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WOMEN'S RESISTANCE THROUGH TESTIMONY

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A STUDY OF SURVIVORS' TALES FROM THE HOLOCAUST

Master's Thesis in Gendering Practices, 30 hec

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Abstract

This thesis analyses Jewish women Holocaust survivor's testimonies. The purpose is to investigate what events the women tell of, how they tell of the choice and act of giving testimony, and to analyse whether resistance is manifest in their stories. I offer an interpretation with a feminist and intersectional historical outlook through the use of oral history as method and collective memory as an overarching framework. Common gender essentialist readings of women's survivor stories from the Holocaust are enhancements of the "heroine" aspect of the characters that emerge in survivor testimonies, and the diminution of character aspects that do not correspond with preconceived gender roles. By further reinforcing epithets such as "heroine", there is a risk of withholding complex readings. In taking use of Avery Gordon's concept of *complex personhood* and Joan W. Scott and Judith Butlers understandings of gender as a useful category of historical analysis, I attempt to avoid essentialism and further a feminist analysis of women's testimonies from the Holocaust. I argue that the actual acts the women tell of, in addition to the telling of the stories themselves and how they speak of this, all serve as means of resistance. The result of the analysis is that the women's testimonies together create a powerful collective memory, a collective solidarity, which seeks to make amends for, and thereby retroactively show resistance to what they endured, while also hindering oppression in the contemporary.

Keywords: the Holocaust, resistance, testimony, women, gender, oral history, collective memory, complex personhood, intersectionality

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1 Introduction

> History through the inconspicuous witnesses and participant's stories. The unseen. That's what interests me – that's what I would like to make literature of. But the narrators are not only witnesses – far from it – they are also actors and writers. It's impossible to get too close to reality. Between reality and us, are our feelings. I understand that I have to deal with different versions – each one has their own version, and when they become sufficiently numerous and intersect, the image of a time and the people who lived then is born.[1] – Svetlana Aleksijevitj in *War's unwomanly face*

The author Svetlana Aleksijevitj suggests in the quote which opens this thesis that she wants to see history through the eyes of the inconspicuous witness, the unseen witness. When she has gathered enough stories, they together create an image of a time and the people who were present, which enables the stories to cross temporal boundaries. Aleksijevitj's stories tell of dramatic changes of the Soviet Union, whereas I look at stories of the Holocaust. However, they share a common totalitarian heritage. Holocaust stories, much like stories of the Soviet Union, abound. Stories about the victims, the perpetrators and the bystanders. This thesis is about bringing together the testimonies given by Jewish women survivors of the Holocaust, look for how resistance is manifest in their stories and what kind of resistance this is. Testimonies offered by survivors and victims of the Holocaust have attracted a wide readership across the world, predominantly in Europe and the USA. A substantial amount of writings has been published on the active role played by women, both as perpetrators and victims in the genocide conducted by Nazi Germany during the 12-year reign of Adolf Hitler (1933-1945). Inspired by works by authors such as Aleksijevitj, I wish to bring many complex and different testimonies together and thus create a new picture of what they experienced, felt and lived, and subsequently analyse this.

An example of the types of testimony I examine is the story Zenia Malecki tells of her time in the Vilna ghetto. She was part of the FPO, *Fareynitke Partizaner Organizatsye* (United Partisan Organisation) in the Vilna ghetto, and here she describes the organized work of the movement:

> My father used to go out of the ghetto on purpose to bring in whatever he could.

[1]Translated by me from Swedish into English, from page 19, Aleksijevitj, Svetlana, *Kriget har inget kvinnligt ansikte*, Ersatz, Stockholm, 2012

> Everyone who has a yellow *Schein* could work. Otherwise, you were really condemned to death. So whoever could, got a yellow *Schein* from the *Judenrat*. My father got one in order to be able to go out to get ammunition for the rifles or other parts for the FPO. He smuggled things in. I also smuggled them in. You couldn't carry a whole gun; you had to smuggle it in parts. It was a holy task. We *had* to do it. It was our goal. We didn't have anything, just survival.[2]

In this quote many different aspects of life as a Jew in Nazi occupied Europe come to the surface, such as the complicated ethical question of collaboration with the Nazis in the form of the *Judenrat*, and the meticulous bureaucracy of death it brought with it. The *Judenrat* were Jewish councils imposed by the Nazis. They traditionally consisted of Jews in high positions such as Rabbis, and were set up in ghettoes and villages to carry out administrative tasks for the Nazis.[3] The extreme task it was to perform resistance was generally lethal, but Zenia and her organization nevertheless saw it as their holy task. The choice is not simple. Either one resists and risks dying, or one dies without having resisted. This is what reality looked like to Jews in occupied areas during WWII. Most of the women who give testimony and who I have chosen as research material were not part of a partisan or other resistance movement. Nonetheless, they do speak of resisting their oppressors in other manners. The goal of this thesis is to examine what this other resistance looked like, and whether giving testimony itself can be understood as resistance.

1.1 Key concepts and thesis synopsis

Before I present the thesis synopsis, I want to clarify and define some central terms used throughout my thesis. The term Holocaust, also known as the *Shoah* ("the catastrophe" in Hebrew), first introduced to the English language in the 1950s, refers to the genocide during the Nazi regime in Europe.[4] This period is usually set between 1933, the start of the Third Reich, and 1945, the end of WWII – and subsequently also the end of the Holocaust. The systematically planned annihilation of all the Jews in Nazi occupied Europe was known as the

[2]Page 259, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998
[3]*Britannica Academic*, s. v. "Judenräte,"
http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/709792/Judenrate. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[4]Page39, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998

Final Solution[5] (*die Endlösung*) in Germany at the time. On July 31st 1941, it was ordered by Hermann Göring, leading member of the Nazi party[6] to Reinhard Heydrich, high-ranking Nazi officer and central figure in the Reich Main Security Office[7] to prepare the plans for the "Solution". The plans were put forward in the infamous Wannsee-conference, which was held January 20th 1942, and subsequently put into action.[8] The Holocaust affected many minorities other than Jews including Roma people, people from the resistance movements and the left, homosexuals and mentally and/or physically disabled people among others. The term Holocaust will be used throughout the thesis, but the focus will only lay on the largest group of victims, the Jews, and specifically Jewish women. Gender studies of the Holocaust, is the study of Jewish women and men in all Nazi occupied areas, including Germany. I will use the term WWII (World War II) to describe the global war initiated by Nazi Germany through the invasion of Poland, lasting from 1939 until 1945.[9] In addition, I will use the word testimony to describe both oral and written stories and memoirs told by individuals or groups of women survivors of the Holocaust. In chapter 2 I will elaborate on the definitions and carry a discussion on testimony, resistance and gender, and how I choose to use these terms.

This thesis is organized in the following manner. Within the introduction of this thesis I look at some key concepts relevant to the thesis and present the aim and research question. Some ethical considerations are made. Chapters 1.4 through 1.4.5 present and discuss the field of research and the research material. The introductory chapters end with the presentation of and discussion on oral history as the method of this thesis. Following the introductory chapters is the main body of the thesis, chapter 2 through 2.5.6. The main body is thematically organised, which means that the theoretical approaches are presented in conjunction to the analysis, where themes that make themselves relevant guides the thesis ahead. The main body is divided in two themes, with the first theme focusing on feminist analyses, from chapters 2.4

[5]"Final Solution," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/207135/Final-Solution. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[6]"Hermann Göring,". *Britannica Academic*, s. v http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/239310/Hermann-Goring (accessed December 16, 2015)
[7]"Reinhard Heydrich," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/264683/Reinhard-Heydrich. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[8]"Wannsee Conference," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/635490/Wannsee-Conference. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[9]"World War II," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/648813/World-War-II. (accessed December 16, 2015)

through 2.4.6. The second theme is that of collective memory, starting from chapter 2.5 through 2.5.6. Chapter 2 begins with a definition and discussion of resistance and testimony, with a deeper discussion concerning testimony and factuality. Thereafter, the feminist theoretical approach of the thesis is presented and discussed. The first findings of mutual assistance among women as resistance follow. I subsequently discuss essentialism and *complex personhood* as an alternative, the role of the Jewish mother and the sense of "loss of self". Finally, the role of the Jewish heroine and survival as resistance is analysed, which wraps up the first theme that comes to look at Jewish women's especially vulnerable role within the Holocaust system and the feminist analysis we can employ onto this. The second half of the main body of the thesis starts off by presenting collective memory as an over-arching theory. The findings and analysis of the will to witness as a means of resistance follows, as well as a discussion of the times when "words fail" as testimony. It continues with an analysis of the Jewish collective memory as resistance and a discussion of whether we can do retroactive resistance through collective memory. In the final part of the thesis, chapter 3, some conclusions are made as well as some further remarks. A list of references follows.

1.2 Aim and research question

The aim of this thesis is to analyse what kind of resistance is manifest in women's oral histories of the Holocaust. Many testimonies of survival have been written in order for future generations to remember what happened – history must be recorded and told, or else it is easily forgotten or distorted. Women's testimonies from the Holocaust are nonetheless often neglected or overlooked because they may seem uninteresting, unfitting or considered to be of lower literary quality. Doing a feminist analysis of survival stories, provides us with new perspectives on the Holocaust experience. Thus, by answering the following research question, this thesis will contribute to the understanding and awareness of past and contemporary gendered political circumstances.

The research question is:

- What kind of resistance is manifest in the oral histories of women survivors of the Holocaust, and how can one view the act of testimony as a resistance in itself?

1.3 Ethical considerations

> […] writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric – Theodor W. Adorno

How does one write or speak of the Holocaust, factually, fictionally or both – and how is this relevant to the ethics of academic writing? Theodor W. Adorno's famous quote, which opens this chapter, has been used time and time again to emphasise the difficulty of expressing oneself about the Holocaust, and can be used in this instance to exemplify why ethics and aesthetics have relevance to each other. The quote has often been interpreted to imply that it is impossible to express beauty in the wake of the immense tragedy that was the Holocaust. Reflected upon philosophically, it cannot be read in a strict sense. Instead, I believe it implies the impossibility of living in the wake of such a tragedy. An extended quote reads:

> Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely.[10]

Adorno later claimed that the famously quoted fragment was intended as criticism of the cultural vacuum and hollowness that inevitably occurred post-Holocaust. In this vacuum it would seem impossible to write poetry. On the contrary, he also argued that one could just as well say that one must write poetry after Auschwitz, pointing to Hegel's argument in *Aesthetics*[11]*;* the awareness of suffering among humans is expressed through art, which is the objective of that awareness.[12] As long as there is awareness, art must exist. However, Adorno would rather pose the metaphysical question of:

> [...] whether one can live after Auschwitz. This question has appeared to me, for example, in the recurring dreams which plague me, in which I have the feeling that I am no longer really alive, but am just the emanation of a wish of some victim of Auschwitz. Well, the bleaters of connivance soon turned this into the argument that it was high time for anyone who thought as I did to do away with himself as well – to which I can only respond that I

[10]Page 34, Adorno, Theodor W., *Prisms*, 1st MIT Press ed., MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1981
[11]Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Aesthetics: lectures on fine art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998

[12]Page 110, Adorno, Theodor W., *Metaphysics: concept and problems*, Polity, Cambridge, 2000

> am sure those gentlemen would like nothing better. But as long as I can express what I am trying to express, and as long as I believe I am finding words for what otherwise would find none, I shall not, unless under extreme compulsion, yield to that hope, that wish.[13]

We must not succumb to the idea of giving up, even though it is tempting as Adorno puts it in the above quote. As long as we are able to express ourselves about the Holocaust, or any tragedy of the like for that matter, we must embrace the opportunities art opens up. Alex Alvarez, as early as 1964, made one of the first comments on the question of the use of art as a way to greater ethical consciousness in relation to the Holocaust. He wrote:

> From the fragile, tentative, individual discriminations of art emerge precisely those moral values which, if understood and accepted, would make totalitarian atrocities impossible.[14]

Can art be a means of resistance to potential atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes? This thesis rests on the kindred question of how oral testimony can be a means of resistance. I am convinced that, as Alvarez claims, from the act of writing and sharing survivor testimony, a form of aesthetic expression, springs the buds of resistance towards powers that want to annihilate human freedom.

The object of the discussion regarding factual vs. fictional written testimonies from the Holocaust has mainly concerned whether one or the other conveyed the atrocities, gave the events justice. In the book *After testimony: the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust narrative for the future,* the authors discuss how the question of aesthetics has preoccupied many survivors looking for a way to write about their experiences.[15] They write:

> Jorge Semprun, a survivor of Buchenwald and the author of several acclaimed novels and testimonies about the Holocaust, has explained that he refrained for many years after the war from writing anything at all. He did not want to write a "straight" testimony, for he was convinced of the paradox that only artifice of literary writing, which allows for invention and various kinds of "poetic licence" in addition to factual reporting, could

[13]Page 110, Adorno, Theodor W., *Metaphysics: concept and problems*, Polity, Cambridge, 2000
[14]Page 4, Lothe, Jakob, Suleiman, Susan Rubin & Phelan, James (red.), *After testimony: the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust narrative for the future*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 2012
[15]Page 4, Ibid

convey the truth of that experience.[16]

For Jorge Semprun, it seemed impossible to convey the whole "truth" about the Holocaust through simply factual reporting. It could only be brought forth through the meshing of fiction and fact. Primo Levi, survivor of the Holocaust and author of several books on his experiences, once suggested that "the essential inadequacy of documentary evidence"[17] to satisfy this curiosity means that the depths of a human being are more likely to be given to us by the poet or dramatist than by the historian or psychologist.[18] Others have claimed the opposite. For example, Bernard Harrison cites Berel Lang's argument in the essay "Aharon Applefeld and the problem of Holocaust Fiction": "certain features essential to imaginative fiction make it incapable of dealing effectively with the historical realities of the Holocaust."[19]

There seems to exist differing opinions on which form of writing "best" conveys the atrocities of the Holocaust. But how is this related to my own inquiry? The Holocaust and how it is conveyed is related to my own ethical responsibility towards my material because I choose to show the testimonies I analyse in the way of short quotes, rather than for example writing long elaborate explanations of what they say in the quotes. I largely let the testimonies speak for themselves, and subsequently analyse them as a whole with the use of theoretical and methodological tools in order to answer my research question. As a researcher, one has ethical responsibility towards the authors of the testimonies. The women giving testimony have not personally granted me the "right" to scrutinize their oral histories, but they have agreed to be published in books which are free to be used by anyone who wishes to. Perhaps it is our ethical responsibility to analyse texts and stories in new ways, such as for example how testimony can be a means of resistance. I am of the conviction that the stories are part of our common history and that we must try to scrutinize it and continue to look at it, even today.

[16]Page 4, Lothe, Jakob, Suleiman, Susan Rubin & Phelan, James (red.), *After testimony: the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust narrative for the future*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 2012
[17]Page 156, Ibid
[18]Page 156, Ibid
[19]Page 156, Ibid

1.4 The field of research

The field of research relevant to my topic in this thesis is broad and varied, stretching from Holocaust studies and studies of WWII, to research on testimony, memory and feminist historical research. The research to which I aim to contribute to with this thesis is that on Jewish women's testimonies of the Holocaust and gender and women's studies of the Holocaust. I will elaborate upon the historical development of these fields in the next chapters and reflect upon the development of both testimony as historical source itself, and the subsequent gender research on Holocaust testimony.

1.4.1 Jewish women's testimonies within Holocaust research – a summary

Up until the late 1970s, with a few exceptions, Holocaust research paid no greater attention to the lot of Jewish women and children. The first testimonies to the living conditions of women and children under Nazism began appearing shortly after the end of WWII, but they mostly concerned non-Jewish German women and/or children. Gender and women's studies as a field of research had not yet taken its form, and Jewish women's testimonies were not studied as historical documents, rather they were considered yet another part of the collective story of Jewish survivor testimonies. Another significant field of research, where women were included, was that of the European partisan resistance movement. Many of the prominent testimonies published in the period between 1945 and the 1970s, were those written by Jewish women who were part of the resistance movement. When the state of Israel was established shortly after the end of WWII, the story of Jewish women's resistance during the Holocaust became building blocks in the creation of the identity of the nation-state.[20] Subsequently, these stories were considered more important (by some) than those of survivors not active in the underground Zionist resistance movement. As accusations such as "going as sheep to the slaughter" [21], were made towards survivors of the Holocaust in the years after the end of WWII, the emphasis lay on resistance in the testimonies, rather than stories of "defeat".

[20]Page 41, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998
[21]Page 41, Ibid

As women's studies developed throughout the 1970s, more research directly relating to women and the Holocaust appeared. Many more survivors told their stories, as the Holocaust-awareness developed in the 1970s.[22] The women's survivor testimonies greatly emphasised how their experiences were gender-related, not seen in previous testimonies to the same extent. However, some of the early gender studies of the Holocaust had a tendency to claim that women suffered more than men and not differently to them.[23] This tendency has largely disappeared as gender studies developed.

The testimonies of this period continued to reveal how women's mutual assistance (acts of solidarity and cooperation) played a significant role in their survival.[24] The testimonies published in this period were less politically motivated, and significantly more religiously moralizing. They were predominantly written by "regular survivors", who were not members of the Zionist resistance movement, as were more common in the 1950s and 60s.[25] After the 1970s, there was a chain reaction of published testimonies, largely triggered by the need to bear witness, as many survivors were growing old. Many more collected volumes of testimonies surfaced, which meant that the stories were considered important among the general populations of post WWII nations in Europe, and nations who received Holocaust survivors post WWII. This would only be possible if there was a general awareness of the importance of testimony. The collections were frequently published by academics, which meant that they became more "research-friendly", and consequently the research on women and the Holocaust surged.[26]

[22]Page 20,Goldenberg, Myrna & Shapiro, Amy H. (red.), *Different horrors, same hell: gender and the Holocaust*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2012
[23]Page 50, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998
[24]Page 39, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993

[25] "Zionism," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/657475/Zionism. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[26]Page 48, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998

1.4.2 Gender studies of the Holocaust

Historical researchers such as Claudia Koonz and Marlene E. Heinemann, Renate Bridenthal and Marion Kaplan all wrote extensively during the 1980s of women's roles in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.[27] Claudia Koonz's *Mothers in the fatherland: women, the family and Nazi politics* (1987)[28] and Bridenthal, Grossmann and Kaplan's *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (1984)[29], Vera Laska's *Women in the resistance and in the Holocaust: the voices of eyewitnesses*[30] and Joan Ringelheim's "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research"[31] (1985) were some important and notable works on gender and the Holocaust in this era. These studies, among others, helped deepen the understanding of women's lived experiences during WWII and the Holocaust, and specifically broadened the gendered perspective. One significant event in the history of gender studies of the Holocaust was the 1983 conference "Women Surviving the Holocaust", which contributed to further research on the topic.[32] As the research on women and the Holocaust developed, a change came about in the early 1990s. The research came to involve not only broad historical aspects of women's experiences, but also personal perspectives. Several personal biographies and stories were published, presenting the individual experiences of women. The anthology *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*[33], by Carol Rittner and John Roth greatly contributed to this development. I have chosen to use some of the testimonies presented in this anthology as research material.

[27]Page 159, Hayes, Peter (red.), *Lessons and legacies: the meaning of the Holocaust in a changing world*, Northwestern Univ. Press, Evanston, Ill., 1991
[28]Koonz, Claudia, *Mothers in the fatherland: women, the family and Nazi politics*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1987
[29]Bridenthal, Renate, Grossmann, Atina & Kaplan, Marion A. (red.), *When biology became destiny: women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1984
[30]Laska, Vera (red.), *Women in the resistance and in the Holocaust: the voices of eyewitnesses*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1983
[31]Ringelheim, J. 1985, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research", *Signs*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 741-761.
[32]Katz, E., and Ringelheim, J.M., *Proceedings of the Conference: Women Surviving the Holocaust*, Occasional papers from the institute for Research in History, New York, 1983
[33]Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993

1.4.3 A critique of traditional gender studies of the Holocaust

Women's survivor testimonies from the Holocaust were shaped by the research made on them and vice versa. Zoë Waxman, Holocaust-historian, argues in her article "Unheard Testimony, Untold Stories: the representation of women's Holocaust experiences"[34], and later in her book *Writing the Holocaust: identity, testimony, representation*[35], that despite the recent developments in Holocaust studies in regards to gender-related issues, there:

> [...] is reluctance on the part of Holocaust scholars to acknowledge testimony that does not concur with preconceived gender roles, patterns of suitable female behaviour, or pre-existing narratives of survival.[36]

Waxman claims that although these "women-centred" readings of testimony from the Holocaust provide insight into women's specific experience, they avoid: "[...] questioning the categories of meaning they have applied to understanding women, and which women have applied to understanding themselves."[37] Waxman seeks to encourage more researchers to pay closer attention to how the identities, experiences and testimonies are structured by preconceived gender roles. The assumptions the writer and the reader have about behaviour connected to gender obscures the diversity within testimonies, according to Waxman. She writes:

> It is important to show that the categories of meaning usually employed to make sense of the world can hide many layers of understanding. For example, the Holocaust was not simply a battle between good and evil. Nor was it discriminatory towards its victims. No moral test was required for the gas chamber, only one of race. Of course, there were people who performed 'heroic' acts, but, also, there were many who merely did what they had to do, in order to survive.[38]

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[34]Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003

[35]Waxman, Zoë, *Writing the Holocaust: identity, testimony, representation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006

[36]Page 661, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003

[37]Page 662, Ibid

[38]Page 663, Ibid

Allowing the victims and their testimonies to be fallible means giving the narrative of the Holocaust a wider spectrum to roam in, a more diverse picture of what responses to extreme circumstances can be. This allows for a more complex interpretation of testimonies made by women, which is why Waxman's critique will be employed in this thesis.

To sum up my elaboration on the field of gender studies of the Holocaust; the expansion of women's studies in the 1970s was the push Holocaust studies needed in order to not only sporadically, but continually, keep women, and children, in mind, as research was conducted. As feminist and gender studies have become increasingly important and expanding fields of research, branching out into other disciplines, they have inevitably touched upon Holocaust studies. Despite the rise of gender studies in academia, gender-related research of the Holocaust is still relatively marginalized within the field of Holocaust studies.[39] However, with critiques such as Waxman's, the field continues to develop.

1.4.4 Research material

In this thesis I have chosen three anthologies of oral Holocaust testimonies told by women as my research material. By analysing three collections of testimonies together, I hope to be able to answer my research question in depth; what kind of resistance is manifest in the oral histories of women survivors of the Holocaust, and how can one view the act of testimony as a resistance in itself?

The first anthology of testimonies is *Kvinnelige tidsvitner - fortellinger fra Holocaust* edited by Jakob Lothe (Women as witnesses of time – stories from the Holocaust). It is a collection of interviews and testimonies from 10 women who survived the Holocaust. The interviews are conducted between 2010 and 2013. The interviews are conducted by Jakob Lothe, the editor. He has written books on the Holocaust, and edited another anthology of Holocaust testimonies, predominantly given by men. In *Kvinnelige tidsvitner - fortellinger fra Holocaust*, the interviews are sometimes filled in with written testimony by the women after the interview is conducted, in order to be as accurate as possible. This means, however, that some parts of the quotes I use, risk to have lost the sense of spontaneity that the purely oral

[39]Page 50, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998

testimony can have. However, I find that the overall usefulness of the oral testimony to my inquiry does not suffer at the hand of this. As the book is written in Norwegian, I have translated the quotes to English myself.[40]

The second source of material I have chosen is the anthology *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, edited by Brana Gurewitsch. This book presents a collection of 25 women giving testimony to their experiences from the Holocaust. Here, the oral histories come from the Yaffa Eliach Collection, donated by the Center for Holocaust Studies to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York. Staff at the center conducted the interviews, including Gurewitsch herself. With the oral history project initiated in the 1990s, Gurewitsch collected the 25 stories, and subsequently published them. The testimonies were collected between the 1960s and 90s, with the vast majority collected in the 1980s. The interviews were predominantly conducted in English, whereas some were held in the native language of the interviewed and later translated with their permission. The title of the book reflects the themes given attention to throughout the anthology. The role of the Jewish mother, sisterhood, and resisters, a sisterhood not bound on genetic similarity but on similar living condition, fate and solidarity.

The third source of material is *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* edited by Carol Rittner and John K. Roth. This book is a study of women's fate in the Holocaust, and contains academic essays in addition to twelve personal testimonies, where some are parts from survivors own autobiographical works, and some are interviews conducted by the Museum of Jewish heritage, New York. The interviews are conducted, and the majority of the memoirs written, between the 1960s and 90s.

The oral testimonies I take use of are all written down, which means that they to a lesser extent reflect the oral sense of spontaneity. However, they still reflect the directness the research requires, even in written form. I have chosen these three anthologies because the authors and editors that have gathered the testimonies are aware of the gender discrepancy in Holocaust testimony, and want to highlight the specific vulnerability of women during the Holocaust. Similarly to me, the authors and editors of the three anthologies see the importance of gathering many stories told by women in order to broaden the story of the Holocaust. The

[40]Norwegian is my native language.

aim to answer the research question and do a feminist analysis on the gendered aspects of the Holocaust is reinforced by choosing three anthologies with testimonies that are already gathered on the basis of gender.

1.4.5 My contribution to the field of research

As a researcher I aim contribute to the field of research with a new analysis of women survivors' testimonies to the Holocaust. This research is, to my knowledge, the first to use oral histories of women survivors of the Holocaust, and attempt to interpret resistance into what they tell of. Rachel Feldhay Brenner has written *Writing as resistance: four women confronting the Holocaust : Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum*, a book examining the diaries of four women of which all died in the Holocaust. This is the only written source I have found directly linking the Holocaust, giving witness, resistance, and women, together. Feldhay Brenner does not thoroughly analyse the gendered aspect with a feminist perspective of the four women's resistance through writing, as is done in this analysis of women's survivor testimonies. In addition to the gender analysis, the theoretical basis lays in amongst others Avery Gordon's theory of *complex personhood*, a theory that, to my knowledge, has not been employed in the manner at hand before. This is how I contribute with something new and not yet explored, in the field of gender studies of the Holocaust, gender studies and Holocaust studies.

I will not make use of the field of trauma-research in this thesis, such as for example history of ideas-researcher Victoria Fareld's work on history, memory and mourning as a way to handle trauma. However, I am inspired by the tradition of history of ideas she writes in, and will make use of her thoughts on non-linear time in her essay "History and Mourning"[41] in my analysis.

1.5 The study of oral history – methodological considerations

I have chosen to make use of oral history as a method of analysis in this thesis. Oral history is

[41]Fareld, Victoria, "History and Mourning" in Ruin, Hans & Ers, Andrus (red.), *Rethinking time: essays on history, memory, and representation*, Södertörns högskola, Huddinge, 2011

traditionally understood as the study of the past by means of personal memories, evocations and life stories, where individuals talk about their experiences to a researcher. The method deals specifically with what people say about the past as they have seen it. Traditionally, the oral history researcher meets with and interviews their sources.[42] I do not have the privilege of doing that, so instead I choose to use interviews conducted by, and testimonies given to, other individuals. Although written, the interviews and testimonies were not manipulated to fit the written word, and reflect the verbal origin of the testimonies. Also, the academic method of oral history has of late developed to come to include earlier conducted interviews and adaptations of interviews and testimonies collected in archives.[43] In light of this recent development, and the oral nature of my material, there is basis for using oral history as a reliable research method.

Using oral history as a method of study potentially allows for complex life stories, narrative agency and testimonies to emerge and be heard. The oral historian Paul Thompson writes that: "Reality is complex and many-sided; and it is a primary merit of oral history that to a much greater extent than most sources it allows the original multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated."[44] Through the use of oral history we are, as researchers, given the opportunity to examine the many levels and sides of a testimony. Oral history is different compared to previous methods of historical inquiry in several ways. As historical research has traditionally looked into archives rather than interview people, it has reflected what has been archived throughout time. This has been the information considered important at the time, traditionally information on the wealthy and powerful. Thus, oral history holds the power to "provide a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account."[45] The main contribution to oral history from feminist research has been that of lifting stories of women and other groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in historical research, and reading them as part of a power structure.[46]

Additionally, I take on an understanding of oral history as a methodology which lies close to

[42]Page 32, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[43]Page 12, Thor Tureby, Malin & Hansson, Lars (red.), *Muntlig historia: i teori och praktik*, 1:a uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2015
[44]Page 5, Thompson, Paul, *The voice of the past: oral history*, 3. ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000
[45]Page 6, Ibid
[46]Page 154, Thor Tureby, Malin & Hansson, Lars (red.), *Muntlig historia: i teori och praktik*, 1. uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2015

that which Penny Summerfield makes use of in her book *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*[47]*:*

> [...] oral history, that is the telling of life stories in response to a researcher's enquiries, is not a simple one-way process, but involves a set of relationships all of which are pervaded by gender. These include a dialogue between the present and the past, between what is personal and what is public, between memory and culture.[48]

I am not completely a researcher in the sense Summerfield describes, as I was not present in the interviews I analyse, however I can make use of this method nonetheless, as I elaborated upon earlier. Through the use of the theory of collective memory, which I will discuss further in chapter 2.5, I examine the dialogue between the present and past, memory and culture. Through the use of gender as a category of historical analysis I examine the "set of relationships all of which are pervaded by gender"[49] by using oral history as a method. The oral historian Michael Frisch has argued against critics that claim that oral history wants to show "what history was 'really' like". Rather, he reminds us, that oral history is about memory. Memory can be "[...] personal and historical, individual and generational."[50] It should be the object of oral history, not merely the method. He claimed that by taking use of oral history in this way it can be a "powerful tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory – how people make sense of the past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them."[51] By employing oral history in this sense, the collective memory the women put forth, is where I search for answers to my research question.

1.6 The application of oral history

There are several ways in which one can conduct an oral history research project. One of them

[47]Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[48]Page 2, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[49]Page 2, Ibid
[50]Page 80, Ritchie, Donald A. (red.), *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011
[51]Page 80, Ibid

is to gather a large collection of stories to interpret.[52] This is the method I have chosen to employ in this thesis. The advantage of this is that it does not require so much content from each individual story. Rather, it grants us the possibility to see how several stories make up a broader historical interpretation, by looking for common themes in the stories. Through this method, I am examining whether the resistance is manifest in testimonies I have chosen as material. The research question of this thesis is: What kind of resistance is manifest in the oral histories of women survivors of the Holocaust, and how can one view the act of testimony as a resistance in itself? In order to fully understand the testimonies at hand and attempt to answer my research question, I am analysing the texts at two levels. Firstly; what events the women tell of, and in which way this may be read as resistance. Secondly; whether the choice and act of giving testimony may be analysed as resistance and how the women tell of this.

By looking for relevant similarities and discrepancies in the stories, I aim to make up a complex picture by looking at how many different women with different stories intersect and come together to form a bigger whole. I do not analyse sound files or transcribed interviews, but interviews gathered in anthologies that aim to lift women's testimonies. Changes occur when interviews are changed to fit the flow of a text. This is visible in some of the quotes I make use of, where the narrative structure fits that of the written word, rather than an oral account. I have however chosen to keep these testimonies because they are valuable sources of information and help me answer my research question.

Additionally; when I make use of the word *narrative* it is meant as a synonym to giving testimony, telling a story etc., and does not refer to the method of narrative analysis.

[52]Page 204, Thompson, Paul, *The voice of the past: oral history*, 3. ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000

2 Women, testimony and resistance – theoretical readings and analysis

2.1 Resistance – a definition and a discussion

In the upcoming chapter I will look at "resistance" and "testimony". I will clarify how I will make use of the terms in this thesis, as they are two of the most central concepts. Oxford English Dictionary refers to resistance as "The action of resisting, opposing, or withstanding someone or something; an instance of this."[53] The philosopher Roger S. Gottlieb writes in his essay "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust" that:

> We may define oppression as a relation in which one group exercises – on the basis of superior power, for its own benefit, and without justification – control over another group. […] an act of resistance […] exists within a context of oppression.[54]

He thus defines resistance as "activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed."[55] In the context of the Holocaust, the oppressors were the Nazis and their collaborators, and the oppressed were Jews in all occupied areas, as well as people with physical and mental disabilities, people with differing political opinions (socialists, anarchists etc.) people of different ethnic minorities, such as Roma people, and other people the Nazis considered being "life unworthy of life"[56] (*Lebensunwertes Leben*). People who were considered to be life unworthy of life were subsequently dehumanized, before they were annihilated. So, anyone who refused to accept Nazi domination and their fate as oppressed within the Nazi scheme can be considered resisters. By combining Oxford English Dictionary's definition of resistance and resisting, and Gottlieb's, we can say that; "actions of resistance – thereby to resist, and resisting – are activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of

[53]"resistance, n.". OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/163661?redirectedFrom=resistance (accessed September 12, 2015)

[54]Page 41, Gottlieb, Roger S. , "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust", *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1983

[55]Page 261, Tec, Nechama, *Resilience and courage: women, and men, and the Holocaust*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2003

[56] Page 163, Friedlander, Henry, *The origins of Nazi genocide: from euthanasia to the final solution*, Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1995

oppression over the oppressed."

By taking use of this definition, it is possible to analyse what actions are those of resistance, and how the women's survivor testimonies can be understood as means of resistance. The definition is broad in the sense that it can encompass any act that does not comply with the will of the oppressors, in this case the Nazis. However it does not include those who contributed to the oppression, the Nazi collaborators, such as governments and individuals who cooperated with, or acted according to the will of the oppressors, in contempt of other options at hand, such as resistance or dormancy. One example of such individuals or groups is that of the *Judenrat*, which I briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter. In ghettos and villages, the Jewish councils were usually ordered to create lists of all Jewish inhabitants, and to conduct other administrative tasks, which eased the annihilation process for the Nazis. However, many members of the Jewish councils believed they were part of an intelligent strategy of resistance, one where the final goal was to save as many Jews as possible. The arguments went as follows:

> Our people is [sic] being denied all human rights…. From now on our right to exist in this world is based on our ability to do manual work… our existence will depend on whether we succeed in organizing matters so that the Germans can derive maximum profit from our work… If we do not arrange it, the Germans will…. They will… achieve their aim anyway, but the suffering of our community will be incomparably greater than if we do it ourselves.[57]

Despite these claims, the councils often facilitated deportations to death camps and actively discouraged and betrayed resistance groups.[58] Gottlieb calls their resistance self-deceptive. The distinction between resistance, collaboration and perpetration can be blurry depending on context. In this thesis however, anyone who directly collaborated with the oppressors are seen as not doing resistance.

[57]Page 44, Gottlieb, Roger S. , "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust", *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1983
[58]Page 44, Ibid

2.2 Testimony – a definition and a discussion

The word testimony is usually used to describe "a person or several persons giving evidence in support of a fact, or a statement."[59] I use the word testimony to describe both oral and written stories and memoirs told by individuals or several women survivors of the Holocaust.

In the ethical considerations I contemplate upon how the factual vs. fictional presentation of testimony or stories of the Holocaust can be controversial. Now, I want to discuss how the mass and scale of testimony may be of importance to our interpretation. In this thesis I have chosen to make use of many different testimonies. The women sharing them vary greatly in terms of social, political and economic background. One testimony is, of course, that individuals' experience of the Holocaust, and therefore their story. However, one inevitably encounters problems when reading history through the eyes of individuals. For example feminist oral historian researchers such as Sherna Berger Gluck have claimed that "portraying the resistance of one or several individuals risks obscuring the pain and suffering of those that cannot speak".[60] Jakob Lothe makes a similar argument and writes of this in his book *After testimony: the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust narrative for the future*:

> Accounts of individuals risk transforming the exception (survival) into the representative example. More disturbingly, any attempt to make the experience of a single survivor somehow representative of the fate of thousands – or millions – may unintentionally reduce victims to a uniformity that is worryingly reminiscent of the Nazi assertion that all racial Untermensch(sic)[subhuman in German, a person considered racially or socially inferior[61]] are essentially the same. […] Imagine how we ourselves would feel were we to know that our own life and fate were to be preserved only through the memory of the life and fate of a friend or contemporary who would somehow "represent" us.[62]

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[59]"testimony, n.". OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/199748?rskey=omn8o4&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed October 01, 2015).

[60]Armitage, Susan & Gluck, Sherna Berger, 'Reflections on women's oral history: an exchange', *Frontiers (Boulder : Print)*., 19(1998):3, s. 1-11, 1998, in page 154, Thor Tureby, Malin & Hansson, Lars (red.), *Muntlig historia: i teori och praktik*, 1:a uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2015

[61]"Holocaust," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/269548/Holocaust. (accessed December 16, 2015)

[62]Page 144, Lothe, Jakob, Suleiman, Susan Rubin & Phelan, James (red.), *After testimony: the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust narrative for the future*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 2012

Lothe makes a good argument as to why we should be careful when reading and writing on personal testimonies from the Holocaust. It is crucial that we keep in mind that the stories represent individual truths, not the full picture of what happened. On the other hand, Lothe continues by claiming that:

> [...] a refusal to portray any of the victims of the Nazis as individuals also dehumanizes them: photographs of bodies being bulldozed into mass graves do nothing to display the humanity of the murdered. […] to convey the humanity of victims and the full extent of the guilt of the perpetrators and bystanders, accounts by and about individuals are irreplaceable.[63]

I believe, as Lothe claims in the above quote, that the ultimate way to convey the Holocaust in an ethically responsible way, and an academically satisfactory manner, is to unveil as much as one can about the guilt of the perpetrator, and spread as varied and many testimonies as possible, in order to avoid rigidity and preconceived ideas of victimhood. I do not find that looking at one or several testimonies necessarily excludes neither the large-scale picture, nor the small scale personal testimony. I am of the conviction that all types of testimony are important, and that studying all of them is crucial, in order to try to understand history as it happened. In this particular thesis, I use a variety of testimonies, as in not to let a few stories tell the whole truth, but simultaneously highlight individual women's stories of survival.

2.3 Testimony and fact

In the previous chapter I considered how the amount of testimony might be problematic and in the ethical considerations I looked at how one aesthetically portrays it can be controversial. I now want to shortly discuss whether when something is written down or told makes a difference.

Is a recollection of an event more "accurate" the closer it is to the time of the event? James Edward Young, author of *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust: narrative and the consequences of interpretation*, has claimed that the survivors' testimonies or diaries written during the Holocaust might be less reliable "factually", because of their proximity to the

[63]Page 144, Lothe, Jakob, Suleiman, Susan Rubin & Phelan, James (red.), *After testimony: the ethics and aesthetics of Holocaust narrative for the future*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 2012

events.[64] The philosopher and Holocaust survivor Emil Fackenheim observed that: "When the eye-witness is caught in a scheme of things systematically calculated to deceive him, subsequent reflection is necessary if truth is to be given to his testimony".[65] The Nazis did everything they could to manufacture the perceived reality of their prisoners and the Nazi followers, and to deceive them of what was to come. The prime example of this is the concentration camp Theresienstadt, which was set up to show the Red Cross how "well" they treated the Jewish prisoners. The victims were at the mercy of the Nazis, even as they testified to their oppression after the Holocaust ended, because the deception had been so intricately applied. Therefore, as Fackenheim points out, the reflection upon the truth of the testimony is of great importance.

Jews who were victims of the Holocaust were often aware of the deception of themselves and the outside world, and some were meticulous when it came to preserving and protecting proof of their fate. An example of such a group was the "Oneg Shabbat", who gathered an archive of the life in the Warsaw Ghetto during 1941 and 1943.[66] Led by Dr Emanuel Ringelblum, the research was aimed at highlighting ghetto family life. Subsequently, diaries and documents were collected, and questionnaires were handed out to women in the Warsaw ghetto. All of this was gathered at a high speed. Ringelblum knew that the threat of deportation was always eminent, so he and the rest of "Oneg Shabbat" hid their research material in three large milk cans and metal boxes and managed to bury it in the ghetto on the eve of the liquidation of the ghetto in the spring of 1943. The inhabitants of the ghetto were sent to Treblinka concentration camp or liquidated in the Warsaw ghetto uprising as the ghetto was being emptied.[67] "Oneg Shabbat" understood the importance of giving testimony to what happened in the Warsaw ghetto, and that if the archive was found by the Nazis, it would be destroyed. Subsequently, they hid their archive very well. Two of the hidden cans have been unearthed, but the third milk can has not been found till this day.

Thus we see that it is not only testimonies, oral or written, that were and are considered of historical importance, but all types of proof that could show the future what had happened to

[64]Page 33, Young, James Edward, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust: narrative and the consequences of interpretation*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988
[65]Page 33, Ibid
[66]"Emanuel Ringelblum, The Creator of "Oneg Shabbat", Holocaust education and archive research team, 2007, "http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/ringleblum.html, (accessed January 07, 2016)
[67]Page 40, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998

the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto. Ringelblum and the other archivists understood the urgency of their meticulous gathering. It is as if they foresaw the Holocaust revisionism (today widely regarded as Holocaust denial) of the 1950s and 60s, which mainly concerned scepticism towards the factuality of the testimonies given at for example the Eichmann trial of 1961.[68] Personal testimonies were frequently questioned by prominent thinkers such as Hannah Arendt.[69] The reason Arendt questioned testimony as a historical source is because of the inherent political and aesthetic agenda of the testimony. Arendt said in connection to writing her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil*, that: "a true witness should be a "righteous" man with an ability of dealing with the story, its poetics and politics".[70] Arendt seems to have believed that "ordinary" Holocaust-witnesses, such as Jewish survivors, did not have the ability to grasp the grander political scheme of the Holocaust because of their personal involvement, and therefore were not suitable as witnesses in trials regarding the Holocaust. Despite Arendt's scepticism, the Eichmann trial, as contrary to the Nuremberg tribunal where few personal testimonies were used as evidence, became the turning point where the witness became the "embodiment of memory" (un homme mémoire), attesting to the past and the continuing presence of the past.[71] One started to believe that personal memory and testimony had legal and historical importance.

I want to continue and deepen the discussion on factuality above with an example of how literature on and testimony to the Holocaust has been unilateral in its understanding of the Jewish identity, due to preconceived ideas of the same. The alleged inherent "political nature" of testimony Arendt claims to see is evident in Jean-François Steiner's book *Treblinka*, from 1966. The book claims to account for the organized resistance and prisoner uprising in the concentration camp of Treblinka. Later inquiry into the factuality of the accounts has shown that much of what Steiner claimed to be true was in fact imagined by Steiner himself. Trauma research has for example looked at the connection between trauma and memory, and how they may interfere with each other, which has evidently happened in the case of Steiner. If the truth

[68]"Attorney General of the Government of Israel v. Eichmann," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/42317/Attorney-General-of-the-Government-of-Israel-v-Eichmann. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[69]Page 247, Ruin, Hans & Ers, Andrus (red.), *Rethinking time: essays on history, memory, and representation*, Södertörns högskola, Huddinge, 2011
[70]Page 223-224, Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil*, Penguin Books, New York, N.Y., 2006
[71]Page 247, Wiederhorn, Jessica, "Case Study: "Above all, we need the witness": The Oral History of Holocaust Survivors", in Ritchie, Donald A. (red.), *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011

does not comply with what we wish it to be, humans have a tendency to manipulate history in order to make it fit with our desires. The lack of factuality, or the imagined reality, is in Steiner's account intrinsically related to that of the Jewish identity. Sidra De Koven Ezrahi writes of *Treblinka* in *By words alone: the Holocaust in literature* that:

> In nearly every case, the resources which enable the victims to withstand inhumane treatment are defined as particularly Jewish traits. These traits, which Steiner affirms as functional or even redemptive, present, in the composite, and over compensatory, sentimentalized portrait of a mythic being who, supposedly by virtue of his heritage, is egregiously spiritual, immune to despair, and extraordinarily inventive.[72]

A glorified sense of Jewish superiority and revisionist nationalism is what we see emerging from the novel. R.J. Lifton, psychologist and author, has called this tendency found in Steiner's *Treblinka* "documentary fallacy". The loyalty towards the dead generates a kind of hagiographical excess, which subsequently denies them the "dignity of limitations", a right to be limited and complex human beings. [73]

Steiner portrays the Jew as a superhuman, immune to pain and suffering, and he, as R.J. Lifton puts it, doesn't grant the victims of the Holocaust, their "dignity of limitation". The question of dignity of limitations can be linked to Waxman's critique of preconceived ideas of womanhood and the Jewish woman in the Holocaust, and my own use of the term *complex personhood*, that of granting humans the right to complexity and multi-sidedness. I will elaborate upon this in the chapter "From essentialism to complex personhood".

But why is it easier to both write, and read, stories of simplified courage and limitless bravery, rather than the more complex reality of fear, cowardice and bravery? I think the answer lies with the readers of accounts such as *Treblinka*. Perhaps it is less discouraging to read of simple resistance, than of defeat and death. Ezrahi puts it in this way:

> […] the unambiguously heroic reading of history, based on the claim to factuality, is more palatable to popular sentiment which is a reservoir of faith in the triumph of courage over meekness, of progress over stasis.[74]

[72]Page 32, Ezrahi, Sidra DeKoven, *By words alone: the Holocaust in literature*, Chicago, 1980
[73]Page 32, Ezrahi, Sidra DeKoven, *By words alone: the Holocaust in literature*, Chicago, 1980
[74]Page 32, Ibid

As readers, we may want to believe that despite the annihilation of at least 6 million of the European Jewish population, it was not hopeless; they fought and struggled for survival. If we are not granted the right to believe the delusions presented in for example *Treblinka*, we simply cannot bear the weight of the Holocaust. Lawrence Langer, author of many books on the Holocaust, has written about the tendency that we simply cannot bear it. Langer claims it affronts what he calls "one of the deepest instincts in the civilized mind: the need to establish a principle of causality in human experience."[75]As Adorno put it, how can we *live* after the Holocaust, knowing what happened? Perhaps self-deception is preferred among some, in order to endure.

There are of course other traumatic historical events that rely on testimony, and where similar adjustments of fact and fiction occur. One of those is the American enslavement of Africans. Avery Gordon, professor of Sociology, writes in *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination* of slavery in the USA, and how it was narrated before and after the abolition. Gordon writes:

> [...] the slave narrative, whatever else it attempted to and did accomplish, was greatly constrained by the demands placed on it by the abolition movement, its primary sponsor and its largest consumer.[76]

The movement for abolition of slavery in the USA controlled what and how narratives of enslaved peoples were published on the whole. Testimonies of women survivors of the Holocaust were and are similarly shaped by preconceived ideas of womanhood, if we are to adopt Waxman's standpoint. But why is it important how the testimonies come about? Isn't it simply enough that they are published? Why should we care by whom? Gordon continues her discussion:

> Does it matter who controls the shape of the story – author or sponsor? Does it matter that the facticity demanded by sponsors may preclude individual personality? [...] Does it matter that several people...alleged that most black agents – including the great Douglass

[75]Page 38, Clendinnen, Inga, *Reading the Holocaust*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999
[76]Page 144, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008

[Frederick Douglass[77]] – had no stories until abolitionists gave them one?[78]

In parallel to this thesis, who gains from portraying women who survived the Holocaust foremost as brave mothers, sisters and children, rather than complex human beings who do both brave and cowardice actions under extreme circumstances? Instead of allowing people to be complex, there exists a risk, similar to the one quoted above, of "giving" the story to a survivor, rather than giving an ear to one. The parallel from the story presented in the quote above, to Steiner's *Treblinka*, is evident. The victims of Treblinka, as Gordon puts it "[…] had no stories until abolitionists gave them one?"[79] Examples such as that of *Anne Frank's diary* and other young women's testimonies form the Holocaust has shown that the stories tend to be "hijacked" and used as symbols for the whole group of victims, dead or alive.[80] Anne Frank, German-Jewish teenager, wrote a diary while in hiding, died in concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, and her diary was published in 1947 after her death. When considering the example of *Treblinka* and the stories of enslaved African-Americans and the example of Anne Frank, it seems as if a political objective governs these stories, rather than solely the frail human psychology. It is however not possible to determine what this political objective might be in the frames of this thesis, as this is not my objective. Therefore, rather than choosing to continue speculating in a conspiratoric manner, I leave it as an inquiry yet to be undertaken.

When we discuss fact/fiction and authenticity, two different tendencies should be kept apart and understood differently; that of deliberate manipulation of history, and how memory is shaped by the individual for different reasons and over time. Steiner deliberately manipulated the stories of the uprising in Treblinka in order to make a compelling story of Jewish heroism. The women's testimonies I am analysing are sources of personal historical accounts that do not seek to claim one singular "truth" as to what the Holocaust experience was like; the historical facts concerning their fate in ghettoes and concentration camps have been meticulously documented in historical accounts of the Holocaust, such as Raul Hilberg's

[77] "Frederick Douglass," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/170246/Frederick-Douglass. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[78]Page 144, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008
[79]Page 144, Ibid
[80]Page 667, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003

Perpetrators victims bystanders: the Jewish catastrophe, 1933-1945.[81] The outlook of the women's testimonies I study is not one of a solitary nature; rather they are performing a constructivist meaning-production by giving testimony, and in extension I am doing the same.

2.4 A feminist theoretical approach

Personal account or structural analysis, which is the best way to understand women's lives throughout history? This has continually been discussed within academia, for instance by feminist historians and scholars such as Denise Riley and Joan W. Scott. During the 1980s they put forward criticism toward the use of personal accounts and "lived experience". Denise Riley was undertaking historical research on wartime and post-war understandings of the mother-child relationship, when she developed her methodological and theoretical critique of the use of accounts of personal experience.

Some historians assumed that women were actively seeking freedom from domesticity and that WWII gave women a chance to "liberate" themselves that otherwise probably not would have been available. They argued that paid work for women (during WWII) had contributed to women's participation in the class struggle and eventual emancipation.[82] Riley took this narrative on women's emancipation during and after WWII, for granted. However, when she started looking closer at the historical evidence, there was little to back up a presumed feminist agitation for nurseries and work. She found that personal accounts of events that happened many years ago are simply not reliable for several reasons. Firstly, contemporary wartime surveys took use of loaded questions, which produced "false" data. Secondly, when using personal accounts to look at something that happened thirty years ago, one must realize that the story will have "discolourations" and "wants" that the historical witness carries. Riley later came to agree with Joan W. Scott's stance in the often-cited article "Gender: a useful category of historical analysis".[83] Scott argued against the use of "women" as a rigid category of people. Penny Summerfield writes in her book *Reconstructing women's wartime lives:*

[81]Hilberg, Raul., *Perpetrators victims bystanders: the Jewish catastrophe, 1933-1945*, Aaron Asher Books, New York, 1992
[82] Page 9, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[83]Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', The American historical review., 91(1986):5, s. 1053-1075, 1986

discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War, in response to Scott's argument: "Instead of working with a taken-for-granted category such as women, at root defined in essentialist terms based on biology, the object of study should be the discourses by which, as part of a dynamic process, such a category was established."[84]

We should more intensely study the processes which create the category women i.e. "gender", rather than women themselves. She goes on:

> Gender, as a constituent of social relations, as a way of thinking a set of social identities, [...] is constantly constructed and reconstructed by powerful sources, which define women and men and control the parameters of possibility in their lives.[85]

The opposition towards this stance was strong among women's history researchers. It was supposed to undermine the work that had been done to strengthen the role of women in research as subjects rather than objects, as had been the historiographical tradition. Summerfield points out, however, that the post-structuralist viewpoint of Riley, Scott, and Judith Butler is the importance of understanding language within social relations.[86] Butler writes of construction and discourses that: "Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible."[87] If we are to understand Butler correctly, this entails that seeing the category women only as a constructed discourse does not negate agency, rather we should understand the terms as symbiotically interconnected.

Summerfield goes further with Butler's argument and develops Scott's final claim on agency and discourse:

> Women 'speaking for themselves', through personal testimony are using language, and by

[84] Riley, Denise, *'Am I that name?': feminism and the category of 'women' in history*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988, in page 10, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[85] Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', The American historical review., 91(1986):5, s. 1053-1075, 1986, Page 10, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[86] Page 11, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[87] Butler, Judith, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York, 2006[1999], in page 11, Summerfield, Penny, R*econstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998

> so deploying cultural constructions. The debate about experience and agency has hinged on the degree of freedom an individual possesses in constructing her own account of personal experience. Scott's position is that no personal testimony represents truth, which is independent of discourse. Historians who base their work on accounts of 'lived experience', claiming that such accounts give access to a social reality apart from controlling forces of the social relations in which their subjects are implicated, falsely separate discourse and experience: experience cannot exist outside discourse, agency cannot exist independently of language.[88]

Scott's stance on the use of personal accounts in historical research is highly relevant to my thesis work. She proclaims that historians should aim to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled. The points of entry are the problems we formulate, but the process is what should be kept in mind at all times. How did things happen, how often and finally – why? Scott brings forth anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo's stance on this: "It now appears to me that woman's place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she does, but of the meaning her activities acquire through concrete social interaction."[89] It is the meaning the gendered experience creates through social interaction that we study.

Thus, it is not the general universal causality we must pursue, but the meaningful explanation to gendered oppression historically. It is crucial to deal with both the individual subject, and the social organization, in order to pursue meaning. This is necessary in order to articulate the nature of their interrelationships, as they are both crucial to understanding how gender works, and how change comes about.[90] Therefore, gender as a category of historical analysis, can provide a way to decode meaning and understand complex connections among various forms of human interaction. I use personal accounts by Jewish women who survived the Holocaust, in order to try to understand some of these "complex connections", and how resistance is manifest in their testimonies.[91]

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[88]Page 11, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998

[89]Rosaldo, M.Z., 'The use and abuse of anthropology: reflections on feminism and cross-cultural understanding', *Signs (Chicago, Ill.)*., 5(1980):3, s. 389-417, 1980, in page 1067, Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', The American historical review., 91(1986):5, s. 1053-1075, 1986

[90]Page 1067, Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', The American historical review., 91(1986):5, p. 1053-1075, 1986

[91]Page 1070, Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', The American historical review., 91(1986):5, p. 1053-1075, 1986

The story each of the women in my material tell of is not primarily a "personal truth", it is also a "truth" created by the discourse in which the memories were created, and a truth created by the time that has passed since the events. In fact, my stance in this research project is, that the personal testimonies of Jewish women who survived the Holocaust are in and of themselves a product of the time they reflect upon, the time that has passed, and how gender and other factors of oppression made an impact on these testimonies. To quote Butler: "Construction […] is the necessary scene of agency"[92], construction is the scene where the personal account unfolds.

In addition to using a poststructuralist feminist understanding of history, I will employ the theory of intersectionality in this thesis. I will now shortly account for how I understand the term, and how I will make use of it. Coined by an African-American lawyer, Kimberlé Crenshaw, it took on the challenge of understanding how one or several individuals can be oppressed on several different axes.[93] An individual can be oppressed on the axis of gender and the axis of race, and these two can meet and intersect. It is this intersection we study. I will use the theory to look at how Jewish women were oppressed as women *and* as Jews. If other axes occur, such as class, this too will be taken into account.

My object in this research is to study the general aspects of the testimonies by trying to "[...] untangle the relationships between discourses and experiences by exploring the ways in which subjects mediated or transformed discourses in specific historical settings."[94] I use this approach in combination with the theory of intersectionality, in order to analyse race and class relations in combination with gender.

[92]Butler, Judith, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York, 2006[1999], in page 11, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[93]Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics', U. Chi. Legal F. 139, 1989
[94]Canning, Kathleen, 'Feminist history after the linguistic turn: historicizing discourse and experience', Signs (Chicago, Ill.)., 19(1994):2, s. 368-404, 1994, in page 12, Summerfield, *Penny, Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998

2.4.1 From theory to analysis

Thus far in chapter 2, resistance and testimony has been defined and testimony and factuality discussed. The feminist theoretical approach has also been considered. The first analytical findings of mutual assistance among women as resistance follow in the upcoming chapter.

2.4.2 Mutual assistance as resistance

One of the reoccurring themes in my material is the women's testimony to the importance of mutual assistance and solidary actions, even in situations where one could avoid danger by simply not cooperating or showing solidarity. Many of the women in my material tell vividly of their experiences of mutual assistance. It is as though the care they showed for each other built a moral defence against the evil in which they lived. It is clear that the many testimonies to this very important solidary care shows how important it was for them to build a community, a group, together forming some sort of safety.

The Nazi German objective was to dehumanize the Jews before killing them, as part of the Final Solution, set in motion in 1941. Gisela Perl practiced as a doctor before the war, and was at arrival at Auschwitz, ordered to work as a doctor in a primitive hospital there. She tells this of her time in Auschwitz:

> One of the basic Nazi aims was to demoralize, humiliate, ruin us, not only physically but also spiritually. They did everything in their power to push us into the bottomless depths of degradation. Their spies were constantly among us to keep them informed about every thought, every feeling, every reaction we had, and one never knew who was one of their agents.[95]

Because the Nazis regarded Jews as Untermensch, dehumanization was not seen as an immoral act; rather it was encouraged and expected. The dehumanization of all Jews included that any act of mutual resistance, if discovered, was harshly punished. Pelagia Lewinska says this, on the importance of cooperation and solidarity in the camps:

> I will never forget you, Jeanne, the schoolteacher, nor you, Salome, the laundress from

[95]Page 111, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993

> Cracow; sometimes you came late in the evening, most often it was dark outside, bearing a warm limp for someone, stockings for other women and me. It is thanks to you, brave "organizers" [black market sellers and buyers] that the Germans did not succeed in exterminating all of us.[96]

The longing to care for and help each other was strong among some women. Rachel Silberman says:

> We helped each other. I must say, in the bad times people didn't care, like my mother didn't care, whether it was me or another girl. There was another mother and three daughters, and we were close together and if anything happened to anybody, we would all help each other.[97]

It is clear that some women formed close familial bonds with others, despite not being related. Rachel Silberman tells another story of attempts of mutual assistance and solidarity in the camps:

> There were sometimes incidents such as, "I don't like you. You are a *Litvak* [Yiddish for Lithuanian), that's why you did that." It was normal; it didn't mean anything. But there was also a Hungarian woman doctor, a thin, tall lady. You could see she was an educated, fine woman. She went around and said to the girls, "Don't eat what they gave today. Don't eat it. This is poison." She was right; there was something wrong. They gave us raw salami, not cooked thoroughly, and she said, "You will all get sick from it." And those who ate did get sick. That woman was so sick herself, but she walked around and watched and tried to help whoever she could.[98]

If you were caught sharing food or similarly, you were punished and/or executed, depending on the "severity" of your act. Thus, acts of care and mutual assistance were "actions of resistance – to resist, and resisting – activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed" because they directly defied their raison d'etre by attempting to survive. Gisela Perl tells this story of the incident which

[96]Page 93, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993
[97]Page 82, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998
[98]Page 82, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

made her decide to do resistance by survival and mutual assistance:

> They [pregnant women] were surrounded by a group of SS men and women, who amused themselves by giving these helpless creatures a taste of hell, after which death was a welcome friend. They were beaten with clubs and whips, torn by dogs, dragged around by their hair and kicked in the stomach with heavy German boots. Then, when they collapsed, they were thrown into the crematory – alive. I stood, rooted to the ground, unable to move, to scream, to run away. But gradually the horror turned into revolt and this revolt shook me out of my lethargy and gave me a new incentive to live. I had to remain alive. It was up to me to save all the pregnant women in Camp C from this infernal fate. It was up to me to save the life of the mothers, if there was no other way, than by destroying the life of their unborn children.[99]

Perl decided to start performing abortions on women in the camp. Being caught pregnant in the camps meant death to both child and mother. Perl showed solidarity by attempting to help women survive. She knew that by resisting to give up, and risking her own death by performing abortions, she could potentially save hundreds of lives that would otherwise have perished. Traditionally, women have been portrayed as children were in survivor literature; helpless victims. Testimonies of women, who acted contrary to traditional expectations of female behaviour, are studied less.[100] These testimonies include stories of women who, as a result of gruesome and cruel circumstances, place their own survival over their children's. Another example is that of women who were appointed to be *Kapos*, Nazi-German given name for prisoner in a Nazi camp appointed to carry out administrative tasks in return for food better treatment, who mimicked the behaviour of the SS prison guards.

Waxman puts forth a sharp critique of the study and amplification of testimonies of mutual assistance among women in the camps. She claims that "[...] such images of mutual care and concern are very moving, but what is problematic is when they are used to obscure the horrors of the concentration camp by introducing a redemptive message into the Holocaust. This is deeply misleading."[101] There is no doubt that the cruel circumstances of the Holocaust brought out the worst in some, as the example of the women *Kapos* above. Despite Waxman's

[99]Page 114, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993
[100]Page 663, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003
[101]Page 672, Ibid

critique of images of mutual assistance as misleading, I do not believe they are misleading in the testimonies I have studies because the overall narrative is that of cruelty and despair, and there are made no attempts to mislead this. Mutual assistance however, is for the women I have studied, the little light that brightened their existence, and sometimes kept them alive. It was, even though it was not always evident to the women themselves, a means of resistance.

2.4.3 From essentialism to complex personhood

We must be careful as to not continue essentialising women, as has been done in earlier research on women survivor testimonies. The philosophical definition of essentialism is, according to Oxford English Dictionary; "the belief in real essences of things".[102] Within feminist theory, essentialism has traditionally been understood as the belief that women have a "real essence", unique to them and contrary to the "nature" of men. This belief has been opposed, but still exists in other disciplines within academia. With the introduction of gender studies of the Holocaust in the 1980s, the focus on women and children was significantly increased, as I mentioned in earlier chapters. However, the focus shifted onto gender-related experiences, such as femininity and the loss thereof, rape and pregnancy. The studies were more often than not laced with an essentialist view of women.

Examples of recent essentialist readings of women's experiences can be found in professor and scholar on women and the Holocaust Myrna Goldenberg's text 'Testimony, Narrative, and Nightmare: The Experiences of Jewish Women in the Holocaust'.[103] She writes: "The experiences of Jewish women during the Holocaust must therefore be examined not only as a valuable part of the historical record of extraordinary and heinous human indifference, [...] but also as equally extraordinary examples of human love and selflessness, as memories that valorise the "female" experience of nurturing and connectedness."[104] I want to avoid the portrayal of women's survivor testimonies from the Holocaust as intrinsically and essentialist female experiences. Rather, I want to grant the women a chance to be understood as complex human beings who were trapped in an intolerable and inhumane situation, which led them to

[102]"essentialism, n.". OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/64504?redirectedFrom=essentialism
[103]Goldenberg, Myrna, 'Testimony, narrative, and nightmare: the experiences of Jewish women in the Holocaust', *Active voices*., S. 94-106, 1995
[104]Page 104, Ibid

do both cowardly and heroic deeds. However, it is necessary to look at how an experience can be gendered, without, in the same breath, claiming that those experiences are somehow intrinsic to neither women nor men. As Raul Hilberg writes: "The Final Solution was intended by its creators to ensure the annihilation of all Jews. Yet the road to annihilation was marked by events that specifically affected men as men and women as women."[105] Therefore I use the understanding of gender which I account for in chapter 2.4, in order to try to understand their experiences within a gender discourse. I want to add the concept of *complex personhood* to my collection of theoretical tools, in order to attempt to portray a more complex picture of what resistance could be. This theory could act as a contributor to further try to prevent essentialist readings of the testimonies at hand.

Avery Gordon, puts the concept of *complex personhood* forth in her book *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*. Gordon does not study the Holocaust specifically, but other similarly monumental events, such as the American enslavement of African peoples. She writes:

> Complex personhood means that all people [...] remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others. Complex personhood means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward. [...] At the very least, complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning. [106]

Time is a weave of the past and the present, of what happened according to history books, and what our imaginations reach towards. By adopting this understanding of humans into the theoretical toolbox, we can create a broader picture of what resistance may look like in the testimonies analysed in this thesis. Employing the theory of complex personhood can help me answer my research question because it grants us the possibility of looking beyond moralizing while examining extreme situations, such as the Holocaust. It grants us the possibility to see

[105]Page 3, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993

[106]Page 4-5, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008

people's testimonies not only as straight forward facts, but as a weave of imagination, fact and wishes. Gordon goes on:

> But this also reminds us that even those who live in the most dire circumstances possess a complex and often times contradictory humanity and subjectivity that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents.[107]

Even though humans live under extreme conditions, they are just as heroic and cowardice as they would be under seemingly "normal" circumstances. It is not fair by humanistic measures to, as Gordon says, "view[ing] them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents."[108]

Waxman has claimed that in order not to pre-empt and simplify the testimonies to the Holocaust one must not presume that one testimony is all-inclusive in regards to the experience of the Holocaust. The stories that are usually pointed out as examples of women's sacrificial and nurturing "nature" show only one of several behaviours among women and men during the Holocaust. Waxman writes "But what about the unfortunate women and men who could not resist eating their paltry bread ration, or the men too exhausted to even consider volunteering for such hard work? Their responses are just as human."[109]Perhaps the theory of understanding Waxman is looking for is *complex personhood*. The devastating hunger that afflicted the victims of the Holocaust caused, of course, many ethical dilemmas that generated great shame to those who could not resist the temptation of eating the ration of the others. Furthermore, it did presumably result in trauma among those who could resist it, but this was understated in testimonies on the part of the story of sacrifice.[110] Nonetheless, some testimonies have been lifted as more heroic than others. This discussion will continue in the chapter "The Jewish heroine".

To sum up, what we read as testimonies are weaves of the reality these women experience, both fictional and factual, in the past and the present. However, this does not make them less of historical documents worthy of enquiry, quite the contrary. The testimonies ask more of us

[107]Page 4, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008
[108]Page 4, Ibid
[109]Page 668, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003
[110]Page 668, Ibid

as researchers. They ask us to, as Gordon says, try to understand that: "life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning."[111] It is in light of my elaboration, in order to conduct an ethically tenable analysis, fruitful to make use of Gordon's understanding of *complex personhood*.

It is clear that women held a special role in the Holocaust-machinery because of their ability to become pregnant and give birth. I want to continue on the note of Gisela Perl's testimony in chapter 2.4.2, and discuss the role of the Jewish mother.

2.4.4 The Jewish mother

In a place and time where abortions were illegal, contraceptives were hard to come by, one can only imagine what it is like to become pregnant while also being trapped in a place where all Jews were considered lives unworthy of life and doomed to death. Not only did women fear the burden of pregnancy, they were also especially vulnerable as they were left with the children when separated in the concentration camps. They were forced to make what Lawrence Langer has called "the choiceless choice", "[...] either they could attempt to dissociate themselves from their children in the uncertain hope of survival, or accompany them to a certain death."[112] Many women were unaware of their certain death if they accompanied the children, as the Nazis did everything they could to conceal the truth about the gas chambers, until the very end. Stories occur of women who chose to make the choiceless choice of abandoning their children for their own uncertain survival, but more often from onlookers who witness of such events. We can only speculate whether these stories were too painful and/or unfitting to the preconceived ideas of motherhood and womanhood in the post-WWII era. But according to Waxman's claims, which I presented earlier, it does seem likely that stories of this type were played down, whereas stories of women choosing to join their children to a certain death were somewhat exaggerated.

Judith Meisel tells in her testimony of an incident with a mother and child at the initial separation in the concentration camps:

[111]Page 4-5, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008
[112]Page 670, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003

> An episode in Stutthof made a strong impression on me. Right in front of me there was a young woman. Later I found out that her name Chavah. She wore a dress that she had to take off. Then a baby fell out of it, a new born child. A Gestapo man took up the child, slammed it in the pavement and killed it. Chavah ended up in our group. We stayed in wooden barracks - three, four or five on each floor bed - lying in a triplex. Chavah lay beside me. She would not open her fist. I said to her that it is okay, while everyone asked: "What do you have inside your fist?" There was a little baby shoe. The Nazis found out about this, and took the shoe from her. When she refused, they shot her.[113]

Judith Meisel tells of a woman who tried to save her child from being killed. In the sorrow and pain left with her after the gruesome murder of her child, she will not let go of the only thing she has left of the child, a shoe. Chavah tried to stand up against the dehumanization forced upon her and her child. For this, she was murdered. However, she might not be looked upon as the Jewish heroine in the traditional sense, the fighting woman sacrificing herself for the cause, as some examples in chapter 2.4.6 will show. But she resisted her own dehumanization and degradation. It is easy to fall in the trap of moralization and mythologization, by appointing her as a heroine nonetheless. However, she could have easily done the opposite of what she chose to. Would she be less of a heroine if she did not sacrifice herself for the shoe? I believe Judith Meisel chose to tell of this story in order to show the gruesomeness and choiceless choice Chavah endured. What I read from Meisel's testimony to this story is a will to show that the Jews did resist the dehumanization of themselves, and that this resistance was neither heroic nor cowardice, simply: complex. Helen Foxman tells this of how she was met when she entered the Vilna ghetto, having left her infant son outside:

> We came into the ghetto with 180 rubles for the two of us. We moved into the bigger ghetto. As we came closer to the gates of the ghetto, my husband got out of the wagon. They let us in and we started to search for a place to live. The first thing… people who knew us were going on like this… "You see?" they said in Yiddish, "that *Ois vorf* (scoundrel, outcast)! The mother left her child outside and came in to save her life." [Crying][114]

[113]Page 98, Nelson, Steve, Lothe, Jakob & Brun, Agnete (red.), *Kvinnelige tidsvitner: fortellinger fra Holocaust*, Gyldendal, [Oslo], 2013
[114]Page 43, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

This is another example of how, especially, women had the extra burden of having to make the choiceless choice, a choice no one should have to endure. Nonetheless, many of these women had to endure it, and be shamed for it afterwards, as we see in Helen's testimony. Granting Chavah and Helen the right to *complex personhood*, and recognizing that every Jew caught in the death camp system were doomed to death, we might reconsider our judgement. It is their refusal to be dehumanized because of their unfortunate positions as mothers in an inhumane situation that is the resistance they tell of.

2.4.5 The loss of self

In the camps there was shown no mercy, there was no moral ground on which to lean, and protecting one peer could mean the death of another. Often times, there was no way of helping another prisoner from for example being punished. This feeling of helplessness added to the loss of a sense of self, which many testimonies tell of.[115] The sense of loss of self was particularly prominent among the women. Waxman writes:

> A comparative study of women's and men's testimonies suggests that more women than men describe the trauma of their initiation into the concentration camp world. Women write of the agony of having to stand in front of men, of being searched for hidden valuables, of being shorn of all their hair, and of being tattooed.[116]

Many describe the inevitable loss of menstruation in the camps as a contributor to the feeling of the loss of self, loss of "womanhood". The bodily experiences and traumas mentioned are connected to the women's preconceived ideas of womanhood and femininity. One example of such traumatizing initiation-examinations women had to endure is told of by Rachel Silberman:

> There were gynaecology chairs, where every tenth or every fifteenth woman was examined. Who should they pick on? My sister, who was not quite fourteen years old. They said that women were supposedly hiding some valuables. My mother nearly pulled her hair out when she saw that. It was out in the open. We didn't realize what was

[115]Page 673, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Womenss history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003
[116]Page 673, Waxman, Zoë, 'Unheard testimony, untold stories: the representations of women's Holocaust experiences', *Women's history review*., 2003(12):4, s. 661-677, 2003

> happening until we got close to it. My sister was yelling so; it was like somebody was going to kill her. German men were doing the examination. Men! There was just plain hysteria among the women.[117]

Giving testimony to what one has experienced during a traumatic experience in life inevitably brings back memories, and can, even if not intended, bring them back very vividly. In a post-war world where one wishes to rebuild a sense of self, a sense of womanhood, bringing back, or even having memories of the loss of the same, is typically suppressed. This tendency, claims Waxman, is what is evident in women's survival testimonies, when some details are held back. Bronwyn Davies writes in her essay "Women's subjectivity and feminist stories", that:

> [...] femininity is particularly unstable and problematic. The proliferation and confusion of discourses of femininity makes it especially difficult for women to attach themselves to an identity: 'the discourses through which the subject position 'woman' is constituted are multiple and contradictory. In striving to successfully constitute herself within her allocated gender category, each woman takes on the desires made relevant within those contradictory discourses. She is however never able to achieve unequivocal success at being woman'.[118]

If femininity is unstable and problematic in a world under "normal" circumstances, then one can only imagine how the instability would increase in the chaotic hellscape the Holocaust was. Some women tell of how they saw survival itself as a duty and as a way of resisting. For example, Pelagia Lewinska tells of the moment when she realized that the disgusting latrines and filth was planned by the Nazis. It was not simply lack of organization from the Nazis' side; their plan was for the Jews to die humiliated in their own filth.[119] She wished to try to defeat this fate, for the sake of all Jews. She says:

> […] the instant when I grasped the motivating principle of these German bandits, it was as if I had awakened from a dream. All right, to perish was to satisfy the enemy's

[117]Page 78, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998
[118]Davies, Bronwyn, 'Women's subjectivity and feminist stories', *Investigating subjectivity*., S. 53-76, 1992, in Page 13, Summerfield, Penny, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998
[119]Page 95, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993

> intentions, to fulfil his plans. No! He would not have it so easily! I felt under orders to live. It was my duty towards those who were gone, to those who remained and those who awaited us in the free world. It was my duty toward a great and sacred cause.[120]

Not only is this a resistance towards perishing at the hands of the Nazis, it's also resistance toward being dehumanized by them. Lewinska continues:

> I got a new grip on myself to sustain the heritage from my beloved friends and teachers. I had to keep living. I had to husband all my strength so as not to cave in despite all that was happening. And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being, I would hold onto my dignity.[121]

For Lewinska, perhaps more than actual survival, the resistance towards dehumanization was the key. Because survival was more a matter of luck than anything else, the resistance towards dehumanization was something the women could actually obtain, even if it was almost impossible. Lewinska goes on:

> After the return from work a band of us trooped to the single tap with our bowls to get water for making our toilet. Then we sought out a free corner by the latrines and, wetting an end of a rag, cleaned ourselves up. That, too, was part of the battle.[122]

Edith Horowitz backs up Lewinska's claim:

> I wonder which is worse – to be eaten up by lice or to be hungry? At least when you wash yourself, you feel like a human being, not like an animal. What I have against this whole experience is that they tried to dehumanize us.[123]

Trying to keep clean in a place where everything and everywhere was filthy was virtually impossible. However, these futile acts worked as spiritual strength and resistance, more than anything else. As the women claim themselves, there were no heroines; everyone simply did

[120]Page 95, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993
[121]Page 90, Ibid
[122]Page 91, Ibid
[123]Page 71, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

what they could to survive. Did the Jews who died not resist their fate? We will never know if they resisted their death, because the vast majority never got to tell their story. However, from those who did survive to tell their story, we see that many did resist their own dehumanization.

2.4.6 The Jewish heroine

I find it necessary; in order to conduct an adequate analysis, to shortly contemplate upon "heroism" and its relation to Jewish women who survived the Holocaust. This is because the "Jewish heroine" became a well-known trope some women survivors of the Holocaust were given in post-war Europe, North-America and Israel, which directly links to my research material. Additionally its application risks essentialising women, and directly opposes my use of *complex personhood* and critical understanding of gender.

The definition of heroism which I will make use of are those deriving from the outcome of the "Conference on manifestations of Jewish resistance" in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, April 7-11, 1968.[124] This definition refers to "active heroism", physical resistance to Nazism and Fascism, and "passive heroism", which includes moral steadfastness, spiritual resistance and daily struggle for survival. I use these definitions because they directly apply to the epithet I am scrutinizing, and are contextually relevant.

In post war Europe, North-America and Israel, some stories of heroism were focused upon, whereas others were left in the shadows.[125] Why? The epithet hero is traditionally given posthumously in order to show who fought who, and whom we are supposed to acclaim, much like a patron saint. This might explain why many chose to lift the testimonies of Zionist partisan heroes and heroines instead of other stories, in post war Europe and Israel.

The perhaps most famous example of a Holocaust-heroine known throughout the world is the story of Anne Frank, which I shortly discuss earlier in chapter 2.3 when contemplating upon

[124]Conference on manifestations of Jewish resistance, *Jewish resistance during the Holocaust: proceedings of the Conference on manifestations of Jewish resistance, Jerusalem, April 7-11, 1968*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1971

[125]Page 150, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998

testimony and factuality. I want to continue on that note in this elaboration. Judith Tydor Baumel, Holocaust scholar, writes of her that:

> In short, it appears that Anne Frank's image as a passive Holocaust heroine was created as much by publishers, playwrights and screenwriters as by the reality of her own life. She therefore falls into the category of "created heroines", unknown during the war, and unrecognised as heroines even in their own circles. Their post-war fame resulted from deliberate promotion which often moulded an image created more for public consumption than for historical accuracy.[126]

Some would perhaps argue with Baumel on this point, and claim that it was the appeal of the diary itself that made it so popular in contrary to other stories, and not the ruthlessness of publishers hungry for profit. However, her point rings true when we consider the examples of Steiner's *Treblinka* and the stories of African-American slaves induced by the abolitionists. But why was Anne Frank so singularly celebrated as a heroine, when there were other stories of heroines told during and after WWII that were more dramatic? Perhaps we find the answer among the stories that were largely ignored or warped after the end of the war. Baumel goes on:

> Mala Zimetbaum, a young deportee from Belgium was fluent in several languages. Chosen to interpret for the SS in Auschwitz, she had relative freedom of movement within the camp. In 1944, she and her Polish boyfriend Edek escaped from Auschwitz, immediately becoming a symbol of freedom. The two were caught, brought back to be hung by the Nazis, and Mala's suicidal defiance at the gallows became legendary in the camp. Katherina Horovitzova was a dancer who slowly undressed before the entrance to the gas chambers, mesmerizing an SS man long enough to grab his machine gun and kill him before being caught. Her story, too, became a symbol of defiance in Auschwitz.[127]

These stories were beacons of light and resistance for the people entrapped in Auschwitz and elsewhere during the war. In post-war Europe they were brought forth on isolated occasions, but perhaps because of the sexual elements, Horovitzova's striptease and Mala's affair with Edek. However, in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, there was generally a political judgement

[126]Page 144, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998
[127]Page 146, Ibid

behind the singling out of heroines. In Israel, the women Zionist resistance fighters became part of the political mission of creating the nation-state. Baumel writes of these women that their stories were promoted and told about in documentaries, whereas women which whom they fought side by side, did not get this treatment. In Europe and USA, however, they were part of the collective Holocaust memory, and were not acclaimed as heroines because of political reasons, to the same extent.[128] The epithet heroine inevitably brings with it crude simplifications of historic events. Therefore, I am highly sceptical of the use of hero/heroine as a label. As a gender studies researcher I know, like Waxman, that gender stereotyping and sexism controls narratives, in our contemporary world, as they did in the post-war era. I choose to look at women survivors of the Holocaust, and their testimonies because I believe their stories can be a means of resistance in our time. It is however important to be cautious of the role of "the Jewish heroine" given to women survivors, when one conducts research.

2.4.7 Survival and its "heroines"

Gottlieb writes in his essay "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust", that any Jew who survived the Holocaust in Nazi occupied Europe showed resistance towards their oppressors.[129] By this he means that any person who survived to see the end of WWII resisted, by simply surviving. But, one could ask, didn't a regular citizen in occupied France resist as well, according to this logic? No, says Gottlieb, for they were not all sentenced to death. Every Jew was to be annihilated according to the Nazi doctrine. Therefore, it was an act of resistance to defy this doctrine. However, some difficult questions arise when we consider this approach to resistance. One question is posed in the chapter "The loss of self", and it makes itself relevant even in this chapter: did the Jews who died not resist their fate?

[128]Page 147, Baumel, Judith Tydor, *Double jeopardy: gender and the Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 1998
[129]Page 47, Gottlieb, Roger S. , "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust", *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1983

Rittner and Roth write in *Different voices: Women and the Holocaust,* that survival was mostly due to luck.[130] However, the choices people made – sometimes "choiceless choices" – did make a difference, but factors such as:

> […] a person's age and sex; when one was deported; whether he or she could ward off sickness; whether one might draw a work assignment that would reduce energy output or enable one to obtain better food; whether one could avoid the punishing whims of guards or the caprice of periodic selections; whether there was help of any kind that one could count on, mattered more.[131]

Some of the survivors' testimonies stress Rittner and Roth's point. For example, Judith Meisel tells this:

> If you wanted to live, you did as you were told. That does not mean you're a coward. You just had to accept it. In a way it's quite the same as accepting that one grows old. There is no alternative. [132]

Doing as one was told could contribute to survival, and it was one way of defying the Nazis plan to annihilate you, but of course it did not guarantee survival. So if it was mostly down to sheer luck if a person survived, how can we even talk of heroes or heroines as has been done in previous narratives on women survivors? Brana Gurewitsch writes in the preface of *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, that:

> […] none of the women consider her survival a result of particular behaviour or choices of her part. Some attribute their survival to the support and assistance of others: their mothers, sisters, or camp sisters. Some say it was divine intervention, and others say it was simply good luck. None considers herself heroic; each simply struggled for survival as best she could.[133]

Resistance is complex because humans are complex. Several of the women in my material are

[130]Page 74, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993
[131]Page 74, Ibid
[132]Page 134, Nelson, Steve, Lothe, Jakob & Brun, Agnete (red.), *Kvinnelige tidsvitner: fortellinger fra Holocaust*, Gyldendal, [Oslo], 2013
[133]Page xx of preface, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

very frank in their description of human behaviour. The extreme and intolerable conditions inevitably brought out extreme reactions in their victims, both bestial and saintly. The women want the reader to know that they experienced both inexplicable horror and kindness. In order to avoid mythologizing the Holocaust, it is crucial to include all aspects of the experience as the witnesses describe it.[134]

To sum up the first theme of the theoretical discussions and analysis: what we see outlined when we analyse what events the women tell of, and in which way this may be interpreted as resistance, a solidary resistance stands out. The common events the women talk about which we can interpret as resistance are those where they resist dehumanization through mutual assistance and speak of the need to survive and to try to live with dignity under inhumane conditions. They act in a solidary manner in order to resist dehumanization and probable death. Perhaps not survival itself, as Gottlieb suggests, but the will to survive and tell of the Holocaust, is an act of resistance. I will elaborate upon the will to witness in the chapter 2.5.1, "Witnessing as resistance".

2.5 Collective memory

Collective memory is a concept closely related to cultural memory, a theory about how culture and history intersect and intertwine. Cultural memory and collective memory differ in terms of historical time span. Cultural memory spans over centuries, whereas collective memory is usually restricted to three generations, approximately 80 years.[135] Humans can by "[...] recalling, iterating, reading, commenting, criticizing, discussing what has been deposited in the remote or recent past, […] participate in extended horizons of meaning-production. […] cultural memory creates a framework for communication across the abyss of time."[136] Cultural memory is deeply rooted in the Jewish religion through traditions and religious festivities which spans thousands of years. However, I want to employ collective memory, a short term theoretical understanding of creation of meaning, as the theory that binds this thesis together.

[134]Page xx in preface, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998
[135]Page 111, Assmann, Jan, *Cultural memory and early civilization: writing, remembrance, and political imagination*, 1. English ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011
[136]Page 97, Erll, Astrid & Nünning, Ansgar (red.), *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2008

Collective memory as a theory originated from the ideas of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. He introduced the idea that the processes of remembering as a collective can be applied at all levels of society, individuals, groups, and masses. He claimed that: "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember."[137] However, memory works as reciprocal action trough social creations. The creation of a memory happens in dialogue with the surrounding discourse. According to Halbwachs, this means that the individual cannot live in a state of mind cut off from the surroundings. The collective and the personal memory gives and takes, in a constant loop. The deeply social process of remembering molds both personal and group memory into a cohesive whole. Potentially contributing to collective memory is, in essence, what the writers of survivor testimonies from the Holocaust are doing. By bringing together many testimonies, the publishers of the anthologies I use as my material, take part in creating a collective memory of the Holocaust, just as I am a part of creating it by gathering stories in this thesis. With a collective memory however, comes forgetting. Unintentional forgetting is partially what many women survivors of the Holocaust have experienced. This has been called a passive form of cultural forgetting.[138] However, it is not related to lack of space to remember. Rather it is related to non-intentional (other times intentional) acts caused by trauma such as losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning, or leaving something out of one's story. The memories fall out of the frames of attention, valuation and use. Some women's stories have had a tendency to be neglected and have lost value to the collective memory of the Jewish history. By using collective memory, I can analyse aspects in the material that have not previously been emphasised. With women's continued testimonies of the Holocaust, however, they insist that their stories are relevant to and part of the collective memory.

2.5.1 Witnessing as resistance

A reoccurring theme that the women in my material tell of is the need and will to witness. However, forgiveness is not given easily. Maria Segal says:

[137]Page 99, Ritchie, Donald A. (red.), *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011
[138]Page 98, Erll, Astrid & Nünning, Ansgar (red.), *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2008

> The reason that I tell is that I've seen what hate can do. Hitler hated the Jews, and many of those who supported him, also did. It is important to forgive, but the fact that my family is gone ... it's hard for me to forgive it.[139]

It seems as though Segal wants to make a testimony as an attempt to wade off future acts of terror based on hate. Making a testimony as to what happened is a way of trying to understand what happened and why. No story can make sense of the hellscape the Holocaust was. Some stories are so hard to tell of, that they simply cannot be uttered in words. Nevertheless, many women choose to tell of the horrors using words and emotion. The stories women such as Segal tell are stories that outline a need to try to make amends, for what happened, even though, as she points out, it is hard to forgive. The testimony itself is perhaps a way of making amends, to compensate for injury and loss, or to be redemptive of the past. Anna Heilman says of her testimony, that:

> I find it very difficult to speak about it; I find it very difficult to remember, but I understand that this is my responsibility and I want to bring about the commemoration of the four girls who were executed in Auschwitz. This is what I wanted to do; this is the essence of my talk.[140]

Heilman wants to honor the four women that were hanged for smuggling gunpowder in order for the *Sonderkommando*("Special Command Units", Jewish prisoners who had to work in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz[141]) to blow up crematories in Auschwitz on October 4th 1944. Judith Meisel tells a similar story:

> If none of us had survived the Holocaust, none of us would have been able to tell our story. (...) The Nazis wiped out entire generations. Never in my life had I imagined that I would have children, and that I would be a grandmother. My eldest grandson is named Aaron. When I held him for the first time, I thought of all the children who did not survive: peers with me now would have had grandchildren. I kept Aaron for all these

[139]Page 91, Nelson, Steve, Lothe, Jakob & Brun, Agnete (red.), *Kvinnelige tidsvitner: fortellinger fra Holocaust*, Gyldendal, [Oslo], 2013
[140]Page 134, Rittner, Carol Ann & Roth, John K (red.), *Different voices: women and the Holocaust*, 1. ed, Paragon House, Minnesota, 1993
[141] "Sonderkommando," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/715306/Sonderkommando. (accessed December 16, 2015)

> people, and especially for those who were with me in Stutthof. We, who were there, promised each other that we would remember to tell the story of what happened to us.[142]

Edith Horowitz emphasizes the same need to give witness as Heilman:

> Not a day passes when I don't think about it. Many times, especially when I feel guilty about smoking, I say to myself, "Edith, you really should try to live as long as you can, not for yourself, but to be a witness. If somebody should write a book that [said] it didn't happen, you should step forward and say, 'I am living proof'.[143]

Rozalia Berke tells a story of an incident where some SS men killed three infant children at the hospital where she worked in the ghetto:

> I really want it to be recorded into history that it happened. I saw it with my own eyes. We were told by Mrs. Lolarh to hush it up, not to talk about it. We didn't know anything. We didn't see anything. But I was in that room with the doctor. I did what the doctor and Mrs. Lolarh told me. I didn't even tell my own mother because I was afraid and they were afraid. What good would it do? The infants were killed. I have to live with this memory. I dream about it. It's in me, and I really want history to know about it.[144]

The will to try to make amends as a way of resistance is expressed through the women's insistence on remembering what happened. Because the Nazi's tried to annihilate all Jews, and silence those who lived, speaking up about ones experiences as oppressed might be seen as a resistance towards the oppressor. Meisel promised her co-prisoners to tell of what happened to them in order to try to make amends for the memory of and all the lives that could have been, but perished at the hands of the Nazis. In a way, she held her grandson for them. Together, the women create awareness on the Holocaust by telling their stories. By giving testimony after the events, they create their own subjectivity and agency, and through this show resistance as a way to oppose dehumanization. Together they reinforce each other. Giving witness, both as an individual and as a group creating collective memory is a process

[142]Page 105, Nelson, Steve, Lothe, Jakob & Brun, Agnete (red.), *Kvinnelige tidsvitner: fortellinger fra Holocaust*, Gyldendal, [Oslo], 2013
[143]Page 71, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

[144]Page 172, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

that is prolonged and strengthened, both by the anthologies I use as my material, and in extension by this research. According to my findings, the act of witnessing is considered by several of the women as an attempt to together make amends for and resist what has been done to them, and to avoid such atrocities in the future.

While some women emphasize the importance of giving witness, others express the impossibility of the same. What if words are not enough to express what one has experienced? In the next chapter I want to shortly account for the importance of studying the silences, the pauses and what we can read between the lines.

2.5.2 When words fail

Sometimes the risk exists that the emotion in the voice of the witness, the body language, the silences, are not conveyed as we recite their words in short quotes and written word. Not only is there a risk of distorting stories because of the limitations of the written word, it is never possible, even for the interviewer, to grasp the immense pain within the witness. Inga Clendinnen writes of her own experience of trying to convey the pain she sees expressed as she interviews a Holocaust survivor who was trapped and gang-raped over several days:

> She recites the 'facts' as sparely as she is able, because words cannot catch the chaos of emotions which enveloped the events. […] Her experience defies verbalization. How could she express it. How could a professional writer, however skilled in language, expand her words to comprehend what has been done to her? Whose art could represent her flinching child's body, her flinching child's heart, under those multiple blows?[145]

How do we convey the unspeakable trauma of Holocaust survival? Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo has said that making testimony of the Holocaust is to "Expliquer l'inexplicable" – to explain the inexplicable.[146]The people who lived through the Holocaust experienced and endured physical and psychological terror where their voices were taken away from them. The enforced silence, in addition to having to "explain the inexplicable", can render anyone speechless. Some women say during the interview that they simply cannot tell

[145]Page 31, Clendinnen, Inga (1999). *Reading the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
[146]Page 54, Ibid

of a certain experience because it is too gruesome. The silences and pauses are also telling us something, we simply cannot be sure exactly what. Even though we cannot analyse something that is ”not there”, I do find it important to keep in mind both the inexplicable nature of the Holocaust, and how this comes to the surface in the testimonies. Additionally, the silence that lasted from the time of the events the women tell of, and the time testimony is given is relevant. For some of the women, that time is between 40 and 50 years. It is usually the urgency of telling before they pass away that breaks the silence, as we have seen in the chapter 2.5.1, “Witnessing as resistance”.

2.5.3 The Jewish collective as resistance

The prevalence of religious unity in the testimonies is astounding. Many women speak of coming from deeply religious homes and attempting to adapt to life as oppressed and follow the Jewish calendar of Holidays, despite living under extreme conditions. Even the women who were secular bring up incidents of others following and continuing religious life, as they observed how it kept the “spirits up”. The observance of the laws of *Kashrut* (laws concerning food[147]), where some would refuse to eat *non-kosher* (foods that do not conform to the laws of kashrut) food offered is especially impressive, as starvation was something that affected all Jews of the time, more or less. Stories such as the one of a cow being smuggled into the Pruzhany ghetto in order to be slaughtered in accordance to the laws of kashrut may seem astounding as it endangered the whole community.[148] However, it was considered necessary.

Another example is Eva Schonbrun, who, only five years old remembers being given a piece of ham by the “block elder.” (*Blockälteste*, inmates in charge of a single concentration camp barrack), and that this was justified because the rations otherwise were not sufficient. However, she does remember it as being forbidden according to *kashrut*, Jewish religious laws concerning food.[149] As the Nazis tried to destroy anything Jewish, it seems that despite being made to starve, live enslaved and watch ones family and community perish, some prevailed and continued the spiritual ritual and life. Edith Wachsman tells of the choices

[147] "kashruth," *Britannica Academic*, s. v. http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/EBchecked/topic/312958/kashruth. (accessed December 16, 2015)
[148]Page 307, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998
[149]Page 307, Ibid

between living by the religious laws, and trying to survive:

> In Riecka we had no *Shabbos* candles. My mother put on the electric light instead. Friday nights my father talked to us about *Eretz Yisrael* [The land of greater Israel]. We would all sit at the table, and there was a little bit of relaxation. On *Hanukah* my father lit candles in one of the valises. If somebody knocked on the door he would slam the valise closed. My sister and I sawed some wood on *Shabbos*. Somehow it didn't bother me. Some things just had to be done.[150]

Upholding these holidays and spiritual traditions in secret did not entail probable violent death and/or punishment, as did openly performed acts of resistance. Physical resistance was largely futile. Thus, this spiritual resistance opened the opportunity for more people to contribute to the fight. Getrud Groag says on this note that:

> Today we are blamed for not having done anything, for not resisting. But after nine boys were hanged for smuggling letters out of Theresienstadt, it was obvious that we could all be machine-gunned in a matter of minutes. We saw no solution in physical resistance. The only thing we hoped was to keep the children and ourselves alive as long as possible, until Jakob Edelstein's hope came true: "Drift, you'll yet see *Eretz Yisrael*."[151]

Continuing to exercise the rituals of the Jewish faith, to believe in the coming of *Eretz Yisrael*, despite Nazi attempts to stop it, are clear "actions of resistance – to resist, and resisting - are activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed", and therefore constitute resistance. In addition to that, it helped to rebuild and strengthen communities by focusing on the one common denominator that brought them all to the same place, their Jewish identities. The memory of the Jewish people and their historical role as oppressed, the continued observance of religious laws during the Holocaust, and how the women give attention to this observance in their testimonies, gives a clear indication of the importance of the Jewish common identity as a collective memory, both during the Holocaust, and today.

[150]Page 136-137, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

[151]Page 254, Gurewitsch, Brana (red.), *Mothers, sisters, resisters: oral histories of women who survived the Holocaust*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1998

2.5.4 Collective memory as resistance

Jan Assmann, scholar on communicative memory writes in *Cultural memory and early civilization: writing, remembrance, and political imagination*, that memory is knowledge with an identity-index. It is the knowledge about oneself and our place within a community, be it a generation, a nation, a cultural or religious group. He says: "Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. One has to remember, in order to belong."[152] The memory happens in a dialogue with the surrounding discourse, and works as reciprocal action through social creation. The Nazis and their collaborators attempted to obliterate all things and beings that were Jewish. By not simply remembering alone, but contributing to a mass of memories, the women's testimonies I study create a collective memory. The ones giving testimony are given a belonging in a common Jewish identity that I elaborated on in the previous chapter. By giving testimony to the Holocaust and the importance of their Jewish heritage as a means of resistance, the women I study create themselves in both a Jewish identity collective and a Jewish women collective. The survivors are showing resistance to that which tried to wipe them out.

To sum up, the way in which the women Holocaust survivors talk about choice and act of giving testimony, becomes a way of attempting to make amends for what has been done. This undertaking can be seen as an intellectual attempt to perform "actions of resistance – to resist, and resisting - are activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed", because by making amends through testimony, one attempts to heal what is now in the past. It is a resistance that crosses temporal boundaries. In the next chapter I will discuss how retroactive resistance might work, and how I argue that the women's testimonies that I study create this through the collective memory.

2.5.5 Retroactive resistance through collective memory

I want to discuss retroactive resistance through collective memory by employing Avery Gordon's concept of "haunting", and her implementation of the philosopher Walter Benjamin's thinking on temporality. Gordon has written of the event of the enslavement of

[152]Page 114, Assmann, Jan, *Cultural memory and early civilization: writing, remembrance, and political imagination*, 1. English ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011

African peoples in the USA as a haunting event. Gordon uses *Beloved*, a fictional novel, to reflect upon the collective memory of slavery in the USA. Toni Morrison creates in *Beloved* a "re memory" through social relations that: "linger well beyond our individual time, creating that shadowy basis for the production of material life".[153] The memory haunts us, and the ghosts live among us all today. *Beloved* represents a collective memory, although it is told through fiction. In this thesis, the testimonies of women survivors of the Holocaust can be seen as haunting our present day with memories of the past, and constitutes one part of the collective memory of the Holocaust. Through collective memory we can "create a framework for communication across the abyss of time."[154] But how is it possible to do retroactive resistance through collective memory? Gordon writes that:

> The […] ghost presents itself as a sign to the thinker that there is a chance in the fight for the oppressed past, by which I take Benjamin to mean that the past is alive enough in the present, in the now, to warrant such an approach. This oppressed past is neither linear, a point in a sequential procession of time, nor an autonomous alternative past. In a sense, it is whatever organized violence has repressed and in the process formed into a past, a history, remaining nonetheless alive and accessible to encounter. Fighting for this past appears to be a paradoxical gesture, but it is Benjamin's way of figuring the historical materialist's relationship to what seems dead, but is nonetheless alive, operating in the present, even if obliquely, even if barely visible.[155]

Not only is the past alive and haunting us, but we are given the opportunity to fight for the oppressed past, if we are to agree with Gordon and Benjamin. This historical materialist view is an attempt to, as Gordon puts it:

> [...] fight for an oppressed past […] to make this past come alive as the lever for the work of the present: obliterating the sources and conditions that link the violence of what seems finished with the present, ending this history and setting in place a different future. Benjamin's insight here is to recognize the reciprocal relationship between the type of thinking the analyst employs, ready for the shock and the moment of understanding, and

[153]Page 166, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008
[154]Page 97, Erll, Astrid & Nünning, Ansgar (red.), *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2008
[155]Page 65-66, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008

the animating role of the life or the era or the event the analyst confronts.[156]

My analysis begins and ends between with what Benjamin sees as the relationship between my type of thinking (my theoretical basis) and the role of animating the era I confront, the Holocaust. We can change the past, and perhaps this is what the women are doing when they attempt to make amends for their own and others dehumanization in the past.

Walter Benjamin and Avery Gordon are not the only ones who have questioned the linearity of time and seen crossing temporal boundaries as a way of resistance. The relation between the past and the present, and how society deals with traumatic historical events has been investigated, by thinkers such as Victoria Fareld. In her essay "History and mourning", Fareld presents the traditional understanding of "historicization", writing about history and thus making it "the past", and its counterpart, exemplified by the Holocaust survivor and writer Jean Améry.[157] Améry refuses to mourn in the expected manner, and does not let the past become history. Rather, he lives the past in the present. Fareld claims that her aim is not to validate his stance, but rather to "stress the particularity of his situation, for which a general assumption about historization cannot account."[158] Amerý's literary breakthrough *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* ("Beyond Guilt and Atonement" Fareld's translation,1966) insists that remembering might be the ethical force with which to lift the amnesia/historicization surrounding the Holocaust that lay over German society in the post-war era of the 1950s and 60s.[159]

Améry questions the linearity of time. He also claims that if the moral person (supposedly one in favour of historicization) demands the annulment of time, then a moral imperative arises, which entails that linear time be replaced by a disordered time in which the present and past exist simultaneously. This viewpoint should be understood in relation to his own thoughts on his past. He writes: "Twenty two years later I am still dangling over the ground by dislocated arms."[160] To Améry, thinking about the past as history does not bring closure, and time and his narrative becomes disordered; history is very much alive in the present. He writes that: "I

[156]Page 66, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008
[157]Page 237, Ruin, Hans & Ers, Andrus (red.), *Rethinking time: essays on history, memory, and representation*, Södertörns högskola, Huddinge, 2011
[158]Page 244, Ibid
[159]Page 242, Ibid
[160]Page 242, Ibid

rebel, against my past, against history, and against a present that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history and thus falsifies it in a revolting way."[161] He refuses to simply *forget*. Fareld claims that this viewpoint should be seen as a revolt, not only existential but also social, against historic-political circumstances in a society which seeks to forget the past, rather than make amends for it. Fareld writes that:

> In a situation in which the past is already treated as lost, yet without the loss having been acknowledged as such, the process of historicization as an initial act of losing the past (in order for it to return as history) has no sense. Améry must stick to his loss. It is the only thing he has left in a society which neither mourns nor clings to its past but treats it as if it has never been present. Society's forgetting is Améry's moral incitement to remember by reliving the past rather than by mourning it as lost.[162]

Our contemporary world has changed since the immediate post-war period. Then perhaps, time was not ripe for dealing with what the Nazis had done. Now, maybe the collective memory and its bearers can cross temporal borders and try to make amends for what happened. By employing collective memory, the women giving testimony might set in motion a different future by "obliterating the sources and conditions that link the violence of what seems finished, with the present."[163] However, in my attempts to "make contact with the disappeared" I face some complex results. Gordon writes:

> Because making contact with the disappeared means encountering the spectre of what the state has tried to repress, means encountering it in the affective mode in which haunting traffics. The disappeared carry the message of the other door, but inside the other door is a flood of tears and consolation. What has the state tried to repress? […]Subversion, opposition, political consciousness, the struggle for social justice, the capacity to imagine otherwise than through the language of the state, the ability to see "what is going on below, hunger, pettiness, misery" and to act on it. It has many names that I will call simply [...], the utopian: the appreciation of the fundamental difference between the world we have now and the world we could have instead; the desire and drive to create a just and equitable world.[164]

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[161]Page 143, Ruin, Hans & Ers, Andrus (red.), *Rethinking time: essays on history, memory, and representation*, Södertörns högskola, Huddinge, 2011
[162]Page 243, Ibid
[163]Page 66, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008
[164]Page 127, Ibid

We face the tears, as in the trauma of the Holocaust and all it entails, such as Améry's very much alive memory of still dangling by his dislocated arms. But we also open the door to that which Gordon calls the "[...] utopian, the appreciation of the fundamental difference between the world we have now and the world we could have instead; the desire and drive to create a just and equitable world."[165] So can we open the door to this utopia with the help of women survivor testimonies from the Holocaust? Améry revolted against his own time's neglect and amnesia surrounding the Holocaust, and similarly, the women do the same kind of revolt by telling their stories. In their memory they travel in time, and therefore in extension, the collective travels in time. According to my findings in the testimonies at hand, and the testimonies themselves, I believe the stories and the women telling them do retroactive resistance as an attempt to make amends for what has been, and spread hope for a better future, "a just and equitable world."

To sum up, the most important finding of this thesis is that of solidarity as resistance. We see the importance of solidarity throughout material presented in the thesis. The actions of mutual assistance were solidary and are means of resistance. The acts of giving testimony are solidary because they aim to resist what might come in the future. Through resisting dehumanization in the past, while in the present trying to make amends for what was, the collective solidary resistance is the unifying resisting power of the material at hand. I am of the conviction that the victims who survived, and ourselves, can still make resistance, by highlighting what has been, in order to resist what might come ahead. We are in extension, by reading and remembering history, given the chance to remember and show resistance to similar tendencies in our contemporary world.

[165]Page 127, Gordon, Avery., *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press ed., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008

3 Conclusion

> We have the ability to suffer and talk about suffering. Suffering gives meaning to the heavy, chaotic life we live. For us, pain is an art. I must admit that the women willingly choose that path…[166] – Svetlana Aleksijevitj in *War's unwomanly face*

In this thesis I have asked myself: What kind of resistance is manifest in the oral histories of women survivors of the Holocaust, and how can one view the act of testimony as a resistance in itself? In order to attempt to answer my research question, I have analysed the texts at two levels. Firstly; what events the women tell of, and in which way this may be analysed and understood as resistance. Secondly; whether the choice and act of giving testimony may be analysed as resistance and how the women tell of this.

Through these guiding questions, my theoretical basis, especially *complex personhood*, and my application of a poststructuralist feminist understanding of history, I have found some common themes which can be interpreted as resistance. The first reoccurring theme I found is that of mutual assistance and solidarity as resistance, a collective solidary resistance. The common events the women talk about which we can understand as resistance are those where they resist dehumanization and act in a solidary manner. It is a collective resistance in the sense that the women speak of the need to survive and to try to live with dignity together under inhumane conditions, in order to resist dehumanization and probable death. The women are resisting their own dehumanization through actions of solidarity, thus showing resistance towards their oppressors by creating a collective memory.

Furthermore, I have found that the choice and act of giving testimony becomes a way of attempting to make amends for what has been done. This undertaking can be seen as an intellectual attempt to perform actions of resistance because it attempts to make right what has been done wrong, resist what has been done in the past. As I discuss in my ethical contemplations, I am of the conviction that from the act of writing and sharing survivor testimony, a form of aesthetic expression, springs the buds of resistance towards powers which want to annihilate human freedom. Like Aleksijevitj says in the quote which opens this conclusive chapter; the women of her research, just like the women of mine, have an ability to

[166]Translated by me from Swedish into English, from page 15, Aleksijevitj, Svetlana, *Kriget har inget kvinnligt ansikte*, Ersatz, Stockholm, 2012

talk about the suffering. The pain that comes with it becomes an art when told. This art of witnessing is a form of resistance. It is a resistance that crosses temporal boundaries because it attempts to heal that which is in the past.

This brings me onto another finding, that of the retroactive resistance. By giving testimony, the women revolt and attempt to make amends. In their memory they travel in time, and therefore by extension, the survivor collective travels in time. According to my findings in the written testimonies at hand, and the testimonies as representations themselves, the stories and the women telling them do retroactive resistance as an attempt to make amends for what has been. For this resistance to be possible, I have found that the women giving testimony in my material form a collective memory. This memory can resist as a unity. The continued observance of religious laws during the Holocaust, the memory of the Jewish people and their historical role as oppressed, and how the women give attention to this observance in their testimonies, gives a clear indication of the importance of the Jewish common identity as a collective memory, both during the Holocaust, and today. By giving testimony to the Holocaust, and the importance of their Jewish heritage as a means of resistance, the women I study create themselves in both a "Jewish identity collective" and a "Jewish women collective".

The most important finding of this thesis is that which shows that solidarity can be a powerful means of resistance, on many levels. The solidarity the women tell of from the time of the Holocaust, the solidarity they show with each other by telling their stories and contributing to the collective memory, the solidarity they show with future generations by warning them of the dangers of fascism. To conclude, I argue that the actual acts the women tell of, in addition to the act of telling of the stories themselves, both serve as means of resistance. This combination creates a powerful collective memory, which seeks to make amends for, and thereby show resistance, to what they endured retroactively and hinder oppression in the contemporary.

The solidarity is a result of attempting to make amends and take responsibility for what happened to the women I write on as individuals and as a group. Everything was taken from them, but their voices live on. To take responsibility for one's own power to witness is solidarity with those that still cannot speak because the words fail, and those that perished, and can never tell us their stories. To witness is power, and resistance is its manifestation.

In a sense, the Jewish collective memory and resistance becomes analogous to that of the Jewish legend of the "Golem". The legend of the golem is a specifically European Jewish story telling of a human figure made of clay, which is supernaturally brought to life.[167] The earliest narratives of the golem dates back to the beginnings of Judaism, but the most famous one tell of 16th century Prague and the Rabbi Judah Loew Ben Bezalel, also known as Maharal (c. 1520–1609).[168] He is said to have created the golem out of clay from the Vltava River in order to protect the Prague ghetto of the time from anti-Semitic attacks and pogroms. But how is this legend analogous to the testimonies I have analysed? I have found that what the testimonies tell of and how the women talk about their narrative is an attempt to redeem for the dehumanization they went through, both then and now. Through this common testimony they create a collective memory together, a sort of golem from the clay. A golem they build together in order to resist and make amends for what happened then and to resist what might happen in the future. In this way, their golem holds a redemptive power.[169] Just like Maharal protected the Jews of 16th century Prague, these stories and the women that tell them, attempt to protect the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust, and the future against neo-fascism through the common redemptive solidary project of giving testimony.

3.1 Further remarks

This thesis contributes to the field of gender studies by employing a poststructuralist feminist understanding onto new and unexplored material. It contributes to Holocaust studies by introducing yet another feminist viewpoint and *complex personhood* as a new perspective. I contribute to challenging essentialist reading of women survivor testimonies, both by questioning gender stereotypical epithets, but also by allowing for *complex personhood*. The findings I have made can benefit future research on Holocaust testimony by opening up for new and unexpected readings. The conscious choice of picking three anthologies with

[167]"golem, n.". OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/Entry/79819?redirectedFrom=golem

[168] Basser, Herbert W.. "Rabbinic Literature in Medieval and Modern Times." Encyclopaedia of Judaism. Brill Online, 2015. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/entries/encyclopaedia-of-judaism/rabbinic-literature-in-medieval-and-modern-times-COM_0156> , 2006, (accessed December 8, 2015)

[169]Breslauer,S. Daniel. "Mythology, Judaism and." Encyclopaedia of Judaism. Brill Online, 2015. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/entries/encyclopaedia-of-judaism/mythology-judaism-and-COM_0129> , 2006, (accesses December 8 2015)

testimonies that were already gathered on the basis of gender, helped answer the research question. However, the long term goal of feminist research on Holocaust testimony should be to consider even men's stories as gendered and further analyse them accordingly. As a result of my study, extended research should be conducted on more survivors' testimonies, in order to further examine the relation between gender, collective memory, resistance and solidarity.

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