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Rescued twice: the French Kindertransport Differences from and similarities to the British Kindertransport

LILLY MAIER

Most Kindertransport research focuses on the British Kindertransport but the United Kingdom was not the only country that welcomed Jewish children prior to the Second World War. Kindertransports also went to Sweden, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Palestine, and the United States.¹ If you count all these child rescue efforts together, we can say that a little over 15,000 unaccompanied minors were saved on a Kindertransport.² This is considerably higher than the 10,000 children usually cited in connection with the British Kindertransport.

This paper will explore the French Kindertransport, which in later years became a French–American Kindertransport. Looking at the French Kindertransport also offers the opportunity to re-examine certain aspects of the British Kindertransport. The experiences of the French Kindertransport children varied widely from those sent to the UK, mainly because they were placed collectively and not with foster families. The following analyses will therefore focus on the differences and similarities between these two child rescue efforts.

The insights shared in this paper stem from extensive archival research in France, Austria, and the United States and more than a dozen oral history interviews I conducted for a book I recently published about the French Kindertransport, the biography of Arthur Kern, one of the French Kinder.³

1 Inge Hansen-Schaberg, “Kindheit und Jugend”, in *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933–1945*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 82–3.

2 Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938–1945* (West Lafayette, ID: Purdue University Press, 2012), 5.

3 Lilly Maier, *Arthur und Lilly: Das Mädchen und der Holocaust-Überlebende* (Munich: Heyne, 2018).

The French Kindertransport

The first difference between the British and the French transports is in the number of rescued minors: only about two hundred children under the age of fifteen reached Paris in two transports in March 1939.⁴

Let us start from the beginning, though: in July 1938, one Mme Natalie Louriée contacted the French Baroness Germaine de Rothschild on behalf of the Viennese Jewish community and asked her to bring Jewish orphan girls to Paris.⁵ Germaine de Rothschild, the wife of Édouard de Rothschild, who ran the French branch of the famous Rothschild bank, was a well-known philanthropist who had dedicated her life to helping children after she had suffered the loss of a son aged four in 1911.⁶ The baroness handed the matter over to the Fondation de Rothschild but also stayed personally involved.⁷ Not much is known about Mme Louriée except that she lived in Paris. She wrote her letters in German and seems to have been well acquainted with the situation in Vienna, so the Austrian historian Gerda Hofreiter has suggested that Louriée was originally Viennese.⁸

Over the next weeks, a flurry of letters was sent between Paris and the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien (IKG; the Jewish Community in Vienna), and with the Rothschilds' backing, the French State Department agreed to issue eight visas in August 1938.⁹ For unknown reasons, it then took until December for six girls to be able to travel to Paris (two others had already emigrated elsewhere during the months-long waiting period).¹⁰

Independently of these efforts, several French committees started to

4 "Aufstellung über alle von der Kultusgemeinde abgefertigte Kindertransporte in der Zeit vom 10.12.1938 bis 22.08.1939" (List of all the Kindertransportes dispatched by the IKG from 10 Dec. 1938 to 22 Aug. 1939), A/W 1964/1, Film 878, Acc. 2006.385, RG-17.017M (Archive of the Jewish Community Vienna, Jerusalem component collection), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter, USHMM). All translations from German and French by the author. See also Paul Weindling, "The Kindertransport from Vienna: The Children who came and those left behind", in this volume, 16–32.

5 Gerda Hofreiter, *Allein in die Fremde: Kindertransporte von Österreich nach Frankreich, Großbritannien und in die USA 1939–1941* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2010), 82.

6 Élisabeth Hernandez, *La Fondation de Rothschild 1939–1944 sous l'occupation* (Paris: Fondation de Rothschild, 2010), 47.

7 Georges Salomon (Director of the Fondation de Rothschild) to Mme Louriée, Paris, 16 July 1938, A/W 1985, Acc. 2006.385, RG-17.017M, USHMM.

8 Hofreiter, *Alleine in die Fremde*, 82.

9 Georges Salomon to Dr. Löwenfeld, Paris, 17 Aug. 1938, A/W 1985, Acc. 2006.385, RG-17.017M, USHMM.

10 Hofreiter, *Alleine in die Fremde*, 82.

organize larger Kindertransports after the *Novemberpogrome* or “*Kristallnacht*” (Night of Broken Glass) sent shockwaves through Europe. First of all, the Russian-Jewish relief organization *Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE, Children’s Aid Society) tried to bring five hundred boys under the age of twelve to France.¹¹ Secondly, Baroness Rothschild herself started a new foundation aimed at helping refugee children: the *Comité Israélite pour les Enfants venant d’Allemagne et d’Europe Centrale* (Jewish Committee for Children coming from Germany and Central Europe, the *Comité*).¹² Lastly, the *Bureau Central d’Accueil aux Enfants* (Central Welcoming Bureau for Children) also tried to bring children to France.¹³

To bring order into this somewhat confusing situation, the French state decided that they would negotiate for visas only with the Rothschilds’ new *Comité*.¹⁴ The *Comité* guaranteed to pay for living expenses as well as education and vocational training for the children for years to come, but also worked closely with the other organizations.¹⁵

In February 1939, the French government agreed to an initial two hundred visas for Jewish children under the age of fifteen.¹⁶ The Jewish communities in Germany and Austria were told to select only children who would permanently remain in France¹⁷ – this is another crucial difference from the British Kindertransport, where all visas were transit-visas meant to reunite the children with their parents in the not so distant future.¹⁸

Similarly to the British Kindertransport, there was much bureaucracy and medical check-ups involved in selecting the participants. As with the selection of children intended for the UK, sick or disabled children or even children with a learning disability were not allowed on the French transports. In a letter, the *Comité* told the Jewish community in Vienna

11 *Ibid.*, 83.

12 Baroness Édouard de Rothschild to IKG, Paris, 13 Dec. 1938, A/W 1986, Acc. 2006.385, RG-17.017M, USHMM.

13 “Ein Aufnahmebüro fuer juedische Kinder” (A reception office for Jewish children), newspaper article, n.d., A/W 1985, USHMM.

14 Hofreiter, *Alleine in die Fremde*, 83.

15 *Comité*, “Memorandum über die Zusammenarbeit mit der Jugendfürsorge-Abteilung der IKG” (Memorandum on Co-operation with the Child Welfare Department of the IKG), 27 March 1939, A/W 1985, USHMM.

16 *Comité* to the IKG’s Child Welfare Department, Paris, 13 Feb. 1939, A/W 1986, USHMM.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Claudia Curio, “Flucht, Fürsorge, Anpassungsdruck: Die Rettung von Kindern nach Großbritannien 1938/39”, in *Kindheit und Jugend im Exil*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2006), 69.

to only “select children who possess a reasonably normal degree of education”.¹⁹ This was done with the hope of saving as many children as possible, and therefore those already in France – or England – were not allowed to attract any negative attention, to avoid further visas not being granted.²⁰

I talk about one tragic example of this in my biography of Arthur Kern.²¹ Although both Arthur (then called Oswald) and his older brother Fritz were on a list of “urgent cases to France”,²² only Arthur could go.²³ Fritz was not chosen, probably because he was suffering from a light form of epilepsy which resulted in a learning disability. In consequence, Fritz aged thirteen was in the same class as his younger brother aged ten. Fritz’s exclusion from the Kindertransport had deathly consequences: two years later he was deported and killed with his parents.

As part of the preparations for the French Kindertransport, the parents had to sign over legal guardianship to the Comité until the eighteenth birthday of their child. The guardianship was only allowed to be transferred back when the parents could prove a place of residence in any country and safe living conditions to take care of their child.²⁴ (This was probably added so that the Comité could not be forced to send the children back to Nazi Germany if the parents could not handle the separation.) Parents also had to sign a legally binding document that they would not try to use their child (then living in France) as a means to apply for a French visa themselves.²⁵

In March 1939, a little over 200 children reached Paris on two transports. More than half the children came from Vienna, the others from Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Mainz.²⁶ Afterwards, the Rothschild committee tried to get visas for 800 more children.²⁷ A number of French

19 Comité to the Child Welfare Department, Paris, 13 Feb. 1939.

20 Hofreiter, *Alleine in die Fremde*, 84.

21 Maier, *Arthur und Lilly*, 45–7.

22 IKG, “Liste der dringenden Fälle nach Frankreich, 1939” (List of urgent cases to France, 1939), A/W 1986, USHMM.

23 IKG, “Liste der Kinder nach Frankreich: 1. Transport 14.3.1939” (List of children to France: 1st Transport 14 March 1939), *ibid.*

24 Authorization Form Samuel Kernberg for the Comité, Vienna, 22 Feb. 1939, Reel 28, Acc. 2009.78, RG 43.113M (Selected Individual Files of Children under the Care of Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants), USHMM.

25 OSE, “Dossier 1605. Oswald Kernberg”, *ibid.*

26 “Aufstellung Kindertransporte”, A/W 1964/1, USHMM.

27 “Report Trude Frankel”, April 1939, A/W 1985, USHMM.

organizations – including Catholic ones – agreed to share the costs but the French government was afraid of war breaking out and did not allow any more transports.²⁸ They only sporadically issued visas for children who had relatives in France.²⁹ Additionally, the Comité took 100 refugee children into their care who were already living in France but whose refugees parents did not have the means to care for them. Many of these additional children had entered France illegally and the Comité was able to get them visas retrospectively.³⁰

Placement of the children

The most significant difference from the British Kindertransport was the placement of the minors. As has been widely documented, in the UK the declared intention was to place all the children in foster families, so they would quickly assimilate and not attract any attention.³¹ Since there were not enough families, a considerable number of children ended up living collectively in hostels or in the German exile schools all over Great Britain.³² In contrast, the organizers of the French Kindertransport never even considered foster families and instead placed all the children collectively in newly created children's homes. The Rothschilds operated one such home, Château de la Guette, in Villeneuve-Saint-Denis,³³ but most children were sent to homes run by the OSE.

The OSE was founded in 1912 in St. Petersburg as a relief organization by Jewish doctors but soon had branches all over the world.³⁴ Fleeing from repression, the OSE headquarters first emigrated to Berlin and in

28 Ibid.

29 Comité to the Child Welfare Department, Paris, 5 May 1939, A/W 1985.

30 "Report Trude Frankel", 1.

31 Rebekka Göpfert, *Der jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39: Geschichte und Erinnerung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1999), 114–23; Anna Wexberg-Kubesch, *Vergiss nie, dass Du ein jüdisches Kind bist* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2013), 60–65.

32 Göpfert, *Kindertransport nach England*, 123–32; Hildegard Feidel-Mertz, "Identitätsbildung und Integration: Exilschulen in Großbritannien", in *Die Kindertransporte 1938/39*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, Claudia Curio, and Andrea Hammel (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003), 102–19.

33 Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, *Les enfants de la Guette: souvenirs et documents (1938–1945)* (Paris: CDJC, 1999).

34 For more about the OSE see Katy Hazan and Michèle Allali, *Une mémoire pour le futur – 90 ans de l'OSE: A Legacy for the Future – 90 Years of OSE* (Paris: OSE and Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2003).

1933 to Paris.³⁵ In 1939, the OSE opened four refugee children's homes in Montmorency and Eaubonne, in the outskirts of Paris – Villa Helvetia, Villa La Chesnaie, Les Tourelles, and La Petite Colonie.³⁶

In these homes, the children lived among peers who were going through the same situation as they were. This provided much comfort and stability. In an interview with the USC Shoah Foundation, Arthur Kern said about this time: "It was all German and Austrian kids. And they had all been sent away by their parents. Basically, what happened was, we started becoming a family. Instead of being friends it was more like becoming siblings."³⁷ This shows the great unity these young refugees felt, unlike children in British foster families, who had to face uncertainty and a new home all by themselves.

The money to care for the children in France and to buy the buildings for the OSE children's homes came largely from a single woman, Baroness Yvonne de Gunzbourg. This liberal Jew was the wife of a Jewish Russian aristocrat. At the end of 1938, she threw herself into her voluntary work as president of the OSE fundraising committee and within a single month had collected a million francs in donations. By 1940, she had herself given more than a million francs to buy eleven additional children's homes.³⁸

In the spring of 1939, an initial group of 304 children came to live in the first four OSE homes. The majority of them were Jewish, yet a small group were children of politically persecuted German or Austrian socialists, who had found refuge in Paris. Of the children, 21 were so weak that they were immediately sent for treatment in Arcachon, so initially 283 children lived in the homes.³⁹ However, the number quickly rose. In June 1939, the OSE took in 35 children from the ill-fated ship *St. Louis*, after they were

35 Katy Hazan, *Rire le jour, pleurer la nuit: les enfants juifs cachés dans la Creuse pendant la guerre, 1939–1944* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2014), 11–14; Katy Hazan and Serge Klarsfeld, *Le Sauvetage des enfants juifs pendant l'occupation, dans les maisons de l'OSE, 1938–1945 / Rescuing Jewish Children during the Nazi Occupation: OSE Children's Homes, 1938–1945* (Paris: OSE and Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2009), 13 and 71.

36 Slavka Pogranova, "Ernst Papanek und die Kinder von Montmorency", (M.A. diss., Sorbonne, 2002), 18.

37 Interview with Arthur Kern, 12 July 1995, Los Angeles, CA, USC Shoah Foundation.

38 "A travers les œuvres de l'Union O.S.E." (Through the works of the OSE Union), *Revue "OSÉ"* 9 (Jan. 1939): 28, Fonds OSE V-25, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris; see also Ernst Papanek with Edward Linn, *Out of the Fire* (New York: Morrow, 1975), 45–6.

39 Hazan and Klarsfeld, *Le Sauvetage*, 71.

refused entry in Cuba.⁴⁰ In the months following the outbreak of the war, the OSE started welcoming Jewish refugee children from Belgium and the Netherlands and eventually also French Jewish children. By the end of 1940, a total of 1,600 children were living in homes operated by the OSE.⁴¹ The year after, the OSE managed to free almost 1,000 Jewish children from the Gurs and Rivesaltes French internment camps.⁴² So, while the French Kindertransport started small, it grew considerably larger over the years.

Educational philosophy

The OSE homes were run by German and Austrian exile teachers, many of whom were socialists or social democrats who had fled Nazi Germany for political reasons. At the forefront stood the director Ernst Papanek, an assimilated Jew and former member of the city council of Vienna.⁴³ His wife, Helene, worked in the homes as a physician. Papanek was an inspiring educator who installed an intense and progressive educational system to help his charges through this difficult time. We would probably still call his school modern and progressive if it existed today. Papanek thought that his most important job was to “make the children happy again” and to help them deal with the traumatic experiences they had lived through as Jewish children in national-socialist Germany.⁴⁴ In his theoretical writings, he spoke of a “mass neurosis” the young refugees had suffered, and he believed that collective housing and collaborative community life was the best way to treat it.⁴⁵ Papanek was inspired by his

40 Georg J. E. Mautner Markhof, *Das St. Louis-Drama* (Graz and Stuttgart: Stocker, 2001), 128; “Die Passagiere der ‘Saint-Louis’ erzählen . . .” (The Passengers of the “St. Louis” tell . . .), *Pariser Tageszeitung*, 23 June 1939, Box 7, Ernst Papanek Papers, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (hereafter, EPP, NYPL); Claudia Göbetzberger, “Dr. Ernst Papanek – Widerstand im Dritten Reich: Leben, Werk und Exil eines österreichischen Sozialdemokraten” (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 2005), 131.

41 Hazan and Allali, *90 Years OSE*, 33; Hansen-Schaberg, “Kindheit und Jugend”, 84.

42 Hazan and Allali, *90 Years OSE*, 35; see also Vivette Samuel’s riveting autobiography *Rescuing the Children: A Holocaust Memoir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

43 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*; see also Göbetzberger, “Dr. Papanek” and Inge Hansen-Schaberg and Hanna Papanek, eds., *Ernst Papanek: Pädagogische und therapeutische Arbeit. Kinder mit Verfolgungs-, Flucht und Exilerfahrungen während der NS-Zeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2015). I am also working on a biography of Ernst Papanek to be published in 2020 (Vienna: Styria).

44 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 86, 95.

45 Ernst Papanek, “Jüdische Jugend in einer Welt des Krieges und der Verfolgung” (June 1944), in Hansen-Schaberg and Papanek, *Ernst Papanek*, 61–79.

former teacher Alfred Adler, a renowned psychotherapist, and instituted playful group therapy sessions, which the children often did not recognize as such.⁴⁶

Many of these Jewish children had not had proper schooling in years, so Papanek and his colleagues often disguised classes as playful discussions, went on field trips, or held classes outside in the gardens to get the young refugees used to school work again.⁴⁷ The educators also let the children address them by their first names and abolished homework and grades, as well as any forms of corporal punishment.⁴⁸ Other parts of Papanek's educational system included the co-education of both genders and a focus on vocational training, so that the young refugees would be able to make a living for themselves, no matter where they would end up in the future.⁴⁹

Probably the most important feature of Papanek's pedagogy was the establishment of a student-run parliament and a student-run court, which gave the youngsters vast responsibilities in the management of the homes.⁵⁰ In doing so, Papanek wanted to teach the children democratic values after years of living in a dictatorship. "The moral education and development of character shall form free and reliable men, able to fight all difficulties and not to be suppressed by any persecutions", he wrote in a report about the homes in 1940.⁵¹

While the young refugees did learn French, their teachers made sure to keep them in touch with their native language and German culture, therefore avoiding alienating them from their parents and their heritage. For example, the young refugees had to learn Goethe's *Faust* by heart, an experience that students in Germany and Austria have had to endure for centuries.⁵² This is once again an important difference from the British

46 Göbetzberger, "Dr. Papanek", 146; Pogranova, "Papanek und die Kinder", 58; for the influence of Adler on Papanek see Gabriele Rühl-Nawabi, "Pädagogische und therapeutische Grundlagen: Die Rezeption des individualpsychologischen Ansatzes Alfred Adlers durch Ernst Papanek", in Hansen-Schaberg and Papanek, *Ernst Papanek*, 34–9.

47 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 64.

48 Hazan and Klarsfeld, *Le Sauvetage*, 74; Pogranova: "Papanek und die Kinder", 54–5.

49 Katy Hazan and Georges Weill, "The OSE and the Rescue of Jewish Children, from the Pre-war to the Post-war Period", in *Resisting Genocide: The Multiple Forms of Rescue*, eds. Jacques Semelin, Claire Andrieu, and Sarah Gensburger (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 245–63.

50 The House Rules are reproduced in Hansen-Schaberg and Papanek, *Ernst Papanek*, 50–52.

51 Papanek, "One Year OSÉ", Box 41, EPP, NYPL; written in English.

52 Michael C. Kiener and Pascal Plas, eds., *Enfances juives: Limousin-Dordogne-Berry. Terres de refuge 1939–1945* (Saint-Paul: Lucien Souny, 2006), 404.

Kindertransport, where there were plenty of cases of children who were reunited with their parents after the war but could not speak German any more, which meant that they could not really communicate with their parents.⁵³

One last feature of Papanek's educational system is the many celebrations he and his staff put on. Every birthday, every Jewish or French holiday was met with the recitation of poems, the singing of songs, and lots of cake. "We loved celebrations so much", Papanek wrote after the war, "that when no country had an acceptable holiday coming up we would put on a play or a circus of our own."⁵⁴

The educator vehemently protested against the criticism of a visitor who said that with all the singing and dancing Montmorency was not a children's home but an operetta by Johann Strauss. For Papanek, these celebrations were part of his plan to let the traumatized children be happy and to forget their worries, basically to allow them to be children again.⁵⁵ An article about a "Children's Summer Festival" by a German emigrant newspaper based in Paris illustrates this nicely: "The summer party showed them [the children] in a jaunty mood, in the best of health, and the games, dances, and chants arranged under the guidance of the Papanek couple on the lush summer green meadow suggest that slowly the horrors of the past are being shooed away successfully from their souls."⁵⁶

Until the outbreak of the war – and even immediately afterwards – the children lived a carefree and almost happy existence, almost like being on a yearlong holiday camp. "Except for most of us being homesick, life at the home was very nice", Arthur Kern remembered decades later.⁵⁷

53 Lilly Maier, "Ein Leben nach dem Kindertransport", in *Fremde Heimat: Rettende Kindertransporte aus Hannover 1938/39*, ed. Florian Grumbly et al. (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung Verlag, 2015), 209. See also Eva-Maria Thüne, "What the Kindertransportees tell us about the Acquisition of English", in this volume, 165–182.

54 "Abschriften von Briefen von Kindern in Heimen, Frankreich, 1939–1940" (Transcriptions of letters from children in the homes, France, 1939–1940), Box 5, EPP, NYPL; Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 86–7.

55 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 86–7.

56 "Aus der Pariser Emigrantenkolonie" (From the Paris Emigrant's Colony), *Pariser Tageszeitung*, 15 June 1939, Box 5, EPP, NYPL.

57 Arthur Kern, "The Plunder, the Destruction and the Dispersion of the Hermann Kernberg Family during the Holocaust Years: As told with Documentation by the Lone Survivor Oswald Arthur Kern né Kernberg" (Los Angeles, 2006); copy in my possession.

Finances

For the year 1939, we have a detailed breakdown of all the costs and expenses related to the running of the four OSE homes near Paris. The total expenditure for the year was 2.2 million francs.⁵⁸ The largest item was the purchase and furnishing (c. 780,000 francs) and the maintenance (c. 630,000 francs) of the four homes. The salaries for the educators (c. 240,000 francs) made up only about thirteen per cent of the total expenditure. A surprisingly large amount of money was set aside for the children's correspondence with their families (c. 13,600 francs). The majority of the funds came from the donations collected by Baroness de Gunzbourg, yet the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee sent a quarter of the budget. The actual care for each child cost 5,600 francs a year in 1939 and rose to 6,500 francs a year in 1940.

There is no similar breakdown of costs for the British Kindertransport but we do have a total number: at the beginning of 1940, the Movement for the Care of Children coming from Germany (later renamed the Refugee's Children Movement) published their *First Annual Report*, in which they state that from November 1938 to November 1939 "the total amount spent was £63,270, which works out at about 6.10.0£ per child." According to the report, this money covered "Transport, Luggage, Reception, Camps, Medical charges, Education and training, Emigration [to join parents or family members in other countries], Salaries", as well as "Office equipment and sundry charges."⁵⁹

It is hard accurately to compare historical currencies but, according to an online currency converter (using the prices of gold, silver, consumer goods in Sweden, and the average hourly pay of a male worker in Sweden to compare the absolute and relative worth of currencies), 10 6£s was the equivalent of approximately 1,140 French francs in 1939.⁶⁰ Compared to the 5,600 francs needed to care for a child in the OSE homes in France, this means that the French model was almost five times more expensive than the British one. Obviously, this is not a perfect comparison, because a large number of children in the UK had private guarantors who paid

58 Ernst Papanek, "Financial Report 1939", in "One Year Children's Houses", Box 41, EPP, NYPL.

59 Movement for the Care of Children from Germany Ltd., *First Annual Report 1938-1939* (London, 1940), 17.

60 Historical Statistics, 'Currency Converter', www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html, accessed 25 June 2019.

for food, clothes, and so on of their charges, but the British report does state that “considering the average cost of 6.10.0£ includes not only the transportation of all children, but the maintenance of all unguaranteed and the emigration costs of 276 children, this is extremely moderate.”⁶¹ Furthermore, at this time the Movement did not receive government assistance: that started only in the autumn of 1941, when the Home Office agreed to pay for seventy-five per cent of the Movement’s administrative costs and “maintenance expenses of children living with foster families”⁶² – so there are no major hidden expenditures missing.

Regardless of the inaccuracies of converting currencies and the problems with comparing two programmes operating on a completely different scale, it is clear that the French Kindertransport – with its collective housing and progressive education system – was much more expensive than the British one. Within the OSE, there was initial resistance against Ernst Papanek’s many reforms: conservative and orthodox members of the OSE thought them too expensive, too work-intensive, and too progressive. Luckily for him, Papanek was backed by the rich, liberal Jewish community in Paris, led by Baroness de Gunzbourg, which prevailed against the critics within the OSE.⁶³

The invasion of France

Another essential difference between the French and the British Kindertransport is an obvious one: unlike Great Britain, France was invaded by the Nazis.

The outbreak of the Second World War resulted in a moral dilemma for the children. While Ernst Papanek repeatedly assured them that they were safe because the French and British were fighting for them against Hitler, that did not diminish their fear for their parents and families still remaining in Nazi Germany. “France had been the enemy against whom our fathers fought and now we were here and they were there”, the French Kind Eric Greene wrote in an unpublished memoir: “It became a very confusing time for us German-Jewish refugee children.”⁶⁴

To calm the frightened children, Papanek integrated them in the preparations for their own “defence”, by having them fill sandbags,

61 Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, *First Annual Report*, 17.

62 Refugee Children’s Movement, *Third Annual Report, 1941–1942* (London, 1942), 1–2.

63 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 116–17; Göbetzberger, “Dr. Papanek”, 134–5.

64 Eric Greene, “The Loneliest Boy” (Durango, CO, 2000); copy in my possession.

darken windows, or prepare makeshift gas masks. “There is always relief in the simple knowledge that you do not have to stand by helplessly and wait for your fate to overtake you, that it is possible to do something about it”, Papanek wrote, looking back after the war.⁶⁵

During the first six months of the war, no actual fighting happened in France or even at the French border, which gave the period its many apt nicknames: the *drôle de guerre* (phoney war) as the French call it or *Sitzkrieg* (sitting war) as the Germans say. With no immediate danger to their life, the most traumatic shock for the young refugees was the total breakdown in communication with their families. There were no direct postal services between warring nations. Lucky children could communicate through a “triangle” method of letter shipping, in which parents wrote to friends in neutral countries like Switzerland who forwarded the post to the children and vice versa, but that meant that a letter took weeks or even months to reach its destination.⁶⁶ After the physical separation from their parents, now there were not even weekly letters left. Realizing that they were truly separated from their parents for an indefinite time greatly outweighed the fear of air raids for many of the children.⁶⁷ In England, Anna Freud observed a similar phenomenon with her charges. The child psychologist and youngest daughter of Sigmund Freud ran a home for war children and orphans in London. “London children, therefore, were on the whole much less upset by bombing than by evacuation to the country as a protection against it”, she wrote in her treatise on children in war.⁶⁸

Similarly to the situation in the UK, Austrian and German men between the ages of seventeen and sixty-five were interned as *étrangers indésirables* (enemy aliens) in France.⁶⁹ Eleven educators had to leave the OSE homes in 1939, either because they were interned (like Papanek himself) or because they were French citizens and were drafted into the French Army.⁷⁰ Unlike the approximately 1,000 British Kinder who were interned as enemy aliens,⁷¹ there are no records of interned French Kinder.

There were also no French Kinder fighting in the war, contrary to the

65 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 15.

66 Interview with Kern, USC.

67 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 14.

68 Anna Freud and Dorothy Trimble Burlingham, *War and Children* (1943; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 21, 37.

69 Barbara Vormeier, “Frankreich”, in Krohn, *Handbuch*, 232–3.

70 Papanek, “One Year Children’s Houses”.

71 Göpfert, *Kindertransport nach England*, 163–70.

more than seven hundred young men and three hundred young women who joined the British armed forces.⁷² This can mainly be attributed to the fact that none of the young Jewish refugees in France had reached the age of eighteen by the time the fighting stopped with the Occupation of the majority of France in the summer of 1940. (There are mentions of OSE children joining the Resistance in later years but it is not clear if any of them had previously come to France on a Kindertransport from Germany or Austria.⁷³)

Kindertransport to the United States

When the Germans neared Paris in June 1940, the OSE children were hastily evacuated to the South of France, where they lived in newly opened children's homes.⁷⁴ It soon became clear, however, that the young Jewish refugees were not safe in so-called Free France or Vichy France. In 1941, the OSE – working with almost a dozen other organizations – managed to rescue 250 children on a second Kindertransport to the United States.⁷⁵ So, contrary to popular belief among Kindertransport researchers, there was a Kindertransport to the United States.

I cannot go into all the details here (that could fill a whole book) but I want to highlight two aspects: first of all, this French–American Kindertransport was a much more collaborative rescue operation than prewar Kindertransports. The French OSE, the American OSE (AMEROSE), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, the Quakers),⁷⁶ the United States Committee for the Care of European Children (USCOM, spearheaded by the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt),⁷⁷ the German Jewish

72 Barry Turner, *Kindertransport: Eine Beispiellose Rettungsaktion* (Gerlingen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 1994), 212; Hofreiter, *Alleine in die Fremde*, 44.

73 Hazan and Klarsfeld, *Le Sauvetage*, 32–36; Hazan and Weill, “OSE Rescue”, 256.

74 Papanek, *Out of the Fire*, 169–86.

75 For a list of all the children on the transport see Serge Klarsfeld, *French Children of the Holocaust: A Memorial* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 95–104.

76 Laura Gumpert, “Humble Heroes: How the American Friends Service Committee struggled to save Oswald Kernberg and Three Hundred Other Jewish Children from Nazi Europe” (Senior thesis, Haverford College, 2002).

77 Ron Coleman, “The United States Committee for the Care of European Children (USCOM) and the Rescue of Children”, Internal Research Memo of the USHMM (Washington, DC: 2015), copy in my possession. See also Michal Ostrovsky, “‘We Are Standing By’: Rescue Operations of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29 (2015): 230–50.

Children's Aid,⁷⁸ as well as half a dozen other groups were needed to bring the children over. Arthur Kern illustrated this pointedly in an autobiographical short story when he changed the famous proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" to match his life: "It took more than a village to raise this child. It took the government of 3 countries, many people and many organizations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to raise this child".⁷⁹

The vast number of different – and often ideologically opposed – organizations led to many misunderstandings, complications, and conflicts during the French-American Kindertransport. For example, the AFSC, which was tasked with organizing the logistics of the transports, thought that the outcome did not justify the extensive work. In the summer of 1941, Allen Bonnel, a delegate working in France, wrote in an internal memorandum: "Expenses for the emigration of these children were extremely high and there is considerable question in our minds whether or not the expenses were warranted, in view of the other uses to which equivalent funds could have been placed."⁸⁰ According to Bonnel, the money necessary to bring one child to the United States could provide for a child in France for an entire year.⁸¹ (The AFSC changed their opinion later on, when Vichy France started handing over Jewish children to the Germans.)

A constant source of conflict was the fact that the American organizations (notably the USCOM) saw the Kindertransport as a denominational child rescue operation. In order to be able to collect donations from all spheres of society, they wanted to ensure that the Kindertransport was not painted as

78 Bat-Ami Zucker, *Cecilia Razovsky and the American Jewish Women's Rescue Operations in the Second World War* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008); Christine Hartig, "Zwischen Emigrationshilfe und Amerikanisierungserwartung: Die Arbeit der German Jewish Children's Aid", in *Die Vertreibung des Sozialen*, ed. Adriane Feustel and Inge Hansen-Schaberg (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2009), 130–51; Michal Ostrovsky, "'Children Knocking at Our Gates': 'German Jewish Children's Aid' and the Rescue Activity of the American Jewish Community during World War Two" (Ph.D. diss., Bar Ilan University, 2012); Michal Ostrovsky, "Transplanted into New Soil: Activities of the European Jewish Children's Aid with Young Holocaust Survivors, 1945–1953", *American Jewish History* 99, no. 3 (2015): 243–66. See also Catherine Rymph, "American Child Welfare and the Wagner-Rogers Bill of 1939", in this volume.

79 Arthur Kern, "Luck" (Los Angeles, 2006); emphasis original; copy in my possession.

80 Allen Bonnel (AFSC) to James G. Vail (AFSC), Marseille, 18 June 1941, Elfriede Schloss Papers, Acc. 1995.A.0368.1, USHMM.

81 Hillel J. Kieval, "Legality and Resistance in Vichy France: The Rescue of Jewish Children", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124, no. 5 (1980): 352.

a Jewish rescue.⁸² This serves to illustrate how completely wrong was their assessment of the danger facing Jewish children in Vichy France but it also sheds light on antisemitic tendencies in the American public.⁸³ Following the USCOM's instructions, the Quakers spent an inordinate amount of time trying to find non-Jewish children for the transports. However, the Vichy government would not grant exit visas for French children and non-Jewish parents were often reluctant to let their children go. So, in the end, the French–American Kindertransport ended up being composed almost exclusively of Jewish children from the OSE homes.⁸⁴

These two cases are just some examples of the numerous conflicts between the large number of organizations involved. At the same time, thousands of letters and memoranda kept at several archives (including the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library) show that no one single organization would have been able to organize a transatlantic Kindertransport in the middle of the war, no one single organization would have been able to save those children by themselves.

The complex and confusing situation with all the many different actors involved is frequently mirrored by historians researching them: most of the literature focuses on just one of the organizations. Especially striking is a separation by countries. While reading books about the OSE, one could think that the French–American Kindertransport was exclusively organized in France; while reading books about the USCOM or the German Jewish Children's Aid, it seems as if the children's transport was exclusively organized in the United States.⁸⁵ I try to remedy this failure in my work by giving equal space to a variety of archival sources from the

82 Margaret Frawley (AFSC headquarters) to the AFSC in Marseille, Philadelphia, 18 July 1941, Collection of the German Jewish Children's Aid, RG 249, MKM 8.16/290, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York; Stephanie Corazza, "The Routine of Rescue: Child Welfare Workers and the Holocaust in France" (Ph.D. diss. University of Toronto, 2017), 51.

83 Gumpert, "Humble Heroes", 18–19.

84 Corazza, "Routine of Rescue", 56–7.

85 For a France-centric approach see e.g. Sabine Zeitoun, *L'Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants (O.S.E.) sous l'occupation en France: du légalisme à la résistance, 1940–1944* (Paris: Harmattan, 1990), 139; Inge Hansen-Schaberg, "Lebensgeschichtliche Hintergründe zur pädagogisch-politischen Arbeit Ernst Papaneks und Anmerkungen zu seinem Werk", in Hansen-Schaberg and Papanek, *Ernst Papanek*, 15. For an American-centric approach see e.g. Judith Tydor Baumel, *Unfulfilled Promise: Rescue and Resettlement of Jewish Refugee Children in the United States 1934–1945* (Juneau, AK: Denali Press, 1990); Ostrovsky, "We Are Standing By", 230–50.

different groups involved. While approaches in this direction have also been made by Stephanie Corazza in her outstanding doctoral thesis on child welfare workers in France during the Holocaust,⁸⁶ and Laura Hobson Faure in a short article,⁸⁷ there is still a great need for further research here.

The second aspect of the French-American Kindertransport I want to highlight is the fact that in the United States the children were placed in foster families and spread all over the country, which is similar to the British Kindertransport.⁸⁸ The one difference here lies within the religious affiliation of the families: in the UK, Jewish children were often housed in Christian families, whereas in America they had to be exclusively Jewish, which made it much harder to find qualifying families.⁸⁹ It is difficult to assess today if this prevented the immigration of more unaccompanied minors to America but it probably played a part.

Many of those who were on a French Kindertransport are now in a unique position to compare the collective placement to living in a foster family because they experienced both. Today, almost all the adult French Kinder state that the “family feeling” they experienced in the homes in France helped them through difficult times, and that in retrospect they much preferred this placement over living with foster families in America.⁹⁰ Reminiscing decades later, Arthur Kern told me: “I was happier at the orphanage in France than later with my foster family. We had lived in a room, ate together, exercised together. We had become a kind of family.”⁹¹

Looking at the British Kindertransport once again, the French placement can best be compared to the approximately 4,000 children who were not placed with families but housed in hostels or exile schools.⁹² The seven German exile schools in particular often followed a progressive educational system similar to that of Ernst Papanek and the OSE, which equally kept the children in touch with their German heritage. And in the

86 Corazza, “Routine of Rescue”.

87 Laura Hobson Faure, “Attentes européennes, réalités américaines: l’émigration des Enfants de l’Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants de la France occupée vers les États-Unis, 1941–1942”, in *L’Œuvre de secours*, ed. Katy Hazan et al. (Paris: Colin, 2014), 166–83.

88 Baumel, *Unfulfilled Promise*, 63.

89 Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, “Jewish Refugee Children in the USA (1934–1945): Flight, Resettlement, Absorption”, in *Young Victims of the Nazi Regime: Migration, the Holocaust, and Postwar Displacement*, ed. Simone Gigliotti and Monica Tempian (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 15.

90 Jane Keibel to Ernst Papanek, June 1965, Box 2, EPP, NYPL.

91 Arthur Kern, personal interview, 29 November 2013, Seal Bach, CA, private archive.

92 Göpfert, *Kindertransport nach England*, 123–32.

hostels the young refugees were at least among peers who were going through the same experiences. Anna Freud as well as Anna Essinger, the headmistress of Bunce Court School, were – just like Ernst Papanek – staunch critics of the placement of refugee children in foster families.⁹³ The Austrian psychotherapist Anna Wexberg-Kubesch came to a similar conclusion in her 2013 book about the Kindertransport. By living together, the children “experienced less individual powerlessness and isolation”, she found.⁹⁴

Conclusion

This paper has given a cursory overview of the French Kindertransport and its differences from and similarities to the better-known British Kindertransport. Looking at the number of rescued children, the British Kindertransport with about 10,000 rescued children was by far the most successful – this is fifty times as many children as the only 200 young refugees who came to France. While the British number stayed the same or even declined (due to children re-emigrating or reaching majority), the French Kindertransport grew considerably, with the OSE at one point taking care of at least 1,600 children.

None of the French Kinder were interned, nor did they join the armed forces like some of their British peers, but they did experience war on a personal level when France was invaded by the Germans. After fleeing from Nazi persecution to France, they once again had to flee, this time from an approaching army. A year after their hasty evacuation to the South of France, 250 children were rescued on a second Kindertransport to the United States. This French–American Kindertransport was a collaborative rescue operation with a dozen organizations involved in the middle of the war.

Those OSE children left in France were hidden with French families and farmers or in monasteries by the Resistance (which some of them joined themselves). The OSE also smuggled about 1,000 children to Switzerland over the green border.⁹⁵

Certainly the most significant difference between all Kindertransports

93 Christiane Berth, *Die Kindertransporte nach Großbritannien 1938/39: Exilerfahrungen im Spiegel lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews* (Hamburg: Dölling & Galitz, 2005), 57; Göpfert, *Kindertransport nach England*, 107.

94 Wexberg-Kubesch, *Vergiss nie*, 59.

95 Hazan and Klarsfeld, *Le Sauvétage*, 32–36; Hazan and Weill, “OSE Rescue”, 256.

was the placement – in France in homes, in the UK (for the majority) and in the US (almost exclusively) in foster care. As this paper has shown, by collectively housing the young refugees, the OSE was able to provide much more intensive care for its charges than the British and American relief organizations. At the same time, the French model was much more expensive, as a comparison of the 1939 budgets suggests.

The OSE and especially Ernst Papanek established a holistic concept, with the goal of saving the refugee children not only physically but also emotionally. Papanek was deeply convinced that the children should not ignore their traumatic past and the fate of their parents. In France, living together allowed the German and Austrian refugee children to stay connected to their native culture and language. In Britain, in contrast, it was a common side effect of the British Kindertransport that children could not talk to their parents after the war because they had forgotten their German.

Today, many researchers and psychologists – including myself – say that this collective housing was a much better placement than living with foster families because it was much less traumatic for the young refugees.⁹⁶ This is an important lesson we can draw from the French Kindertransport, especially with regards to today's unaccompanied child refugees.

96 See e.g. Wexberg-Kubesch, *Vergiss nie*, 59; Feidel-Mertz, "Identitätsbildung und Integration", 104; Andrea Hammel, "Familienbilder im Spannungsfeld: Autobiographische Texte ehemaliger Kindertransport-Teilnehmer", in Benz, Curio, and Hammel, *Die Kindertransporte*, 191; Inge Hansen-Schaberg, "'Sie Waren Unentbehrlich': Ernst Papanek und die Rettung traumatisierter Kinder", *Bildung und Erziehung* 62, ed. Georg Walter et al. (Oldenburg, 2009), 105–22.