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‘What my mother taught me’: An exploration of the maternal experience in the ghetto and its impact on attitudes and behaviours in motherhood after the war

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Contents

Introduction

In February 2020, *The Telegraph* published an article discussing the long-term psychological impact of the Holocaust under the headline: 'Many Holocaust survivors thrived, but have their children inherited their trauma?'[1] While the question points to psychologists' ongoing interest in the effects of the Holocaust on successive generations, it is also indicative of a perspective that incorporates all 'survivors' and their 'trauma' into a single category. However, as clinical research has found, the effects of Holocaust experiences on survivors' parenting and relationships with their children were not homogenous.[2] While research on the 'intergenerational transmission of trauma' between survivors and their children is important, it has often fallen short in recognising that 'the experience of the Holocaust […] might have been rather different amongst survivors.'[3] Indeed, there has been limited focus on the ways in which a *specific* aspect of experience impacted both survivors and their actions after the war; previously, survivors and their Holocaust experiences have been subsumed into one universal object of study.[4]

However, the Holocaust was 'not a single, monolithic event.'[5] Indeed, as environmental historian Tim Cole and gender historian Joan Ringelheim have demonstrated, particular Holocaust experiences were influenced by factors such as a person's gender and the spaces of persecution they encountered.[6] Although neither gender nor geography are the key focus of this dissertation, these seminal works indicate the importance of specific parameters for the investigation of experiences. Consequently, this dissertation uses a precise spatial scale of analysis and experience as a starting point, exploring the maternal experience within the specific space of the ghetto.[7] Using

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[1] L. Mintz. 'Many Holocaust survivors thrived, but have their children inherited their trauma?', *The Telegraph,* 1 February 2020, < https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/life/many-holocaust-survivors-thrived-have-children-inherited-trauma/> [accessed 6 April 2020].

[2] For an overview of the key research on the long-term psychological impact of Holocaust experiences on survivors and their children, see: E. Barel et al., 'Surviving the Holocaust: A Meta-Analysis of the Long-Term Sequelae of a Genocide', *Psychological Bulletin,* 136:5 (2010), 167-198.

[3] Barel et al., 'Surviving the Holocaust', 689.

[4] For an example of a study which has investigated survivors as one undifferentiated group, see: R. Lev Weisel and M. Amir, 'Posttraumatic Growth Among Holocaust Child Survivors', *Journal of Loss and Trauma,* 8:4 (2003), 229-237.

[5] T. Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (London: Bloomsburg, 2016), 2.

[6] Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes;* J. Ringelheim, 'The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust', *Simon Weisenthal Centre Annual,* 1 (1984), 69-87.

[7] The ghetto has been chosen as the spatial scale because it was the only Nazi-controlled space in which families were largely able to stay together.

a broader concept of the 'maternal experience' that includes all experiences in which survivors either identified with and adopted a maternal role or experienced being mothered themselves crucially enables the inclusion of a wider diversity of personal dynamics.

With this in mind, this study attempts to restore the focus of investigation to the *individual* experience and its impact by examining three women's distinctive maternal experiences and their effects on their later attitudes towards motherhood. It will demonstrate that, while these experiences influenced the women's postwar behaviours, the specific ways they did so were not the same and were instead determined by the particular circumstances and encounters of the individual. In doing so, this dissertation argues that the maternal experience in the ghetto, and consequently its impact, cannot – and should not – be homogenised. Indeed, by using the concept of the maternal experience rather than motherhood, it will reveal that previous historiography focusing on motherhood in the Holocaust, which has emphasized the sacrificial actions of biological mothers, does not fully acknowledge the range of unique ways in which both women and girls encountered and assumed aspects of the socially constructed 'maternal role', which is ultimately crucial to understand the diversity of impacts such experiences could have after the war.[8] The overall aim of this dissertation is thus twofold: to further the recognition of diversity amongst female experiences, and to demonstrate the significance of *individual* encounters in determining women's attitudes and behaviours as mothers after the war.

Literature

In focusing on both the maternal experience of women in the ghetto and its emotional and psychological impacts, this dissertation is interdisciplinary in nature and has been informed by literature on Jewish motherhood, as well as works from the fields of trauma studies and psychology. Consequently, while focusing primarily on the development of the historical scholarship of Jewish mothers in the Holocaust, it will also briefly outline works on trauma and survivors that have been particularly informative.

[8] See the Literature section for a discussion of the existing scholarship on Jewish mothers and the maternal experience.

Motherhood and the Maternal Experience

Until recently, discussions of motherhood and the maternal experience in mainstream Holocaust literature have remained limited in scope.[9] Early examinations of Jewish motherhood in the Holocaust, emerging in the context of the 1980s, when the growth in gender and women's studies aimed to 'reclaim the hidden experiences of women,' focused almost exclusively on celebrating the mother's sacrificial role.[10] Brana Gunewistch's 1998 edited volume, *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women,* argued for the prevalence of Jewish women who 'supported each other like sisters and nurtured each other like mothers.'[11] While the works in this volume helped pioneer an important focus on the significance of maternal actions in the Holocaust, as Anna Hardman has identified, it also created a narrow notion of female behaviour that homogenised the maternal role across spaces.[12] This construction of the Jewish mother has continued as a dominant perspective in the scholarship on women and families in the ghetto. Indeed, in key articles by Dalia Ofer and Leah Balint, the mother has been understood almost solely in a role that 'revolved around maternal love, suffering, self- sacrifice and self-effacement..'[13] Collectively, these works, focusing primarily on the biological Jewish mother, have contributed to a universalisation of the maternal experience, which has served to conceal and erase nuanced and individual perspectives within a celebratory metanarrative.[14]

However, this homogenised perspective has not gone entirely unchallenged, with a number of historians attempting to highlight the diversity and individuality of women's experiences, more recently. In particular, Esther Hertzog has discussed women's 'unheroic' actions as mothers in

[9] H. Duffy, Motherhood During and After the Holocaust: Testimonial and Fictional Perspectives', *The Journal of Holocaust Research,* 34:2, (2020), 91-94 (91).
[10] J. Ringelheim, 'The Holocaust: Taking Women's Experiences into Account', *The Jewish Quarterly,* 39:2 (1992), 19-23 (21).
[11] B. Gunewitsch, 'Introduction', in B. Gunewitsch (ed.), *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), (xii).
[12] A. Hardman, *Women and the Holocaust,* (London: Holocaust Education Trust, 2000), 12.
[13] D. Ofer, 'Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in Eastern Europe' in P. Medding and M. Harman (eds.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: Volume XIV: Coping with Life and Death: Jewish Families in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 143-162. ; L. Balint, 'Jewish Mothers' Courage in Saving their Children', in E. Hertzog (ed.), *Life, Death and Sacrifice: Women, Family and the Holocaust,* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2008), 183-206; Duffy, 'Motherhood During and After the Holocaust', 93.
[14] S. Horowitz, 'Memory and Testimony of Women Survivors of Nazi Germany', in J. Baskin (ed.), *Women of the Word* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 256-282 (265).

ghettos and camps, arguing the need to recognise and accept the diversity of mothers' behaviour.[15] More broadly, Zoë Waxman's works on women and their testimonial representation have emphasized the importance of incorporating narratives of women's experience outside the traditional patterns of female behaviours in order to recognise the individual and thus gain a more heterogenous understanding of the Holocaust as a whole.[16] Yet, while these historians have drawn attention to the diversity of female experiences and their significance, much of the discussion has continued to focus on the specific concept of *motherhood* in the context of *women's* experiences as biological mothers. Thus, this study seeks to build on these scholars' recognition of the diversity of female experiences by eschewing the traditional framework for investigating motherhood in favour of the broader concept of the 'maternal experience,' enabling the inclusion of more complex interpersonal dynamics of women in the ghetto.

Trauma Studies

Cathy Caruth's edited volume on trauma, which she defines as 'an overwhelming experience of catastrophic events, in which the response […] is often delayed and uncontrolled,' provides an insight into the ways in which trauma manifests itself in the aftermath of experience.[17] Of equal value, Dori Laub's multiple works on massive psychic trauma, and its impact on survivors' ability to retell and resolve their memories, has supported this study's investigation into the significance of the 'individualized' experience in 'inform[ing] as well as shap[ing] one's subsequent life experience and action.'[18] While other research papers have been useful in contextualising the long-term impact of Holocaust experiences, it is these works have been of particular value for this dissertation and decoding the narratives of trauma.[19]

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[15] E. Hertzog, 'Subjugated Motherhood and the Holocaust', *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust,* 30:1 (2016), 16-34.
[16] Z. Waxman, 'Unheard Testimony, Untold Stories: The Representation of Women's Holocaust Experiences', *Women's History Review*, 12: 4 (2003), 661-667; Z. Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[17] C. Caruth, 'Introduction' in C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3-12 (8).
[18] D. Laub and N. Auerhahn, 'Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust' in Y. Danieli (ed.), *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York: Springer, 1998), 21-41 (22).
[19] M. Crespo and V. Fernández-Lansac, 'Memory and Narrative of Traumatic Events: A Literature Review', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practise, and Policy,* 8:2 (2016), 149-156; A. Sagi-Schwartz et al., 'Does intergenerational transmission of trauma skip a generation? No meta-analytic evidence for tertiary traumatization with third generation of Holocaust survivors', *Attachment & Human Development,* 10:2 (2008), 105-121.; J. Prager, 'Lost childhood, lost generations: The intergenerational transmission of trauma', *Journal of* Human Rights, 2:2 (2003), 173-181.

Methodology

In order to explore the significance of the individual contexts of women's maternal experiences in determining their long-term impact, this dissertation employs a specific microhistorical approach to allow close analysis, exploring the stories of only three women. This method supports the argument for the recognition of the intricacies of individual experience, because a drastically reduced scale enables us 'to reintroduce the individuals' into research.[20] Indeed, as has been recently argued, a microhistorical focus elucidates the complexities of personal encounters, showing individual realities and 'deconstructing the monolithic approach.'[21] As a relatively new approach in Holocaust studies, this method has been critiqued, particularly because it has been perceived not to represent conclusions beyond the microscale.[22] However, the purpose of this study is to *rescue* the individual experience from broad conclusions about experience. Indeed, it is the ability of a microscale to provide a 'different dimension of analysis' – that of personal emotions and perceptions – which is crucial to showing the intimate relationship between these women's encounters and their aftereffects.[23]

The evidence for this investigation of three women's experiences derives from oral testimonies held as part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Oral History Archive. Consequently, the methodological aspects of these sources must also be considered. Firstly, these testimonies have been selected specifically because each of the women only experienced the ghetto and not any other Nazi-controlled space, such as the camps or the trains. Thus, the relationship between traumatic moments within this controlled space and aspects of their lives after their war is more clearly defined. However, oral sources do have inevitable limitations;

[20] J. Wallen, 'The Witness Against the Archive: Towards a Microhistory of Christiansdadt' in C. Zalc and T. Bruttman (eds.), *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2019), 300-314, (302).
[21] C. Zalc and T. Bruttman, 'Introduction: Towards a Microhistory of the Holocaust' in Zalc and Bruttman (eds.), *Microhistories,* 1-14, (3).
[22] T. Snyder, 'The Holocaust as a Regional History' in N. J W. Goda (ed.), *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust: New Transnational Approaches* (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2014), 17-38.
[23] G. von Fritjtag Drabbe Künzel and V. Galimi, 'Microcosms of the Holocaust: Exploring New Venues into Small-Scale Research of the Holocaust', *Journal of Genocide Research,* 21:3 (2019), 335-341, (336).

previously, oral history has been critiqued for its subjective and inaccurate nature.[24] In this dissertation, however, it is this very quality of oral testimonies, as 'human documents rather than historical,' that enables the study of the impact of the individual maternal experience.[25] As oral historian Alessandro Portelli has argued, what events these women remember and how they retell them, crucially 'tells us […] about their *meaning*.'[26] Indeed, while the subjective nature of oral history has been perceived as a pitfall, it is this subjectivity that enables an investigation into the women's intimate perspectives on their individual experience.

Dissertation Structure

In order to explore the diversity of maternal experiences and demonstrate the importance of individual circumstances on women's postwar attitudes towards motherhood, this dissertation employs a three-chapter structure to examine each testimony in turn. It first explores the story of a young girl forced to adopt a nurturing role in the ghetto, arguing that the trauma of this maternal experience impacted on her later behaviour as a mother. Chapter 2 explores the representation of an experience in which a woman describes a supported and happy childhood in the ghetto but suggests that this still caused conflict in the parent–child relationship because it was at odds with the metanarratives of the ghetto experience. Finally, the third chapter explores the significance of a traumatic maternal experience outside the family, arguing that the unresolved distress from witnessing this continued to influence the woman's choice not to have children. Thus, taken together, the three narratives elucidate the diversity of possible experiences and impacts, ultimately demonstrating the importance of recognsising individual stories.

[24] C. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); J. E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
[25] L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: Ruins of Memory* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), xi.
[26] A. Portelli, 'What makes Oral History different?', in R. Perks and A.Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader,* Third Edition (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 48-59 (52).

Chapter One

Dalia Ofer has suggested that the role of the Jewish mother during the Nazi persecution was to lessen and absorb her children's suffering.[27] Yet, for Leah Silverstein, who entered the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941 at the age of sixteen without a traditional maternal figure, the burden of responsibility forced her to become the 'mother' figure to others in her family. Examining Leah's retelling of her experiences, this chapter will demonstrate the impact of being forced to assume maternal responsibility in the ghetto on Leah's postwar motherhood. My main finding in this chapter is that Leah's adoption of the maternal role resulted in her exposure to multiple incidents of trauma, consequently impacting her behaviour as a mother, which resulted in tensions with her sons.

Leah's biological mother died when she was five and was replaced by a 'wicked stepmother' in the years preceding the war, so Leah entered the ghetto without a maternal figure who would 'cushion family members in times of difficulty.'[28] Crucially, in instances where there was no supportive mother figure in the ghetto, younger girls were forced to become primary caregivers in their families.[29] This was certainly the case for Leah. Although she chose to live with other young people in the ghetto, her narrative indicates that she nevertheless dedicated herself to supporting her father and grandmother, despite her generational status as a child. The responsibility she assumed is apparent early in her recollection: 'I was running from the kibbutz to see how my father is doing […] And I run to see my grandmother.'[30] Commenting that her ghetto existence was 'limited' purely to supporting her family, Leah reveals how overwhelming her responsibility was.[31] Clearly, then, if motherhood is recognised as a 'socially constructed arrangement' rather than a simple biological process, Leah's actions constituted the assumption of a maternal role.[32]

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[27] D. Ofer, 'Motherhood under Siege' in Hertzog (ed.), *Life, Death and Sacrifice,* 41–68.
[28] Interview with Leah Silverstein, (1996), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Oral History Archive, RG-50.030.0363 ; J. Michlic, 'Introduction' in J. Michlic (ed.), *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939-Present: History, Representation and Memory* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2017), xv-xxxiv (ix).
[29] L. J. Weitzman and D. Ofer, 'The Sequential Development of Women's Coping Strategies During the Holocaust: A New Theoretical Framework', in A. Pető, L. Hecht and K. Krasuska (eds.), *Women in the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges* (New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 27-63, (45).
[30] Interview with Leah Silverstein (1996)
[31] Ibid.
[32] E. Herzog, 'Subjugated Motherhood', 19.

Clearly, in becoming her family's provider while lacking her own protective maternal figure, Leah was prematurely forced to become an adult. Drawing on Jerome Bruner's work, however, is the meaning of these experiences which is most crucial to identify.[33] Leah's affective retelling of her experiences indicates that these were memories of trauma, portraying a childhood burdened by sacrifice and responsibility. Exploring the traumatic impact of Leah's role reveals the connections between this experience and her behaviour as a mother after the war.

As provider for her grandmother and father, Leah went without provisions herself in order to support her family. In this way, her sacrifice paralleled the actions of many adult mothers in the ghetto, who tried desperately to provide for their children.[34] The emotional significance of such sacrifice is evident in Leah's self-reflexive recollection as she remembers her attempts to save bread and potatoes for her father: 'Thinking of it now in hindsight, I think that it was, that was very terrible, I mean, it was a hard thing for me to do because I was hungry all the time too, you know.'[35] As Cohen, Fogelman and Ofer suggest, one must listen for 'disparate narratives simultaneously' when exploring the testimonies of child survivors.[36] Clearly, in revisiting her childhood memories, Leah also reinterpreted their meaning in light of her current perspective as an adult. In choosing to emphasize the 'terrible' and emotionally complex nature of her decisions, Leah implicitly reveals the traumatic significance of her role. As Michlic has identified, children who had to fill the role of an adult in their family suffered trauma because, in doing so, they were forced deny their status as children.[37] Indeed, Leah's admission that she 'was hungry all the time' highlights the absence of her own maternal figure, who could support and nurture her. Emphasizing 'in hindsight' the pain of disregarding her hunger, Leah communicates the scale of her sacrifice. The parallels between her actions and those of adult mothers in the ghetto point to Leah's premature assumption of mature responsibilities.

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[33] J. Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Enquiry,* 18:1 (1991), 1-21 (7).
[34] D. Ofer, 'Parenthood in the Shadow of the Holocaust', in Michlic (ed.), Jewish *Families in Europe*, 3-23.
[35] Interview with Leah Silverstein (1996)
[36] S. Cohen, E. Fogelman and D. Ofer, 'Introduction' in S. Cohen, E. Fogelman and D. Ofer (eds.), *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive* (New York: Berghan, 2017), 1-14 (1).
[37]Michlic, 'Introduction', xvi.

What is more, by adopting this maternal and protective role towards her father and grandmother, Leah assumed a significant level of responsibility for their lives and, consequently, their deaths. Despite her efforts, Leah was unable to prevent their passing and was forced to witness their final moments. Leah's affective recollection of this moment exposes profound feelings of responsibility and powerlessness, as well as the poignancy of the traumatic memories:

> 'These sights of my father and of my grandmother dying from starvation and terrible hygienic conditions, is a picture which haunts me till this very day, you know. And this is over half a century ago, and it torments me in terrible nightmares to this very day […] And I stood there, a young girl, you know, tears were running down my cheeks, I couldn't help them.'[38]

Leah's narration, although fragmented, communicates the anguish of helplessly witnessing these final moments. It seems that images of her loved one's deaths continued to permeate her life and her dreams, as evoked by the anguished description of her 'torment.' This 'haunt[ing]' is evidence of psychic trauma for, as defined by Cathy Caruth, 'to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image.'[39] Indeed, the unavoidable reappearance of these images corroborate with Langer's conception of a survivor's 'wounded identity', in which memories of a need to act but an inability to do so continue to haunt the survivor.[40] In her emotional statement that 'I couldn't help them,' Leah communicates the powerlessness that contributed to traumatization. Unsurprisingly, then, Leah reveals that her inability to fulfil her 'maternal' role in the ghetto resulted in trauma and her ongoing bereavement.

The absence of an effective maternal figure of her own also left Leah unprotected from the trauma of the ghetto, more generally. As the psychologists Laub and Auermahn have observed, the mother figure helps develop a child's psychic 'protective shield' by attempting to safeguard them from

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[38] Interview with Leah Silverstein (1996).
[39] Caruth, 'Introduction', 4-5.
[40] Langer, *Ruins of Memory,* 181.

upsetting encounters outside the family unit.[41] Yet, because Leah's stepmother was 'a terrible person,' Leah was deprived of this type of protection. Indeed, after her father's death, the stepmother delegated to Leah responsibility for his burial, forcing her to witness the disturbing sights of the ghetto graveyard. Recollecting this graphic moment, Leah's speech becomes disjointed: 'And all these corpses, you know, the limbs intertwisted between, you know, with open mouths and I was a young girl, and the stench from that pile of human corpses was so terrible.'[42] This vivid description points to the intensity of the memory. Studies of trauma and narrative suggest that Leah's ability to recall in detail sights and smells reflects a traumatic memory.[43] It seems then, that being exposed to these experiences had left a significant emotional mark, undermining her childhood innocence.

Evidently, Leah's maternal experience in the ghetto stands in stark opposition to the sentimentalized image of the heroic Jewish mother that scholars have previously suggested; instead of being protected by a mother, Leah is herself forced to adopt this role.[44] More importantly, her recollections indicate that the experience continued to be deeply traumatic for Leah. The instances of traumatic witnessing, alongside her bereavement, convey a perspective 'loaded with the trauma of a lost childhood.'[45] Crucially, these recollections of the ghetto not only provide a window into the past but also reveal how this trauma continued to have meaning in Leah's life. Having identified the emotional impact of Leah's maternal experience, it is possible to observe a number of ways it continued to influence her outlook and behaviour as a mother after the war.

Loss of childhood and emotional innocence emerges as a subtext of Leah's recollection of the ghetto. Indeed, at multiple points, she explicitly asserts that she was just 'a child' when she faced these traumatic experiences. Aaron Hass has identified that, when young survivors felt that adult figures had failed to protect them emotionally, anger and resentment permeated their approach as a parent.[46] While Leah does not express anger specifically, the articulation of an explicit desire to

[41] D. Laub and N. Auerhahn, 'Knowing and Not Knowing Massive Psychic Trauma: Forms of Traumatic Memory', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 74: 2 (1993), 287-302 (293).
[42] Interview with Leah Silverstein (1996).
[43] Crespo and Fernández-Lansac, 'Memory and Narrative', 149.
[44] The heroicism of the protective mothers is discussed in: Balint, 'Jewish Mothers', 183-206.
[45] Ofer, 'Cohesion and Rupture', 149.
[46] A. Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust,* (London: I. B Tauris and Co, 1991), 7.

protect her own children from the traumatic 'realities' of the Holocaust can be seen as meaningfully connected to her own experiences. Unprompted, she comments, 'You see, in a family, there are things you, you couldn't tell young people what the reality was because you were afraid it might warp their emotional growth.'[47] Leah's concern about 'emotional growth' suggests an over-protectiveness, which is a common theme in psychological studies of survivor parents, as a consequence of their own experiences of emotional vulnerability.[48] In Leah's case, the emotional impact of being forced to assume a sacrificial caregiving role, in the absence of her own protection, can be argued to have resulted in her particular preoccupation with, and concern for, the protection of her sons' emotional wellbeing.

However, although Leah explicitly desires to limit her sons' exposure to the Holocaust and its trauma, towards the end of her testimony she acknowledges, somewhat paradoxically, that her 'obsess[ion] with Holocaust' has caused tension within parent–child relationships.[49] Leah explains this by imitating her sons' questions: '"Why do you always have to talk about the Holocaust?" And how can I not talk about it when my only immediate family perished in it?'[50] Initially, this statement appears inconsistent with her earlier discussion of withholding the details of her Holocaust trauma. However, it is evidence of the 'several currents' that flow within a single testimony.[51] Leah's desire to protect her children reflects her attempt to reconstruct her identity as a protective mother through her testimony. For, as Herbert Kelman suggests, identity is a 'self-defining relationship' in which one can attempt to actively construct oneself as the person one wishes to be.[52] Thus, it is my interpretation that Leah's effort to represent herself in this way indicates her intense *desire* to be a protective mother, driven by her own contrary experiences. Nonetheless, in her revelation that she could not prevent herself from talking about her experiences, Leah reveals that, despite this desire, she has remained unconsciously 'hostage to a humiliating and painful past.'[53]

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[47] Interview with Leah Silverstein (1996)
[48] D. Ban-On and J. Chatain, *Parenthood and Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), 5.
[49] Interview with Leah Silverstein (1996)
[50] Ibid.
[51] Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies,* xi.
[52] H. Kelman, 'The Place of Ethnic Identity in the Development of Personal Identity: A Challenge for the Family', in Medding and Harman (eds.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 3-26, (8).
[53] Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies,* xi.

On the surface, the specific connection between this behaviour and Leah's ghetto experience appears ambiguous, given that Leah speaks only to her experiences more generally. However, in mentioning the deaths of her loved ones as the cause of her obsessive discussion of her experiences, Leah implicitly connects her behaviour with the trauma of witnessing their deaths and her sense of responsibility. Leah's inability to integrate this loss and grief into her life story, resulting in its reappearance in her maternal behaviour, suggests evidence of 'traumatic bereavement.' This phenomenon was particularly significant in survivors who lost an infant and were unable to mourn fully due to self-accusation and guilt surrounding the death.[54] Consequently, building on Haas's view, Leah's need to continually 'bear witness' to her experiences in order to remember her family can be understood as reflecting unresolved grief and feelings of guilt surrounding her failure to fulfil the role she had assumed in the ghetto.[55]

Overall, this chapter has examined the relationship revealed in the testimony between a ghetto experience that lacked a protective maternal figure and the survivor's postwar behaviour as a mother. It has shown that the traumatic impact of having to assume extensive caregiving responsibilities typically associated with motherhood, without any adult to safeguard her, unconsciously influenced both Leah's self-perception and her behaviour as a mother. Whether, as has been suggested in previous clinical papers, Leah's behaviour contributed to an intergenerational transmission of this trauma remains unclear from a study of testimony alone.[56] Nonetheless, the connections between Leah's ghetto experience and her actions in motherhood, although largely implicit, demonstrate that the trauma of a maternal experience as a child could continue to impinge on a survivor's postwar behaviour and interactions as a mother after the war.

[54] For more information on traumatic bereavement see: E. Witztum and R. Malkinson, 'Examining Traumatic Grief and Loss Among Holocaust Survivors', *Journal of Loss and Trauma,* 14:2 (2009), 129-143.
[55] Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust,* 11.
[56] S. E. Lezter-Pouw and P. Werner, 'The relationship between females Holocaust child survivors' unresolved losses and their offspring's emotional well-being', *Journal of Loss of Trauma,* 18:5 (2013), 396-408.

Chapter Two

Chapter One explored the testimony of a woman whose adoption of a maternal role in the ghetto represented a deeply traumatic experience that consequently permeated her attitudes as a mother after the war. However, Waxman is correct that not all women's ghetto experiences were the same, so Leah's reactions cannot be considered as universal.[57] Therefore, this chapter will explore the impact of Sylvia Murawski's maternal experience in the ghetto, which, in contrast to Leah, she depicts as relatively non-traumatic. My main findings in this chapter are twofold: firstly, the unusually positive way Sylvia represents her time in the ghetto affected the nature of her later relations with her son; secondly, that her self-representation was heavily influenced by her maternal experience and upbringing, which complicated her identification as a 'Jewish survivor.'

The impact of Sylvia's experiences on her interactions with her sons hinged on uncertainty surrounding her positive representation of her time in the ghetto. Consequently, it is vital to first understand the perspective she presented in her interview. Sylvia's testimony depicts an experience in which her mother actively provided for her, indicating that Sylvia's family unit did not cease to exist in the ghetto.[58] It is apparent that Sylvia's mother assumed the central responsibility for supporting the family, because her father 'mostly stayed home.'[59] Describing her mother's actions, Sylvia recalls that 'she had only ambition to buy food and let people, let people, help some people with feeding them.'[60] Indeed, Sylvia explains that her mother committed herself to buying and selling her thing in order to provide for her family, commenting that, 'Not everyone was hungry in the ghetto […] We had three meals a day.'[61] Her mother's ability to access and offer food was particularly significant in the ghetto space, as the provision of food was often symbolic beyond physical sustenance, enabling women to demonstrate their maternal commitment and fulfil their role as nurturers.[62] Consequently, Sylvia situates her mother as a fundamental character in her ghetto experience. This perspective, and the image of her mother Sylvia presents, is not unusual in

[57] Z. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 132.
[58] Ofer, 'Cohesion and Rupture', 143.
[59] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992), USHMM, OHA, RG-50.233.0096
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ofer, 'Cohesion and Rupture', 156.

itself. Indeed, the heroic nurturing mother–woman remains a hegemonic trope in Holocaust scholarship, having been observed in a number of survivors' narratives.[63] However, Sylvia further reflects that her mother's access to food enabled mealtimes that were 'jolly and cheerful.'[64] The implication of this comment is significant, suggesting that her time in the ghetto was, in fact, positive and happy. While any suggestion of normality is relative in the context of the ghetto, Sylvia's comments nonetheless suggest that her family life operated with what Ofer has described as a 'semblance of normalcy.'[65]

Later in her testimony, Sylvia explicitly establishes this perspective in a broader reflection on her experiences: 'From my point of view, the life was very, very … I enjoyed life […] Those two years were very happy years for me.'[66] These comments are intriguing, particularly given historical perspectives on the Warsaw Ghetto. As Tim Cole asserts, the image of the ghetto as a 'place of disease and death' is prevalent in many testimonies.[67] Sylvia's proclaimed happiness thus presents an alternative view to the recollections of survivors such as Leah Silverstein. It is known that survivors' use of individual words, such as 'happy', often connote different meanings from their meaning in broader society, but although it is likely that Sylvia's references were different in the ghetto, her choice to focus on her enjoyment – and to remember her experience in this way – is crucial. [68]

Such an interpretation does not mean that Sylvia was not exposed to distressing experiences, however. Living in the ghetto was in itself a traumatic experience, given the rupture from one's previous life.[69] In her testimony, Sylvia reflects on a 'special relationship' with a young girl, Franja, who became her student in the ghetto and to whom Sylvia refers as her 'daughter.'[70] Franja was forced by poverty into an orphanage, where she subsequently died, and Sylvia describes their last

[63] For more information, see: Hertzog, 'Subjugated Motherhood', 16–34.
[64] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992).
[65] Ofer, 'Cohesion and Rupture', 154.
[66] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992).
[67] Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes*, 29.
[68] H. Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 7.
[69] H. Greenspan et al., 'Engaging Survivors: Assessing 'Testimony' and 'Trauma' as Foundational Concepts', *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, 28:3, (2014), 190-226 (217).
[70]Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992).

meeting as the 'most remembered moment' of her entire experience of the ghetto, suggesting the emotional impression it created.[71] Yet, despite this admission, Sylvia's discussion of the ghetto largely avoids extensive discussion of or reflection on this experience or others of a traumatic nature. This relative silence contributes to – and enables – the representation of her ghetto experience as 'mild' and happy. While this is not to suggest that Sylvia's representation is *wrong* to ignore painful moments, it does indicate that the positive perspective she adopts also contains silences. However, Mary Beard is correct that oral testimonies must be understood as evidence of the narratives and perspectives the subject wishes to create.[72] Thus, Sylvia's depiction of the ghetto is shaped by how she wanted to *present* her experience through her narrative. Crucially, as will be discussed later, this presentation was influenced by Sylvia's upbringing and her complicated relationship with her identity as a Jewish survivor.

Ultimately, it is evident that Sylvia largely attempted to represent her maternal and ghetto experiences as unproblematic. In an exchange with her interviewer, Sylvia reveals that this produced tensions with her sons, influencing their interactions relating to her ghetto experiences. In response to Sylvia's expression that she was happy in the ghetto, her interviewer appears perplexed, questioning how her narrative relates to others she has heard 'that [she'd] heard.'[73] Immediately, Sylvia's tone shifts and she becomes frustrated: 'You ask the same questions as my sons. "How can you say you were happy? I was happy.'[74] Although Sylvia is reluctant to discuss her life after the war, the emotions implicit in this exchange shed valuable insight on her relationship with her sons. As Portelli observes, changes of tone often reflect feelings and attitudes the speaker does not otherwise discuss.[75] Sylvia's tone becomes audibly defensive, conveying a sense of irritation not just with her interviewer but also with her sons, both of whom 'ask the same questions.' Sylvia's exasperation suggests that differences between her perspective and her sons' expectations of the ghetto experience were a point of contention.

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[71] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992)
[72] M. Beard, 'Re-thinking Oral History: A Study of Narrative Performance', *Rethinking History,* 27:4 (2017), 529-548, (531).
[73] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992)
[74] Ibid.
[75] Portelli,'What Makes Oral History Different', 50.

To an extent, Langer is correct that there is often conflict between a survivor's desire to tell their story and the struggle of listeners to truly understand recollections that are outside the normal realm of experience and description.[76] However, as Sylvia's testimony indicates, it was her description of happiness, not trauma, that created a gulf between herself and her sons. Sylvia's sons' surprise at her claim to have been happy exposes the problematic interaction between cultural memory surrounding Holocaust experiences and individual narratives that deviate from it. As Sara Horwitz identifies, intense ideas of suffering and loss dominate the metanarrative of the Holocaust, influencing the broader expectations surrounding survivors' testimonies.[77] Indeed, this discourse served to construct a 'new truth' about the total destructiveness of the Holocaust, reducing the multiplicity of experiences into a single narrative of terror and survival.[78] It thus appears that the impact of Sylvia's ghetto experience on her relationship with her sons was caused by her contradictory recollection of the ghetto. Crucially, this indicates that survivors' experiences could impact their mother–child relationships precisely because they were not constructed with trauma as their central point.

It seems, therefore, that the impact of Sylvia's ghetto and maternal experiences revolved around how she had chosen to remember and represent them to others, rather than a direct transmission of trauma. Significantly, the source of this conflict – Sylvia's positive *representation* of her ghetto experience – was grounded in her understanding of herself. Her testimony suggests that Sylvia's identification as a 'Jewish survivor' was not straightforward because of her upbringing. Crucially, as Waxman has identified, the narratives survivors constructed were dependent on their contemporary conceptions of identity.[79] Indeed, the ways survivors represented their experience were as much about the self-construction of the identity in the now as about the events themselves.[80] Therefore, it is my interpretation that Sylvia's representation of her ghetto experiences was influenced by her cultural upbringing, and the consequent ways in which she perceived herself.

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[76] Langer, *Ruins of Memory,* xiii.
[77] Greenspan et al., 'Engaging Survivors', 221.
[78] A. Hunter, '"To tell the Story": Cultural trauma and Holocaust metanarrative', *Holocaust Studies,* 25:1-2 (2019), 12-27 (23).
[79] Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust,* 151.
[80] M. Peleg, R. Lev-Wiesel and D. Yaniv, 'Reconstruction of Self-Identity of Holocaust Child Survivors Who Participated in "Testimony Theatre"', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy,* 6:4 (2014), 411-419 (416).

Discussing her upbringing, Sylvia is reluctant to describe herself as Jewish: 'It's very, very hard to say about – that my family was Jewish […] I was raised more in Christian tradition than Jewish.'[81] What is more, Sylvia explicitly connects her mother's conversion with a wish to be assimilated into Polish society, calling it an act of 'social mobility.'[82] It is clear that Sylvia did not have a strong affiliation with the Jewish community before the war, and her parents' decision to become assimilated suggests that the family rejected differentiation in favour of societal integration. Together, such factors have been observed frequently to result in an ambiguous relationship between individuals and the cultural identity of the Jewish survivor.[83] In Sylvia's case, because her cultural 'inner script' before the war eschewed Jewish identity in favour of acceptance, the desire to integrate gave her a different perspective on the collective survivor identity.[84] Her 'contentious' representation of her ghetto experience can thus be recognized as an attempt to separate herself from the differentiating cultural experience of traumatic witnessing, through the depiction of a 'happy' and un-transformative experience.

Jewish survivors are often described as sharing a distinct cultural trauma that binds them into the separate communal identity of the 'Holocaust survivor.''[85] However, Sylvia makes clear that she does not want to be considered different from broader society, emphasizing that, 'I didn't feel different […] I don't feel different than other people.'[86] The observation that she 'didn't want to be different than other girls' makes it apparent that Sylvia feared being considered as part of an alternate 'survivor' group.[87] Like her parents, Sylvia favoured social integration, so the narrative she constructs presents her experiences as 'happy' in order to separate her from the 'collective image of a traumatic past' that served to separate Holocaust survivors from others.[88] Thus, Sylvia's representation of her ghetto experiences, although questioned by her sons, can be understood as a

[81] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992)
[82] Ibid.
[83] P. Dembowski, *Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto: An Epitaph for the Unremembered* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).
[84] A. Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory": Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates', *Oral History,* 32:2 (2004), 35-44 (36).
[85] Hunter, '"To tell the story"', 13.
[86] Interview with Sylvia Murawski (1992).
[87] Ibid.
[88] J. Assman and J. Czaplicka. 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125-133 (129).

product of her upbringing and a subsequent 'preoccupation with not being identified as different' after the war.[89]

Paradoxically, then, it was Sylvia's desire to construct a testimony at odds with the metanarrative of collective Jewish suffering, in order to (re)-assimilate herself into wider society, that ultimately caused dislocation in her maternal relationship, because her narrative differed from other depictions of the ghetto. Indeed, in remaining silent on her experiences of trauma, Sylvia is ultimately left in an ambiguous identity: neither fully sharing the collective identity of the Jewish survivor nor belonging to the wider society who had not experienced the ghetto or the Holocaust.

Overall, this chapter has shown that an alternative maternal experience to that discussed in Chapter One could still have an effect on female survivors' relationships as mothers, but in a different way. Sylvia's testimony suggests that the effect of the maternal experience was not always the transmission of trauma. Instead, sometimes, these experiences created a gulf of understanding between survivors and their children. Moreover, Sylvia's construction of her narrative shows that representation and identification could, in themselves, be impacted by a survivor's upbringing. Indeed, her testimony illuminates what it means to be a mother whose perspective of experience-outside-discourse was not able to be fully recognized by others.[90] Ultimately, however, the tensions that arose in Sylvia's interaction with her sons points to the fact that, even when a woman did not explicitly identify herself as a survivor, postwar relationships could still be impacted, as a consequence of living through the ghetto and carrying this history.

[89] R. Krell, 'Child Survivors of the Holocaust: 40 Years Later', *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry,* 38:6 (1993), 378- 380 (378).
[90] P. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews,' *Cultural and Social History,* 1:1 (2004), 65-93 (93).

Chapter Three

Thus far, this dissertation has examined 'maternal experience' in the context of two women who were either under the protection of their mother or became a mother figure themselves. However, as Duffy recently outlined, discussions of motherhood during the ghetto must also recognize young Jewish women's 'socially constructed role as the main child carers' in the community.[91] Therefore, this chapter seeks to expand the parameters of what constitutes a 'maternal experience,' demonstrating that events outside the family relating to the protection of others' children could also represent meaningful maternal events. Consequently, examining the testimony of Maria Rosenbloom, who decided not to have children of her own after the war, my main finding in this chapter is that the trauma of witnessing the murder of others' children in the ghetto impacted both Maria's maternal identity and her consequent attitudes towards having children.

Unlike the women previously discussed, Maria entered the ghetto as a young woman rather than a child. Born in 1918, she was already twenty-three when she entered the Kolomyia Ghetto in Poland.[92] Crucially, as psychologists Dan Bar-On and Julia Chatain have observed, survivors who experienced more of their childhood before the war often had pre-existing ideas of motherhood, as a consequence of the greater intergenerational transmission of the parental framework.[93] Therefore, entering the ghetto as a young adult, Maria was likely to have a more developed idea about maternal responsibilities than the women in previous chapters. This is significant because, as Elizabeth Baer and Myrna Goldenberg have identified, the gender-specific socialization of women as nurturers had particular influence on the impact and meaning of their experiences.[94] Therefore, in order to understand the significance of Maria's traumatic witnessing, it is crucial to firstly examine her childhood and the framework of protective maternal behaviour with which she grew up.

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[91] Duffy, 'Motherhood During and After the Holocaust', 91.
[92] While Kolomyia is now part of Ukraine, it was considered part of Poland during the Holocaust.
[93] Ban-On and Chatain, *Parenthood*, 26.
[94] E. R. Baer and M. Goldenberg, 'Introduction' in E. R. Baer and M. Goldenberg (eds.), *Experience and Expression: Women, Nazis and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), xiii-xxv (xiv).

From her testimony, it is immediately apparent that Maria's upbringing was coloured by the family trauma of the death of a sister before Maria's birth. Maria explains: 'She died right in my father's arms […] My parents didn't talk about it, but it was always in the air and I suspected something happened.'[95] Although her parents did not discuss her sister's death, it is clear that Maria felt their unspoken pain, poignantly commenting that she grew up in a 'family that suffered from depression'.[96] In many ways, the upbringing she describes – a family environment of ever-present but 'covered up' pain with which she herself could not identify – parallels the later experiences of second-generation children of Holocaust survivors.[97] As the extensive psychological research on this group has shown, parental silence surrounding trauma had a powerful influence on children, contributing to their overidentification with the pain of their parents.[98] Indeed, this is also evident in Maria's case. She suffered pain because of this loss, recalling with visible emotion in her video testimony, 'the time her mother would cry' over her sister.[99] Maria's strong feelings show that she grew up possessing a 'complex of attitudes, beliefs and emotions' about a child's death, even though she could not fully relate to the event herself.[100]

Moreover, as a consequence of this loss, Maria's mother adopted an extremely over-protective attitude. 'My mother was extremely anxious about me and my parents overprotected me,' she explains.[101] Describing her childhood, Maria repeatedly focuses on her mother's fearful 'obsession' that she 'didn't look well enough' and needed to be closely looked after.[102] Although the protective Jewish mother has been identified as a recurrent trope in culture more generally, Maria directly connects her mother's behaviour to her parents' trauma and her own role in the family:[103] 'I grew up in this family in which I extremely important […] because I had to replace the losses.'[104] This comment is indicative of the deep significance of maternal protection in Maria's family.

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[95] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (Sept. 17, 1996), USHMM, OHA, RG-50.030.0379
[96] Ibid.
[97] E. Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 67.
[98] Ban-On and Chatain, *Parenthood,* 5.
[99] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (1996)
[100] S. Juni, 'Identity Disorders of Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors', *Journal of Loss and Trauma,* 21:3 (2016), 203-212 (205).
[101] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (1996)
[102] Ibid.
[103] J. Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[104] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (1996).

Ultimately, it is clear that Maria's childhood was deeply influenced by the death of her sister, resulting in her mother's overprotectiveness towards her and her siblings. As psychologists Harkness and Super have identified in their study of motherhood patterns, such behaviours are implicitly communicated to children, resulting in the transmission of a cultural framework regarding the responsibilities of the mother figure.[105] It is therefore likely that Maria entered the ghetto with an understanding of the maternal role as being intimately connected with the need to protect children. The significance of Maria's ghetto experience, wherein she witnessed the violent murder of others' children, can therefore be understood as a trauma with a particularly personal significance, undermining the protective responsibility she saw as part of the maternal role.

When remembering the ghetto, Maria becomes noticeably distressed when she describes this moment. Having previously been composed, her narrative becomes emotionally charged, indicating the moment's significance.[106] An analysis of her fragmented and moving recollection exposes its continued traumatic impact:

> 'There was a scream and I figured what are the Germans bring chicken, they are killing the chicken? They found they slaughtered in this slaughterhouse, they slaughtered our children […] This was the end of me, this was the end of me. I ran home. Couldn't talk. I couldn't tell anybody what I heard.'[107]

Although the children were not Maria's own, her affective narrative indicates the profound impact of the moment. Maria's speech fragments and loses narrative coherency, as she seems to ask herself if 'they are killing the chicken'. Indeed, in her video testimony it appears that Maria speaks

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[105] S. Harkness and M. Super quoted in I. Glassman and R. Eisikovits, 'Intergenerational Transmission of Motherhood Patterns: Three Generations of Immigrant Mothers of Moroccan Descent in Israel', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 37*:4 (2006), 461-477, (461).

[106] It must be noted that, while Maria was a young adult when she entered the ghetto, her relationship with her mother did not cease to exist. In her testimony, she describes how her mother actively took on a sacrificial role to feed and support Maria, despite the fact they lived separately. While these actions certainly constitute part of Maria's 'maternal experience,' they do not appear to have clear connections with Maria's postwar attitude to motherhood, which is the focus of this chapter, and have therefore not been discussed.

[107] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (1996).

from within the memory itself: her concept of time between the 'now' of the interview and the 'then' of the experience becomes blurred as the overwhelming nature of the memory reasserts itself. As oral historian Selma Leysdorff suggests, such sudden narrative incoherence is often indicative of an intensely traumatic experience that disrupts the speaker's ability to retell a memory in the present.[108] Certainly, this evidence of trauma is unsurprising, given the deeply upsetting nature of an incident 'standing outside the framework of normal experience'.[109] However, Maria's inability to fully externalize the memory indicates that the trauma *continues* to have a significant psychological impact, remaining 'too overwhelming' and painful to describe coherently, even at the time of her interview in 1996.[110] This points to the centrality of the event in Maria's life. As psychologist Dori Laub has outlined, unresolved trauma continues to impact the victim's subsequent experiences, particularly those implicitly related to the event.[111]

In addition, Kelman observes that specific moments of trauma can undermine parts of the witness's identity.[112] Interestingly, Maria claims the children as 'our' children. The language suggests that she felt they were, in some ways, her own, a perception that has implications for the impact of their deaths on her maternal identity. As already discussed, Maria's particular framework for the woman–mother emphasized the *protective* role in the maternal identity. Yet, during this experience, Maria was rendered helpless to protect children whom she describes as connected to herself. Given her framework, therefore, it is likely she perceived this moment as a 'failure' in relation to her biological gender-identity as a mother.[113] Maria repeatedly exclaims that, 'This was the end of me.' Such language suggests that she perceives the moment as some form of psychic death, a powerful sign of its emotional significance. If, as her words suggest, Maria understood these children as figuratively her own, her inability to protect them clearly disrupted her maternal identity as their protector. Indeed, it is understood within trauma studies that witnessing atrocity 'unmakes' parts of the self which is perceived to have been assaulted or undermined.[114] Thus, it is

[108] S. Leysdorff, 'Introduction', in S. Leysdorff, K. L. Rogers and G. Dawson (eds.), *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1-26 (15).
[109] L. Abrahms, *Oral History Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 178.
[110] D. Laub, 'An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival', in D. Laub and S. Felman (eds.), *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-92 (79).
[111] Laub and Auerhahn, 'Intergenerational Memory', 21-41.
[112] Kelman, 'The Place of Ethnic Identity ', 4.
[113] Juni, 'Identity Disorders', 206.
[114] Greenspan et al., 'Engaging Survivors', 219.

my interpretation that these children's deaths represented an assault on Maria's gendered maternal self, marking the 'end' of the identity to which she refers.

Clearly then, Maria's testimony demonstrates that an experience in the ghetto outside her own family had long-lasting emotional significance. Indeed, the impressionistic language of her recollection reveals that the trauma was still unresolved at the time of her interview. In line with Suzanne Kaplan's perspective, having acknowledged the symbolic impact of an experience, it is consequently possible to observe how these memories are part of a survivor's world and continue to assert influence in their lives.[115]

Although it is not discussed directly in her testimony, Maria did not have children after the war, despite getting married.[116] This was a contrast to the large majority of survivors, who were 'consumed with rebuilding their lives' through marriage and children.[117] The Nazis had killed children because they represented the Jewish future; thus, the proliferation of births after the war represented, in many ways, Jewish defiance.[118] However, as Kaplan perceptively asserts, for some women, witnessing Nazi attempts to eliminate children had a lasting impact on their own attitudes towards having families.[119] Indeed, Maria's discussion of other women reveals her own fears surrounding having children: 'The children were born in the shadow of chimneys […] I still don't understand the courage these women had to start families. I still admire their courage.'[120]

Maria's repeated assertion that starting a family represents an act of 'courage' points to her own emotions. Intentionally or otherwise, the language implies that she conflates having a family with

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[115] S. Kaplan, 'Child survivors and childbearing; Memories from the Holocaust invading the present', *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 23:2 (2000), 249-282 (252).
[116]'Maria Rosenbloom', obituary, *The New York Times* (Oct. 27th 2011), <https://archive.nytimes.com/query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage-9D0CE4DA163AF934A15753C1A9679D8B63.html> [accessed 8 May 2020].
[117] Cohen, Fogelman and Ofer, 'Introduction', 2.
[118] N. Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 69.
[119] Kaplan, 'Child survivors', 249.
[120] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (1996)

danger and painful feelings, even after the war.[121] Yet, as Kaplan argues, fear that has no context in the postwar world indicates an origin in a traumatic experience.[122] From Maria's testimony, this would suggest that witnessing the children's murder in the ghetto had resulted in a trauma that had not healed. Having been unable to protect the children, Maria experienced the 'death' of a part of herself, so even though the persecution of Jewish children was over, the trauma continued to distort Maria's perception of the consequences of having a child. Other women's decisions to start families were acts of 'courage' because, for Maria, having children represented danger and the potential to re-experience her trauma. Ultimately, this indicates that Maria's experience in the ghetto did not change her behaviour as a mother, as for the women in previous chapters, but instead impacted her choice to become a mother at all.

Although Maria chose not to become a mother, her dedicated career in social work and survivor rehabilitation can be understood as an alternative maternal role, and an attempt to 'save' others. The significance of the role is evident in Maria's passionate discussion of her experiences, which lasts almost two hours. Observing that her job 'saved [her] always', Maria suggests that she feels her work is a form of catharsis, rescuing her from her earlier pain.[123] To an extent, her choice to devote herself to 'serve and help other survivors' can be understood as enabling her to perform the role she was not able to fulfil in the ghetto.[124] Although Maria still suffers from the trauma of the incident, she comments that the 'centrality of [her] experiences in her life' has driven her to 'build on top of the trauma' through helping others.[125] Ultimately, this corroborates Patrick Meade's assessment that working with others was a way for survivors to create meaning from their traumatic experiences and fulfil a caring role outside their family.[126] It appears, then, that Maria's experiences in the ghetto not only impacted her attitude towards having children but also influenced the direction of her life, inspiring a career dedicated to helping others.

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[121] This interpretation of Maria's language is informed by the definition of 'courage' as: 'the ability to do something dangerous, or to face pain or opposition, without showing fear', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/courage> [accessed 10th May 2020].
[122] Kaplan, 'Child Survivors', 273.
[123] Interview with Maria Rosenbloom (1996)
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] P. Meade,'"What happened After": Meaning- Making in the Lives of Holocaust Survivors' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2011), 222.

Although the ghetto experience in this chapter is not directly related to the relationship between the survivor and her own mother, it is my interpretation that the trauma Maria witnessed constituted a form of 'maternal experience' that challenged her gender-defined maternal identity. It is clear that the trauma impacted the course of Maria's life. Crucially, her testimony demonstrates that, in some cases, the consequence of a traumatic maternal experience was the survivor's decision not to have children at all but to find another way to enact the maternal role.

Conclusion

Using the testimonies of three female survivors of the Holocaust who each recollect a distinct 'maternal experience' in the ghetto environment, this dissertation has investigated the relationship between these women's stories and their postwar attitudes and relationships pertaining to motherhood. Bringing together the disparate threads of analysis, this final section offers some concluding remarks on the findings of the three chapters and their significance in wider scholarship.

Although each chapter analyses a different representation of the maternal experience, all respectively conclude that there appear to be connections between the women's encounters and their later attitudes towards motherhood. However, while these women's stories corroborate that their experience in the ghetto shaped those attitudes, my findings also demonstrate that the particular effect of each women's experience was individually determined. Indeed, the impacts of these women's experiences varied distinctly: in Chapter One, Leah's adoption of an adult, caregiving role influenced her behaviour as a mother; in Chapter Two, Sylvia's upbringing influenced her representation of her ghetto experience, which consequently impacted her parent–child relationship; in Chapter Three, a traumatic experience outside the family influenced Maria becoming a mother at all. Taken together, the stories show that neither the maternal experience in the ghetto nor its impact were homogenous. Instead, individual circumstances and maternal events determined the unique impact of women's experiences.

Given these findings, this dissertation concludes by arguing for the recognition of *individual* maternal circumstances and events in scholarly discussions of both motherhood in the ghetto and its later impact. Indeed, while these women's stories encourage us to recognise that experiences in the ghetto continued to have consequences after the war, they demonstrate the centrality of the personal situation in determining the outcome. Despite examining only three survivor life-stories, specifically within the ghetto space, it is apparent from this thesis that relying on broad conclusions about Holocaust experiences and their impact fails to recognise the diversity of individual narratives. While this is not to a call to disregard entirely the hegemonic metanarratives of the Jewish mother and the maternal experience in the ghetto, or the psychological research concerning unaffected survivor mothers, this dissertation has shown that a broader and more nuanced

approach to the maternal experience is both important and useful.[127] In doing so, it has hoped to further the work of Zoe Waxman and Esther Hertzog, who have argued against the metanarratives of women's experience and for the need to instead recognise the complexity of survivors' stories and the factors that influenced the survivors' responses.[128]

While this paper has shown the relationship between the ghetto experience and women's postwar maternal roles, it is a microhistorical study. Thus, there is undoubtedly scope to expand this research wider. Indeed, the diversity of these three stories is itself evidence of the heterogeneity of individual circumstances. In light of this, it seems pertinent to accept that 'messiness may be a solution' for approaching survivors' experiences and their impacts going forward.[129] For, as much as living through the ghetto, and more broadly the Holocaust, represented a shared cultural wound, Maria Rosenbloom is correct that 'survivors are not a homogenous group.' [130] Thus, their stories must be acknowledged on an individual level in order to truly comprehend their meaning and power.

[127] Gurewitsch, (eds.), *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters;* Ofer, 'Cohesion and Rupture', 143-162 ; M. H. van IJzendoorn, M. Bakermans-Kranenburg, and A. Sagi-Schwartz, 'Are children of Holocaust survivors less well-adapted? A meta-analytic investigation of secondary traumatization', *Journal of Traumatic Stress,* 16: 5 (2005), 459-469.
[128] Z. Waxman*, Women in the Holocaust: Feminist Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); E. Hertzog, 'Subjugated Motherhood', 16–34.
[129] S. Sulieman, 'The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust', *American Imago,* 59:3 (2002), 277-296 (289).
[130] M. Rosenbloom, 'The Holocaust Survivor in Later Life', *Journal of Gerontological Social Work,* 8:3-4 (1985), 181-101 (189).

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