

A Procession of Shadows: Examining Warsaw Ghetto Testimony

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The diaries and memoirs of the Warsaw Ghetto lament the destruction of Warsaw and the loss of its people. These accounts document life in the Ghetto and testify to the horror and tragedy of those merciless days. The following paper reviews a number of diaries and memoirs concerning the Warsaw Ghetto in order to compare the unique nature of the documents, as well as to explore the challenges and distinctions of each narrative form. An examination of the accounts show how the diaries depict individuals in transformation, while the memoirs reveal writers struggling with the confines of their own imaginations in order to restore the events as they happened. Furthermore, the diaries exemplify how the brutal conditions in the Ghetto impacted and wrought changes in the individual writers. In contrast, the memoirs demonstrate survivors attempting to retrieve the loss of self. The work of the memoirists underlines the sheer impossibility of transmitting the horrors of the Holocaust and exemplifies its destructiveness on life.

Keywords: Holocaust, Warsaw Ghetto, Polish Jews, testimony, diary, memoir

*On the evening of 31 August 1939, Germany staged a "Polish attack" on a radio station in Gleiwitz, a German frontier town. The Gestapo-orchestrated attack served as "evidence" of Polish aggression. The following morning Germany responded by invading Poland as a defensive measure. Consequently, the first city to be bombed in the Second World War and the first city to be turned into a battlefield was Warsaw, the capital of Poland. A small section of the city was later turned into a ghetto for Jews and remains a symbol of man's destructive power.

Within three years of the German invasion, ninety percent of the residents of the Warsaw Ghetto had been sent to extermination camps. According to Berenstein and Rutkowski (1958), approximately 489,000 Jews resided in the Ghetto at various times, and of that number, 446,500 people perished. When a second uprising broke out in Warsaw in 1944, the German army razed the Ghetto and utterly demolished the city. The Germans were unable, however, to destroy the memory of the years of brutality and annihilation. What occurred in the Warsaw Ghetto is known, in large part, because individuals recorded what they witnessed and experienced firsthand.

Indeed, from the ashes of the Warsaw Ghetto came detailed, written accounts. Some had

been buried, while others were smuggled out. The accounts documented daily life in the Ghetto, and testified to the horror and tragedy of those merciless days. Some accounts appeared in diary form, written at the time of the events, while others appeared years later, written by survivors in the form of memoirs.

The diaries and memoirs of the Warsaw Ghetto lament the destruction of Warsaw and the loss of its people. Yet "an examination of the diaries and memoirs of the Holocaust reveals... that these texts compel us to revise some basic critical assumptions about the creation and reception of testimonial narratives" (Foley, 1982, p. 333). Thus, an analysis of the form and strategies employed by authors in the re-telling of their experiences can help illuminate our basic understanding of the Holocaust. In addition, examining the reader's responses to these testimonies can further clarify the authorial strategies adopted by some writers.

Nevertheless, the objective here is not to analyze these accounts for their documentary evidence. The factuality of these accounts does not concern this study. As James E. Young observed, the diaries and memoirs should be studied for their interpretations of events, which can be considered as the "authentic truth of the narrative" (Young, 1987, p. 420). Therefore, the focus must be on the authors' understanding of events and not necessarily the facts themselves. How individuals frame their experiences can be as revealing as the experiences themselves.

The following paper will examine a number of diaries and memoirs from the Warsaw Ghetto, each written by Polish Jews. Kaplan's (1965)

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Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan, Ringelblum's (1974) *Notes From the Warsaw Ghetto* and Korczak's (1978) *Ghetto Diary* will be used as source material written as the events in the Ghetto occurred. Donat's (1965) *The Holocaust Kingdom* and Kazik's (1994) *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter* will be used as examples of accounts written by survivors after the events in question.

This paper will compare the unique nature of these documents. After placing the Warsaw Ghetto in historical context, the memoirs and the diaries, as two narrative forms, will be defined and then contrasted. Next, this paper will focus on the challenges and distinctions of each form, including a study of the recording and understanding of daily life in the Ghetto. In other words, the Warsaw Ghetto diaries and memoirs will be compared to what is normally considered characteristic in each narrative form. Finally, I will analyze and compare what each account demonstrates to the reader, as well as reveal the complexities associated with understanding the two forms.

The Warsaw Ghetto

In 1939 Warsaw contained the largest concentration of Jews in all of Europe. According to the Municipal Council Statistical Department, there were 380,567 Jews in Warsaw in August 1939, or 29 percent of the city's total population (Bartoszewski & Polonsky, 1991). Soon after they captured the city, the Nazis began dealing with the "Jewish problem."

Their first step was to isolate the entire Jewish population of Poland in particular cities. Rights and the freedom of movement for everyone classified as a Jew were restricted. All Jews were required to wear distinctive armbands with a star. In early 1940, thousands of Jews between the ages of fourteen and sixty were forced into labour camps, and approximately 15,000 to 20,000 people were deported from Warsaw. Between 1939 and 1941 over half a million Polish Jews died in ghettos and labour camps (Bergen, 2002, p. 111). Many starved to death, while others succumbed to disease due to overcrowding and the terrible sanitary conditions.

The Warsaw Ghetto was officially established in September 1940 and it was completely sealed off by November, although, by that time the majority of Jews had already been excluded from city life. Initially, the Ghetto, which was incredibly small, measured 3.5 square miles or

2.4 percent of the area of Warsaw (Kazik, 1994). By March 1941, and because of the increased migration of refugees, the Ghetto population soared to 445,000 people (Kazik, 1994). A visitor to the Warsaw Ghetto observed the following living conditions:

On the streets children are crying in vain, children who are dying of hunger. They howl, beg, sing, moan, shiver with cold, without underwear, without clothing, without shoes, in rags, sacks, flannel, which are bound in strips round the emaciated skeletons, children swollen with hunger, disfigured, half-conscious, already completely grown-up at the age of five, gloomy and weary of life. They are like old people and are only conscious of one thing: 'I'm cold.' 'I'm hungry.' (Noakes & Pridham, 1998, p. 1067)

There was little food, heating materials, medical facilities and supplies in the Ghetto. Consequently, mortality rates increased dramatically.

In 1942, at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin, German officials gathered to organize and restructure their efforts to destroy the Jews. Those that attended the conference discussed various methods of mass killing. The technique of choice became concentrated killing centres utilizing gas chambers. Consequently, during the summer of 1942, approximately 300,000 Jews in Warsaw were deported, primarily to the extermination camp of Treblinka, where the majority of those deported were systematically murdered (Bartoszewski & Polonsky, 1991).

During the winter of 1942-1943 resistance to the Nazis grew in Warsaw. In January 1943 an ultimately abortive revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto began. However, for the population of the Ghetto, the unsuccessful resistance was a moral breakthrough (Bartoszewski & Polonsky, 1991). A little more than a year later, resistance organizations began forming and in August 1944, the Polish Uprising in Warsaw took place. This uprising was also unsuccessful and the Nazis punished the population severely. Approximately 150,000 people were killed as a result of the uprising, ultimately leaving Warsaw completely destroyed (Kazik, 1994).

In the last years of the war, the Nazis continued to deport Jews to the killing centres. The Germans evacuated their prisoners during the winter of 1945, as the allies closed in on the camps. The death marches persisted until May 1945 when Germany finally surrendered. By the end of the war, millions of Polish Jews were

dead and Warsaw Jewry never recovered from the devastation brought on by the Nazi policies of mass murder. Towards the end of the twentieth century, there were scarcely 4,000 Jews remaining in Warsaw (Bartoszewski & Polonsky, 1991). However, the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto still looms large, and it is towards this memory that we now turn.

The Diary and the Memoir

A diary is normally written chronologically and can be described as a continuous documentation of a person's beliefs and desires, as well as a record of one's thoughts on the events of their lives (Arons, 2003, p. 123). Often, in moments of adversity or struggle, an individual will turn to diary writing as a conduit for their feelings. Diaries are generally unedited, and yet the diarist is aware that their writings may be read posthumously (Arons, 2003, p. 124). Furthermore, diaries commonly have specific structural patterns that often bring forth conventional responses when read. According to Karl J. Weintraub, in his study of autobiographical literature,

...the diurnal entries of the diarist are governed by the very fact that a day has its end. Even if in the maturing diarist a sense of selection begins to be guided by the growing awareness of what this person values and does not value, the journal entry is the completed precipitate of each day. It has its very value in being the reflection of but a brief moment; it attributes prime significance to the segments of life (Weintraub, 1975, p. 827).

Diaries can allow the silenced to have a voice. It is a venue in which the writer can help narrate the facts and events of life. However, as we shall see, diaries from the Warsaw Ghetto challenge some of these typical structural patterns.

A memoir, in contrast, is characteristically an edited narrative of an individual's past experiences. The memoirist will often employ devices associated with novelists, such as point of view, voice, structure and character (Arons, 2003, p. 124). Additionally, there is typically more time and reflection given to writing a memoir than there is in diary writing.

Readers often expect a better grasp of the significance of events from the memoirist than they would from the diarist. The expectation is that, with the benefit of retrospection, memoirists are better equipped to make sense of their own experiences. According to Weintraub,

The fact once in the making can now be seen together with the fact in its result. By this superimposition of the completed fact, the fact in the making acquires a meaning it did not possess before. The meaning of the past is intelligible and meaningful in terms of the present understanding; it is thus with all historical understanding (Weintraub, 1975, p. 826).

The memoirist has lived through the experience and knows its outcome. Furthermore, historical sources and other forms of representation can be consulted, which can provide an expanded perspective on the memoirist's situation.

Yet, the brutal experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto challenge the memoirist in regards to both the "limits of language" and the reader's reception. The "limits of language" refers to the frustration of survivors to describe, in narrative form, their traumatic experiences; the harrowing events often appear to elude depiction. Memoirists also know that their audiences will likely not have experiences comparable to the magnitude of the Holocaust. Describing incidents to audiences, most of whom have no analogous frames of reference, is a sizeable challenge for the survivor.

Thus, while the reader of a diary expects close attention to the texture of daily life, the reader of a memoir anticipates the unique perspective that retrospection brings. Diaries typically include specific details, such as names and dates, while memoirs normally extract meaning, order and understanding from the past. But, this is not always the situation with the diaries and memoirs from the Warsaw Ghetto. The harrowing events in the Ghetto brought unique challenges to the retelling of the experiences.

Reasons for Writing About the Warsaw Ghetto

Accounts of the Warsaw Ghetto have appeared in diaries, memoirs, novels, films and paintings. One of the first forms to have appeared after the war was the diary, many of which were written by individuals who did not survive the Warsaw Ghetto. Some of the best-known accounts were the diaries of Chaim Kaplan, Emmanuel Ringelblum and Janusz Korczak. All three died either in the Ghetto or in extermination camps before the end of the war.

A common theme in the Ghetto diaries was writing out of a sense of duty. The diarists wrote from some innate need to preserve and docu-

ment the events they were witnessing. However, what they wrote was not intended for their eyes alone. Often a diary is written privately, for the diarists themselves. What makes Warsaw Ghetto and other Holocaust diaries unique is that most were written to be heard and acknowledged by others. Moreover, the diarists wrote, not entirely on their own behalf, but for their communities. Thus, there was an overlapping of the individual and the collective.

Chaim Kaplan wrote his diary out of a sense of duty. Born in 1880 in Horodyszcze in the Russian empire, Kaplan moved to Warsaw in 1902 to establish a private elementary school. An educator and a linguist, he began writing his diary in 1933, but his *Scroll of Agony* only contains entries made after Germany's invasion of Poland. In August 1942, Kaplan recorded his last entry. He and his wife are believed to have died in the Treblinka extermination camp in either December 1942 or January 1943 (editor's note in Kaplan, 1965). Shortly before being deported he arranged for his diary to be smuggled out of the city. In 1965 parts of the diary were first published. In 1973, missing entries from 1941 and 1942 were located and were included in a revised edition published that same year.

In January 1940, Kaplan explained, "I sense within me the magnitude of this hour, and my responsibility toward it, and I have an inner awareness that I am fulfilling a national obligation, a historic obligation that I am not free to relinquish.... My record will serve as source material for the future historian" (Kaplan, 1965, p. 104). Thus, his diary became something more than an individual writing for himself. While he certainly wrote, in part, on his own behalf, he also wrote for his entire community, one that was being destroyed before his eyes. A year later he added, "I feel that continuing this diary to the very end of my physical and spiritual strength is a historical mission which must not be abandoned" (Kaplan, 1965, p. 323). He wanted desperately to record his experiences, as they occurred, and for this record to be kept in preservation for future generations. For Kaplan, keeping a diary was an inherited assignment.

Emmanuel Ringelblum also recognized the strong call to record what he saw and experienced. He was born in 1900 in Nowy Soncz, Poland and was educated in Warsaw. In 1927, Ringelblum received his doctorate in history. He became a teacher and a social historian. Ringelblum began writing his diary in January 1940, while he was also organizing a group who reco-

rded daily information during the Nazi occupation of Poland. The group, known as *Oneg Shabbat*, produced numerous essential diaries and documents. According to Yisrael Gutman, the documents from the Ringelblum archives "form the largest and richest collection of materials about the Jews and their fate during the war and the Holocaust in Poland" (Gutman, 1982, p. 358). In late 1942, Ringelblum wrote his last entry. In 1943, he was a participant in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. In March 1944, he was discovered by the Gestapo and was executed among the ruins of Warsaw with his wife and twelve year-old son. His diary, along with his archives, had been buried deep under the Warsaw Ghetto. In September 1946, the first part of his diary was found sealed in a rubberized milk can. A few years later, in December 1950, the second part of the diary was found.

Indeed, much like Kaplan, Ringelblum felt duty-bound to document the horrors that surrounded him. He was a great archivist and took note of the smallest of details, such as the price of black-market goods and even the weather. Ostensibly, no detail went unnoticed. In February 1941, he stated that "the drive to write ... is powerful: even young people in labour camps do it" (Ringelblum, 1974, p. 133). He recognized the historical magnitude of documentation and he also encouraged and helped others to record.

Diarist Janusz Korczak described his duty in this way: "If I were to say that I have never written a single line unwillingly, that would be the truth. But it would also be true to say that I have written everything under compulsion" (Korczak, 1978, p. 169). While he struggled to document the terrible events of this period of his life, he also felt a tremendous commitment to write. This obligation compelled Korczak to struggle to find ways to record his thoughts and to take note of his observations concerning the events surrounding him.

Korczak was born in Warsaw in 1878 and given the name Henryk Goldszmidt at birth. He was a well-known physician, author, educator and a child advocate. In 1911 he was appointed head of a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw. Korczak began writing his diary in January 1940, but he mainly wrote between May and August 1942. His last entry was recorded in August 1942, and in 1978, his diary was finally published. He managed to hand the diary to a friend before being deported and it was eventually bricked up in the attic of an orphanage. In August 1942, Korczak was ordered to have the children of his

orphanage report for deportation. He accompanied the children to the Treblinka extermination camp, despite being given an opportunity to escape. He died along with the children in the camp soon after arriving.

Unquestionably, these three men wrote out of a sense of accountability to their communities. All three diarists felt the necessity, the internal pressure to record. In their writing there is a position of responsibility undertaken, a mission to bear witness to atrocity. The overwhelming will to record is the result of being forced to endure suffering imposed by others (Des Pres, 1976). Thus, the individuals' response to the endurance of horror is to remember through recording. They cope with their anguish through the writing process, knowing that they are attempting to preserve a people's history at a terrible moment in time. The diarist is duty-bound to record the evil through which they and others have suffered.

Furthermore, the diarists were often aware that what they were writing was incomplete due to the extreme nature of their environments. They wrote in the shadows, documenting when and where it was possible. Diarists would often omit names and other details because they knew that if their accounts were discovered they would be punished. Consequently, standard diaries, and Holocaust diaries in particular, are "provisional forms of writing" (Rosenfeld, 1980, p. 53). However, some diarists, like Ringelblum, planned on expanding and refining their diaries, turning them into history books or memoirs after the war. Of course, the above authors of the Warsaw Ghetto diaries never had the opportunity to build upon their work. Unlike the memoirists, such as Donat and Kazik who had the opportunity to write and rewrite their accounts—and liberated from concerns of reprisal—the work of the diarists is often left fragmented and unfinished. While the average diarist can expect to return to their diary, those who died in the Warsaw Ghetto did not have this prospect.

In contrast, memoirs of the Warsaw Ghetto were generally written a considerable time after the events in question. Distinct from the above-mentioned diarists, memoirists have survived the events they have written about. They endeavor to revisit the memories of their experiences, reliving and depicting it through narrative writing. They often feel a sense of moral obligation and a need to commemorate

the dead. Their writing is an attempt at the intricate task of coming to an understanding of the past, or to work through the horrors they witnessed. Two well-known accounts are the memoirs of Alexander Donat and Kazik. Both men survived their ordeals and came to write about their experiences decades after the Holocaust.

Like other memoirists, Alexander Donat began taking notes about the events as they happened. In 1944, while interned in a concentration camp at Vaihingen in southern Germany, Donat exchanged names with a young boy who was scheduled to leave the camp that would have separated him from his brother, his only living family member. Donat wanted to transfer because he could no longer handle the workload at the camp. The name exchange worked and Donat was shipped out. Two weeks later the Nazis killed the boy that stayed behind with Donat's former name: "Michael Berg." The former Berg, now named Alexander Donat, managed to survive in the next camp. He kept the name for the rest of his life.

Donat, the survivor, was born in 1905 in Poland. He was an accomplished journalist and lived in Warsaw with his wife and son when, in 1939, Germany invaded Poland. He and his wife were sent to various camps, while their son lived with Polish Catholics. They all survived the war and immigrated to the United States in 1946 where Donat became involved in the printing business. He wrote his memoir, *The Holocaust Kingdom*, in 1965. He died in 1983 in New York.

Donat, like many of the diarists, realized the importance of recording as events developed. In September 1940 Donat explained, "I had become a superfluous human being.... It is characteristic of superfluous men to keep diaries, and so I, too, began to jot things down. Everything that happened... was still clear in my memory" (Donat, 1965, p. 20). Donat began to make notes early into the war, documenting what he deemed significant. He later remarked,

I felt I was a witness to disaster and charged with the sacred mission of carrying the Ghetto's history through the flames and barbed wire until such time as I could hurl it into the faces of the world. It seemed to me that this sense of mission would give me the strength to endure everything (Donat, 1965, p. 183)

Clearly, Donat realized the importance of being

a witness. He wrote to record a violent history and to preserve the story of a people, but also to show evidence to a world that remained silent as the Jews of Europe perished. Des Pres (1976) has observed that Donat's need to be a witness was so great that it became his identity as a survivor. His need to testify to what he saw and experienced in the Warsaw Ghetto and the concentration camps was a driving force behind his survival. Donat wanted to ensure the painful events in the Warsaw Ghetto were told to the world.

Similar to Donat's desire to record and bear witness, Kazik also felt a moral responsibility to tell. Kazik (also known as Simha Rotem) was born in Czerniakow, a suburb of Warsaw. He published his memoir, *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter*, over forty years after the events in question. During the war, Kazik was a member of the Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto. After the failed uprising, he assisted the remaining Jews in Warsaw.

Kazik began keeping an informal diary in 1944, reflecting on what he had gone through. In 1981 he edited and dictated part of his story to a friend. After liberation in 1946, Kazik moved to Palestine. He later became an advisor to the television miniseries *Uprising*. He currently lives in Jerusalem with his wife and two children.

In his memoir, Kazik observes that there was "a sense of responsibility to preserve, and to tell, the story of Polish Jewry in the 'days of destruction and revolt'" (Kazik, 1994, p. xi). Clearly, Kazik also felt an obligation to share his story. Once again, we see the opportunity for the memoirist to speak to the world, after the events in question, out of a sense of moral commitment and responsibility, as well as to acknowledge and venerate the dead.

In addition to this principled task, Donat and Kazik have both written as a response to atrocity and to oppose the silence they felt during the war by nations, individuals and even God. Patterson (1998) argues that Holocaust memoirs are written to recover human life from this silence. Much of the world was silent, but survivors call out to be heard.

Moreover, the memoir becomes not only a means of testifying and bearing witness, but also an attempt at recovering the loss of self. Many memoirists note feeling that they have lived through their own death. Thus, they are haunted by the death of the self. Their writing is, in many ways, a method of disentangling them-

selves from this past death. When Donat discovered that the boy he changed places with had been killed, he remarked, "Officially, I died there too. Had it not been for that chance, last-minute encounter, I would have shared their fate ... here Berg died, and Donat was born" (Donat, 1965, p. 259). Donat used the name of the dead boy in his writing and has made his silence heard. He wrote in remembrance of the name exchange; he wrote to commemorate an exchange that saved his life at the expense of another. Donat was given life and felt accountable to the name and the boy that gave it to him. Hence, he, like so many other survivors, owed his life to the dead.

The Recording and Framing of Ghetto Life

The depiction of daily life in the Warsaw Ghetto was a tremendous challenge for both the diarists and the memoirists, but for very different reasons. The diarists had to worry about hiding and preserving their accounts since it was a crime for them to keep a diary. If discovered, the diaries would have been confiscated and destroyed; the authors would have been severely punished. Thus, Ringelblum often avoided using names, usually referring to Germans as "they" and using code names for others. On the whole, it is incredible that any accounts survived at all. The memoirists, on the other hand, often feel that it is unbelievable or impossible to have even personally survived the Holocaust. In transmitting their experiences, they face the challenges presented by memory and the "limits of language." The survivors often struggle with lapses in memory, as they are not writing, like the diarists, in close proximity to events in question. Memoirists feel compelled to document their experiences, yet also think it is unfeasible to adequately and accurately describe to those who were not present.

Kaplan often discussed the challenge of even keeping a diary. In July 1942, he wrote, "My utmost concern is for hiding my diary so that it will be preserved for future generations" (Kaplan, 1965, p. 335). Along with recording, he felt his responsibility was also to protect the diary from being discovered by the Nazis. Yet, the daily devastation he witnessed made it exceedingly difficult to write. In September 1939, he mentioned, "In my psychological state it is hard to hold a pen in my hand, and my pen is not the one to describe what befell us last night" (Kaplan, 1965, p. 27). The difficulty in writing

was compounded by the difficulty in living day to day in such an environment. The events Kaplan experienced were overwhelming and challenged his ability to record. He continued, "It is beyond my pen to describe the destruction and ruin that the enemy's planes have wrought on our lovely capital" (Kaplan, 1965, p. 29). Kaplan's close proximity to a world of chaos challenged his ability to make sense of it. He felt overwhelmed by the images of destruction he witnessed on a daily basis.

Those that lived and wrote as events in the Warsaw Ghetto took place also had difficulty separating fact from fiction, truth from rumor. Normally, the reader of a diary expects that the accounts, due to their proximity to the events, will be stronger in regards to detail than the accounts of the memoirists. But, as the philosopher and Holocaust survivor Emil Fackenheim observed, "When the eye-witness is caught in a scheme of things systematically calculated to deceive him, subsequent reflection is necessary if truth is to be given to his testimony" (Fackenheim, 1978, p. 58). Fackenheim revealed that he better understood his own desperate situation only *after* he had learned about the camp system. Reading about his situation afterwards gave him a new and improved perspective and understanding on what he had actually experienced. The same might also be true for those forced to live in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Ringelblum describes numerous times the challenge of sifting through rumor and gossip. In April 1942 he wrote, "...Rumors were thick that an extermination squad had come to Warsaw... This rumor is associated with the fact that there are various foreign contingents in Warsaw... Besides, one is always hearing reports about extermination squads that are wiping complete Jewish settlements off the face of the earth" (Ringelblum, 1974, pp. 256-257). He knew, as a trained historian, the importance of sifting through myth and rumour when writing about the events of the past. Kaplan, too, observed something similar: "Since we have no reliable means of receiving news, rumors abound about the political situation in the world and the military situation on the Western front.... In spite of all these peculiar rumors whispered from mouth to ear, no one really knows what is going on" (Kaplan, 1965, pp. 43-44). Being cut off from the daily news made it complicated for the people in the Ghetto to understand not only what was happening inside the Ghetto, but outside it as well. Thus, decisions made regarding daily life

became even more complicated.

As Ringelblum and Kaplan have noted in their diaries, rumors were rampant in the Ghetto and made "factual" writing difficult. However, as they tried to separate fact from fiction, some diarists were actually able to recognize that both were part of the experience. In particular, Kaplan was suspicious that the Nazis were manipulating what he saw and heard, and thus, understood. As early as January 1940, Kaplan began writing about the impact of the Nazis deceit on the people of the Ghetto,

It is not my custom to write in my diary about rumors. I always think that only actual facts are worthy of note. This time I only wished to show our mood, our state of mind, the atmosphere which causes such frightening rumors to spread. An evil rumor, when it is being spread, is worse than the event itself when it comes to pass (Kaplan, 1965, p. 101).

An important element of the Nazi system was the deception of its victims. As a result, the victims were often confused and more susceptible to the system in which they were ensnared. Kaplan's diary illustrates that this was a key component of Nazi policy.

The memoirists also faced great challenges in transmitting their experiences. Even if they kept notes during the period in question, memoirists have to overcome issues of memory, as well as challenges to language and imagination. In other words, names, dates and details can become confused or lost over time. Survivors strive in their memoirs to describe to the "inexperienced" reader what life was like in the Ghetto – a seemingly impossible task. "Holocaust writers will have to overcome immense strains on the imagination" (Rosenfeld, 1980, p. 7). The memoirist is challenged to find suitable or fitting words, symbols, images and idioms for their accounts. While diarists, perhaps due to the immediacy and emergency of their situations, rarely lingered on the problem regarding the "limits of language," the memoirists have the time and the distance to reflect on this significant complication.

Indeed, to return and write about the experience, the memoirist must also in some ways face death once more. This relates to the very nature of the experience for survivors of trauma. Now no longer facing the immediacy of death, the memoirist can deal with the subject in detail. Survivors can contemplate again their own mor-

tality and recall those that perished in front of their eyes.

In contrast, as they wrote, the diarists confronted death directly, on a daily basis. Interestingly, diarists, while referring to death, did not usually linger on the subject. A primary difference between the two forms is that the memoirist writes about death much more than the diarist (Arons, 2003). In confronting death on a daily basis, the diarist perhaps avoided lingering on the subject in their writing; there was simply no need to torment themselves with these thoughts in their diary entries.

Donat, for instance, frequently reflects on death in his memoir. Furthermore, he also claimed to have trouble remembering certain conversations. He illustrated in his writing the difficulty in communicating his experiences. While interned at Maidanek, he presented the following remarkable conversation that he had with a fellow inmate, which illustrates both points,

...Everything depends on who transmits our testament to future generations, on who writes the history of this period. History is usually written by the victor.... Should our murderers be victorious, should they write the history of this war ... they may wipe out our memory altogether, as if we had never existed, as if there had never been a Polish Jewry, a Ghetto in Warsaw, a Maidanek.... But if we write the history of this period of blood and tears – and I firmly believe we will – who will believe us? Nobody will want to believe us, because our disaster is the disaster of the entire civilized world. We'll have the thankless job of proving to the reluctant world that we are Abel, the murdered brother.... (Donat, 1965, p. 211).

Donat is able to exemplify the tremendous difficulty in communicating his experience, and the experience of any Holocaust survivor, by directly describing this intricacy in his memoir. By outwardly acknowledging this problem, he has actually made the reader an accomplice to this issue. Indeed, in his memoir, the reader is constantly made aware of the tremendous struggle writers of Holocaust memoirs face in transmitting their experiences.

While the diarist wrote as the events were occurring, the memoirist often waits years, even decades, before returning to the memories of those terrible years. Paradoxically, memoirists have the benefit and the burden of knowing the

outcome of war, of knowing its facts, myths, biases and excuses. Thus, while their scope is enlarged, the memoirists are also confronted by myriad, occasionally conflicting, representations of life concerning the Ghetto and the Holocaust.

Kazik acknowledges the gaps in his memory. He explains, "I tell only what I remember.... I want to convey things as I saw them – and as I see them now – in my own way; and I take full responsibility for what is written here ... there are some blanks in my memory. I didn't want to 'restore' memories and have preferred to leave the 'holes'" (Kazik, 1994, p. xiii). Rather than consulting other representations of the events or inventing unnecessary details, perhaps like one would do in imaginative literature, Kazik prefers to offer the reader these gaps in his narrative. Later he remarks, "I have no memory of the people or the code words that got me [there] ... I vaguely remember a field ... but I can't give details" (Kazik, 1994, p. 87). Kazik is fully aware of the limits of his memory, despite having kept notes from the period and having gone over his story numerous times. For survivors, the fact that their experiences defy simple comprehension reveals both "*the truth of an event*" and "*the truth of its incomprehensibility*" (Caruth, 1995, p. 153, italics in original). For Kazik and Donat the impenetrability of the event is the reality of it. Moreover, memoirists recognize that by turning the memory of a traumatic event into narrative, both verbalizing and characterizing the experience, they risk losing the essence of that experience.

Nevertheless, certain images are still unsullied in Kazik's memory. For example, the day the Germans entered Warsaw, Kazik writes, "The picture is still engraved in my memory.... I was depressed and scared" (Kazik, 1994, p. 9). The image of the German march through Warsaw is significant because, for Kazik and many others, it was the beginning of the end of the world that they knew. While the facts and figures can sometimes be confused, the meaning of events is often explicit in the mind of the survivor. Certain memories can become fixed in the mind and remain unaltered during a lifetime (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995). Memories that are experienced in moments of extreme feeling or sensation leave indelible memory traces in the minds of those creating the memories. For Kazik, the above memory created intense emotions within him and the image remained fixed, unchanged in his mind.

Reflections on the Similarities and Differences of the Accounts

The diaries of Kaplan, Ringelblum and Korczak clearly illustrate men in transformation. The men we meet at the beginning of each diary are not the same ones that greet us toward the end of their accounts. Their temperaments and personalities appear to change as the war progressed and as Nazi policy and actions began to truly reveal themselves.

Early into the war, Kaplan writes in defiance of the German decree that Jews were prohibited to keep a certain amount of money at home. He explained the exceptionality and strength of Polish Jews. Accordingly, on 30 October 1939 Kaplan boldly stated,

The enemy erred in thinking he was in Berlin, dealing with his own "Juden." After the prohibition forbidding a Jew to keep more than 2,000 zloty in his home, the naïve Jews of Germany would probably have stood in line at the banks the next day by the tens of thousands to fulfill the Fuhrer's commandments. But the Polish Jews said emphatically "No!" They didn't deposit a single penny, but you won't find a single Jew whose strongbox contains more than 2,000 zlotys! All these ridiculous decrees, which attest to low culture and sadistic wickedness, arouse laughter among the Jews of Poland (Kaplan, 1965, p. 61).

As the Nazis increased their harrowing measures against the Jews of Poland, including slave labour, isolation and beatings, the extreme suffering began to take its toll. Less than a month later, Kaplan's tenor began to change. For example, on 23 November 1939, he wrote,

It is hard to watch the death of an entire community, which with all its limitations did have its positive features; and the features were completely and entirely Jewish.... We do not have the spiritual strength of our forefathers, whose souls were tempered, and who in the midst of terrible privation did not forget their spiritual needs and sacrificed themselves for these things. In the face of persecution which endangers our physical existence, we are ready to give up everything that has heretofore been dear and holy to us (Kaplan, 1965, p. 74).

Kaplan's resolve was suffering greatly as the Nazis increased their pressure on the population. As Gutman (1982) has noted, Kaplan's tone

seemed in total contradiction to his previous comments that Polish Jews had outwitted the Nazis and carried on in spite of the cruel policies inflicted on them. The terrible suffering endured by the Jews of Poland had a profound influence on Kaplan's consciousness. The confidence he had that his people would survive the war intact was rapidly and irrevocably shaken.

Thus, in some instances, there was an utter austerity to the written accounts by these diarists. According to the diarists, as the war raged on, viewing death became almost common. In Ringelblum's first diary entry, 1 January 1940, an observation he noted was that, "The mortality among the Jews in Warsaw is dreadful. There are fifty to seventy deaths daily" (Ringelblum, 1974, pp. 7-8). Seeing death in the streets made a discernible impression. However, compare that to a diary entry written over a year later, on 17 August 1941: "There is a marked, remarkable indifference to death, which no longer impresses. One walks past corpses with indifference. It is rare for anyone to visit the hospital to inquire after a relative. Nor is there much interest in the dead at the graveyard" (Ringelblum, 1974, p. 194). The diarist does not linger on death, but rather mentions it as a fact of daily life. Kaplan also made a similar comment in June 1942,

The Jewish section of Warsaw has become a city of slaughter. We have endured three more nights of butchery, and we have almost become accustomed even to this.... Habit becomes second nature, even in matters of life and death. We are so used to the idea of being shot to death that this entire horrible matter no longer frightens us (Kaplan, 1965, p. 288).

The continuous scenes of death and destruction became, at times, overwhelming to the senses and the diarists reflected this reality in their writings. Death is certainly not ignored, but it is stated matter of fact.

However, this is not to say people became oblivious to the pain and suffering of others - on the contrary. Ringelblum, who was a qualified historian, also changed as a writer as the war progressed. He began his diary by making entries that were promptly, objectively written, shifting rapidly from one subject to the next. Clearly, his aim was to document a history of the period. But even by 1941, Ringelblum's writing

became much more personal and featured more reflective commentaries. In December 1941, he remarked,

A terrifying, simply monstrous impression is made ... [by] the wailing children who ... beg for alms, or whine that they have nowhere to sleep. At the corner of Leszno and Karmelicka Streets, children weep bitterly at night. Although I hear this weeping every night, I cannot fall asleep until late. The couple of groschen I give them nightly cannot ease my conscience (Ringelblum, 1974, p. 241).

Ringelblum's feelings and opinions are now included in his later reports, which did not regularly occur in his earlier entries. His later entries demonstrate a man who was willing to express his emotions, to record how the events were impacting him personally.

The memoirist, on the other hand, not only had to endure the events in the Warsaw Ghetto and the concentration camps, but they must also contend with what Caruth (1996) calls the "crisis of survival" and Rosenfeld (1980) calls the "extended anguish of survivorship." More specifically, the survivors have to deal with life-after-death, a life troubled by feelings of compunction and meaninglessness. Survivors often feel that their lives are unearned and feel guilty for having been returned to life after so many met their deaths (Rosenfeld, 1980). Moreover, the memoirist has the burden of not only recollecting a painful past, but also the impossible task of "psychic restoration" and "moral reconciliation" (Rosenfeld, 1980, p. 53). Many survivors feel the need to somehow justify their lives after experiencing so much death.

Kazik and Donat work through these issues in their respective memoirs. Kazik asks himself, "In despair, I went over everything I had done since we had left the Ghetto; I kept asking myself if I had done everything I could" (Kazik, 1994, p. 48). Indeed, Kazik continuously had to deal with his feelings of guilt for having survived the war. He wondered if he could have helped or saved more people. Donat also doubted and questioned himself after liberation,

I relived every step of the last five years, tormented by nightmares and visions; and I had endless conversations with my loved ones. I flayed myself with a thousand ifs, the thousand ways in which the implacable course of affairs might have turned out differently, and a procession of shado-

ws passed before my eyes.... Why hadn't I died with them? What was best and noblest in my people had been destroyed. Why was I permitted to live? (Donat, 1965, p. 293)

He expressed feeling that his life was undeserved. Donat felt a need to justify his own survival because of the death of so many others. In narratives of personal experience, it is clear that narrators become deeply involved in reliving events of the past. By writing about their past, they try in some ways to exorcise it.

Both Donat and Kazik discuss feeling that their lives are unearned. By questioning their own survival, their own existence, guilt has wrapped itself around them. In efforts to escape from the guilt, both men took to writing. Telling their stories was their way to try to alleviate their sufferings. Therefore, self-reproach becomes yet another obstacle for the memoirist.

French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas argued that guilt arises from the survivor's being at "home" or having a place in the world because they have "usurped" their neighbors place (Levinas, 1986). Survivors may ask themselves why they survived and so many, living next to them, have not. Kazik informs the reader, "In almost every meeting ... the questions came up, 'How did you survive?' It was asked again and again.... I had the feeling that I was guilty for surviving. This was why ... I didn't talk very much. I avoided exposing my past. I preferred not to tell about myself and where I had spent the war years" (Kazik, 1994, pp. 152-153). Thus, Kazik spent years in silence. He grew tired and weary for having to justify his existence. Life is loud, Donat once explained, but death is silent. In order to bring to an end the silence of death, the memoirist writes and tells of their experience. Writing aids the transition back to a regular life and allows the writer a method for dealing with the trauma.

Indeed, after years in the Warsaw Ghetto and the concentration camps, writing was a way to recover life. Upon liberation, Donat wept tears of sorrow because he had simply experienced too much tragedy. He admitted that his principal fear was "going home" because he was "afraid that when I did, my last ties to life would be irrevocably broken. There would be nothing left" (Donat, 1965, p. 292). After years of fearing death, Donat now feared life. He worried that by returning to life he would be violating the memory of those that died. Kazik also faced this crisis after the war. While always hoping for lib-

eration, when it finally came, he was unsure of how to continue on with life. He realized that a "return to [his] prewar life was impossible" and that he could no longer live in Poland (Kazik, 1994, p. 149). The war had destroyed the world he knew and to recover his life he had to find a way to move forward. His method was to write and re-tell; his method was to remember.

Therefore, writing their memoirs was a way for both Donat and Kazik to respond to this dilemma, to the "crisis of survival." The survivors attempted to liberate themselves by confronting the death denied to them. Trauma consists in having confronted death, but also in having survived without actually knowing death (Caruth, 1996). In other words, one's proximity to death and one's own survival are both inexplicable. Along with writing out of a moral obligation and a need to commemorate the dead, the memoirist looked to restore meaning and order to a life taken from them during the war. The memoirists testify to the brutal nature of the events and their writings demonstrate the impossibility of properly transmitting the horrors of the Holocaust and its destructiveness on life.

In summary, the Warsaw Ghetto diaries challenge specific diurnal patterns, while the memoirs confront the "limits of language" and the readers' expectations. The diarists faced the daily challenge of distinguishing truth from rumour, while the memoirists struggled with the confines of their own imaginations in order to restore the events correctly as they happened. Moreover, the diaries depict individuals in transformation. The diaries exemplify how the brutal conditions in the Ghetto impacted and wrought changes in the individual writers. The memoirs, in contrast, demonstrate survivors attempting to retrieve the loss of self. The memoirs endeavor and struggle to show what the survivor experienced during these tumultuous, harrowing years.

Conclusions

Warsaw Ghetto diarists and memoirists wrote, at the most basic level, to leave a written account of what they had experienced. Yet, what can we as readers take from these accounts? Korczak anticipated this dilemma when, in one of his final entries, he wrote, "I have read it over. I could hardly understand it. And the reader? No wonder, that the memoirs are incomprehensible to the reader. Is it possible to understand some-

one else's reminiscences, someone else's life? ... Is it possible to understand one's own remembrances?" (Korczak, 1978, p. 151). This problem can be applied to both Warsaw Ghetto diaries and memoirs. Since it would be impossible for the average reader to truly understand or relate to these experiences, one must, nevertheless, read to *know* what happened. Through the shadows we view man's appalling brutality to man. Thus, knowledge of the atrocities makes us all a witness to the events of the Warsaw Ghetto and the concentration and extermination camps. A level of witnessing in relation to the Holocaust experience is one where the practice of witnessing is itself being witnessed (Laub, 1992). The reader of these documents is witnessing written testimony pertaining to atrocity. As witnesses, we become cognizant of the details of these crimes against humanity.

What is also clear is that the diarists and memoirists have testified to the cruelty they have endured and the murder of so many. These testimonies are examples of spiritual resistance, responses that emerged from the very depths of the Holocaust. As Elie Wiesel has observed, "If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony. We have all been witnesses and we all feel we have to bear testimony for the future" (Wiesel, 1977, p. 9). As we have seen, testifying was a powerful incentive for survival. The desire to emerge from the horrors of the Warsaw Ghetto and tell of their experiences was immense.

The diarists wrote out of a sense of duty and purpose. Many felt it was their mission to record and document. Their accounts cry out to be heard. They were not written to be read privately, but to be acknowledged publicly. The memoirist also felt a sense of duty and a moral obligation to write. They too wrote to document their experiences and to remember the dead. But, they also wrote to recover the life that was taken from them. They wrote to restore some sense of order and meaning from a past that still existed in the present. "The experience," writes Kazik, "is still happening, still going on" (Kazik, 1994, p. 153). To understand their present, they had to revisit, relive and testify about the past.

Through the fragmented and unfinished diaries, we observe writers attempting to make sense of disaster. Their writings are an example of what it means to write during destruction and annihilation. We observe individuals in dram-

atic transformation as death and devastation take their remarkable toll. The diaries document the individual's consciousness in peril. Therefore, they speak of broken and incomplete moments.

As time distances the survivors from the events in question, they risk removing themselves from these events, and thus, there is a temptation to succumb to silence (Rosenfeld, 1980). The memoirist responds to atrocity by opposing silence, whether it is the silence brought on by death, man, nations or God. By speaking out, by responding to atrocity, they break the silence and attempt to recover the self.

The accounts explored in this paper demonstrate the moral obligation to testify and the unique challenges in expressing the experience. These documents are responses to barbarism and they uphold what it means to be human. Through the words of the diarists and memoirists, words that pass before our eyes like a procession of shadows, the reader only glimpses at life in the Warsaw Ghetto. The last line of Chaim Kaplan's diary asks, "If my life ends – what will become of my diary?" (Kaplan, 1965, p. 340). His diary, and the accounts of all those testifying against the brutality of fascism during the war, has become an extraordinary force opposed to evil.

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