**DANIELLA DORON**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION**

**Podcast with Daniella Doron and Nikki Freeman**

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Nikki Freeman: Hello everyone. My name is Nikki Freeman. I'm history PhD candidate at The Ohio State University. Today I have Dr. Daniella Doron with me here. She's a senior lecturer in Jewish history at the Australian Centre for Jewish civilization at Monash University. Dr. Doron is the author of Jewish Youth and Identity and Post War France: Rebuilding family and Nation, published by Indiana University Press in 2015. Today, we'll be talking about her new project, which studies Jewish children who experienced familial separation during the Nazi years. largely these were Central European Jewish youth brought to the United States. So welcome, Daniella.

Daniella Doron: Thanks, Nikki, and thanks for the invitation to have this talk.

Nikki Freeman: Very happy to have you here. This is my first question for you: How does studying child refugees and their migration change or perhaps, rather, enhance our understanding of the Holocaust?

Daniella Doron: I think there are several ways that writing about child migration during the Nazi years can intervene in Holocaust historiography. For one, there has been I mean, so on the one hand, there has been a robust literature on the experience of children during the Nazi years, but there's been less literature on the experience of child refugees. And, the work that has existed largely, not exclusively, but largely focuses on the Kinder transport. So, one of the interventions is to look beyond the European continent. I also think that focusing on child refugees sheds light on how the experience of being a refugee, of being a migrant, is very much shaped by age. For adult refugees, they had a lot to lose by the act of migration. They did experience it as a hellish, a disorienting experience that marked a downward socio and economic trajectory for child migrants. On the other hand, at least initially, it was exciting, it was an adventure. They stood to gain a lot through the act of migration. And so, age is very much a critical category of analysis here. A part of the other intervention is that if we turn our attention to emotion, something that is beginning to be studied in Holocaust historiography, I think it could shed light not on just experience, but also decision-making. How emotions can account for mobility or immobility.

Nikki Freeman: So you talk about emotions. What kind of emotions were children experiencing when they first migrated to US?

Daniella Doron: Sure, so at least initially, their migration was characterized by excitement and adventure. Especially male refugees would look forward to encountering cowboys and Nazi non-Nazis or gangsters. Let me just start that over. At least initially, male refugees would look forward to encountering cowboys and gangsters and Indians, things that they had read about in novels. They were excited about the prospect of going on a steamship and coming to the new world. They were excited about the prospect of leaving Nazi Germany. And this is stands in stark contrast to adult refugees. And then as time wore on, of course, we see homesickness, longing for their families, for their parents, for familiar surroundings. We see guilt for enjoying a relatively privileged life, as life is becoming increasingly more difficult for their parents and their friends and family. We see anxiety, a lot of anxiety, and that's really the case from the very beginning. When refugee youth set foot in the United States, they feel anxious for their families. They feel anxious about their new foster families, their new homes. They feel anxious about whether they will actually be able to manufacture a family reunion? Well, they will be able to get the visas that will be necessary for their families to come to the United States. And, all of these emotions, I argue, drove activity. It drove decisions, and drove movement and change in agency.

Nikki Freeman: Were there any gender differences between the experiences of boys and girls?

Daniella Doron: So that's a very good question and one that I'm thinking through constantly. As a gender historian, of course, I'm always looking for gender. And to some extent, it's there, right? It's there in the ways that boys and girls react to landing in the United States. As you know, as I said earlier, ways we talk about cowboys and Indians, we don't generally see that with girls. And, we knew this from the existing scholarship and how parents thought about their children's migration. Often, they were far more willing to let boys depart than girls. We know this from the scholarship that has already been written. But, I also wonder the extent to which gender kind of flattens out during the refugee experience and it may be not as pronounced as I'm looking for it. So, it's there in the way that children experience migration, and certainly the expectations placed upon them. Surely, I've no doubt that boys are expected to go into that profession and to make a living and that's not the expectation for girls in the 1930s and the 1940s. But, I'm still hoping to tease all of this out.

Nikki Freeman: Very interesting. So, you kind of hinted at this youth as active agents in migration. In what ways do you see in your research that refugee children take action in their own lives?

Daniella Doron: Sure. So, this is something that is rather pronounced in my sources. Refugees for one, in many cases, while in Europe, they advocate for themselves to be on these child migration schemes. They, in some cases, they put themselves on to the list, especially in the 1940s when things are truly worsening and deteriorating. Upon landing in the United States, and we see social workers write about this over and over and over again. Children are trying to get visas for their parents. They're asking families for help in getting visas. They're writing to people. They're asking strangers there. keeping their parents abreast of visa development. And, this was also a mission that was charged to them by their parents. Their parents expected the children to help navigate their exit out of Germany. They were the people on the ground that could hopefully best do this. So, children are very much working for visas. They're trying to champion their own cause in terms of where they will be placed. They almost uniformly prefer being placed with relatives as opposed to foster families. And part of that preference, of course, may have been just the idea that a relative would be more suitable home. But, also, we know, I know, from resources that they anticipated that a relative would be more willing to get a visa to a family member. So, they're arguing with the social workers as where they're going to be placed. They prefer wealthy homes rather than middle class or working-class homes, again, driven by this issue for a visa. They're trying to the best of their ability to take control of their own lives and to advocate for themselves. So, this is something that's rather Paramount pronounced in the sources from the 1930s in the 1940s.

Nikki Freeman: And, what were their relationships like with their foster families? Was there any tension, and were these children able to reunite with their birth parents after the war?

Daniella Doron: Those are two very good questions, and there's no uniform response. In some cases, children replaced with very loving foster families that they grew very attached to. They were very happy with them. They formed and forged strong emotional connection with the other children in the house and with the parents. In other cases, in many cases, there was tension. And that's partly because these children did not match what were seen as the emotional expectations of foster families. The foster families expected well-behaved children who are grateful for the support, who were cute and sweet. And instead, they found children who've obviously gone through a rather rupturing experience. So, there were behavioral problems. These children intentionally remained emotionally aloof from their families. And, as I said, they misbehaved. So, there was a lot of tension that kind of bubbled to the surface between the foster children and their families. And, it was a rather common experience to live in multiple foster families over the course of their childhood. And in terms of family reunion, some children lost their parents. That is very much a dominant narrative, but it's also not as dominant as I had anticipated. When I first started this research, I thought the vast majority would be rendered orphaned by the war, but in fact, a larger percentage than I ever anticipated were reunited with their families. During the war, their parents eventually got a visa, and partly because for one of the child migration schemes, the children chosen were part of families that were high up on the visa waiting list. So, they moved to the United States and very soon thereafter, their families had come to the United States as well. Then others, they lost one or two family members during the war, but in some cases, one parent or both parents arrived. So, there was eventually a family reunion, though those family reunions were also difficult and strained, or could be, because of course there was a long wait, in many cases, between the initial act of migration and the family reunion.

Nikki Freeman: Do you consider this a history of emotions?

Daniella Doron: No, I don't. I often refer to it as an emotional history. By which I mean, I'm not tracing one emotion, let's say fear or anxiety, and tracking how that emotion was socially constructed or affected societal or political change. Nor am I trying to document or make a claim to being able to document the emotions that people experienced and felt. Instead, I'm trying to trace the emotions that Jewish refugee youth wished to project and the image that refugee youth sought to project about themselves. And, so I really see this emotional history as a self-narrative. As ego documents. In essence, how refugee youth wished to be seen by others, and that allows me to write about the emotions that they were writing about rather than the emotions that they experienced.

Nikki Freeman: Thank you so much, Daniella. We really look forward to reading and hearing more about your new project.

Daniella Doron: Thanks, Nikki. I really appreciate the conversation.

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