

Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in the East European Ghettos during the Holocaust

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In the course of the destruction of European Jewry between 1939 and 1945, the family as a social unit and as a personal sanctuary faced unprecedented pressures and duress. Unlike previous tragedies of deportation, war atrocities and economic persecution that were the lot of European Jews – particularly from Eastern Europe – from the First World War onwards, the Holocaust challenged the very basis of family cohesion. Nonetheless, during the long months of ghetto life and through the deportation to the death camps, families and remnants of family units did not cease to exist. Even in the death camps following the separation of the sexes and the killing of virtually all mothers, children and the elderly, inmates clung to what was left: either to a fragment of the family, such as siblings or cousins, or to “surrogate families” such as friends or *landsmen*¹ – or, in the absence of all, to memories of the family that once was.

After the Holocaust, a salient characteristic of the Jewish survivors was their will to establish new families. Those who had lost their spouses and children tended to remarry and have other children as soon as possible. The same was true of young men and women who had been deprived of the normal experience of family life from the war’s onset. In the displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, rabbis performed hundreds of weddings and the rate of birth was extraordinarily high – forty-one births per year per thousand individuals in the years 1946 and 1947. Commemorating the dead was part of the impetus for having children; just as important was the need to retrace and recreate the rhythms of lost family life.

This article seeks to analyze the Jewish family -- specifically, the relationships between members of the nuclear family unit -- during the ghetto period in Eastern Europe. Utilizing the framework of the history of the Holocaust, it will reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the Jewish family in extremis, highlighting the role of tradition in the cohesion or dissolution of family bonds. Attention will be given to the impact of ghetto conditions on families from different social groups, and on the role of the Jewish authorities in shaping the patterns of responses and behavior in the family. The focus on family provides a different perspective on the ghetto system, both from the point of view of Nazi policy and from that of the Jewish administration and leadership, shedding light on the everyday lives of individual Jews and their efforts to remain alive. The family was both a burden and a source of strength, hindering many persons’ chances of survival while providing others with the motivation to endure despite all odds.

One reservation must be noted. An article of this sort cannot cover all of the many issues that are part of family experience and efforts of survival during this period. The extended family, for instance, was an important factor in the Jewish milieu both

before the war and during the Nazi regime. This article will also not touch on rescue through escape and on the ways in which family ties often prevented young people from leaving the ghetto. Many families survived either by hiding or by passing as Aryans -- whether together as a unit or dispersed. The Jewish partisans' "family camps" is another specifically Jewish phenomenon of the war that will not be discussed here. These and other important issues await future publication.

The Jewish Family in Prewar Europe

The lack of comprehensive research on Jewish families in prewar Europe allows us to draw only tentative conclusions about its main features. Some generalizations are in order, however, before beginning to analyze the disruptions caused by ghetto life. A good starting point is the social and economic situation of Jewish families and the cultural setting (such as religious or assimilative milieu) in which they functioned, with particular reference to the contrast between West and East European Jewry.²

Compared with Jews in Central and Western Europe, who were mostly middle- or upper-middle class and who had wide-ranging contacts with the surrounding non-Jewish society, Eastern European Jews were far more insular. Typically, East European Jewish men were not professionals. As shopkeepers, middlemen, carpenters, shoemakers or tailors, their clientele was largely Jewish, and their families tended to live in buildings or neighborhoods that had a distinctly Jewish character. Not surprisingly, their sense of Jewish identity was also particularistic. Many East European Jews spoke Yiddish at home. Their children, even those who went to neighborhood public schools, had mostly Jewish friends: studying in Polish or other local languages, they would speak the language with a noticeable Jewish accent.³ Compared with their Western co-religionists, East European Jews were much more likely to be religiously observant or traditional in outlook, and there was far more reliance on the extended family in periods of economic hardship.⁴

The goals of becoming a "lady of leisure" or of attaining fulfillment through professional or volunteer work were far more apparent among the bourgeois circles in Western and Central Europe, penetrating only slowly into the East European upper middle-class milieu. Middle- and upper middle-class women in Western Europe did not often work outside the home, and they were usually able to employ household help (generally provided by non-Jews). In lieu of paid employment, they participated in women's clubs and did volunteer work. Adolescent daughters often studied at professional schools and sometimes even at universities; their mothers were responsible for the home, and also had the major responsibility for raising children and transmitting social and cultural (including Jewish) values and norms.⁵

In Eastern Europe, the standard of living was far lower. Economic necessity forced many women into the job market, either working at home at piecemeal work or else in family shops or other commercial establishments. About one third of the Jewish women in Poland, for example, were employed, comprising about 20 percent of the Jewish labor force. Like their West European counterparts, East European Jewish women were responsible for running their households, with household help more apt to be provided by their daughters than by outside help. Husbands involved themselves neither in household work nor in the education of their daughters, although they often took charge of schooling and supplemental Jewish education for their sons.⁶

West and East European Jews alike placed noteworthy stress on the importance of family life. As Paula Hyman has remarked, "Jews entered the modern era with a

powerful myth about the strength and stability of the traditional Jewish family throughout the ages.”⁷ In her analysis, the “traditional Jewish family” shared two important values generally assigned to the modern family: affection between parents and children; and an emphasis on the importance of emotional ties between couples.⁸ Other scholars have speculated about a different value -- the legendary devotion of Jewish mothers to their children -- which can perhaps be traced to the ever-present threat of persecution. Though impossible to gauge quantitatively, such characteristics of the Jewish family are on ample display in Jewish folklore and in classical texts from the Bible onwards.⁹

What happened to Jewish family solidarity during the Holocaust? For answers, one must turn to the main -- and fragmentary -- sources of this period, which include diaries kept by individuals and more formal records such as the chronicles of the Lodz ghetto, the reports of Judenrat meetings in the Lublin and Bialystock ghettos and various other forms of ghetto documentation such as the underground newspapers put out by the youth movements that were collected in the Oneg Shabbat underground archive of Warsaw. Postwar sources, including memoirs, oral testimony and memorial books (*yizkor bicher*), also contain valuable information and insights.

Many of these sources are intensely personal. Contemporaneous sources present the voices of individuals whose families were caught at that very moment in the Nazi onslaught, whereas postwar testimonies and memoirs are marked by bereavement and often guilt. Each type of source, moreover, carries its own biases. The perspective of those writing at the time is influenced both by immediate, local events and the overwhelming emotions of fear, pain, anger and impending loss. Postwar sources display shifting perspectives over time: as survivors mature and become parents or grandparents, the initial guilt felt by many is subordinated to a overwhelming sense of loss ("my parents could never experience the joy of being grandparents"). In Lawrence Langer's terminology, "tainted memory" and "the ruins of memory" become ever more visible in later accounts.¹⁰

Many survivors were small children or adolescents when the war broke out, and thus their perspective is loaded with the trauma of a lost childhood. They may remember their families with great nostalgia, but also with a latent anger at having been abandoned. Many can recall only fragments pertaining to family relationships. Others suffer the pain of remembering familial conflicts that were never resolved, or feel remorse over acts such as stealing a family member's portion of bread. Such issues present an enormous challenge to researchers striving to maintain a proper balance between empathy and critical distance.¹¹ A main aid in achieving this balance is the use of a conceptual framework that draws links between the personal, the general and the political dimensions of the Holocaust.

Impact of Economic and Housing Conditions on the Family

Wealth and income were major factors causing divisions between individuals and within families. Officially, all Jews lost their assets during the first months of the war and about a year later were forced into ghettos, usually located in the poorest and least developed sections of town.

Although a general directive about the establishment of the ghettos was issued on September 21, 1939, a specific law establishing ghettos was never enacted. Hence, the establishment of ghettos did not proceed in an immediate or uniform manner. In this article, the main focus is on three of the largest ghettos -- Lodz, Warsaw and Kovno -- each of which had specific characteristics that were applicable to other ghettos as well.

The Polish cities of Lodz and Warsaw had a different status during the war, Lodz being part of the Warthegau region that was annexed to the Third Reich, and Warsaw falling within the jurisdiction of the Generalgouvernement (the Polish regions not annexed to Germany or the Soviet Union, which were headed by Hans Frank). Kovno, in Lithuania, was part of a wide area, including the Baltic countries, Byelorussia, eastern Poland and Ukraine, that was occupied by the Germans after the invasion of Russia in June 1941.

All of the ghettos were characterized by dreadful physical conditions: thousands of people concentrated in a small section of the city lacking proper infrastructure and cut off from general municipal services. A Nazi order of October 1939 set up an internal governing mechanism for the ghetto known as the Judenrat, or Jewish Council. In Lodz, the Judenrat was headed by Chaim Rumkowski and the ghetto was entirely sealed off almost at the outset. In Warsaw, connections with the Polish side of the city continued despite formal restrictions that mandated the death penalty for Jews found outside the ghetto. Poles and Jews established an underground supply line between the ghetto and the Aryan side, and smuggling became a vital lifeline. The Warsaw ghetto was also characterized by individual economic initiatives; Poles and Germans were allowed to establish small industries, known as "shops," in which Jewish labor was cruelly exploited.

In the areas occupied by the Nazis after the invasion of the Soviet Union, most Jews were confined to ghettos following the first wave of mass killings executed by the Einsatzgruppen (with the assistance of local nationalist groups) as part of the Final Solution. Thus, the ghettos consisted of Jews who had already experienced the loss of family and friends and the destruction of their communities. They hoped that the worst was over and that the Nazis had an interest in keeping a small minority of Jews (mainly of them skilled workers) alive. Kovno represents this ghetto model.

Overall, the least fortunate of the Jews in the ghettos were the refugees from smaller towns and villages who were expelled by the Nazis to the larger towns. The fate of the 20,000 Jews of Kalisz, a town in western Poland, is illustrative: during the first weeks of the occupation, this Jewish community was decimated both by pogroms (organized by the Germans, who were aided by the Poles), deportation to forced labor, a mass murder of the sick and weak in the nearby forest and the mass escape of some 7,000 people to Warsaw.¹² Shelters for these and thousands of other refugees were established in the first weeks of the war in large cities such as Warsaw, Lodz, Krakow, Vilna and Bialystock. Already stripped of their homes, the refugees were dependent on relatives, friends and public-aid organizations for food and basic commodities. After the move to the ghetto, they remained among the most destitute people in the population.

Other Jews in the ghetto, although also uprooted from their hometowns, lived on a far better footing. Some managed to take with them various valuables -- jewelry, gold ornaments, household items, decorated linen and fancy clothing -- which they were then in a position to sell or barter. Jews who had business relationships with non-Jews, whose contacts were not broken off, were able at first to continue some of their business operations. This provided them with a crucial advantage, as contacts with the Aryan side could be invaluable, for example, in obtaining false papers or in smuggling people out of the ghetto.¹³ It is hard to estimate the size of this group; not only was it different in each ghetto, but the numbers also decreased over the course of time.

For a small minority, the ghetto provided the opportunity to make a fortune. In Warsaw and in some of the other larger ghettos, big-time smugglers and informers became rich. Mary Berg, an adolescent originally from Lodz who kept a diary of life in

the Warsaw ghetto, writes of a family from her hometown that was involved with the notorious "Gang of Thirteen" -- a group of Jews who collaborated with the Nazis -- and describes their corrupt and opulent lifestyle in the midst of the extreme poverty and misery of others.¹⁴ But her own family was also relatively well off. Berg's father was an art dealer who fled Lodz when the city was occupied, at first escaping to the Soviet territories and then, together with his family, moving to Warsaw. With the help of business acquaintances, he managed to get money for the art treasures he had left behind. The family also took valuables along, and these enabled them to live reasonably well even in the ghetto. They continued to employ a housemaid, for example, celebrated Mary's birthday with a cake and Hanukah of 1941 with the traditional potato pancakes. At a later stage the family resources became more depleted, but at this point, using connections with the Judenrat, the father was able to obtain the desired post of superintendent in an apartment building occupied by relatively well-off Jews. With this job, along with assistance from relatives in the U.S. (the mother was an American citizen), the family was able to get by. Mary attended an architecture course given by the Judenrat; another woman from an affluent family, Helena Szereszewska, writes in a postwar memoir that her daughter studied nursing in order to obtain work at the ghetto hospital.¹⁵

A good deal of trade was carried out in the ghetto, both legal and illegal. Much of it involved the supply of food and raw materials for the ghetto "shops," or small industries owned by Germans and Poles that provided goods for the German army. Some tradesmen, such as Avraham Gefner of Warsaw, were connected with the Judenrat. Others were able to transfer previous business operations to the ghetto with the help of a Polish partner. Some Jews, trapped in the ghetto, continued to receive income from businesses managed by a non-Jewish partner or friend. In Krakow, a number of Jews were even able to continue living outside the ghetto for several months.¹⁶

In Warsaw, the more affluent Jews lived on ghetto streets (Leszno, Nowolipski) that had better apartment buildings and a number of cafes and theaters -- the ghetto's night life. One of the women interviewed by Cecilia Slepak of the Oneg Shabbat project was Mrs. G., who had originally been relocated to Leszno Street. Mrs. G explained that this move had been difficult but not unbearable -- her real distress had begun only when she was forced to move from there to a room in another apartment in a crowded and ugly section of the ghetto.¹⁷ In Lodz, forty-six families connected with the Judenrat and the ghetto police lived in Marishin, also considered a desirable ghetto location.

Although housing was a major concern, obtaining sufficient food was even more crucial. Szereszewska describes how a supplier would arrange to deliver a sack of potatoes to her apartment and notes that she would ask the delivery man to enter from the back door so that the neighbors wouldn't notice. (She speaks in other places of her sensitivity to the poor conditions of others, mentioning, for example, that she had better clothing than many of the women she met whenever she would take her baby grandson out for some fresh air.) Mary Berg writes that her mother regularly hosted two refugees from their hometown of Lodz for lunch and dinner, and extended assistance to others who could not sustain themselves.¹⁸

In the more affluent families, women had rarely worked, and this pattern continued until the family faced overwhelming crisis -- at which point women had to share the economic burden. Some became entrepreneurs. Mrs. G. is a good example. After her husband lost his business, she began to trade in Jewish-owned luxury furniture

and Persian rugs that had escaped confiscation. Posing as an Aryan, Mrs. G. would leave the ghetto illegally, thus risking her life, and would meet her Polish partners near the courthouse, where she would work out the details of transferring the goods (these were most often stored on the Aryan side). Another enterprising woman, Mrs. C1, assisted her parents in opening a restaurant inside the ghetto. She told Slepak that she exploited her romantic involvement with a *Volksdeutsche* in order to obtain supplies.¹⁹

As long as they dwelt in reasonably bearable living conditions and had food to eat, families were able to maintain a precarious sense of stability. Many, however, fell prey to informers who led Nazis to their homes in a search for gold or valuables,²⁰ and many others worried about relatives or close friends whose situation was more desperate than their own. The sources tell of individuals who took the initiative to relieve others' distress, as did Mary Berg's mother.²¹ But there are also stories of people, admittedly a small minority, who took advantage of their relative wealth -- for instance, men who neglected their children and deserted their wives for younger, prettier women; or young girls who stole from their parents and used the money for cosmetics, fancy dresses or leather boots. In the reality of increasing suffering and the ever-present fear of death, some adopted the philosophy of conspicuous consumption, a form of "living for today."²²

As the occupation continued, the number of those living in extreme poverty was constantly on the rise. Even those who earned a small salary (such as individuals who were working for the Judenrat) needed to supplement their income in order to obtain the basic food for their families. As savings dwindled, people resorted to selling or bartering their household goods. The task (most often carried out by women) was difficult, as the market was flooded with goods. Middle- and lower-middle-class families sold items they had spent years to acquire in order to obtain a few sacks of potatoes, flour, sugar or vegetables. In ghettos that were not yet completely closed off (for instance, Warsaw until the end of 1941, Krakow and Kovno), trade was conducted at illegal marketplaces set up within the ghetto. In Lodz, in contrast, the ghetto was sealed from the outset and from the summer of 1941, it had its own currency. Trade, which was banned by the Judenrat, could take place only among the ghetto population.

Yisrael Gutman estimates that in the Warsaw ghetto, more than fifty percent of the people had no income from work as of 1941.²³ Most of these people were essentially starving to death. Unemployment had particularly severe consequences for families headed by single women. As starvation in the ghettos increased, the soup, bread and ersatz coffee distributed in the working places were an individual's primary source of nutrition. Peretz Opochinski describes women workers in a Warsaw "shop" that produced underwear. Despite long hours and poor physical conditions, their anxiety increased whenever raw materials were missing or orders were low. They would come to work anyway in the hope of receiving food, which many mothers would then take home and give to their children.²⁴

"Home" by this time was, at best, a place of bare existence.²⁵ Household items and furniture were either being sold or else burned for fuel. As time went on, overcrowding in some ghettos (those, for example, of Warsaw, Vilna, Kovno and Lodz) became worse when the authorities redrew the lines to make the ghetto even smaller. Hundreds of families living on streets that were now considered "Aryan" were once again forced to find shelter. A one-room apartment in the downsized ghetto could house two or more families.

Such dire conditions had a number of direct effects on families. Relationships between parents and children and between husbands and wives were radically altered as

traditional roles and responsibilities became redefined. As the crisis became ever more extreme, some families drew closer together; in others, the ties broke down.

Changing Roles of Family Members

The most significant changes in family relations came about in consequence of women's working outside the house and the resultant declining position of the husband as chief provider. For some, this was a shift that occurred at the beginning of the war when many family businesses were destroyed or badly damaged. Husbands lost their source of income for the weeks and months it took to make the necessary repairs -- and by that time, many of the ghettos were already being set up. Barred from their former places of business, Jewish men were now at risk whenever they walked on the streets -- fair play for harassment, or for being seized and taken away for forced labor. Sometimes they were taken for local work, but they could also be sent outside the city, returning home weeks or months later, often broken physically or in spirit. Fearing the consequences of being seized, many Jewish men stayed off the streets during daylight hours. In one way or another, a sizable number of ghetto families found themselves without an adult male provider.

Thus women, in particular, were forced to take the initiative. Some took their husbands' place in selling merchandise or else leased equipment or vehicles such as a horse and cart, which were then hired out. Before the ghettos were established, they petitioned the authorities for permission to reopen or start new businesses, and pleaded for the right to send clothing and medicine to husbands who had been arrested or deported. They took care of home repairs and, when necessary, found new temporary quarters for their families. All of these tasks were unfamiliar to women, and were part of the initial confrontation with the violence and chaos of the occupation. Children, who were out of school for months at a time, helped as well, holding a place in lines for food and water or taking care of younger siblings. In the ghetto, many of them became smugglers.

A theme that emerges in various sources is the enormous struggle to retain some form of "normal" family life. Mrs. F., for example, was the wife of a shoemaker and the mother of three children under the age of fourteen. Even before the war, the family was just getting by, being dependent on the daily income provided by the mending and selling of shoes. Mrs. F. had helped her husband then by selling his shoes in the marketplace (they had no store of their own). Shortly after the occupation, her husband had been sent to a forced labor camp. Left alone, Mrs. F. first tried to recover merchandise and accounts that were due, and then sold the remainder of her husband's stock. Within a short period of time, she was left empty-handed. At this point, Mrs. F. used ingenuity. She removed her armband in order to pass as an Aryan and began to trade in various items, relying on the other merchants not to inform on her. Several months later, her husband returned from the forced labor camp. His experiences there had injured him both physically and emotionally, and it was months before he was able to function normally. For fear of once again being seized, Mr. F. dared not venture onto the streets.

The move to the ghetto in November 1940 cut Mrs. F. off from her new trading venture. The family's situation became more desperate. Mr. F. lacked the leather to make new shoes, and there seemed to be no other source of income. At this point, his wife decided to turn to smuggling. Again posing as an Aryan, she would slip out of the

ghetto and stay for several days at a time on the outside, returning with supplies that were in general demand in the ghetto such as food, medicine and soap, as well as with materials needed by her husband. Mr. F. served as a liaison with customers in the ghetto, confirming which items his wife should attempt to bring in (they communicated via one of the few telephones to be found in the ghetto). As had been the case before the war, the “family business” was a cooperative venture, although Mrs. F.’s role was now the dominant one.

Amazingly, Mrs. F. gave birth to a fourth child early in the fall of 1941. Interviewed by Slepak, she explained that pregnancy had filled her with new vigor. She continued her ghettos crossings even while pregnant, knowing that she would soon have a new mouth to feed. Mrs. F. took a break for two months after her baby was born, but was forced to resume when her husband fell ill. Toward the end of 1941 or early in 1942, while on the Aryan side of Warsaw, she was turned over to the Gestapo by an informer and was put to death.²⁶

Another woman interviewed at length by Slepak was Mrs. R3, the wife of an independent printer from Warsaw and the mother of two unmarried sons. Until the outbreak of war, Mrs. R3 had run the home and had taken care of her sons’ education. At first, her husband was able to continue his printing business, albeit on a reduced scale. On July 8, 1940, all of the Jewish printing plants in Warsaw were closed down. A gang of German policemen burst onto the premises, where Mr. R3 was working alone, beat him badly and confiscated the business. As with Mr. F., it took months for Mr. R3 to recover from the injuries he sustained.²⁷

Like many other middle-class Jewish women, Mrs. R3 began to sell family possessions such as jewelry and household items. When they were forced out of their home and into the ghetto, the family’s situation deteriorated still further. At this point, Mrs. R3 became determined to find a job; as she explained to Slepak, she felt unable to remain inactive. Her goal was to become superintendent of one of the apartment buildings on Leszno Street – a position that commanded a monthly salary of fifty zloty a month, paid by the Judenrat. At first, despite various connections with the Judenrat, Mrs. R3 failed to gain the post. It went instead to a middle-aged musician, who lived with his son’s family. Mrs. R3 refused to accept this situation. Capitalizing on the fact that many thefts were taking place in the building, she organized a petition to replace the superintendent, and eventually succeeded in gaining the position for herself.

Mrs. R3’s organizing abilities now became even more apparent. She proved to be extremely hard-working in her new job, working each day from 5:30 a.m. until late in the evening. She maintained a clean and well-run building, and kept beggars, thieves and other intruders far away -- assisted in all these tasks by her two sons and, occasionally, by her husband. Her sons, for instance, developed a system (based on the brief time lag between the knocking on the building's entrance door and its opening) to warn young male tenants of upcoming nighttime raids, which became more frequent in the spring of 1942. In these raids, conducted mostly by the SS but sometimes assisted by Jewish police or informers, people were either murdered, arrested or seized for forced labor. Mrs. R3 also cultivated a good working relationship with the Jewish police who periodically came to check the building’s level of cleanliness and efficiency. By serving as the tenants’ intermediary, Mrs. R3 spared the people in her building from excess harassment and the need to pay bribes.

Mrs. R3’s many connections, resulting both from her job and from the location of her building, enabled her and her sons to become middlemen in various business transactions between residents of the ghetto and Poles. As such, they received a

percentage of all goods or money that changed hands. Mrs. R3 also showed an altruistic side, helping to trace the relatives of Jewish children who were sent from other ghettos to Warsaw after their families had been deported.

Relationships Between Couples and Between Parents and Children

At this point, it is important to focus attention on two crucial factors affecting family life that have only been mentioned in passing: deportations and periodic mass murders. These were a constant threat to the people of the ghetto, whose population was already being decimated by starvation and disease.

In the Generalgouvernement, deportations to forced labor camps had been a fact of life from the very outset of the Nazi occupation. From March 1942, however, the deportations became part of the Final Solution -- the destination was the death camps. Although most Jews did not have concrete knowledge concerning the death camps, the rumors concerning mass killings and gassings, combined with the quite visible mass deportations, created an atmosphere of unbearable fear: those who had not yet been deported knew that they lived on borrowed time.

In Lodz, the largest ghetto in the western part of Poland that had been annexed, to the Reich, deportations to the Chelmno death camp began in the fall of 1941 and lasted on and off until September 1942. Following this, deportation to killing centers was suspended for approximately eighteen months.

The situation was different in areas of eastern Poland and the Soviet Union that were occupied in the summer of 1941. Here, mass murder began even before the establishment of the ghettos. Sometimes, as in the case of the Ninth Fort in Kovno, the forest of Ponar in Vilna or Babi Yar in Kiev, the killings -- executed by the *Einsatzgruppen* -- had taken place, and continued to take place, not far from the ghettos. Towards the end of 1941, the situation stabilized somewhat, but by this time many Jewish communities consisted of the remnants of families, including thousands of orphan children.

In an atmosphere of dread, the family could be either a support or a burden. The *Lodz Chronicle*, which was compiled under the auspices of the Judenrat, records one "typical document of life" -- the request of a wife to divorce her husband:

I ask to divorce my husband, because he is not ready to support his family. We are a family of five. A short time ago we were six -- my thirteen-year-old daughter died of starvation. I ask mercy on my other three children, since we are unable to live like this. My husband is working in the carpenters' *restore* [the term used in Lodz for the small ghetto workshops]. For the last two years there is no peace at home -- fights and battering occur every day. I cannot bear it any longer. I plead for help, I have no other way to save my life.²⁸

The *Chronicle* notes that "this [request] sheds light on the relationships [within families] in the ghetto."

Another story of family break-up is that of Mrs. KR, an energetic woman who had worked with her two sisters in a Warsaw marketplace, selling vegetables, meat and fish. At the war's onset her family's home was badly

damaged, and they found shelter in one room of her brother's small apartment. Her husband, who had owned a women's coat store that was destroyed in the shelling, failed in his efforts to trade at the market, and he was also frightened to be out in the streets. For some time he stayed at home with the children and helped with household chores. One day, the apartment was raided, and he was seized and put to work arranging homes for high Nazi officials.

Although Mr. KR remained free, the relationship between himself and his wife deteriorated, becoming exacerbated by the terrible overcrowding in which they lived. At a certain point, Mrs. KR left her brother's apartment and moved in with her two sisters. After the ghetto was established, she lived there as a single mother.²⁹

OPOCHINSKI writes about Moshe Papugai, a fifty-seven-year-old man who engaged in illegal trading in the ghetto. Papugai had been caught several times as he slipped in or out of the ghetto, but he always managed to rescue himself. One day, following his safe return from the Aryan side, he came home and had a fight with his wife. In his anger, OPOCHINSKI writes, Papugai turned himself over to a Nazi official to be sent to a forced labor camp. "In these days," OPOCHINSKI concludes, "couples quarrel about any senseless thing."³⁰

In Lodz, hunger created a new rhythm of family time: the ten-day span. Food rations were distributed every ten days and the amount supplied was never sufficient; often what was sent to the ghetto could not suffice for even a few days. Tiny lots of land -- no more than several square meters -- were distributed to families by the Judenrat on which to grow vegetables, but this did not alleviate the general starvation. Under the rationing system, families were forced to strictly allocate their food. People who maintained the proper rhythm were those who ate a small portion each day. Others could not. By the time the tenth day had arrived, families were living in an agony of expectation and tension.

A kind of ceremony began in many homes when the food allotment was brought in. First came the weighing on a home scale -- an important item, since it was necessary to make sure that the family had gotten its full ration. If even a few grams were missing, the family went to demand them. Next the bread was divided equally in the presence of all. Each family member kept his or her bread in a separate small bag. Cooked food was also shared with a careful eye, and there was great tension in the act of eating. The *Lodz Chronicle* reports that on January 12, 1941, for instance, an eight-year-old boy complained to the police that his parents had deprived him of his bread; he asked the police to punish them.³¹

In a wartime diary of the Lodz ghetto, Dawid Sierakowiak documents the painful relationships within his family, especially between his parents. The year 1941 is highlighted in his diary as "never-ending hunger"; for 1942, he refers repeatedly to "the bloodthirsty Nazi beast" and to the fact that "we live in constant fear." Sierakowiak's mother was deported in the mass deportation (*sperre*) of September 1942:

After the doctors announced the verdict [that she was not strong enough to work and therefore would be deported], and when Mom, unfortunate Mom! was running like mad around the house, begging the doctors to save her life, Father was eating soup that had been left

on the stove by the relatives hiding in our apartment, and he was taking sugar out of their bag! True, he was kind of confused, questioned the police and the doctors, but he didn't run out anywhere in the city; he didn't go to any friends' connection to ask for protection. In a word, he was glad to be rid of a wife with whom life had been becoming harder and harder, thus pushing Mom into her grave.³²

This quotation shows Sierakowiak's emotional trauma at the time his mother was selected for deportation: it is clear that he needs to blame someone. His father's idleness and general confusion, in the midst of prolonged starvation, had severely impaired the relationship between father and son, and the son's judgment is merciless. Nonetheless, Sierakowiak also describes how his father attempted to secure his wife's release over the following two days, while his mother waited with all the other deportees at the assembly center in the ghetto hospital. The elder Sierakowiak visited his wife and promised to do everything on her behalf, and he also approached a neighbor who was a nurse there, asking her if his wife could be reexamined and assuring her that his wife was fit to work. These efforts were to no avail, however, and within a mere two days the mother had deteriorated to the point where it was hard to recognize her.

Sierakowiak's portrayal of his mother fits many other women of the time. He describes her dedication to her family, her willingness to extend help and her belief that life had a meaning and that one should live according to certain values. She would give a portion of her food allotment to her husband and daughter, "shrinking," the son writes, as a result. Yet she worked in the ghetto workshop, cultivated their small garden, cooked and managed all the household chores.³³

Women such as Mrs. Sierakowiak were able to maintain a delicate physical and emotional balance well beyond what might have been expected. The family was their cause; so long as the family, or even part of it, remained intact, they called upon their inner resources to persevere.

Sometimes, however, there would come a crisis, such as the death or deportation of a child, that was too much to bear. The guilt at having failed to protect a child, the devastating fear and helplessness concerning the deportations, could ruin even stable and loving relationships. Like Papugai, who quarreled with his wife and then turned himself in, other men volunteered for forced labor and never returned home.³⁴

Other couples, however, reinforced their bonds in the midst of the overwhelming hardships of ghetto life. In most cases, the strategy was to strive for even a semblance of family normalcy. Some families, for instance, went to great lengths to hoard a bit of food for celebrations such as a birthday.³⁵ In his wartime diary, Avraham Tory describes a bar mitzvah in the Kovno ghetto.³⁶ Holidays were a form of maintaining family unity, as everyone sat around a Sabbath table, or as children lit Chanukah candles and received small presents such as a colored ribbon or a small candy.³⁷ In Lodz, the Judenrat distributed extra food in honor of Passover and Shavuot; in Kovno in 1943, Purim was celebrated.³⁸ In times of relative calm, the holidays could be a great source of consolation and unity.

Sitting together at meals, even when there was almost no food at the

table, was an important component of family life in the ghetto. For Jewish women in particular, the preparation of food represented commitment and love. However, given the appalling scarcity of food, it was an extremely difficult task. Children of all ages were enlisted to search garbage cans for scraps that could be turned into edible dishes; potato peelings, for instance, became a staple.³⁹ Fuel was also in terribly short supply. In Lodz in the spring of 1941, there was so little fuel that some 75,000 adults and 10,000 children were forced to eat in public kitchens. Although this may appear to have been an efficient means of utilizing scarce resources, the public kitchens had a severe effect on ghetto morale, and great efforts were made by the Judenrat to obtain more fuel to be distributed to individual families.⁴⁰

Food could both divide families and serve as a demonstration of love and commitment. Many husbands and fathers shared the food coupons they received in the ghetto workshops with their families. Others brought home food that was served in the workshops. Seeking to combat this phenomenon, the heads of the Lodz Judenrat decided to replace the coupons with “special nutrition meals” that would be served and eaten at the workshops, with workers not allowed to bring any of the food home. Chaim Rumkowski, the head of the Judenrat, defended the new policy in a meeting with the pressers at a tailoring shop. “These [meals] are meant only for yourselves, whereas the coupons could be enjoyed by your families as well,” he admitted. “But the Jewish principle of community, the Jewish concern for the family is not applicable here. At stake is the fate of the collective, the fates of individuals.”⁴¹ Apart from demonstrating the concern that workers felt for their families, this quotation indicates the way in which the public sphere – in this case, the Judenrat – attempted to interfere with the private sphere of the family, and the extent to which it was successful in so doing. A similar effort was made in Kovno, where the Germans prohibited workers from saving food to take home. This system, which relied on having Judenrat supervision, was apparently unsuccessful, since the sources reveal continuing instances of parents smuggling home food for their families.⁴²

Despite all their efforts, however, mothers and fathers almost inevitably failed to provide for all of the needs of their children. Some of the most basic functions of parenting – the transmission of social skills and family traditions – were badly impaired, along with the ability to provide children with psychological support and a sense of self-confidence. The parents’ pervasive helplessness was often manifested in times of extreme crisis. The sources, for example, contain many accounts of parents who tried unsuccessfully to obtain extra food or medicine for a sick child.⁴³ Sometimes parents were able to save the child -- but this could come at the expense of others, as when parents sold food rations in order to buy medicine. In some cases other children died as a result, and the grief-stricken parents regarded themselves as murderers.⁴⁴

The daily atmosphere of crisis took a toll in more mundane ways. Fathers were frustrated by their inability to provide their children – and especially their sons -- with secular or religious education. The failure to do so, it was felt, was bound to be an impediment in the future. For many religious parents, it was a source of great sadness to know that their children were unable to study religious texts. In his ghetto writings, Jozef Zelkowicz describes how one father tried desperately to keep at least one of his sons literate in the

Talmud. When the son became too weak to concentrate, the father felt a tremendous sense of hopelessness.⁴⁵

During the brief period when ghetto schools were operating, parents encouraged their children to attend. In Lodz, for instance, the Judenrat made great efforts to provide schooling. For about a year, until the summer of 1941, forty-five schools were functioning. Schoolchildren received a meal of soup or of bread and marmalade, which motivated them to come. The children of poorer families, however, were often missing, either because they lacked the most basic clothing or because they had to help their families with various chores.⁴⁶

Even when the schools were shut down, the attempt to provide education continued. Groups of children would meet in the homes of a former teacher and would study privately for a fee. In Warsaw, educational activities for children, which included theater and singing, were organized by teenagers in the framework of house committees or youth movements.⁴⁷

In some cases there was a significant shift in familial roles, the children becoming their parents' protectors or the family's main breadwinners. One case in point is the child smugglers of the Warsaw ghetto, who risked their lives to slip in and out of the ghetto. In other instances, a child would take over for a deceased or disabled parent. Such cases, however, were not the general rule. Many other children were unable to endure their hunger and the general deterioration of their family's surroundings. Outbursts of anger were common, as was stealing of food from other members of the family. The sources speak of some children who secretly sold household items for food, and there are even some reported cases of murder.⁴⁸

In her postwar memoir, Sara Selver-Urbach describes the changes in her family as a result of the war and the way family relationships were affected. Before the war, she writes, her mother had been fragile and high-strung, albeit devoted to her husband and children. During the first summer in the ghetto, however, Selver-Urbach's father died. The mother fell ill with the shock, but then recovered. From that point on, and even after the death of her youngest child, a five-year-old daughter, the mother displayed tremendous courage and resourcefulness. She began to supplement the family income, which was dependent on the salary of her elder son (a seventeen-year-old who worked at the ghetto post office) through the sale of handmade knitted garments. When the knitting no longer sufficed, she opened a vegetable store in part of her one-room ghetto dwelling, selling the produce from a large ground-floor window. When the store failed, she took care of an elderly handicapped woman. Throughout this time, the mother also insisted on maintaining a traditional home. Since kosher meat was either unavailable or beyond her means, she did not cook meat – except when her older son fell ill, and she prepared horse meat for him in an effort to provide more nourishing food. However, she became angry at this same son, a member of a nonreligious youth movement, when he showed reluctance to observe the Sabbath or other Jewish holidays.⁴⁹

The ghetto did not erase traditional manifestations of the generation gap between parents and children. Those who were involved in youth movements, for example, were often at odds with their parents. Selver-Urbach portrays the clashes between her mother and her older brother, who dedicated all of his after-work hours to the youth movement. His mother chastised him for

neglecting his younger brothers and sister and resented his diverging from his late father's way of life. Although this brother gave the money he earned to his mother and brought home some of the food he received from work, she felt that he was neglecting other obligations.⁵⁰ For the brother, however, the youth movement offered a vision for the future, a brightness in the nearly unremitting gloom of the ghetto.

The centrality of youth movements varied in different ghettos and at various stages of the ghetto period. In Lodz, for example, the older members of the youth groups lived until the fall of 1941 in a commune known as the *kibbutz hakhsarah*, located in the Marashin section (Warsaw and Czestochowa were two other ghettos with a similar arrangement). They worked in the commune's garden plots, studied and shared social activities. Away from home, they were spared many of the stresses of everyday ghetto life. They also had more food, both because of the garden produce and because they received slightly larger rations. Living in somewhat better conditions, they were able to maintain their vision in a brighter future. Their parents tended to feel more ambivalent about the youth movements. On the one hand, they wanted their children to enjoy better physical conditions; on the other, they both resented their children's not being available to help out at home and worried about the possibility of unexpected raids on the commune.

Youth movements gave meaning to the lives of their members, offering warmth and belonging to those whose families had been traumatized or dismembered. Yet the search for personal identity could also be carried out in more traditional settings. Unlike her brother, Sara Selver-Urbach did not abandon a religious way of life. Instead of attending a youth group, she spent her afternoons studying Bible, mishnah and Jewish history with a group of girls from the Beit Yaakov school who met at the home of a former teacher. For Sara and her friends, these meetings were a ray of light. Her enjoyment, however, was mixed with a sense of guilt and unease: although she always finished her chores before leaving the house, she sensed that her mother disapproved of these meetings away from the family. Nonetheless, she continued to go, feeling the need for both a social haven and a setting where spiritual matters could be discussed.⁵¹

Other sources describe a different situation entirely – one in which all meaningful activities were conducted within the family. Menahem Liberman, for example, was ten years old in 1939. In his postwar account, he describes no relationships with friends or even neighbors. His sole focus was the family – his mother (the father having been deported during 1941), his brother, his uncle and his cousins. Although he mentions having attended school for a short time, he does not recall any school friendships. When he was deported to a labor camp in 1944, he was extremely lonely and longed for his mother.⁵²

Families and the Authorities

Jewish families in the ghettos suffered both from external factors such as hunger, poor housing and deportations, and from the resulting strains in family relationships. For the Nazis, the Jewish family was totally without worth; if anything, it was a hindrance to their goal of thoroughly exploiting Jewish labor. Therefore, from the very outset of the occupation, the Nazis brutalized Jewish families. Well before implementation of the Final Solution, they expelled

thousands from their homes, confiscated and robbed business and personal possessions, arrested and deported husbands and fathers. Nazi officials most often responded with contempt when confronted by relatives with pleas for mercy, and individuals were tortured or abused in the presence of their families. The Jews were thoroughly dehumanized, viewed at best as instruments of production.

The Nazis introduced a number of measures in Kovno and in other ghettos that were specifically designed to raise productivity. The age for compulsory work for women was raised from forty to sixty. The Nazis ordered institutions to be set up in the ghetto to provide care for children and babies, so that their mothers could be put to work. As previously noted, workers were prohibited from bringing food home to their children. Although the Nazi head of Kovno decided against separating the living quarters of men and women, as had been done in Riga -- believing that such a move would not enhance productivity -- he did approve of mandatory abortions for all pregnant women.⁵³ Unlimited intervention in even the most intimate family matters was a mark of Nazi policy.

For the Jewish authorities, matters were far more complex. On the one hand, they were compelled to carry out Nazi demands; on the other, they were charged with the well-being of the ghetto population, whose needs were enormous. Adam Czerniakow of the Warsaw Judenrat often refers to his meetings with women and mothers, who came both to plead for their loved ones (members of the Judenrat were expected to intervene with the German authorities to get men freed from labor camps and to find out what had happened to missing relatives) and to request economic assistance.⁵⁴ In the face of large-scale needs, a number of public assistance programs were set up in the ghettos, such as soup kitchens and refugee shelters. Other measures, however, violated the private family sphere.

In order to guard against epidemics, the Judenrat mandated the disinfecting of apartments, bedding and public bath houses.⁵⁵ As previously mentioned, the authorities in Lodz issued special meal coupons and forbade workers to bring food home. A women's police unit was also established in 1942, when most women began to work in the *restores*, to take care of wandering children who had been left unattended. The *Lodz Chronicle* reports the case of a five-year-old girl who was found wandering in the streets late at night by a German soldier. More humane than most, he took her to the German police, who handed her over to the Jewish authorities, who then located the mother working on a night shift at one of the workshops (the daughter had wandered out to visit her). This particular story had a happy ending. Occasionally, though, parents were punished for similar occurrences, the Jewish authorities showing no reluctance to interfere in the more intimate spheres of family life.⁵⁶

From the beginning of the occupation, the Judenrat in Warsaw attempted to instill order in the forced labor program. In order to prevent random kidnappings on the streets, it instigated a policy of providing an allowance to families with a member doing forced labor. Many husbands from poorer families volunteered as a result. Their action displayed concern and responsibility, but the outcome was often a broken and demoralized family. In other ghettos, such as Lodz, the Judenrat both used harsher means of

enforcement and canceled the food allotments for men who had been sent to forced labor. In Kovno, working under Nazi instructions, the Judenrat divided the ghetto into two sections, “working” and “non-working.” Non-workers were deported and killed over the course of a few months. The Judenrat heads were probably unaware, at least at first, of what happened to the deportees. Nonetheless, their actions helped to seal their fate.

As the occupation wore on, the general strategy developed by Jewish authorities in places such as Kovno, Vilna, Bialystock, and Czestochowa was to utilize Jewish labor for the benefit of the Nazis.⁵⁷ The assumption was that the more productive the ghetto workers were, the better their chances of survival. Mothers who were left on their own after their husbands had been deported to forced labor camps were selected first for deportation camps, and thus whole families vanished. The implementation of the “rescue through work” policy encouraged the Jewish authorities to exercise the right to interfere in the private lives of families. Such issues as who should take care of the children, what women should wear, whether they should use make-up and how they should cover their hair were taken out of the realm of private decision-making to become the subject of official directives.⁵⁸ The most extreme and horrifying example was Rumkowski’s call in September 1942 for the surrender of the old, the sick, and all children under the age of ten:

I must stretch out my hands and beg: Brothers and sisters, hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers, give me your children! ... Give me the sick. In their place, we can save the healthy. I know how dear the sick are to any family, and particularly to Jews.... I understand you mothers; I see our tears, all right. I also feel what you feel in your hearts, you fathers who will have to go to work the morning after your children have been taken from you, when just yesterday you were playing with your dear little ones....I only want to tell you what I am asking of you: Help me carry out this action! I am trembling. I am afraid that otherwise, God forbid, they will do it themselves.⁵⁹

In general, the Jewish leadership in the ghettos shared conventional Jewish family values, and believed that its actions were enhancing the viability of the ghetto. One of its more innovative functions was to perform civil marriages when religious ceremonies were forbidden. In Lodz, for example, the Judenrat gave newlyweds a loaf of bread and a jar of honey. Marriages are documented in the *Lodz Chronicle* for almost every day during 1942, although a special divorce court was also established in the fall of 1942 and on November 19, 1943, it was recorded that 102 requests had been filed, of which twenty-five were eventually canceled, sixteen were approved and nine were denied. Rumkowski’s wife Regina, a young lawyer, was involved in this court and generally argued in favor of saving existing marriages. Similarly, Rabbi Shimon Huberband writes in his wartime diary that many marriages were performed in Warsaw, whereas there were relatively few petitions for divorce.⁶⁰

Jewish authorities were also willing to perform marriages in order to prevent single women from being deported. Avraham Tory writes in his diary that in Kovno, every single woman was looking for a man during the

“selections” of October 1941.⁶¹ Another poignant situation was that faced by *agunot* – women whose husbands’ deaths could not be absolutely determined and who were thus unable to remarry in accordance with Jewish law. In at least one rabbinic responsa dealing with this question, Rabbi Ephraim Oshry of Kovno ruled that the rabbis must delve deeper into the halakhic literature in order to find a way to allow such women to remarry. Otherwise, he argued, there was the danger that they would turn to the Judenrat to obtain a civil marriage, which could eventually lead to complex problems involving illegitimate offspring.⁶²

The high rate of marriage was a consequence of the need for personal contact, warmth and togetherness in spite of, and perhaps because of, the difficult situation and impossibly crowded conditions of housing. It also resulted from a feeling of temporality – individuals’ desire to experience love and sex while they could. This is not to say that all young couples got married; many formed intimate relationships outside of wedlock. Mary Berg notes in her diary, for example, that the ghetto theater performed a play on the difficulties of young couples in the ghetto. In this play, which concerned two couples living in one room, the lack of privacy led to quarrels and infidelity.⁶³ Notwithstanding, the desire to establish stable relationships generally prevailed.

Living alone was extremely difficult even from the practical point of view. It was almost impossible for a person living alone to accomplish all of his or her necessary daily tasks in the limited free time available between the end of work and the beginning of the curfew (or the hour when electricity was cut off). The *Lodz Chronicle* describes a typical Sunday -- which became a “free” day only after the regular work day was expanded to ten or eleven hours:

Here... Sunday...has no connotations of rest, joy, and festivity. The ghetto’s Sunday bears the imprint of heavy burdens.... By early Sunday morning, the streets are already busier than on workdays. People of all ages go into and out of the various shops where the allocated provisions are distributed: Shops of groceries, bread, milk, meat, and sausages! But if we take a closer look we see that what has been obtained barely suffices for a few days, and yet it is supposed to last for two weeks....The children carry wood.... Thousands of bent backs can be seen, shoulders laden with knapsacks. Little boys pull briquettes behind them in toy wagons, old men carry loaves of bread and cabbages in baskets and shopping nets. People crowd in front of the shops. They shout, gesticulate, laugh with tears in their eyes... The housewives have even more chores. The laundry has to be done and tattered clothes mended, linen has to be aired, scrubbed, and ironed. The bedding has to be carried into the courtyard, into the garden...⁶⁴

Recognizing the difficulties faced by those living alone, the ghetto authorities initiated various communal living arrangements. In Kovno, for example, a number of single men were housed with a single mother, who assisted them in household chores. A second benefit of such an arrangement was that it “justified” the woman’s staying home with her children instead of working.

Conclusion

The history of the Holocaust provides no comfort. Most families, whether they sustained the hardship of ghetto life or were broken and dismembered by it, ultimately perished. Nonetheless, for those wishing to understand the lives of Jews from the outbreak of war until their final destruction – a trial of endurance that sometimes lasted as long as three or four years – it is necessary to look at the family.

The term “normalcy” has been used several times in this article in describing attempts of families to adapt to the contingencies and calamities of the occupation and of ghetto life. This is a difficult term to use – it may even seem illegitimate, given an environment so opposed to what Jews considered “normal” in the period before the onslaught. When Mrs. F. of the Warsaw ghetto became pregnant and had her fifth child, was this an act of “normalcy”? I think that the answer is underlined in the description and analysis provided in this paper: the quest for even a semblance of normalcy was what Jews desperately tried to achieve, knowing full well that everything in the ghetto defied and even negated normalcy.

In Oskar’s Rosenfeld’s descriptions of the Lodz ghetto, the paradox is ever apparent. His description of the “madhouse” Sunday quoted above, for example, shows an order, a logic, a division of labor and an aim – that of gaining a measure of self-determination for the coming week. Rosenfeld and others convinced themselves that their lives in the ghetto could not have been conducted in any other way. More generally, it was this endeavor to behave normally in the most abnormal conditions that gave the ghetto its character and its ability to sustain itself up until the final destruction.

The ability to love and to hate, to fear and to dream, to hold on to visions of the future and to reject a parent’s way of life, to steal food and to help an ailing relative, to love a child entirely and to abandon it – all were part of the same striving for survival. As a writer of the *Lodz Chronicle* noted in June 1942, just before the dreaded visit of a Nazi commission to the ghetto:

But what precisely is it that the citizen of the ghetto desires; what does he want and what does he expect from that commission? He wants only to be left in peace, not to be torn from his family, to be allowed to endure in these severe conditions, and to have his work acknowledged. If he is acknowledged, he will be granted the right to remain in the ghetto and, consequently, will be allotted a modest food ration.⁶⁵

The use of “normality” to describe such a passage makes a mockery of banality.

It is crucial to appreciate the contradictions and the ambivalence that are revealed in the Holocaust sources. In many instances, these are a function of a kind of pendulum reaction to the ongoing crisis of the ghetto. During the worst times -- periods of deportations and selections or greater than usual food deprivation – the ghetto was a place of unbearable fear and despair, and many were unable to sustain even the most basic norms of behavior, such as caring for children, parents or other relatives. At other times, when the situation was relatively better, the strains were better borne.

In September 1942, immediately following the mass deportation, Oskar Singer wrote:

Here in the ghetto after three years of war, with only a few exceptions, the term "family" has been erased from the dictionary. If there had still been any illusions, they have vanished in the aftermath of the deportations. In this terrible period, with all its shocking sights -- children forcibly separated from their mothers and vice versa -- nonetheless a certain impassiveness was most noticeable immediately after such incidents, and even more so in the following days. This impassiveness among the masses, the smooth crossover to daily routine, the opaqueness of mind -- if indeed one can use that word to characterize this phenomenon -- all this testifies to an indescribable dulling of the senses, and to the total cessation of all normal thought processes.

And yet, in such times when people knew how to get through the tragedies that befell their loved ones with that same indifference -- and in such times when instead of families there exist only "collectives for family housing" in which all the food rations are weighed and divided up among the members, and when the short-changing of the weaker by the stronger family members is the source of incessant family quarrels and disputes -- in circumstances such as these, can one speak at all about that warmth of family, as seems to be expected?

Yet one year later, the same writer wrote the following:

Yom Kippur, October 8/9 1943, has a special place in the history of the ghetto.... Young boys stood in the doorways at the gates, and in the courtyard entrances, hawking (in Yiddish) "Lekht! Lekht! (candles). These are short, thin, homemade tallow candles, which are used for the Sabbath. This time they served a double function: to usher in both the Sabbath and Yom Kippur....Nearby, women and girls were bustling about, preparing the evening meal. The meal was as meager as usual, consisting mostly of potatoes and some vegetable or other, but the thought of Kol Nidre transfigured it.... The Yom Kippur Sabbath was marked by dignity and solemnity. People walked silently through the streets in their holiday best....Once again, families could get together, as they had not been able to do in a long time. Parents took their children by the hand and went strolling; on this day, the work in the various workshops did not keep husband, wife, and child apart. Now and then one could even see a Jew openly carrying a *seyfer toyre* (scroll of the Torah)....On Yom Kippur in the year 1943, the ghetto has literally become a shtetl.⁶⁷

Such quotations portray the pendulum of crisis within the catastrophe, the rhythm of feelings of Jews in the ghetto.

Notes

¹ See Lidia Rosenfeld Vago, "A Personal Narrative," in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. Dalia Ofer and Leonore Weitzman (New Haven: 1998), 273-284; Myrna Goldenberg, "The Burden of Gender," in *ibid.*, 327-339; Imre Kertesz, *Leló goral* (Tel-Aviv: 1994); and Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: 1993).

² For a more comprehensive description of the differences between Jewish families in Eastern and Western Europe, see Paula Hyman, "Gender and the Family in Modern Europe," in Ofer and Weitzman (eds.), *Women in the Holocaust*, 25-38; on the formation of the German Jewish family and its impact on the acculturation and self-identity of Jews in Germany, see Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: 1991). For the general issue of the role of Jewish women in the modernization process, including integration and the preservation of Jewish identity, see Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women* (Seattle: 1995).

³ See Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: 1983); and Raphael Mahler, *Yehudei Varshaw bein shtei milhamot ha'olam: historiyah kalkalit soziyalit leor hastatistikah* (Tel-Aviv: 1968).

⁴ For a vivid description of East European Jews' reliance on extended family, see Hilde Hupert, *Yad beyad 'im Tommy* (Tel-Aviv: 1978) and Sara Selver-Urbach, *Miba'ad lahalon beiti: zikhronot megeto Lodz* (Jerusalem: 1964).

⁵ Marion Kaplan, "Keeping Calm and Weathering the Storm: Jewish Women's Responses to Daily Life in Nazi Germany 1933-1939," in Ofer and Weitzman (eds.), *Women in the Holocaust*, 39-54.

⁶ See Bina Garnazarska-Kedari, "Temurot bamazav hahomri shel shekhavot ha'ovdim hayehudim bapolin (1930-1939," *Galed* 9 (1986), 169, table 8; Louis Briner, "Some Speculations on the Emotional Resources of the Jewish Family," in *The Jewish Family in a Changing World*, ed. Gilbert S. Rosenthal (New York: 1970), 307-320.

⁷ Paula Hyman, "The Modern Jewish Family: Image and Reality," in *Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, ed. David Kraenner (New York: 1989), 179-193.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁹ See Benjamin Schlesinger, "The Jewish Family in Retrospect: What's Past is Prologue," in *Jewish Family Issues: A Resource Guide*, ed. Benjamin Schlesinger (New York: 1987), 13-17. Schlesinger's theory is that the permanent threat and danger experienced by Jewish families -- and particularly mothers -- in the course of child-rearing was the source of the unusually strong ties between Jewish mothers and their children.

¹⁰ See Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: Ruins of Memory* (New Haven and London: 1991); and William Helmreich, *Against All Odds* (New York: 1992).

¹¹ See, for example, Selver-Urbach, *Miba'ad lahalon beiti*; Salek Prehodnic, *Hasipur he'azuv shel hate'ud: yoman bamahavo* (Jerusalem: 1993); Bela Guterman (ed.), *Bevo hazeman: yehudei Levov tahat hakibush hanazi* (Tel-Aviv: 1991).

¹² See Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: 1990), 164-165. For a tragic description of a refugee shelter, see Joseph Keremish (ed.), *Itonut hamaheret heyehudit beVarshah*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: 1979), 423-425.

¹³ See, for example, the story of Nechama Tec's family in her *Dry Tears: The Sociology of a Lost Childhood* (New York: 1986); and that of Mary Berg's family in her

Geto Varshah: yomanah shel Mary Berg (Tel-Aviv: 1947). Also see “Mrs. G.” in the Slepak report, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), JM/215/3, band 3. Cecilia Slepak belonged to the “Oneg Shabbat” underground research group organized by Emmanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto. Slepak’s job was to carry out in-depth interviews with a cross-section of women in the ghetto. She interviewed sixteen women, who were asked to describe their lives prior to the war and after the outbreak of the war, and how they and their families coped with life in the ghetto. Many of Slepak’s questions dealt with the economic situation of the women’s families, their children, their work, and details about their everyday lives. For a more extensive account of the actual report and on the lives of women in the Warsaw ghetto as ascertained from the report, see Dalia Ofer, “Gender Issues in Diaries and Testimonies of the Ghetto,” in Ofer and Weitzman (eds.), *Women in the Holocaust*, 143-168.

¹⁴ See Berg, *Yomanah shel Mary Berg*, 83, 88-89; also see Perez OPOCHINSKI, “Smuggling in the Ghetto,” from his *Reshimot* (Tel-Aviv: 1970), 139-152 and Keremish (ed.), *’Itonut hamahteret hayehudit*, vol. 2, 258-259.

¹⁵ See Berg, *Yomanah shel Mary Berg*, 43-48; and Helena SZERESZEWSKA, *Haperek haaharon: zikhronot miVarshah hakevushah* (Tel-Aviv: 1980), 48-49.

¹⁶ See Yael Peled, *Krakow hayehudit, 1939-1943: ’amidah, mahteret, ma’avak* (Tel-Aviv: 1993); YVA, VD-109, video testimony of Cecilia Berger.

¹⁷ Slepak report, band 3. For a detailed description of the establishment of the ghetto in Warsaw and the changes in its boundaries, see Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: 1982), 46-81; see also Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Ketavim aharonim*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: 1992), 208. Ringelblum’s notes were published in English as *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed.

and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: 1958). The Hebrew version, however, offers the full original Yiddish text.

¹⁸ Szereszewska, *Haperek haaharon*, 33-34; Berg, *Yomanah shel Mary Berg*, 62.

¹⁹ Slepak report, bands 3, 1.

²⁰ See Berg, *Yomanah shel Mary Berg*, 40-41; and Ringelblum, *Ketavim aharonim*, 219; Szereszewska, *Haperek haaharon*, 55-57.

²¹ See, for example, the memoirs by Szereszewska and Huppert; also see “Mrs. C1,” who describes her endless efforts to expand her business and find new partnerships with Poles. Mrs. C1 felt responsible for supporting not only her own family (a husband and a twelve-year-old daughter) but also her parents and her sister’s family (Slepak report, band 3); Haim Aharon Kaplan, *Megilat yisurim* (Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem: 1966), 272-293.

²² See Rahel Aurbach, *Varshever zavoos* (Tel-Aviv: 1985), 110-112 and *idem*, *Birkhovot Varshah, 1939-1943* (Tel-Aviv: 1954); also see Ringelblum, *Ketavim aharonim*, 236, 237 and 376; Keremish (ed.), *'Itonut hamahteret hayehudit*, vol. 2, 475.

²³ Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 77.

²⁴ Opochinski, *Reshimot*, 177-191; also see the story of Mrs. F1, who had worked in Lodz as a translator in a large export company. When the war began, she fled to Warsaw. Mrs. F1 describes the various places she worked, including a workshop that produced tin cans (Slepak report, band 1). A moving description of the exploitation of workers in the “shops” is found in *'Itonut hamahteret hayehudit*, vol. 4, ed. Joseph Keremish (Jerusalem: 1989), 202-204.

²⁵ See, for example, Jozef Zelkowicz, *Bayamim hanoraim hahem* (Jerusalem: 1995), 53-54; and Kaplan, *Megilat yisurim*, 42-44. The former is a complete translation from the Yiddish manuscript that was found in the ghetto, a few pages of which were translated and reprinted in *Lodz Ghetto: Inside a Community Under Siege*, ed. Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides (New York: 1989), 320-321, 336-347.

²⁶ See “Mrs. F,” Slepak report, band 1. For different stories of women who took the initiative, see “Mrs. R3” (band 5), “Mrs. R.” (band 2), “Mrs. Z.” (band 2), and “Mrs. K.” (band 1). All of these women came from a middle- or lower middle-class background.

²⁷ See “Mrs. R3,” Slepak report, band 5.

²⁸ *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, 4 vols., trans. and annotated by Arie Ben-Menachem and Joseph Rab (Jerusalem: 1986-1989), vol. 1, 307. A selection from the Chronicles was translated into English as *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto 1941-1944*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki (New Haven and London: 1984). Whenever a citation appears in the English version, I will cite from the English; in all other cases, the citation is translated by myself from the Hebrew version.

²⁹ “Mrs. KR,” Slepak report, band 5.

³⁰ OPOCHINSKI, *Reshimot*, 253-254.

³¹ *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 1, 5.

³² David Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*, ed. Alan Adelson (New York and Oxford: 1996), 219.

³³ For a complete description of the time of the mass deportations of September 1942, see *ibid.*, 214-226. See also Dobroszycki (ed.), *Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, 248-255 and Zelkowicz, *Bayamim hanoraim hahem*, 247-370.

³⁴ See, for example, Selver-Urbach, *Miba'ad lahalon beiti*, 57-60, where the author tells the story of her mother's cousin's family. Following the death of their two daughters, the husband volunteered for forced labor in order to distance himself; his wife, unable to bear living alone, died shortly thereafter. Also see Zelkowitz, *Bayamim hanoraim haahem*, 39-40.

³⁵ See, for example, Oskar Singer, who describes both a birthday celebration arranged by his wife and the family's participation in making pancakes from potato peels (*Chronikah shel Geto Lodz*, 4, 177, and 283).

³⁶ Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary* (Cambridge and London: 1990), 502.

³⁷ *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 3, 770-772.

³⁸ See Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 253-256, 502; *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 4, 144, 265, 273.

³⁹ *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 4, 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 151, 299-302. In December 1941, Rumkowski announced that families would be receiving fuel so that they could cook at home, and some 120,000 people were provided with fuel (*ibid.*, 292). By May 1942, the Judenrat was attempting to reduce the number of those eating in the public kitchens by distributing larger rations to families who cooked at home (*ibid.*, 444, 446).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 611-615; Dobroszycki, *Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, 397-400.

⁴² See, for example, Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 213.

⁴³ A particularly tragic story is found in *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 4, 389. When the son of a certain family fell ill with tuberculosis, the father gave the child some of his own food and sold some of the rest of the family's rations to obtain medicine.

The child died, however, and sometime later, the entire family died as well. See also Zelkowicz, *Bayamim hanoraim hahem*, 64-70, 131-141.

⁴⁴ See, for example, the painful “Father’s Lament,” an anonymous remnant found on the back of a soup kitchen record, reprinted in Adelson and Lapidés, *Community Under Siege*, 348-349; see also Prehodnik, *Hasipur heazuv shel hate’ud*, 62-69, 88-98, 236-244, on his life after his wife and daughter were deported. Selver-Urbach describes the death of cousins in *Miba’ad lahalon beiti*, 66-67.

⁴⁵ Zelkowicz, *Bayamim hanoraim hahem*, 133-142.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-63; *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 1, 25 (n. 30); oral testimony of Miriam Akavya, Oral History Department (OHD), Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University, 2373 (hereafter: Akavya OHD).

⁴⁷ On teachers who taught at home, see Kaplan, *Megilat yisurim*, 113. On the educational activities organized by the Warsaw ghetto house committees, see David Ben-Shalom, “Va’adei habatim beVarshah bemisgeret he’ezrah ha’azmit” (Master’s thesis, The Hebrew University, 1996); also see “Mrs. G.” in the Slepak report, band 3.

⁴⁸ See Ringelblum, *Kitavim aharonim*, 367. “Children made their parents miserable,” he notes on p. 164. See also OPOCHINSKI, *Reshimot*, 198; and TORY, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 111.

⁴⁹ Selver-Urbach, *Miba’ad lahalon beiti*, passim.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 53, 39-42. Organized youth movements criticized the religious study groups; see Keremish (ed.), *Itonut hamahteret hayehudit*, vol. 1, 365. Also see Adelson (ed.) *Diary of David Sierakowiak*, 97-98, 101-102, 104, where he writes of his need to study, the importance of friends in the search for identity and the difficulties of

having such feelings in the light of the misfortune all around them; Berg, *Yomanah shel Mary Berg*, 47-48, 102-103; and Keremish (ed.), *Itonut hamahteret hayehudit*, vol. 2, 397-398 (also n. 16, which describes how Mark Fulman organized an underground high school in Warsaw).

⁵² Menahem Liberman, oral testimony, YVA 03/8991.

⁵³ On Nazi measures in Kovno, see Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 213, 225, 233-234, 260 and 262. On the issue of abortion in the Lithuanian ghetto of Shavlie, see Aharon Pick, *Reshimot migei haharigah: zikhronot kituvim begeto Shavlie (Lita) bishnot 1942-1944* (unpublished manuscript).

⁵⁴ Adam Czerniakow, *Yomano shel Adam Czerniakow* 108-111, 121-122.

⁵⁵ See OPOCHINSKI, *Reshimot*, 57-84, *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 2, 108, 418.

⁵⁶ On the intervention of the Judenrat in the personal sphere, see *Chronikah shel geto Lodz* vol. 2, 2-3, 108, 321-323, 418. The story of the little girl who went to look for her mother is found in *ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁷ See Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: 1972), 388-451.

⁵⁸ *Chronikah shel geto Lodz*, vol. 2, 108, 418; vol. 3, 372; 551; Ringelblum, *Ketavim aharonim*, 42; Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 173, 175, 254.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Adelson and Lapides (eds.), *Community Under Siege*, 328-331.

⁶⁰ See *Chronika shel geto Lodz*, vol. 3, 690; Shimon Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem* (Tel-Aviv: 1969);

⁶¹ Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 45-49. He also discusses special divorce arrangements (p. 68).

⁶² See Ephraim Oshry, *Mima'amakim: sefer sheelot uteshuvot* (New York:

1959), 23-38; and Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 203, 204. A different perspective on this issue appears in Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem*, 92-102, 117.

⁶³ Berg, *Yomanah shel Mary Berg*, 99-100.

⁶⁴ Dobroszycki (ed.), *Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, 363-365.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶⁷ Dobroszycki (ed.), *Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, 395-396.