

Revisiting the “Talking Cure”: Capturing Children’s Wartime Experiences through Hans Keilson’s Work on Sequential Traumatization

In what kind of century do we live, when in the hour of need and danger, parents are denied the right to protect their children, and when children must learn to imagine the violent death of their parents and siblings and, nonetheless, don’t understand!¹

Hans Keilson

In the wake of catastrophes of racialized violence and wars that continue to mount in the twenty-first century, the question arises: how, in the path of man-made disasters, might we elicit, listen to, record, and react responsibly and with care to children’s experiences of persecution and violence? The citation I opened this essay with suggests a chilling disparity between imagining (possible) and understanding (impossible) violent death—a lacuna that sits at the heart of every new act of war or destruction, especially when the recipient is particularly vulnerable to harm. This is one of many incongruities particular to violent experiences explored in psychoanalyst Hans Keilson’s work on trauma with Jewish child orphans in the Netherlands after the Second World War. Thinking of trauma as an uneven process with multiple stages and intensities rather

1 The translation is my own. The original reads: “Was für ein Jahrhundert, in dem es Eltern in der Stunde der Not und Gefahr verwehrt ist, ihre Kinder zu beschützen, und Kinder in der Phantasie den gewaltsamen Tod ihrer Eltern und Geschwister lernen müssen und dennoch nicht begreifen!” “Die fragmentierte Psychotherapie eines aus Bergen-Belsen zurückgekehrten Jungen,” in *Kein Plädoyer für eine Luftschaukel: Essays, Reden, Gespräche*, ed. Heinrich Detering (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 2011), 92.

than as a punctual incident that consumes the imagination while obliterating understanding insists on the historicity of experience among other modes of temporality (such as those of deferral and belatedness) associated with earlier Freudian conceptions of trauma.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, therapists and social scientists of many stripes struggled to understand the relationship between war and childhood experience when faced with the flood of child survivors. Indeed, it would take some time until individual stories were shared, and often only at a significant temporal remove from the events that shaped their lives.² The type of information sought—often recorded piecemeal, initially factual information required for bureaucratic or organizational purposes for the most part—shaped the form of questions. For example, whereas survivors themselves might be interested precisely in mining the lacunae or seeking to understand gaps and inconsistencies in their biographies or the broader impact of their childhood experiences on the trajectory of their lives, in the late 1950s, lawyers providing legal representation to Holocaust survivors in reparations cases required coherent autobiographical narratives in forensic psychological assessments, without which their claimants were unlikely to receive compensation from the West German government for injuries suffered during the Nazi regime.³ Thus, aspects of mediation and cultural contextualization are of

2 For an introduction to the history of child survivors of the Nazi genocide in the early postwar years, see the collection of essays: Sharon Kangisser and Dalia Ofer, eds., *Starting Anew: The Rehabilitation of Child Survivors of the Holocaust in the Early Postwar Years* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, the International Institute for Holocaust Research, the Diana and Eli Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Holocaust, 2019). One better-known archive of child survivor testimony in the US-American context is the Kestenberg Archive of Testimonies of Child Holocaust Survivors. This archive encompasses interviews conducted with child survivors immediately after the Second World War, copies from JIH depositions, as well as a vast archive of adult testimonies by former child survivors, which was created in 1981 by psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg and her husband, attorney Milton Kestenberg. See the essay collection Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Eva Fogelman, and Dalia Ofer, eds., *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017). The Kestenberg Archive of Testimonies of Child Holocaust survivors was originally called the Jerome Riker International Study of Organized Persecution of Children in 1981. As Kangisser Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer explain in their introduction to the volume, the Kestenberg Archive is unique in at least two ways: first, because many child survivors were telling their stories to someone for the first time; and second, because the interviews were conducted by mental health professionals. 1–12.

3 For a historical account of the vicissitudes of meeting the very specific prerequisites measuring the mental health of Holocaust survivors when they applied for reparations from the German government, see Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psycho-*

the essence when we ask about childhood experiences, particularly under conditions of genocide or other forms of racialized state violence.⁴

My essay elaborates on evolving understandings and deployments of the so-called "talking cure," particularly as concerns the concept of "trauma," in the specific sociohistorical setting of the Netherlands, although the implications of trauma research with children indubitably has significantly broader purchase for the contemporary moment. The focus of the paper is polymathic psychiatrist/psychoanalyst and creative author Hans Keilson's pioneering contribution to trauma studies through his painstaking work with Jewish Dutch war orphans, his longitudinal study *Sequential Traumatization in Children: A Clinical and Statistical Follow-Up Study on the State of the Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands*, published in German in 1979.⁵ I initially provide a biographical sketch of Hans Keilson, followed by a brief contextualization of the historical circumstances particular to Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands—more specifically, that of Jewish child survivors of concentration camps and those emerging from hiding only to find a largely destroyed Jewish community in the Netherlands. Then, I will offer a close reading of one of the descriptive-analytical case studies in his psychoanalytic work to open up its complex semantics of silence, language, and knowledge.⁶ In

analysis in an Age of Catastrophes (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2017), 89–122.

- 4 In her book *Survivors: Children's Lives After the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), historian Rebecca Clifford elaborates on the historical and more recent approaches used in an attempt to encounter (or, more often than not, to recover testimony about their childhood through adult testimony) the experiences of "child survivors" in the aftermath of the Holocaust. This attempt took a variety of forms: in-person interviews (though, as mentioned, less often with children and more commonly with adults), published case histories and oral interviews, or by reading memoirs and diaries. Paradoxically, the nomenclature "child survivor testimony" most often denotes an anachronism; the term itself was of a much later vintage and indicated a sea change in the perspective used to interpret these and other versions of histories, experiences, and available memories of those who had lived through the Holocaust as children.
- 5 Hans Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization in Children: A Clinical and Statistical Follow-Up Study on the State of the Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands*, with Herman R. Sarphatie, trans. Yvonne Bearne, Hilary Coleman, and Deirdre Winter (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992). The original German-language version of Keilson's book was published in 1979 and bore the title *Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern. Untersuchung zum Schicksal jüdischer Kriegswaisen* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2005).
- 6 Anna M. Parkinson, "Untimely Tales: Psychoanalysis as Spectral Modernism in Hans Keilson's Novel *The Death of the Adversary*," in *Tales that Touch: Migration, Translation, and Temporality in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century German Literature*

closing, I shall consider the ongoing significance of Keilson's work for the field of trauma studies today.

Hans Keilson was born into a Jewish family in the German town of Bad Freienwalde an der Oder in 1909. During the twilight years of the Weimar Republic, Keilson moved to Berlin to study medicine and physical education. In 1933, he published his first novel with Fischer-Verlag. With the ever-encroaching Nazi legislation targeting the livelihoods and very existence of Jewish Germans, Keilson's book was almost immediately banned, and on completion of his medical degree, he was prohibited from practicing medicine. Of necessity, he worked as a physical education instructor in Jewish Schools in and around Berlin until 1936, when he went into exile in the Netherlands on the urging of his first wife Gertrud Mainz, whose prescience initiated their emigration from an increasingly antisemitic Berlin and, Keilson believed, also most likely saved their lives.⁷ After the German occupation of the Netherlands in 1940, Keilson went into hiding in the environs of Amsterdam and for a time also in Delft, continuing his work for the Dutch resistance and traveling on forged papers under the name of Jakob van Linden to consult with Jewish children in hiding who exhibited behavior that placed them in danger of exposure. Keilson avoided deportation and survived in hiding in the Netherlands. After the defeat of the Nazi regime and the liberation of the Netherlands, Keilson immediately applied for Dutch citizenship and lived most of the remainder of his long life (he died at the age of 101 in 2011) in Bussum, outside of Amsterdam. After qualifying to practice as a doctor in the Netherlands, Keilson then completed a doctorate in psychiatry, as well as training in psychoanalysis.

Keilson's work as a therapist in the Netherlands had already begun years earlier with his clandestine work for the Dutch underground, and it continued with Dutch Jewish child orphan survivors in the postwar context, becoming part of the fraught and fractious history of the relationship of minority-majority groups in the Netherlands. By compar-

and Culture, ed. Bettina Brandt and Yasemin Yildiz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 53–72.

7 These biographical details are gleaned from various published accounts of Keilson's life. (Auto)biographical details can also be found in almost all of Keilson's publications, including Hans Keilson, *Kein Plädoyer für eine Luftschaukel*; Hans Keilson, *Da Steht Mein Haus: Erinnerungen*, ed. Heinrich Detering (Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 2011); Hans Keilson, *Tagebuch 1944 und 46 Sonetten*, ed. Marita Keilson-Lauritz (Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 2014). Although it was published too late for inclusion in this essay, it would be instructive to see the recently published first complete official biography of Keilson that appeared in Dutch in the Netherlands: Jos Versteegen, *Hans Keilson: Telkens een Nieuw Leven* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2023).

ison with other, comparatively larger Western European countries, the Jewish community in the Netherlands had been decimated through Nazi persecution. Before the Second World War, the Dutch Jewish population included one hundred and forty thousand individuals, of whom a mere twenty-five thousand to twenty-nine thousand (15 percent) survived persecution. Approximately 3,500 Jewish children survived: 1,417 returned to surviving parents, leaving 2,041 Jewish Dutch children orphaned, of whom 1,300 were under thirteen years of age. These children's destinies were inextricably interwoven with those of the postwar foundations and commissions established on their behalf.⁸ This chapter of postwar Jewish-Dutch history (roughly 1945–1950) has been examined critically in recent decades, not least because of sometimes contentious postwar legal rulings on the guardianship of surviving Jewish Dutch orphans.

In retrospect, it is clear how the approach taken by the Dutch government to the so-called "war orphan problem" must have compounded the enormous losses already suffered by the Dutch Jewish community. Drafted by the Dutch government-in-exile, a bill of law provided the postwar legal framework to handle the "war orphan problem," including the creation of the legal category "war foster children" (*oorlogspleegkinderen*), which was to have long-lasting consequences for both those categorized as such and the Dutch Jewish community as a whole. The Order in Council/Royal Decree (K.B.) No. 137 of August 1945 officially established a governmental Commission for War Foster Children (*Commissie voor Oorlogspleegkinderen*/OPK) responsible for ruling on the welfare of and making formal legal recommendations regarding the children's future guardianship. This bill also removed a parent's right of guardianship if they had not returned to retrieve a child they had given away during occupation within one month of the war's end; the child then became a ward of the state.⁹

Similarly, in August 1945, in keeping with the spirit of Dutch tradition that had allowed religious communities to regulate their affairs auto-

8 E. C. Lekkerkerker, "Oorlogspleegkinderen," *Maandblad voor de Geestelijke Volksgezondheid* 1, no. 7 (October 1946): 228. Cited in J. S. Fishman, "Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands—The Guardianship Issue 1945–1950," *The Wiener Library Bulletin* 27, no. 30/31 (1973/74): 31–36, here 31.

9 Diane Wolf, *Beyond Anne Frank: Hidden Children and Postwar Families in Holland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 12. Here, Wolfe cites a memo from the bill proposal that states: "Parents who do not report within one month will presumably be those who have been transported somewhere else from the Netherlands. They will probably not be capable of taking their parental duties the way that they should. They shall not be permitted to resume their parental authority until they have demonstrated that they are fit to do so."

mously, the Jewish Co-ordination Commission created the foundation Le Esrath Hajeled (“For the Good of the Child”), an organization Keilson was involved with from its inception.¹⁰ Le Esrath Hajeled initially provided social services to children returned to a Jewish environment, including documentation for OPK Commission guardianship cases. The foundation’s intention to eventually replace the OPK Commission did not come to fruition.¹¹ In most cases, the OPK Commission alone would decide the placement of the orphan based on its assessment of the degree of “Jewishness” of the child’s original nuclear family.

Historian Joel S. Fishman’s research into what he accurately termed the “war orphan controversy” reveals a startling level of antisemitic bias on the part of the government ruling that not only led to restricting the options for Dutch Jewish child orphans but also curtailed the agency of surviving parents or relatives in the Jewish community. Intended as a gesture of recognition of the “moral authority” of Resistance groups who had been active in saving Jewish children by placing them in hiding with gentile families during the German occupation of the Netherlands, the Dutch government was, at best, paternalistic, if not overtly biased, in adopting the groups’ attempts to “build a society without divisive denominational differences and racism.” What this meant concretely was prioritizing nationality rather than the religious background of the child’s family when making guardianship decisions. For the most part, the OPK Commission understood “Jewishness” or Jewish identity solely in religious or political terms, as manifested, for example, through synagogue attendance or keeping a kosher household, on the one hand; on the other hand, being Zionist was considered an unambiguous marker of Jewish

10 There are varied and slightly differing versions of the spelling of this organization’s name in the literature on its history. I have chosen this spelling of the organization (Le Esrath Hajeled) for purposes of continuity and since it is the one most frequently used in Hans Keilson’s work.

11 According to Fishman, this substitution did not take place. Instead, to cater to the needs of Jewish orphans remaining in Gentile households along the lines of the work done by Le Esrath Hajeled, the commission established a separate organization of its own called Help to War Foster Children. Unsurprisingly, each organization’s idea of what this “help” for Jewish orphaned children should consist of varied dramatically from that of its counterpart. Fishman, “Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands,” 32–35. Much later on, members of Le Esrath Hajeled took groups of foster children to live in Israel, and by 1967, 264 war orphans had emigrated from the Netherlands to Israel. According to Fishman, Jewish child orphans who emigrated to Israel tended to be more centered in their identities and have a less fractious relationship with their past. (As we will see from a more detailed psychological perspective in Keilson’s study of the war orphans, these responses varied widely from individual to individual.)

identity. Other, less obvious forms of Jewish cultural identity (with which the majority of the original Jewish Dutch community identified) were not weighted equally as criteria in considering the question of guardianship, being outbid in importance by other, more generalizable factors when measuring the physical and psychological wellbeing of Jewish orphans.¹² In other words, in an effort to avoid racialized particularism, the commission overrode cultural differences that were central to Jewish identity for many in the Dutch Jewish community. In spite of the traditional historical practice of religious tolerance with which the Netherlands is associated, this ruling left the OPK Commission open to accusations of antisemitic prejudice and eroded the autonomy of the surviving members of the Dutch Jewish community. In many cases, this erasure of Jewish identity later generated confusion, disorientation, and suffering as documented in many of the interviews with former Jewish child orphan survivors included in the longitudinal research undertaken by Keilson.

As Fishman argues, the language used to formulate the law also articulated the leading assumptions of OPK members, including that parents would not be returning or that the Jewish orphans' status was equivalent to that of "abandoned or neglected" children rather than that of orphans (their designation as *Oorlogspleegkinderen* [foster children] rather than as *weeskinderen* [orphan children] reveals precisely this logic).¹³ The majority of the OPK Commission consisted of Dutch gentile persons, with invited members of the Dutch Jewish community consistently in the minority. Further, less outspoken members of the Dutch Jewish community were most often recruited rather than those strongly identified with recognizable markers of Jewishness (for example, Zionists or Orthodox Jews).¹⁴ The declaration of the orphans' "best interest" as first and

12 See: Fishman, "Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands" and Wolfe, *Beyond Anne Frank*.

13 Fishman's important article is unambiguous in this regard; it is titled: "The War Orphan Controversy in the Netherlands: Majority-Minority Relations," in *Dutch Jewish History Proceedings of the Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands, November 28–December 3, 1982* (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University, 1984), 421–32, here 425–26.

14 Fishman lists the participating Resistance groups as: "Het Kindercomité," the "Van Doorn Group," the "Theo de Bruin Group," and the group called "Oom Piet." Fishman, "The War Orphan Controversy," 424. For a reappraisal of Fishman's research through the lens of human rights discourse (specifically here, in terms of child kidnapping), see also: Diane L. Wolf, "Child Withholding as Child Transfer: Hidden Jewish Children and the State in Postwar Netherlands," *Journal of Human Rights* 12 (2013): 296–308. Wolf also refers the reader to more recent work on this

foremost their Dutch national identity signaled a turn away from the primacy of Jewish identity, and likewise ran counter to the Dutch tradition of cleaving to practices of universal religious tolerance.¹⁵ Significantly, this also broke with traditional Dutch law that held that orphaned children should be reared in the faith of their deceased parents.¹⁶

If it was not so painful, it would perhaps be ironic to note that in their zeal to leave behind exclusionary, racially-driven ideology associated with Nazi thought, the commission often failed to consider Jewish identity (understood by them as a prejudicial form of racialized identity) a vital consideration for the placement of Dutch Jewish orphans. Indeed, in their attempt to altogether avoid using practices of racial categorization they associated with Nazism, members of the commission unwittingly applied an inverted form of antisemitic logic. Thus, surviving relatives of the Dutch Jewish orphans (and, at times, even the surviving parents themselves upon their return to the Netherlands) endeavoring to assume guardianship of Jewish children again faced discrimination as they attempted to argue for the importance of bringing up the war orphans in Jewish households instead of leaving children with gentile foster parents who had taken them in during the Nazi Occupation.

This history provides the backdrop to Hans Keilson's postwar work on sequential traumatization in children. Likewise, it indicates the limited autonomy available to orphans' surviving family members in cases concerning the struggle for guardianship by illustrating aspects of curtailed agency and the psycho-social vulnerability of Jewish orphans and surviving adult members of the shrunken Jewish community in the Netherlands. Although surviving Jewish orphans had experienced explicit antisemitic persecution and the threat of death during the Nazi occupation, lingering antisemitic prejudice continued to cast its shadow over the resolution of the children's postwar destinies.¹⁷

history: Bob Moore, *Victims and Survivors: The Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands 1940–1945* (London: Arnold, 1997).

15 See: Fishman, "The War Orphan Controversy."

16 Fishman, "The Jewish War Orphans," 32.

17 See, for example: Christine Kausch and Katja Happe, "Untertauchzeit: Von prekären Leben in den Niederlanden unter deutscher Besatzung," and Cordula Lissner, "Erzählte Lebensgeschichte und die Frage, wer zuhört: Die Kindertransporte 1938/39," in *Folgen sequenzieller Traumatisierung: Zeitgeschichtliche und Psychotherapeutische Reflexionen zum Werk von Hans Keilson*, ed. Barbara Stambolis and Ulrich Lamparter (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2021), 59–79 and 117–36, respectively.

Survival and Many Unhappy Returns

Our access to the testimonies of child survivors is, of course, mediated by multiple factors, not least the temporal distance from childhood events when narrated by adult survivors or the developmental stage of the child when events occurred, as even under normal circumstances, memory remains inconsistent until five or six years of age.¹⁸ Debórah Dwork's trailblazing work *Children with a Star* points to a divide when she defines children as a "subculture" of society at war, with perspectives that may differ vastly from those of adults.¹⁹ Further, in attempting to gain access to what historian Joana Michlic paradoxically terms the childhood "world of the unarticulate,"²⁰ speakers and listeners navigate the co-mingling of memory and current adult perspectives that may be informed by representations of events in extant scholarship and popular culture, creating what might be called a memory feedback loop. It is important to add to this the ways in which "subcultural" histories of child survivors cannot be disentangled from the rapid growth in post-Second World War societies of the field of child experts—ranging from pedagogues to therapeutic practitioners and those working for governmental social welfare agencies—as is clear in the case of the postwar Netherlands too.²¹

18 Wolf, "Child Withholding," 305.

19 Debórah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

20 Joana Beata Michlic, "What Does a Child Remember? Recollections of the War and the Early Postwar Period among Child Survivors from Poland," in *Jewish Families in Europe: 1939–Present* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 153–54.

21 Recent publications mining this vein of inquiry offer detailed socio-historical and psychoanalytical accounts of the intertwining of practices of psychoanalysis with discourses on mothering, democracy, and pathology in the British postwar context, demonstrating multiple ways in which histories of children during genocidal events and their aftermath are framed by socio-political interests. See: Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Viewing the same psycho-historical terrain but through a different lens, see: Shaul Bar-Haim, *The Maternalists: Psychoanalysts, Motherhood, and the British Welfare State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). These studies include explorations of the theories and normative implications of work by leading child psychoanalysts such as Anna Freud and John Bowlby, who participated in the assessment of child (and mother) mental health in postwar England. Importantly, as historian Rebecca Clifford stresses and which can be borne out in the examples examined in my essay, practitioners' approaches to wartime experiences of children cannot but be informed by their own desires, anxieties, and beliefs. Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors: Children's Lives After the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 17, 43, and 157.

Keilson's work contributes to this larger body of postwar research by child psychologists, psychiatrists, humanist pedagogues, social workers, and other professionals concerned with child welfare and the long-term social consequences of the disruptions, displacements, and unbridled violence unleashed by National Socialist tyranny and the ensuing war.²² Completing for a second time his studies in medicine, this time in the Netherlands, Keilson also commenced psychoanalytical training in 1949 and became a training analyst in 1970. His pioneering study, based on his research on sequential traumatization, was the capstone that earned Keilson his doctorate in psychiatry.²³ Keilson explains how the study emerged from his own personal experience after working with troubled children in hiding during the German occupation of the Netherlands, and particularly his postwar experience as a consultant with Le Esrath Hajeled.

Titled *Sequential Traumatization in Children: A Clinical and Statistical Follow-Up on the Fate of the Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands*,²⁴ Keilson's German-language monograph on trauma can be considered a *Zeitdokument* (literally a "time document," or document of its time) in at least two senses of the word: first, as a document recording and reflective of the role of the concept of "trauma" at a particular moment, a point to which I will return in my consideration of the broader reception of Keilson's concept; and second, as a palimpsest of closely woven narratives composed of layers of experience that, quite literally, tell the disjointed and extended story of the children's trauma, as becomes particularly clear below in my analysis of one of the valuable histories contained in the descriptive-qualitative studies of Keilson's individual analysands' cases.

Beginning in 1967 with his work as a research associate in the Amsterdam University Hospital of Child Psychiatry, Keilson studied the consequences of what he calls the "sequential traumatization" of his subjects, namely, Jewish war orphans who had survived Nazi persecution in the Netherlands. Almost a decade later, in 1978, he completed his study with

22 See also the collection of essays on the rehabilitation of child survivors in: Sharon Kangisser Cohen and Dalia Ofer, eds., *Starting Anew: The Rehabilitation of Child Survivors of the Holocaust in the Early Postwar Years* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, the International Institute for Holocaust Research, the Diana and Eli Zborowski Center for the study of the aftermath of the Holocaust, 2019).

23 In 1992, an English translation of the study was published by Magnes Press in Jerusalem: Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization in Children* (see footnote 5).

24 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization in Children*. The original German-language version of Keilson's book was published by Psychosozial-Verlag (Gießen) in 1979, with a second edition published by Psychosozial-Verlag in 2005.

the support of research psychologist and psychoanalyst Hermann R. Sarphatie.²⁵

One significant dimension of Keilson's research is its ambitious temporal scope. His study centered on the long-term consequences and aftermath of Nazi state-sponsored policies and practices of racial extermination for surviving Jewish child orphans from the Netherlands, concluding with adult interviews with former child survivors that Keilson conducted in Israel and the Netherlands more than twenty years after the original events. Among other factors, Keilson's remarkable longevity allowed him to publish his longitudinal study on trauma in German in 1979, at the age of seventy, eleven years after he began his research. He attributes the study's long gestation period to his dependence on his sometimes ungainly or unruly sources, including material gathered for unrelated or bureaucratic purposes by the OPK Commission or Le Esrath Hajeled, as well as the personal and political sensitivity of his research, which addressed lived memory and painful recent history.²⁶

In addition, Keilson refers to the neglect of the aspect of psychiatric history he sets out to explore in his study as a further mitigating factor.²⁷ He specifies that his aim was

to present clearly and authentically [. . .] the particular biographical abundance of the material under investigation, with its extensive social and historical ramifications, and thus to render it accessible to critical appraisal.²⁸

With its descriptive-clinical and quantitative-statistical analysis of orphaned Jewish Dutch child survivors, Keilson's study captured and critically appraised layers of history, politics, psychology, and social complexes constitutive of his own personal history as a member of the European Jewish community and a citizen of his adopted country, the Netherlands. In this sense, his study brought into focus his own biography, while providing a critical assessment of "the fate of the Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands" from a psychological (psychiatric/psychoanalytical) perspective, as per the subtitle of his book.

25 For a detailed account of the process of researching and writing the study, see Hans Keilson, "'Sie werden von niemandem erwartet.' Eine Untersuchung über verwaiste jüdische Kinder und deren sequentielle Traumatisierung," *Exilforschung* 3 (1985): 374–95.

26 Keilson, "Sie werden von niemandem erwartet," 375–76.

27 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, "Preface to the original introduction," XIII–IV.

28 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, XIII.

The clinical-descriptive segment of Keilson's book follows the conventions of psychoanalytic case studies, while the statistical-quantitative analysis adheres to psychiatric statistical metrics. Framed through his hypothesis of the lasting effects of the children's cumulative traumatization—namely, their persecution at the hands of the Nazi regime and subsequent triggering effects for trauma in their postwar environment—Keilson defined sequential traumatization as a confrontation with “life-threatening danger and a succession of extremely stressful events.” By definition, trauma is untimely or out of joint, and Keilson offered a nuanced understanding of trauma's temporality as discontinuous yet recursive, also significantly underscoring the intensity of the cumulative nature of a sequence of events that he called the “traumatic situation,” which resulted in “chronic, extreme psychological stress.”²⁹ Further, in its complex and multivalent understanding of the temporalities peculiar to persecution, his study insisted on the centrality of the political and social contexts in which historical events and their psychological after-effects unfolded in the Netherlands both during and—just as importantly—after the Second World War.³⁰ Files from the OPK Commission and Le Esrath Hajeled contributed to Keilson's study by offering recorded biographical details, guardianship decisions, and partial information about the trajectories of the postwar lives of 1,854 Jewish Dutch orphans who had been in hiding or had survived Nazi concentration camps.

Keilson's *Sequential Traumatization* was the first longitudinal study on trauma that took the developmental stage of the child at the time of traumatization into consideration. His study went beyond an examination of the more visible signs of neglect and organic illness such as starvation, inflicted disabilities, residual cerebral impairment, disease, or infection, all of which were especially prevalent in children returning from concentration camps.³¹ The age of separation from the mother was the first organizing principle in his study, very much in keeping with the importance given to the role of mothering at the time (as compared to more gender-neutral concepts of parenting today).³² According to what he called the “genetic aspects of character development in psychoanalytic theory,” he shifted focus from Freudian libido theory to a theory of basic

29 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, 48–50.

30 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, 48–49. Keilson gently broaches this volatile history in his study (32–35). See Fishman, “The War Orphans Controversy in the Netherlands,” 421–32.

31 Keilson, “Sie werden von niemandem erwartet,” 378.

32 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, 85–86.

needs, dividing the age of the children when separated from their mothers into six discrete categories (by comparison, attachment theorist John Bowlby had a quadripartite categorization): I—birth to eighteen months; II—eighteen months to four years; III—four to six years; IV—six to ten years; V—ten to thirteen years; VI—thirteen to eighteen years.³³

Further parameters for Keilson's study included positing three discrete phases of traumatic experience (although there are arguably other phases and the subtle overlap of each of them).³⁴ The first traumatic sequence was defined by the onset of persecution, confinement, enforced isolation, and the destruction of the Jewish family unit, beginning with the invasion and occupation of the Netherlands by German troops. The second traumatic sequence began either with a child's deportation to a concentration camp or being forced into hiding. This phase often included an acute sense of being at the mercy of a hostile environment (characterized variously by hunger, illness, and privation), utter dependency on others, and, it goes without saying, the necessary erasure of Jewish identity when living with foster families. The third and final traumatic sequence occurred with the transition from the status of wartime illegality and statelessness to that of restored legal citizenship in the postwar world. Factoring in the developmental stage of the child when parted from their mother (the norm assumed that the role of caregiving was taken on by mothers), the final traumatic sequence was often characterized by an intensification of ongoing psychological precarity, not least due to the contested and thorny question of guardianship of the orphans.³⁵

33 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, 42–43. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the specific details pertaining to each of these age categories, which Keilson based on then-current standards for the different functions and stages of maturation, and which included factors such as: the level of dependency of the child on the mother at different stages of life, the development of cerebral functions including cognitive skills and language, an increased attunement to the outside world, emotional maturation, the capacity for remembering, the attainment of critical thinking, and later sexual maturation.

34 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, 52–75.

35 See: Hans Keilson, "In der Fremde zuhause," *Werke in Zwei Bänden. Gedichte und Essays*, ed. Heinrich Detering and Gerhard Kurz (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Verlag, 2005), 218–20. According to Wolf, Dutch journalist Elma Verhey's book *Om het joodse kind* (Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1991), with its documentation of cases of inappropriate state intervention into processes of Jewish family reunification in the Netherlands, helped to bring this lesser-known postwar history into public discourse: "Verhey's book suddenly transformed a personal, psychological wound into a social and collective experience, forty-five years after the fact." Wolf, *Beyond Anne Frank*, 19–20. For more on this controversy framed as part of the

It is also important to emphasize, as Keilson highlighted in detail in some of his individual case studies, that many of the children were forced to move with high frequency from one hiding place or family to the next during their time in hiding. In practice, this may have meant a series of many other “sequences” with the potential for exposure to hostile elements that are then subsumed under one identified in Keilson’s study. Although we can only hazard estimations, in known cases, the number of different families that a single child stayed with fluctuated between five to fifty different locations, especially if conflict arose within a household or if the child or family in question was put in danger because of their sheltering the Jewish child.³⁶ In fact, Keilson noted that it was difficult to ascertain how often children had to move from one hiding place to the next because keeping records of this nature during the German occupation would have been dangerous.

Importantly, Keilson found that the final stage of the three traumatic sequences—that which occurred once the war was over—was often the most difficult, for this was when child survivors both recognized the end of a life-threatening period of persecution and, at the same time, were confronted unambiguously with the immense and irrevocable losses suffered by their original family. Put another way, child survivors then became subject to the temporality of mourning and had to reckon with the vicissitudes of grief. And it is this vein, I think, that we can also understand Keilson’s declaration in a later interview: “Mourning is actually the substrate of my sense of life.”³⁷

history of the postwar rise of antisemitism in the Netherlands and documented through archival research and eyewitness accounts, see Dienne Hondius, *Return: Holocaust Survivors and Dutch Anti-Semitism*, trans. David Colmer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

36 Keilson, “Sie werden von niemandem erwartet,” 376–77.

37 “Die Trauer ist eigentlich die Grundlage meines Lebensgefühls.” This is the original German sentence from Keilson, *Da steht mein Haus*, 103.

*"My War Began after the War": Jewish Orphan Survivors in the Netherlands*³⁸

Keilson offers a vivid simile for obstacles to the "talking cure" of analysis, writing:

The many unknown factors which surrounded the files like a massive wall of silence were an inherent part of the persecution situation experienced by the children in hiding. It was, after all, this silence to which they owed their lives.³⁹

This image of an inimitable, defensive enclosure of silence—an obstacle generating a wide gap in the archive of incomplete or cryptic case files latent with meaning—gestures toward paradoxes at the heart of working with child survivors through the method of Freud's so-called "talking cure." This dialectic between language and silence is constitutive of the precarious negotiations of the tension between self-exposure and self-protection that had been practiced by the children as an instilled or unconscious survival tactic during their years of living under conditions of persecution, when hiding became the norm. Defense mechanisms such as silence or the obfuscation of identity that had been key to the child's survival clashed with the postwar desiderata of therapists and other child service workers. As Keilson phrases it: "It was, after all, this silence to which they owed their lives." Ironically and painfully, precisely because of their having lived under perverse circumstances, this protective silence may have represented one of the few ways in which child survivors, wittingly or otherwise, expressed a form of agency: that of sheer survival,

38 This phrase is taken from interviews by Jewish survivors who were still considered to be children (i. e., in most cases, less than sixteen years old) in relation to the postwar period. It refers to the mounting difficulties faced by child survivors after the Second World War was over and they had survived years of antisemitic persecution in hiding or in concentration and death camps. Thus, the concluding chapter of the foundational work on the history of Jewish children in Nazi Europe by Holocaust historian Debórah Dwork is titled "My War Began in 1945," which is in reference to the subsequent long-lasting after-effects of persecution for child survivors after the end of the Nazi regime and the Second World War, which most often continued to color—if not at times completely disrupt—their adult lives. This phrase is telling inasmuch as it is at stark odds with accounts that read survival in a redemptive manner as a form of victory over persecution, where in many cases this is clearly not the "happy ending" for a survivor. Indeed, in some cases there may have been no end in sight.

39 Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, 18.

which would culminate—in many cases after a time lag of an indefinite period—in recurring symptoms of trauma, specifically in the form of psychosomatic complaints. Children's recourse to silence and their own particular, even strange use of language—especially among those who had lived in conditions of extreme deprivation in concentration camps or alone in hiding—were, perversely, both sign and symptom of their extremely limited agency in a reduced and repudiating world.⁴⁰

Acting as an existential prop in the immersive practice of grappling with the past, Keilson's work with child survivors provided him with traces of a broken continuity⁴¹ between his early fascination with Freudian psychoanalysis in Weimar Germany⁴² and his much later psycho-

40 For more recent contributions that likewise draw attention to psychosomatic and other symptoms that continued to reverberate among former European child survivors of the Holocaust in the early postwar years, see in particular the contribution by Irit Felsen and Danny Brom, "Adaptation to Trauma, Silence, and Social Support," in the edited collection *Starting Anew*, 315–50. Also, of particular interest here is the inclusion in the Appendix of *Starting Anew* of the 1946 report by psychologist Dr. Paul Friedman, "Report on a Survey of the Psychological Conditions of the Surviving Children in Europe," 351–88. This report was commissioned by the Health Committee of the Joint Distribution Committee and offers a survey of the psychological conditions of Jewish displaced persons in four European countries (France, Switzerland, Poland, and Germany), with a focus on children, on the basis of which it provides recommendations. For more contributions on this topic, see this journal issue of which my essay forms part. This essay developed from a paper delivered at the international conference *Childhood at War and Genocide: Children's Experiences of Conflict in the 20th Century—Agency, Survival, Memory and Representation*, which took place at the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History in Munich on October 17–19, 2022.

41 The phrase "traces of broken continuity" is formulated to stand in contradistinction to Keilson's reference in German to calendrical time as one of "eine einzige, ungebrochene Kontinuität." Keilson, *Da steht mein Haus*, 9.

42 Keilson often retold the tale of how as a young man he bought Sigmund Freud's *Vorlesungen* with prize money he won in an essay contest to which he submitted an essay on Hermann Hesse's *Demian*. The slender leather volume by Freud somehow survived the discontinuities of exile. For example: Keilson, "All das Schöne, nicht den Abgrund. Aus einem Gespräch mit der niederländischen Zeitung *De Pers* (2010, gekürzt)," in Keilson, *Kein Plädoyer für eine Luftschaukel*, 151. See also: "Es war dieselbe Zeit, in der ich mit meinem Beitrag zu einem Schülerwettbewerb des Börsenvereins des deutschen Buchhandels, über Hermann Hesses *Demian*, den dritten Preis errang. Von dem so gewonnenen Betrag von dreißig Mark kaufte ich mich drei Bücher: ein Novellenbuch von Stephan Zweig, dann von Karl Plättner, einem Kumpan von Max Hoelz, den Band *Eros im Zuchtbaus* (um meine Neugierde zu befriedigen) und schließlich die in Leder gebundenen, im Taschenbuchformat und Dünndruck erschienenen Vorlesungen von Sigmund Freud, eines der Bücher, die mein Exil überdauert und mein Leben bestimmt haben." Keilson, *Da steht mein Haus*, 66.

analytical practice in the Netherlands.⁴³ Although he was in his mid-thirties at the end of the war, Keilson shared key experiences with the younger children and adolescents with whom he worked. As a German Jew, he, too, had experienced antisemitic persecution, survived for the most part in hiding, and he had lost both his parents and his home(land). Writing of the Jewish children's home where he had worked after the Second World War, he recalled:

I saw the children who had lost everything as they emerged from their hiding places and returned from the camps, their parents, siblings, relatives—often sixty to seventy people—lost. I saw the destruction in us and in them during the day, when they were at play, and I heard them in their beds in the evenings crying, crying unrestrainedly. No one needed to feel ashamed, each child knew why another was crying, and we too, the adults in the home, knew it. We were all bound together by the same fate.⁴⁴

Empathetically, through the prism of his own loss, Keilson recognized a common fate that bound him to the suffering of Dutch Jewish child survivors. At the same time, his work also demonstrated the understanding that his and their "fate" diverged significantly in cultural, experiential, and especially in developmental terms. It would take some time for therapists to acknowledge the role of countertransference in child therapy which, in Keilson's view, was unavoidable.⁴⁵ He unambiguously addressed the central role of transference (and the vital awareness of one's own

43 Keilson, "In der Fremde zuhause," 220.

44 German in the original: "Ich sah die Kinder, die alles verloren hatten, als sie aus den Verstecken (sic) und aus den Lagern zurückkamen, verloren ihre Eltern, Geschwister, Angehörige, oft bis zu sechzig, siebzig Personen. Ich sah die Zerstörung in uns und in ihnen, tagsüber, wenn sie spielten, und ich hörte sie abends in ihren Betten weinen, ohne Zurückhaltung weinen. Niemand brauchte sich zu schämen, ein jedes Kind wußte, warum ein anderes weinte, und auch wir, Erwachsene im Heim, wußten es. Das Los verband uns alle." Keilson, "In der Fremde zuhause," 218.

45 Countertransference refers to the unconscious feelings of the analyst vis-à-vis their analysand/patient, especially as pertains to the analysand's own transference of feelings from another relationship onto the relationship with the analyst. It is important to stress here that although Freud coined the term, its full implications were explored by analysts after Freud, particularly those working within the field of object relations therapy, which includes many psychiatrists working with children, such as Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and arguably also Keilson himself. See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 92–93.

countertransference) in the therapeutic setting in a paper presented in 1986, at the first meeting of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) held in Germany since the end of the Second World War:

As an analyst, whoever cannot endure functioning in the role of the SS officer who had murdered the parents of the patient must change their profession. [...] Years ago, when I was starting out in my therapeutic work, I myself was unable to bear it in the case of a twelve-year old boy, and only experienced under a caring psychoanalytical supervision [...] just how wounded I still was.⁴⁶

Keilson underscores the centrality of a neutral space and an accommodating attitude in the therapeutic session in which the child is free to communicate their extreme experiences. At the same time, the therapist must be able to tolerate situations that transfer the impact of the child's destructive and toxic experiences into the holding environment of the therapeutic session in the hope that selfhood or a sense of identity will be restored to the child.

When he began counseling child survivors after the Second World War, Keilson faced a steep learning curve. It took many years for him to attain a perspective from which to intuit the important affective dimensions in the sometimes-dense silences in therapeutic sessions with Jewish child survivors. He learned to listen attentively for the valences of silence so as to decipher their affectively fraught impact on language under the Nazi dictatorship. Initial failed therapeutic sessions with child survivors who manifested symptoms of trauma far more extreme than analysts had yet encountered in psychological treatment in any context helped Keilson recognize the wall of silence surrounding these children as an indication of the radical alterity that had defined their everyday experiences in camps or hiding.⁴⁷

46 Original in German: "Wer es als Analytiker nicht aushält, in der Übertragung als SS-Mann zu fungieren, der die Eltern des Patienten ermordet hat, muss seinen Beruf wechseln. [...] Ich selbst hatte es vor Jahren, zu Beginn meiner therapeutischen Arbeit, mit einem zwölfjährigen Jungen nicht ausgehalten und erlebte erst in einer liebevollen psychoanalytischen Supervision, [...] wie verwundet ich noch immer war.« Hans Keilson, "Ein Anfang, kein Versöhnungsfest: Rückblick auf einen Kongress," *Kein Plädoyer für eine Luftschaukel*, 59. This essay was written at the request of the editors of the journal *Psyche* and appeared under the title: "Der Hamburgerkongress war ein Anfang, kein Versöhnungsfest," *Psyche* 10 (October 1986): 887–81.

47 Keilson states: "In der kinderpsychiatrischen Praxis hat man Bilder in diesem Ausmaß und in dieser Intensität bisher noch nicht erlebt. Das Neuartige dieser Bilder

Consider his first consultation with a child survivor of a concentration camp. "Esra," the pseudonym used in Keilson's case study of a twelve-year-old boy, was the sole survivor of his large Orthodox Jewish family. What Keilson later judged as his own initial unhelpful—even failed—postwar sessions with Esra, whom he compared to "a sleepwalker coming from another world," later became key to Keilson's understanding of experiences of sequential traumatization.⁴⁸ In his book, he made clear the ways in which extreme traumatic experience, particularly in earlier developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, destroys socio-linguistic norms and instills states of alterity in survivors.⁴⁹ Several decades later, when Keilson returned to the original case file he had compiled from his sessions with Esra between November 1 and 13, 1945, Keilson's observations focused on how Esra's experiences had disrupted the indexical or referential function of language itself. That is, language conventions taken for granted as the foundation for a semantic community before the events of the Second World War had been radically reconfigured through the quotidian conventions of the camps, distorted by the hostile environment under the imperative of survival in the face of persecution and extermination. In his case study, Keilson specifically demonstrates how the conventional understanding of the word "bed" as a designation for the furniture on which one sleeps held different connotations depending on the particular lived context of the utterance. For Esra, who survived internment in Bergen-Belsen, "bed" instead meant something beneath which to hide while sleeping.⁵⁰ In other words, Keilson could not presume that Esra and the Dutch society he re-entered after the war shared even the most basic lexicon, let alone words that conveyed the same affective, symbolic, or semantic charge.

In 1984, Keilson returned once more to Esra's case in a German-language essay written for a psychoanalytic readership entitled "Where Language Falts" / "Where Language Falls Short."⁵¹ The failure of language expressed in the essay's title signals neither a reified realm of

war, dass sie das menschliche Vorstellungsvermögen übertrafen." Keilson, "Die fragmentierte Psychotherapie eines aus Bergen-Belsen zurückgekehrten Jungen," *Kein Plädoyer für eine Luftschaukel*, 83.

48 In the German original: "ein Schlafwanderer, der aus einer anderen Welt kommt." Hans Keilson, "Die fragmentierte Therapie," 80.

49 This case study forms the basis for Keilson's essay, "Wohin die Sprache nicht reicht," first published in *Psyche* (1984). Keilson, "Wohin die Sprache nicht reicht," in *Kein Plädoyer für eine Luftschaukel*, 145.

50 Keilson, "Wohin die Sprache nicht reicht," 37–38.

51 In German: "Wohin die Sprache nicht reicht."

“unspeakability” or that which defies representation—a secular theological “beyond” of language—nor, alternatively, a realm in excess of understanding through symbolization, as is characteristic of the “Real” of Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁵² Rather, it points to how massive traumatic experiences fundamentally impacted the referential function of language for many child survivors, alienating them from their former sociolinguistic communities on the most fundamental level.

Thus, the process of mapping experience through language to create shared meaning first needed to be reestablished, and this took many years, including long periods with no contact between Keilson and Esra. It was only in a session with Keilson long after 1945 that Esra was able to articulate his disturbing experiences in Bergen-Belsen, including having woken up next to his mother’s corpse in the camp barracks one morning. Today we are much more familiar with the so-called “concentrationary universe” of the camps, with this quality of otherworldliness ascribed to what passed for “everyday life” in the extraordinary world of the camps, but in the decades immediately after the war’s end, this aspect of survivors’ behavior and the context in which it took place was not widely understood, and the extreme experiences testified to by camp inmates were initially often met with confusion or disbelief.⁵³

Like other postwar professional care workers specializing in psychiatry or psychoanalysis, Keilson’s commitment to his work was complexly intertwined with his personal experience, particularly his ongoing dedication to commemorating the irreparable loss of his own murdered parents. In fact, the dedication to *Sequential Traumatization* reads as follows: “en lieu of the Kaddish.” The Kaddish is a ritual Jewish prayer of mourning, understood here as a commemoration of his parents by way of the labor through which he sought to understand the aftereffects of the destruction that had claimed their lives: it was only after the war

52 Keilson, “Die fragmentierte Psychotherapie,” 94.

53 Two well-known examples are David Rousset’s term “the concentrationary universe” (“l’univers concentrationnaire”), which is also the title of his account of the Neuen-gamme and Buchenwald concentration camps: David Rousset, *L’univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: Éditions du Pavois, 1946). Yehiel De-Nur was known internationally for his Stalag novels, which he wrote under the penname Ka-Tsetnik, but in particular because of his dramatic testimony at the Eichmann trial (Jerusalem, 1961), during which he collapsed (Session No. 68). He opened his testimony as follows: “this is the history of planet Auschwitz. [...] the time there is not a concept as it is here, on our planet.” Citations are transcribed from the original English subtitles accompanying the Hebrew testimony from a live recording of the trial. Session No. 68, 69, accessed March 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3-tXyYhd5U>.

when Keilson learned that six months after his parents' initial internment in the Dutch transit camp Westerbork in April 1943 they had been deported to Birkenau, where they were murdered on arrival. In this sense, too, like the children with whom he worked, Keilson's understanding of his past losses also occupied a zone of belatedness and uncertainty.⁵⁴

In his final autobiographical account published just before his death in 2011, Keilson introduces the metaphor of the calendar, with its reassuring cyclical rhythms and predictability, over and against which we might grasp the untimely temporality particular to persecution:

Whoever has lived and survived on the run in the middle of Europe as a Jew and a persecuted person is offered, in retrospect, only one single, unbroken continuity as the background of his existence: that of the calendar with its monotonous, recurring numbers of weeks and months, weekdays, Sundays, and holidays, printed in red ink and valid all over the world.⁵⁵

Working with trauma means encountering a concept of temporality that does not run according to calendrical time or the twenty-four-hour schedule by which we calculate our days. Psychoanalytical work on trauma explicitly thematizes the temporal registers of belatedness and retroactivity and asks in which ways past suffering interrupts the surviving subject's present. Psychoanalysis itself is a practice of maintaining affective proximity to a difficult past, a form of engaging with lived dimensions of intimate histories of German persecution. In his desire to comprehend the suffering of Jewish Dutch orphans, Keilson also gained an intimate understanding of the history of destruction experienced by the Jewish community of the Netherlands, his chosen home.

54 This is emphasized in the brief preface to his German publication, where Keilson writes: "Despite the purely clinical design of the study, my double training as a physician and teacher in Germany and my sphere of work there until 1936, as well as my years of experience as adviser to the Jewish war orphans organization in the Netherlands after the end of the Second World War, meant that the concept of a follow-up study of children took on a personal significance which went beyond the thematic unity of psychiatric, social-psychological and pedagogical problems." Keilson, *Sequential Traumatization*, XIII.

55 German original: "Wer als Jude und Verfolgter auf der Flucht mitten in Europa gelebt und überlebt hat, dem bietet sich im Rückblick, als Hintergrund seines Daseins nur eine einzige, ungebrochene Kontinuität an: die des Kalenders mit seinen eintönig wiederkehrenden Zahlen der Wochen und Monate, Wochen- und Sonn- und Festtagen, mit roter Farbe gedruckt und gültig in aller Welt." Keilson, *Da steht mein Haus*, 9.

Conclusion: Outspoken and Unspoken Destinies of Trauma

A remarkably versatile German-language writer, Keilson's work, including his poems, fiction, and essays, gave form to myriad experiences, exhibiting a spectrum of emotions and performing a memorial function of sorts. His ambivalent relationship to his mother tongue, German, is demonstrated by his choice to write his major scientific work on trauma in German even though almost all of his therapy sessions and interviews with child survivors were conducted in Dutch. Referring to this, Keilson states: "in addition to the psychological results, [I wanted to] describe the historical facts that had led to their being orphaned in the language of the perpetrators, which also was and still remains mine."⁵⁶ In other words, we can be grateful for Keilson's work, which represents an ongoing struggle to articulate through the German language the ways in which his own personal losses were compounded. Indeed, glimpses of experiences offered through his extraordinary acts of linguistic and disciplinary boundary-crossing in his poetry, novels, and descriptive-analytical renderings of his case study subjects make legible the complex human costs of violence and its constitutive ambivalence that continue to resonate with us today.⁵⁷

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Freudian-based psychoanalytic concept of "trauma" has changed, with its accent falling variously on an individual or collective's psycho-organic state of being, which acts as an indicator of the disruptive violence of extreme socio-historical events. In an essay charting the development of the term "trauma" in psychiatric discourse, Keilson traced the historical arc from Charcot's and

56 Keilson writes: "[ich wollte] außer den psychologischen Ergebnissen die historischen Tatsachen, die zu der Verwaisung geführt hatten, in der Sprache der Täter beschreiben, die auch meine war und immer noch ist. In dieser gebrochenen Formulierung liegt auch mein Verhältnis zur deutschen Sprache, ein vielleicht gebrochenes Verhältnis, das gewiß nicht nur als ein Verlust betrachtet werden muß." Keilson, "Wohin die Sprache nicht reicht," 246.

57 For an analysis of this kind of illuminating boundary-crossing between psychoanalysis and literature and the insights into structures of ambivalence this affords us, see my essay: "'Death of the Adversary': Enduring Ambivalence in Hans Keilson's Postwar Psychoanalytic Literature," in *Die vergangene Zeit bleibt die erlittene Zeit. Untersuchungen zum Werk von Hans Keilson*, ed. Simone Schröder, Ulrike Weymann, and Andreas Martin Widmann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), 91–103. On the topic of Hans Keilson's use of silence in different forms of writing, see: Jens Birkmeyer, "Die vielen Stimmen im Schweigen. Diagnosen der Ungesagten in Hans Keilsons Essays," and Simone Schröder, "Die verschachtelte Wahrheit: Erzählstrukturen in Hans Keilsons psychoanalytischer Essayistik," in *Die vergangene Zeit bleibt die erlittene Zeit*, 189–202 and 203–20, respectively.

Freud's early work in psychoanalysis on traumatic neuroses to the term's later emphasis on socio-historical factors (what Keilson refers to as "man-made disasters")⁵⁸—from "shell shock" exhibited by soldiers returning from trench warfare during the First World War, to survivors of genocidal warfare.⁵⁹ Addressing the lingering history of suspicion of faking one's symptoms ("malingering") that has accompanied the term trauma from its inception, he discussed how this topic gained urgency in the postwar period, when forensic-psychological claims were being filed by (predominantly Jewish) survivors.⁶⁰ Although the postwar West German reparations law for survivors of the Holocaust finally was passed in 1956 after lengthy negotiations between the West German government, Jewish organizations, and the Western Allies, the legal recognition of the diagnosis of trauma as a legitimate medical basis for reparation claims was only gradually accepted.⁶¹ Still operating in the long shadow of antisemitism,

58 Hans Keilson, "Die Entwicklung des Traumakonzeppts in der Psychiatrie: Psychiatrie und manmade disaster," *Mittelweg 36: Zeitschrift des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung* 6, no. 2 (April/May 1997): 73–82, here 75–76. See: Werner Bohleber, "Hans Keilson und die Entwicklung der Traumatheorie in der Psychoanalyse," in *Folgen*, 43–58. Bohleber clearly identifies the historical discourses on trauma from Jean-Martin Charcot's work in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century France onward that Keilson draws on and in which he participates.

59 For a selection of historical essays on the cultural reassignment of female-associated symptoms of hysteria to account for male trauma after World War One, see: Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, eds., *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

60 For a brief summary of the history of struggle in the negotiation of a legitimate definition of trauma, particularly in psychiatry, that takes both the debates in the postwar West German context of reparations and the discussion of the US-American Vietnam veterans into account, see: Herzog, *Cold War Freud*, 92–103.

61 Herzog, "Post-Holocaust Antisemitism and the Ascent of PTSD," in *Cold War Freud*, 89–122. Herzog's chapter captures the history of the battle on the part of sympathetic psychiatric medical experts for recognition from German institutions responsible for war reparations of the ways in which traumatic experiences could cause victims permanent, incapacitating damage. In the postwar period, the significance and legitimacy of "trauma" as a psychiatric diagnosis with impact on reparations cases was far from uncontested in legal, scientific, and medical terms, a matter that had, at times, devastating ramifications for those victims seeking reparations for injuries and losses suffered due to Nazi racial policies and their genocidal consequences (what is referred to today as the "Holocaust"). On this history, see particularly: Robert Krell and Marc I. Sherman, *Medical and Psychological Effects of Concentration Camps on Holocaust Survivors* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997); Christian Pross, *Paying for the Past: The Struggle over Reparations for Surviving Victims of the Nazi Terror* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), and Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), among others.

German courts originally contested the findings of research on trauma by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in Norway, the Netherlands, France, and Poland.⁶² Keilson's research on the long-term damage inflicted on children through the traumatic experience of manmade disasters contributed to the evolving scientific literature that argued for the long-term effects of trauma for adults and children alike in a range of pedagogical and humanitarian contexts.⁶³ His articulation of trauma as a psychological process (rather than a singular event) with deep causal links to external social factors was ahead of its time.

Trauma's most recent manifestation takes the form of the psychiatric diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a term officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 in the field's standardized reference work *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III*.⁶⁴ The diagnosis of PTSD increased in part as a response to antiwar activists seeking a way to explain disturbed or uncharacteristic behavior such as blocked affect and intrusive memories of violence as experienced by many US veterans initially after the war in Vietnam, and then later in the context of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶⁵ That PTSD emerged as a diagnosable condition specifically from the fraught

62 For the timeline of changes in legal and broader societal attitudes toward survivors and the need for reparations from the late-1950s onward, see: Herzog, *Cold War Freud*, 103–13. Munich-based psychiatrist Kurt Kolle, Mainz-based psychiatrist Ernst Kluge, New York-based William G. Niederland, and émigré psychoanalyst Kurt Eissler (who later became the Director of the Freud Archives) were among those who contributed significantly to shifting the climate of opinion in medicine, thereby giving ballast to the legitimacy of “trauma” as a diagnostic category for psychiatric assessment in adjudicating reparations cases for victims of the Holocaust. Herzog also argues for the discursive influence of the “Americanization” of the debate on the Holocaust under the influence of William Niederland and Henry Krystal, among others, in the US-American context from the late 1960s onward. Here, 109–10.

63 Keilson was, of course, not alone in his attempts to understand the effects of wartime trauma on children. For example, Anna Freud, living in England after having fled Austria, founded the Hampstead War Nurseries for foster children with single parents in 1940. See: Anna Freud and Sophie Dann, “Experiment in Group Up-bringing,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 6 (1951): 127–68. For details about the Hampstead War Nurseries, see: Clifford, *Survivors*, 154–64; and Shapira, *War Inside*, 66–86.

64 The American Psychiatric Association, “DSM History,” accessed on October 15, 2023, https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/about-dsm/history-of-the-dsm#section_0.

65 The most recent version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), in which PTSD remains a diagnostic category, was published in 2013.

social context of returning Vietnam veterans who had been affected negatively by their participation in the war in Southeast Asia and required reintegration into society illustrates the socio-historical and cultural specificity of the diagnosis.

In addition to Keilson's nuanced temporal concept of sequential traumatization as processual rather than originating in a single incidence of unexpected violence, his emphasis on understanding trauma's embeddedness in a specific socio-cultural environment is pertinent for understanding trauma in a transnational framework. For example, the "Americanization" of trauma under the apparently universal rubric of the term "PTSD" erases the cultural specificity of acts of violence (and, relatedly, important political and historical context).⁶⁶ Far from representing a universal measure for trauma, the diagnosis of PTSD is the product of a particular political and historical-sociological moment and not a medical or scientific diagnosis divorced from its cultural context of specific wars abroad in which the United States was and is an active participant.⁶⁷ When this cultural specificity goes unacknowledged, it blunts the use of trauma as a diagnostic tool in other geo-political and cultural settings because, perhaps contrary to appearances, violence's cultural ubiquity cannot be measured in universal terms but only in relation to its distinct socio-historical setting. This becomes particularly urgent today as we continue to contend with the afterlife of excessive and everyday acts of violence that characterized European colonial rule and the history of slavery in the US-American context.⁶⁸

In the wake of its publication, Keilson's study on sequential traumatization was not frequently referenced outside of European psychoanalytic circles nor was it readily visible or easily locatable on the map of contemporary mainstream or even specialized psychological discourses on trauma.⁶⁹

66 For an account of the "Americanization" of trauma in psychiatry, see: Herzog, *Cold War Freud*.

67 For a convincing critique of the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, the collusion of science, medicine and politics in its diagnostic history, and the US-militarism it supports: Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Combat Trauma: Imaginaries of War and Citizenship in Post-9/11 America* (London: Verso, 2022).

68 For a critique of psychiatric scientific "objectivity" in the context of the history of US-American slavery, see: Deidre Cooper Owens, "Examining Antebellum Medicine Through Haptic Studies," in *Medicine and Healing in the Age of Slavery*, ed. Sean Morey Smith and Christopher D. E. Willoughby (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021). Many thanks to Wesley Hogan for sharing this reference with me.

69 For a recent reception history and assessment of the ongoing value of Keilson's work on trauma in the present, see Barbara Stambolis, "Öffentliche und wissen-

David Becker, a German psychoanalyst and long-time resident of Chile (1982–1999), has been instrumental in drawing attention to the ongoing relevance of Keilson's work.⁷⁰ A nuanced and perceptive reader of Keilson's research, Becker argues for the importance of his emphasis on traumatic sequences' unpredictable temporality, as well as the significance of understanding the social context giving rise to traumatic experiences as the precondition for undertaking any kind of therapeutic intervention.⁷¹

Underscoring the historical significance of the concept of "trauma" in an increasingly transnational context, Becker's elaboration of the significance and relevance of "sequential traumatization" has pushed Keilson's work beyond its original European framework to address transnational contexts in productive ways. While Keilson's particular socio-political context is that of the surviving Jewish minority in the Netherlands after the Second World War, Becker rightly points out that Keilson's model is capacious enough to help us understand histories of extreme violence or genocide in quite different contexts ranging from Chile to Bosnia,

schaftliche Wahrnehmung von Hans Keilsons Arbeit mit traumatisierten jüdischen Kriegswaisen," in *Folgen*, 23–41. See also: Bohleber in *Folgen*, 43–58. For his work's reception history: *Geschichte als Trauma. Festschrift für Hans Keilson zu seinem 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Dierk Juelich (Frankfurt a. M.: Nexus Verlag, 1991); "*Gedenk und vergiß—Im Abschaum der Geschichte*". *Trauma und Erinnern. Hans Keilson zu Ehren*, ed. Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber and Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarsik (Tübingen: edition diskord, 2001). References to Keilson's work on trauma can be found in more recent publications on sequential traumatization in transnational contexts. See: Dieter Nelles, Armin Nolzen, and Heinz Sunker, "Sequential Traumatization: The Living Conditions of Children of those Politically Persecuted under the Nazi Regime," *Taboo* (Fall–Winter 2005): 59–70; and David Becker and Margarita Díaz, "The Social Process and the Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Chile," in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 435–45. See also: Herzog, *Cold War Freud*, 114–22; and Kausch and Happe, "Untertauchzeit."

70 David Becker, "Zwischen Trauma und Traumadiskurs. Nachdenken über psychosoziale Arbeit im Gazastreifen," *Werkblatt* 27, no. 65 (2010): 50–86; see also: D. Becker, *Die Erfindung des Traumas. Verflochtene Geschichten* (Freiburg: Edition Freitag, 2006).

71 Here (and elsewhere), he engages with the work on trauma by psychiatrist and anthropologist Richard Rechtman and anthropologist and sociologist Didier Fassin. For a sophisticated sociological-philosophical genealogy of the term "trauma" in the context of psychiatric/psychological epistemologies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as an analysis of the changing moral attitudes toward suffering and the attendant moral politics, see: Fassin and Rechtman, *Empire of Trauma: The Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Rwanda, and Gaza.⁷² Becker's critique of a universalizing humanitarian "one-size-fits-all" use of trauma as a diagnostic tool regardless of the historical and cultural context in which the sequence of events takes place finds resonance in psychiatrist Derek Summerfield's view that the diagnosis of "trauma" in many humanitarian settings can be patronizing, culturally reductive, and misguided, not to mention inadequate to the task of socio-economic repair, which should, in reality, act as the precondition for therapeutic treatment.⁷³ After extensive work in the Gaza region, Summerfield argued forcefully for decolonial practices when treating mental illness in humanitarian situations, including a de-universalizing approach to the diagnosis and treatment of suffering that takes into account the context in which the traumatic events took place, and one that is invested in long-term, local solutions rather than short-term, imported interventions.⁷⁴

Significantly, Summerfield's contentions and Becker's own work in non-European settings are buttressed by two central aspects of Keilson's project on "sequential traumatization": his focus on the socio-cultural specificity of the event, and the importance of the longer historical *durée* beyond (and before) the period of enacted violence. In other words, Keilson argues for the contextualized situatedness of therapeutic intervention and an understanding of trauma not only as a punctual event but quite possibly as a multi-leveled and differentiated set of sequences of individual and broader societal suffering. Trauma in Keilson's work is understood in both collective and cultural (as opposed to solely individual and organic) terms. In other words, it matters greatly who produces knowledge, in what context, and to what end, and which other perspectives are elided, obscured, or erased in the process, as has been shown in critiques of the production of colonial and racialized medical epistemes.⁷⁵ The

72 See: Becker, "Zwischen Trauma und Traumadiskurs"; and Becker and Diaz, "The Social Process."

73 Derek Summerfield offers this rather scathing critique in damning terms (ostensibly to provoke discussion) in "The Invention of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and the Social Usefulness of a Psychiatric Category," *BMJ* 322 (January 13, 2001): 95–98; Summerfield, "A Critique of Seven Assumptions Behind Psychological Trauma Programmes in War-Affected Areas," *Social Science and Medicine* 48 (1999): 1449–62.

74 See also: Kate Andersen and Mohammad Salaymeh, "Traumatic Construction and Traumatic Events," *Keppel Health Review* (Autumn 2021), <https://www.keppelhealthreview.com/autumn2021/decolonisingtrauma-part1>.

75 Recent scholarship historicizes the colonial and neo-colonial production of medical knowledge and critiques claims of epistemic neutrality and scientific objectivity. For an analysis of the imbrication of fascism and psychiatry in postwar France and

distressing truth is that Keilson's approach to trauma as a chronicling of violent events affecting children and adults alike remains a project that is far from complete. In Keilson's work, the careful attention paid to the imbrication of historical experience and individual biographies makes it possible to cautiously imagine the future, better understand the past, and inhabit the present, for better or for worse.

its colonies, see: Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021); for a global contextualization of psychoanalytic concepts in the postwar, Cold War era, see: Herzog, *Cold War Freud*; for a critique of the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, the collusion of science, medicine, and politics in its diagnostic history, and the US-militarism it supports: Abu-El-Haj, *Combat Trauma*.