

# Memory as a Form of Public Sociability of Jewish Child Survivors in Postwar Thessaloniki<sup>1</sup>

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*Child survivors were isolated in Shoah literature, a fact that impacted upon their subjectivity as they felt that their experiences were not as worthy to tell as those of other survivors. Based on archival research and oral testimonies of child survivors, the article investigates the reconstruction of Jewish life in Thessaloniki and the formation of postwar identities. It explores the ways in which men and women who were children in the 1940s and 1950s experienced sociability in welfare institutions such as the Summer Camp and the Children's Center. Sociability is a key concept in analyzing memory and forgetting as conditions for the formation of subjectivities. Sociability constitutes a memory space that activates new subject formations. Oral testimonies revolve around the theme of anti-Semitism in postwar Thessaloniki that stigmatized Jewish identity and created feelings of shame and fear. Anti-Semitism constructs a biographical continuum in testimonies that connects the Shoah with their lives after the war. Thus, children's affective life is the analytical perspective through which the construction of subjectivities is investigated. As shame is analyzed in the context of anti-Semitism and of the stigmatization of Jewish identity by the Christian population, the article offers a historical investigation of the dynamic tendency of shame in producing identity.*

The article explores forms of sociability of the Jews of Thessaloniki after the war in search for understanding the ways in which child survivors re-constituted their lives after returning from concentration camps or from their hiding places.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Research for this article was conducted as part of the research project "Forms of public sociality in 20th century urban Greece: Associations, networks of social intervention and collective subjectivities" (Co-ordinator: Efi Avdela, University of Crete) under "Thalis: 10.74.11.03. Reinforcement of Interdisciplinary and Interinstitutional Research and Innovation" for priority axe 10, NSRF.

I would like to thank Alikí Arouh, Director of the Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, for guiding me to the material of the Archive and for facilitating the use of important material. I am also indebted to Professors Sean Field and Rhonda Hinthér for their important comments and helpful suggestions during the review process.

<sup>2</sup> The term "child survivor" came to widespread use in the psychological literature in the late 1970s. The earliest psychological studies were mostly of orphan children resettled in Israel and Western Europe after the war as these children had experienced the most extreme loss. As Susan Rubin Suleiman points out, one has to distinguish the self-identification of child survivors from the use of that label by psychologists. Self-identification as a child survivor indicates a

role of memory is central to the investigation of postwar reconstruction because regaining life after the Shoah involved various processes: forgetting, remembering, repressing what they had experienced but also managing psychologically and practically the effects of the loss of most of their relatives, the almost complete destruction of the Jewish community and Jewish life as well as facing what others had endured during the war.<sup>3</sup>

Sociability is one of the key concepts through which the formation of postwar identities will be investigated. Participation in collective activities organized by voluntary committees of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki was an important aspect of “belonging” and contributed to children’s sense of personal identity. The article considers memory and forgetting as conditions of postwar sociability and goes even further to consider memory and forgetting as forms of sociability. The conceptualization of memory as a form of sociability and the analysis of its sociable function enable the shifting of a perception of subjectivity from being perceived as sediment to traumatic memory to an understanding of memory as a dynamic process that re-signifies identity and transforms trauma into something different.<sup>4</sup> The role of emotions will be central to the understanding of postwar subjectivities as fear and shame were conditions for the transformation of identity. It is through the vehicle of emotions that memory re-signifies identity. Four situations will be identified in which memory as a form of sociability mediated by emotions played a key role in re-signifying identity: First, the places of children’s sociability such as the Children’s Centre and the Summer Camp are focal memory spaces that constitute a shared identity. Second, family history through the memory of suffering and struggle for survival becomes an incorporated history that connects generations. Third, although forgetting and erasure of differences were conditions of children’s sociability, these differences became prominent as the survivors emphasized the need to preserve the individuality of their own stories. Fourth, shame appears a constitutive factor of postwar identities; its productive role consists in the re-signification of a traumatic and vulnerable subjectivity due to anti-Semitism to a dynamic and positive one.

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“generational consciousness”. Susan Rubin Suleiman, “The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust,” *American Imago* 59, 3 (2002): 293.

<sup>3</sup> When the war broke there were between 70,000 and 80,000 Jews living in Greece of whom more than 50,000 lived in Thessaloniki. Less than 10,000 survived and the result was the loss of some of the ancient Jewish communities in Europe. Most of the Jews of Thessaloniki had been deported between 15 of March and beginning of June 1943. Almost all of them were deported to Auschwitz where 43,850 arrived. 37,386 of them were sent immediately to death. According to Danuta Czech, 54,533 arrived in Auschwitz from Greece. In 2 September 1944 only 2,569 Greek Jews were still alive in Auschwitz. Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-1944*, Greek edition trans. K. Kouremenos (Yale University Press, 1993), 285.

<sup>4</sup> For Jewish argumentative language as having a sociable function, see Deborah Schiffrin, “Jewish argument as sociability,” *Language in Society*, 13, 3 (1984), 311-35.

The exploration of post-Shoah sociability in Thessaloniki will be pursued through a combination of analysis that focuses, on the one hand, on voluntary Committees whose welfare policies and activities were directed to children and young people and, on the other hand, through a perspective “from below,” on the memory of men and women who were children during the late 1940s and 1950s. The interviewees belong to 1.5 generation, a term improvised by Suleiman to designate child survivors of the Holocaust who were “too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have been there during the Nazi persecution of Jews.”<sup>5</sup> For this purpose I use oral testimonies that I conducted with survivors and testimonies held at the USC Shoah Foundation.

Child survivors were forgotten and as a result they forgot themselves as survivors. They were not recognized as Holocaust survivors for a long time.<sup>6</sup> Accounting for the isolation of child survivors entails to account for the variations of their experiences as well as for the factors that contributed to the construction of their memories. The exploration of the factors that impacted the formation of identities reveals similarities to the experiences of other survivors as well as differences that relate to the survivors’ social context and history.<sup>7</sup> Many child survivors returned to hostile anti-Semitic environments.

### **Postwar institutions for the rehabilitation of child survivors**

By 1945 the Jewish community of Thessaloniki had shrunk to 2,000 people. Before the war a quarter of the city’s population had been Jewish and two-thirds of the country’s total Jewish population lived there. Survivors found themselves in a city deserted of Jews, without Jewish schools, without synagogues, without Jewish shops and without Jewish communal organizations. Most of them were left without a family and had to adapt themselves in a totally new environment. As one interviewee states: “It was cruel, because for my mother, when she returned

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<sup>5</sup> Suleiman, “The 1.5 Generation,” 277.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Valent, “Resilience in child survivors of the Holocaust: Toward the concept of resilience,” *The Psychoanalytic Review* 85, 4 (1998): 524; also A. Mazor, Y. Campel, E.D Enright, R. Orenstein, “Holocaust Survivors: Coping with post-traumatic memories in childhood and forty years later,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 3 (1990): 1-44. This argument has to be contextualized. Boaz Cohen’ study shows the widespread interest in the experience of child survivors in the immediate postwar period; “The Children’s Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (2007) 21, 1: 73-95.

<sup>7</sup> Svetlana Shklarov explores the ways in which silence and marginalization affected Soviet child survivors’ group identity. Svetlana Shklarov, “Identity and Resilience after Long Silence,” *Kavod* 2 (2012), <http://kavod.claimscon.org/2012/02/soviet-jewish-child-survivors/>

to Thessaloniki, the city seemed as a huge cemetery”.<sup>8</sup> Whole neighborhoods had been demolished and only one synagogue remained which had been used as a warehouse. Their homes and shops had been occupied by local collaborators or refugees. The Service for the Disposal of Jewish Property, which had been founded in May 29, 1943 for the distribution of Jewish property to collaborators under legal pretext, continued to administer it. It was replaced by a Jewish-run welfare organization that undertook the legal procedure for the return of Jewish properties in 1949. Thus, although the first legislation for the restoration of Jewish properties to their former owners passed immediately after liberation, such policy collided with the interests of wartime beneficiaries and their patrons.<sup>9</sup> By the summer of 1945 the political climate in the government had changed in favor of collaborators who formed a “Union of Trustees” to put pressure on the governor-general’s office.

The first survivors who returned from the mountains to Thessaloniki were members of the Resistance Organization (EAM). They gathered in Monastirioton synagogue in December 5, 1944 and elected a temporary committee with the purpose to reorganize communal life, regain communal property and mark the place for the cemetery that was confiscated and destroyed by the collaborative government during the occupation.<sup>10</sup> In June 1945 the Central Board of Jewish Communities (KIS) was established, which undertook the coordination of all the activities for the reconstruction of the communities including the communication with foreign Jewish organizations.

Voluntary Committees were staffed by men and women of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and acted as mediators between the Community Council and international organizations such as the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). They were established in 1946 aiming at providing recreational and educational facilities for children between 6 and 16 years old. The Committees’ activities were linked with the foundation of institutions such as the Children’s Center, the Nursery School and the Summer Camp. Immediately after the war there were 150 children in Thessaloniki while between the liberation

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<sup>8</sup> Interview of Flora Kamhi, born in Athens in 1943, in Greek. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 9 July 2014.

<sup>9</sup> After the decision of a judge in late 1945 who ordered that since the Jews had “abandoned” their properties during the war, they had no automatic right of return; the governor-general froze all transfers. Local authorities obstructed the issue of certificates that proved kinship in order to slow down the return, while by 1949 the mayor’s office had been blocking the issue of such certificates for more than a year. Mark Mazower, *Salonica: City of Ghosts* (NY: Vintage, 2006), 422-3. For the delay of the implementation of adjudicated properties, see Karina Lamsa and Iakov Shibi, *Life from the start: The migration of Greek Jews in Palestine, 1945-1948* (in Greek) (Athens: Alexandria, 2010), 140-46.

<sup>10</sup> Rena Molho, “La reconstruction de la communauté juive de Salonique après la Shoah,” E. Benbassa (ed.) *Salonique. Ville juive, ville ottomane, ville grecque* (Paris 2014), 117-38.

and the end of 1948 there were 200 children born in the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. 85% of the children were born in families of survivors of the concentration camps.

Initially, American Joint Distribution Committee's (AJDC) programs were oriented to the provision of food, clothing and housing as those who returned from concentration camps found their houses occupied by other tenants, taken by collaborators or demolished by the Germans. Central British Fund (the branch of AJDC in Britain) granted funds for improving housing conditions so that shelters were reduced. Besides, AJDC distributed loans to artisans and merchants in order to start again their business.

One of the most important figures of the foreign relief organizations was Ann Molho responsible for the economic management of AJDC. Her particular interest in the welfare of children led to a number of initiatives concerning the relief and educational needs of children and young people. The Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad (JCRA) funded by the AJDC's branch in Britain released her from the economic management of the AJDC and allocated to her the responsibility of organizing the Children's Center. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (JCTH) expressed its gratitude to the JCRA for its financial contribution and sanctioned Ann Molho's proposal for the establishment of Children's' Center. The Community adopted Ann Molho's suggestion to form a committee of "gentlemen and two ladies for the moral, religious and intellectual education of Jewish youth."<sup>11</sup> Children's Center started its activities on the 6 of November 1946.

Children's Center was created with the purpose to take away children from the "demoralizing atmosphere of their homes, to give them an opportunity to enjoy fresh air, to play freely, to eat well."<sup>12</sup> Molho describes the insecurity in which families lived as many had not been properly housed and had not found sufficient livelihood. The cost of living was rising and Jewish women and their infants lived in crowded and insanitary conditions. Men were called to fight in the bitter civil war and a large proportion was found unfit for military service suffering from tuberculosis.

During the 1950s the Committee of Children's Center was recognized as the most important institution of the community due to its undertaking the moral and intellectual education of children. Its mission was the formation of a Jewish identity through the teaching of Jewish history, Hebrew and religion. Lectures on Jewish history and other topics were organized at the Center, while the

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<sup>11</sup> "Jewish Committee from Relief Abroad," Letter of the JCTH to the JCRA, 5 November 1946. IKTH-00189-00048.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Cohen "Day Nursery Project," 20 November 1948, IKTH 00885, Youth Committee 1948-1953, JCTH.

Committee aimed at attracting the biggest possible number of children in order the new generation of the Community to be edified.<sup>13</sup>

### **Anti-Semitism as an organizing experience of testifying**

Verónica Tozzi taking as her paradigm the written testimonies of three survivors, Primo Levi, Victor Klemperer (both survivors of the Shoah) and the survivor of ESMA<sup>14</sup> Pilar Calveiro, elaborates Hayden White's argument of the figurative nature of testimonies.<sup>15</sup> Tozzi argues that these testimonies as any other testimony are figurative, which means that we have to pay attention to the tropes of testimonies in order to understand their meaning. The three survivors, according to Tozzi, have chosen to write in a scientific and austere style that draws on the "expertise" deriving from their profession, chemist, philologist, and sociologist. The austere and scientific language of the above testimonies is chosen by the witnesses due to their discomfort with the status of testimony as a secondary source waiting to be evaluated by the scientific interpretation of the historian. They claim testimony as an interpretative tool that attributes meaning to the event; in Tozzi's and White's argumentation testimony constructs at least in part the event.

In this paper testimonies derive their meaning from their contribution to self-awareness and understanding of the subject's position in the society she lives in. The meaning of memory lies not back in the past but in its interpretation. Thus, the interviewees' testimonies will not be treated as secondary sources waiting for interpretation but as providing the historian with the tools and metaphors that have structured individual lives.

Recently, scholarly work on hidden children started to re-evaluate the notion of traumatic as a general category that applies indiscriminately to all survivors. As Nicholas Stargardt argued, an excessive emphasis on "innocent suffering" has rendered child survivors as objects rather than subjects of history. Children lived the war in a network of social relationships. "Children established their own chronologies of the war through key events; the moment when their war became real."<sup>16</sup>

Anti-Semitism rises in testimonies as a rupture and as an organizing principle around which their lives after the war revolved. Anti-Semitism

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<sup>13</sup> 21 November 1954, IKTH 02659, Minutes of the School Committee, First Book, JCTH.

<sup>14</sup> The Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada housed one of the worst concentration camps during the last Argentine military dictatorship.

<sup>15</sup> Verónica Tozzi, "The Epistemic and Moral Role of Testimony," *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 1-17.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 10.

constructs a biographical continuum in testimonies that connects the Shoah with their lives after the war. The interviewees remember that the feeling that their lives were at risk because they were Jews erupted in the most violent and abrupt way. Ariella Asser points out that hidden children grew up almost overnight. They abruptly started to interpret the meaning behind words, read looks and sense danger.<sup>17</sup> Suleiman, based also on the research of Kestenberg and Brenner, considers premature aging - having to act as an adult while still a child - as a form of trauma specific to this generation of children.<sup>18</sup> As children they repressed fear because their social role did not allow them to express their feelings conforming to the norms of the upbringing of children in pre-war Greece.<sup>19</sup> But most important, children's physical, emotional, social and moral capacities made their survival possible. Notwithstanding children's vulnerabilities, Valent assesses their capacity for resilience, re-evaluating at the same time the notion of resilience. He argues that child survivors of the Holocaust were able to do extraordinary things because of their "ability to arrange their psyches as seemed desired. Although they experienced dread, desolation panic, grief despair, anger and guilt akin to adults, like adults they could also freeze, numb, and make the emotions and their contexts unreal."<sup>20</sup>

On April 6, 1941 German troops attacked Greece. Thessaloniki and its region remained under the control of the German army, while the Peloponnese, central Greece and most of the islands were assigned to the Italians. Northern Greece was controlled by Bulgarian forces. In July 8, 1942 all male Jews between eighteen and forty-five were ordered by the local Wehrmacht commander in Thessaloniki to present themselves for registration in Plateia Eleftherias. On July 11, nine thousand men underwent tortures under the heat before putting their names down in order to be sent to forced labour for German technical companies.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ariella Asser, "Children of War face the 'Trauma of Reality': A psychoanalytical approach," in *Young People in the Maelstrom of Occupied Greece: The Persecution and Holocaust of the Jewish People, 1943-1944*, ed. Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (Athens: Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2009), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Suleiman, "The 1.5 Generation," 277.

<sup>19</sup> "We were ashamed to say that we are hungry. We were afraid to say, mother, I am hungry. We had to be useful and offer something, not to make demands." Interview of Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel, born in 1936 in Thessaloniki, in Greek. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 14 March 2014. "I can tell you that I did not ask my mother what happened to Alberto, my cousin whom I loved dearly; or where is aunt. I did not talk to my mother. She was very austere. Until she died, she was very austere. Very cold." Interview of Flora Michael, born in 1935 in Thessaloniki, in Greek. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 8 May 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Valent, "Resilience in child survivors of the Holocaust," 521.

<sup>21</sup> During the assembly Jews who arrived late were beaten, and bulldogs were sent to attack those who dared to sit, smoke, or cover their heads. Rena Molho, "Problems of Incorporating the

The decision to implement the Final Solution in Greece was taken in January 1943 when Adolf Eichmann sent his deputy Rolf Günther from the Main Reich Security Office to Thessaloniki and a few days later Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner accompanied by about one hundred German police. The operation had to be completed in six to eight weeks.<sup>22</sup> The racial legislation was implemented in February. Thessaloniki's Jews over the age of five had to wear the yellow star, dwell in a ghetto, and their shops and homes had to be marked.

Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel remembers her father, who perished in a concentration camp, returning from the round up of Jews at Plateia Eleftherias as the beginning of the catastrophe.<sup>23</sup> The family went hiding in Athens living a terrifying underground existence but her father was betrayed and caught. A life of fear would become the norm:

I remember that I was afraid. I articulated that later. In Athens my uncle named Hasdai took me to a coffee shop. I was wearing a knitted dress with a ribbon; my mother had knitted it. I was afraid for being Jewish and I took a red pencil, I wet it on my lips and I made a huge cross to my light blue dress. My mother scolded me of course. I wanted to become Christian because I realized that it was a crime to be a Jew. I had lost my little cousins, I understood the sign, to be a Jew it was a very bad thing for me.<sup>24</sup>

From the point of view of the present, anti-Semitism becomes the binding force that shaped their social relationships with the Christian population. "We were discriminated and we fought against it. I give great importance to this. I mean initially anti-Semitism during the war and later after the war."<sup>25</sup>

Alexandros Simha was born in Kavala in 1937. His father was director in a tobacco company. They moved to Athens when he was three years old. "Feelings of guilt started to grow inside me. I felt that I belonged to an inferior class of people."<sup>26</sup>

While recounting the events during the war, the narrative jumps to post-war childhood.

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Holocaust into the Greek Collective Memory: The Case-Study of Thessaloniki," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 40 (2013): 304.

<sup>22</sup> Mazower, *Salonica*, 397-8.

<sup>23</sup> Interview of Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel, born in 1936 in Thessaloniki, in Greek. USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, interview code 47867.

<sup>24</sup> Interview of Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive.

<sup>25</sup> Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel, Interview to Pothiti Hantzaroula, 14 March 2014.

<sup>26</sup> "Alexandros Simha", *Hidden Children in Occupied Greece: An exhibition of the Jewish Museum of Greece, September 29, 2003- February 28, 2005* (Athens: Jewish Museum of Greece, 2007), 24.

Unfortunately I remember doing the sign of the cross. Because I was so frightened after what I had suffered after the occupation in primary school that I made the sign of the cross and went to Sunday School. I did everything because I was frightened and terrified.<sup>27</sup>

Shame about Jewish identity pervaded postwar childhoods. Children concealed that they were Jewish as they were ashamed about it. The stigmatization of Jewish identity and the categorization of Jews as inferior were internalized as shameful possessions by children. The content of anti-Semitism in postwar Thessaloniki was a mixture of religious mythology about sacrificial ceremonies, social mythology about the Jewish plutocracy and economic interests due to the appropriation of Jewish property.<sup>28</sup> Jewish property was confiscated by the Germans and had rewarded local collaborators. The Service for the Disposal of Jewish Property (YDIP) was set up by Governor General of Macedonia, Vassilis Simonides, for the administration of Jewish property. Pro-German armed gangs entered shops and made their new proprietors to sell off whatever was there. Neighbors also looted Jewish property and emptied the houses and shops of Jews who were transferred to the ghettos and later to concentration camps.<sup>29</sup>

Rosina Asser Pardo born in Thessaloniki in 1933 was hidden with her parents at the center of Thessaloniki in the house of a doctor, friend of the family, for eighteen months. Almost no Jews remained in Thessaloniki after the deportations ended in August 1943. An unknown number of children were adopted and up to one hundred were hiding with friends. Those left lived under the extreme fear of being found as searches for hidden Jews continued until liberation.

*Interviewer. How did you feel about your Jewish identity when you were hiding?*

Yes. Even before hiding, I had started to feel ashamed for being Jewish. I was ashamed because I was wearing this yellow star. I was angry because I could not get into the tram and I had to go to school by foot. And then I started to be afraid. In this notebook I used to keep I wrote about the events there, I talk about Jewish identity, I say that for us Israelites the

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<sup>27</sup> Interview of Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive.

<sup>28</sup> Rikoyla Samouel refers to the age-old accusations of blood sacrifice and of matzoth containing Christian blood brought by her classmates against her.

<sup>29</sup> Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, 274-78; Molho, "Problems of Incorporating the Holocaust into the Greek Collective Memory," 311-14. "When legislation passed, it talked of 'caretakers' and 'trustees,' as if to imply that the arrangement was provisional and that the caretakers themselves had no claims to ownership. The real owners were referred to as 'having settled abroad'." Mazower, *Salonica*, 415.

troubles have started. I was afraid and ashamed and I can tell you that even after our liberation I never proclaimed that I was Jewish.<sup>30</sup>

### **Memory as a form of sociability and the formation of a positive identity**

As has already been noted, shame was an emotion that pervaded the interviewees' subjectivity during and after the war. Shame was a constitutive factor of their subjectivity. For more than forty years, guilt and shame have played a key role in analyzing the experience of inmates in the concentration camp. Primo Levi in his chapter "Shame" acknowledges shame as the dominant sentiment of survivors and feelings of guilt as an aspect of survivor experience.<sup>31</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points to the dynamic tendency of shame in shaping identity and the performative dimension of the experience of shame.<sup>32</sup> Giorgio Agamben places shame at the centre of his analysis of the experience of inmates in the concentration camp. Agamben, by referring to Auschwitz as an event that returns eternally, makes shame central to the historical transmission of the past. Shame is the hidden structure of all subjectivity and consciousness, which has the meaning of being subjected and being sovereign, of subject's witnessing its own desubjectification.<sup>33</sup> Anti-Semitism stigmatized Jewish identity and created feelings of shame to the interviewees. The process of the transformation of a stigmatized category to a positive identification raises the issue of writing the history of difference from the point of view of memory and trauma. Judith Butler argues that identity is constituted through injury when the name by which one is called is a social category and an injurious interpellation. Yet, such an identity will not necessarily remain forever rooted in its injury, but the possibilities of resignification will rework and unsettle that passionate attachment to subjection without which subject-formation – and reformation – cannot succeed.<sup>34</sup> In a similar way, Alfred Garwood has viewed survivor guilt as a form of self-empowerment intensifying an active stance of the victim towards her own history.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interview of Rosina Pardo (Asser), born in 1933 in Thessaloniki, in Greek. USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, interview code 44631.

<sup>31</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. R. Rosenthal (New York: Vintage, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault," in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 246.

<sup>35</sup> Alfred Garwood, "The Holocaust and the Power of Powerlessness: Survivor Guilt an Unhealed Wound," *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 13, 2 (1996): 243-258. Garwood's argument is based on H. Klein's interpretation of guilt as maintaining "a link to Holocaust survivors' past and those

The dynamic process of turning against the norm that subordinated the subject and transforming stigma into a positive identification can be illustrated in the following situations in which sociability marks the memory space that activates new subject formations. Rikoyla Samouel recounts how watching the room of the Children's Center full of people inverted her image of a vanished Jewish life in Thessaloniki. She remembers the scene and shows me the picture of the assembly in 1947 as bearing a political meaning. The apprehension of people gave her a sense of political power that overturned the prevailing representation of the community as frail.<sup>36</sup> The image of a mass of Jewish people broke an "absolutely sanctioned public silence" on questions of difference and presence and revealed "something that existed but that had been suppressed".<sup>37</sup> Seeing enabled her to comprehend the relationship between her identity and politics: "the first direct sense of political power comes from the apprehension of massed bodies."<sup>38</sup> The point of Samouel's description is to document the survival of a community, the realization of a mass of people that existed and reversed the notion of a vanishing Jewish Thessaloniki. Furthermore, the vision of the people at the Children's Center brought about a sense of belonging, opened new possibilities for a positive identification and recognition of her identity. It marked a coming to consciousness of her.

The second situation concerns memory as a political movement and as a duty in order to render historical what had hitherto been hidden from history. Memory as a form of sociability concerns the insertion of family history into the history of the subject. The transmission of family history to subsequent generations is a form of healing for the loss of the beloved parents and kinship. Memory transforms the subject into an incorporated history and renders the self a living bearer of the past. Samouel reads her grandson's speech for the Bar Mitzvah who incorporated the story of great grandfathers and great grandmothers as an integral part of his life trajectory and subjectivity. The self bears the history of the past and memory serves to acknowledge the contribution of previous generations to the becoming of an adult. Child survivors did not have an adult understanding of what was happening to them. When their children started to pose questions to them about their experience of the Holocaust, they began to read books in order to understand what they had gone through, from their deportation to Bergen-Belsen to the death marches and liberation. Flora Mihael was born in 1935 in Thessaloniki. She and her family were among the few hundred Jews with

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they lost, thereby serving a healthy adaptive purpose in maintaining a sense of belonging to their lost family and to the Jewish people." Garwood, "The Holocaust and the Power of Powerlessness," 24.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* (1991): 774.

<sup>37</sup> Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 775.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, "The Evidence of Experience."

Spanish papers who together with the communal leaders made up the last transport. They were sent from Thessaloniki to Bergen-Belsen.

I didn't know anything. I did not understand. They didn't tell me anything. I am sure that my parents didn't know. After years we started with my husband [a hidden child] to read. We watch movies but mostly we read books. We wanted to tell our children and we started reading. Now my sons are informed about everything Especially Ari asked a lot of questions.<sup>39</sup>

The identity of the survivor did not rise automatically from the experience of deportation or hiding. Self-identification as a survivor was a process in which memory reworked the personal experience in the light of an external knowledge that connected the history of the self with the history of other survivors. The individual histories acquired their power of producing subjectivity in the process of narrating the history of the self both as the history of survivors and as family history. At the same time, as Marianne Hirsch argues, postmemorial work reactivates and reembodies more distant and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with individual and familial forms of mediation.<sup>40</sup>

We started with my husband to read and narrate our stories. First of all *I wanted to learn who I am* in order to explain to my children. My husband didn't quite know how they were saved. He used to tell me his story and our children listened.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of memory in creating a subjectivity and a genealogy of belonging through suffering that binds generations together can be assessed when the subject is been denied by the future generations the duty of memory. Sabetai (Mimis) Bezas was born in Thessaloniki in 1931. His parents and sister escaped deportation and tried to hide in Athens. Their escape was an odyssey as, after their first failed attempt to go to Athens, they were aided by the communist-oriented resistance organization National Liberation Front (EAM) and arrived in Athens through Larissa. From Athens, they went to Albania in order to unite with his father's brother. After staying in Dures and then in Tirana, they escaped to Italy and from Italy they arrived in Egypt where they stayed until the end of the war.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview of Flora Mihael. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 8 May 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, 1 (2008): 111.

<sup>41</sup> Interview of Flora Mihael. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 8 May 2014.

I have a grievance, a very bad repressed feeling: my children and grandchildren never asked me ‘what did you do during the war, dad? How did you survive?’

*Did you want to tell them?*

Yes. After we were saved, after the burden of all this anxiety that I had within me, my only desire was to transmit to my children, to awaken in them the knowledge of the kind of world they live in and become aware of what can happen to them so that they will learn how to guard. And I have three bookshelves with books on these issues.<sup>42</sup>

### **Forgetting as a form of sociability: The elimination of difference**

Forgetting became also a means to build an identity and a sense of belonging to the community immediately after the war. Sociability among children who survived the war was based on forgetting the experiences of the war as well as suppressing the differences of their experiences.<sup>43</sup> Their identity as Jews was based on forgetting their persecution. This attitude seems to diverge from the experiences of survivors who were adult during the war. The public sphere was fragmented; immediately after the war the political representation of the Council as well as the activities of various organizations for the welfare of the community became arenas of dispute. The newspaper *Israilitikon Vima* during the electoral campaign for the Central Board of Jewish Communities called for the support of the candidates who were “hostages” and “resistance fighters” and for rejecting those “who had been involved in the Jewish Council during the persecution.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the newspaper castigated the Zionist federation and its activities in various areas of Greece.<sup>45</sup> Although the Jewish community maintained a low profile in the city of Thessaloniki that went hand in hand with a general silence about the Jewish presence in Thessaloniki, there were dividing lines within the community. Based on oral testimonies, Bea Lewkowicz’s research shows that the experience of the deportees returning from the concentration camps was very different from that of the Jews who had been in the mountains fighting in the resistance or in hiding. Both partisans and camp survivors formed two distinct

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<sup>42</sup> Interview of Sabetai (Mimis) Bezas, born in 1931 in Thessaloniki, in Greek. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 9 April 2014.

<sup>43</sup> See also Asser, “Children of War face the ‘Trauma of Reality’: A psychoanalytical approach,” 30-37.

<sup>44</sup> “Something timely: The ‘small numbers,’” *Israilitikon Vima* 16 (March 15, 1946). The newspaper advocated its readers to vote “with fanaticism the Hostages in the elections of the Community.” By “small numbers” the article refers to the Jews who had been deported to Auschwitz. The members of the Jewish Council had been deported in the last transport to Bergen-Belsen.

<sup>45</sup> “Stop the harassing of the communities,” *Israilitikon Vima* 15 (March 8, 1946).

groups in postwar Thessaloniki that were characterized by mutual mistrust.<sup>46</sup> They also formed their own political parties in the elections of the community that took place in the early 1950s.

For child survivors forgetting meant also that individual differences, class and social differences had to be erased. The different stories of persecution were suppressed and rendered irrelevant to children's relationship with each other. Thus, as memory became a form of sociability during the 1990s, the differences of the experiences were brought at the forefront. It was in this period of time during which Holocaust discourse developed as a more public genre that class differences were stressed; the individual or family story was valued for its uniqueness; the experiences during the war became important in their variety. The fate of the majority who perished in the concentration camps was distinguished from the experience of the Spanish citizens or the members of the Council who were deported to Bergen-Belsen.<sup>47</sup> For Spanish citizens who were in Bergen-Belsen, their camp was considered "much harsher" than the camp of the deportees from the community council. The traitors were given a prominent place in narration and the stories of hiding gained legitimacy.<sup>48</sup>

The suppression of difference and memory of the war was valued in the interviewees' testimonies. Children's Center became a refuge for children and an escape from the inimical environment that surrounded the Jews of Thessaloniki after the war. All the interviewees refer to the social unity that was enjoyed among them in the Children's Center and the summer camp. They reconstruct the

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<sup>46</sup> Bea Lewkowicz, "'After the War We Were All Together': Jewish Memories of Postwar Thessaloniki," in *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960*, ed. Mark Mazower (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2000), 256.

<sup>47</sup> The role of the "Jewish Councils" (Juderäte) has only recently started to be explored in historiography. Among Salonican Jews it is widely held that the Jewish Council and in particular the community's president, Rabbi Tzevi Koretz, were responsible for appeasing the Jews of Thessaloniki about their deportation and for not advocating their hiding. Minna Rozen explains that the way Koretz was portrayed in Jewish historical memory should be attributed to survivors' need for a scapegoat in order to deal with trauma, guilt and shame. Survivors' frustration at their inability to take revenge on the Germans was resolved by choosing Koretz as a scapegoat. "Jews and Greeks Remember their Past: The Political Career of Tzevi Koretz (1933-1943)," *Jewish Social Studies* 12, 1 (2005): 111-166. It is only very recently that historian Rika Benveniste investigated the Council's decisions and policies. Benveniste argues that in the restricted framework of "choiceless choices" and of their limited knowledge about the fate of Jews, most of its members took measures to alleviate the community from forced labor and to cancel the deportation. Furthermore, their fate would be death as they were not excluded from the "Final Solution." I am grateful to Rika Benveniste for letting me use the unpublished manuscript. *Survivors: Deportation, Resistance and Return of the Jews of Salonica in the 1940s* (in Greek) (Athens: Polis, forthcoming).

<sup>48</sup> Lewkowicz also found in her interviews that the issue of traitors was not widely discussed by her interviewees in the early 1990s when she conducted the interviews with survivors. Lewkowicz, "'After the War We Were All Together,'" 264.

relationship between them in terms of kinship and in order to stress the strong bonds that tied them together they extend these ties to the present. The children of the Center and summer camp still keep contact and it was also through these ties that I became acquainted to the interviewees.<sup>49</sup>

The continuity of fear and shame as effects of anti-Semitism on children's subjectivity broke because of the indefatigable and persistent efforts of the members of the Community who participated in the voluntary Committees. Women like Zermain Koen who returned from Auschwitz and found the courage to take an active part in the reconstruction of the community felt that it was the Community who helped her.

*Did you help to the reconstruction of the community?*

They helped me.

*Was there an organization?*

I thing there was one. Her name was Miss Molho and we worked a lot together with Miss Molho. When Miss Molho came she wanted to create a camp and I said, I will help you. I learnt to cook well for many people [in the Displaced Persons camp of Teresienstadt Cohen undertook the cooking for the Displaced Persons]. And together with Miss Molho we created the camp. We gathered all the children, then we created the Children's Center and we brought all the children together.<sup>50</sup>

Working with the community and, especially, children seems to have offered recourse from grief, which was the persistent emotion of their lives after returning to Thessaloniki. At the same time they were rebuilding the Jewish community and identity. For children who were the beneficiaries of these initiatives their participation had a double meaning. First, it imbued a sense of belonging to the community. As a consequence strengthening the sense of belonging contributed to fighting against prejudice and shame.

Secondly, participating in the Children's Center and the camp was a way to regain childhood and an escape from grief. The love and care with which children were addressed by those who worked at the Center offered recuperation for the perceived indifference and coldness of parents.

As I already told you, Miss Molho who came dressed in military form was a volunteer. She embraced us. She gave to my sister Flora her first toy, I

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<sup>49</sup> Pavlina (Palomba) Matathia and Rina Koen (born in 1937 in Thessaloniki) together with Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel were interviewed in 19 February 2014. I am deeply indebted to them for introducing me to child survivors and for their trust.

<sup>50</sup> Interview of Zermain Koen, born in 1910 in Thessaloniki, in Greek. USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, interview code 48674.

cry when I think of that because she hadn't seen a toy; it was a red bear or rabbit. What a joy... finally a toy in the house. As I said in the interview [at the USC Shoah Foundation] I hadn't play with toys.

### **Shame as a dynamic factor of producing subjectivity**

The feelings of betrayal and shock were prevalent to all the Jews who came back to Thessaloniki in 1945. As Lewkowicz points out, they not only returned to a “ghost city,” an image used by survivors to describe a city empty of Jews and Judaism, but they also returned to a city in which their houses and shops were taken by Orthodox Greeks who did not want to return them to their owners.<sup>51</sup> All the interviewees had shocking stories of cruelty to report about the reaction of occupiers in their failed attempts to convince them to evacuate their houses or return stolen property or property given to friends to keep.

Children lived in an atmosphere of fear after liberation. Lacking the cognitive means to understand their persecution and feeling ashamed about their Jewishness, they did not allow their mothers to talk ladino in public. Their attempts to cope psychologically by focusing on the future and on current issues such as academic performance were often curtailed by the solemn atmosphere of mourning. For children in hiding who were born during the war, such as Flora Kamhi, the terrifying stories told by camp survivors in private took extraordinary dimensions in their childhood imagination. Hirsch has used the term “postmemory” to describe the structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Postmemory is the relationship that the generation of those who witnessed cultural trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before. These experiences are “remembered” by means of stories, images and behaviors. Thus, postmemory’s connection to the past is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. The secondary relationship with times and places that Flora Kamhi had never experienced and whose power overshadows her own memory illuminates the way in which history passes down to us.<sup>53</sup> Her house was a nest for the women who had returned from concentration camps and exchanged their experiences. As she was too young to go to school, she listened to these stories, which were her first reminiscences through which she tried to make sense of the world.

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<sup>51</sup> Lewkowicz, ““After the War We Were All Together,”” 255.

<sup>52</sup> Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” 106.

<sup>53</sup> As Eva Hoffman pointed out, for the second generation certain questions arise from the Shoah with a sense of living connection; Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), xv.

This history [of the Shoah] imprinted on me. I couldn't understand. My little mind could not understand what it meant to be Jew. I grew up in a Jewish house and I wondered if this was what it meant to be a Jew: your life to be in danger and to enclose you at their will and kill you. Insecurity inhabited me but also obduracy. And this was positive because you react through pain and you say "I will show you;" because there was anti-Semitism when I was a child in Thessaloniki.

Child survivors indicated that creativity can emerge from resourcefulness developed in traumatic situations and that meaning can be made even of the biggest traumas.<sup>54</sup> For children school provided the opportunity to show their skills and to distinguish among their peers even though they were confronted by anti-Semitic attitudes from classmates and teachers. Flora Kamhi identifies three stages in the effects of the Shoah on Jews: shame that came after the deprivation of self-esteem and led to silence, then anger and obduracy. Anger became the motivating force that moved things forward.

I was one of the first children who went to school in Makedonika Ekpaideftiria. I started to feel that there is light. This didn't have to do with the economic situation. We were few children and teachers looked after us. I started to feel that life has other things than mourning and misery.<sup>55</sup>

The contribution of shame to the reworking of identity and self recognition reveals not only the transformative dimension of emotions but illuminates the process of subject formation as a dynamic enterprise in which the subject is present in its own making and produces subjectivity. Shame transfigured the attribution of stigma into a sign of distinction and contributed to the building of a positive identity. Samouel, who was bullied by her classmates at school, became the most distinguished student. Shame was transformed into a struggle for recognition and sharpened the child's self-awareness.

Did you see all these awards? I want them to be kept at some place, not to be perished. They are the proof of my struggle in life. I was the best student at school and the schoolmaster, Mr. Protokanistras, said: 'Religion is not important. Look at her.' I was given the award of the best student. [...] And when they called me to get the award, I was very small, and they

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<sup>54</sup> Valent, "Resilience in child survivors of the Holocaust," 531-532.

<sup>55</sup> Interview of Flora Kamhi, born in Athens in 1943, in Greek. Interviewed by Pothiti Hantzaroula, 9 July 2014.

cheered. I mean that recognition started for me. It started at the primary school. Mr. Bakas showed my notes to the whole school as exemplary.

## Conclusion

Memory, silence and repression in this article were treated as forms of sociability contributing to the construction of new identities. Children's sociability after the war was based on the repression of differences and their identity as Jews required the erasure of class distinctions as well as the suppression of differences in their experiences during the war. Although the survivors from concentration camps recounted their experiences in private sociability, public memory and sociability suppressed these memories. Rikoyla (Ketty) Samouel and her siblings while reading their class work under the bed as there was no space in their one-room apartment they listened to the terrifying narrations of her mother's friends who had returned from Auschwitz and visited them. Their house gave them a sense of family so they often visited and even stayed with them. As Lewkowitz argues, the history of the Jews has not formed a part of the public memory of the city of Thessaloniki. There are no "Jewish sites" that are part of the urban consciousness of its inhabitants and there is hardly any mention of the Jews or the fate of the community during the Second World War in Greek guidebooks or schoolbooks.<sup>56</sup> The multicultural past of the city is not acknowledged and the longstanding and extensive Jewish contribution to the city had until recently been forgotten and erased from its public face.<sup>57</sup> During the 1990s when the era of testimony swept also Greece and survivors felt not only safer but also that they bore a recognized and respected identity as compared to the recent past, differences started to mark testimonies. The eruption of testimonies can be attributed to the fact that there was a more receptive audience for their experiences but it was mainly the international boom of testimonies that created the context and environment for Greek Jews to testify and be heard.

Anti-Semitism in Greece remains prevalent and has shaped survivors' testimonies and identities.<sup>58</sup> Anti-Semitism and the stigmatization of Jews by the

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<sup>56</sup> Lewkowitz, "'After the War We Were All Together,'" 250. As Mark Mazower points out, 70 years after the liberation it is still a sad experience for pedestrians to step on stones from the damaged cemetery, destroyed in November 1942, or see them in walls. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, 276.

<sup>57</sup> The recent study of Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer on Czernowitz is illuminative of a similar process that shows how fraught the politics of memory are; *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> A report issued by researchers at Tel Aviv University in 2013 who conducted research on racist and anti-Semitic attitudes shows that Greece holds the highest percentage among European countries in anti-Semitism. 69 percent of the adult population expressed anti-Semitic views. "Presentation of the annual report on anti-Semitism," KIS,

Christian population are key factors in the construction of their identity. The dynamic role of shame in the formation of identity is an important analytical framework to understand the participation of the subject in the making of her/his subjectivity in traumatic situations. Shame about bearing a stigmatized identity sharpened children's self-awareness and was transformed into a force for positive distinction. Becoming distinguished as pupils enhanced their self-esteem and public recognition of their traits returned as a positive feeling about their Jewishness.

As mourning had been postponed and repressed, memory as a form of sociability acquired a new meaning and function. Individual memory was valued and connected generations. As family history bound generations together, memory made allowance to mourning and Jewish identity became the incorporated history of the self.

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