We know pain few can comprehend, having

seen our families and communities obliterated. We are living proof that the unthinkable is always possible.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the most horrific massacre (pogrom) of Jews since the end of the Second World War, the authors of the open letter relate how the Holocaust has influenced their lives, especially their lifelong mourning for their murdered families. The letter indicates that its authors could not shed the emotional scars and wounds in 1945, and that these scars and wounds have been part of their post-Holocaust identities and memories despite having lived outwardly successful professional, social, and familial lives. These scars and wounds resurface in emotionally overwhelming and painful moments in survivors' lives, such as during times of individual mourning and when there are attacks against Jewish communities in Israel and abroad.<sup>2</sup>

The vast body of psychological and historical literature on the impact of war and genocide on child survivors from the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, the Wars of Yugoslavia, Darfur, and Somalia also speak volumes about the persistence of similar scars and wounds in young survivors. These scholarly works, along with the wealth of varied ego documents produced by child survivors, urge us to recognize the topicality of the field of children, war, and genocide studies both in the past and the present moment.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the history of children during the Second World War, many studies have focused on the experiences, identities, and (self-)representations of child refugees and survivors and their rehabilitation. But the field can also contribute to the study of historical topics such as the destructive breakdown in relations between different ethnic and national groups in Central and Eastern Europe before and during the Second World War. It can also offer insight into the devastating outcomes of political propaganda on the education of children in societies under the control of the Soviet and Nazi totalitarian regimes.

The study of the children of the Second World War and the Holocaust can have even wider ramifications. It can contribute to research on rele-

1 "Open Letter: Holocaust Survivors Respond to Largest Massacre of Jews since the Holocaust," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed October 13, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKghRGH7pjM>.

2 Joanna B. Michlic, "Missed Lessons from The Holocaust: Avoiding Complexities of Jewish Child Survivors' Life Experiences," *Journal of the History of Children and Youth* 17, no. 2 (2024, forthcoming).

3 Yudit Kiss, *More Nights Than Days: A Survey of Writings of Child Genocide Survivors* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2023).

vant contemporary topics like the scope of brainwashing and the mental and physical exploitation of youths and children in war and conflict zones by militias and armies such as extreme Islamic terrorist organizations like Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ, Jihad), and ISIS. Research on the experience and consequences of the short-term and long-term separation of many young Jewish survivors from their biological parents during the Holocaust can also offer important insights and clear warnings about the destructive outcomes of long separation, children's loss of their original cultural identity, and the many failures that accompany attempts to reunite children with their birth parents—developments that have recently taken place in different parts of the world.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, there is an urgent need for systematic, global research and education about children, war, and genocide at schools, colleges, and universities, as well as museums as a means to both enrich our understanding of the human condition and society and, hopefully, prevent wars and genocides in the future.

Children are the primary victims of wars, armed conflicts, and genocides. They perish first and in disproportionately large numbers. Wars and genocides also destroy the family and family bonds, and this is strikingly visible in the case of child survivors who are marked for life by painful memories of the loss of their parents, childhood, and community, as well as by their experiences of displacement. Thanks to the last two and a half decades of historical, sociological, anthropological, literary, and ethnographic research, scholars now know much more about the thinking, being, and feeling of Jewish and non-Jewish European children and youth, in addition to their daily experiences both during and in the aftermath of the Second World War. The mass of scholarly works on children and youth in the Nazi era (1933-1945) and studies analyzing the ways relatives, adoptive parents, social workers, medical staff, and respective states treated young survivors in the aftermath of the war is constantly growing. However, large research gaps remain, especially related to topics such as the German war against Soviet children in the East; older children's agency in (self-)survival and rescue from a comparative perspective; the role of gender in survival; and the fate of young orphans during and in the aftermath of war and genocide.

4 On the relevance of the separation of Jewish children from their biological families during the Holocaust for the discussion of recent cases of forced and violent separations of Central American children from their parents in the United States (2017-2019) and Ukrainian children from their parents in the ongoing Russian war of attrition (2022-), see: Michlic, "Missed Lessons from The Holocaust: Avoiding Complexities of Jewish Child Survivors' Life Experiences."

The articles in this volume largely originated in the international conference “Childhood at War and Genocide: Children’s Experiences of Conflict in the 20th Century—Agency, Survival, Memory and Representation” that took place between October 17 and 19, 2022, at the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ) in Munich, with the cooperation of Tobias Freimüller at the Fritz Bauer Institute and the UCL Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies IAS. In planning the conference, we were guided by child-centered historical methods and interdisciplinary approaches focusing on child survivors’ production and articulation of their experiences in different formats such as diaries and letters written within genocide, early postwar interviews, drawings and paintings, and late postwar oral histories and memoirs. We aimed to examine different case studies using comparative and transnational lenses. But our goal was not only to look for similarities and differences across varied cases but also to use one set of phenomena to understand the other: for example, the forced transfer of children and child survivors’ identities in the aftermath of genocide; Children Born of War (CBOW) and the long-term social and familial identity stigmas and painful secrets; and the intersection of the therapeutic counseling of child survivors and the biographies of those who provided such treatments. In this volume, we present many of the major “fruits” of our conference and post-conference discussions, which are authored by senior and junior scholars, including doctoral researchers.

From the very beginning of the initial planning stage of the conference, we were confronted with Russia’s barbaric invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, followed by the horrific news that thousands of Ukrainian children and their mothers were fleeing the country. At that moment, we realized that the subject of our conference had become, yet again, of utmost relevance for understanding the current situation of children in Ukraine.

In his official statement of February 27, 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke about the “watershed” or “turn of the times” (*Zeitenwende*), referring to the disruption of the peaceful European order that now had to be defended from Putin and his authoritarian regime.<sup>5</sup> Russian heavy bombardments and large-scale military offensives against civilians resulting in the destruction of entire towns and cities and caus-

5 Olaf Scholz, “Regierungserklärung in der Sondersitzung zum Krieg gegen die Ukraine vor dem Deutschen Bundestag am 27. February 2022 in Berlin,” accessed October 3, 2023, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/992814/2131062/78d39dda6647d7f835bbe76713d30c31/bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-reden-zur-zeitenwende-download-bpa-data.pdf>.

ing the mass exodus of people illustrate that we have been witnessing a war that has not been experienced on European soil since 1945. In this ongoing war, we are confronted with news that is filled with images of mass murder and torture and revelations about the use of rape as a military weapon against Ukrainian women and the forced displacement of Ukrainian children from their homeland. Looking closely at the situation of Ukrainian children in the areas occupied and annexed by the Russian invader, we can speak about Children of War—those who were injured and killed, separated from their parents, kidnapped, or detained by Russian military forces and other Russian occupational authorities. According to the Ukrainian Office of the Prosecutor General, 511 Ukrainian children have been killed, 1,125 wounded, 2,212 missing, and 19,546 deported and/or forcibly displaced since the beginning of the war till December 2023. Among the latter group are the most vulnerable children from Ukrainian children's homes (orphanages) and some children who were separated from their parents and siblings. It has also been reported that thirteen children might have been sexually abused as of December 2023.<sup>6</sup> These are crimes against humanity.

One of the official Russian practices used to deny Ukraine the right to exist as an independent state is the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, followed by their re-education and subjection to intense coerced Russification.<sup>7</sup> Although a team of investigators assembled by the UN Human Rights Council could not verify the exact number of abducted Ukrainian children in the ongoing war, investigators have, however, accepted the evidence that Russian authorities have placed the most vulnerable Ukrainian children in Russian children's homes and Russian foster families and granted them Russian citizenship. To make this process efficient and final, President Putin signed a decree on May 30, 2022, according to which Ukrainian children without parental care can be naturalized as Russian citizens in a quick and simplified procedure.<sup>8</sup> The Pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued

6 See the daily updated numbers on the official platform of the Ministry of Reintegration and the National Information Bureau on behalf of the Office of the President of Ukraine, which was created as a tool for finding children and documenting the crimes committed against them, last accessed October 3, 2023, <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>.

7 Yulia Ioffe, "Forcibly Transferring Ukrainian Children to the Russian Federation: A Genocide?" *Journal of Genocide Research* 25, no. 3-4 (2023): 31-51.

8 *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, Advance Unedited Version, A/HRC/52/6*, accessed November 30, 2023, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/A\\_HRC\\_52\\_62\\_AUV\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/A_HRC_52_62_AUV_EN.pdf). See also: *Report on Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian*

warrants for the arrest of President Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova in March 2023. The latter is the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, who has been responsible for the unlawful deportations of Ukrainian children.<sup>9</sup> Other evidence collected suggests that some vulnerable Ukrainian children were taken by force to Belarus, Russia's ally in the war of attrition against Ukraine. The official Russian version claims that these children were taken to Belarus to recuperate in sanatoriums; however, they have not yet returned home.<sup>10</sup> In June 2023, Pavel Latushka, the former Belarusian Minister of Culture and member of the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus, handed over evidence to the ICC that showed that at least 2,100 Ukrainian children from some fifteen Russian-occupied towns and cities had been forcibly removed to Belarus with President Lukashenka's consent.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, it is difficult to calculate the exact number of abductions of Ukrainian children or the precise figures for those Ukrainian children who have suffered from violence and forced displacement due to active warfare and the occupation of parts of Ukrainian territory between February 24, 2022 and the present. However, obvious war crimes committed against Ukrainian children by the Putin and Lukashenko regimes have been documented. In the ongoing attempts to recover the deported children, the Ukrainian state and an activist Ukrainian group called Kid-mapping, working in partnership with the Latvian-based human rights group Every Human Being, have been documenting all identified cases of forcibly abducted Ukrainian children.<sup>12</sup>

*and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, Related to the Forcible Transfer and/or Deportation of Ukrainian Children to the Russian Federation*, OSCE, May 4, 2023, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/542751>; Yuliia Khomyn, "Why the Deportation of Ukrainian Children to Russia is an Act of Genocide," June 1, 2023, <https://war.ukraine.ua/articles/deportation-of-ukrainian-children-to-russia-is-a-genocide/>.

9 Press Release of ICC, March 17, 2023, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and>.

10 Tatiana Gargalyk, "Detei iz Ukrainy nezakonno vezut v RB po prikazu Lukashenko?" accessed November 28, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/ru/ukrainskih-detej-nezakonno-vyvozat-v-belarus-otvetit-li-za-eto-lukashenko/a-65399019>.

11 Irena Kotelovich, "Ukrainskich detei massovo vavoziat v Belarus. Chto proshodit i pochemu eto voennoe prestuplenie?" accessed November 29, 2023, <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/12-07-2023-ukrainskih-detej-massovo-vyvozat-v-belarus-chto-proshodit-i-pochemu-eto-voennoe-prestupleni>; Anastasiia Chupis, "Childhood in the Conditions of War. The Ukrainian experience," *Baltic Worlds* XVI, no. 4 (2023): 4-11.

12 See the report: "Activists Map Deported Ukrainian Children in Russia," *The Moscow Times*, May 23, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/05/23/activists-map-deported-ukrainian-children-in-russia-a81244>.

One cannot ignore historical phenomena resembling Putin's current policies toward Ukrainian children. In fact, one can argue that the Russian state's orchestrated practice of abduction and forced Russification of Ukrainian children echoes the deportations of blond-haired and blue-eyed Slavic children from Eastern Europe to Nazi Germany for Germanization during the Second World War. It also echoes, in its intent, the Young Turks' practice of kidnapping and forcibly converting to Islam Armenian children and youth during the Armenian genocide that took place between 1915 and 1916—a case study described in detail in this volume.

At the same time, young children and youth have been treated as the “spiritual armament” of the state both in Putin's Russia and Lukashenka's Belarus.<sup>13</sup> Building unequivocal loyalties to the state is achieved by ideological brainwashing, militarization, and the political mobilization of children and youth. This phenomenon takes place on a daily basis at Belarusian and Russian primary and secondary schools, as well as outside of schools, during extra-curricular activities in state-sponsored cultural institutions wherein children are being molded into “patriots” by playing military games and participating in “military patriotic camps.” In the latter, they are exposed to real weapons and are forced to train with them.<sup>14</sup> This current intense brainwashing of children did not start in 2022 but can be traced back to 2016 when children eight years old and older began to be forcefully encouraged to join the so-called “youth army” (*Junarmija*) under the auspices of the Russian Ministry of Defense. British historian Ian Garner interprets the outcome of the sinister ideological and military manipulation of children and youth as the phenomenon of creating the “Z-Generation.” Based on online interviews with Russian youths, his analysis of how Putin's regime has brainwashed sections of the Russian youth into what Garner calls a messianic cult is succinct, vivid, and

13 On cases of the brainwashing of youths and the molding of them into illiberal generations in contemporary post-Soviet states, see: Oleg Antonov, Sofie Bedford, Ekaterina Kalinina, and Olena Podolian, eds. “Youth and Authoritarian Values: Internal and External Soft Power Influence,” special issue, *Baltic Worlds* 16, no. 3 (August 2023); and Yuliya von Saal, “Onkel Wowo, wir stehen zu dir! Militarisierung und Mobilisierung des kindlichen Alltags in der Sowjetunion und in Russland” (Reprint), *Zeitgeschichte-online*, July 1, 2022, <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/themen/onkel-wowo-wir-stehen-zu-dir>; Chupis, “Childhood in the Conditions of War.”

14 In the case of Belarus, see: Yuliya von Saal, “Erziehung zum Hass. Die Militarisierung der Kindheit in Belarus,” *Osteuropa* 72, no. 12 (2022): 127–42; on Russia, see: Dar'ja Talanova, “Blut tropft aus den Ranzen: Patriotismuserziehung an Russlands Schulen,” in *Osteuropa* 72, no. 12 (2022): 115–26.

disturbing.<sup>15</sup> Garner's study invites further scholarly research on this troubling topic by applying diachronic and synchronic comparative lenses.

Without a doubt, the ideological and military brainwashing of children and youth in post-Soviet Russia originated in the Soviet state of the 1930s under Stalin's rule. During the 1930s, the Soviet regime introduced repressive measures in childcare institutions and used schools and cultural institutions running programs for children as ideological instruments of the totalitarian state.<sup>16</sup> However, the ideological brainwashing and militarization of children and youth have been a global phenomenon in the past and present, including the current striking and devastating case of Palestinian children and youths trained by Hamas and Jihad to hate Israel and Jews.<sup>17</sup> Hamas and other Islamic terrorist organizations have also cynically employed Palestinian children, adolescents, and women as human shields in past and current wars against Israel.<sup>18</sup> Overall, the topic of the ideological brainwashing and militarization of children and youths in wartime conflict zones deserves a thorough examination by analyzing various cases from the Middle East, Africa, South America, and Putin's Russia in a comparative perspective.

Articles in this volume build on recent studies of children and childhood and, thus, contribute to scholarly discussions about the historical agency of youths and children. Since the history of childhood emerged as a field of study in the 1960s, historians have disputed the significance of

15 Ian Garner, *Z Generation: Into the Heart of Russia's Fascist Youth* (London: Hurst Publisher, 2023).

16 Olga Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Andy Byford, "The Imperfect Child in Early Twentieth-Century Russia," *History of Education* 46, no. 5 (2017): 595-617; and Manon Van de Water, *Moscow Theatres for Young People: A Cultural History of Artistic Innovation and Ideological Coercion, 1917-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

17 See the report from March 2023, "UNRWA Education: Reform or Regression? A Review of UNRWA Teachers and Schools Concerning Incitement to Hate and Violence," accessed November 29, 2023, <https://unwatch.org/un-teachers-call-to-murder-jews-reveals-new-report/>.

18 See, for example: CBN News video, "Son of Hamas Co-Founder Denounces the Group at UN. Exposes 'Savage' Indoctrination of Palestinian Kids," accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjOEJumoABg>; Seyla Benhabib, "An Open Letter to My Friends Who 'Signed Philosophy for Palestine,'" *Medium*, November 4, 2023, <https://medium.com/amor-mundi/an-open-letter-to-my-friends-who-signed-philosophy-for-palestine-0440ebd665d8>. On the history of humans used as human shields in wartime conflicts, see: Neve Gordon and Nicola Perugini, *Human Shields: A History of People in the Line of Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).



children's voices and agency.<sup>19</sup> The integration of children's voices into scholarship on peacetime societies, societies at war, and societies experiencing genocidal conditions has been recognized as one of the central challenges of historical childhood research. In the very first issue of the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* in 2008, Joseph M. Hawes and Ray Hiner argued that historians of childhood should "resist any historiographical trend and fashion that turns attention away from children or by implication denies them historical agency."<sup>20</sup> One of the most recent theoretical contributions to the scholarship on childhood agency was made by Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander, and Stephanie Olsen, scholars in the subfield of the history of emotions and childhood who, in their own words, became "frustrated with the concept of agency."<sup>21</sup> The important 2020 debate about children's agency and the state of the field of the history of childhood was published as a roundtable discussion in the October issue of the *American Historical Review*. In this venue, Sarah Maza questioned the field of history of children and childhood and insisted that what we need is history *through* children rather than history *of* children.<sup>22</sup> In response to Maza, brilliant defenses of the field were offered by leading scholars of childhood including Steven Mintz, Ishita Pande, and Bengt Sandin, among others. They rejected Maza's assertion that children are only important insofar as they affect adult histories.<sup>23</sup> Instead, they insisted that children are distinct beings with their own modes of consciousness and behavior, who attempt to make sense of the world around them and who are capable of various kinds of actions.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in the introduction to *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, Mischa Honeck and James Marten state that children and youth during and in the aftermath of war and genocide cannot be treated

19 For an overview of children's agency in historical perspective, see: Julia Grant, "Children Versus Childhood: Writing Children into the Historical Record, or Reflections on Paula Fass's *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*," *History of Education Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2007): 468–90.

20 Joseph M. Hawes and Ray Hiner, "Hidden in Plain View: The History of Children (and Childhood) in the Twenty-first Century," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 4–47.

21 Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander, and Stephanie Olsen, "Against Agency," *Society for the History of Children and Youth Featured Commentaries*, October 23, 2018, <http://www.shcy.org>.

22 Sarah Maza, "The Kids Aren't All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood," *American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 12–685.

23 See, for example: Steven Mintz, "Children's History Matters," *American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 128–92, and also Ishita Pande's and Bengt Sandin's responses in the same issue.

24 Mintz, "Children's History Matters."

as “mere objects of adult design.”<sup>25</sup> Correspondingly, Joanna Michlic insists that in spite of internal weaknesses and adults’ influence, children’s testimonies are the best window into children’s worlds of feeling, being, and thinking that scholars can ever access.<sup>26</sup>

The articles in this volume are chiefly embedded in the experiences of children in Europe in the twentieth century, especially before, during, and in the aftermath of the Second World War. Unsurprisingly, one of the key groups of children explored in our volume is Jewish children. One reason for that is the fact that pre-adolescent Jewish children and youths created a relatively large amount of ego documents in the twentieth century that have serendipitously been preserved and collected in historical archives and private collections all over the world. That wealth of diaries, poems, personal testimonies, and pictorial images has facilitated a new wave of historical studies of Jewish children and childhood since the late 1990s and played an important role in facilitating research about other groups of children.<sup>27</sup> The abundance of ego documents produced by Jewish children means that historians who embark on writing the history of Jewish childhood before, during, and after the Holocaust do not face what Peter Stearns, a pioneer of childhood studies and emotions, calls the “granddaddy issue”—namely the lack of sources created by younger preadolescent children.<sup>28</sup> In fact, our volume showcases some of these Jewish children’s ego documents that have not been accessed, analyzed, or interpreted by historians until today.

Characteristically, Jewish children’s drawings and paintings stand out as the least studied evidence of their lives under the brutal conditions of exclusion, persecution, and extermination. Given these sources’ elusive nature, they demand interdisciplinary scholarly methods to interpret them as material testimonies of children’s engagement with the world. These methods could then be applied to the nuanced analysis of pictorial testimonies of other cohorts of child survivors which, in turn, can facilitate

25 Mischa Honeck and James Marten, “More than Victims: Framing the History of Modern Childhood and War: Introduction,” in *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, ed. Mischa Honeck and James Marten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 6.

26 Joanna B. Michlic, “Children in the Holocaust,” in *Cambridge History of the Holocaust*, ed. Natalia Aleksun and Marion Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

27 See: Friederike Kind-Kovács and Machteld Venken, eds., “1918, 1945, 1989: Childhood in Times of Political Transformation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Introduction,” special issue, *Journal of Modern European History* 19, no. 2 (2021): 155–65.

28 Peter N. Stearns, “Challenges in the History of Childhood,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 35.

comparative and transnational studies of children's drawings and paintings in the aftermath of wars and genocides.

Only between six to eleven percent of Europe's prewar population of Jewish children survived the Holocaust. In the immediate aftermath of the Shoah, Jewish organizations began to compile figures to understand the human losses in communities and the age groups represented in the remnant of European Jewry. However, the statistics they compiled were only fragmentary and imprecise because of three major factors: first, the lack of exact prewar statistics concerning Jewish children within some Jewish communities; second, the frequent national and transnational relocation of young Jewish refugees in the early postwar period; and third, the ongoing and incomplete recovery of Jewish children from private non-Jewish homes and Christian convents and monasteries during the same period.

One 1946 report explained that in the British and American zones of occupation in Germany in July 1945, only 3.5 percent of the 22,400 Jewish Holocaust survivors who remained in Nazi Germany after 1939 were under the age of sixteen.<sup>29</sup> In 1945, the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) began extensive research on the losses of Jewish children and youths in nine countries in post-fascist Europe. In the AJDC's 1946 report entitled *Jewish Children in Liberated Europe*, Leon Shapiro acknowledged the lack of precise estimates of how many Jewish children survived in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Luxemburg, and Finland.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, he endeavored to chart the most accurate map of Jewish children's losses based on all available sources, including prewar statistics. For example, Shapiro cautiously indicated that of the thirty thousand Jewish children believed to have lived in Austria at the outbreak of the war, only three hundred survived, including seventy-three young persons rescued from concentration camps. Shapiro's report also demonstrated that the highest losses among Jewish youth and children were in central-eastern and eastern Europe. That should not be surprising given the severity of the Nazi occupation of that region and the scope of local collaboration. In the case of Hungary, where Jewish children and youths under fifteen years old numbered 78,244 of the total Hungarian Jewish population of 444,567—according to the 1931 census, nine thousand full and half-orphans were counted in the latter part of 1945. In the case of

29 Zorach Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted: Jewish Refugees and Displaced Persons after Liberation* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1946), 53.

30 Leon Shapiro, *Jewish Children in Liberated Europe: Their needs and the J. D. C. Case Work* (New York: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1946), 3.

Poland, where 29.6 percent of the entire Jewish population numbering 3,113,900 was composed of Jewish children and youths under fifteen years old in 1931, the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP) was able to locate and register only five thousand Jewish child survivors, mostly half and full orphans, in the second half of 1945.<sup>31</sup>

With a focus on the Second World War, our volume also looks closely at non-Jewish Slavic children and their ruptured childhoods in Belarus in the aftermath of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. It also engages with the most “taboo” and shameful aspect of the history of children in Nazi Germany and Austria between 1936 and 1945, namely the so-called *Lebensborn* children who were born as a result of sexual relations between single Aryan mothers and German SS, military, and civilian personnel in specially created maternity homes as part of Nazi racial and population policies promoting “hereditarily healthy” Aryan offspring. As a social consequence of the Second World War, these children have experienced stigmatization, and their postwar biographies contain deeply rooted family secrets.

A similar damaging psychological and social impact of the Second World War has been noted in the large and varied cohort of CBOW, who are defined as children conceived by foreign enemy, occupation, or peace-keeping soldiers and usually local mothers. In recent years, the CBOW field has flourished and has resulted in new and significant comparative studies authored by senior and early career researchers.<sup>32</sup> Our volume recognizes the importance of CBOW, presenting one of the least-known cohorts of the group: Polish children born to Polish female forced laborers and Displaced Persons and fathered by foreigners, including Germans and American Afro-Caribbean soldiers. In 1945, many Polish mothers abandoned their CBOW, and subsequently, these children became part of the multinational group of unaccompanied children cared for by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in the western occupied zones of Germany. In the future, it will be necessary to launch comparative studies of CBOW and Jewish child survivors, especially those who were the offspring of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish marriages in East Central Europe, to gain a new historical understanding of the intimate consequences of war for intergenerational families with ties to both survivors and perpetrators, as well as Jewish survivors of mixed ethnic groups/CBOWs’ self-representations throughout the post-1945 period.

31 Shapiro, *Jewish Children*, 2.

32 Sabine Lee, Heide Glaesmer, and Barbara Steltz-Marx, eds., *Children Born of War, Past, Present and Future* (London: Routledge, 2023).

The first four articles in the research section of this volume focus on the ways in which children and young adults experience war and genocidal violence. Though they look at two distinct historical events—the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust—and engage with children from different geographical, social, religious, and national and ethnic backgrounds, all four articles share telling examples of children’s resilience and resourcefulness in times of violent destruction. Through careful historical analysis, they document children as historical actors with varying degrees of agency depending on their age and other political and social conditions. Together, they demonstrate the importance of using early postwar and late postwar testimonies of child survivors to unearth events and experiences that otherwise would be inaccessible to scholars.

In the first article, Edita Gzoyan reconstructs the experiences of approximately two hundred thousand Armenian children during the Armenian genocide, the first genocide of the twentieth century in which 1.5 million Armenians were eradicated by the Young Turk government under the guise of World War One. After the destruction of the Armenian political and cultural elite and non-elite male population, the Young Turks ordered the forced removal of Armenian children from their families and placed them in Ottoman Turkish orphanages and with individual Turkish families. The aim of this cruel policy of separation from birth mothers was for the children to lose key facets of Armenian identity including language, culture, and religion and, thus, fully assimilate into Turkish society. Through a careful interrogation of survivors’ memories, Gzoyan describes quotidian experiences of the violent “assimilation industry” these children, up to the age of fifteen, suffered. She also provides ample evidence of how the children and young people responded to the program of coerced assimilation into Turkish identity. Confronting a cultural genocidal policy, their responses ranged from open acts of defiance to (presumed) compliance to avoid physical brutalization and murder. Drawing on the pioneering studies of the oral histories of survivors of the Armenian genocide by Donald and Lorna Miller and Nazan Maksudyan, Gzoyan places Armenian children at the center of the historical narrative of the Armenian genocide.<sup>33</sup> She also explores the “choiceless choices” of Armenian parents that encompassed dilemmas

33 Donald Miller and Lorna Miller, “Women and Children of the Armenian Genocide,” in *Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. by Richard Hovannisian (London: Macmillan, 1992), 153–68; Donald Miller and Lorna Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

like which child's life is more valuable and which child should be kept and which child to offer to Muslim Turkish families.<sup>34</sup> Gzoyan's article demonstrates the need for comparative research on the complexities of post-genocidal social identities of Armenian children forced to convert to Islam in order to physically survive, Jewish children who converted to Catholicism during the Holocaust and thus physically survived, and any other groups of child survivors who were forced to convert to a new religion in order to escape murder.

Turning to the Second World War, Yuliya von Saal investigates the phenomena of what she calls the adultification and parentification of young children in the Soviet Union during the "Great Patriotic War" (1941-1945). Her article examines the breakdown of the generational order, focusing on the occupied Socialist Soviet Republic of Belarus (BSSR). Von Saal shows the collapse of normative childhood under wartime conditions by paying close attention to the subjective experiences, actions, perceptions, and feelings of affected youths. She delineates how the children ceased to be children in their everyday lives and how naturally they took over the responsibilities of adult members of their families. This includes not only Jewish children, who had been exposed to complete annihilation since the first year of the occupation, but also non-Jewish Slavic children, who had to take on responsibilities and roles that were at odds with their biological age. At the same time, von Saal calls for the acknowledgment of the complexity of the ways in which children functioned during and after the war, and for the recognition of not only the pathological consequences of war-related role reversal but also the transformative effects of such a reversal on society as a whole. Her analysis of children's war experiences continues beyond the end of the "Great Patriotic War" to demonstrate that the adult agency forcibly imposed on Soviet children during wartime was not easily reversed. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Soviet regime insisted on returning to the Stalinist pre-war narrative of a "happy childhood". The state not only refused to provide the younger generation with mental health support, but it also expected them to become productive, prosocial, and loyal citizens. By early 1950, the state shut down the mental health studies about the young people of the Second World

34 The literary scholar Lawrence L. Langer coined the term "choiceless choice" in his 1980 essay and since then the term has become one of the fundamental notions in the Holocaust Studies. The term is used to refer to a decision about how to act in the ghettos or the concentration camps where no real decision was possible, see: Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps," *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (1980), 53-59.

War which Soviet psychiatrists and psychologists had been carrying out since 1943.

Expanding on his highly acclaimed research project “Jewish Child Forced Labourers, 1938-1945,” Dieter Steinert analyzes the experiences of Jewish child forced laborers during the Second World War.<sup>35</sup> Steinert estimates that several hundred thousand Jewish children—probably more than a million—had to endure longer or shorter periods of forced labor before being liberated or, most likely, murdered in the Holocaust. He shows that Jewish children and adolescents under the age of eighteen were found in virtually every space where forced labor was used by Nazi Germany, including the workshops of SS slave labor camps in the German Reich, the ramp in the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex, and the sorting centers for murdered Jews’ possessions during *Aktion Reinhardt* (March 1942 to November 1943). Children worked in mining and agriculture, performed construction work and were forced to build production plants, bridges, roads and railway tracks, barracks, airfields, defensive positions, and trenches, jobs beyond their physical strength. Based on a plethora of late-postwar survivor testimonies, Steinert uncovers previously neglected everyday histories of young forced laborers and, in the process, identifies diligent survivor-observers of Nazi crimes. He convincingly explains why young Jewish forced laborers’ experiences have only recently captured the attention of scholars. In the past, key oral history projects have focused on general experiences of survival in the Holocaust and the loss of one’s family and community rather than on forced labor. Thus, Steinert’s study contributes to the wider methodological discussion concerning the frames of late postwar testimonies, qualified by Alexandra Garbarini as “far-sighted.”<sup>36</sup> He demonstrates that careful combing through these testimonies enables the historian to uncover wartime events and developments previously ignored and grasp the meanings individuals impart on their childhood Holocaust experiences that otherwise would be inaccessible.

Correspondingly, Lilia Tomchuk examines a previously neglected topic in Holocaust research, the everyday encounters between Jewish youths and Italian soldiers in two Transnistrian counties, Balta and Juguastu. Italy’s participation in the German war against the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front has received increasing attention from historians in the

35 Johannes-Dieter Steinert, *Holocaust und Zwangsarbeit. Erinnerungen jüdischer Kinder 1938-1945* (Essen: Klartext, 2018).

36 Alexandra Garbarini, “Diaries, Testimonies and Jewish Histories of the Holocaust,” in *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust: New Transnational Approaches*, ed. Norman J. W. Goda (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 91–104, here 102.

past two decades. Tomchuk contributes to this body of scholarship by shifting the focus to Italian soldiers' attitudes toward and treatment of Jewish children and youth born between 1924 and 1937, thus interrogating the powerful postwar national commemorative myth of "*Italiani brava gente*" ("Italians, good people"). Tomchuk's examination of more than one hundred late postwar testimonies of young Jewish survivors enables her to reconstruct the complex nature of encounters between Italian soldiers and Jewish youths, revealing the agency of older Jewish children and adolescents in their interactions with the Italian military. By employing gender and age as categories of analysis, Tomchuk successfully identifies multiple facets of barter between individuals and groups of Jewish children and Italian soldiers stationed in Transnistria.

The next three articles in the research section explore three major topics: the wartime rescue policies targeting Central European Jewish children in the West; early postwar policies concerning family reunification, children's welfare and national belonging; and psychotherapeutic approaches to child survivors. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the West was deeply shocked about the unprecedented number of orphaned children—Jewish and non-Jewish—who were victims of the Nazis' destructive policies, which were considered to constitute a "war against children."<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Western politicians, pundits, and humanitarian activists feared the generation of war-damaged children and, therefore, saw their rehabilitation as a priority for building new societies in the post-1945 era.<sup>38</sup> However, young Jewish and non-Jewish refugees' voices were hardly taken into account in the discussions about policies that were purported to act in the "best interest of the children." In fact, the idea of "the best interest of the children" was subordinated to the political and social needs of adult members of societies, including the specific requirements of potential adoptive parents, rather than addressing the real needs and painful experiences of child refugees.<sup>39</sup>

Laura Hobson Faure shows that subordination of children's needs to the interests of the state and adult members of society had already

37 Heidi Ferenbach, "War Orphans and Postfascist Families: Kinship and Belonging after 1945," in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. Frank Biess and Robert G. Moelle (New York: Berghahn Books), 175–95.

38 Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3; and Rebecca Clifford, "The Picture of (Mental) Health: Images of Jewish 'Unaccompanied Children' in the Aftermath of the Second World War," *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 15, no. 2 (2022): 137–38.

39 Michlic, "Missing Lessons from the Holocaust."



emerged during the Second World War in her examination of the little-known case of *Kindertransports* of German Jewish children who first arrived in France between 1938 and 1941 and subsequently had to flee to the United States between 1941 and 1942. Her analysis of the care policies for unaccompanied Jewish children before and during the Holocaust reveals that there was no single solution in the Jewish diaspora to help these children, despite their shared religious origins. Central European Jewish children confronted challenges as they learned new languages, new cultures, and new social systems alone, without the assistance of their parents. Only rarely did these children encounter trustworthy and empathic adults in different national and geographical settings. Hobson Faure employs a comparative and transnational lens in her analysis of approximately 253 young German Jewish refugees, with a special emphasis on brothers Claus and Werner Gossels. This constitutes a new and innovative approach in the field of Holocaust and Jewish childhood studies, and as such, it should be welcomed as an important and inspiring method for the study of child refugees of post-1945 wars and genocides. Her use of comparative and transnational perspectives contributes to a deeper understanding of children's responses to the various humanitarian agencies and individuals assisting them, the complex and chaotic trajectories of escape, and the heavy emotional and familial toll of displacement.

Expanding on his acclaimed PhD dissertation, Jakub Gałęziowski's article investigates the politics of the newly established Polish communist government, which vigorously campaigned for the return of all Polish children deported to Nazi Germany during the Second World War.<sup>40</sup> The national request for the repatriation of those officially called "stolen children" was amplified and applauded in the official communist media of the early postwar period, and this issue has subsequently become part of a powerful national narrative about righting the wrongs committed by Nazi Germany against Poland and its people. However, as Gałęziowski skillfully explains, the early postwar Polish communist campaign for the return of "stolen children" ended in chaos and failure and had negative short-term and long-term repercussions on a cohort of CBOWs repatriated to Poland. More than eighty percent of the children the Nazis deported from Poland during the war never returned to their homeland,

40 Jakub Gałęziowski, *Niedopowiedziane biografie. Polskie dzieci urodzone z powodu wojny* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2022). On Gałęziowski's book in English, see: John Beauchamp, on *Understated Biographies*, *ThefirstNews*, June 10, 2023, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/memory-of-polish-children-born-of-war-in-the-spotlight-39055>.

and the number of children who returned to Poland between 1946 and 1951 is estimated to be between 3,500 and 4,500. Among the twenty per cent of those who were repatriated to Poland were many CBOW born during the war in Nazi Germany and Austria or immediately after the war in the British and American occupation zones of Germany. These children were abandoned by their Polish mothers, who feared social ostracism within their own country. But as Gałęziowski argues, exclusion and negative stereotyping were part and parcel of the life experiences of CBOW in postwar Poland. One such child, a girl named Genia whose father was an African-American soldier, was not adopted by a Polish family nor was she accepted into an orphanage for older children. When she was four and half years old, she was admitted to the State Hospital for the Nervous and Mentally Ill in Lubliniec, and there the trail of her existence ends.<sup>41</sup>

Turning westward, Anna M. Parkinson discusses the legacy of Hans Keilson (1909–2011), a German-Dutch-Jewish psychoanalyst and writer who was a member of the Dutch Resistance during the Second World War and settled in the Netherlands permanently in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Parkinson's contribution is an example of the growing number of works about Keilson that have been published in recent years. The author of the first seminal study about the impact of the Holocaust on different groups of child survivors, Keilson played a major role in advancing the conceptualization of trauma and expanding our understanding of the long consequences of trauma in young survivors.<sup>42</sup> Keilson's study was based on his clinical work with child Holocaust survivors that began during the war, when he worked as a counselor for troubled Jewish children on behalf of the Dutch Resistance. At the same time, he himself was living under an assumed identity. Parkinson masterfully discusses Keilson's method of using the "talking cure" with children who learned to be silent to stay alive and whose sense of agency was limited because of

41 See: Jakub Gałęziowski, "Researching Global Phenomena in Local Circumstances: Polish Children Born of War in the Context of CBOW Research," in: *Children and Youth at Risk in Times of Transition: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Baard Herman Borge, Elke Kleinau, and Ingvill Constanze Ødegaard (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 115–38.

42 See: Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 116–18; and Aurèlia Kalisky, "Sharing a Fruitful Silence: Hans Keilson and Listening to Jewish War Orphans as a Psychoanalyst and Survivor," in *After the Darkness? Holocaust Survivors' Emotions, Psychological and Social Journeys in the Early Post-war Period*, ed. Constance Paris de Bollárdière and Sharon Kangisser Cohen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem with Association of the American University of Paris, 2023), 227–56.

their wartime experiences in concentration camps or completely alone in hiding. Through a careful analysis of Keilson's approach to his young patients, Parkinson reveals the short- and long-term effects of traumatic wartime experiences on young survivors' sense of agency and ability to form personal relations in the postwar period. Parkinson's contribution also demonstrates the need for historical research on lesser-known "wounded healers," who, like Keilson, dedicated their lives to the treatment of child Holocaust survivors, and whose own personal lives were marked by unbearable family losses in the Holocaust.

In the Source Commentary section, three texts focus on neglected contemporaneous sources produced by children before and during the Second World War, as well as on ego documents penned by adults involved in humanitarian schemes designed to support children from war-torn continental Europe. Wiebke Hiemesch expertly demonstrates the importance of children's pictorial works as historical sources by analyzing a neglected collection of children's drawings from the Talmud Torah School in Hamburg, Germany, produced in the 1930s. By employing a material culture perspective, Hiemesch interprets the children's drawings as artifacts embedded in a complex cultural and historical context. Her work urges scholars to pay attention to both the creation and afterlife of these precious material testimonies.

Similarly, Zofia Trębacz underscores the importance of underused Jewish children's letters from within the Holocaust for researching the social history of the Jewish family and children in Nazi-occupied Poland. She examines the letters of two sisters, Estera and Awiwa, to their father Chaim Finkelsztejn, the well-known Zionist journalist and director of the publishing house Haynt, as well as the correspondence of half-siblings Artur and Rywka to their father Szmuel Zygielbojm, the famous and tragic Bundist (Jewish socialist) leader who committed suicide in exile in London in May 1943. Her analysis sheds new light on family relations, emotions, and the coping mechanisms of children who were separated from their beloved paternal figures and experienced ghettoization and persecution.

Lorraine McEvoy's commentary focuses on letters sent by members of the UK-based voluntary organization Children of Europe Air Rescue to the British government, calling for financial support for an initiative to offer German children from defeated Nazi Germany a recuperative holiday. Given the fragmentary and elusive nature of the letters and the lack of other personal and other documentation, McEvoy concludes that there are many unanswered questions about the motivations behind this planned humanitarian action.

Our volume ends with the Project Descriptions section, which showcases the works-in-progress of four junior and early career scholars. Oksana Vynnyk's doctoral dissertation interrogates the complexities and paradoxes of a medical relief campaign that aimed to provide medical assistance to Ukrainian children suffering as a result of the Soviet state-induced famine of the early 1930s, which is commemorated as the Holodomor. Drawing on perspectives from the history of medicine and hunger, and employing late-post-Holodomor testimonies of survivors, Vynnyk aims to reconstruct the experiences and reactions of young patients during and in the aftermath of the Holodomor.

Similarly, in his doctoral project, Barnabas Balint explores young Hungarian Jews' responses to persecution during the Holocaust, drawing on sources from multiple archives. To capture the full picture, he aims to chart the evolution of attitudes and beliefs of young Hungarian Jews from the interwar period, throughout the war, and in the immediate postwar years. Balint's goal is to enhance our knowledge of the subjective experience of young Hungarian Jews by employing age as an intersectional category of analysis—probing how it interacted with gender, religion, and ideology. His approach promises to deepen our understanding of youth and youth agency in times of discrimination and persecution.

The final project featured in this section deals with the burdensome consequences of the Second World War for *Lebensborn* children and their multigenerational families in contemporary Germany and Austria. Lukas Schretter and Nadjeschda Stoffers's "Interview Narratives of Lebensborn Children from the Wienerwald Maternity Home, 1938-1945" is part of a larger ongoing project network that aims to collect oral history interviews with children born in *Lebensborn* maternity homes operated by the National Socialist regime all over Germany and Austria. Schretter and Stoffers focus on the historical reconstruction of one such facility, the Wienerwald Home, which operated in Austria from 1938 to 1945. Their research reveals how sensitive and painful the circumstances of one's birth and family are for those who were born in the Wienerwald Home, how challenging is to collect the oral testimonies of former *Lebensborn* children, and how these children and their multigenerational families came to terms—or not—with a dark family past shaped by the Nazi era. Schretter and Stoffers make an important contribution to the conversation about the methodological and ethical issues concerning *Lebensborn* children that could be helpful in scholarly discussions about other groups of CBOW.

Overall, our volume presents a collection of innovative contributions about overlooked and neglected children's experiences and representations

of war and genocide in the twentieth century and the echoes of these experiences in the twenty-first century. Thus, it shows the importance of positioning microhistories of children within the context of their prewar and postwar families and wartime relations, as well as in relation to the history of “wounded healers” who engaged in therapeutic treatments of child refugees and those individuals working for humanitarian agencies. The volume also demonstrates the need to examine the effects of war and genocide on children and childhood—children’s emotions, mental health, and social identities—and on child survivors’ relations within their families and friendships and the broader societies in which they have lived. It invites scholars to conduct research on the subject by applying diverse methods and analytical approaches to historical inquiry, including emotional and oral histories, synchronic and diachronic comparison, and microhistorical and transnational perspectives. Therefore, we hope that our volume will be an inspiration to other scholars and that it will enhance the growth of the field and contribute to debates about the global development of the history of childhood and children’s historical and social agency. Given its persistent topicality, *Children, War, and Genocide* is a field of global interest, and it deserves to be well represented in special research centers and widely taught.