Never Forgotten: Diary Writing as Resistance During the Holocaust

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This thesis explores the use of diary writing as an act of resistance by Jews during the Holocaust. The primary goals of this thesis are to examine the historiography of resistance during the Holocaust, to analyze seven diverse Holocaust diaries, to determine common themes amongst those diaries, and to explore diary writing as an act of resistance. This thesis is based on Holocaust diaries as well as secondary sources.

Each of these seven diaries offers a different perspective of the Holocaust, and yet, there are common themes that emerge. Chapter One, *Introduction and Historiography of Resistance*, introduces the idea of writing as resistance and outlines the development of the study of resistance during the Holocaust. Chapter Two, *Life in the Ghetto,* examines the process of ghettoization in the various ghettos that the diarists lived. Chapter Three, *Lost In Translation: The Struggle for Language in Ghetto Diaries*, explores the difficulty the diarists had as they attempted to write about that which they were experiencing, and the various tactics they used to try to describe the indescribable. Chapter Four, *Hope for Survival,* looks at the different ways that the diarists expressed their hope, desire, and even optimism for their survival beyond the war. Lastly, Chapter Five, *Writing for the Future,* analyzes the diarists' purposes for writing about their experience with the goal of educating future generations. Additionally, many diarists had hoped that their personal narratives would be used as evidence against the Nazis for the crimes committed against the Jews.

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Acknowledgements

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In my first year at the University of Southern California, I took the class "The Holocaust" with Dr. Gillerman, which was the most meaningful class I took in my undergraduate career. Nine years later, I was lucky to work with Dr. Gillerman again on this thesis. I am deeply appreciative of her guidance, support, patience and kindness throughout this process. I feel honored to have worked with her and I am forever grateful to have learned from her—twice.

I dedicate this thesis to the millions of Jews who were brutally murdered at the hands of the Nazis. May the words of the diarists continue to tell the stories of the lives and communities lost.

זכרונם לברכה *May their memory always be for a blessing*

Chapter One: Introduction and Historiography of Resistance

Never forget. These two words have become the slogan among Jews of ensuring that the horrors of the Holocaust are never repeated. While it is important to "never forget," it is also essential to question how we remember the responses and actions of the Jews during the Holocaust. Since the end of World War II, historians have dissected many aspects of the war in general and the Holocaust in particular. One way that historians, scholars and the general public have analyzed the events of the Holocaust is by looking at acts of resistance that took place during the Nazi invasion and the subsequent deportation of Jews to labor and death camps. Early works on the topic of resistance began in Israel. Roni Stauber, a contemporary scholar who writes about the early works on the memory of the Holocaust in Israel, concludes that "the issue of Jewish heroism and its commemoration was tightly bound to the notion of Jewish resistance, and to the idea that Jews living in Israel were a new breed, different in their behavior from their brethren in the Diaspora."[1] Early writers on the Holocaust only looked to armed actions as genuine acts of resistance. As a result, Jews who did not commit acts of armed resistance were criticized and grouped with individuals who did not fight at all. This assumption led to the idea that the Jews went to their deaths "like sheep to the slaughter," which spread from the scholarly world to the larger public.[2]

Another historian, American Phillip Friedman, also began to write about the resistance movement early on. In 1954, he wrote a history of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, where the underground resistance movement fought the Nazi invasion of the ghetto with grenades and weapons, keeping the Nazis from liquidating the ghetto for a month. Friedman

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[1] Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance" in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 341.
[2] Ibid., 341-342.

suggests, “the Warsaw Uprising has the moral impact of the Spartans’ battle against the Persians at Thermopylae, and stands as a reminder of the murderous possibilities inherent in totalitarian regimes.”[3] Similar to Stauber and the early writers, Friedman looked to the armed actions of resistance as the only examples of Jewish resistance in the face of Nazi brutality.

The capture of Nazi SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, who organized the deportation of millions of Jews to Nazi concentration camps, and his public trial in Jerusalem in 1961, became a turning point for the study of acts of resistance during the Holocaust. As mentioned previously, many of the early conceptualizations of resistance were based solely on acts of armed resistance. However, as the case unfolded and testimony was heard, the public, especially in Israel, began to see the Jews of the Holocaust in a new light. During this trial, according to sociologist Shmuel Ettinger, “the Jewish public and the world at large was told, clearly and in detail, the story of the devilishly concealed and cunning methods by which the murderous Nazi machine and its satellites led the scattered, exhausted and defenseless victims to the death-chamber.”[4] This new information led the Jews as well as non-Jews to re-evaluate how the behavior of Jews was remembered.

Due to the publicity and the testimony shared with the public surrounding the capture and trial of this top Nazi official, three books were published, all expressing similar opinions toward the Jews’ actions during the Holocaust. Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Informed Heart* and Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* all place blame on the Jews “for their ostensibly shameful conduct during the

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[3] Ibid., 342.

[4] Shmuel Ettinger, “The Consolidation of the State of Israel” in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1096.

Holocaust."[5] These publications furthered the false belief that the Jews went to their deaths "like sheep to the slaughter."

Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* details what he calls the Nazis' "machinery of destruction." In his conclusion to the book, he lays out his belief that the Jews' failure to resist "was one of the striking features of the destruction process."[6] He contends that there were only a few acts of armed resistance and it was too little too late. He argues that the Jews' reluctance to fight the enemy was the result of previous events in Jewish history. He states, "Over a period of centuries the Jews had learned that in order to survive they had to refrain from resistance… This experience was so ingrained in the Jewish consciousness as to achieve the force of law."[7] However, the Nazi destruction was unlike anything the Jews had every experienced throughout their 2,000 year history. When the leaders of the communities realized this difference, it was just too late.[8]

Similar to Hilberg, Bruno Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart* held that the response of the Jews was the result of prior events in Jewish history. Unlike Hilberg, Bettelheim was a survivor of both Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps so his account was based on a first-hand account.[9] With regard to the actions of Jews, he writes:

> Millions of Jew who did not or could not escape in time or go underground as many thousands did, could at least have marched as free men against the SS, rather than to first grovel, then wait to be rounded up for their own extermination, and finally walk themselves to the gas chambers.[10]

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[5] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 343.
[6] Michael R. Marrus, "Varieties of Jewish Resistance: Some Categories and Comparisons in Historiographical Perspective" in *Major Changes Within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), 275.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (Illinois: Free Press, 1960).
[10] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 343.

Lastly, Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* criticized the Jewish leadership, specifically the heads of the Judenräte.[11] She believed that "they had been coopted by the German authorities and had in effect assisted the Nazis' murder of European Jews."[12] With regard to the resistance movement, Arendt incorrectly characterized their actions as "pitifully small… incredibly weak and essentially harmless" against the Nazi regime.[13] While her understanding of Jewish resistance was imprecise, she did highly laud those who did resist.

As a result of these books, a variety of scholars set out to dispute these claims. A body of literature of anthologies of Jewish resistance originated at this time. While some of these anthologies surfaced in the 1950's, they were published only in Hebrew. As a response to the Eichmann trial publications, this body of work expanded to English and continued to grow. Scholars sought "to demonstrate that Jews did not go to their deaths passively, but offered a good deal of armed resistance to the Nazis and their allies."[14]

By the 1960's, in addition to publishing an increasing number of works about resistance during the Holocaust, scholars also began to try to clarify terms and definitions used to describe the people and the actions taken that may be categorized as resistance. For many scholars, the idea of resistance solely referred to armed resistance. However, Israeli historians began to point to the importance of noting other forms of resistance that took place during the Holocaust. As a result of this broader category, the term *Amidah* began to be used in place of the word 'resistance' by the late 1960's. *Amidah* means 'stand' in Hebrew and therefore, suggests that the Jews who resisted stood in the face of danger rather than sitting back and following the directions of the perpetrators. At the 1968 Yad Vashem conference

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[11] Judenräte was the Jewish council usually within ghettos.
[12] Marrus, 273.
[13] Ibid., 274.
[14] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 343.

on Jewish resistance, Mark Dworzecki, himself a survivor of the Vilna ghetto and five Estonian concentration camps, defined the term *Amidah* as the following:

> The concept of 'stand' is a comprehensive name for all expressions of Jewish 'non-conformism' and for all the forms of resistance and all acts by Jews aimed at thwarting the evil design of the Nazis—a design to destroy the Jews, to deprive them of their humanity, and to reduce them to dregs before snuffing out their lives.[15]

Similarly, Holocaust researcher Shaul Esh offered an additional term of *Kiddush Ha-Hayyim*, the sanctification of life, "the overwhelming impulse to preserve life in the midst of death." Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum, a rabbi from the Warsaw Ghetto, coined this term. For Esh, this preservation of life stemmed from one's "commitment to *Jewish* life—albeit 'each man according to his understanding.'"[16] This terminology is in contrast to the idea of *Kiddush HaShem*, which is the sanctification of the name of God. *Kiddush HaShem* has often been understood as sanctifying God's name by choosing death over forced conversion. However, this was not an option for Jews during the Holocaust. Rabbi Nissenbaum explains, "This is the hour of *Kiddush Ha-Hayyim* and not of *Kiddush Ha-Shem* by death. Formerly, our enemies demanded our soul, and the Jew sacrificed his body in sanctifying God's Name. Now the enemy demands the body of the Jew. That makes it imperative for the Jew to defend it and protect it."[17] Other Israeli writers embraced this new term as it offered a moral and spiritual aspect to survival under horrendous conditions.

In addition to these two terms, the word 'resistance,' while referring to the Holocaust, has been defined and redefined by scholars and historians in an attempt to accurately capture these acts. Over the years, the definition has been honed and reflects new findings within the

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[15] Ibid., 346.
[16] Marrus, 277.
[17] *The Holocaust Chronicle*, s.v. "Kiddush ha-Hayyim." http://www.holocaustchronicle.org/StaticPages/370.html.

area of resistance. In addition, some definitions include all types of resistance whereas others specifically include or exclude specific forms of resistance.

The debates surrounding a definition for resistance were more specifically addressed at "The Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance," a Yad Vashem conference in Jerusalem from April 7-11, 1968. At the conference, the actual implications behind the idea of Jewish resistance were considered. The participants of the conference framed their discussions with the understanding that armed resistance was not the only way Jews resisted in the face of the Nazi brutality. Nachman Blumenthal, a Polish-Jewish historian, suggested, "Resistance is opposition to every hostile act of the enemy in all his areas of operation…By 'resistance' [he] means not only physical acts, but also the spiritual and moral resistance which Jews displayed under Nazi occupation." While his definition of resistance is quite broad, he points out that everyday activities like educating children and praying under difficult conditions is not heroic. Rather, they are "simply normal, every-day duties which a Jew fulfills as a matter of course."[18] Blumenthal argues that resistance and heroism is not one in the same. This insight suggests that there were scholars at the time who equated resistance and heroism. In contrast to Steinberg, Blumenthal views Jewish resistance as unique. He "added the adjective 'Jewish' to the term 'resistance' not only because we are discussing the resistance of Jews, but because we are dealing with a type of resistance which is distinctively limited to Jews and is different from that of other groups."[19]

Leon Poliakov, an author of early works about the Holocaust, offered another voice during the proceedings of the conference. He points to the importance of differentiating acts

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[19] Nachman Blumental, "Sources for the Study of Jewish Resistance" in *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Conference of Manifestations of Jewish Resistance Jerusalem, April 7-11, 1968*, ed. Meir Grubsztein (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1971), 46-47.

of resistance into two groups: armed resistance and passive resistance. For Poliakov, anything that does not involve fighting is to be categorized as passive resistance.[20] While this initial grouping is important for the understanding of the development of the term 'resistance,' the distinction was immediately questioned at the conference. Sarah Neshamit, who published on resistance, did not like the term 'passive resistance.' She believed that "not every attempt to crawl into a hole of some kind constitutes resistance. Not every act performed in order to remain alive, falls under the category of resistance… Resistance is every act, which is designed to thwart the enemy even though it may possibly clash with the will to survive… I do not rule out unarmed resistance. On the contrary, there were many forms of resistance—armed as well as unarmed," but she does not accept a definition which speaks of passive as well as active resistance.[21] Neshamit suggests that resistance acts must have the intention to stop the enemy, even if it may result in death. Based on Nashamit's understanding of resistance, forging papers or hiding does not constitute resistance as these actions are intended to preserve life without attempting to eliminate the enemy. This important point, along with a more direct definition, continued to be debated for many years after the conference.

The Yad Vashem conference was only the beginning of these important conversations surrounding the term 'resistance.' Another early contributor to the conversation is Lucien Steinberg's book, *Not as a Lamb: The Jews against Hitler,* which was published in 1974. Steinberg views Jewish resistance narrowly because he does not believe that the definition of the word 'resistance' should be broadened just "because it concerns the Jews."[22] For

[20] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 346.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 344.

Steinberg, resistance is resistance, regardless of who is the one resisting. He argues that the meaning of 'resistance' should not be broadened "to include those perfectly commendable, admirable, praiseworthy phenomena which have no real place within the concept of resistance: for example, to organize soup kitchens; to keep the synagogues open even in the most dangerous times; to set up strictly Jewish children's homes and orphanages so that even during the worse periods the children might have the sort of education that would encourage them to become worthy Jews; and many of those who devoted themselves to the success of these enterprises were arrested by the Gestapo or by its local representatives, deported, or gassed," along with those who benefited from these actions.[23] While his definition of resistance is limited, he does recognize the achievements of the Jewish armed resistance, "but in a more subdued and complex voice than his predecessors."[24] He says, "By revolting against the Hitler regime which intended to exterminate the entire Jewish population, the Jews were not engaging in acts of heroism, they simply wished to preserve the material and moral substance of their people. Their success won them immortality."[25] This explanation suggests that the armed resistance was an effort to preserve human dignity as opposed to attempting to disrupt the actions of the Nazis. Steinberg's narrow view of the term 'resistance' offers a solid foundation for scholars to build upon and develop.

As the conversation about an accurate definition continued, some scholars added a political perspective to the discussion. In 1983, Roger Gottlieb, a professor of Philosophy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, argued that, "Resistance involves acts motivated by the intention to thwart, limit, or end the exercise of power of the oppressor group over the

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 345.
[25] Ibid., 344.

oppressed. The *intention* is critical, involving a set of beliefs both about the identity of the persecuted and the responsibility of the persecutor."[26] Similar to Neshamit, Gottlieb includes the intent to impact the oppressor, in this case, the Nazis. Additionally, the intent of the resistance is not personal identity or survival, but rather to limit the power of the oppressor and maintain some communal presence. Eight years later, Detlev Peukert offered a similar political perspective. Peukert argued the need to distinguish between *Nonkonformität* (nonconformist behavior) and *Widerstand* (resistance). For him, the need to resist "was intended to make a public impact and to pose a basic challenge to the regime."[27] For both of these scholars, the significance of resisting was not for personal purposes to retain identity but rather to have an impact on the oppressor and their actions.

By the 1990's, scholars were honing their definition of Jewish resistance for the purposes of publications as resistance became a more prominent topic within the field of Holocaust research. Robert Rozett, a Holocaust resistance scholar and Director of the Yad Vashem Libraries, wrote the definition of 'Jewish resistance' for the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* published in 1990. His definition is as follows:

> Planned or spontaneous opposition to the Nazis and their collaborators by individual Jews or group of Jews. In the Nazi system, within which Jews were faced with a process of dehumanization that ultimately culminated in death, any act that opposed that process can be regarded as resistance. In response to this system, Jewish resistance to the Nazis took many forms and worked on many different levels.[28]

Rozett's perspective of Jewish resistance is broad and includes any act that "opposed the process of dehumanization."[29] This definition is open to interpretation, as some scholars, would say that hiding and forging papers opposed the process, whereas others, like Neshamit,

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[26] Marrus, 279.
[27] Ibid., 280.
[28] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 347.
[29] Ibid.

would not. While Rozett's definition is valid, it is broad and does not encompass all the intricacies involved in the understanding of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, such as armed and unarmed resistance as well as the goals of these acts of resistance.

Similarly to Neshamit's focus on the intention of the acts of resistance, sociologist and survivor, Nechama Tec, defines resistance as "motivated by the intention to thwart, limit or end the exercise of power by the oppressor over the oppressed." Professor Emerita of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Ruby Rohrlich takes Tec's definition focused on intention of the acts and suggests that, "For Jews during the Holocaust, simply surviving can be considered a form of resistance to the German goal of Jewish extermination."[30] While other scholars may disagree with this connection, Jewish existence was exactly what the Nazis were fighting against; therefore, this perspective offers an intriguing argument to consider the mere act of surviving as an act of resistance.

Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli scholar of the Holocaust, has been a key scholar in the resistance discussion, often arguing for a broad definition of Jewish resistance. Indeed, in the 1980's, he defined Jewish resistance as "any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters."[31] This definition includes the words 'group actions,' which excludes many of the resistance acts recorded that were carried out individually. But by 2001, Bauer has changed his view, as is evident in his book *Rethinking The Holocaust.* In it, Bauer acknowledges his exclusion of individual acts of resistance, and he no longer believes that the words 'Germans and their supporters' from his original definition are still accurate. Instead, he redefines Jewish resistance with the inclusion of individual acts as well as the

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 119.

terms, 'Germans and their collaborators.' Bauer uses Germans as opposed to Nazis in his definition because "the vast majority of the German population supported, participated in, or at least condoned the genocidal murders of Jews and many others."[32] As for the change from supporters to collaborators, Bauer argues that while some people may not have supported the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, they may have participated in aiding the Nazis in some way. Bauer does not see the Nazis alone as the perpetrators, but also includes the general population of Germany who did not stand up to the actions of the Nazis against the Jews and others.

Bauer's updated understanding of Jewish resistance is nevertheless connected to the early idea of *Amidah*. This new definition "includes both armed and unarmed actions and excludes passive resistance, although that term is almost a non sequitur, because one cannot really resist passively. When one refuses to budge in the face of brutal force, one does not resist passively; one resists without using force, and that is not the same thing."[33] This argument that there is no such thing as passive resistance but rather there is resistance without force is an important distinction and points back to the discussion that began at the Yad Vashem conference in 1968. For Bauer, *Amidah* includes smuggling, self-sacrifice for the sake of the family, engaging in activities for the sake of increasing morale such as cultural, educational, religious and political activities, and rebellion by use of force or arms.[34] While Bauer's definition is broad, his research and years of experience offer an explanation of Jewish resistance that built upon the research of scholars who came before him, and it is thorough and thoughtful.

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[32] Ibid., 120.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

While Holocaust scholars have spent years developing an accurate definition for the term 'Jewish resistance,' Canadian historian Michael Marrus created a system to classify acts of resistance during the Holocaust. Adapted from a classification system first developed by Werner Rings, Marrus offers five kinds of resistance "without judging them or creating a hierarchy of merit."[35] The five categories are as follows:[36]

Symbolic Resistance, or I remain what I was

Polemic Resistance, or I tell the truth

Defensive Resistance, or I aid and protect

Offensive Resistance, or I fight to the death

Resistance Enchained, or freedom fighters in camp and ghetto

Symbolic Resistance includes actions of opposition, sometimes putting the individual at risk but not necessarily. These efforts "represented a refusal to be habituated to terror in everyday life, a determination not to accept this as the 'normal' state of things to which individuals had to bend every effort to adjust."[37] Acts of spiritual resistance are placed in this category as well.

Polemic Resistance, while similar to Symbolic Resistance, goes one step farther. These acts are those of protests, the need to spread the truth of the reality to other people within the community. One example of this type of resistance is the collection of documents that together compose the *Oneg Shabbat* archive. Emmanuel Ringelbaum, a historian, along with others, compiled communications "both within and outside the ghetto of detailed information about the fate of deported Jews, as well as every possible aspect of Jewish

[35] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 359.
[36] Marrus, 283.
[37] Ibid., 285.

existence in the ghetto."[38] There are examples like the *Oneg Shabbat* archive that suggest that this type of resistance was not uncommon.

Defensive Resistance includes the acts of Jews to aid and protect those who were in greatest danger of the Nazi threat. Jews in the underground resistance movement, organized escape networks to save others. This type of resistance took manpower, time, organization, outside support and most importantly, silence.

Offensive Resistance, most commonly thought of as armed resistance, involves combat operations. Unlike the other categories, this type of resistance often includes aspects of the other categories. Armed fighters "also organized protests, prepared clandestine newspapers, and smuggled people to safety."[39] While fighting was a large aspect of the resistance, much of the fighter's time was spent remaining underground and alive.

Resistance Enchained was "the desperate fight of those who were cut off, without help, and practically without a hope to survive."[40] Acts of this kind include revolts and uprisings in the ghettos and camps. This type of resistance can be viewed as the last resort actions, when there were not other options. Most of these revolts and uprisings did not have a large impact on the overall Nazi plan, but in some instances, they kept the Nazis away for just a bit longer. For the Jews in these situations, fighting to the death was a reality.

Marrus' system of classification is significant to the conversation surrounding the definition of the term 'resistance.' An unintended consequence of attempting to define something as intricate and opinion-filled is judgments being placed on the individuals and groups for what they did or did not do under those extreme conditions. What acts should be

[38] Ibid., 288.
[39] Ibid., 293.
[40] Ibid., 296.

marked as acts of resistance versus acts that were second nature to the person? Is one person deemed more praiseworthy than another because of their act? Because of this slippery slope, Marrus' system of classification allows these acts of resistance to be categorized without judgment being placed on the act or the person.

While historical analyses of resistance and how to define the term have evolved significantly over the past several decades, there remains a strong emphasis on armed, collective actions when determining acts of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. This work seeks to build on the ideas of Sarah Neshamit, Robert Rozett, and Yehuda Bauer to argue that diary writing is a significant and relevant form of Jewish resistance. I will consider Jewish resistance as the variety of actions, armed and unarmed, taken by Jews from the beginning of the Third Reich until the final liberation of camps in 1945 in an attempt to maintain human dignity, normalcy and sanity in the face of Nazi dehumanization. Like Sarah Neshamit suggests, using the terms 'armed and unarmed resistance' as opposed to 'active and passive resistance' offers a more accurate picture of the situation, especially when looking at diary writings. A person cannot passively resist but they can resist without the use of weapons. As Robert Rozett argues, Jewish resistance should include any act that opposes the process of dehumanization that the Jews faced in the Nazi system.[41] By turning to writing, these individuals were able to express their human emotions and to maintain their inner selves. Similarly, Yehuda Bauer, along with others, expands the definition of resistance to include any act where the intention is to foil the aims of the oppressor.[42] The Nazis sought to erase any memory of the Jews and these diaries destroy that intention.

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[41] Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," 347.
[42] Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* 120.

Diaries are important sources for a myriad of reasons. First and foremost, they were written in the moment, when the experiences of the day were clear in their memory and the emotions of the writers were fresh. The writings do not have the luxury of retrospection, as other Holocaust documents that were written by survivors have. These recordings were based purely on personal experiences, thereby offering a personal interpretation of history. Together, the multitudes of diaries from the Holocaust offer multiple voices and perspectives of the same time period.

These diaries also offer the personal evolution of each author over the course of time. For many diarists, their outlook on the situation at the beginning of their diaries differs greatly from the later entries. As time went on and the situation in the ghettos continued to deteriorate, the authors often questioned when the war would end, what the world would look like and whether there would be any remnants of a once thriving community. While personal evolution differed for each person, the experience of each offers important insight into the consciousness of individuals at that time.

As each person witnessed the atrocities taking place around them, the authors also used their diaries as evidence of these acts for the future. Whether the author lived to tell of the experience or not, their words would live on as proof of what took place. And they continued to write even despite the conditions they were enduring and the looming danger if their diary were to be found by a Nazi officer. Despite these obstacles, the authors recognized the significance of their writing for the community as a whole and its need for evidence to remain. Rachel Brenner, a professor of Modern Hebrew Literature, emphasizes that “as Jews, they felt an obligation toward their people—a mission—that empowered them to carry on

their intellectual effort despite depression, constant hunger, and deprivation."[43] David Patterson, a scholar of Judaic Studies, echoes this point by suggesting, "The act of testimony is an act of responsibility that situated the diarist and the diary within a relation to the community and its ebbing way of life—its tradition, its covenant, and its mission."[44]

Of course, diaries are considered a valuable source for historical purposes. And yet I am also using them as an expression of individual agency. These diaries are testimonies of the lives of their authors, written as history was unfolding, not after the fact. Also significantly, these diaries tell not only the stories of individuals but also of the collective Jewish story. These stories remain even today, despite the tragic end of most of their communities.

Finally, diary writing gave the diarists a sense of agency during a time when they were being made to feel less human and powerless. Their words offered them an outlet for expressing their true feelings and emotions about what they were seeing, hearing and experiencing. "The degree of intellectual freedom attained in the defiant act of writing afforded a sense of direction in this unprecedented situation," Brenner writes. "The artistic activity of literary self-portrayal communicates a measure of control over destiny and a sense of uniqueness intended to offset, to some extent at least, the specter of despair."[45] While the authors did not have control over much in their lives, their diaries allowed them to be free with their words and feelings.

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[43] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Writing As Resistance: Four Women Confronting the Holocaust* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 7.
[44] David Patterson, *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 23.
[45] Brenner, 10.

As the views of Holocaust resistance have evolved over time, writing has become more widely accepted as a form of resistance. One reason this shift evolved is that historians were "eager to show that the Jewish masses were not passive but resisted their oppressors by whatever means were available to them."[46] For most Jews at this time, armed resistance was not an option due to the lack of basic resources and weapons. Therefore, individual Jews had to use whatever means possible to resist. For many people, writing a diary, poetry and songs, or acting in theater productions, enabled them to resist the dehumanization process. As a result of this shift, "along with partisans, therefore, 'ghetto scribes' have gained posthumous recognition as figures of resistance who attempted to subvert the Nazis with writing instruments as their weapons. The broadening of the category of resistance has since become the prevailing interpretation of Jewish cultural production during the Shoah."[47]

Once cultural activities began to be more accepted as forms of resistance, scholars began looking at the diaries through the new lens as writing as resistance. These diaries offer an eyewitness, first-hand account of the conditions of life during the occupation, and the brutalities and murders carried out by the Nazis. Garbarini points out that "while diaries are not evidence of successful resistance to genocide, they are texts of struggle that document Jews' efforts to maintain a sense of an individual self, even as that possibility was being erased."[48] Further, not only was the very act of writing a form of resistance, but also the permanence of that narrative meant that their memory could not be erased, which is exactly what the Nazis wanted to achieve. Garbarini suggests that as these authors' lives were being turned upside down and the threat of death loomed, they attempted to preserve the evidence

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[46] Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (Michigan: Sheridan Books, 2006), 7.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 9.

of these crimes, which demonstrated their "keen awareness that annihilation is incomplete when memory is preserved."[49]

Due to the secretive nature of diary writing and the circumstances of the time, many diaries that were written during the Holocaust were lost or destroyed. Therefore, it is impossible to know how many diaries were actually written during this time.[50] However, the hundreds of diaries that have been recovered and published offer an important genre of work that allows readers today a deeper understanding of life during the Holocaust.

When looking at diaries as documents, it is imperative to recognize the unique features of Holocaust diaries as compared to ordinary diaries. Typically, a diary is thought of as a collection of writings, often written on a regular basis and records the events of the author's day or experiences. Diaries are usually personal and kept private as they hold the thoughts and emotions of the author. Additionally, diaries are dated, which places them in a context and allows the author to share details of a specific time. As for diaries written during the Holocaust, Garbarini considers a diary as a text that "preserves the gradual acquisition of knowledge and shifting of values that occur in life."[51] Some Holocaust diaries were written like a traditional diary that recorded the person's innermost feelings and emotions, as well as observations of the world from the author's perspective. Other diaries were written with a specific audience in mind, such as a loved one from whom the author was separated. Another category of diaries written during the Holocaust were those written by multiple authors, with the intention of chronicling the activities and atmosphere of the time, as opposed to expressing personal feelings.

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[49] Ibid., 2.
[50] *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust,* s.v. "Diaries."
[51] Garbarini, 17.

Karl J. Weintraub, a scholar of autobiographical literature, analyzed Holocaust diaries and recognized the interconnection in these diaries between time, words and meaning. As writers record their day, they are in essence writing a commentary on that day and their experience of it. This commentary of the day "is to be understood not as explication but as interrogation."[52] Weintraub suggests, "To the extent that it is lived in commentary, the day assumes significance, not because it has been brought to a halt but because it has been made part of a process of becoming through the process of interrogation."[53] These Holocaust diaries not only allow for the recording of personal feelings and actual events that were taking place, but they also allow authors to chronicle their own commentary. By writing their own commentary, these authors offer a particular look at history as it took place, without the impediment of hindsight.

Every diary written during the Holocaust is unique due to the individual nature of diary writing. I have chosen to analyze seven distinctly different diaries, which offer perspectives from differing geographic realms, ages and genders. Yitskhok Rudashevski was a young boy who describes the difficulty of growing up during the Nazi occupation in the Vilna Ghetto. Halina Nelken wrote her diary between the ages of 15 and 17, and she chronicled the emotional toll life in the Krakow Ghetto took on her and the community as their freedom was taken away. At the age of 18, Miriam Korber began writing a diary where she accounts for the arduous journey her family took from Campulung to Djurin, Transnistria, as well as her new life in the ghetto. Etty Hillseum was a 27 year old who used her diary as a place to express her inner thoughts and issues related to being a young adult during the Nazi occupation in Deventer, east of Holland. After being physically separated

[52] Patterson, 18.
[53] Ibid., 19.

from his love, Egon “Gonda” Redlich used his diary as a place to write letters to her detailing his life and his role within the Youth Welfare Department in the Terezin Ghetto. Avraham Tory wrote about the specific details of the Kovno Ghetto and the acts of the Nazis with the intention of having his writing be used as evidence of the crimes the Nazis committed in order to bring them to justice after the war. Similarly, Abraham Lewin, a member of the underground archive *Oneg Shabbes*, wrote his diary in the Warsaw Ghetto, which chronicled all aspects of life in the ghetto to serve as a record for the future. Together, these seven diaries are prime examples of how diary writings are significant acts of unarmed resistance.

By analyzing these seven diverse diaries, four prominent themes emerge that are central to understanding writing as resistance during the Holocaust. The writers show us the process of ghettoization from a first-hand perspective. The ghettoization process was one of the first steps the Nazis took to remove the Jews from greater society and deem them as outcasts. Most diaries were written prior to deportation to concentration camps, specifically in the ghettos. In the ghettos, Jews still had access to some of their possessions from home and were able to attain writing materials. In addition, while space in the ghettos was limited, there was a bit of personal time and space for the authors of these diaries to sit alone and write out his or her thoughts. However, once people were transported to camps, most writing halted due to the inability to take personal items, the loss of freedom and the sheer brutality that took place from the moment the person stepped foot into the cattle car. As a result, most of the diaries from this war period tell of the conditions in the ghetto: the limited space and resources, the torture by the Nazis, the Jewish councils, the rumors about the ghetto and the war effort, the relationships, the decrees, the fear, and the death. Each ghetto was different in how it was run and the activities that took place within it. Some ghettos were bare, constantly

made smaller and dealt with disease outbreaks on a regular basis. Other ghettos, like Terezin, seemed to be more like a little town, where cultural activities took place. However, even in ghettos like Terezin, the Jews were at the mercy of the Nazi officers and the limited freedom. Overall, the writings found in the diaries about this ghettoization process exhibit the ways in which the diarists dealt with the unfolding of Nazi decrees, poor ghetto conditions, brutality and murders.

In their struggle to capture in language that which each of the writers experienced, we are able to come face to face with their works of translation. All writers faced the unfathomable and unprecedented, and yet, they were able to write in a language that someone someday may be able to understand. The authors in this study struggle with language and from this struggle, we learn about the metaphors they depend on and the Jewish historical lens they use to try to convey the conditions and the experience.

The third theme that connects to resistance is the individual and collective desire for survival. While they each wanted to survive, the reason behind their desire to survive varied. For some, usually those who were younger, they wanted to continue the life that was placed on hold by the war. They wanted to lead the remaining Jewish community beyond those hopeless days and to rebuild the communities that were destroyed. Other authors expressed their desire to survive in an effort to see the Nazis defeated and to serve as witness for the cruelties committed against the Jews. Regardless of the reason the author wanted to survive, the overwhelming desire by the diarists indicates the resilience of ghetto residents despite the constant fear of danger and death.

Finally, I analyze diary writing as having the aim of bearing witness. I see in the many writings an effort by the authors to construct a historical record of a destroyed people.

At the same time, they seem to be building a bridge to the future and the communities they imagined would still exist. The authors knew that they may not survive the war, but there was a chance that their words could remain and tell the narrative of a people who were annihilated, to document the civilization, and to be a voice and a witness of that lost community. Some authors used their diary to share their personal journey, in an effort to assist others who may be dealing with troubling times. Others wrote details in their diary that could be used after the war as evidence against the Nazis. Regardless of their intention, their writings give a personal face and narrative to an experience that often loses the personal dimension because of the sheer number of people that were affected. It is impossible to know the histories of six million people, but these individual narratives offer insight into individuals and their desire to use writing as resistance. And if the Nazis sought to destroy Jews and Jewish civilization, diaries and their testimonies may serve as the voice of evidence in the future.

Yet while all of these diaries offer a personal, eyewitness account of the unimaginable living conditions during the Nazi occupation and a form of resistance that took place among ordinary individuals, these diaries do not and cannot replace the lives of those which they detail. Alexandra Zapruder, a Holocaust educator and author, accurately reminds the reader of Holocaust diaries, "the essence in confronting the diaries…is exactly *not* to confuse the reading of them with the rescue of individual lives, even symbolically, but to allow them to be seen as the partial records that they are; and to contemplate at one and the same time what is before us and what is lost and unrecoverable."[54] These diaries do not bring their authors back to life, but their words testify to their lives and their resistance. These words preserve

[54] Alexandra Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 8.

the author's memory and those of communities lost at the hands of the Nazis' and their collaborators. With the indelible presence of these words and the readers' readiness to read them, then the Nazis' determination to annihilate the Jewish people and the story of their destruction could not be realized.

Chapter Two: Life in the Ghetto

The words within these diaries offer insight into life within the ghetto as the Nazis were determined to separate the Jews from the rest of society. The diarists record their responses to everyday happenings in the ghettos, chronicling the fateful and often random decrees imposed on ghetto inhabitants, describing pervasive hunger and smuggling activities, as well as round-ups, actions, and deportations.

Although conditions and the timing of policies varied considerably among ghettos, diarists offered extended commentary on these conditions and their impact on themselves and other ghetto inhabitants. While the policy that would lead to the establishment of ghettos in various cities was enacted at different times, the first ghetto to be established was in Lodz on April 30, 1940.[55] Earlier, on February 8, the Jews of Lodz were instructed to move to specific streets and buildings bringing only a few personal belongings.[56] The sealing of the walls of the ghetto in April was the direct result of needing to resettle Germans from the Baltic countries into the newly vacated homes.[57] The Germans maintained control over the newly concentrated population of Jews with the creation of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council). In the beginning, the *Judenrat* was given the responsibility of organizing planned activities but as time went on, they were tasked with more difficult tasks such as taking a census for the purposes of the Nazis.[58]

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[55] Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 38.
[56] Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 166.
[57] Friedländer, 38.
[58] Ibid., 41.

While the original intention of the ghettos was a temporary solution, over time they proved to be successful in containing the Jews in a concentrated area and accomplished the Nazis' psychological and educational goals of spreading the hatred toward the Jews.[59] Some ghettos were sealed from the beginning, whereas others were partially closed, allowing Jews to leave the ghettos during specific hours, usually for work purposes.[60] Unlike the ease of setting up the Lodz ghetto, the Warsaw ghetto was more difficult as a third of the residents in Warsaw were Jewish.[61] The Jews were told they needed to move to the segregated area due to the Germans' concerns about spreading epidemics, so in March 1940 a quarantine area was declared, and later that month, the walls were built.[62] While each ghetto was unique, the ways in which the Germans undertook their establishment followed a similar pattern.

Before being moved into these ghettos, the Jews were to be marked as Jews according to the decree requiring them to wear an identifying armband or badge. Jews were first required to wear a yellow triangle in the town Włocławek in Warthegau beginning on October 24, 1939.[63] The decree was also applied that November to Lodz, Krakow and Sosnowiec.[64] On November 23, 1939, the order requiring every Jew throughout the Generalgouvernment to wear these distinguishing markers announced that, "All Jews and Jewesses within the Government-General who are over ten years of age are required, beginning December 1, 1939, to wear on the right sleeve of their inner and outer garments a white band at least 4 inches wide, with the Star of David on it."[65] The requirement to wear

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[59] Ibid., 38.
[60] Yahil, *The Holocaust*, 168.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Friedländer, 38, and Yahil, *The Holocaust*, 169.
[63] Yahil, *The Holocaust*, 156.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

these badges was extended to other Nazi-occupied areas. On July 3, 1941, the ordinance was issued for the Jews of Vilna.[66] Then, on September 1, 1941, Hilter had the decree published that required the Jews of the Greater Reich to wear these identifying yellow badges.[67]

Many diarists described this process of identification, which led to feelings of humiliation, isolation, and powerlessness. As the Germans attempted to turn the Jewish Star of David into a symbol of Jewish powerlessness and helplessness, Yitskhok Rudashevski, who was a teenager during the war, ultimately transforms the significance of the badge so that it does not humiliate him. In the Vilna ghetto in July 1941, he was required to wear an identifying badge on both his front and back that was a yellow circle with the letter J inside of it.[68] At first, Rudashevski wrote about the humiliation of wearing this identifying marker. "I was ashamed to appear in them on the street not because it would be noticed that I am a Jew," writes Rudashevski, "but because I was ashamed of what [they were] doing to us. I was ashamed of our helplessness."[69] Yet upon further reflection, he stopped paying attention to the physical aspect of the badge. After some time in the ghetto, he concludes that the badge "is attached to our coats but has not touched our consciousness. We now possess so much consciousness that we can say that we are not ashamed of our badges!"[70] This ability to transform the intended acts of dehumanization is characteristic of his writing throughout his diary.

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[66] Ibid., 277.
[67] Ibid., 293.
[68] Yitskhok Rudashevski, *The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto June 1941-April 1943,* trans. Percy Matenko (Israel: Ghetto Fighters' House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1973), 29.
[69] Ibid., 30.
[70] Ibid.

Halina Nelken, also a teenage diary writer, noted the irony of the once-Jewish symbol of power that was being reconstructed into a symbol of degradation. On December 8, 1939 in Krakow she wrote, "The Germans have issued a most hideous ordinance. From now on, all Jews have to wear a white band with a blue Star of David on the right arm. David was the greatest king of the Jews, and the Star of Zion was once a sign of triumph—today it is to be a sign of contempt."[71] So many Nazi actions were full of irony, and Nelken captured the particular humiliation the Nazis intended with acute insight.

When Etty Hillesum was faced with the decree that Jews in her town of Deventer would be forced to wear a badge, she was initially not too worried by this action. Born Esther Hillesum, on January 15, 1914 in Middelburg, Netherlands, she had two brothers, Mischa and Jaap.[72] Her family settled in Deventer, a town in the east of Holland in 1924.[73] University education was important to Etty and her family. She received her first degree in law at the University of Amsterdam and then enrolled in the Faculty of Slavonic Languages for graduate study.[74] Once the war began, however, she turned her attention to studying psychology, which became significant to her understanding of what was taking place around her.[75] Over the course of her diary entries, it becomes apparent that Hillesum was a lively and thoughtful woman who was trying to figure out who she was as she came of age in this difficult time. She felt a sense of freedom, despite the growing restrictions, and she spent much of her diary writing about her relationships, specifically with men.

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[71] Halina Nelken, *And Yet, I Am Here!*, trans. Halina Nelken with Alicia Nitecki (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 59.
[72] J. G. Gaarlandt, introduction to *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*, by Etty Hillesum, trans. Arno Pomerans (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), ix.
[73] Gaarlandt, introduction, ix.
[74] Ibid., x.
[75] Ibid.

The way in which the German occupation took shape differed enormously depending on location. In Holland, where Hillesum lived, Jews were not quite as restricted at first and there were no ghettos as in Eastern Europe. Therefore, while Hillesum was exposed to restrictions and mistreatment of the Jews, her experience prior to being moved to the work camp Westerbork was different than that of other diary writers considered here. Yet like the other diarists, she too was required to wear an identifying badge. Until the point when she was obligated to wear the badge, the early decrees did not seem to impact her directly, or at least that is how she felt. But when her friend and lover, Julius Spier, a psychochirologist, asked, "Well, are you coming over here with your yellow star?" the reality of the situation began to hit Hillesum a little harder.[76] While her early diary entries focused more on her emotions and relationships, on April 29, 1942, her world began to shake as she acknowledges in her diary that, "Only a few months ago I still believed that politics did not touch me and wondered if that was 'unworldliness', a lack of real understanding. Now I don't ask such questions any more. I have grown so much stronger and I honestly feel I can cope with these frightful days, that I'll get through them, even make it my historical duty to get through them."[77]

Abraham Lewin wrote less about his reaction to having to wear the badge than about the unfolding of the Nazi decrees in the ghetto. Lewin was born in Warsaw in 1893 to a strict Orthodox Hasidic family.[78] His father Shabtai was a scholar and rabbi, but died when Lewin

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[76] Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943,* trans. Arno Pomerans (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 107.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Antony Polonsky, introduction and editor to *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto,* by Abraham Lewin, trans. Christopher Hutton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988)6.

was just a teenager, leaving the young Abraham to support his mother and sister.[79] While he was raised in this traditionally religious home, he gradually removed himself from Hasidism.[80] However, his religious upbringing remained present with him throughout his life.[81] He was a secondary school teacher at the Yehudia School, a private Jewish school for girls where he taught Hebrew, Biblical studies and Jewish studies.[82] One of Lewin's colleagues at the school was Emanuel Ringelbaum, who became famous for setting up and leading the underground archive of the Warsaw Ghetto called *Oneg Shabbes.*[83] Lewin's diary became an integral aspect of this archive as it chronicled much of what took place in the ghetto. The members of *Oneg Shabbes* were "conscious of the momentous times in which they lived and of the deadly peril facing the Jews of Europe, they determined to chronicle all aspects of life in the ghetto to serve as a record for future generations."[84]

Lewin observed how after the initial introduction of the armband, the ghetto inhabitants introduced their own set of armbands and consequently created an internal hierarchy in the ghetto. On May 27, 1942, Lewin notes how the authorities responded to the Jews' innovation. He explains that, according to the new decree:

> Jews may only wear the regulation armband, and are forbidden to wear more than one and to alter it in any way, with the exception of the *Ordnungsdienst,*[85] who in addition to their normal Jewish armband wear a special armband designating their office. Up to now different kinds of officials, such as officials of the Jewish community, and others, and also certain professions such as doctors and dentists, have created special armbands designating their specialization, thus supposedly bestowing on themselves a certain degree of protection in the street against German thugs. These special armbands were intended to announce: we are not simple, ordinary Jews, we are

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[79] Polonsky, 6-7.
[80] Polonsky, 7.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 13.
[84] Ibid.
[85] The Jewish ghetto police.

> carrying out important duties and therefore should have certain privileges. This decree puts an end to that. There are no different categories of Jew.[86]

One of the remarkable contributions that Lewin gives us throughout his diary is the way he chronicles not only the Nazi decrees but also the inner workings of Jewish society in the ghetto. As this diary entry reveals, some Jews within the ghetto used the decree as a means by which to negotiate the many constraints and restrictions of the ghetto. Lewin understood the addendum to the armband decree as a way for the Nazis to do away with any differentiation amongst the Jews.

After the implementation of the identifying badges, the Nazis began relocating many Jews to ghettos. Diarists wrote about the many difficulties involved with the transition from their homes to ghettos. Not only were they forced to leave their homes with limited possessions and resources, but they were also becoming literally sealed off from the rest of the world. Yitskhok Rudashevski uses his dairy to discuss the pain of leaving his home on September 6, 1941 as well as the life he loved.[87] Rudashevski was born in Vilna in 1927 and was a teenager during the war.[88] His father Elihu was a typesetter in the publishing house of the Yiddish newspaper *Vilner Tog* [*Vilna Day*] and his mother Rose was a seamstress.[89] Rudashevski did not write in his diary about the personal belongings he took with him or the decree itself. For Rudashevski,

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[86] Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. Antony Polonsky and trans. Christopher Hutton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 101.
[87] Rudashevski, 31.
[88] Percy Matenko, introduction and translation to *The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto June 1941-April 1943*, by Yitskhok Rudashevski (Israel: Ghetto Fighters' House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1973), 8.
[89] Ibid.

> I think of nothing: not what I am losing, not what I have just lost, not what is in store for me. I do not see the streets passing before me, the people passing by. I only feel that I am terribly weary, I feel that an insult, a hurt is burning inside me. Here is the ghetto gate. I feel that I have been robbed, my freedom is being robbed from me, my home, and the familiar Vilna streets I love so much. I have been cut off from all that is dear and precious to me.[90]

Rudashevski did not highlight what one might expect from a teenager attempting to make sense of a traumatic time, but rather records his hurt and humiliation at being forcibly removed from his home and his former life.

Halina Nelken was also a teenage diary writer, born in 1923 in Krakow, Poland.[91] In the beginning of her diary, she wrote about the comfort of home and her happy childhood, growing up in a home with her parents and older brother Felek.[92] While she and her mother expressed concern about the deteriorating situation, her father optimistically remarked, "Don't worry, you're home with your parents!"[93] While this was a comfort to her, she confided in her diary, "I know that nothing bad can happen to me at home, because the family home is untouchable. It is the safest place in the world. And yet…"[94] She soon learned that her family was not, in fact, untouchable as they were forcibly moved to the Krakow Ghetto on March 18, 1941.[95] Conscious of the significance of the moment, she noted that "I am leaving behind my happy childhood and carefree teenage years forever."[96]

Miriam Korber and her family also left for the ghetto in 1941, but their route to the ghetto in Romania was more circuitous. On June 26, 1941, Romanian and German army

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[90] Rudashevski, 32.
[91] Nelken, 277.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Nelken, 50.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 73.
[96] Nelken, 72.

intelligence officers and local forces organized the first large-scale massacre of the Jews of Iasi, the capital of Moldavia, as retaliation for Soviet air raids and to limit Jewish uprisings.[97] Thousands of Jews were murdered in the city, while others died after being placed in freight train cars traveling without a destination.[98] The violence against the Jews continued on a regular basis. In the autumn of 1941, many Jews, including Miriam Korber and her family, were sent to a ghetto in Transnistria, which was in southern Ukraine that was Romanian-occupied and controlled.[99]

Korber was born in Campulung-Moldovensc, a town in the southern part of the Romanian province of Bukovina in 1923.[100] She lived with her parents, Leon and Klara Korber, and her younger sister Sylvia, whom she affectionately calls Sisi in her diary.[101] The Korber family was forced out of Campulung, along with other Jewish families in 1941 beginning the long journey on October 12 to the ghetto in Djurin, Transnistria, where they arrived on November 4.[102] The first entry in Korber's diary chronicles their journey and the sadness that came with leaving not only their home, but also moving to a strange city. Leaving home for the Korber family involved not only moving to another town, but an arduous trek crossing the Dniester River and traveling by truck with German soldiers.[103]

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[97] Friedländer, 225.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Friedländer, 226.
[100] Miriam Korber, "Miriam Korber: Transnistria," in *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, ed. Alexandra Zapruder (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 243.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Korber, 245.
[103] Ibid.

Along the way, they had to say goodbye to Miriam's paternal grandparents as they left them in an asylum for elderly people.[104]

While the relocation to the ghetto was difficult for these diarists, the move was just the beginning of the restricted life they would live within the ghetto. Ghetto life was organized around the random announcements of decrees, which would jolt any sense of normalcy for the ghetto residents. These decrees often placed an added level of restrictions, limiting their freedom and their sense of autonomy within the ghetto walls. Often, these decrees started small in scale and escalated toward limiting movement outside on the streets and requiring people to report to a central location to be deported. These diary passages offer insight into how each of these writers analyzed the significance of these decrees, either for themselves individually, for their community, or in an effort to try to understand the purpose from the regime's perspective.

Twenty-seven year old Etty Hillesum spent much of her diary writing about her personal feelings and emotions, specifically about men and her relationships with them. In the beginning of the diary, she spent little time discussing the matters of the world around her. While she is living and writing in Deventer, she does discuss some of them briefly, but gives them little attention as she tries to remain hopeful. An entry on October 24, 1941 offers an example of her desire to avoid letting the decrees consume her life as she writes, "Tonight new measures against the Jews. I have allowed myself to be upset and depressed about it for half-an-hour."[105] She even acknowledges that the decrees being placed on the Jews were having little effect on her life but she feels bad for those people who were being affected by them. She writes:

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Hillesum, 47.

> Last night I wondered again if I was so 'unworldly' simply because the German measures affect me so little personally. But I don't fool myself for one single moment about the gravity of it all. Yet sometimes I can take the broad historical view of the measures: each new regulation takes its little place in our century and I try then to look at it from the viewpoint of a later age.[106]

As conditions worsen and begin to affect her more directly, she devotes more time and space in her diary writing about them. She notes that Jews are no longer allowed to visit greengrocers' shops, they will have to turn in their bicycles, they will no longer be able to travel by tram, and they must not be on the streets after 8 o'clock at night.[107] While Hillesum displayed a particularly lively and optimistic spirit, even she eventually began to feel the weight of the decrees as they began to increasingly affect her life.

Yitskhok Rudashevski wrote in great detail about the work certificate decree that was imposed on the Jews of the Vilna Ghetto. Work certificates identified certain individuals with special skills, which often protected them from being deported, at least for a certain amount of time. At first, yellow certificates were passed out to what Rudashevski called professional workers, which ghetto inhabitants viewed as a "privilege of life" for the worker and his or her family.[108] This certificate divided the community into those who had the yellow certificate and those who did not. These yellow certificates were given to 3000 families, which amounted to about 12,000 people.[109] Rudashevski reports that the people with the yellow certificate were leaving the ghetto as "they are headed for life. How I envy them!"[110] However, in the middle of the night, the people with yellow certificates returned to the

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[106] Ibid., 109.
[107] Ibid., 118.
[108] Rudashevski, 164.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., 38.

ghetto, though he does not know why.[111] Days later, Rudashevski's mother returns from the second ghetto with a yellow certificate, which offers Rudashevski a sense of relief. The perception of the yellow certificate as a life-saving document leads him to realize that he had quickly moved from the group of have-nots to those who have. His family "join[ed] the stream of lucky ones who are leaving the ghetto."[112] But this excitement disappears as his family learns that old people who are registered as parents are not allowed to leave the ghetto with the rest of the group.[113] For the Rudashevski family, this announcement means that grandmother is not permitted to leave with them. Of this devastating moment, Rudashevski writes, "We quickly say good-bye to grandmother: forever. We leave her alone in the middle of the street and we run to save ourselves. I shall never forget the two imploring hands and eyes which begged: 'Take me along!' We left the ghetto."[114] Later he continued by writing, "We cannot forget that we have abandoned grandmother."[115]

Egon "Gonda" Redlich also tracked the decrees and their implications on the Jews living in the Terezin Ghetto. Unlike other ghettos, the Terezin Ghetto, also known as Theresienstadt, was both an assembly camp as well as the "model camp" of the concentration and extermination system.[116] While there were transports leaving Terezin headed to Auschwitz and Treblinka on a regular basis, the Germans had also created a "Potemkin village" with the intention of fooling the world.[117] This village-like atmosphere afforded a bit more freedom to the residents, including opportunities to engage in cultural activities.

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[111] Ibid., 40.
[112] Ibid., 44.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 45.
[116] Friedländer, 351.
[117] Ibid., 354.

Redlich, the youngest of five children, was born on October 18, 1916 to a lower-middle class family in Olmutz, once the capital of Moravia.[118] His father, who operated a candy store, offered his children a non-orthodox view of Judaism growing up.[119] While Redlich had little interest in religion or politics, he was particularly bothered by the anti-Semitic attacks at his school, and as a result, he joined Maccabi Hatzair, a Zionist youth movement.[120] Although he wanted to study law, this desire dissipated when the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia in March of 1939.[121] Instead, he worked to help young men and women make *aliyah* to Palestine.[122] While living in Prague, he worked at the Zionist Youth Aliyah school, where he was the soccer coach, counselor to the boy scouts, and taught Hebrew and Jewish history.[123] He later became the assistant director of the school, which becomes significant once he moves to the Terezin ghetto.[124] Because he had a reputation as an educator prior to the move to the ghetto, the ghetto elders chose him to direct the *Jugendfürsorge*, the Youth Welfare Department, which was responsible for the housing, care and education of the children in the ghetto.[125]

Redlich tracked the decrees that were relevant to him and the community as a whole. He was particularly bothered by the decrees that the Nazis tried to offer as necessary for the benefit of the Jewish residents, but which he knew were not. On July 22, 1942, he tells of the

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[118] Saul S. Friedman, introduction to *The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich*, by Egon Redlich, trans. Laurence Kutler (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), xii.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Nora Levin, foreword to *The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich*, by Egon Redlich, ed. Saul S. Friedman, trans. Laurence Kutler (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), ix.
[124] Friedman, xii.
[125] Ibid., xiii.

decree that all suitcases must be turned in so that the belongings can be shared. Redlich commented that "the true explanation of the order is something else: to steal the best belongings for themselves. They will leave each person only essential clothes and linen."[126] Understanding the true intentions of the Nazis, he used his diary as an outlet. In June 1943, SS Commandant Seidl was replaced with another SS officer named Anton Burger.[127] A month later, Commandant Burger began to enact new decrees. Among those decrees included the Order of the Day that required all pregnant women to report their pregnancy, and women who were less than six months pregnant to have the fetus destroyed.[128] This decree against pregnant women was supplemented in October 1943 when it forbade women from having children and forbade the use of contraception.[129] A month later, individuals had to agree in writing to infanticide.[130] Redlich "signed [an affidavit] that I would kill my child," even though his wife, Gerta Beck, was six months pregnant with their son Dan, to whom she gave birth months later in Terezin.[131]

In addition to tracking the decrees related to pregnant women, Redlich also noted decrees that were imposed on the broader population of the ghetto. All people between the ages of fourteen and sixty were required to register. However, Redlich acknowledged that "no one knows the reason. They are promising that the registration is not for a transport eastward, but who believes?"[132] Again, Redlich rightfully expressed distrust of the occupiers. He also noted that the Jews were forbidden from crossing the street that the Germans used to

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[126] Egon Redlich, *The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich,* ed. Saul S. Friedman, trans. Laurence Kutler (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 59.
[127] Ibid., 119.
[128] Ibid., 124.
[129] Ibid., 132.
[130] Ibid., 136.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., 129.

return home.[133] There was only one crossroad that the Jews were permitted to use as long as they had permission, otherwise the Jews had to circle the whole city to get to their destination.[134]

Abraham Lewin set out to record the details of the Warsaw Ghetto, established in October 1940, for the *Oneg Shabbes* archive, which detailed the myriad decrees placed on the Jews. The decrees started less imposing on daily life, like not allowing Jews to play or listen to the musical works of non-Jewish musicians and composers, and not being permitted to perform dramas by non-Jewish authors.[135] By August 1942, another decree was made requiring an additional move within the ghetto in an effort to decrease the size of the ghetto, which made Jews living on specific streets move from their homes by a certain date.[136] The decrees created panic. A week later, Jews who were not employed were not allowed south of Leszno Street and "those who are caught there will be shot."[137] In addition, workers' families were no longer protected, and anyone who did not work had to voluntarily go to the *Umschlagplatz*, the location where the Jews were deported.[138] Of these decrees, Lewin writes, "We can see that the Germans are playing a game of cat and mouse with us. Those employed have protected their families, now the families are being deported (killed) and they want to leave behind the working slaves for the time being. *What horror!* They are preparing to destroy us utterly."[139] Continuing to document Nazi decrees, Lewin noted a proclamation

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[133] Ibid., 131.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Lewin, 117.
[136] Ibid., 155.
[137] Ibid., 160.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

on November 6, 1942 requiring 700 male and female workers to collect Jewish property.[140] While these workers were promised accommodations and food, Lewin explains that because the ghetto numbers had decreased so dramatically, he doubts "if there will be 700 men and women in the ghetto of working age who will be prepared to accept this work."[141] "True," he notes, "it is not strenuous work." Yet, just because the work was not physically demanding did not mean that the work was not difficult psychologically. Lewin continues, "It is humiliating and depressing work, because it involves gathering up all the property in the buildings that belonged to Jews and handing it over to the murderers and looters. Each home tells of living people who once lived and worked there and who were murdered in such a horrific fashion."[142] In the process of documenting the decrees in the ghettos, Lewin ends up documenting the destruction of the Jews of Warsaw.

One of the subjects that no diarist could avoid was the topic of food. Ghetto policy was clearly intended to make available far less food than what was necessary to survive. As a consequence, smuggling was widespread, and the punishment for it was well known. In many ghettos, smuggling took place within the narrow cracks in the ghetto walls and tunnels.[143] In some instances, the ghetto guards and Jewish ghetto police were bribed to turn a blind eye to the smuggling. Due to the highly limited food supply within ghettos, the Jewish Council was keenly aware of the importance of this underground smuggling which brought more resources to people who needed it desperately, and therefore, did not do much to try to stop it.[144]

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[140] Ibid., 200.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 200-201.
[143] Friedländer, 128.
[144] Ibid., 149.

Halina Nelken wrote often about her constant feeling of hunger. “Today, I write and cry and cry and my stomach is growling and I am hungry, hungry, HUNGRY!”[145] The lack of food, along with the other deprivations of ghetto life led to heightened tensions in her relationships. On February 15, 1941, she writes, “We are all so miserable and under such stress that we start fights about anything. Well, we have reason enough to feel angry: lack of money, freezing weather, that abominable pharmacy, and hunger. Hatred toward life and myself is growing in me because I am so powerless! All I can do is curse—though only in my diary—damn it all!”[146]

Like many Jews in the ghetto, Nelken’s family struggled to obtain food beyond the basic rations to survive. She explains how “sometimes we can get watery milk from neighbors who deal with Aryan smugglers and get provisions through a hole in the ghetto wall in exchange for money, jewelry, or clothing.”[147] Rudashevski witnessed firsthand some Jews smuggling food into the Vilna ghetto and the dangerous consequences of being caught. At the ghetto gate, he witnessed the arrest of 20 people who worked outside the ghetto when the guards noticed that they were concealing flour.[148] As a result, they were taken to Lukishki Prison. “Lukishki Prison,” Rudashevski explains, “is the ghetto’s most terrifying word. People rarely return from it.”[149]

Avraham Tory, born in 1909 as Avraham Golub in the Lithuanian village of Lazdijai, was forced to move the Kovno ghetto after attempting to hide. Tory learned from his brother-in-law, Benjamin Romanovski, a high official in the Soviet government of Lithuania, that he

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[145] Nelken, 70.
[146] Ibid., 69.
[147] Ibid., 144.
[148] Rudashevski, 107.
[149] Ibid., 108.

was on a list of suspicious Jews who would be arrested and deported to Siberia.[150] In an effort to avoid arrest, he went to Vilna to hide. However, on June 22, 1941, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union leading Tory to return to Kovno and move into the ghetto with the rest of the Jews.[151]

Prior to moving to the ghetto, Tory was an active member of both the Maccabi Club and General Zionist Youth Movement in Lithuania.[152] He studied law at university in Kovno and even traveled to the United States to continue his studies at the University of Pittsburgh, but returned to Kovno when his father died suddenly.[153] As the head of the Maccabi sports team in Lithuania, he traveled to Palestine in 1932 as a gymnast in the first Maccabiah games in Tel Aviv.[154] His Zionist activities increased as he got older, even traveling to Geneva, Switzerland as a delegate in the twenty-first Zionist Congress.[155] This Zionist Congress took place as the German army invaded Poland, leaving the delegates from Eastern Europe wondering if they should return home after the convention.[156] Sadly, many of them, including Tory, determined it was best to return home.

Shortly after moving to the Kovno Ghetto, Tory was named the secretary of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Committee of the Ghetto), which made him privy to information and people within the ghetto.[157] Because of his unique position, he decided to keep records of his

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[150] Martin Gilbert, introduction and editor to *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, by Avraham Tory, trans. Jerzy Michalowicz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), xii.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., x.
[153] Ibid., x-xi.
[154] Ibid., xi.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., xii.
[157] Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, ed. Martin Gilbert, trans. Jerzy Michalowicz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 168.

observations and collected documents that he believed were important for relating the narrative of the Jews in the Kovno Ghetto, like many of the other diarists, he records the many instances of smuggling that he witnessed. On November 28, 1942, he discussed an instance where the Gestapo learned that Jewish wagoners bringing fodder into the ghetto from the village of Vilky were also smuggling other items into the ghetto as well.[158] Consequently, the Gestapo stepped up efforts to catch the smuggling in the act but because the wagoners had been warned prior to their arrival back at the ghetto, nothing was found when the wagons were searched.[159] Similarly, he reported that the ghetto gate checks of workers returning to the ghetto got stricter as time went on and he noted that items like a kilogram of marmalade and a kilogram of meat were confiscated.[160]

In Warsaw, Abraham Lewin similarly tracked the overwhelming hunger of the community as well as the smuggling that took place in his ghetto. He echoes what other diarists said, that at a certain point, survival in the ghetto was dependent on a person's ability to attain bread to eat. People who worked in factories or for the Germans were given a small portion of bread, but it was not enough for a working individual to survive.[161] He asks the question, "What are those Jews who are still alive supposed to do and how are they supposed to live?"[162] In response to his own question, he outlines the dwindling options available to the Jews. On November 27, 1942, Lewin writes, "A certain percentage of the Jews are still living on the proceeds of looting during the 'action', when all our property worth millions and millions was abandoned." These Jews were surviving as the result of scavenging, even from

[158] Ibid., 157.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., 256.
[161] Lewin, 217.
[162] Ibid.

those within their own community. Lewin continues, "A certain percentage live from smuggling or from 'trading,' that is, from selling things outside the ghetto… Often everything they are taking out or trying to bring in is confiscated, mainly food." These Jews risked their lives to attain basic resources from outside the ghetto walls, despite the known consequences of being caught. On many occasions, Lewin observed many people, both adults and children, being attacked and even shot for being caught smuggling.[163] Yet for some, the risk was worth the potential reward.

In addition to describing roundups and "actions," diarists also detail the deportations of Jews out of the ghettos and the realities of what happens once they leave the ghetto walls. On August 28, 1942, Abraham Lewin reports a story after a fellow ghetto resident returned from Treblinka. "His words confirm once again and leave no room for doubt that all the deportees, both those who have been seized and those who reported voluntarily, are taken to be killed and that no one is saved. This is the naked truth."[164]

Although Etty Hillesum had initially written that the measures against the Jews did not seem to affect her too much, this view gave way to an increasing awareness of the ultimate fate of the Jews. In a diary entry from June 1942, Hillesum still feels secure in knowing where her parents are. But with the increase in the number of transports, she is aware that this security may not last much longer.

> I am also aware that there may come a time when I shan't know where they are… when they might be deported to perish miserably in some unknown place. I know this is perfectly possible. The latest news is that all Jews will be transported out of Holland through Drenthe Province and then on to Poland. And the English radio has reported that 700,000 Jews perished last year alone, in Germany and the occupied territories. And even as we stay alive we shall carry the wounds with us throughout our lives… I have already died a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps.

[163] Ibid., 89, 125 and 216.
[164] Ibid., 170.

> I know about everything and am no longer appalled by the latest reports. In one way or another I know it all. And yet I find life beautiful and meaningful. From minute to minute.[165]

This uncertainty became a reality when a week later her brother Mischa was selected to be transported to Drenthe.[166]

On April 5, 1943, Yitskhok Rudashevski tells of a report of a transport from the Vilna Ghetto that was believed to be going to Kovno, but instead the 85 railroad cars of Jews holding about 5000 people were taken to Ponar where they were shot to death.[167] While this was certainly not the first transport where news returned to the ghetto that the Jews were taken to Ponar and killed, this newest report suggested to ghetto inhabitants that these deadly transports were continuing. In light of this news, Rudashevski describes the situation of the Jews of the Vilna Ghetto. "People sit caged in as in a box. On the other side lurks the enemy which is preparing to destroy us in a sophisticated manner according to a plan, as today's slaughter proved… The situation has been confirmed. We have no one to depend on. The danger is very great. We believe in our own strength. We are ready at any moment."[168] Based on Rudashevski's perspective of the situation throughout his diary, it seems that he was ready for the possibility of being taken away as there was no one there to help them.

Halina Nelken also wrote about rumors of more deportations from the Krakow Ghetto in the near future. As a result, she reports how desperate parents were sending their children away to live with Aryan people.[169]

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[165] Hillesum, 127.
[166] Ibid., 142.
[167] Rudashevski, 138.
[168] Ibid., 138-139.
[169] Nelken, 174.

Because of Gonda Redlich's leadership role within Terezin ghetto, he was in a unique position, both in terms of his access to information about transports, and also in trying to keep the children off the transport lists. He compared his work of trying to save the children to his work before the war. He wrote on January 7, 1942, "Our work is like that of the Youth Aliyah [to Eretz Yisrael]. There we brought children to freedom. Here we attempt to save the children from the face of death."[170] In another instance, Redlich reports what took place when people who were on the transport list did not show up at the designated time. When those 180 people did not report for the transport, everyone in the ghetto was punished. It was "forbidden to go out in the street after 6pm, lights must be out after 6pm, all gatherings are forbidden, and the ghetto police have been ordered to carry truncheons."[171]

For most of the authors of the diaries who recorded the progression of ghettoization, they did not remain in their respective ghettos until the very end. Most of them were deported to camps, where they either were murdered or in the rare case, survived.

At the time of the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto, Halina Nelken was already separated from her family, who had remained in the ghetto while she was living in the barracks and working at the *Fliegerhorst*, the air force base. In the spring of 1943, Nelken wrote that the Germans had liquidated the ghetto on March 13 and killed the sick people in the hospital and the children in the *Kinderheim* (children's home).[172] The remaining Jews held on to the "remains of their belongings [as they] were beaten, whipped, kicked, and shot. Those who were still in Ghetto B were herded to Plac Zgody to be killed there, or deported to

[170] Redlich, 4.
[171] Redlich, 80.
[172] Nelken, 190.

Belzec or Sobibor."[173] This terrifying scene was likely played out over and over again as the ghettos were liquidated with the progress of the war.

[173] Ibid.

Chapter Three: Lost In Translation:

The Struggle for Language in Ghetto Diaries

The diarists put into writing the progression and deterioration of the ghetto as they saw it unfold before them. Though their words and descriptions sought to draw a picture of what they were living through, the actual characterizing of their experience remained, at the same time, beyond their grasp. As they searched for the words to capture the extremity of the conditions they were facing and the magnitude of the destruction they were witnessing, there seemed to remain a wide gap between the words they wrote and their ability to make sense of what they had just described. Simply put, the diarists struggled to describe the indescribable.

Many of the authors of these diaries write specifically about their struggle to find the words to describe that which they saw. Etty Hillesum's practice of writing enabled her to separate herself from the outside world and to avoid losing herself in the chaos around her. "The worst thing for me will be when I am no longer allowed pencil and paper to clarify my thoughts—they are absolutely indispensable to me, for without them I shall fall apart and be utterly destroyed."[174] While the experience was difficult to characterize with words, for Hillesum, these words were what kept her feeling as much herself as possible, given the circumstances. These words also gave her a way to make sense of what she was seeing and feeling. She writes, "I think I know what all the 'writing' was about as well: it was just another way of 'owning', of drawing things in more tightly to oneself with words and images. And I'm sure that that used to be the very essence of my urge to write: I wanted to

[174] Hillesum, 140.

creep silently away from everyone with all my carefully hoarded treasure, to write it all down, keep tight hold of it and have it all to myself."[175]

As chroniclers, both Avraham Tory and Abraham Lewin wrote about their struggle to accurately write about the experience for people to read in the future. Therefore, Tory collected other primary documents to further support the observations he made in his diary.

> In order to illustrate actual life within the Ghetto, I also collected documents, publications, orders, warnings, notices, and commands issued by the evil regime and—not to mention them in the same breath—announcements of the Jewish Ghetto Council, which often constituted precedents in times of emergency, the likes of which are not to be found in any law book anywhere in the world. I collected paintings, symbols, graphics, songs, and macabre humor, which, as in a distorted mirror, reflect private and social life in the Ghetto.[176]

Tory goes on to point out that many people living in the ghetto also needed to write to make sense of what was taking place around them. "There are some people among us who cannot contain their urge to write; they must put their thoughts in writing. Some of them write poems; others write stories or memoirs. Recently, after a prolonged lull in literary activity, poems of Ghetto life have been brought out, as well as stories from the history of our people; they had been secreted in various hiding places."[177] Tory hoped that all of these documents together would offer those who came after the war perhaps only a glimpse of what Jews were forced to endure.

While Lewin wrote in his diary in an effort to chronicle events that took place in the Warsaw Ghetto, he also wrote about the struggle to write because of his own inability to believe what he was seeing. For him, writing made the experience real, but his disbelief also made him question if what he was experiencing could actually be real. On June 3, 1942, he

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[175] Ibid., 12.
[176] Tory, 168.
[177] Tory, 309.

writes, “Last week I was told that Krakow Jews are to be forcibly resettled. I didn’t believe this tragic news and so I didn’t write it down.”[178] At a later time, Lewin echoed this struggle again as he writes, “The human hand and pen are weary of describing all that has happened to the handful of Jews who are for the time being still alive, myself among them. The cup of our sorrows has no parallel in our history.”[179]

In order to characterize the ghetto experience in his own words, he depended on details, names, numbers and locations to offer the reader a full picture of the facts of the situation. And yet, he notes, “The Germans’ crimes and the Jews’ tragedies are such that there are no words adequate to describe them.”[180] In another attempt to grasp the scope of the Nazi crimes, he turned from words to numbers. “In terms of the number of victims, Hitler has murdered an entire people,” he wrote on December 29, 1942. “There are many peoples in Europe who number fewer than the number of our martyrs. The Danes and the Norwegians are no more than three million. The Lithuanians, the Letts and the Estonians have far fewer. The Swedes—six million. The Slovaks fewer than two million, and so on. And Hitler has already killed five, six million Jews. Our language has no words with which to express the calamity and disaster that has struck us.”[181]

While Lewin depended on facts to make sense of what was taking place around him, Yitskhok Rudashevski used another method to express that which could not be described through words alone—doodles. Rudashevski’s first cousin who survived the war noted that Rudashevski showed an interest in writing before the war started.[182] Therefore, it was not

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[178] Lewin, 115.
[179] Ibid., 176.
[180] Ibid., 79.
[181] Ibid., 232.
[182] Matenko, 9.

surprising that he dedicated his time in the Vilna Ghetto to writing in his diary, attaining an education, and participating in cultural clubs. He helped to start the Yiddish poetry club and was an active participant in the club that collected ghetto folklore and prepared sociographic sketches.[183] He wrote his diary in Yiddish, which he was comfortable speaking and writing.[184] Yet when those words did not express that which he needed them to, he doodled, which seemed to offer him an outlet and serve as an extension for his words.[185]

Like Rudashevski, Egon Redlich recognized the power of alternate forms of expression when words were not enough. For him, writing in his diary in the form of letters to his love Gerta Beck offered him a way of sharing what he has seen, felt and learned.[186] But as an educator who was responsible for the children in Terezin, he knew that words would not be enough for the children themselves. Therefore, he created opportunities for the children to use art as a means for personal expression. He noticed that the "children's life in the ghetto [was] expressed in all their work."[187]

Similar to Rudashevski, Halina Nelken also wrote a diary prior to the outbreak of the war. Her great aunt Mala had given her the diary before the war and had explained to Nelken why it was important for a young girl to have a diary. "Be a heroine of the everyday," Mala told Nelken. "Write your own novel. This is the place for your dreams and complaints. A lady may complain only in writing and to herself."[188] Ironically, Nelken did not have the agency of a heroine as Mala had implied prior to the war. Nelken found little to dream about, but her diary was a place where she wrote about her complaints. "I turn to my diary in the

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[183] Matenko, 9 and Rudashevski, 80.
[184] Matenko, 13.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Levin, x and Redlich, 2.
[187] Redlich, 126.
[188] Nelken, 37 (Note written by Nelken about her diary after the war).

most difficult moments. How come I do not write when—in those very rare occasions—something nice happens, and I am in a good mood?"[189]

Miriam Korber's diary, like Nelken's, ended up being something entirely different than she intended. Written entirely in Romanian, originally it was a notebook intended as a poetry album, but owing to the circumstances of the war, the notebook took the form of a diary that recorded her family's passage from Campulung to Djurin.[190] In addition to chronicling their trek and her life when they arrived in Djurin, she also kept a list of people that she remembered who had died.[191] Her intended poetry album became a yizkor album, which allowed her to use those names to hold onto the memories that might somehow be lost.

In addition to struggling to make sense of what they described, many of the diarists also made conscious decisions about what language to use when writing their diaries. Egon Redlich consciously chose to write his diary in Hebrew for two main reasons. The first was that it "offer[ed] him practice with the language he hoped to use in the Jewish homeland after the war"; the second was so that it should serve "as a barrier to translation should the Germans discover his notes."[192] His choice exhibited his hopes for survival and the rebuilding of Jewish life in Palestine. Yet, he "refuse[d] to write in Hebrew on *Shabbat*, preferring Czech instead," which allowed him to mark Jewish time through his language choice.[193]

Similar to Redlich, Abraham Lewin also made a language change in his diary, though Lewin's shift came later in his diary and was not only used for specific entries. Lewin began

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[189] Ibid., 70.
[190] Zapruder, 245 and 249.
[191] Korber, 263.
[192] Redlich, 1.
[193] Ibid., 2.

writing his diary in Yiddish but later switches to Hebrew.[194] While the reason for his decision to switch languages cannot be known, the historian Antony Polonsky speculates that "perhaps [he felt] that only a sacred language was fit to record martyrology which made the massacres of Chmielnicki or of 1918-19 pale into insignificance. His Hebrew, although sometimes stilted and convoluted, with many Yiddishisms or Polonisms, is filled with the spirit of the Hebrew prophets he so loved. These biblical echoes give to his narrative an almost poetic quality."[195] While Redlich did not want to use the Jewish language on *Shabbat*, Lewin may have shifted to Hebrew because it has been the Jewish language of prophetic vision and catastrophe.

Halina Nelken also made a significant shift in the way she wrote in her diary. After her entry on May 23, 1942, she wrote her diary in a new format. Reflecting on this change after the war, she says, "It was as though I had suddenly grasped that the incomprehensible which was happening to us must be recorded, regardless of the danger such a document represented. I kept writing in a different form, in the third person, substituting 'she' for 'I,' so that if the document were found during a search, it could be easily dismissed as just a trifle, a fictional or fantastical story, as nothing real."[196] It seems that, at this point in time, ghetto life got even stricter and began to turn into a labor camp without barracks.[197] This shift in the outside world caused an internal change within Nelken and her understanding of what was taking place around her. This shift within her diary mirrors a greater ability to comprehend the nature of the catastrophe facing the Jews.

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[194] Polonsky, 37.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Nelken, 164.
[197] Ibid.

One of the strategies these writers found to help bridge the gap between words and experience was by connecting the unprecedented nature of the present moment with Jewish historical memories and frames of reference. Halina Nelken, Egon Redlich and Avraham Tory all connected their hopes for rescue to the holiday of Passover. During Passover 1941, Halina Nelken's father read the *Haggadah* aloud for the four members of her family. Commenting on the Israelites' slavery in Egypt, she points out that, "We are again slaves, like our ancestors once were in Egypt. Who will 'bring us forth with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm?'"[198]

Avraham Tory also turned to the Passover story as a source of hope and to be reminded of the greater purpose for the Jewish people and their history. On April 19, 1943, he writes, "Today is Passover eve. I wanted to get some encouragement in order to recall—in these days of slavery and enslavement—the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt…We believe in the Exodus taking place for each generation. The more we are being enslaved, the greater is our faith. *Am Israel Hai* (the people of Israel live)."[199] But this does not mean they should be discouraged but rather rise up, as was taking place that day in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the Jewish people will live on.

On Passover 1944, writing a year after Tory, Egon Redlich notes the irony of observing the holiday marking Jewish liberation from captivity. "Passover—a festival of freedom, of light, of freedom. Around the city are walls and barbed wire. In the evening, lights are forbidden. And during the day, you cannot go out."[200] He continues to note the incongruities of marking Passover in a state that was worse than slavery, where they are

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[198] Ibid., 78.
[199] Tory, 302.
[200] Redlich, 113.

forbidden to eat bread, but in the ghetto, that is all there is. He cites the biblical passage, " 'In all your habitations you shall eat matzos.' But here in the ghetto, they celebrated the seder and ate—rolls. A strange act, a strange ghetto—strange Jews, a strange world. A celebration of Passover and for the seder they eat [leavened] bread."[201] It may not have made sense for the intent of the holiday, but for the Jews who were not celebrating in the freedom of their own homes, they nevertheless celebrated the holiday in a way that allowed them to frame their experience in Jewish religious terms.

Abraham Lewin, for his part, turned regularly to the Bible for his frame of reference. This orientation was not surprising given his Hasidic upbringing, though when he wrote in the ghetto, he no longer identified with this form of traditional Judaism.[202] With regard to his wife being taken away, he wrote frequently about the unimaginable pain he felt now that she was gone and he did not know where she was. "Only now do I understand the full meaning of the words of the Bible," he writes. "Thus a man leaves his father and his mother and goes unto his wife and they become of one body."[203] In a similar manner, he heard stories about Jews who were able to pass as Aryans who were going to destroyed Jewish communities and rescuing the Jewish children who were living with "merciful Christians or elsewhere." In response he writes, "I feel the desire to bury my face in my pillow and to weep and weep endless tears for the tragic fate of my people, for the destruction of the frail Jewish sheep being choked and devoured by the wild and savage German leopard. Outcast lamb of Israel,

[201] Ibid., 114.
[202] Polonsky, 7.
[203] Lewin, 194.

who will give us a second Ezekiel who will sing words of comfort and summon up a second valley of bones?"[204]

On other occasions, Lewin compares the Nazis to past enemies of the Jewish people. On May 21, 1942, the eve of Shavuot, he states, "Hitlerism in this respect represents a throw-back to the dark days of Babylonia and Assyria. For Hitler plans to uproot and drive entire nations from one end of Europe to the other and even from one continent to another."[205] And in yet another entry, he refers to the Nazis as the "old-new Amalekites," connecting the Nazis to the murderous nation in the Bible and viewing the Nazis as the latest instance in a long line of persecutions against the Jews.[206]

While diarists such as Nelken, Redlich and Tory related the catastrophic events they were witnessing to earlier moments in Jewish history, other diarists sometimes employed the use of metaphors to try to illustrate the unprecedented nature of the unfolding events. Many of the metaphors that the authors used in their writing compare the Jews' situation to those of animals, which had no control or freedom. "I feel we are like sheep," Yitskhok Rudashevski writes in the fall of 1941. "We are being slaughtered in the thousands and we are helpless. The enemy is strong, crafty, he is exterminating us according to a plan and we are discouraged."[207] Over a year later, he noticed more crowding, less food coming through the ghetto gate, and more people being arrested. Fearing the worst hewrites, "This time we shall not permit ourselves to be led like dogs to the slaughter!"[208] His language bore striking

[204] Ibid., 122.
[205] Ibid., 84.
[206] Ibid., 120.
[207] Rudashevski, 46.
[208] Ibid., 138.

similarity to Abba Kovner's call to action on December 31, 1941 and other diarists of the time.

Like Rudashevski, Gonda Redlich also used the sheep to the slaughter metaphor. On October 5, 1942, he described a transport filled with elderly people that would be leaving Terezin. Trying to understand the reality of the situation he writes, "Father, mother, a grandfather of people who have worked here for months. This is the reward—a ghetto in Poland. A death sentence. The mood isn't good. Fear and despair, anger, anger. Sheep led to the slaughter. Without the possibility of defense."[209] Here, Redlich pointed out that the Jews did not have the ability to defend themselves, whereas Kovner used the same metaphor to suggest that the Jews should nevertheless try to defend themselves. In response to another transport, Redlich writes on January 20, 1943, "The transports are a flock of lambs. Sheep sent and cast aside, sheep whose taskmasters are also lambs. Jews driving Jews. And eternal circle."[210] This entry was particularly powerful coming from Redlich who worked on both the transport and appeals committees, which determined who would be deported.[211] Reinforcing what appears to be a widely circulated phrase, Halina Nelken writes in the Krakow Ghetto in June 1942, "What words could describe how we are being driven to slaughter? Worse than cattle."[212]

[209] Redlich, 76.
[210] Ibid., 98.
[211] Ibid., 3.
[212] Nelken, 173.

Chapter Four: Hope for Survival

Despite their struggle to find the words to describe the terror and chaos of the world in which they now found themselves, individuals continued to write. They wrote about their personal life and their relationships, about the conditions of the ghettos, and the desire to survive. This desire, and in some cases even optimism, to survive offers the reader insight into a remarkable aspect of the psychology of these individuals, who, despite the constant fear of the unknown and the presence of death around them, in many cases, continued to write about their desire to live beyond the war. Clearly embedded in their writing is the impulse to survive as well as an optimistic spirit, despite the unprecedented conditions of the Shoah.

Etty Hillesum's outlook was perhaps the most optimistic among all the diarists. For her, surviving meant paradoxically accepting that death could happen at any moment. As a result, she focused on appreciating every moment she was alive. Her early diary entries chronicle her hopes for the future. Yet as the conditions of the world around her drastically decline, she begins to contemplate the reality of death. Consistent with the attitude found throughout her diary, she used the situation as an opportunity to begin living in the moment and appreciating all that she had, rather than dwell on what she would lose. On the morning of March 21, 1941, she writes, "And if I knew that I was going to die tomorrow then I would say: it's a great shame, but it's been good while it lasted."[213] Hillesum's sense of life as precious and unexpected leads her to imagine that when the time does come, she wants to be able to say that she lived the best life she could under the impossible conditions.

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[213] Hillesum, 15.

At the beginning of Hillesum's diary, she discussed her lack of connection to prayer, wondering about how one goes about praying.[214] Yet she eventually turns to prayer and to God as she faces the inevitability of her death. While it appears from her writings that she has a deep connection with God, this connection seems to be a personal one. She does not question how God could let the Nazi brutalities take place, but instead sees it as the result of the harm humans cause each other. "And yet I don't think life is meaningless," Hillesum writes. "And God is not accountable to us for the senseless harm we cause one another. We are accountable to Him! I have already died a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps. I know about everything and am no longer appalled by the latest reports. In one way or another I know it all. And yet I find life beautiful and meaningful. From minute to minute."[215] Despite her sense that she understood the deadly realities of the war, she nevertheless found hope and meaning in life.

Indeed, Hillesum's notion of survival did not focus on outliving the war, but instead found expression in living fully in the moments she had left. On July 3, 1942, Hillesum writes, "By 'coming to terms with life' I mean: the reality of death has become a definite part of my life; my life has, so to speak, been extended by death, by my looking death in the eye and accepting it, by accepting destruction as part of life and no longer wasting my energies on fear of death or the refusal to acknowledge its inevitability."[216] Death was everywhere and instead of hiding from it, Hillesum realized that by acknowledging the presence of death around her and the reality that she may die in the near future, her desire to live and appreciate the moments she had left instead constituted her way to survive in the present.

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[214] Ibid., 62.
[215] Ibid., 127.
[216] Ibid., 131.

Unlike Hillesum's acceptance of the inevitability of death, Yitskhok Rudashevski lived with the ardent desire to survive, doing whatever was possible to remain strong for this moment and for the future. As an active member of ghetto clubs, such as the literature, history, natural science and ghetto folklore clubs, and the Pioneer organization of the general organization of students in the U.S.S.R. under the Communist Party and the Consomol (young communist organization) in the Vilna Ghetto, Rudashevski, along with other young people in the ghetto, used their time in the ghetto to prepare for the future as potential leaders of the community at the end of the war.[217] By continuing to collect ghetto folklore and studying while living in the ghetto, they remained an optimistic force preparing for life after the war. With regard to the determined spirit of the ghetto youth, he writes, "We have demonstrated that even within the three small streets we can maintain our youthful zeal. We have proved that from the ghetto there will not emerge a youth broken in spirit; from the ghetto there will emerge a strong youth which is hardy and cheerful."[218] For Rudashevski and these other youths, there was no question that they would prevail and survive. And when they did live past these trying times, they would not be broken by the experience but rather elevated by their survival.

The Pioneer organization in which Rudashevski participated, along with fourteen other young people, teacher Mire Bernshteyn, and comrade Musye Saginor, dedicated their time in the ghetto to preparing themselves for their life after the war and rebuilding that which was destroyed by the Nazi occupation.[219] "We need to concern ourselves with social cooperation in the club and in school," Rudashevski writes. "At the meetings we shall also

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[217] Matenko, 9 and 161 (Notes to the diary).
[218] Rudashevski, 105.
[219] In Rudashevski's diary, he refers to teacher Mire Bernshteyn as "M." and comrade Musye Saginor as "Mu."

train ourselves, because we must prepare for the life that is in store for us. The future will require dedicated people who will have to guide the masses toward great renewal."[220] For this Pioneer group, its notion of survival was connected to its sense of obligation to lead the surviving community to continue living. Rudashevski acknowledges that that life will not be easy but it is the responsibility of his cadre of youth to begin preparing for it now with unrelenting ferocity, even as the destruction continued.

Rudashevski's unwavering certainty about the survival of his group and its role in leading the survivors after the war applied equally to his own survival. In the beginning of January 1943, Rudashevski wrote in his diary that he must decide whether to go to the trade school and get a job, or to continue studying in school. After contemplating both options, he decided to remain in school studying, which had been his passion prior to moving to the ghetto. He justifies this decision explaining: "I still have suitable conditions, so I must not interrupt my studies. My determination to study has developed into something like defiance of the present which hates study, loves to work, to drudge. No, I decided. I shall live with tomorrow, not with today… studying has become even more precious to me than before."[221] In stark contrast to Hillesum's desire to live in the moment, Rudashevski decided that he must live by preparing for tomorrow. He loves working with the clubs within the ghetto now, such as the literature and history clubs, because it allows him to look beyond the current conditions of ghetto life to a time when the Jews will prevail.

Halina Nelken viewed survival in terms similar to those of Rudashevski. Perhaps their youth led them to be optimistic and hopeful in a way that adults were not: Rudashevski wrote his diary between the age of 13 and 15, and Nelken wrote when she was 15 to 17 years

[220] Ibid., 131.
[221] Ibid., 120.

old. Like Rudashevski, Nelken turned her attention to the future and the preparations necessary for her life after the war. In October 1941, Nelken writes about her strong opposition to working at the factory because she does not know how long the war will last. Her concern is that by working at the factory she would not be preparing herself most effectively for the future. If she were to work at the factory and the war lasted two more years, she noted, she "will be two years older as well, old and a complete zero!"[222] She continues, "I won't be able to be just beginning after the war, because I won't have either the money or the energy, not to mention the time. So I cannot allow myself to waste time now, I have to learn and prepare myself for the future now."[223] Nelken knew it was dangerous for a Jew living in the ghetto to be unemployed. While she preferred a job where she "could be more useful as a 'brain,'" she accepted a job working in a co-op producing brushes and brooms to give her employment and to save her from forced labor.[224] For Nelken, the focus on surviving in the ghetto was not the struggle for survival itself—that was a given for her—but rather on preparing herself for life after the ghetto walls were destroyed.

Miriam Korber looked at survival differently than Hillesum, Rudashevski and Nelken. Korber neither accepted death as Hillesum did, nor believed that survival was likely as Rudashevski and Nelken. Korber had a strong desire to live, yet at the same time, she also questioned why she wanted to survive at all given the conditions she was living in. Korber's writings lead Alexandra Zapruder to conclude that Korber had an "inexplicable desire to live, despite the misery and hopelessness of their circumstances."[225] Zapruder comes to this conclusion based on many of Korber's diary entries, including when she writes, "And I

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[222] Nelkin, 97.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Zapruder, 247.

wonder in all honesty, why do we still want to live? Only hope keeps us alive."[226] Korber continued to question the will to live amid such pain in her entry on January 28, 1942 where she writes, "Why is there in us such a yearning for life? Why don't we cut short our torment? Is there cowardice or greatness in this ability and will to survive the hardship? And will we survive in the end? Perhaps all of these things will turn us into real human beings and in other times we will know how to appreciate the good in life."[227] How could one watch the brutality and daily struggle of their community without questioning still the desire to survive? And yet as she wonders about her own will to survive, she can still imagine that the conditions she is experiencing might prepare her to appreciate everything that will come at the end of the war.

Egon Redlich also imagined that the tortuous conditions at Terezin would one day allow him to appreciate life outside of the ghetto. In his diary (which was really a series of letters to his wife Gerta Beck whom he affectionately called "Beczulkah"), he writes, "In spite of it all, Beczulkah, we're not the only ones suffering in this terrible century. Maybe later we will appreciate more how nice it is to be alive. After the days of suffering, everyone will feel the meaning of freedom. How good it is to live."[228] This expression of hope for the future offers Redlich's belief that both he and his wife will live on beyond the end of the war, to a time when they will be able to enjoy all the freedoms that they were robbed of in the ghetto.

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[226] Korber, 258.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Friedman, xiii and Redlich, 6.

Redlich had a strong desire to live, especially to see his wife Gerta again who remained in Prague.[229] While throughout his diary he yearned to be reunited with his wife, after four months in Terezin the impulse to survive also came from his growing connection to being Jewish. "On the whole: I have turned into a Jew in the fullest sense of the word," he writes on April 4, 1942, which also happens to be Shabbat. "Czech songs and culture have lost all their meaning. I am reaching a goal which I have longed for: to be a Jew, with all that the word means. I have much work and am working with renewed vigor."[230] While being Jewish is what brought him to Terezin, it is Judaism that now gives him the strength and determination to survive.

Like Redlich, Avraham Tory also connected survival during the Holocaust to a greater Jewish purpose. As is evident in much of his writing, Tory's desire to survive was deeply connected to his hope for the Jewish community to survive. As for the struggle of each day to survive, he reflects, "despite the seven compartments of hell that the Jews—as individuals and as a community—have gone through, our spirit has not been crushed. Our eyes are wide open and we are attuned to what is going on around us. We do not forget for one moment the hallowed purposes of our people."[231] The Nazis could not destroy the sacred purpose of the Jewish people, because it is the Jewish spirit that will allow them to survive this moment in time. Tory continues,

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[229] Levin, x.
[230] Redlich, 32.
[231] Tory, 209.

> Everything we do, all the things we go through, seem to us a necessary evil, a temporary hardship, so that we may reach our goal and fulfill our duty: to keep on going, and to keep spinning the golden thread of the eternal glory of Israel, in order to prove to the world the will of our people to live under any conditions and situations. These goals supply us with the moral strength to preserve our lives and to ensure the future of our people.[232]

Interestingly, Tory saw this struggle to live as a "necessary evil" in order to move beyond to the next purpose of the Jewish people. The struggle of the Jews to survive this experience would inevitably prove the uniqueness, or even chosenness, of the Jewish people to the rest of the world. In a time when the Nazis were trying to dehumanize the Jews and to rid the world of them, Tory saw this crisis as a time when the Jews would further exhibit their chosenness to the world and their ability to surpass any obstacle placed before them. This perspective on the situation allowed Tory to be confident in the survival of the Jews and their future generations.

In addition to writing his diary, Tory also collected valuable artifacts that could be used to incriminate the Nazis at the end of the war. All of these documents were carefully buried in five crates in the Kovno Ghetto, with the hope that at least some of these irreplaceable documents would survive beyond the Nazi occupation.[233] Included in these crates was Tory's written last will and testament in case he died before the end of the war. This powerful document lays out Tory's personal goals in chronicling all that took place within the ghetto walls and his view of his purpose in the ghetto. He asked priest V. Vaickus that when the last of the Jews in Lithuania were gone, to retrieve the crates from the ghetto and take it to the head of the World Zionist Organization.[234] While Tory expresses his hope

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[232] Ibid., 210.
[233] Gilbert, xxiii.
[234] Ibid.

to survive the war, he worked hard to ensure that if he himself did not survive, his personal testimony would survive to bring the Nazis to justice for their crimes.

In his diary, Tory not only writes about his own desire to survive, but also his determination to help others remain hopeful. He writes, "I took part in the effort to console the young and the old, to encourage them not to surrender and to continue to struggle and to believe that they would be rescued from the Ghetto and from their bitter fate in spite of everything."[235] For Tory, survival of the important documents was not enough, but he took it upon himself to also try to encourage others around him to be hopeful for their own survival. Through his work to help others, he pushed himself to remain optimistic and hopeful, even though his role within the Kovno Ghetto made him privy to some of the more difficult details of the Nazi plan.

Abraham Lewin, who like Tory chronicled the minute details of ghetto life for the future, wrote about the difficulty of living and the hope to survive. While he was not certain that he would survive like the young diary authors were, he reflected on what the worst part of the ghetto experience was. At the conclusion of Shabbat on May 16, 1942, he writes,

> An unremitting insecurity, a never-ending fear, is the most terrible aspect of all our tragic and bitter experiences. If we ever live to see the end of this cruel war and are able as free people and citizens to look back on the war-years that we have lived through, then we will surely conclude that the most terrible and unholy, the most destructive aspect for our nervous system and our health was to live day and night in an atmosphere of unending fear and terror for our physical survival, in a continual wavering between life and death—a state where every passing minute brought with it the danger that our hearts would literally burst with fear and dread.[236]

His statement beginning with "if" offers deep insight into Lewin's personal feelings about whether survival is possible. Yet, he continues to imagine how he and the rest of the

[235] Tory, 168.
[236] Lewin, 73.

survivors would reflect back on their time in the Warsaw Ghetto. He describes a fear, not of death itself, which surrounded him all the time, but rather the fear of the unknown that each day and night in the ghetto brought. He wanted to survive, but given the conditions of the ghetto and the brutality at the hands of the Nazis, he was not so sure that survival was possible, despite his desire for it.

While Lewin could not be certain that anyone would survive life in the ghetto, he observed a strong desire amongst ghetto residents to hold on to any hope possible to survive until the end of the war. He writes, "One of the most remarkable incidental phenomena seen in the present war is the clinging to life, the almost complete cessation of suicides. People are dying in vast numbers of the typhus epidemic, are being tortured and murdered by the Germans in vast numbers, but people do not try to escape from life."[237] He imagined that facing terror and death, many people would want to die themselves, but that was not the case. "In fact just the contrary: people are bound to life body and soul and want to survive the war at any price," Lewin writes. "The tension of this epoch-making conflict is so great that everybody, young and old, great and small, wants to live to see the outcome of this giant struggle, and the new world order."[238] Lewin observed the strength and power of the human spirit to see beyond that which was in front of him or her and to prevail. Hope remained in a seemingly hopeless situation. Surprisingly, this hope to live was not reserved just for the young as Lewin witnessed. An elderly man told Lewin, "I want to live to see the end of the war and then live for just another half hour longer."[239] While our younger diary authors expressed a desire to live to beyond the war to be active members in leading the surviving

[237] Ibid., 119.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.

Jewish community and to continue the life that they had been robbed of, this man offers another perspective. At his age, the purpose of survival was not simply to continue living, but rather to witness the destruction of the Nazis and the conclusion of the war. This perspective was significant as it is clear that Jews living in ghettos had hope and they desired to survive, although the purpose behind that desire for survival differed for each individual.

In addition to writing about their desire to survive, many of the diarists also discussed the role of rumors within their respective ghettos and the added anxiety to which these rumors contributed. Rumors ran rampant throughout every ghetto. Some of these proved to be true, while others did not. These rumors created a real struggle for human understanding as the authors of these diaries expressed through their words. As Jews living in the ghetto tried to understand what was happening, they grasped on to any semblance of knowledge, as so much of life experience in the ghetto was constantly unknown. If the rumor had a bad implication, such as knowledge of future transports, the people were fearful of whether they themselves or their loved ones would be required to report for it. Whether the transport was a reality or not, this rumor causes extreme anxiety. If the rumor offered hope, like good news from the war front, the people felt a sense of hope and determination, but often, these rumors were not true and only led to greater sadness, as hope was lost. In the end, the rumors about the fate of the ghetto inhabitants could give them hope for survival, or could suggest that there was no hope left.

In Yitskhok Rudashevski's final diary entry written on April 6, 1943, he no longer gave credence to rumors circulating in the ghetto. He writes, "A happy song can be heard in the club. We are, however, prepared for everything, because Monday proved that we must

not trust nor believe anything. We may be fated for the worst."[240] On the previous Monday, the ghetto residents had learned that the transport of 5000 people, which they were told was going to Kovno, was in fact taken to Ponar, the valley of slaughter of the Vilna Jews where they were all killed.[241] But he was right that they were fated for the worst. When the ghetto was liquidated on September 23, 1943, along with his parents, he moved to a hide-out that belonged to his uncle.[242] Then on either the 5th or 7th of October, they were discovered by the Germans and sent to Ponar.[243]

Miriam Korber also wrote about the many rumors that circulated among the Jews in Djurin. Some of these rumors included information that a more restricted ghetto was being set up, or that a large group of Jews from Djurin would be evacuated.[244] At another time, there was a rumor that led to a sense of hope that the Jews would be allowed to return to their homes. She writes on March 14, 1942, "Each week we hear different news, […] pleasant lies that stir the blood and fill us with courage, just like a shot of camphor. They say that we will return home on the second, the tenth, or the fifteenth of the month. We are always told of dates, but until now everything has been a lie."[245] But even though the rumors had all been false, there is a sense that such gives them a sense of hope. And then, over a year later, on September 11, 1943, she writes, "Hopes have come to an end; rumors have also quieted down. We are no longer going home! Last week everyone knew that we would be leaving on

[240] Rudashevski, 140.
[241] Matenko, 12 and Rudashevski, 138.
[242] Matenko, 12.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Korber, 266-267.
[245] Ibid., 262.

the fifteenth."[246] This implies that at some point more rumors started that again they would be returning home, but this too was false.

Abraham Lewin similarly wrote about the dependence on news from the street, even though it was not always correct. "Sometimes I am quite calm about my life and sometimes a little indifferent, but suddenly I am gripped by fear of death that drives me insane. Everything depends on the news coming in from the street."[247] In another entry, Lewin wrote about a rumor that he hears regarding the fate of the Jews who ended up at Treblinka. "Fifteen kilometres[sic] before the station at Treblinka the Germans take over the train. When people get out of the train they are beaten viciously. Then they are driven into huge barracks." The story continues, "For five minutes heart-rending screams are heard, then silence. The bodies that are taken out are swollen horribly. One person cannot get their arms round one of these bodies, so distended are they. Young men from among the prisoners are the gravediggers, the next day they too are killed. What horror!"[248] When Lewin heard this story, he cannot know whether it is true or not, but the feelings that arose at the possibility that this could be his destiny only lead to feelings of fear and anxiety.

At another time, Lewin heard that an international commission might come to the ghetto "to research and investigate and inquire into the Jewish question."[249] While this news again may have offered the Jews a sense of hope that the outside world cared about their fate, Lewin was hesitant. "It would be possible to believe the news if we had heard that the treatment of the Jews had improved anywhere," he notes, "if we had at least heard that we have ceased to be lambs for the slaughter, and that they stopped murdering us systematically

[246] Ibid., 268.
[247] Lewin, 142.
[248] Ibid., 153.
[249] Ibid., 214.

and in vast numbers."[250] But no news of that sort leads Lewin to be weary of this seemingly "good" news.

[250] Ibid.

Chapter Five: Writing for the Future

While the authors of these diaries recorded their desire and struggle to survive day to day, they also wrote with the intention of writing for a more distant time in the future. These authors were impelled to leave an account of a community that would no longer exist after the war, even if this had not originally been their intent in keeping a diary.

While writing for the future was not the original intent for every diarist, it was for many writers, such as Etty Hillesum. Hillesum viewed herself as an agent of information for future generations as she wanted to share the details of her experience navigating the changing conditions under the Nazi occupation. Even if she would not live to tell her story, she hoped that she had lived her life in a way that others in the future could learn from and build upon. "I wish I could live for a long time so that one day I may know how to explain it, and if I am not granted that wish, well, then somebody else will perhaps do it, carry on from where my life has been cut short," Hillesum writes. "And that is why I must try to live a good and faithful life to my last breath: so that those who come after me do not have to start all over again, need not face the same difficulties. Isn't that doing something for future generations?"[251] While recognizing that she might not be the one to survive to narrate her own story, she knew that trying to describe what she and other Jews lived through would be difficult. Yet she felt she was up to the task of writing. "A few people must survive if only to be the chroniclers of this age. I would very much like to become one of their number."[252] In the event that she would be given this opportunity, she realized that she must take in everything that she was experiencing and continue to write about it for the sake of

[251] Hillesum, 131.
[252] Ibid., 147.

remembering the significant details. On September 30, 1942, she states boldy, "If I have one duty in these times, it is to bear witness. I think I have learned to take it all in, to read life in one long stretch. And in my youthful arrogance I am often sure that I can remember every least thing I see and that I shall be able to relate it all one day. Still, I must try to put it down now."[253] Even at her young age, Hillesum recognized the significance of the time she was living in and its implications for the rest of humanity. She hoped the record she kept of what she saw, heard and experienced would be instructive for future generations trying to navigate the complexities of life during difficult times.

As Hillesum wrote throughout her diaries about coming to terms with the possibility of her imminent death, she also thought about how her diaries themselves would be preserved for future generations. Recognizing that she may not return from the camps, Hillesum passed her diaries to a friend, Maria Tuinzing, for safekeeping.[254] At the end of the war, Maria was to give the diaries to Klaas Smelik and his daughter Johanna.[255] Klaas Smelik was the only writer she knew and she hoped that he would arrange to have her diaries published.[256] The publication of her diaries would thus ensure that her words and the details of her life would live on long after she was murdered. It was in this way that Hillesum saw her writing as her personal act of resistance against the Nazis.

Like Hillesum, Halina Nelken also used her diary both to write about her own experiences as well as to describe the deteriorating conditions of life in the Krakow Ghetto. Not only did she write about her desire to have her writing tell her story after the war, she also acted to try to bring this about. Prior to the end of the war, she passed along her personal

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[253] Ibid., 186.
[254] Gaarlandt, xiii.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.

treasures to a confidant to ensure safekeeping as it was, as she put it, "the chronicle of our life."[257] She gave her diaries, poems and photographs to Paul Muller, a German civilian who worked with her at the *Fliegerhorst*, the air force base.[258] Muller worked hard to save Nelken, along with her friend and friend's mother. While he was unable to rescue her, he did keep and protect her diary, which allowed her written words to detail the story of the Krakow Ghetto. Nelken did ultimately survive and also gave testimony after the war.

Other diary authors, including Yitskhok Rudashevski, Avraham Tory, and Abraham Lewin, also wrote their diaries with the intention of having the information passed on to future generations. However, unlike Hillesum and Nelken, whose diaries offer personal stories, these diaries offer rich insights into the details of the ghetto life for the sake of chronicling the life of the Jews as well as to provide written evidence to incriminate the Nazis for their brutality and murder. Yitskhok Rudashevski, for example, wanted to pass along actual history and literary works about life in the ghetto. Rudashevski spent much of his time in the ghetto participating in literary and history clubs. In the Yiddish poetry club, poets wrote about their time in the ghetto. Reflecting on the importance of the works created by this group, Rudashevski writes, "I feel that I shall participate zealously in this little circle, because the ghetto folklore which is amazingly cultivated in blood, and which is scattered over the little streets, must be collected and cherished as a treasure for the future."[259] This poetry reflected another literary approach by writers to try to capture the intense reality on the streets of the ghetto.

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[257] Nelken, 194.
[258] Ibid., 193.
[259] Rudashevski, 81.

In Rudashevski's history club, the participants decided to keep a detailed history of the ghetto based upon the experiences of individual ghetto residents, similar to the chronicling done by the members of *Oneg Shabbes* in the Warsaw Ghetto. The club members specifically investigated the history of a typical ghetto social unit: Courtyard Shavler 4 within the Vilna Ghetto. The club members created a questionnaire to be asked of residents of the courtyard.[260] While each person's experience and answers were different, the responses tell of the "same sad ghetto song: property, certificates, hide-outs, the abandonment of things, the abandonment of relatives."[261] But many of these residents were unhappy with the questioning and the interviewers' pushing for details related to such sensitive and painful situations. "We did not get a good reception. And I must sadly admit that they were right. We were reproached for having calm heads. 'You must not probe into another person's wounds, our lives are self-evident,'" Rudashevski writes. While he understood this woman's point of view, he saw his ultimate purpose in collecting more than her individual story alone. He recognized that, "She is right, but I am not at fault either because I consider that everything should be recorded and noted down, even the most gory, because everything will be taken into account."[262] Rudashevski recognized that each person's experience had significance to the ghetto story as a whole.

While Rudashevski wrote his diary with the intention of having this chronicle of life in the Vilna Ghetto be of benefit to future generations, he either did not have a plan to protect his diary or he was taken away before the plan could be put into place. Rudashevski's family was taken by the Nazis from their hideout and brought to Ponar where they were ultimately

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[260] Ibid., 73.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., 84.

shot. Rudashevski's first cousin Sore Voloshin-Kalivatsh was the only family member to escape from the Germans.[263] Once the war was over, she returned to the homes where her family and Yitskhok's family lived before everyone was taken. While looking for the family album, she came across Yitskhok's diary, which she knew existed but which had never been spoken about.[264] After reading it, she shared it with poet Avrom Sutskever and Skmerke Katsherginski, both fellow partisans.[265] They helped to pass the diary along to the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research of New York and *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem for safekeeping and archival purposes.[266] As a result, excerpts of Rudashevski's diary were first published in 1953 in the journal *Di Goldene Keyt* (The Golden Chain).[267] The Hebrew version of Rudashevski's entire diary was published in 1968 in Israel making his writing on the Vilna Ghetto available to future generations of readers.

Similar to Rudashevski, Avraham Tory also saw significance in capturing the details of life in the ghetto for readers in the future. Tory's writing, according to Martin Gilbert, "combines the emotion of an eyewitness to destruction with the determination of that same eyewitness to record facts, figures, and details as precisely as possible."[268] Tory's account of life in the Kovno Ghetto is even more valuable and insightful because he was secretary of the Jewish Committee of the Ghetto, the *Altestenrat*, and was privy to information that most residents of the ghetto did not have.[269] He recorded otherwise unrecorded discussions between the Jewish Council and the German authorities, which offer an often unheard

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[263] Matenko, 12.
[264] Ibid., 10 and 12.
[265] Ibid., 12.
[266] Ibid., 13.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Gilbert, xiii.
Martin Gilbert is a British historian of Jewish history.
[269] Tory, 168.

perspective of the situation.[270] In March 1943, for example, there were rumors of purges in the ghetto by the Germans. The Jewish Council conducted a census to better understand the demographic breakdown of the remaining residents of the ghetto. The Jewish Council learned that there were many elderly people, even though SA Colonel Hans Cramer would say there were no old people in his ghetto.[271] In addition, there was a large number of children in the ghetto and many more women than men, as their husbands had already been killed.[272] In an effort to hide this information, Tory records the decision of the Jewish Council to reduce the number of elderly people and children on the census handed over to the Nazis.[273] In addition, the women were included on the workers' roster so the council did not have to increase the number of ghetto residents.[274] Recorded conversations, like this one, offer insightful details about life within the ghetto so that future generations may begin to understand the experiences of Jews.

In addition to his writings that recorded these private discussions, and the facts and details of life in the ghetto, he also kept documents that could be used as evidence against the Nazis in the future. From his position in the ghetto, he clearly recognized the significance of life in that moment in history. On July 25, 1943, he writes, "The details of this life are without precedent, not just in Jewish history, but in universal history as well. These details must not be allowed to sink into oblivion."[275] Because of the unique nature of this life, he knew that it was essential that future generations knew about the atrocities committed at the hands of the Nazis against the Jewish community of Europe.

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[270] Gilbert, xiii.
[271] Tory, 260.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid., 160.
[275] Ibid., 438.

In addition to taking seriously his role of chronicling the smallest details about life in the Kovno Ghetto and the acts of the Nazis within it, Tory also sought to ensure the survival of these documents, whether he survived the war or not.[276] When he was no longer able to hide the documents in the Council building, he relied on Pnina Sheinzon, a woman he knew prior to the war, to hide the important materials, even though she risked her life doing it.[277] Tory would send the writings to her through one of two messengers, either 14-year old Joel Shmukler or 11-year old Yenkele Bergman, or by himself.[278] He placed the documents within 5 crates, which he hid in the ghetto with help from his friend Shraga Goldsmith.[279] In addition to his writings and the documents he collected, he included his last will and testament in each of the crates.[280] Writing in his last will and testament, Tory outlines the purpose behind his writing, his collecting, and his hiding. "With awe and reverence, I am hiding in this crate what I have written, noted, and collected, with thrill and anxiety, so that it may serve as material evidence—'corpus delicti'—accusing testimony—when the Day of Judgment comes, and with it the day of revenge and the day of reckoning, the calling to account."[281] Not only was he writing to tell the story of the Kovno Ghetto to future generations but also to bring the Nazis to justice for the heinous crimes they committed against the Jews.

As rumors began to spread throughout the ghetto that the Jews would be deported, Tory decided that he needed to have a plan for the recovery of crates and documents in the event that he did not survive to dig them up. He turned to a non-Jew, the priest, V. Vaickus,

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[276] Ibid., 125.
[277] Gilbert, xxiii.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Tory, 168.

and gave him specific instructions that "upon the annihilation of the last of the Jews in Lithuania, he should remove the material and deliver it to the person who would then be the head of the World Zionist Organization."[282] Additionally, Tory gave V. Vaickus a photograph of the location where the crates were buried as well as directions on how to retrieve them.[283] After passing along this secret information, Tory felt sure that the documents would end up where they belonged in order to fulfill his mission to exact revenge on the Nazis.

Whereas Tory worked primarily alone to collect the information and depended on others to help hide and recover it, Abraham Lewin was just one of many people working to compile information and documents from the Warsaw Ghetto for future generations. In 1940, Emanuel Ringelblum, Lewin's colleague prior to the war, realized the significance of the time they were living through and decided to create a scientific institute in the ghetto, a kind of extension of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in the ghetto's underground.[284] Over time, however, the role of this group of individuals changed into a document-collecting organization.[285] The group archived a variety of ghetto materials, both from open institutions and secret organizations within the ghetto, employment papers, tram cards, concert programs, and candy wrappers produced within the ghetto.[286] Additionally, they kept materials of personal significance such as diaries, private conversations, photographs, and works

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[282] Gilbert, xxiii.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Robert Moses Shapiro, ed., *Holocaust Chronicles: Individualizing the Holocaust through Diaries and Other Contemporaneous Personal Accounts* (New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1999), 84.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid., 86.

produced by children.[287] Based on the reading of all the material collected by the members of *Oneg Shabbes,* Antony Polonsky argues that each of the members of *Oneg* Shabbes were "conscious of the momentous times in which they lived and of the deadly peril facing the Jews of Europe."[288] Regarding these meetings of the *Oneg Shabbes* members, Lewin writes on June 6, 1942,

> In these tragic times, whenever several Jews gather together and each recounts just a part of what he has heard and seen, it becomes a mountain or a swollen sea of misfortune and Jewish blood. Jewish blood pure and simple. We gather every Sabbath, a group of activists in the Jewish community, to discuss our diaries and writings. We want our sufferings, these 'birth-pangs of the Messiah,' to be impressed upon the memories of future generations and on the memory of the whole world.[289]

As for Lewin's personal diary that was written for the *Oneg Shabbes* archive collection, he wrote because he believed that "future generations will not believe it. But this is the unembellished truth, plain and simple. A bitter, horrifying truth."[290] No matter how difficult it was to write about the indescribable situation he was witnessing firsthand, he knew that without his words and descriptions, few would believe that which took place.

In order to ensure the survival of these important writings and documents from the *Oneg Shabbes* group, the members knew they had to find the means of protecting the documents. On July 29, 1942, after an *Oneg Shabbes* meeting, Lewin writes that the participants discussed ownership of the collection and how they could get it to Yivo in America should they all die.[291] In the end, the archive was hidden in many milk churns and

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[287] Ibid.
[288] Polonsky, 13.
[289] Lewin, 120.
[290] Ibid., 157.
[291] Ibid., 141.

tin chests that were buried within the ghetto walls.[292] At the end of the war, many but not all of the archives were found, allowing the collection to tell the story of the Warsaw Ghetto from a variety of individual perspectives. These documents allow the observations and the memories of the members of *Oneg Shabbes* to live on and for the crimes against the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto to testify to the brutality and murder of the Jews of Warsaw at the hands of the Nazis. Today, the *Oneg Shabbes* documents are one of the single greatest sources we have for life in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Unlike the authors mentioned above, some diary authors did not write with the intention of having their writing be passed to future generations. Yet, the very nature of writing implies some type of permanence. While Miriam Korber and Egon Redlich certainly did not set out to write their diaries with the intention of sharing their personal narrative with those who come after them, their actions and words signify a shift in their thinking. Miriam Korber, for example, viewed her writing in a negative light and she hoped to destroy it at some point in the future. On July 15, 1942, she writes, "I know that all my writing is meaningless. Nobody will read my journal and, as for me, should I escape alive from here, I will throw into the fire everything that will remind me of the damned time spent in Djurin. And still, I write."[293] While she was adamant that her writing was of no significance, she continued to write, making her words and her experience permanent. The last sentence of "And still, I write" seems to be her acknowledgement that she hopes that her words will live on, and maybe subconsciously that is exactly what she wanted. Through the permanence of her words, her memory remains alive. Korber, along with her mother, father and sister all

[292] Polonsky, 13.
[293] Korber, 266.

survived beyond the ghetto of Djurin.[294] Due to the highly sensitive nature of her writing, after the war, her mother and then her husband hid the diary from her, as they "feared the emotional repercussions of her reading the diary and remembering the horrors of life in Transnistria."[295] However, in the end, Korber decided herself to publish the diary in the 1990's.[296] Her own decision to publish the diary suggests that she eventually came to see that her writing was an important document for the public to have access to.

Egon Redlich began writing in his diary, which was written on pages from office calendars, as a way to share details of his life with his wife Gerta, from whom he was separated.[297] Yet, even though his writing was meant for her, he nevertheless continued to write in his diary even after she arrived in Terezin. In addition to writing for his wife, it seems he was also writing to preserve the memory of what the Jews were enduring as well. Saul S. Friedman, the editor of Redlich's diary, believes that Redlich "was aware of the historical significance of events unfolding about him. His journal was a conscious effort to record as much as possible for posterity."[298] He keeps detailed notes about potential high Nazi officials coming to visit and the preparations that were necessary for these visits.[299] He also kept track of the deteriorating conditions within the ghetto, such as the limited space, outbreaks of diseases, and ration cards, as well as the cultural activities that continued, such as children's plays and art exhibits, educational lectures and Sabbath parties. As he looked around Terezin and saw what was taking place he realized that "life in Terezin offers many interesting insights. To the historian, to the sociologist, it is a limitless well of experiences

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[294] Zapruder, 248.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Friedman, xiv.
[298] Ibid., xiii.
[299] Redlich, 70 and 103.

and achievements."[300] Despite the inhuman conditions he experienced and witnessed, he was also able to acknowledge that it was all evidence of everything that was taking place within the walls and that it was significant for future generations to know about. When his son Dan was born in March of 1944, Redlich decided that he wanted to write a diary for Dan as well.[301] Redlich writes, "I want to give my beloved a diary and write his history in it."[302] Although Dan would not remember life in Terezin, Redlich deemed it important for Dan to understand where he came from and the circumstances under which he was born.

Prior to being deported to Auschwitz/Birkenau, Redlich decided to hide his diary, along with the diary for Dan, in a woman's purse.[303] It was not until 1967 that Czech workers found Redlich's diaries in an attic.[304] The diaries were then given to the State Museum in Prague and later, in 1982, they were published in Hebrew.[305] While Redlich had not made a plan to get his diaries out to the public after his deportation, one can only imagine that he had hoped that he would retrieve his diaries after the war or that someone else would find them. Despite being hidden for many years after the war, Redlich's diary was, in the end, eventually published. His words were made available for the world to read and to shine a light on the conditions of life in the Terezin Ghetto.

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[300] Ibid., 63.
[301] Friedman, xiii.
[302] Redlich, 144.
[303] Friedman, xiv.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

"And people will know what happened…And they will ask, is this the truth? I reply in advance: No, this is not the truth, this is only a small part, a tiny fraction of the truth… Even the mightiest pen could not depict the whole, real, essential *truth."*
-Stefan Ernest, "The Warsaw Ghetto," written in hiding in 1943[306]

As Stefan Ernest so poignantly articulated in his diary, that which we know about the Holocaust is only a fraction of the reality. And yet, it is those written words we have that enable us to see into an unimaginable world. With each and every written word that survived the war, the memory of the six million Jews who were murdered remains alive. The ultimate plan of the Nazis to rid the world of the Jews and any reminder of them was thwarted with the presence of these diaries. The diaries that survived tell the individual stories of the diarists and the collective stories of Jewish communities as the Nazi occupation spread across Europe.

From these diverse diaries, we learn about the ordinary human beings who took it upon themselves to fight the Nazis in whatever way they could, which for them meant recording what they experienced and witnessed both as individuals and as members of the Jewish community. The various diaries I looked at offer insight into the individuals of different ages, locations and backgrounds, as well as their intentions in keeping the diary during that unprecedented time. For some, like Etty Hillesum and Miriam Korber, the diary was a place for the diarist to express her feelings, clarify her thinking, and reflect on the details of her life. For others, like Avraham Tory and Abraham Lewin, the diary was a place to write the details of their lives so that their first-hand account of the actions of the Nazis could be used as evidence against them in the future.

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[306] Friedländer, prior to *Contents.*

The reality of the changing world began to set in for the diarists as the routine of their daily lives began to be interrupted. The diarists wrote about the disruptive changes, starting with the requirement to leave their homes and move to the ghettos, followed by the limited resources, harsh decrees and deportations. Their experiences were unlike anything they had imagined, or that the reader today might imagine. Their written words offer a window into the shifts in daily life of the individuals and the communities, which were once home. The diarists wrote about their feelings around those changes. Even in the chaos of the time, these diarists exhibited extraordinary strength in their ability to analyze and comment on the changing circumstances and to see a purpose for their story in the future.

As the diarists experienced the destruction of their families and communities, they tried to represent that reality through their writing. Yet many of the diarists expressed the difficulty of finding the words to portray all that they witnessed. While they struggled to translate what they saw into words, the reader today cannot fully understand the complexities of the changing situation through their words alone. Yet amidst the many cultural resources we have today—historical documents, literature, testimonies, memorials, and museums—the voices of these writers stand out. As the last survivors gradually pass away, the diaries will remain as the voice of that lost generation. And while their words are a commentary on that which they experienced, these diaries offer the greatest insight into life at that time and remain as a symbol of the continual resistance against the Nazis' as they attempt to silence them.

While the diarists struggled to represent what they witnessed and how to understand it, many of them continued to express their desire, and even hope, for survival. Even during this dark time in history, these ordinary individuals found it within themselves to remain

hopeful that they could and would survive. It is this hope in the most unexpected place that the reader can learn from. Even when the world seemed to be in utter chaos, it was important for these diarists to remain optimistic for their individual future and the collective Jewish people's future. While many of these diarists did not survive the war, the result of their hope led to writing important sources for future generations to learn about that time.

Not only was the act of writing in a diary an act of resistance at the time of the war, but these diaries also represent a continual act of resistance. Even after the war has ended, their words evoke the presence of the individuals who wrote them, which is exactly what the Nazis did not want. These diaries remind today's readers of these ordinary individuals who took significant risks in an effort to transmit their experience to our generation. We as readers of these diaries, we embody the future they wrote for—we are their intended audience. We have an obligation to those diarists to keep their stories alive and to remember the lives and communities that were lost. For many, these diaries are the only remains of those individuals and the Jewish communities of which they were a part. And it is because of these remaining diaries that the diarists and their communities will never be forgotten.

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