Motherhood under Siege

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Introduction

The perspective of mothers and motherhood issues in the Holocaust presents an important aspect of the tragedy of the individual and the community. It is connected to the history of the family during the Holocaust, to issues of gender and the cultural role of women, wives, and mothers in Jewish societies. Therefore, it requires for a multidisciplinary approach.

In this, as in any proper study of motherhood, the institutional and individual perspectives are treated in tandem and as intertwined. In the historical description, the approach of the community and its institutional and social frameworks including Judenrat policies, self-help organizations, support for mothers without a spouse, etc., are all factors to be integrated with the personal narratives of mothers. The title expression 'Under Siege' is appropriate to Jewish life during the Holocaust in general. With the description of mothers and motherhood, I focus on a single issue in order to illuminate the perspective of the individual as part of the Jewish collective.

As historical works stress, the particularity of the events presents a difficulty in the analysis of motherhood as a general concept during the Holocaust. Therefore, the description of motherhood in the various Jewish communities of different countries must take into account their differing historical circumstances, and examine the developments and conditions that emerged under Nazi rule and those that affected the Jewish family unit. Theoretical concepts are useful to better understand and formulate a comprehensive explanation of motherhood and family in times of crisis.

Researchers have vast amounts of documentation, though fragmentary, on Jewish life under German rule. There are contemporaneous formal documents, such as the minutes of Judenrat meetings and reports of various committees and self-help organizations, which provide information on numerous topics of daily life. There are also personal letters sent to family members living in other parts of occupied Europe, or between Jews in different ghettos and forced-labor camps. All provide a great deal information about the writers' cultural milieu,

the community and social environment. In addition, there are many survivors' testimonies that were recorded at the end of war, which capture their still-fresh memories. A final source of valuable material is Holocaust survivors' postwar testimonies, collected either several or many years after the event. These latter testimonies may reveal new perspectives reflecting the survivors' postwar life experiences as well as the integration of their broader knowledge of the events of the Holocaust into their personal histories. With all these sources at hand, the historian can combine the approaches of an ethnographer, a sociologist, and a psychologist, in order to produce a rich and complex depiction of an individual's history and that of an entire community. Yet the historian must remain aware that the narrative s/he is writing is also a product of his/her own personal and cultural milieu.

The testimonies and other sources of information may lead to seemingly contradictory impressions. Different conditions in each ghetto, different phases of ghetto life, the variety of ghettos, concentration and forced-labor camps, the stages of the war, and shifting policies towards Jewish labor, all leave one with a great sense of apprehension about making generalizations.

By contrast, within the vast amount of documentation there exists only a small amount of contemporaneous material written by individuals—men, women, fathers and mothers. This issue must be addressed empirically. As seen in this paper, the documentation left by mothers is very much smaller, as women left fewer accounts than men and were often depicted through the eyes of men. In her study, *Family Frames,* Marianne Hirsch notes that in Art Spiegelman's book, *Maus*:

> "Anja" [the mother] is simply recollected by others; she remains merely a visual presence and not an oral one. She speaks in sentences that are only imagined by her son or recollected by her husband. In their memory, she is mystified and objectified—shaped to the needs and desires of the one who remembers.[1]

Written memoirs and recorded testimonies of young people describing their families are often filled with statements expressing guilt for having been rescued and surviving. This can also be seen in the testimonies of child survivors who were placed with families in order to be saved, with the unfulfilled promise that one or both parents would come back to retrieve them. These recollections carry a sense of anger and disappointment. Whether expressed by a young person or a child, the longing for the parent is painful. As a result, the representation of the family—and of the mother in particular—is often idealized in testimonies.

We have very little knowledge about the individual families, of whom just a few letters or a single diary were left. Thus, we must be wary of attributing all family behavior as a response to wartime circumstances. It may be that the ties that connected a couple were already thin and fragile before the war and that the

wartime crisis simply enhanced its breakup. Usually our conception of a normal family during this period includes a married couple with children; therefore, mothering and motherhood are studied within the context of the family unit. Prior to World War I and its aftermath, family units without a paternal figure had begun to emerge among Eastern European Jewish households. This was in part due to the tragedies of deportation during the First World War and to the large-scale population migrations during the first decades of the twentieth century. Husbands left home for lengthy periods to work, study, or to celebrate a holiday at a Rabbi's court. Some husbands simply abandoned their wives and children. Therefore, in a great number of families during the 1920s and 1930s a different structure came into being, composed of either a mother with her children or a grandmother who became the head of the multigenerational household.[2] However, the concept of the normative family had both mother and father, which comprised the majority of Jewish families.

I would like to include a few more notes about methodology that relates to the theoretical foundation of motherhood as presented by the sociologist William Goode. Every culture has an ideal of motherhood embedded within its tradition. People relate to this ideal from the perspective of their place within their own society. There are differing models of motherhood between different societies and among diverse groups within the same society. Motherhood should be studied within its cultural, social, and historical context. It should also be analyzed from the perspective of economic class and gender differentiation.[3]

I find the theoretical conception of William Goode to be helpful here. I will employ it in relating to the similarities and differences in the practice and concept of motherhood among Jews in different parts of Europe. Two additional theoretical concepts will be used in my analysis.[4]

In a study of the family structure, Wally Seccombe relates to the interdependence between the way families organize their lives and the economic system of their society. In his view, the development and relationship between the nuclear family and the extended family and the different roles of its member were a reflection of economy and culture of the society. Seccombe's perception may assist in understanding the changes within Jewish families when Jews were cut off the surrounding economy.

The third theory that I will use relates to the historical experience of Jews and its impact on the family and particularly upon mothers.[5] In his study on the "Jewish Family in Retrospect: What's Past is Prologue", Benjamin Schlesinger states that the often violent assaults against Jews throughout their history prompted the development of a particular defense mechanism and a strong instinct of mothers to protect their children. This became, in his view, a cultural code within the Jewish family. In relation to the Holocaust and to the experience of Jewish families in Eastern Europe in the twentieth century, one may conclude that the

tragic experience of deportation during World War I and the Nazi assault were precursors that reinforced the need for such a protective mechanism. These theories will guide the empirical findings that relate to mothers behavior under Nazi assault.

Motherhood in Jewish tradition and the move to modernity

In Jewish tradition, the ideal figure of a wife and a mother is depicted in the biblical Book of Proverbs (Chapter 31): *"Eshet chayil"* ("woman of valor") a standard part of the Sabbath liturgy in the traditional Jewish home. She is described as devoted to her husband and children, sees to all the needs of the home, and is active economically in providing for the family's livelihood. She is praised by her children and husband, and is known in public for her achievements and her love of the Almighty.

William J. Goode writes about the role relations within a family and in society in his book, *The Family*. He states:

> In all societies, a range of tasks is assigned to females and another set is given to males, while still others may be performed by either sex. Both sexes are socialized from the earliest years to know what these roles are, to become competent in doing them, and to feel that the division of tasks is proper.[6]

In modern times, Jewish mothers were greatly influenced by the conventions of the societies in which they lived. Therefore, they were expected to promote the socialization of their children in both the Jewish and the non-Jewish societal spheres. We may observe this in Marion Kaplan's work on the Jewish middle class in Germany during the Second Reich, wherein she described the tension prevailing in the mothers' social messages:

> Faced with the contradictions and constant flux, mothers had to raise proper German children while affirming and redefining Jewishness, to present a family in the appropriate light to a society intolerant of differences, and to create a refuge for a minority to come home to."[7]

Middle-class Jewish mothers had to function as keepers of the religious tradition by modeling Judaism as a way of life: keeping the Sabbath, celebrating holidays, observing dietary rules. They were responsible for their children's good conduct both in school and in the broader non-Jewish society.

Among both Eastern and Western Europe Jews, the home was of major importance in one's integrating into the Jewish tradition. In Eastern Europe, the study of religious texts and rituals was conducted in a more formal educational setting, such as a Jewish afternoon school for boys and occasionally for girls, or in a traditional Jewish school known as the *Heder.* While Jewish identity varied

among Jews in the different European countries, the sense of living apart from the general society was more prominent in Eastern Europe. In the traditional Jewish family, the role of a mother was concentrated within the private sphere of the family. (This actually contradicts the image of the proverbial “woman of valor” mentioned above.) However, the private and public spheres were not completely separated. Many wives helped to provide for the family, many being involved in the family business. They often had contacts with customers and their activities in the marketplaces were often considerable. During the 1930s, about one-third of the Jewish women in Poland were employed outside the homes, comprising about 20 percent of the Jewish labor force.[8]

There was a public sphere of great importance, particularly among middle-class families, which involved extending aid to those less fortunate and the poor. This was a more modern form of the *tzedaka* (charity) tradition, which here involved working through institutions, collecting goods and money for contributing to the poor, or doing direct social work among the lower classes. Many women were involved in these activities.

Under Nazi rule and during the war, the Jewish family went through a period of grave crisis. The lives of its members were constantly threatened. Every part of the family unit was greatly devastated by starvation, displacement, and death. One must ask how women, as wives and mothers, coped with the crisis. In the following, I shall pursue major themes of women’s self-understanding by describing the major changes in the economic and social situation of the family and how these affected the fulfillment of traditional roles and women’s behavior towards their children. I shall also demonstrate how each concept of motherhood was besieged by the Nazi onslaught. In conclusion, I will investigate the legacy of motherhood in the wake of this experience.

Identity: Woman, housewife, mother

Leaving Home

In Eastern and Western Europe, the home was the source of pride and a representation of one’s identity in both traditional and non-traditional Jewish families. Housewives would accumulated household items such as furniture, linens and dishes through hard work and painstaking savings. These material acquisitions were a source of self-esteem. Among the middle- and lower-middle classes, the collecting for dowries was a major symbol of devoted mothers and prosperous housewives. Therefore, leaving one’s home either by flight or by being forcefully relocated into a ghetto, leaving behind treasured belongings, had a devastating, severely traumatizing affect on women. They felt as if they had lost their anchor in life; they were bereft at having to leave the home that was their safe haven, their natural environment. Thus, for many women the first major humiliating crisis—excepting the loss of a family member—was the

expulsion from or need to flee one's home. This happened to tens of thousands of women in the first months of the war when expulsions took place from the regions in Western Poland that had been annexed to the German Reich. (Such actions affected tens of thousands of non-Jewish Polish families as well.) Many women and other family members became refugees, uprooted from their homes within their own country.

Another phenomenon of uprootedness was caused by the massive destruction of cities that were heavily bombed and shelled by the invading German army. In Warsaw, for example, one-third of its houses were hit in German air raids and shelling, with a large number being completely destroyed. As a result, many residents lost all they had and became refugees in their own city. This was the case also in smaller cities and towns, becoming more visible when the Jews were ordered to concentrate in specially designated areas even before a ghetto was established.

Still another group of refugees were comprised of Jews who had been deported from other countries. They were, in fact, exiles: strangers to the new environment, lacking knowledge of the local language, considered as 'others' even by the local Jews. In Poland prior to the mass killing, thousands of Austrian and German Jews were sent to the General Government (the non-annexed, Nazi-administered part of Poland), many to the Lublin area, and housed among the local Jews. I will elaborate on these refugees further on. The extreme case in which the majority of the Jewish population was comprised of such exiles was in Transnistria, the southern part of the Ukraine that Germany handed over to the Romanians.[9]

Although most became destitute, class differentiation and the extended family situation still mattered. Among those families who remained in their own homes, economic distinctions of the past continued to be meaningful. Families that managed to take household items or other valuables with them, even if they had been deported from their homes, were able after some time to find a room to rent. Families with relatives nearby or in the same city were better off than those who moved to places where they were utter strangers.

Family ties were one of the most important sources of aid. Letters that were sent from one ghetto to another indicate how families in different places endeavored to assist each other. These letters often contained requests for financial assistance from family members or expressed gratitude for money received. A telling example is a letter dated January 1, 1942, from Mirl in Grabow to her brother in Warsaw. She asks him if he had received the money that she had sent him, and informed him of the destruction of the community in coded words, such as *"What Haman planned to do, happen in our place."* She told about the death of their mother and her own children, and asked him to report on what was happening with them.[10] Loyal non-Jewish friends were often able to assist.

Handing over one's household belongings and other valuables for safekeeping was a way to save some material goods and sources of funds, and thus helped reorganizing life, though an uprooted one.

After the establishment of the ghettos, which occurred in each city and town at a different time and place, the economic situation of most families notably worsened, and the number of uprooted families increased considerably. However, there were families whose homes were in the section that was subsequently designated as the ghetto, thus did not have to relocate. These relatively fortunate families were thus were able to sublet rooms and obtain some income thereby.

Under these circumstances, the matter of keeping the family together became dominant. From the mother's point of view it involved the effort to maintain a normative life, to go on with the regular routines even if providing only the basic necessities for the family: food, cleanliness, childcare, assisting one's husband, keeping a sense of a home and some intimacy. All these were the building blocks of a ghetto mother's identity and sense of purpose. This applied to the periods before the beginning the mass killings and deportations to the death camps. In the areas where mass killings commenced with the occupation, it applied to periods of relative quiet in the ghetto or when the deportations to the camps would be suspended for an interval.

Refugees and the lower class

The worst conditions were suffered by those who had to live for long months in the public housing shelters [in Yiddish: *Punkten*] set up for refugees. Situated in public buildings that had no residential accommodations, the physical and sanitary condition in the makeshift living quarters were extremely difficult. They were overcrowded and lacked privacy, making the situation unbearable. Many tried to move out to apartments, but those too were overcrowded.

Women were constrained by being unable to perform their daily duties and the chores associated with being a wife and a mother. With few regular homemaking duties remaining to be performed, women felt stripped of their central role as both mothers and wives and left some of them feeling completely worthless.[11]

The central responsibility of keeping the living quarters clean was beyond attaining in these refugee centers. Lack of hot water and soap made washing and laundry extremely difficult. People became infested with disease-bearing lice, and soon the typhus spread wildly throughout the refugee centers and in the overcrowded apartments. As a result, health issues and epidemics became a major concern for the refugees. The high mortality rate among young children left mothers desolate over their bereavement, and there was not even a proper

burial due to the family's lack of money and the large number of deaths. (The percentage of child mortality in the Warsaw ghetto in 1941 was 9.4% and during the first three months of 1942 this rose to 14.8%).[12]

From the Warsaw ghetto we have chilling descriptions of dead bodies in the streets, often left naked and covered by newspapers.

Mothers felt that they were deprived of the ability to fulfill their basic responsibilities and saw how their children were deteriorating in front of their eyes. Poverty, high food prices and the lack of facilities all worked against them. Contemporary records of the period document that the rise in price for bread, potatoes, and other food, resulted in starvation on a large part of the population.[13]

Historian Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, who initiated the massive documentation project and archive that would enable future historians to write the wartime history of Polish Jewry, noted in his diary on May 20, 1941, that bread prices had increased to 15 zloty for a one kg. loaf. This increase, he added, would bring the majority of the ghetto's inhabitants to the point of starvation.[14]

Isaiah Trunk provided the following prices for a number of basic products on the Warsaw ghetto black market during the first six months of 1941:[15]

Product	Price per kilogram January 1941	Price per kilogram June 1941
Brown bread	3.45 zl	18.15 zl
Rye bread	5.00	27.60
Barley	8.00	25.00
Beans	6.50	29.95
Sugar	9.20	35.80
Potatoes	1.20	6.75
Horsemeat	5.00	20.30
Pork fat (lard)	15.50	72.30

Source Trunk, Epidemics, Table 3, p. 70

The analysis of the June 1941 prices demonstrates that in order to have the basic nourishment and avoid starvation, a family of four required about 1,200 zloty per month. However, even workers in demand such as carpenters or brushmakers did not earn more then 750 zloty per month, so that even those who worked hovered on the verge of starvation.[16]

For mothers to prepare a meal from the meager products available was a major challenge. Many had come from established, middle-class homes and had no prewar experience of living in poverty.

The problem of starvation was most critical in the large ghettos of Lodz and Warsaw. In places with smaller populations, or in those regions where ghettoization did not occur until the end of 1941, the situation was somewhat easier. However, most records from all parts of occupied Eastern Europe describe the hunger and food shortages as the major issue, even before ghettoization and prior to 1941. The case of Transnistria is even more telling. The first wave of exiles arrived there in the fall of 1941, just before the most difficult winter months. Most of them lacked financial means and had few if any items to barter. The places where they were concentrated were not supplied with food and the majority of these refugees were unable to purchase food from the local population, either due to lack of means or because of the harsh regulations of isolation. Fifty percent of the exiles died in the first winter of 1941/42 because of the starvation and typhus. The records about desperate mothers are shocking. Many sent their children to beg for food in the surrounding villages, despite the danger of being shot by the Romanian or Ukraine gendarmes for leaving the enclosed confines of the ghetto. The extensive death toll left between 5,000-7,000 orphans in the various ghettos of Northern Transnistria.[17]

More women had to work outside the home, either because their husbands were unable to provide or were absent. Work shifts were very long, often from dawn to dark. A few descriptions of the homes of working mothers demonstrate the neglect that often plagued these families. However, working mothers were obliged to maneuver between work and the care of their children during work hours. Avraham Lewin described how working mothers would have to leave their little children at home alone all day. These children often went hungry and cold, having little to wear nor adequate bedding in the freezing, unheated apartments. Often mothers returned home to find a child dead. This situation caused mothers terrible distress and would leave them feeling completely helpless.[18]

A description of medical treatment administered by a nurse to a poor family depicts a family unit consisting of a mother and four children, living under appalling conditions in the basement of an apartment house. The basement had no windows and no light, and no furniture except for a few dirty blankets and several mattresses. The mother had to support her children, so she found work as a laundress for a family that was better off and could pay for the service. Meanwhile her own children were left alone in the neglected and filthy basement.[19] The nurse showed no sympathy for this mother, and her report includes criticism and a sense of estrangement. Twice she emphasizes that the mother was not around to take care of her sick child because she would go out to her workplace. But what were the alternatives for this mother, who had four

little ones to take care of? It should be left to the historian's imagination to construct a story of such a family in the Warsaw ghetto or in other similar situations where single mothers struggled to keep themselves and their children alive.[20]

In Warsaw was very difficult for women to find employment. Fragments from the Ringelblum archive depict recently widowed mothers who became hysterical when they were left alone with little children, since they did not know how they would be able to endure. Many asked themselves more than once about the possibility of joining their deceased husbands, but the responsibilities of caring for their children usually took precedence over such thoughts.

A report dated June 21,1942 from the Refugee Committee in Warsaw to Yitzhak Giterman, head of the Central Aid Committee (ZSS- Zydowska Samopomoc Spoleczna), just one month before the mass deportation from the ghetto, reported that 3,500 women and 1,800 men were unemployed in one refugee shelter, with an additional 3,200 children under fifteen years of age.[21] How many of these 3,500 women were mothers with children is not known.

In her research on women, Cecilia Slepak presents the narratives of 16 women and their lives in the ghetto.[22] Several mothers were among the interviewees. One of the mothers previously a middle-class housewife, worked as a cleaning woman in the household of a well-to-do family. One day her husband was taken by the Germans, and she did not know what had happened to him. Despite the great pain this caused her, the only way she was able to provide for herself and her ten-year-old daughter was through her work. She took the child with her to the workplace. She was worried about her daughter's education, but no other solution was available. As a middle-class housewife in the past, who could afford help in her own household, it was difficult and in some respect humiliating for her to work as a maid, but she accepted this. She would comfort herself with the thought that it was a temporary situation, that other people were suffering even more, and that her husband would return. This mother had not lost the sense of being part of a family and a community.

Another narrative included by Slepak was that of a mother of two who became a surrogate mother to the two children of her sister who had died of typhus. She too was without a husband, but her family had already dispersed before she moved to the ghetto. Prior to the war she had been a vendor of vegetable produce, and she continued to sell in the marketplace until she was forced into the ghetto. There she tried to resume her business in order provide for the children. From Slepak's description, we learn that the whole family took part in the enterprise—the mother, her sister and the four children—until the typhus epidemic infected all of them. All recovered except for her sister, who died, leaving this woman with four children to provide for.

Slepak described her with great respect, in particular her struggle to work: as a laundress, a vendor, a cleaning woman—anything to avoid becoming a beggar. She endeavored to take care of the children and was proud that they were not swollen from hunger, though they were very weak[23]

Sara Selver-Urbach describes her mother before the war as being weak and utterly dependent on her husband. He was the leader of the family, made all the decisions, and was the provider. Things did not change until her father was deported to a forced-labor camp and never returned.

At first her mother was in shock and barely functioned. Her older brother started to work in order to provide for the family's livelihood. However, after the baby brother fell sick, their mother pulled herself together and started to search intensively for ways to provide for her family. Part of their room had a big window facing the street, and this she turned into a shop, hoping to sell used items. After this venture was unsuccessful, she mended clothing and also taught her daughter. Despite the fact that she continued to be bitter and complained constantly about her misery, she went on to keep the children and the family intact. Despite being a religiously observant woman, she was ready to feed horsemeat to her older son, who fell ill, to give him strength. This demonstrated her adaptability to the hardships she experienced.[24]

In addition to the heroic efforts of mothers to take care of their children, there were also cases of a different nature. Some mothers left their starving children in a children's shelter or beside an orphanage door, hoping that their child would be better fed there and would survive. However, that was often an illusion. The increase in the numbers of children at the 39 Dzielna Street children's shelter in Warsaw, according to a report in the Ringelblum archive, demonstrates how many mothers abandoned their children since they felt unable to take care of them. In January 1941, the shelter housed 480 children; six months later in June it sheltered 625 children. (During those months 135 children died in the shelter.)[25]

Peretz Opoczynski describes the situation of these mothers as follows:

> There is no doubt that these mothers do this only after anguished self-searching. No doubt their hearts are torn within them as under cover of darkness they sneak away, leaving their babies on the stairs of a CENTOS corridor or the community council building, or just out on the street. The Judenrat together with CENTOS established a home for abandoned children but their numbers increase every day.[26]

Among poor families, children often became the providers. This, however, was true also in families whose situation was slightly better than those described in the preceding paragraphs. The following should therefore be seen as relating also to the middle class, or at least the lower middle class in the ghetto.

The most famous cases are the smuggler children, immortalized by ghetto poet Henryka Lazowert.[27] Smuggling food for their families, these youngsters risked their lives each time they crossed the ghetto's boundaries. This phenomenon of children who became supporters of their families is characteristic of many ghettos throughout Eastern Europe. Testimonies from Transnistria tell that often the local population was more generous to the children than to the adults. And even when they would not let them enter their homes because of the lice with which they were infested, the householders would hand them a bowl of soup and some bread. These situations caused mothers to have intense inner conflicts: on the one hand, they were thankful for the food brought in, but on the other, they felt guilty for the risks that their children were taking.

Bajli Kaselbergwas a 15-year-old girl in Warsaw who engaged in smuggling. She described how her mother would stand on the corner of a certain intersection in the ghetto and Bajli would give her a sign from the streetcar when crossing to the Aryan side.[28]

Mothers were often unable to maintain any type of control over their children, especially the ones who had become street children. Lacking a real home, they would wander around all day trying to find something to eat, even to the extent of grabbing food from passersby.[29] The mothers' helplessness brought them so low when they became depressed and starved, that they were no longer able to give a thought to their wandering children.[30]

The lower middle class and middle class

In having some funds at their disposal, the lower-middle- and middle-class families were somewhat better off than those in the lower classes. Even though their income might have been very meager, they were able to exchange household items for food in order to support themselves. As long as a family remained together within its own city, even if moved from their original residence, and had managed to save some of their household items or keep some ties with non-Jewish friends and acquaintances, they had a better chance of surviving—at least until deportations began. These generalizations must, however, be limited by taking into account other factors not discussed here, such as age and health, the size of the family and its social connections.

Barter became a major factor in the economy of the family, and usually these transactions were carried out by women. The common items to be offered were garments and household goods. The latter, as mentioned above, had often been acquired by painstaking efforts during the prewar years, so parting from them took an emotional toll on the mothers. In smaller ghettos such as Kovno and Vilna in Lithuania, Blechatow near Lodz, and Deblin near Lublin, the situation was usually better. This was notably the case in places where the ghetto was not sealed off by a fence or wall, and where some of the workplaces were situated

outside the ghetto.[31] In those circumstances, Jewish workers were able to contact non-Jews in order to exchange various items for food to take back with them into the ghetto. It is important, therefore, to bear in mind that situation was different in each ghetto and that the progression of the "Final Solution" in each region and locality had a crucial impact on the control over the ghetto.

Living conditions in all ghettos were dire, and most families lived in one room. Sometimes a family had to share its room with two or more other families. The average occupancy in Warsaw was 9.2 people per room, in Vilna 5.8 – 7, and in Lodz, 7.[32] It is hard to imagine how families could manage in such crowded living conditions. As mentioned previously, there were problems in the refugee centers with the lack of the intimacy, but the circumstances were not much better the crowded apartment. It took a heavy toll on relationships within the family. If one considers Goode's theory mentioned above: in the culture of the Jewish middle class, the wellbeing of the family was the overall responsibility of the wife and mother. It is therefore appropriate to see this problem as worrisome to women more than to men. Women had to share cooking time in the apartment's kitchen, which often served up to ten families. Dividing cooking time or cooking together was a cause for both contention and friendship and solidarity. Under the severe shortages and constant hunger, even if not outright starvation searching in one other's cooking pot could result in agitation. Sometimes mothers who could spare some food were sensitive to the needs of their neighbors and shared their food or helped to feed another family's child.[33] Families invited refugees or children who had lost a parent to eat with them, which resembled the middle-class mothers' prewar involvement in social welfare aid, now in the ghetto setting.[34]

Under these harsh conditions, caring for the children was still a primary concern. Mothers, even when left alone, did their utmost to protect their children from cold and hunger, to provide hygienic conditions for their health, and endeavored to pay attention to the children's emotional and intellectual needs.[35] They utilized all services that were available for children in some ghettos such as Lodz, Vilna, and Kovno: special food rations for young and schoolaged children, or for those recuperating from a serious illness.

All this notwithstanding, the fact is that often very young children of the middle- and lower-middle-classes had to work to support the family. Many survivors testify that mothers felt guilty for sending them to do hard manual work, at the tender age of ten or less, out of necessity. Documents of the ghetto period describe the children's willingness to take responsibility for their family and do all kinds of work for a livelihood. Young children pushed carts, toiled in workshops, went out to peddle saccharin or homemade cigarettes, and the most famous 'occupation' of all: smuggling. On occasion, the fact that the children were at work and not at home prevented or reprieved them from being deported when a roundup of Jews occurred.).[36]

The strength of mothers can be seen illustrated in two contemporaneous diaries. The first quote is from the diary of Fela Szeps. She was a 22-year-old from Dabrowa Gornica and wrote about her home until she and her sisters were deported to the Grünberg forced-labor camp in Upper Silesia. This passage is quite telling for many middle-class Jewish families. She wrote:

> In slow stages the normal life returned within the war conditions. These were lives in constant fear, in which one had to hide while walking in the streets. These were days of fear and nights of anxiety […] our small family was still holding. Despite the storm outside my mother knew how to create an atmosphere of care and warmth. It was quiet and pleasant in our apartment. "Would you remember my sister?" Not once while reading we completely forgot the outside reality. There always was the threat of being kidnapped to the camps in front of us, but our code (slogan) was "always, everywhere and in all situations—together." Our mother particularly fought to keep us next to her, under her protecting wings, with all her might. And the day came that our nest was destroyed.[37]

It is important to pay attention to the expression "normal life returned" in the opening of the quotation. The description of the quiet time in the diary is far from what one would ordinarily consider a normal daily routine. Only in view of the reality of the labor camp and distance from home, life under Nazi terror could be imagined or reconstructed as normal.[38]

The second quotation presented as a general statement of evaluation is from the diary-memoir of the artist Esther Lurie, who was interned in the Kovno ghetto. Lurie, who lived in Palestine, was caught by the war while visiting family in Kovno. Unmarried and childless, she lived with her married sister in the ghetto after their parents were deported:

> I could not stop wondering how delicate women, who were often ill in the good days, became strong under these conditions. In particular, women who had children had to mind their energies. And one can say that children prosper in the ghetto. […] The only joy that was left for parents were the children. And if we remember that so many mothers were left without the spouse, all that was left for them were the children. They were ready to risk their life for the children, without thinking twice. The fact is that women in the ghetto demonstrated more energy and larger adaptation to the harsh conditions than men. […] In most cases women were the providers for the family. [39]

These quotations sum up the courage that mothers often displayed when faced with being responsible for their children and the family. This should be read in the larger context of problematizing gender in the narrative of the Holocaust.

Families who were deported to Poland from other countries

Another group of refugees were the Jews deported from European countries to occupied Poland. Often they were deported directly to the death camps, but some were first deported to ghettos or forced-labor camps. As mention above, Austrian Jews were deported to the Lublin region in the fall of 1939 and again in early 1941; German Jews were deported to the ghettoes of Lodz, Kovno, Riga, Minsk and to forced-labor camps.

Abraham Lewin writes about the German Jews in Warsaw:

> Between us and them there still stands a wall of many hundred years of prejudice and linguistic division. In the final analysis, it is difficult for a Jew from Hanover to have a conversation with a Jew from Piaseczno or Gryca and vice versa.[40]

What follows is the story of once such deported family:

The story of the Berger family from Prešov, Slovakia, as told by Esther Neuman Berger, the daughter who survived, is an example of the plight of a deported mother. The Berger family was a middle-class Jewish family who kept a religious home. They had five children, two boys and three girls, ages 8 to 18. Esther was 10 years old when the war begun. Her 16-year-old sister was deported to Auschwitz in March 1942 with the first group of Slovakian Jewish girls. (It was discovered after the war that having been unable to adapt to camp life, she perished shortly after her arrival.) Two months later, the Bergers were rounded up in Prešov's main synagogue with thousand of other Jews scheduled for deportation to Poland.[41]

When the news of the upcoming deportation came out, the father was unable to exempt his family, despite his good relations with the authorities. The mother prepared a rucksack for each member of the family. In each rucksack she put some bread, which she hoped would last them for a while. She also stitched some money into each of the children's bags and in their clothes. She made sure they remembered by heart the address of her sister who lived in the United States. The father showed the children where he hid the family's valuables and told them about items he had entrusted to his non-Jewish friends. Having lived through the experience of the First World War, the father assumed that he would not return but that the children would, and that they should be able to recover the family's home and assets.

Upon reaching Poland they were brought to the small town of Deblin, near Lublin, from which a few weeks earlier the local Jews had been deported to the Sobibor and Belzec extermination camps. The Berger family received one room in the deserted home of a family that had been deported. Additional rooms in the house and elsewhere were given to other families from Prešov. Jewish homes in Deblin had already been stripped of all the possessions of previous residents.

(According to various testimonies, Poles entered the recently vacated houses and stole everything they could take.)

The residence was very crowded and dirty. The mother started to clean and tried to obtain some of the necessities to give the small dwelling a semblance of a home. Mrs. Berger found the courage to adapt herself and her family to the new situation. She encouraged her husband and children to go work in the camp near town. She agreed that 12-year-old Esther would replace a Polish Jewish woman who had a work permit, which was considered to be a lifesaver. The woman paid Esther an extra fee for taking her place. Esther worked on a farm near the Deblin airfield and she managed well with her work. The youngest brother started to pack small saccharin sweets and sell them in the streets of the ghetto or to sneak them over to the 'Aryan' side for sale, as the Deblin ghetto was not walled off. The Bergers had no household items to barter for food, but they did have some money and valuables that they smuggled into the ghetto upon entering it. An uncle in Prešov, who had not been deported yet, sent them some aid via a special emissary. Thanks to all of these factors, they managed to get by.

The mother was responsible for cooking, laundry, and cleaning, together with her mother-in-law. Despite the radical change from her previous life, she was able to use her skills as a housewife and a mother, and to offer help to her husband.[42] She often encouraged their children who were engaged in hard physical labor, while remaining concerned for their health. After a few months in Deblin, the older sister, Lea, age 18, contracted typhus. She had worked in a construction center carrying 150 buckets of water daily for the making of special concrete blocks. Twelve-year-old Esther replaced her for a few days, since this work paid higher wages than her job on the farm. After several days, the mother—who had been watching Esther—realized that the work was far too difficult for such a young girl, so prohibited her from continuing. Esther thus returned to her previous work on the farm, which paid less but was more suitable and safe for a young girl to perform. The mother kept her older daughter at home and fed her as best she could. This, however, meant putting the other members of the family on a more meager diet. Even after Lea regained her strength, her mother kept her from returning to the harsh workplace. This act had unfortunate consequences, as she was not working when the third deportation surprised the Jews in Deblin and she was taken to her death.

The mother did not have many months to test her adaptability, since all family members—except for Esther and her father, who were at work—were deported to the Treblinka camp in October 1942, only five months after their arrival in Deblin.

Eastern and Western Europe: Separation for rescue

This next section presents what I consider one of the most difficult aspects of besieged motherhood during these years. Separation for the purpose of rescue was perhaps the most heartbreaking in its contradictory significance. The following is a passage from the memoir of Shalom Elati, a 10-year-old boy from the Kovno ghetto. He described the event of his leaving the ghetto in the spring of 1944:

> I didn't really want to leave that morning, to emerge from the dim warmth of Mother and our only room, to prepare for departure. But I had to. All the arrangements had been made, and now everything depended on getting past the sentries successfully. […] But this time my exit was fast and smooth. The German officer was not there, and only our people supervised the roll call, with no interference from the guards. A few more steps and we had already reached the riverbank. […]
>
> Her [i.e. Mother's] instructions were clear: once we reach the other bank I was to march without stopping through the Lithuanians standing there, cross the road, and go up the path that led into the hills. I was to walk all alone, without raising suspicion and without looking back. Further up the path, a woman would meet me and tell me what to do.
>
> All this occurred so quickly and so easily that I scarcely grasped what had happened to me in such a short while. […]
>
> Like Moses in the bulrushes I was cast by Mother onto the shore of life. I therefore dedicate this story to my mother, who gave me life twice, but was unable to save herself even once.[43]

This is a description of separation—a departure to the unknown—which included both sadness and joy. In this case, it resulted in a successful outcome: the child was rescued. Mothers knew the hardships and uncertainties that followed their children. It made the dilemma of separation even more distressing. To separate from her child when s/he was in great danger was against motherhood's most basic instinct. In times of fear and danger, it is most natural for a mother to embrace her child and hold it close. She wants to offer comfort, to ease the pain, to provide protection. However, when great disaster threatened the Jews during the years of destruction, the mothers had to act contrary to their basic instincts. This was a calculated and most painful act, filled with anxiety and frustration. The mothers who decided to separate from their children had weighed this against the alternatives, which seemed far more dangerous for their children.

In the early years of Nazism before mass killings of Jews, many thought that their separation would only be temporary and would alleviate the children's miserable conditions. However, as the annihilation process progressed, separation created some hope for possible rescue.

Not all mothers were ready to take such a drastic step. Not all were sure that this was the right way to help their children. Esther Lurie, for example, talked about her sister, who had a little girl whom she refused to send to live with a Christian family, as she was unable to accept the idea that her child would grow up among non-Jews and thus learn to hate Jews. Her slogan was: we must stick together.[44] In any event, only a small number of Jewish mothers were able to relinquish their children to foster families. Usually these Jewish mothers were from middle- or upper-middle-class families who either had money or had professional connections with non-Jews. This complex situation was indicative of the dilemma that confronted Jewish mothers and fathers from the early years when the Nazis rose to power.

Prewar separation

Thousands of parents separated from their children and sent them off to strange places, sometimes in a different country with a different culture and language. Ten thousand children were sent to England on the well-known *Kindertransport*. Another six thousand were sent to the Land of Israel by the Youth Aliyah, an organization established to take German Jewish youth away from persecution so that they would grow up in freedom. Their parents knew that they would live in institutions or on a kibbutz (collective farm), far from the middle-class environment in which they had been reared. They would have to learn a new language and struggle with difficult conditions in an untamed environment with a totally different climate.[45]

"My darling Klarinka," wrote Sara Kofler to her 16-year-old daughter who had been sent in January 1939 with the Youth Aliyah to Palestine, when the conditions in Vienna became desperate:

> I must confess that I miss you very very much [emphasis in the original], however, I hope, that if I could be sure that you felt really happy, I would be happy with you. I am sure that you are also longing for us, this is fine, and you can admit it.[46]

These lines in her letter, and in other mothers' letters, reveal the inner conflict they went through. Sara Kofler was comforting herself with the "real happiness" of her child, while knowing very well that her child was yearning to be with her and would have to endure very traumatic days.[47]

From letters of other mothers we learn how they endeavored to remain involved in the details of their children's experiences. They asked about friends and social

activities. They advised their children what vocation they should learn, and how to manage their daily affairs. Physical distance did not seem to be an obstacle to mothers' following and understanding their children's development.[48]

In addition, parents, who sent their children on illegal immigration voyages to Palestine were uncertain whether the children would actually arrive at their final destination. This was the feeling of the parents of a group of children known as the Villa Emma group. These children left Germany and Austria before the outset of the war, and were stranded first in Yugoslavia and then were moved to Slovenia. When it became too dangerous there, they were transferred to Italy where they lodged at Villa Emma in the small village of Nonantola (this is how the group received its name.) Following the occupation of Northern Italy, they were successfully moved to Switzerland. It was only after the war's end that they did finally set out for Palestine. Their parents, who said good-by to them in the hopes of being reunited one day, had meanwhile been deported to the East, never to return.[49]

Ten thousand children were sent to England on the *Kindertransport*. Some of them were sent to institutions while others were placed with non-Jewish families. The parents did not know in advance where their children would end up or even for how long. The mothers and fathers knew that they would not be around to offer them support during the difficult times of transition. We know that both parents and children missed each other very much, but as it was primarily the responsibility of the mothers to care and support their children physically and emotionally, their guilt feelings were strong. However, in an almost dialectical way, they were convinced that they took the correct step to save their children.

One may conclude that the life stories of these children had a happy ending. In the context of the total annihilation of their communities, they at least were saved, as their parents had wished. We must also remember that during the 1930s, for most lower- or middle-class Jewish families, the physical wellbeing of children was what mattered. Parents of that time did not pay as much attention to psychological considerations. During the 1930s and 1940s, there was no established theory of family education or a clear consideration of what was important for a child's emotional development. It was simply accepted that it was important to provide a child with physical security.[50]

Many children suffered greatly from the abrupt separation from their parents, and they waited in vain for years in the hopes that their parents would fulfill their promise and be reunited with them. Only long years later, after these children grew up to be parents themselves, could they comprehend the pain of their mothers and fathers who send them away. Only after realizing the full magnitude of the Holocaust and its scale of human destruction were they able to

find some form of compassion for their lost parents. Only then, in many cases, did the pain of loss and the endless longing somewhat subside.[51]

Separation during the war years

After the outset of the war and when the deportations began, separation became a complete rupture. Very few of the parents were able to keep in touch with the children and with those to whom they had been entrusted, such as a non-Jewish family, convent nuns or the monks of monasteries where they were hidden. In Belgium, for example, where a large number of Jewish children were hidden through the resistance organization, parents were not even informed where their children had been placed.[52] The fear that they would be caught by the Germans and interrogated and forced to give the children's address was too great a risk to take, for both the child and the protective family. In Eastern Europe, often the protective families themselves did not know that the child they were keeping was Jewish. In most cases, a child's identity had to be kept secret. Sometimes, desperate mothers would leave their babies on the doorstep of a non-Jewish home or institution in the hope that somebody would be kind and humane enough to take them into their care. It is even known that mothers threw their children out of the train en route to the death camps. This was their ultimate endeavor to rescue the child while taking the supreme risk that the child might not survive the act. These cases were desperate behavior completely contradictory to what a mother would have acquired through culture, socialization, and values.

A mother left this most shocking note with her little son, who had probably been thrown off a deportation train taking them to be murdered. Published in a collection of "Last Letters," it reads:

> Merciful People:
>
> Save the child, May God repay you, don't hand over the child to the murderers!
>
> Everything will be paid for, he has two pieces of property in Lukow, everything will be paid for.
>
> Have mercy on the miserable child!
>
> This is the request of a mother unable to do otherwise.
>
> The distressed mother, H/P/[53]

We have very little documentation from the time, of mothers or fathers on child/parent separation. It is therefore heartrending to read the letters from parents to their children published by Frederick Raymes and Menachem Mayer, *Are the Trees in Bloom over There?* The Raymes family of Hofheim in southern Germany were part of a group of over 6,500 German Jews deported from little

towns and villages in that region. In October 1940, the Raymes arrived at the Gurs concentration camp in France. After four months in the camp, their two sons were taken by the French-Jewish children's aid organization, *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE), to an orphanage in Southern France.

The parents wrote to the children from March 1941 until August 1942, when they were deported to Auschwitz. Hilde Raymes, a mother who experienced the uprootedness and duress of a refugee in a German concentration camp in France, wrote most of the letters. Like Sara Kofler, she too expressed her great concern over the daily details and asked herself constantly about her children's health and food situation. She was planning to send them fruit and other things that they loved. In most of her letters, she pleaded with them to be kind to each other. The father appealed to the younger son, age 8, to listen to his older brother who was 12 years old. The parents begged the brothers to stay together, as if that would compensate for their own distance from the children.

In a letter dated August 10, 1942, just before her deportation to Auschwitz, the hopeless mother wrote, contemplating their separation while confronting the journey to the unknown:

> Just a few lines before the voyage. I do not know to where we are going to be transported. We are not at all sorry that we are leaving you behind. You are better protected; perhaps later you will know everything. Take care of your health.
>
> All the best, my children, and kisses from your mother.
>
> P.S. My dear Manfred and Heinz, be good to each other, these are my concerns.[54]

Reading the letter we ask, what was the meaning of the sentence, "Perhaps later you will know?" Was the mother alluding to her fears that the children did not understand why they had been separated from their parents? Is she hinting at the fact that she already knew her and their father's doomed fate and that the children had a better chance to survive?

In some small places, where ghettos were transformed into forced-labor camps, Jews managed to bribe the Germans to let them keep their children with them.[55] The children were not registered and thus did not receive food rations, but neither were they deported. We already noted this fact in the labor camp near Deblin: eighty children were living there until the camp's liquidation in July 1944.

Hannah Szientprout Topolski testified that her mother forced her out of the march to the *Umschlagplatz* (German: assembly area) and told her to run away and find a safe haven in the labor camp.[56] She was only twelve years old and already worked in the camp, but she was afraid to run away on her own and felt unsure about the surrounding. Her mother, though, did not give up. This was the

third deportation from Deblin. Most of her extended family had already been deported to Sobibor, and the mother had previously found out about the death camp. She was determined that her daughter should run away and mingle with the Polish crowd that was standing on the sidewalks, watching the Jews being marched to their death. The child had fair hair and was small, so her mother thought that she had a good chance not to be noticed in the midst of the crowd; she told her to go back to the labor camp and find her father.

In desperation, the mother tried to escape first with her nine-year-old daughter, but was chased back by a German guard. After her mother's failure, Hannah was convinced to try, trusting her mother to follow with her little sister. Successfully, she left the line and stood for a few hours amid the crowd watching the Jews march off. Then she sought a way to get to the labor camp, but was unsuccessful. She wandered in the fields. When evening approached, she knocked desperately on a farmer's door but was chased away. Frightened and hungry, she walked unsure of her next steps, feeling the chill of October evening, when in the distance she saw the image of her mother. Was it true or an illusion?

Hannah started to run to that direction and called her mother desperately, when suddenly she heard her mother's voice faintly coming from a certain ditch. Yes, Hannah was lucky. Her mother did fulfill her promise and managed to escape from the death march. Her mother's embrace calmed her, and they remained in hiding for many hours until the trains loaded with the Jews departed from the Deblin railroad station.

Hannah was with her family in the labor camp in Deblin until the summer of 1944, when they were sent on a transport to Czestochowa. These were difficult years of hard work, illness and lack of food, but they did not starve to death. It was always the mother, with her ingenuity and resourceful manipulations, that kept up the spirit of hope. She did not let the struggle to survive fade away. The father was deported from Czestochowa to Buchenwald just days before liberation. He did not survive. When the Soviet army came to Czestochowa they liberated the mother with her daughters and one son.

Conclusion

> On one matter there was full consensus: To take a child out of the ghetto was considered a solemn, holy task. The Jewish policeman, or another official at the gate, would sometimes offer what help he could, even at the risk of his own life. Those who were able might send a child to an acquaintance or to a stranger whom they would pay, but for many this option was simply not possible. However, there were many parents who did not want to send their children away and declined to do so. Parents debated this matter extensively, some arguing that on principle they

> would not send their child to a gentile. Mothers said that they would rather die with their children than send them away. They were unable to imagine the ensuing separation if their children were taken from them. Others said that if the Nazis would lay their hands on them, they would ask to be killed with their children. The most popular way to rescue children from the ghetto was to arrange for underground hideouts – *malines,* as they were called in the ghetto.[57]

This is a testimony from the Kovno ghetto, which is supported by many other documents. In Kovno and in Shavli, before the liquidation of the ghetto, the Germans raided the ghetto during working hours. While most of the mothers were away at work, the Germans deported their children to death camps. The devastated mothers returned from work only to find out that their children were gone.

Dr. Aharon Pick from Shavli reported that women in the ghetto were unable to conceive that their children were murdered.[58] They endeavored throughout all these long and horrible years of the ghetto to save them, and then, when the Soviet Army was almost at the gates of Lithuania, they were murdered. Rumors spread through the ghetto every day that the children had been seen, or that they were deported to Germany, or that they were living safely in some remote camp and at the liberation they would be reunited with their parents. Ringelblum, mentioning the experiences of mothers who lost their children in the Warsaw ghetto and would listen to rumors of their whereabouts, noted sadly that all these reminded him of the old Jewish legend of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.[59]

Were these mothers who experienced the Nazi annihilation policy blind to the reality that their children were lost forever? Was this a psychological defense mechanism that helped them endure the present and long for the future? These mothers endeavored for long and trying months to shelter their children, and it became the anchor of their life. Were they unable to accept the abrupt and cruel disappearance of their children? Were they trusting the tradition of the Jews as a "people of remnant" (Hebrew: *She'erit*) and thought that they and their children would become such remnants? Could Schlesinger's theory reinforce such assumption? I leave it as a question.

And yet mothers also deserted their children to rescue themselves, and some were ready to put their babies to sleep in order to get a place in a hideout. Mothers in the ghetto workplaces ("shops") in Warsaw, during the days of the mass deportation of summer 1942, sometimes faced a choice to either go to death with their children or to hand them over for deportation. Their decisions varied. I shall end with a quote from Ruth Bondy on mothers in Auschwitz-Birkenau in June 1944, who had come there from the Theresienstadt ghetto:

> Although many of the women of Theresienstadt were privileged to live in the family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau with their children, by June 1944

> they knew they were going to be sent to the gas chambers. Because the Nazis needed working hands, they held a selection: the mothers of young children had the choice of presenting themselves to be selected as workers – or staying with their children and thus be sent to the gas chambers. After six months in Birkenau they had no illusions about saving their children – they knew that their children were going to be sent to the gas chambers. Only two of about 600 mothers of young children appeared for the selection; all the others decided to stay with their children to the end.[60]

What is the legacy that these mothers bequeathed us? Is it a story of dignity and despair, a story of courage and struggle against all odds? It certainly leaves us with great wonder about those women and their children who survived the war and created new families. From the testimonies of survivors, fathers and mothers who lost children during the war, we know that the pain of loss never disappeared. The lost child continued to live in the parent's heart, beside those children who were born into new families that were formed after the war. Often these children learned about their parents' losses when they grew up and became adults or after the death of one of the parents.[61] The deep memory that Lawrence Langer describes in his work was one mechanism that enabled mothers and fathers to live with the pain of loss alongside the joy of new life.[62]

[1] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 33.

[2] An interesting illustration of the family situation emerges from the collection of autobiographies of Jewish youth in Poland initiated by YIVO, in 1932, 1934, and 1939. An anthology of the autobiographies that survived were published in *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust*. Jeffrey Shandler (ed.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

[3]William J. Goode, *The Family.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Foundation of Modern Sociology Series, 1982, second edition, pp. 1-14.

[4] Seccombe Wally, *A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe*. London, New York: Verso, 1992, Introduction, pp. 1-7.

[5] Schlesinger Benjamin, “The Jewish Family in Retrospect: What’s Past is Prologue,” in *Jewish Family Issues: A Resource Guide*. Benjamin Schlesinger (ed.) New York: 1987, 13-17.

[6] Goode, p. 71.

[7] Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 31.

[8] See Bina Garnazarska-Kedari, “Temurot bamazav hahomri shel shekhavot ha’ovdim hayehudi’im be-Polin (1930-1939,” [The changes in the material condition of the Jewish working class in Poland] *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*. Gilbert S. Rosenthal (ed.), New York: T. Yosselof, 1970, pp. 307-320. Paula E. Hyman, “Gender and the Jewish Family in Modern Europe,” in Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (eds.) *Women in the Holocaust*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998, pp. 31-36.

[9] Transnistria was the southern part of the Ukraine occupied by the German and Romania army in the summer of 1941. In September 1941, an agreement was signed between the German and the Romanian in Tiginia and the region was given to the rule of the Romanians and named Transnistria. The Romanians nominated a governor to the region and it became the depot area for some 150,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina that the Romanian government wanted to deport from the State. A few thousand Jews from the Regat were also sent to Transnistria and some 20,000 Roma.

[10] Rutha Sakowska, (ed.) *Archiwum Ringelbluma, Listy o Zaladizie.* Warsaw: ZIH, 1994, Letter from Mirl from Grabow to her brother in Warsaw, dated January 1, 1942; see also February 13 1942, a letter of Lenczycki from a labor camp near Posen to her sister and brother-in-law, Gelernter in Warsaw. Lenczycki was in a labor camp with nothing of her belongings and she is asking to send her parcel. She also informs her sister that she is allowed to receive up to 5 marks and that it is permissible to sent in a regular letter.

[11] M-10 ARI/77 bulletin for the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) describing the situation in Poland during the first 13 months of the war September 1939; November 1940; M-10 ARI/ 211 bulletin of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) describing the situation in Poland during the year 1941. (Yiddish) See also M-10 ARI/309 “*Vi azoy “lebe” di heymloze oyf di punkten”* (Yiddish: How the homeless live in the shelters).

[12] Isaiah Trunk, “The struggle of the Jews against contagious diseases”, (Yiddish: Mikhome keygen Yidn durk farspreiten krankayten) *YIVO Blater,*37, 1953, p. 93.

[13] Yad Vashem AR-309 , “ How the homeless live in the *Punkten*”.

[14] Yad Vashem AR-309 , “How the homeless live in the *Punkten*”; Emanuel Ringelblum, *Diary and Notes Vol I.* (Hebrew) Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1993), p. 282. “May 9th, the prices are skyrocketing

again, bread 12 zloty potatoes 3.4-4 zloty per one kilogram," p. 284; the price of bread 14.50 zloty (May 18th), p. 285; May 20th, the price of bread is 15 zloty.

[15] Isaiah Trunk, "The struggle of the Jews against contagious diseases"(Yiddish). *YIVO Blater* 37, 1953, pp. 53-100; An English version appeared in English in *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 8, 1953, pp. 92-204 .

[16] Ibid, p. 71.

[17] Avigdor Shachan, *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria.* New York: East European Monographs, 1996, pp.190-271; Ruth Glasberg Gold, *Ruth's Journey: A Survivor Memoir*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, pp.62-117; Jan Ancel , *Transnistria 1941-1942*. Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2003, pp. 339-428.

[18] Avraham Lewin. See the description of the apartment and four little children alone and in misery, "*Vi azoy "lebe" di heymloze oyf di punkten"* (Yiddish: How the homeless live in the shelters) YVA, M-10 AR-309, p. 9.

[19] YVA M-10 ARI/196, Maluba Regina, "A report of one medical treatment".

[20] A cruel description of a poor family and the neglect and poverty in the home, described by Rozycki. YVA M10/ 429.

[21] Yad Vashem Archives (YVA) M-10 ARII/85.

[22] Slepak report, YVA JM/215/3, band 3. Cecilia Slepak belonged to the *"Oneg Shabbat"* underground research group organized by Emanuel 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; also, Dalia Ofer "Her View through My Lens: Cecilia Slepak "Studies Women in Warsaw", in *Gender, Place and Memory in Modern Jewish Experience.* Judy Tydor Baumel, Tova Cohen (eds.), London, Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003, pp. 29-50.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Sara Selver-Urbach, *Miba'ad lahalon beiti: zikhronot megeto Lodz* (Hebrew: Through the window of my home; memoirs of Lodz Ghetto). Jerusalem: 1964).

[25] YVA M-10 ARI/223 1941. I would like to thank Ms. Lea Priess for providing me with this document.

[26] Peretz Opoczyski, *Sketches from the Warsaw Ghetto* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1970, p. 105.

[27] Henryka Lazowert, "The Little Smuggler" in, *And They Will Call Me : Poems from the Holocaust in Yiddish and English Translation*. Waltham Mass: Brandeis University, 1982, pp.10 -11.

[28] YVA M-10 ARI/470; See also the following comment by Ringelblum:"This is the way stuff is smuggled through Sienna Street: The street cleaner stands on the Other Side of the Wall diligently sweeping. He pushes various objects through the rain-water culvert with his broom; he receives money through the same channel. Emaciated three- or four year-old children crawl through the culverts to fetch merchandise from the Other Side. Imagine what a mother must go through when her child is in mometary danger of death." Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Ghetto: The Journal of Emanuel Ringelblum.* New York: McGraw Hill, 1958, p.172.

[29]On street children see, Rachel Auerbach, *In the streets of Warsaw: 1939-1943.* (Hebrew) Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1954), p.24; Ringelblum 1 p. 299; Dalia Ofer "Children and Youth During the Holocaust:

Issues for Research," in, *The Holocaust: History and Memory: Essay Presented in Honor of Israel Gutman.* Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001, pp. 72-74.

[30] YVA, M10 426, Rozycki p.24

[31] David Silberklang, *Hashoah bemahoz Lublin* (Hebrew: The Holocaust in the Lublin District). Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2003, pp. 93-117; YVA M1/E 874 Testimony of Sumer on his life in Deblin and the ghetto; YVA M1/E 1627 testimony of Moses Klawer on his life in Deblin and the ghetto; YVA MIQ 101, testimony of Adam Kostecki and many more, see also Avraham Lewin, On the deportations from Deblin, p. 71, 78-79.

[32] For further information about living condition in the ghettos of Vilna, see Aharon Einat, *The Internal Life in the Vilna Ghetto* (Hebrew: Hachaiim hapnimiim begeto Vilna). Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006; For Lodz, see Michal Unger, *Lodz, aḥaron ha-geṭaot bePolin* (Hebrew: Lodz: the last ghetto in Poland). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005, for Warsaw, Abraham Lewin, *A Cup Of Tears: A Diary from the Warsaw Ghetto.* Antony Polonsky (Ed.) Oxford: Blackwell, 1988, pp. 4-7.

[33] Helena Szerszevska, *Haperek haaharon* (Hebrew: The last chapter). Tel Aviv: Lohamei Haghetatot, 1980, pp.104-127.

[34] Mary Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg: Growing Up in the Warsaw Ghetto.* S.L. Shneiderman (Ed.) Oxford: OUP, 2006, p. 38-9 Feb. 5 1941, p. 41 Feb. 20, p. 99-101 October 1941, p. 110 Dec. 1941.

[35] Tamar Lazarszon-Rostovski, *Yomanah she Tamara* (Hebrew: The diary of Tamara).Tel Aviv: Lohamei Haghetatot, 1975, pp. 71,82, 87; Shalom Elati, *Lahazot et hanhar,* (Hebrew: Crossing the river). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, Carmel, 1999, pp. 89-91 Esther Lurie, Memoirs of the Kovno Ghetto (Hebrew) YVA 03/637, and many more places.

[36] See Esther Neuman Berger's testimony, Yad Vashem Archive (YVA) 033c/4154; Hannah Topolski, (Yad Vashem) (YV) 03/9295; see testimonies in note 29.

[37] Fela Szeps, *Ba-lev ba'arah ha-shalhevet: yomanah shel Felah Sheps, maḥaneh ha-avodah Grünberg* (Hebrew: A Blaze from Within: The Diary of Fela Szeps, the Grünberg Forced-Labor Camp) Bella Guterman (Ed.), Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002, pp. 41-42, Hanukkah, no date.

[38] For some elaboration on this matter see, Dalia Ofer "Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in East European Ghettos during the Holocaust", in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. XIV, 1998: 143-165.

[39] YVA 03/637.

[40] See for example what Lewin is writing about the German Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto.* Antony Polonsky (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, pp. 85-86, entry (May 21, 1942).

[41] Esther Neuman Berger, Yad Vashem Archive (YVA) 033c/4154, the story of the Berger family is based on her testimony, which I shall not mention again in the notes.

[42] A number of testimonies of survivors from Prešov who were deported to Deblin are in the Yad Vashem collection. Some were taken in the DP camps in Germany right after liberation and some were taken years later. They have different narratives but are similar in the larger contour of the description on the arrival to the Deblin ghetto and the state of the houses that they were put in. Many describe the mothers' efforts to clean the place, the care to give the place some resemblance of home, and in general their naiveté in regard to their future. See for example YVA 03/6303 Shosha Klapus, born in Prešov in 1925, and was deported to Deblin in May 1942; Israel Shapira M49E/139; Avraham Weingarten, 03/6751, was born in 1928 and deported to Deblin in May 1942.

[43] Shalom Elati, *Lahazot et hanhar,* pp. 11-12; translation provided by the author.

[44] Esther Lurie, YVA 03/620, pp. 140-141.

[45] Sara Kadosh, *Ideology vs. Reality: Youth Aliyah and the Rescue of Jewish Children During the Holocaust 1933-45*. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1990.

[46]*Za'akah beterem shoah* (Hebrew: A scream at the outset of the Holocaust) translated from the German and edited by Klara (Hedwa) Koppler Yuval, Jerusalem: private publication, (2000) p. 22. This collection of letters is a striking example of feelings of parents (the Kopplers) who sent their daughter to Palestine. She left Vienna on January 1, 1939 with the Youth Aliyah. The parents tried to conceal from their daughter the hardships that they were experiencing in Vienna during 1939. The mother's letters expressed concern over the difficulties that her daughter experienced in the new country. She endeavored to be involved in all details of daily life, without expressing distrust in her daughter's ability to manage. On November 1939, after the war broke, the parent too boarded an illegal immigrant ship that was stranded in Yugoslavia and never reached Palestine. The parents, together with their younger daughter, were murdered by the Nazis in Yugoslavia.

[47] I have dealt with the issue of personal letters, and with letters of mothers in another study. "Personal Letters in Research and Education on the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4, no. 3 (1989), pp. 341-55; *The Dead-End Journey: The Tragic Story of the Kladovo-Sabac Group.* Lanham: University Press of America, 1996 (with Hannah Weiner).

[48] Dalia Ofer, Hannah Weiner, *The Dead-End Journey.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996, pp. 58-60, 69-72. Of significant interest are the letters from Ghaje Weinstock to her children from October 1939 to April 1941 (private collection); see also the letters of Jacob and Sara Rotman to their children, (private collection).

[49] Yael Nidam-Orvieto, *Parashat Yaldei Vila Ema berei hazalat yeladim bitkufat hashoah*" (Hebrew: the story of the children of Villa Emma as a reflection of the rescue of children during the Holocaust). *The Twelvth World Jewish Congress,* section 5) Jerusalem 2001. pp. 145-154; *Parashat Yaldei Vila Ema: hahatzala shel kevutzat yeladim bitkufat hashoah* (Hebrew: The Story of Villa Emma: a rescue of one group of children during the Holocaust). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005; on illegal immigration see Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel.* New York: OUP, 1990.

[50] Dan Baron, Julia Chaitin, *Parenthood and the Holocaust.* Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001, p. 17.

[51] Koppler, A Scream at the Outset, p. 13; Frederick Raymes, Menachem Mayer, *Haim Ha`ezim Porhim ezlachem?* (Hebrew: Are the trees blooming over there?). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem: 2001 pp. 13-14, 16-17; Sharon Cohen Kangisser, *Finding their Voices: Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel: Social Dynamics and Postwar Experiences*. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2005.

[52] Testimony of Mrs Fanny Eisenberg, USHMM, signature, May 31, 2007 "One Person."

[53] *Last Letters from the Shoah*.Zvi Bachrach (Ed.), Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Devora Publishing, 2004, p. 269. See also USHMM RG 10.249 letters, Diary of Frida and Reinarch 1939-42, entry of the mother, May 1 1942, entries of the father May 24 1942, October 20 1942.

[54] Meir, Menaḥem, Frederick Raymes (Manfred Mayer) and Menachem (Heinz) Mayer note l; pp.102-103.

[55]YVA, testimony of Abraham Weingarten 03/67; Salzman Mayer, M49/1168.

[56] YVA 03/9295.

[57] Esther Lurie, pp. 140-141.

[58] Aharon Pick. *Reshimoth migai haharega* (Hebrew: Writing from the death land: memoirs from the Shavli Ghetto 1942-1944). Tel Aviv: 1988, p.202.

[59] Ibid. p. 202; Lurie, p. 181.

[60] Ruth Bondy, "Women in Theresienstadt and the Family Camp in Birkenau" in Ofer and Weitzman, 1998, p. 324.

[61] See for example the book of Baruch Milch, *Ṿe-ulai hashamayim reḳim* (Hebrew: And the Heavens may be Void). Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999. Of particular interest is the introduction by his daughter Shosh Milch-Avgial, pp. 9-22.

[62] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 1-38.