

**WOMEN'S LIFE WRITING AFTER THE HOLOCAUST:
CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES**

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CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on the writing practices of some female Holocaust survivors as the strategies against the challenges in Holocaust history and literature which exclude and efface the women's perspective, through the literary analysis of two Holocaust memoirs, *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* by Rena Kornreich-Gelissen and *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* by Livia Bitton-Jackson. Despite the differences in these memoirs regarding the memoirists' authorship status, memoirs' literary tone and minor themes revolving around the personal Auschwitz experiences, their similarities in terms of maximizing the self-representation and producing self-knowledge with motivation and aim to organize a shared consciousness and discursive communities after the Holocaust become prominent as the various strategies in Holocaust writing. By looking at the self-representation in these memoirs not only under the influence of public discourse but also constructed in connectedness to other women and the use of the opportunities of historical and literary writing practices, this study offers that women's Holocaust writing does not only bear witness to the gender-related atrocities but also claims the visibility of women's perspective and helps women construct their identities in literature after a dark past targeting women with violence and humiliation. By making content, thematic and discourse analysis over these two memoirs, through this study, I aim to open a discussion on women's Holocaust writing which might not have pre-determined and rule-bound features and which might be questioned whether it is transforming and transformed.

ÖZET

KADINLARIN HOLOKOST SONRASI YAŞAM YAZINI: ZORLUKLAR VE STRATEJİLER

TUĞBA YAVUZ

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, EYLÜL 2020

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Holokost, Holokost edebiyatı, kadın yazını, feminist analiz

Bu tez, Rena Kornreich-Gelissen'in *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* ve Livia Bitton-Jackson'ın *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* başlıklı Holokost anı kitaplarının edebi analizi üzerinden bazı kadın Holokost hayatta kalanlarının kadın bakış açısını dışlayan ve gizleyen Holokost tarihi ve edebiyatının zorluklarına karşı geliştirmiş olabilecekleri yazma pratiklerine odaklanıyor. Bu anı kitaplarının anı sahiplerinin yazarlık durumları, kitapların edebi tonu ve kişisel Auschwitz deneyimleri etrafındaki ikincil temaları açısından farklılıkları olsa da öz temsiliyeti olabildiğince artırma ve özsel bilgiyi üretme yoluyla ortak bir vicdan ve söylemsel topluluklar yaratma amaçları, kadın Holokost yazınında önemli stratejiler olarak öne çıkıyor. Öz temsiliyete sadece kamusal söylemin etkisinde değil ama aynı zamanda öz temsiliyetin diğer kadınlarla ilişkisellik yoluyla inşasına bakan bu çalışma, kadın Holokost yazınının sadece toplumsal cinsiyet temelli deneyimlere tanıklık etmediğini, ayrıca kadınları şiddet ve aşağılama yoluyla hedef alan karanlık bir geçmişten sonra kadın bakış açısının görünürlük iddiası ve edebiyatta kimlik inşası için yardımcı olduğunu öne sürüyor. Bu iki anı kitabını içerik, tema ve söylem analiziyle incelediğim bu çalışmada, kadın Holokost yazınının önceden belirlenmiş ve kurallara bağlı özellikleri olmayabileceğine ve hem dönüşen hem dönüştürücü yapısının sorgulanabileceğine dair bir tartışma açmayı amaçlıyorum.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Known as one of the most documented genocides of the 20th century, Holocaust has a vast space to be researched, discussed and memorialized in its scope ranging from the World War II to the rising right populism and authoritarianism in today's world, from its historical consequences to traumatic effects; interdisciplinary within and beyond the limits of history, art, literature and even pop-culture; both among the Jewish community and the rest of the Western world. Even though, and indeed for the matter that, it has been described as undefinable and incomprehensible by its consequences and impacts, Holocaust and its aftermath hold a unique feature in numerous aspects that creates its depictions and concepts. For instance, the almost interchangeably altered definitions of victim, survivor and witness exclusive to the Holocaust elicit a new understanding of war and violence. As Elie Wiesel stated, survivor's testimony contains in itself some shortcomings to tell the experience of victims of the Holocaust since "those who have not lived through the experience will never know; those who have will never tell; not really, not completely. . . . The past belongs to the dead" (Agamben 1999). On the other hand, not only stated as such but also the Holocaust owns its particular ethical dimensions, concerns and discussion topics inside and outside the limits of this unique period of history. Through these, it is no longer struggled for being proved. However, it is more probable to be debated over how to bare its impacts and experiences, to transmit its memories, to interpret its knowledge and mostly how to represent its actuality in various disciplines.

Incontrovertible contribution of historical investigation to comprehend the Holocaust through various kinds of sources both primary and secondary such as original archival documents, oral testimonies, diaries and other written eyewitness accounts intrinsically displays the complementary nature between historical documents and personal statements. In other respects, this collaboration not only provides information but also lands all parties with filling in the blanks of history with the responsibility of truthfulness. Though plausible, the expectation and the responsibility for objective truth might rule out the borders of personal statements, the hardship of

bearing witness to a traumatic past and the limitations of memory. Moreover, while Holocaust already precludes its witnesses through not only extermination but also its incomprehensible and ambiguous psychological structure, both the conventional history and the representation of past in the post-Holocaust era also might make the Holocaust's very victims avert themselves to perceive their experiences as relevant and worthwhile in the historical setting (Laub 1992). However, what completes the "unknowable" lacuna of a dark past and what challenges the official representation is the personal knowledge and histories as well as literature. Nonetheless, neither history nor literature excludes the other regarding their adequacy and contributions. On the contrary, both are consistent with each other for the matter of social context and historical accounts. Even though the historians seek a comparison between archival documents and autobiographical texts on the level of reference to events, they also acknowledge that the bases for truth claim in these are different and literary texts still contain some truth about the past *Popkin 2003*. Particularly in the case of memoir, the border line between history and literature considering the difference between fact and fiction gets thinner. However, it does not mean that historical and literary studies should be perceived similar in their cognitive concerns. Quite the reverse, the cognitive differences in history and literature regarding types of analysis, use of sources, objectivity and subjectivity, and representativeness and collectiveness. Nevertheless, in his study on history and literature, while Fredrik Chr. Brøgger (1984) recounts these differences, he also considers the tools of history and literature as mutually significant in the historical setting. For instance, while history might use literature as a historical source, literature also benefits from history by getting familiarized with the events and issues of a given period. In this sense, both are consistent with each other for the matter of social context and historical accounts. In this regard, In this sense, within the limits of this study, I cautiously avoid the binary comparison between history and literature and instead explore the reciprocal opportunities and mutual challenges of these "sibling rivals" in the Holocaust context. For this reason, by holding on to the claim that Holocaust created its literary genre which is a memoir, I discuss Holocaust life writing regarding memoir's textual features and offerings to the reader in terms of both historical record and literary scope.

Coined as "sibling rivalry" by Louise W. Knight (2007), the relationship between history and memoir originates from their connection to memory and their distinctive ways of dealing with the past, which makes way for a triad of disciplines – history, literary studies and memory studies. Nourished by several disciplines including cultural history, sociology and literature as a broad area of study, memory studies converge the first two in concern with the subjects of memory and remembrance

culture. In doing so, connecting all three to represent the past resolves the binaries and produces a multifaceted method bringing new features to each. In other words, while history and memoir previously tended to be differentiated from each other by their focus on either collective or individual memory and by their accuracy level comparing fact and fiction, this connection instead establishes a bond between the past, its subjects and its reminiscent writer and reader. In the case of Holocaust literature, this bond makes possible the comprehension of the context of writing, the content of the text and offerings of the writing process for the survivor and of the content for the reader. From this point of view, instead of focusing on the historical validity of the Holocaust memoirs which has always been controversial, I consider the discussions around the examination of accuracy in literary texts as both a challenge and an opportunity to observe the Holocaust memories in representation by forming a frame for the exploration of possibilities and limitations of literature.

In this thesis, I purpose to discuss over the two memoirs whether female life writing has acquired specific characteristics within the frameworks of the Holocaust literature and studies whether the Holocaust literature has acquired specific characteristics by itself and within the framework of Holocaust studies beyond the while controversy continues between history and literature. I mainly argue that some female survivors of the Holocaust have developed various strategies for expressing their survival in Auschwitz through maximizing the self-representation against the exclusion of women's personal perspective in history and through knowledge production in literature via either collective writing or self-initiatives, thus having a strength to organize a shared consciousness. Besides, through the claim of that even if some patterns and commonalities are found in this literature, the overall objective of a literary text is mostly dependent on its writer within the cultural setting, I focus on the subject positions of writers, survivor-authors in this thesis, both within the framework of their texts and communities. Bringing the gender aspect to this discussion in concern with how women are perceived in history, society and literature; I problematize the women's life writing that has been given inadequate place and importance in their community and the Holocaust literature. Furthermore, through the analysis of women's memoirs, I argue that the representation of women's experiences in the Holocaust literature is limited to neither conventional gender norms nor pre-determined textual configurations. Hence, this study tries to show that female survivors of the Holocaust have developed various strategies in the Holocaust period, and they still do in the Holocaust's aftermath through writing.

Although the Holocaust scholarship has begun to give a more expansive space to the gendered aspects of the Holocaust, it is still inadequate to grasp the holistic consequences from a feminist literary approach. Previous studies have given more and

more attention to women and gender. However, they were not safe from reproducing conventional gender norms and putting communal and cultural responsibilities on the shoulders of women. When the women in the Holocaust have been represented with their traditional roles as "mothers" and "caregivers", it rules out the differences and various identity formations among women and turns into an exclusive discourse. In other words, the memory of the Holocaust, which determines proper morality for women towards their communities, might lead to silencing of different stories. This silence is not only because there was, and is still, visible censorship on different stories. This is also that but also writing a memoir is expected to carry appropriateness to the culture and responsibility of unity in the communal discourse, which brings us to the discussion of memory politics in literature. From this point of view, through this thesis, I challenge the usual and accustomed Holocaust scholarship that accepts the women's writing either through communal responsibilities or in terms of mere literary products read as heart-wrenching or harrowing stories, propitious and utopic. In this sense, as significantly different from numerous studies on women's Holocaust writing that tended to portray the women and gender issues regarding the only victimization, sexual violence and fragility, I focus on the female memoirists of the Holocaust through their practice of agency both in the Holocaust through their connections and in the literature by taking the pen in hand against what has been written before about their experiences of atrocities.

This thesis, which has both descriptive and exploratory purposes of discovering where women's memoirs are placed in the Holocaust literature's literary canon and whether female Holocaust survivors have a particular writing practice and strategy, is a humble attempt of literary analysis through a feminist lens. My intellectual interest in women's experiences and coping skills during the difficult pasts inclined to the women's Holocaust experiences when I encountered with the Holocaust history through a project on comparative genocides and women's positions in which I was involved as a co-writer. After our research for this project, the main reason directed me to question women's writing on the past and consequently to write this thesis was the lack of information on the women's positions within a certain historical period which should have been given by the women themselves. Therefore, through a feminist curiosity as well, I developed an interest in women's historical writing to challenge the women's invisibility in the official representation. As limited to the Holocaust context because of practical reasons instead of a broader context including other genocides of the 20th century, I attempted to consider the women's life writing after the Holocaust, particularly in concern with the literary opportunities and challenges. Although the grounded theory is preferred during the data collection in order to prevent strained interpretation of women's personal life stories under

the influence of the grand narratives, both my positionality as a feminist and the aspect of the memoirists' genders as females reassert the two main approaches of the feminist analysis that are respectively 'toward the woman as a reader' and 'toward the woman as a writer' (Moran 2012). However, even if the feminist analysis exerts its authority in this thesis and although a qualitative researcher cannot deny their assumptions and values (Neuman 2014), I keep my criticism as a reader and the criticism toward me as a reader within the limits of the determination of women's image and stereotypes of women's role, and the interpretation of these contents. Instead, I prioritize to give the sense of the positions of the women memoirists whose memoirs are included in this research as primary materials.

In the first chapter which has two sections, I first give a brief framework of Holocaust literature which is periodized in four main phases from 1945 to the present by David G. Roskies and Naomi Diamant (2012). By holding on to the claim that memoir is the primary genre of the Holocaust literature, and as my main concern is the positions of survivor-authors in life writing, I examine each phase through their influences over survivors and their memoirs. In this section, as a limitation of my study, I touch upon minimal numbers of memoirs. This minimality is because I use this brief information about the memorial and literary phases only as a bridge to the discussion of women's memoirs in the Holocaust literature. In the second section of this chapter, I gather the arguments of early studies on women's life writing after the Holocaust, and I try to discover where women's memoirs are placed in the Holocaust's literary canon. I regard this section especially important to have an understanding and to develop a methodology to read and analyse the primary materials of this thesis.

In the second chapter which is the central part of my thesis, I take two memoirs written by women as my primary materials: *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* by Rena Kornreich-Gelissen and *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* by Livia Bitton-Jackson. Among the several memoirs which vary in terms of their spatial focus, language, or date of publication, I selected my materials from those including the Auschwitz concentration camp experiences, originally written in English to avoid the limitations of translation, and published in the second half of the 1990s to be able to examine the conditions that make these memoirs possible. In this chapter, through a set of generic questions on who, when, how and what writes in these memoirs in terms of structures, forms and contents; and through interpretive questions on the importance and distinctive characteristics of these memoirs in terms of aims and motivations, I utilize and combine three methods as thematic, content and discourse analysis. Already depicted as the Holocaust memoirs, the central theme in these books is the Holocaust experiences of female

survivors mostly in similar ways because of the systematic structure of the Nazi executions and the social context in the Auschwitz concentration camp as a shared space. However, in consideration with the representation of these experiences in writing, repeated minor themes and/or the absence of some details that are coded with a latent approach reveal both distinctiveness and commonalities in these texts in search of a post-Holocaust writing strategy exclusive to women. In order to avoid the errors of thematic coding such as mentioning the concepts and patterns at only a descriptive level or applying coding mechanically (Neuman 2014), content analysis beyond the counting the frequency of words and themes enables me to understand the memoirs' intentions and to analyse the flow of information better. With the awareness that the content analysis has disadvantages or challenges of being reductive and subjective, I endeavour to allow both the memoirs and the early scholarship to speak to each other in a dialectic method. Although it does not necessarily mean that the memoirs and the early scholarship are opposed to each other, on the contrary, many convergences might be observed, only after this dialogue I prefer my presence to be recognized during the interrogation of each argument.

Besides the commonalities mentioned above, the reason why I chose these books for my analysis is that they also offer another vantage point on women's agency in terms of both individual identities and communal network settings since Rena experiences the camp with her sister and Livia with her mother. In this case, both memoirs give a mutual opportunity to discuss whether their connectedness to others coincides with the early Holocaust scholarship on gender considering women with their traditional roles as caregivers and nurturers or whether this helps us discover women's identity constructions in the social setting. Nonetheless, the definition and/or the measurement of women's agency might need to be broadened for a clear conceptualization through this analysis since Rena and Livia represent two different indicators because of their age during their times in Auschwitz. While Rena was a 22-year-old young woman when she was sent to Auschwitz in 1942, Livia was only a 13-year-old girl when she was transformed from Plaszow to Auschwitz in 1944. I consider this age difference curiously to explore how young girls are positioned differently and vis-à-vis (older) women in the Holocaust narratives, and primarily to support my research in terms of its representative reliability. Apart from this, there is a fundamental difference between these memoirs, which requires attention to the appellation of Rena and Livia throughout this thesis. Unlike Livia who already had literary competency before this memoir was written, Rena does not write this memoir by herself as "[she] couldn't get it on paper" even though "[she] 'd been

writing [her] story for fifty years in [her] head".¹ However, even if *Rena's Promise* is penned by Heather Dune Macadam whose voice is included in the book from time to time, the story is conveyed by Rena's "narrating self". In this sense, I do not necessarily differentiate the writer and the survivor or survivor-author from each other in the process, and I make a challenging decision to call Kornreich-Gelissen and Bitton-Jackson alternately as memoirists, writers, and enunciators.

Another method of analysis in this thesis requires an utterly different discussion regarding my question as to the structure of the post-Holocaust writing of female survivors. As put in the borders of the memoirs, the discourse analysis of these books takes into consideration the genre, structure, grammar and vocabulary choices yet concerning their social context as particularly the Holocaust memoirs. Although it constitutes a shorter part in comparison to other two analysis methods despite its time-intensive feature, a shift in the core from the works to the conditions that generate the discourse in these memoirs, stated by Dominique Maingueneau (2010) as the peculiar wish of discourse analysis, gives an essential room to the discussion on the Holocaust literature.

The changing focus on the Holocaust and gender, which was previously based on women's distinctive camp experiences and victimization in the face of sexual violence and humiliation, has recently brought new topics to the discussion. By bringing new understandings to gender identity which is no longer limited to the binary between men and women or to heterosexuality, these new topics embark on a request of finding the personal stories of those who have previously been ignored. Hence, the studies on women's life writing focusing on the above-mentioned aspects which reached a pick in the 1990s recently began to fall into a decline. Although this decline did not hinder the attention on women's experiences, a shift in gender-based memory of the Holocaust and methodologies that bring academia and activism together pushed women's Holocaust life writing into the background. In this respect, the lack of current studies on women's memoirs is reflected in my study as a shortcoming, particularly as a limitation in my literature review or primary resources which might seem archaic. However, regarding the increasing age of Holocaust survivors and the decrease in number of survivors still alive in 2020 as the main transmitters of the Holocaust memory, reading the Holocaust memoirs and encouraging survivors to pen their memories are now more important than ever. From this respect, in my study, I insist on focusing on the memoirs written by women for both post-generations and future generations. In doing so, I not only look into the women's Holocaust experiences through these memoirs but I also try to bring the writing

¹Rena Kornreich-Gelissen and Heather Dune Macadam, *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 6.

practice of female survivors back into the framework of Holocaust literature. For this purpose, I ask following questions: How can a female Holocaust memoir be comprehended in terms of its literary devices such as voice, tone and setting as well as its narrative content? Does it offer something different? Does it also offer a new or a particular way of understanding through its discourse? If yes, is this structure of a female Holocaust memoir associated with a group of women who might generate a discursive community? Hence, does this community open up an opportunity for feminist literary analysis in concern with the critical comprehension of women's life experiences?

2. HOLOCAUST LIFE-WRITING: 1945 TO PRESENT

2.1 Memoir: "The Genre" of the Holocaust Literature

Besides its comparison to history in terms of its accuracy, the memoir also occupies a unique place in literature regarding its relation to reality and its distance from fiction. Taking the memory of past and actual experiences as its focus similar to history's question "What happened?", the narrativization of past in memoir through personal statements is what makes this literary work a hybrid genre. In other words, memoir hybridizes the exploration of a historical period and the justification of personal perceptions; hence, neither historical record nor personal story is the solitary output of it. Consequently, it is not a coincidence that memoir contributes to various fields such as courts through its testimonial and eyewitness accounts, education and media studies through its intimate knowledge and vivid details, in addition to transferring information compatible with documents about the historical setting. However, as an autobiographical production at the end, memoir does not charge its narrator with the historian's assignment of bringing out the truth through documentation. On the contrary, it allows memoirist to discover one's memory and encourage them to bear witness. Nonetheless, this discovery is not only inward-oriented but also extroversive since life narrator is nurtured by the very experience of the particularities of the past under the influence of history and society as a remembering individual. Hence, this relatedness between history, society and individual in the context of memoir requires its examination with the triad of text, reader and writer on all occasions. In my research on women's life writing after the Holocaust, I benefit from the statement above to approach and examine the memoirs written by Jewish female survivors in 1990s. However, before concentrating on such texts, in this section, I look through the historical and cultural shifts upon Holocaust's public memory and literature to explore later in this thesis where to place women's

Holocaust memoirs and what they offer that is different.

Holocaust memoirs, as "memoirs of history", have previously been tried to be characterized within a minimal framework. According to Andreas Lixl-Purcell (1994), the basic characteristics of Holocaust memoirs are mostly formed by their nonlinearity, objectivity and plurality. In other words, he claims that these memoirs do not apply a chronological order to the presentation of past, and they attempt to provide objective truth and contain plural voice. As an early study, his findings are irrefutable per se, yet requires follow-up research. In order to examine the validity of this characterization, one needs to look through the aspect of historical and memorial periodization. The attempt of David G. Roskies and Naomi Diamant to periodize the Holocaust literature for the first time reveals that literature responded to World War II and Holocaust quickly and earlier than its history. According to them, emerged in the wartime period between the years 1939 and 1945, Holocaust literature has three phases after the war concerning the representation and memorialization of the Holocaust in public. These phases that give distinctive characteristics and functions to the Holocaust literature are respectively *communal memory (1945-60)*, *provisional memory (1960-85)* and *authorized memory (1985-present)*.¹ Since the framework of my research is limited to the Holocaust's aftermath and survivors' memory, I omit wartime writing and start from the period in which the first post-Holocaust memoirs were published when was still as quite early as 1945. Numbers collected by Robert Rozett (2001) through The Yad Vashem collection demonstrate that the first memoirs by survivors were written very soon after the war in several languages and different parts of the world, and reached and retained the highest number with 22 memoirs published in the year 1946 until 1962. The unsteady number of memoirs for almost two decades until they outnumbered from the 1960s onwards and finally started to be counted by hundreds since 1990s is a corroborative indicator for the periodization of Roskies and Diamant. In other words, these numbers, before consulting the content, provide important information about the influence of remembrance culture on both survivors and their community that are in search of listeners/collocutors. After that, this information forms a frame for the literary analysis of a Holocaust memoir in terms of not only what is written and how but also for whom it is written. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the changing scope of Holocaust memoirs within the limits of the periodization mentioned above. Nonetheless, I would like to specifically indicate that I discuss this mostly through the positionality of survivor-authors, as it may bridge over my study focusing on women memoirists and their subject positions within the writing.

¹Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide*, 8.

It is not a haphazard attempt to conceptualize the post-Holocaust writing of survivors not from the personal yet communal aspect in the first phase starting from the year 1945. It is not only because survivors had been dehumanized, de-subjectified and traumatized by the witnessing humiliation, violence and death. Beyond that, recently survived the concentration and death camps, lost both loved ones and fellows, and migrated to mostly non-Jewish lands, the search of survivors for a community is not obscure or abrupt. For this reason, although considered through the shame of survival and shame distress, indeed plausible to some extent for the ambiguous post-traumatic effects over survivor, this search of a community requires another reading. The early phase writing hides the subject-author and conveys a collective voice not only because of the rupture of individual identity but also for the communal responsibility. From this perspective, collective voice in this period's writing can also be addressed as intersubjective between survivor and victim who died. However, a victim-oriented approach that rejects hearing what had been seen from the survivors' eyes would not lean towards this argument. Even so, I still tend to claim that if the first survivor-authors of this period have ever embarked on a quest of a collective voice, let alone personal; this was possible through the interchange of thoughts between living and dead and through communal responsibility. This responsibility is very appreciable in the earliest memoirs. For instance, the words of Miklos Nyiszli (2011) in his memoir *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account* published in 1946 as one of the first books revealing the Nazi atrocities might properly constitute this motivation: "I felt it my duty to my people and to the entire world to be able to give an accurate account of what I had seen if ever, by some miraculous whim of fate, I should escape".² Furthermore, Nyiszli himself declares his work as "drawn up by [himself] in strict accordance with reality, and without the slightest exaggeration, in [his] capacity as an eyewitness".³ From this point of view, it can be said that early writings with the claim of distance from exaggeration and literariness as much as possible both memorialize fellows as it were the duty of faithfulness and attempt to provide accurate knowledge for the communal memory. Besides, for some survivors, the exposure of what actually happened has been expressed as one of the ways of survival, as Olga Lengyel (1995) put in her memoir *Five Chimneys: Story of Auschwitz*, dated 1947, in those words: "I had then two reasons to live: [...] to dream and pray for the day to come when I could go free and tell the world, 'This is what I saw with my own eyes. It must never be allowed to happen again!'"⁴

²Miklos Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*, trans. Tibere Kremer and Richard Seaver (New York: Arc, 2011), 56.

³Nyiszli, "Declaration" in *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*.

⁴Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995), 89.

In this respect, remembering and writing constitute interchangeable domains as a source and target in the early phase memoirs: Some write to remember, some remember to write. Nonetheless, the communal memory phase is not indisputable, especially in terms of its remembrance culture that determines what and how to remember for the survivor. If ever the first memoirs help both survivors and their community find a collective voice back, this does not avert survivors to perceive their experiences as negligible. Even though writing means a way of survival for some, there are numerous examples of early narratives that do not give vast space to other personal survival strategies but rather interpret the survival as fortuitous.⁵ To build an afterlife, one also needs to reflect on one's achievements from a survival perspective, which seems to be done in the following phase.

The phase of provisional memory intends to cross the borders – the borders of experience, language, community and even memoirs. The memoirs in this period, following the Eichmann Trial in 1961, bring a drastic change into the aim, narrator and narrated. Previously undesirable to be heard so dragged some survivors to ambiguity and silence, the perspective of survivors draws eyes on itself in concern with the afterlife as mentioned earlier in this new period. In retirement from the historical claim of objective truth and authenticity of eyewitness accounts, this period calls out the advocacy that brings the interchangeably personal and political dimensions of autobiographical writing to the discussion. Personal knowledge and demands substitute historical knowledge. Survivor, who earlier was the transmitter of the knowledge, decides to be the writer of the history from their point of view. In search of a transregional language to represent the actuality of the experience, "survivor-author" as a new being of the Holocaust also gives their testimonies a shape of remonstrant performativity. The practical and political dimension of this performance that takes account of experience, though without ruling out the realistic representation, changes the survivor's status from the external to the internal subject of history. Furthermore, this change requires a transformation in memoirs linking the past-self with present and future and establishes the sense of self-making in afterlife. Necessarily come to mind, following Roland Barthes' (1989) theorization of middle-voice⁶, this act of writing after Holocaust in this phase keeps the survivor-

⁵"To a great extent, survival was a matter of chance, of fortuitous circumstances beyond a person's control. Luck is among the reasons most frequently given by the survivors I interviewed to explain how they survived. Luck is beyond intentions – beyond actions and consequences, cause and effect. In a sense, luck is the final cause, the cause of all causes." See R. Ruth. Linden, "The Phenomenology of Surviving: Toward a Sociology of the Holocaust" in *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 84-102, 95.

⁶ Thus defined, the middle voice corresponds precisely to the state of the verb *to write*: today to write is to make oneself the centre of the action of speech; it is to effect writing in being affected oneself; it is to leave the writer inside the writing, not as a psychological subject but as the agent of the action." See Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 11-21, 18.

author within the action of speech and finally brings the demand of agency in the Holocaust literature. This presence within the speech and the demand of agency calls reader for a contract with writer. Through this contract, author expects reader to trust themselves despite the representational identity of autobiography. Moreover, reader also accepts to be invoked with the new moral and ethics within the framework. However, as reader and writer share both different places and understandings, it is not possible to monitor this contract. Hence, I claim that this period's writing that lays no claim of truth by itself might lead to a challenge for some memoirs to be only read as heart-wrenching and harrowing works of literature, having been disconnected from its political demand.

In the study of Roskies and Diamant, the final phase of Holocaust's public memory as authorized memory dated from 1985 onwards, despite not saying much about the writer's status, highlights the sanctity of Holocaust that cannot be compared with anything else. I am still prone to discuss this stage, that preserves the uniqueness of experience and reputability of survivors, regarding the challenges that this incomparability raises in terms of morality and undergoing responsibility for survivor-author. In other words, I claim that even though the survivor's status has been changed over in around four decades from historical keeper to narrator, or text's status from document to narrative, the global spread of the Holocaust memory reinstates the survivor-author for writing as persuasive as possible without failing in respect for victims' community and saviours which is the comeback of writing practice under custody. By "writing under custody" I mean that any change over time has not transformed the historical question "What happened?", and has distinguishably loaded the survivor with the communal question "How well, if not accurate, could you narrate what had happened?" However, what distinguishes this new communal question from the previous ones is the new shape given to memoir throughout the time in terms of its form, which is more literary this time. It is not that history abandons personal stories anymore or vice versa. It is instead that with writing turned into a transformative action, literature is preferred and performed more because of its possibilities and opportunities. In the light of this, from the 1990s onwards, still under the influence of authorized memory that authorizes the writer for the Holocaust's memory, one should start considering the memoirs from a literary lens that enables the survivor-author to represent both the past and past-self 'well'.

In this section, I humbly attempted to give a brief framework of Holocaust literature which has four main phases concerning survivor's changing positions in front of history and society. Even though each requires an in-depth analysis of both historical, political and social settings in their particularities, I preferred to take my starting point from the influences of these phases over survivors and their literary works.

Hence, contrary to some researchers that tried determining the characteristics of these memoirs as if they are consistent, I wanted to exemplify the impermanent features of the Holocaust literature. In other words, during this research, I tend to analyse survivors' memoirs rather like living social organisms of culture that offer a broad insight over many settings of historical and social life as well as transforming narrative styles that might acquire cultural meanings.

In light of this brief framework, in the next section, I examine how women's life writing has been produced after the Holocaust and how it has been considered regarding its content and importance. In this examination, I do not aim to make a comparison between male and female survivors. Nevertheless, I discuss women's memoirs in regard to their gendered content and I try to discover if these women-exclusive experiences have led to a women-exclusive writing strategy which was similarly aimed by some feminist circles. Even though I leave this attempt of discovering writing strategies to the second chapter through the analysis of two particular memoirs, I consider this discussion as a necessary groundwork for this further analysis by looking into the early writings and scholarship.

2.2 A Discussion on Women's Holocaust Writing

Long before the Holocaust writing has emerged and it played a crucial role for women survivors, the place and importance of women's life writing has been discussed a lot by feminists through revealing the gender binary between women and men, and the male-dominated feature of literature in the face of this binary. Perceived with their traditional roles in the domestic spheres, disempowered women's search for a voice in literature as well as in politics and economy has meant an enormous struggle against inequality and patriarchy. When it comes to the Holocaust literature, the need for struggle has increased because of the women's vulnerability as the victims of the Nazi atrocities and because of their invisibility in the so-called gender-neutral feature of the Holocaust history. Plausible to some extent, this gender-neutrality finds its justification in the unity of Nazi persecutions against the whole Jewish community regardless of gender, age, social class, etc. Moreover, many scholars insisted that considering the Holocaust from a gender-related perspective leads to a comparison among victims and a distraction from this unity. Despite that, the differences in the experiences of men and women in the concentration camps have been acknowledged and discussed widely. One of the pioneering feminist Holocaust

scholars, Joan Ringelheim (1998), argues that more Jewish women than men were deported and selected for the death in the extermination camps.⁷ For instance, being a woman arrived at a concentration camp as pregnant or with small children, so as a person who was less valuable for the workforce than men, was the equivalent of more victimization and even a death sentence. In this respect, Ringelheim claims that the victimization of Jewish women is doubled because of their Jewishness and womanhood at the same time, and their annihilation is most likely related to fertility and matrilineality in the Jewish community. On the other hand, even though it has been stated that women were treated differently than men in the Holocaust for such reasons, it is revealed in many research, like in Ronit Lentin's with the women survivors, that "women's Shoah experiences tend to be neutralized into a so-called 'human' perspective, which, on examination, turns out to be masculine" (2000). Through this examination, it is observable that the cover over the women's experiences is related to not merely the communal integrity but mostly women's negligibility in the society. This is because, as stated above as a double-edged struggle, women's life writing practice after the Holocaust bears the meaning of not only bringing the gender-related atrocities into the light but also the claim of visibility and construction of identity within the culture of remembrance.

The previous section of this chapter has shown that the Holocaust literature plays a crucial role as a historical and social instrument for collective memory through keeping the historical record of the Holocaust and transferring its memory to the post-generations. Despite the changing expectations from the Holocaust memoirs throughout the time from objectivity to personality, these memoirs maintain their importance since they call the people's mind for preventing the Holocaust from happening again besides they plead the stories of all other inmates through proving the actuality of the Nazi exterminations and memorialize the fellow inmates. In other words, the importance is mostly attributed to the political dimension in these texts besides the conveyance of the Holocaust experiences. Other than that, these which has no historical or political references tend to be associated with women's writing. For instance, Marlene E. Heinemann (1989) refers to Estelle Jelinek's statement, which argues that women's autobiographies of this period refrain from making references to the political and historical events. Even though Heinemann finds Jelinek's statement inadequately qualified, she still claims that personal relationships are mostly accentuated by more women than men in the Holocaust memoirs. Despite that these observations might depend on the memoirs analysed, which means writing practice and motivation cannot be generalized through gendered compar-

⁷ Joan Ringelheim, "The Split between Gender and the Holocaust," in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. Dalia Ofer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 340-350, 345.

ison, I pay attention to each argument that corresponds to different examples of memoirs. In doing so, I also highlight the fact that Holocaust memoirs differ from each other in terms of their motivations, aims, forms and contents. Further to that, even if women's writing can be characterized with their main theme around the personal relationships, I am rather prone to consider this characteristic in terms of its opportunities for and limitations in the autobiographical genre in the historical and cultural contexts. In this sense, within the framework of this study and within the limits of my primary materials, I discuss what women's memoirs offer that is different and what changes they bring to life writing after the Holocaust.

Similar to Ringelheim's statement I mentioned above, many women-centred and gender-based approaches to the Holocaust likely present women with their traditional roles as "mothers" and "caregivers" because of the Nazi mechanism both targeting women's sexuality or rather fertility and perceiving them as "unproblematic victims" (Waxman 2007). This is not disclosed as such by only the Holocaust scholars but also presented by some of the survivors themselves. In other words, female survivors might also represent themselves with such unilateral identities that are adopted within the survivors' communities as well. From this point of view, one can argue that the memory of the Holocaust creates a sort of hegemony which determines the proper morality and community responsibility for women. For instance, the woman is expected to behave properly, should prioritize her children before her life, take care of other women and children in the camps, and develop solidarity between others. Not in the camps alone, Zoë Waxman, in her book *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History*, explores that female behaviour in the ghettos where the family systems were broken down have been exposed to and criticized by the male gaze (Hilton 2018). This is why, in writing as well, if women have different stories to tell, for example about their lack of control over hunger or any slight misbehaviour, the male-dominated post-memory would not allow these to be heard besides the history that already effaces women's point of view. Hence, any attempt to make these stories heard would hardly take its place in the Holocaust's literary canon. This argument which silences women's experiences requires the discussion of canon as well as of what makes some memoirs of women more known and even best-sellers. Besides, considering one of my research objectives, through this discussion, it is also possible to discover where women's memoirs which I analyse in the second chapter would be placed in the literature with their uncanonical features.

When one asks what the primary texts of the Holocaust canon are, there come only a few names that have gained a wide audience: Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Victor E. Frankl, Anne Frank and Art Spiegelman. As various examples and sub-genres of the Holocaust literature from diaries and memoirs to comic books, what makes

these texts canonical is their strategies to depict what is incomprehensible, in other words, their strength to embody the reality in literature. On the other hand, except Spiegelman's fictional comic book published in 1980, other texts are of historical importance for their first publications very soon after the liberation in 1946 and 1947. Further to that, not only their uniqueness as some of the first examples but also their rapid translations into English following the 1950s compared to other early texts are the key reasons for them to enter the Western world. In addition, because of their contribution to the universalization of the Holocaust memories and their wide-reaching content that could also be read out of the Holocaust context from history and literature to psychology, these texts' canonicity is beyond doubt. Yet still, as mentioned in the previous section, at least 22 Holocaust memoirs written in different languages only in the year 1946 could be found in the collections. However, only a few had gained the importance of being the pioneers. Hence, it is still a vivid question to the structure of the Holocaust literature why especially women's books' English translations have appeared almost half a century after their original publications.

On the one hand, despite the late recognition of women's writing after the Holocaust, I also question how the canon could be defined when we talk about women writers and the Holocaust. Is there a separate canon of women's Holocaust writing that differentiates itself from the male-dominated accustomed Holocaust literature? I believe that it is this male dominance in the Holocaust writing which inevitably requires the critics to bring gender-based perspective to the discussion. In other words, the contextualization of women's writing in the Holocaust framework, with the concern of not only the memory of the past but also the distinctive experiences of women, is because these experiences have for a long time been ignored and ruled out. However, contextualization has its limitations over women's writing as well as its opportunities. Even though the primary examples of women's Holocaust writing such as *None of Us Will Return* (1965) by Charlotte Delbo, *All but My Life* (1957) by Gerda Klein, *weiter leben* (1992) by Ruth Kluger, *Five Chimneys* (1947) by Olga Lengyel or *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of Survivor* (1991) by Judith Magyar Isaacson differ from each other according to their language, period of writing, genre and main issues; it is more probable to find each and every one of them not in the catalogues of "Holocaust and history" or "History and criticism" or "Holocaust, Jewish" but of "Women and the Holocaust" and "Women writers" or "Holocaust and personal narratives". In this regard, to speak for these examples, women's writings after the Holocaust tended to be reduced to their gender aspect although they vary from memoirs to hybrid-genres such as prose and poetry; are published in different languages from French and German to English; are penned by both Jews and non-Jews;

and finally, have vast issues in the centre about being a child, a political prisoner, a resister in the Holocaust as well as about racism, life under the Nazi persecutions, medical experimentations in the camps, and so on. Therefore, because the female perspective on such issues which have gender-based consequences such as sexual humiliation and violence and infertility presents specific information than a male perspective on the gendered Nazi mechanism targeting women differently, the canon of women's Holocaust writing was predominantly defined through this respect. In sum, when we talk about women's writing and the Holocaust, the certain issues that are prioritized in the scholarship, if not in the survivors' conceptions, have usually been indicated through violence and sexuality as a major theme including menstruation, amenorrhea, rape, pregnancy and childbirth; through the role of friendship among women in the camps based on traditional women's values eventuated with either nature or socialization; and through practical effects of solidarity and sisterhood as opposed to male prisoners' solitude (Goldenberg 1996). In this regard, in the given circumstances which ended up with late recognition of women's writing in the Holocaust literature because of the reluctance to highlight gender differences among the survivors instead of the wholeness of Nazi persecutions against the Jewish community and because of the exclusion of female perspective in history writing, I still see a need to discuss the political, social, cultural and linguistic consequences of the inadequate place given to women's life writing. I believe that this would be an important starting point for the examination and historicization of the particular narratives of the Holocaust in this concern.

In this examination, I benefit from the tool kit that Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) provide for reading the life narratives, but I keep its limits to the authorship of women after the Holocaust and the cultural meanings that their narratives acquire. At the time when female survivors first started to write their memories down, which was as early as 1946, the depiction of Holocaust narratorship and authorship had not a cultural but historical meaning. As I discussed in the previous section, this historical meaning has occurred because of the motivation of survivors to tell the world what had happened in the concentration and death camps without a slightest exaggeration. The lack of attention to one's self in these texts, or in other words, the absence of the survivors' qualities and roles in this particular situation was quite dominant with a self-effacing attitude. Besides, survivors were reluctant to narrate their survival because it was not appropriate for the memory of the victims. Instead, in order to fill in the gaps of the Holocaust history taken its shape relatively after the literature, extroversive observations of selections, roll calls, medical experiments, and gas chambers were the main records of these testimonies rather than inward-oriented personal experiences. It is not haphazard to call these texts as testimonial

evidence as they provided significant knowledge about the structure of the camps and the whole Nazi mechanism. However, one should differentiate this observation from experience in the sense that not all survivors were exposed to what they have observed. Contrary to this, what gives significance to the women's testimonies which are stated as involving the personal stories more is that they inevitably transfer their memories of which they were both the observer and exposed. Suppose it is revealed that all women's memoirs have the details of, for instance, sexual humiliation during the shaving in the camp as well as sexual abuse and menstruation or amenorrhea in the same manner. In that case, this is because of the aggregate nature of this gender-based mechanism that is ineluctable for either young girls and older women. In this sense, I intend to consider the authorship of women about this particular historical moment through its cultural meaning besides its historical importance which brings the unaddressed experiences of a whole group of women into the light.

The second concern of this examination, as I mentioned above, is the historicization of women's life writing regarding the political, social, cultural and linguistic consequences and forces. In order to historicize the autobiographical writing practices, Smith and Watson suggest asking what kind of narratives have been getting published and why. However, keeping track of only what gets published might have limitations to comprehend the psychological and personal consequences of this process over the female survivor-authors. In other words, even though this examination would give a sense that the structure of Holocaust literature seems to change throughout the time in regard to the women-centred and gender-based memories, the lack of consideration in what has not been included in these texts would hinder the attempt to capture the shield of silence in the remembrance culture. Beyond the silence about the Holocaust itself as a taboo subject during the war period which could not be talked about under the threat of fascism, it should be admitted that its remembrance culture afterwards has also created some silences. Although some survivors might choose not to talk about some of their experiences, in a sense, their silences are opted to some extent, because of the Holocaust's psychological influence, it is also a case that the means of narration were missing until the late 1970s for women. Unsurprisingly coincides with the second-wave feminism that encourages women to understand their personal lives and with feminist theorizing of gender in the genocides, a new understanding of women's experiences in the Holocaust have remarkably improved. However, even though this approach encourages women through the politicization of personal lives, studies done in the late 1990s which I also referred in this section reveal that the movement was inadequate by itself to offer tools for empowerment of women to tell their stories. In other words, although *écriture féminine* or women's writing, coined by Hélène Cixous in the year 1975,

asserted a necessity in literature for women to revolt from the predominantly masculine styles in writing and to establish an antithesis of these styles by centralising the women's own selves and bodies in the language and text against the patriarchal repression. In other words, women's access to a new language to bring their experiences into the light was still limited and challenging. In this regard, I think that even though *écriture féminine* could bring up a new understanding of women's visibility and rights in the social domain as well as literature, it was still limitative because of its highly theoretical frame which might have failed to create its tools and to include all women's writing in the feminist canon, as it has also been criticized by Diana Holmes (1996). This aspect of language, in the case of Holocaust women's writing which could not access the opportunities of literary theories from 1970s, might also be considered in two main concepts: the foreign language that survivors started to speak and decided to write in and the linguistic act to present the memory. From this point of view, I first argue that female survivors' access to a new language instead of their mother tongue was what helped those get easily recognized which can be indicated through the increasing numbers of memoirs written in English. However, the linguistic act is still a vivid concern for the representation. In this sense, I secondly argue that the opportunities of literature should be taken more seriously in this case that any movement or study could not provide means for the narrativization of the stunted subjects. Therefore, in the next chapter, I intend to make a feminist literary analysis of two particular memoirs written in the 1990s by female Holocaust survivors instead of their historical examination. Why a feminist literary analysis? Why another attempt to study women's life writing after the Holocaust but in consideration with not only women as survivors but also women as writers? In this study, one of my intentions is to explore in which senses women's memoirs have commonalities and differences in terms of their writing strategies. In doing so, I not only suggest that women's Holocaust life writing claims to be both Holocaust testimonies and memoirs revealing the gendered experiences within the spaces of atrocities but I also discuss the transformative power of these texts. In one respect, I consider this transformation in self-perception and agency demand of women survivors. In other respect, I move the discussion of women's life writing from women's victimization in the face of atrocities to their survivor position and political initiatives after the Holocaust. For women to gain strength in their struggle against the gender-blind historical and literary fields, I try to discover if women have created their language, if not genre, which might pioneer their descendants. For this discovery, I benefit from the discussions in this chapter about the structure of Holocaust literature and its consequences over survivors, and I analyse two memoirs written in the second half of the 1990s in the next chapter in the focus of self in representation and writing strategies.

3. ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S HOLOCAUST MEMOIRS

THROUGH *RENA'S PROMISE* AND *I HAVE LIVED A THOUSAND YEARS*

In the previous chapter which I focused on memoir as the genre of the Holocaust literature and women's life writing within this framework, I attempted to do a groundwork for the analysis of two memoirs written by women in the second half of the 1990s. In the light of information collected in the first chapter, in this chapter, I both describe what these two memoirs have to tell and how they do it, and discuss their features with the characteristics determined by the early scholarship.

Taking *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* by Livia Bitton-Jackson (1989) and *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* by Rena Kornreich-Gelissen (1995) as the primary materials of my analysis, I respectively examine two main topics as self in representation and writing strategies. In the analysis of self-representation in these memoirs, I consider the self as both dehumanized literally and figuratively, and as constructed in connection to others. In the analysis of writing strategies, I first look at how these memoirs are written in terms of their production process. Then I question if their motivation has led to discursive communities which share historical and ethical concerns both in the context of the Holocaust and its future. Through this analysis, I do not necessarily try to find similar features and patterns; on the contrary, I focus on both similarities and differences which have distinct offerings and limitations regarding female life writing. By also taking into the consideration the early studies on women's memoirs that frame these works from a one-sided aspect regarding either the authenticity of story or the informative feature of the narrative, I attempt to channelize this discussion on the women's memoirs from their content to the writing experiences of survivors as well. limited aspects, I eventually assert a claim that each memoir should be read within their uniqueness yet regarded as a significant part of a broader context of the struggle against the prejudice, racism and hatred.

Born as Elli L. Friedmann in February 1931 in Šamorín, Livia Bitton-Jackson is the youngest of her Jewish family of four. Vivacious with the joy of Sabbath mornings,

summers by the Danube River, families picnicking in the grass; being an exquisite and talented poet adorns Elli's childhood dreams. Besides, dreaming the prep school in Budapest, she impresses her teacher with her success and makes an honour scroll, another unattainable dream of her, in her compulsorily early graduation in the spring of 1944. As a very joyful and active girl, a tall one with long arms and legs and straight hair, her mother's comparison her to her brother, Bubi, is like the only thing that bothers her. "Why can't I be like him?" she asks whenever she witnesses her mother's admiration to Bubi. Later, she also confesses another disappointment in her early life that she, as a Jewish girl, gets forbidden to speak to her childhood crush Jancsi, a Christian Gentile. Bitton-Jackson's story in her memoir, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*, starts with this pre-Auschwitz life, achievements and resentments of hers. On the other hand, even in these early stories, the shadows of anti-Semitism and consequences of the German occupation distinctly manifest themselves. However, this manifestation is inevitably interpreted through not Elli's 13-year-old self but unsurprisingly Bitton-Jackson herself. For instance, only a few weeks before the Friedmann family was sent to Nagymagyar ghetto, Bitton-Jackson's word choice to interpret the orders over Jews to deliver their valuables or restrictions over their social life is striking: "The dreaded moment has come: There is no escape. We are in the hands of the SS. The process of our 'liquidation' has begun."¹ By choosing an official terminology after all for enunciating the forthcoming incidents, she not only gives her memoir an anachronical structure but also reminds the reader that no Holocaust memoir can be written independently from the post-liberation knowledge and mind. This might not attract much attention at first glance since there is already a previously mentioned contract between reader and writer on that an autobiographical text gives shape to the memories by remembering them later. However, in order to claim that the memoirist is concretely in the centre of the text, one should pay attention to the repetitive reminders showing that remembering individual 'was there living' and 'is here interpreting'. Hence, this is the best possible way to give survivor-author credit for her endeavour to process her memories. From this point on, the reader enters through the doors of Livia Bitton-Jackson's rooms of memory and authorizes her with the way she transfers what she had seen as a teenage girl in Nagymagyar ghetto and Auschwitz, from April 1944 until the liberation.

In the foreword of her memoir, Bitton-Jackson herself summarizes the scope of her book whose content revolves around these recollections of her dark memories but also calls the audience for hope and struggle in those words:

¹Livia Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* (Broadway, NY: Scholastic Inc., 1997), 25.

"My fears have returned. And yet my hope, my dream, of a world free of human cruelty and violence has not vanished. My hope is that learning about past evils will help us to avoid them in the future. My hope is that learning what horrors can result from prejudice and intolerance, we can cultivate a commitment to fight prejudice and intolerance. It is for this reason that I wrote my recollections of the horror. Only one who was there can truly tell the tale. And I was there."²

Her words warn the reader from the start that these recollections should not be only read as harrowing stories of the Holocaust enclosed with human suffering but also as a source to learn about the reasons behind the past malignancy and how to fight it with faith and hope. In this version of her memoir re-written for the third generation, she recommends young readers to build a future free of enmity and encourages them to prevent future catastrophes. However, Bitton-Jackson does not exclude herself from this process of future struggle. On the contrary, by saying "We can cultivate a commitment to fight"³, she highlights her fight that has been going on since then for a better world, this time within collective action. In other respects, this is not only a call for youth to gather together but also compensation for Bitton-Jackson herself of those times that had isolated the victim from her circle. In doing so, her memoir reserves a unique place per se in two senses: She not only tells the story of her teenager-self in the Holocaust in this book but she also seems to establish another kind of youth imagination through her lost adolescent past.

The second memoir I include in my analysis, *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz*, differentiates itself from Bitton-Jackson's book with its prologue. In the prologue, Rena Kornreich-Gelissen shares an anecdote about her tattoo that she surgically removed and introduces herself to the reader through this anecdote. Uncomfortable from the naïve questions about the numbers tattooed on her forearm in Auschwitz, Gelissen decides to remove it and justifies her decision through these words: "So I chose to have the questions excised from my arm, but not my mind – that can never be erased. [...] The tattoo [in a jar of formaldehyde] has probably faded by now, I haven't checked. I need no reminders. I know who I am. I know who I was. I was on the first Jewish transport to Auschwitz. I was number 1716."⁴ The aim of telling this story or how it should be read is not included in any part of the book, which is an essential difference among the majority of other Holocaust memoirs. Nonetheless, whether or not the survivor intends to tell her story for

²Bitton-Jackson, 11.

³Ibid.

⁴Kornreich Gelissen and Macadam, *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz*, xi.

a specific reason, the ways to read these texts are pre-determined and require a discussion. Besides this primary difference that I touch upon later, Rena Gelissen's background is quite similar to Livia Bitton-Jackson's. Gelissen, as Rena Kornreich, was born in August 1920 in Tylicz as the third daughter of four to a Polish-based Jewish-Orthodox family. Despite her father's approach toward women's place which is home, kitchen and synagogue, she studies Hebrew in *cheder*⁵ along with boys by her mother's insistence. Studying and thus teaching many languages, like Elli, Rena also impresses everyone with her diligence. Along with it, taking care of her youngest sister, Danka, is the favourite activity of her. The first part of the book including these details and more of the early life shares similarities with Bitton-Jackson's in terms of the memories of changing dynamics in social life, the prohibition of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, abrupt home raids and seizure of valuables and religious properties. On the other side, older enough to leave the family house, Rena's pre-Auschwitz story is distinct because of her escape to hide in Slovakia and her chosen surrendering to the Nazi authorities. Rena Kornreich-Gelissen, as she introduces herself in the prologue, was sent to Auschwitz on March 1942 in the first transportation deporting the Jewish women to the camp. Numbered 1716 and being the 716th women in the Auschwitz concentration camp, Rena Kornreich-Gelissen's memoir is of historical importance known as the only memoir written by among those who were in this first transportation.⁶

Argued by Myrna Goldenberg (1996) as a certain characteristic shared by both men and women's memoirs, the narrative structure in these two memoirs also begins with the belonging of survivors to their family and community as well as to the birth city. It then moves to the violence and atrocities in the ghettos and camps, and to the struggle of the subject in front of these difficulties which at the end finalises itself with a transformed and developed self. Although memory of the past is tangibly chaotic in the mind of survivor, this structure in these memoirs assigns a chronological time frame to the narrative as if it is the natural flow of memoirs. In the second section of this chapter, I discuss this chronological order in these memoirs related to either editorial or authorial choices, as opposed to how it is usually regarded as a lack of linearity in women's Holocaust memoirs. Besides, by referring to the earlier discussion in the previous chapter, even though the Holocaust memoir could be categorised as non-fiction, its novel-like features such as plot, character arc, sequence and tone should also be taken into consideration due to this typical narrative structure. In fact, these two memoirs not only present what has been experienced during

⁵IPA: /hd/; Type: noun. An elementary school for Jewish children, teaching basic Judaism and Hebrew.

⁶For the story of nearly a thousand of young and unmarried Jewish women who were in the first train to Auschwitz from Slovakia in March 1942, see Heather Dune Macadam, *999: The Extraordinary Young Women of the First Official Transport to Auschwitz* (New York, NY: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2020).

the Holocaust period in a death camp. They also reveal how the authors discover their stories in which they were the main protagonists through an enriched plot about surviving the death camp and finding a meaning in this survival through a set of personal relationships. It is diversified in the content-wise structure of Kornreich-Gelissen's and Bitton-Jackson's books that the sequence in this relatively similar plot is either given through chapter titles or adumbrated through the tone of the text. In other words, the sequence following an order from pre-Holocaust life to the Auschwitz experiences and lastly to the liberation, like three-act structure in a novel, is already parted in chapters in *Rena's Promise* such as "Tylicz", "Auschwitz-Birkenau", and "Neüstadt Glewe". On the contrary, in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, the confrontation part which focuses on the Auschwitz concentration camp or the resolution part toward the liberation is preferentially supported by either the darkened or the hope-inspiring tone. As I discuss in the second section, such literary preference embedded in the narrative is closely related to the survivor-author's individual writing practice as well as her literary competencies. I believe that reading these Holocaust memoirs through an analysis of narrative structure also considering the writing strategies besides of the analysis of narrative mostly focusing on the content is significant to close the distance between narrator and protagonist, who converge on the body of survivor-author. It is in this sense that, as I mentioned earlier, my study attempts to read these two memoirs not only through their content but also through survivors' writing experiences to discover if there is certain writing practice of female survivors of the Holocaust.

Lastly, among the experiences of ghettos, several labour camps as well as Auschwitz concentration camp, the reason why I focus only on fragments of the Auschwitz memories of Bitton-Jackson and Kornreich-Gelissen is apparent. This is not only because both experienced Auschwitz for a considerable time comparing to other places or the majority of these books cover the Auschwitz experiences. Instead, unique as a death camp enclosed with not only electric fences but also the consistent death threat, Auschwitz is a place that has always been incomprehensible for its consequences yet significant for its structure. Had several sub-camps, it is known that over six thousand inmates have been liberated from the main camp and Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁷ Considering these numbers of survivors and memoirs written, it indicates that the experiences of Auschwitz are not easily captured and require one to work through its traumas if only the reminiscent wishes. Regarding the repressed nature of the Holocaust memories because of its ambiguous psychology and hard-to-reach language for representability, Dominick LaCapra (1986) suggests con-

⁷United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Liberation of Nazi Camps," Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed July 25, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/liberation-of-nazi-camps>.

ceptualizing this act of working through from not only therapeutic but also ethical and political aspects. Accordingly, it offers possibilities for both self-questioning and argumentation. In other words, working-through allows the survivor to tackle with their repressed memories and thus to recover from the repetition of those in mind and later encourages survivor to interpret the hardship of past within the historical and cultural settings. From this point of view, hence, I am prone to read these memoirs as not only the historical narratives but also a psychical strategy for women to overcome such repetitive repressions on their self in terms of the effects of Auschwitz death camp. In this respect, I start the discussion with the analysis of self in Auschwitz and its representation.

3.1 Self-Representation in Women's Memoirs

Besides their central theme which revolves around the Holocaust experiences of women, the refrains about self as a minor theme assert themselves in the centre of both memoirs. In other words, self as a latent code substitutes the camp experiences as a semantic theme. For this reason, this analysis requires me to dwell on, surprisingly mutual, patterns of Bitton-Jackson and Kornreich-Gelissen that underlie the interpretation of their individual experiences. It is possible to classify the perception of self in two main categories: dehumanized as either non-human or specifically animal and constructed in connection to others.

In *Rena's Promise*, the rapid change in the flow of self-perception in sequential pages reveals how powerful the Nazi mechanism is on one's ontological questioning:

"I figure I am a human being, I have a right to ask." ⁸

"He doesn't see I am a human." ⁹

"It is natural to think this way - we are human beings, we assume we will all be treated humanely." ¹⁰

"They [kapos] are prisoners. We are slaves. They are human. We are

⁸Kornreich Gelissen and Macadam, 57.

⁹Ibid., 58.

¹⁰Ibid., 59.

not." ¹¹

Similarly, in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, the impact of inhumane treatment manifests itself as such:

"A criminal, or Jew, what's the difference in their intent? What's the difference in my shame? I am no longer a human being. I am singled out at will, an object." ¹²

In these sentences, it is easily observable that the individual starts to question how she is treated and demands a humane approach. However, from the very first days on in the Auschwitz, through the degrading attitudes of the Nazi guards, she doubts her being and interiorizes the very mechanism of dehumanization in the camp. Further to that, another question occurs in the mind of the individual: "If not a human being, what am I?" It is quite striking that depiction of inhumane treatment reasserts itself with animal-like metaphors and gains a comprehensive coverage in the writings of Bitton-Jackson and Kornreich-Gelissen. By illustrating the language use of the Nazi guards as well, this likening ceases to be random metaphors in both memoirists' minds.

"The epithet 'blöde Lumpen', idiotic whores, is now downgraded to 'blöde Schweine', idiotic swine. More despicable. And it is upgraded only occasionally to 'blöde Hunde', idiotic dogs. Easier to handle." ¹³

"We are like lambs being led to slaughter, following one another because we know nothing else to do." ¹⁴

"Like a team of plow-horses we are prodded." ¹⁵

"We have seen how they step on us like cockroaches." ¹⁶

¹¹Ibid. 94.

¹²Bitton-Jackson, 31.

¹³Ibid., 78.

¹⁴Kornreich Gelissen and Macadam, 63.

¹⁵Ibid., 78.

¹⁶Ibid., 110-111.

"Cattle and sheep are treated with more respect." ¹⁷

"[...] we are not as good as criminals. We are nothing in their eyes - we are merely pests to be exterminated." ¹⁸

Leigh Gilmore (1994) distinguishes poststructuralist and feminist positions in terms of the relation between "self" and "identity" in her study to theorize women's self-representation with a feminist approach. Accordingly, poststructuralist position approaches the self under the influence of language and textual construction, whereas the feminist position pays regard to the meaning of experience in the autobiographical text. However, despite this difference, Gilmore argues that reliance on experience is not implicitly ineffective over identity construction either. Other than that, forging a link between the two, both textual discourse and individual practice within the cultural setting should be taken into consideration to explore the agent in life writing. In the light of this, regarding that these sentences above were written about five decades after the liberation, not only the influences of degradation to non-human beings in the camp but also the everyday discourse in public afterwards should be considered. As an extensive discriminatory usage, the reference of "cockroach" is not unexpected, for example as in Gerhard L. Weinberg's observation (1995), "the Poles were, in German eyes, an East European species of cockroach, their state was generally referred to as [...] a country just for a season". Besides, the core of comparison between dog and swine can be found in the Jewish belief. However, the depiction of "lambs being led to slaughter" should be attentively discussed with non-European Jewish public discourse. As also a form of victim-blaming, the antipathy among Israeli Jews toward Ashkenazi Holocaust victims who were regarded as those who went to death passively finds expression in this Hebrew Bible¹⁹ based phrase. Hence, the presence of this likening in the texts of Holocaust survivors joining back in their Jewish communities highlights once more that memories are highly mediated by the public discourse (Hirsch 2008).

Discussed in the previous chapter, the hidden subject in early Holocaust writing was mostly understood in two bases through the justification of communal responsibility and shame of survival which are indeed exclusive to each other. In Giorgio Agamben's work, this shame is approached ontologically as survivor's relation to their being or non-being that hence is self-loss. In other respects, the survivor that witnesses to death, and loses all meaning in life feels guilt in survival. In order to work

¹⁷Ibid., 111.

¹⁸Ibid., 143.

¹⁹Isaiah 53:7

through this guilt, survivor-author hides their self and believes that only proving the actuality of what had happened in the memory of disappeared can fulfil the remniscent's meaning of survival. In this sense, the hidden structure of subjectivity in the text both help survivor free themselves of distress in isolation and holds the claim of objectivity to provide historical knowledge. However, others require a distinction between shame and humiliation that result in either collective or individual levels. "Humiliation individualizes", summarizes Lisa Guenther (2011), whereas shame isolates the self from its relation to others. Humiliation also dehumanizes the victim; removes all unique features and differences, and both degrades the individual to a non-human being and reduces them to replaceable objects. In a broad sense, and as it is mentioned above, this dehumanization process ranges from poor living conditions and degrading clothes to tattooed numbers and language used by the Nazi guards. Nonetheless, considering the bases mentioned above to justify the absence of subjectivity in early writing, how can one interpret these later examples giving a lot more room to the depictions of humiliation through self-representation? Does that stand for the demand of agency? If dehumanization leads to self-loss and its depiction in writing constitutes an agency demand, what do autobiographical content and writing offer for women? In its narrowest sociological meaning, "agency" reflects the human capacity and will to make decisions and to practice autonomous actions. The agent, as a powerful subject, is not only able to but also entitled to implement these decisions through various strategies to reach their goals and objectives best. However, in the context of the Holocaust, the subject is stuck in the dichotomy between victim and agency because of the humiliation and destruction of the body in a literal sense and identity in a figurative sense. What would challenge this dichotomy could be either the extension of the description of agency or the exploration of intersubjectivity between survivors' close circles within the shared experience.

Beyond the dichotomy between victim and agent that is seen more common, another contrast takes place between survivor and agent. Ruth Linden (1993) finds "Holocaust survivor" a problematic concept as much as the Holocaust itself which is, on the other hand, used to concretize the Jews' experiences under the Nazi regime. Nonetheless, in the simplest sense, "Holocaust survivor" is conceptualized as those who suffered yet remain alive after the Nazi persecution. As discussed earlier in the first chapter, survival is mostly associated with luck by the survivors themselves, whereas for some the basic skills and strategies played a crucial role to remain alive. In one respect, the significant difference between these understandings of survival opens a discussion about agency once more. Does the fortuitous survival mean that the survivor did not make an effort to change what existing, thus, did not show

agency to implement power to achieve the life back? On the other hand, can this lead us to the conclusion that those who endeavoured did not perish at all? Either way, whether it ends in death or not, it is mostly indicated that finding meaning in survival is what strengthened the survivors in the camp and encouraged them to take actions. In Victor E. Frankl's words, "Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give [prisoners] a why – an aim – for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost." (1984). I take into consideration the major survival strategy and practice of agency in both Kornreich-Gelissen and Bitton-Jackson from this regard. Indeed, in the case of *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz*, it shows itself in the title that for Gelissen, the purpose of surviving the Auschwitz was to keep her sister, Danka, alive. "I know that I must be with my sister. I know that I must make sure she lives; without her I cannot survive. I do not admit that to myself, but I know she is a part of my truth, my being,"²⁰ states Gelissen in her memoir. Moreover, she justifies the motivation behind her actions in the camp with this purpose: "I do know that the only way I can keep my promise to my sister, though, is to keep her with me all times; too much can happen in a moment. There is no debate in my mind about my duty to my sister; the oath is the driving force behind all of my actions"²¹. This connectedness of Rena to her sister Danka is interpreted by the early scholarship as a "feminine" act which is a lack in the male prisoners, and indeed, makes female survival more likely (Myrna 1998). Undoubtedly, this interpretation tends to reproduce the traditional role of woman, in comparison to man, as a caregiver. Typically discussed from this perspective, it is understandable how important connectedness and caregiving are in women's camp life. However, I am hesitant to regard this bond through innate femininity yet repeated performance within socialization and cultural practice. In fact, what else could be expected from those who came to the camp together or found their family members after arrival? In this respect, what distinguishes the survival in connectedness rather than solitary is not that women needed to stay in solidarity or to build bonds between each other to survive. It is rather that how women enact these bonds for the action against the Nazi guards or the camp circumstances by performing an agency which aims at great struggle or by constructing a self which is in relation to others as well. Like Rena Kornreich-Gelissen, Livia Bitton-Jackson also survives the camp with a family member, her mother. However, unlike Rena, who is the bigger sister, this experience for Livia, who is a teenage daughter, means a double-challenge. She always cares

²⁰Konreich Gelissen and Macadam, 99.

²¹Ibid., 175.

of her mother, especially after her mother gets paralyzed because of an accident in the barrack, and indeed, because her mother could never accommodate herself to camp conditions. Nonetheless, Bitton-Jackson does not constitute a self-heroized representation through this relationship; instead, she criticizes her youngness: "I am too young and too scared and excessively concerned about my mother because I am still a child. The grown-ups know better. I thought I had grown and matured in the camp, but I still behave like a baby"²². It is in this sense that the caregiving and protective actions of Rena and Livia do not stand in the same place. This comparison puts forth another distinctness in experience between older women and young girls in the Auschwitz. Rena had to behave courageously for her younger sister who needs the bigger sister's care, whereas Livia had to do the same due to the lack of care normally expected from her mother. As a result, either way, both Kornreich-Gelissen and Bitton-Jackson use their decision-making capacity and implement their strategies to survive, which generates agency in vulnerability and victimization, through their connectedness to others. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily extinguish the individual/separated identity, which is already loaded with gendered communal behaviour for women. Likewise, it does not require a communal identity either as their connectedness is limited to family members. All in all, either through self-effacing like in Rena or self-dramatizing like in Livia, survivors give their identity shape and their agency meaning within the networks in their self-representational life writing, which reifies the "survivor" concept in women's memoirs through intersubjectivity.

These similarities between *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* and *Rena's Promise* in terms of their latent theme around self and dominant content around intersubjectivity, namely the destructed subjects' search for meaning through their connectedness to others, bring another question to mind: Do female Holocaust survivors that share similar experiences also have a particular writing practice and strategy? This question is divided into two in itself: If there is such a thing, what does this practice offer? What are the possibilities and limitations of particular writing practice on women's life narratives after the Holocaust? If there is not, what designates the significant commonalities in the texts of women who did not read each other's memoirs? I discuss these questions through a discourse analysis of each memoir below in the light of essential features of this autobiographical genre, and relation to each memoir's standing in their discursive communities.

²²Bitton-Jackson, 124.

3.2 Strategies of Life Writing after the Holocaust

The exploration attempted, first of all, requires distinguishing the main difference between the two memoirs in terms of their writing process. In other words, as I mentioned in the beginning, survivors' positions to their texts regarding their involvement should be clarified. Among the two, *Rena's Promise* as a collaborative work of the survivor Rena Gelissen and the researcher Heather Dune Macadam calls attention to both the hardship of writing and, on the other hand, possibilities of the genre. It is mentioned in the first part of the book that Gelissen happens to meet Macadam to publish her story through a coincidental phone call. It is transferred by Macadam that Gelissen had difficulties in getting her story on paper even though she had been writing it for fifty years in her head. Italicized within the book, the details of this and this kind of conversations between them as well as Macadam's depictions of the writing process are narrated by the voice of Macadam. Fortunately, the details of interruption, silences, emotions within Gelissen's narrativization observed by Macadam give a powerful sense of how nonlinear and fragmented memory is, how difficult to keep the narrator on the topic and, most importantly, how challenging is for one to write this memory down chronologically and as structured as possible. On the one hand, Macadam's involvement in the text is beyond the role of a ghost-writer. Instead, her voice is included from time to time to summarize the narration, especially pre-Auschwitz stories, and to give historical background, such as the invasion of Poland in 1939 or expulsion of Jews from the border, which makes an essential contribution to easy follow-up of the flow of information. On the other hand, this involvement also interrupts the bond that a reader might want to build between themselves and the survivor, or in other words, makes the reader feel like an outsider of the conversation between survivor and writer. Nonetheless, as the presence of Rena Gelissen, or say, her voice in "narrating I" is not drowned in the majority of the memoir, I am somewhat prone to praise this collaboration that gives the survivor the opportunity of speaking of her own experience. In comparison to *Rena's Promise*, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* is an example of a more common practice among survivors which allows the survivor to become the writer of their own story. Even though these narratives are edited as the requirement of publication, and indeed Livia Bitton-Jackson already thanks to her editor Stephanie Owens Lurie and Lurie's editorial team, the presence of editor is never made felt in the narrative. Moreover, in Bitton-Jackson's memoir, the complementary historical knowledge such as appendix of chronical events is given by herself. It is no doubt that literary interests and capabilities, as well as her occupation as a professor of

history, play a crucial role in Bitton-Jackson's writing. Originally published in 1980 with the title "Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust", the re-written version of this memoir for teenagers as well as two other books about her post-Auschwitz life might be an indicator of this particular literary endeavour. In some respects, this individual practice of writing in comparison to a collaborative autobiographical text might also be discussed through political dimensions in terms of self-knowledge production. In this sense, one can argue that individual practice gives more freedom to the survivor-author. In contrast, the direction of collaborator writer leads the narrator to make concise interpretation of her self-perception in a limited and structured framework. However, in my research in consideration with writing strategies, I tend to pay regard to the transformative nature of Holocaust and its aftermath over authorship or narratorship that enables everyone willing to tell their stories whether or not individually or collaboratively, with or without literary concerns. In this sense, despite their contrast in terms of authorship which has noticeable differences yet distinctive possibilities and limitations in itself, I add one last aspect to the discussion regarding the offers of women's life writing after the Holocaust. In the following, I extend my question on writing strategy to discursive features and ask whether these women's Holocaust memoirs have distinctness in literature and society, mainly through their discourse.

As I mentioned in the "Introduction" section of my thesis, through this research, I attempt not only to describe what is written, how and by whom but also to explore the discursive opportunities of these memoirs within their social context. In a broader sense, throughout this thesis, I have an approach that none of the Holocaust memoirs can be read without considering the historical period and cultural context that have remarkable impacts on survivors' memory. I discuss this impact not from a perspective that withholds the survivor from their agency and self-identity but from a communicative or reciprocal one. In other words, and basically, Holocaust memoirs are both affected by culture and do affect the culture at a social level. Further to that, beyond the understanding of "collective memory" coined by Maurice Halbwachs as a function of the social life which offers that memory is dependent on socialization and communication, I consider the act of writing memoirs as a practice within the "cultural memory" that enables memory to be transferred and transmitted among the members of society or between generations (Assmann 2008). Therefore, I attempt to both comprehend the context that generates the literary discourse in these memoirs and explore their impacts in the community. For this exploration, I look at the motivations of Bitton-Jackson and Kornreich-Gelissen in their memoirs and what comes after these books, and I conclude with the exploration of 'discursive communities' which these books might wish to organize.

The reason why I chose the memoirs taken their final shape in the second half of the 1990s is mostly related to both a generally increasing interest in Holocaust history and involvement of new subjects in its research such as gender studies in these years. Typically explained with the end of the Cold War and opening archives (Cesarani 2004), the interest in Holocaust has led to the publication of a great number of memoirs, media coverage through movies and documentaries as well as many initiatives for visual archives. On the other hand, the advanced struggle to centralize women's rights within the human rights movement at the beginning of 1990s benefited the scope of the gender studies and Holocaust at an interdisciplinary level. Previously regarded as an adverse impact on the holistic understanding of the Holocaust in that Jewish community was targeted, gender aspect in this field was criticized for "making Holocaust secondary to feminism" (Ringelheim 1993). However, this period's writing which is not necessarily in concern with feminism but instead with the various dimensions of Holocaust experiences inevitably provided both readers with multi-dimensional knowledge and female survivors with multifunctional practices to give voice to their experiences. In other words, the unprecedented interest of the public, hence, increased the demand in written publications and their previously hidden contents. By hidden, I do not necessarily mean an institutional censor on individual personal stories yet instead, referring back to Laub, an aversion among survivors to make their own stories heard by the public. In these respects, similar to many examples of this period, neither Bitton-Jackson nor Kornreich-Gelissen constitutes their motivation from a feminist perspective. Even the gendered experiences such as menstruation in camp conditions, gynaecological exams and sexual violence against women or heavy workload over women are represented reluctantly in these memoirs. In other respects, one can argue that it is not because women-exclusive experiences are regarded as irrelevant by even female survivors themselves. On the contrary, I instead tend to give a chance to read these memoirs as an attempt of regaining the subject position in history with and despite the gendered experiences. From this point of view, it is indisputable that both Bitton-Jackson and Kornreich-Gelissen move their experiences beyond the borders of representation of womanhood even though they put forth how to survive the Holocaust as women. Moreover, through emphasizing their struggle against "malignancy" within their texts, they provide the public with a way of life which centralizes solidarity, faith and hope. In this sense, I believe that through their rhetoric on 'not giving up', both generate a discursive community that offers a new way of life for especially groups of young people under the favour of the textual configuration they have preferred to use.

A quick look at these two different examples of Holocaust memoirs in terms of their content and writing process puts forth that textual configuration is neither a focus

nor an obstacle for women. Besides, women's memoirs maintain their importance as long as they rely on experience. Nonetheless, the way of presenting this experience within the limits of the genre was the primary concern of this research. Through the analysis in this chapter, it is showed that the presentation does not require pre-determined methods. In fact, distinctness found between Bitton-Jackson and Kornreich-Gelissen's memoirs reveals that women's memoirs might not share pre-determined characteristics that have been mentioned in the first chapter such as non-linearity, objectivity and plurality. Livia Bitton-Jackson's endeavour to adhere to chronology either through dating each chapter or through adding an appendix leaves no doubt for this. Likewise, the collaborative work of Kornreich-Gelissen and Macadam keeps the story related to the historical period either through historical knowledge or through footnotes, including follow-up researches. Besides, contrary to the observations of Lixl-Purcell to find such characteristics, neither the chronological order nor historical references are the indicator of an objectivity claim or attempt. Other than that, also characterized with their communal voice in his observation, I argue that the "explicit plural subject rather than the singular subject" in women's memoirs, at least in the case of *Rena's Promise* and *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, does not efface the subject identity yet maximizes it with connection and solidarity. As a result, a study that reads these memoirs within their uniqueness but discovers their opportunities separately would conclude that these memoirs are not limited to their gendered content per se. However, they also have the strength to organize a shared consciousness. This is because *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* takes its place among other canonical Holocaust memoirs and diaries which are benefited as practical educational tools in schools. Likewise, this is because the follow-up initiatives of *Rena's Promise*, the Promise Project and the Rena's Promise Foundation, proceed on their way to gather youth together to fight against prejudice, racism and hatred.

4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis which has a descriptive and exploratory purposes to discuss whether female life writing has acquired specific characteristics within the frameworks of the Holocaust literature and studies through the content, thematic and discourse analysis of two memoirs written by female survivors, I first discussed the changes in the content and authorship status of Holocaust survivors since 1945 to the present to understand the structure of the Holocaust literature. In this discussion, my main objective was to find out how these changes affect the relationship of survivors with their survival positions in the past as well as their responsibilities in their communities in and for the future. In the first chapter, I tried to show that the memorializing practices in society, or say the culture of remembrance in its general sense, have inevitable influences over survivors' memories either through selecting and ordering what to remember and how or mediating the discourse both within the survivors' conception and their communities. On the other hand, in order to avoid an essentialist delusion, it also should be noted that the relationship between the historical concern of public and sociological concern of survivor individual is reciprocal. This reciprocity best exemplifies itself in the Holocaust literature in the sense that both the survivors' texts and communal discourse nourish each other for organizing mutual moral and ethical concerns and consciousness. In other words, survivor individuals are not only another passive component of the ongoing victimization in the face of particular historical and cultural contexts but also the active agent of these processes through their knowledge as the carriers of the history and their personal experiences as the mediators of the story. However, this argumentation is not adequate by itself to comprise all members of survivor community, especially regarding the women's experiences. In order that women too gain this agent position in society and literature, the gender-neutral nature of Holocaust history that effaces women's point of view should also be taken into consideration.

The discussion on women's life writing in the second part of the first chapter was fundamentally developed in concern with the inadequate importance given to women and their texts in the Holocaust's writing culture. As a critique to the canonicity

of some Holocaust texts, in this section, I discussed that women's autobiographical texts after the Holocaust took a remarkably long time to be recognized in the international field because of the delay either in their translation into English or in their circulation as the supplementary representations of the struggle against the Nazi atrocities. On the other hand, even though this recognition, despite arrived late, is most likely associated with the developments in the feminist movement, namely the second-wave feminism from the 1960s onwards; and even though this movement states a milestone in the understanding of women's distinctness personal experiences, it was not sufficient solitarily to create new tools for women to express their perceptions. This is because gender and sexuality maintain their tabooed positions in the survivors' communities as well as in Holocaust history. Still, as a subject that has not been surmounted, nonetheless, acquisitions in the field of gender studies by the 1990s should not be ruled out. In particular, the shifting attitude towards women's experiences in the Holocaust from their victimization and sexual humiliation to their survival success through specific skills and strategies have an enormous influence over the female survivors to perceive their stories equally worthwhile. From this perspective, this can also be gratulated in a sense that women have begun to be supported through literature to build their self-identity in life writing through both disclosing the dehumanizing Nazi mechanism and claiming their agent positions against it with the retrieval of personification. Hence, I concluded my discussion about the importance of life writing for women after the Holocaust in the first part and I intended to explore these literary means over two memoirs written by women survivors in the second part of this thesis.

The second part in that I analysed two memoirs, namely *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* by Rena Kornreich-Gelissen and *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust* by Livia Bitton-Jackson, coincides with the second objective of my thesis which is to explore the women's writing practices as well as their strategies for self-representation. Provided me with their rich sources which constitute a collage of pre-Holocaust Jewish family organization, gradually increasing restrictions over the social life, deportation and camp experiences and Holocaust's aftermath, I benefited from the earlier discussion to comprehend the vantage points of these memoirs on women's unique struggle in the gendered structure of Auschwitz death camp. In the focus of that, these two memoirs show that in a place where forces the subjects to experience itself through restrictions, female inmates of the Auschwitz endeavoured to develop some methods and manners by using the limitations of this structure. Having been dehumanized in the face of Nazi atrocities and later discredited through the claim of the individuality of personal experiences, both the self-representation and writing practice of women in

these books are a significant indicator of survival: A dynamic which is constructed through coming together of different women with similar motivations has the power to push the limits of the authority – authority of Nazi mechanism, of patriarchal communities, and of literary canons. Furthermore, these motivations, that also constitute the practices for learning how to survive, are a significant occasion for women to get to know themselves. In sum, both Kornreich-Gelissen and Bitton-Jackson reveal very well how they were pitying themselves in the face of dehumanization at the beginning but how they built their subjectivity through their connectedness to other women in Auschwitz. Even though the influence of public discourse makes its presence felt in these representations or the early scholarship tends to perceive this portrayal with women's conventional gender roles, on the contrary, these two memoirs show the self-identity in transition. In *Rena's Promise*, this transition discloses itself in the Gelissen's position from the victim to the warrior who finds the meaning of survival concerning the survival of her sister. Likewise, in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, the shifting role between mother and daughter transforms how a teenage girl, Elli, builds her identity through the protection of their mother rather than being protected by someone older.

These findings above are deduced not only from the dominant theme around the self in the network setting but also from the way how both memoirists establish and comprehend their Auschwitz experiences around this relatedness. In this establishment, the supplementary means of memoirs of the Holocaust literature for the conjunction of historical and personal statements play a crucial role. Livia Bitton-Jackson, through the story of her teenage self in the Holocaust, intends not only to work through her traumatic memories by writing them down but also to organize a shared consciousness among young readers through providing a base for the fight against prejudice and intolerance. Similarly, Rena Kornreich-Gelissen and Heather Dune Macadam's collective work not only provides Gelissen with an opportunity to free herself from the memories of past which she had been writing in her head for decades but also encourages those who keep silence to raise their voice.

The main argument of my study was that some female survivors of the Holocaust had developed various strategies in the Holocaust period, and they continued finding new strategies about their survival in the Holocaust's aftermath through writing. In the case of the memoirs I analysed in this thesis, these strategies have power to organize discursive communities in society as well as in history and literature through maximizing the self-representation and self-knowledge production. In other words, against the challenges of exclusion of women's perspective in history and lacking knowledge production in literature, it can be deduced that Kornreich-Gelissen and Bitton-Jackson via their involvement in their texts, with or without literary

concerns, used the opportunities of the memoir's genre to keep their stories related to the historical background for regaining their subject positions after the Holocaust. However, the limits of this study do not offer that these strategies are pre-determined, rule-bound or changing over time. Even though my primary materials differ from some memoirs analysed by early scholars which directed them to conclude with straight characteristics of women's Holocaust memoirs regarding their non-linearity, objectivity and plurality, it is not possible to deduce that a new genre of literature or a new way of writing Holocaust memoirs may have emerged since the 1990s. I believe that a more comprehensive further study through the analysis of a larger number of books can be incredibly important to understand whether there is a new form of writing that might have been influenced by the developments in the field of gender studies from the 1990s onwards, thus enabling female survivors to comprehend their own identities in different ways, and remind them of the importance of their experiences especially in this period when the number of survivors alive is decreasing. Nonetheless, in my study whose one of the main concerns was the subject positions of female survivor-authors of Holocaust in life writing as not only "women as survivors" but also "women as writers", I explored writing practices of Rena Kornreich-Gelissen and Livia Bitton-Jackson through their selves in representation. By attempting not only to describe what is written, how and by whom but also to discover the discursive opportunities of these memoirs within their social context, I read these memoirs as not only the historical narratives but also a psychical strategy for women to overcome some repetitive repressions on their selves in terms of the effects of Auschwitz death camp. From this point of view, I regarded these two female survivors' life writing practice after the Holocaust not only as bearing witness to the gender-related atrocities but also as claiming visibility and construction of identity within the culture of remembrance. In a sense, I focused on the memoirs of Kornreich-Gelissen and Bitton-Jackson through their practice of agency both in the Holocaust through their connections and in literature by taking the pen in hand against what had been written before about their experiences of atrocities. Lastly, in my study with an attempt to challenge the usual and accustomed Holocaust scholarship accepting women's writing through communal responsibilities or in terms of mere literary products, I tried showing that these two memoirs' rhetoric on struggle and hope offers a new way of understanding the prejudice, hate and racism for especially groups of young people under the favour of the textual configuration they have preferred to use.

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