

Call for papers

THE HOLOCAUST AND MOTHERHOOD

A One-Day Interdisciplinary Conference

Holocaust Research Institute

Royal Holloway, University of London

23rd March 2018

Keynote speakers: **Dr Zoë Waxman** (University of Oxford) and **Dr Helga Amesberger** (Institut für Konfliktforschung)

Although some oppose a scrutiny of Jewish suffering in gender terms on the grounds that the Nazis targeted men and women alike, and others believe that a feminist focus risks to trivialise or de-Judaize the Holocaust, the advent of women's studies and feminist theory has inevitably — albeit belatedly — created a space for a discussion of the specificity of the women's experience of the Shoah. The last two decades have seen a rise of interest in the women's predicament in ghettos, concentration camps, hiding or resistance organisations. As well as to sexual violence or women's solidarity, scholars such as Dalia Ofer, Esther Herzog, Zoë Waxman or Helga Amesberger have turned their attention to motherhood, which, given that the Holocaust can be regarded as a negation of Jewish reproductive rights, should indeed be considered a fundamental issue. Unlike traditional warfare, the Nazis systematically killed not only men but also—if not foremostly—women, who, being capable of childbearing, were seen as a major threat to the purity of the Aryan race. In line with Hitler's view that one gestating Jewish mother posed a greater danger than any fighting man, the chances of survival of pregnant women or of women accompanied by children were severely reduced. Whatever their wartime circumstances, Jewish women were rendered particularly vulnerable by menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and responsibility for their children. However, women's responses to motherhood were far from uniform, ranging from acceptance of their traditional role as child-bearers and child-carers, which often meant death, to rejection of it through abortion or denial of the offspring, which, if these women survived, frequently led to their condemnation by society and/or their enduring sense of guilt.

The ambition of this interdisciplinary conference is to explore from a variety of perspectives questions related to Jewish motherhood during and after the Holocaust. The conference will also be an opportunity to discuss literary and cinematic portrayals of women's choices regarding motherhood during the war and in its aftermath. The potential lines of inquiry include:

- Being a Jewish mother in ghettos/camps/hiding/partisan organisations
- Cultural specificity of Jewish motherhood in the face of the Holocaust
- Changes to the normative understanding of motherhood during persecution
- Being a mother-survivor/Having a survivor as a mother
- Motherhood vs. fatherhood
- Wartime separation for rescue/postwar reunion of mother and child
- Forced abortion/sterilisation
- Infanticide
- Foster mothers
- Motherhood during and after the Holocaust in literature and cinema

Proposals (a maximum of 300 words) for 20-minute papers should be sent by **1st July 2017** to Helena Duffy (helena.duffy@rhul.ac.uk). A selection of full-length journal articles based on the conference papers will be published in a special issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*.