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978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

At the conclusion of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, a Soviet officer on horseback arrives at the gates of the labor camp and tells the surviving Jews that they are free to go. Looking at one another in confusion, the survivors hesitate and then slowly shuffle through the gates. Through cinematic magic, they are suddenly striding across the hills of Israel fifty years later. For Hollywood, the Holocaust ended with the arrival of Allied troops and the defeat of Nazi Germany. For the 300,000 Jewish survivors who became displaced persons (DPs), liberation occurred only after they left Europe. Their transition to life in freedom took place in DP camps and in German towns. Temporarily living amid their former persecutors, these survivors reclaimed their Jewish heritage, began creating new families, and sought to define Jewish identity after Auschwitz.

The story of how nearly 300,000 Jewish survivors arrived in Germany is one of inconceivable loss, postwar persecution, and extraordinary determination. In 1944, Soviet forces pushed into Poland and began liberating the few remaining survivors of the concentration camps whom the Nazis had left behind. When the Nazis retreated, they forced the majority of prisoners on death marches into Germany. On January 27, 1945, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz. As the Soviets advanced, there emerged other Jews who had survived hiding in the forests, or fighting with the partisans, or passing as Christians with Aryan papers. As soon as they were physically able, these survivors returned to their hometowns to search for their families. Most Jews chose to rebuild their lives in their country of origin. An unknown number who had survived on Aryan papers retained their assumed identities and lived on as non-Jews. Particularly those survivors with leftist political leanings, such as communists and Bundists, remained to build a socialist future that they hoped would eradicate antisemitism and permit Jewish citizens to live in peace. Hungarian Jews in particular returned to their homes in large numbers.

Polish and Lithuanian Jews returned home burdened by memories of neighbors and fellow nationals who had collaborated with the Nazi persecution of the

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Jews. Met with the physical ruin of their communities and the realization that few Jews remained alive, they contemplated their future. Often their Christian neighbors reacted with hostility to their return, muttering sentiments along the lines of “What! You’re still alive? We thought Hitler had taken care of the Jews.” Those Eastern Europeans who had profited from the plundering of Jews and who now occupied their homes and businesses did not intend to lose their booty. Some survivors who returned home were murdered by those who sought to retain ill-gotten Jewish property.

Under such circumstances, tens of thousands of these survivors sought a way out of Europe. Beginning in spring 1945, some Jews followed the path laid out by former Jewish partisans under the leadership of Abba Kovner of Vilna and headed south through Romania to Palestine. Political instability in the Balkans forced Brichah, the organization for the illegal movement of Jews out of Eastern Europe, to find new routes. Divided by the victorious Allies into American, British, French, and Soviet zones of occupation, the western zones of Germany became major reception areas for Jews fleeing Eastern Europe.

By summer 1945, Jews who had survived in hiding, survivors of the concentration camps, and former partisans hoping to get passage to a new life in Palestine or the United States began entering Germany. For logistical reasons the vast majority entered the American Zone of occupied Germany, although a sizeable minority resided in the British Zone, particularly in the Belsen DP camp. Once in Germany, these survivors joined 18,000 to 20,000 German Jews and approximately 60,000 other Jews who had survived liberation there and were now in displaced persons assembly centers (DP camps).¹ Later, in 1946-1947, nearly 200,000 “infiltrates,” mostly Polish Jews who had survived the war in Soviet exile under debilitating conditions, would join these DPs. They made the dangerous, illegal journey to Germany, viewing it as a way station to a better life elsewhere. So it was that without a national homeland, their communities decimated, and their families murdered, Jewish DPs began rebuilding their lives in the land of their persecutors. From 1945 to 1957, Jewish survivors in Germany established families; engaged in meaningful religious practices; and began to integrate their prewar, wartime, and postwar lives.

It was rare for anyone over forty years old to survive the harsh conditions of the concentration camps or for anyone under sixteen to avoid selection to the gas chambers. That so many survivors were in late adolescence affected not only the sexual and reproductive activities in the DP camps but also religious and political beliefs and activities. Because the survivors were in Germany, seemingly mundane aspects of DP life (clothing, sports, and romance) became invested

¹ Approximately 80,000 Jews were liberated from concentration camps in Germany, but thousands continued to die of disease and complications related to starvation. Others repatriated, at least temporarily, immediately after liberation in their search for family. By summer 1945 approximately 60,000 Jewish camp survivors were alive in Germany. The German Jews mentioned survived outside of the camps in hiding or as “privileged” Jews in mixed marriages or of “half-Jewish” parentage. See Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002), pp. 28-29.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

with symbolic meaning. Meanwhile, the presence of DPs in their country not only contributed to German feelings of victimization but also allowed Germans to transfer their discontent with Allied military government authorities onto the weaker DPs. The interactions of Jews and Germans shed light on issues of rehabilitation, revenge, and reconciliation in the aftermath of genocide.

Jewish DPs were a self-selected group who refused to repatriate to their countries of origin. Few of them could imagine remaining in Europe, let alone Germany. They could not put down roots in what they called “blood-soaked soil.” Germans still evoked fear, and their refusal to accept responsibility for wartime crimes reinforced Jewish suspicion of them. The DPs’ future lay elsewhere – in a new Jewish home in Palestine or with relatives outside of Europe. Opportunities for emigration were initially few. Britain restricted Jewish entry into Palestine in order to placate Arabs as both Jews and Arabs challenged Britain’s mandate. The United States maintained immigration quotas that favored non-Jews, and countries of the British Commonwealth had immigration schemes designed to attract labor in areas for which few Jewish survivors qualified. Even if one could acquire a visa to a host country, there remained much paperwork for individuals who had no birth certificates or other documentation required by modern bureaucracies. There were also medical exams, and a spot on a lung in a chest x-ray could delay emigration, sometimes indefinitely. Finally, in 1948, Israel declared its independence and the United States relaxed its immigration laws. As a result DPs flowed out of Germany, and by 1950 most Jewish DP camps had closed. A few ill and rudderless survivors remained in the Bavarian DP camp of Föhrenwald until its closure in 1957.

Most scholarship on DPs has approached the topic from the perspective of political history. Early studies emphasized the Cold War and international politics, minimizing the political autonomy of the survivors and focusing instead on international politics, Allied policymakers, and Zionists from the *Yishuv* (Jewish community in Palestine).² Even those historians who credited the DPs with influencing international public opinion concerning the creation of the State of Israel tended to emphasize the leadership role of the *Yishuv* in organizing the DPs.³ In Israel, the “new historians,” such as Tom Segev, Idith Zertal, and Yosef Grodzinsky, have argued that Zionists manipulated and exploited survivors for their own political purposes.⁴ The voices of the survivors are muted

² See Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum Heimatlosen Ausländer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985); Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzels, *Lebensmut im Wartesaal* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994); Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³ See Zeev Tzohar, “Holocaust Survivors as a Political Factor,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (1988): 432–444; Abram L. Sacher, *Redemption of the Unwanted* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983); Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *From Catastrophe to Power*; Yosef Grodzinsky, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2004).

Cambridge University Press

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Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

in these histories, and DPs remain without agency.⁵ Important recent studies that focus on the internal politics of the DP community have demonstrated that survivors had very clearly defined interests and argued vigorously on their own behalf, refuting the suggestions of DP passivity and victimization.⁶

Historians of postwar Germany have also concentrated on political history, either the policies of the occupying governments or state founding in the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. After 1985, scholars began exploring issues of social history, gender, and popular culture in postwar Germany. They analyzed the ways that Germans had developed a narrative of their own victimization, and some noted the role German perceptions of DPs played in that process.⁷ An interest in local histories of the period led some historians to write about DP camps as a forgotten episode in the recent German past.⁸ The results primarily described DP organizational life and, concentrating on the large DP camps, tended to treat them as relatively isolated from local Germans. More recently, historians of the Jewish community in Germany have emphasized the important role DPs played in developing postwar Jewish organizations.⁹ Sociologists are examining questions of Jewish identity, but they have focused more on post-1989 developments than on the immediate

⁵ On the “new history” and its approach to the DPs, see Yechiam Weitz, “Dialectical versus Unequivocal: Israeli Historiography’s Treatment of the Yishuv and Zionist Movement Attitudes toward the Holocaust,” in *Making Israel*, edited by Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp. 278–298, esp. pp. 286–287 and 293; Derek J. Penslar, *Israel in History: The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 37–38.

⁶ Lavsky, *New Beginnings*; Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Mankowitz’s book concentrates on the American Zone.

⁷ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Elizabeth Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman,” *American Historical Review* 101:2 (April 1996): 354–395; Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁸ Susanne Dietrich and Julia Schulze Wessel, *Zwischen Selbstorganisation und Stigmatisierung: Die Lebenswirklichkeit jüdischer Displaced Persons und die neue Gestalt des Antisemitismus in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, Veröffentlichungen des Stadtarchivs Stuttgart, vol. 75 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998); Angelika Eder, *Flüchtige Heimat: Jüdische Displaced Persons in Landsberg am Lech, 1945 bis 1950*, Miscellanea Bavarica Monacensia, vol. 170 (Munich: UNI-Druck, 1998); Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Lebensmut im Wartesaal: Die jüdischen DPs (Displaced Persons) im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1994); Ulrich Müller, *Fremde in der Nachkriegszeit: Displaced Persons – zwangsverschleppte Personen – in Stuttgart und Württemberg-Baden, 1945–1951*, Veröffentlichungen des Stadtarchivs Stuttgart, vol. 49 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990); Frank Stern, “The Historic Triangle: Occupiers, Germans and Jews in Postwar Germany,” *Tel Avivur Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 19 (1990): pp. 47–76; Juliane Wetzel, *Jüdisches Leben in München, 1945–1951: Durchgangsstation oder Wiederaufbau?*, Miscellanea Bavarica Monacensia, vol. 135 (Munich: UNI-Druck, 1987).

⁹ Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945–1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

postwar period.¹⁰ Historians are now investigating the “second history” of the Nazi regime, namely, the efforts of Germans to confront their Nazi past. In these histories, Jewish–German relations are often connected to generational interests and shifts.¹¹ Finally, historians are beginning to recognize the multicultural aspects of postwar German experiences and to incorporate Jews and ethnic German expellees into the larger narrative of German history.

This book examines the internal life of the DP communities in both the American and British Zones of occupied Germany while firmly placing the DPs within the context of postwar Germany.¹² A fundamental premise is that location had an impact on DPs, that residence in Germany affected DPs as they attempted to make the transition to life after the Holocaust. The interaction of Jewish DPs with the German landscape and people had a tremendous influence on the meanings DPs attributed to their actions and to their identity. For instance, farming a plot of land requisitioned from a former Nazi had important psychological, emotional, and political significance for survivors of the Holocaust. Giving birth to children in Germany with German medical personnel in attendance simultaneously evoked the trauma of the fate of mothers and children during the Holocaust and led to feelings of DP triumph and revenge. DP efforts to force Germans to acknowledge responsibility for wartime crimes often resulted in the opposite effect, and yet the attempts helped to foster DP pride and to restore their sense of agency.

Social and cultural activities served as mechanisms for the development of ethnic identity and gender roles. Religious rituals assumed importance as a means of performing and creating Jewish identity and community. Secular and Orthodox alike came to understand the Holocaust as part of the cycle of Jewish history and to claim their place among the generations. Through sharing their memories of their wartime persecution, survivors of different backgrounds and experiences created social memories of the Holocaust and forged a common identity. Schools, newspapers, kibbutzim, and mourning academies helped to create a DP memory community and to promote new communal ties. The obligation to honor the dead led DPs to insist on the cooperation of

¹⁰ For example, Lynn Rappaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity, and Jewish-German Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes, eds., *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986).

¹¹ Norbert Frei, *1945 und Wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005), p. 27; Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2001), p. 9. On early postwar German attempts to confront the past, see also Anthony D. Kauders, *Democratization and the Jews: Munich, 1945–1965* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press for the Vital Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004).

¹² With the exception of Hagit Lavsky’s book and a collection of essays on the Belsen DP camp, scholars have focused on the American Zone of occupied Germany, where most DPs resided. Lavsky, *New Beginnings*; Jo Reilly, et al., eds., *Belsen in History and Memory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

Cambridge University Press

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Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Allied and German authorities in reburials and to demand, in the name of the dead, open immigration to Palestine. DP theatrical performances transformed the Holocaust narrative into one of Jewish resistance and created new endings through imagined family reunions and a Jewish future in Palestine. Rejecting the notion of Jewish passivity, DPs emphasized the strong, revenge-seeking new Zionist man and his female equivalents: the partisan girl and the new Zionist mother. Despite their nightmares, fears, and uncertain future, Jewish DPs sought to re-imagine themselves not as victims of Nazism but as survivors of the great catastrophe. As DPs in occupied Germany, Jewish survivors of the Holocaust demanded respect and demonstrated their determination to reclaim control over their lives.

The study of Jewish DPs reveals much about non-Jewish German behavior and opens a window onto immediate postwar German responses to defeat, occupation, and Jews. Just as DPs reacted to living among Germans, Germans responded to the presence of Jewish DPs. Confronted with bombed-out cities, a devastated infrastructure, millions of men detained as prisoners of war, and housing and food shortages, Germans concentrated on their own experiences of trauma and victimization. They had little sympathy for the foreign nationals in their midst, believing that they should return to their countries of origin and cease to be a burden on German communities. Germans portrayed Jewish DPs as criminal outsiders unfairly protected and coddled by the occupying Allied forces. Rather than attributing their misery to failed German policies of military aggression, Germans could blame Jewish DPs for postwar criminality and housing shortages. Jewish DPs were relatively powerless targets of German dissatisfaction with defeat and occupation. By castigating Jewish DPs, Germans found a safe way to criticize Allied occupation forces for their failure to maintain law and order and for their requisitioning of German property. The emphasis on the supposed immorality and criminality of Jewish DPs enabled some Germans to attempt to salve their consciences with the belief that the Jews had been at least partially responsible for their own persecution.¹³

Although it is tempting to explain all such lack of empathy toward Jewish survivors as the enduring influence of Nazism, German expressions of antisemitism after 1945 frequently reflected continuity with the pre-Nazi past. Germans had made similar complaints against Eastern European Jews in the aftermath of the First World War.¹⁴ Even the tensions between Jewish DPs and German Jews reflected these older stereotypes of Western and Eastern European Jews.¹⁵ Where remnants of the Nazi ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) did become apparent was when Germans welcomed ethnic German expellees from the East while attempting to exclude Jewish DPs.

¹³ In 1949 one-fifth of Germans polled agreed that Jews shared responsibility for their persecution. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, p. 85.

¹⁴ See Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 230.

¹⁵ Kauders, *Democratization and the Jews*, pp. 51-52.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

Despite general hostility toward Jewish DPs and the unwillingness of the majority of Germans to acknowledge any moral or material obligation toward DPs, there were signs of a new beginning in German Christian–Jewish dialogue. Many relationships between non-Jewish Germans and Jewish DPs were born of opportunism and economic necessity, yet some genuine friendships occurred. Germans missing their former German-Jewish friends and colleagues were often open to new relationships with Jewish DPs. Non-Jewish German concentration camp survivors viewed Jewish survivors as fellow persecutees. Anti-Nazis expressed their rejection of the Nazi regime through friendships with Jews. Some Germans reached out with kindness to their DP neighbors, and some German women converted to Judaism and married DPs. By 1950, a few prominent politicians, cultural figures, and clergy were speaking out about German responsibility for the crimes committed against the Jews. While these were small steps toward Christian–Jewish dialogue in immediate postwar Germany, they helped to create the basis for the more widespread engagement of the late 1950s.

The study of interactions between Germans and Jews and the internal life of DP communities required the use of previously underutilized sources. Many Jewish–German interactions occurred in small towns and villages; local German archives contain important materials. This book begins to mine these rich resources. DP organizations generated a tremendous number of Yiddish-language documents, recording their efforts both to govern the DPs and to represent their interests to the outside world. In addition to those documents related to organizational and political matters, I examined religious and cultural records.

In the past, sources have been an obstacle to the study of the private lives of DPs. The records most commonly used by historians to document their work on DPs, reports written by military and United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) personnel, frequently ignored domestic life.¹⁶ Often women and children were mentioned only when their marriages and births were registered. Social workers, psychologists, and other observers recorded their interpretations of DP attitudes and living conditions in reports and journals, but often they imposed their own preconceived ideas onto the DPs. Thus, they often tell us more about the attitudes of the observers than of the DPs themselves.¹⁷ The study of domestic life and identity construction requires the use of new sources, such as memoirs and oral history interviews.

Personal narratives illuminate the meanings behind DP behavior, helping us to understand the significance of religious rituals after the Holocaust

¹⁶ Jo Reilly, “Cleaner, Carer and Occasional Dance Partner? Writing Women Back into the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen,” in *Belsen in History and Memory*, p. 158.

¹⁷ Paul Friedman, “The Road Back for the DPs: Healing the Psychological Scars of Nazism,” *Commentary* 6 (December 1948): 502–10; Koppel Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DPs,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9 (1947): 101–26; Edward A. Shils, “Social and Psychological Aspects of Displacement and Repatriation,” *Journal of Social Issues* 2 (August 1946): 3–18.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and to explain attitudes toward revenge and questions of gender and ethnic identity. I have supplemented the written record of DP documents with diaries, memoirs, and oral history interviews. In addition to conducting my own interviews of former DPs, I studied several hundred videotaped interviews at the Visual History Archive of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education.

It is essential to treat personal narratives of the Holocaust with great care. Scholars have discussed the difficulties that survivors have articulating their memories and that their audiences have comprehending them; researchers have warned against the temptation of infusing meaning into survivors' suffering.¹⁸ Memories of the DP experience, however, are usually less traumatic than those of the Holocaust. While the ability to communicate the trauma of the Holocaust is limited by what is "tellable" by the survivor and "hearable" by the reader or interviewer,¹⁹ memories of the DP period are easier to convey. Like all historical documents, however, DP narratives need to be analyzed by taking into account their manner of creation, the purpose for which they were created, and the intended audience. An awareness of the conditions in which the recounted memory was encoded and in which it was retrieved as well as how the gender of the survivor shaped the memory can help the historian gauge its usefulness for historical evidence.²⁰

In the cases of a few survivors, I was able to compare earlier and later interviews and interviews with memoirs. The central memories remained constant with slight variations in the details that the survivor remembered or chose to share at a particular time. Historian Christopher Browning has also discovered that survivor memories are more stable and less alterable over time than one might expect, affirming their usefulness as historical documents, particularly when no other records exist.²¹ Memory studies also show that individual

¹⁸ For discussions of the intricacies involved in interpreting survivor narratives and in using them as historical evidence, see Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Learning from Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 9 (Fall 1995): 192-207; Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Efraim Sicher, ed., *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting Life and History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), pp. 20, 30-31.

²⁰ On the encoding and retrieval of memories, see Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), pp. 45-46, 60, and 71. On gender, see Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003); Marlene E. Heinemann, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Sara R. Horowitz, "Gender, Genocide, and Jewish Memory," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 20 (Winter/Spring 2000): 158-190; R. Ruth Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

²¹ Christopher Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Post-War Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 47.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

memories are surprisingly consistent over time. When one has access to a large number of personal narratives, they can help isolate core memories and screen out any distortions. Neuroscientist Daniel Schacter has argued that videotaped interviews with Holocaust survivors “can help to ensure that forgetting and distortion – which can infiltrate any individual rememberer’s story – are counteracted by the overwhelming truths that emerge from core elements that are shared by numerous rememberers.”²² Carefully read and analyzed, DP personal narratives can provide important information about events as well as about the meanings survivors have given to them.

In order to provide a sense of how survivors’ options were shaped by their interactions with others, the book begins with an overview of DP relations with Allied personnel, international relief workers, and Germans. It proceeds thematically in a roughly chronological fashion to illuminate the steps by which survivors rebuilt their lives: mourning the dead, redefining Jewish manhood and womanhood, caring for children, shaping Jewish identities, and leaving Germany. The survivors’ immediate need to mourn and to commemorate the dead leads us to investigate Jewish identity and the role of religious rituals. Commemorative events also exposed German attempts to evade responsibility for the deaths. As survivors recovered their physical strength and secondary sex characteristics, they strove to attain new gender ideals and to create new Jewish families. Children, both those who survived the Holocaust and those born in its aftermath, represented hope for the continuity of Jewish generations. DPs placed a tremendous value on Jewish children and frequently came into conflict with relief workers over what constituted the best interests of the children. In the educational programs of the schools and kibbutzim, in holiday observances, and in the cultural activities of the newspapers and theaters, survivors sought to understand their past and to put it into a narrative framework that linked Jewish history with their personal experiences of persecution, their existence in the DP camps, and their dreams of a Jewish future in Palestine. Through their courts of honor, DPs asserted their Jewish values and their distinctiveness as a people. DP political organizations consistently demanded free immigration to Palestine as the solution to their displacement. A Jewish state in Israel represented a new home and a new family to the survivors.

What emerges from this study is a picture of Jews not torn from their roots but continuing to draw strength from them and committing themselves to building lives in the spirit of their childhood homes; that they undertook this project of renewal on German soil added to their urgency. Reestablishing Jewish life and families in full view of their former oppressors gave DPs a sense of satisfaction and revenge. At the same time, the unwillingness of Germans to accept responsibility for Nazi crimes increased Jewish anxiety about their security and their future. Germans forced to participate in commemorations for Holocaust victims considered themselves freed from guilt and without need to confront the past. Paradoxically, the Jewish presence in Germany facilitated

²² Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 305.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42958-0 - Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945-1957

Margarete Myers Feinstein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

German forgetting of wartime crimes and contributed to the growing myth of German victimhood as Germans and Jews competed for housing, food, and the good will of the Allies.

Within the DP camps Jewish survivors reminisced about their prewar homes, shared their experiences of the war years, and dreamed of a future away from Europe. Here they learned to integrate their Shoah experiences into their life narratives. They also had their first indications that outsiders did not want to hear about what had happened. Well-meaning Allied relief workers told them to forget about their experiences and to focus on the future, that it was not healthy to dwell on the past. And yet, for the few years that many survivors spent in the DP camps, they engaged in an instinctual group therapy before entering a world that, unwilling to listen, forced them into a silence that lasted for decades. This book seeks to reclaim a portion of that silenced past.