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The 1945 Bytom Notebook: Searching for the Lost Voices of Child Holocaust Survivors

This paper focuses on an unpublished Yiddish manuscript of 42 child Holocaust testimonies, collected and written down in Polish Bytom in 1945 by Shlomo Tsam, the principal of the local Hebrew School, who – through chronicling the fate of his charges under the Nazis – gave permanence to the children's stories of loss and survival, stories which otherwise would have been lost.

Introduction

In 1945, Shlomo Tsam (1911-1977), principal of the Hebrew School in Bytom, Poland, collected the testimonies of 42 of his pupils about their fate under the Nazis, and he wrote down their stories. Tsam's notebook is a remarkable collection of child Holocaust testimonies which chronicles the fate of his charges, all of whom were brought together by deportations, persecution, and postwar upheavals in Bytom for a short period of time before they moved on, mostly to North America or Palestine/Israel. This Yiddish manuscript, entitled (קינדר און וואס דרעצלן »What Stories Do Children Tell?«), was sent by its author to the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CJHC) in Poland, and then found its way into the archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, where it lay unknown and unpublished until it was brought to our attention.[1]

This paper tells the story of this unique document and of the Holocaust survivors who produced it – Shlomo Tsam and his pupils. The notebook will be placed within the context of early postwar child Holocaust testimony collections, and its value for understanding Jewish children's experiences in the Holocaust will be shown. This paper will also illustrate how the ITS archives can help further the understanding of the children's fate and their postwar experience.

1 YIVO Archives, Record Group 225: The Hersh Wasser Collection, 1939-1946, item 2.9. The Yiddish manuscript has been translated into English by Judy Grossman and Sidney Lightman. We would like to thank these translators for their work, which will be published in a critical edition of Tsam's notebook, compiled by the authors of this paper.

Early postwar child Holocaust testimonies

The immediate postwar years were times of existential insecurity, traumatic memories, and difficult living conditions for Holocaust survivors. Yet Jewish organizations and individuals collected thousands of survivor testimonies, and although most of those testimonies were taken from adult survivors, there are thousands of child testimonies as well. Adults (often educators such as Tsam) were collecting testimonies from surviving children, archiving or publishing them. Tsam's decision to collect and write down some of his pupils' testimonies is therefore not an isolated act but has to be seen in the context of the testimonial endeavours of his time.

In the early postwar years, recording technology was in its infancy, and the necessary technical equipment hard to come by, which is why the vast majority of early Holocaust testimonies consists of written sources.[2] There were two big organized collection drives, one run by the Central Historical Commission of the Liberated Jews in the American Zone in Germany (CHC), and the other one orchestrated by the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland (CJHC), which also developed questionnaires and guidelines for taking testimonies; calls for testimonies were sent out and selections of testimonies published. Between them, these organizations collected almost 900 children's testimonies. Another big project, yielding about 1,000 children's »autobiographies« from children's homes in Poland and Germany, was organized privately in Poland and the DP camps by Benjamin Tenenbaum.[3]

While these testimonial endeavours were occasioned by the Holocaust, they also have to be seen in the context of prewar life story writing, which was an established part of life in Poland. This tradition saw numerous memoir writing competitions in the 1920s and 1930s, solicited by social scientists via media campaigns, aimed at different parts of society – including the youth – and resulting in thousands of submissions from the (largely non-Jewish) population. YIVO, the Centre for Jewish Studies in Vilna, also ran three such memoir competitions in the inter-war years (1932, 1934, 1939), inviting teenagers and young people aged 14-22 to write their autobiographies. Hundreds submitted entries to these

2 David Boder's 1946 Voices Project, which consists of voice recordings of interviews conducted by Boder with about 130 survivors, is a rare exception that confirms the rule. See the project website for more information: http://voices.iit.edu/ (accessed 3 November 2012).

3 www.zchor.org/testimon/shoachil.htm (last accessed Nov. 3, 2012). The Tenenbaum collection is held in the Ghetto Fighters House Museum, cf. www.gfh.org.il/ (last accessed Nov. 3, 2012). Tenenbaum published some of the testimonies he collected in Merhavia (Palestine) in 1947, under the title ממשפחה אחד מעיר ושניים (One of a City and Two of a Family).

competitions.[4] This focus on children and young people and the importance placed on the authentic voice of the child carried over into the postwar world, where it informed the work done by historians and educators with survivor children.[5] Thus, Janush Korczak, the famous Jewish educator in Poland, spread his child-centred ideology through publications and radio programs, asking the children to write of their experiences and lives. As a teacher in a prewar Jewish school, Tsam would have been familiar with this culture of collecting autobiographical documents.[6]

Tsam's notebook

Shlomo Tsam was a teacher in the Tarbut School, a Jewish Hebrew language Gymnasium, in prewar Rovna (then Poland). During the war, he and his family hid in the woods, where he joined and fought with the partisans. After their liberation, they joined the Polish families of the region who were deported from the area now set to become part of the USSR. Tsam found himself in Bytom in Silesia, where he established and led a Jewish Hebrew school. The pupils in the school were child survivors of the Holocaust, mostly – like Tsam – from what had been the eastern reaches of Poland. Some of the children were orphans, but many had survived with a parent or a sibling. Tsam's stay in Bytom was short – like many other Jews he left for occupied Germany in the autumn of 1945. There, in the DP camp of Gabersee, he taught in the Jewish school until his emigration to the US in July 1949, where he continued to work as a teacher until his untimely death of cancer in 1977.[7]

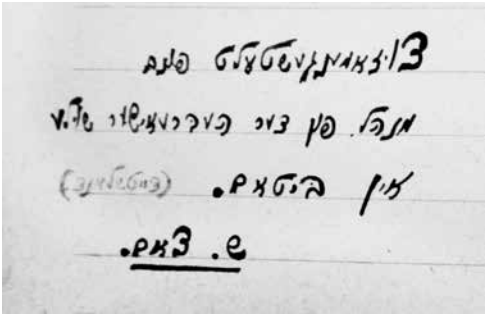
During the few months Tsam spent in postwar Bytom as the director of the Hebrew School, he must have decided to collect the testimonies of some of his charges. We do not know how he went about this, because there are no surviving notes which would help shed light on this question, nor do any of the children whom we were able to trace remember anything about testifying or even about their teacher Tsam. This is not surprising, because – like Tsam – many of

4 See Jeffrey Shandler (ed.): Awakening Lives. Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust, New Haven/London 2002.

5 For an analysis of the cultural and epistemological background informing early postwar collections of child Holocaust testimonies, see Beate Müller: Trauma, Historiography and Polyphony. Adult Voices in the CJHC's Early Postwar Child Holocaust Testimonies, in: History and Memory 24.2 (2012), pp. 157-195.

6 See Boaz Cohen: The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust, in: Holocaust and Genocide Studies 21.1 (2007), pp. 74-95.

7 We would like to thank Dr Rosaline Barron, Tsam's daughter, for her help with establishing information about the biographical background of her late father.



Detail from the title page of Tsam's Manuscript © by the Authors.

the children would have been in Bytom for only a short period of time, and of course much more momentous things happened (and had happened) in their lives than at the Hebrew School they attended after the war, and we must not forget that the events in question took place more than six decades ago.

The timelines involved in turning the children's stories into a written version are not entirely clear. Tsam's manuscript seems to have been written – or at least completed – in Germany, as its title page contains the word דייטשלאנד (daytshland), albeit in fainter ink than the rest of the information on that page[8]:

The faint ink of the word in brackets might well indicate that it was added after the notebook itself had been completed, which makes it possible that Tsam wrote the book itself (or most of it) while still in Poland or while en route to Germany, that he took it with him to Germany, added the location דייטשלאנד onto the title page, and then sent the notebook off. Where to? We presume to the CJHC in Warsaw, because he seems to have sent his Holocaust-related writings to various historical commissions. His notebook was definitely part of the CJHC's collection in Warsaw for a short while (in fact, copies of the testimonies contained in Tsam's notebook have become incorporated into the CJHC's testimonies), so this is where he will have sent it.[9] In the opening lines of his contribution to the Yizkor book on Olyka, Tsam says:

8 The text translates as: »Compiled by the Principal of the Hebrew School in Bytom, S. Tsam«.

9 For brief summaries of the testimonies contained in Tsam's notebook, see Żydowski Instytut Historyczny: Relacje czasów zagłady inwentarz. Archiwum ŻIH IN-B, zespół 301. Tom III, Nr. 2001-3000. Holocaust Survivor Testimonies Catalogue. Jewish Historical Institute Archives, Record Group 301. Vol. III, No. 2001-3000. Warsaw 2002, pp. 332-345 (file numbers ZIH 301/2860-2902). The Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (ŻIH) is the successor organization of the CJHC. For a history of the CJHC, see Natalia Aleksiun: The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, 1944-1947, in: Polin 20 (2008), pp. 74-97.

> »I have written extensively about the gruesome events that took place during the five-year war, pogroms and massacres. My writings, *The Eternal Ban, Days of Awe, Stories Told by Youth* and *The Fiery Sunset,* which were submitted to the historic commissions in Warsaw, Prague and München not only describe the tragedy of my town, Olyk, not only the tragedy of Ukrainian Jewry, but also the events from Vladivostok to Berlin.«[10]

The title *Stories Told by Youth* clearly refers to his notebook of child testimonies from Bytom. When the notebook reached the CJHC in Warsaw, somebody pencilled the note באקומען, »bakumen [=received] 1.XI.1945« onto the last page of the notebook, which suggests that Tsam wrote down the testimonies no later than in October 1945, by which time he seems to have been in Germany already. Two other works by Tsam, the originals of which are today held by YIVO, were part of the CJHC's collection: an extant testimony by Tsam written in the form of a diary, and a shorter version thereof; the longer text clearly shows a CJHC stamp.[11] This means that there was a cluster of works by Tsam in Warsaw at the time. From Warsaw, Tsam's notebook eventually made its way to YIVO in New York City. It is part of a body of documents brought over from Poland to New York by the survivor activist and last remaining member of the underground Warsaw ghetto archive, Hersh Wasser. That he should have chosen to include Tsam's notebook indicates that he thought it to be of particular importance.

It is easy to see why. First of all, most of the Holocaust testimonies collected at the time were given by adults, for two main reasons. First, many more adults than children survived the war, both in terms of absolute numbers and in percentage terms, so that there were simply more adults to ask than children; survival rates in Poland were particularly poor.[12] Second, the organizations which

10 Tsam: The Last Date: 15 Av, 1942 [July 29, 1942], in: Natan Livneh (ed.): Pinkas ha-kehilah Olyka; sefer yizkor (Memorial Book of the Community of Olyka), Tel Aviv: Olyka Society, 1972, p. 331. The English translation of this Memorial Book, including a link to Tsam's essay, is available from JewishGen at www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Olyka/Olyka.html (last accessed March 3, 2012).

11 YIVO Archives, Record Group 225: The Hersh Wasser Collection, 1939-1946, items no. 5.1 and 5.2.

12 While about 33 percent of adult European Jews survived, only 11 percent of Jewish children did. See Debórah Dwork: Children With a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe, New Haven, CN; London 1991, p. xxxii and p. 274f. Survival rates varied from country to country; they were particularly bad for Poland, where only 380,000 Jews, or 12 percent of the formerly 3,3 million strong Jewish population, survived. See »Polen«, in: Eberhard Jäckel/Peter Longerich/Julius H. Schoeps (eds.): Enzyklopädie des Holocaust: Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden, vol. II, Berlin 1993, p. 1149. According to Nahum Bogner, only three percent of Jewish children under the age of 14 survived in Poland. See Nahum Bogner: At the Mercy of Strangers. The Rescue of Jewish Children with Assumed Identities in Poland, Yad Vashem, 2009, p. 15).

took it upon them to gather testimonies did so with a view to obtaining material both for historiographical research and for legal purposes, i. e. the material was meant to be potentially suitable as evidence in court cases against the Nazis. With these intentions in mind, it is understandable that adults' testimonies were regarded as more factually reliable, more insightful, and with a greater scope than those of the young. Yet there was much interest in children's testimonies, too, which resulted in initiatives to collect such testimonies. However, the emphasis here was not so much on the historical facts which, it was believed, could best be learnt from adult witnesses, but rather on showing how the Jewish children had coped with Nazi persecution and on the psychological and physical state of the young survivors, as the CJHC's guidelines for collecting testimonies from children state.[13] Tsam, who was not officially involved with or trained by the CJHC, collected and recorded the testimonies of his pupils independently.

Tsam's notebook is valuable and unique in so far as he solicited testimonies from a distinct group of youngsters who were at that moment in time all students of the Jewish school in Polish Bytom in the summer or early autumn of 1945. Although the children belong to different age groups, and although their backgrounds differ, there are still considerable similarities between the pupils. Almost all of them came from Belarus, the Ukraine, and Galicia, in eastern Poland, mostly from smaller towns or villages in the provinces of Lwów, Stanisławów, Tarnopol, and Wołyn. While most of the children lost family members, many were not orphans but had at least one parent left when they came to Bytom. The majority of the children survived the war by hiding in the forests, by being hidden by gentiles, or by passing themselves off as non-Jewish. This means that – despite obvious individual differences – we are faced here with a group of child survivors who share some similarities, and whose fates can therefore be compared to each other. And as their stories were written down by one person, analyses of a more structural, stylistic nature can also be undertaken. By contrast, when dealing with child testimonies put to paper by a variety of different staff within an organization such as the CJHC, comparisons across testimonies are hampered by the fact that individual adult scribes would have dealt differently with the information received.

So what does Tsam's notebook contain? It contains 42 children's testimonies and an afterword, entitled א וואָרט צו דער יוגנט, *Word to the Youth*. The children

13 Zentralkomitee der Polnischen Juden, Historische Kommission, Instruktionen zur Erforschung der Erlebnisse von jüdischen Kindern während der deutschen Besatzungszeit, in: Feliks Tych et al. (ed.): Kinder über den Holocaust. Frühe Zeugnisse 1944-1948, Berlin 2008, pp. 273-292; here: pp. 277-279. To the best of our knowledge, there is no English translation of these guidelines and the questionnaire. The Polish original was published in Łódź in 1945.

whose fates Tsam chose to include in his manuscript were aged between 9 and 17 at the time. The majority of these young survivors were girls: we can clearly identify 26 girls and 12 boys; the gender of the remaining four children is unclear because they wished to remain anonymous, and Tsam heeded their request, as he makes clear at the beginning of his notebook. That there should have been more female than male survivors whose fate Tsam set out mirrors the simple historical fact that it was easier for girls to survive than for boys: male circumcision meant that there was an »objective« way of checking whether a boy was Jewish or not, whereas there was no such »test« for girls. As for the age profile of the children, most were teenagers:

Age	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Number	1	2	3	5	4	11	3	7	6

This age profile is not surprising, as younger children had poorer chances of surviving the Nazis' persecution: they could not work, they were more dependent on protection by adults, they were less able to cope emotionally and strategically with facts and experiences such as the loss of close relatives, displacement, depravation, fear, and the elements.[14]

The children's experiences: themes and patterns

The testimonies children gave right after the end of the war to Tsam tell us of the childrens' harrowing experiences. Their stories focus on the extermination of their communities in the eastern borderlands of Poland, which took place in 1941-1942, and on life on the run, trying to survive the Germans and their collaborators.

When reading the testimonies for the type of information given and the structural organization of these texts, some interesting patterns emerge. The testimonies start with the onset of Nazi persecution, describe the events that led to the survival of the witness, and usually end with the liberation. As is the case with testimonies collected by Jewish organizations, there is precious little information about life before the occupation – the purpose of the testimonies was

14 It is of course true that this particular age profile might merely reflect the age distribution of pupils in Tsam's school – younger children may not have attended his Jewish school. However, when comparing the age profile of Tsam's pupils with that of the larger numbers of child Holocaust testimonies held by the CJHC, it becomes clear that teenagers were more numerous among these young witnesses than younger children. And of the young survivors David Boder interviewed in 1946, none was younger than 10. The age profile found in Tsam's notebook is therefore not untypical.

not to provide a comprehensive life story but to document the phase of persecution suffered. We usually get the names of family members (although the parents are often simply referred to as such, hence we do not always learn their first names). With Tsam's testimonies, there is hardly any information about the socio-economic or religious background of the children. This contrasts with many child testimonies collected by the CJHC, which usually feature such key biographical data at the beginning of the testimony, for CJHC staff were asked to obtain that kind of information, as the relevant guidelines state.[15] The same is true of testimonial essays collected by the Munich-based Central Historical Commission (CHC), which start off with the name, place, and date of birth of the witness, the names of the parents, and the number of school years completed. That both the CJHC and the CHC noted down these personal data indicates these organizations' interest in gathering details which would serve bureaucratic and identification purposes. Tsam, for not being involved with these organizations, was under no obligation to obtain similar data; if he did, he did not include them in his notebook. His interest lay with the stories of the children, not with the creation of a dataset suitable for tracing the children. He even added the age of his pupils only as an afterthought, as the penciled-in figures show; only the survivors' names and their places of origin feature in blue ink, as do, of course, their stories.

As for the content of the children's testimonies, a range of topics recurs. Thus, all the testimonies speak of violent acts of persecution such as pogroms, *Aktionen*, and executions, they describe atrocities committed (beatings, torture), as well as sexual abuse, ranging from sexual blackmail or coercion to rape. The children witnessed neighbours, friends, and family members getting injured, abused, or even killed; and of course they themselves were often enough exposed to pain, injury, and maltreatment. Unsurprisingly, where family members were injured or killed, the events surrounding these occurrences are usually described in detail, albeit at times in surprisingly sober words which seem to contain little, if any, emotion. But the traumatic impact of the depicted events is implied in the details given, e. g. when judgmental, negative terms such as »bandits« are used to refer to the Germans, these words betray the aggression towards the murderers. Likewise, where dialogue is repeated verbatim, this could be read as a sign of certain crucial statements having been etched onto the minds of the young at the time. Thus, Mira Trastman of Rokitnoye recounted the murder of her father in front of her eyes:

15 See the first section of the CJHC's questionnaire (Łódź 1945), which forms part of the organization's guidelines on how to collect testimonies from child survivors. For a German version of these guidelines, see Tych et al. (ed.): Kinder über den Holocaust, p. 285.

> »We began to drown in a bog, my father was discovered in the bushes, and the German bandits demanded that he tell them where the people were. Not receiving a reply, they put out both his eyes and shouted at him: ›Flee to Palestine!‹ Then they ran over him with the truck and killed him.«

There is on occasion a puzzling mismatch between the summative way in which atrocities are enlisted without much comment, and passages which are about emotions, but which appear relatively unconnected to, or at least disjointed from, the events that led to these feelings in the first place; the following passage from Sunik Brenner's testimony is a case in point:

> »Jews became ›pebbles‹ in the hands of the *Gestapo*. They used Jews to practise on for boxing, rape, shooting, and so forth.
> I pined for my parents, sisters and little Boris, and this, together with my disgust at the Ghetto nightmare, threw me into dark despair.«

We see here that the chronological depiction of events on the one hand, and the thematization of their psychological effects and their often traumatic repercussions on the other hand, are not easy to weave into a story without one narrative strand disrupting the flow of the other.

In other cases, the force of the loss is apparent from the stress placed on the fact of having witnessed the atrocity first-hand: expressions such as »before my eyes« occur frequently.

> »The first family, Schwarz, was immediately killed, and then my father Yeshayahu, my mother Sasie and my older brother Benzion were shot before my eyes,«

reported Sheindel Priefer who was about ten years old at the time.

Obviously, the shattering of their family was hugely traumatic for children in the Holocaust. Where Tsam's children lost one or both parents, this moment of losing the parents usually features prominently in the narrative, especially if the incident was witnessed by the child: »I shall never forget the scene when my father, Shloime Misholov, was delegated to go to the German sadists to ransom the community,« we read in M. Mishalov's testimony.

> »After they had taken the gold, two tall Germans (one wearing *pince-nez*) took my father down to the gigantic bridge, where they hurled him into the depths of the river.«

The shattering of the family was not only about the murder or death of family members. Many times the children witnessed sexual molestations, humiliations, mental breakdowns, and ensuing suicides of family members. »The com-

mandant was not satisfied with the way my [sister] Hinde had washed his floors,« recounted 12-year-old Mottele G-r:

> »[…] so he stripped her and told her: ›That's how you have to walk home – without a stitch of clothing!‹ When she arrived home naked, she smiled for appearance's sake and said that, luckily for her, hardly anybody had noticed, and so on. At dawn the next morning, we found her lying in bed with her throat cut.«

There is not very much information about life in the ghetto: children unfortunate enough to have been imprisoned in the ghetto often did not survive the harsh conditions, the deportations or final liquidations of the ghettos. Those who fled from the Germans often did so together with their families, but in many cases, family members were separated from each other, either through force or through the chaos created by people running for their lives. Invariably, the stories describe incidents which led to the children's and their family's initial displacement, we learn about how they escaped and where to (often the forest), or where they tried to hide, for example in attics, barns, or bunkers. Children had to devise ingenious survival strategies in order to stay alive. Many of them adopted false identities and passed themselves off as non-Jewish. The responses and behaviour of the gentiles – Poles and Ukrainians – which were often crucial to the Jews' fate while they were on the run, play an important part in the testimonies.

Survival on the run appears in many of the children's testimonies. After escaping to the forest and there losing their parents, sisters Busia, aged six at the time, and Shulamit, not yet four then, had to fend for themselves. »We both began to wander through the villages,« recounted Busia. »Nobody begrudged us bread, but nobody let us stay overnight, so we learned to spend the night in a field or in an orchard, and sometimes, we used to steal into a cowshed.« D. G-'s experience in the countryside was even tougher. »Nobody wanted to let me in and nobody wanted to give me a little piece of bread either,« he related, and he had to steal food in order to survive.

> »During that time,« his story continues, »I taught myself to eat raw chickens, beetroots, etc. I did not spend my nights in the same places that I spent my days. My [hiding] places were in haystacks, straw, broken boards, piles of rubbish.«

Children's testimonies open a window to the intricate relationships between gentiles and Jews during the Holocaust. The children were on the run, their fate was in the hands of strangers. Every non-Jew the child met could be his guardian angel – or the angel of death. The first collectors of children's testimonies

commented on the way the children recounted their interactions with the world around them: »Wherever the children encountered good people, help or encouragement, they express their appreciation in words full of the warmest feelings,« wrote Maria Hochberg-Mariańska in her introduction to an early anthology of children's testimonies:

> »Every human gesture, even just the offering of a slice of bread or words of genuine sympathy, these heartfelt reactions in the terrible days of the Holocaust – none of this has been forgotten by these persecuted children […]. In the same frank and straightforward way the children describe evil deeds and base people. […] Bitterness and pain fill the children's recollections of those Poles who hunted them, betrayed them and handed them over to the common enemy.«[16]

At times, the children were saved through the empathy, care, and moral fibre of non-Jewish rescuers. After she alone survived the attack by Germans and Ukrainians on her family hiding in the forest, Sheindel Priefer had nowhere to go:

> »In the meantime, night fell – a frosty, dark night. As I left the forest, I asked myself: ›Where do I go?‹ With a strangled cry, I wandered about in the deep snow until I came across a Ukrainian called Ivan Ladanov, from the village of Sokolets. I stood there, half-naked and barefoot, telling him: ›My parents have been shot in the forest. Give me a piece of bread.‹ The members of the household started crying. Ivan stood up and said: ›We must *save* her!‹«

At other times, rescue came only in return for money or sexual favours: »Will you be mine?«, a militiaman asked then 13-year-old L. V., who was standing naked, awaiting her execution with the rest of the Jews of Stepen. »If so, I'll save you,« the man added. She consented, explaining to Tsam that »at the age of thirteen I was only able to save myself because of my beauty.«

The hardships suffered, especially those of a directly physical nature such as hunger and cold, feature frequently, while the depiction of emotions such as fear, sadness, or rage is more erratic. Many testimonies end with the liberation by the Red Army.

16 Maria Hochberg-Mariańska/Noe Grüss (eds.): The Children Accuse, [Krakow, Łódź, Warsaw 1947], transl. by Bill Johnston, London; Portland, OR 1996, pp. xxix f.

Tsam's presence

While there is no reason whatsoever to doubt that Tsam recorded the testimonies faithfully, it is important to note that Tsam was the author of the texts, and on occasion added to the children's stories by supplying historical data, weaving them into the individual child's testimony. This becomes particularly clear in those cases where the testimonies start off with exact numbers of Jews killed in a given community on a particular day. Out of the 42 testimonies, 24 start off with information about the size of the local Jewish community, and frequently we encounter exact dates of pogroms, *Aktionen* etc. While it is true that older children might well have known such details, the same is doubtful where younger children are concerned.

Consider the case of Rachel Gelman from Rovno, whose testimony starts off with the following paragraph:

> »Our city numbered more than 30,000 Jews. The first pogrom took place on 14 July 1941. Almost 3,000 Jews were killed. The second pogrom took place after a visit by *Reichsminister* Alfred Rosenberg[17] on 4 November. He conferred about Rovno and ruled: ›Too many Jews!‹«

Rachel Gelman was eleven years old in 1945 when Tsam had contact with her; she would have been seven when the events in question took place. It is highly unlikely that such a young child would have been able to remember and repeat all of the details quoted above. It is quite clear that Tsam, who worked as a teacher in Rovno before the war, would have been familiar with the historical events which feature in the opening lines of Rachel's testimony. He obviously inserted them, quite possibly with a view to lending the girl's story more strength through supplying additional information. In the rest of Rachel Gelman's testimony, local history is combined with the girl's personal fate, as becomes evident when looking at the personal pronouns used and their referents, which veer from *the Jews* and *they* to *we*, *us*, and *I* when she loses contact with her parents.

Another obvious sign of Tsam's presence are the comments he made on some of the children, e. g. when Tsam finishes A. F-g's testimony with the line »The child was in tears. She regretted having revealed her sins,« by way of commenting on the fact that the girl apparently turned defiant towards the end of her story, refusing to say anything else. And in several cases, Tsam adds the line »Let this not be forgotten!« as a closing statement.

17 Rosenberg (1893-1946) was a Nazi racial ideologue, German politician, and Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories.

The ITS files

The ITS files provided to us proved an invaluable source on the children's fate once they left the Bytom school. What stands out is that the pupils in the school were not an organic group but rather an *ad hoc* group of children. From the school's establishment in 1945 until the end of 1946, pupils would come and go. Some of them reached other destinations in postwar Poland such as the Helenowak children's home near Łódź. On leaving Poland for Germany, the documents show them dispersed across several DP camps: Föhrenwald, Deggendorf, Bamberg, Bad Reichenhall, Aschau (a *kinderlager*) and the International Children's Center in Prien, all located in the American Zone of Occupation in Bavaria. The documents attest to the fact that Bytom was only the first station on the children's road to a safe haven and that reaching safety would sometimes take until 1949, four years after the end of the war.

Tsam's school was very unlike the children's Kibbutzim or youth groups established after the war in Eastern Europe. These had Zionist ideology and goals – to get the children to *Eretz Israel*. They also had a very distinct group identity and dedicated youth leaders (Madrichim) who held the group together. While these groups also moved from DP camp to DP camp, they did so as a group with the goal of reaching *Eretz Israel*. This was also why many of these groups, having taken part in illegal immigration attempts, found themselves in the British detention camps on Cyprus as the penultimate stop on their odyssey. Tsam's children, by contrast, moved with family members or other survivors, and while some joined Zionist youth groups and reached Palestine that way, others went to Israel after its establishment in 1949, together with the rest of the DP population, and many others emigrated to the US or Canada.

The unstable situation in postwar Poland was not conducive to running a Jewish school with a steady student population. Tsam's fragile attempt to organize a genuinely educational working school was thwarted by the fact that the students were moving within Poland and then abroad quickly. Tsam himself left Poland after hearing about the death of one of his pupil's father at the hands of anti-Semites.

What sort of documents on Tsam's pupils does the ITS hold? It has an abundance of lists in which the children are mentioned: Lusia Priefer, for example, appears on a March 1946 list of children in the Helenowak Children's home in Łódź. She also features on two lists of displaced persons, Nominal Rolls, in Bad Reichenhall (dated 26 April 1947 and 1 August 1947). Likewise, Gershon Mendelkern appears (as Grisza Mandelkorn) on a list of DPs in Camp Föhrenwald (dated 1 August 1946). He is also enlisted among 381 emigrants who left for Palestine on 8 September 1948. Similar lists of departing DPs give us not only

information on which of the children left Germany, but also on their destination, address, and sponsors in the US.

Other important sources are the registration cards filled out for the DPs when they reached Germany, the so-called AEF DP registration record. These provide information on the children's dates of birth, home towns, and desired destinations. Some were updated during the children's time in the DP camps and when they left Germany. Thus, Mandelkern's record card (opened on 21 January 1946) tells us his date of birth, home town, and the names of his murdered parents. It also gives his desired destination (Palestine) and his destination in Germany: Föhrenwald. A hand-written note on the card tells us that he left for Palestine on 13 August 1948.

Documents prepared during the 1950s and 1960s also appear in the files. These relate to the official confirmation requested by the now grown-up children of their persecution during the Holocaust and its aftermath. These *Certificates of Residence* and similar documents enabled the children to claim reparations from the German government following the reparation agreement signed between the German and the Israeli government and the Conference on Material Claims against Germany (the Claims Conference) in 1952. Sala Markus, for example, requested a C*ertificate of Incarceration* on 11 November 1954. She claimed to have been in Potozcany SS-Gut from 5 July 1941 until the end of November 1942, and later on in Brzezany from December 1942 until July 1943, before escaping to the forest with her mother, where they hid. The requested certificate was issued on 12 November 1956.

The number of documents per child varies from one document to nineteen. In cases where there is an abundance of documents, it is possible to build a record of the children's war experiences and their postwar travels and travails.

A good example is the case of Busia Weiner. We do not know exactly when she left Poland, but she appears on the December 1946 list of the children's camp in Aschau. We learn she was registered there with UNRRA team 1068 (no date), from where she was moved to the children's centre in Prien. She appears on a list of the children there (in the 6-10 year old group), dated 18 January 1947. She was deemed a »candidate for the US« (no date). Her papers were submitted to the US Consulate on 27 January 1947, and her visa arrived on 27 March 1947. On 12 April 1947 she sailed to the United States on the *Marine Perch*, as the passenger list illustrates. Since the ship set sail from Bremen in the British Zone, Busia had to be moved there from Prien. This was done on 21 April 1947, and the girl was registered there by the American Joint Distribution Committee's Location Centre in Bergen Belsen. All this knowledge was gleaned from the postwar documents generated from Busia's arrival in Germany until her embarkation to the U.S.A.

But the ITS also holds another set of documents, those produced in the 1950s at Busia Weiner's request, and these teach us much more about her experiences during and after the war. She was born on 15 April 1938 in Rokitno (or Rokytne today), but sometimes gave her place of birth as nearby Tomaszgorod (Tomashorod). Following the German occupation, she was forced to wear the *Judenstern* from 1 August 1941 on. In May 1942, she was incarcerated in the ghetto, and in August 1942 she fled to the woods and hid there. She was liberated by the Russians in March 1944. At some point in time she was transferred to Bytom, where she stayed for three months, and then crossed the border to Germany. She spent six months in Berlin before she arrived in Aschau on 18 December 1946, from where she was moved to the Prien children's centre on 1 January 1947. These later documents also provide Busia's new name and address in the United States.

Conclusion

The *surviving remnant* of European Jewry was faced with a host of grave problems. How could they rebuild their lives and their communities? Where should they go, now that their home communities had largely been destroyed, their friends and families decimated? How could they best help document the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators? The case of Tsam, a survivor and refugee himself, who ran a school for Jewish child survivors and who wrote down the stories of his charges, illustrates the precarious, short-lived, and transient nature of makeshift postwar Jewish communities which changed as quickly as they were formed, with their members turning their backs on Europe in droves, seeking new homes further afield.

By collecting the testimonies of his pupils, Tsam created a silent witness to this particular moment in time, an example of how one individual's initiative secured for posterity snapshots of young Jewish survivors whom fate and chance had brought together for but a few weeks in postwar Polish Bytom. Tsam's endeavours to save from oblivion the »historical tears« of his »historical orphans«, as he put it in his afterword, is connected with other contemporary attempts by Jews and Jewish organizations to create a Jewish-voiced history of the *khurbn* and to potentially provide the courts with documentary evidence in the form of personal narratives of the persecuted.

But the notebook not only demonstrates the fluidity and precariousness of postwar existence for Holocaust survivors, and not only provides us with children's stories of loss and survival which would have been lost had it not been for Tsam's initiative. The notebook is also a prime example of the challenges early

postwar testimonial sources present today's readers with: how to better understand the context and motivations driving early testimony collections, and the impact of contemporary intentions on the texts; how to evaluate testimonial documents now that so much is already known about the Holocaust; how to respond to harrowing stories of individuals' fates when there are so many whose voices have been lost forever; and how to learn from history.