

# The 'Other' Voice in Survivor Narratives: A Gender-Based Approach to the Holocaust\*

ROSARIO ARIAS

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* (1947), Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* (1946), and Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960) are often referred to, and quoted as representatives of survivor narratives, and they attracted immediate critical attention when they came out. Undoubtedly, Levi's work greatly contributed to establish the corpus now considered canonical in Holocaust studies, following Stefania Lucamante: "Levi's intellectual legacy is such that, without his work, it would be difficult to study today's writings on the Holocaust" (Lucamante 2003, 88)<sup>1</sup>. An interesting case is Jakob Littner's text, published in 1948, which remained obscure until 1992 when Wolfgang Koeppen published a revision of the text as a fictional work. In 2002 the original text was published under the title *My Way through the Night* and it called the attention of scholars, although it remains a lesser-known text among Holocaust survivor

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narratives<sup>2</sup>. Boris Pahor's *Necropolis* (1967), in turn, is an autobiographical account of Trieste-born Pahor's experience at several Nazi concentration camps as a political prisoner, as he was imprisoned "for his involvement with the antifascist Slovenian resistance" (O'Neil 2011)<sup>3</sup>. Originally published in Slovenian in 1967, Pahor's *Necropolis* was neglected until 1995, when it was translated into English. In 2007, Pahor's autobiographical novel was translated into Italian and since has been deemed a key text in Holocaust testimonial literature. Clearly, the narratives and experience of survivors like Levi and Wiesel, among others, have significantly shaped the direction taken by Holocaust studies since its inception. In contrast, women's survivor narratives have sometimes been conspicuously absent from critical study, and have remained peripheral, or rather, they have not often been analysed specifically from a gender approach. However, since the late 1980s and 1990s, several critics have been keen to focus on the perspective of the 'other' voice, not without contestation, by paying attention to the way women are figured in texts by men, to the way women's personal experiences are portrayed in women's narratives, and finally, to the significance of gender in understanding the Holocaust as a whole (Horowitz 1998, 366-67). Therefore, in what follows I will deal with the ways in which the female voice, a vulnerable 'other' within others, is heard, both in "literary testimony" and factual survivor testimonies, as well as voices of Jewish and non-Jewish authors, to broaden the scope of this study. I consider the relevance of a gender-based approach to Holocaust studies a controversial topic among historians and Holocaust critics. In focusing on the 'other' voice, I will demonstrate how women's position has been re-oriented in twenty-first century academic scholarship on the Holocaust.

## 1. THE DISTINCTIVE DIFFERENCE OF A GENDER APPROACH TO THE HOLOCAUST: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The 1980s, "the so-called 'second wave' of interest in the Holocaust" (Ubertowska 2013, 27), and 1990s saw the burgeoning interest in the intersection of Holocaust studies and gender studies, always suffused with controversy and suspicion, since some critics proposed that the Holocaust is so incomprehensible, that to undertake a feminist or gender approach would be seen as trivial. Nevertheless, in the 1990s several studies like Carol Rittner and John Roth's *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (1993), a ground-breaking study on gender and the Holocaust, attracted the interest and appealed to academics in both gender

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Pross for this reference to Jakob Littner's story and text.

<sup>3</sup> My gratitude goes to Prof. Dr. Cinzia Ferrini for drawing my attention to Boris Pahor.

studies and Holocaust studies. It addressed the absent voices of women's survivor testimonies, and included analysis of women's experiences. Other books have significantly contributed to increase the ever-expanding field of gender studies and the Holocaust in the last twenty-five years; nevertheless, "not until recently has Holocaust Studies generally enlisted feminist or gender theory in its analyses, nor have academics shown much, if any, awareness of their own gender assumptions" (Goldenberg & Shapiro 2013, 2). Arguably, gender approaches to the Holocaust are intent on reflecting diverse experiences, both male and female, and on opening up new avenues of research into the relations between men and women and the experiences of women. These approaches complicate the past in unexpected ways as regarding women, gender, and sexuality, which "will result in new questions and new understandings" (Goldenberg & Shapiro 2013, 5). One critic, Judith Tydor Baumel, undertook in-depth study of the situation of scholars at the beginning of the twenty-first century to map out the intersection of Holocaust and gender studies. She identified three attitudes to gender and the Holocaust which ranged from utter rejection to approval and acceptance, but with a cautionary note (Baumel 2002, 198). Most incursions into gender and the Holocaust were prefaced with a justification of the scholars' research, which "accentuate[d] the realization that a gendered perspective on the Holocaust" is far from being fully accepted (Baumel 2002, 201). Since the beginning of the 2010s there have been several attempts to examine these controversies, and to offer research methodologies for a feminist take on women's survivor narratives. One such example is offered by Aleksandra Ubertowska who tries to cast light upon the wealth of material on the Holocaust and the feminist perspective. She argues that the female experience punctuated the structuring of the narrative and the fashioning of the writing subject:

In case of female authors, a different rule of structuring the concentration camp and Holocaust experience dominates the discourse. The aspect of autonomy, individual strength, loses its significance for the sake of saving the family or loosing [sic] those closest. The female subject involved with testimony (the autobiographical 'I') is also constructed differently. It manifests itself in attempts to depersonalize the narrative, as well as through efforts to accentuate the saving role of community ties, created within the circle of 'foster families', 'sister' relations, and friendships. (Ubertowska 2013, 34)

This critic goes on to explain that metaphorical language is often used in women's narratives to suggest the effects of trauma upon her identity through tropes such as the (muted) female voice, following Carol Ritter and John K. Roth in their introduction to *Different Voices* (Ritter & Roth 1993, 16). One common aspect in women's survivor testimonies is *gender wounding*, defined by Sara R. Horowitz as "a shattering of something innate and important to her sense of her own

womanhood [...] that emerges in literary texts by women – and, differently, in works by men” (Horowitz 1998, 366). Considering the ways in which the atrocity of the Holocaust affected women and men in their specificity reveals how they responded to their trauma and shattered identities. Pregnancy, for example, appears in many testimonial accounts and can be used “a fulcrum upon which to explore moral dilemmas of survival” (Horowitz 1998, 374). In general terms, Sara Horowitz (Horowitz 1998, 371-372) finds in academic treatment of women and the Holocaust a focus on narratives of heroism (emphasis on bravery and agency of women and motherhood), on the one hand, and on narratives of atrocity (emphasis on loss and suffering), on the other. However, this is not a clear-cut division, as both narratives mingle and undercut one another in the reflections of women survivors, as seen in the texts under discussion.

## 2. FEMALE SELVES' SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AT AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU: MOTHERHOOD AND IDENTITY IN DELBO, LEWIS, MILLU

Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz and After* (1995): *None of Us Will Return* (1946/1965), *Useless Knowledge* (1946-47/1970) and *The Measure of Our Days* (1960s/1971), translated into English by Rosette C. Lamont, has contributed to a more nuanced analysis of survivor narratives, in general, but also of the gender aspects narrated in her text, in particular. When France was invaded and occupied by German troops during the Second World War, Delbo returned to France. Her husband had joined the French Resistance, and Delbo also joined. On 2 March 1942 they were arrested on the “charge of distributing anti-German leaflets in Paris” (Barrows). When her husband was killed in May in 1942, she was transported to Auschwitz, alongside two hundred and thirty other Frenchwomen, most of them members of the Resistance, and who had been arrested not for ethnic or religious reasons, but for political reasons. Delbo stayed in Auschwitz (Birkenau – the female side of Auschwitz), and a satellite camp until January 1944, and then she was sent to Ravensbrück, the all-female concentration camp. The Red Cross released her and moved her to Sweden. Then, she returned to France, when her health had improved. As Lawrence Langer has posed, the trilogy is Delbo's masterpiece. The first volume, *None of Us Will Return*, had been finished in 1946, but “Delbo put it in a drawer and sat there for 20 years” (Langer 1995, xvii). She finally published it in 1965. The second volume, *Useless Knowledge*, was published immediately after the first, and Delbo's last piece, *The Measure of Our Days*, came out in 1985, the year of her death. However, there is some conflicting information regarding the period of her writing and the dates of her publications (Graham 2015, 14). Her trilogy, which can be analysed

from the point of view of an eye-witness account and testimony, is considered Holocaust literature as it combines autobiography (prose) and poetry. However, contradictory as it may seem, the use of 'we' of the text excludes the reader, but it is a "necessary technique", according to Graham, since "it allows Delbo to detail the events of the camps while also reminding the reader of the 'ungraspable' nature of the event of the Holocaust" (Graham 2015, 76).

The fact that Delbo wrote the first volume of her trilogy right after she had gone through the harrowing events underlines the imaginative capacity of Delbo as a survivor who resorts to poetry and prose to find a way to deal with the paradox of survival. As Susana Onega has aptly noted in this volume, art forms offer the opportunity for Delbo to restore order to a fragmented self, both individually and for the community. Delbo employs impressions and sense memory to narrate her experience in a style reminiscent of interior monologue, mixed up with descriptions, poems, and several voices and points of view. Ellen Graham has aptly suggested that the ambiguities in Delbo's writing place the reader in closer engagement with the text, more particularly through the poems that abound in the trilogy, to make the reader *see* (Graham 2015, 71). In order for a traumatised survivor to work through his/her trauma and to integrate himself or herself in the community, the most effective way, according to Boris Cyrulnik, is

[...] to transform the trauma [...] As soon as we can talk about a trauma, draw it, put in on a stage or think it through, we can control the emotions that either overwhelmed us or made us freeze when it occurred. Representing the tragedy allows us to rework the feelings it triggers. (Cyrulnik 2011, 68)

In fact, Delbo asserts in her first volume that her autobiographical writing is a belated process: "[p]resently I am writing this story in a café – it is turning into a story" (Delbo 1995, 27). Seen in this light, resilience depends on individual capacity to imaginatively rework the feelings elicited by trauma. Then, imagination and creativity, art and literature provide mechanisms of resilience. Delbo acknowledges that "[t]he will to resist was doubtlessly buried in some deep, hidden spring which is now broken, I will never know" (Delbo 1995, 64). Clearly, there is a constant tension between two forces at work in Delbo's text: death and survival, history and storytelling, which points out the paradoxical nature of trauma: Delbo and other survivors (Mado, for example) find difficulties healing their wounded selves: "[e]ven those of us who believe they buried the past within their innermost secret depths, even those who added to that past all kinds of new memories [...] piling them up in order to cover the past, it will not disappear [...] I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it" (Delbo 1995, 266-67).

Delbo's trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*, belongs to testimonial literature written by women survivors, in this case, by a French writer, member of the Resistance.

Likewise, another text, *A Time to Speak* (1992), by Helen Lewis, an award-winning dancer and choreographer in Northern Ireland, who died aged 93 (in 2010), lived in the Terezin ghetto, and was later deported to Auschwitz in 1942, testifies to the relevance of the 'other' voice in Holocaust writing. Both Delbo and Lewis resist the main objective of the Nazi project: eradicate physical witnesses to the extermination project – an event without witnesses. This was achieved by depriving victims of their identities by annihilating their selves. In the concentration and extermination camps, “the deported were deprived of their identity, their body, and even their names...[i]n testimonial Holocaust writing, survivors and witnesses attempt to recover the individual identities of which they were deprived and, through first person narrative, once again become subjects with a voice” (Loew 2011, 10). Immersed in contradictions and paradoxes, Holocaust writing offers alternating shifts between muteness and speech, as it oscillates between meaning and meaninglessness, as Sara Horowitz develops in her *Voicing the Void* (1997). In survivor writing, “the trope of muteness functions as an index of trauma, which both compels and disables testimony” (Horowitz 1997, 30). Charlotte Delbo alongside Primo Levi employ muteness to explore the struggle of the survivor to find the adequate vocabulary to express the unspeakable (Horowitz 1997, 30). A very interesting association between ‘witness’ and to ‘bear witness’ is made by Horowitz. She argues that muteness and speech are inextricably linked with blindness and sight, because “to witness implies both to see (to be an eyewitness) and to speak (to bear witness)” (Horowitz 1997, 87). Muteness connects also with the author’s “search for a credible, authentic voice” (Horowitz 1997, 30). However, as some critics have argued, in women’s testimonies of the Holocaust, this act is double: “the double difficulty of affirming an independent subjectivity of these women as witnesses” (Loew 2011, 12). In other words, this means that the female voice has become doubly muted and silenced, both marginal and peripheral, as well, in Holocaust research.

In Delbo’s third volume of *Auschwitz and After, The Measure of Our Days*, Marceline, a fellow survivor, cannot even think of the possibility of bearing children, after Auschwitz (1995, 334). Charlotte Delbo explores the effect that the Auschwitz experience has had upon her, and upon her friends, thus offering instances of *gender wounding*. The Auschwitz self returns as a revenant and haunts the process of healing, thus threatening Delbo’s recuperation and integration into the social group, as reflected in the difficulties the survivors face in healing their wounded selves. In turn, Helen Lewis suffers PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) up to 1949, when her first child is born: “Yet in spite of being safe and feeling secure, I was tormented by a recurring nightmare, from which I always woke screaming in terror. It stopped, never to return again, after the birth of our first child, Michael, in 1949” (Lewis 1992, 131). When looking herself at the mirror, she does not relate

to the face she sees in the mirror, unrecognizable because of her wounded identity: "Would time give me back my face, or would it bear the mark of the camps for life, like the tattoo on my left forearm?" (Lewis 1992, 118). These narrative accounts problematise questions of female identity and motherhood, avoiding simplistic generalisations about women, gender and sex.

Although clearly the Holocaust was not about gender or sex, "acknowledging women as victims of (sexual) violence also asserts that women's lives are as valuable as men's" (Goldenberg 2013, 100). In the face of the Final Solution, rape and other forms of sexual violence against Jewish women had been secondary in academic study until recently. Race mixing was considered a crime, but rape occurred. However, gender perspectives upon the Holocaust should not be restricted to examining women (and men) as objects of particular abuses (Nazi brutality attacked men and women both as Jewish people as Jewish and as men and women), but also as "developers of particular survival strategies", thinkers and agents in re-constructing their shattered existence (Horowitz 1998, 375).

Survival strategies are common in women's accounts, and they feature in both Delbo's and Lewis's texts. Solidarity and bonding stand out as survival strategies in their narratives, and Myrna Goldenberg underlines "the importance of connectedness, nurturance and caregiving in women's memoirs" (Goldenberg 1998, 336), but other critics, like Lawrence Langer, argue that there is no evidence that "mutual support between sisters, when possible, prevailed more than between brothers" (Langer 1998, 362). As stated earlier, the Holocaust was not about gender or sex, but to rescue the voice of women, their experiences and coping strategies undoubtedly broadens the scope of the field of Holocaust studies. Both Delbo and Lewis emphasise the relevance of *bonding*, as seen in Delbo's text when they go to a fellow survivor's funeral after the liberation: "Everyone of us who returned was lucky,' Jeanne said. 'Lucky to have had the others.'" (Delbo 1995, 341). Then, Lewis states that "one of the unwritten laws of the camp was that survival was possible only as part of a group, never on your own" (Lewis 1992, 100). However important bonding and solidarity are in Delbo's narrative, Delbo's text also provides instances of a less idealised vision where bonding does not always lead to survival or recuperation of the self, after their Auschwitz experience. In addition, it has been noted that more research must be conducted on the mother-daughter bond since "bonds between mothers and daughters function in the accounts of Holocaust victims and survivors as symbols of life, hope, tradition, and continuity, as well as containing a measure of rupture and devastation" (Bergen 2013, 26).

In this sense, special attention should be paid to the Italian-Jewish Liana Millu's collection of stories of women who lived with her at Auschwitz-Birkenau: *Smoke over Birkenau* (1986). Prefaced by Primo Levi, who acknowledges that "[f

or a variety of reasons, the women's situation was a good deal worse than that of the men" (Millu 1997, 7), this book unfolds six stories of heroism, following Horowitz's distinction between "narratives of brutality" and "narratives of heroism" (Horowitz 1998, 371-372) in the depiction of women bonding together to save the life of a child or a newborn, and the heroism of the pregnant woman to carry to term the child. However, it also portrays the ambiguous responses and the consequences such a heroic act could bring for the survival of others, putting at risk their lives, and thus offering a more complex picture of the situation at Birkenau. This is seen in the story entitled "Under Cover of Darkness":

"Maria is pregnant, *Frau blockova*," came a voice out of the blue. Erna spun around, every head turned, and Adela found herself the focus of a unanimous and passionate curiosity. She stood surrounded, cool as a cucumber, frowning slightly. "Pregnant?" Erna repeated incredulously. "She's pregnant? How do you know? What kind of crazy story is that?" (...)  
 "It's true," whispered a girl next to me. "I saw her do it too. I knew she was up to. Remember that night she kept us all up?" (Millu 1997, 75)

Finally, Maria will be helped out by the women in her block only to find death in childbirth. The distinction between narratives of brutality and narratives of heroism becomes blurred, as all the stories end in suffering and death. Another example is Bruna who saves fresh food from the black market for her teenage son, fearing he might be sent to the gas chamber due to his weak condition. Out of desperation, Bruna "calls out to him across the electric fence to which they both rush, their meeting ending in a fatal final embrace" (Kelly 2003, 844), one of the most disturbing scenes in the book. The six vignettes are described by an eyewitness narrator who offers a first-hand account of the women at the extermination camp. The first story narrates a perpetrator's actions against a woman, which underlines how the Holocaust "functioned as a network of atrocity perpetrated by people who did not need to subscribe to Nazi ideas or even to be on the winning side of the genocidal equation to be agents of destruction" (Bergen 2013, 20).

### 3. THE 'OTHER'S OTHER': WOMEN AS PERPETRATORS IN RAVENSBRÜCK'S NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMP FOR WOMEN: HELM AND SCHNEIDER

Delbo, Lewis and Millu represent the Auschwitz-Birkenau experience in their testimonies, and this demonstrates that the extermination camp has been privileged as subject of enquiry in Holocaust studies, also as regards women. Crucially, Ravensbrück, the only all-female camp, has hardly been discussed

in works on gender perspectives on the Holocaust, such as Rittner and Roth's *Different Voices*, which only includes a short paragraph to the all-female camp (Rittner & Roth 1993, 7); or Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman's edited collection, *Women in the Holocaust* (1998), as relevant as *Different Voices* in gender-related perspectives on the Holocaust. In this sense, the recent publication of Sarah Helm's *If This Is a Woman: Inside Ravensbrück: Hitler's Concentration Camp for Women* (2015), a biography of Ravensbrück, fills in this gap and reveals the stories of death, suffering, horror, hope and survival generated in the camp. Interestingly, this camp has been neglected in the work of historians, according to Sarah Helm, author of *If This Is a Woman*, whose title plays with Levi's well-known *If This Is a Man* (and it is a quotation from Levi's work, which served as inspiration for Helm). In it, Helm attempts to set history right in giving Ravensbrück, as well as the stories produced in the camp, the place it deserves in Holocaust studies. This camp does not feature prominently in the story of the Holocaust, and it deserves a closer attention precisely because its existence has been glossed over by the western communal memory (Laqueur 2015, 2).

Helm's book helps us understand how comprehensive and "thoroughgoing" the Final Solution was, as well as its desire to eradicate those considered 'deviant', unfit, or, simply, "undesirable" (Reich 2015, 1), by portraying life at Ravensbrück, one of the 42,500 sites in Nazi Germany where victims were killed, in this case, solely women, which makes this camp unique. This camp opened in 1939, situated about 50 miles north of Berlin. In the 1950s this camp was placed behind the Iron Curtain, and for several decades Western survivors and historians had no access to the site, and relevant data and evidence disappeared. Even though other books have recorded life at this camp, none is so focused on so many women prisoners as Helm's study: "Ravensbrück was the only Nazi concentration camp built for women" (Helm 2015, xi). Most of the prisoners were Polish, some were Jewish, most were political enemies, prostitutes, members of the resistance, Roma people, physically and mentally disabled, and those who were regarded as "inferior" or "asocials" (lesbians). The camp's most well-known victim was the Jewish Olga Benário, communist, who was the model for "Die Tragende", a statue of a woman carrying a fellow prisoner "which stood over the East German memorial site at Ravensbrück" (Laqueur 2015, 3).

One reviewer of Helm's text notes that its relevance lies, in part, in highlighting Ravensbrück as a training camp for female guards, for other camps (Laqueur 2015, 4). Helm's book acquires added significance when placed alongside Helga Schneider's *Let Me Go: My Mother and the SS* (2001), which sheds light on women's experience at the women's camp. In *Let Me Go* Schneider provides an account of her mother, a concentration guard, who walked out of her daughter's life when she was 4, leaving her and her baby brother who was 19 months old.

Schneider saw her mother again 30 years later when she took her little son to meet his grandmother, and there she was told the truth of the matter, and why she had left leaving them behind: to join the Nazi SS. Her mother had special training to qualify as a concentration-camp guard: after early activism in the National Socialist Party

then Ravensbrück and finally Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück she had collaborated on certain experiments which were carried out on the prisoners, and then she had undergone the training for future extermination camp guards. (Schneider 2005,15)

*Let Me Go* traces the trauma the author manifests, having suffered from an absent mother-daughter relationship, from a distorted surrogate mother figure (her stepmother), and from a life without love until she married an Italian boy and settled in Italy. When her mother is in her nineties, she receives a call from an old friend of hers urging Helga Schneider to visit her mother whose health is rapidly deteriorating. *Let Me Go* records the emotional turmoil the visit causes Schneider, but also it provides glimpses into the life of a guard, a perpetrator, which contributes to new ways of dealing with Holocaust memory in the twenty-first century. This has been found lacking in other relevant studies on women and the Holocaust, such as Camila Loew's *The Memory of Pain: Women's Testimonies of the Holocaust* (2011), where it is clear that more research is needed on the subject of women who were complicit with the Nazi regime and its collaborators. In this case *Let Me Go* is a text authored by one child of the perpetrator generation, where aspects related to women, gender, and sexuality are privileged. In so doing, it casts new light upon "three major debates in Holocaust historiography: How did the killers carry out their task? Who collaborated and why? And do we need victims' voice to understand genocide?" (Bergen 2013, 15).

In this line, *If This Is a Woman* relies on the survivors' testimonies, as well as documentation found after the Fall of the Iron Curtain, regarding Nazi medical experiments. Chapter 13 is entitled "Rabbits", the name the victims receive as they are used for medical experiments, conducted by doctors who later justified their actions by claiming that they were following orders, or that these decisions had nothing to do with them:

[Karl] Gebhardt, and his deputy, Fritz Fischer, would both assert at the Nuremberg doctors' trial in 1947 that the idea of using women as the next guinea pigs was nothing to do with them. Gebhardt even claimed that he was ill in bed when the decision was taken to use women. (Helm 2015, 233).

Further on, Helm provides the accounts of the medical experiments on women's legs, from the point of view of the victims and from the perspective of the

doctors, as recorded in their trial: "...the doctors had taken the decision to insert a larger amount of bacteria into the women's legs, with more dirt, glass and splinters to ensure that infection spread further" (Helm 2015, 238). In turn, Helga Schneider's personal account of a child of a perpetrator gives us an insight into the guard, her mother, who feels no remorse about assisting the doctors in their medical experiments at Ravensbrück:

'Didn't you feel any compassion for those human guinea pigs?' I ask my mother. As I do so, I realise the pointlessness of my question.

She hesitates for a second, lowers her head and stares at her hands.

Then she raises her eyes and declares with a kind of obtuse arrogance, 'No, I felt no compassion,' and she seems to stumble over the words, 'for "those people", because the operations were being carried out for the good of humanity'. (Schneider 2005, 68)

Doris L. Bergen states that women's roles as perpetrators found legitimation and approval through familial relations, referring to the criminals' wives, but others were "hands-on perpetrators", like Schneider's mother, "practitioners of extreme violence", one of the 4,000 women who worked as guards who exercised power and authority, as well as women prisoners who functioned as *kapos* and heads of blocks. These women offer relevant information "on the social dynamics of extreme violence" (Bergen 2013, 19). *Let Me Go* provides a harrowing account of a perpetrator's perspective upon the extreme violence exercised at the camp, and this is manifested through verbal and non-verbal elements since the perpetrator's body expresses her lived experience and emotions. Since phenomenological perspectives are utilised to analyse the body as narrator in the life stories of Holocaust survivors, Schneider's mother's narrative, that of a perpetrator, lends itself to this kind of analysis. A narrative full of silences and gaps, the former guard shows arousal of emotion and bodily gestures that the daughter has to decipher and decode to see whether her mother had any feelings towards the past, or if the past has left any trace upon her body: "She gets to her feet, apparently in a terrible mood all of a sudden. She takes a few steps through the room: she walks upright, apparently quite steady on her feet" (Schneider 2005, 83); "[t]hen she subsides into floods of tears – too high-pitched, too shrill" (Schneider 2005, 86). The answer is contradictory, as the mother expresses anger, rejection, and sadness, but never shows remorse or repentance. Thus, it remains clear that the daughter's visit shatters the reader's expectations as one expects to find a successful reconciliation between mother and daughter, that never happens. Even though the first-person narrator, the daughter, is traumatised, as secondary witness, and cannot cope with her mother's lack of repentance and mercy, the visit does her good in that she succeeds in tearing herself away from her mother.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, the Holocaust was not about gender or sex, but to rescue the voices of women, their experiences and coping strategies, broadens the scope of the field of Holocaust studies. As the genocide was part of everyday life, it is necessary to bear in mind women's experiences, gender and sexuality to understand the historical event in its fullest sense. The texts under study in this essay by Delbo, Lewis, Millu, Helm and Schneider contribute, to varying degrees, to a more thorough understanding of the Holocaust and women, not only as victims, but also as perpetrators. Since the 1990s there has been an upsurge of interest in women and the Holocaust, as developed throughout this essay, yet this means that more research must be carried out in this area. In addition, "recognition of the presence...of sex and sexual violence in the Holocaust has enabled productive comparison with other cases of war and genocide in ways that highlight similar dynamics and particular qualities" (Bergen 2013, 22). All in all, despite the controversies, as I hope to have demonstrated, Holocaust studies benefit from gender-focused analyses, as they expand our knowledge of the inherent complexities that lie in the Holocaust experiences.

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