

Françoise Ouzan, *How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives: France, the United States, and Israel*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018. xiv + 297 pp. Bibliography and index. \$32.00 US (pb). ISBN: 978-0-253-03395-6.

Review by Antoine Burgard, The University of Manchester.

In the last few years, the experiences of Jewish children, adolescents, and young adults during and immediately after the Holocaust and the discourses and practices of the various actors involved in their care have been examined by a growing number of historians.[1] Françoise Ouzan's comparative and multidisciplinary book is an essential addition to this vibrant field. Her main goal is to put the "emphasis on the voice of individuals" (p. 2). Her life story approach, "a broad cross section of life stories reflecting major historical events and representative experiences of survivors," (p. 5) is commonplace in Holocaust studies--even more in works focusing on children and youth--but *How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt their Lives* is original in its scope. The book offers a comparison between France, the United States, and Israel, three of the main countries of residence of Holocaust survivors. In so doing, it overcomes a weakness of many previous studies that were limited by their national frameworks.

Drawing on forty in-depth narratives of former child-survivors in these three countries, more than 250 other closely examined testimonies, and data collected in American, French, and Israeli archives, Ouzan has the ambition to "[provide] answers to the enigma of the paradoxical success (professional and/or personal success) of Jewish children and young adults," to "[challenge] our understanding of post-war rehabilitation and lasting trauma, while throwing light on the transnational aspects of the lives survivors built," and to "[reveal] the contributions they brought (in almost every field) into the countries in which they settled or resettled" (pp. 9-10). The life stories that the author thoroughly retraces are therefore framed in terms of resilience and self-reconstruction. These stories are, according to Ouzan, illustrative of the "paradoxical success" of Holocaust survivors but also offers a wider "inquiry into the adaptative nature of any migrant and, more generally, any human being" (p. 11). By choosing these "successful" individual trajectories, the author distances herself from accounts that challenged an over-optimistic perception of the post-war lives of Holocaust survivors, especially in North America.[2] Two entangled questions arise from this choice. As always with such approach, it is difficult to assess the extent in which Ouzan's life stories actually represent a "broad cross section" of the post-war experiences of young Holocaust survivors. And by choosing to focus on stories of rehabilitation and resilience, even if she does acknowledge failure, she partly participates in what Tony Kushner has recently described as "the understandable desire for a happy ending" that is prevalent in Holocaust memory and history.[3]

The book is structured in nine chapters. The first chapter lays the foundation of the research, drawing on a body of works, such as Sergio DellaPergola's or Susan Rubin Suleiman's, that will be familiar to Holocaust scholars. Some fascinating issues addressed in this opening chapter--the influence of chronological age on war and post-war experiences, emotions and their importance

in shaping migration trajectories, etc.--will be of interest to many scholars in childhood and migration studies.

All three countries are then examined, each with two chapters. The narratives within these six chapters are classified based on the nature of the country of residence after the war (return or resettlement) and the nature of the survival during the war. While acknowledging that “all [Holocaust survivors] faced various forms of harmful humiliation, which is enough to destroy self-confidence”, Ouzan distinguishes “those who experienced proximity to death, and those who fled or were hidden without experiencing direct contact with death” (p. 16). Even though it is unclear where exactly she draws the line between these two categories, as many young survivors that fled or were hidden experienced direct contact with death, this typology does ease the reading.

The first chapter on France focuses on concentration camp survivors with the like of Izio Rosenman or Simone Weil. Through their trajectories, Ouzan addresses a wide range of issues from name change to the importance of living in a collective Jewish environment. The second chapter continues this examination of post-war French society and addresses the specificities of the hidden children's (*enfants cachés*) post-war experiences. As with the previous chapter, the life stories presented here (Boris Cyrulnik, Georges Perec, André Glucksmann, and Serge Klarsfeld) will be generally familiar to French historians and Holocaust scholars but are rich in detail. This chapter highlights three potential limitations of the book: the gender imbalance among the selected life stories (even though she addresses the importance of motherhood in later chapters), a limited engagement with existing literature (in this chapter, with the literature on hidden children such as that by Nathalie Zajde or Marion Feldman, among others) and, more importantly, the implications that come with the focus on success stories. For instance, in concluding how these *enfants cachés* “have turned the pain of the loss of dear ones into creative energy” (p. 92), she frames their post-war experiences almost exclusively in terms of resilience. In so doing, she risks overshadowing not only the failures but even more importantly the ordinary trajectories--the survivors that did not become war heroes, successful businessowners, or academics.

The fourth and fifth chapters, on the United States, give Ouzan the opportunity to question the influence of various factors on the everyday lives of survivors (for instance, religiosity that was predominantly encouraged in the United States and silenced in France). It follows a similar structure (first the camp survivors and then the hidden children) and maintains its focus on successful stories (Tom Lantos who is the only survivor to have served in Congress, philanthropist Fanya Gottesfeld Heller, etc.). Through their trajectories, Ouzan celebrates the contributions of immigrants to the country. In this chapter, the author retraces the life of Manfred Mayer (Fred Raymes). The scientist is quoted saying: “The decision not to emigrate to Palestine was both a secular response and an escape” (p. 147). This raises a very interesting question about individual decision-making and migration that could have been further developed in this book: why did these young survivors end up in France, Israel or the United States and not elsewhere?

The sixth and seventh chapters focus on Israel and similarly question how the social, political, and cultural environment in which they lived shaped the young survivors' experiences after the Holocaust. Through detailed life stories, Ouzan celebrates their contributions to the Jewish state,

especially in its early years. She offers a clear overview of the wide range of experiences of persecution and, as with the rest of the book, innovatively links wartime and post-war periods. The sixth chapter examines the issue of the rebirth of Jewish identity and retraces the trajectories of academics Margot Cohn and Israel Gutman, and Rabbi Israel Meir and “Lulek” Lau among others. It shares many questions with the next chapter on Israel that highlights the importance of the diaspora and transnationalism, both “key concepts in approaching the postwar Jewish plight” (p. 200). Once again, some of the life stories here will be familiar to many readers--especially Saul Friedländer’s--but Ouzan offers very detailed and thorough biographies. As in previous chapters, the author does highlight the challenges young Holocaust survivors faced in their post-war lives, whether in the United States where “adaptation to ‘normal’ life was not devoid of difficulties and obstacles” (p. 127) or in Israel where this adaptation “meant the loss of the mother tongue, often the loss of one’s name and a complete change of civilization and culture” (p. 152). These difficulties further reinforce the narratives of resilience that are at the center of this book.

The eighth chapter is one of the most original contributions of the book with a focus on “transnational actors” (or “citizens of the world”) Samuel Pisar, Elie Wiesel, and Aharon Appelfeld. Ouzan further interrogates how their pre-war and war experiences shaped their perceptions of national belonging and Jewishness: the Holocaust “(ironically) unified through the existential fracture [it] provoked” Jewish people who had very different relations with their countries of origin and residence, their Judaism, and Israel.

In the ninth and last chapter, Ouzan offers concluding remarks on young Holocaust survivors’ “involvement in various fields of culture, the arts, and the economy in both Jewish and non-Jewish societies, as well as constructing the memory of the Holocaust” (p. 239). Importantly, she reflects on key terms of her work such as the highly “subjective” notion of integration (p. 252). She also acknowledges one of its biases: “Focusing on those who fared best in spite of their being orphans should not diminish the survivors who could not overcome their trauma and committed suicide in middle age, even while apparently enjoying successful careers” (p. 256). It is important to go even beyond and ask: what about those in the middle, the Holocaust survivors that did not fail but did not tremendously succeed after the war and whose lives “lived without glory” are less visible?[4] Those stories also deserve to be told.

NOTES

[1] Beth Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust. The Youngest Remnant and the American Experience* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017); Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France. Rebuilding Family and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Simone Gigliotti and Monica Tempian, eds., *The Young Victims of the Nazi Regime. Migration, the Holocaust and Postwar Displacement* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016); Lynne Taylor, *In the Children’s Best Interests: Unaccompanied Children in American-Occupied Germany, 1945-1952* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Rebecca Clifford, *Orphans of the Storm: Children After the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

[2] Beth B. Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Adara Goldberg, *Holocaust Survivors in Canada. Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

[3] Tony Kushner, *Journeys from the Abyss: The Holocaust and forced migration from the 1880s to the present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 195.

[4] Ivan Jablonka, “Écrire l’histoire de ses proches” in Tal Bruttman, Ivan Ermakoff, Nicolas Mariot, and Claire Zalc, eds., *Pour une micro-histoire de la Shoah* (Paris : Seuil, 2012), 55.

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