

A Second Chance in Exile?  
German-Speaking Women Refugees in American Social Work After 1933

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Barbara Louis

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Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Co-Advisor  
Susan Jones, Co-Advisor

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## **Dedication**

To my grandmother Maria Geroldinger  
and the memory of my grandfather Karl Geroldinger

## Abstract

This dissertation examines the trajectories of Austrian and German Jewish women refugees who established careers in American social work. It traces their lives and careers from ambitious and idealistic young women to their new beginnings in the unfamiliar professional landscape of the United States, and the interwoven, at times conflict-laden, dynamics of their ongoing development within their profession into the last quarter of the twentieth century. I argue that educated, political, Jewish émigré women created productive careers in American social work that enabled them to maintain their identities as intellectuals, emancipated, and activist women dedicated to social reform, albeit in modified ways. While social work as a typical female profession provided the opportunity for empowerment and success for émigré women, the social forces that structured gender relations in larger society reached into the presumed female domain and curtailed the women's options.

Focusing on Elsa Leichter, Gerda L. Schulman, Gisela Konopka, Etta Saloshin, and Anne Fischer as major protagonists, this study illustrates various paths that exiles from war-torn Europe were able to pursue in the social work profession ranging from a caseworker in Richmond, Virginia, to innovators in family and group therapy at a large agency in New York City, to a highly decorated and internationally respected professor of social work at the University of Minnesota. Drawing on the historiographies of intellectual migration and exile, gender and science, as well as the history of the social sciences, the dissertation combines a transnational and comparative perspective with group biography to provide an inclusive account of the émigrés' lives, careers, and

migration paths, as well as the different contexts and circumstances they encountered.

This study proposes to include peripheral actors and those in related applied fields instead of restricting the understanding of the social sciences to their purely academic realms in order to arrive at a more nuanced recognition of the complex forces and processes that shaped academia, the applied professions, and the population they served.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AAGW	American Association of Group Workers
ALC	Austrian Labor Committee
CURA	Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
DNB	Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library), Frankfurt/Main, Germany
DPA	Deutsche Presse-Agentur (German Press Agency)
DZI	Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen (German Central Institute for Social Issues), Berlin, Germany
ERC	Emergency Rescue Committee
GJCA	German Jewish Children's Aid
HICOG	High Commission for Occupied Germany
ISK	Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund (International Socialist Militant League)
JFS	Jewish Family Service
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
LBI	Leo Baeck Institute, New York City
MFGT	Multi-Family Group Therapy
MSSA	Master of Science in Social Administration
MSSW	Master of Science in Social Work
NASW	National Association of Social Work
NCJW	National Council of Jewish Women
NCSW	National Conference on Social Work
NRS	National Refugee Service

ORTHO	American Association of Orthopsychiatry
RJCC	Richmond Jewish Community Council
RPI	Richmond Professional Institute
SDAP	Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
UMNA	University of Minnesota Archives
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
VMFA	Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Organization
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Organization

## INTRODUCTION

“I probably would not have had as good a career in Vienna. Should I be grateful to Hitler now?”<sup>1</sup> This joking comment, articulated by Greta Stanton, who spent her professional life as a child welfare worker and professor of social work in New York City and New Jersey, echoed similar statements by women in social work who had escaped from the National Socialists. Social work as a women’s profession offered career opportunities, and émigrés took advantage of them, becoming child welfare workers, family therapists, university professors, and social activists, among others.

This dissertation examines the trajectories of Austrian and German Jewish women refugees who established careers in American social work. It traces their lives and careers from ambitious and idealistic young women to their new beginnings in the unfamiliar professional landscape of the United States, and the interwoven, at times conflict-laden, dynamics of their ongoing development within their profession into the last quarter of the twentieth century. I argue that educated, political, Jewish émigré women created productive careers in American social work that enabled them to maintain their identities as intellectuals, emancipated, and activist women dedicated to social reform, albeit in modified ways. While social work as a typical female profession provided the opportunity for empowerment and success for émigré women, the social forces that

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<sup>1</sup> Greta Stanton, interview by Niko Wahl, August 28, 1998, recording, Leo Baeck Institute (LBI), New York. German original: “Es wäre mir in Wien wahrscheinlich nicht so gut gelungen, Karriere zu machen. Soll ich dem Hitler jetzt dankbar sein?” Stanton (1919-2011), who was an assistant professor at Hunter College and became an associate professor at Rutgers University in 1971, also published the memoir *Still Alive in the Shadow of the Shoah: What I Remember and What I Want My Grandchildren to Know about My Life Experiences* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2009).

structured gender relations in larger society reached into the presumed female domain and curtailed the women's options. Focusing on Elsa Leichter, Gerda L. Schulman, Gisela Konopka, Etta Saloshin, and Anne Fischer as major protagonists, this study illustrates various paths that exiles from war-torn Europe were able to pursue in the social work profession ranging from a caseworker in Richmond, Virginia, to innovators in group therapy at a large agency in New York City, to a highly decorated and internationally respected professor of social work at the University of Minnesota.

Roughly 130,000 people from Austria and Germany escaped the National Socialists and went to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Based on statistics from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, historian Sibylle Quack calculated that among these were about 30,000 women who found refuge in the United States between 1939 and 1943.<sup>3</sup> Extracting the number of social workers from the total number of refugees proves difficult, however. The *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Émigrés 1933 – 1945*, which constitutes the most comprehensive publication on exiles and émigrés from Central Europe, lists 117 émigrés in social work.<sup>4</sup> Historian of social work Joachim Wieler, based on a combination of archival sources and his personal

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<sup>2</sup> Even though the exact numbers put forward by historians vary, they revolve around this suggestion by Herbert Strauss, "The Immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 16 (1971): 69.

<sup>3</sup> Sibylle Quack, "Changing Gender Roles and Emigration: The Example of German Jewish Women and Their Emigration to the United States, 1933-1945," in *People in Transit: German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820-1930*, ed. Dirk Hoerder and Jörg Nagler (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995), 390.

<sup>4</sup> Werner Röder, Herbert Strauss, and Sybille Claus, eds., *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Émigrés 1933 - 1945*, vol. 3 (Munich, 1983), 204. This dictionary, aimed at a comprehensive overview of émigrés, includes about 8,700 biographies, among which are about five hundred social scientists and three hundred psychologists and psychoanalysts, not all of whom went to the United States, however. Brigitte Bruns, "Thesaurus und Denkmal des Exils: Zur Rezeption des Biographischen Handbuchs der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933/International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Émigrés 1933 – 1945 in Publizistik und Exilforschung," in *Sprache - Identität - Kultur: Frauen im Exil*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1999), 222-23.

knowledge of émigré social workers from Austria and Germany in the United States, estimated the number to be more than two hundred.<sup>5</sup>

One of the main difficulties of finding social workers among the refugees was the lack of a separate occupational category on the refugee lists, as Wieler argued.<sup>6</sup> Refugees who thought of themselves as social workers were usually grouped with psychologists, sociologists, educators, or, more generally, social scientists.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the founding generation of European social work had degrees in related disciplines. For example, Alice Salomon, who was a driving force in social work education, organization, internationalization, as well as research in Germany and who emigrated to New York, held a doctorate in economics.<sup>8</sup> Hertha Kraus, director of the Cologne welfare department who became a professor at Bryn Mawr College, had graduated from Frankfurt University with a Ph.D. in political science.<sup>9</sup> The majority of émigrés who held positions in American social work, however, entered the profession only after they had settled in the

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<sup>5</sup> Joachim Wieler, "Destination Social Work: Emigrés in a Women's Profession," in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. Sibylle Quack (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995), 266. In the early 1990s, the author conducted oral history interviews with thirty-four German- and Austria-born social workers in the United States (nineteen women and fifteen men), ten of whom are included in the list of the *Biographical Dictionary*.

<sup>6</sup> Wieler, "Destination Social Work," 266.

<sup>7</sup> Historians sometimes maintained this classification practice, for example Peter Eppel, *Österreicher im Exil - USA 1938-1945: Eine Dokumentation* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> On Salomon see for example Joachim Wieler, *Er-Innerung eines zerstörten Lebensabends: Alice Salomon während der NS-Zeit (1933-1937) und im Exil (1937-1948)* (Darmstadt: Lingbach, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> After Alice Salomon had disappeared into obscurity in Germany for several decades, Joachim Wieler's work initiated a profound reevaluation of her status in the history of social work, which is now illustrated by a substantial body of literature on her as a central figure of the profession. See, for example, Carola Kuhlmann, "Gender and Theory in the History of German Social Work - Alice Salomon, Herman Nohl and Christian Klumker," in *History of Social Work in Europe (1900-1960): Female Pioneers and Their Influence on the Development of International Social Organizations*, ed. Sabine Hering and Berteke Waaldijk (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003), 95–103; Anja Schüler, *Frauenbewegung und soziale Reform: Jane Addams und Alice Salomon im transatlantischen Dialog, 1889-1933* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2004); Wieler, *Er-Innerung eines zerstörten Lebensabends*; on Hertha Kraus see for example Ursula Langkau-Alex, "Hertha Kraus, die Flüchtlingshilfe der Quäker und die Perzeption von Verfolgten/Geretteten," in *Die Vertreibung des Sozialen*, ed. Adriane Feustel, Inge Hansen-Schaberg, and Gabriele Knapp (Munich: Text + Kritik, 2009), 115–29; Gerd Schirrmacher, *Hertha Kraus - Zwischen den Welten: Biographie einer Sozialwissenschaftlerin und Quäkerin (1897-1968)* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2002).

United States and found social work an unexpected occupational opportunity that was different from its European counterparts.

This dissertation is concerned with a group of young European women, who chose social work in the process of professional reorientation in emigration.<sup>10</sup> Even though the protagonists in this study did not belong to a homogenous group, they did share a cultural background and key formative experiences during their early lives in Europe. As such, they can be understood as members of a generation, as Karl Mannheim described it, stressing common experience rather than chronological attribution.<sup>11</sup> While I use this concept loosely, Mannheim conceived it as a macro-sociological construct to be applied on a societal level in order to explain social change. Its core statement of a group's common experience of one or more formative events or, more generally, its shared socio-historical environment as the unifying thread of a generation, holds true for the case studies in this dissertation.

Growing up during a period when empires collapsed, many young Austrians and Germans were enthralled by an atmosphere of renewal and democratic promise, despite the hardships of chaos and poverty of the interwar years. The women in this study sympathized with socialist ideas, but there was a spectrum of ideology, activism, and political involvement to which they subscribed, ranging from merely siding with the husband's socialist political opinion to working in the socialist underground anti-Nazi resistance movement. Similarly, while they shared a Jewish heritage, the value placed on Jewish traditions in their homes varied greatly. Education mattered tremendously to

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<sup>10</sup> As chapter one will show, even Elsa Leichter, who had practiced social work in Europe, encountered a profoundly different profession in the United States that had very little in common with its Viennese counterpart in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generationen," *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie* 7 (1928): 157–85.

them. Born in the first two decades of the twentieth century, they attended university at a time when this opportunity was still relatively new to women. Even though several of them came from an immigrant and working-class background, education and membership in intellectual circles played a major role in their identities and shaped their aspirations for the future. Many, but not all, participated in socialist and Jewish youth groups, which instilled in them a heightened sense of political and social responsibility, as well as the interest in and early experience with group dynamics.

Affiliations with such groups constituted the foundation for networks that often lasted for many decades and spanned the Atlantic. Finally, these women had in common the experience of being threatened and persecuted by the National Socialists; and their eventual immigration to the United States, where they became professional social workers. In contrast to the older pioneer generation, this dissertation focuses on a younger generation who were young enough to retrain and enter the workforce in the United States.

The women émigrés reflected intensively on their identities. In order to understand and represent the “sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act,” I use “identity” in the sense of Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper’s “self-understanding.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast to “identity” which implies “sameness across time or persons,”<sup>13</sup> has a reifying and essentialist character, and often claims objectivity, “self-understanding” allows for subjectivity. It allows individuals to construct their self-understanding, which can be multiple, fluid, unstable

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<sup>12</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 17. For an intricate, German-language discussion of the term, see Lutz Niethammer and Axel Dossmann, *Kollektive Identität: Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” 18.

and contradictory. Even though the subjective character comes to the fore in “self-understanding,” the term does not imply that the actors are entirely independent of their environment as they are making sense of themselves. One’s own understanding grows out of engaging with and reacting to the social and cultural environment. It is forged at the intersection of the individual and the social. Therefore, the concept of self-understanding is useful to open up the space for both the women’s permanent and changing senses of self, which they found challenged repeatedly along their way.

### **Methodology: Transnational, Comparative, Biographical**

This dissertation combines a transnational and comparative approach that allows an inclusive account of the émigrés’ lives, careers, and migration paths, as well as the different contexts and circumstances they encountered.<sup>14</sup> As such, this study bridges two research traditions that adopted either a departure or arrival perspective. From a departure perspective, European accounts often focus on emigration, and its consequences for the country of origin (“brain drain”).<sup>15</sup> The arrival perspective concerns the experience and impact immigrants have on the host society or, alternatively, the adaptation of immigrants

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<sup>14</sup> A perspective taking into account the complexities of the movement of people and ideas can be found in Mitchell Ash and Alfons Söllner, eds., *Forced Migration and Scientific Change: Emigré German-Speaking Scientists and Scholars after 1933* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1996) and in Christian Fleck, *A Transatlantic History of the Social Sciences: Robber Barons, the Third Reich and the Invention of Empirical Social Research* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011); Johan Heilbron provided a theoretical framework in Johan Heilbron, et al. “Toward a Transnational History of the Social Sciences,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 44 (2008), 146-60.

<sup>15</sup> Reinhard Bendix, “Intellectual Emigration from Hitler’s Germany,” *Society* 27 (1990): 51-58; Irving Louis Horowitz, “Between the Charybdis of Capitalism and the Scylla of Communism: The Emigration of German Social Scientists, 1933-1945,” *Social Science History* 11 (1987), 113-38; Friedrich Stadler, ed. *Vertriebene Vernunft: Emigration und Exil österreichischer Wissenschaft, 1930-1940* (Vienna: Jugend u. Volk, 1987).

to the host society.<sup>16</sup> Taking into account the émigrés in their contexts before they left Europe, their experiences during their migration movements (which in some cases took months, in others even years), and their lives and careers in their new home country, which often entailed further relocations, career changes and work in Europe and beyond, illustrates the nature of such transfers of people, ideas, methods, and institutions as multidirectional and complex interactions.<sup>17</sup>

In order to explore émigré women's paths into American social work, the continuities and interruptions in their lives and careers, as well as their ongoing negotiations of their identities in their personal and professional lives, this dissertation applies a biographical approach.<sup>18</sup> According to Simone Lässig, biography can be productively applied to reveal "coincidences and ruptures, but also ... limited opportunities and structural limitations in the historical process itself." Using biography "virtually encourages methodological eclecticism, the transcending of intra- and interdisciplinary boundaries."<sup>19</sup> As a genre, which had fallen out of historians' favor during the heyday of social history with its focus on social structures and collectives,

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<sup>16</sup> See for example Lewis Coser, *Refugee Scholars in America: Their Impact and Their Experiences* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe 1930-41* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983); Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile: Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See for example Jürgen Osterhammel, "Transferanalyse und Vergleich im Fernverhältnis," in *Vergleich und Transfer: Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble and Jürgen Schriewer (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2003), 439-466; Kieran Klaus Patel, "Transatlantische Perspektiven transnationaler Geschichte," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29 (2003): 625-647; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Ian Tyrrell, "Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009): 453-474.

<sup>18</sup> For recent discussions on the uses of biography in history and the history of science see, for example, Simone Lässig, "Introduction: Biography in Modern History – Modern Historiography in Biography," in *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, ed. Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 1-26; Thomas Söderqvist, ed. *The History and Poetics of Scientific Biography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Lässig, "Introduction," 20.

biography has received new appreciation in historical scholarship during the past two decades.<sup>20</sup> While biographies of “great men” continue to capture the imagination of popular audiences both in history in general and in history of science in particular, historians of science have rediscovered biographical approaches as means to contextualize science, to reconceptualize science as a social activity, to study its interactions with society, and to include more and untraditional actors in their analyses of scientific pursuits. Theodore Porter, for example, called for an approach to writing about scientists that integrates the personal and the professional, or, in other words to treat the lives of scientists as “scientific units.”<sup>21</sup> Thomas Etzemüller put a married couple as the “scientific unit” into the center of his study of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal.<sup>22</sup> Going a step further, Thomas Söderqvist claimed that engaging in biographical studies has the potential to “reorient our ways of thinking about our lives in unfamiliar terms” and therefore constitutes more than just an auxiliary for the history of science.<sup>23</sup>

Another significant modification to biography came by means of including gender. Research on scientific couples and couples’ collaboration has shown the variety

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<sup>20</sup> German historian Simone Lässig argued that in Germany, where the Bielefeld School of Social History dominated the profession, the biographical genre was subjected to much fiercer and wide-ranging criticism than it was the case in the British and American historical communities, where biography could maintain its status as a legitimate historical genre, even during the era of social history dominance. Lässig, “Introduction,” 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore M. Porter, “Is the Life of the Scientist a Scientific Unit?” *Isis* 97 (2006), 314-21; see also Mary Jo Nye, “Scientific Biography: History of Science by Another Means?” *Isis* 97 (2006), 322-29. The focus on scientific biography in this issue of *ISIS* is itself an indicator for the renewed interest in biographical approaches in the history of science.

<sup>22</sup> Etzemüller’s innovative study illustrated how the Myrdals used their marriage as a miniature role model for larger Swedish society to show their vision of how a modern, democratic society should operate. Thomas Etzemüller, *Die Romantik der Rationalität* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Söderqvist, “Existential Projects and Existential Choice in Science: Science Biography as an Edifying Genre,” in *Telling Lives in Science: Essays on Scientific Biography*, ed. Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47. See also Thomas Söderqvist, “‘No Genre of History Fell under More Odium than that of Biography’: The Delicate Relations between Scientific Biography and the Historiography of Science,” in *The History and Poetics of Scientific Biography*, ed. Thomas Söderqvist (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 241-62.

of roles that women played in scholarly endeavors, which stands in stark contrast to the limited functions they had been accorded in biographies of “great men,” such as assistants and secretaries to their husbands or as providers of an atmosphere in which the husband could productively pursue his work.<sup>24</sup> Women now receive a sliver of the spotlight of biographical attention.<sup>25</sup> As in the case of men, this occasionally led to works on “great women,” while regular or working-class women still receive less scholarly attention.<sup>26</sup> The women in this study fit neither the category of elites nor of the lower-classes, but are located in-between, as this dissertation will further explore.

This study transcends the focus of biographical writing on one individual and explores the lives and work of a small group of women. While the number of biographical studies of groups and collectives has increased recently, this had not led to more consistency in methodological terminology among historians.<sup>27</sup> This study uses the term “group biography,” common in American historiography, to explore a small group

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<sup>24</sup> On gender and biography, see Paola Govoni, “Biography: A Critical Tool to Bridge the History of Science and the History of Women in Science: Report on a Conference at Newnham College, Cambridge, 10-12 September 1999,” *Nuncius* 15 (2000): 399–409; Paola Govoni, “Crafting Scientific (Auto)Biographies,” in *Writing about Lives in Science: (Auto)Biography, Gender, and Genre*, ed. Paola Govoni and Zeldia Alice Franceschi (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 7–30. On scientific collaboration, see Helena M. Pycior, Nancy G. Slack, and Pnina G. Abir-Am, eds., *Creative Couples in the Sciences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Annette Lykknes, Donald Opitz, and Brigitte van Tiggelen, eds., *For Better or for Worse? Collaborative Couples in the Sciences* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the following books on notable women scientists: Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983); Brenda Maddox, *Rosalind Franklin: The Dark Lady of DNA* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s biography of the Martha Ballard, an eighteenth-century midwife in New England is still the exemplar of scholarship on regular lives of women. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> In addition to general inconsistencies in using the terms group biography, collective biography, and prosopography, Martina Niedhammer identified a systematic difference between German-speaking and English-speaking historians in her group biography of five Jewish families in Prague. For the former, “Kollektivbiographie” tends to have a strong analytical component, while the latter use the term “collective biography” also to refer to collections of biographies. Niedhammer, *Nur eine “Geld-Emancipation”? Loyalitäten und Lebenswelten des Prager jüdischen Großbürgertums 1800-1867* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

of actors, and where possible their interactions, who share common elements in their background, such as “a family, a place, an organization, a movement, a cultural affinity, a point in time.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, more than quantitative collective biography allows, a group biography can provide analytical insight into dynamic topics such as identities, world-views, political attitudes, the impact of historical events on the actors, as well as the influence of social backgrounds.<sup>29</sup> Directing the focus on a group as middle ground between the individual and a larger collective allows to explore more fully the experience of women émigrés in social work and to recognize common patterns, differences, and interactions without losing sight of the details and contingencies of individual lives in changing environments.

### **Historiography: Exile, Gender, and the Applied Social Sciences**

Exile studies have traditionally focused on intellectual and political elites, thus they have shared with the biographical genre a preference for well-known individuals.<sup>30</sup> Research on such prominent persons or groups of émigrés in the social sciences, such as the Frankfurt School, the intellectual exiles at the New School for Social Research, and Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University, has demonstrated the marked influence of

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<sup>28</sup> Margot Peters, “Group Biography: Challenges and Methods,” in *New Directions in Biography*, ed. Anthony M. Friedson (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981), 41.

<sup>29</sup> Levke Harders and Veronika Lipphardt, “Kollektivbiografie in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte als qualitative und problemorientierte Methode,” *Traverse: Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 13 (2006): 88; Martina Niedhammer, *Nur eine “Geld-Emancipation”?*, 22-23. Note that Harders and Lipphardt used the term “Kollektivbiographie” not in the quantitative sense, but in line with “group biography” as employed in Anglo-American scholarship to argue this point.

<sup>30</sup> Intellectual immigrants, exiles, refugee scholars, refugees, émigrés, and forced emigration are terms used in the literature, often unsystematically, to refer to intellectuals and professionals from Austria and Germany fleeing from the National Socialists and settling, among other places, in the United States. In this dissertation I will predominantly (and interchangeably) use the terms émigrés and exiles, common in German-language literature, as well as refugees, which was how the subjects of the study often referred to themselves.

European social scientists in the United States.<sup>31</sup> Christian Fleck expanded this focus with his collective biography of German-speaking émigré social scientists, which provides an excellent overview but leaves the women migrants largely unexamined.<sup>32</sup>

The intersection of gender and exile opens up a space to interrogate the liberating or restricting nature of exile. Historians have argued that men and women had profoundly different experiences in exile.<sup>33</sup> Historians have found that women were quicker in learning the language and adjusting to daily life, as they generally took on the responsibility of caring for the immediate needs of the family.<sup>34</sup> Heike Klapdor argued that women were willing to abandon their profession and status and give in to the “banality of survival” by accepting any job that would secure the family’s existence.<sup>35</sup> In fact, women, more than men, encountered expectations, sometimes from social workers who provided vocational counseling, to give up their aspirations and take up menial jobs in order to allow their husbands the time they needed to continue their careers, thus prioritizing the men’s careers over the women’s.<sup>36</sup> Atina Grossmann argued that female doctors from Weimar Germany who emigrated to the United States experienced new restrictions as a result of their exile. They encountered a conservative environment,

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<sup>31</sup> Giuliana Gemelli, ed. *The "Unacceptables": American Foundations and Refugee Scholars Between the Two Wars and After* (Brussels: P. Lang, 2000); Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise*; Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile*.

<sup>32</sup> Fleck, *Transatlantic History of the Social Sciences*.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Siglinde Bolbecher, “Frauen im Exil – Die weibliche Perspektive,” *IWK Mitteilungen*, no. 1-2 (2005): 3; Siglinde Bolbecher (ed.) *Frauen im Exil* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2007); Claus-Dieter Krohn et al. (eds.) *Frauen und Exil: Zwischen Anpassung und Selbstbehauptung* (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1993); Quack, “Introduction”; in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. Sibylle Quack (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995); Sibylle Quack, *Zuflucht Amerika: Zur Sozialgeschichte der Emigration deutsch-jüdischer Frauen in die USA 1933-1945* (Bonn: Ditz, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Bolbecher, “Frauen im Exil,” 2.

<sup>35</sup> Heike Klapdor, “Überlebensstrategie statt Lebensentwurf: Frauen in der Emigration,” in *Frauen und Exil: Zwischen Anpassung und Selbstbehauptung*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn et al. (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1993), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Quack, “Introduction,” 8.

discrimination against Jews and foreigners in the medical profession, and suffered gender prejudice that constrained their lives and work.<sup>37</sup> Yet, Linda Nochlin contended that exile had a liberating effect on female artists, because many found less rigid social structures in their new situation and encountered new perspectives and stimuli, while Klapdor claimed the opposite effect, that exile forced emancipated women back into traditional gender roles.<sup>38</sup> Thus, historians have established transformations in gender roles as a consequence of exile and emigration, but very few works are dedicated to detailed analyses of these processes.<sup>39</sup>

So far research has focused predominantly on the hardships of exile, particularly for women, but scholars have called for a change in perspective by exploring the productive potential of exile for women.<sup>40</sup> This dissertation explores the tension between these two poles and, without denying the hardships, argues that social work provided a professional refuge for women that enabled them to have careers and maintain their identities as educated, professional, and activist women, albeit in different configurations compared to their lives in Europe. Even though the women encountered conservative role expectations, social work as a profession open to women provided a framework for

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<sup>37</sup> Atina Grossmann, "German Woman Doctors from Berlin to New York: Maternity and Modernity in Weimar and in Exile," *Feminist Studies* 19 (1993): 65-88.

<sup>38</sup> Klapdor, "Überlebensstrategie statt Lebensentwurf," 26; Linda Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation," *Poetics Today* 17 (1996), 317-77.

<sup>39</sup> Sibylle Quack's work remains a noteworthy exception. She found that gender roles for Jewish women transformed already in Germany as a reaction to National Socialist discrimination of Jews, for example in cases in which women had to take up employment to supplement the decreasing income of their husbands. The modified gender roles, argued Quack, were carried along into emigration and played a crucial role in successfully adjusting to the new environment. Quack, "Changing Gender Roles and Emigration."

<sup>40</sup> Bolbecher, *Frauen im Exil*.

diverse, though not unbound, professional activities that were considered appropriate for women and enabled them to live fulfilling professional lives.<sup>41</sup>

The disciplinary proximity of American social work, psychology, psychiatry, and sociology, as well as social work's status as an applied social scientific academic discipline—in contrast to Europe—reshaped the ambitions of émigré women and provided career opportunities, thus intersecting gender, exile and the (applied) social sciences. This project is inspired by a modest but growing historical literature on women, gender, and social science, which followed the lead of research on women and science from the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>42</sup> In her landmark publication *Women Scientists in America*, Margaret Rossiter laid out numerous mechanisms of exclusion from academia directed at women and women's strategies to counter them. Even though Rossiter was predominantly concerned with the natural sciences, her argument applies to social work as well, as it can be interpreted as a counterpart in the social sciences to home economics, which she explored as a separate and limited, yet productive, site for women to enter academia and pursue scientific activities.<sup>43</sup> Such academic segregation of men's and

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<sup>41</sup> While this dissertation limits the focus to women, in a further project I would like to include men in social work also to better understand dynamics between men and women, thus applying gender as a relational concept as proposed by Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053–75.

<sup>42</sup> The field of gender and science was launched by Margaret Rossiter, Rosalind Rosenberg, and Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, and theorized by Evelyn Fox Keller, for example. Barbara Laslett, among others, extended the analysis to the social sciences. See, for example, Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "In from the Periphery: American Women in Science, 1830-1880," *Signs* 4 (1978), 81-96; Barbara Laslett, "Gender in/and Social Science History," *Social Science History* 16 (1992), 177-95; Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Helene Silverberg, ed., *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*.

women's fields, to which was attached more or less prestige, as well as higher or lower pay, still reverberated in the academic setting that women émigrés entered in the 1940s.<sup>44</sup>

Historians have identified social work as a professional field in which women could thrive and which they came to dominate.<sup>45</sup> Compared to other academic disciplines and professions, social work in fact turned out to be a generally hospitable environment for women. However, Jennifer Cote recently challenged the dominant narrative by contending that while women indeed dominated the field in number, men tended to have both higher positions and incomes.<sup>46</sup> Cote's argument concerned the early decades of the twentieth century, which is a common time period for analysis in the historiography of social work. Historians agree that the transition of social work into a full-fledged profession was complete by the end of the 1920s, not least due to the efforts of the first generation of professional social workers. As the following decades brought with them continuing expansion, differentiation, and transformation of social work, women émigrés entered a professional environment in the early 1940s that they found very attractive. The sheer availability of jobs constituted a pragmatic reason to join the profession.

I further argue that social work's institutional integration into academia constituted a draw for émigré women. As members of a generation who placed a high

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<sup>44</sup> The processes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that resulted in the differentiation of male-dominated, allegedly objective, sociology and female-dominated, helping and subjective social work from common origins are discussed, for example, in Patricia Lengerman and Gillian Niebrugge, "Thrice Told: Narratives of Sociology's Relation to Social Work," in *Sociology in America: A History*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 63–114; Helene Silverberg, "Introduction: Toward a Gendered Social Science History," in *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3–32.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Clarke A. Chambers, "Women in the Creation of the Profession of Social Work," *Social Service Review* 60 (1986): 1–33; Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer Cote, "'The West Point of the Philanthropic Service': Reconsidering Social Work's Welcome to Women in the Early Twentieth Century," *Social Service Review* 87 (2013): 131–57.

value on education and who had taken advantage of the recent opportunity for women to attend university in Europe, they discovered and were surprised that the profession allowed them to reenter intellectual, academic communities in emigration. Thus, while in the United States most women were not able to realize the visions they had held in Europe of their professional future, which included positions as teacher, judge, and physician among others, they found in social work an alternative that captured elements that were important for them personally, and which they had previously located in various other occupations. These elements included a desire to play a productive role in the creation of a better and just society to a more specific wish to work with children and adolescents.<sup>47</sup> My argument, therefore, contests Christine Hartig's claim that the excellent reputation of American social work, and particularly of the New York School of Social work, radiated even into Europe and attracted European women to the American profession.<sup>48</sup> At least for many young, ambitious European women, social work played very little role, as they developed their plans and aspirations, even though social work underwent a process of professionalization in Austria and Germany, similar to the United States, as the next section will briefly outline.

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<sup>47</sup> Whether or not the women would have been able to realize their visions in Europe is far from conclusive. As research in the United States has demonstrated, access to higher education did not necessarily translate into professional opportunities. See, for example, Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* and her second volume, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action, 1940-1972* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> Christine Hartig, "Zwischen Emigrationshilfe und Amerikanisierungserwartung - Die Arbeit der German Jewish Children's Aid," in *Die Vertreibung Des Sozialen*, ed. Adriane Feustel, Inge Hansen-Schaberg, and Gabriele Knapp (Munich: Text + Kritik, 2009), 130-51.

## Social Work in the United States, Austria, and Germany

Social work emerged as a profession in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While social workers were concerned with providing solutions to the immediate social problems they faced in their immediate contexts, the social work project was also part of a larger “intense, transnational traffic in reform ideas, policies, and legislative devices.”<sup>49</sup> More specifically, the social work pioneers of various countries were in personal contact and exchanged visions and ideas in developing foundational theories and practices, a significant element in the history of the profession, which historians have only recently started to explore in detail.<sup>50</sup>

In the United States, social work emerged as part of a larger trend of professionalization in the social sciences that had started in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Settlement houses were established in American cities in the 1880s, which became sites of social activism and endeavors in progressive social reform.<sup>52</sup> Another strand of social work, which would soon dominate the profession, grew out of the efforts of the Charity Organization Societies, the first concerted efforts to coordinate

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<sup>49</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*; see also Kerstin Eilers, “Social Policy and Social Work in 1928: The First International Conference of Social Work in Paris Takes Stock,” in *History of Social Work in Europe (1900-1960)*, ed. Sabine Hering and Berteke Waaldijk (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003), 119-28.

<sup>50</sup> For the axis Germany-United States see, for example, Rita Braches-Chyrek, *Jane Addams, Mary Richmond und Alice Salomon: Professionalisierung und Disziplinbildung Sozialer Arbeit* (Opladen: Budrich, 2013); Schüler, *Frauenbewegung und soziale Reform*. An important expansion of this German-American research focus by including Alice Masaryk, who founded the first school of social work in Prague, is provided by Rebecca L. Hegar, “Transatlantic Transfers in Social Work: Contributions of Three Pioneers,” *British Journal of Social Work* 38 (2008): 716–33. Transfers also took place outside the circle of well-known professionals, as Karl Fallend demonstrated in his case study of Caroline Newton, an American social worker who went to Vienna in the 1920s to work with Sigmund Freud, intent to advance the integration of psychoanalysis with social work upon her return to the United States. Karl Fallend, *Caroline Newton, Jessie Taft, Virginia Robinson: Spurensuche in der Geschichte der Psychoanalyse und Sozialarbeit* (Vienna: Löcker, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> See for example Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

the proliferating private welfare initiatives and to apply standards for the provision of relief. So-called friendly visitors, middle-class women, were sent to the homes of the poor to serve as morally uplifting role models as well as to supervise the improvement of welfare recipients.<sup>53</sup> Mary Richmond, general secretary of the Baltimore COS and later the Philadelphia COS, was a major driving force in social work professionalization. With her landmark publication *Social Diagnosis*, she provided a social work textbook, which constituted the first systematic presentation of casework practice and delineated criteria of client data collection, data interpretation, and resulting practices in order to precisely identify a client's problems and use the appropriate measures for helping.<sup>54</sup> In the same year, the first national organization, the Social Workers Exchange was founded.

In 1898, the New York School of Philanthropy was established. In 1919, the existing seventeen schools of social work in North America organized in the Association of Training Schools for Professional Social Work with the goal to unify social work education and create common standards for training and education. Thus, by the 1920s, American social work had transitioned from scattered and mostly privately organized efforts in social welfare to a field that started to gain professional autonomy and identity as well as public authority with representatives starting to enter high-ranking

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<sup>53</sup> These Charity Organization Societies (COS) were based on the model developed in London founded in 1869. Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 4. For discussions of COS as precursors of professional social work see also Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1966); James Leiby, *A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Walter Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: Free Press, 1974).

<sup>54</sup> Mary Ellen Richmond, *Social Diagnosis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917). See also Elizabeth N. Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

administrative positions as exemplified by Julia Lathrop, the director of the U.S. Children's Bureau.<sup>55</sup>

While industrialization, urbanization, and immigration had been the major causes for the social problems that social workers set out to alleviate earlier in the twentieth century, during the Great Depression, New Deal programs increased the employment opportunities for social workers. Simultaneously, the professional associations raised the standards and by the late 1930s, a Master's degree was implemented as the prerequisite to enter the ranks of professional social workers hired by most local, state, and federal agencies.

With regard to contents and methods of American social work, the 1920s and 1930s saw a rise of psychoanalytic orientation at the cost of approaches that included environmental factors. While Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis* had laid the groundwork for casework that understood the individual in the context of his/her environment, developments in the 1930s brought a narrowing of approaches and increasingly turned to the intrapsychic aspects of clients while abandoning the exterior context.<sup>56</sup> This development was codified in the seminal textbook of 1940, Gordon

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<sup>55</sup> See for example Robert L. Barker, *Milestones in the Development of Social Work and Social Welfare* (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 1998); Leiby, *A History of Social Welfare and Social Work*; Lengermann and Niebrugge, "Thrice Told"; Lubove, *The Professional Altruist*; Philip Popple and P. Nelson Reid, "A Profession for the Poor? A History of Social Work in the United States," in *The Professionalization of Poverty*, ed. Gary R. Lowe and P. Nelson Reid (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999), 9-28; Rebecca L. Stotzer and John E. Tropman, "Professionalizing Social Work at the National Level: Women Social Work Leaders, 1910-1982," *Affilia* 21 (2006): 9-27.

<sup>56</sup> See for example Kathryn L. Cornell, "Person-In-Situation: History, Theory, and New Directions for Social Work Practice," *Praxis* 8 (2006): 50-57; Barbara L. Simon, *The Empowerment Tradition in American Social Work: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Hamilton's *Theory and Practice of Social Case Work*, which became the standard textbook for psychoanalytically oriented therapeutic casework.<sup>57</sup>

In the 1930s, group work emerged as an alternative and challenge to the individual, psychoanalytic casework. Whereas casework emphasized the relationship between the social worker and the clients, group work gave priority to processes within the group with the social worker as facilitator, as well as to egalitarianism, as a representative of group work explained: "Social work comes in large part from a perspective which says that those helped by social work—social workers' clients—need to be made better, improved, raised to a higher state of grace, provided with a higher level of insight, and that the major medium for such improvement is the relationship with a social worker. Group work on the other hand, tends to dislike this view of human and not even to accept fully the term 'clients.' Group workers have always preferred the term members, emphasized a strengthen perspective, focused on a participatory and (social) democratic view of society, valued diversity and differences among people and seen them as sources of strengths for groups valued pluralism ad [sic] cultural relativism in preference to dogmatism and insisted ... that members and workers share a human condition, with neither one being a 'better' person than the other."<sup>58</sup>

Overall, refugees and migrants have not played a role as professionals in the historiography of social work, as Michael Reisch argued. His work proves the notable exception by arguing that German-Jewish immigrants profoundly reshaped American

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<sup>57</sup> Gordon Hamilton, *Theory and Practice of Social Case Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

<sup>58</sup> Lisa D. Hines, "Evolution of Group Work Education in Social Work" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 1995), 80. Hines interviewed twelve leading social group work educators and practitioners, whose positions and experience she described, whereas she did not disclose their identities.

social work by bringing principles of democracy and social justice to the profession, thus transcending the prevailing individualist concepts that prevailed at the time.<sup>59</sup>

In Austria, the first effort to professionalize social work was put forward by Ilse Arlt, who, in 1912, founded the *Vereinigte Fachkurse für Volkspflege* (“Arlt School”) a school for social workers in Vienna.<sup>60</sup> Arlt envisioned her school both as a training facility and an educational institution for women that should empower them and help them become self-reliant and independent welfare workers as well as social researchers. Moreover, the school also served as a site for exhibitions on welfare-related topics for the education of the public, and Arlt planned to install a permanent museum of social welfare.<sup>61</sup> In 1938 the National Socialists closed down the school and destroyed the entire museum collection. In addition to Arlt’s pioneering school, six other training institutions for social workers had been founded in Austria in the 1910s and 1920s. Some were religion-based; others were tied to city or regional administrations.<sup>62</sup>

In Vienna, the city welfare administration operated as the largest social welfare employer, as well as a dominant force in Austria that shaped the direction and character

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Reisch, “The Democratic Promise: The Impact of German-Jewish Immigration on Social Work in the United States.,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 53 (2008): 171.

<sup>60</sup> Ilse Arlt, *Wege zu einer Fürsorgewissenschaft*, ed. Maria Maiss (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2010); Silvia Staub-Bernasconi, “Ilse Arlt: Enjoying Life on the Basis of Scientific Theory of Needs,” in *History of Social Work in Europe (1900-1960)*, ed. Sabine Hering and Berteke Waaldijk (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003); Werner Steinhauser, *Die Geschichte der Ausbildung zur professionellen Sozialarbeit in Österreich, 1912-1992* (Vienna: Österreichisches Komitee für Soziale Arbeit, 1992), 112-18.

<sup>61</sup> The exhibits consisted of material provided by students’ theses and covered topics ranging from social legislation and welfare systems to matters pertaining to home economics, such as housekeeping, child rearing, nutrition, making and mending clothing, etc. For details see Silvia Ursula Ertl, “Ilse Arlt – Studien zur Biographie der wenig bekannten Wissenschaftlerin und Begründerin der Fürsorgeausbildung in Österreich,” in *Ilse Arlt – (Auto)biographische und werkbezogene Einblicke*, ed. Maria Maiss and Silvia Ursula Ertl (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2011), 41-47.

<sup>62</sup> Social Caritative Frauenschule der Katholischen Frauenorganisationen für Wien und Niederösterreich, Evangelische Soziale Frauenschule, Staatliche Fürsorgeschule des Landes Steiermark, Akademie für Soziale Verwaltung der Stadt Wien, Fürsorgeschule des Landes NÖ/Baden, and Landespflege und Fürsorgeschule Riesenhof des Landes Oberösterreich, see Steinhauser, *Geschichte der Ausbildung zur professionellen Sozialarbeit*, particularly chapter 3. While there were catholic and protestant training schools for social workers, no Jewish schools are listed in the sources.

of the profession up to the 1970s.<sup>63</sup> During the heyday of the social democratic city government of Vienna, welfare programs expanded massively as part of the government's attempts to create a new and socialist society. The Vienna city administration, which profoundly extended its social services during the 1920s, had its own training center for women employed in its welfare services called *Akademie für Soziale Verwaltung der Stadt Wien*. As the name indicates, the goal was focused less on empowering welfare recipients and the social workers, but rather administering welfare efficiently, as reflected in the rather narrow training and the limited professional tasks assigned to social workers employed by the city.<sup>64</sup>

In Germany, the professionalization of social work was also in full swing by the 1920s. For example, by 1927 thirty-three training schools for social workers operated across the country.<sup>65</sup> Alice Salomon attempted to introduce casework in Germany in the 1920s, but her efforts failed. According to Christoph Sachße, the main reason for this failure was “different basic conceptions” in American and German social work.<sup>66</sup> The

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<sup>63</sup> According to Karl Sablik, by 1927 Vienna had more than six thousand social workers which probably covers all areas of welfare, but it still is a very high number. For the same year Wolfgruber reports that 245 social workers were employed by the *Jugendamt*; Sablik is cited in Helmut Gruber, “The ‘New Woman’: Realities and Illusions of Gender Equality in Red Vienna,” in *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the two World Wars*, ed. Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (New York: Berghahn, 1998), 89n45; see also Gerhard Melinz, “Von der Armenfürsorge zur Sozialhilfe: Zur Interaktionsgeschichte von “erstem“ und “zweitem“ sozialen Netz in Österreich am Beispiel der Erwachsenenfürsorge im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert” (University of Vienna: Habilitation Thesis, 2003); Gudrun Wolfgruber, *Zwischen Hilfestellung und sozialer Kontrolle: Jugendfürsorge im Roten Wien, dargestellt am Beispiel der Kindesabnahme* (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 1997), 64.

<sup>64</sup> This rather circumscribed design of social work stands in stark contrast to other city-run institutions such as the *Child Diagnostic Service* under the directorship of Charlotte Bühler, in which social reform and cutting-edge research intersected; see Gruber, “The ‘New Woman,’” 66.

<sup>65</sup> Christoph Sachße, *Mütterlichkeit als Beruf: Sozialarbeit, Sozialreform und Frauenbewegung, 1871-1929* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 252. On the history of social work in Germany see also, for example, Sabine Hering and Richard Münchmeier, *Geschichte der sozialen Arbeit: Eine Einführung* (Weinheim: Juventa, 2000); Rolf Landwehr and Rüdiger Baron, *Geschichte der Sozialarbeit: Hauptlinien ihrer Entwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1983); Wolf Rainer Wendt, *Geschichte der sozialen Arbeit*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Enke, 1995).

<sup>66</sup> Sachße, *Mütterlichkeit als Beruf*, 283.

American model of casework with individuals (based on empirical assessments of the clients' situation) did not square with a bureaucratized, normative profession as it developed in Germany and Austria. The contrasting focus on the individual client, on the one hand, and on the provider in the form of public administration, on the other hand, was at the heart of the incompatibility of the two systems, but the specific historical context also mattered. At a time when the German population still struggled with mass poverty as a consequence of World War I, a methodological shift of the profession toward "individualized pedagogical counseling" seemed ill advised, perhaps even cynical.<sup>67</sup> While Salomon's unsuccessful efforts to introduce social casework in Germany in the 1920s may seem insignificant, it is meaningful for this project in two ways. First, this episode speaks to the differences in social work between Central Europe and the United States in the first third of the twentieth century and thus provides the backdrop before which the protagonists of the following chapters negotiated their careers, visions, and identities. Second, these same basic differences continued to frame the—sometimes troubled—relationship between American and German social workers later in the century, particularly after World War II, when American social workers, émigrés among them, returned to Europe to help in the rebuilding of welfare services.

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter one introduces two émigrés from Vienna, Elsa Leichter and Gerda L. Schulman, whose paths crossed at the Jewish Family Service in New York City in the mid-1940s, where they were employed as caseworkers. Tracing these women's careers

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<sup>67</sup> Sachße, *Mütterlichkeit als Beruf*, 283. In fact, as chapter two and three will discuss, case work in the United States faced similar criticism during the Great Depression, which led to the development of alternatives to the mainstream approach.

from their early disparate aspirations in Vienna to collaborators and innovators in Multi-Family Group Therapy at a large Jewish welfare agency in New York, the chapter illustrates how social work in the mid-twentieth-century offered professional opportunities to émigré women including the possibility for research and innovation, and thus allowed them to express visions and ideals they had fostered already in Vienna. They joined the profession with training in mainstream individual-centered casework, and expanded it to work with groups, a preference that had become part of their world view in their socialist circles of friends in Europe.

Chapter two shifts the focus to group work, which emerged in the 1930s and provided a contrasting specialty to the psychoanalytical therapeutic casework. Group work was rooted in social activism, democratization, and social justice, and it turned out to be an attractive field of work for émigrés from a socialist background. Group workers focused their attention on the social environment and interpersonal relationships as constitutive in the wellbeing of individuals and stressed the importance of group experience in their work. Gisela Konopka, a fervent socialist and trained teacher, and Etta Saloshin, a former dance instructor, became professors of social work at the University of Minnesota in the late 1940s and exemplify two contrasting types of group work educators. Konopka, who had entered the field with a strong dedication to the social and political aspect of group work, grew increasingly disillusioned when group work became part of the National Association of Social Workers and lost its distinctive and radical edge in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, she struggled with the gendered environment in her university department, which she experienced as restrictive and disrespectful to her as a woman and accomplished scholar. Saloshin, in contrast, adjusted

to the circumstances and built a more modest, yet productive career within the possibilities of her position.

Whereas the previous chapters portrayed women with unusually accomplished careers in social work, chapter three features Anne Fischer, whose biography is typical of women who had to reconcile their primary responsibility to family and the household with involvement in social work, in Fischer's case first as a volunteer and only later as a professional. Located in Richmond, Virginia, Fischer serves as an exemplar of the situation of women émigrés who spent their lives at the periphery, outside the metropolitan social, cultural, and professional centers. Fischer's life and career in emigration developed in close connection with the local Jewish community. As she had emigrated already in 1934, she began helping Jewish refugees as a volunteer for the Richmond Jewish Community Council and in a personal and informal collaboration with her friend Hermann Simon, a German-Jewish lawyer, who served as an emigration consultant for his Jewish clients. Fischer's experience and expertise garnered in the course of her volunteer work became the basis and motivation for turning to professional social work during the years of World War II.

The epilogue, finally, follows Gisela Konopka and Anne Fischer to Germany after World War II, where they helped rebuild social services after the devastation caused by the National Socialists. They taught courses in social work methods and served as consultants in rebuilding and organizing institutions, ranging from child guidance clinics to public welfare providers. Moreover, they became part of an emerging transatlantic network of student and teacher exchanges in social work. This epilogue provides a brief glimpse into the experiences of émigré social workers in their former home countries,

their encounters with German social workers and administrators, and the implications of these activities for their self-understanding. Echoing patterns that have become visible in other chapters, the epilogue reveals the multi-faceted roles of practitioners and their agency to shape the modes and content of their work—a topic that invites more historical attention in the future.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**SOCIAL CASEWORK, BUT WITH GROUPS: ELSA LEICHTER AND**  
**GERDA L. SCHULMAN'S COLLABORATION IN FAMILY THERAPY**

“Many people will say that they learned something [the concept of “process”] that I think I developed maybe a little further. I never conceptualized it to an extent where anybody would quote me at all, except for people who worked with me, maybe.”<sup>1</sup> In a series of oral history interviews with her granddaughter Kathy starting on her ninetieth birthday in 1995, Elsa Leichter pondered the notion of process, a concept that had guided her professional practice as a social worker and had become part of her life philosophy. Understanding the task of the social worker in terms of a structured helping process that was used to productively guide the clients through their treatment was a core tenet of the functional school of social casework to which Elsa Leichter subscribed.<sup>2</sup> The term is also strikingly appropriate to capture the essence of her life and career including migration, her striving for improvement in her work, as well as negotiating the various elements of her identity, which she shared with other fellow émigrés.

Elsa Leichter and Gerda L. Schulman, the main case studies of this chapter, had to flee from Vienna after the National Socialists annexed Austria in March 1938. They eventually came to work at the Jewish Family Service (JFS) in New York City, establishing their specialty in group therapy and family therapy, in which they became respected experts in the 1960s and 1970s. Schulman and Leichter went into casework, the

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<sup>1</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter, November 1995, video recording, private collection of Kathy Leichter.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief introduction to functional case work see, for example, Katie M. Dunlap, “Functional Theory and Social Work Practice,” in *Social Work Treatment: Interlocking Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Francis J. Turner, 4th ed., (New York: Free Press, 1996), 319–40.

dominant segment of American social work, which by the 1940s had come to mean psychoanalytically-oriented therapy administered to individuals seeking help. JFS enabled social workers, such as Leichter and Schulman, to work directly with clients, but also to conduct research and publish at a time when many other private welfare agencies limited their activities to providing relief and consultations.

As Leichter practiced and taught group therapy at the Jewish Family Service in New York, she adapted the concept of “process” to her particular clientele, method of therapy, and agency context. The tweaking and modifying of techniques has no doubt been a part of regular social work practice. While Leichter, as she said, never conceptualized her version of process, the specifics of her contribution are as of yet unknown—in contrast to the innovation in Multi-Family Group Therapy which Leichter devised together with her colleague Gerda L. Schulman.

In this chapter I argue that their position in therapeutic casework in a major social work agency enabled Elsa Leichter and Gerda Schulman not only to earn a living in emigration but also to develop a professional expression of their long-standing dedication to practice-oriented social reform that dovetailed with their self-understanding as intellectuals, socialists, and modern women, while at the same time advancing social work through their research, teaching, and innovations in family therapy. The choices they made professionally rested on long-standing ideals and aspirations, fueled by their experience in socialist Vienna of the interwar years, which they pragmatically modified—without losing their vision or idealism—to fit the dynamic landscape of opportunities in American social work in the mid-twentieth century. In doing so, they negotiated the terrain between the dominant individualistic, Freudian casework in the United States that

had become synonymous with American social work in the mid-twentieth century, and their preference for group approaches. Within casework, Leichter and Schulman's early careers coincided with an era of controversy and reorientation during the 1930s and 1940s, a time when the dominant Freudian mainstream, the diagnostic school, was challenged by the so-called functional school of social casework, which followed the teachings of Otto Rank, a former disciple of Freud. While the diagnostic school prevailed, the crisis had an invigorating effect on the profession, as functional elements were incorporated into casework. Leichter and Schulman exemplify flexibility by combining these approaches, and picking up other trends in the social sciences, for example research on the group that proliferated in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

### **Elsa (Schweiger, Kolari) Leichter, 1905-1997**

Elsa Leichter was born as Elsa Schweiger in Vienna in 1905 to Jewish parents who had immigrated to Vienna from Galicia.<sup>4</sup> Leichter grew up in a socialist family in Leopoldstadt, Vienna's second district, where the largest concentration of Jews (56,779 persons, or 34 % of the district population) was located in the city in the first decades of

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<sup>3</sup> Sociologist George Homans made a landmark contribution to the theory and research on small groups. George Caspar Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950). For a discussion of the significance of Homan's work, among others for social groupwork, see A. Javier Treviño, "George C. Homans, the Human Group and Elementary Social Behavior," *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, accessed November 15, 2014, [www.infed.org/thinkers/george\\_homans.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/george_homans.htm).

The next chapter will discuss mid-century group work and its significance for women émigrés in more detail.

<sup>4</sup> For biographical information on Elsa Leichter see Antonia Fischer, "Elsa Leichter: Immer auf Wanderschaft," in *Emigrierte Sozialarbeit: Portraits vertriebener SozialarbeiterInnen*, ed. Joachim Wieler and Susanne Zeller (Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus, 1995), 211-16; Christian Fleck and Heinrich Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus: Der Austromarxist Otto Leichter (1897-1973)* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2000); Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler, November 8, 1990, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin; Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter; Karin Nusko, "Leichter, Elsa, geb. Schweiger," accessed August 31, 2014, [www.biografia.at](http://www.biografia.at); Theo Waldinger, *Zwischen Ottakring und Chicago: Stationen* (Salzburg: Müller, 1993).

the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the first district, where many of the assimilated and wealthy Jews lived, the poorer and more orthodox immigrants from the eastern parts of the Habsburg Empire settled in the second district. She recalled that as a child she was ashamed of her parents and the family's eastern European Jewish heritage. Among her earliest memories was an incident when other children called after her: "Polish Jew!"<sup>6</sup> As Polish Jews were considered the bottom category, while Jews from Prague held the top rank, Leichter looked for ancestors and relatives of a more respected heritage in order to find a location higher up in the Jewish hierarchy in which she could fit. She bargained with her mother: "Aren't we a little bit Hungarian? Aunt Berta lives in Budapest after all."<sup>7</sup> Being Jewish was a part of Leichter's identity, of which she was acutely aware and which she tried to negotiate even as a child.

Leichter's parents put a high value on their three daughters' education. Even though money was scarce, Leichter's mother allowed and even encouraged her to attend a *Gymnasium* for girls (Humanistisches Gymnasium Rahlgasse), whose degree enabled graduates to attend university.<sup>8</sup> While Leichter was still in school, she further cultivated the political engagement that particularly her father fostered at home. She joined the socialist students' association, one of the many organizations that sought to instill socialist values and foster community spirit and solidarity among young people in Vienna.

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<sup>5</sup> Population data Vienna, 1910, by Leo Goldhammer quoted in Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 44. On Jewish life and identity in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Vienna see Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. German original: "Sind wir nicht ein bisserl Ungarn? Die Tante Berta wohnt doch in Budapest."

<sup>8</sup> The term *Gymnasium* refers to secondary schools in Austria and Germany that prepare students for university education.

After graduating in 1923, Leichter complied briefly with her mother's wish and studied medicine at the University of Vienna. Ironically it was Leichter's traditional mother who provided one early impulse for Elsa to deviate from the traditional feminine role. Having three daughters, the mother was deeply disappointed that there was no son. Elsa became the embodiment of her mother's hopes and fantasies about "her son, the doctor."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the University of Vienna, Leichter attended the Academy for Social Administration (Akademie für Soziale Verwaltung), the city's training program for social workers.<sup>10</sup> In an attempt to become a social physician, which was a non-existing profession, she studied medicine during the day, and in the evenings she attended classes to become a social worker. In doing so, she intended to forge a compromise between realizing her mother's wish for her to become a physician, on the one hand, and following her socialist ideals about playing an active role in realizing a reformed, just, and socialist society in Vienna, on the other hand: "I wanted to become sort of a doctor with a social focus. That was pure idealism. I really didn't even know what I was talking about."<sup>11</sup> Other people with a comparable ideological background had similar ideas, however. In Berlin Gisela Konopka began to harbor aspirations to become a "social

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> While in both oral history interviews she presented this choice as a matter of course and did not even discuss alternatives, it is not entirely clear why she chose the Academy for Social Administration among the available schools. Perhaps the training course offered by the socialist city administration was the obvious choice in her politically framed universe. Perhaps it was the only realistic option. The Vereinigte Fachkurse für Volkspflege (Arlt School), which was the most professionally advanced social work training directed by the Austria social work pioneer Ilse Arlt, was also dubbed "Hofratstöchter-Schule" and was a school for middle-class and upper-middle-class women. See Maria D. Simon, "Von der Fürsorge zur Sozialarbeit" (lecture, Wiener Psychoanalytische Vereinigung, Vienna, October 2, 2004). The other two schools at the time, the Social Caritative Frauenschule der Katholischen Frauenorganisationen für Wien und Niederösterreich and the Evangelische Soziale Frauenschule were affiliated with the catholic and protestant churches, respectively. See Steinhäuser, *Sozialarbeit in Österreich, 1912-1992*.

<sup>11</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

doctor,” as chapter two will discuss, and in Vienna Leichter befriended Assia Adler, daughter of the social democratic politician Friedrich Adler, who also combined studying medicine and social work.<sup>12</sup>

Leichter’s first attempt to combine her own ideals and the expectations of others into a new category of occupation that combined medicine and social work proved impossible. She quit the medical program in 1925 but continued her social work training and graduated the following year. She subsequently found employment as a social worker at the youth welfare office (Jugendamt) in Brigittenau, Vienna’s twentieth district, which was a poor, working class district adjacent to Leopoldau, where she had grown up. She stayed for twelve years, from 1926 to 1938. As she pursued social work, which she had envisioned as her contribution toward the realization of a reformed, socialist society, she found herself on the lower end of an administrative apparatus with no prospect of advancement carrying out routine tasks of handing out welfare checks and inspecting foster children’s homes. Such low-rank social administrative work for the Vienna municipality had very little in common with the notion of social work as the emancipatory project of middle-class women, which has come to represent the profession in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Lubove, *The Professional Altruist*. Even though the image of the empowered middle-class woman as the figurehead of social work is still prevalent, it has received objections by historians. Daniel J. Walkowitz contended that in fact for the majority of female social workers, “the work was basically supervised and dead-end.” Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7. More recently, Jennifer Cote argued that studies which stipulated the empowerment aspect of social work for its practitioners focused selectively on the situation in Chicago with its exceptional female leadership and thus overstated the pervasiveness of social work as a professional haven for women. Cote, “The West Point of the Philanthropic Service.”

As Leichter's social contacts came predominantly from socialist circles, she was engulfed by an atmosphere of enthusiasm and optimism in the 1920s and early 1930s. After World War I, Austria had become a democracy, women had the right to vote and some university faculties had started to admit women. Moreover, between 1919 and 1934 the city of Vienna was ruled by the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei, SDAP), which treated the city as a socialist laboratory (as historian Helmut Gruber argued).<sup>14</sup> Thus, in the midst of chaos and poverty after World War I, the socialists embarked on the project of not only attempting to solve the many immediate problems in the city, but also to conjure up a working class counter-culture to the bourgeoisie, which should be the seed of the new socialist society of the future. In contrast to other socialist projects in Europe at the time, according to Gruber, the Viennese variety of socialism was unique in its attempt to fully permeate and transform the workers' lives ranging from politics to the work place to the private sphere of family and sexuality. This comprehensive approach to transforming the proletariat rested on Austromarxist theory, according to which the creation of a socialist society did not start after the revolution, but already existed within a capitalist context.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the well-known flagship of "Red Vienna," the extensive municipal housing projects, the city initiated a wide range of reforms and programs, such as large-scale welfare and public health programs, workers' education, sports organizations, libraries, and lecture series. In addition, there were groups for children and youth to impart socialist values, solidarity, and community spirit at a young age, education for orderly family life, as well

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<sup>14</sup> Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working-Class Culture, 1919-1934* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Austromarxist theory was developed by Max Adler, Friedrich Adler, Otto Bauer, and Rudolf Hilferding, among others.

as marriage and sexuality guidance.<sup>16</sup> Within this comprehensive program, the responsibilities of social workers entailed contributing to the transformation of the working class family to resemble the ideal of the orderly middle class family. The ultimate goal was to create optimal conditions to raise an improved population.<sup>17</sup>

Leichter's life was infused with Vienna-style socialism. The family subscribed to the party newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Workers' Newspaper). Her father was a "soldier of the socialist party," as Leichter called it, because he collected dues from party members.<sup>18</sup> As an adolescent, Leichter pulled away from her immediate and extended Jewish family, who had constituted her significant social contacts, and replaced them with friends of her own choosing, who were mostly socialists. They shared an enthusiasm for nature, art, education, and community, which was in line with the program of the SDAP. She subscribed to and partook in socialist culture, which framed her experience as an adolescent and young adult, without being particularly knowledgeable about the underlying Marxist and Austromarxist theories. In hindsight, she stressed the idealistic attitudes she and her friends exhibited, for example regarding free love, which did not find expression in real life.<sup>19</sup>

Leichter's ideals in the realm of gender relations and her self-understanding as a woman were inspired by concepts of the "new woman." Framed by the socialist context, these two outlooks provided the ideal of liberated and modern womanhood, to which she

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<sup>16</sup> Gruber, *Red Vienna*, 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> See Gudrun Wolfruber, *Von der Fürsorge zur Sozialarbeit: Wiener Jugendwohlfahrt im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Löcker, 2013), 29ff. For an analysis of Vienna's welfare system and its Eugenics framework, see Britta I. McEwen, "Welfare and Eugenics: Julius Tandler's *Rassenhygienische* Vision for Interwar Vienna," *Austrian History Yearbook* 41 (2010): 170-90.

<sup>18</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

aspired.<sup>20</sup> The image of the new socialist woman was widely disseminated by socialist literature. Gruber described this image as follows: “Her physical appearance was youthful, with a slender garçon-figure made supple by sports, with bobbed hair and unrestraining garments bespeaking an active life; her temperament was fearless, open, and relaxed. To her husband she was a comrade; for her children she was a friend.” Rationalization in the household should help to save time to spend with the working-class movement, to “remain intellectually sharp,” and to attend to the emotional needs of her husband and children.<sup>21</sup>

Leichter recalled that even at a very young age she was critical of girls who subscribed to traditional gender roles. She felt superior to girls like her cousins, who were interested in fashion and whose major aspirations were to be pretty and to procure a good husband. In contrast to them, Leichter understood herself as a good socialist and “very advanced about her relations with men.”<sup>22</sup> Except for leisure time activities and her outward appearance, this idealistic self-perception did not translate into actual practice, however.<sup>23</sup> Even though she theoretically aspired to the model of the new socialist, liberated woman who was intellectually mature and a comrade to her husband, she was not able to express these ideals in her relationship to her first husband Fritz Kolari, whom she had met when she was about eighteen. She was in medical school when they became a couple but, because her husband was a worker, she felt uncomfortable. Deeply

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<sup>20</sup> Gruber, “The ‘New Woman.’” For Germany see Claudia T. Prestel, “The ‘New Jewish Woman’ in Weimar Germany,” in *Jüdisches Leben in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, Arnold Paucker, and Peter Pulzer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 135–55.

<sup>21</sup> Gruber, “The ‘New Woman,’” 69-71.

<sup>22</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>23</sup> Leichter’s friend Theo Waldinger described in his memoir that the women in his group of friends drew the scorn of their families as well as bystanders on the street through their rebellious act of having their hair cut short. Waldinger, *Zwischen Ottakring und Chicago*, 59.

ingrained traditional notions of gender relations including the idea that “the man must be above the woman” prevailed for her.<sup>24</sup> Even though her husband neither complained nor demanded her to change, this tension was a major reason for dropping out of her medical studies. Many years later she conceded that she “was the opposite of a liberated woman.”<sup>25</sup> At the time, however, Leichter and others tried to cope with significant social change that swept through the early twentieth century, as well as the political transformations in the wake of World War I. This turmoil framed her personal development, as she acknowledged: “I was a child of the transition from the monarchy to the republic.”<sup>26</sup> This transition was not an orderly one, but it entailed chaos, confusion, contradiction, struggle, insecurity, and antagonism—conditions that are reflected in Leichter’s biography.

Her life in Vienna began to fall apart by the mid-1930s. While the brief Civil War of 1934 and the subsequent Austrofascist era had no economic impact on her daily life, and her work was stable albeit not fulfilling, her relationship with her husband deteriorated, ending in divorce in the summer 1938.<sup>27</sup> In March 1938, immediately after the national socialists’ annexation of Austria, Leichter lost her position, as did all her other Jewish co-workers at the youth welfare office. In contrast to many others, Leichter’s emigration proceeded rather smoothly. With the help of distant relatives who

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<sup>24</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>25</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgruber argued that some positions were probably reassigned for ideological reasons but the impact of the Austrofascist regime on the Vienna youth welfare office is not yet conclusively established. Wolfgruber, *Von der Fürsorge zur Sozialarbeit*, 49.

had settled in New York City and who provided affidavits for their visas, Leichter and her sisters were able to immigrate to the United States in November 1938.<sup>28</sup>

### *Encountering a Different Kind of Social Work*

While she stayed with her relatives in the Bronx and worked as a nursemaid in Brooklyn for several months, Leichter planned her new professional life with the help of the National Refugee Service (NRS), one of the major organizations that helped the European refugees to get settled. As Leichter had been a social worker in Vienna and there were jobs available in American social work at the time, her vocational counselor suggested that she remain in this profession. She needed to return to school and get an American degree to qualify for paid positions, however. As Leichter was unmarried, had no children, and was therefore flexible, the NRS sent her to Cleveland to attend Western Reserve University, funded by a scholarship from the Council of Jewish Women. She spent the spring and summer 1939 in a settlement in Cleveland to get adjusted and improve her English and started her social work program in the fall 1939.

Leichter described the atmosphere in social work as very friendly and welcoming. She encountered a warm reception, as American social workers associated Viennese émigrés with psychoanalysis. Whether this association was real or imagined, playing along was a pragmatic move that opened doors to a future that the émigrés could later shape according to their interests. In addition to having grown up in the birthplace of

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<sup>28</sup> Her father had already died, and the mother's story was complicated. Born in the Bukovina, she was on the Rumanian quota and had to wait until she got permission to leave for the United States. In spring 1939, she was allowed to make the trip. She traveled on the SS St. Louis, whose refugee passengers were not allowed entry to Cuba despite having been granted visas before leaving. The ship had to return to Europe, Leichter's mother was interned in a camp in France, before she eventually managed to get to New York in 1941. Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

psychoanalysis, Leichter knew the psychoanalyst August Aichhorn from her work at the Viennese youth welfare office. Aichhorn had pioneered a psychoanalytical approach to working with problem youth, and for this work he was revered in social work circles in the United States:<sup>29</sup> “In Vienna I worked with August Aichhorn. He was our consultant. Actually he was much more recognized abroad than in Vienna ... He did assessments ... [and] those checks one issues, the money transfers. In any case, when I said that I had worked with August Aichhorn they all were speechless with admiration.”<sup>30</sup> This connection with Aichhorn, who worked as an adviser at the youth welfare office and signed documents, made Leichter special in the eyes of her teachers and colleagues and turned out to be a facilitating factor in her American career. Other Viennese-born social workers echoed this experience, for example Maria Dorothea Simon. In contrast to Leichter, Simon had substantial ties to psychoanalysis as she had worked with Anna Freud in London, who was an innovator in child psychotherapy. Simon then went to Seattle, Washington, in 1946, where she sought employment. She described the atmosphere: “There was a high demand for social workers at the time, psychoanalysis was popular, and my previous job at Anna Freud’s nursery opened all doors.” Simon joined the Jewish Family Welfare Service, whose “director probably thought that by

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<sup>29</sup> August Aichhorn directed a home for neglected and delinquent adolescents just outside Vienna. He used psychoanalysis in his pedagogical treatment in this setting, which was acknowledged internationally as pioneering approach, see for example Bernhard Handlbauer, “Psychoanalytikerinnen und Individualpsychologinnen im Roten Wien,” in *Die Revolutionierung des Alltags: Zur intellektuellen Kultur von Frauen im Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit* ed. Doris Ingrisch, Ilse Korotin, and Charlotte Zwiauer (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 75-100.

<sup>30</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “In Wien habe ich mit August Aichhorn gearbeitet. Der war unser Konsulent. Aber in Wirklichkeit ist er im Ausland ja viel mehr anerkannt worden als in Wien ... Der hat da seine Gutachten gegeben ... die Checks, nicht, oder was man da ausgestellt hat, die Geldanweisungen. Jedenfalls, als ich gesagt habe, ich habe mit August Aichhorn gearbeitet, sind sie buchstäblich vor Bewunderung alle zerflossen.”

hiring me she had caught a big fish.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition to psychoanalysis, which paved the way for Viennese women into American social work, the organization of social work education in the United States proved very attractive to émigré women. Having social work programs institutionalized at colleges and universities rather than in extra-academic organizations appealed to women for whom education and intellectual pursuits had been paramount. By attending university in Europe, women like Elsa Leichter who came from working-class immigrant families had taken the first steps in moving upward in the social hierarchy, a trajectory that was interrupted by the National Socialists. For Leichter, there was more, however. She regretted that she had given up her university education and maneuvered herself into a low-rank, tiresome job. To her, having to start over in the United States appeared in the garb of a welcome opportunity. She recalled how much she appreciated the opportunity to go back to university, because it gave her the chance to make up for bad decisions in the past, as she explained: “This [requirement to get a degree] suited me tremendously. Somehow I started to catch up. It was a little bit like, if you can say that, I received a second chance in this awful situation. I knew I had messed up, with medical school and then the job. It wasn’t like here, where the profession was appreciated and where I could advance. It was an entirely different life.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Maria Dorothea Simon, “Maria Dorothea Simon \*6.8.1918,” in *Soziale Arbeit in Selbstzeugnissen, Band 2*, ed. Hermann Heitkamp and Alfred Plewa (Freiburg: Lambertus, 2002), 246. German original: “Die Nachfrage nach Sozialarbeitern war in dieser Zeit groß, Psychoanalyse war ‘in’, und meine ehemalige Tätigkeit in Anna Freuds Kinderheim öffnete mir alle Türen...Die Leiterin dachte wohl, sie hätte mit mir einen großen Fisch gefangen.”

<sup>32</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Das hat mir unglaublich in den Kram gepasst. Irgendwie ist dann bei mir ein Nachholen gekommen. Es war ein bisschen so, wenn man das so sagen kann, in dieser furchtbaren Situation wie eine Second Chance. Ich hab’ gewusst, ich hab’ mich ein bisserl verhauen mit dem Ganzen, mit der Medizin und dem Beruf selber; es war nicht so wie hier, wo der Beruf anerkannt worden ist, und wo ich weiter gekommen bin ... es war ein vollkommen anderes Leben.”

Returning to social work, this time at Western Reserve University, provided Leichter with perspective and a clearer view on the profession as it had been practiced in Vienna. Whereas the day-to-day actual practice in a welfare agency is bound to fall short compared to an enthusiastic and optimistic environment in a graduate program, and therefore a comparison of the two is not necessarily fair, the contrast helped her negotiate and clarify her shifting professional identity, as well as shape her thinking about social work. She had experienced her position as an employee of the Vienna city administration as a dead-end job with no advancement opportunities. With a hierarchical arrangement in place that strictly separated the decision-making civil servants from the subordinate, implementing social workers, she had no possibility of advancement within the bureaucratic apparatus:<sup>33</sup> “I wanted to grow ... to evolve.” This opportunity to grow came when she started her training in Cleveland. She recalled: “From the first moment on, I experienced what I never experienced as a social worker in Vienna. There was no talent to be seen. There was no opportunity to prove one’s talent, that was my experience. I mean, you really have to believe what I say. Because it sounds so incredible. Here I discovered myself. That was the curious thing. The other was a job, really just a job. Only here did I develop a real dedication to my work.”<sup>34</sup>

The main tasks of social workers in Vienna consisted of handing out welfare

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<sup>33</sup> The social workers were furthermore divided into two categories, that of the principal social worker (Hauptfürsorgerin) and assistant social worker (Hilfsfürsorgerin). For the distinction that resulted in different salaries and benefits, only the educational background was decisive, not the social work training or the actual tasks carried out. See Susanne Birgit Mittermeier, “Die Jugendfürsorgerin: Zur Professionalisierung der sozialen Kinder- und Jugendarbeit der Wiener Städtischen Fürsorge von den Anfängen bis zur Konstituierung des Berufsbildes Ende der 1920er Jahre,” *L’Homme* 5 (1994): 114-16.

<sup>34</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Ich habe den Wunsch gehabt to grow ... mich zu entwickeln.” “Ich habe vom ersten Moment etwas erlebt, was ich in Wien als Sozialarbeiterin nicht erlebt habe. Es war kein Talent zu sehen. Man hat keine Möglichkeit gehabt es zu zeigen, das war meine Erfahrung, ich meine, Sie müssen mir das wirklich glauben, so wie ich’s sag ... Weil es klingt so unglaublich. Ich hab’ mich selber erst entdeckt. Das war das Merkwürdige. Das andere war ein Job, es war wirklich ein Job. Da habe ich erst eine wirkliche Hingabe an die Arbeit entwickelt.”

money and inspecting foster children's homes, which took them to slum neighborhoods and involved difficult situations, as Leichter described: "[Sometimes] I was really scared ... poverty, alcohol, syphilis, and, partly, abused children."<sup>35</sup> Her training had not provided her with the necessary understanding of these processes nor with strategies to deal with such situations, as Leichter recalled: "We had no training in how to interact with people ... There was nothing in our training that told us what it means to provide help and to receive help. I only learned that here. For me that was an incredible watershed, also professionally. It was a lot ... how to put this, it was administration, of money ... And we had custody of foster children. It was legal guardianship. I remember very vividly, we had cards, and we had to visit every month. Home visits were standard, and people came to office hours when they wanted something. The major home visits were for foster children and for people who received some kind of relief. 'Child healthy, well cared for.' Done. That was it. They made sure that we did not talk to the children. We weren't trained at all! Thinking about how we worked back then is absolutely horrifying for me now."<sup>36</sup> In a different interview she qualified her previous statement of the training, remarking that they had psychology courses at the social work academy in Vienna, but unlike in the United States, there was no integration between the theory

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<sup>35</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>36</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: "Wir waren ja überhaupt nicht trainiert auf Umgang mit Menschen ... Es hat nichts im Unterricht gegeben, das gesagt hat, was bedeutet es, Hilfe zu geben und Hilfe zu nehmen. Das habe ich erst hier gelernt. Für mich war das eine ungeheure Zäsur auch professionally gewesen. Es war viel, viel, wie soll ich sagen, es war Administration, von Geld ... Und wir haben Aufsicht gehabt über Pflegekinder. Das war eine gesetzliche Aufsicht. Ich erinnere mich genau daran, wir haben Karten gehabt, und man musste jedes Monat hingehen. Hausbesuche waren das Übliche, und zum Parteienverkehr sind die Leut' gekommen, wenn sie was wollten ... Der Haupthausbesuch waren Pflegekinder und Leute, die irgendeine Unterstützung gehabt haben. 'Kind gesund, gut gepflegt.' Fertig. Das war alles. Die haben dazu geschaut, dass man mit dem Kind nicht redet; wir waren nicht trainiert! Das ist für mich furchtbar der Gedanke, wie wir damals gearbeitet haben."

during her training and how this could be applied in the daily practice.<sup>37</sup> The setup would have allowed for it, as the students spent three months during each of the two years at one of the district offices, but the training and the practice remained two separated realms.<sup>38</sup>

Even though the practice of social work, helping people who needed assistance and ultimately contributing to better social relations was the core of Leichter's career, the intellectual content—"the concepts were exciting, really exciting"—and academic embeddedness of the training in the United States mattered deeply to her.<sup>39</sup> It provided continuity in her self-understanding as an educated woman, which was a crucial part of her identity, even as she had struggled to express it in Vienna, when she dropped out of medical school. She also experienced external challenges to this self-understanding, when she first moved to New York and lived with her cousins. The relatives strongly opposed her plans of going to Cleveland to attend university. According to them, a Jewish immigrant to New York needed to start at the very bottom and work his/her way up. Leichter recalled that "at the beginning, it was really bad. The American Jews who started out at the Lower East Side were jealous. They definitely did not accept that an American Jew, who came from Galicia, and a girl, who came from Vienna ... who had attended university, that we don't necessarily have to start where they did."<sup>40</sup> In the United States, attending university and getting a good position enabled her to continue

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<sup>37</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>38</sup> Ilse Arlt, who dedicated her work to the professionalization of social work, was very critical of the city's social work academy, mostly because she considered its approach and training unscientific, as one of her students remembered. Anna Holecek, quoted in Ertl, "Ilse Arlt," 56.

<sup>39</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>40</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: "Am Anfang war das sehr arg. Die amerikanischen Juden, die an der Lower East Side begonnen haben, waren einem neidig. Sie haben absolut nicht akzeptiert, dass ein amerikanischer Jude, der aus Galizien gekommen ist, und ein Mädels, das aus Wien gekommen ist ..., schon durch die Universität durchgegangen ist, dass wir nicht unbedingt dort beginnen müssen wie die, nicht wahr."

her path, and she “started to own my talent, gradually,” thus resolving the tension between her ambitions, on the one hand, and the embarrassing reality of “being a dropout,” on the other hand.<sup>41</sup>

After Leichter completed her course work, she left Cleveland for New York in 1941, where she had secured a position with the Jewish Social Service Association (a precursor of the Jewish Family Service, or JFS).<sup>42</sup> Starting as a caseworker at the East Manhattan district office at Astor Place, she advanced quickly in the agency’s hierarchy, moving from caseworker to supervisor to district supervisor, director of group therapy, and eventually in 1951, she became borough supervisor of the Bronx Consultation Center, a newly founded office that combined the three former offices of the Bronx.<sup>43</sup> Leichter repeatedly stated that she had been offered higher-ranking administrative positions, which she declined because she was determined to stay in social work practice: “I never wanted to be the boss, because that was pure administration, and that was exactly what I resisted.”<sup>44</sup> She valued working with her clients. This preference grew out of her newly acquired approach to social work as gained at Western Reserve University. Her background as a social worker in Vienna remained significant as an exemplar of what she wanted to avoid in the future and thus helped her configure her later activities at JFS.

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<sup>41</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>42</sup> She completed her thesis based on cases from her social work practice seven years later and graduated with a Master’s of Science in Social Administration (M.S.S.A.) in 1948. Elsa Leichter, “Can Fathers, Too, Be Helped to Help Their Children? An Analysis of Five Child Problem Cases Known to the Jewish Family Service of New York City Considered Improved by the Caseworker, with Special Reference to Obtaining the Participation of the Father as Well as the Mother in Agency Contact and to the Effect of This on Family Relationships” (Master’s Thesis, Western Reserve University, 1948).

<sup>43</sup> “New Family Center: Jewish Service to Complete 3-Unit Merger on Thursday” *New York Times*, June 5, 1951.

<sup>44</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Ich wollte nie Chef werden, weil das war rein administrativ, und dagegen habe ich mich ja gewehrt.”

The professional opportunity was only one among several motivations that drew Leichter back to New York. While she appreciated the immersion into mainstream American culture in Cleveland, as it helped her adjust and better understand the society she was now part of, she “was very determined to come back to New York ... in a sense that this is the city I wanted to live in, not in Cleveland ... But there was something about Cleveland, about the Middle West. New York was probably more familiar, you know, more European, and I had my two sisters here, and so on.”<sup>45</sup> In New York, she also had a circle of friends from Vienna, who were connected to the Austrian Labor Committee (ALC), the exile organization of Austrian socialists in New York founded by Friedrich Adler.<sup>46</sup> Leichter and her friends regularly attended meetings, discussions, and lectures organized by ALC, where she met Otto Leichter, a dedicated Austrian socialist, former editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, and one of the leaders of this organization. They got married on June 26, 1943.<sup>47</sup>

The second chance that Elsa Leichter liked to invoke extended to her personal life. While she had voluntarily subordinated her career to her first husband in Vienna by giving up medical school, her marriage to Otto Leichter took on an essentially different character, which eludes adequate description on the spectrum between traditional and progressive. On the one hand, Elsa Leichter had matured and her outlook had become less idealistic and instead receptive to the complexities of reality. On the other hand, the experience of escape, exile, and resettlement had a greater impact on the gender roles in their relationship than it probably would have been the case in more ordinary

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<sup>45</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>46</sup> See for example Hans Christian Egger, *Die Exilpolitik der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie 1938 bis 1945* (Munich: Grin-Verlag, 2008); Manfred Marschalek, *Untergrund und Exil* (Vienna: Löcker, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> For more biographical information on Otto Leichter see Fleck and Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus*.

circumstances.<sup>48</sup>

In some respects, as Leichter recounted somewhat regretfully, she could not escape the traditional gender roles. When Elsa and Otto became a couple, she was working for the Jewish Social Service Association, whereas he was without employment. In this position with only Elsa earning an income, he refused to get married. He only proposed to Elsa after he had been hired by the Office of War Information in 1943. Moreover, Otto made it abundantly clear that he planned to return to Austria after the war to help rebuild the country, and that he expected her to join him if she became his wife.<sup>49</sup> She agreed, even though she had no desire to return to Europe. In the end, she was spared from making this decision. In order to explore the situation in Austria, Otto went to Vienna by himself in 1947, where his hopes of being welcome in the socialist party and of being able to play a constructive role in building up a democratic society were bitterly disappointed. In 1948 he came back to New York and stayed.<sup>50</sup>

In their family life, the gender roles took on a nontraditional constellation. Otto Leichter had fled to the United States with his sons Henry, born in 1924, and Franz, born in 1930. About two months before Otto met Elsa, the family learned that Käthe Leichter, Otto's first wife and the boys' mother, had been killed by the National Socialists in spring 1942.<sup>51</sup> She had delayed her departure from Austria and had been arrested in 1938, while Otto and his sons went first to France and later to the United States. He had assumed both

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<sup>48</sup> For an analysis of the impact of exile and emigration on gender roles, see Quack, "Changing Gender Roles and Emigration."

<sup>49</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter; Fleck and Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus*, 92-96.

<sup>50</sup> About Otto Leichter's experience in Vienna after World War II see Fleck and Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus*, 97-174. For a detailed autobiographical account of the experiences of a similarly disappointed socialist returnee see Joseph T. Simon, *Augenzeuge: Erinnerungen eines österreichischen Sozialisten. Eine sehr persönliche Zeitgeschichte* (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1979).

<sup>51</sup> Herbert Steiner, *Käthe Leichter: Leben und Werk* (Vienna: Europa-Verlag, 1973).

the maternal and paternal role, a pattern that remained for some time, even after Elsa had joined the household. He had qualities that were traditionally associated with the female parent. For example, “he could create a home and comfort in the worst situations,” as Elsa recalled.<sup>52</sup> He was the cook in the family. Such an atypical role constellation, a result of their refugee experience, also saved Elsa from the difficult position of assuming the place of the sons’ mother.<sup>53</sup>

The Leichters led independent professional lives. Elsa pursued a stable and steadily advancing career in social work. In contrast, Otto experienced a difficult professional situation for years. An Austrian journalist dedicated to the socialist party of his home country had limited opportunities in the United States if he wanted to stay within his line of work. After Otto Leichter’s return from Austria in 1948, he struggled to establish himself professionally. He wrote as a freelance journalist for some European newspapers, worked in a factory for a short time, and had some brief project appointments with the United Nations, but no permanent position materialized. His competence was tied to the German language, and his identity as a socialist became increasingly precarious in the political climate of 1950s-United States, as Fleck and Berger argued.<sup>54</sup> In 1957, almost a decade after he returned to New York, his freelance relationship with the German Press Agency (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, DPA) turned into a stable and prestigious position, when DPA commissioned him to establish a correspondent office at the United Nations, which he directed until his retirement in

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<sup>52</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>53</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter. Leichter remarked that Otto had “a heavy parental role carrying both genders.” This perceptive analysis of their family constellation reflects the perspective of an experienced family therapist reflecting on her life.

<sup>54</sup> Fleck and Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus*, 176-77.

1971.<sup>55</sup>

During these years of temporary jobs and freelancing, Otto Leichter worked at home much of the time, while Elsa went to her job in the agency, which she found fulfilling, which was her own sphere, and about which she preferred to keep to herself. Otto, in contrast, had the desire to share his day, his work, and his thoughts with her: “When I came home...he would receive me at the door very often with a piece of paper, an article he wrote or a letter he got ... but I did not have a need to share ... something was so complete that I could let go ... Otto would often quote me ... and say: ‘With Elsa, when you ask Elsa, where was she? Out. What did she do? Nothing.’”<sup>56</sup> This reversal of traditional gender roles also revealed itself as Elsa continued to describe their evenings after a work day, even when Otto had his position at DPA: “I knew more maybe about his day than he knew about mine, which was fine ... I was ready for a drink, but not necessarily to hear all about the German Press Agency.”<sup>57</sup>

Overall, Leichter described Otto as a supportive husband and her marriage as a “very deep friendship,” which was a product of their dedication to each other and the willingness to continuously work on their relationship.<sup>58</sup> Leichter remembered: “We developed our lives in America, really, together... When I met him, he was still a greenhorn, practically... I had already a job. I was a little bit more arrived, if you wish. Because my profession lent itself better to that.”<sup>59</sup> They had in common a strong appreciation for the United States, despite Otto following his sense of political duty and

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<sup>55</sup> Fleck and Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus*, 178-84.

<sup>56</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

trying to return to Austria, and despite his lengthy struggle to gain a professional foothold. Elsa commented on the arrogance of European exiles, particularly prominent among the intellectuals, and their unwillingness to even try to understand and, much less, to appreciate their host country and its culture.<sup>60</sup> Otto was a part of such a group of exiles, but he did not share this sentiment about the United States' cultural inferiority. In his circle he probably kept his dissent quiet, but he did talk about it with Elsa, who had no strong ties to this group and had also adopted a positive attitude toward the United States "wanting to get into the culture, but not becoming an American, what did I know what 'an American' was."<sup>61</sup>

Agreeing on this fundamental level, Elsa and Otto created a relationship that was complementary. While both were socialists and very interested in American politics, Elsa shaped a more practical expression of her worldview and her sustained need to contribute to a better society through her occupation as a social worker. This also helped her to avoid direct comparison with Otto's first wife, who had been politically active, very well known, and, after she was murdered by the National Socialists, was elevated to the status of a martyr among Austrian socialists, which did not bode well for Elsa's acceptance as Otto's wife among their socialist circle of exiles. In social work, Elsa found fulfillment and her very own sphere within American society. Her professional life was furthermore framed by Jewish elements. In contrast to Otto, who had distanced himself from Judaism as a young man and defined himself through his political conviction, Elsa's Jewish

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. She recalled that the typical exposure to American culture, which framed many exiles' thinking about the United States, was limited to authors such as Upton Sinclair, Walt Whitman, and Theodore Dreiser, and that they had "no idea about the richness of culture."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Her last comment about not knowing "what 'an American was'" seems to be the result of her reflections later in life, but in part it could as well pertain to an openness and curiosity about the culture at the time.

heritage was important to her, albeit not in a religious sense. Otto teased her about playing the Jew in the family, but to her this part of her identity grew in significance beyond a mere cultural heritage.<sup>62</sup> While her Jewish belonging resulted in experiences of anti-Semitism as a child and being expelled from her country, it turned into a positive force in the United States. Jewish organizations helped her reshape her life, provided her with a fellowship and enabled a career within the system of Jewish welfare. Before turning to Leichter's work, however, the next section introduces Gerda Schulman who became her close friend, co-author, and collaborator at the Jewish Family Service.

### **Gerda (Lang) Schulman, 1915-2013**

Gerda L. Schulman was born Gerda Lang on September 15, 1915 in Vienna.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to Leichter's modest upbringing, Schulman grew up in a well-situated, assimilated family in Vienna's third district. Her Hungarian-born father, Eugene (Jenő) Lang, owned a successful business importing fruits from Spain and Sicily, which grew into a large international company reaching into South America.<sup>64</sup> Schulman's mother Helene, born Helene Steiner, came from an established Jewish family who lived in Vienna's first district. Typical for a woman of her time, Helene did not get the opportunity to realize her interest in higher education herself, but she was immensely supportive of her two daughters Gerda and Lily and strongly encouraged them to pursue their interests.

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<sup>62</sup> Fleck and Berger, *Gefesselt vom Sozialismus*, 94; Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter.

<sup>63</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, "Personal History of the Lang-Steiner Family," Schulman papers, German National Library (DNB), Folder A.04; Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger, October 4, 1999, AHC 1218, recording, Austrian Heritage Collection, Leo Baeck Institute (LBI), New York.

<sup>64</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, "Personal History of the Lang-Steiner Family," Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A.04, 16ff. These international connections and the wealth provided by the company proved decisive in the family's escape from Austria in 1938.

Schulman grew up in a Viennese family in which Jewish religion or traditions played little to no role. While she recalled that the family observed a few traditional Jewish holidays, she did not feel Jewish, nor was that identity an issue for her until the National Socialists assumed power in Germany in 1933. In her everyday life, she had barely any contact with Jewish religious culture, as she remembered: “I don’t think I knew anybody who ate kosher.”<sup>65</sup> Only when her orthodox grandfather came to visit did she find it necessary to venture over to the second district to buy kosher food for him. In fact, Schulman’s family held orthodox Jews, who in the contemporary Viennese context often came from the eastern part of the Habsburg empire, and who were poorer and less educated, in contempt: “We adopted a subtle, slightly-anti-Semitic attitude, which was mixed, of course, with class.” This attitude became manifest, for example, when Schulman’s mother disapproved of one of Gerda’s friends from school, who had a Polish background.<sup>66</sup>

Gerda and her older sister Lily attended the “Schwarzwaldschule” (Mädchengymnasium der Eugenie Schwarzwald), an innovative, reformed school and the first school for girls in Austria whose diploma granted access to university.<sup>67</sup> Schulman recalled that she became interested in politics early and felt attracted to socialist ideas, which was coupled with a passion for literature and the arts. Looking back through the lens of an experienced family therapist, she later described her transformation from a timid and shy child into an outgoing and daring tomboy. Schulman interpreted this shift as a strategy to impress her father who seemingly had preferred Schulman’s sister: “This

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<sup>65</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> For more on the founder of the school, educational reformer Eugenie Schwarzwald, see Robert Streibel, ed., *Eugenie Schwarzwald und ihr Kreis* (Vienna: Picus, 1996).

subtle constellation: Mother-I, Father-Lily changed gradually, and I earned different labels like the ‘avid reader, the bright and serious one.’”<sup>68</sup> Assuming the role of the boy in the family, Schulman became her father’s “little comrade,” as he called her.<sup>69</sup> Thus, in addition to her parents’ support and the stimulating atmosphere at her school, Schulman attributed her turn towards an academic career to a reaction against her sister, in the course of which she created her personality as an intelligent, inquiring, and serious person.

As it was the case with other women émigrés who subscribed to socialist ideology, the motivation for Schulman’s choice of occupation was connected to her political and social idealism. Determined to contribute to the creation of a better and just society, young socialists sought careers that, in their own understanding, allowed them to work toward this goal. Such contribution could take on a variety of forms. While Elsa Leichter dreamed about being a “social doctor” and eventually became a social worker in Vienna, Gerda Schulman saw her approach to helping bring about a better society by studying law and becoming a juvenile judge. Her goal was to work with troubled children and juvenile delinquents.<sup>70</sup>

Choosing the career of a judge to help adolescents in trouble was an unusual route to take for a woman at the time, when social work, teaching, or psychology were typical professional fields. While academic role models were not available in her own family, Schulman’s choice of career was influenced by Hans Kelsen, a prominent law professor

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<sup>68</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, “Personal History of the Lang-Steiner Family,” Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A.04, 41-42.

<sup>69</sup> Gerda Schulman, “Essay on Feminist Family Therapy: A Review of Women in Families: A Framework for Family Therapy and The Invisible Web: Gender Patterns in Family Relationships,” *Contemporary Family Therapy* 12 (1990): 76.

<sup>70</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, “Personal History of the Lang-Steiner Family,” Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A.04, 43.

and father of Anna Kelsen, her best friend at the time. In addition to his work in legal theory, he is known for formulating the constitution of the Republic of Austria after World War I.<sup>71</sup> Schulman recalled that she immensely enjoyed the intellectual atmosphere in the Kelsen household, which was very different from her own home, as her parents were resourceful and entrepreneurial, but not intellectual. In fact, the Kelsens served as role models also for Schulman's parents, who followed their lead when it came to educational and similar decisions, for example concerning the question of which school the girls should attend.<sup>72</sup>

Inspired by Hans Kelsen, Schulman began studying law at Vienna University in the fall 1933. Since the faculty of law had admitted women for the first time in 1919, the number of female students had risen to approximately 290 women (10% of the total student body) by the fall semester 1933.<sup>73</sup> About 20% of these women were Jewish.<sup>74</sup> While Waltraud Heindl claimed that female Jewish students at Vienna University during this time period did not experience discrimination by faculty or students colleagues, Schulman's account qualifies this statement by illustrating the subtleties inherent in the arrangements and interactions between the genders, as well as among religious groups.<sup>75</sup>

While Schulman's narrative confirms Heindl's statement by saying that she was not

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<sup>71</sup> On Kelsen and the significance of his work see, for example, Tamara Ehs, ed., *Hans Kelsen: Eine politikwissenschaftliche Einführung* (Vienna: Facultas WUV, 2009); Rudolf Aladár Métall, *Hans Kelsen: Leben und Werk* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1969); Stanley L. Paulson, ed., *Hans Kelsen: Staatsrechtslehrer und Rechtstheoretiker des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>73</sup> In contrast, the faculty of philosophy started admitting women in 1897 and the faculty of medicine in 1900. Waltraud Heindl, "Zur Entwicklung des Frauenstudiums in Österreich," in *Durch Erkenntnis zu Freiheit und Glück ...: Frauen an der Universität Wien (ab 1897)*, Waltraud Heindl and Marina Tichy, eds. (Vienna: WUV Universitäts-Verlag, 1990), 17-26. For the numbers of male and female students during the interwar years see Tamara Ehs, "Die Staatswissenschaften: Historische Fakten zum Thema 'Billigdokorate' und 'Frauen- und Ausländerstudien,'" *Zeitgeschichte* 37 (2010): 243-45.

<sup>74</sup> Waltraud Heindl, "Die konfessionellen Verhältnisse: Jüdische und katholische Studentinnen," in Heindl and Tichy, eds., *Durch Erkenntnis zu Freiheit und Glück*, 149.

<sup>75</sup> Waltraud Heindl, "Die konfessionellen Verhältnisse," 143.

treated differently from non-Jewish students, she also described that Jewish students knew to avoid anti-Semitic professors, which may account for the fact that they did not experience immediate discrimination. Schulman did not recall that anybody talked about how to behave as a Jew or pointed out professors who were anti-Semitic, but she remembered that this knowledge was out there: “It was very known that there were some anti-Semitic [professors]... see, anti-Semitism, to some degree, was accepted I suppose like here with the black people. You don’t have to tell a black person that many whites have a kind of a bias.”<sup>76</sup>

Navigating through the university as a woman required similar strategies as doing so as a Jewish student. However, while anti-Semitism was, in Schulman’s recollection, not openly discussed, discrimination against women was. Students had devised a system of informal communication networks that were connected to tutoring. Before taking the big exams, students attended tutoring sessions, in which they reviewed material and prepared for the tests. In addition, they also learned which professors welcomed female students and which ones did not. Schulman remembered that “you would be told which professor was against girls and made what you would call sexual harassment. Who would sit there and say: ‘You shouldn’t sit there with such pretty legs.’ I mean, that was totally accepted. I didn’t even think it was odd.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, even though Jewish women were outsiders among the law students, they built networks and strategies of communication for mutual support in a hostile environment to compensate for the disadvantages they faced. In addition, Schulman “was very determined to show them that I am as good as

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<sup>76</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

they [were].”<sup>78</sup>

Schulman completed the regular law curriculum and took some classes in psychology as electives, which was a popular thing to do among Schulman’s friends, and among left-leaning students in Vienna more generally.<sup>79</sup> These students particularly gathered around Charlotte Bühler, a prominent developmental psychologist.<sup>80</sup> Schulman continued to pursue this interest in psychology during a stay abroad in Switzerland. Partly for academic reasons and partly to spend time with her friend Anna Kelsen, she went to Geneva, where Hans Kelsen held a position at the University. He recommended that she work with Jean Piaget, a developmental psychologist and friend of Kelsen. Schulman followed his advice and joined the Kelsen family for several months in 1936. In addition to taking classes in psychology at the University of Geneva, she volunteered in a home for wayward children.<sup>81</sup>

Another study trip abroad, this time in Paris, proved significant for her personal life, as she met Hans Schulman, her later husband. They got engaged in December 1937. In January 1938 Gerda Schulman received her doctoral degree as one of seven women, and in March the National Socialists annexed Austria. This event forced her to leave Austria and to suffer “the loss of my beloved Vienna.”<sup>82</sup> Like Leichter, Schulman recalled that she had been in absolute denial about the approaching danger in the years and months leading up to the events in March 1938: “I ... was very aware of what went

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> “Meldungsbuch,” Gerda Schulman papers, DNB, Folder C.01.01.01.

<sup>80</sup> “Schulman Lebensdok. Studium (iur) Wien (1933-1938),” Schulman papers, DNB, Folder C.01.01.

<sup>81</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger; Hans Kelsen to Gerda Lang, 25 October 1935, Schulman papers, DNB, Folder B.01.01.

<sup>82</sup> Schulman’s father had already moved some of his money abroad, and her mother had insisted on the urgency to leave the country as soon as possible after the annexation. The family members traveled separately and met up in Trieste, where Hans Schulman picked up Gerda to take her to Amsterdam, while the rest of the family went to Argentina. Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

on in Germany. I was convinced it would not happen in my Vienna, in Red Vienna.”<sup>83</sup>

She was fortunate, however, as Hans Schulman was Dutch and Gerda received citizenship through him. The couple stayed in Amsterdam with the Schulman family for about a year, where they were safe. Since they were soon convinced that war was imminent, they decided to leave Europe for the United States. In contrast to most other women in this study, Gerda Schulman did not enter the United States as a refugee but instead as a tourist in May 1939 and only changed her immigration status later.<sup>84</sup> Even though Schulman was not a refugee in legal terms and repeatedly stressed how privileged she had been, her lived reality in the subsequent years was very similar to the experiences of other women who had refugee status. In fact, she found herself in the same situation as her fellow Jewish exiles, with the class distinctions her family had held in Vienna mostly eradicated, and people around her puzzled by the fact that she couldn't speak Yiddish.<sup>85</sup>

### *Professional Reorientation*

Gerda and Hans Schulman settled in New York City. Hans Schulman's transition into his new life in the United States appears smooth, since he was a numismatist and was able to stay in the line of work he had done before. Gerda, in contrast, had to change direction substantially. Because of different legal systems in Austria and the United States, an Austrian law degree was of limited use.<sup>86</sup> Getting an American law degree would have taken many years and, more importantly, would have been very difficult to

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, "Personal History of the Lang-Steiner Family," Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A.04, 44.

<sup>85</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>86</sup> For an overview of Austrian and German lawyers and legal scholars who went to the United States, see Ernst C. Stiefel, and Frank Mecklenburg, *Deutsche Juristen im amerikanischen Exil (1933-1950)* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991).

manage financially.<sup>87</sup> In their book about German lawyers in exile in the United States, Stiefel and Mecklenburg reported that most of the exiles went into related professions, such as accounting, tax accounting, real estate, finance, and insurance. Schulman is one of seven lawyers (five men and two women) in Stiefel and Mecklenburg's list who became social workers in the United States, which was a pragmatic choice in her situation. In contrast to Schulman, who had just graduated and did not have any professional experience, others mostly put their European law degrees and positions in social administration to use in administration and university positions. For example, before going into social work in the United States, John Otto Reinemann had headed the legal department at a youth welfare office in Berlin, and Albert Schrekinger, who became a professor of social work at the University of Nebraska, had worked for the Vienna municipality.<sup>88</sup> In these cases the professional experience in German and Austrian social administration lent itself to be continued in the United States, where social administration was a category of social work. Their choice of career in exile seemed more obvious than Schulman's transformation into a therapeutic social worker. Gender may explain a part of these different trajectories as well. Reinemann and Schrekinger had already high-ranking positions in the city administration of Berlin and Vienna, respectively, which had been a male domain. Even though most of the men also had to get a social work degree in the United States, afterwards they rose relatively quickly to leading positions in agencies or secured professorships at universities, while many of the women remained in social work practice.

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<sup>87</sup> While the length and the costliness of getting a law degree in the United States is commonly mentioned as a reason for exiles to change occupation, Schulman was also told that language would be a problem in her case. As she spoke with a Viennese accent, becoming a trial lawyer would be no option for her. Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>88</sup> Stiefel and Mecklenburg, *Deutsche Juristen im amerikanischen Exil*, 75.

Schulman's professional reorientation was initiated by a combination of refugee aid societies and personal networks that led her onto her path to social work. In order to get a sense of her options, she networked; or in her own words, "one was passed around ... By chance somebody sent me to somebody who then was the senior social worker at the New York Hospital. And it was the beginning of the heydays of social work here ... And when you came from Vienna, you were immediately... you were Freudian! ... Everybody said: 'Do you know Freud?'"<sup>89</sup> Similar to Leichter, Schulman's Viennese origin made American social workers curious and well-disposed toward her.

Whereas the individualistic casework approach rested on Freudian psychoanalysis, and American refugee advisers and social work teachers saw a special affinity between the Viennese émigrés and this kind of social work, in fact this association was based on a limited understanding of early-twentieth-century psychology in Vienna. Sigmund Freud was certainly a key figure, but he was not the only innovator during the interwar years, when Vienna had become a center of modern psychological thought.<sup>90</sup> In addition to Freudian psychoanalysis, Alfred Adler's individual psychology was immensely popular.<sup>91</sup> Karl and Charlotte Bühler came to Vienna from Germany. Karl, a representative of Gestalt psychology, headed the psychological institute at the University of Vienna, and his wife Charlotte, a developmental psychologist, was a

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<sup>89</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>90</sup> For an example of sizeable body of literature see Mitchell G. Ash and William R. Woodward, eds. *Psychology and Twentieth-Century Thought and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>91</sup> In contrast to Freudian psychoanalysis, which focused on the history and treatment of an individual and often operated in seclusion, Adlerian individual psychology was characterized by a holistic view of the individual, emphasized people's sense of community ("social interest"), and maintained as a core tenet that people can be educated and change, all of which dovetailed with a socialist framework that aimed at the improvement of society. See, for example, Handlbauer, "Psychoanalytikerinnen und Individualpsychologinnen im Roten Wien." On the controversy between Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, which led to Adler and his followers to break away from the Freudian school and found their own, see, for example, Bernhard Handlbauer, *Die Adler-Freud-Kontroverse* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990).

productive teacher and researcher and, among other activities, ran a psychological laboratory in cooperation with the Vienna municipality.<sup>92</sup> This psychological institute, and particularly Charlotte Bühler's courses, was a popular gathering place for socialists who were interested in social reform guided by social scientific and psychological knowledge, with Gerda Schulman and her friends among them. Thus, while she was interested in psychology during her years as a student in Vienna, it was not the kind that American social workers assumed.

At her meeting with the senior social worker at the New York hospital, Schulman talked about her education and her interest in psychology, when "in the middle of the conversation she [the social worker] looks at me and says: 'You know what you are saying? You want to become a social worker.' And I said 'What is that? I didn't know that. What is a social worker?'"<sup>93</sup> Once Schulman learned more about the profession, she started to consider it a viable career option. After all, turning to law in Austria had been a vehicle to help the underprivileged and work with wayward youth. While social work would not have occurred as an appealing profession to her in Austria, in the United States it turned out to be a different occupational avenue leading to a similar goal.

And yet Schulman felt the need to justify her change of occupation and assert the validity of her decision to abandon previous aspirations to become a judge and go into social work instead. Considering the disparity in prestige of the two professions, even in the United States where social work had a considerably higher reputation than in Europe, Schulman's choice of career in emigration may have appeared as unusual to some, or perhaps even ill-advised. Schulman, however, turned a pragmatic professional choice in a

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<sup>92</sup> On Charlotte Bühler see, for example, Gerald Bühring, *Charlotte Bühler: Der Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 2007).

<sup>93</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

difficult situation in an unfamiliar country into the logical culmination of previous experience and interests, as she reflected on her career later in her life: “Coming from an [sic] European background and having completed law school at the University of Vienna, my turning to a School of Social Work might appear strange. To me, however, it was a natural development, since I had planned to become a juvenile judge and my years of study were filled with courses in psychology. Soon after my arrival in this country I entered and graduated from the New York School of Social Work. This was an important period in my life, not only because I learned some basic things about social work and casework in specific, but also because living and studying with young Americans gave me a real sense of belonging.”<sup>94</sup>

In order to embark on this new professional endeavor, Schulman applied to the New York School of Social Work, an institution with a focus on psychoanalytical social casework, and was admitted to start the Master’s program in the spring semester 1940, as the University accepted credits from her law studies in Vienna to fulfill the requirements of the Bachelor’s degree.<sup>95</sup> The English language remained a significant obstacle, however. Even before she decided to go into social work, Schulman had attended language camp for refugees in the Catskills over the summer. In this camp, Schulman “really learned English, and ... how to smoke cigarettes and so forth, and other things.”<sup>96</sup> As by the fall her English was good but not sufficient for graduate school, her advisers

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<sup>94</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, “Exploration of the Meaning of the Past by Client and Worker in a Dynamic Helping Relationship which is Oriented toward the Present,” Gerda Schulman papers, DNB, Folder C.01.03.01, iii.

<sup>95</sup> For an institutional history of the School of Social Work see Ronald A. Feldman and Sheila B. Kamerman, *The Columbia University School of Social Work: A Centennial Celebration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>96</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

sent her to a Jewish social work agency to read case records for several months.<sup>97</sup> This exposure to case records not only helped with English in general, but she became familiar with social work terminology and the environment of a social work agency, even before starting her program.

Schulman graduated in February 1942 with the thesis “A Study of Parental Attitudes in Cases of Fifteen Children Showing Obsessional Traits.”<sup>98</sup> In this study, she assessed “the parental influence on the formation of neurotic and particularly compulsive traits in children.” As she explained, an understanding of such parental influences is relevant for social work because “one of the most difficult factors to be overcome in remedial treatment of children is the attitude of the parent to his child.” In addition to social workers, she claimed, the parents need to be better informed and have a better understanding of the psychiatric processes in their children and with their children “to help to guide a child’s development toward a healthier adulthood.”<sup>99</sup>

This thesis is a document with a clear research focus to inform social work practice. Schulman’s thesis was situated in the mainstream of social casework in the early 1940s by using Freudian theory to improve the mental health of social work clients. In addition to focusing exclusively on psychological processes, she claimed that parents often cited external factors for the condition of the child, in order to distract from the likely possibility that for “the children’s problems and difficulties ... both parents, but

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<sup>97</sup> It is not clear if this task was part of actual employment or merely an exercise, but I suspect it was the latter. Most likely it grew out of the long-standing collaboration between the school and New York agencies, where students also did their field work required by their programs.

<sup>98</sup> Gerda Schulman, “A Study of Parental Attitudes in Cases of Fifteen Children Showing Obsessional Traits” (Master’s Thesis, Columbia University, 1942).

<sup>99</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, “A Study of Parental Attitudes,” Gerda Schulman papers, DNB, Folder C.01.02.01, 2.

particularly the mother, seem responsible.”<sup>100</sup> The intensity with which Schulman subscribed to psychoanalytical therapy of individuals as the subject of social work represents her first steps in the new profession and illustrates an abrupt departure from the kind of psychology in which she had been interested in Europe. Informed by their socialist framework, many members of the Bühler circle had placed a heavy emphasis on the social environment as a factor in understanding psychological processes. Her training at the New York School of Social Work located Schulman on the opposite end of the spectrum.

While Schulman’s first years in the United States were successful and productive career-wise, her personal life proved more difficult. In 1943 she gave birth to her daughter Monica, and a year later her husband divorced her. Schulman raised her daughter by herself and never remarried. As an immigrant and new to her profession, she had to navigate life as a single mother at a time when child care facilities were not available to her. While working part-time at the Jewish Family Service, Schulman was able to rely on her parents, who had also immigrated to New York from Argentina, where they had spent the war years. In 1947, they moved to California but maintained a close relationship with Schulman’s daughter Monica. An “enormously successful and ... very unusual person,” Monica led a troubled life, starting with anorexia when she was thirteen and eventually culminating in suicide at age forty-two.<sup>101</sup> Schulman and her family honored Monica with the Monica L. Gollub Scholarship for “an idealistic young woman

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>101</sup> Monica Gollub was the first woman commissioner appointed by the governor to the New York State Workers’ Compensation Board in 1979. Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger; Gerda L. Schulman, “Personal History of the Lang-Steiner Family,” Gerda Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A.04, 46; Monica Gollub Obituary, *New York Times*, January 4, 1986, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/04/obituaries/monica-gollub.html>.

who devoted her professional life serving the disadvantaged” at the Eugene Lang College of the New School in New York.<sup>102</sup>

While Schulman had always been very close to her family, Elsa Leichter, a friend and colleague from the Jewish Family Service assumed particular significance in her life. After portraying the theoretical framework of Leichter’s and Schulman’s work, the next section details their trajectories as they converged in Multi-Family Group Therapy, a treatment they developed for their clients at JFS in New York City.

### **Diagnostic Versus Functional Casework**

Leichter and Schulman graduated from the social work programs at Western Reserve University and Columbia University, respectively, steeped in the Freudian, so-called diagnostic approach to social casework. Their jobs, however, took them to the Jewish Family Service, an agency aligned with the opposing functional school of social casework. Starting in the 1930s, this approach was developed at the University of Pennsylvania as a competitor to the dominant Freud-based approach, which led to an intense feud among theorists and had implications for those in practice.

Dominated by Virginia Robinson and Jessie Taft, the Pennsylvania School of Social Work was the hotbed of functional casework based on the theories of Otto Rank, a former disciple of Sigmund Freud, who broke away from his teacher with a modified version of psychoanalytic theory.<sup>103</sup> Rank had traveled extensively in the United States in

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<sup>102</sup> Eugene Lang, the namesake of Schulman’s father, is Schulman’s cousin, i.e. the son of her father’s brother, who became an enormously successful entrepreneur in manufacturing. The New School’s college of liberal arts is named after him, as he donated ten million dollars to the university to expand this college. See <http://www.newschool.edu/lang/lang-history>, accessed October 19, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> For an account of Rank’s life and work see E. James Lieberman, *Acts of Will: The Life and Work of Otto Rank* (New York: Free Press, 1985).

the 1920s, which brought him to the University of Pennsylvania in 1927, where he was first invited to give a talk and later to teach courses. Both Taft and Robinson underwent therapy with Rank, became staunch supporters of his work, and shaped the social work program at the University of Pennsylvania following Rankian psychology. In doing so, they provided an institutional home for the outcast who had once been Freud's mentee.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, they helped disseminate Rank's work. Taft translated the lengthy German texts into English to make them accessible to an American audience and to use them in training social workers.

Compared to classic Freudian psychoanalysis, Robinson and Taft found Rank's approach better suited to the specific practical requirements of social work. Rank understood the client's will as the crucial vehicle for changes in personality and for adapting to changing environments, which stood in stark contrast to the Freudian deterministic model according to which adults repeat behavior they had exhibited as infants. Rank's most radical modification of psychoanalytical technique was to shorten the therapeutic process, which had an enormous practical value for social workers, who had to operate in settings usually characterized by a shortage of time and financial means to spend on a client. Therapy according to Rank emphasized the relationship between therapist and client, as well as the therapeutic process, which he understood as an empowering experience for the client. In contrast to the Freudian approach, which focused on the past, the therapy according to Rank concentrated on the present.<sup>105</sup> Thus, Rank's framework lent itself to a version of social casework that meshed well with an

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<sup>104</sup> See Fallend, *Caroline Newton, Jessie Taft, Virginia Robinson*, 115.

<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Fallend, *Caroline Newton, Jessie Taft, Virginia Robinson*, 115ff; Lubove, *The Professional Altruist*, 114 ff; Eric S. Stein, "Otto Rank: Pioneering Ideas for Social Work Theory and Practice," *Psychoanalytic Social Work* 17 (2010): 116-31.

agency setting with limited resources. Aside from practice-related matters, this division spoke to a perennial conflict within social work about its basic orientation as either a helping profession dedicated to social reform and the empowerment of clients or the more recent and dominant trend of perceiving those in need of help as patients who needed to be fixed by the social workers. Psychologist John Ehrenreich, who interrogated the development from a social policy perspective, argued that in this fierce debate about techniques and methods, social workers implicitly engaged in a controversy about the role of the newly created welfare state, about its implications for social work, and about the relationship of people to the state and society more generally.<sup>106</sup>

In the context of practice, functionalists set out to rectify the shortcomings that diagnostic casework started to encounter in dealing with large numbers of clients during the economic depression of the 1930s. Social caseworkers were so preoccupied with their psychoanalytic approach that they “struggled with how to provide psychological help to people who were suffering economically ... and became sidetracked from their fundamental concern with improving clients’ social functioning and with their commitment to the poor.”<sup>107</sup> However, Gordon Hamilton, one of the leading representatives of the diagnostic approach who provided the authoritative diagnostic text with her book *Theory and Practice of Social Case Work* in 1940 and introduced the term “psychosocial” to point out the interrelatedness of the clients’ internal and external worlds, was very critical of the controversy. She commented that the problem was not so much located in shortcomings of theory, but in a stark discrepancy between theoretical content and practical application. Being a voice of reason who was not heard in the noise

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<sup>106</sup> John H. Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), especially chapter 4.

<sup>107</sup> Eda G. Goldstein, “Psychoanalysis and Social Work,” *Psychoanalytic Social Work* 9 (2002): 34.

of the controversy, she criticized the popular, excessive focus on psychoanalysis and lamented that social work had lost its way by being too absorbed by the inner life of their clients.<sup>108</sup>

Elsa Leichter and Gerda Schulman entered the field in the 1940s, when the war between the diagnostic and the functionalist camps was in its most intense and acrimonious phase. The rift between the two camps was so vast—and supposedly unproductive—that the Family Service Association of America commissioned a study in 1947 to find commonalities between both schools of thought. Instead of common ground, all the committee could find were differences, as well as an almost Kuhnian incommensurability between the two paradigms with “wide gaps in mutual understanding which interfered with our attempts to arrive at comparisons.”<sup>109</sup> This incompatibility carried over into employment practices resulting in difficulties of social workers trained in the diagnostic tradition to get jobs in functional agencies and vice versa.<sup>110</sup> And yet, both Leichter and Schulman graduated from diagnostic schools and started working at a functionally oriented agency. Leichter’s teachers in Cleveland certainly were not happy when she accepted a job offer from the Jewish Family Service. She recalled: “They cried

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<sup>108</sup> See Goldstein, “Psychoanalysis and Social Work,” 35; Gordon Hamilton, *Theory and Practice of Social Case Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940). In the course of the 1950s, both camps started to recognize the advantages of the respective other side, and by integrating elements of the previous opposing schools, a synthesis of both case work approaches started to emerge by the late 1950s. See Martha M. Dore, “Functional Theory: Its History and Influence on Contemporary Social Work Practice,” in *A Century of Social Work and Social Welfare at Penn*, ed. Ram A. Cnaan, Melissa E. Dichter, and Jeffrey Draine (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 165-79.

<sup>109</sup> *A Comparison of Diagnostic and Functional Casework Concepts* quoted in Dore, “Functional Theory,” 172. In some places, reverberations of this feud between the diagnostic and functional schools could be felt as late as the 1980s, as Dore revealed in her personal recollections. As she received a job offer from the University of Pennsylvania, a colleague at Columbia University expressed her condolences instead of congratulating her. Joining the Penn faculty was not easy either: “It was as though everyone there spoke a language that was similar to but not quite the same as mine... I was clearly stamped with a big D for diagnostic and made to understand that the failure to communicate belonged only to me.” Martha M. Dore, “Commentary,” in *A Century of Social Work and Social Welfare at Penn*, ed. Cnaan, Ram A., Melissa E. Dichter, and Jeffrey Draine (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 180.

<sup>110</sup> See also Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination*, 125-26.

and said: ‘Please don’t forget what you learned here! They are functional!’ At the time, they were the big sinners.”<sup>111</sup> Leichter did not seem to mind entering the territory of the ideological enemy. In fact, perhaps she was less committed to the Freudian underpinnings of the Cleveland program than her teachers had assumed. While Leichter’s choice of employment may have appeared to them as a breach of solidarity with the diagnostic approach, it was merely another change of direction in her trajectory with more to follow over the next decades. Leichter, who was older than most of her American-born colleagues in graduate school and had a diverse background that included medicine, social work training and practice in Vienna, as well as a substantial body of literature that she had read in her socialist circles, was perhaps more pragmatic than others in using theories as flexible vehicles for improved practice rather than perceiving them as ultimate truth and marker of affiliation within the profession. While émigrés frequently emphasized that practice and service for the clients was their fundamental cause, they did rely on an intellectual foundation they had acquired in Europe, which perhaps made them attuned to theorizing and enabled them to raise above the disputes of the time and find a place in the profession.

As Leichter started working at the Jewish Family Service, she immediately realized that her training that had so intensively focused on Freudian psychoanalysis was only useful to a certain degree in the everyday practice at the agency. It became clear to her that, for the sake of her clients, she needed to find a balance between attention to intra-psychic processes, to the environment, and to the clients’ material needs. She described one of her first cases that she attempted to handle with the diagnostic approach

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<sup>111</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. Original: “They cried and said ‘please don’t forget what you learned here. They are functional.’ Das waren damals die großen Sünder.”

as learned in Cleveland: “Then the supervisor came—I was dealing with a relief case—and she said: ‘So, what do you think ...?’ And I said I am convinced there is an Oedipus. And she said: ‘So, what do you do with it? Maybe there is an Oedipus ... But they need relief. How are you going to...?’ And I thought: But, yes, you are right!”<sup>112</sup> Leichter found that she was not properly equipped to conduct her responsibilities at the agency to her satisfaction and, in addition to the in-house courses at JFS, she started to take classes and workshops at the University of Pennsylvania with teachers of the functional school, such as Virginia Robinson. Leichter “actually changed sides to a large extent, but not entirely.”<sup>113</sup> She recalled that a crucial element of her practical work, the awareness of the interpersonal processes between client and social workers including an understanding what it means to give or receive help, had not been part of her training in Cleveland.<sup>114</sup> While this perspective was part of how social work was conducted at JSF in general, it took on special significance for Leichter, as she reflected on her practice both in the light of her training and her previous experience in Vienna: “This was very important to me, and I thought about Vienna, and how I clueless I was in situations in which I was afraid, and what have you.”<sup>115</sup>

Schulman also transitioned from the diagnostic to the functional approach, while she was working for JFS. In contrast to Leichter’s case, however, there is no evidence that the shift was similarly dramatic. She explained that she gradually got interested in

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<sup>112</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Da ist der Supervisor gekommen – und das war ein Relief Fall, nicht – und sie hat gesagt: ‘So, what do you think ...?’ And I said I am convinced there is an Oedipus. Hat sie gesagt: ‘So, what do you do with it? Maybe there is an Oedipus ... But they need relief. How are you going to...?’ Da habe ich mir gedacht: Ja, Sie haben doch Recht!”

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. German original: “und ich bin in Wirklichkeit umgeschwungen to a large extent, nie vollkommen.”

<sup>114</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter; Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>115</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Das hat mir schon sehr viel bedeutet, und ich habe an Wien gedacht, und wie ich da so völlig ahnungslos durch die Welt gezogen bin in Situationen, in denen ich mich gefürchtet habe, und was weiß ich. ”

the teachings of the program at the University of Pennsylvania, mostly because of her work environment that was functionally oriented. After five years at JFS, “I reached a point professionally where the discrepancy between my outer success and my feeling that I wanted something more and different for myself and those I wanted to help.”<sup>116</sup>

During the academic year 1951/52, equipped with a fellowship from the Jewish Family Service, she attended the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania from where she graduated with an Advanced Curriculum Certificate in 1952. Her thesis, “Exploration of the Meaning of the Past by Client and Worker in a Dynamic Helping Relationship which is Oriented Toward the Present,” displays core elements of the functional school as applied in her practice, such as an emphasis on the relationship between the client and the social worker, the helping rather than corrective position of the social worker, and an orientation toward the present.

Considering the fierce feud between the diagnostic and functional schools of social casework that constituted the context of Leichter’s and Schulman’s early years in social work, their transitioning between them appears quite remarkable. A long-term perspective on their careers, however, reveals that this flexibility was characteristic rather than exceptional. Their adaptability and eclecticism to solve practical requirements fueled their most innovative contribution to social work, for which they combined their specialties of group therapy and family therapy to adjust multi-group family therapy to agency settings as found at the JFS.

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<sup>116</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, “Exploration of the Meaning of the Past by Client and Worker in a Dynamic Helping Relationship which is Oriented Toward the Present,” Schulman papers, DNB, Folder C.01.03, iii – iv.

## Family Therapy, Group Therapy, and Multi-Family Group Therapy

In her social work practice, Gerda Schulman specialized in family therapy. She explained this as a pragmatic move guided by opportunity: “Family therapy became my specialty. It was just that I got in when it began to be developed.”<sup>117</sup> In the 1950s, several psychiatrists on the East Coast began to include the patients’ families in the treatment of patients with severe schizophrenia, thus expanded the focus of diagnosis and treatment from the individual to their social environment.<sup>118</sup> While these advances in family therapy happened in a medical context, similar processes took place in social work, not least because social casework traditionally had strong ties to and was deeply influenced by developments in psychiatry.<sup>119</sup> Casework, which had traditionally focused on the individual, also opened up to include members of the clients’ immediate family networks.

Group therapy became Elsa Leichter’s specialty at JFS, where she ascended to director of group therapy by the late 1940s. Her intensifying work with groups is reflected in the paper “Family Casework Through the Group Method” published in *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*.<sup>120</sup> In this article she laid out the process of group counseling at JFS by means of an exemplary case, thus explaining to her colleagues the functioning of this process, for which clients and under which circumstances it was applicable, and its benefits vis-à-vis individual therapy. The client, who Leichter referred to as Mrs. B, approached the agency to seek help with her four-year-old son, who was

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<sup>117</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, interview by Hermann Zwanzger.

<sup>118</sup> Among the pioneers were Theodore Lidz at Yale, Nathan Akerman in New York, and Lyman Wynne at the University of Rochester, see for example Michael Wirsching, ed., *Paar- und Familientherapie* (Berlin: Springer, 2002), particularly chapter 1.

<sup>119</sup> For an analysis of this relationship see Lubove, *The Professional Altruist*, particularly chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>120</sup> Elsa Leichter, “Family Agency Service in Relation to Marital Problems,” *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 23 (1946): 157–65; see also Elsa Leichter, “Family Casework Through the Group Method,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 32 (1956): 376–87.

“aggressive, hyperactive, destructive[,] ... had frequent temper tantrums, and there was some bedwetting at night.”<sup>121</sup> During the therapy, which lasted more than a year and focused on Mrs. B, the client worked through her relationships with the problem child and the two siblings, her husband and her parents, particularly her mother. Leichter held individual sessions with Mrs. B in addition to the weekly meetings of the group, which consisted of six members. She also called in Mr. B and the son for individual sessions. When Leichter considered it necessary, she consulted with psychiatrists about particular aspects of her client’s problems, referred Mrs. B as well as her son to a psychiatrist at a hospital, and ordered a physical check-up of the son. Thus, in order to approach the goal of helping the clients to realize “limited goals of a psycho-social nature, aimed at a more balanced and therefore healthier functioning of the family as a whole rather than ... drastic personality change of each individual member,” she combined different kinds of assistance as their need emerged over the process of therapy.<sup>122</sup> While Leichter used some Freudian elements in the analysis, such as referring to Oedipal aspects of Mrs. B in relation to her father, this case illustrated how the requirements of every-day practice were better met with a flexible mix of approaches, as well as attention to the social environment.<sup>123</sup> In this case, Leichter teased out Mrs. B’s immigrant background as a Polish Jew to have played a role in her uneasiness in her American existence, in addition to relationship problems with the various members of her family, the combination of which, as Leichter concluded, led to a state of anxiety, which fueled the son’s behavioral

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<sup>121</sup> Leichter, “Family Casework Through the Group Method,” 377.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the boy suffered from myopia, but his oculist decided that, with his behavior, glasses would pose a too high risk of injury. Leichter suspected that the bad eyesight contributed to the boy’s frustration, and together with a physician as well as a psychiatrist decided that the child could wear glasses, which immediately led to some improvement in his behavior.

problems. The solutions for the complex problems were complicated as well, and involved the grandmother, both parents, as well as the son. In addition to providing “social approval and acceptance” for Mrs. B, on which she depended on to a high degree, the group also simulated the larger social environment and functioned as a safe setting in which she could experiment with and test her newly developed conduct.<sup>124</sup>

Whereas in the above setting one family member, the main client, participated in the therapy group, Leichter and Schulman started to experiment with putting entire families together. They were inspired by developments in psychiatry. Peter Laqueur, who published the first paper on this new treatment in 1964 together with two colleagues, is commonly credited with the creation of multi-group family therapy.<sup>125</sup> By treating several families together, the psychiatrists hoped that the patients could benefit from positive outside role models, differentiate themselves from their own families, and thus to step outside the structure that may have played a causative role in their problem. Similar to family therapy, this method was initially intended as improved treatment for schizophrenia patients in a hospital setting, but also to provide a forum of communication and exchange for the patients’ families.<sup>126</sup> While Laqueur and his colleagues started the first attempts of multi-group family therapy in the 1950s and published early results in the 1960s, this method was increasingly refined during the 1980s and 1990s to be applied

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<sup>124</sup> Leichter, “Family Casework Through the Group Method,” 378; 387.

<sup>125</sup> H. Peter Laqueur, H.A. LaBurt, and E. Morong. “Multiple Family Therapy: Further Developments.” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 10 (1964): 69-80.

<sup>126</sup> For an overview of the history of multi-group family therapy, or multiple family therapy, see Eia Asen, “Multiple Family Therapy: An Overview,” in *Journal of Family Therapy* 24 (2002): 3–16; Scott A. Edwards, “The Essential Elements of Multi-Family Group Therapy: A Delphy Study” (PhD diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2001); Paula Hollins Gritzer, and Helen S. Okun, “Multiple Family Group Therapy,” in *Handbook of Family and Marital Therapy*, ed. Benjamin B. Wolman and George Stricker (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 315-42; Fritz B. Simon, Ulrich Clement, and Helm Stierlin, *Die Sprache der Familientherapie: Ein Vokabular* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), particularly pages 226-27.

to a wider variety of conditions including drug abuse, eating disorders, child abuse, and chronic illnesses. In her survey article “Multiple Family Therapy: An Overview,” Eia Asen even refers to this approach as the “multiple family paradigm,” accentuating the sustained significance this method has assumed in therapeutic settings.<sup>127</sup>

In the early 1960s, Leichter and Schulman adapted Laqueur’s multiple family therapy model to a social work clientele and transferred it to the institutional setting of the Jewish Family Service. Schulman recounted the story of their “professional ‘marriage:”

Elsa had become the agency’s director of group therapy and was in charge of the training program – in fact she trained me as she did so many others in this modality . . . . I had in the meantime become interested and specialized in family therapy and headed a special department. Motivated by our enjoyment in working together—we had carried cases jointly and had done some writing together—we hit upon the idea to become a co-therapeutic team combining our respective skills and specialties. Thus, we decided to form a group consisting of three families and this is how MFGT was born at JFS.<sup>128</sup>

To MFGT practitioners, their method was more effective than regular group therapy because the entire family was present in the treatment situation, which enabled “family drama or comedy . . . [to be] plaid [sic] out in front of the group rather than being reported about as it occurs in other therapy.”<sup>129</sup> While MFGT focused on the actual interpersonal interactions of the families, rather than an interpreted narrative by one member, the group situation also functioned as a simulation of the social environment in which participants could try new ways of behavior or interaction. In addition to combining group therapy and family therapy, the practitioners stressed their method’s character as therapy and claimed a place for it in the profession as “a treatment modality, not just a societal

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<sup>127</sup> Asen, “Multiple Family Therapy,” 14.

<sup>128</sup> Gerda L. Schulman “For November 18 1976,” Gerda Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A.01.01, 4.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

phenomenon like ... a communal living group.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, by making sure to stress the therapeutic connection, through which social work claimed its legitimacy, they distanced themselves from other, competing group approaches in social work, such as group work, which will be discussed in chapter 3.

Laqueuer and his colleagues in psychiatry focused on severely ill people diagnosed with schizophrenia, who were kept in psychiatric wards, often in social isolation, and were subjected to sometimes grueling medical treatment, such as insulin shock treatment.<sup>131</sup> The Jewish Family Service, in contrast, was an agency that offered consultation and outpatient treatment to those clients who sought help. The client and his or her family had to go to the agency for their appointments, which were often held at a weekly or bi-weekly basis for several months. Therefore, not only were the cases less severe, the clients also had to participate on their own volition. Furthermore, even though the therapy working groups in hospitals sometimes included social workers, the leaders were physicians and psychiatrists.

Neither Elsa Leichter nor Gerda Schulman had a medical degree, and yet they led their own therapy groups, modified the treatment modalities, and published their findings in pertinent journals. However, as Schulman deplored in a conference talk in 1978, regardless of their “skills and merits, social workers often find themselves at the low end of the career totem pole.” She went on to argue that “psychiatrists claim they deserve more money because of longer training and medical authority.” In reality, though, “oftentimes in family therapy social workers have much more experience and training

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>131</sup> Asen, “Multiple Family Therapy,” 3.

than some psychiatrists and still earn less.”<sup>132</sup> This commentary on the relationship between psychiatrists with a medical degree and social workers reveals yet another dimension of how the professional world of social workers was reflective of occupation and gender. The ostensible issue of the disparity in education and subsequently salaries was undergirded by unequal gender relations, as more men than women were psychiatrists and vice versa in social work.<sup>133</sup> While this dynamic is true for the United States in general, coming to choosing a profession from the outside as a refugee or an immigrant with little to no financial means made it even less likely for women to go into psychiatry than for American-born women.<sup>134</sup>

This multi-family group therapy added to the other kinds of treatment modalities at the JFS, such as group therapy, marriage counseling, and family therapy, among others. In this agency, which focused on the family as the central unit of therapy, Leichter and Schulman based their work on the assumption “that all parts of the family are interdependent, affect each other in a most powerful way, and participate in the perpetuation of their system.”<sup>135</sup> Multi-family group therapy was considered particularly suitable for families that benefited from outside inspiration or role models, or who were missing a parent, since a member of a different family could assume this role in sessions

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<sup>132</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, “no title” (draft of paper to be presented at the conference “The Changing Role of Social Workers in Mental Health,” South Beach Psychiatric Center, April 14, 1978), Gerda Schulman papers, DNB, Folder A1.01.01, 2.

<sup>133</sup> According to the National Survey of Psychiatric Practice, only 14.5% of psychiatrists were women in 1982. The percentage rose to 25% in 1996, cited in Frank et al., “Characteristics of Female Psychiatrists,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 158 (2001): 205.

<sup>134</sup> Immigrant men certainly faced similar economic restrictions. More research is needed to get more insight into the gender dynamics among refugees and immigrants regarding their positioning in social work and related professions.

<sup>135</sup> Elsa Leichter, and Gerda L. Schulman. “Multi-Family Group Therapy: A Multidimensional Approach,” *Family Process* 13 (1974): 95.

or serve as a role model.<sup>136</sup> Thus, nuclear families, different family configurations, and sometimes even members of extended families were part of the therapy groups. Such configurations of social work counseling significantly differed from the typical individual casework situations, both in the theoretical understanding and in the actual setting. With their socio-political background that valued groups over the individual, and their own personal preference of groups of peers and family, it is not surprising that after their brief stint of training in diagnostic casework, both women found a way to direct their work into a specialty that focused on interpersonal relations. Within the general individualistic framework of American social work in the mid-twentieth century, they created a niche and pioneered a social work specialty at their agency that was framed by a group approach. Thus, they found an intermediate position by linking the individual back to his/her social context, which had largely fallen out of favor in the psychoanalytically oriented casework.

Leichter and Schulman co-authored several articles from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s chronicling their approaches to multi-family group therapy, discussing case studies, and generally sharing with their audience their experiences and recommendations.<sup>137</sup> Based on their work with groups of families at JFS, they presented processes and dynamics that occurred in the situations and settings they discussed, offered procedures and recommendations for other practitioners in this area of social work. Over the years, these articles also took on the character of progress reports on this

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 95–96.

<sup>137</sup> Elsa Leichter and Gerda Schulman, “Emerging Phenomena in Multiple Family Group Treatment,” *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 18 (1968): 59–69; Elsa Leichter and Gerda Schulman, “Interplay of Group and Family Treatment Techniques in Multifamily Group Therapy,” *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 22 (1972): 167–76; Leichter and Schulman. “Multi-Family Group Therapy.”

treatment modality and the authors' increasing expertise in and refinement of the method.

Leichter and Schulman became recognized as innovative contributors to the advancement of family therapy. Their publications entered the canon of literature on multi-group family therapy and remained standard references until the 1980s. By then, the renewed interest and research in this field brought in its wake a wave of new literature that gradually replaced older publications. However, Leichter and Schulman's articles on MFGT are still referenced alongside Peter Laqueur, the creator, as the developers of an important variation of the method for the specific setting of a family agency.<sup>138</sup>

Leichter and Schulman pursued their separate areas of work beyond their cooperation on multi-group family therapy. Undoubtedly informed by the experience and knowledge gained from their collaboration, Leichter continued to use the group approach in her work with married couples, experimented with different constellations, and reported her findings in publications. Transcending the individual orientation remained the core of her approach. In her 1973 article "Treatment of Married Couples Groups," she pointed out the significant departure of this treatment, which it had in common with the family groups she conducted together with Schulman, from "the orthodox psychoanalytic school of thought" that insisted on working with one person exclusively.<sup>139</sup>

Leichter not only transcended the individual orientation, she also invoked her own experiences and strong belief in advocacy for suffering people instead of blaming the

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<sup>138</sup> For example, in the *Family Therapy Sourcebook* Leichter and Schulman's 1974 article "Multi-Family Group Therapy: A Multidimensional Approach" is listed in the section "Key Books, Chapters, Articles" with the following annotation: "Case examples are used to illustrate the dynamic and process of outpatient MFGT. This is an excellent article and would be useful for anyone about to initiate outpatient MFGT." Fred P. Piercy, and Douglas H. Sprenkle, *Family Therapy Sourcebook* (New York: Guilford Press, 1986), 286.

<sup>139</sup> Elsa Leichter, "Group Psychotherapy of Married Couples' Groups: Some Characteristic Treatment Dynamics," *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 12 (1962): 154–63; Elsa Leichter, "Treatment of Married Couples Groups," *The Family Coordinator* 22 (1973): 31–42

victim. In this article, she went beyond discussing therapeutic techniques, commented on larger social trends influencing the institution of marriage, and warned against judgment, while demonstrating the appropriateness of a more relativistic, tolerant and psychosocial approach. In the conclusion of the article on group treatment of married couples, she cautioned readers “to remember that the institution of marriage is now in a state of great flux” and she advised being vigilant of the further unfolding of this development, but to refrain from judgment. Listing drug use, “switching of partners” in sexual relationships, and the consequences of women’s liberation as examples of factors influencing relationships, Leichter reminded her colleagues that as members of society, therapists “tend like many others to react with shock and rather judgmental attitudes.” They need to put their personal values aside and, since the clients came to seek assistance, “help the marital partners to achieve the kind of relationship which is mutually more satisfying and offers some stability and security to the next generation.”<sup>140</sup> Coming from a woman who experienced an atmosphere of transforming gender relations in 1920s-Vienna, this commentary was certainly a call for professional conduct in social work but also a recognition of her own experience about needing to be flexible and to accept change as part of social reality.

Schulman expanded her research to issues in family therapy including single parent families, step-families, troubled adolescents, sibling relationships, and feminist

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<sup>140</sup> Leichter, “Treatment of Married Couples Groups,” 41.

family therapy.<sup>141</sup> An invitation to contribute an article about “The Changing American Family: For Better or Worse” to the first issue of the new journal *International Journal of Family Therapy* in 1979 speaks to the status she held within the professional community.<sup>142</sup> Echoing Leichter’s observations about transformations in marriage constellations in the context of family, Schulman explained that this topic’s “underlying theme had to do with profound anxiety reflecting the fear that family may not survive.” Reassuring her readers that change is inevitable but can be positive and productive, she explained: “While the structure of the family has changed, as is true of any other living system, whose survival depends on its successful adaptation to the environment, all families have certain functions in common.”<sup>143</sup> Stressing function, for example caring for and socializing the young, rather than the family’s changing structure, Schulman argued that family was not going to disappear, as it is a constitutive unit linking the individual to larger society.

This article, more than other publications that focused on modalities and techniques of treatment, reveals the eclectic intellectual foundation of Schulman’s work and reflects changing perspectives in the social work profession. Her use of biological language and ecological metaphors is particularly striking. Within four decades she had moved from her master’s thesis that investigated in strictly Freudian terms the

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<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Gerda L. Schulman, “The Single Parent Family,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 51 (1975): 381–88; Gerda L. Schulman, “The Changing American Family: For Better or Worse,” *International Journal of Family Therapy* 1 (1979): 9–21; Gerda L. Schulman, “Divorce, Single Parenthood and Stepfamilies: Structural Implications of These Transactions,” *International Journal of Family Therapy* 3 (1981): 87–112; Gerda L. Schulman, “Treatment of the Disturbed Adolescent: A Family System Approach,” *International Journal of Family Therapy* 7 (1985): 11–24; Gerda Schulman, “Essay on Feminist Family Therapy: A Review of Women in Families: A Framework for Family Therapy and The Invisible Web: Gender Patterns in Family Relationships,” *Contemporary Family Therapy* 12 (1990): 75–85; Gerda L. Schulman, “Siblings Revisited: Old Conflicts and New Opportunities in Later Life,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 25 (1999): 517–24.

<sup>142</sup> Schulman, “The Changing American Family.”

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

relationship between mother and child to an ecological perspective on how to understand family and social change. While I do not claim that Schulman subscribed to each of these perspectives equally, the flexibility she exhibited seems remarkable. The individualist Freudian approach of her master's thesis most likely grew out of the diagnostic orientation of her program, which she soon expanded to groups in her practice. By the 1960s, the term "systems" occurred frequently in her (and Leichter's) work, which relied on cybernetics and systems theory in its intellectual foundations, which swept through the social sciences as well as ecology, and also reached into social work.<sup>144</sup> In the late 1970s, when Schulman published this article on the American family, ecological thinking had started to become popular in social work.<sup>145</sup> While the impact of this so-called eco-systems perspective on her social work practice has yet to be investigated, using this language served as a communication strategy within the professional community and showed that she sought a spot at the cutting edge of her field.

Schulman argued that the family, like any other "living organism," needs a "balance between forces maintaining stability and others promoting change."<sup>146</sup> Changes in power structures and gender roles are "leaving it more vulnerable and unsettled, while at the same time opening new areas which it is hoped will lead to a new consciousness and growth."<sup>147</sup> Among the developments that resulted in changes in the family, she

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<sup>144</sup> Leichter and Schulman did not reference cybernetics or systems theory, which invites a future project investigating the theoretical substance of this popular terminology in their work.

<sup>145</sup> See, for example, Carel B. Germain, "An Ecological Perspective in Casework Practice," *Social Casework* 54 (1973): 323–30; Carel B. Germain, "Introduction: Ecology and Social Work," in *Social Work Practice: People and Environments*, ed. Carel B. Germain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 1–22.

<sup>146</sup> Schulman, "Changing American Family," 9. Whether she used ecological language with its theoretical underpinnings or merely as metaphor, it shows a departure from linear thinking. Schulman acknowledged that her clients' behaviors and situations both reflected and constituted social networks and movements, and that neither can be understood without the other.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

listed the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and the women's liberation movement. While she conceded difficulties and unsettlement as part of the process, "we are in the midst of a phase—a temporary upheaval," ultimately she interpreted these developments as positive with the potential outcome of a better society. Obviously her peer professionals, and perhaps even the larger public, were concerned with these developments, as she felt the need to address them and frame them positively. For her, however, they corresponded with her lifelong ideological principles that she had already valued as a young woman in Vienna. Her primary and ongoing concern, among them, was the situation of women in families and in the larger society.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Schulman experienced American society as "incredibly conservative," particularly as she came from an environment that granted her a great deal of freedom as an adolescent and a young woman. Attending law school as a woman in 1930s-Vienna was also linked in her mind to this specific freedom she enjoyed as a young woman. Struggling as a single mother in the 1940s, however, exacerbated her feeling of being restricted as a woman in her particular context. Her awareness of gender roles and inherent inequalities reached back to her childhood and in fact to her mother's generation, as she argued in a book review on feminist family therapy.<sup>148</sup> While she maintained this concern with feminist issues throughout her life, in the 1980s and 1990s a feminist perspective entered social work and also family therapy, thus providing her with

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<sup>148</sup> She listed the fact her mother was not allowed by her family to attend university, which the mother regretted all her life, in addition to her own experience of being relegated to the back of the synagogue with the other women, as formative in her development as a feminist. Schulman, "Feminist Family Therapy," 76.

a theoretical framework and a language to professionally engage this topic.<sup>149</sup> Criticizing the systems approach for maintaining and reproducing power structures in the family, she commented in a quite self-critical fashion that “family therapy has operated in a gender-blind fashion by ignoring the experience unique to women,” and that the fact that “women carry responsibility without power” was not a consideration in family therapy practice.<sup>150</sup> As she recognized the importance of this approach for her practice, she also realized that it gave a voice and “validation of many thoughts I have had but not always used” at a time when she had “become increasingly sensitized to gender issues in general and ... more explicit in using them to the advantage of the families.”<sup>151</sup> When this article appeared, Schulman was eighty-five years old and still strove to improve her work by including recent theoretical and methodological approaches. Some of them were linked to continuities in political and social convictions spanning her life and, as in the case of feminist thought, stayed with her for decades until, through advances in theory, she was able to express them in her practice that “eventually may help to bring about a more just and inclusive society.”<sup>152</sup>

Schulman was a dedicated teacher. She synthesized her growing experience both in practicing and teaching, ranging from conducting workshops for various agencies and organizations, to teaching courses at universities such as Case Western Reserve University, Adelphi University, and Hunter College, using her book *Family Therapy: Teaching, Learning, Doing*, which was published in 1982 and very well received both by

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<sup>149</sup> For an overview of the entangled history of feminism and American social work see, for example, Susan P. Kemp and Ruth Brandwein, “Feminisms and Social Work in the United States: An Intertwined History,” *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 25 (2010): 341–64.

<sup>150</sup> Schulman, “Feminist Family Therapy,” 78.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>152</sup> Schulman, “Feminist Family Therapy,” 81.

social workers and psychiatrists.<sup>153</sup>

As much as Schulman appreciated the JFS as a productive environment and the appropriate framework for Schulman's endeavors into family therapy for over twenty years, she had outgrown its limitations by the early 1970s. Her obligations at the agency were increasingly at odds with numerous requests from universities and social service agencies to give talks and conduct workshops and, in a more general sense, with how she envisioned practicing her profession. Thus, she retired from her position at the agency, and entered into private practice in addition to teaching at Adelphi University's School of Continuing Education as well as the School of Social Work at Hunter College.<sup>154</sup> In addition to running a private practice in family therapy, Schulman left her mark on social work as an institution builder. In 1978, she started a Family Therapy Sequence as a Post-Master's Program in Advanced Clinical Social Work at the Hunter College School of Social Work, which she directed until 1993, when she was almost eighty years old.<sup>155</sup> She still worked with clients when she was over ninety years old. Schulman died on February 26, 2013.

Leichter, in contrast, stayed with the Jewish Family Service until she retired in the early 1970s. Otto Leichter died in 1973. In her seventies, Leichter redefined herself once more and refused to live a life as Otto Leichter's widow. Despite the enormous loss, she interpreted this event as a new beginning and started to teach family therapy in Germany

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<sup>153</sup> Gerda L. Schulman, *Family Therapy: Teaching, Learning, Doing* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

<sup>154</sup> "GS an Irving Goldman; enth. Akad. Lebenslauf (Bgr.)," Gerda Schulman Papers, DNB, Folder B.02.

<sup>155</sup> Folder C.01.04.01 "Schulman Lebensdok.," Sammlung Gerda Schulman, German Exile Archive, 1933-1945. A one-year Post-Graduate Certificate in Advanced Clinical Social Work: Individual and Family Treatment is still offered by the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College. "Graduate Catalogue," accessed November 19, 2013, [http://catalog.hunter.cuny.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=14&poid=1877&returnto=1252](http://catalog.hunter.cuny.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=14&poid=1877&returnto=1252).

each summer for ten years.<sup>156</sup> She died in 1997 at the age of ninety-two.

## **Conclusion**

The name “Freud” opened doors for Viennese émigrés in American social work in the 1940s and facilitated a smooth transition into the profession. After their training in the Freudian diagnostic tradition, however, Elsa Leichter and Gerda L. Schulman found that for their purposes at the Jewish Family Service the methods of the opposing functional camp in American casework, which followed the teachings of disgraced Freud student Rank, was much better suited. Coming to the United States as a social worker and a doctor of law, these two women underwent retraining, continued to learn and to explore theories and methods in social work that enabled them both to better serve their clients—ignoring some of the ideological sensibilities that structured the profession in the mid-twentieth century.

Leichter commented that a core concept of the functional school, the importance of process “seemed to speak to me naturally... [it was] something that was very appealing, it felt very good, right.”<sup>157</sup> In contrast to other people who focused exclusively on goals and outcomes and struggled with this idea, the idea of process resonated with Leichter. It appears to have been not only a useful concept for her work, however, but a way to frame productively her experience as an émigré. This kind of social work provided émigré women with jobs, with a way to earn a living, but on a more profound level it helped them deal with their experiences. It helped to integrate the instability and uncertainty that shaped their early lives but certainly reverberated for much longer into

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<sup>156</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Kathy Leichter. An analysis of her work in Germany will be part of an extended version of this project.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

their identities and accept them as, at times painful, elements that eventually lead to a positive outcome. Leichter, more than other émigrés, clearly articulated this unsteadiness that characterized particularly the first half of her life, and understood it as something coming out of the massive historical transitions in the twentieth century, but also as something that was part of her Jewish family, which had a long history of migration with “every generation living at a different place.”<sup>158</sup> Embracing change and unsteadiness as conceptualized by this social casework theory, to which Schulman also subscribed, helped the émigrés to negotiate their identities, in their dynamic and ever changing lives. Pursuing the ultimate goal of contributing to the betterment of conditions and psychosocial elements of people’s lives, they furthermore applied ecological instead of linear thinking, and they incorporated feminist thought and other ways to avoid blaming women clients for their behaviors and situations.

Historians have demonstrated how personal and professional lives are inextricably linked, and these biographies have shown that this was particularly true for these two émigrés in social work. Casework required them to reflect continually their own behavior, emotions and relationships to their clients in their work, which turned into a “life philosophy,” a way of thinking about other aspects of their lives as well, including their autobiography. More than just using concepts from their work for their personal lives, the currents went in both directions, in that social workers fed what they learned back into their professional practice. It is striking that Leichter published several articles on married couples’ therapy and marital problems, while Schulman’s publications included discussions of divorce and single parenthood.

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<sup>158</sup> Elsa Leichter, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Jede Generation war woanders.”

Finally, these women's work exhibited a central value that they had developed in Europe and toward which they gravitated back after their initial training. Growing up in a socialist atmosphere, in which community and interpersonal connections were central, and where youth groups and group activities were in the foreground, they entered a segment of social work in the United States that focused on the individual. While they were excited about their training and about (re)starting their careers, they found themselves in positions in which they worked with groups, thus stressing interpersonal connections and the social environment. This was certainly facilitated by the JFS, where the family was the unit of understanding social problems, and this was a reason why they found this environment so inspiring. The focus on groups was more than a technique, however, it resonated with a philosophy that valued the individual, but only in the context of its social environment.

While Leichter and Schulman found a niche to express this interest in and conviction of the value of the group within the predominantly individualist casework segment of social work, other émigrés found their professional home in social group work, which initially did not have a therapeutic focus, but, among others, grew out of the activist tradition of the settlement movement, and which flourished in the 1930s and 1940s. The next chapter discusses primarily Gisela Konopka, an émigré from Germany, who created a career in group work, in which she combined political activism, social advocacy, humanitarianism, and prolific intellectual work into a productive life in exile and beyond.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**AMBIVALENT RELATIONS: GISELA KONOPKA AND ETTA SALOSHIN,**  
**PROFESSORS OF SOCIAL GROUP WORK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

Would I want to be a doctor? Yes, I would, but... Would I want to be a psychiatrist? Yes, I would, but... Would I want to be a teacher? Yes... and I actually am one... Would I want to be a lawyer? Oh yes, I would [but] when I look at all this it stands out that social work is the profession that includes many aspects of those things that I would want to do and at the same time it allows me to do all these things that some of these professions do not provide.<sup>1</sup>

This praise of social work was articulated by Gisela Konopka, émigré from Germany, professor at the University of Minnesota and innovator in social group work. The multifaceted character of social work, which made it an attractive profession, allowed women like her to build a successful and satisfying career in emigration.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, this statement lists careers with higher prestige than social work that émigré women who became social workers had envisioned in Europe before the National Socialists expelled them from their home countries and stripped them of their aspirations. Even in her ostensible enthusiasm about social work, Konopka conveys the ambivalence that was her constant companion throughout her professional life.

While social casework, a psychoanalytically based approach focusing on the individual, dominated the American social work profession, social group work as an alternative specialty gained momentum in the 1930s and increasingly in the 1940s. Group

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<sup>1</sup> Gisela Konopka, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Golden Gate Chapter of the NASW, 1959, quoted in Janice Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit: Gisela Konopka* (Edina: Beaver's Pond Press, 2005), 135.

<sup>2</sup> Her leadership in the field is exemplified by her book sales, for example. Konopka's book *Social Group Work: A Helping Process* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963) went through three editions, the last one in 1983, and a second edition of *Group Work in the Institution: A Modern Challenge* (New York: Association Press, 1954) was published in 1970. Her books were translated into several languages, among them German, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Danish, Dutch, and Turkish. Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 156, 201.

workers emphasized social work's initial commitment to social reform and social justice, which caseworkers had abandoned as they aligned with psychology and psychotherapy. As the Great Depression, the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, and World War II confronted American society, a faction of social workers began to doubt the usefulness of an individualistic and psychological approach to meet these challenges. In their minds, focusing on the empowerment of the individual in the context of a group, fostering egalitarianism among group members, and instilling a sense of duty and responsibility toward the group as well as larger society were needed to prepare citizens for their roles in a stable, democratic society.

Social group work was political in character and outlook. "Social reform, social responsibility, democratic ideas, and social action" were core elements of the field since its inception.<sup>3</sup> By the 1920s, it "combined elements of a goal, a philosophy, a movement, a psychology of life, and a profession."<sup>4</sup> Social group work consolidated and grew in the 1930s, thus adding professional opportunities for émigrés in a field to which they felt deeply connected because of their political allegiances, as well as their experiences in the European youth movement, in which they first encountered the empowering potential of group experience. Michael Reisch argued that émigrés brought with them "beliefs in humanistic principles and a passion for collective democratic participation" which transformed the American understanding of "democracy as primarily a process to guarantee individual freedom" within the profession.<sup>5</sup>

Starting in the mid-1950s, when the political and social climate in the United

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<sup>3</sup> Lee quoted in Michael Reisch, "The Democratic Promise: The Impact of German-Jewish Immigration on Social Work in the United States," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 53 (2008): 172.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

States had changed and the reorganization of the social work profession required group work to adjust to the therapeutic mainstream, Konopka and some fellow émigrés grew increasingly critical of and dissatisfied with the profession, while others, such as Etta Saloshin, who is the supporting case study in this chapter, were less opposed to these developments and found ways to work productively within the common conventions of the profession. Konopka sought areas of professional and activist involvement outside of social work, when she realized that her contributions were no longer as welcomed as she had hoped. Konopka's story illustrates how an initially euphoric encounter with a new profession in exile turned sour over the decades, despite all outward signifiers of success. As she negotiated the political, intellectual, and personal elements of her identity as an émigré, she put an emphasis on the social democratic, humanistic, empowerment-focused continuities in understanding herself and her work that were increasingly at odds with the interests and status of the profession. Gisela Konopka epitomizes the complexities and tensions, hopes and disappointments, successes and failures in the life and career of a woman émigré in the United States who explicitly attempted to reconcile her identity as an American social worker with strongly held political and philosophical beliefs she had developed in early twentieth-century Europe.

### **Gisela (Peiper) Konopka, 1910-2003**

Born on February 11, 1910 to Jewish parents who had immigrated to Berlin from Poland, Gisela Konopka (Peiper) grew up as the second of three daughters of Mendel

Peiper, a merchant vegetable shop owner, and Bronia Peiper, a seamstress.<sup>6</sup> As she was growing up in humble circumstances, required to help out in her parents' shop after school, for example by delivering food to wealthy clients, she became aware at a very young age of social inequality and the humiliation of belonging to the lower class. In her autobiographical narratives, she created biographical continuity by tying her life-long dedication to equality and social justice to this crucial childhood experience that forced her to use the shabby delivery entrance to those grandiose buildings in Berlin to serve people who "were too lazy to pick up even half a pound of butter."<sup>7</sup> This experience, explained Konopka, profoundly shaped her outlook on life: "If you grow up in a class society you may not feel poverty, but you feel the horrible sting of being someone 'inferior' and I hated it, fought it, resented it. It continued through all my life."<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this humiliation Konopka felt as a member of the lower-class, Jewish, immigrant population, it was the socialist world of ideas, to which her father introduced her, that exerted a sustained influence on her thinking, decision making, and actions. Socialist literature was available to her in her home, and her father took her on walks and out on delivery tours, during which he discussed with her politics and literature. This status made her, in her own words, the boy in the family: "When I say the

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<sup>6</sup> For biographical information on Gisela Konopka see, for example, Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*; Hildegard Feidel-Mertz, "Gisela Konopka: Sozialpädagogin, Hochschullehrerin," in *Jüdische Frauen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jutta Dick and Marina Sassenberg (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 221; Sibylle Kleiner, "Sozialarbeit als Kunst, wo Fühlen und Denken zusammen kommen," in *Emigrierte Sozialarbeit: Portraits Vertriebener SozialarbeiterInnen*, ed. Joachim Wieler and Susanne Zeller (Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus, 1995), 202–10; Gisela Konopka, *Courage and Love* (Edina: Burgess Print. Co, 1988); Gisela Konopka and Vida S. Grayson, *An Oral Memoir of Gisela Konopka, 1910: A Series of Interviews* (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1981); Rhoda G. Lewin "Gisela Peiper Konopka," in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, accessed January 20, 2014, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/konopka-gisela-peiper>; C. Wolfgang Müller, "Gisela Konopka," in *Lexikon des Sozial- und Gesundheitswesens*, ed. Rudolph Bauer (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1992), 1190.

<sup>7</sup> Konopka, *Courage and Love*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

‘boy,’ it’s because at that time one talked about these things to boys.”<sup>9</sup>

This explicit consciousness of class and her subsequent affiliation with the socialists remained more important for Konopka than being Jewish. Even later, in the United States, she asserted that her Jewish belonging was a matter of external attribution, but not an integral part of her self-understanding. She explained: “I am not an orthodox Jew, whatsoever. I appreciate some of the customs, as I appreciate lots of other cultures.”<sup>10</sup> Quoting the movie *Gentleman’s Agreement*, she continued: “I am a Jew by discrimination.” In her professional life, she worked with Jewish organizations, but also with local churches—for example with the Lutherans in Minnesota—and various organizations that were involved in social work and welfare programs. She expressed her stance on ethnic and cultural groups as follows: “I do not adhere to all that ethnic nonsense. I can not become one of these people who gets so immersed always with sub-group business. I still see the world as a totality.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite the family’s difficult financial situation during Konopka’s childhood, her parents enabled her to attend grammar school, which would allow her access to a university education later on. At school, she was recruited to a Jewish youth group when she was twelve years old becoming a group leader two years later, and she subsequently joined socialist youth groups. The spirit in these groups was romantic, egalitarian, and

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<sup>9</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

democratic. Young people experimented with alternative lifestyles, challenging the conservatism that they saw represented by their parents' and grandparents' generations.<sup>12</sup>

While these youth groups provided a sense of belonging, a community of like-minded peers, and a life-long network of friends to many of their members, their significance for Konopka was even more substantial. Replacing her father, her previous primary discussion partner whom she experienced as increasingly conservative, she turned to her friends to debate politics. While all the peers in her circles were leftists, there were various political positions within this leftist spectrum, and long debates helped the young activists to find out for themselves their individual political stance. They were convinced that once they clarified their political position, they would eventually be moved to act in the struggle for a new and just society. On the one hand, Konopka was confident in her rejection of the communists, since she neither agreed with Marxist doctrine nor, as a pacifist, with communists' readiness to use violence to achieve goals. On the other hand, she also considered the social democratic party ill-suited to her, because she perceived the party, just like her father, as too conservative. She eventually found her ideological home in a group called the International Socialist Militant League (Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund, ISK), an organization that sought to carve out a productive position between the communist party (KPD) and the social democrats (SPD). Its members had their own theories and ethics based on a foundation provided by

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<sup>12</sup> On the German youth movement see, for example, Fritz Borinski and Werner Milch, *Jugendbewegung: Die Geschichte der deutschen Jugend 1896 – 1933* (Frankfurt/Main: Dipa, 1967); Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1962); Barbara Stambolis, ed., *Jugendbewegt geprägt: Essays zu autobiographischen Texten von Werner Heisenberg, Robert Jungk und vielen anderen* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013).

the philosopher Leonard Nelson and the socialist activist Minna Specht, among others.<sup>13</sup> While Konopka did not wholeheartedly subscribe to the ISK's position, she maintained that Nelson's philosophy, as implemented in this group, was close to her own thinking. Nelson rejected Marxist historical materialism and based his view of socialism on Kantian philosophy. He also disagreed with the democratic principle that the majority is always right and claimed that a society requires leadership. Konopka found the parts of his philosophy that were connected to the dedication for the cause attractive: "He based his political practice on the concept of 'duty,' of obligation found in one's own conscience... Leaders [should be] trained to consider the good for everybody, deeply imbued with a sense of justice and willing to sacrifice their own comfort for those ideals."<sup>14</sup> This sense of duty and giving up comfort for the greater good framed her biography and helps to explain her immense professional productivity and sustained dedication to humanitarian causes.

After Konopka graduated *Gymnasium* she spent a year working in a bottle factory in Hamburg to earn money for her education and to gain some first-hand experience of the workers' labor and struggle.<sup>15</sup> Still in Hamburg, she studied education, history, psychology, and philosophy from 1929 to 1933, with, among others, psychologist William Stern, who is primarily known for developing the intelligence quotient (IQ) as a

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<sup>13</sup> The precursor to ISK, which was founded in 1925, was the Internationaler Sozialistischer Jugendbund, which Nelson and Specht had founded in 1917 with the support of Albert Einstein, among others. Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 320.

<sup>14</sup> Konopka, *Courage and Love*, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 21.

measure in intelligence testing.<sup>16</sup> In 1933, she graduated from Hamburg University with a combined major in Education, History, and Psychology.<sup>17</sup>

With her interest in psychology and education and a desire to work with underprivileged children, Konopka perceived the profession of a teacher as the occupation that best matched her interest at the time in Germany. She was interested in the work of Siegfried Bernfeld, for example. Bernfeld connected socialism with psychoanalysis and education.<sup>18</sup> While she rejected a “rigid psychoanalysis,” she was intrigued by ideas circulating in the progressive educational movement about new and anti-authoritarian approaches to issues such as juvenile delinquency. In addition, her ideal profession combined education and social reform with medicine.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to Leichter, who had a similar but vague vision about being a social physician in Vienna, Konopka had a concrete role model in Germany: Max Hodann, a socialist, sex educator, and physician, who had worked together with Leonard Nelson in the youth movement. For Konopka, this combination remained an idea, though, as she never studied medicine.

In 1933 the National Socialists took over Germany. They withdrew Konopka’s German citizenship and banned her from working as a teacher as she had intended.<sup>20</sup> She

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<sup>16</sup> As Eugene DeRobertis argued in a recent article, reducing Stern’s work to intelligence testing constitutes a misrepresentation of his work, as he was also an early proponent of a humanistic approach to child psychology. Eugene M. DeRobertis, “William Stern: Forerunner of Human Science Child Developmental Thought,” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 42 (2011): 157–73.

<sup>17</sup> “Curriculum Vitae. Gisela Konopka, D.S.W.,” 1. Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 17, “Offices, Speeches, Curriculum Vitae 1956 – March 26, 1962.”

<sup>18</sup> On Bernfeld see, for example, Karl Fallend, ed., *Siegfried Bernfeld oder die Grenzen der Psychoanalyse: Materialien zu Leben und Werk* (Basel: Stroemfeld, Nexus, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> In July 1933 the National Socialists passed the “Law on the Revocation of Naturalization and the Deprivation of German Citizenship” which enabled them to withdraw citizenship from individuals they considered undesirable in Germany. See, for example, Diemut Majer, “*Fremdvölkische*” im Dritten Reich: ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Rechtssetzung und Rechtspraxis in Verwaltung und Justiz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der eingegliederten Ostgebiete und des Generalgouvernements (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1981).

became active in the political resistance movement and was arrested in 1936. After spending some time in the concentration camp Fuhlsbüttel in Hamburg, she was released in 1937. Her resistance group helped her to get out of Germany by arranging a marriage to an Austrian man in order for her to get a passport.<sup>21</sup> She spent about a year in Vienna, where she joined an underground socialist group again, worked with children, and studied nursery school and Kindergarten work. In March 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria. Konopka was imprisoned again and, after her release, had to leave the country. It was important to her to emphasize that her arrest was based on her underground work and not merely because she was Jewish; she thus claimed agency, insisting on defiance, and rejecting victim status: “Many Jews, and I know a lot [of] others besides myself, did not fight as Jews. We fought as parts of a movement that considered the Nazis a dangerous and mean and inhuman thing. And I am still proud and will always be proud of the fact that I was not suffering in concentration camps just by the accident of birth, but because I actively fought.”<sup>22</sup>

Konopka decided to go to France. In 1932 she had gotten involved with Paul Konopka. They had been a couple ever since, but could not get married once the National Socialists governed the country, because she was Jewish and he was not. By the time Konopka had to leave Austria, Paul was already in France, and so she decided to join him. When World War II began, Paul was interned in a camp, and Gisela went to Lyon, where she found employment first as a domestic worker and later as a nanny. As the National Socialists tightened their grip on Europe and invaded France in spring 1940, the

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<sup>21</sup> Gisela Konopka, interview by Joachim Wieler, December 12, 1990, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin. The sole intention of this marriage was to get Austrian citizenship and a passport. She later got a divorce during her time in France.

<sup>22</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 129.

situation for German refugees in France got more dire. Even though Konopka had Austrian citizenship, she left her position near Lyon and went to Montauban in the South of France, where she joined Austrian socialists who had organized and gathered in this little town that had a socialist mayor who welcomed the refugees.<sup>23</sup> Paul, in the meantime, had been released, heard from an acquaintance about Gisela's whereabouts and made his way to Montauban. They found shelter in a little village nearby, and lived there until the spring 1941, when Gisela received a visa for the United States through efforts of the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC), an organization that helped evacuate intellectuals, artists, and musicians from Europe.<sup>24</sup> Paul obtained his visa two months later and joined Gisela in New York, where they were married three days after his arrival.

Professional reorientation was a pressing issue for Konopka in the United States. When she arrived, the refugee service helped her find a job as a caregiver of an old man: "Nothing related to whatever I had learned or anything like that. I was just making a living again...And that's the way I felt my life would continue ... The prospect of doing anything else but menial labor did not occur to me."<sup>25</sup> Refugee women commonly abandoned previous professional ambitions and supported themselves and their families by whatever labor was available.<sup>26</sup> Maria Halberstadt, one of Konopka's friends from Hamburg, however, who had immigrated to the United States in 1933, worked for the Emergency Rescue Committee in Cleveland and was familiar with professional

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<sup>23</sup> Konopka, *Courage and Love*, 280. Otto Leichter and his sons, for examples, were among the refugees in Montauban, before they moved to the United States.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on the ERC, see United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ed., *Assignment, Rescue: The Story of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 217.

<sup>26</sup> Sibylle Quack, ed., *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

opportunities. She urged Konopka not to give up her aspirations and to go back to school for further training. After all, she had attended university in Germany. Since she had trained to be a teacher, Konopka sought out the teachers' union in New York to inquire about job opportunities, but the reaction she received was deeply disappointing to her as she recalled: "I have never forgotten the answer. The answer was, my God, we have enough teachers, we don't need some people who come from over there."<sup>27</sup>

In further conversations, Halberstadt pointed out to Konopka that the American profession of social work, particularly the then emerging field of social group work, dovetailed very well with her interests and also with some elements of her German university education. Konopka, who, as a child in Germany, had negative experiences with social workers as condescending and punitive, was skeptical. Moreover, women like Konopka, who had attended university in Europe, could not reconcile their image of European social work with their self-understanding as intellectuals. Their perception of social workers stood in sharp contrast with their self-understanding as independent, emancipated women, the ideal they had aspired to in interwar Europe: "Social work was no profession in Germany. It had – when I say no status, I do not mean the class status. I mean it had no significance as anything that anybody would consider studying who came from a political and intellectual background... It was a secondary occupation. You went into it if you had not the qualifications for the university... And there were a few, which I didn't know at that time, that were really very idealistic and thought they could make something out of that profession. But in general, no. It wasn't something that anybody who would go to the university would consider. It wasn't taught at the universities. It

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<sup>27</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 221.

wasn't. The other thing is that social work was mostly *Fürsorge*. Now that means 'the dole' (public relief). The *Fürsorge*, most of the time, was under the thumbs of bureaucrats who had no knowledge about social work.'<sup>28</sup>

The distinct character and levels of professionalization of social work in Central Europe and the United States made it an unanticipated choice for émigrés, particularly for those with an academic background who were interested in social reform. Konopka represents a group of émigrés who required prodding and convincing to consider social work as a career. Skillful, empathetic explanation was necessary for émigrés to realize social work's available spaces for professional activity that could accommodate the émigrés' intellectual and activist aspirations. Konopka's friend Maria Halberstadt and Clara Kaiser, professor of social work at New York School of Social Work, explained American social work in a way that piqued her interest.<sup>29</sup> In Konopka's words, "Maria said, well, you know, in America social work is different from what we know in Europe, and I think you should look into that. And I said no, no, no. And she said, you know, it's different. First of all, it's taught at the university, and they have just developed a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 89-90. She was not aware that German social work was in the process of professionalization, and that progressive approaches to public welfare were taking place, for example under the leadership of Walter Friedländer in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg; the public perception of social work had not yet mirrored this development, as Konopka's statements as well as the disinterest in social work by other émigrés highlight.

<sup>29</sup> Andrews-Schenk remarked that the Konopkas were befriended by Maria Halberstadt, one of the members of the Cleveland rescue committee and that it is unclear why the Cleveland office helped them while they were still in New York and later even assisted in their resettlement, Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 46. Since the publication of this biography in 2005, new sources have become available. The combined information from Konopka's oral histories, her letters, and newspaper articles that mention Maria Halberstadt reveals that Halberstadt and Konopka knew each other from when they both lived in Hamburg. Thus, it was less the Cleveland committee that got involved in assisting the Konopkas, but rather Halberstadt, the friend, who could use her contacts with the Cleveland committee and help out the Konopkas to get their new lives on track. This connection and its significance for Konopka's career reveals once more the relevance of her network with roots in Germany for establishing a new life in the United States. See Konopka and Grayson, *Oral History*, 220; "Ex-Reich Teacher Assails Colleagues for Hitler Aid." *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, July 17, 1934, 8; Emergency Rescue Committee, *Lives*, 1941, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, accessed online January 24, 2014, [http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY\\_AR3344/33-44\\_Admin\\_Orgs\\_Subj/AR33-44\\_00051/NY\\_AR3344\\_00051\\_00039.pdf](http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia/Documents/NY_AR3344/33-44_Admin_Orgs_Subj/AR33-44_00051/NY_AR3344_00051_00039.pdf).

specialization that is very close to what you really are interested in and that is working with young people. It's youth work, they call it 'group work.' – I still remember when she described it to me (laughs). – And it's quite new, and I think you would be interested in just looking into that."<sup>30</sup> Konopka considered her friend trustworthy enough to seek out a social worker to explore her options. Halberstadt put her in contact with Clara Kaiser. They knew each other from Cleveland, where Kaiser had taught at Western Reserve University. Kaiser encouraged Konopka to attend university and get a degree in social work, since she could transfer some of her German credits, the job prospects were good, and it was a way out of domestic work.<sup>31</sup> Speaking to Kaiser, Konopka encountered a different, more appealing, kind of social work personality: "It was a different experience. She was not condescending. She took me seriously."<sup>32</sup> Kaiser told her about a newly established program in group work at the University of Pittsburgh, which had slots available, and the school also offered scholarships, which was essential for Konopka. Furthermore, Pittsburgh seemed to offer better opportunities to the Konopkas than New York.

Even though many refugees preferred to stay in New York because they appreciated the metropolitan and partly European character of the city and because most of them could rely on at least a small network, Gisela and Paul Konopka decided to move on deeper into the country. Gisela Konopka remembered a talk by a social worker who urged the recently arrived Europeans not to get stuck in New York, which impressed her greatly: "He said that refugees should leave New York. They should get out of New

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<sup>30</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 222.

<sup>31</sup> Gisela Konopka to Nora [no last name identified], 18 June 1941, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder "Correspondence: Fall 1941-42."

<sup>32</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 222.

York, that it wasn't good to stay in New York, that everybody was hanging around here, that it was just a harbor and there were many things that – that this is a big country. And I think he did superbly in convincing us...And he was right. And so we thought, we'll just get out and start our luck in some other part of the world."<sup>33</sup> A third reason was the availability of work in Pittsburgh for Konopka's husband Paul. The couple went to Pittsburgh in August 1941, where Paul, who had training and experience as a metal worker, soon found a job to supplement the scholarship that Gisela would receive starting in the fall of 1941. In order to enable Gisela to continue her academic training, Paul gave up his own desire to attend university and instead kept working to support her.<sup>34</sup> Finally, there was yet another reason for the Konopkas to leave New York and move to an area that was less populated by refugees and immigrants. While Konopka neglected to mention this motivation in her memoirs, in a letter from June 1941 to friends in France she explained that they also wanted to move away from New York to meet new people, particularly people who would be willing to provide affidavits for the many people that the Konopkas hoped to assist in their escape from Europe.<sup>35</sup> While in retrospective interviews Konopka interpreted her early years in the United States predominantly in the light of her professional development, her correspondence from the early 1940s reveals different priorities and illustrates how much of her and her husbands' resources went into efforts to rescue friends whose lives were threatened by the National Socialists.

Despite Konopka's initial skepticism about social work, she realized that group work in particular was a perfect match for her interests and previous training, as she

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<sup>33</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 223-24.

<sup>34</sup> As Gisela had attended university in Germany, she could go straight to graduate school. Thus, this constellation provided them with better prospects overall.

<sup>35</sup> Gisela Konopka to Nora [no last name identified], 18 June 1941, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder "Correspondence: Fall 1941-42."

began her studies in the social work program at the University of Pittsburgh. As she worked with Gertrude Wilson, Gladys Ryland, and Marion Hathway, among others, she started to develop a vision about her professional self and her career with which she felt comfortable: “I was interested in group work, and when she [Wilson] began to talk about group work, it was as if I were coming home. This was my whole teaching that I had in Hamburg in relation to education. This was the idea that you must understand individuals, you must understand individuals in groups ... My philosophy was intensified. Gertrude Wilson had a much wider view than the youth groups; she had this view of a world where people would understand each other better.”<sup>36</sup>

Wilson was one of the leading scholars of social group work and published two seminal books in the 1940s, *Group Work and Case Work, Their Relationship and Practice* (1941) and, later, *Social Group Work Practice: The Creative Use of the Social Process* (together with Gladys Ryland, 1949).<sup>37</sup> Konopka particularly appreciated Wilson’s intellectual approach, infused with precise thought and conceptual ideas. Ryland, in contrast, the co-author of Wilson’s second book, did not make much of an impression on Konopka, as she was a representative of the recreational side of group work. While Konopka was dedicated to establishing social group work, with its roots in recreational activities, on a sound philosophical and social scientific foundation, she was bothered by the ongoing reputation of group work as just being fun and entertainment.<sup>38</sup> This negative reputation of group work was often invoked by caseworkers in an attempt to distance themselves from their competitors and to claim professional territory as a

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<sup>36</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 241-42.

<sup>37</sup> Gertrude Wilson, *Group Work and Case Work, Their Relationship and Practice* (New York: Family Welfare Association of America, 1941); Gertrude Wilson and Gladys Ryland, *Social Group Work Practice: The Creative Use of the Social Process* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).

<sup>38</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 354.

serious, scientific endeavor.

In addition to Wilson, Marion Hathway was Konopka's favorite teacher. She felt connected to Hathway not only through social work, but also because of her progressive political stance and her connection to the labor movement: "What a person she was. [She] knew the labor movement, and she was identified with it and she was identified with political action and the need to do something to make the world a better place."<sup>39</sup> With Hathway as a teacher, Konopka was able to draw on her previous interest in and experience with the German labor movement, which helped her link her past to her newly emerging activities in American social work. This helped her feel grounded and at least partly competent in the new environment that was exciting, but also overwhelming at times. Konopka credited Hathway for introducing her to the Pittsburgh Survey and how to do research "not thinking that everything has to be done by statistics," a way that greatly appealed to Konopka.<sup>40</sup> With Hathway as her adviser, Konopka wrote a Master's thesis, "Workers' Education in Pittsburgh with Particular Reference to the Federated Labor Schools, 1918-1942," and graduated in 1943 with a master's degree in Social Service Administration (MSSA).<sup>41</sup>

By that time, Gisela and Paul were separated again, as Paul had been conscripted into the army in July 1942 and did not return until 1945. On the personal level the renewed separation was difficult, yet they both were proud and happy that Paul could actively contribute to fighting the Nazis, instead of simply observing from afar.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 23. For an account of Hathway's work and her ideas for an alternative, progressive kind of social work see Janice Andrews and Michael Reisch, *The Road Not Taken: A History of Radical Social Work in the United States* (Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 101 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 238.

<sup>41</sup> Gisela Konopka, "Workers Education in Pittsburgh with Particular Reference to the Federated Labor Schools, 1918-1942" (Master's Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1943).

Gisela, in the meantime, appreciated her social work training. Shortly before she graduated in 1943, she thanked him for giving her career priority and validated their decision with what she had learned about job prospects: “Our biggest concern, once we graduate, will be which job to take because there are so many and very good ones available. There is a big demand for social workers in almost all areas of public life... And I am and always will be grateful to you for enabling me to study.”<sup>42</sup>

Before Paul left for Europe, they had experienced discrimination as practiced in the United States. Gisela and Paul met up in Washington, D.C., to spend a few days together, and they also visited Virginia. They wanted to go swimming and enjoy some other leisure time activities, just as they used to do in Germany, but they realized that they were denied access to many facilities. Konopka recalled: “And every advertisement said ‘restricted.’ First we asked people, what does that mean, because we didn’t know. We said is it restricted in relation to money? That’s what came into our heads. And there we were told, no, restricted for Blacks and Jews. We were so angry and so upset, we said if there is anything in our life that we have to fight it is this idiotic prejudice. And Blacks and Jews were One [sic], there was just no question.”<sup>43</sup> Discrimination remained one of the issues that Konopka continually addressed in her work. While this cause was rooted in her own experiences with anti-Semitism, she transcended the personal level and continually pointed out the basic mechanisms that were similar no matter which group

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<sup>42</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 12 January 1943, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Personal Mail 1944.” German original: „...unsere grösste Sorge, wenn wir mit der Schule fertig sind, wird sein, welchen Job wir nehmen sollen, weil so sehr viele und so sehr gute offen sind. Es ist eine Riesennachfrage nach Social Workern auf fast allen Gebieten des öffentlichen Lebens... Und ich bin Dir noch immer und werde Dir immer dankbar sein, dass Du mir dieses Studium möglich gemacht hast.”

<sup>43</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 238.

they addressed.<sup>44</sup>

Pittsburgh marked an important milestone in her new life, where she started a successful and fulfilling career: “It was our beginning in the United States, it was exhilarating, in spite of the sadness of separation and war, it was finding a profession that I found that – this old story about having a conscience and wanting to do something was there ... It was my home.”<sup>45</sup> After graduating from the School of Social Work, she held a position as a psychiatric group worker at the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Clinic from 1943 to 1947. In a letter to friends she explained what she did: “I was mainly working with difficult children who had been made distrustful or unhappy and helped them recover. We work in close contact with the psychiatrist.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, she held positions as field instructor and lecturer at the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh and the School of Social Work at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, respectively. At the same time, she was an active and sought-after lecturer at various community organizations, often giving several talks a week.<sup>47</sup> After two years at the Child Guidance Clinic, she confessed in a letter to Paul that she would like to move on to a better job, perhaps in administration, implying that social work was a pragmatic choice but not the profession of her dreams: “I feel I want to go into something bigger. I feel sad that I did not study medicine, because psychiatry would have been my job, but I don’t think it

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<sup>44</sup> For example, in one of the earlier publications, an article based on her work at the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Clinic, she argued that the group work setting can be beneficially applied to alleviate tensions between individuals from different races and cultures. Gisela Konopka, “Group Therapy in Overcoming Racial and Cultural Tensions,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 17 (1947): 693–99.

<sup>45</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 327.

<sup>46</sup> Gisela Konopka to friends [no names identified], 14 August 1947, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 6, Folder “Mail 1947.”

<sup>47</sup> “Biographical Time Line,” Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 1, Folder “Biographical Time Line of G. Konopka 1929-1988.”

possible to do this now. So I stick to what I have.”<sup>48</sup>

When she moved to Pittsburgh in the summer of 1941, she wrote to friends that she and Paul were “pleasantly disappointed,” because in contrast to the city’s reputation as a grim and dirty place, they experienced it as beautiful and charming “in its summer dress.”<sup>49</sup> She would eventually experience the smog for which the city was notorious as she reported in a letter to her husband in 1944. “I found out that many people had exactly the same thing, bad headaches and feelings of nausea. It has something to do with the coaldust [sic] and humidity entering the sinus. Well, since it is nothing special and will change with the weather I don’t feel worried.”<sup>50</sup> After several years in Pittsburgh, she was ready to move on. As she recalled: “It was such a beautiful country, and we were in this terribly dirty city.”<sup>51</sup> She was ready to move on, as she recalled: “I wrote a letter, I remember that, to Paul, saying the two most beautiful cities I have ever seen in the United States are San Francisco and Minneapolis, and if we could, I wished we could go to Minneapolis.”<sup>52</sup>

The opportunity presented itself in the fall of 1946, when Konopka was invited to speak at a meeting of the Minnesota State Welfare Conference.<sup>53</sup> Shortly thereafter Konopka’s friend Mary Blake, at the time executive director of the Elliot Park

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<sup>48</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 8 December 1944, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Mail 1945.”

<sup>49</sup> Gisela Konopka to Lily and Hans [no last name identified], 23 August 1941, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Correspondence: Fall 1941-42.” German original: “Wie ihr seht, sind wir in Pittsburgh gelandet, eine grosse Stahlstadt, von der erzählt wird, dass sie hässlich und dreckig sei, die wir aber – allerdings jetzt im Sommerkleid –, geradezu schön und reizvoll finden, und sehr angenehm enttäuscht sind.”

<sup>50</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 12 August, 1944, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Mail 1945.”

<sup>51</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 325.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-27.

<sup>53</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 67.

Neighborhood House in Minneapolis, told Konopka that the social work program at the University of Minnesota was looking for a faculty member specialized in group work. Konopka fit the position perfectly and was offered the job. Andrews-Schenk argued that a teaching position would have meant “a step toward her life’s dream,” as Konopka initially had trained to be a teacher in Germany.<sup>54</sup> I suggest that this position went beyond this dream. A position at a large research university by far surpassed the visions to become a school teacher that she had as a student back in the early 1930s. Furthermore, a university not only provided an intellectually stimulating but an interdisciplinary environment, in which she could thrive.

The job was a tremendous professional opportunity, and Konopka loved Minneapolis, the lakes, and the surrounding region. She felt that the political atmosphere would suit her as well as Paul: “The community is quite progressive thinking in many respects (this is the country of the former farmer-labor party).”<sup>55</sup> Paul, the factory worker, was flexible as to where to live, and the couple wanted to leave Pittsburgh, and yet they hesitated because they had concerns about this move. Minneapolis was notoriously dubbed the “capitol of anti-Semitism,” and the Konopkas debated whether they should voluntarily enter such a hostile environment after they barely had escaped the Holocaust in Europe.<sup>56</sup> In addition to the reported anti-Semitic atmosphere and discrimination in the area, the University of Minnesota was plagued by anti-Semitic and anti-Black agitation in 1947 by a group called the Democratic Nationalist Party, whose members defaced walls

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>55</sup> Gisela Konopka to Eric [no last name identified], 14 August, 1947, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 6, Folder “Mail 1947.”

<sup>56</sup> On Anti-Semitism in Minnesota, see Hyman Berman, Bill Holm, and Linda Mack Schloff, *Jews in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002).

with vitriolic slogans and threatened members of the community.<sup>57</sup> The fact that the group's leader was arrested and the group disappeared, in addition to mayor Hubert Humphrey's legal initiatives to remove discrimination and to strengthen legal rights, were enough signs for the Konopkas to be optimistic about the future development of Minneapolis, and they decided to move there.

In 1947, Gisela Konopka joined the faculty at the School of Social Work as assistant professor and remained at the University of Minnesota until her retirement in 1978. The director of the social work program at the time was F. Stuart Chapin.<sup>58</sup> Konopka admired him as a scholar and personality, because he represented to her an integrative approach to social science and social activism that coincided with her own ideas: "Dr. Chapin ... was a very famous sociologist and a gentleman ... When I say gentleman, there was an elegance there. He was not unapproachable, but he was also not folksy. I liked him. I liked the determination he had. Also his attitude towards social work. I had already learned that some sociologists kind of looked down on social work. Well, this was not the case with Stuart Chapin. He was very proud of the fact that he had helped found one of the first schools of social work, I think it was Smith. He told me that he then went to Minnesota – and Minnesota is one of the oldest schools of social work – and he helped found that. He found that it was very important to be a scientist and a doer

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<sup>57</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 68.

<sup>58</sup> F. Stuart Chapin, who is known, above all, for his contributions to quantitative sociology such as various measurements and scales, served as chair of the sociology department for almost three decades, from 1923 to 1952. He remained a staunch supporter of social work and maintained the directorship of the social work program, until it became its own administrative unit in the College of Science, Literature and Arts in 1949. For a history of the sociology program at the University of Minnesota, see Gary A. Fine and Janet S. Severance, "Great Men and Hard Times: Sociology at the University of Minnesota," *Sociological Quarterly* 26 (1985): 117–34. The history of the relationship between sociology and social work is discussed in Patricia Lengerman and Gillian Niebrugge, "Thrice Told: Narratives of Sociology's Relation to Social Work," in *Sociology in America: A History*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 63–114.

... And it was delightful to be on his faculty.”<sup>59</sup> This integration of sociology and social work, of being a scientist and a doer, however, was outdated by the 1940s. As historians of the social sciences and social work have argued, the establishment of academic sociology and the professionalization of social work resulted in the separation of these two fields by the late 1920s.<sup>60</sup> Chapin, who had established his authority as a quantitative sociologist, as a staunch supporter of social work was a scholarly model in decline, when Konopka joined the School of Social Work. A few years later the social work program split from the department of sociology, and a social worker assumed directorship of the program. Thus, this integrative aspect that Konopka initially found so attractive in her program was on the downswing when she started her job, and the discrepancies between her understanding of social work and where the program, and also the larger profession, was heading would grow over time and cause significant friction.

While Gisela’s career blossomed, Paul found a position as an engineer at General Mills, where he remained until his retirement in 1971. Even though he never received a university degree, which he had initially desired, he was satisfied with his career, particularly because he experienced his work as fulfilling, and he could advance in the company without a professional or graduate degree.<sup>61</sup> He did not mind leaving Pittsburgh, because he “worked in a factory ... [and] was not attached to his job.”<sup>62</sup> In Minnesota, however, he felt at home both professionally and socially, and preferred not to undertake further relocations.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 330-31.

<sup>60</sup> Lengerman and Niebrugge, “Thrice Told.”

<sup>61</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 68.

<sup>62</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 329.

<sup>63</sup> For example when Gisela received an offer from the United States Children’s Bureau in 1955, see Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 112.

Konopka approached her responsibilities with great enthusiasm reveling in the intellectual atmosphere of the university. Her primary responsibility at the School of Social Work was to build a group work curriculum and train the students who wanted to specialize in group work. She admired her colleagues who had an academic background, for example Alice Shea. “She had her doctorate in psychology – but at the same time knew so much about social work, had practiced also in social work. But that’s what I mean, this combination of being scholars and yet practice ... I felt elated being in that environment. I was on a campus. I have to say that meant an awful lot to me. It was absolute heaven to be in an intellectual community.” In addition to enjoying the intellectual environment, she was active outside the university, as she detailed in a letter to her sister and her mother, who in the meantime had moved to Palestine: “Being part of a large university is so inspiring, almost too much, because I can’t possibly do everything I would like to. I participated in a seminar with the psychologists recently. They are fighting over theories, and I couldn’t restrain myself and, of course, participated in the discussion, and now I almost have friends among them. Yesterday I had a meeting with child guidance people here, and furthermore I am working with others on standards for a ... juvenile detention home... And then there is the work with all the other organizations, and teaching and learning.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, starting in the early 1950s, she repeatedly visited Germany to give lectures, to help rebuild social services after the war, and to

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<sup>64</sup> Gisela Konopka to [her family], 17 January 1948, Gisela Konopka Papers, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 6, Folder “Mail 1947.” German original: “Teil einer grossen Universität zu sein, gibt so viel Anregung, fast zu viel, ich kann noch lange nicht alles tun, was ich möchte. Neulich war ich in einem Seminar mit den Psychologen hier – sie schlagen sich die Köpfe ein über Theorien und ich konnte nicht an mich halten, sprach natürlich in der Diskussion und nun habe ich fast Freunde unter ihnen – gestern hatte ich ein meeting mit den Leute von Child Guidance hier, und dann arbeite ich mit ein paar anderen an standards [sic] für ein ... Juvenile detention home... Dann ist da natürlich die Arbeit mit all den anderen Organisationen und lehren und lernen...”

introduce the group work method to German social workers.<sup>65</sup> She worked on numerous university, local, state, national, and international committees and served as a consultant for state and federal departments for issues such as youth, delinquency, child welfare, mental health, and veterans. Over the course of her career, her main research interests crystallized in the fields of institutions and the process of group work, philosophy and history of social work, history of social welfare, history of correctional reforms, adolescence (especially girls), and delinquency, specifically with regard to institutions and delinquency of girls.<sup>66</sup>

Konopka spent the academic year 1954/55 at Columbia University in New York working on her doctorate. Her initial plan was to work with Eduard C. Lindeman: “I wanted very badly to work with Lindeman. I had heard him speak, I felt an affinity – philosophy and history were very close to my thinking – and I thought that way I can have a year of that.”<sup>67</sup> He died in 1953, the year before Konopka arrived in New York, and so she decided to write her dissertation on “Social Work’s Search for a Philosophy: With Special Reference to Eduard C. Lindeman.”<sup>68</sup>

The year at Columbia University provided her with time and a site to think through the changing, challenging ideas about social work that she encountered in New York. Her activities during this academic year reflected interests still in formative stages, which she intended to combine into a frame to approach social work. While social work

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<sup>65</sup> Margaret West, “Der Verlust an Fachkräften für die Jugendwohlfahrt im Dritten Reich,” *Neue Praxis: Zeitschrift für Sozialarbeit, Sozialpädagogik und Sozialpolitik* 23 (1993): 512-29.

<sup>66</sup> Gisela Konopka, “Biography,” Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 1, “Biographical Timeline.”

<sup>67</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 377.

<sup>68</sup> Gisela Konopka, “Social Work’s Search for a Philosophy: With Special Reference to Eduard C. Lindeman,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1957). A year later, the dissertation was published as a book, Gisela Konopka, *Eduard C. Lindeman and Social Work Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958).

as a profession was still carving out space to distinguish itself from other disciplines and professions, Konopka argued that the heyday of different fields acting in isolation was over and that academic disciplines and professions needed to work together. Echoing a talk by historian Arnold J. Toynbee who advocated “studying human life as a unity”<sup>69</sup> she argued that “the old distinctions between disciplines are beginning to fade... For instance, we ... still talk about the ‘individual’ in his ‘environment,’ though we have learned that psychologically these are really not clearly separate.”<sup>70</sup> This statement is also a criticism of the organization of and schisms in social work, directed at the individualist social casework as taught at the Columbia School of Social Work.

In her dissertation, Konopka discussed the work of Eduard C. Lindeman and his significance for a social work philosophy upon which to rest the profession. Considering the state of social work and the fierce controversies over the priority of the individual or society, Konopka found Lindeman’s approach to social work useful to formulate an integrative framework. Citing Lindeman’s colleague and her dissertation adviser Nathan Cohen, she pointed out that “maintaining the balance between wide social reform and intensive work with individuals” has been the main challenge to social work.<sup>71</sup> These two could be integrated, if “individualism and humanitarianism” were “redefined within the framework of democracy as a way of life” as conceived by Lindeman, from which practical implications for social work emerge:<sup>72</sup> Social work and science should be partners, but “always ... remember, that science tells us ‘what is,’ but not necessarily

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<sup>69</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, “The New Opportunity for Historians,” lecture at the University of Minnesota, November 6, 1955, cited in Konopka, “Lindeman,” 174.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Nathan Cohen cited in *ibid.*, 170.

‘what should be.’” Social work education should strengthen the critical facilities of students instead of indoctrinate. Social work practitioners should be able to recognize commonalities with other professions and coordinate their methods with others. Social workers should not exclude lay people, and finally, “social work should realize the important role of social action.”<sup>73</sup>

Konopka strongly agreed with these programmatic statements for social work. In her dissertation, she formulated a theory of social work that sought to relate social work concepts, values, and methods into an integrating framework for the profession. She considered values paramount in social work. Along the lines of Lindeman’s understanding, she conceptualized a theory that contained primary and secondary values for social work. She suggested that the primary values function like axioms in mathematics, meaning that they are absolute.<sup>74</sup> In the context of social work this means that there are values shared by all social workers, and these she found in the standards for professional practice as accepted by the American Association of Social Workers in 1951.<sup>75</sup> These standards postulate as irrefutable the “dignity of the individual and the responsibility of the individual for others.”<sup>76</sup> The empirical reality of the profession of the time with its deep rifts between different camps, however, did not suggest such a common ground. This was due, according to Konopka’s theory, to secondary values, which include a wide variety of issues such as the role of women in society, racial segregation or integration, the role of religion for organizing social life, over which social

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 170-71.

<sup>74</sup> Here she deviated from Lindeman who denied the existence of absolute values.

<sup>75</sup> *Standards for the Professional Practice of Social Work*. New York: American Association of Social Workers, 1951.

<sup>76</sup> Konopka, *Lindeman*, 179.

workers fought viciously. The variation of perspectives, according to Konopka, on the secondary values is caused by four factors: the social workers' cultural and family background, rules of social groups such as church and profession, personal experience, and scientific theories on human behavior.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to the primary values, these secondary values are open for investigation, discussion, and rational analysis. She formulated her ultimate hope for social work as follows: "If social work accepts itself as a profession based on primary values which are axioms as well as a profession constantly guided by secondary values which must be investigated, many of the controversies will lose some of their religious fervor and social work will enter a period far more consonant with the calm and cooperative effort expected of a human relations profession."<sup>78</sup>

Writing the dissertation was a milestone experience. On a personal level, she could finally continue with her university studies, which the National Socialists had interrupted in Germany, and the degree provided her with a sense of satisfaction and closure. The dissertation enabled her to explore the history of social work in the United States, which was very important to her, and more specifically the relationship between social work's origins in relation to ethics and the role religion played in this history.<sup>79</sup> Studying for her doctorate at Columbia University put her in the midst of a thriving intellectual and interdisciplinary community. In her dissertation, Konopka also worked out for herself a foundation for her profession that was congruent with her own ethical, professional, and social standards. Thus, the theory of social work she devised in her dissertation was also an offer to her profession of a framework of integration and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>79</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 390.

unification that provided a space for rational and scientific negotiation that should lead to a less disjointed and more productive profession. In doing so, she offered a theoretical contribution to the consolidation of social work that was on the agenda in the mid-1950s.<sup>80</sup> Konopka's framework can also be read as a strategic document for the process of the consolidation of social work. Aligning social work according to her outline would provide space for social group work and negotiating the secondary values would not only apply to social workers' clients, but also to social workers themselves and the way they prioritize their methods and foci. The religious fervor Konopka mentioned not only referred to social work's subjects, but to social work itself.

As in other instances of Konopka's intellectual endeavors in social work, she was disappointed by the tepid reception of her dissertation. After she graduated in 1957 with a Doctor of Social Welfare (DSW), her thesis was published as a book by the University of Minnesota Press in 1958. While the book was favorably reviewed, for example in the *Social Service Review*, one of the most important journals in social welfare, the reviewer paid more attention to the work of Lindeman as presented by Konopka and less to her own contribution.<sup>81</sup> The academic book did not sell well, which deeply disappointed Konopka. As a possible reason she listed bad editing by the University of Minnesota Press. An even more sobering possibility was that potential readers from social work did

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<sup>80</sup> Under the leadership of Konopka's dissertation adviser Nathan Cohen the seven biggest social work associations merged into the National Association of Social Workers in 1955, for which Cohen would serve as the first president. Elizabeth J. Clark, "National Association of Social Workers," in *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, 20th ed., ed. Terry Mizrahi and Larry E. Davis (Oxford University Press, 2008), accessed November 30, 2014.

<http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195306613.001.0001/acref-9780195306613-e-260?rskey=ksDsuK&result=260>

<sup>81</sup> Louis Towley, review of *Eduard C. Lindeman and Social Work Philosophy*, by Gisela Konopka, *Social Service Review* 33, (1959): 174–75.

not care about the relatively abstract history and philosophy of the profession.<sup>82</sup>

### **Henrietta (Etta) Saloshin, 1906-1999**

Konopka had emerged, nonetheless, a well-known German-speaking, Jewish émigré who held a professorship at the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, but she was not the only one. Austrian-born Etta Saloshin, who also discovered professional social work as an appealing career in the United States and who also specialized in group work, became Konopka's colleague on the faculty in 1949. Two highly motivated émigrés with similar interests working at the same institution might have forged an innovative and productive union, as exemplified by Elsa Leichter and Gerda Schulman at the Jewish Family Service in New York City, detailed in the previous chapter. But such a constellation could also lead to the opposite, as it turned out in the case of Konopka and Saloshin.

Henrietta Saloshin was born in Vienna in 1906. After graduating from high school (Gymnasium) in 1923, she wanted to study medicine, but her family's financial situation did not allow it. Furthermore, her father, a physician himself, was concerned about the job prospects in the deteriorating economic situation. He argued that "he didn't want to enlarge the academic proletariat."<sup>83</sup> Not quite knowing what to do with her life, Saloshin spent about two years learning crafts such as book-binding and basket weaving, and earning some money selling her products. In 1925, Saloshin attended a summer course in Laxenburg, a small town near Vienna, to where the School for Rhythm, Music and Body

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<sup>82</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 390.

<sup>83</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler, December 11, 1990, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin. German original: "Ich will nicht das akademische Proletariat vergrößern."

Education had relocated from Dresden in the same year.<sup>84</sup> She loved this school, and stayed for a three-year professional training that focused on “music, rhythm, body movements, modern dance, and music theory, history, improvisation, and choreography.”<sup>85</sup> The classes also included anatomy and physiology, as well as courses in education taught by August Aichhorn.<sup>86</sup> Saloshin concluded her training with an exam by the Vienna city board in 1928. During the following ten years, she worked at the Neues Wiener Konservatorium as an instructor of interpretive dance.<sup>87</sup>

After the annexation of Austria in 1938, Saloshin fled to the United States, where she arrived in October. An uncle had provided her with an affidavit and also arranged a job as a nursing maid in Tampa, Florida. That job was not to her liking, and she left in the spring of 1939, spending the next decade moving to different places and holding various positions. She tried New York City, where “one felt at home. One could spend time with other refugees ... with similar experiences.”<sup>88</sup> With the difficult employment situation in New York City, she decided to move to Buffalo, NY, where her sister and brother-in-law had settled in the meantime. In 1943–44 she lived in St. Louis, Missouri, and then in Chicago, Illinois, from 1945 to 1947. In Chicago she shared an apartment with a friend, her now-divorced sister, and her mother who had also managed to leave Europe. There

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<sup>84</sup> The school in Dresden was founded by Émile-Jaque Dalcroze, the Swiss educator and musician who is known for developing eurhythmics. On the history of Hellerau-Laxenburg and its pedagogical concepts see Herta Hirmke-Toth, *Rhythmik in Hellerau-Laxenburg: Die pädagogische Arbeit der Schule Hellerau-Laxenburg 1925-1938* (Saarbrücken: Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulschriften, 2009); Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), particularly 119–25.

<sup>85</sup> Helen J. Yesner, “From Vienna with Love: An Interview with Dr. Etta Saloshin,” NASW Newsletter, Minnesota Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, November 19, 1979, Henrietta Saloshin Papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>86</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>87</sup> “University of Minnesota–Faculty Information Form,” Henrietta Saloshin papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>88</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “In New York war man zu Hause. Man war mit den anderen Refugees zusammen, ... die die gleichen Erfahrungen hatten.”

she worked with the YWCA and the Girl Scouts, where she worked at camps, taught exercise classes, and served as a counselor as well as a group leader.<sup>89</sup> Looking back at her work with the Girl Scouts, she concluded: “Social work. That’s what I did. I didn’t know it, but that’s what I did.”<sup>90</sup>

All these positions entailed practical social work, some of which echoed earlier experiences. Even as a student at Hellerau-Laxenburg in Austria, Saloshin had done what she later recognized as fieldwork, in which she taught free body movement courses to unemployed women or wives of unemployed men in a workers’ district. In her oral history interview, Saloshin repeatedly pointed out that long before she even thought about studying social work, she was engaged in activities that she later recognized as elements of social group work and dance therapy.<sup>91</sup> She was not ignorant of social work in Austria, however. In fact, she had looked into it while she tried to figure out what to do with her life and decided she was not interested, because the training and the actual job were mostly administration of material relief.<sup>92</sup>

With all her occupational experience in areas that fell within the realm of professional social work, Saloshin decided to get a degree, or as she expressed it: “I decided to become legitimate.”<sup>93</sup> As a young woman in Vienna, she had harbored the wish to attend university and study medicine, but as her father opposed these plans, she turned to dancing. Now, in the United States, she took advantage of the opportunity to

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<sup>89</sup> Yesner, “From Vienna with Love.”

<sup>90</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> The biographical article in the NASW newsletter states that “the only school of social work there emphasized social policy and legislation.” In fact, there were more than one training institutions for social workers in Vienna. Saloshin most likely referred to the Academy of Social Administration run by the City of Vienna, which perhaps to her, as it had been for Leichter, was the only viable school. Yesner, “From Vienna with Love.”

<sup>93</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler: “Ich habe beschlossen, legitim zu werden.”

finally get a graduate degree in her early forties.<sup>94</sup> In addition to an ongoing commitment to education, this pattern of émigré women attending universities and getting degrees relatively late in their lives also speaks to the openness of the field, which had capacities and perhaps, at times, also valued students with life experience. The émigrés' networks also played a role. Friends, colleagues, acquaintances or even indirect contacts, who had emigrated several years earlier and had established their careers in the meantime, supported the more recent arrivals into the American academic and professional world.

Saloshin attended the School of Social Work at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, where Fritz Redl, a fellow Austrian émigré, held a professorship.<sup>95</sup> During her first year at the University, she worked part-time once again for the Girl Scouts, this time as a supervisor of the program staff. Her field placements, the praxis requirements in social work programs, were casework assignments at the Jewish Family and Children's Service and later at a mental hospital. After she had graduated in 1949 with a Master of Social Work (M.S.W.), specializing in group work, she moved back to Chicago with the intent of finding a job at an agency or a hospital. Around this time she

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<sup>94</sup> Several women in this study commented on their advanced age as students. While they realized that it set them apart from the majority of their American student colleagues, just like their origin, their language, and their previous education, none of them experienced their age as a negative factor in their relationship to their colleagues or their teachers.

<sup>95</sup> Fritz Redl (1902-1988) was a progressive educator working in Vienna, where he collaborated with August Aichhorn in early experiments with psychoanalytical child guidance clinics. In the United States, Redl taught at the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, before he received a professorship in social work at Wayne State University. In Detroit, he founded "Pioneer House," a residential facility for delinquent children. In the 1950s, he served as the director of the Child Research Branch at the National Institute of Mental Health for six years. Even though Redl's orientation was psychoanalytic, he placed great importance on the environment (the "milieu") and group processes in his work with children, which exerted a strong influence on social group work. As Raush pointed out, "Redl was a powerful critic of typical 'mental health' of curing a child's illness while failing to attend to the worlds we create to define the child's reality." Among Redl's publications, his book *Children Who Hate: The Disorganization and Breakdown of Behavior Controls* is perhaps the most well-known. William C. Morse, "A Half Century of Children Who Hate: Insights for Today from Fritz Redl," *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 10 (2001): 75-88; Harold L. Raush, "Fritz Redl (1902-1988)," *The American Psychologist* 47 (1992): 1143; Fritz Redl and David Wineman, *Children Who Hate: The Disorganization and Breakdown of Behavior Controls* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1951).

heard that the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota was looking for a trained group worker for the position of a field instructor. She applied, was hired, and moved to Minnesota in the fall of 1949. In the following spring, according to Saloshin, John Kidneigh, the program director, approached her and urged her to pursue a doctoral degree.<sup>96</sup> In 1954, she received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota with a thesis on “Development of an Instrument for the Analysis of Social Group Work Method in Therapeutic Settings.” Her dissertation was a contribution to social work methodology and reflects the aims of the profession to develop standardized tools that may be generalized to a variety of settings. Saloshin saw the contribution of her dissertation to the scholarship as follows: “1. As a stepping stone for further clarification of the similarities and distinctions between social group work and other methods utilizing the group for therapeutic purposes. 2. To develop a method of objective analysis of narrative records which could be used by social group work as well as by other methods. 3. As a step forward in the scientific understanding of social group work as a professional method.”<sup>97</sup> Saloshin’s understanding of the character and function of group work as a method to be rigorously applied in order to contribute to social work’s therapeutic goals differed substantially from Konopka’s broader and more philosophical understanding of social group work as “human rights put into practice.”<sup>98</sup>

Saloshin was promoted to Associate Professor in 1954, and starting in 1959 she was Professor of Social Work at the School of Social Work Faculty at the University of

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<sup>96</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>97</sup> Henriette Etta Saloshin, “Development of an Instrument for the Analysis of the Social Group Work Method in Therapeutic Settings” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1954), 17.

<sup>98</sup> Gisela Konopka, “Formation of Values in the Developing Person,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 43 (1973): 90.

Minnesota until her retirement in 1972.<sup>99</sup> She remained actively involved in the community as a speaker and adviser for more than two decades. She had started to include the topic of ageing already in her graduate classes in the 1960s, at a time when there was not much interest among the students. Saloshin commented that the “negative attitude toward the aged that permeates our society also makes it more difficult to recruit young social workers who are eager to change the world.” A lack of prestige of this field within social work also contributed to a lack of interest in geriatric social work, according to Saloshin.<sup>100</sup> She maintained her interest in this field however, and shifted her professional focus further to ageing and retirement, issues that increasingly attracted social workers’ attention in the 1970s and 1980s. She subsequently served as a lecturer and a consultant to local agencies as well as companies which established or already ran programs for those in pre-retirement or retirees, such as the Dayton Corporation and the Pillsbury Corporation.<sup>101</sup> For her accomplishments in “improving the quality of life for the elderly and advancing and promoting the work of gerontology,” Saloshin was the first person to receive the Outstanding Gerontologist Award of the Minnesota Gerontological Society established in 1984.<sup>102</sup> Saloshin never married and lived with her sister for

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<sup>99</sup> “University of Minnesota–Faculty Information Form,” Henrietta Saloshin papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>100</sup> Joe Blade, “Negative Attitude Cited: Finding Social Workers to Deal With Aged Termed Difficult,” *The Minneapolis Star*, October 16, 1967. Henrietta Saloshin Papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder “Biographical Material.”

<sup>101</sup> At the University of Minnesota, her activities included teaching courses on ageing at the Humphrey Institute, as well as for the All University Council on Ageing. Furthermore, she chaired the Minnesota Task Force on Work and Volunteerism for the White House Conference on Ageing 1981. “Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae,” Henrietta Saloshin Papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder “Biographical Material.”

<sup>102</sup> Jim Tift, “State Gerontological Society Announces Achievement Award Winners,” April 26, 1984, Henrietta Saloshin Papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder “Biographical Material”; “Outstanding Gerontologist Award,” Minnesota Gerontological Society, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.mngero.org/awards-scholarships/outstanding-gerontologist-award>.

extended periods of her life. She died in a nursing home in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, in April 1999.<sup>103</sup>

In contrast to Konopka, Saloshin had a steady and satisfying career at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work. She seemed to get along well with the director, and she adapted to the dominant mode of social work more generally and in her department in particular. She focused her energies on her teaching responsibilities and her involvement with various community organizations.<sup>104</sup> Whereas Konopka focused on adolescents, Saloshin dedicated herself to the issues that arise for people and their environment when they get older, thus being an early representative of geriatric social work in the Twin Cities area. She was content to have found a satisfying position at a level that was much higher than she had ever hoped for. With her wish to study medicine in Vienna shattered as a teenager, she eventually did find her way into academia, and a career that integrated her into the prevailing mode of social work.

### **Social Group Work Welcomes Émigrés**

Émigrés like Gisela Konopka with a socialist background and experience in the youth movement found that opportunity and interest intersected in social group work. As a specialization within professional social work, group work emerged in the 1920s and

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<sup>103</sup> Obituary, *Star Tribune* April 28, 1999, accessed March 17, 2014, [www.startribune.com/obituaries/11600271.html](http://www.startribune.com/obituaries/11600271.html).

<sup>104</sup> Her professional publication record was modest, as she remarked on her curriculum vitae: "Some publications in professional journals, should write more, but doesn't." Henrietta Saloshin Papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder "Biographical Material."

1930s and expanded rapidly in the 1940s.<sup>105</sup> Starting with informal meetings of group workers in New York City in the early 1930s that were attended by fifteen to twenty people, group workers created a group work section in the National Conference on Social Work (NCSW) in 1935. At the annual meeting of the NCSW in Atlantic City, a first official meeting of group workers comprised 50 people. After several smaller organizational changes, the American Association of Group Workers (AAGW) was formed in 1946, whose membership climbed up to 1,811 in 1948.<sup>106</sup> The largest organizational restructuring of social work in general, which also affected social group work, was the creation of the National Association of Social Work (NASW) out of seven separate associations in order to unify social work and create a stronger organization that would be a bigger force to advocate for social work's interests.

In her seminal book *Social Group Work: A Helping Process*, Konopka defined social group work as “a method of social work which helps individuals to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences, and to cope more effectively with their personal, group or community problems.”<sup>107</sup>

Historian of social work Janice Andrews claimed that group work was attractive for liberal and left-leaning people because of its liberal roots, and thus attracted

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<sup>105</sup> For an overview of the history of social group work, see for example Janice Andrews, “Group Work’s Place in Social Work: A Historical Analysis,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 28 (2001): 45–65; Scott Briar, “Social Casework and Social Group Work: Historical and Social Science Foundation,” in *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1971), 1240; Marcos Leiderman, Martin L. Birnbaum, and Barbara Dazzo, eds., *Roots and New Frontiers in Social Group Work: Selected Proceedings* (New York: Haworth Press, 1988); Kenneth E. Reid, *From Character Building to Social Treatment: The History of the Use of Groups in Social Work* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981).

<sup>106</sup> Andrews, “Group Work’s Place in Social Work,” 48–49.

<sup>107</sup> Konopka, *Social Group Work: A Helping Process*, 34.

immigrants in particular.<sup>108</sup> The liberal undercurrent and the mission of personal empowerment, democratization, and social justice did appeal to socialist émigrés such as Konopka who were aiming at social change through their work and, particularly after their experiences with European fascism, were interested in contributing to democratization. Through group work, so they hoped, they could help prepare people—particularly young people—for their roles and mutual responsibilities in a democratic society.

While the political aspect was certainly crucial, group work had several additional advantages for émigrés compared to casework. For instance, the practical element of group work tapped into the émigrés' experiences in the European youth movement. Thus, even though they were formally newcomers to the profession of social work, this experience endowed them with expertise they could bring to a field that had just started to take shape and was still malleable and open to new impulses. Konopka frequently stressed these transatlantic continuities in her practical experience as group member and leader: "Group work was something absolutely natural to me. It wasn't a brand-new experience, and not a brain experience only."<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, the practical character of working with groups somewhat alleviated the problem of the language barrier for the émigrés, an obstacle that all of them encountered to some degree. In contrast to caseworkers, however, who relied on talking as the major way of performing their work, social group work also applied to creative and leisure time activities, for which an impeccable command of language was perhaps desirable but not absolutely essential. Before Saloshin became a professional social

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<sup>108</sup> Andrews, "Group Work's Place in Social Work," 51. In this article, Andrews left this point at the stage of a brief observation. She did not argue this statement, nor offer any further analysis.

<sup>109</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 64.

worker, for example, her work both in Austria and the United States involved dance and sports activities that should contribute to the empowerment of participants. When she gave gymnastics workshops for unemployed women in Vienna in the 1920s, she “had no idea that this had anything to do with social work.” It was only much later in the United States that she realized that without knowing she had practiced “social group work through body movement, ... which here has also been called dance therapy.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, the practice of group work elements related to recreation was a potential area of expertise that connected Saloshin’s work in Europe to her career in the United States.

This support for the practice-based character of group work for European émigrés was prominent in the roughly two decades between the formation of group work and its merger with the NASW in 1955. In the process, the definition and goal of social group work was modified from an emphasis on growth and development to focus on treatment of individuals who exhibited problems with social adjustment, as Alan Klein explained: “Social group work ... demoted social action and prevention ... in order to conform to the therapeutic and corrective stance of the majority specialization.”<sup>111</sup> This shift was accompanied by group work increasingly adopting talking at the expense of other kinds of activities as the dominant mode of operation, as spearheaded by therapeutic social casework. Ruth Middleman, a critic of the narrowing base of techniques in social group work, recalled that “to fit in, the social group workers played down their involvement with and knowledge about using activities and the special interests of group participants

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<sup>110</sup> Etta Saloshin, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Eigentlich habe ich ja schon Sozialarbeit gemacht, Gruppenarbeit, und zwar durch Bewegung...man hat es ... hier auch dance therapy genannt.”

<sup>111</sup> Alan F. Klein, *Social Work through Group Process* (Albany: School of Social Welfare, State University of New York, 1970), 109; see, also, Albert S. Alissi, *Perspectives on Social Group Work Practice: A Book of Readings* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 24.

as a point of engagement and became, like case-workers, helpers who talked.”<sup>112</sup> While Alan Klein pointed to the small number of group workers in the overall population of social workers as reason why they were not able to preserve their field’s distinctive goals and methods, Ruby Pernell, who had been Konopka’s student colleague in Pittsburgh and later joined the social work faculty at the University of Minnesota, argued that social group workers made “a historic decision about their identification and affiliation and let go the identifiable bonds with recreation and informal education.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, group workers becoming part of the NASW resulted in a changed character of social group work, as it adjusted to the parameters of mainstream casework.

Before group workers reshaped their field in the likeness of casework in the late 1950s and 1960s, group work had been open for impulses from various directions and for people from diverse backgrounds. In fact, the direction of the process of professionalization that eventually resulted in group work’s affiliation with social work was contested. As group work reflected varied organizations from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ranging from the settlement movement to recreation and adult education to labor union organizing, among others, the professional affiliation with social work was one among several options, albeit the one with the strongest support whose proponents argued that “group work is a method in social work . . . not a profession—social work is the profession.”<sup>114</sup> As a significant outcome during the 1940s and early 1950s, these diverse origins of group work provided multiple points of contact and entry

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<sup>112</sup> Ruth Middleman, quoted in Andrews, “Group Work’s Place in Social Work,” 57.

<sup>113</sup> Ruby Pernell, quoted in Andrews, “Group Work’s Place in Social Work,” 57. The American Association of Group Workers had about 2,800 members at the time of the merger, while the total number of social work professionals was about 22,000. *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>114</sup> Harleigh Trecker quoted in Andrews, “Group Work’s Place in Social Work,” 50. In Germany, for example, social group work maintained its strong affiliation with education and is commonly referred to as social pedagogy (*Sozialpädagogik*).

for émigrés who came from backgrounds such as education, social psychology, labor unions, youth groups, and recreation and dance.

Konopka was not among the opponents of the merger in the mid-1950s. In fact, in 1962 she deplored the situation where caseworkers and group workers learn from each other but “do not always credit each other for the help they gain from each other.”<sup>115</sup> Over the years, however, she grew increasingly critical of the social work profession, because she felt that the initial promise of a mutually nurturing coexistence of the different specialties had not become a reality.

Whereas other social group workers rejected therapy as an appropriate method for their field and attributed it exclusively to the realm of casework, Konopka did not agree on this particular dividing line. In the mid-1940s, she was convinced that group work could be applied beneficially in psychiatric settings, as it introduced the environment as a crucial factor to approaches that otherwise focused on psychological processes of the individual. However, in contrast to casework, according to Konopka, group work “never dogmatically accepted psychoanalysis like casework did.”<sup>116</sup> While she had been interested in psychoanalysis for a long time and also collaborated with Fritz Redl who was psychoanalytically oriented, she never practiced psychoanalysis in her own work, because the children she worked with were not terribly sick, “but they have problems around them,” and therefore she did not consider psychoanalysis a necessary approach.<sup>117</sup>

Except for the years between 1943 and 1947, when Konopka served as a psychiatric group worker at the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Clinic, her work focused on

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<sup>115</sup> Konopka, *Social Group Work: A Helping Process*, 13.

<sup>116</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 350.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

social work education. In addition, she conducted research and she published prolifically.<sup>118</sup> Above all, she was concerned with adolescents, especially in institutions.<sup>119</sup> Starting in the 1960s, she directed her attention to delinquent adolescent girls, who she felt had been overlooked with research focusing on boys. She received a grant from National Institute of Mental Health for a three-year research project, which resulted in the book *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict*.<sup>120</sup> Ten years later, she published a second book on girls based on interviews, *Young Girls: A Portrait of Adolescence*, this time expanding the topic beyond delinquency, with the aim to raise understanding for girls both within the profession and in the general public.<sup>121</sup>

### **Activities Outside the Social Work Profession**

Konopka made it a priority to expand the scope of her activities beyond the realms of academia and the social work profession. She served on regional, state, and federal committees, many of them related to corrections. She conducted training courses for police officers. She reached out to the larger public to raise awareness about and discuss contemporary social issues covering topics such as race relations, the future of Europe, gender issues to juvenile delinquency.<sup>122</sup> Her methods of outreach were eclectic, ranging from lectures at scholarly conferences to frequent speaking assignments in various group settings (for example youth and church groups), to newspaper articles, and

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<sup>118</sup> Konopka published eleven books and more than three hundred articles.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Gisela Konopka, *Group Work in the Institution: A Modern Challenge* (New York: Association Press, 1954).

<sup>120</sup> Gisela Konopka, *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

<sup>121</sup> Gisela Konopka, *Young Girls: A Portrait of Adolescence* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976). The Lilly Endowment funded the project with a grant of over 300,000 dollars.

<sup>122</sup> "Biography," Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 1, Folder "Biographical Timeline of G. Konopka. 1929-88."

even radio and TV shows.<sup>123</sup> She became known as an expert particularly on youth, and she frequently served as the go-to person for journalists, as a plethora of newspaper articles illustrate.<sup>124</sup>

Konopka regularly gave talks on a variety of social and political issues for which she drew sizable audiences. In a letter to her husband she explained why these speaking assignments—she often gave several talks a week—to youth or church groups were so important to her: “They [i.e. adolescents at a YWCA group] give me much strength and I feel as if I have a bigger impact than I do speaking in front of large audiences who already think this way anyway. Here I connect to the roots, to people who usually don’t hear these things.”<sup>125</sup>

In the immediate post-World War II years, she often spoke about Germany in order to provide a nuanced understanding of the social and political conditions that had led to World War II, as well as her vision of a peaceful post-war order involving a unified Europe. She strove for a humanistic and nuanced understanding, even of Germany under National Socialist rule. Her talks on Germany were not generalizing condemnations, but—to the surprise of many listeners and to the chagrin of fellow refugees—she tried to convey a more complex picture. With German friends and her non-Jewish husband on her mind, Konopka underscored that not all Germans were National Socialist perpetrators; in fact, she upheld that non-Jewish Germans also were persecuted and killed for their

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<sup>123</sup> For example, Konopka cooperated twice with the local public television station, KTCA. In 1964, they produced a series called “Girls in Conflict,” which grew out of her research project on delinquent girls, and in 1969 they worked together on a series on “Being Young,” see Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 155, 177.

<sup>124</sup> Several folders of newspaper articles about her activities are available at University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>125</sup> Gisela to Paul Konopka, not dated, Konopka Papers II, Box 5, Folder “Personal Mail 1944,” German original: “... schöpfe ich selber viel Kraft daraus, und habe das Gefühl, dass ich mehr tue, als wenn ich in grossen Versammlungen zu Leuten spreche, die sowieso so denken.”

political convictions and resistance work and that their efforts should not disappear from the historical record.

Even when Konopka spoke about Nazi Germany, she made sure to make her larger argument pertinent to the current situation in the United States, thus communicating insight and awareness that was immediately relevant for her audience. For instance, she gave a talk in front of “colored HighSchool [sic] students (boys and girls) at the YMCA” in January 1951 titled “What to do with Germany?” In a letter to her husband she explained the talk: “I spoke for almost an hour giving the present state of Germany, historical background of the political developments and the way I would see the solution...I emphasized the fact that in the back of the whole Nazi work is this definite idea of race superiority and this is something to fight here as much as over there.”<sup>126</sup>

In 1968, Konopka changed her full-time appointment at the school of social work into a part-time position and spent the remainder of her time as a “Coordinator of Community Programs” at the newly founded University’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), established to link the university with the local and regional community.<sup>127</sup> This center was another way for her to transcend the academic boundaries, reach out to the community, and to make the work of the university relevant to the community. “The new office will attempt to match the needs of the community with the resources, faculty, and students of the University.”<sup>128</sup> The newspaper article goes on to list specific tasks that the community requested: “Community groups during the past

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<sup>126</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 5 January 1945, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Personal Mail 1944.”

<sup>127</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 170.

<sup>128</sup> *Minnesota Daily*, February 2, 1968, 1.

month indicated a desire for University aid in three areas: community cultural development, including technical aid in theater, social history, and consumer economics.” Konopka’s responsibilities at the center revolved around youth development, which was one of her main areas of expertise and a major professional concern. With this new responsibility, she was able to bridge academic work and community outreach in her work, which had been an ongoing aspiration spanning her entire career.

Together with her colleagues Miriam Seltzer and Diane Hyatt Hedin, Konopka submitted a proposal to the university to establish a Center for Youth Development and Research as a division within CURA. The Center with its focus on “research, teaching and service” was approved in 1970 and Konopka appointed its director.<sup>129</sup> Having gained more autonomy, she conducted her research projects on youth, including youth delinquency, in this center, which grew rapidly and had a staff of about twenty-five by 1973.<sup>130</sup> The research for the book *Young Girls: A Portrait of Adolescence* was also conducted by this center, whose affiliation Konopka had transferred from CURA to Home Economics on the St. Paul campus in 1974.<sup>131</sup> Konopka had now added physical and administrative distance to the social work department as well as the profession of social work in a larger sense, from which she felt increasingly alienated.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Andrews-Schenk *Rebellious Spirit*, 185-86.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* This decision to transfer the Center for Youth Development to Home Economics, a discipline which was almost exclusively the province of women, as well as its consequences invites more research in the future.

<sup>132</sup> Konopka’s perhaps major legacy at the University of Minnesota is connected to this center. Robert Blum, a pediatrician, became a fellow in 1977 and later a driving force to continue work in Konopka’s spirit, see Andrews-Schenk *Rebellious Spirit*, 125. The Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health at the University of Minnesota’s Department of Pediatrics is dedicated to research on adolescence and to disseminate knowledge in a language accessible to non-specialists and “to provide information, programs and policy support to the youth-serving community.” “Konopka Institute,” accessed October 23, 2014, <http://www.peds.umn.edu/dogpah/programs-centers/konopka>.

## Parting Ways with the Social Work Profession

Konopka was plagued with problems and crises both on a personal and a more general professional level, the extent of which may seem surprising considering her great successes and the numerous accolades she accumulated over the course of her career. As her personal diaries and partly also her letters reveal, she often struggled with self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, maybe depression even, which may provide a partial explanation of what others have described as an excessive need for admiration and the fact that “she liked the limelight.” Her perceived need for attention led to interpersonal problems with colleagues and students, particularly at the University of Minnesota.<sup>133</sup> Over time, however, a chasm occurred that transcended the department and extended to the larger social work profession. While in the 1940s social work, and particularly group work, seemed the perfect fit Konopka, by the 1970s she found herself alienated from her profession.

Some students at the University of Minnesota disliked Konopka’s teaching style and conduct as a faculty member. Immediately after her appointment, she acquired a reputation of being very demanding, and students warned each other to “watch out for Konopka.”<sup>134</sup> While being demanding is not necessarily a negative attribute of a teacher, other accusations were more serious. Some students complained that, while Konopka

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<sup>133</sup> Schreiber cited in Andrews-Schenk *Rebellious Spirit*, 75. In contrast to biographical accounts that focus on success, Andrews-Schenk’s narrative of Konopka’s life tends to emphasize the struggles and dark periods. This may be caused by the author’s intention to counterbalance the conventional biographical pieces and therefore provide a perspective that is closer to Konopka’s personal experiences. However, this perspective is also due to the sources available to Andrews-Schenk. She had the rare fortune that Konopka gave her access to her personal diaries, on which she drew heavily for the book. Konopka had a habit of turning to her diary when she felt vulnerable, lonely, or depressed, but she rarely discussed happy episodes in her life in her diaries. Thus, while the diaries add great depth and nuance to the biography, they also bear the danger of creating a too negative account when relying on them as the major guiding source for the narrative.

<sup>134</sup> Ruth Teeter, a former student, cited in Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 75.

loved to preach and theorize democracy, she did not practice it in the classroom. In fact, the students felt that Konopka came across as harsh, authoritarian and intolerant. For a class in which teaching practices through modeling them in the classroom was as important as teaching intellectual content, this was a serious allegation. Konopka's own self-image and her intentions as a teacher stand in striking contrast to the experiences and interpretations of some students.

Expectations of behavior and professional conduct were undoubtedly linked to gender roles. While women made up almost the entire social work faculty at the University of Minnesota, the director was a man.<sup>135</sup> This arrangement had historical roots, as the social work program was a subdivision of the sociology department from its beginning in 1917 until 1949, when it was transformed into a unit in the College of Science, Literature and the Arts.<sup>136</sup> Sociology was the men's department, the social

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<sup>135</sup> In contrast to most other academic departments that were almost exclusively male-dominated, however, social work had numerous female faculty.

<sup>136</sup> Several minor changes of the social work program led to some confusion in historical literature. Andrews-Schenk stated that "the social work program received independent status as the School of Social Work in 1942." Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 74. A letter from W.C. Coffey, president of the University of Minnesota, clearly states: "The Regents of the University of Minnesota... approved the ... the designation of the Graduate Course in Social Work be changed to School of Social Work, and that the title of Professor F. Stuart Chapin be changed from Chairman of the Department of Sociology and Director of the Graduate Course in Social Work to Chairman of the Department of Sociology and Director of the School of Social Work. It is stipulated that this involves no changes in the internal status of the department or in the administrative relationship with the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts, or the general University Administration." W.C. Coffey to Dean T.R. McConnell, Professor F. Stuart Chapin, and Mr. T.E. Pettengill, 16 March 1942, Sociology Records, UMNA, Box 1, AH26.1 7.

workers were women.<sup>137</sup> During this time period, the chair of the sociology department also served as the director of the social program. From 1923 to 1949, sociologist F. Stuart Chapin was a very supportive director of the social work program. Chapin worked tirelessly on turning social work from a little regarded women's profession held in low esteem into a respected academic field, as he expressed in a letter in 1943: "... the problem of gaining academic recognition for professional social workers on a staff when such people seldom have any graduate degrees or evidence of publication or research to offer. We have gradually overcome this difficulty in the past twenty-five years and several of our staff are widely respected people by scholars in other faculties of the University."<sup>138</sup> Chapin represented the program to the academic world and to higher ranking university officials. Gertrude Vaile, the associate director, effectively ran the program and made the decisions concerning contents and internal administration.

While Konopka respected Chapin, admired his intellectual prowess, and felt very much at home at the School of Social Work, things changed dramatically when John Kidneigh took over the position of director in 1949.<sup>139</sup> He had succeeded Vaile after her retirement as associate director and then became the director of the School of Social

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<sup>137</sup> A look at a faculty list from 1942 shows how clearly the line of demarcation was drawn. F. Stuart Chapin served as Chairman of Sociology and Director of the School of Social Work. All personnel in Sociology, i.e. fifteen people, were male (professors, associate professors, instructors and down to the teaching assistants) with one exception: the stenographer was a woman. In the School of Social Work, on the other hand, of eleven persons, the associate director, all associate professors, instructors, teaching assistants, and the stenographer were female, only two lecturers were male."2026 Sociology and Social Work, 1942," Sociology Papers, UMNA, Box 1, Folder AH26.1. Even as late as in 1960, the Department of Sociology did not have a woman on their faculty; all fourteen faculty members were men. In the School of Social Work, by contrast, the faculty was the same size and comprised five men and nine women *University of Minnesota Budget 1959/60* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1959), 45-55. Thus, Sociology joined the disciplinary departments that had no (or very few) women and social work joined the professional programs where women dominated like home economics and nursing.

<sup>138</sup> Chapin to Wilson, October 11, 1943, Sociology Records, UMNA, Box 1, AH26.1 8, University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>139</sup> This reflects a larger trend of men attempting to reshape women's field in this time period, as Rossiter has demonstrated for home economics. Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action, 1940-1972* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), chapter 8.

Work, when it split from the Department of Sociology.<sup>140</sup> The social dynamics at the program shifted, and Konopka had the impression that feminine conduct was valued more than professional accomplishments. She felt increasingly uncomfortable, which resulted in tensions with other faculty members and, above all, the director Kidneigh. In Konopka's view, Kidneigh wanted to be adored and flattered by his subordinate female faculty. Konopka refused to partake in such antics, because in her opinion she had acquired enough professional accomplishments to approach him as his equal. Konopka found that some colleagues interpreted her insistence on professional treatment as arrogance, and her growing number of publications and international engagements only increased this distance between them. Thus, while Konopka successfully started a new career in the United States, was on the rise in her profession, and had acquired a professorship at a large university, she found herself in an environment that she experienced as hostile by the mid-1950s.

When Konopka decided in 1954 to get a doctorate, both John Kidneigh and Theodore Blegen, dean of the graduate school at the time, advised her against it. In her oral memoir, Konopka emphasized that both Kidneigh—up to this time and despite personal differences—and Blegen had been very supportive of her overall.<sup>141</sup> Thus, it was likely that their advice was not rooted in a mean-spirited attempt to obstruct her professional advancement. They perhaps had practical reasons and the interest of the program in mind, for example that working on a degree would interrupt her work. Furthermore, they were convinced that her teaching position would be secure without

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<sup>140</sup> John Kidneigh was a trained social worker with a master's degree from the University of Utah and worked for Social Security Administration, before joining the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 74.

<sup>141</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 374.

adding a doctoral degree. Kidneigh also argued that it would be awkward for a faculty member to get a degree in her own department and that he would not allow it.<sup>142</sup> Finally, Kidneigh and Blegen's refusal of support in this matter also speaks to gendered expectations of academic trajectories at the time. While there is no doubt that Konopka could have stayed in a stable job teaching social work at the University of Minnesota without a doctorate, her career would most likely not have been the exceptional success that eventually characterized her biography.<sup>143</sup> Negative reactions among her colleagues to Konopka's numerous publications, her being in the spotlight, and public visibility can be read as disapproval of Konopka's behavior which contradicted the prescriptions of an acquiescent feminine conduct. When her colleague Kurt Reichert, a fellow émigré and social worker who had fled from Austria, remarked that "she's not humble, not a typical Minnesotan," he covered part of the problem, but Konopka's refusal to comply with gendered role expectations certainly aggravated her situation.<sup>144</sup>

In her days as a student in Pittsburgh and during her first years as a social work practitioner, she commented on the atypical gender roles in her relationship to Paul. In the early 1940s, Paul had written about his experiences as a refugee in France and he tried to get the article published. She wrote to him: "Maria wrote that they try to get it published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. That would be wonderful, and I would be secretly gleeful when you can no longer say that I am 'the big cheese.' Then you will be it and I

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<sup>142</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 100-101. Konopka, by contrast, felt awkward to sit on doctoral committees without having a Ph.D. herself. Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 374.

<sup>143</sup> While she tended to believe Kidneigh and Blegen in 1954, in retrospect she stated that her doctorate was absolutely necessary for an academic career. Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 374.

<sup>144</sup> Kurt Reichert cited in Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 76.

will only be your wife.”<sup>145</sup> In another instance, about two years later, she jokingly reflected on her career: “It is Friday afternoon and my first vacation day. It feels so good to be home. I know I ‘missed the boat’ in life. I should have been a farmer’s wife with 5 children at least, who stays home with her family, does a lot of housework and other work too, but mostly likes to stay home with husband and children. And now just look what has become of me!”<sup>146</sup>

Over the years, with Gisela Konopka’s plentiful obligations at the University and scholarly community, as a public speaker and consultant, and her involvement in the local community, Paul became her anchor. He created a quiet and harmonious atmosphere at home and attended to her emotional and physical wellbeing.

When Kidneigh and Blegen suggested that a doctorate was not necessary for Konopka’s position at the university, they considered her position in the stratified arrangement of genders perfectly appropriate. This gendered hierarchy becomes apparent in the distribution of doctoral degrees as well. In a distinctly feminized profession, in which a man could easily be “feeling adrift in a woman’s world,” more men than women would get doctoral degrees at the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota.<sup>147</sup> In fact, in the fifteen years after the first person graduated with a Ph.D. in 1951, the School of Social Work awarded thirty-two Ph.D. degrees to twenty-four men

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<sup>145</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 21 November 1942, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Letters from Erhardt in Army Nov., Dec., 1942.” German original: “Maria schreibt, dass sie versuchen, es bei den ‘Atlantic Monthly’ unterzubringen. ... Es wäre ganz wundervoll, und ich hätte meine heimliche Schadenfreude, wenn Du dann nicht mehr sagen kannst, dass ich „das grosse Tier“ bin. Dann bist Du’s und ich bin nur Deine Frau.”

<sup>146</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 22 December 1944, Konopka Papers II, UMNA, Box 5, Folder “Mail 1945.”

<sup>147</sup> Carl Warmington, quoted in School of Social Work, *Leadership Toward a Caring Society: 75 Years of Research, Teaching and Service* (School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, 1992), 36.

and eight women.<sup>148</sup> In addition to Saloshin, three more male émigrés received doctoral degrees in the social work program at the University of Minnesota. Kurt Reichert from Vienna graduated in 1955, Henry Maier, who grew up in Frankfurt, received his degree in 1959, and Joseph Meisels, also from Vienna, in 1962.<sup>149</sup>

The first woman, and the sixth person overall, to receive a Ph.D. from the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota was Etta Saloshin in 1954. Konopka's and Saloshin's relationship proved difficult.<sup>150</sup> They differed in their ideas about the nature of group work and its position in social work, as well as in their personal alliances in the delicate social fabric of the social work faculty. Saloshin's primary loyalty was to Kidneigh, which deeply disappointed Konopka, who had advocated for Saloshin's hire. Konopka's solution to the struggles with her adversaries on her faculty was to work around them. Instead of giving up the doctorate, she went to New York and graduated from Columbia University, where she reinforced her interdisciplinary connections and also intensified her relationship to social work colleagues outside of Minnesota.

By the end of the 1950s, she seriously pondered leaving the University of Minnesota, but decided against it because of her involvement in the community and

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<sup>148</sup> Saloshin, "Development of an Instrument."

<sup>149</sup> Kurt Reichert, "Some Aspects of the Relationship between Private Physicians and Social Agencies: A Study Based on a Sample of General Practitioners, Internists, and Pediatricians" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1955); Joseph Frederick Meisels, "Self-Conception, Job-Perception and Job Satisfaction of Social Workers" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1962); Henry W. Maier, "Three Current Child Development Theories Applied to Child Caring Tasks: A Study of Three Child Development Theories as Postulated by Jean Piaget, Erik H. Erikson and Robert R. Sears for the Purpose of Applying Principles Derived from These Theories to Child Caring Tasks in Children's Institutions" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1959).

<sup>150</sup> While the complicated relationship between Konopka and Saloshin framed both women's experiences at the School of Social Work, it is difficult to approach historiographically due to extremely uneven bodies of source material. Almost everything we know about their conflict is narrated from Konopka's perspective, whereas Saloshin's more limited sources are silent on this issue. Furthermore, in her oral history interview, Saloshin focused on the time before coming to Minnesota. After talking briefly about her dissertation, which she defended in 1954, she then jumped to retirement in 1972 and her activities from then on.

because of her husband, who was doing well and liked it there. While she honored her teaching obligations at the School of Social Work, she made ample use of opportunities elsewhere, which brought satisfaction and new, more positive relationships. She taught workshops and summer classes both in the United States and internationally, she went abroad for research and speaking engagements, went on leaves of absence to work on research projects, and took on responsibilities at the University of Minnesota outside of the School of Social Work. With Konopka turning her attention elsewhere, Saloshin assumed responsibility for the group work sequence. During a three-month stay in Europe in 1961, Konopka sent a letter to her husband reporting news from the program she had just received from her colleague Ruby Pernell: “Etta’s courses are really becoming the most important ones. Well, I do not care so much any more. I am sure I’ll write, and that is really more important. This is my contribution, let her have the glory on that faculty.”<sup>151</sup>

Konopka strove to infuse social work with a solid backing in philosophy and to include the social environment as well as political conditions as factors in identifying and solving social problems. As an example of numerous similar statements, looking back at her career in 1997 she described her impression of social work’s development as follows: “There have been changes over the years. Some parts of social work—from my view—have lost the great tradition of ‘philosophy translated into practice,’ have narrowed it to ‘technique,’ and have sometimes turned a mistaken ‘professional’ approach into treating people like puppets. But we can still combat this.”<sup>152</sup> Konopka, upholding her broader vision of social work grounded in intellectual and philosophical considerations, reacted

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<sup>151</sup> Gisela Konopka to Paul Konopka, 31 January 1961, cited in Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 143.

<sup>152</sup> Gisela Konopka, “Human Dignity: All Lives are Connected to Other Lives,” *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping* 3 (1997), 55–58.

against a development in social work that, as she saw it, increasingly conceptualized the social worker as a technical expert who manipulated the client into what was considered appropriate social behavior. Such a concept collided with her understanding of the social worker as a facilitator who helped instill in her clients a feeling of self-worth, a sense of responsibility towards fellow humans, and, therefore, personal agency. In doing so, she also argued against a narrow view of psychology and psychiatry in American social work. “My view of man is psychosocial, seeing the individual as a whole, interacting constantly with others and with the systems and subsystems in which he or she finds himself or herself.”<sup>153</sup> Without explicitly articulating it, she also criticized a trend that increasingly cast the female social workers as lower-rank technicians, who acted based on knowledge created by male social scientists.

Opposing a punitive approach to corrections, Konopka tirelessly spoke out on the behalf of delinquent adolescents and tried to raise awareness and understanding for them as troubled humans in need of support. Her activities included service as consultant in the area of juvenile delinquency, lobbying for penal reform, and conducting workshops for police and correctional officers. Furthermore, she used public talks and newspaper articles in order to engage the broader public into adopting a more humane and constructive attitude towards juvenile offenders.

Konopka had been interested in juvenile delinquency and the correctional treatment already as a young woman in Weimar Germany, where progressive educators experimented with alternative institutions. Decades later in the United States, she returned to this interest. She advocated replacing mass institutions with community-based

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<sup>153</sup> Konopka, “Formation of Values,” 90.

group homes, which should facilitate rehabilitation instead of merely punish the adolescents. Group work again provided the guiding principles. Living in small groups with peers should help the adolescents to become aware of their social functions and responsibilities both in their groups and the larger community, instill a sense of self-confidence and self-worth, and involve the offenders as active agents of rehabilitation. She contested the American penal system based on dated and religion-inspired principles of “retaliation, redemption through work or silence, strict obedience enforced through military-type discipline, protection through custodial care, education through provision of mostly vocational and often outdated training, sometimes individual or group therapy unrelated to the rest of the milieu, and especially an overall separation from the community.”<sup>154</sup> These practices, according to Konopka, were counterproductive to rehabilitation and were certainly not conducive to helping the delinquents become self-reliant and responsible members of society capable of fulfilling their citizen’s duties in a democracy.

In an attempt to illustrate the obsolete approach to juvenile delinquency, Konopka pointed out how inconsistent Americans were in their attitudes toward science and technology on the one hand, and the social and human sciences on the other hand. As flying to the moon had recently captured the public’s imagination, she argued that “delving into the secrets of human behavior and human relations is as exciting and adventuresome as space flight.”<sup>155</sup> And yet, no comparative resources, collaborative efforts, and intellectual rigor to the ones that made space flight possible went into amelioration of human relations, and that “in this area the country is the most

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<sup>154</sup> Gisela Konopka, “Our Outcast Youth,” *Social Work* 15 (1970): 80.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

backward.”<sup>156</sup> She deplored that “we are not willing to discard old, ineffective concepts proved to be useless ... We do not build on knowledge derived from past experiences and many people ... We follow some catchy fads ... We do not use sharp evaluation, even when possible—we either just continue what has traditionally been done or excuse our poor practices by blaming someone else (the legislature, the public, and the like) ... Society as a whole does not spend money with needed generosity in any area concerned with human beings.”<sup>157</sup> While she was very careful not to equate knowledge of the natural world to that of human society, she argued that the methodological principles and the intellectual rigor used in science and technology should inspire a more rational, systematic, and diligent approach to social issues: “It is necessary once and for all to clarify our goals on the grounds of our knowledge and experiences and translate these goals into tangible practice.”<sup>158</sup> Konopka not only challenged her readers to more historical awareness by claiming relevance of previously gained knowledge for contemporary applications, she also had a more international orientation in mind. She advocated a more historical, international, and systematic outlook of social work by pointing out time and again that knowledge and experience gained elsewhere and at various points in time should be made useful for solving social problems in the contemporary United States context. After extensive research both in Germany and the United States, she suggested adapting the Lindenhof model, a progressive experiment of 1920s Germany, to the correctional reforms in the 1960s United States, which should be

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 76.

updated by knowledge provided by contemporary psychosocial research.<sup>159</sup>

The Lindenhof, an experiment pioneered by the German progressive educator Karl Wilker, was a correctional facility set up as an “educational and therapeutic community” combining “the individual influence of an adult who respected young people with a total, stimulating, and warm environment in which the students (as they were called rather than inmates) were encouraged to help each other.”<sup>160</sup> Konopka’s underlying plea to politicians, professionals in corrections, and society was to acknowledge the juvenile delinquent not as a “‘bad’ person” but as a human being at a developmental stage in which he/she undergoes tremendous transformations, and to recognize factors such as race, class, and gender as significant elements of juvenile behavior.<sup>161</sup>

Konopka proposed a book project to Aldine Press: “I think I might want to start out by describing the present situation and the incredibly low standards as well as the confused goal setting in this field. I then want to move into what we have learned about the history of delinquency institutions in this country and present as a model, some of the reform in the 1920’s in Europe with a view toward the now and the future. I really think this is terribly important and that we do need more writing in relation to goal setting instead of just surveys.”<sup>162</sup> The book never came to fruition. Even though she had secured a book contract beforehand, the final manuscript was rejected because it was not “good enough,” in her interpretation.<sup>163</sup> Her efforts to get it published elsewhere were in vain,

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<sup>159</sup> On Lindenhof see for example Stephan Lhotzky, “Karl Wilker’s Lindenhof” in *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems* 3 (1994): 53–55; Karl Wilker, *Der Lindenhof: Werden und Wollen* (Heilbronn: Lichtkampf-Verlag Hanns Altermann, 1921).

<sup>160</sup> Konopka, “Our Outcast Youth,” 79.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*,” 77.

<sup>162</sup> Gisela Konopka to James Clark, Aldine Publishing Company, 17 March 1969, Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 22, Folder “‘Our Outcast Youth’ Correspondence 1969-71.”

<sup>163</sup> Konopka and Grayson, *Oral Memoir*, 407.

as well.<sup>164</sup> Rather than a lack of quality, the responses by other publishers she had approached with the manuscript suggest that the book did not fit any disciplinary publishing program or targeted readership in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the editor for sociology at Prentice Hall considered it too historical and thus of limited use for students.<sup>165</sup> She did get two articles accepted based on this research in major social work journals, however, one by *Social Work* and the other by the *Social Service Review*.<sup>166</sup> She had intended these as supplemental publications to the book and not in lieu of it.

Over the decades, Konopka's work seems to become increasingly out of sync with mainstream American social work. The popularity of group work in the profession was in decline more generally and Konopka's particular approach and perhaps her personality, as well as her unwillingness to adhere to changing professional standards caused friction with the social work community. She cast yet a wider net. During a six-month sabbatical leave from fall 1970 to spring 1971, she traveled extensively, including to the Philippines, Thailand, India, Turkey, Israel, Iran, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. She lectured, taught group work, conducted workshops for social workers, social work educators, and personnel in institutions, and offered consultations on topics such as curriculum building in social work and institutional care of children. She also met with policy makers and administrators to discuss youth delinquency and corrections, among

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<sup>164</sup> The records reveal that Konopka's attempts to get the book published extended to a period of over two decades, from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 22, Folder "'Our Outcast Youth' Correspondence 1969-71."

<sup>165</sup> Alan B. Lesure to Gisela Konopka, 11 March 1969, Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 22, Folder "'Our Outcast Youth' Correspondence 1969-71."

<sup>166</sup> Konopka, "Our Outcast Youth;" Gisela Konopka, "Reforms in Delinquency Institutions in Revolutionary Times: The 1920s in Germany," *Social Service Review* 45 (1971): 245-58.

other topics.<sup>167</sup>

Her publication record shows that, by the 1970s, she increasingly published outside the major American social work journals as well as in foreign journals. As Andrews-Schenk reported, some colleagues criticized the quality of Konopka's scholarly work and the fact that she did not publish in the 'right' journals.<sup>168</sup> Konopka's response to a rejection of an article in *Social Work*, the journal of the NASW, illustrates the conflict of interest between Konopka and her discipline: "I was very amused about the reasons for not publishing my paper...it is the second time that Social Workers do not publish something that I wrote because I am talking too 'informal.' If they would want to, I could translate all that I have to say into the typical 'gobbledy-gook.' Frankly, I think it is boring...I am enclosing a paper that was published by ORTHO [American Journal of Orthopsychiatry]. It was immediately accepted by the editors, but I knew that Social Workers would never want it because of its 'informality.'"<sup>169</sup>

Konopka found an intellectual home in the American Orthopsychiatric Association, an interdisciplinary organization bringing together "professionals interested in the intersection of mental health, social justice, and human rights."<sup>170</sup> Founded by a group of nine psychiatrists in 1924 and having developed in close association with the child guidance movement, this association took as its core tenet the significance of the

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<sup>167</sup> Gisela Konopka, "Report on my Sabbatical Leave," May 11, 1971, Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 1, Folder "Articles about GK, 1965-1968."

<sup>168</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 175.

<sup>169</sup> Gisela Konopka to Beatrice Saunders, 22 October 1974, quoted in Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 207.

<sup>170</sup> Natallia Sianko, "Introducing ORTHO: The American Orthopsychiatric Association," accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.apa.org/international/pi/2011/07/ortho.aspx>.

social environment for individuals' mental health.<sup>171</sup> As the forum for the exchange of various perspectives on research, theory, methods, social action, public policy, and mental health practice, the association started to publish the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* in 1930.<sup>172</sup>

Konopka participated in the annual meetings of the American Orthopsychiatric Association and, in 1962, was elected president for the upcoming year following the presidency of Fritz Redl. The interdisciplinary membership organized around the theme of mental health and social justice, i.e. the individual in its social environment, provided precisely the stimulating environment that she enjoyed, and her position brought her the appreciation and freedom that she felt social work was denying her. This was the scholarly and professional community to which the social environment, social justice, and social reform mattered.

Even though group work reemerged in the late 1970s and social group workers started to forge a new identity within social work, Konopka had no desire to become part of this movement.<sup>173</sup> As her husband had died in 1976 and she had retired from her university positions in 1978, she reduced her activities to community involvement as well

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<sup>171</sup> David M. Levy, "Orthopsychiatry: Its History, Its Future: Beginnings of the Child Guidance Movement," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 38 (1968): 799–804; on the history of the child guidance movement see also Margo Horn, *Before It's Too Late: The Child Guidance Movement in the United States, 1922-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

<sup>172</sup> An examination of this association and its significance for émigrés in social work and related fields has yet to be carried out. Most of the émigrés I studied were members and met at the annual conferences, thus it could have played an important role in structuring their professional networks and knowledge exchange.

<sup>173</sup> Some of the social workers who still identified as group workers realized that "group work seemed to have given up its identity ... in the 60s and 70s" as "unintended consequences" of the merger in the mid-1950s. They successfully launched the journal *Social Work with Groups: A Journal of Community and Clinical Practice* and founded the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups. Catherine P. Papell, "More Than Sixty Years With Social Group Work: A Personal and Professional History," *The Social Welfare History Project*, accessed October 20, 2014, [www.socialwelfarehistory.com/recollections/1053](http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/recollections/1053). See also Andrews, "Group Work's Place in Social Work," 61–62.

as writing. Having received numerous awards for her achievements over the 1980s and 1990s, she died in Minneapolis in December 2003.<sup>174</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the arrival of European émigrés looking to establish a new professional life in the United States coincided with a window of opportunity in social group work, which was expanding and professionalizing. In addition to finding training and employment opportunities, émigrés realized that group work, in particular, connected interests, experience, and ideologies from their European past with potential future careers in the United States that could satisfy their professional and ideological needs, as well as their commitment to social reform. The diverse roots of group work evident in the American settlement movement, neighborhood centers, adult education, recreation, camps, Jewish centers, self help, and labor union organizing provided a broad scope of contact and entry points for the Europeans. During this period, group work was still expanding and open for new people and ideas. As they built careers in the United States, émigrés infused social group work with their enthusiasm and experience and flourished with their profession.

When group work became a subsection of the National Association of Social Work in 1955 and started to take social casework as its model, group work lost many of its distinct features and, by the 1960s, became largely invisible in the profession. The reasons for the decline of group work were not limited to factors internal to the profession, however. Since many group workers identified with the political left, the shift

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<sup>174</sup> For a list of honors and awards, see Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, chapter 9.

in the political climate in the 1950s and particularly McCarthy's campaign hit group work very hard. As historians have started to explore the impact of the political climate of the early 1950s on social group work, it has become clear that much work remains to be done to understand better the political aspects of the dynamics underlying the development of social work in the post-war era.<sup>175</sup>

In addition to the political affiliation and sympathies of many social work professionals, the cornerstones of group work, such as community and diversity, became suspicious. Social workers shifted the focus of their attention to the individual. For social group work as a subdivision of social work, this meant that the group no longer stood equal next to the individual as units of social work activities, but instead the group was increasingly instrumentalized to reach and influence individuals. As the analysis in this chapter has shown, this transformation of social group work was both a function of developments within the social sciences as well as the larger milieu. Emerging during the economic and social turbulences of the 1930s as a functional and politically charged alternative to the shortcomings of psychoanalytic casework, the various strands condensed into a disciplinary identity during the 1940s and early 1950s. This distinct identity was on the wane in the following two decades with the increasing subjugation to the individual casework approach. The group had been transformed into a tool for working on the individual.

Gisela Konopka's career reflects many of these advances and tensions in social work, and particularly social group work, over the course of roughly half a century.

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<sup>175</sup> Janice Andrews and Michael Reisch have started to critically investigate the history of American social work during this era. Janice Andrews and Michael Reisch, "The Legacy of McCarthyism on Social Group Work: An Historical Analysis," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 24 (1997): 211–35; Andrews and Reisch, *The Road Not Taken*.

Having studied education and psychology in Germany, bringing an interest in and some experience with maladjusted children, her activities as a youth group leader, and her involvement with German labor unions, she arrived in the United States in 1941, just as social group work started to expand and professionalize. After studying with some of the founders of professional social group work, paramount among them Gertrude Wilson, and having plenty of experience, Konopka was well equipped to play a major role in carrying the field forward. As group workers were concerned about their field's philosophical and historical void, Konopka used her dissertation to offer a philosophy as a basis of unification and for establishing practices. By the time the book was published in 1958, however, social group work had already been absorbed into the National Association of Social Work and group work's advocates largely abandoned their efforts to maintain it as a field with its own, distinct character.

The tensions and conflicts between Gisela Konopka and the American social work profession, which intensified over the years and peaked in the 1970s, illustrate the value of a biographical approach. Instead of ending the narrative at the point of successful professional reorientation in emigration, usually marked by finding a permanent job and thus implying a happily-ever-after scenario, a long-term biographical perspective can reveal further upheavals in the development and identities of both of the émigrés and their profession. Undoubtedly some émigrés, for example Etta Saloshin, found in social work a satisfying environment in which to spend their working lives. While mainstream social workers thought of themselves as scientific, modern, and cutting-edge problem solvers, Konopka could not accept that her profession wholeheartedly embraced what she considered narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness

and rejected her critical and historically informed approach that emphasized continuities at the core of these issues across cultures, space, and time.

Despite Konopka's disillusionment with the direction social work was taking, she did appreciate the opportunity it had offered when she arrived as refugee from Europe, with her ambitions destroyed and her budding career disrupted. With the large number of refugees, among them numerous academics, many people had to adjust their ambitions, and particularly women were relegated to menial or technical jobs. While Konopka and Saloshin started out in domestic service, they found in social work an avenue into academic positions as full professors. Among the opportunities for émigré women, such a position was very prestigious, and more common among the men in the émigré population. Attaining this kind of stature in a field was unusual for émigré women, however. A larger number of women who secured their livelihood in social work stayed in the ranks as practitioners. One of them was Anne Fischer, the case study of the next chapter.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**THE RELUCTANT SOCIAL WORKER: ANNE FISCHER'S WINDING PATH**  
**INTO PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL CASEWORK**

Only few women among the émigrés in social work embarked on illustrious careers and secured prestigious positions in the profession. For the large majority, social work provided job opportunities after a relatively short training period and a source of income deemed appropriate for women, even in socially conservative areas.<sup>1</sup> Social workers were typically practitioners employed by one of the many private organizations or departments of public welfare. These social workers were concerned with carrying out the daily tasks of their respective workplace's mission, including child and maternal welfare, hospital social work, and provision of material relief, among others. The majority of these social workers, both Americans and émigrés, focused on their daily practice. Most of them were not engaged in research, teaching, or in publishing activities. They left few traces and are largely invisible in the historical record.

Anne Fischer, the case study of this chapter, belongs to this group of lesser-known practitioners. She left an extensive collection of private correspondence with her friend Hermann Simon, however, which provides unique insights into daily life in emigration, into processes of adjustment to a new social, cultural, and professional environment as well as the mundane details of everyday life. Starting in the early 1930s,

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<sup>1</sup> Librarian was another occupation open to women in several countries of emigration. See for example Ilse Korotin, ed. *Österreichische Bibliothekarinnen auf der Flucht* (Vienna: Praesens-Verlag, 2007).

Fischer and Simon maintained an intensive letter exchange lasting into the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Initially, they usually wrote several letters per week, which decreased over time, as they started to turn to the telephone as a major means of communication. In her letters, Fischer typically provided an account of her activities since the last letter, described her impression of people she had met, summarized discussions from social functions she found interesting, detailed her emotional state, discussed literature and art (as well as on rare occasions politics), chronicled her family's daily life, detailed news from her husband's work as well as the children's experiences in school, and overall discussed whatever occupied her mind at the time. These letters to her confidante almost took on the quality of a diary and illuminate Fischer's life and her thoughts, reflecting changes over time, in minute detail, thus providing depth and texture to her narrative of migration and of personal and professional reorientation. They allowed me to zoom in on crossroads and contentious episodes in her life, which reveals an entangled web of personal desires, professional and intellectual aspirations, and talent bound by family obligations and social conventions, but also disappointments, self-criticism, contradictory intentions and actions, insecurities, reluctance, and indecisiveness in a richness not frequently available in the records of émigrés.

Anne Fischer was involved as a volunteer in refugee work for several years, providing assistance to European Jews who fled from the National Socialists. Her husband, the physiologist Ernst Fischer, held a professorship at the Medical College of

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<sup>2</sup> Fischer and Simon met in the late 1920s, when they both lived in Frankfurt. They maintained a close connection throughout their lifetime. For the years between 1943 to 1951, Fischer's letters are lost, and the main events can only be gleaned through Simon's letters responding to her. In addition to the correspondence, I also was able to consult an oral history interview with Anne Fischer. Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler, October 6, 1990, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin.

Virginia and secured the family's financial stability. Anne prioritized taking care of the children and the household. In contrast to the émigrés discussed in the previous chapters, Fischer's story is more conventionally gendered in many ways, both regarding her lifestyle and how she approached social work.

The historiography of American social work in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries focuses on its professionalization, which entailed a process of separating the trained social workers from the lay persons, or volunteers. In the nineteenth century, the volunteer had been a central figure in American philanthropy. As so-called friendly visitors, predominantly white, Christian, middle-class volunteers visited the homes of the poor, intent on helping them out of their presumed self-inflicted, desperate state by serving as role models and by “direct influence of successful, educated, and cultured representatives of the middle class upon the dependent individual or family.”<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, the perception of poverty as a personal shortcoming and character deficiency made way for an understanding of larger societal and economic factors as causing social problems, thus requiring new countermeasures. Social work developed novel social-science-based theories, techniques in dealing with clients, and training programs for social work practitioners. Instead of approaching with sympathy, female virtue, and morality, the new professional social workers, in their view, met their clients with objectivity, scientific neutrality, and rationality. Social workers no longer understood themselves as delivering benevolent charity, but rather as purveyors of professional treatment. As a consequence, the status and role of the volunteer changed significantly. Trained social workers with skill and expertise became the conveyors of

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 12.

social services, while the volunteers were devalued and excluded from the profession in the process.<sup>4</sup>

Historians have overestimated the smoothness of passing the torch from the amateurs to the professionals, as Regina Kunzel argued in her study of single mothers and the professionalization of social work.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, standard accounts “underplay the roughness of this transition ... [and] obscure the resistance and resilience of the older tradition.”<sup>6</sup> While Kunzel analyzed the struggles for professional power that took place in maternity homes over unmarried motherhood, this chapter introduces refugee aid as a site where both volunteers and professionals were engaged well into the 1940s. The influx of large numbers of Jewish refugees from Europe posed a challenge to the organizations in charge of the newly arrived. While refugee aid was an area of employment for trained social workers, the demand for their services often exceeded the social worker’s capacity or private organizations were simply not able to afford professionals. Volunteers filled in. Émigré volunteers like Anne Fischer were not merely lesser versions of professionals, however. While they did not have professional training, they were equipped with competence that could not be taught at schools of social work: they shared a cultural background, language, and experience with refugees.

Metropolitan areas with large poor and immigrant populations, such as Chicago and New York City, constituted the centers of professionalizing social work and generally served as the settings for its historiography. Exile studies have traditionally shared this geographical focus on large cities, as many exiles and refugees sought out

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 18-19, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

urban areas because of their cosmopolitan character and assumed job opportunities. New York in particular was popular for its European flair and the large networks of refugees and exiles, where Austrians and Germans could recreate social and cultural institutions and even aspire to a familiar atmosphere that no longer existed in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Much less is known about the lives of exiles and refugees on the periphery, particularly in the southern parts of the United States, where they encountered circumstances that were very different from big city life.<sup>8</sup> Anne Fischer's story of building a life in Richmond, Virginia, sheds some light both on life in the province and as a social worker located outside the centers of the profession. She provides a contrasting vantage point to the previous chapters, from which to interrogate the life of a Jewish émigré woman and her path into American social work.

This chapter argues that social work embedded in the local Jewish community enabled émigré women such as Anne Fischer, whose lives were framed by the rules of a traditional marriage, to realize goals beyond their domestic responsibilities, which provided them with a sense of professional, social, and moral accomplishment. Through Fischer's volunteer work of helping fellow refugees, which eventually led her into a career in professional social work, she created a sphere of activity outside the home allowing her some financial and emotional independence from her husband. While her affiliation with the Jewish community made her work possible, both the community's social rules and Fischer's location on the geographical and professional periphery

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Geneviève Susemihl "*... and It Became My Home*": *Die Assimilation und Integration der Deutsch-Jüdischen Hitlerflüchtlinge in New York und Toronto* (Münster: Lit-Verl., 2004); Brigitta Boveland, *Exil und Identität: Österreichisch-Jüdische Emigranten in New York und ihre Suche nach der verlorenen Heimat* (Giessen: Haland & Wirth im Psychosozial-Verlag, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar: Krieger, 1993).

curtailed her professional opportunities. She is emblematic of émigré women in social work, who spent their careers in daily practice of the profession, who neither conducted research nor published, and who are therefore mostly invisible in the historical record. As this chapter will show, however, by activating resources from outside the social work profession, Fischer's activities modified local practices to the benefit of her clients.

### **Anne (Rosenberg) Fischer's Early Life in Germany**

Anne Fischer was born Anne Rosenberg in Stuttgart in 1902. Her father Bernhard Rosenberg was a physician, and her mother was a housewife. Anne and her older brother Eric grew up in a working-class district in Stuttgart, in the house where their father had his doctor's office.<sup>9</sup> Surrounded by her father's patients, Anne gained insight into the working class' living conditions as a young girl without having to share these circumstances in her own life.

She attended *Gymnasium* for girls and graduated in 1921. She wanted to attend university but her father did not allow it, as he wished for his daughter to get married. Then she met Ernst Fischer, later to be her husband, who was a medical student and fervent socialist. He supported Anne's desire to go to university and convinced her father to give his permission.<sup>10</sup> She first attended Stuttgart Technical University to study chemistry. Next she went to Frankfurt University, and eventually took classes at

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<sup>9</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Heidelberg University. She abandoned chemistry and followed her interest in German literature, philosophy, and the arts, a passion she maintained throughout her lifetime.<sup>11</sup>

Anne Rosenberg and Ernst Fischer married in 1925. After graduating from medical school, Ernst turned to a research and teaching career in physiology. He received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, which took the couple to Naples for six months shortly after their wedding, and then to London for another six months. They returned to Frankfurt, where Ernst worked with Albrecht Bethe at the Physiological Institute.<sup>12</sup> In 1929, Ernst Fischer went to the University of Rochester, New York, as an exchange researcher for several months, where he built important ties that proved significant several years later when the family sought ways to leave Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Anne Fischer focused on her responsibilities as a wife and mother, and continued to attend classes at the university during her leisure time, but without completing her degree. Her own self-understanding did not include having a professional or academic career, as she explained: “I was nothing but the wife of a professor in the making ... I

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<sup>11</sup> Among the circles and scholars she cited as influential later was the so-called Georgekreis, a group of writers around the charismatic author Stefan George. She remarked that her admiration for this group embarrassed her later, as they were outspokenly elitist and absolutely devoted to their messiah-like leader. See Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler. On the Georgekreis and its relation to the German bourgeoisie see Carola Groppe, *Die Macht der Bildung: Das Deutsche Bürgertum und der Georgekreis, 1890-1933* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Albrecht Bethe was the father of physicist and Nobel Prize winner Hans Bethe, a fellow émigré in the United States and, at least in the early years, part of the Fischers' network in the United States. He is perhaps best known for his work on the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, his contribution to the development to the hydrogen bomb and his subsequent strong critical position on nuclear weapons.

<sup>13</sup> Dietrich von Engelhardt, ed., “Fischer, Ernst, Physiologe,” in *Biographische Enzyklopädie deutschsprachiger Mediziner*, vol 1: A–Q (Munich: Saur, 2002), 175; Werner Schuder, ed., “Fischer, Ernst,” in *Kürschners Deutscher Gelehrtenkalender*, vol. 12 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1976), 722.

went to university to attend some lectures ... and I had two children.”<sup>14</sup> Her son Georg was born in 1926 and her daughter Eva in 1932. Fischer’s main responsibilities included raising the children and managing the household, for which she could also rely on two domestic employees. Overall, she lived a comfortable life in a social environment that included mostly academics and members of the educated middle class.

When the National Socialists assumed power in Germany in 1933, Ernst Fischer was dismissed from his position at the University.<sup>15</sup> Albrecht Bethe advocated on Fischer’s behalf, but to no avail, since the administration argued that the position would be canceled altogether.<sup>16</sup> The Fischers pondered what to do. They considered the idea of the Thousand Year Reich ridiculous and were convinced it could not possibly last longer than a few years. One option they considered was to establish a private laboratory in the basement of Anne’s grandmother’s house, so Ernst could continue his research, while they sat out the National Socialist nightmare.<sup>17</sup> Another possibility they deliberated was

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<sup>14</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler. The way Fischer structured her narrative in the oral history interview mirrored the priorities set in her own life. After talking about her childhood, her education, and her interests, her wedding constitutes a turning point in the narrative. Her story of her life as a married woman switched to focus on her husband’s work and career. German original: “Ich war gar nichts außer die Frau eines werdenden Professors. Und ich hab’ auch so ein Leben geführt. Bin an die Universität gegangen und habe Vorlesungen gehört ... und nebenbei habe ich zwei Kinder bekommen.” Not getting her doctorate turned into a sore spot, mostly dormant, and yet sensitive to pain at times. She reported that years later she was criticized for not finishing university, i.e. getting her doctorate, by Josephine Höber, wife and collaborator of physiologist Rudolf Höber, who held a position at the University of Pennsylvania after their emigration from Germany. Fischer tried to defuse this criticism by referring to Höber, who claimed that she had three children and took five major exams while also being a wife, as “an educated woman of the previous generation” implying that the standards for this pioneer generation were higher and did not necessarily apply to her. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 22 June 1937, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 17.

<sup>15</sup> The “Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums” (Civil Service Restoration Act) constituted the legal basis introduced by the National Socialists for dismissing state employees on racial or political grounds. Reichsgesetzblatt 1933, Teil I, 175-77.

<sup>16</sup> After the Fischers had emigrated, the position was not canceled but instead filled by not only one but two people. Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

emigration to China.<sup>18</sup> Since they had a relative in the United States and, more importantly, since Ernst's former academic host and staunch supporter, physiologist Wallace O. Fenn, organized a position for him at the University of Rochester, they decided to move to the United States in 1934.<sup>19</sup>

Anne Fischer did not want to leave Germany at all. Her personal situation was complicated, as she was in love with Hermann Simon (1900-1990), a lawyer, who was also a family friend. Born in Frankfurt in 1900 as the son of a bank vice president, he studied law in Frankfurt, Freiburg, Berlin, and Bonn, graduated in 1924 with a doctorate in law, and passed the bar exam in 1926. In the following year, he went to work in Paris, London, and New York to gain a better understanding of the French, British, and American legal and economic systems. From 1927 to 1933 he practiced law in Frankfurt. In May 1933 the Ministry of Justice reversed Simon's admission to the bar because of his Jewish ancestry.<sup>20</sup> He consecutively worked as a business consultant and as a financial and emigration adviser for Jews who were leaving Germany, until he immigrated to the United States himself, settling in New York City in March 1938.<sup>21</sup> He attended law

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<sup>18</sup> While Fischer discussed in her oral history interview different options for their future, as she and her husband saw them in 1933, she did not mention potential plans of moving to China. Her correspondence, however, reveals that for a while this was an option she seriously considered and even preferred. See for example Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 August 1933, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 2, and Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 18 February 1934, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 3.

<sup>19</sup> With Wallace O. Fenn, who became a close family friend, Ernst Fischer had a well-connected and powerful ally in academia, who worked tirelessly on finding him a permanent position after the fellowship at Rochester University expired. For more information on Fenn, see for example Hermann Rahn, *Wallace Osgood Fenn, 1893-1971* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1979), accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/fenn-wallace.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> "Lebenslauf des Dr. iur. Hermann E. Simon," 28 July 1936, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 1, Folder 28. Simon's letters to Anne Fischer are part of the Anne Fischer Collection, whereas other material is available through the Hermann Simon Collection, kept also at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York City. For biographical information see also Ernst C. Stiefel, and Frank Mecklenburg, *Deutsche Juristen im Amerikanischen Exil (1933-1950)* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 124.

<sup>21</sup> According to his report to the German Reich's economic ministry in July 1936, Simon assisted 357 Jewish emigrants with their financial and tax matters between July 1, 1933 and July 15, 1936. "An den Herrn Reichswirtschaftsminister," 21 July 1936, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 1, Folder 28.

school at New York University and graduated in 1941. In 1942 he passed the bar exam. In the United States, he continued his advocacy for Jewish refugees and was a board member of organizations such as the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe and Selfhelp of German Émigrés. He joined the army in December 1943, which took him to France in the summer of 1944 and later in the same year into Germany as a member of the Eighth Infantry Division. After his return to the United States, Simon joined the Manhattan-based law firm Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson in 1947, where he worked as a partner and, after his retirement in 1979, as a counsel until his death in August 1990.<sup>22</sup> Simon's and Fischer's love affair lasted throughout their lives. He never married, and she repeatedly considered leaving her marriage with Ernst Fischer to live with Simon in New York. Until then, they used letters to communicate, which resulted in this rich record of correspondence that constitutes the main source for this chapter.

### **A Wife in Emigration**

Anne Fischer arrived in the United States together with her children in late August 1934, longingly expected by Ernst, who had made the trip two months earlier and in the meantime had set up the foundation for their new lives. He was optimistic and ready to start his new life both professionally and in his relationship with Anne. Anne, however shared neither his optimism nor his determination to build a better life and

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<sup>22</sup> Hermann Simon to "Dear Friends," 26 December 1944, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 3, Folder 20; New York University Alumni Bulletin, Vol. VI, No. 3, Spring 1943, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 57; Stiefel and Mecklenburg, *Deutsche Juristen im Amerikanischen Exil*, 124; "Hermann E. Simon, 89, Lawyer in Manhattan," *New York Times*, August 19, 1990, accessed August 31, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/19/obituaries/hermann-simon-89-lawyer-in-manhattan.html>.

happier future for themselves in the United States.<sup>23</sup> She joined him, reluctantly and unhappily, following her sense of responsibility for her family, as she considered a life outside of Germany the only possibility to raise the children in a hospitable environment with good schooling.

Anne Fischer's correspondence from her first few years in the United States exudes misery, pessimism, and a persistent sense of being out of place. Experiencing her relocation so negatively sets Fischer apart from other women in this study, who reported rather quick adjustment and an appreciation of the opportunities they encountered in the United States.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note, however, that Fischer moved to the United States earlier than the other women in this study, at a time when Jews were gradually excluded from economic and social life in Germany, but overall their lives were not yet immediately threatened by Nazi persecution. In addition to Fischer's personal disaster of being separated from Simon, the sense of general loss outweighed the happiness and relief of having escaped.

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<sup>23</sup> In a letter she wrote on the ship traveling to the United States, she explained how torn and dismal she felt: "I am getting more and more depressed. If I think about how much E. is looking forward to us – and how I will disappoint him... I know that he got through the past months with the sense: in America everything will be new and it will be good. I really want to help him – but without lying..." Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 17 August 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: "Es bedrückt mich immer mehr. Wenn ich denke, wie sehr E. sich auf uns freut und – wie ich ihn enttäuschen werde... Ich weiß genau, dass er in den letzten Monaten in dem Gefühl ausgehalten hat: drüben wird alles neu und gut. Ich möchte ihm wirklich helfen – aber nicht lügen..."

<sup>24</sup> Since I am working with oral history interviews and letters, this difference could be an artifact arising from the differences in sources. In an attempt to create coherent narratives, interviewees may remember selectively, gloss over difficulties, and reinterpret past events. Gisela Konopka, for example, reported in her oral history interview that she was positively surprised by the United States and that she appreciated the opportunities she received. Since she left letters from this time period, I was able to compare the oral history interview with the letters, which did not yield discrepancies in content. Fischer also mentioned in her oral history interview that she was unhappy at first, but the brief mention pales in comparison with the overwhelmingly positive rest of her narrative. The letters don't contradict the oral history account, but they do bring to the foreground the intensity and the details of Fischer's struggles to adjust and to come to terms with her new life.

Fischer seemed unable to find anything in the United States that she could appreciate. She resented everything American, including the culture, people, customs, architecture, food, and books. Upon arriving in New York City, an experience that émigrés typically described as awe-inspiring, elating, or at least very impressive, she met with her friend Georg Eisler, a fellow émigré, who was enthusiastic about the city.<sup>25</sup> To convince Fischer of the magnificence of the city, he showed her the newly erected Rockefeller Center building. Fischer was annoyed by her friend's excitement and remained steadfast in her opinion: "I allow myself to hate this magic. Something inhumane is unleashed in it, and to me humans are still more important than skyscrapers ... The fact that Georgie of all people has surrendered to these powers hit me very hard."<sup>26</sup> Fellow émigrés, who liked their new lives or elements of the United States, irritated her, and Fischer considered them traitors to her beloved German culture, to which she felt a deep, romantic connection.

Even more than New York City, Fischer disliked her life in Rochester. A scientist's wife who had enjoyed her middle-class lifestyle and academic network in Frankfurt, where she could spend an afternoon attending a lecture by Martin Buber, before discussing the newest essay by Thomas Mann over dinner with likeminded friends, she could not reconcile herself with her new life that she considered dull and provincial.<sup>27</sup> Neither was the physical environment, which she found lacking in sophistication, to her liking as she complained to Simon: "I don't like it at all... Things

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<sup>25</sup> Her friend was the Hamburg-born publisher and Hebrew scholar Georg B. Eisler, not to be confused with the Austrian artist Georg Eisler.

<sup>26</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 August 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: "Ich erlaube mir, diese Magie zu hassen. Darin wird etwas Un-menschliches [sic] entfesselt – und mir ist der Mensch immer noch wichtiger als der Wolkenkratzer... Dass ausgerechnet Georgie vor diesen Mächten kapituliert, trifft mich sehr."

<sup>27</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 September 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5.

here are so ‘untidy,’ so sloppy! ... The way houses were put into the fields randomly and with haste, and how they were just left there offends me every day anew. I am glad that one can pass by those very quickly in the car.”<sup>28</sup> The pace of life around her and what she perceived as a culture of makeshift also caused her discomfort: “Everything...gets more or less finished as quickly as possible...This fear of losing time appears to me like a disease—or like idolatry.”<sup>29</sup> She would understand this rush to quickly finish things, she continued, if it were to save time for something more important. All she could find, however, was an emptiness in American culture and society, which she repeatedly juxtaposed with the rich and soulful German culture that she had to leave behind.

Fischer was far from isolated socially, but she felt disconnected from most people around her. She missed the long, deep, and blunt conversations about subjects such as politics, religion, art, and literature. She accepted the stereotype of American superficiality, which she found so hard to bear, as her description of an afternoon with fellow faculty wives illustrates: “How many more silly afternoons like the one today will have to pass? I was invited to a gathering of the younger wives of the faculty. Everyone played bridge—25 young women. I had time to study them thoroughly. So aloof. Such alien horizons! So little humanity in their eyes. Again this atmosphere of indifference, of being haphazardly woven together—three hours of bridge—and then the wind will scatter these leaves to some other place ... One can tell that underneath their standardized skin

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 August 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: “Es gefällt mir gar nicht... Es ist so ‘unaufgeräumt’ hier – so schlampig! Schon wie die Häuser geschwind irgendwo ins Feld gestellt und dort stehen gelassen worden sind, beleidigt mich jeden Tag aufs neue. Gut, dass man im Auto an allem so gut vorbeikommt.”

<sup>29</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 August 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: “Es muß nur alles – möglichst viel – schnell irgendwie fertig gemacht werden... Einstweilen kommt mir diese Angst vor dem Zeitverlust wie eine Krankheit vor – oder wie ein Götzendienst.”

all of them are very busy—strapped into the American routine with no meaning, faith, kindness.”<sup>30</sup>

Fischer also struggled with the English language, an immediate obstacle which, more than a practical problem, she interpreted as part of the profound cultural differences between the Americans and herself, resulting in a feeling of utter isolation: “Everything here is happening in a space that is devoid of air and life (except for memory and hope...). When I talk to Americans, air is set in motion, nothing more. The words don’t reach their destination—neither here nor there.”<sup>31</sup> The people to whom she felt connected were either Germans, or Americans who had spent time in Europe, or who were at least Germanophiles.<sup>32</sup> These persons were rare, however, and after an invitation at the house of one of her husband’s American colleagues, where the conversation had once more focused on servants, money, and scandals, she asked in desperation: “How long can one bear not being able to take one’s own presence seriously?”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 Februar 1935, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 6. German original: “Wie viele so törichte Nachmittage wie der heutige müssen ... noch vorbeigehen? Ich war eingeladen zu einer Zusammenkunft der jüngeren Frauen der Fakultät. Alles spielte Bridge – 25 junge Frauen. Ich hatte Zeit, sie eingehend zu studieren. So fern. Was für fremde Horizonte! So wenig Menschlichkeit in den Augen. Wieder diese Atmosphäre des gleichgültigen, zufällig zusammengewebten – 3 Stunden Bridge – dann treibt der Wind die Blätter woanders hin... Man sieht ihnen allen unter ihrer Standard-Haut an, wie beschäftigt sie sind – so ohne Sinn Glauben Güte eingespannt in den amerikanischen Ablauf.”

<sup>31</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 1 September 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: “Hier geschieht alles in einem luftleeren, lebensleeren Raum – (außer Erinnern und Hoffen...). Wenn ich mit den Amerikanern rede, wird die Luft bewegt – sonst nicht. Die Worte kommen nicht an – weder hüben noch drüben.”

<sup>32</sup> Soon after Fischer’s arrival in Rochester, she and her husband were invited by the Sterns. Mister Stern, a German zoologist, was married to an American woman who had spent some time in Germany studying psychology: “As I took off my coat, she saw my beautiful purse and said: ‘Only in Germany can you find things as beautiful as this!’ And thus we had become friends.” Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 August 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: “Schon beim Ablegen sah sie meine schöne Tasche und sagte: ‘So etwas Schönes gibt’s halt nur in Deutschland!’ Damit waren wir befreundet.”

<sup>33</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 6 September 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5. German original: “Wie lange hält man es aus, seine eigene Gegenwart nicht ernst nehmen zu können?”

While Fischer participated in the social life of Rochester's academic community during her first year in the United States, she spent most of her time on her responsibilities as a wife and mother and, with the help of a maid, running the household. She had no plans of taking up employment, but she mentioned in a letter to Hermann Simon that "if I took on any work here, I would like to do 'charity.'"<sup>34</sup> This statement was inspired by one of the few positive encounters she reports in her first year with Miss Cohen, a social worker at the school of Fischer's son. Fischer was very impressed by the intelligent, welcoming, and understanding woman who became an important contact and who explained American customs and social rules to her. With her sympathetic way of interacting with people, Cohen became a role model for Fischer. A different motivation for Fischer expressing a general interest in charity was her belief at the time that the disorganized and primitive American society needs help: "... charity, which in my opinion is much more useful here in this ill-defined hustle than I ever considered it at home. Here the 'good heart' can accomplish so much more."<sup>35</sup> These considerations were purely theoretical, however, as getting a job was not on Fischer's agenda, and securing a position for Ernst for the following year had absolute priority.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 28 November 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 6. German original: "Wenn ich hier etwas 'tun' würde, möchte ich eigentlich auch 'Wohltätigkeit' machen."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. German original: "Wohltätigkeit..., die hier in diesem ungestalten Treiben meiner Ansicht nach viel sinnvoller ist als sie mir je zu Hause vorkam. Das 'gute Herz' kann hier viel mehr tun."

<sup>36</sup> The entry on Ernst Fischer in *Kürschners Deutscher Gelehrtenkalender*, one of the few sources on his biography, incorrectly lists him as "Assoc. Prof. Rochester/USA 34." "Schuder, ed., "Fischer, Ernst," 722. As Anne Fischer clarified for Simon, Ernst was not a regular employee (such as the émigrés who found jobs at the New School of Social Research), but he was on a two-year fellowship, paying 216 USD a month, organized by Fenn to render possible Ernst's emigration from Germany. His official title was "visiting associate." While the fellowship was granted for two years, Ernst started to look for a new position during his first year for two reasons. First, as Anne Fischer noted, out of moral considerations, as funds were scarce and Ernst wanted to relinquish his position for someone else in need. Secondly, I suspect he also wanted to advance his career with a position of higher prestige and better pay as quickly as possible. See Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 24 April 1935, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 8.

With support by Fenn and some European contacts, Ernst Fischer applied for several professorships, for example in Switzerland, Peru, and at the newly founded university in Teheran, Iran.<sup>37</sup> Thoughts on moving to Iran dominated Anne Fischer's correspondence in the spring 1935 and, for a while, this step seemed very likely to happen. The negotiations culminated in Ernst attending a meeting with an Iranian diplomat in New York City.<sup>38</sup> Other possibilities, which they did not seriously consider at the time, as Ernst could also stay in Rochester for a second year if nothing else worked out, included a lesser-paid assistant position at Stanford University.<sup>39</sup> He was not chosen for any senior professorship, but in the summer 1935 he was offered a position as associate professor in the Department of Physiology at the Medical College in Virginia.<sup>40</sup> He accepted the offer, and in early October 1935 the family moved to Richmond, Virginia.<sup>41</sup>

### **Negotiating a Jewish Life**

A few weeks after the Fischers' arrival in Richmond, the reformed Jewish community of Beth Ahabah, the largest congregation in town, reached out to them—in

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<sup>37</sup> Iran is also among the places historian Atina Grossmann is currently investigating in her project "Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India: Sites of Refuge and Relief for European Jews During World War II." <http://cooper.edu/humanities/people/atina-grossmann>, accessed August 12, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 1 May 1935, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 8.

<sup>39</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 16 April 1935, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 8.

<sup>40</sup> The Richmond Professional Institute merged with The Medical College of Virginia in 1968 and became Virginia Commonwealth University. Henry H. Hibbs, the institute's first administrator, published a history of the institution based on his personal experiences in 1973. Henry H. Hibbs, *A History of the Richmond Professional Institute: From Its Beginning in 1917 to its Consolidation with The Medical College of Virginia in 1968 to Form Virginia Commonwealth University* (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1973).

<sup>41</sup> The position in Richmond and Ernst accepting it made a sudden appearance without further explanation in Fischer's correspondence. Anne Fischer and the children spent the summer in Germany with her family, while Ernst stayed in the United States. Anne Fischer and Hermann Simon met a few times while she was in Germany, which is presumably the reason for her letters turning out rather scant and not as detailed during the summer compared to the rest of the year.

Anne Fischer's assessment both to welcome and to recruit them.<sup>42</sup> She explored what the congregation had to offer, talked to the rabbi and to representatives of the temple sisterhood, and went to the synagogue. Fischer was not convinced that this reformed service was right for her, however, as she explained to Simon: "A service of the reformed kind, with music and hymns and English prayers... In lieu of a sermon he [the rabbi] read an 'open letter' to the president concerning social security and retirement plans. He was 'in favor.' This was followed by the final hymn. All of it was somewhat empty, but without pretense and artificial pathos."<sup>43</sup> Even though she felt disconnected and alien, she was not yet ready to give up on this congregation, as she had the impression that "in America, I belong there [the Beth Ahabah] more than to any other place in America."<sup>44</sup>

Fischer was determined to pass on a sense of their Jewish roots to her children and to instill in them a curiosity about Jewish history and culture.<sup>45</sup> She attempted to forge a balance between immersing the children in mainstream American culture and providing them with an awareness of their Jewish heritage, for example by celebrating both Christmas and Hanukkah. While passing on a sense of and, as she hoped, a love for their Jewish belonging was a priority for her, she tried to hide this urgency from her children. She encouraged them to participate in Jewish life in Richmond, preferably

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 5 November 1935, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 11.

<sup>43</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 19 November 1935, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 11. German original: "Der Gottesdienst im reformierten Stil mit Musik u. Hymnen u. englischen Gebeten... Statt der Predigt verlas er einen 'offenen Brief' an den Präsidenten zur Frage der Sozialversicherung und Altersunterstützung. Er war 'pro'. Dann kam der Schlussgesang. Es war alles ein bisschen leer, aber ohne Anspruch und ohne falsches Pathos."

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. German original: "Ich gehöre doch mehr dahin in Amerika – als anderswohin in Amerika."

<sup>45</sup> The question about a Jewish education for the children was already an issue in Rochester, which Fischer discussed with Miss Cohen, the school social worker. Fischer argued that she wanted to prevent her son Georg from losing his connection to his past and his sense of belonging to a Jewish cultural and religious community. Cohen was not sympathetic to this argument and emphasized the importance of Georg's assimilation in Rochester. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 October 1934, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 5.

because they wanted to and not because they were forced to.<sup>46</sup> Her efforts in immersing the children in Judaism led to tensions with her husband, as Ernst did not share Anne's passion for Jewish culture. He protested Anne's plans of signing Georg up for sabbath school, for example, which not only put him in conflict with Anne, but also with some representatives of the Jewish community. After the initial friendly invitations to the Fischers, they used pressure to integrate the family into their community. A teacher at the sabbath school, for example, pointed out that in a small town like Richmond it was essential to be a member of a congregation: "In New York you might be able to stay outside the congregation, but not here. It may work for a year or two, but after that nobody will respect you."<sup>47</sup> Fischer was amused by the exasperated advice she received from Jews more than once: "Go to the Baptists or the Episcopalians if you like ... but you have to belong to a congregation!"<sup>48</sup>

The Richmond Jewish community was far from homogenous. The different groups provided various niches for newcomers to fit in, but at the same time rendered

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<sup>46</sup> While Anne Fischer maintained her ties with the Richmond Jewish community for the rest of her life, her daughter Eva joined the Unitarians in the 1950s. Fischer didn't mind. In fact, in the context of the social climate of the time, she supported her daughter's decision, as she considered the local Unitarians a "good, progressive group ... mostly intellectuals, and besides this church has an interracial group – something extraordinary in this state." Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 May 1953, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 2. German original: "Die Unitarians sind eine gute, fortschrittliche Gruppe hier ... meistens Intellektuelle u. ausserdem hat diese Kirche auch eine interracial group – etwas Besonderes in diesem Staat."

<sup>47</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 27 October 1936, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 13. German original: "In New York könnten Sie es sich vielleicht leisten, außerhalb der Gemeinde zu bleiben, aber nicht hier. Das mag ein oder zwei Jahre gut gehen – aber danach: nobody will respect you."

<sup>48</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 13 September 1937, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 18. German original: "Meinetwegen gehen Sie zu den Baptisten oder den Episcopalern ... aber man muss einer congregation angehören!"

their situation more complicated.<sup>49</sup> In the fall of 1937, two years after their relocation to Richmond, Anne Fischer was still unsure about where and how she and her family fit into the town's Jewish society. While she had resolved that she belonged to the Jewish community, she was still conflicted as to which congregation was appropriate for her. She had visited the reformed congregation Beth Ahabah repeatedly over the previous years and regularly interacted with its members, but she disliked the emphasis of the congregation on its social aspect as the provider of a community, while, in Fischer's opinion, it neglected the religious aspect. Other European émigrés agreed, as she reported: "Coincidentally, all the emigrants we talked to in the past few days, talked about the [Jewish] community - full of derision and contempt...I can't accept the factitiousness regarding the religious ... just for the sake of the children's social integration. There is more at stake than just the 'social.'"<sup>50</sup>

In order to explore other options, Fischer decided to take a closer look at the conservative temple Beth-El.<sup>51</sup> As usual, she reported her impressions to Hermann Simon: "On Friday night we went to the conservative synagogue. We both liked it: it was so much more genuine, Jewish, and devout than the reformed one. It was a real religious service—and not a social get-together. The ritual [could be] recognized as Jewish...The

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<sup>49</sup> On the history of Jewish life in Richmond see Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: Published for the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond by the University Press of Virginia, 1979); Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Richmond, Virginia," accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.isjl.org/virginia-richmond-encyclopedia.html>

<sup>50</sup> Anne Fischer Hermann Simon, 6 September 1937, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 18. German original: "Zufällig haben alle Emigranten, mit denen wir in den letzten Tagen gesprochen habe [sic], über die Gemeinde geredet – voller Spott u. Verachtung... Einzig um der sozialen Einordnung der Kinder willen ... kann man die Verlogenheit im Religiösen nicht in Kauf nehmen. Es geht halt doch nicht nur ums 'Soziale'."

<sup>51</sup> A group of members of two orthodox congregations founded Beth-El in 1931 as a conservative alternative with some reformed elements to the strict orthodox congregations, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Richmond, Virginia," accessed May 19, 2014.

congregation ... what you call lower middle-class.”<sup>52</sup> Even though the Fischers found Beth-El more appealing regarding the way religion was practiced, associating with the conservative congregation proved problematic. As soon as word got out that the family was interested in Beth-El, members of Beth Ahabah got alarmed, “appalled” and “distraught” even. A well-meaning woman warned them about Beth-El and told Anne Fischer that she wouldn’t find anyone “congenial” in this congregation and that her son would be deeply unhappy with the children there.<sup>53</sup> The unspoken issue at the heart of this matter was a long-standing rift between the well established Jews of German descent, who were organized in Beth Ahabah, and the Jews from Eastern Europe, who were organized in the city’s conservative and orthodox congregations. As late as 1943, Solomon A. Fineberg from the American Jewish Committee described the local Jewish community: “In Richmond, lines are drawn between Jews of German and Jews of Russian extraction with almost unparalleled sharpness. So ingrained is the snobbishness of the one group toward the other that it is no exaggeration to say that German Jews cannot associate with Jews of East European origin on equal social terms without themselves risking the loss of their social standing.”<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the danger of alienating social contacts she had fostered over the past years and who held powerful positions in Richmond, the conservative congregation posed an additional problem for the Fischers. Beth-El had a Zionist orientation, and the rabbi was opposed to helping German refugees settle in the United States, while Beth

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<sup>52</sup> Anne Fischer Hermann Simon, 13 September 1937, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 18. German original: “Freitag Abend waren wir im konservativen [sic] Gottesdienst. Es hat uns beiden gefallen: es war so viel echter, jüdischer, andächtiger als bei den Reformierten. Es war wirklich Gottes-Dienst – u. nicht geselliges Beisammensein...Der Ritus so, dass man ihn als jüdisch erkennen konnte...Die Gemeinde ... was Du lower middle-class nennst.”

<sup>53</sup> Anne Fischer Hermann Simon, 13 September 1937, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 18.

<sup>54</sup> Solomon A. Fineberg, quoted in Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 296-97.

Ahabah welcomed refugees. Reflecting on this ongoing dilemma about the process of how to integrate their Jewish culture and faith into their lives in the United States, Fischer observed: “How odd – how the entire problem has shifted. Now the choice is: Zionist or reformed – and not religious or social, as I initially thought.”<sup>55</sup> In the end, she stayed with Beth Ahabah, which organized most of the private welfare initiatives in Richmond, including the refugee aid for European Jews during World War II.

Reconciling the membership in the Jewish community with participating in outside organizations constituted yet another challenge for the family. Both the Richmond chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), affiliated with Beth Ahabah, and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Richmond invited Fischer to become a member.<sup>56</sup> While Fischer found the YWCA much more progressive and its events and lectures more interesting, the “C” bothered her and she decided to formally join the NCJW, thus prioritizing her affiliation with the Jewish community.<sup>57</sup> Her ten-year-old son Georg, who was the family member most eager to fit into American society, faced a similar quandary. The YMCA boy’s club at his school invited Georg to join. A rabbi, however, advised Fischer against allowing her son to join the club to avoid getting him exposed to unwanted influences. After considerable drama, Georg was allowed to join the YMCA boy’s club about a month later, after both the

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<sup>55</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 14 October 1937, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 18. German original: “Wie sonderbar – wie sich das ganze Problem verschoben hat. Jetzt heißt die Wahl: zionistisch oder reformiert – und nicht religious oder social, wie ich gemeint habe.”

<sup>56</sup> For an institutional history of the National Council of Jewish Women see Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993); the NCJW is also discussed in Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman’s Cause: The Jewish Woman’s Movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); a focus on the specific context of the American South provides Mark Bauman, “Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22 (2003): 34–78.

<sup>57</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 20 March 1936, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 12.

Jewish and the Christian camp had compromised, and the YMCA pledge was altered for Georg as to not offend his Jewish faith.<sup>58</sup>

Fischer's early years in the United States were shaped by intense negotiations about her Jewish identity, both with herself and her social environment. As it became clear that the family would stay in the United States, her initially half-hearted efforts to become a part of American society became more serious, which was accompanied by a struggle of how to reconcile adjustment to their new society with maintaining her European Jewish identity. As the Fischers' lives became more and more intertwined with the Jewish community in Richmond, they had to clarify their self-understanding as Jews and position themselves within the Jewish-American local society. For Ernst this was not a problem. His ancestry was Jewish and he was a member of the Richmond Jewish community, but he did not find himself in any philosophical or theological quandaries about this affiliation. In Germany, his self-understanding as a socialist trumped his Jewishness. Anne had joined him in his convictions in spousal solidarity. They positioned themselves on the very left edge of the socialist spectrum, adopting the Marxist attitude of religion as "opium of the people," and withdrew their memberships from the German Jewish community.<sup>59</sup> In emigration, however, Anne Fischer reconfigured her priorities. She rediscovered her Jewish heritage, while she abandoned any political passion, which had always been rather modest. She reflected: "Somehow the Jewish fate has been closer to my heart recently than the working class."<sup>60</sup> This Jewish fate bound her to Hermann Simon, with whom she discussed related issues, and it provided an area of contact with

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<sup>58</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 November 1937 and 6 December 1937, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 18.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>60</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 7 May 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 6. German original: "Irgendwie liegt mir seit einiger Zeit das jüd. Schicksal mehr am Herzen als das der arbeitenden Klasse."

American society, volunteer and later employment opportunities, and eventually a community in which she felt comfortable.

Other émigrés also emphasized the significance of belonging to a Jewish community in emigration. Margarete Hirsch, for example, a German-born social worker who spent her career at the Jewish Family Service in Cincinnati and who moved to Richmond after retirement in the mid-1970s to live with her sister, became a member in the same congregation as Anne Fischer and considered this affiliation very important in her later life.<sup>61</sup> Henry Maier, in contrast, a fellow émigré from Frankfurt, who held a professorship in social work at the University of Washington in Seattle, was plagued by an absence of feeling a strong affiliation with his Jewish heritage and thus the Jewish community, as he explained: “Interestingly, I still have problems today. I couldn’t see myself classified as Jewish. This causes problems with friends until today, because I am so unidentified with Judaism or with being Jewish.”<sup>62</sup>

Anne Fischer’s identification first with Beth Ahabah and later with Or Ami, a congregation that broke away from Beth Ahabah in 1972, grew. Over the years, she became an esteemed member of the Jewish community, as evidenced by numerous awards that she received later in her life.<sup>63</sup> In the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, she became a productive mediator between the established Jews in Richmond and the

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<sup>61</sup> Margarete Hirsch, interview by Joachim Wieler, November 15, 1990, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Maier, interview with Joachim Wieler, January 23, 1991, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin.

<sup>63</sup> Fischer received the “Distinguished Service Award” from Beth Sholom Home, a Jewish health care facility for senior citizens, in 1974; in 1978 the award “Congregant of the Year” from the congregation Or Ami; the “Distinguished Community Service Award” of the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond in 1981; and in the same year the “Methuselah Award” from Beth Sholom Home. Curriculum Vitae of Anne Fischer,” Fischer supplement, DZI; Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – Richmond, Virginia,” accessed August 10, 2014. <http://www.isjl.org/virginia-richmond-encyclopedia.html>.

newly arrived refugees, a function that eventually led her into professional social work, as the next section will detail.

### **“A Go-Between Refugees and Committee”: Fischer’s Volunteer Work in Refugee Aid<sup>64</sup>**

Even though Fischer’s private life in the United States required much of her attention and energy, she placed a high value on maintaining her ties to Europe.<sup>65</sup> She stayed informed about the people in her German network either by correspondence with them, or through the letters from Hermann Simon, who regularly updated her with news about their families, their mutual friends, and acquaintances.<sup>66</sup> What had started as a personal exchange of information about their shared network gradually also turned into coordinating and providing support of people in need. Such support could range from organizing home visits to people who felt desperate and lonely, to arranging legal assistance and helping with emigration matters.

In the spring of 1936, Anne Fischer began helping Hermann Simon with his work as an emigration lawyer. Simon’s main work in Germany consisted of advising and assisting German Jews, who planned to emigrate, in financial and legal matters.<sup>67</sup> Fischer helped with the cases of those who wanted to settle in the United States, starting a

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<sup>64</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 18 February 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 25.

<sup>65</sup> The major part of the Anne Fischer collection at LBI is her original correspondence with Hermann Simon, which presumably was returned to her after Simon’s death. In this exchange of letters she continuously mentioned her correspondence with other people, thus providing an impression of the large volume of letters she wrote and received, even though they are not extant in the archives.

<sup>66</sup> With more people leaving Germany in the course of the 1930s, Fischer’s network expanded geographically, including Great Britain, Palestine, France, New Zealand, and Switzerland. For this dissertation, the axis between Central Europe and the United States is the most relevant.

<sup>67</sup> The most important tasks for him were to find emigration destinations for his clients and arrange the necessary paperwork for sponsors if necessary, and to find ways to minimize the financial loss of émigrés under the complex and ever changing legal framework put in place by the National Socialists.

collaboration that intensified in the months and years to follow. During this early stage of her involvement in refugee work, Fischer's main task was to find Americans who were willing to provide affidavits for European Jews to enable them to immigrate to the United States.<sup>68</sup> Once a person had agreed, she helped with the paperwork, which, once completed, she sent to Simon in Germany, who then finalized the arrangements for his client's emigration.

Fischer's first case required her to approach Mr. Meyer Greentree, an elderly local businessman of Richmond, who had lived in the United States for decades, and to ask him for an affidavit for some of his German relatives.<sup>69</sup> During their first meeting, he immediately declined her request, citing as reasons the imminent, expensive renovation of his store, and that taking on the responsibility for a family, who he didn't even know personally, would be too great for him to bear. In addition, he knew of three more remotely related families who tried to get out of Germany, who he feared would also approach him if he agreed to support Fischer's case. Furthermore, Greentree cited his old age, arguing that it would be irresponsible to promise assistance to his relatives when he might die soon, which would leave them on their own or turn over the responsibility for

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<sup>68</sup> In addition to immigration quotas that were in place and sought to restrict particularly immigration from southeast Europe, within these quota the so-called "likely to become a public charge" clause (LPC) created the biggest obstacles. Visa applicants had to prove that they had sufficient financial means to support themselves during their early years in the United States, or they needed affidavits from friends or family who guaranteed such support for them. As the directives for these affidavits were very vague and the individual consuls had much leeway in accepting or declining them, drawing up acceptable paperwork was a difficult and lengthy process. For a discussion of affidavits and the LPC clause see, for example, Gary David Mitchell, "The Impact of U.S. Immigration Policy on the Economic 'Quality' of German and Austrian Immigrants in the 1930s," *International Migration Review* 26 (1992): 940–67; Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Perennial, 2002), 294 ff.

<sup>69</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 6 March 1936, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 12. She explained to Simon that she wrote this very detailed account of her meeting because he would perhaps be interested in the reactions of people who were asked for an affidavit. She concluded her account of this first meeting by stating: "My first experience as a schnorrer! It must be a horrible trade. How appalling if you have to do it for yourself!" German original: "Meine erste Erfahrung als Schnorrer! Es muss ein schrecklicher Beruf sein. Wie fürchterlich, wenn man es für sich selbst tun muss."

the relatives to his children. Fischer replied that he would also be responsible for his relatives' fate if they had to stay in Germany.<sup>70</sup> While he did not change his mind at the time, he did invite Fischer to dinner and to talk to his wife as well. Fischer, on her part, brought her husband.<sup>71</sup> A respectable assistant professor at the Medical College supporting her affidavit request added social capital to strengthen her case. At this point, however, Fischer was not overly optimistic about the outcome of her mission. Yet, she still hoped that Greentree had a "good Jewish heart for family" and would grant the affidavit eventually.<sup>72</sup>

Over the next ten days, Fischer's efforts intensified and culminated in paying visits to Greentree up to three times a day. After the dinner, he had promised to think about granting the affidavit, and a week later, by March 17, he had agreed and signed the papers.<sup>73</sup> His Jewish moral sense and religious duty had trumped both his skepticism about his relatives and the concern about his social standing. Fischer successfully finalized her first attempt to secure an affidavit for a Jewish family who planned to leave Germany.<sup>74</sup> At this point, Fischer acted as the unofficial American liaison of Herman Simon rather than as a representative of a refugee organization. While she had no training in nor any guidelines about how to approach such a task, she relied on her interpersonal

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<sup>70</sup> She suspected that the real cause for the businessman's reluctance was his concern about his reputation in small-town Richmond in case the relatives turned out to be in any way embarrassing to him.

<sup>71</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 6 March 1936, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 12.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. German original: "Ich traue ihm aber ... ein gutes jüdisches Familienherz zu."

<sup>73</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 11 March 1936 and 17 March 1936, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 12.

<sup>74</sup> The success of this episode only extended to Fischer's activities. While she convinced Greentree to take on the responsibility for a family he did not know and against his initial resistance, and helped him to sort out the lengthy and complicated paperwork, a process that spanned three months between March and May 1936, the family ended up not taking advantage of their opportunity. The reasons remain obscure. Only comments by both Simon and Fischer reveal that this project eventually failed. Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 21 May 1936, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 1, Folder 28, and Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 May 1936 Fischer papers, LBI, Box 5, Folder 13.

skills, her experience as an educated, middle-class wife fluent in formal social interaction, and on her growing understanding of the workings of the Richmond Jewish community.

After this first successful attempt at securing an affidavit for a German family, she was involved in numerous additional cases.<sup>75</sup> By 1938, Anne Fischer was not only helping some of the German émigrés who were Herman Simon’s clients but she also volunteered for the initiatives that the Jewish community in Richmond organized. Several organizations were involved in this initiative, first and foremost the Richmond Jewish Community Council (RJCC), which cooperated with the National Refugee Service (NRS), as well as with the Richmond chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).<sup>76</sup>

Just as her refugee work constituted a substantial part of her daily life in the United States, her rescue efforts followed her into her summer vacation in Europe. Several family members, including her parents and her grandmother, were still in Germany in 1938. With their fates uncertain, Fischer wanted to spend her summer in Europe to see them, as she had done in the previous years. This year, however, she spent most of the time in Switzerland and ended up not entering Germany, as everyone involved considered it too dangerous. Instead, some family members and friends came to

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<sup>75</sup> While the exact number of affidavits she helped to secure is difficult to determine with the information available, I estimate, based on her correspondence, that she was involved in varying capacity in dozens of successful cases.

<sup>76</sup> The efforts of the NCJW in refugee aid around World War II are discussed in Linda Gordon Kuzmack, “‘My Only Hope’: The National Council of Jewish Women’s Rescue and Aid for German-Jewish Refugees,” in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. Sibylle Quack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 191–204. While the RJCC cooperated with the NRS through its so-called coordinating committee, wealthy philanthropists of Richmond under the leadership of William B. Thalhimer, Sr. also established and funded their own unofficial refugee agency. See Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 300–01. Communicating across this network of official and private organizations and coordinating their tasks proved complicated and led to friction and frustration among those involved, as emerges from Fischer’s correspondence particularly from 1938–1941.

see her in Switzerland. Other relatives and acquaintances who wanted to emigrate also visited to consult with her about opportunities abroad and the necessary paperwork. She used this trip to Europe to deliver affidavits, and she visited the main office of the Zurich Jewish community, where the social worker pleaded with her: “Arrange for affidavits!”<sup>77</sup>

After returning to Richmond at the beginning of September 1938, Fischer intensified her activities in helping people to emigrate from Germany and in assisting newly arrived refugees in the Richmond area. By early October sixty refugees had settled in Richmond, and the local Jewish community had committed to accept fifty-two more.<sup>78</sup> In mid-November, after the pogroms in Germany, her affidavit work peaked. On the one hand, more and more European Jews were asking for affidavits and, on the other hand, an increasing number of Americans were willing to help, still shocked by the news about the pogroms. Both factors combined resulted in a heightened sense of urgency, an experience that Fischer described in early December 1938: “Of course we have to stretch ourselves to the maximum in order to help the ones ‘inside’ to get out.” Fischer expected this experience to change the lives of those involved and the quality of their relationships to others: “The very substantial concern for others will never leave us and will be an

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<sup>77</sup> Fischer reported that the office was crowded with Austrian Jews—ninety to a hundred people would appear every day in search of assistance. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 22 July 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 7. German original: “Sorgen Sie für Affidavits!”

<sup>78</sup> Under the “Richmond Plan,” the Jewish community had pledged to admit one refugee per week, thus the fifty-two refugees most likely accounted for the quota for the next year. See Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 301. According to Berman, Richmond with a Jewish population of 5,300 out of a total population of 180,000 in 1930, received 328 refugees between 1934 and 1943, which was higher than the national average; *ibid.*, 288, 299.

essential part of this new kind of ‘existence’ ... I keep thinking that in this sense all of us are still doing way too little.”<sup>79</sup>

However, as 1938 wound down and 1939 began, Fischer observed that the Americans’ willingness to help, which had peaked in the weeks after the pogroms in November 1938, had already cooled off, thus rendering her affidavit work more difficult. Referencing Shakespeare, she insisted: “But one has to be able to move Olympus. Now only the Olympi are left; the easy ones have all been harvested.”<sup>80</sup> The growing number of failed attempts at acquiring affidavits frustrated her, but succeeding in difficult cases also provided her with a sense of achievement.<sup>81</sup> Reflecting on the tasks involved in this administrative work, that is, handling the paperwork and serving as a communicator between potential providers of affidavits, refugee organizations, and the government offices, she compared her activities to the tasks of a lawyer and declared that, as a consequence, she had acquired a better understanding of Simon’s work:<sup>82</sup> “My affiliation with the committee really is a unique opportunity for me to experience your profession on

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<sup>79</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 5 December 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 11. German original: “Natürlich müssen wir uns bis an die äußerste Grenze anspannen, um denen ‘drinnen’ herauszuhelfen...Die sehr substanzielle Sorge um die anderen wird uns nie mehr verlassen u. wird ein ganz wesentlicher Teil eben der neuen Art von ‘Existenz’ sein...Ich mein [sic] immer, dass wir in diesem Sinn alle noch viel zu wenig tun.”

<sup>80</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 28 December 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 11. German original: “Man muss aber eben den Olymp bewegen können. Jetzt sind nur noch die Olympe übrig; die leichten sind schon alle abgepflückt.”

<sup>81</sup> For example, according to her own account, she was the first person to get an affidavit from Morton Thalhimer, “one of the most hard-nosed and richest real-estate dealers in Richmond.” This affidavit was the “first that he granted for the Committee! I am very proud. Various people have tried with him before.” Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 16 February 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 13. German original: “... einem der hartgesottensten u. reichsten real-estate dealers von Richmond ... Das erste, das er fürs Kommittee gegeben hat. Ich bin sehr stolz. Es haben es schon verschiedene Leute bei ihm versucht.”

<sup>82</sup> As Fischer’s correspondence particularly of the late 1930s reveals, handling the paperwork was not as trivial as it may sound, as correctly filled-in forms and the exact format of written statements could make the difference between an approved and a declined visa. What was considered correct for filing the visa requests sometimes also depended on the official in charge of decision making. Thus, at times a successful process not only required the formal knowledge of the visa process, but also the informal knowledge of officials’ predilections and peculiarities and the skill to take these into account.

a very small scale, and yet in its essence.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, about three years into her involvement in refugee aid, she understood her work similar to that of a lawyer and as a way to share meaningful work with Simon. While all over the country social workers carried out similar tasks in refugee aid, either as professionals hired by refugee organizations or as volunteers like Fischer, she did not understand herself as connected to these professionals.

As the number of refugees settling in the Richmond area kept increasing, Fischer’s responsibilities shifted and grew.<sup>84</sup> For example, she became a member of the so-called hospitality committee, which “was in charge of welcoming and adjusting the refugees.”<sup>85</sup> On a rotating basis, each member of the committee was assigned one family to look after for one month.<sup>86</sup> Fischer invited her assigned refugees to her home, but she also went to their houses to make sure things were in order. Morton Gottlieb, a former lawyer, secretary of the Virginia State Refugee Service in Richmond and salaried director of the Jewish Community Council, administered the official parts of refugee resettlement in the area. The women of the NCJW helped the refugees with their daily lives and also took care of them emotionally as best as they could. This arrangement reflected prevalent ideas of gender roles, in which men were in charge of the official administration, whereas

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<sup>83</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 24 January 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 11. German original: “Diese Zugehörigkeit zum Committee ist wirklich eine ganz einzigartige Chance für mich, Dir Deinen Beruf im ganz kleinen – aber eben doch im Prinzip nachzuerleben.”

<sup>84</sup> By March 1, 1939, 120 refugees had settled in Richmond. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 1 March 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 14.

<sup>85</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 26 September 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 20. German original: “Man hat mich aufgefordert im Hospitality Committee mitzuarbeiten, das die Begrüßung u. Eingewöhnung der refugees als Aufgabe hat.”

<sup>86</sup> The reason for this arrangement, according to Fischer, was the attempt to distribute the responsibilities fairly and to give each refugee family the same chance of attendance by the committee members. “Otherwise everyone would make a dash for the nice ones and the unlikeable ones end up with no one.” Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 28 October 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 21. German original: “Sonst stürzen sich wieder alle auf die Netten u. die Unsympathischen gehen leer aus.”

the women covered the areas of interpersonal and emotional assistance.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the women's responsibilities were reminiscent of a type of social worker that, by the late 1930s, had become obsolete within professionalizing social work. The friendly visitor, a middle-class volunteer, was the epitome of nineteenth-century social work. Instead of technical skill, the friendly visitors considered their personality, virtue, and moral integrity as women their primary qualifications. They visited the urban poor, often immigrants, and intended to ameliorate their situation by serving as role-models and by providing well-meaning advice. As poverty arose from moral deficiency, so went the rationale, a good friendly visitor could change the clients' attitudes and guide them to a more productive, sober, and eventually orderly and wealthier life and therefore adjust them to more desirable standards, as conceived by members of the white middle-class. Traces of this earlier practice were left in refugee aid as organized by the NRS and the NCJW. The women of the hospitality committee were volunteers and carried out their responsibilities at their discretion rather than according to strict guidelines, as professional social workers would be expected to at the time, and they served as role models for the orientation of the refugees. However, the Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany of the late 1930s and early 1940s differed from the slum dwellers that had made up the typical clients of nineteenth-century friendly visitors. While adjusting them to the middle-class was still the ultimate goal, the home visits had less of a moralistic overtone than the earlier predecessor. Nevertheless, in addition to helping the newly arrived to settle in and to get their lives on track, these visits did have a controlling

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<sup>87</sup> As Jennifer Cote argued, this was also the arrangement in place in social work, an allegedly female profession. Jennifer Cote, "'The West Point of the Philanthropic Service': Reconsidering Social Work's Welcome to Women in the Early Twentieth Century," *Social Service Review* 87 (2013): 131–57.

element with Fischer and her colleagues making sure that the money the refugees received was spent appropriately, that the households were kept properly and that the children were well cared for. Thus, while in the social work profession, friendly visiting was frowned upon as an outdated service performed by untrained volunteers, some elements of this older practice lived on in organizations like local refugee committees that were loosely linked to but were not part of professional social work.

How to approach refugee work was the subject of much discussion and conflict. Fischer changed her opinion on this subject over the years. While upon her arrival in the United States in 1934, she mentioned that she would be generally interested in charity if she were to do anything at all outside her domestic duties, by 1940 and with experience in refugee aid, she had become very outspoken against a charity-based approach. Her “policy” was “as little ‘charity’ as possible and as normal-American milieu, treatment and chances as possible.”<sup>88</sup> This point of view conflicted with the positions of some of her colleagues at the RJCC, of the Jewish community, and in part of the refugees themselves. In contrast to her colleague Werner Wolff, also a volunteer, she opposed “tapping American charity” because in her opinion this would prolong the refugees’ state of dependence.<sup>89</sup> Fischer advocated helping the refugees to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible, even though this could make their lives more difficult initially. Her approach was also met with resistance by the Jewish population of Richmond and by fellow refugees who had lived in the area for several years. The Jewish population, who preferred to remain as inconspicuous as possible, feared that autonomous and visible

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<sup>88</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 February 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 25. German original: “Meine ‘Politik’ ist: so wenig ‘charity’ wie möglich u. so normal-amerikanisches Milieu, Behandlung u. Chancen wie nur möglich für die refugees.”

<sup>89</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 May 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 28.

behavior by newly arrived refugees would draw attention and perhaps lead to anti-Semitic sentiment toward them.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Fischer identified a “ghetto attitude” among the refugees who tended to stay within the Jewish community, which she considered detrimental to quickly assuming self-reliance. In her opinion, the Jewish community in Richmond was just too small and economically not powerful enough to be able to sustain and protect the refugees.<sup>91</sup> Thus, fully cognizant of the difficulties of the process as she had experienced them herself, Fischer insisted in the refugees’ quick assimilation into American culture and society.

Some people questioned the meaningfulness of Fischer’s efforts and of helping the refugees altogether. Her close American friend Linda deemed Fischer’s work beneath her, not requiring any special skills, which anyone else could do just as well. Even though Linda was a volunteer involved in refugee work herself, she came to question the usefulness of the refugee work overall, wondering if it might be better for the refugees “if we ‘let nature take it’s [sic] course.’”<sup>92</sup> In instances like this, when Fischer’s confidence in the meaningfulness of her work wavered, she turned to Simon for reassurance. Simon was deeply convinced of the importance of the refugee work, as was Fischer’s husband Ernst. Anne Fischer claimed that neither Simon nor her husband realized the difficulties of the actual practice on the ground, the daily, painstaking work and the training that would be necessary—which she did not have—to perform well and provide good service to the clients, as she pointed out in a letter in June 1940: “You [Hermann Simon, Ernst

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<sup>90</sup> Berman’s account corroborated Fischer’s observation. He reported that particularly Christians opposed potential competition on the job market that the refugees could bring, whereas the Jewish community was concerned that the arrival of too many refugees could trigger general anti-Semitism. Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 301.

<sup>91</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 February 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 25.

<sup>92</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon 21 February 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 25.

Fischer] have no idea at all of the psychological and pedagogical detail work that would be required to really make a difference... In reality, it is possible in rare cases that the refugees' problems can be solved by one act only... The screwed-up personalities are the really problematic cases – exactly what the 'case-work' of refugee committees in the province is all about – and these cannot be 'helped' most of the time."<sup>93</sup> The volunteers were often overwhelmed, particularly when they had clients with mental health problems. Fischer felt insufficiently equipped to actually assist her charges well and felt an acute awareness of "how [sic] amateurish my work is."<sup>94</sup>

Anne Fischer's experience as a refugee, albeit a privileged and a well adjusted one, provided her with a useful perspective in her work.<sup>95</sup> While she was often frustrated and frequently felt helpless in the face of all the difficulties and obstacles in her refugee work, her accomplishments as a mediator between the refugees and the committee provided her with a sense of achievement and satisfaction. While the local committee's *raison d'être* was to help the refugees, at times these two camps acted as if they were enemies, and Fischer tried to conciliate. She perceived Gottlieb, the director of the Jewish

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<sup>93</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 4 June 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 29. German original: "Ihr habt ja gar keine Ahnung von der psychologischen und pädagogischen Kleinarbeit, die nötig wäre, um wirklich etwas zu erreichen... Es ist doch so, dass die Probleme des Refugees ganz selten mit einem Akt aus der Welt geschafft werden können... Die wirklich problematischen Fälle sind die verkorksten Persönlichkeiten – genau das, was das 'case-work' von Refugee committees in der Provinz ausmacht – und denen ist meistens überhaupt nicht zu 'helfen.'" One of the clients at the time, who Fischer felt ill-equipped to help, was Ms. I. As Fischer tried to convince her that she had to live with the budget granted by the refugee committee, Ms. I. fainted and had to stay in bed all afternoon. About two months later, she attempted suicide by slitting her wrists, which she explained with worries about the committee. Specifically, she wanted a maid and the refugee committee refused to fund a domestic servant for a refugee family. By mid-1941 new problems emerged with this client. At that point, Fischer referred to her as a "mental ...[and] hopeless case." Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 22 June 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 28; 12 September 1940, Box 6, Folder 31; 22 May 1941, Box 6, Folder 39.

<sup>94</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 May 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 28. German original: "Weil ich mir so bewusst bin, wie dilettantisch meine Arbeit ist."

<sup>95</sup> In the larger circle of refugee workers, she had the reputation as "model refugee of Richmond," as she was told by colleagues from New York. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 6 November 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 22.

Community Council, as insensitive and not truly caring about their cause, whereas some refugees, in Fischer's opinion, were too demanding and inflexible.<sup>96</sup> Her contributions to the grand cause of rescuing fellow Jews from the National Socialists and enabling them to start a new life in the United States often boiled down to solving petty disputes.<sup>97</sup> In a truly gendered fashion, Fischer, as the volunteer, carried out the emotional and communication work, whereas her paid superior, Gottlieb, stayed within his role as administrator. And yet, these mediation tasks, for which she could capitalize on her special knowledge and experience, provided her with the immediate and tangible successes she needed to keep her afloat in her work, as she wrote to Simon: "My greatest 'successes' are the instances, in which I could make Gottlieb a little bit more understanding of the situation."<sup>98</sup>

In order to maintain this special position, she considered it paramount that the refugees perceived her as one of their own, which made her very careful about how she presented herself. For example, when Gottlieb suggested that she should give a talk at a conference about her refugee work, she declined because she feared that "the other refugees would resent me for 'rising above' them," as had happened to her colleague

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<sup>96</sup> She seemed to take issue with Gottlieb's detached—which he probably would have called professional—outlook on his job, which stood in stark contrast with her passionate approach: "Gottlieb said ... that he became a social worker, because it provides him with a stable income, regular vacation, and no perturbation. How does he do it?" Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 6 March 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 26. German original: "Gottlieb hat ... gesagt, er sei social worker geworden, weil man da sein sicheres Einkommen habe, seine regelmäßigen Ferien u. keine Aufregungen. Wie macht er das?"

<sup>97</sup> Such conflicts often revolved around financial support, but also grew out of mutual cultural misunderstandings between the committee and the refugees, different interpretation of social rules, or just negligence.

<sup>98</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 4 June 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 29. German original: "Meine 'Erfolge' sind da, wo ich Gottlieb ein bisschen mehr Verständnis für die Situation beibringen konnte."

Wolff, another volunteer.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, she was reluctant to accept official positions within the Jewish organizations. She was skeptical when Gottlieb suggested in early 1940 she take over the refugee-related office work and thus relieve him from parts of his own responsibilities. She was interested in this offer, but she also had reservations about it: “I would love to do it – on the one hand; I have the feeling that this is ... a more solid work... On the other hand, I would lose my position of trust and my special role as go-between refugees and Committee because of too close ties with the Committee.”<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, as these tasks were intended as in addition to and not in lieu of her already existing responsibilities, she was reluctant to take on yet more work as an unpaid volunteer. It was not even the unfairness of assuming responsibilities from a paid position and doing them free of charge that bothered Fischer at this time, but she was worried about falling short of her domestic responsibilities. While her intense volunteer work was only possible because her mother helped out in the household, her husband, despite his support of her refugee work in principle, got increasingly irritated with the amount of time she spent volunteering: “Ernst has been very angry, because he says that he has only allowed me to use two mornings and two evenings a week for my work, and it is of course much, much more.”<sup>101</sup> The tentative solution was to compromise. She took over

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<sup>99</sup> Fischer explained that the refugees were talking ill about Wolff, who showed ambition in his refugee work, also as a potential vehicle for professional advancement. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 4 June 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 29. German original: “... würden es mir die anderen refugees sehr übel nehmen, wenn ich mich so über sie ‘erheben’ würde.”

<sup>100</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 18 February 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 25. German original: “Ich täte es gern – einerseits; irgendwie habe ich das Gefühl, dass das eine ... solidere Arbeit ist... Andererseits: verliere ich durch die zu enge Liaison mit dem Committee die Vertrauensstellung u. die besondere Rolle als go-between refugees u. Committee.”

<sup>101</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 18 May 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 28. German original: “Ernst schimpft sehr; denn er sagt, er habe mir nur 2 Vormittage u. 2 Abende pro Woche für die Arbeit erlaubt u. es ist natürlich schon viel, viel mehr.”

more responsibilities temporarily. For example, when Gottlieb went on vacation or attended conferences, he would leave his office and his responsibilities with Fischer.<sup>102</sup>

While she kept turning down official positions, and while she tried to maintain a safe position in volunteering, Fischer felt increasingly uncomfortable. The demands and requirements of her work, as well as her own sense about qualifications she should have in order to perform well, conflicted with the volunteer status, to which she had clung for years. Furthermore, Gottlieb and other representatives of refugee organizations encouraged her to venture into professional social work. Gottlieb employed various strategies and exerted gentle pressure, for example by presenting her to other people as the Committee's caseworker, which made her particularly uncomfortable. The obvious solution for her dilemma would have been to get a degree in social work. Gottlieb had suggested so already in spring 1940. Except for a brief mention to Simon, Fischer seemed not to engage this idea seriously. Working with refugees was something she did out of moral, and perhaps religious, conviction, but it was not part of her vision for a career. In fact, at the eve of 1940, as she contemplated the upcoming year, she considered the possibility to take on more responsibilities for the committee. While she really wanted to withdraw from public life and make pottery, an interest she had fostered for several years, her moral obligations, which tied her to refugee work, prevailed: "I would like to do it –

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<sup>102</sup> See for example Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 May 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 28. She had negotiated similar compromises before. In 1939, for example, she was offered the chairmanship of the so-called Naturalization Committee. She declined, but accepted the position of co-chair. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 25 May 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 16.

not as much as making pottery... Oh well, one can't compare these two. Helping is of course more important than the other."<sup>103</sup>

While the volunteers generally did not have a social work or comparable degree, they received some guidelines and had some supervision. Anything beyond this basic level was left to personal initiatives of the individual volunteers. As Fischer felt inadequately trained and found the resources in Richmond insufficient, she tried to acquire as much advice, knowledge, and education as she could, without enrolling in a university program. In the early phase of her refugee work that involved mostly paperwork, she relied on Simon to a great extent. Even though the NCJW provided some support and supervision by sending representatives to Richmond periodically, who provided instructions, updates on laws, procedures, forms, and discussed specific questions and cases, Fischer found this assistance insufficient.<sup>104</sup> She frequently sought legal advice from Simon and requested from him forms or templates that she considered of higher quality than the ones available to her in Richmond. In June 1938 she sent such a request to Simon: "Could you send me a draft for an affidavit? ... A copy will suffice. Our local affidavits! At a place where people don't even pay income tax!"<sup>105</sup> She also turned to him when she worked on resettling Jewish refugee women as domestic workers: "Could you please have the forms for three domestic contracts sent over as quickly as possible...and a few more of the excellent instruction sheets...? Thank you! It's so much

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<sup>103</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 20 December 1939, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 23. German original: "...würde ich's gern tun – nicht so gern wie töpfern... Ach, man kann's ja nicht vergleichen. Helfen ist natürlich wichtiger als das andere."

<sup>104</sup> See for example Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 March 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 3.

<sup>105</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 20 June 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 6. German original: "Kannst du mir mal so einen Affidavitentwurf schicken? ... Copy genügt. – Unsere hiesigen Affidavits! Wo die Leute nicht mal Einkommensteuer zahlen!"

faster through you than via the Council.”<sup>106</sup> Thus, Fischer consulted with Simon about immigration procedures and other legal matters for her personal education, and improved her performance in refugee work as well. By tapping into support that lay outside the local NCJW resources and using Simon’s knowledge, templates, and worksheets to build on, she also contributed to the modification of the practices of refugee aid in Richmond.

Being located in Richmond, Fischer felt cut off from the social, intellectual, and professional centers, such as New York City. Whenever possible, she participated in networking and information exchange with colleagues from outside her immediate community. While she used dinners or similar social occasions, which she attended because of her social standing in the community, to discuss her work, Fischer also made an effort to participate in professional meetings. In November 1939, for example, she attended a state-wide meeting of the National Refugee Service. As she was a volunteer, she needed a special invitation by William Thalhimer, a prominent figure of Richmond Jewish philanthropy in order to be admitted to the meeting. Social work conferences also provided the information and resources she needed for her work, but she did not attend them herself. Gottlieb, the official representative of the NRS in Richmond, usually went and passed on to Fischer the information he deemed relevant. By the beginning of the 1940s, she started to read social work literature, which had grown in size and quality over the 1930s. Fischer was particularly taken with Virginia Robinson’s *A Changing Psychology in Social Case Work*, the foundational text of the functional school of social casework, the approach which Leichter and Schulman, for example, also found useful in

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<sup>106</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 24 December 1938, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 11. German original: “Könntest du mir so postwendend wie möglich die Formulare für 3 domestic contracts...schicken lassen und noch ein paar mehr von den ausgezeichneten instruction sheets...? Vielen Dank! Es geht so viel schneller über Dich als über den Council.”

their practice. While Fischer only expressed in general terms that the book helped her get a clearer understanding of the difficulties she encountered in her refugee work and was useful in working through them, it was likely the book's exploration of the social worker–client relationship and the focus on the clients' personal and emotional adjustment according to individual needs, which she could use in her daily work with the refugees.<sup>107</sup>

Even though Fischer strove to perform as well as possible in her refugee work, she was reluctant to enter the professional realm. She was ambivalent about her status, hovering on the margin of the social work profession, and maintaining an awkward balance between her own ambition performance-wise and a path into professional work, which seemed to be obvious for those around her. For several years, up until spring 1941, Fischer had made plans to establish her personal and financial independence from her husband, but she did not see her future professional self in the area where she had spent years volunteering and thus gathering experience and expertise. Instead she wanted to open an art and gift store together with a friend. A thread about this topic runs through the correspondence from about 1938 through the spring of 1941. Fischer detailed her preparations including the contacts she made with art dealers, issues about budgeting and finance, her search for locations including drawings of potential storefronts, and her conversations with Richmonders about local taste in arts and crafts and the feasibility of such a store in a small town. After years of planning and preparing, Fischer abandoned her gift shop plans when they were the most specific in May 1941. The Richmond office

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<sup>107</sup> Virginia, P. Robinson, *A Changing Psychology in Social Case Work* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930); Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 4 June 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 29.

of the National Refugee Service had offered her a salaried position, and Fischer decided to finally take a step toward professional social work.

### **Joining the Ranks of Professional Social Workers**

On June 26, 1941, Anne Fischer wrote to Hermann Simon: “On Monday morning ... I returned to the office as a volunteer.”<sup>108</sup> In contrast to her expectations, she did not become a part-time employee in charge of refugee work in Richmond.<sup>109</sup> However, the NRS did offer her a paid position over the summer to organize the resettlement of refugees in Norfolk, about a hundred miles southeast of Richmond, but she declined, claiming that “I ... realized that I am really just a caseworker – one who uses his personal relationship with the refugee to make an impact, but I am neither an organizer nor an executive.”<sup>110</sup>

After the back and fourth of negotiating her professional role, she returned to her position as a volunteer in the summer of 1941. Yet, her self-understanding had shifted substantially over the past few years, as she had acquired a clearer image of what she wanted to do and where her talents lay. While she was constantly critical of her performance, feeling underqualified and inadequate in her work, representatives of NRS were very satisfied with what she was doing. Morton Gottlieb, for example, spoke highly

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<sup>108</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 24 June 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 40. German original: “Montag früh bin ich – matter of fact – als volunteer ins Büro zurückgekehrt.”

<sup>109</sup> Fischer was under the impression that she was offered a job through the NRS, which NRS representative Gottlieb claimed was a misunderstanding (Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 May 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 39). However, about two weeks later Gottlieb told Simon at the Annual Meeting of the National Refugee Service that he expected the NRS to appoint Fischer as his part-time assistant (Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 26 May 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 34). For reasons unknown as of yet, Fischer was never officially offered this position.

<sup>110</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 21 June 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 40. German original: “Mir ist ... aufgegangen, dass ich wirklich nur ein caseworker bin – einer, der die persönliche Beziehung zum Hebel seiner Wirkung macht, aber nicht eine Organisatrix oder Executive.”

of Fischer, when he talked to Hermann Simon at an NRS meeting referred to above.<sup>111</sup> Gottlieb also received praise for Fischer's work from higher up in the NRS hierarchy.<sup>112</sup> He prodded Fischer in the spring 1940 and again in the spring 1941 to sign up for a degree in social work, so that she could get a salaried position in one of the social work agencies in the area. Furthermore, he repeatedly left her in charge of the office when he had to go out of town, which speaks to his trust in Fischer's capability in refugee work. While she rejected the term "social worker" in roughly the first five years of her refugee work, in June 1940, she referred to herself as a social worker for the first time in her correspondence with Hermann Simon.<sup>113</sup> A few years earlier, she had considered her involvement in refugee work similar to that of a lawyer, as it had entailed mainly paperwork and as she did not know much about the social work profession. Her growing experience, however, involving ongoing personal contact with the refugees moved her understanding of her work's character closer to social casework. Contact with other social and refugee workers as well as reading social work literature no doubt also contributed to Fischer's growing understanding that her activities resembled the practices covered by professional social work territory and may have offset her older impressions of social work from her years in Europe.

Her involvement in refugee work took a major blow in the summer 1941. In addition to her thwarted hopes regarding a salaried job with the NRS, her parents had left Richmond and spent the summer on the West Coast with Fischer's brother. They set out

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<sup>111</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 26 May 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 34.

<sup>112</sup> "Morton Gottlieb called and told me – en passant – that a "higher authority" (?) thought that "I did such a good job" with the committee, and whether I was a paid employee. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 28 October 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 32. German original: "Morton Gottlieb rief mich an u. sagte mir – en passant – dass man 'höheren Orts' (?) fände, dass "I did such a good job' im Committee u. ob ich eine bezahlte Kraft sei."

<sup>113</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 4 June 1940, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 29.

to explore the option of moving there, as Fischer's father could not get used to the climate in Virginia.<sup>114</sup> Previously, Fischer's mother and grandmother had assumed the domestic responsibilities of the Fischer household, which opened up time for Anne Fischer's refugee work. Now she was back in charge of the household herself, and she was uncertain of the consequences for her volunteering. Additionally, the resettlement work had decreased significantly by the fall 1941: "Now I am back to being a hundred-percent housewife – or ninety-nine percent in any case. Resettlement has died down almost entirely. Gottlieb is even less interested in the refugees than before."<sup>115</sup> Some refugees did require her attention until the end of the year, however. These cases were smaller in number, but much more difficult, taxing, and tragic.<sup>116</sup>

During the first two weeks of January 1942, Fischer substituted for Gottlieb again. While she found her responsibilities particularly challenging this time, she regained new enthusiasm for the work. The beginning of 1942 was marked by profound changes in the NRS work, as the United States had entered the war in December, and President Roosevelt had issued Presidential Proclamation 2526 that included provisions conferring the status of enemy alien – and with it numerous restrictions, for example regarding travel and possession of short-wave radios – to certain groups of German-born

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<sup>114</sup> Eventually the parents decided to move to California, while Fischer's grandmother stayed with her in Richmond.

<sup>115</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 September 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 43. German Original: "Inzwischen bin ich wieder 100 % Hausfrau geworden – oder jedenfalls 99 %. Resettlement ist fast ganz eingeschlafen. Gottlieb hat weniger als je Interesse für die refugees übrig."

<sup>116</sup> Anne Fischer paraphrasing Monte Kandel, Field Representative of NRS. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 12 September 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 43. Some of the few people who succeeded to leave Nazi-occupied areas at this point had been exposed to extreme violence by the National Socialists, or had lost family members and friends, who had been deported and killed. These refugees were traumatized to a much higher degree than earlier arrivals, and therefore constituted a greater challenge for the refugee workers.

individuals, which applied to many refugees.<sup>117</sup> Jewish organizations and the NRS were among the agencies to inform and advise refugees about the changing rules and the implications for their everyday lives. Prior to that, however, these new regulations needed to be translated from the provisions into actual practices and specific guidelines, which the NRS did not handle to Fischer's satisfaction. When she had to prepare a newsletter for the refugees about the new regulations, she once more resorted to Simon: "Could I copy passages from your publications and incorporate them into my circular? ... Because I don't trust the NRS any more."<sup>118</sup> While she had repeatedly argued that she preferred the casework-type tasks in refugee work, she realized that there were elements of Gottlieb's position that she enjoyed, as she could play a decisive part in decision-making processes. This newly found agency provided her with a sense of empowerment, as she described to Simon: "Despite everything – it's a pleasure to be alive and to feel that my efforts have an effect and that I can help (without overestimating it). The struggle about the interpretation of the radio provision gave me great pleasure. Yours against three men."<sup>119</sup>

At the same time, Fischer struggled with waves of doubt concerning the meaningfulness of her work. While she still deemed the support of refugees important in principle, she also felt a need to contribute more immediately to the war effort. As she

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<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Scott M. Behen, "German and Italian Internment," in *Encyclopedia of Immigration and Migration in the American West*, ed. Gordon Morris Bakken, Alexandra Kindell, and Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 275–78.

<sup>118</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 January 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 47. German original: "Darf ich eigentlich Stücke aus euren Publikationen abschreiben und in mein Rundschreiben 'incorporieren'? ... Dem NRS glaub ich nämlich nichts mehr."

<sup>119</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 7 January 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 47. German original: "Trotz allem – it's wieder eine Lust zu leben u. zu spüren, dass man wirken u. mithelfen kann (ohne es zu überschätzen). Der Kampf um die Auslegung der Radioverordnung hat mir grosses Vergnügen gemacht. Deins gegen drei Männer."

tried to find a role available to women in defense, however, she once more realized that the options for her in Richmond were not quite what she had in mind.<sup>120</sup> Even though defense work did not claim any of her resources that could limit her other responsibilities, she reached a level of frustration in her refugee work that she found unbearable and, in February 1942, she decided to resign.<sup>121</sup> This frustration was not caused by the refugees, but by the local committee, mostly by Morton Gottlieb, whom she had experienced as “sloppy and ignorant” for years.<sup>122</sup>

As before, however, the change of Fischer’s volunteer status did not materialize. Just as transitioning into a regular, salaried position had not worked out, her attempt at resigning was unsuccessful as well.<sup>123</sup> Gottlieb inquired if she would be willing to take over his position in case he joined the armed forces: “He said, Ms. Fischer, why don’t you sit in my chair until I come back from the war?”<sup>124</sup> This position would include not only the “disgustingly minimal refugee work” but Gottlieb’s entire job, including “administering the Jewish Community Fund, public relations, and the yearly fundraising campaign.” She neither accepted, nor declined.<sup>125</sup> As Fischer was skeptical about the

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<sup>120</sup> A nutrition course in preparation for future canteen work was overcrowded, so she felt that her services were not needed. Furthermore, one of Fischer’s friends, whom she characterized as a very capable person and who had signed up with the local volunteer organization, was assigned the task of arranging flowers in the Medical College’s hospital once a week. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 29 January 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 47.

<sup>121</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 February 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 48.

<sup>122</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 5 March 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 49. Her frustration had been building up for several months, but her letters does not reveal what eventually motivated her to the decision to resign.

<sup>123</sup> She announced that she would tell the story about “How I tried to resign from the Committee” in tomorrow’s letter, but she either never wrote this letter, or it got lost. It is not clear what happened, but most likely Gottlieb talked her into staying, as he planned on leaving and needed a successor for his position. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 24 February 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 48.

<sup>124</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>125</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 20 April 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 50. German original: “... nicht nur die – widerlich minimale – Refugee-Arbeit, sondern den gesamten job – mit dem Verwalten des Jewish Community Funds, Public Relations u. jährlicher Campagne.”

RJCC hiring a woman as executive director, she thought she might not have to make a decision anyway. She had a very powerful supporter in town, however. The real estate agent Morton Thalhimer, one of the richest people in Richmond and an influential board member of the RJCC, held her in high esteem and endorsed her for a more permanent role in the organization.

Dealing with the internal politics of the RJCC was an inescapable part of Gottlieb's position, which Fischer would have to take on if she took over from him. Simon and Fischer agreed that this would be a rather unpleasant aspect of the job. Fischer also had to consider whether she wanted to put herself in a position that was intertwined with and dependent on the rich and powerful members of the Richmond Jewish Community, a concern she shared with Simon: "If you only knew personally the clique here that one depends on! If the job were only still case work! But it's a so-called promotion job – promotion of Thalhimer's and Schwarzschild's ideas."<sup>126</sup> As Gottlieb was not accepted into the armed forces, Fischer was spared the decision, but by thinking through the possibility of assuming the JCC's directorship, she had become acutely aware of community politics that loomed large for any leader of a small town's community council.

While Fischer was undecided about her future career in the spring of 1942, there was little doubt that she wanted one, which is a significant departure from her self-understanding in the previous years. She had started out as a home maker, had ventured into volunteer refugee work, and for years considered various options that ranged from

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<sup>126</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 28 April 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 50. German original: "Du solltest die Clique von der man dort abhängig ist, persönlich kennen! Wenn es wenigstens noch case work wäre, was man zu tun hat. Aber es ist ein sogenannter promotion job – promotion der Thalhimerschen und Schwarzschild'schen Ideen."

staying at home and withdrawing from public activities entirely to opening an art and gift store, to accepting a full-time position as Gottlieb's successor as the executive director of the RJCC. By the spring 1942, she seriously started to explore career options. The question was no longer whether or not to take up a paid position, but rather what kind of employment to go into. Social work seemed to her like an interesting profession to pursue at this point. After inquiring with the Virginia State Department of Public Welfare about job opportunities, she felt encouraged to do so.<sup>127</sup> She considered her age to be appropriate to go into this profession, particularly because she had the necessary life experience, and partly because her children were growing more independent. She considered it the right time to "devote oneself to society – either to take revenge or to show gratefulness ... depending on one's experiences."<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, a position in public welfare would enable her to build on her experiences in refugee work and, at the same time, provide a way out of the confines of the Jewish community in Richmond: "I would prefer public welfare to the Richmond Jewish Community Council. I really don't want to serve these hypocrites."<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, Fischer started to question her decision to volunteer for several years. While she maintained that at the time it had seemed the right choice, in retrospect she realized that insisting on her volunteer status for so long perhaps had held her back career-wise. Continuing the work she valued forced her to compromise in her

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<sup>127</sup> While Fischer did not have a degree in social work, which was a requirement for state employment as a social worker, she could transfer so credits from her German university education. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 30 April 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 50.

<sup>128</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 30 April 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 50. German original: "... genau der Punkt, um sich der 'Gesellschaft' zu widmen – um sich an ihr zu rächen oder sich bei ihr zu bedanken ... je nachdem wie die 'Erfahrungen' waren."

<sup>129</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 30 April 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 50. German original: "Public Welfare gefiele mir besser als Richmond Jewish Community Council. Diesen Pharisäern möchte ich wirklich nicht 'dienen'."

professional advancement. Even though she repeatedly commented on how she preferred one-on-one interactions with the refugees to public relations or fundraising work, at times she regretted that her work was so invisible, of which she became acutely aware when she compared it to the work of some of the men she encountered. After a meeting with an NRS employee who had told her about some of his glorious, successful cases, she admitted: “Most likely only half of it is true – but it was still entertaining. For a moment, however, I felt bitterness rise inside me, when I saw this egotistical, glittering lion parade in front of me, and I had to think of my own [past] two years.”<sup>130</sup> Fischer had the impression that some people, particularly men, used organizations such as the NRS, and by implication the plight of the Jews, to advance their careers and earn glory and salaries that were not necessarily met by their actual job performances.

Gottlieb continued his quest for a position with the armed forces. Leaving the executive directorship of the RJCC in Fischer’s hands after his departure was part of his overall plan. Fischer, who grew increasingly frustrated by these discussions that had led to nothing in the past, commented to Simon: “I don’t want to hear it any more!”<sup>131</sup> On the one hand, she was still concerned about maneuvering herself into a situation, where she would be dependent on the wealthy supporters of RJCC, but on the other hand, such a job would be a chance to increase her financial independence from her husband and provide her with a reputable activity outside the home.

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<sup>130</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 14 May 1942, LBI, Box 6, Folder 51. German original: “Wahrscheinlich ist nur die Hälfte wahr – aber unterhaltend war’s doch. Einen Moment lang freilich war’s mir doch ein bisschen bitter zu Mut – als ich diesen egoistisch-glitzernden Löwen paradieren sah u. dabei an meine 2 Jahre ... dachte.”

<sup>131</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 5 June 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 52. German original: “Ich kann’s jetzt schon fast nimmer hören!”

Becoming the director of RJCC was of course only one among several ways of attaining personal independence. As she had already given serious thought to going into professional social work, she contacted the local school of social work. The director of the School of Social Work at Richmond Professional Institute (RPI), a division of the College of William and Mary, informed her that she would be admitted to the master's program, but at the same time warned her about the school's "awfully basic," even "primitive" character. He suggested she should attend one of the big schools in New York City or Chicago, where she would "find a more congenial atmosphere," colleagues with similar interests and backgrounds, and where she would "get more out of it." As much as she would have loved to follow his advice, moving away, even for the limited time that attending graduate school required, was not an option. This sentiment of being tied to her place both in a social and geographical sense was captured in her reply to the director's comments: "I am married to Richmond." So they agreed that she would take two classes during the upcoming summer session to explore the program, to see how well she can balance school work and her domestic responsibilities, and then decide whether or not to join the program full time in the fall.<sup>132</sup>

Just as Fischer entered summer school at RPI in June 1942, Gottlieb received a job with the armed forces. He transferred his responsibilities to Fischer, who was hired as acting executive director of the Richmond Jewish Community Council, which was "the highest position I ever held in my life, before I even had any training."<sup>133</sup> The contract

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<sup>132</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 June 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 52.

<sup>133</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: "Und dann wurde ich the acting director of the Jewish Community Council, die höchste Stelle, die ich je in meinem Leben eingenommen habe, bevor ich je eine Ausbildung hatte."

stipulated a work load of three hours a day and a monthly salary of sixty dollars.<sup>134</sup> By July she struggled to keep up with her miscellaneous responsibilities. She felt guilty about neglecting her daughter, who spent most days with Fischer's grandmother. While she liked the social work program, she thought she did not perform as well as she ought to, because of the limited time she could dedicate to her school work. This also left her pessimistic about the possibility of continuing the program in the fall. As the social work program at RPI only admitted full-time students, she had doubts about the feasibility of combining her studies with her new job. This job caused her the biggest headache. While she was happy finally to be paid for her refugee work, she had to take over all the responsibilities of the executive director, as she had feared. Gottlieb had held a full-time position, and Anne Fischer had taken care of the refugee work as a volunteer. For Fischer, the RJCC had converted all responsibilities into one part-time job. Instead of the three hours per day that her contract entailed, she sometimes worked up to ten hours, which she and some of her friends and colleagues found infuriating.<sup>135</sup> When she addressed this situation in a conversation with Samuel Binswanger, the president of the RJCC, he responded by wondering what she was doing all day anyway.<sup>136</sup>

The low salary reflected the attitude of at least some of the RJCC leadership toward Anne Fischer in the position of acting executive director of the organization. While she scored a partial victory, as the RJCC executive committee granted her a full-time position and a monthly pay of one hundred dollars by mid-August, the committee

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<sup>134</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 June 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 52.

<sup>135</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 July 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 53.

<sup>136</sup> [Ibid] Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 July 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 53. Flabbergasted by this insult, Fischer talked to her husband, who in turn consulted with a Southern gentleman about how to react appropriately. The gentleman saw two possibilities: Anne Fischer should either resign immediately, or her husband would have to challenge the president.

made it clear that they preferred a male director.<sup>137</sup> Since the search for a suitable successor could take a long time, the president advised her to conduct her work as if she would keep her position until further notice. Her supporters, on the other hand, reassured her that she would not be removed any time soon, because the RJCC would not be able to afford a male director with the profile envisioned by the opposing camp.<sup>138</sup>

The community leaders' ideas about gender roles constituted a significant factor that contributed to the difficult situation Anne Fischer encountered as acting executive director of the RJCC. As the Jewish women had their own organizations, the president of the RJCC and his allies objected to a woman heading an organization that included both women and men. These gender-based reservations coincided with a crisis of the RJCC. Some members feared that the RJCC might fall apart if they failed to recruit a strong, that is male, leader with experience and the ability to restructure the organization, which seven years into its existence faced serious challenges.<sup>139</sup> Reasons for the crisis included mismanagement during the previous years resulting in a strained financial situation, as well as discontentment among the larger community about the hegemony of German Jews on the Council.<sup>140</sup> The rhetoric of the opposition to Fischer was based on gender, but her German origin may have also worked to her disadvantage. Thus, while it is questionable that Fischer would have been welcome as an executive director even in less

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<sup>137</sup> Fischer had threatened to resign if the hours and her pay were not adjusted. Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 24 August 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 54.

<sup>138</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 September 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 55.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Failure to collect money pledged at the annual community drive for several years resulted in missing funds up to a quarter of the RJCC's yearly budget. The conflict about the Council's composition was more difficult to rectify. Founded in 1935, the RJCC was initially governed by members of the Jewish establishment of Richmond, who were predominantly of German ancestry and members of the congregation Beth Ahabah. Jews of Eastern European origin felt left out and demanded a say in the RJCC resulting in the restructuring of the organization in 1945, allowing a better representation of the conservative and orthodox Jews, who were actually in the majority in the local population. Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 296.

turbulent times, the critical situation of the RJCC in the early 1940s was not a time in which the representatives dared to experiment with the Council's leadership.

Fischer handed in her resignation from the position of acting executive director of the RJCC in November 1942.<sup>141</sup> She had decided to go to university and get a degree in social work, which was not compatible with her job, where she felt like a place holder for her yet to be found successor. Hermann Simon, who was about to join the armed forces in December, supported her decision.<sup>142</sup> To him a university degree that accredited Fischer for the field of work in which she was interested and in which she had already gained experience, seemed a sensible undertaking. However, he was very skeptical about "psychoanalysis of American make," the main driving force in social work at the time. He beseeched Fischer: "You know how I dislike the National Refugee Service social workers on account of their psychoanalysis psychosis – so please keep free from it and remain as you are."<sup>143</sup> Even if she wanted to, it would have been difficult, as the program offered in Richmond represented the main stream of social work at the time, which was social casework dominated by psychoanalytical therapy. She recalled that having read Freud back in Europe put her in an advantageous position in her program at a time, when her student colleagues, who she described as very religious overall, reacted with shock to such revolutionary ideas.<sup>144</sup>

Fischer attended the School of Social Work at Richmond Professional Institute starting in 1943.<sup>145</sup> As the school's director had warned her the previous year, Fischer

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<sup>141</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 November 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 57.

<sup>142</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 21 November 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 52.

<sup>143</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 29 February 1943, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 55.

<sup>144</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>145</sup> On RPI see Hibbs, *A History of the Richmond Professional Institute*.

encountered a program that did not live up to her intellectual expectations of a university education, nor was it conducive to her preferred style of learning. Even before she entered the School of Social Work, she bluntly conveyed her impression of the faculty to Simon: “The teachers are bad and unimaginative, thus they have students memorize material, which is incredibly difficult for a forty-year-old person.”<sup>146</sup> In that same letter, she also expressed her very personal reason for her decision to go to graduate school, despite the shortcomings of the program. She had realized that she “felt uncomfortable in her existence” and accused Simon of not helping her to alleviate this situation. “So I will have to help myself. I just couldn’t come up with anything better yet.”<sup>147</sup> While Fischer’s studies kept her busy to an extent that she once again felt guilty about neglecting her daughter, she insisted that she did not feel challenged intellectually. On the contrary, she had a “feeling of mental deterioration under the impact of ... [her] university studies.”<sup>148</sup>

Even though Fischer was less than thrilled about the quality of instruction at the School of Social Work, she did appreciate the theory of social casework and was excited about the psychological and psychoanalytical elements that had become central to the profession. She was particularly impressed by what she considered the “efficiency of psychoanalytic theories and their application” in treating clients.<sup>149</sup> Considering her previous work as an untrained volunteer who had to deal with difficult interpersonal encounters, sometimes with refugees traumatized by unspeakable atrocities, for which she had not been adequately prepared, it is understandable that learning psychological

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<sup>146</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 June 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 51. German original: “Die Lehrer sind schlecht u. ideenlos – also lassen sie auswendig lernen – und das fällt einem mit vierzig Jahren unheimlich schwer.”

<sup>147</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 June 1942, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 51. German original: “Also muss ich mir halt alleine helfen. Es ist mir bisher nur noch nichts besseres eingefallen.”

<sup>148</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 28 March 1943, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 56.

<sup>149</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 18 April 1943, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 57.

principles as translated into social work practices was an epiphany for her. In retrospect Fischer remarked that “it was such a wonderful experience . . . that the work could be substantiated by theory, that there was a frame of reference for it. This was such an exhilarating experience for me as a student. And I was already over forty!”<sup>150</sup> She acquired a pool of systematic methods, with which to approach the relationships with her clients, instead of having to rely on her common sense and intuition, which had resulted in her frequently feeling inadequate. Simon, whose opinion she valued above all else, tried to find a positive aspect of her “present professional ideology.”<sup>151</sup> As he had often criticized her for being too emotional, immature, and irrational, he remarked: “I am glad to see . . . that you seem to be able to apply your new psychological knowledge with some detachment and make it more a part of your general outlook upon the world.”<sup>152</sup>

In the spring 1944, Fischer started working on her thesis, in which she explored “the mentality, adjustment, and general attitude of the immigrants,” based on her own experience in refugee work.<sup>153</sup> As in many refugee-related instances before, Simon offered his advice. In the case of Fischer’s thesis, he suggested she look into publications such as *Aufbau* and *Contemporary Jewish Record* to analyze what refugees had written about their experiences, and use refugee statistics from the National Council of Jewish Women and the National Refugee Service. In doing so, he subtly encouraged her to look beyond the core focus of psychoanalytical social work literature and create what he considered a more interesting thesis. Her work seemed to pay off and impress the faculty.

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<sup>150</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler. German original: “Es war so ein wunderbares Erlebnis für mich selber, dass man diese Arbeit mit einer Lehrtheorie unterbauen konnte. Dass man diesem Ding einen frame of reference geben konnte. Das war so ein beglückendes Erlebnis für mich als Student. Und ich war doch schon über vierzig!”

<sup>151</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 18 April 1943, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 57.

<sup>152</sup> (Ibid.) Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 4 April 1943, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 2, Folder 57.

<sup>153</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 8 March 1944, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 3, Folder 11.

Curt Bondy, a psychologist from Hamburg, at the time a faculty member at the College of William and Mary, reported in a letter to Simon that in a faculty meeting a teacher from the School of Social Work said:<sup>154</sup> “We have only one student who is able to work scientifically, that is Mrs. Fischer.”<sup>155</sup>

She graduated with a Master’s of Science in Social Work (M.S.S.W.) in the summer 1944 with a thesis titled “A Study of the Problem of the Refugee in Richmond.”<sup>156</sup> With her degree in hand, Fischer embarked on an active career in social work. Even before graduation, she had received job offers from two local agencies, the Family Service Society and the Memorial Child Guidance Clinic, the first child guidance clinic in the South. She joined the former as a caseworker and finally entered the professional ranks of social work after almost a decade of volunteer work with the RJCC.<sup>157</sup> While she was not an employee of the child guidance clinic, she also worked closely with this agency, thus attempting “to establish the close cooperation between the two organizations which they ... would like to have.”<sup>158</sup> In 1945 she left the Family

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<sup>154</sup> Curt Bondy, who had studied with William Stern, headed a project (Lehrgut Groß Breesen) in Germany, in which young Jews lived together on a farm to learn agriculture in preparation for their emigration to South America. After serious threats from the National Socialists, Bondy left Germany for the USA in 1939. The possibility to go to South America had fallen through by that time, but he found a supporter in William Thalheimer, who bought a farm near Richmond to continue the project (called Hyde Farmland), which enabled about twenty-five young Jews to escape from Germany. Bondy and Fischer became good friends, and she often visited the farm and helped as much as she could. The project eventually faltered in 1941, and Bondy found a job at the College of William and Mary. Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

<sup>155</sup> Curt Bondy to Hermann Simon, quoted in Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 30 May 1944, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 3, Folder 13. Simon commented to Fischer: “I felt not only proud of you, but also sorry for the College.”

<sup>156</sup> Fischer, Anne. “A Study of the Problem of the Refugee in Richmond.” Thesis (M.S.S.W.), Richmond Professional Institute, 1944.

<sup>157</sup> The Family Service Society of Richmond was the largest private agency in Richmond, which was founded in 1906 in order to coordinate the numerous scattered charity organizations in the area. See Mary Frances Shelburne, “A Brief History of the Family Service Society of Richmond, Virginia”(Master’s Thesis, College of William & Mary, 1932).

<sup>158</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 8 June 1943, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 3, Folder 14. Being a liaison between two or more agencies and create modes of cooperation would also be one of her tasks in Germany.

Service Society for the child guidance clinic, where she served as a caseworker and supervisor until 1952.<sup>159</sup>

Her training had been firmly rooted in the Freudian diagnostic tradition, but in her practice she appeared to incorporate elements from the functional school. In fact, she explained that the training was Freudian, but the practice was not. Social workers adopted from psychoanalysis talking as the key element, as opposed to home visits, for example.<sup>160</sup> Otherwise it seemed to be mostly a theoretical frame, which they found useful. Just like the other women in this study, Fischer had to find a way between psychoanalytic social work and more functional approaches that she deemed appropriate for her practice. There is no evidence that this conflict between the two major case-work schools in New York and Philadelphia mattered to Fischer, nor that this was an issue within social work circles in Richmond. The first social work book that she mentioned as having been so helpful in her refugee work, was, in fact the foundational text of the functional school. In her teaching, however, she used the canonical textbook of the diagnostic tradition. In the oral history interview, she used terminology that was typical of the functional school. For example, she emphasized the importance of process and of reflecting what it means to give help and what it means to accept help—which is almost a verbatim agreement with what Leichter called the core of her approach to social work, and what she had learned in Philadelphia. Thus, like the other case studies in this dissertation, Fischer was pragmatic and flexible in using techniques and methods. While she identified as a social worker, the profession and her status in it did not seem overly important to her. What mattered were her clients and her community, and she continued

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<sup>159</sup> “Curriculum Vitae of Anne Fischer,” Fischer supplement, DZI.

<sup>160</sup> Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler.

practicing combining tools that she considered in the best interest for the people she worked with, even if that meant that she was not on the cutting edge of her profession.

Even when Fischer had seemingly settled into a successful career by the late 1940s and early 1950s, she still was not quite satisfied with her life. Her personal situation was still unresolved twenty-five years after her relationship with Simon began. In 1953, Fischer's desire to change her life and to leave the confines of her existence in Richmond welled up forcefully. While fantasies of leaving her husband and joining Simon in New York are almost constantly present throughout the years in her correspondence, now was the first time that she took concrete measures toward this step. She inquired about social work jobs in New York and discussed her situation with a divorce lawyer. More importantly, she and her husband Ernst agreed that they should go through with the separation, and she even informed the children.<sup>161</sup> In the end, however, she never divorced Ernst, and she lived in Richmond for the rest of her life. She did not give up her relationship to Hermann Simon, either. It appears that she arrived at a mode of reconciling the elements in her life that had previously caused so much tension, and that she gained a realistic and pragmatic understanding of both her own life in Richmond and her relationship to Simon. Simon's lucid analysis reveals the core issues at stake: "You know that I would consider it a mistake if you broke up with 'Richmond' without having acquired an inner freedom and independence...Do you remember the tenet that one doesn't live in a 'concept' but always in reality? Your so-called 'appearance' [life in Richmond and marriage to Ernst] is also a reality and truth, which you shouldn't turn into

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<sup>161</sup> See for example Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 27 May 1953, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 2, and 5 August 1953, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 3.

an un-reality because you dislike your existence.”<sup>162</sup> Her life in Richmond, which she often described as merely keeping up appearances, was richer and more substantial than she was ready to admit, even though fraught with problems. Invitations to work in Germany provided temporary respite, and she was convinced that her work there was meaningful, perhaps more so than in Richmond.

Between 1952 and 1968, Fischer went to Germany seven times, each time for six or seven months, to train social workers and to work as a consultant (these overseas assignments will be the subject of chapter 4 – Epilogue). Being out of the country for such extended periods of time resulted in an atypical career for an American social worker. A permanent position at an agency or a university did not allow such repeated, extensive absences. Fischer’s career developed a pattern, in which these assignments in Germany alternated with short-term positions in Virginia.

She worked as a case-supervisor at the Richmond Children’s Aid Society from mid-1954 to mid-1955. From 1957 to 1960, she was an assistant professor at the School of Social Work, RPI, where she supervised student field work, and taught classes in “Social Casework,” “Social Services for Children,” as well as “Human Growth and Development.” From 1961 to 1964, she returned to the Memorial Guidance Clinic, where she held various positions, ranging from intake supervisor, to chief psychiatric social worker, to director of psychiatric social services. In the summer 1965, she taught a course on “Casework Practices for Visiting Teachers” at the University of Virginia in

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<sup>162</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 27 May 1953, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 4, Folder 18. German original: “Wie Du weißt, würde ich es für falsch halten, wenn Du Dich von ‘Richmond’ trenntest, ohne vorher die innere Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit gewonnen zu haben...Erinnerst Du Dich an den Grundsatz, dass man nicht im ‘Konzept’ sondern immer wirklich lebt? Dein sogenannter ‘Schein’ ist auch eine Wirklichkeit und eine Wahrheit, die man nicht durch eine Abneigung gegen seine Existenz zur Unwirklichkeit machen sollte.”

Charlottesville. After this teaching position, Fischer assumed the executive directorship of the Jewish Family Services, which she held until mid-1967. After her last assignment in Germany from fall 1967 to spring 1968, she served as a social work consultant for the Virginia Department of Education, and she held visiting faculty positions at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, until 1974, when she retired and once again directed her energy to volunteering in the Richmond community.<sup>163</sup>

## Conclusion

When Anne Fischer died at the age of 105 in April 2008, many members of the Jewish community in Richmond remembered her involvement as a volunteer and activist, which she had kept up until late in her life. Anne and Ernst Fischer's names have been familiar to a wider circle, however, in a context entirely unrelated to social work. When the Fischers moved to the United States in the 1930s, they brought with them a major collection of German expressionist paintings including works by August Macke, Emil Nolde, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Wassily Kandinsky, which Fischer made accessible either to the many guests who visited their home, or through temporary exhibits in the area.<sup>164</sup> After Fischer's death, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) acquired the

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<sup>163</sup> "Curriculum Vitae of Anne Fischer," Fischer supplement, DZI.

<sup>164</sup> This collection constituted half of the art collection of Ernst's parents, Ludwig and Rosy Fischer. Ernst's brother Max, who emigrated to the United States a year after Ernst, was supposed to take the other half with him, but the paintings got confiscated, lost, destroyed, or sold in the meantime. Anne and Ernst's collection included twenty-one pieces by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, whose paintings reached extraordinary prices at art auctions, for example 38 Million Dollars in 2006, and 9 Million Dollars in 2009. Catharine Calos, "Museum Acquires German Collection," *The Winchester Star*, August 3, 2009; Catharine Calos, "Va. Museum Acquires prized German Expressionist Art," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 24, 2009, accessed August 15, 2014, [http://www.timesdispatch.com/entertainment-life/va-museum-acquires-prized-german-expressionist-art/article\\_4fe619c4-e3ca-58fd-bd59-5aedc70508f1.html](http://www.timesdispatch.com/entertainment-life/va-museum-acquires-prized-german-expressionist-art/article_4fe619c4-e3ca-58fd-bd59-5aedc70508f1.html).

collection of about two hundred pieces of art, which “elevated VMFA’s holdings of German Expressionism to international significance.”<sup>165</sup>

At any stage of her life in the United States, Fischer had to reconcile multiple responsibilities and activities, in part due to her own volition, in part by historical circumstances, and in part imposed by social roles, which were tied to expectations regarding gender and class as well as increasingly framed by her moral sense growing out of Judaism. These complex demands as well as possible ways to meet them were recognized by others, as evidenced by the statement by two of her granddaughters that was presented at Fischer’s memorial service: “She would...give us confidence that we could aspire to anything...but she also made it clear that whatever we did, we had to do well...Nothing was undertaken for our own ambition alone, but because it had the potential to make the world a better place...When we were growing up, Anne showed us that a woman could have a profession, could be involved in the wider world, could be a sophisticated hostess, could support art, music and politics, could juggle any number of roles, and still remain her essential self – complex, challenging, and curious.”<sup>166</sup>

Her professional activities, both volunteer and salaried positions, entailed collaborations that bridged her personal and professional life. Scholarship on spousal collaboration in science has shown the multifaceted entanglements of husbands’ and wives’ work.<sup>167</sup> While Fischer’s contribution to her husband’s work in physiology was

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<sup>165</sup> “About the Collection: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century European Art,” Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://vmfa.museum/collections/early-20th-century-european-art/>.

<sup>166</sup> Clare Davies and Sheila Dawson, cited in Bruce Kahn, *Memories of Anne Rosenberg Fischer*, 2008, LBI, Manuscript MS 778.

<sup>167</sup> See for example Helena M. Pycior, Nancy G Slack, and Pnina G. Abir-Am (eds.) *Creative Couples in the Sciences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Annette Lykknes, Donald Opitz, and Brigitte van Tiggelen (eds.) *For Better or for Worse? Collaborative Couples in the Sciences* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2012).

modest, she helped him in an assisting capacity intermittently over the decades. She served as lab partner, took photograph of organisms Ernst worked on, and translated and edited conference presentations as well as articles. In the early 1940s, prospects of government work in Washington, D.C., emerged for Ernst, and she considered abandoning refugee work and becoming her husband's part-time lab assistant.<sup>168</sup> More important than working with her husband, however, was the collaboration she upheld with Hermann Simon, who was also a significant life-long partner, who co-existed, sometimes in a peaceful but mostly in an antagonistic relationship, with her husband. While Fischer did not mention Simon once in her oral history interview, her personal correspondence reveals the essential role he played in her life, not only for her emotional wellbeing. It was through him that she got involved in refugee work and, as a consequence, became a social worker.

Fischer's involvement in refugee aid started as a transnational cooperation with Simon when she organized documents in the United States he needed for his clients in Germany, who prepared to leave the country. Accomplishing similar tasks, that is acquiring affidavits for prospective Jewish immigrants to the Richmond area, was a major part of her involvement in the next stage of extra-domestic activities that she carried out as a volunteer for the Richmond Jewish Community Council and the Richmond chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, both of which cooperated with the National Refugee Service. As more refugees from Germany settled in the Richmond area, Fischer's responsibilities changed from primarily administrative tasks to assistance of the newly arrived in processes such as getting settled, finding

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<sup>168</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 28 October 1941, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 6, Folder 44. Ernst was not called to Washington, and the family stayed in Richmond.

accommodation, jobs, schools for their children, as well as providing emotional and psychological support. As a German émigré herself, she used her unique perspective to mediate between the organizations, the refugees, and the locals. This volunteer work brought her en route to a professional social work career, becoming the acting executive director of the RJCC, before getting a Master's degree in social work, and then holding various positions in social work agencies, as well as teaching appointments, in addition to training social workers in Germany after World War II.

In contrast to other women in this study, who enthusiastically joined the social work profession soon after their arrival in the United States, Fischer was hesitant. In part, she did not want to commit for personal reasons, since she was hoping for many years to leave Richmond and join Simon in New York. Ultimately, she was drawn to social work neither by ideological reasons nor scholarly interest, nor by economic necessity. As a middle-class woman, wife of a faculty member at the local college and mother of two children living in a medium-sized town, Fischer did not consider taking up employment for several years after immigrating to the United States. Instead, she was engaged in what she considered charity at first, which was considered in her community a morally and socially appropriate endeavor for a woman in her position, and which eventually led her into professional social work. Besides her social standing, the kind of social work education, and perhaps also practice, she encountered in Richmond was a less intellectually exciting version than what other émigré women found in places like New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia, which were centers of innovation, in which some of the émigrés participated. Women such as Leichter, Schulman, and Konopka found a way to feed productively their experience, intellectual

interest, and desire to contribute to social reform in the blossoming field of social work. The version of social work Fischer had available in Richmond was more basic and perhaps more typical for many women in social work, but Fischer's rather affluent background renders her not exactly representative of the majority of women émigrés. Nevertheless, her struggles to identify, combine, and move between different personal and professional strategies were similar to many others, who found a vocation in social work. Careers like Konopka's, Leichter's and Schulman's were exceptional and not available to the majority of women, who found ways to function in (semi-)professional positions in their communities.

And yet, the type of mainstream casework Fischer was taught helped her both to come to terms and better understand her experience in refugee work she had done as an untrained volunteer, as well to get the training necessary for future professional practice. Her subsequent work in various Richmond agencies provided her with some satisfaction and sense of achievement. However, she experienced the highest professional fulfillment when she went back to Germany several times in the 1950s and 1960s to help rebuild welfare services and to train social workers, as the next chapter, the epilogue, will briefly discuss.

**CHAPTER FOUR – EPILOGUE**  
**TRANSATLANTIC TEACHERS: ANNE FISCHER’S AND GISELA KONOPKA’S**  
**WORK IN POST-WAR GERMANY**

By the time World War II ended, the women in this study had completed their social work training and had started to settle into their American careers. They felt at home both in their profession and in the United States, and they had no desire to move back to Europe. The refugees and exiles had become immigrants. This did not mean that they had cut all ties to Europe, however. Even though all the émigrés had a troubled relationship with their societies of origin, some of them were willing to contribute to the rebuilding efforts in Europe. In doing so, they had to negotiate an underlying tension created by their own complex motivations for returning to Central Europe, on the one hand, and their obligations to the goals of their sponsor, which in many cases was the U.S. State Department. This epilogue illustrates the émigrés’ ongoing commitment and connections to Europe, which proved consequential for their careers and for their self-understanding entailing both rewarding and troubling elements. They returned temporarily, contributed to the rebuilding efforts of their former home countries, maintained contact for decades afterwards, and became nodes in a transnational network in social work that emerged after World War II.

Emigrés were involved in European social work and welfare in the post-War years.<sup>1</sup> All protagonists of this dissertation, except for Gerda Schulman, went back to

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<sup>1</sup> The total number of émigrés in social work who were involved in European reconstruction after WWII has yet to be determined. This is a difficult task, however, as many different organizations were involved. From the thirty-four social workers interviewed by Joachim Wieler for his oral history project, about a third was active in Europe after World War II. Joachim Wieler, “Zusammenfassung und Ausblick,” in *Emigrierte Sozialarbeit: Portraits vertriebener SozialarbeiterInnen*, ed. Joachim Wieler and Susanne Zeller (Freiburg im Breisgau: Lambertus, 1995), 306.

Europe at some point to teach or serve as consultants for welfare institutions.<sup>2</sup> While a comprehensive analysis of émigrés' activities in Europe has yet to be conducted, this epilogue follows Gisela Konopka and Anne Fischer to Germany for a brief exploration of their overseas assignments. They worked in Germany for the U.S. State Department's International Educational Exchange Service in the early 1950s, administered by the High Commission for Occupied Germany (HICOG), and later for German organizations.<sup>3</sup>

After World War II, the American government sought out former émigrés to send to Germany as re-educators with the tasks of assisting the Germans in rebuilding welfare services, bringing the German social work profession up to date with international (meaning American) standards, and ultimately contributing to the democratization of German society.<sup>4</sup> According to a HICOG guideline from September 1, 1950, U.S. specialists had to be “citizens of the United States highly qualified and professionally prominent, whose services are desired in Germany to confer and advise with German agencies on pertinent questions in their specific fields in conjunction with projects planned, according to indicated need, by various HICOG substantive divisions.”<sup>5</sup> While

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<sup>2</sup> They did not necessarily go back to their home countries to offer their services. Elsa Leichter, for example, only worked in Germany, never in Austria, to where she returned regularly for vacation.

<sup>3</sup> In a future project, I would like to mine this topic more thoroughly. This will entail expanding the focus to include U.S. government initiatives and private organizations (e.g. Quaker initiatives, Unitarian Service Committee), as well as assignments both in Austria and Germany.

<sup>4</sup> For some examples of an extensive body of literature on American post-War activities in and influences on Europe, see Karl-Heinz Füssl, *Deutsch-amerikanischer Kulturaustausch im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2004); Philipp Gassert, “Amerikanismus, Antiamerikanismus, Amerikanisierung: Neue Literatur zur Sozial-, Wirtschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des amerikanischen Einflusses in Deutschland und Europa,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 39 (1999): 531–61; Uta Gerhardt, “Re-Education als Demokratisierung der Gesellschaft Deutschlands durch das amerikanische Besatzungsregime: Ein historischer Bericht,” *Leviathan* 27 (1999): 355–85; Uta Gerhardt, *Denken der Demokratie: Die Soziologie im atlantischen Transfer des Besatzungsregimes* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007); Ellen Latzin, *Lernen von Amerika? Das US-Kulturaustauschprogramm für Bayern und seine Absolventen* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> HICOG guideline, September 1, 1950, quoted in Carl Wolfgang Müller, *Wie Helfen zum Beruf wurde: Eine Methodengeschichte der Sozialarbeit, 1945 - 1985* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1988), 141.

the official statement is rather broad, the specific requirements for these specialists in the social work field made it difficult to find suitable candidates.<sup>6</sup> German language proficiency was an advantage. Political orientation was also important. The United States government was interested in sending persons who were motivated to contribute to democratization. This motivation could be found in former left-leaning refugees, particularly like Konopka, who had been active in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. Professional aptitude was obviously crucial. The delegates needed to be advanced social workers and experienced teachers with intercultural sensitivity and an ability to endure emotional and physical stress. While empathy and a thorough understanding of and feel for German culture and social conventions was not discussed by the American officials as requirements for the mission to Germany, these aspects eventually proved significant for the women's ability to carry out their tasks.

The émigré social workers returning to Germany to help rebuild welfare services and to train German social workers brought with them theories, methods, and practices that they had acquired during their American training and professional experience.<sup>7</sup> In his book on the history of social work methods that focuses on Germany, C. Wolfgang Müller deplored that “German anti-fascists and émigrés played no role in the planning of re-education and re-orientation programs, but were only involved in the implementation, if at all.”<sup>8</sup> While Anne Fischer and Gisela Konopka did not participate in drafting the re-

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<sup>6</sup> Konopka's correspondence with the American administration in Germany reveals the difficulties in finding people who met the requirements put forth by the American government.

<sup>7</sup> A detailed exploration of how the women adapted these theories, methods, and practices to the local conditions, and how the German social workers reacted and, perhaps further modified them, will be part of a future project.

<sup>8</sup> Müller, *Wie Helfen zum Beruf wurde*, 143. German original: “Es fällt auf und macht nachdenklich, dass deutsche Antifaschisten und Emigranten bei der Planung von Umerziehungs- und Umorientierungs-Programmen keine oder nur eine ausführende Rolle gespielt haben.”

education programs, the assumption of a clear division between planning and implementing these measures does not reflect the turbulent realities of those years, nor does it do justice to the émigrés' work in Germany. Their roles were more diverse than those of carriers of theories, methods, and practices. First, they could not always rely on detailed instructions regarding the specifics of the work and thus had to make decisions about content and procedures or weigh in on them. Secondly, they considered very carefully what kind of advice or training was appropriate in different contexts, taking into account the state of knowledge of the German colleagues, the infrastructure in which they had to work, and the personalities and attitudes of the people they encountered. Fischer's and Konopka's correspondence contains detailed descriptions of their day-to-day experiences in Germany illuminating the numerous strategic and practical decisions inherent in their work as translators of professional practices and culture.<sup>9</sup> As this epilogue will illustrate, pursuing the ultimate goal of improving social relations in their former home country, they shaped their missions by making decisions about what theories, methods, and practices to teach, by varying strategies of communication and teaching, and by developing, in cooperation with their German colleagues, appropriate modes of operation for welfare institutions. This provided them with an experience which, in turn, once again transformed their thinking about themselves as German-Americans and social workers.

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<sup>9</sup> Doris Bachmann-Medick, "Introduction: The Translational Turn" *Translation Studies* 2 (2009): 2–16; for a discussion of the potential of "translation" as an analytical concept for history, see Simone Lässig "Übersetzungen in der Geschichte – Geschichte als Übersetzung? Überlegungen zu einem analytischen Konzept und Forschungsgegenstand für die Geschichtswissenschaft" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38 (2012): 189–216.

## **American Delegates in Germany**

In the summer of 1950, Konopka went to Germany under the auspices of HICOG. This was the first time she returned to Germany after she had left in 1937. From mid-June until mid-September 1950, her task was to assist and advise in the rebuilding of social services, particularly the child welfare system. Her specific task assigned by the State Department was “to stimulate and assist German plans for the development of child welfare services toward better diagnosis of needs and more individualized care as are necessary to prevent delinquency, destitution and other social maladjustment and also to improve child welfare training by in-service training courses and new methods to be applied by schools of social work.”<sup>10</sup> To this end, Konopka worked as a consultant and lecturer at correctional institutions, child welfare services, and child guidance clinics in Berlin and Hamburg.<sup>11</sup>

While Konopka never moved back to Germany indefinitely, she frequently returned to Europe in various capacities, sometimes for time periods as long as three months at a time. After this first trip in 1950, she returned for a second round in 1951, when she stayed for two months. The next extended stay took her to Hamburg, Berlin, and Nuremberg in 1956, again under the auspices of the U.S. State Department. In 1960, she accepted an invitation from the Unitarian Service Committee to teach in Bremen. In 1961 she used her sabbatical semester to go to the Netherlands on a Fulbright Grant, primarily to study the treatment of juvenile delinquents. While the primary motivation was to study, she also took the opportunity of being in Europe for lecturing, teaching,

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<sup>10</sup>Theodore M. Willcox to Gisela Konopka, 2 February 1950, Konopka papers I, UMNA, Box 17, Folder K837 “Correspondence Re summers in Germany Jan 30, 1949-Feb. 13, 1951”.

<sup>11</sup>“Biography. Gisela Konopka, DSW, ILCSW. Professor Emeritus, Center for Youth Development and Research. Professor of Social Work and Pediatrics,” Konopka papers I, UMNA, Box 1, Folder “Biographical Timeline of G. Konopka. 1929-88.”

consulting, and networking both in the Netherlands and beyond. Her lecturing and teaching activities in the following years took her mostly around North and South America, as well as to Israel, and in 1965 she returned to Germany as a lecturer at the Victor Gollancz Academy in Erlangen and at the University of Frankfurt.<sup>12</sup> The Victor Gollancz Academy invited her back in 1967, when she also lectured at the University of Cologne. The list of short stays for conferences, lectures, and short workshops, in addition to these longer trips, is extensive and spanning the globe and awaits further analysis. This epilogue focuses on her involvement in Germany in the 1950s, where introducing her German colleagues to group work, her specialty, was among her main tasks.

Anne Fischer's first overseas assignment as a Welfare Specialist for the U.S. State Department took her to Mannheim from October 1952 to April 1953 to help set up a child guidance clinic and to train its clinical staff.<sup>13</sup> This clinic had been founded two years earlier with American money by the psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich. With inadequate premises and, more importantly, staff that was not properly trained for their responsibilities, the institution had faced a rough start.<sup>14</sup> Paul Helwig, a psychologist and director of the clinic, had repeatedly asked for an expert to assist him in building the

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<sup>12</sup> Victor Gollancz was a British publisher, humanitarian, and organizer of various Jewish aid campaigns. After World War II he raised funds for youth welfare projects and training of youth social workers. The German government supported the initiative, which became fundamental in providing German social workers with advanced social work training, for example by inviting teachers from the United States. See, for example, Müller, *Wie Helfen zum Beruf wurde*; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> "Curriculum Vitae of Anne Fischer," Fischer supplement, DZI.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief history of the Mannheim clinic see Timo Hoyer, *Im Getümmel der Welt: Alexander Mitscherlich - Ein Porträt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 239ff.

institution.<sup>15</sup> Fischer's job was to get the clinic on track. As she had worked at the Memorial Guidance Clinic in Richmond for the previous seven years, she brought the necessary knowledge and experience for the task.<sup>16</sup>

Fischer returned to Mannheim for seven months in October 1953, and then again in October 1955. These two trips also took place under the auspices of the U.S. State Department, but in cooperation with the Welfare Department of the City of Mannheim. Her main assignment was to work with the Public Family Welfare Service, particularly to train the personnel involved in child and family welfare. In October 1956, she started her fourth round of teaching and training in Germany, this time in Hamburg, where she taught social casework and served as a supervisor for twenty German social workers. She was sponsored by the Victor Gollancz Foundation and cooperated with this foundation three more times. From October 1960 to June 1961, she trained social workers in Frankfurt/Main. From September 1964 to April 1965 and from October 1967 to April 1968, she taught social casework and supervision in Erlangen.<sup>17</sup>

The émigrés were involved in more areas of exchange than just their assignments in Germany. The group of U.S. specialists working in Europe, such as Konopka and Fischer, was much smaller than Europeans visiting and studying in the United States, which was the other part of the exchange program. Émigrés also participated stateside, for example by teaching and fostering relationships with foreign students, recommending

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<sup>15</sup> While Fischer referred to Helwig as director of the clinic, Hoyer described him a deputy director, while presumably Mitscherlich, at least at the beginning, held the title of director. In this epilogue, I will follow Fischer's lead. Hoyer, *Im Getümmel der Welt*, 241.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Fischer never found out exactly why the government chose her to go to Germany. She suspected that a German exchange student who studied in Virginia and stayed with the Fischers perhaps mentioned her in his report to the U.S. State Department and recommended her for an overseas post. Anne Fischer, interview by Joachim Wieler. Consulting the records of the State Department at the National Archives should help clarify this question.

<sup>17</sup> "Curriculum Vitae of Anne Fischer," Fischer supplement, DZI.

people to come to the United States, and later also by recommending them for professional and academic positions. Konopka's position as professor of social work at the University of Minnesota and her role as a leader in the area of social group work afforded her influence. Her correspondence reveals that both American and German decision makers frequently asked her for recommendations of social workers for positions during the 1950s and 1960s. Not surprisingly, Konopka often recommended for key positions her own students or social workers who had attended her shorter training courses. Konopka's influence on German social work lasted until long after she had been there in person.<sup>18</sup> A similar dynamic is true for Fischer, even though on a smaller scale, as she did not hold a comparably prominent role in her profession. Neither did she have a permanent professorship and thus had not as many institutional means at her disposal. And yet, in a way reflecting her overall status and career, she fostered relationships with the leaders in Germany who she had worked with, mentored Germans who studied in Virginia, and advised and recommended social workers through her own widespread network, thus exerting some modest influence in an even less visible manner. When Konopka and Fischer set out for their first assignments in the early 1950s, however, these long-term implications were not at all foreseeable. While some Germans certainly welcomed them, they encountered resistance and antagonism, which they needed to overcome in order to work productively.

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<sup>18</sup> Margarete Krüger informed Meredith Wilson, president of the University of Minnesota, that "among the few German social workers who are holding a Master [sic] degree in Social Group Work from an US-University, most of them have been students at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis." Letter Margarete Krüger to O. Meredith Wilson, 4 August 1965, Konopka papers I, UMNA, Box 17, Folder "Correspondence re: Overseas Assignments: Germany 1967."

## German Encounters and Strategies Against Resistance

While Fischer's and Konopka's German roots worked in their favor for being appointed to their overseas assignments by the U.S. government, there were individuals among their German colleagues who met the émigrés with skepticism, reluctance, and outright hostility. In the first few weeks after her arrival in Germany, Anne Fischer, as usual, recounted her impressions to Hermann Simon. While she was not surprised by the authoritarian thinking that some of the social workers exhibited, she was still dismayed by it. Some Germans met the émigrés expecting sympathy for the hardships they had to endure during the allied bombings of German cities. Fischer commented that “the Germans have forgotten everything that had happened before the time, when they experienced the bombs in their cities.”<sup>19</sup>

Much of the conflict played out in strife over methods. A number of German welfare workers were skeptical and passionately antagonistic about methods that they perceived as American, which they considered alien to the German way of doing social work and unsuitable for their welfare system.<sup>20</sup> Fischer and Konopka understood this resistance and developed strategies to avoid it, for instance by eschewing terminology that they suspected would trigger rejection and hostility from the Germans and by finding ways to convey their messages in a language and manner that the Germans not only understood but were willing to accept.

Konopka approached such resistance in her work by trying to understand it in its

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<sup>19</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 20 Oktober 1952, Fischer Papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “... wie die Deutschen alles vergessen haben, was vor der Zeit liegt, da sie in ihren Städten die Bomben zu spüren bekamen.”

<sup>20</sup> See also Manfred Neuffer, “Die Rezeption der Amerikanischen Methoden der Sozialarbeit nach 1945 in Westdeutschland,” in *Innovation durch Grenzüberschreitung*, ed. Franz Hamburger (Rheinfelden: Schäuble, 1994), 131–48.

larger societal and historical context. Reflecting on her work later in life, she concluded that there had been two main reasons for this German resistance to American social workers. First, she understood that the Germans felt as if American social workers were forcing foreign theories and methods on the Germans. To her, resisting these processes was understandable, considering that in Germany “so many things were forced on people.”<sup>21</sup> She realized that she needed to tread carefully to reach her goals. As a second reason she identified xenophobia that she saw prevalent in German society at time.<sup>22</sup>

One of Konopka’s strategies to overcome this resistance was to avoid national labels when talking about social work theories, methods, and practices. This was only in part a rhetorical strategy, however. In addition, it reflected her knowledge of group work’s diverse history, as well as her firm conviction of its usefulness as a universal tool of democracy. She stressed that social group work was neither American nor German, but that it had multiple origins and was subject to ongoing modifications, as social workers use and adapt it to different needs and contexts.<sup>23</sup> Thus, she shifted the discourse and relieved her German colleagues from the necessity to take sides in this sensitive issue.

As a second strategy, Konopka avoided referring to social group work as a method during her first few trips in Germany, but instead in a very general manner as a way “to work with groups without forgetting about the individual,”<sup>24</sup> which she situated within the empowerment mission of social work as “helping people to help themselves.”<sup>25</sup> In doing so, she attempted to neutralize the potential feeling of being

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<sup>21</sup> Gisela Konopka, interview by Joachim Wieler, December 10, 1990, recording, German Central Institute for Social Issues, Berlin.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. German original: “Mit Gruppen arbeiten, ohne das Individuum zu vergessen.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

talked down to that the phrase "teaching the Germans a better method" could have elicited. Furthermore, the term 'method' can carry different meanings in different disciplines and languages. Instead of dealing with potential misunderstandings or varying perceptions between herself and her German colleagues that this idea of group work as a method might have entailed, she attempted to sidestep conflict or resentment that she knew would deflect from what she wanted the Germans to learn. In hindsight, she evaluated this approach as highly successful in that people were very accepting and that she did not encounter any problems.<sup>26</sup> In her 1951 report to the U.S. State Department, however, she was more nuanced and stressed the difficulties in interacting with the Germans. Even though Konopka concluded that eventually her German colleagues became friendlier towards her, this was the result of a process, in which she had to work hard to earn acceptance and cooperation: "The only way to improve them [i.e. human relations] is through continued and patient interchange in which those who are the helpers must accept a great deal of hostility. In every one of the courses I conducted, I have met distrust and hostility towards myself as a representative of America. Only by continuing to work together and even opening the possibility to express hostility, this feeling could slowly be overcome."<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the notes chronicling the feedback on a course she gave at a youth center in Berlin reveal that her strategies to avoid rejection and to neutralize the perception of American imperialism were at least partly successful and helped students to open up and learn. One student remarked: "I appreciate the fact that Ms. Konopka did not want to try to tell us that everything in the U.S. is perfect but that they have a struggle for

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Gisela Konopka, [no title], Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 19, Folder "Report on German Summer 1951," 8.

their ideas as we do.” Another participant addressed the sensitive issue of re-education: “I never had the feeling that were [sic] supposed to be reeducated but that we had something to contribute and that group work was based on knowledge and research done in many countries.” In a similar vein, another participant commented: “The most wonderful thing however was that she seemed to apologize about the fact that she even helped us.”<sup>28</sup>

Anne Fischer also encountered a defiant attitude as she started her work at the child guidance clinic in Mannheim. In contrast to Konopka, Fischer decided to employ the very methods that she was supposed to teach to overcome the Germans’ antagonism. After one of the first meetings with the director of the Mannheim child guidance clinic, she wrote to Simon: “I think we’ll get along well. He is just ‘touchy’ about ‘American’ methods and I have to try to elicit the changes, that I consider beneficial for the clinic, from within himself – using casework methods. Oh, dear, the situation requires endless discretion, in many directions.”<sup>29</sup> In addition to using her professional, interpersonal skills to make her colleagues well-disposed toward her, her German origin was a crucial factor. She could foreground commonalities and emphasize that she was one of them, which put her in a more advantageous situation compared to her American-born colleagues, who did not have this option.

While much of the discussions and conflicts revolved around American methods and their fit for German social work, a number of other issues resonated within this discourse. Perhaps the most profound among them concerned discrepant views about

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<sup>28</sup> Handwritten notes, Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 19, Folder “Report on German Summer 1951.”

<sup>29</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 4 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Ich glaube wir verstehen uns. Er ist nur ‘touchy’ gegen ‘amerikanische’ Methoden u. ich muss die changes die der Klinik meiner Ansicht nach gut täten, aus ihm selber zu entwickeln versuchen – mit case work Methoden. Oh Liebs, die Situation verlangt schon einen unendlichen Takt – nach vielen Richtungen hin.”

humans between the émigrés and some of the German welfare workers. For Konopka, social group work boiled down to “a way of putting human rights into practice.”<sup>30</sup>

Fischer came to Germany with an understanding of social casework also as an instrument of empowerment, which required respect for the clients and accepting them as human beings of equal worth to the therapist.<sup>31</sup> These ideals conflicted with basic concepts about the relationship between social worker and client that the émigrés encountered among their German colleagues. At times, Fischer grew desperate and doubted the entire mission, as she had the impression that she faced an unbridgeable disconnect between herself and her German colleagues. After a group discussion with German social workers about unemployed youth, she vented to Simon: “We had an animated discussion, and yet I feel depressed, because I have a growing feeling that we don’t quite understand each other. Even when we say the same, we don’t mean the same. When we [i.e. the Americans] say respectfully: The client needs to decide by himself – they [i.e. the Germans] somehow say it with contempt. Ultimately these social workers believe that one has to control, intervene, punish, and subdue.”<sup>32</sup>

This perspective, according to Fischer’s interpretation, was linked to an idea of man determined by heredity, a vestige from the National Socialist world view, which

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<sup>30</sup> Gisela Konopka, “Formation of Values in the Developing Person,” in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 43 (1973): 90.

<sup>31</sup> In the early 1950s, caseworkers and group workers in the United States insisted on a demarcation between their fields. However, the contrast with the profoundly different profession of post-War German social work puts the differences between group work and casework in perspective.

<sup>32</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 30 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Es war eine angeregte Diskussion, aber ich bin doch deprimiert, weil ich immer mehr das Gefühl hab, dass man sich eigentlich gar nicht recht versteht; selbst wenn man das gleiche sagt, meint man gar nicht das gleiche. Wo wir mit Respekt sagen: das muss der Patient selbst entscheiden – sagen sie’s irgendwie mit Verachtung. Im Grund meinen diese soc. workers doch immer, dass man kontrollieren, “einschreiten”, strafen, unterdrücken muss.”

continued to frame the thinking of some social workers:<sup>33</sup> “Here everything is full of predisposition and heredity... all social workers. It took a while until I realized the connection to Hitler. One of my main topics with the social workers is now [the idea] that people can change, and that we can help people to change.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Fischer identified a pivotal point. The concept of social work as encouraging human development and growth, as helping people help themselves is based on the premise that the clients have agency, that they can assume responsibility for their own lives, and they are capable of change. Even though not all of Fischer’s German colleagues were susceptible to these ideas, some indeed appreciated the input that opened up new directions in their work. Helwig, the director of the child guidance clinic, was among them and became an important ally for Fischer. In December 1952, about two months into her stay, Fischer was surprised to hear that Helwig had changed his opinion about American-style therapeutic social work, of which he had previously disapproved. He admitted that he had misunderstood it as superficial, formulaic and insensitive, but he had since learned from Fischer that he had been wrong. In fact, he and his colleagues “liked this new method, because it postulates a true respect of the person and the integrity of the patient – in contrast to approaches from the outside and top-down, to the authoritarian ‘intervention’

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<sup>33</sup> More research is needed in order to tease out the various strands of thinking inherent in German social work after World War II. National Socialist ideology certainly framed the thinking of many social workers, but it had itself built on already existing assumptions.

<sup>34</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 9 November 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Hier ist alles voll von Veranlagung u. Vererbung ... alle soc. workers. Es brauchte einige Zeit, bis mir der Zusammenhang mit Hitler aufging. Eins meiner Hauptthemen bei den Fürsorgerinnen ist nun, dass man sich ändern kann u. dass man jemand helfen kann sich zu ändern.”

of German therapists.” Enjoying a temporary sense of achievement, she added jokingly: “Now I can actually go home.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Flexible Identities**

The émigrés deliberately employed different configurations of their identities. Being perceived as either German or American entailed advantages and disadvantages. Over the years, Konopka and Fischer carved out space between these two poles, in which they could foreground the American or the German elements as needed. Germans, for the most part, considered Konopka American. In a letter to O. Meredith Wilson, president of the University of Minnesota, Margarete Krüger, a representative of the Victor Gollancz Foundation in Erlangen where Konopka taught in the 1960s, commented on Konopka’s value for the for the development of group work in Germany, conveyed some praising feedback from the students and concluded: “We had the privilege of having a true representative of the Social Work [sic] profession as well as your country among us.”<sup>36</sup> In a letter to Konopka, however, Krüger stressed the importance of Konopka being steeped in European intellectual traditions: “Our communication shows how much, despite your various American teaching and research duties, you are capable of thinking in our European ways.”<sup>37</sup> Konopka’s German upbringing and education was crucial in

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<sup>35</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 18 December 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “... dass die ihnen neu aufgehende Methode ihnen so gut gefalle weil sie den wahren Respekt vor der Person, der Integrität des Patienten voraussetze – im Gegensatz zum von aussen u. von oben/zum autoritären “Eingreifen” des detuschen Therapeuten. – Nun kann ich eigentlich nach Hause gehen.”

<sup>36</sup> Margarete Krüger to O. Meredith Wilson, 4 August, 1965, Konopka papers I, UMNA, Box 17, Folder “Correspondence re: Overseas Assignments: Germany 1967.”

<sup>37</sup> Margarete Krüger to Gisela Konopka, 3 May 1966, Konopka papers I, UMNA, Box 17, Folder “Correspondence re Overseas Assignments: Germany 1967.” German original: “...zeigt diese Verständigung mit Ihnen, wie stark Sie trotz Ihrer vielseitigen amerikanischen Lehr- und Forschungsaufgaben in unseren europäischen Bahnen zu denken vermögen.”

providing her with the necessary fluency both in intellectual matters as well as in interactions with her German colleagues. Pivotal elements that enabled go-betweens like Konopka to succeed in their work included the ability to translate ideas between two cultures, as they had acquired fluency in both, compassion or at least tolerance for both cultures, as well as the ability to shift between identities without losing themselves.

Konopka was explicit about her allegiance to the United States, which even intensified while she was abroad. During her stay in Germany in the summer 1950, when Konopka had only been at the University of Minnesota for three years and in the United States for ten years, she sent a letter to Dean Theodore Blegen, saying that “Being far from home, it made me feel that I belonged to the University of Minnesota.”<sup>38</sup> Konopka’s trips to Germany were important for the processes of negotiating her identity. On the one hand, her dedication to these missions in Europe reveal her sense of duty and her need to play a role in German recovery from the devastation caused by the National Socialists. On the other hand, exposure to her former home country reinforced her sense of belonging to the United States as well as the University of Minnesota.<sup>39</sup> Her role as a translator in social work provided her with agency to shape post-War German social work and disseminate her approach to group work, but at the same time it forced her to reflect on her own identities and allegiances.

Similar to Konopka, Fischer’s allegiance belonged primarily to the United States. Particularly at the beginning of her first stay, she felt more comfortable among Americans than among Germans. After she first had arrived in Mannheim, Simon asked

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<sup>38</sup> Gisela Konopka to Theodore Blegen, 26 September 1950, Konopka papers I, UMNA, Box 17, Folder K837 „Correspondence Re summers in Germany Jan 30, 1949-Feb. 13, 1951.

<sup>39</sup> In such correspondence with her superiors at the university, Konopka may overstate her case of belonging and allegiance. Sources of this kind certainly require a critical reading, but I would argue that the basic message still remains unchanged.

about her relationship to the Germans at the Mannheim child guidance clinic. Based on his own experiences as a soldier stationed in Germany a few years earlier, he expected that an important task for Fischer would be to convey egalitarian modes of interaction to her colleagues: “If you are successful in showing your colleagues how to treat fellow humans at eye level instead of merely seeing them as superior or inferior, you will have accomplished a lot. After all, the cyclist type is prevalent among the Germans. He kicks down and looks upward to get ahead. That the upward glance usually degenerates into obsequious groveling in front of his superior makes the atmosphere even more unpleasant.”<sup>40</sup> Fischer responded: “You ask about the Germans’ relationship to me. This is a complicated issue. There is a lot of the ‘ogling upwards’ as you wrote. Things are only uninhibited when we sit down and work objectively on a task ... Returning to my democratic, American upper floor in the evening feels always good.”<sup>41</sup>

Encountering their former home societies and German stereotypes about the United States revealed long-term shifts in the women’s understanding of themselves as well as their adopted home country. In 1954, Fischer described in her report to the U.S. State Department the attitudes of Germans towards Americans, as she had encountered them: “Many discussions in private and in public had revolved around the question: in what way are Americans and Germans different? The German thinking usually ran like

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<sup>40</sup> Hermann Simon to Anne Fischer, 5 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 4, Folder 12. German original: “Wenn Du Deinen Mitarbeitern zeigen kannst, wie man seine Mitmenschen als Menschen auf gleicher Ebene behandelt, statt sie nur als ‘über-’ oder ‘untergeordnet’ zu sehen, so hast Du schon viel erreicht. Der ‘Radfahrer’typ ist ja verbreitet bei den Deutschen – er tritt nach unten und sieht nach oben, um vorwärts zu kommen. Dass der Blick nach oben gewöhnlich in serviles Kriechen vor dem Vorgesetzten ausartet, macht die Atmosphäre noch unerfreulicher.”

<sup>41</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Du fragst nach der Beziehung der Deutschen zu mir. Das ist eine komplizierte Sache. Es ist sehr viel von dem ‘nach oben schießen’ drin, von dem Du schreibst. Ganz unbefangen ist’s nur, wenn wir uns hinsetzen, und sachlich an einer Sache arbeiten ... Die Rückkehr am Abend in meinen demokratischen, amerikanischen Oberstock tut mir immer gut.”

this: Americans are naive [sic], rationalistic, pragmatic in their philosophy of life; we are seeking the absolute, the mystic, the transcendental aspect of life, placing a positive value on all the German attributes.”<sup>42</sup> This characterization could as well have been a statement in one of Fischer’s letters when she first moved to the United States in 1934. Twenty years later, she used very different interpretations of perceived American peculiarities. While she had held the “culture of makeshift” in contempt when she moved to the United States in the mid-1930s, in 1952, she wrote approvingly about an American officer in Germany who “understands the American art of improvisation,” as she found out that there were no plans as to what her job in Mannheim should specifically entail.<sup>43</sup>

At the 1952 Christmas dinner at Helwig’s house that was attended by American-born U.S. specialists, a colleague from the child guidance clinic, and Fischer, mutual resentments over mentality and probably more general conflicts about the American mission in Germany erupted, bringing to light yet another issue of conflict, as Fischer reported: “Suddenly there were victors and defeated in this oh so cultivated room, where they had just sung about the birth of the best and most peaceful of Jews ... Darling, everything is so awfully complicated.”<sup>44</sup> Even though the émigrés sometimes pragmatically used their national and cultural identification as they saw fit to achieve professional goals, they also encountered situations, in which they found the tensions and complexities difficult to endure. Fischer admitted that she felt hurt by the stereotypes about Americans. Furthermore, Helwig had commented that he had not asked for

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Fischer, “U.S. Specialist Report,” 2–3, Fischer supplement, DZI.

<sup>43</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 2 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Er versteht die amerikanische Kunst der ‘Improvisation.’”

<sup>44</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 25 December 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Auf einmal waren Sieger und Besiegte in diesem ach! so [sic] kultivierten Weihnachtszimmer, wo sie gerade von der Geburt des allerbesten u. friedvollsten Juden gesungen hatten ... Liebling, es ist alles so schrecklich kompliziert.”

American psychiatric social workers, a remark that pained her, even though she believed that he liked her personally and found her work useful.<sup>45</sup> In order to be able to deal with the complicated interpersonal relationships involved in her work, she had come to Germany with a strict resolution of professionalism, as she explained to Simon: “[I am] resolutely determined to only see the good in each person and not to want anything except what’s best for the clinic. (Remind me in case I fail).”<sup>46</sup>

### **Hardship and Gratification**

Going to Germany for three months in 1950 did not curtail Konopka’s obligations as a junior faculty member at the University of Minnesota. Her star was on the rise, but having joined the Minnesota faculty only three years earlier, she also had to attend to her career in the United States, regardless of her contributions were in Germany.<sup>47</sup> Thus, she had to carry the burden that came with such tasks on her own, without the possibility to counterbalance it in other areas of her work. This heavy schedule put a serious strain on Konopka’s physical condition and on her relationship with her husband, who had to stay behind in the United States and work. She was also afraid that the quality of her work in the United States would suffer, as she mentioned to Wilmer Froistad, the chief of the HICOG branch for Public Health and Welfare: “The point is, that last summer I left the day after examinations and returned the day before the opening of school, and aside from

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. That Helwig automatically cast American social work as psychoanalytic case work speaks to the caseworker as the epitome of American social work at the time, on the one hand, and perhaps to the fact that German psychologists were not necessarily familiar with the intricacies of the American social work profession, on the other hand.

<sup>46</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 10 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Eisern entschlossen, das Gute in jedem Menschen zu sehen u. nichts zu wollen als das Beste der Klinik. (Erinner’ mich daran, falls es schief gehen sollte!)”

<sup>47</sup> Andrews-Schenk remarked that the significance of Konopka’s work in Germany was little understood by her American contemporaries. Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 85.

personal considerations, this makes for poor work here, and so I have to limit myself.”<sup>48</sup>

Going to Germany also meant that she had to turn down numerous teaching invitations from other American universities, which would have been important for professional networking and building relationships with other institutions. For example, the 1951 trip to Germany rendered impossible her engagement at the University of California, Berkeley, where she had been invited by her colleague Walter Friedländer, a fellow émigré from Germany.<sup>49</sup> Thus, while her age and where she stood in her career were conducive to being able to do the work in Germany and to being accepted there, it potentially impeded her professional advancement in the United States.

The trips to and activities in Germany as a U.S. specialist took a heavy toll on Konopka, particularly in the first few years. It goes without saying that the traveling and amount of work was strenuous physically, but the strains that came with her overseas engagements were perhaps even more varied than she had anticipated. Synthesizing the entries of Konopka’s personal diary during the summer of 1950, Janice Andrews-Schenk concluded: “She was unable to sleep much of the trip, but was consumed with terrible nightmares, headaches, and much sadness. She felt tense, and yet, excited.”<sup>50</sup> While Konopka would have preferred not to return to Germany in 1951, she agreed to go when the State Department requested her to, because she attached utmost importance to her work overseas. However, instead of going for the entire summer, she insisted on only

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<sup>48</sup> Gisela Konopka to Wilmer Froistad, 27 November 1950, Konopka Papers I, Box 17, Folder K837 “Correspondence Re summers in Germany Jan 30, 1949–Feb. 13, 1951.”

<sup>49</sup> Letter Gisela Konopka to Walter Friedländer, 1 March, 1951, Konopka Papers I, Box 12, Folder “B Correspondence 1950-51 K827 2.”

<sup>50</sup> Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit*, 85.

spending two months in Germany in 1951, which was eventually granted after tedious negotiations with the HICOG office, which went on for almost half a year.<sup>51</sup>

Emotional turbulences joined the physical and professional strains. The recent past weighed heavily on many German social workers who participated in Konopka's workshops of the early 1950s, and they sought relief by confessing to Konopka their misdeeds. She understood this need and made herself available, which added to the emotional challenges of being in Germany. In an oral history interview, she recalled that during workshops she used to stay at the same very modest accommodations that the participants used. At night, some of her students would come to her room and talk about atrocities they had committed during the war. In contrast, some of her American colleagues preferred to stay at hotels, which made them less accessible and also indicated to Konopka more distance in their relationship with the students.<sup>52</sup> Konopka was very outspoken about the burdens of these trips not only in personal diaries, letters, and oral histories but also in her official reports to the U.S. administration: "Such courses must not again be given with so much responsibility on one shoulder ... The emotional load for this one person is too heavy. It means that on one person falls all the resentment and hostility directed toward formerly frustrated lives, toward the U.S. as the 'rich country,' toward new learning, etc. At the same time on this person too falls all the love and hope for the new life, for understanding, for human bond. The latter does not mean only

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<sup>51</sup> The correspondence between Konopka and several levels of the HICOG administration in 1950 and the first half of 1951 reveals Konopka's determination and skills in navigating the inextricable labyrinth of hierarchical levels, competencies, and political interests of bureaucrats, military, and social workers that made up the American presence governing German affairs in the post-War years.

<sup>52</sup> Gisela Konopka, interview by Joachim Wieler.

numerous individual talks in between sessions, but simply the taking on of so many human emotions.”<sup>53</sup>

The reports that the U.S. specialists submitted to the State Department upon their return from Germany served a tools, with which the social workers attempted to influence and shape their missions. Konopka, for example, used her 1951 report to push for modifications of the overseas assignments, which she had been requesting in letters throughout the previous year but which had not been granted. The major request had been to conduct a 4-week institute that should be more substantial than short and superficial workshops. She envisioned teaching in a similar way and as much as she usually did in one semester in the United States, thus her overseas courses would resemble summer courses in the United States. To this end, she asked to bring Ruby Pernell, a colleague from the University of Minnesota. The HICOG office declined this request citing financial restrictions that would not allow funds for an additional person.<sup>54</sup> In addition to financial constraints, this conflict represents opposing notions about the delivery method of this mission. Konopka repeatedly pointed out that teaching, particularly teaching social work including practices, was more than delivering intellectual content, and therefore required extended and intense courses. Moreover, since the ultimate goal of the re-education effort was democratization, which dovetailed with a major aim of social group work, she tried to carve out more space for teaching her specialty: “Teaching is not an intellectual process but a giving of oneself. In a country where every person carries with

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<sup>53</sup> Gisela Konopka, [no title], Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 19, Folder “Report on German Summer 1951,” 2–3.

<sup>54</sup> Letter Walter R. deForest to Gisela Konopka, 16 January 1951, Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 17, Folder K837 „Correspondence Re summers in Germany Jan 30, 1949-Feb. 13, 1951. As Ruby Pernell was an African-American colleague, Konopka had perhaps more profound intentions than just to have help with the teaching load.

him a load of severe conflicts, guilt feelings, hopes, the teaching that opens a person has to accept these emotional tensions. On the shoulders of one person this is almost too much to bear if the courses are supposed to keep the free and yet also scientific atmosphere ... I think it is important to live the idea of teamwork, especially in Germany, not only to talk about it. They must see the possibility of cooperation, not only the work of one person ... This was only achieved in a too small extent.”<sup>55</sup> Since the HICOG office had refused to allow Konopka’s assistant to go to Germany, Konopka in turn reduced her teaching. Instead of an intense 4-week course carrying the load of an entire semester, she cut back her teaching to a 10-day session, and afterwards not very surprisingly reported that with reduced means she was not able to do satisfactory work.

Fischer’s social work career in the United States was very different from Konopka’s, as it was not wedded to one institution that required a certain procedure for advancement. She held shorter appointments at social work agencies and temporary teaching positions, which alternated with her overseas assignments. Fischer also stayed in Germany for longer periods of time, typically for six months each. Despite the challenges and the antagonism that Fischer had to face in Germany, overall the positive experiences outweighed the negative ones, and she experienced these overseas assignments as empowering and deeply satisfying. Even though she went to Frankfurt and Heidelberg, and during nostalgic walks revisited places that were significant to her—mostly because of memories that tied these places to Simon—her positive experiences in Germany were overwhelmingly connected to her work. Only a few weeks into her first stay in 1952/53, she euphorically wrote to Simon: “It is wonderful. I have never before

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<sup>55</sup> Gisela Konopka, [no title], Konopka Papers I, UMNA, Box 19, Folder “Report on German Summer 1951,” 3.

had work that allows me to make a difference on so many different levels. This morning: staff conference according to the agenda (and pace) established by me; discussion in ‘micropsychology,’ real analytical problems, then supervision with the psychiatrist – then an hour of case discussion with ‘Apollo’ [a student]; tea in the afternoon – first meeting of my social worker with the social worker from the youth welfare office – plans for a better cooperation between the agencies. Don’t you think I am doing really well?”<sup>56</sup>

About halfway through her first sojourn in Mannheim, she still felt this way: “You can’t really imagine my life here – the deep emotions and excitement ... in which one exists when doing this kind of work. I have not experienced anything like this – except maybe during the very first days of my refugee work.”<sup>57</sup> In addition to Fischer feeling productive and having a sense accomplishment, a sense that she really can make a difference and help her German colleagues, her work was appreciated by some of the leading figures in the region, which boosted her self-esteem and satisfaction even more, even though she also felt somewhat embarrassed about it. For example, the director of the youth welfare office, impressed by Fischer’s work at the child guidance clinic, asked her to stay for another six months and restructure her agency. Fischer commented to Simon: “I can’t

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<sup>56</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 23 October 1952, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 1. German original: “Es ist herrlich; ich habe noch nie eine Arbeit gehabt, die mich so auf allen Ebenen wirken lässt. Heute früh: staff conference nach dem von mir eingerichteten Plan (u. Tempo) – Diskussion in ‘Mikropsychologie’, richtig analytische Probleme, dann Supervision mit der Psychiaterin – dann eine Stunde case discussion mit dem ‘Apollo’; nachmittags Tee – erstes meeting meines s.w. mit der s.w. vom Jugendamt – Pläne für die bessere cooperation der agencies. – Findest du nicht auch, dass ich’s gut hab?”

<sup>57</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 7 January 1953, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 2. German original: “Von meinem Leben hier machst Du Dir allerdings keinen rechten Begriff – von der Ergiffenheit und ‘Spannung’ ..., in der man existiert in dieser Art von Arbeit. Ich hab so etwas – vielleicht mit Ausnahme des allerersten Beginns der Refugee-Arbeit – noch nicht erlebt.”

help it that I see so much work that needs to be done here – things for which really only a person with language skills and professional expertise can be considered.”<sup>58</sup>

These impressions were confirmed in the long run, when the long-term effects of Fischer’s work became visible. When she returned to Mannheim in 1955 to take stock of the situation, she was very satisfied to find that the operations at the youth welfare office had greatly improved, which both Fischer and the director of the office interpreted as a result of casework approaches that Fischer had introduced in the previous years.<sup>59</sup>

Konopka’s overseas work was similarly considered a success, even on a much larger scale. In 1979, the Federal Republic of Germany awarded her its highest merit award, and within German social work circles she is still referred to as “mother of group work.”<sup>60</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This epilogue offered some preliminary glimpses into Anne Fischer and Gisela Konopka’s experiences as U.S. welfare specialists in post-War Germany. While historians of social work have debated the influence of American social work methods on the profession in Germany with a focus on content, this chapter expanded the focus to pay attention to the individuals who performed such transfers. This perspective sheds light on the agency of Fischer and Konopka, and reveals that understanding them as carriers of social work method from the United States to Germany underestimates their diverse roles in these processes. A perception of the émigrés as mere vehicles of transfer

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<sup>58</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 7 January 1953, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 2. German original: “Ich kann doch nichts dafür, dass ich wirklich soviel hier zu tun sehe – Dinge, für die wirklich nur einer mit Sprach- und Fachkenntnis in Betracht käme.”

<sup>59</sup> Anne Fischer to Hermann Simon, 25 September 1955, Fischer papers, LBI, Box 7, Folder 5.

<sup>60</sup> Margaret West, “Der Verlust an Fachkräften für die Jugendwohlfahrt im Dritten Reich,” *Neue Praxis: Zeitschrift für Sozialarbeit, Sozialpädagogik und Sozialpolitik* 23 (1993): 512–29.

neglects their sometimes more and sometimes less successful attempts to shape the content of their assignments, as well as their strategies to overcome resistance from her German colleagues and open up avenues for productive exchanges.

My evidence demonstrates how local conditions shaped the application of ideas and methods in social work. The cultural exchange at the local level was complex and often yielded surprising results. There was no universally successful approach available to the German-American social workers. Even the translational work between the Americans of German origin and their German colleagues was complex and, at times, difficult to navigate. This study underscores and tests in different localities on two continents the need for historians to understand scientific knowledge in social work as a product of local cultural exchanges and the work of go-betweens such as Konopka and Fischer.

These assignments in Germany also had a transformative effect on the émigrés' lives and their self-understanding. Konopka was concerned that frequent and lengthy absences would negatively impact the development of her career in the United States. Anne Fischer, however, whose opportunities in Richmond were more limited, experienced her work in Germany as very empowering and more meaningful than any social work position she had previously held. Encounters with their former home country caused them to reflect and clarify their identities as German-Americans, as professional social workers, as Jews and socialists who faced persecution and came back as members of a victorious power with the mission to build a better and more democratic society. These assignments constituted their very own contributions to fighting the National Socialists. While as women they had not been allowed into the armed forces during the

war, they understood their overseas assignments in the 1950s as a way to eradicate deep-seated National Socialist thinking and ideology among some German social workers and to offer them more humanistic and egalitarian ways of interacting with their clients.

An analysis based on the subjective experience of émigrés has the potential to complement, as well as add depth and nuance to the story of re-education efforts in Germany and of the roles of migrants therein. The rebuilding of the German welfare system not only relied on American interventions, however. Social workers also fled to Great Britain with its longstanding tradition of social work and came back to Germany after World War II. It would be worthwhile to combine, compare, and contrast influences in a further analysis. Austria was a shambles as well. To my knowledge, a systematic examination of aid programs and the involvement of former Austrian refugees is still pending. Finally, this short chapter could only illuminate a few selected aspects of Fischer's and Konopka's roles as translators, of their involvement in training German social workers, and as consultants for rebuilding institutions. Further research is needed to better understand this rich tapestry of post-War relations, knowledge circulation in social work, and the involvement of émigrés in advancing both mutual understanding and their profession.

## CONCLUSION

When Lieselotte Grothe recalled that “becoming a social worker would have never occurred to me,” she echoed the sentiment of fellow German-speaking émigrés of her generation, who left Europe to escape from the National Socialists and settled in the United States, where they built careers in social work.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation explored biographies of émigré women and analyzed how they shaped their lives and careers in the United States, how migration impacted their work, their private lives, and their identities, and what roles the women assumed in producing knowledge, developing practices in their profession, as well as in offering their findings to larger society.

Unanticipated by many of them, women found in American social work an opportunity to create careers that allowed them to integrate intellectual and professional interests, their European education and training, as well as a way to follow their desire to contribute actively to social reform, the latter of which frequently had its roots in the socialist ideology that had framed the formative years of their lives. As American social work expanded in the 1940s, the émigrés had no problems to find jobs after two years of training, thus making the profession a reasonable and pragmatic choice. Joining a field that required graduate university training and allowed them to participate in an intellectual environment turned out deeply satisfying for a group of women who had been among the first in their families to attend university. This sets the case studies of this dissertation, members of a generation as conceived by Mannheim, apart from older women, such as Alice Salomon, who had already held high status within German social

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<sup>1</sup> Lieselotte Grothe, interview by Joachim Wieler, November 10, 1990, recording, German Institute for Social Issues, Berlin. German original: “Fürsorgerin zu werden wäre mir nie in den Sinn gekommen.”

work but could not transfer their professional prestige to the United States and, consequently, had a more negative experience in exile. Others, even among the generation under consideration, who were interested in social work in the United States but for various reasons were not able to join the profession, were excluded from the analysis in this dissertation, but should receive attention in future studies if sources permit.

Successful trajectories notwithstanding, social work brought with it a circumscribed universe of opportunities for the women émigrés. Despite the profession's reputation as a women's field, it was governed by the same gender dynamics that stratified society in general. Even though women created careers in social work, secured their livelihoods, built personal independence, and contributed to the advancement in their field, they ultimately operated in a space where men occupied the upper echelons. The protagonists of this dissertation encountered this pattern, for example, as family therapists who were subordinated to male psychiatrists, as female faculty members in a paternalist academic setting, and as a social worker in the context of a non-metropolitan Jewish community, where expectations of competence and leadership were explicitly tied to maleness.

Being Jewish, the very aspect that the National Socialists applied—in their own definition—to expel the women from their home countries, had the potential to acquire a productive quality for émigrés in the United States. Anne Fischer, for example, found spiritual and social belonging in the Jewish community in an otherwise foreign and strange land. Jewish welfare organizations proved crucial for women's careers by establishing the framework for their professional lives ranging from directing them to

social work, to the provision of scholarships to fund their education, to employment in Jewish social agencies. While for many, being Jewish had been of little significance in their self-understanding as young women in Europe, renegotiation processes of their identities in the United States yielded a new relevance of their Jewish heritage, even though the extent and character varied significantly.

Even though social work made possible a variety of professional activities under its umbrella, many émigrés, though not all, gravitated toward group settings compared to individualist approaches. They had nurtured this preference in the youth movement and in socialist circles in early twentieth-century Europe, and the women's entry into social work coincided with an emerging research interest in the group in the social sciences and in psychology in the 1940s and 1950s. Some social workers took up this approach as an alternative to the mainstream individualistic, therapeutic casework approach, and entered a line of work that felt familiar and meaningful to the émigrés. Looking at these women's strategies revises the traditional understanding of American social work as based in the narrower individualistic psychoanalytic approach, or even the tenets of functionalism, developed by leading social scientists in universities. Exploring how ideas and methods were deployed on the ground and including a focus on these previously unexplored émigré women reconfigures the overall picture of social work practice.

Women in social work approached their new profession with enthusiasm, gratitude, and optimism in the early 1940s, declaring it a perfect fit for their interests, aspirations, and needs. However, some experienced disillusionment over the following decades. Especially group workers like Konopka who entered the field with a decidedly political, i.e. leftist, persuasion, were disappointed by the consolidation of various social

work specialties under one umbrella, which resulted in group work losing its specific profile and in its subordination to the individualist casework paradigm. Konopka's increasing international work in the 1960s and particularly 1970s and her philosophical and historical approaches in her work removed her further from the mainstream of the American profession. As a practitioner in family therapy, Gerda Schulman also parted ways with the profession and went into private practice in the early 1970s, as it was not possible for her to reconcile teaching engagements with her obligations at the Jewish Family Service. This speaks to the difficulties in bridging the educational, intellectual, and interpersonal aspects with social work practice—a combination that initially had been of utmost importance to the émigrés when they encountered social work in the United States.

The émigrés' personal situation played a constitutive role in the development of their careers. The kind of opportunities available to the women varied with their marital status, their husbands' occupation, as well as the character of their marital relationship. Whereas historians of exile have identified patterns of women subordinating their careers to their husbands' as they reconfigured their lives in emigration, and thus underwent a conservative reversal of female empowerment gained in Europe, the case studies from social work in this dissertation suggest a wider variety of outcomes. Social work provided Anne Fischer, who was in a traditional marriage with her husband providing for the family, with a meaningful sphere of activity outside the home that she could reconcile with her domestic responsibilities through varying arrangements of volunteering, part-time, and eventually full-time work. Gerda Schulman, a divorced mother working at the Jewish Family Service in New York, was able to support her family with her work as a

family therapist in a setting that she described as supportive of her situation. Her colleague at the agency, Elsa Leichter, came to the United States unattached, got married when she had already settled down professionally, and created in her social work career her own sphere that defined her independently from her husband. Gisela Konopka's education and training took priority over her husband's ambitions, not least because social work afforded her better opportunities and quicker advancement than it would have been the case for her husband who had been a metal worker in Germany. Thus, class emerges as another factor affecting the gender arrangements in these women's relationships.

While the émigrés' marriages and relationships influenced the women's professional approaches, their occupation as social workers, in turn, shaped their personal lives. Refugees and exiles had to deal with difficult and traumatic experiences. Social workers brought this experience to their profession as motivation, knowledge, and as increased sensitivity to the problems they tried to solve with their clients. Focusing on these women has the potential to change our historical picture of the activities of applied social scientists and social workers and how they interacted with clients. Moreover, they learned from their professional practice and applied their growing professional knowledge and interpersonal skills to issues in their own lives and relationships.

In their letters, memoirs, and oral histories, the women repeatedly pointed to their status outside the professional social work mainstream. While this could be cause for frustration, they also pointed to the productive potential of being "in-between," or "a bridge" and, as in the case of Fischer, even cultivated this status. In her refugee work, she used outside resources to feed into improved practice, and used her "go-between"

position to broker between her clients and the committee. Similarly, in their work in post-war Germany, émigré social workers foregrounded shifting elements of their identities to raise the acceptance and therefore the effectiveness of their work. Historians are beginning to appreciate the importance of “go-betweens” in understanding the translation and deployment of scientific ideas and practices, and this study contributes to that relatively new area of research in the history of science.

The literature on women in exile points to social work as a professional haven, but few studies have actually explored it. This dissertation with its focus on five case studies opens up an avenue for further research in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the opportunities and limitations social work provided for émigrés in the United States. By using social work, a typical female profession, my goal was to illuminate the experiences of a group of women as they sought to define new careers in mid-life and in an unfamiliar cultural, social, and professional landscape. But men also encountered social work in exile. Exploring the entire group of émigré social workers, both men and women, will be a necessary next step for understanding the significance of this profession for the lives of European émigrés in the United States.

As especially emphasized by the epilogue, the migration movements of these exiles was not limited to their emigration. Several of them returned to Europe after World War II temporarily, either as specialists nominated by the State Department or sent by other private organizations to help rebuild German welfare services, and to help with the democratization of the country. For Austria, where no comparable thorough re-education measures were applied, a comprehensive study of social work and the welfare system has yet to be carried out. Refugees who went into social work also served as important nodes

in the growing network of transatlantic exchanges of social work students in the post-war period, and were thus significant for the international circulation of theories, methods, and practices in social work. More research is needed to uncover these flows of concepts, methods, and practices and the processes of adaptation to their new contexts. These case studies demonstrate the importance of carefully studying the local cultural exchanges that mediate social workers' daily work—and the application of social scientific approaches.

The United States was one among many destinations for refugees from the National Socialists, and not the only one where people found careers in social work. Some people fled to Great Britain and others to Palestine, for example, where they built careers in social work. Maria Simon, for example, received her social work training in Czechoslovakia and Great Britain, but also spent some time working for the Jewish Family Service in Seattle, Washington, before she returned to Austria, where she was instrumental in the professionalization of social work in the 1970s. Comparing exiles in different countries, exploring their mutual connections, and examining their professional activities in relation to the development of social work is another research area worth pursuing, which has the potential to inform the historiography of social work and the applied social sciences that has so far been written in predominantly national frameworks. Such transnational approaches have the capacity to add a more fine-grained analysis of host societies than exile studies have done so far, as well as to appreciate regional differences. As this study has revealed, “social work in the United States” was hardly a homogenous entity. It varied with intra-professional specialization, community affiliation, and geographical location, among others.

By pointing to social work as a profession in which women émigrés were able to maintain, to a varying extent, their self-understanding as intellectuals and academics in exile, this dissertation suggests to widen the frame of research on emigration and exile of social scientists to include applied professions. As the biographies of the women in this study have illustrated, their careers in social work were the results of complex dynamics that involved economic conditions including the job market, their personal situations, social opportunities and pressures, political circumstances, and the conditions prevalent in the higher education system. Including peripheral actors and those in related applied fields instead of restricting the understanding of the social sciences to their purely academic realms helps to arrive at a more nuanced recognition of the complex forces and processes that shaped academia, the applied professions, and the population they served.

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