

## **For an *inner Jewish history*: Viennese and Salonikan Jews interviewed by David Boder in 1946\***

*Stefania Zezza\*\**

**Abstract.** David P. Boder, an American Latvian-born psychologist, came to Europe in 1946 to interview Holocaust survivors in order to study how the impact of the catastrophe had affected them and to let American people grasp the dramatic situation of displaced persons in Europe. Among the interviewees there were Jews from Thessaloniki and Vienna, whose interviews were recorded with a wire recorder, later transcribed and translated into English. They represent an effective means for a deeper understanding of both the survivors' situation after the liberation and the way they dealt with their own past and future, in particular in relation with the cities they were from. They provide that Judeo-centric approach Philip Friedman, the father of Jewish historiography on the Holocaust, aimed at in order to get the full picture of the events. There were many differences between Thessaloniki's and Vienna's Jewish communities but, at the same time, in their history there were similarities. Thessaloniki's Sephardi community shaped the city's features for four centuries, since until the end of the Twenties the Jews constituted the majority of the population. The community in Vienna was mainly Ashkenazi and constituted a minority which nonetheless deeply influenced the cultural and economic life of the city. Both in Thessaloniki and in Vienna the Jewish population included people of different nationalities, which influenced their fate during the Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. In Thessaloniki people owning a Spanish, Italian and Portuguese citizenship were initially excluded from the anti-Jewish policy, but eventually, in 1943/4 many of them were deported. In Vienna, where the persecution began much earlier, as a consequence of the Anschluss, and the Nazis aimed at getting rid of the Jewish population, emigration became a matter of life or death: to hold a citizenship of Poland or Austria, or Hungary, for instance, made a difference in getting a visa or papers to emigrate. In both cities members of the same family might have had different citizenships, therefore they endured also the tragedy of separation which was particularly hard in Vienna, more rare in Thessaloniki, where the speed of the ghettoization and deportation didn't allow emigration. My research is focused in particular on 6 interviews: three given by Salonikan Jews, three by Viennese. My purpose is to analyze how the Nazi persecution, carried out according to a global general plan, affected people coming from different backgrounds, which were the analogies and the differences between their experiences, how they dealt with the persecution and what was their relation with their hometown after the liberation. Boder's interviews allows also to understand the different kinds of trauma the survivors endured utilizing the Traumatic Index Boder elaborated. Despite the chronological shifts, both groups underwent isolation and persecution, uprooting, deprivation, separation, deception, uncertainty and ignorance about their present and future. These interviews are among the earliest testimonies on the Holocaust and were recorded in that time, between the liberation and the beginning of a new life, when the survivors were living in uncertainty and grief, between a painful past and an unknown future: no one of them wanted to go back to their cities, their world had vanished.

**Keywords:** Holocaust, interviews, Jewish history, Salonika, Shoah. testimonies, trauma, Vienna.

**Riassunto.** David P. Boder, uno psicologo americano nato in Lettonia, giunse in Europa nel 1946 per intervistare i sopravvissuti alla Shoah e per studiare come l'impatto della catastrofe li avesse colpiti. Intendeva, inoltre, far comprendere al popolo americano la drammatica situazione dei profughi in Europa. Tra gli intervistati c'erano ebrei di Salonico e Vienna, le cui interviste sono state registrate con un registratore, successivamente trascritte e tradotte in inglese. Esse costituiscono un mezzo efficace per una comprensione più profonda sia della situazione dei sopravvissuti dopo la liberazione sia del modo in cui hanno affrontato il proprio passato e futuro, in particolare in relazione alle città da cui provenivano. Inoltre, forniscono quell'approccio "ebraico centrato" a cui Philip Friedman, il padre della storiografia ebraica sulla Shoah, mirava per avere un quadro completo degli eventi. Esistevano molte differenze tra le comunità ebraiche di Salonico e di Vienna ma, allo stesso tempo, nella loro storia c'erano delle somiglianze. La comunità di Vienna era principalmente ashkenazita e costituiva una minoranza che tuttavia influenzò profondamente la vita culturale ed

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\*\* Ph.D. candidate, University Tor Vergata, Rome; Address: Via Domenico Silveri 3, 00165 Roma, Italy, e-mail <stefania.zezza@gmail.com>.

economica della città. Sia a Salonicco che a Vienna la popolazione ebraica comprendeva persone di diverse nazionalità, fattore che ne determinò il destino durante la persecuzione nazista. A Salonicco le persone in possesso di cittadinanza spagnola, italiana e portoghese furono inizialmente escluse dalla politica antiebraica, ma alla fine, nel 1943/44, molte di loro furono deportate. A Vienna dopo l'*Anschluss*, I nazisti miravano a sbarazzarsi della popolazione ebraica, l'emigrazione divenne una questione di vita o di morte: possedere una cittadinanza polacca o austriaca, o ungherese, per esempio, fece la differenza per ottenere un visto o documenti per emigrare. In entrambe le città i membri della stessa famiglia potevano avere cittadinanze diverse, quindi subirono anche il dramma della separazione che fu particolarmente duro a Vienna, più raro a Salonicco, dove la velocità della ghettizzazione e della deportazione non permise l'emigrazione. La ricerca si concentra in particolare su 6 interviste: tre rilasciate da ebrei di Salonicco, tre da viennesi. Il mio scopo è analizzare come la persecuzione nazista, condotta secondo un piano generale globale, abbia colpito persone provenienti da ambienti diversi, quali siano state le analogie e le differenze nelle loro esperienze, come hanno affrontato la persecuzione e qual è stato il loro rapporto con la loro città natale dopo la liberazione. Come abbiamo subito l'isolamento e la persecuzione, lo sradicamento, la privazione, la separazione, l'inganno, l'incertezza e l'ignoranza riguardo al proprio presente e futuro. Queste interviste sono tra le prime testimonianze sulla Shoah e sono state registrate in quel tempo, tra la liberazione e l'inizio di una nuova vita, quando i sopravvissuti vivevano nell'incertezza e nel dolore, tra un passato doloroso e un futuro ignoto: nessuno volle tornare nelle proprie città, il loro mondo era svanito.

**Parole chiave:** Interviste, Olocausto, Salonicco, Shoah storia ebraica, testimoni, trauma, Vienna.

## Introduction

David P. Boder, an American Latvian-born psychologist, came to Europe in 1946 to interview Holocaust survivors in Displaced persons' camps and shelter houses in order to study how the impact of the catastrophe had affected them and to let American public opinion grasp the dramatic situation of displaced persons in Europe. He aimed at identifying the traumatic experiences of the survivors by examining what they told, through their linguistic choices of words and expressions. Among the survivors he interviewed, there were Jews from Salonika and Vienna, whose interviews were recorded with a wire recorder, later transcribed and translated into English.

These interviews were collected at an early stage, when the survivors were living in a state of uncertainty, between the liberation and an uncertain future. They represent an effective means for a deeper understanding of both the survivors' situation after the liberation and the way they dealt with their own past and future. They also allow to compare the survivors' experiences in relation with the cities they were from and their background.

The purpose of this work is to demonstrate how individual testimonies of Holocaust survivors can be interpreted as a historical source, analysing not only what they remembered, but also the reasons they focused on some events and not others, and how they recollected and told their experiences. Personal testimonies fully represent the complexity of the Holocaust, an event which was globally planned but whose features and outcomes depended on place, time, people involved. Philip Friedman, a survivor himself, called "the father of the Jewish Holocaust literature", already in 1949 (Friedman, 1980) pointed out that it was necessary to collect, record and interpret the Jewish sources in order to understand the true reality of the Holocaust. According to him the German sources

must be balanced and complemented by Jewish records and statements - interviews with Jewish survivors, reports by Jewish groups and individuals, and biographical materials. Moreover the above-mentioned German sources cover only the political background, the organizational and administrative frame, of Jewish life under occupation. The inner Jewish history, the sufferings and the spiritual life, are rarely or falsely reflected in the German sources, and must be studied in Jewish sources. (Friedman, 1980, p. 503)

Thus, micro-history becomes a key for understanding the bigger and complex events of the Holocaust and their impact on individuals.

Friedman understood that the Jewish sources needed to be collected and interpreted according to new methods which could overcome the issues linked to subjectivity and, at the same time, highlight their importance for a full picture of the events of the Holocaust:

I must admit that the collection of contemporary Jewish materials is not satisfactory; either in quality and in quantity. In order to get more and better material, we must train interviewers in this type of work, which is to utilize sociological (questionnaires, interviews and so forth) rather than historical methods... (Friedman, 1980, p. 505)

This is what David Boder did, working on the interviews he had collected until his death. The analysis of six interviews with Salonikan Jews and three with survivors from Vienna has been carried out studying how and why the interviewees recollected key events or relevant experiences, and identifying the traumatic events which affected them with the support of Boder's Traumatic Inventory (Boder, 1954).<sup>1</sup> Some experiences and traumas were common to both groups, others were specific and depended on their context, their language and socio-cultural background.

## Vienna and Salonika

There were many differences between Salonika's and Vienna's Jewish Communities but, in their history, there were similarities as well. Both hosted the majority of the Jewish population of Greece and Austria and their features were deeply influenced by the Jewish presence.<sup>2</sup>

In these multicultural cities, the Jewish population included people of different nationalities,<sup>3</sup> a fact which affected their fate during the Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. In Salonika people owning a Spanish, Italian and Portuguese citizenship were initially excluded from the anti-Jewish policy, which actually started in summer 1942 against the Greek nationals.<sup>4</sup> Many of them were eventually deported first from Salonika in 1943, then from Athens in 1944: the Spanish and the Portuguese nationals were sent to Bergen Belsen, the Italians to Auschwitz Birkenau. Also in Vienna the Jews held different citizenships as a consequence of the immigration waves from Poland and Russia, and because of the effects of the geopolitical changes in national borders after World War I. Austrian citizenship was granted only to those who were residents within the new Austrian borders from 1914, the others acquired the citizenship of the countries where they were born, which were once part of the Austro Hungarian Empire. This resulted in serious consequences for the fate of Jews and Jewish families after the Anschluss.

Among the six interviewees from Salonika four with Spanish or Portuguese citizenship escaped to Athens and were deported from there in April 1944, two were Greek nationals and were deported

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<sup>1</sup> The quotes from this article are written in italics.

<sup>2</sup> Salonika's Sephardi community shaped the city's features for four centuries because, until the end of the Twenties, the Jews constituted the majority of the population. The community in Vienna was mainly Ashkenazi and was a minority which, nonetheless, influenced the cultural and economic life of the city.

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish Community of Salonika, which dated back to the II century b. C. and was originally composed of Romaniotes, Greek-speaking Jews, was the result of consecutive migration flows also of Ashkenazi Jews from Germany, Hungary, Poland and of Italian Jews. Actually, the most significant among these flows was the arrival of about 20,000 Sephardim from Spain and Portugal in the XV and XVI centuries, as a consequence of their expulsion during the *Reconquista*. They had brought with them their Spanish habits and the Ladino language (*Judeo Espanol*) which they spoke as their first language, up until the 1920's at least. In 1913 Salonika was annexed to the Greek kingdom: the new rulers carried out immediately a Hellenization process that significantly affected the Salonikan Jews' conditions and way of life: the youngest generations learnt Greek while their parents kept on speaking Ladino or spoke Greek with a recognizable accent, which prevented them to hide among the Greek speaking population. Several Jews held or could claim for foreign citizenship or status as Spanish, Portuguese and Italian protégés as a consequence of previous agreements, some dating back to the XVII century, or laws passed in Spain and Portugal.

<sup>4</sup> Before July 11, 1942, the *Black Sabbath*, the anti-Jewish policy was not implemented officially, several episodes of harassment and discrimination occurred though. See also Bowman S. Editor, (2002).

with the first transport to Auschwitz Birkenau on March, 15, 1943. Regarding Vienna, among the three interviewees Nelly Bondy was born in Vienna but lived in France, Friedrich Schlaefrig, was born and lived in Austria, and Malka Johles, Polish, resided in Vienna.

In Vienna, the persecution began immediately after the *Anschluss* in 1938: the Nazis aimed at getting rid of the Jewish population for whom emigration became a matter of life or death. To hold a citizenship of a specific country made a difference in getting a visa to emigrate or to be included in other countries' immigration quota. In both cities, members of the same family might have held different citizenships, therefore they endured also the tragedy of a permanent separation.

From 1938 to 1941 the emigration rate was extremely high, approximately 136,000 Jews out of 200,000 were forced to leave Austria: especially younger people and men moved to other countries, they often had to leave part of their family behind. Other 50,000, 33% of the total pre-*Anschluss* population, were deported between 1941 and 1945. At the end of the war 5,512 Jews, mostly *Mischlinge* or protected by mixed marriages, were in Vienna. Only 2,142 of those who had been deported went back to the city.<sup>5</sup>

In Salonika, where the speed of the ghettoization and deportation did not allow a mass emigration, the separation of families was a consequence of the German invasion in 1941 and of the implementation of the persecution. It was mainly due to escapes to Athens in 1943 and to the deportation itself.<sup>6</sup> Only a few Jews managed to hide or went to the mountains.

Despite the differences in the phases and procedures of the implementation, the outcome of Nazi's anti-Jewish policy was the same in both cities: two ancient Jewish communities, with distinct and peculiar features, were almost totally annihilated. The survivors interviewed by David Boder were among the few remnants of a vanished world, where they couldn't and didn't want to go back.

Boder's interviews show, from an internal perspective, the key events and the kind of trauma the survivors endured, how they were affected by the Nazi policies and perceived their harsh situation. Despite the chronological shifts, both groups underwent isolation and persecution, uprooting, deprivation, separation, deception, uncertainty and ignorance about their present and future.

The global implementation of the anti Jewish policy followed generally the same pattern all over Nazi occupied Europe: identification, isolation, expropriation, ghettoization, deportation and extermination. Nonetheless, the ways in which the Nazis implemented their policy depended on time and on the local social and historical conditions. By analysing the interviews, key relevant events can be identified which had a significant or minor impact upon the interviewees according to their origin. The traumatic experiences<sup>7</sup> resulting from them were basically the same and should be seen in relation to what Boder (1954, p. 35) calls *deculturation* an antonym of Dollard's concept of *acculturation*. (Dollard, 1935).

The term "deculturation" must be understood as referring to two different concepts: ( a ) the deculturated or deculturating environment (the verbs are used both in their transitive and passive connotations) and ( b ) deculturated personality. A deculturated environment such as a concentration camp, slums, lock-ups of police stations, bombed-out cities or any makeshift installation in substitution of standard conditions and attributes of existence is bound to evoke manifestations of subcultural behaviour in its victims. On the other hand deculturation of personality manifests itself not in the physical submission but in the intellectual and affective acceptance of the materially and ethically deculturated mode of existence.

At the same time, it is possible to analyse the specific traumatic and deculturating events of each group.

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<sup>5</sup> For the numbers and percentages see: Offenberger, I.F. (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Out of 56,000 Salonikan Jews, who lived in the city before 1943, approximately 45,000 were deported; after the war about 1,950 Jews resided in the city. About the numbers of prewar Jewish population and the number of deportees and survivors see also Antoniou, G., Moses, A.D. (Edited by) (2014); Bowman, S. (2009); Mazower, M. (1993); Michael Molho & Joseph Nehama (1949).

<sup>7</sup> About the traumas which affected survivors and their definition see Boder (1954).

VIENNA	THESSALONIKI
ANSCHLUSS (MARCH 13, 1938)	INVASION (APRIL 1941)
KRISTALLNACHT (NOVEMBER 9, 1938)	BACK SATURDAY (JULY 1942)
ANTI-JEWISH MEASURES (1938-45)	ANTI-JEWISH MEASURES (1943)
EMIGRATION (1938-41)	GHETTOIZATION (1943)
DEPORTATION (1939-1945)	DEPORTATION (in 1943 from Thessaloniki and in 1944 from Athens)

### Isolation and persecution

The first relevant events which affected and changed Mrs. Johles' and Mr. Schlaefrig's lives were the *Anschluss* and the *Kristallnacht*, turning points for all Viennese Jews. They understood that the civil and social rules they were accustomed to had been then definitively overturned. The *pogrom* which followed the annexation led to the closure of Mrs. Johles' business, a delikatessen shop she ran with her husband, a Polish citizen. On March 14, 1938, when the *Anschluss pogrom* was being carried out, «They closed our shop right away. Then they opened it again. But ... nobody came in anymore. Because there was a guard standing by the door. It didn't go anymore. From this very moment on.»

The Nazis' seizure of power caused also the arrest and detention of Mr. Schlaefrig, both for his being high profile in the Jewish Community and for his political attitudes. He was an Austrian citizen, born in 1875, architect and former counsellor in the Austrian Railroad Ministry. At the time of *Anschluss*, he was president for the second time of *B'nai B'rith* Lodge, which had supported the plebiscite planned by Chancellor Schuschnigg to preserve the independency of Austria.

When Schuschnigg was planning in Austria a plebiscite on the question of the Anschluss, ... this plebiscite was supported also with the resources of the *B'nai B'rith* and other Jewish resources... I personally participated in these things and I did not know that, on the evening of Hitler's invasion, my name ... together with other names, as one of the, let's say, prominent Jews, was given as one who supported the government of Schuschnigg... I was already politically delivered.

Mrs. Johles and her husband understood the impending danger and made the decision to emigrate. They went from one consulate to the other in order to get the papers, unfortunately with no result.

I had interested (*sic*) the whole time to go away of course, so I stood in line from one consulate to the next, then I got an (unintelligible) in May... Then we waited, and waited and on ...October 27 my husband was taken away to Bonj...to Bonjui. A notice of amnesty arrived and he will, err, come back.

Mrs. Johles 's husband was in fact caught in the *Polen Aktion* and sent to Zbaszyn,<sup>8</sup> on the Polish border, on October 27. One week later he managed to go back to Vienna.

After the Kristallnacht the Nazis entered their house: «On November 10, they invaded our... maybe twenty Gestapo men, they took everything, all jewellery, all silverware, everything they took away from me. My husband was arrested on the way».

In the wave of arrests following March, 11, Mr. Schlaefrig and a large number of members of *B'Nai B'rith* were kept in prison for three weeks. He was suspected of connection with communist party, Moscow, and, paradoxically, with the Elders of Zion. He was beaten and interrogated every night:

There was no lack of personal, of physical mistreatments... we were beaten with those...with rubber truncheons... These weeks were full of night interrogations, we were regularly called for with that closed box-carriage. We were taken to the main police station for night interrogations and in the morning we were returned home...to jail. [...] The questions are to a large extent pointless, because, because a large...a large part of the questions were limited to personal viewpoints.

The Nazis could not produce any kind of formal accusation but, after he was released, there were searches in his apartment every night. He was arrested three times until he was deported from Vienna in September 1942, in the meanwhile he couldn't keep his apartment, had to sell all of his properties to people certificated from the party, getting a fourth part of their value, and moved five times.

Mr. Schlaefrig focused in particular on the effects of the *Anschluss*, did not talk about the *Kristallnacht*. This is quite understandable: the major shocking and traumatic turning point for many Viennese Jews was the annexation and the following *pogrom*. The *Kristallnacht* brought about consequences they had already experienced: arrests, pillaging, the indifference of the police and of their neighbours.

In this phase both the interviewees experienced what Boder, in his Traumatic Inventory, listed under the denomination *socio-economical and geographical traumas: brutal and abrupt removal of a person from most environmental stimuli which have formed the conditioning framework of his everyday life; introduction of new stimuli especially in the form of human beings unpredictable in behaviour and not restricted in their behaviour by law, tradition or threat of complaint, lack of recourse to law; lack of information as to rules which were to govern the individual's present or future conduct and mode of living*. About this Mr. Friedrich said «This was a frightful time because one never knew when one would be arrested». The *cultural affective* area was affected as well, especially for the *depersonalisation* they were subjected to.<sup>9</sup>

About the trauma deriving from *direct body violence*, Mr. Schlaefrig remembered he was kept in an overcrowded cell (*constriction of physical space necessary for actual body movements, as a consequence of crowding*), interrogated at night (*active interference with sleep and rest*) and beaten (*punishment administered by "authority"*).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David Boder misunderstood the spelling of the name and transcribed it as it sounded.

<sup>9</sup> «States of constraint such as ( a ) arrest, (b) imprisonment, and depersonalization for an ignominious treatment of the individual with the utmost disregard for his rights, standards, and values» (Boder, 1958, p.42) He told Boder they were «thrown into those closed box-carriages, like cattle».

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

## Uprooting

The Jews in Vienna were helpless, this condition of persecution, uncertainty and deprivation compelled them to find a way to emigrate.<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Johles and her family managed to flee illegally to Belgium in December 1938 leaving behind all their belongings. In Aachen they were checked, searched and robbed by the Gestapo, that eventually let them leave. It was the beginning of an odyssey which led them from Brussels to Southern France and caused the temporary separation of the family.<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Schlaefrig dealt with similar issues: his son had been living in South Africa from 1936, his daughter emigrated to England. He tried to emigrate with his wife, but bureaucratic problems about papers, quotas and visas prevented them from leaving. His experience is quite paradigmatic of what happened to Jews in Vienna at that time: they were ready for emigration to South Africa, then Australia and Cuba but could not obtain a permit. Despite the help from American Lodges it took too long to get the affidavit from the USA. In addition, in 1941, new policies for immigration were issued which made the Jews' situation even harder.

This urge or need to escape to a safer place or to emigrate was an experience almost all the interviewees<sup>13</sup> faced sooner or later.

Nelly Bondy was born in Vienna but moved to Paris where she married Harry Bondy, a Czech citizen, in 1936. They ran a jewellery store. After the German invasion, she fled with her children to Southern France to join her husband, who was serving in a Czech regiment. About one year after they went back to Paris, she risked being arrested, on July, 16/17, 1942, during *la Rafle du Velodrome d'Hiver*.<sup>14</sup> «One morning – it was half past four in the morning – they came up to fetch me. Well, I didn't open my door; and I left Paris the very night with the children...».

The *Rafle* was a decisive event for Jews living in France. At that time she was alone with her children, her husband had been already arrested.<sup>15</sup> She escaped to the free zone in the south, where she managed to stay in hiding, concealing her identity until she went back to Paris and was arrested at the Gare de Lyon. She was taken to Drancy, while her children were being hidden in the south.

Mrs. Bondy too experienced the separation from her family, the persecution and the uprooting, at a different time and in a different place. She suffered from traumas pertaining to *socio-economical/geographical* and *cultural-affective* areas.

Also the interviewees with Spanish or Portuguese citizenship from Salonika, initially exempted from the anti-Jewish measures, endured the same fate. The important events which forced them to escape to Athens<sup>16</sup> were the German invasion in April 1941 for Nino Barzilai and Manis Mizrachi

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<sup>11</sup> The emigration of the Jews was the original purpose of the Nazis, Eichmann was sent to Vienna to organise it. He profited from the situation and forced the IKG to collaborate with him. Between May 1938 and December 1939, exactly 117,409 Jews fled from Vienna. «As people scattered around the globe, their culture and society vanished with them, never to be resurrected. And irreparable family divisions began to occur with the move to mass exodus in 1938.» (Offenberger, 2017, p.158); «... approximately 15,000 Jews who emigrated between March 1938 and October 1941 were caught in another Nazi-occupied territory and would not survive the Holocaust» (ibidem, p.174).

<sup>12</sup> They lived in villages close to Toulouse. Her husband went to the internment camp in Saint Cyprien on May 17, she stayed at the village supported by the villagers. She managed to get her husband out from Saint Cyprien on July 18 because he was a Polish citizen. They stayed in the village until September. Then they went to a family camp, Brens in Tarn, and stayed there until February 1941. They moved to Lyon on February 6 because they knew 'they would have been sent away'.

<sup>13</sup> The Salonikan Jews deported to Auschwitz in spring 1943 did not have the opportunity to escape.

<sup>14</sup> She was among the few foreign Jews living in Paris who were not taken on that July 16, 1942 and later deported..

<sup>15</sup> Arrested by the French police in May 1941, he was interned for thirteen months in the Loiret, in the Beaune-la-Rolande camp. He was deported with convoy no. 5, which left directly from Beaune-la-Rolande on June 28, 1942 directed to Auschwitz, there he was assassinated on September 7, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Athens was under Italian rule until September 8, 1943. The Italians did not applied the same anti-Jewish measures as the Germans did in their zone, so the Spanish Salonikan Jews thought that they would have been even safer there in the future.

and the implementation of the deportations for Eda Button and Jacob Button.<sup>17</sup> The later they got to the Greek capital, the harder and more complex their trip and settlement were.<sup>18</sup>

Mr. Barzilai was born in Salonika in 1892, he was a Portuguese citizen. He lived in Spain for 20 years, then moved back to Greece when the Spanish civil war broke out. The outbreak of the Greek Italian war prevented him and his family from going back to Spain. Portuguese citizenship had been granted by Portugal in 1913 to the Jews who could demonstrate their Portuguese origin and it was renewed every other year. When the Germans occupied Salonika, he settled in Athens and kept running his business. In his interview he did not talk much of his transfer to Athens: «Later, the Italian war started... Italy and Greece, and then, after some time, the Germans came and occupied Greece. We left Salonika, and moved to Athens where we settled».

Also Mr. Mizrachi and his parents moved there at about the same time. Manis Mizrachi was born in Salonika in 1922, his father Oscar held Spanish citizenship, was an importer of clothing and paper, his mother was a Turkish national. Since Oscar was a freemason «we were afraid for the Germans, them not to take him away from us. That for we made it up to go to Athens, the capital of Greece...» The Spanish consul granted them they would have not been taken, so they did not hide. The Barzilaïs and the Mizrachis stayed in Athens until spring 1944, when they were arrested and deported.

The trip to Athens was much more traumatic for Jacob Button and Eda Button.<sup>19</sup>

Jacob was eventually summoned by the Germans together with other Spanish subjects, so he made the decision to leave and go to Athens «that was under the Italian rule and there were no measures against the Jews».

I was of Spaniard citizenship, and because of this we were the last Jews of Saloniki to be driven away... The Jews were summoned by the German Police to make an announcement. ... I attended the assembly and was able to hide, and later find a way to go to Athens.

Most probably he refers to July 29, 1943, when «Jewish holders of Spanish citizenship ... were summoned to Beth Shaul synagogue by Wisliceny, the S.D. officer for an urgent announcement. Most of them showed up. They were notified that they were allowed to leave for Spain on their own and that they could take along whatever they owned... In reality the Spanish Jews had fallen into a trap... they were loaded forcibly onto trucks and taken over to Baron Hirsch camp...»<sup>20</sup>

He tried to leave with his family by boat but was cheated and robbed by the captain, so he had to get back to Salonika. He was helped by Greek friends to stay in hiding for some days then tried again to leave by train. He was recognised as a Jew and was arrested, his family got to Athens.

He experienced betrayal, hiding, the separation from his family, and arrest. After being kept in prison for three months, finally he was released for the efforts of the Spanish Embassy. When he arrived in Athens, the Germans had already begun to register the Jews: they were ordered to report weekly at the synagogue.

By divorcing on paper her Greek husband, Eda Button got back her Spanish citizenship, which she had lost because of her marriage. After he fled to the mountains, she left her daughter in a convent and reached her relatives in Athens. Like Mrs. Bondy and Mrs. Johles, she endured a long and labyrinthine trip. Like Mr. Schlaefrig, she had to move several times when in Athens, especially after September 8, 1943, when the Germans took over. «And the Germans were in Athens and the head of the Gestapo was in Athens again and he did the same things that were done in Thessaloniki, they began to do that in Athens again.» she told Boder.

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<sup>17</sup> They were not related, despite having the same surname.

<sup>18</sup> This can be noticed from the syntactic order of the sentences in particular in the interviews of Mrs. Button and Jacob Button.

<sup>19</sup> They were not relatives.

<sup>20</sup> Bowman, S., 2002, p. 161. They were deported with members of the Jewish Council to Bergen Belsen on August 2, 1943.



All these interviewees underwent uprooting, separation from their families and uncertainty. According to Boder's Traumatic Inventory, at this stage their traumatic experiences were both *cultural-affective*,<sup>21</sup> and *socio- economical and geographical*.<sup>22</sup>

## Ghettoization

Before divorcing, Eda Button was considered a Greek Jew because of her marriage, as such she was initially subjected to the anti-Jewish policy implemented by the Germans in Salonika from February 1943.

They ordered that we leave our houses, leave all our furniture and that we have to go in a ghetto. They marked several streets, with stars ... and we couldn't go out of these streets. We also have to wear the stars... my husband had to leave his office ... we lived on what we had... we had to stay at home all the time... in one room with other four people, men and women together. [...] Our things, the things that we had salvaged, we sold that for the Greeks, for eh, for little.

That was the third key event for Salonikan Jews, as we can see from Eda Button's testimony the experiences which affected Jews with Greek citizenship at that time were the registration, the introduction of the yellow star, the expropriation and the ghettoization.<sup>23</sup>

The second relevant event for the Salonikan Jews, after the German occupation had been the Black Saturday, on July 11, 1942. That day was a turning point for many Salonikan Jews and their families.<sup>24</sup> The Germans gathered all Jewish men between 17 and 45 years in Plateia Elephteria in order to register them as forced labourers. During a hot summer day, 9000 men were kept under the sun, mistreated, forced to do gymnastics being severely threatened and beaten by the Nazis. The forced labourers' living and working conditions were so hard that the Jewish community payed a ransom, comprising the money got from the sale of area of the ancient Jewish cemetery, to the Germans in order to free them in autumn 1942.

Mr. Sochami was one of the forced labourers and was sent to work outside Salonika. When he went back, he was sent to the ghetto.

We were taken to a labor camp. Those of us between 17 and 45 years of age ... just men. Our names were written down, and we were given some signs. And we had to work. After working there, we were taken to... er ...some railways to guard them. After then we were taken to a ghetto. We were locked in the ghetto and we remained there for eight days.

Eda Button likewise remembers February 1943 as a time of uprooting, deprivation, impoverishment, overcrowding and fear for the deportation. Jews had to wear the star of David, leave their house and their belonging, and go to a ghetto.

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<sup>21</sup> Ignorance of relatives' fate, a state of (b) flight, (c) hiding and (d) illegal existence (false papers or assumed status as aryan, etc.) or travel, perfidy and betrayal. (Boder, 1958, p.44)

<sup>22</sup> Flight in the path of war and the break-up of the family group. (Ibidem. p.43)

<sup>23</sup> Eichmann sent Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner to Salonika in order to carry out the deportation of the Salonikan Jews, which began on February 6th 1943. Alois Brunner had been the head of the Jewish department in Vienna where he organized the deportations from 1939 to October 1941. They worked together with Max Merten, the head of the city's military administration, who signed the orders. From that day on the Nuremberg Laws were imposed on the city. The Jews were obliged to register themselves and their properties, which were confiscated or looted, to wear the Yellow star, and move to the ghettos established in the city obeying a curfew. On February 25th all the Salonikan Jews, except those exempted because they had Spanish or Italian citizenship, were concentrated in specific areas of the city,

The main area was the Baron Hirsch neighborhood, in the proximity of the rail station: it was supposed to house 2000 people but 8000/ 10,000 Jews were gathered there at the time of the deportation. As soon as a train was loaded with 2800 average deportees, other Jews were forced into the ghetto/transit camp from the other concentration areas: Regie Vardar, Kalamaria and n.151. The Baron Hirsch ghetto was sealed off and fenced in early March, the deportations began on March 15, 1943.

<sup>24</sup> Families were supported usually by men, once they were gone they suffered a serious impoverishment and were helped by the Jewish Community.

They ordered that we leave our houses, leave all our furniture and that we have to go in a ghetto. They marked several streets, with stars... and we couldn't go out of these streets... We also have to wear the stars.... My husband had to leave his office... we lived on what we had ... we had to stay at home all the time... in one room with other four people, men and women together».

In France Mrs. Bondy had been interned for three months in Drancy, the transit camp, where she suffered the same traumas.

Well, I was arrested and was sent to Drancy, that famous camp near Paris. I stayed there three months. There was nothing to do. I was taking care of the room. I was sweeping the floor and the... There was quite a big dormitory. There were ... there must have been, ...well, eighty or so.

Also Mr. Mizrachi, Mr. Barzilai and Jacob Button with their families were kept in Haidari, a transit camp in Athens, before their deportation.

Analogous events affected Mr. Schlaefrig in Vienna, before his deportation to Theresienstadt on September 8, 1942. Even though a ghetto was never established in the city, the living conditions of the Jews in 1942 were ghetto-like.

Jews remaining in Vienna through the great deportations in April 1942 lived under ghetto-like conditions. Although barbed wire did not physically confine them, and they lived in districts throughout the entire city, they did not move freely, nor were they able to evade German orders.».<sup>25</sup>

They were concentrated in collective buildings in specific districts of the city, had to wear the Star of David which marked also their houses.

In this phase of the prelude of ghettoization and its implementation under different forms, the traumatic experiences of the interviewees were *socio-economic and geographical*, that is *Compulsory transfer of domicile, transfer to significantly substandard housing or improvised inadequate shelters, confiscation of personal property and money, exclusion from the original social group, being forced into the position of out-group*, and *cultural-affective: states of constraint, state of anxiety and fear, a status of threatening danger such as being assigned for deportation*.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Viennese Jews and Jewish Greek men rounded up on July 11, like Mr. Sochami, and Mr. Barzilai in Haidari, there was also *requiring forced or "slave" labor*, often used as a means to humiliate an torture the prisoners. He remembers:

They sent me to a concentration camp in Haidari, Athens, where I spent five and half months doing forced labor. They invented this labor for us, to make us feel tired, because we transported stones from one place to another, and the following day, we would move the same stones back to their original place. We were not working on the fortification nor doing any other tasks, we just carried stones and they made us work everyday.

## Deportations

The concentration and the ghettoization of the Jews aimed at making the deportation easier. All the interviewees were deported to a camp, or more than one, from different places: it was a decisive moment in their interviews. Their destination depended on their citizenship, background, place and time of arrest. Eventually, they all suffered from the traumatic effects of deportation and deculturation, even though on varied scales, in relation to their destination and factors like language, gender, skills, which could partially affect their fate.

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<sup>25</sup> Offenberger, 2017, p. 261.

<sup>26</sup>Boder, 1958, p. 42.

For instance, the three Salonikan Jews deported from Athens in April 1944 were sent to Bergen Belsen as exchange Jews.<sup>27</sup> Miss Benmayor and Mr. Sochami, both Greek nationals, were deported with the first transports to Auschwitz Birkenau. Also Nelly Bondy had been sent there from Drancy. Mr. Schlaefrig was deported to Theresienstadt on September 8, 1942. They were all transported by train, in overcrowded wagons,<sup>28</sup> with no privacy, toilet facilities, food or water. The longer the journey, the more traumatic this experience was.

Almost all of them had no idea of what their destination could be, they were also victims of deception by the Germans: Eda Button thought, like many people in the transport of April 2, 1944, she was going to be sent to Spain. Jacob Button and his family were sent to Haidari before the deportation and were assured that they were going to be sent to Spain:

Me, my wife and my two young children were arrested with me, we were also assembled there in the prison, near Athens, in Haidari, there, there we received a visit from the Spanish ambassador in Athens, and I was, we were told that the Germans had promised them to send us to Spain.

In Vienna and in Salonika, the Germans forced the Jewish institution, respectively the IKG and the Jewish Council, to forcibly cooperate with them for the communications and the organisation of the transports. In August 1942, Mr. Schlaefrig was informed about his impending deportation by the *Kultusgemeinde*, of which he had been a member. He asked to be exempted from waiting for the deportation in one of the *Sammellager*,<sup>29</sup> where the living conditions were terrible, and went directly to the station. In his interview he claimed that the IKG was in charge of selecting people for the transports and mentioned the director Joseph Loewenherz and Benjamin Murrelstein as privileged and protected people until winter 1942-43. The same opinion about the Jewish Council's privileged situation circulated in Salonika. «It was thought that if the Jews did it themselves, it will proceed in a more humane form... otherwise the Gestapo themselves would do that» he stated. As a matter of fact, the lists were compiled by the *Zentralstelle*, handed over to the Gestapo, then to the IKG, that was in charge of carrying out the deportation.

## The camps

Even though the interviewees were deported to different camps, they suffered a *deculturation* process and specific traumas which can be easily identified in their testimonies. Their common feeling was the uncertainty about the future, the ignorance of what was happening. «They brought us to Auschwitz. We did not know what was done», said Rita Benmayor.

Mrs. Johles, who managed to avoid the deportations from Southern France, told Boder she heard rumours: «They didn't want the people there, they wanted us to go to Kiev.<sup>30</sup> And they were supposed to die, in Kiev». About the transports to Auschwitz, which were sent weekly from Theresienstadt, Mr. Schlaefrig stated: «nobody ever knew where these transports went».<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bergen Belsen was originally established as a camp for Jews holding neutral countries' citizenship. As the interviewees declared, they were not forced to work and families could meet. During evacuations of the camps in Poland, Bergen Belsen became the destinations for thousands of prisoners.

<sup>28</sup> Mr. Schlaefrig and his wife travelled in a third-class wagon.

<sup>29</sup> The *Sammellager* was the place to which people designated for deportation were to report prior to the departure of the train transport. (Offenberger, 2017, p. 255).

<sup>30</sup> She said "Kiev" since she identified it as a destination for the transports to Eastern Europe.

<sup>31</sup> About the lack of information and the fact that in Theresienstadt people did not know or did not want to accept the idea of an ongoing extermination in the camps see also Hájková A., 2020. In particular: «Until the last weeks of the war, prisoners did not know what had happened to those who were deported and refused to acknowledge messages that informed them of the destruction. Still, a wave of panic, based on scant information, surrounding two eventually abandoned projects of the German authorities morphed into the belief that the SS were going to kill everyone in Terezín. This hysteria was a manifestation of the remaining prisoners' slow recognition of the Holocaust». (p. 237).

The transports were the beginning of a series of traumas, related to different spheres, which affected the interviewees until their liberation.<sup>32</sup> They were forced, both during the deportation and the evacuations, to *travel for days in overcrowded boxcars without facilities or room to sit down, wash, or lie down*. They had *no toilet facilities in locked cars where women, men and children were locked together*. This meant *the abolition of traditions of decency and dignity by suspending the separation between the sexes and privacy for bodily care and processes of bowel movements* which continued inside the camps. Nelly Bondy told Boder about her trip to Auschwitz: «After two days and three nights: no toilet facilities ... no nothing... we just wrapped a cover around us». Also about the transports to Bergen Belsen, Mr. Mizrachi said that they were loaded onto «train of beasts»: 64 people were kept inside a wagon where there was nothing to eat, no facilities and a small quantity of water so they could not wash themselves. « It took 14 days, but after 10 days we were like beasts.»

They found themselves in an overthrown world, and, to describe it, metaphors and a new language were needed. About the first selection, Mrs. Bondy used the expression “we were chosen out”, when Boder told her that the word was “selected”, she replied: « But we didn’t know then, you see.» It was, as Mr. Schlaefrig said, « a special existence... people got accustomed to a great deal under these conditions». A right definition for deculturation.<sup>33</sup>

From the analysis of the interviews it is clear that women were particularly traumatised not only by the lack of privacy and hygiene,<sup>34</sup> but also by the shaving, tattooing and clothing process.

Rita Benmayor, a girl of 17 at that time, underlined that they «cut the hair, took all clothes».

All of them were deprived of their belongings, in Auschwitz also of their name, hair, physical features. Nelly Bondy told Boder:

They took everything from us... We were quite shaved... everything. The whole body. I thought first it was because of the vermin or so... But later on I changed my mind. I think it was the sheer malice or so... Women did it but men passed through the room all the time. You see, it was the most horrible experience... And then we got old Russian uniforms... and a foulard... they left me my own shoes... It took me three days to recognise my fellow... My fellow prisoners with whom I had arrived». (N. Bondy).

These experiences were listed by Boder under the *Appearance, cleanliness, dress* theme, which were the basic needs the prisoners lost inside the camp.<sup>35</sup>

When Nelly Bondy, who could speak many languages, was sent from Birkenau to Auschwitz to work in the administration, she stressed the change in her condition saying «I was safe, I got better clothing, I got these striped clothes... I was allowed to grow my hair a bit... There was hot water to wash oneself with... whereas in Birkenau there was no water at all».

The deprivation of basic needs and current social rules,<sup>36</sup> hunger,<sup>37</sup> exhaustion, labor exploitation were part of the demolition of socio-cultural habits which produced the deculturation process. Both

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<sup>32</sup> Confiscation of personal property, money; Death of relatives or ignorance of their fate; Creation of prolonged (protracted) states of terror; Abolition of religious worship; Abolition of funeral rites or any vestige of dignity in disposal of the dead, desecration of cemeteries and utilitarian processing of human bodies; Complete blocking of habits of writing and reading. Requiring forced or “slave” labor. Chronic overtaxing of physical resources by overwork, bad working conditions. (Boder, 1958)

<sup>33</sup> Although in Theresienstadt there was ‘no shortage in cultural life’, starvation, diseases and fear brought about deculturated behaviors, like stealing.

<sup>34</sup> F.S stated: «Washing belonged almost to the things impossible.»

<sup>35</sup>Listed by Boder as: brutal shaving, bathing, and delousing processes. Tattooing of prisoners. Insufficient clothing, clothing that did not fit. Failure to provide facilities for keeping clean, lack of soap and water. Maintenance of conditions which made it impossible for prisoners to free themselves from lice and vermin. (Boder, 1958, p.45)

<sup>36</sup> Boder lists «Heterogeneous masses of people, strange to each other, differing in age, sex, nationality, country of origin, language, social status, even if all are protagonists of the same misfortune. (b) Lack of recourse to law. Break-up of the family group» (Ibidem).

<sup>37</sup> Listed by Boder as «compulsory change of nutritional habits both in kind of allotted food and in extreme reduction of its nutritional value and bulk. Creation of prolonged states of semi-starvation and thirst» (Ibidem) .

Mr. Mizrachi and Mr. Schlaefrig realised this reversal of rules of civil life when old people were forced to walk and run from the stations to their destinations, Bergen Belsen and Theresienstadt. Hunger caused changes in normal eating habits and stealing.

«I ate the dirt; we stole each other the bread, we did that» said Rita Benmayor in relation to Birkenau, and, about Retzow, «there was nothing to eat.» In Bergen Belsen, despite their 'privileged condition', the Spanish Jews from Salonika had the same trauma: «we starved and everything we saw on the earth we took it out from there and started to eat it without caring if it was dirty or clean. ... without cooking, like beasts. We had no rights to go out... we were not supposed to work».

Also diseases played a significant role, especially typhus which was a direct consequence of the harsh living conditions of the prisoners, all the interviewees talked about typhus epidemics which maybe considered a key experience as well as death. In Auschwitz and in the other camps death was an obsessive and ubiquitous presence, an impending threat which became part of daily life. «Death was a 'light' matter under these conditions», said Mr. Schlaefrig, pointing out that.

### **Liberation and loneliness**

Liberation happened at different times and in different ways according to the place where the interviewees were. Those who were in Auschwitz Birkenau were evacuated from the complex in January 1945 or shortly before and experienced the death marches. The women were sent to Ravensbrück and its sub camps, Mr. Sochami ended up in Buchenwald. This trauma was listed by Boder as *long marches on foot after weeks and months of starvation*. Once again the text of interviews provide information about the traumatic experiences of the death marches: they were 'taken to', 'marched to', 'loaded onto open freight cars'.

When they were liberated, or rescued in Nelly Bondy's case, in spring 1945: she managed to escape during a march in Leipzig: « I couldn't walk so I escaped». She hid in a church for three days and didn't tell she was Jewish but told that she was born in Vienna «which accounted for her good German». The Salonikans in Bergen Belsen were liberated by the Americans close to Farsleben. The train they had been loaded onto had left the camp and was directed to Theresienstadt when it was bombed. The Ninth Army found it in the countryside and rescued the passengers, most of them were affected by typhus. Mr. Schlaefrig was liberated by the Russians in Theresienstadt, unlike the other interviewees, he knew that the liberation was near, since he could get information spying the Czech guard who could listen to the radio.

All the survivors were sick, undernourished, completely overwhelmed. To them the liberation represented the moment when they realised their losses. They had lost not only their families, their houses and their belongings, but also their bond to the place where they were from. This is the reason why their words and expressions about liberation belong to the semantic area of loneliness and isolation. Rita Benmayor said: « They took the whole family...My whole family is in the crematorium... I am left alone from the whole family...» and Henry Sochami: «I am the only one left in my whole family; out of 27 I am alone in the world». Also Manis Mizrachi told Boder: «When the freedom came, I was quite alone, I remained quite alone...».

The Holocaust marked a caesura in history and in their personal lives. No one among the interviewees wanted to go back to their country or city.

Their words stressed also the feeling of loss, uncertainty and belong to the semantic area of waiting. Rita Benmayor said: «I did not want to go to Greece, why, I had no family. If I went to Greece, see my house without my mother, without father, I cannot see that». When she was interviewed, she said she wanted to go to America, but she was waiting to leave. Her uncle in the US sent her an affidavit, but the quota for the Greeks was closed. At the moment she was working in Paris.

Also Mr. Sochami felt he couldn't go back to Greece and stayed in Paris, like Manis Mizrachi. After his recover in the hospital in Hillersleben, he decided to go to France where he had some relatives who did not survive the deportation and he could not find them. When he was interviewed

he did not know where to go, maybe to the US, but «Unfortunately I have no one». Three Salonikans from Bergen Belsen did not lose their family but had no plan to go back to Greece. Jacob Button wanted to go to Palestine: «I have applied to Palestine; I want to go to Palestine. I am waiting for a whole year here and I have not received the permission to go to Palestine. I had to try to find something to work here». Mr. Barzilai settled in France. He was very grateful to the French: «None of us will ever forget what France did for us... I will soon start to work. We believe we can stay here in France, in this area».

The situation of Eda Button was a bit different, her husband had already illegally left for Palestine and was waiting for her in Tel Aviv. She had managed to get her child back from the nuns in Salonika but she was having troubles with her. «From the moment she came to me she suffered – she believes that I made her bad (sick) – And especially if she, the little one, maybe she was told that her mother was bad». The child didn't want to stay with her, basically she did not know her mother and wanted to go back to the convent in Salonika where she had been very well cared of. Eda, troubled and sad, said: «I don't want to drive to Greece. I cannot see this country anymore. And I want to drive to Palestine to be free».

Also Mrs. Bondy got in touch with her children when she went back to Paris, but was waiting to settle properly before taking them back. She knew that her husband had died when she was working in the administration office in Auschwitz. She told Boder:

When I was in Auschwitz, I worked in the so-called *Politische Abteilung*, that was part of the administration of the camp, I found out by his file card that he had been, three months after his arrival, killed by a guard, in 1942. [...] My husband's file card was still there in... ah... in July 1943; but it was no more there in October 1943.

Mrs. Johles managed to escape to Switzerland from France on December 27, 1942 and was interviewed by Boder in Geneva, she was ready to go to the US with her husband and her daughter. Her older son had already left for Palestine with the first legal transport of youngsters on May 28, 1945.

Friedrich Schlaefrig, who was 71, at the time of the interview, and his wife were waiting to join their son in South Africa.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusions

From the analysis of Viennese and Salonikan Jews' interviews with David Boder it appears that, despite the differences in geographical and historical coordinates, the Holocaust affected them with the same traumatic events. Their context and background differed, but the global implementation of the Nazis' anti-Jewish policy brought about an irremediable break in the survivors, depriving them of their lives as they used to be, of their roots and leaving a deep wound in their souls. From this point of view, as we could see, the key concepts in their experiences were uprooting, isolation, separation, uncertainty and deprivation. Their trauma derived from the prolonged exposition to extremely stressful events: invasion and occupation of their residing place, implementation of anti-Jewish measures, persecution and deportation, psychological and social consequences after the war. The impact of their trauma was cumulative, additive, and summative wherever they came from. They were ready to begin a new life but were not ready to go back to their homelands, which were then perceived as lands not as homes.

Boder grasped the importance of examining the survivors' perspective at that time to fully understand their situation and indicated a path which is worth following and investigating further.

As Malka Johles, the only one of the interviewees who was not deported, told Boder: «One can't possibly... much to tell, my good man. There is so much to tell. Should they experience what it is like to sit on, on boxes».

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<sup>38</sup> Their daughter was in Canada at that time.

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