Following a distinguished career as an educator, Margaret Taft is now a Research Fellow at Monash University, Australia. Her doctoral thesis in early Holocaust testimony set the foundation for her pioneering work, which has been instrumental in the field of Holocaust studies.

This is a pioneering study that intertwines history and testimony in an illuminating manner. At its centre stands the critical analysis of early eyewitness accounts written by Jews and published in the years 1941–49. Margaret Taft explores the emergence of Holocaust testimony, one who moves through three transitional stages which shape the varying perspectives, identities and transformations of testimony. By shifting the focus back onto the first voices, Margaret Taft challenges two popular misconceptions, experienced and transmitted over years in the ‘Myth of Silence’. From the same Jew begins to record the horrific and traumatic events they experienced. After the war and liberation, survivors narrated their experiences behind the ‘silence barrier’, only to be broken by the Eichmann trial (1946) and finally abandoned years later when the end of the Cold War sparked an explosion in Holocaust history and memory.

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FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR
From Victim to Survivor
The Emergence and Development of the Holocaust Witness
1941–1949

MARGARET TAFT

VALLENTINE MITCHELL
LONDON • PORTLAND, OR
In memory of my late parents, both of whom were survivors of the Final Solution.

Their courage and resilience inspired and enriched our lives.
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The relationship between Holocaust survivors and historians has always been – and still is – a complex and emotionally charged one. Tensions, even animosities come to the surface when survivors read or listen to accounts by historians in which they do not recognize their own experiences. I have witnessed many such encounters throughout my academic career; one in particular left an indelible mark on my memory. In November 1990, I attended with two colleagues – the late John Foster and the young Mark Baker – a symposium staged by the Melbourne Jewish community to commemorate the anniversary of Kristallnacht. Our presentations first sparked unrest among the large audience, then an outburst of anger. One survivor rushed to the podium, brandishing his Auschwitz tattoo and shouting:

‘You historians! You are the Mengeles of today. You are dissecting our mind and body. You cannot tell the truth as you did not experience the horrors of the Holocaust.’

The uproar was short-lived. Louis Waller, a renowned Law professor from Monash University, who chaired the panel, quickly restored order, calmly stating: ‘The witness should never be the judge.’

Margaret Taft does not quarrel with witnesses, nor does she say anything that survivors might find disturbing. On the contrary, she pays tribute to the pivotal role played by witnesses and survivors in recording and recalling the horrific and traumatic events of the Nazi genocide unleashed against the Jewish people. Growing up in Melbourne and educated at Monash University, she is the daughter of survivors and dedicates her book to her late parents. She pays homage to ‘their courage and resilience (that) inspired and enriched our lives’. What she presents is a pioneering and challenging study that intertwines history and testimony in an illuminating manner. At its centre stands the critical analysis of early eye-witness accounts written by Jews during the war and in the immediate post-war years. Margaret Taft listens to the first voices and contextualises the responses to the destruction of Jewish life. What emerges is a conceptualization of the Holocaust witness; one
who moves through three transitional stages which shape the changing perspectives and responses, identities and transformations of testimony. The first section covers the years 1941–43. Diaries, journals and pamphlets, written in hiding during the ‘numbered days’ in ghettos (Kovno, Vilnius, Łódź and Warsaw), reveal not only the suffering or the struggle to resist and to survive but also the attempts to understand and to comprehend the unfolding ‘Jewish catastrophe’. The second chapter looks at reports, articles and books produced between 1944 and 1946. They point to a fuller realization of the destruction of Jewish life and the efforts to come to terms with loss and survival in a world after Auschwitz, still infected by anti-Semitism. They also reflect the prevailing ‘anti-fascist’ consensus and ‘patriotic’ sentiments, and stress the obligation to document the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators and to bring the murderers to justice. The third and final section sheds light on the years 1947–49. Margaret Taft evaluates a small, yet highly significant set of memoirs and shows that two iconic symbols of the Holocaust – the Warsaw Ghetto, the site of Jewish resistance and heroism, and Auschwitz, the epicentre of the murder of the Jews – have now moved into the centre of Jewish survivor recollections.

Margaret Taft’s narrative makes fascinating reading and offers important contributions to Holocaust scholarship. As she convincingly argues, the National Socialists perceived the Jews as ‘parasitic vermin’ which had to be eradicated. Indeed, it was ultimate Nazi intent to create a world ‘free of Jews’. The Second World War permitted the architects and executioners of the ‘Final Solution’ to unleash their genocidal campaigns. From the outset Jews, defamed, discriminated against and isolated, attempted to resist the Nazi onslaught. Non-compliance, self-assertion and protests, escapes via state borders into hiding on the Aryan side or into suicide, ghetto uprisings and partisan warfare were the main forms of resistance. Documenting the events of the ‘Final Solution’ too belongs to the realm of Amidah, the Hebrew word for ‘standing up’ – a term introduced by Yehuda Bauer to define the concept of Jewish resistance. The National Socialists destroyed Jewish communities in Europe but they were not able to kill all Jews or to erase all traces of their crimes. Margaret Taft concludes her study with a key sentence: ‘In this way the witness was able to defeat once and for all the ultimate aim of the Final Solution: the eradication of a Jewish future’ (p.187).

By shifting the focus back onto early eye-witness accounts, Margaret Taft challenges two popular misconceptions, enshrined and transmitted over years in the ‘Myth of Silence’. She joins the circle of historians
that includes David Cesarani, Zoe Waxman, Dina Porat, Boaz Cohen, Amos Goldberg and Alan Rosen who have re-discovered and analysed parts of these first testimonies. Over many years, it was generally accepted that the so-called ‘silence barrier’ or ‘code of silence’ of survivors was only broken by the Eichmann trial (1961) before being abandoned years later in the wake of ever-increasing Holocaust awareness and remembrance. Though Margaret Taft does not incorporate unpublished accounts into her study, she refers to the efforts of the ‘She’erit Hapletah’, ‘the surviving remnants’ of European Jewry, to tell their stories. At the end of the war the army of Displaced Persons (DPs) included some 200,000 Jewish survivors. There is evidence to suggest that more than 10 per cent of them testified to the horror they had experienced in the form of completed questionnaires, protocols, reports and interviews which are now dispersed across numerous archival depositories. All of them bore witness in private letters, postcards and telegrams.

Over 25,000 testimonial accounts were recorded in different places – in the transit rooms of DP camps set up in Germany, Austria and Italy; by Jewish Historical Commissions or relief organizations; in registry offices of newly established communities, most notably in Munich, Łódź, Warsaw, Bratislava, Budapest and Bucharest or in other cities such as Paris, Amsterdam, London and Jerusalem. Only a few of these early, fresh memories have yet been evaluated. In addition, there are the affidavits from early Nazi war crimes investigations and trials, as well as statements submitted in later restitution and compensation proceedings. This immense body of hitherto largely unexplored testimonies are, in my view, more relevant for Holocaust history and memory than the recollections recorded in recent years in the wake of burgeoning ‘Oral History programmes. The outbreak of the Cold War and the dismantlement of the ‘antifascist’ consensus restricted research and publications on the Holocaust. Survivors encountered a wall of silence set up by post-war societies which showed little or no interest in listening to their stories.

After liberation all survivors searched for missing relatives and embarked on long journeys to rebuild their shattered lives in new homelands; be it in the newly established Jewish State of Israel or in Diaspora communities around the world. Wherever fate took them, they were accompanied by memories of traumatic experiences: they bore scars which never fully healed. Years later the end of the Cold War sparked an explosion in Holocaust history and memory encouraging many survivors to tell their stories. Today, the rapid growth of this trend...
has resulted in a highly fragmented and overwhelming state of research, only partially accessible to experts in their field of specialization. More than 100,000 testimonies have been collected so far, which in turn has paved the way for the emergence of what has been termed a ‘memory cult’ or ‘memory work’. One outcome is clear: soon there will be no further living witnesses to testify to the horrors of the Holocaust. The existing testimonies, recorded over more than seventy years, will be preserved for future research – some in their original form in archival depositories, others transformed by modern technology to make them more easily accessible.

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I was taught to read Yiddish by the inspirational teacher Danielle Charak. Not only did she bring me back to my mother tongue, a language I had only spoken with my late parents, but she also opened a rich new world of literature to me.

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To my darling children Daniel and Jessica and daughter-in-law Ganit, I cannot thank you enough for your patience and interest in my
work. I love you dearly. Last, but never least, I wish to thank my husband and beloved partner in life, Jonathan, who always offered support and showed total commitment to my research. I would never have undertaken this project without his loyalty and devotion.
On 23 June 1941, one day after the German army invaded Soviet-occupied Lithuania, Polish-born Jew Herman Kruk made a fateful decision to remain in Vilna. ‘If I am going to be a victim of Fascism’, he wrote in his diary, ‘I shall take pen in hand and write a Chronicle of a city.’ Kruk’s determination to be ‘the mirror and the conscience of the great catastrophe’ reveals an impulse to bear witness that transcended personal, individual interests. Kruk was murdered in an Estonian labour camp on 18 September 1944, but not before he buried his precious diaries in the presence of six witnesses.1

Eight years later, in the aftermath of the war, former Warsaw Ghetto resistance fighter and survivor Tuvia Borzykowski reflected on his Holocaust experiences and subsequent liberation in his 1949 published memoirs, *Tsivshn falndike vent* (published in English as *Between Tumbling Walls*): ‘I was like a walker between two walls; one was the recollection of the past years, the life in the ghetto, the stacks of dead bodies, the destruction of my people; the other was the hope for the future, in a world free of the Nazi scourge.’2 Borzykowski’s writings reveal the anguish of survival and the paradox of liberation. The struggle to reconcile an inescapable past filled with the horrors of unprecedented mass murder is juxtaposed with the irrepressible desire to work towards a better, just world, one which would ensure a Jewish future.

This book is concerned with the early development of ideas and understandings of the Holocaust by those who directly experienced its impact. Kruk’s diary and Borzykowski’s memoir are representative of a much larger corpus of work written by Jewish victims and survivors of the Holocaust throughout eight devastating and turbulent years between 1941 and 1949. The study begins in 1941, when the Nazis embarked upon the Final Solution, a systematic plan of mass killing aimed at the total extermination of the Jews of Europe, and continues to 1949, just after the establishment of the State of Israel, when survivors were rebuilding their personal and communal lives. It was during these years that European Jews collectively and individually
confronted the extremes of human experience and we first see the emergence and development of the Holocaust witness as an important social and political figure.

Witnesses produced their testimonies in a number of difficult and mainly hostile environments: in the ghettos of Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, as concentration camp escapees fleeing from the Nazis, as liberated survivors returning to places of devastation such as Warsaw and Vilna, and finally as Displaced Persons, homeless and stateless, in the liberated American and British zones. This book raises a number of important questions concerning the nature of this early witnessing and the struggle to bear witness. What were the shared understandings that victims and survivors had of their experiences at a time when they were first emerging as witnesses to an unprecedented tragedy? How did victims conceptualize their experiences during the onslaught of the Final Solution and what did it mean to be a survivor in the immediate post-war period? How did witnesses seek to understand their experiences over a period of cataclysmic change and personal and communal tragedy? And how did they impart meaning to a Holocaust experience not yet part of the public consciousness? The answers to these questions lie within the written works of the murdered victims who concealed their eyewitness accounts in the ashes and detritus of the camps and ghettos and in the reports and memoirs of the survivors who miraculously lived to tell the story of their harrowing experiences.

Early scholarly investigation into the Holocaust followed the traditional praxis of historical analysis that sought to address the questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ such a human catastrophe could have happened.3 Although the search for answers to questions of causality was a critical starting point for historical exploration, it served to direct attention to the perpetrator and bystander. By its very nature, the perpetrator documentation that formed the basis of early historical research and scholarship excluded the victims’ experiences.4 It also emphasized how the victims died rather than their attempts to live and survive, an emphasis that impacted on the shaping of Holocaust historiography in its formative years and directed Holocaust research for the first two to three decades. Studies of the role of anti-Semitism and the Nazis’ decision-making processes that followed also rested squarely on the actions and motivations of the perpetrators.5

Interest in Jewish responses to the Nazis’ mass murder campaign increased following the Eichmann trial. Researchers initially saw victim responses through the paradigm of Jewish resistance, unambiguously
defined as active armed struggle. The first subgroup of victims and survivors who had received broad public recognition by the 1960s were those who rose up in armed revolt against their oppressors. Heroic narratives of resistance fighters and partisans went some way towards countering claims by scholars such as Hanna Arendt, Bruno Bettelheim and Raul Hilberg that Jews were to some extent complicit in their own deaths, that historical experience had taught Jews to acquiesce, to comply with authority figures in order to survive. But a new wave of resistance scholarship challenged this definition of passive complicity. A deeper understanding followed of the different forms that resistance took, ranging from spiritual and cultural acts of defiance, acts of evasion and deception, to the complexity of the underground organizations and the limitations confronting the Jews at the time and the problematic role of the Judenräte.

Historical interest in the construction of Holocaust narratives based on victim testimonies gathered pace in the 1980s. At the same time, interest developed in the study of memory, in particular the intersection of testimony, language and trauma. Historians have now come to place great importance on the role of memory in negotiating and reconciling the past and the disjunction that can occur when archival documentation and personal recollections of an event are at variance. The past twenty years have seen a significant growth of interest in the way the Holocaust is remembered and represented, with a central focus on the role of the Holocaust witness. Holocaust historiography has come to embrace investigations into testimony, memory and the act of witnessing, including recent studies of how individuals recall the same events at discreet intervals over long periods of time. With aging survivors now declining in number, there is growing interest in the way that testimony is transmitted to a second and third generation, the children and grandchildren of survivors. Second-generation memoirs bring other issues to the fore, matters concerning the ownership of memory and the conflicts that inevitably arise when memory and facts are in contention.

The current interest in testimony and memory is timely, but the status attained by survivors and the attention afforded to their testimonies in recent decades has largely eclipsed the prodigious efforts made by victims and survivors to record, collect and preserve vast amounts of testimony both during and immediately after the Holocaust, giving rise to the popular notion that witnesses remained dormant or were inconsequential, passive and powerless until non-survivor
audiences were ready to engage and listen. In challenging that view, the present study takes us back to a time when victims and survivors first began the process of finding meaning in their experiences through the act of bearing witness. This study shows that victims and survivors were anything but silent or passive, either during or immediately after the war, and that peacetime in Europe was anything but peaceful; rather, it was a time of great uncertainty amidst continuing hostilities and competing political agendas.

Scholarly interest in the early attempts to bear witness in the ghettos and camps and the activities of survivors in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust has gathered momentum in the past ten years. The result is a growing body of landmark works which examine this early period in new ways. Initially it was the diary writers, the ‘scribes of the ghettos’, who came under particular close scrutiny. A number of important scholarly works have been published, contributing to our understanding of the Holocaust victims’ attempts to bear witness during the onslaught of the mass killings, as individuals or as part of collective enterprises such as the Warsaw Ghetto Oneg Shabbat Archive. More recent historical interest has shifted to an examination of the complexities and contested interests in post-war Europe, with a particular focus on the plight of Jewish Displaced Persons while also affirming the dynamic role that survivors had in controlling their destiny and in reconstructing their lives and communities amidst the turmoil of a European continent in chaos. In addition, historians have focussed on the reception that Jewish survivors received in the countries to which they migrated. All these works are important to our understanding of the deeply complex issues at play, particularly in the post-war period, but they tend to examine the war and its aftermath as distinct from each other rather than deeply interconnected. This is not a criticism of the scholarship undertaken; rather, it reflects the discrete, in-depth nature of the research. The present study links the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath in a way that has not previously been done and identifies this eight-year period as a continuum in the development of the Holocaust witness.

A popular and prevailing view still credits the Eichmann trial in 1961 with providing the impetus for the emergence of the Holocaust witness. Such a view sees the trial as the defining historical event which initially shaped and defined who the survivor was and what the Holocaust meant. It is certainly true that the trial, by providing a global audience for Holocaust survivors, had a direct impact on non-survivor
communities and to some extent broke a ‘silence barrier’ between survivors and non-survivors. But survivor witnesses strove to give meaning to the events that threatened their existence and endeavoured to understand what they themselves represented as victims and survivors long before the Eichmann trial and in spite of the world’s indifference. The development of a global audience for holocaust testimony and the first emergence of the witness are not concurrent events. Victims and survivors who confronted their experiences throughout the 1940s did so in a way that ultimately helped other survivors shape an identity that was meaningful, purposeful and empowering in the post-war world. In its earliest manifestation, the act of bearing witness was driven and directed by the victims and survivors, with little involvement from communities outside their own. Despite minimal public interest in the victims as witnesses during the Holocaust and arguably limited interest in them as survivors in the immediate post-war period, victims and survivors nevertheless provided testimony in a number of different ways and in different contexts.

The cataclysmic events of the twentieth century have given rise to new ways of interpreting the concept of witnessing and the notion of the witness. The traditional Jewish understanding of the act of bearing witness, however, is much older and is intrinsic to the religious laws and traditions of the Jewish people. The Jewish notion of witnessing centres on the imperative to remember the past in order to maintain an enduring spiritual connection with it, an idea deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible, particularly throughout Deuteronomy and in the Prophets, and originating as a commandment from God. For the Jewish historian and philosopher Yosef Yerushalmi, the Hebrew Bible ‘seems to have no hesitations in commanding memory’:

> Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past. (Deut. 32:7)

> Remember these things, O Jacob, for you, O Israel, are My servant; I have fashioned you, you are My servant: O Israel, never forget Me. (Is. 44:21)

> Remember what Amalek did to you. (Deut. 25:17)

Yerushalmi claims that the imperative zakhor (remember) appears in its various declensions in the Bible no less than 169 times, usually with either (the people of) Israel or God as the subject, for memory is incumbent upon both. Two important questions Yerushalmi asks are:
‘What were the Jews to remember and by what means?’24 And how, if at all, is ‘the commandment to remember related to the writing of history?’25 While the commandment to remember is unconditional, its terms and processes appear arbitrary and are more fluid. The universal problem appears to be one of selection. What is remembered is not always recorded and much of what has been recorded is not necessarily remembered. What is most important to the present study is the way in which this Judaic sacred injunction to remember has been transmuted into a secular, contemporary responsibility that found such resonance in the Holocaust and saw it immediately become an experience that was narrated, recorded and remembered.

The nature of events in the first half of the twentieth century and especially the Holocaust bring the Judaic and secular meanings of witnessing together in a unique way that gives direction and shape to the emergence and development of Holocaust witnessing between 1941 and 1949. The secular act of bearing witness in this period takes place in a context of perpetual conflict. Witnessing is bound up in a constant engagement with opposing forces, a perpetual laborious struggle against obstacles that threaten its existence and effectiveness.26 The witness acts as a perilous interface between the destructive actions of the immediate past and an inhospitable, even hostile, present. The adversarial concept of bearing witness pits the witness against opposing, destructive forces but also locates witnessing within Judeo-Christian legal and juridical frameworks that are underscored by ethical and moral practices. In the legal system the witness is not always willing and compliant. Often witnesses are subpoenaed to appear before the court and are subject to cross-examination. Their testimony comes under extreme scrutiny as the law compels them to tell the truth. According to Jewish tradition, the witness also exists to serve justice and the rule of law when a crime is committed or when a moral community is under threat.27 The witness is still constrained to tell the truth, but does so out of an inner moral compulsion and a sense of connection to that community, its history and perpetual travails.28 For the sake of others, the witness assumes primary responsibility for the truth: to uncover, to reveal and to transmit it.

In assuming responsibility for the truth, the witness must not only recount or reconstitute facts, but also engage with a complex process of comprehending, interpreting and remembering.29 The truth may be located in direct experience but it must also be understood, albeit in different ways by different individuals. What is evident throughout this
study is that witnesses exhibit different transitional stages of knowing and understanding the truth that was the Final Solution. What we see is a witness who initially must overcome his or her own struggle to accept and believe the truth and then find ways to respond to it.

When a witness undertakes a moral commitment to reveal the truth, he or she must then transmit that truth to an audience by means of an individualized explanation. Bearing witness then raises the expectation that an audience will respond in a moral and ethical way. While the giving of testimony is a singular act, bearing witness is a dialogical process between the witness and the intended audience. What emerges in this study is a struggle to both engage a non-survivor audience and to make that audience fully understand what is expected of it. The type of response the witness sought was only to realize its fullest expression some decades later.

The human catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century proved to be a turning point for the Jewish people, not just because of their scale but because of their nature. ‘The Jewish experience of the twentieth century’, writes the historian David Roskies, is one in which ‘one cycle of violence rapidly gave way to another’. Roskies cites four major crises that threatened Jewish existence throughout the century. When the Kishniev pogrom erupted on Easter Sunday 1903, nearly fifty Jews were murdered and hundreds injured on a ‘blood libel’ charge. The pogrom quickly caught the attention of the world and inspired Chaim Nachman Bialik’s poem ‘In the City of Slaughter’. During the First World War, the concept of ‘total war’ first emerged, with vast numbers of civilians dragged into the orbit of military conflict and thousands of Jews murdered, robbed and deported along the Eastern Front. Roskies’s third example, the Civil War in the Ukraine, claimed ‘between 60,000 and 250,000 civilian Jewish lives’, while ultimately the unprecedented horrors of the Holocaust saw the murder of six million.

In previous centuries, Jewish catastrophes inflicted by the Crusades, the perpetual ‘blood libel’ charges, the expulsions from England in 1290, from France in 1302 and from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 could be explained by the rabbis in terms of biblical precedent and archetypes. To a large extent this rabbinic interpretation also blamed the victim for incurring the wrath of others as a punishment for religious transgressions: ‘for our sins we were exiled’, or ‘the fathers ate sour grapes and the teeth of the sons are set on edge’. By shifting responsibility to the victim, the rabbinic view absolved the perpetrator...
of guilt. But the twentieth century brought a dimension to mass destruction and human devastation that could not be understood or addressed in traditional ways. New threats to Jewish life and ultimately to the very existence of the Jewish people required a different framework for Jewish response. For twentieth-century emancipated Jews no longer confined to the ghettos, this challenge engendered a response that not only addressed the way in which history was perceived, but also how it was written, giving rise to what Roskies terms the 'literature of destruction'.

Secular Jewish intellectuals and writers who were active in the early part of the twentieth century were still influenced by their own distinctive Jewish heritage and religious practices, but were also acutely aware of what was going on around them, particularly the new political and social movements that changed the way in which events were recorded. In a time of modern total warfare and mass exterminations, it became important to preserve every fragment of evidence as if it were sacred. From the time of the Kishniev pogrom in 1903, Jewish writers would draw on eyewitness accounts to 'render the concrete and sensual particulars of modern violence, would spare neither victim nor victimizer, and would seek the causality of war, revolution, and pogrom not in heaven but on earth'.

When the Great War broke out in 1914 a leading group of Jewish intellectuals in Warsaw issued the following declaration:

Woe to the people whose history is written by strange hands and whose own writers have nothing left but to compose songs of lament, prayers and dirges after the fact. Therefore, we turn to our people that is now and evermore being dragged into the global maelstrom, to all members of our people, men and women, young and old, who live and suffer and see and hear, with the following appeal: BECOME HISTORIANS YOURSELVES! DON’T DEPEND ON THE HANDS OF STRANGERS! Record, take it down and collect!

This declaration was part of a process of democratization that relocated historical responsibility from the academy to the streets, allowing everyone to share in the writing and recording of every facet of everyday life.

While these secular Jewish writers still made reference to some biblical archetypes, they did not base their work around them; they did not want to record events ‘after the fact’ through ‘prayers and dirges’. Rather, they incorporated contemporary witness testimonies and
depositions into the collective archive of Jewish experience. The biblical commandment to remember became enshrined in an innovative modern canon, one in which the witness took on a pivotal role in recording Jewish history as it happened and came to carry the moral responsibility to bear witness for others as a consequence. Thus the social and cultural implications of the biblical commandment *Zakhor* were encoded in the fabric of contemporary secular Jewish life. Although the act of bearing witness found its greatest expression in the Holocaust, it was not without conflict, which came at once from without and from tensions arising from within. As this book reveals, both during and immediately after the Holocaust the witness endured many hardships and encountered many obstacles that contested all efforts to narrate, record and remember.

Like all work on testimony and memory, the present study draws on close readings of specific statements in order to understand how individuals both recall and recount events they have experienced. Twenty-one key texts have been chosen for this study because they best reflect the way in which a concept of witnessing that was held in common emerged in the diaries, journals, reports and memoirs of this period. By analysing the similarities and differences between these texts and exploring the ways in which they show a changing understanding of the Holocaust, the study illustrates the development of particular and influential ideas about the witness and the survivor.

Diaries and memoirs are, in the words of historian Gustav Corni, ‘the fruits of a deliberate and reasoned decision to leave a testimony, of a rational desire to come to terms with what is happening and what has happened’. All the works chosen for this study were initiated and written by victims and survivors without the intervention of any intermedias. The texts selected provide insight into the conceptual processes involved in interpreting hitherto unimagined experiences as they were occurring in the period under review. The genocidal intent of the Final Solution is the cornerstone to an understanding of the intellectual and emotional effort involved in trying to make sense of what was happening for those caught up in the process, or grasping the magnitude of what had taken place for survivors. Jews had long dealt with persecution and discrimination but had never encountered an exterminationist policy like that implemented by the Third Reich. The Holocaust was an event without precedent and beyond human experience: the waging of war on a defenceless civilian population with the objective of killing every man, woman and child. In all the works
chosen, the authors sought to go beyond individual experience and to speak for the millions who suffered and perished, and those few who had survived. In particular, the study is concerned to show how witnesses responded to and made sense of the shift from persecution, exclusion and expulsion to total annihilation.

Testimonies instigated and collected by intermediaries, whether by private individuals such as Leyb Konichowsky or Alfred Wiener or by the public commissions established by survivor communities in the Allied occupied zones, have not been investigated. Although the testimonies collected by the numerous Jewish Historical Commissions were important at the time and much groundbreaking research into the work of these commissions has recently been undertaken, the way that witness statements were collected and the reasons for their collection do not serve the interests of this study. The commissions formalized and institutionalized the act of bearing witness. They embarked upon a collective and systematic process of gathering factual testimonies in an attempt to create a historical record using victim data: to construct a public, collective bank of victim experiences that would document the great crime committed against the Jews of Europe. For this reason, many of the testimonies were given as sworn statutory declarations, particularly when they were to be used as indicting evidence against war criminals, as was often the case. In the same way the historical questionnaires that were constructed, sent out and collected by the Historical Commissions were highly structured in order to provide a particular outcome, such as recording sites of massacres, documenting numbers and names of those murdered, and identifying the murderers by name and any distinguishing characteristics. The work of the Historical Commissions served an important historical and judicial function at the time, given that perpetrators deliberately sought to conceal their identities and their crimes. It was an auspicious and courageous attempt to quantify and qualify the breadth of Jewish experience. However, the commissions did not attempt to move beyond the factual, or explore how their experiences were conceptualized by the victims.

The implementation of the Final Solution meant that its full force was initially felt by the Jews living in the East. Accordingly, this investigation focuses on Jews living in the East, where the earliest attempts to understand this dramatic change in Nazi policy and practice occurred. Historians Robert Jan van Pelt and Deborah Dwork emphasize the differences between those Jews forced to live under Nazi rule in the East and those in the West.
Western European Jews faced death when the Germans opened the box cars and pulled them out onto the unloading ramps of Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz. Jews in the ghettos of Eastern Europe faced death every day. No Jew in the west starved to death or died of infectious diseases arising from overcrowding in the cities’ Jewish quarters. Not so the east. All the smuggling and the concerts and the clandestine classes could not long relieve the misery of the ghetto. Every Jewish person faced hunger, disease, and a constant threat of deportation. Physical conditions in the ghetto led to death. German policy led to death.43

It is in the East that we find the first attempts to come to terms with the true nature of the Final Solution as it unfolded and to bear witness to an unprecedented tragedy.

The study identifies three major conceptual stages in this development, linked to three distinct historical junctures between 1941 and 1949 that occur sequentially and follow events that impacted directly on the witness. For this reason the book is structured into three consecutive chronological sections. The first section, ‘From Persecution to Annihilation: The Struggle to Know and Understand’, begins in mid-1941 and continues until the commencement of 1943. It examines ten diaries and chronicles written by inhabitants of the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania as the Final Solution was unleashed upon the Jews of Europe and they experienced the most catastrophic phase of the mass killing campaign. The second section commences in 1944 and continues until 1946. ‘Confronting the Truth in a Period of Transition’ looks at the period when Europe was liberated and came under Allied occupation. It examines five different sources published throughout this time, in order to comprehend how survivors responded to and began to make sense of the enormity of their personal and communal loss. Today, people are able to attach a meaning to the Holocaust, whatever that subjective meaning may be, but there was no such possibility in 1945. The third section, ‘From Private Victim to Public Survivor’, discusses six memoirs published in the period from 1947 to 1949 in order to understand how victims publicly reshaped their identities into that of survivors and what this meant at a time when they were re-establishing their personal lives and reconstructing their communal institutions. As will be seen, the formal end of the war did not signal the end of suffering for many Jewish survivors but rather presented them with a new set of existential challenges.
NOTES


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**Introduction**


21. Ibid., p.5.
22. Ibid., p.9.
23. Ibid., p.5.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p.35.
37. Roskies (ed.), *Literature of Destruction*.
39. Ibid., p.19.
40. Quote cited in ibid., p.18.
CHAPTER ONE

From Persecution to Annihilation: The Struggle to Know and Understand, June 1941–January 1943

‘The fact is that reality has surpassed imagination by far ... ’
Chaim Kaplan, diary entry, 11 April 1942, Warsaw Ghetto

In the eighteen-month period from mid-1941 to the beginning of 1943, the Jews of Eastern Europe were subjected to a systematic mass murder campaign the nature and scale of which had never been experienced before. Right from the start, there was a sense of the need to document and to bear witness to these terrible events, as Jews had always recorded the tragedies that befell them. The particular nature and circumstances of this tragedy however, determined that personal writing in the form of diaries, journals, chronicles and letters made up the dominant form of testimony. In the confines of the ghettos many people set about observing and recording their experiences for posterity. But as they struggled to document and understand the events that so rapidly engulfed them they came to realize that they were confronting a new and unprecedented threat.

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War the Jews of Europe had already endured centuries of persecution and discrimination. This persecution took many forms, ranging from embargoes on particular trade and commercial practices, restrictions on entry to state educational institutions and ghettos within confined residential areas, to acts of abuse and physical violence, often culminating in pogroms. Nevertheless, whatever the nature and severity of the persecution and its manifestations or the cost in human lives, Jewish communities learnt to interpret the problems it posed in ways that enabled them to respond and survive.
When the Nazis came to power in 1933, government-sanctioned persecution and discrimination plunged to new depths.\(^5\) At first, however, while the Nazis were developing a new level of systematic destruction, in some ways the persecution of Jews shared many of the characteristics of the anti-Semitism of old, leading many Jews to believe that yet again they could overcome the impositions of this new regime.\(^6\) By the time the Nazis marched into Poland on 1 September 1939, Nazi persecution of the Jews had taken a more brutal and deadly turn, expanding beyond German territory. Even though Nazi occupation demonstrated a far more ruthless and methodical approach to persecution, nothing could have prepared European Jewry for the onslaught, totality and unprecedented nature of the Final Solution in 1941.\(^7\)

Between June 1941 and the commencement of 1943 the pace of mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe intensified. In this eighteen-month period, Poland, Lithuania and the Soviet/Nazi battlefront became the epicentre of the murder campaign against the Jews.\(^8\) The Jews of Poland and Lithuania were thus the first to confront this new reality – one that had at its core a radical plan for the total extermination of European Jewry.

Historians have long debated the radicalization of Nazi policy that led to the Final Solution and the reasons for the dramatic escalation of mass murders in this period.\(^9\) The focus of this debate originally centred on whether genocidal intent underlay the Final Solution from the outset or, alternatively, whether particular circumstances and opportunities presented themselves in ways that suggested how the Third Reich might finally solve the ‘Jewish question’. Much current historical thought views the origins and implementation of the Final Solution as a deadly and highly complex combination of ideology, opportunity and timing.\(^10\)

It is now clear that the period after the Nazis launched their assault on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, and up to the beginning of 1943, was the most catastrophic phase of the mass murder campaign.\(^11\) Christopher Browning concludes that from the outbreak of war to the commencement of March 1943, 75–80 per cent of those six million Jews who would die had already been murdered by starvation, disease, mass shootings and, ultimately, in the gas chambers.\(^12\) Approximately 60 per cent of these murders occurred over these eighteen months.\(^13\)

It is this staggering death toll and the new ways in which mass killings were undertaken that makes this period an important one in which to investigate the means by which the Jews of Poland and Lithuania were
able to gather information about what was happening to them and the extent to which they were fully able to grasp and interpret the threat that faced them and its unprecedented implications. There was no coherent or generally agreed understanding of the events that were occurring throughout this deadly period. What this chapter explores is the disparity that often existed between different individuals and groups in terms of how they saw and understood what they were experiencing. In the Łódź Ghetto, for example, there was confusion and immense anxiety, as no one really knew what was happening. This was expressed in the Łódź Chronicle in February 1942: ‘in reality the ghetto has not received any precise information on which to base an idea as to the fate or even the whereabouts of the deportees. This mystery is depriving all ghetto dwellers of sleep.’ By contrast, some of those in Vilna could already see genocidal intent. Abba Kovner’s ‘Vilna Declaration’ made on 1 January 1942 concluded that ‘Hitler means to exterminate all the Jews of Europe’.

Ten diaries and chronicles that were written in the ghettos of Warsaw, Łódź, Vilna and Kovno throughout this eighteen-month period have been selected and analysed in order to understand the different levels of awareness and the various ways in which people in these communities came to understand what was happening. The works chosen illustrate the range of information that could be gathered in each location at that time, and the varying levels of understanding that people could and did attain.

Obviously victims were not privy to the Nazis’ ideological plan for their total extermination (a plan that was kept so secret that even amongst leading Nazis it was often referred to only in euphemisms). All they could do was observe and experience the pain and suffering and the combination of system and chaos that was happening around them. They noted the extreme level of brutality and senseless violence against the most vulnerable members of the community, random snatchings from the street, the inhumane living conditions in overcrowded ghettos where death by starvation and disease were daily occurrences, the disappearance of people without a trace, the unprecedented numbers of people being deported to places unknown and rumours of unthinkable crimes in obscure locations. These occurrences all confounded as they horrified those who sought to understand, through logic and reason, their ultimate purpose.

The systematic extermination of Jewish communities began in Lithuania with the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing squads, ably
assisted by ‘enthusiastic’ local Lithuanians. A report sent to Berlin by Einsatzgruppe A commander, SS General Walter Franz Stahlecker, dates the ‘first pogrom’ in Kovno between 25 and 26 June 1941, where ‘more than 1,500 Jews were eliminated by the Lithuanian partisans’ and ‘on the following nights 2,300 Jews were rendered harmless in the same way’. This occurred only four days after the commencement of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The deaths of the first Jews of Vilna to be murdered at Ponary occurred on 11 July 1941. By 25 November 1941, the Einsatzgruppen had murdered 18,898 people in the fields of Ponary alone, and another 13,501 in small towns in the Vilnius region.

The mass murder campaign began in the east, but quickly spread to engulf the whole of Poland. It also heralded a new form of extermination involving purpose-built gas chambers. The Łódź Ghetto, the second largest after Warsaw, and the most isolated, experienced its first phase of deportations to the newly constructed mobile gas vans of Chelmno between 16 January 1942 and May 1942, and a second phase starting on 1 September and continuing throughout 5–12 September 1942. Over 70,000 Jews were murdered in these deportations. On Himmler’s orders, Łódź, the last remaining ghetto, was liquidated in August 1944, with the 68,000 Jews who remained there being sent to Auschwitz. Of the 204,800 individuals who had lived in the Łódź Ghetto over the four years of its existence, only 7,000–10,000 survived.

The first mass deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto, the largest in Poland, to the Treblinka extermination camp commenced on 22 July 1942 and continued in phases until 12 September 1942. In this short seven-week period, 265,000 Warsaw Ghetto Jews were murdered at Treblinka. Deportations from the ghetto to Treblinka continued until the ghetto was finally liquidated in May 1943. Of those Jews who had remained in the ghetto until its liquidation, only 1,000–2,000 survived.

COMMUNICATION, THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE AND THE STRUGGLE TO CONCEPTUALIZE THE ‘UNBELIEVABLE’

One of the first new phenomena that Jews sought to understand was the ‘deportations’. In the absence of any clear directives, any attempt to understand what all these deportations meant was dependent upon various channels of communication and information gathering.
processes that operated at different levels and across geographic boundaries. The information gathered in this way could then be pieced together and interpreted in order to try to work out Nazi intent. But Nazi policy and practice made keeping the lines of communication open and acquiring information, recording it and preserving it in a radically altered world both difficult and something undertaken at great peril. Information gathering involved listening to illicit radio broadcasts, or producing or reading underground newspapers. Those found to be involved in these activities faced execution. The keeping of diaries, notebooks and chronicles that recorded and preserved important information fell into the same category of subversive activity.26

Those seeking to establish the truth faced the difficulty of dealing with Nazi prevarication. Initially the Nazis sought to subdue their victims by giving them a false sense of security. They anticipated that deliberate acts of deception would enable them to execute their master plan with efficiency and without resistance. On 29 July 1942, six days after the daily deportations to Treblinka had commenced in the Warsaw Ghetto, sending hundreds of thousands of Warsaw Jews to their immediate death, ghetto inhabitant Abraham Lewin recorded a discussion between himself and a Nazi official concerning the suicide of the head of the Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, and the fate of the deportees: ‘The day after Czerniakow’s death the German officer W . came and apologized, justifying himself by saying that he was not responsible for the death and giving his word of honour as a German officer that those being deported are not being killed.’27 Victims were trapped in a deceptive environment where the discrepancies between Nazi action and public comment served deliberately to confuse and deceive, making it extremely difficult to gather reliable information. However, as we shall see, perpetrators did inadvertently provide information to those who actively sought to uncover the truth.

It was hard to gather information about what was happening to all Jewish communities as communication between different groups and places was haphazard and severely limited. In this period, the overwhelming majority of Jews in Poland and Lithuania were being concentrated into ghettos, which soon became deadly ‘holding pens’.28 Ghettos were sealed, placed under close surveillance and deliberately isolated by the Nazis. Yitzhak Zuckerman, a leader and organizer of the Jewish armed resistance movement in the Warsaw Ghetto, noted this isolation and fragmentation of Jewish communities throughout Poland. In his report titled ‘The Creation and Development of ZOB’ which was
written in Warsaw in March 1944 and sent to London via the underground, Zuckerman explains the Nazi principle of cutting off the means of communication by dividing and isolating their victims within what had once been a comparatively unified area: ‘The ghetto walls split an organism of three and a half million into thousands of cells, sunk into terrible destitution. The ghetto walls separated the Jews from the outside world and also from themselves. In the days of destruction, every community confronted its fate on its own.’ Communication outside the ghettos with local non-Jewish communities, which were often hostile to Jewish interests, was similarly constrained and dependent upon personal contacts and underground channels. In some cases, as in the Warsaw, Łódź, Vilna, Kovno and Bialystok ghettos, groups of individuals operated in collaboration with each other in collecting and documenting information. But each individual was still left vulnerable to idiosyncratic and fragmentary means of accessing and accruing information. As a result, the information people had was often partial, piecemeal, hearsay and sometimes contradictory, as Abraham Lewin reveals in his diary entry of 7 January 1943 in the Warsaw Ghetto: ‘We are locked in a cramped and tiny prison and we have no idea what is happening outside the walls of our prison, except in the form of sickening and confused rumours.’ Yet, in spite of all the obstacles put in front of the ghetto inhabitants, information still came both in and out of the ghettos.

The inability to communicate freely posed one set of problems, but the lack of appropriate language to describe the unprecedented things that were happening also hindered the ability of those watching to articulate and describe those same occurrences. For Gustawa Jareka, words, once great and powerful, were now empty and ineffective, frustrating the efforts of the writer: ‘We hate them [words], because they too often served as a cover for emptiness or meanness. We despise them for they are pale in comparison with the emotions tormenting us. And yet, in the past the word meant human dignity and was man’s best possession – an instrument of communication between people.’ For many, the unfolding events were indescribable. They ‘cannot describe’ but they ‘must’, lamented Herman Kruk on 29 December 1942. ‘Concepts lose their clarity ... Words stop effecting and influencing’, he added. Those attempting to record what they saw had to rely on concepts that already seemed anachronistic. Words such as ‘pogrom’, ‘purge’ or ‘catastrophe’ (the Yiddish equivalent being khurbn) did not convey the magnitude of the crime and yet this was all they had. Some
writers, such as Chaim Kaplan and Abraham Lewin, drew heavily on biblical analogies, but this, too, proved the bankruptcy of language. As the concept and actualization of ‘holocaust’ and ‘genocide’ were being enacted, the words to name or describe them were yet to become standard reference for the total annihilation of a people.  

To understand what was happening to the Jews required the ability to both foresee and articulate the totality of Nazi intent, to comprehend and interpret acts of absolute evil, to understand the true nature of the crime while directly experiencing it. While a few individuals managed to arrive at and express this critical state of knowledge quite quickly, others did not. For some, the denial of unacceptable truth was a protective shield against the hopelessness of their predicament. Others were unable to imagine the actual scale of destruction that was occurring around them.

But those who did recognize and understand what was happening were still confronted with a major challenge: how to make others understand something that was unbelievable and that lay beyond the scope of previous human experience and historical knowledge. As Jozef Zelkowicz exclaimed as he recorded the tumult that the September 1942 deportation of children and the elderly wrought on the Łódź Ghetto community, ‘Ultimately you will grab yourself by the hand and cry out, it isn’t true!’ In the eighteen-month period under investigation in this chapter, the victims often remained suspended in a paradoxical, unresolved state between truth and disbelief.

**DIARIES AND CHRONICLES: THE MEANS TO OBSERVE, RECORD AND BEAR WITNESS**

Many Jews have taken to heart their representation as the People of the Book, the ‘bearers of the commandment Zachor [Remember] as a basic tenet of their private and individual lives and have always written their own history. Jews have always been the scribes of their own communities and of their own experiences, both secular and sacred. This heritage that unites the sacred with the cultural obligation to remember meant that throughout this period many people were engaged in providing testimony to what they saw occurring around them.

Diaries and chronicles that were secretly maintained in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania formed the principal means by which information was recorded and stored by the victims. These diaries and
chronicles may have been written in private and in secret, but many were maintained with public intent as those diarists came to realize that total annihilation of the Jews would be incomplete if their memory of it was preserved for future generations. What we see here is a duality of purpose, one in which recording private experience and creating a public record inform and validate each other. In this way, the private experience becomes embedded in the creation of a public record. There is little that separates them; they coexist as an interdependent act to rescue memory and bear witness to the truth.

While the Nazis controlled life and death in the ghettos, it was the diarists and chroniclers who therefore wrested control of victim memory, rescuing facts and experiences from oblivion. This form of writing constituted a major act of civil resistance as it presented a defiant protest against their own death, that of their community and the eradicating of all memory of it. These victims knew that the Nazis also wanted to obliterate all evidence of their crime and any trace of Jewish existence. By recording and preserving memory of the atrocities committed against them, these Jews were waging their own war against the Nazis.40 The zeal with which this chronicling and diarizing was undertaken was noted at the time by Emmanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw Ghetto: ‘What Jews did in private in their homes did not interest the Germans. So the Jews started to write. Everyone did: journalists, authors, teachers, community workers, young people, even children. Most people kept diaries where daily occurrences were reflected through the prism of personal experience.’41

Historians have shown a keen interest in the phenomenon of the Holocaust diary, both for its Judaic features and as a historical document.42 According to the Israeli historian Dina Porat, the 400 diaries traced so far tell us a great deal about the individual people who wrote them and their different places of origin, in particular the horrific conditions experienced on a daily basis in the ghettos of Warsaw, Vilna and Łódź.43

Diaries differ in style, content and intent. Some diaries were simply written as private individual records; others had a public audience in mind. Some people were concerned only to observe and note what was happening; others sought also to interpret the events they recorded. The diary of the young Dawid Sierakowiak in the Łódź Ghetto, for example, records observations made with a keen attention to detail. Sierakowiak displays youthful curiosity but little awareness of the potential significance of his diary as a historical document.44 Other
diary and chronicle writers reveal a conscious desire not only to record their experiences, but also to act as witnesses to the collective fate of their people. They indicate a premeditated decision to bear witness and collect evidence, moving beyond the commonly held notion of the diary as a personal or observational work to one that holds greater significance as a historical document. They possessed a heightened sense of historical awareness. For Gustawa Jareka, 'the suffering and destruction of this war will make sense when they are looked at from a distant, historical perspective'.

While some of the diaries written at this time record Nazi and collaborator activities, others focus on the victims themselves. It is clear that by September 1942, Jozef Zelkowicz in the Łódź Ghetto was aware that the deportations meant certain death, but rather than providing evidence concerning the number of deportations he writes empathetically and with considerable psychological insight into the plight of the victim. As an eyewitness, he recorded life and death in the ghetto, questioning and raising moral issues in the process.

Different diaries within the same ghetto could reveal different perspectives on the same issues. For example, the question of smuggling in the Warsaw Ghetto was a contentious issue for many; Emmanuel Ringelblum saw smugglers as heroes of the ghetto, while Chaim Kaplan viewed them with great contempt. Some diaries from different ghettos exhibit an interesting degree of uniformity, particularly when discussing the issue of collaborators and informers or the Jewish police.

A striking characteristic of these writings is the way that many diarists, regardless of age or background, reveal the ability to see beyond their own personal experience to interpret the broader implications of the events they were recording. In Vilna, for example, 14-year-old Yitzhak Rudashevski’s diary entry of 8 July 1941 describes his immediate reaction to having to wear an identifying Jewish badge:

I was ashamed to appear in them on the street not because it would be noticed that I was a Jew but because of what [they were] doing to us. I was ashamed of our helplessness ... It hurt me that I saw absolutely no way out. The badge is attached to our coats but has not touched our consciousness. We now possess so much consciousness that we can say we are not ashamed of our badges. Let those be ashamed who have hung them on us.

Rudashevski does not just record the fact that he must wear a Jewish badge; he also articulates his engagement with the experience and his
broader response to it. But because each individual saw his or her predicament differently and understood it in different ways, each piece of writing reflects a different personal response and interpretation of the experience. The writers move beyond what James Young calls the ‘rhetoric of fact’.50

For David Patterson, the Holocaust diary represents a distinct Jewish response to the diarist’s predicament, one that is located within a Judaic moral code that links the written word to an individual’s moral responsibility to bear witness. This commitment to the other is what Patterson acknowledges as a defining characteristic of the Holocaust diary: one that sees ‘a human being stand in a moral relationship to other human beings’.51 The Holocaust diarist is therefore intrinsically connected to the writer’s community in a way that makes him responsible for it and to it.

In Vilna, for example, the librarian and activist Herman Kruk proclaimed his intention to bear witness in his diary on 23 June 1941, just one day after the Nazis invaded Lithuania.

If I am going to be a victim of Fascism, I shall take pen in hand and write a chronicle of a city ... Jews will go into the ghetto – I shall record it all. My chronicle must see, must hear and must become the mirror and the conscience of the great catastrophe and of the hard times. I have decided to write a chronicle of the events of Vilna.52

Kruk has a clear sense of the relationship between ‘victim’, ‘witness’ and ‘truth’ and the moral responsibility that underscores it. Kruk’s self-conscious decision to be the ‘mirror’ and ‘conscience’ of the ‘great catastrophe’ reveals a self-determination and intent that was present from the outset. He demonstrates a heightened sense of historical awareness and social conscience with a clear commitment to his community. He uses his diary to be the witness to a ‘great catastrophe’ and also to form the basis of what he believes is an important historical document – thus linking the need to bear witness with the obligation to record history. Indeed, he often uses the term ‘chronicle’ rather than diary to describe his own writing. In the same way, Emmanuel Ringelblum, Abraham Lewin and Chaim Kaplan in the Warsaw Ghetto use their diaries primarily as a means to bear witness while they purposely record and document for posterity what they learn and know of the Final Solution.53

David Patterson sees the Holocaust diary firmly and exclusively embedded within a Judaic framework. He does not see the Holocaust
diary purely as a historical document. However, the historic and the Judaic are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the Judaic traditions inherent in the writing of these diaries and the intention to have them act as historical records inform each other. It is true that some diarists may appear to have written exclusively to bear witness, emanating from a sense of obligation to, and engagement with, a broader readership. They made public pronouncements to a future audience as they sought to invoke a moral response. ‘Why did this happen?’ exclaims Abraham Lewin in the Warsaw Ghetto, on 21 September 1942. ‘And why is the whole world deaf to our screams?’ But in these questions lies also an implicit optimistic belief that their written testimonies would be retrieved by a future community, charged with a moral responsibility, that would also want to know how and why this happened. As a history of their fate was yet to be written it was beholden upon the witness to initially pose the questions that he or she believed others would feel compelled to answer. In this is the added belief in the power of history to invoke change and to direct the course of a morally robust future. Vilna Ghetto inhabitant Zelig Kalmanovich demonstrates this conviction in his diary entry on 27 December 1942: ‘History will revere your memory, people of the ghetto. Your least utterance will be studied, your struggle for man’s dignity will inspire poems, your scum and moral degradation will summon and awaken morality.’ What emerges here is the Judaic commitment to bear witness and responsibility to the other as well as a great belief in a future moral world directed by a history of the past. ‘Thus the holocaust will steal its way into world history’, proclaimed Kalmanovich. For these writers, a belief in the enduring power of everyday writers of history to act as political agents of change transcended their own mortality. This conviction dominated the collective work of the historian Emmanuel Ringelblum’s ‘Oneg Shabbat’ archive in the Warsaw Ghetto:

The record must be hurled like a stone under history’s wheel in order to stop it. That stone has the weight of our knowledge that reached the bottom of human cruelty ... a chronicle of days of hell is being composed, in order that one may understand the historical reasons that shaped the human mind in this fashion, and created government systems which made possible the events in our time through which we passed.

David Roskies points out that the ‘ghetto writings provided an internal focus for their writers, one that is fundamentally different to the post
war period’. Roskies is referring specifically here to the collective nature of some of the ghetto writings, particularly the Oneg Shabbat initiative in the Warsaw Ghetto, rather than the individual story as told by survivors both ‘in print and more recently in videotaped interviews’. But it also raises another issue that is of great importance in discussing the differences between the ghetto writers and those of the post-war period. The post-war writers could view their experiences with some degree of hindsight and – more importantly – knowledge, while the ghetto writers recorded events from within the heart of darkness, at the most critical time in the life of the ghetto and the mass murder of its inhabitants. However, James Young contends that even diary writers had to reconstruct the events they recorded – that no one really wrote at the exact moment of actualization. He therefore claims that there is always some degree of distance between the act of writing and the event, and that this distance allowed for contemplation and a process of reconstruction, one in which diarists mediated their texts according to the strictures of diary writing and the constraints and influences under which they operated. This implies that all personal writing is written in the past, that it is only a question of the degree of distance, and that the reader must be mindful of the way in which the diary was constructed when evaluating its contents. Young’s argument is cogent, but arguably it is the Holocaust diarists’ closeness to any given event rather than their distance from it and their vested interest in the outcomes of those events that provide a unique perspective that is unavailable in other written forms throughout this period. As the ghetto diarist wrote with the increasing knowledge that he faced certain death he was challenged by a merging of subject and object, of being both the narrator and the narrative itself. By bearing witness to the fate of his community he also became witness to and recorder of his own fate. It is this duality which constitutes the most defining feature of the Holocaust diary.

**THE GHETTOS AND THE DIARISTS**

**Lithuania: Kovno and Vilna**

By 1939 the independent state of Lithuania was home to 250,000 Jews. In the interwar years the Jews enjoyed relative economic and cultural autonomy in spite of rising Lithuanian anti-Semitism. They sustained a vibrant network of Yiddish and Hebrew institutions, daily press, and yeshivot (religious schools). The cities of Kovno and Vilna had two of the largest concentrations of Jews living in Lithuania at that time.
The city of Vilna became known as the ‘Jerusalem of Lithuania’ for its status as the world centre of Halacha (rabbinic law). It rivalled Warsaw as a cultural, religious and educational centre. Jews in Vilna numbered approximately 58,000 by 1939 – 25 per cent of the city’s population. It was home to a diverse community of literati, leading educational institutions and political organizations.

Kovno, the capital of independent Lithuania between 1920 and 1939, was home to approximately 40,000 Jews at this time. The Kovno Jewish community also prided itself on its religious and cultural heritage which saw a flowering of cultural life, educational institutions and economic life prior to the outbreak of war.

The Soviets annexed Lithuania in June 1940. Initially the Jews of Lithuania viewed this favourably, as a buffer against the advance of the Nazis. The Soviets allowed the Jews to retain work in the civil service and be admitted into academic institutions. However, the Soviet regime became increasingly oppressive. It outlawed Hebrew education, Zionist teachings and private enterprise; it abolished the right to religious observance, and eventually expelled large numbers of Jews to Siberia. On the other hand, the Lithuanians viewed the Jews as Bolshevik collaborators. The level of anti-Semitism rose and violence against the Jews escalated. When the Nazis marched into Lithuania in June 1941, the Lithuanians greeted them as liberators. The Nazis had, in their midst, large numbers of Lithuanians willing and able to undertake the task of Jewish extermination. The Jews were therefore trapped between a murderous Nazi command and the willingness of the local population to carry out its orders. Historians now consider Lithuanian collaboration as an inherent feature in the execution of the Final Solution in Lithuania.

The ghettos of Vilna and Kovno were established in 1941, at the same time as the mass killings commenced there, unlike the ghettos of Warsaw and Łódź which were established in 1940, before the full onslaught of the Final Solution. The Jews of Lithuania were simultaneously confronted with their own incarceration and the ferocity and ‘blatantly public nature’ of the mass killings. The Kovno Ghetto diary of Avraham Tory and the Vilna Ghetto diary of Herman Kruk reveal much about the immediacy of the Nazi assault in Lithuania. But they also show the capacity of these men to gather information from elsewhere that would enable them to foresee and understand the nature of the mass murders that confronted their ghettos’ inhabitants.
The Diarists: Avraham Tory and Herman Kruk

The pre-war lives of Tory and Kruk were different in many ways. Tory was a native of Lithuania, while Kruk was born in Plock but lived in Warsaw until the outbreak of war. Prior to the war both men were politically active in Jewish affairs, but Tory showed an early commitment to Zionism while Kruk was attracted to the secular socialist teachings of the Bund. Tory had a formal education, graduating as a lawyer in Kovno in 1933, while Kruk was a self-educated man who displayed an early passion for Yiddish literature and helped to establish travelling libraries in Poland.71 By 1930, Kruk was the director of the Yiddishist Grosser Library of Warsaw, publishing many articles and editing its monthly journal. Following Tory’s graduation he practised law as a practitioner-clerk in court chambers in Kovno.

Despite their different backgrounds, the unprecedented circumstances that confronted Tory and Kruk in 1941 led both men to assume positions of responsibility in their respective ghettos. At 32 years of age, Tory became the deputy secretary of the new Jewish Council of the Kovno Ghetto and an aide to Dr Elchanan Elkes, who was elected its leader on 4 August 1941. In Vilna, Kruk became the chief librarian of the ghetto library and the principal authority concerning all cultural initiatives and educational matters. He devoted himself to the collection and preservation of books, manuscripts and documents. Such was his authority and reputation that he was requisitioned by a senior Nazi, Alfred Rosenberg, to collect and sort books and artefacts to be shipped to Germany.72 These positions gave both Tory and Kruk considerable authority within their ghettos, placing them at the centre of ghetto affairs and enabling them to closely monitor the events that engulfed them and their communities.

The detailed records that both men kept makes it clear that they shared a strong sense of purpose in documenting what was happening around them, assembling information concerning their plight from a variety of sources. The kinds of information that the two men collected and considered important, however, were very different. For Tory, as a lawyer, what mattered were factual materials, figures, dates and names. He was especially concerned to keep official German documents and decrees as supporting evidence.73 Not only did Tory attempt to record all that happened within the Jewish Council, but also that which occurred between the German command and the ghetto authorities. His observations of ghetto life were written in a frank and objective style, but his descriptions of Nazi actions are nevertheless harrowing
and emotional, particularly when he describes the selection process that precipitated the brutal murder of women and children, as happened at the Ninth Fort on 28 October 1941, for example. Here he describes how ‘mothers clasped their little children to their broken hearts, hugging and kissing them as though aware they were doing so for the last time’.

Kruk was primarily concerned to record the routine of everyday ghetto life with all its contradictions and misery. He sought to gather and to record the collective experience and to expound its moral implications for a future world. He describes his own writing as a chronicle rather than a diary, reflecting the content, tone and style that he adopted. Kruk struggled to remain objective, even referring to himself in the third person at times, but his writing occasionally lapsed into a confessional mode. In his entry of 24 June 1941, for example, he confides to the reader: ‘Words From The Heart. There are no words for my suffering ... I want to and will make it through.’ Throughout 1942, Kruk shows how the cultural life of the ghetto remained intact. He proudly announced at a ceremony in the ghetto library on 13 December 1942 that 100,000 books had been read. For Kruk, books enabled the ghetto inhabitants to transcend the horrific reality that confronted them. This view was shared by others at the time.74 Even the Nazis could not destroy the cultural life of Vilna Jewry.

Both Tory and Kruk view the Lithuanians as principal agents of mass murder but their understanding of Lithuanian complicity varies slightly. In the six-month period between June 1941 and December 1941, Tory was most concerned with Lithuanian culpability and especially with the ferocity and speed with which the Lithuanians executed the mass murders. While under the auspices of the Einsatzgruppen he notes that the murders were executed by Lithuanian partisans. On 8 July 1941, Tory reports on a conversation between the Lithuanian finance minister Jonas Matulionis and the lawyer Yaacov Goldberg in which Matulionis comments that ‘assaults on the Jews express the will of the Lithuanian people’. Tory concludes that all Lithuanians are implicated in the murder of the Jews. Kruk agrees that Lithuanians and Nazis were both responsible for the murder campaign but, unlike Tory, Kruk is careful not to apportion blame on all Lithuanians. While in no way absolving those he calls ‘hooligans’ of their crimes, and commenting that ‘Lithuanians are so wild and nervous’,75 he tempers these comments with references to those who assist the Jews, by bringing letters into the ghetto and warning against impending actions: ‘Yesterday a railway worker from near
Minsk came to a Jewish home and brought a list of 87 Vilna Jews. They asked him to convey that they are alive and working near Minsk. 756

MASS MURDER: BELIEF AND DISBELIEF

The immediacy, efficiency and rapidity with which the murders were carried out left the local Jewish communities of Kovno and Vilna stunned and incredulous. Tory and Kruk were also shocked by the ferocity of the attacks but responded by assembling a record of the killings as they occurred. Throughout the six-month period from June 1941 to December 1941, both men became preoccupied with the nature, method and sheer numbers involved in the mass murders.

On three nights in June 1941, Tory reported that ‘no fewer than 700 Jewish martyrs were put to death by Lithuanian murderers’. On 7 July 1941 he noted that many in the ghetto ‘fear that death lies in wait for them around every corner’. This fear was reinforced when ‘the guard revealed the day before, 1,800 Jews had been shot in the Seventh Fort’. On 4 August 1941, Tory claimed that ‘within just ten or twelve days the Seventh Fort alone swallowed up to 6,000 Jews and then fell silent’. By October 1941, Tory reflects on the ghetto’s response to the sheer magnitude and acceleration of the murders: ‘many did not know what was happening to them’. What was initially unclear to the Jews of Kovno at this time was the intended outcome of this murder campaign and Lithuania’s position as the first site of the Final Solution’s implementation. Tory’s early entries illustrate the difficulty that ghetto inhabitants had in understanding what these murders really meant.

Like Tory, Kruk immediately began recording the mass shootings that occurred outside the ghetto walls. On 20 July 1941 he recorded the first rumours of Ponar and the level of disbelief that surrounded them:

What is happening in Ponar? On the tenth of this month a rumour came to the Judenrat that people were shot in Ponar. The Judenrat didn’t want to hear anything and considered it an unfounded rumour. Five days later reports came to the Judenrat from various people who secretly repeated the rumour about what is happening in Ponar ... the Judenrat didn’t believe it this time either.

By 4 September 1941, Kruk was still trying to make sense of the pointless brutality and execution of mass murder at Ponar but could not articulate the unimaginable: ‘The dreadful thing is hard to describe.
The hand trembles, and the ink is bloody. Is it possible that all those taken out of here have been murdered at Ponar? ... How can you write about it? How can you collect your thoughts?’ However, Kruk establishes unequivocally that the fields of Ponar are a fatal destination. Between July 1941 and December 1942 he makes nineteen specific references to Ponar as the site of mass murder.

EYEWITNESSES AND ‘WORD OF MOUTH’ SOURCES REVEAL THE ‘TRUTH’

Kruk and Tory came to understand the methods used in the mass murder of Jews from eyewitnesses. Both men record eyewitness testimonies from those who had survived the mass shootings, some of whom had miraculously dragged themselves from the pits and returned to the ghettos, and from others who secretly observed the executions. The details are horrific. The method is calculated and Kruk notes that it is ‘carried out systematically’ and the brutality surrounding them appears unlimited. By 6 October 1941, Tory also has eyewitnesses who have seen hospital staff and patients being murdered in the same way. They tell him of the method of mass shooting, describing how the pits were dug and the way the patients were thrown into them and how they were shot inside their own graves.

Just as eyewitnesses bring Tory and Kruk convincing information regarding the murder of their own ghetto inhabitants, so too do witnesses inform both men of the murder of Jews in the rest of Lithuania and Poland. In some cases their information comes from non-Jews. Tory receives news regarding the fate of the Jews and Nazi operations from an underground Polish Catholic courier by the name of Irena Adamovich. He records in full her detailed report, some 1,200 words in length, on 8 July 1942 and again briefly mentions another visit from her on 24 July 1942. Adamovich reveals specific details of mass murders in cities and villages throughout Lithuania and Poland. She brings news of the ghettos in Krakow, Czestochowa, Radom and Warsaw as well as the underground resistance movements, particularly in Vilna, whose members believe in ‘death with honour’. The information reveals comprehensive knowledge of the scope of Nazi activities and Jewish responses, numbers of executions and modes of resistance. Most significant of all, she states that ‘Belzec is a killing centre: Sobibor and Majdanek, extermination centres’. This is the first and only conclusive statement made about these death camps in Tory’s diary but
it confirms that by 8 July 1942 some people in the Kovno Ghetto had received information about a ‘new’ and far more ‘efficient’ method of extermination.

Kruk places great reliance on eyewitness accounts: ‘I talked to someone who had seen it so the following information is reliable’, he records on 27 August 1941. He makes constant reference to the contact he has with people who move in and out of the ghetto, the railway workers, the janitor of his lodgings, and anyone who can provide information. He intimates that he is not alone in this quest: ‘People ask one another; everyone seeks the truth.’ Kruk’s authority and activities in the ghetto also bring him into contact with a wide range of people able to supply information concerning the fate of Jews in other cities and the ‘new’ means of extermination. In this way Kruk learns of the slaughter and ‘purges’ in Kovno, where ‘17,000 Jews are left’,77 Bialystok78 and Grodno,79 and particularly Warsaw, where he records Czerniakow’s suicide on 22 July in his 30 September 1942 entry. He knows that the actions there lasted two months80 and that the Jews of Warsaw were deported to Treblinka near Malkinia, where ‘they are poisoned with gas’.81 He also refers to Belz [Belzec] in the Lwow district where they were poisoned en masse with gas or killed with electric currents in the former soap factory there.82 On 4 July 1942 he confirms the difficulty and elusiveness of securing information from isolated Łódź: ‘Just received a message from Łódź. For us, Łódź is one of those cities from which you can obtain almost no information.’ The information he does receive, however, is inaccurate and does not inform him of the Chelmno deportations.

By the end of 1942, Tory and Kruk had credible information that pointed to a radical and systematic programme of mass extermination throughout Lithuania and Poland: one that had progressed from mass shootings to the use of gas chambers. This was further corroborated by information received through more traditional and formal means of communication.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

News of events outside the ghettos was received by Tory and Kruk in a number of ways other than by eyewitnesses or through word-of-mouth sources. Formal communication channels in the form of telephones, radio broadcasts, newspapers and postal services appeared to function in both ghettos but with varying degrees of efficacy.
Based on evidence from these writings, the telephone seems to have been of limited use in Vilna and Kovno at this time. Tory makes only four references to telephones, usage of which was heavily restricted and possibly censored. He does not mention if there were attempts to circumvent these restrictions by using coded messages, as was the case in the Warsaw Ghetto. Kruk makes no mention of telephones, either as a source of information or as a means of communication. By contrast, both men claim that postal services operated throughout this period, apparently with little censorship. A large number of letters was received through functioning post offices as well as through numerous underground channels. Tory refers to the possibility of sending letters to Riga through the Ghetto Guard, and mentions that an underground postal service operated between Kovno and Vilna. This is corroborated by Kruk, who informs the reader that ‘letters have arrived through private channels’ and that a ‘lively correspondence exists between the two ghettos’. Kruk also confirms the lack of censorship. He receives letters from Warsaw which reveal knowledge of Ponar,83 and a letter from Shanghai. On 18 May 1942 his sister in Warsaw writes that she has received a letter and parcel from the USA and that their brother is well. Letters were sent in other ways too. On 18 August 1942, Kruk records that on the previous day ‘a train passed through Vilna with Jews who tossed out about 20 letters to those working in the Vilna railway station ... They did not know what would be their fate.’ Even these letters were collected and distributed. Tory also refers to a letter he received from ‘a person living in a nearby hamlet. He cries for help. He has been hiding in a barn ... Recently letters such as these are not uncommon. I have received many such letters.’

Black market activities and smuggling between the ghetto inhabitants and the local population are obliquely mentioned by Tory, as is the use of underground radios. But for Kruk it is radio broadcasts that are the most vital link to the wider world and to news of the progress of the war. He makes eleven specific references to illegal radio reports. He listens to British news reports and German communiqués. In spite of his claim on 27 January 1942 that ‘all radios were confiscated in the city today’, he continues to receive radio reports about the war. Tory does not reveal or record any real interest in the overall progress of the war; however, on 5 December 1942 he reports that ‘news of a wave of actions against Jews in Poland (mainly Warsaw) has depressed the ghetto inhabitants’. And again, on 15 December 1942, he tells the reader that ‘news reached us of protests in the parliaments of England
and the United States, and in the Soviet Union, against the persecution of Jews. Kruk, too, records this statement made by the Allies on 17 December 1942 condemning Hitler’s murder of the Jews. In addition, Kruk records reports about Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler and Rosenberg. It is through speeches made by Himmler and Rosenberg that Kruk has confirmation of the Nazis plans for the Final Solution – ‘The Jewish question is being brought to its last stage. We must remove Jews from all European countries’ – and a report from an English radio broadcast informs him that ‘Himmler issued an order to destroy all the Jews of Europe’.

A number of illegal newspapers appear to be available and accessed with varying degrees of ease by both Tory and Kruk. While Tory makes only one brief mention of a Lithuanian paper, on 31 December 1942, in which a summary of the year’s events are published, Kruk proves to be a prolific reader of newspapers, acknowledging the usefulness of the information they provide. On 28 August 1941 he reveals considerable knowledge of the Polish and Lithuanian underground press, claiming that there are ‘46 illegal newspapers’. The ‘illegal’ Polish press confirms what he has learnt from other sources concerning Treblinka and Belzec. The same newspaper reports on 26 November that ‘the Warsaw Ghetto has been reduced from 450,000 to 35,000 Jews’. On 16 December 1942 he notes that an illegal Lithuanian newspaper, *Niepriklausoma Lietuva*, estimates that only 46,000 Jews remain in Lithuania. Kruk immediately calculates that as there were 250,000 Jews previously, ‘80 per cent of the Jews were annihilated’.

The additional information that these communication channels brought helped ghetto inhabitants form a fuller picture of what the Jews of Europe were experiencing and how the world was responding. This could not have led to a fuller understanding of what had happened to them in Vilna and Kovno throughout the latter part of 1941, nor could it have helped to thwart Nazi actions at the time. The rapid and systematic nature of the Nazi assault in Lithuania overran and preceded information that was gathered from outside the ghetto throughout 1942. But news of the killings in Lithuania did reach other parts of Poland by late 1941. At that time the Jews had no credible evidence that this systematic extermination was to be replicated in other places and in a far more efficient and deadly manner. On another important level, for those trapped in the Vilna and Kovno ghettos, news gathered between the ghettos and from outside the ghettos helped to alleviate the sense of isolation that the ghetto inhabitants were forced to endure and,
more importantly, gave them a sense of being connected to each other and with the outside world.

By the end of 1942, both Tory and Kruk had arrived at a comprehensive assessment of the devastating events that led to the destruction of their communities. But even in their final statements the two men reveal different perspectives and concerns. For Tory this statement takes the form of a lamentation, as he reviews the immediate past: ‘For us, the year 1942 was a year of annihilation, slavery, terror and the evil spirit. Every day we became more bereaved and poorer. Today we can only lament, and preserve our mourning in memory of the tens of thousands of our brother martyrs who died sanctifying God’s name, the victims of a “crime” – to be a Jew.’ But Kruk is also concerned about the future. He contemplates what will become of the record he has so assiduously collected, ‘and what the world will make of this is hard to say’. Kruk believes that his writings will bestow a legacy on future generations: ‘But if I do not survive, others will leaf through my notes and will be able to empathize with what we have gone through and experienced here.’

By the end of 1942, Kruk and Tory had been confronted with the truth of the Final Solution, yet they still retain a sense of shock and disbelief in its possibility. In his report on 26 December 1942 about the Grodno massacre, Kruk makes a statement that reflects a state of mind still in confusion: ‘Everything is veiled, everything is unclear and most important, everything is uncertain.’ Unlike Abba Kovner’s statement that ‘Hitler means to exterminate all the Jews of Europe’, made twelve months earlier as a call to arms to the Jewish resistance movement in Vilna, Kruk and Tory’s personal appraisal of the extent and totality of the Final Solution stops short of the type of pronouncement made by Kovner. It was the graphic descriptions of events that encircled them and the extensive amount of information they received from a variety of sources that dictated the scope of their diaries throughout this murderous eighteen-month period and their efforts to bear witness to events that were still deemed unbelievable.

POLAND

The Łódź Ghetto

By the time the Nazis captured Łódź in September 1939, it was the second-largest city in Poland, with a Jewish population of 230,000, approximately one third of the total population of the city, and the
second-largest Jewish community in Poland. Following its occupation, it was initially incorporated into the Generalgouvernement and then, ‘in accordance with wishes of the local German population’ (which by 1939 accounted for some 60,000 Volksdeutsch), annexed into the German Wartheland by a decree on 8 November 1939. Its name was promptly changed to Litzmannstadt. By 1944, the number of German inhabitants had increased to 144,000, with Germans from the Old Reich being settled there permanently.

According to the historian and Łódź Ghetto survivor Lucjan Dobroszycki, the city of Łódź was subjected to immediate and intensive Aryanization, unlike any other city to come under the yoke of Nazi occupation. The Poles were immediately put into the position of pariah. The Polish language was barred from schools, theatres and cinemas. There was no Polish police force or fire brigade. All levels of administration were executed by German nationals. This isolation and complete subjugation of the Poles particularly disadvantaged the Jewish population of the ghetto. It removed a potential source of interaction and assistance, especially with the Polish underground, and thereby the possibility of finding sanctuary with the local population and the gathering of important information in ways that were possible in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Dobroszycki maintains that with only one known exception, resulting from a mixed marriage between a Pole and a Jew, there was ‘no record of any Jewish family or individual surviving the war in Łódź by being on “Aryan” territory, as occurred in Warsaw, Krakow, Lublin, and many other Polish cities. The Jews in the Łódź Ghetto were cut off as nowhere else.’ From the time that the Łódź Ghetto was sealed off from the outside world on 1 May 1940 until its final liquidation in August 1944 it remained the longest-surviving ghetto and the most isolated.

Łódź’s unique predicament and the circumstances in which Łódź Jews found themselves differed vastly from other towns and ghettos. These differences affected the ways in which the Jews of Łódź came to understand what was happening to them and their ability to obtain information about their fate. The ghetto’s isolation contributed to and compounded the sense of confusion, bewilderment and despair concerning the unknown destination and fate of thousands of individuals sent out of the ghetto on the deportations that commenced in January 1942 and continued throughout that year. Unlike the mass shootings that occurred earlier in Lithuania, these deportations actually heralded a new, previously unheard of means of mass murder, that of gassing victims in mobile gas vans located at Chelmno, a precursor to
the purpose-built gas chambers of Treblinka, Majdanek, Sobibor, Belzec and Auschwitz.96 Łódź had the tragic yet unique distinction of not only being the most isolated ghetto but the first one to have its population systematically murdered in this way.97 The combination of seclusion and deprivation, together with Nazi deception in covering up this new means of mass murder proved to be overwhelming for most of the ghetto inhabitants, who struggled to understand the true nature of the deportations. Nevertheless, throughout 1942 mounting evidence began to emerge that enabled some ghetto inhabitants to piece together just what these deportations really meant. Ironically, and in spite of their efforts to deceive and conceal, it was the Nazis who, in the end, provided the most damning evidence of all.

Although different in style and content, the four documents selected for investigation here share a striking similarity in the way they record the mood of the ghetto in response to its isolation and its frustration in trying to understand the purpose behind the deportations. They differ in the way they portray each author’s personal concerns, particularly regarding the progress of the war and the limitations of existence within the ghetto. Three of these documents are personal diaries while the fourth document, the Łódź Chronicle, was a semi-official publication produced within the ghetto archives and maintained throughout the ghetto’s existence. It was written by at least seven different people working within that department.98 Two of the diarists also wrote for the Chronicle at one time or another.

THE ŁÓDŹ CHRONICLE

The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto was a collaborative, internal publication with a restricted readership which did not go beyond the Jewish administration.99 It consists of approximately 1,000 bulletins and, although not a diary in the traditional sense, the Chronicle nevertheless systematically produced almost daily entries derived from eyewitness accounts and community records of the Łódź Ghetto between 12 January 1941 and 30 July 1944. In spite of the different authors it still manages to speak with one voice as a collective witness documenting a collective fate and is characterized by what Dobroszycki claims is a ‘consistent formal and thematic structure’.100 It was kept secret from the German administration, which would have viewed it as a seditious document, in the same way that they regarded diaries, underground newspapers, photographs and radios as seditious.101
The greatest problem confronting readers of the *Chronicle* is its compromised status. Anything which the *Chronicle* produced was contingent upon the approval of the Ghetto Elder, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, an autocratic and controversial figure: hence Rumkowski was always portrayed in the most glowing terms. In addition, it had to remain undetected by the Nazi command. If it was found, it must not contain anything incriminating. The authors therefore struggled to depict accurately the prevailing mood of the ghetto and provide factual, contemporaneous reports of what was known at the time, while exercising editorial restraint. Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations the *Chronicle* provides the reader with a great deal of information concerning what was known in the ghetto and the means by which information was attained.

**THE DIARISTS**

The private diaries of Jozef Zelkowicz, Oskar Rosenfeld and Dawid Sierakowiak provide an obvious counterpoint to the quasi-official nature and editorial limitations of the *Łódź Chronicle*. Zelkowicz and Rosenfeld were both contributors to the *Chronicle* so their diaries are free of the self-censorship they had to exercise when writing for the *Chronicle*. This is most revealing in their criticism of Rumkowski, whom Zelkowicz calls a ‘proud Jew, who runs his kingdom highhandedly and tyrannically’. Dawid Sierakowiak, who was an intelligent, articulate and politically astute 17-year-old in 1941, provides a teenager’s perspective on the events in the Łódź Ghetto. Nevertheless, he too is highly critical of Rumkowski, whom he calls a ‘demagogue’, ‘a man sick with megalomania’ and a ‘sadist-moron’.

Prior to the outbreak of war the lives of Zelkowicz, Rosenfeld and Sierakowiak had taken very different paths. Circumstances beyond their control, however, saw them all incarcerated in the Łódź Ghetto. Jozef Zelkowicz was born in a small town outside Łódź. He received a traditional orthodox Jewish education, became a rabbi at the age of 18 and then a teacher and later a bookkeeper. By the time he had settled in Łódź in the mid-1920s he was publishing short stories and articles in the Yiddish press in Poland and the USA. With the outbreak of war and his confinement in the ghetto, Zelkowicz worked in the archives and became a major contributor to the *Chronicle*. As a member of the intelligentsia and an established writer and researcher, he authored a prolific yet diverse number of texts in the ghetto. Unfortunately his
published diary provides only a part of its full corpus and therefore includes only a selection of articles, short stories and reportage pieces. Oskar Rosenfeld’s life work was also devoted to literary pursuits, but his interests spread to Jewish theatre and the radical politics of Zionism. Born in Moravia in 1884, he spent his formative years in Vienna where he received a PhD in 1908. Following the Anschluss of Austria to the German Reich in 1938, Rosenfeld and his wife fled to Prague where he commenced work as a newspaper editor for the *Jewish Chronicle*. While his wife was able to secure passage to London, Rosenfeld was trapped by the outbreak of war. In November 1941, together with 5,000 Prague Jews, Rosenfeld was deported to the Łódź Ghetto. On 6 June 1942 he was employed in the ghetto archives and like Zelkowicz became a significant contributor to the *Chronicle*. Rosenfeld had an uncommon affinity with eastern Jewry. He spoke and wrote Yiddish and mixed comfortably in Polish Jewish circles. This enabled him to communicate freely with the ghetto inhabitants, obtaining information from a variety of sources. Rosenfeld’s diary is comprised of seventeen surviving notebooks, with the first entry on 17 February 1942. The entries comprise terse, intense notes that are jotted down in a documentary style. They reveal very little information about the author. Both Zelkowicz and Rosenfeld remained in the ghetto until its final liquidation in August 1944 when both were sent to their death at Auschwitz.

Unlike Zelkowicz and Rosenfeld, Dawid Sierakowiak was born in Łódź and was only 15 years old when he began writing his diary on 28 June 1939, three months before the Nazis marched into his city. He diligently maintained his diary until 15 April 1943. He died in the ghetto three months later from a combination of tuberculosis and starvation. Sierakowiak’s diary reveals a talented, intelligent young man who strove to continue the life he knew before the war. He was preoccupied with his schooling which was abruptly halted in 1942, his desire to continue learning, his passion for socialist causes and his battle to overcome hunger and disease, a struggle he eventually lost. He records conversations with his peers and his parents, discussion groups and the prevalence of ghetto rumours. He also displayed considerable insight, claiming in a diary entry on 13 October 1941 that ‘only the Devil can tell what else might happen here. They will probably totally destroy us.’

The circumstances and experiences that these three diarists shared
in the Łódź Ghetto far outstripped their differences in age or background. An isolated ghetto under the control of an autocratic Jewish leader and a Nazi regime determined to exploit and deceive its inhabitants before exterminating them ensured that those seeking the truth about the deportations had to rely on other ways to obtain information than those more readily available in other ghettos.

THE QUESTION SURROUNDING ‘RESETTLEMENTS’

The term ‘resettlement’ was one of the euphemisms used by the Nazis to conceal the true nature of the deportations from the ghetto to Chelmno. Between June 1941 and December 1942 the Chronicle makes thirty-three entries that refer specifically to these ‘resettlements’. The first two entries, on 20 December 1941 and 29–31 December 1941, alert the ghetto that 10,000 people are to be immediately resettled. Between 1 January and 31 May 1942 there are twenty-five entries that confirm more resettlements. The remaining six entries occur between 1 June and 31 December, with two of them in September. The dates of these entries accurately reflect the timing of the deportations of 70,000 Łódź Ghetto inhabitants sent to their death at Chelmno throughout 1942. The mounting speculation concerning the fate and whereabouts of these deportees is a recurrent theme in these Chronicle entries. The entry for the month of February reflects a state of confusion:

Many widely varied stories appeared in the ghetto concerning the fate of the deportees. It was said, for example that the deportees were set free in Koluszki; those who spread this unverified information claimed that this news had come from many deportees in Warsaw. Another rumor had it that the deportees were in the Kolo county and also in the vicinity of Brzesc Kujawsk.¹⁰⁸

The constant threat of being resettled was also a growing concern for Rosenfeld, Zelkowicz and Sierakowiak, although they go about recording it in different ways. Between 17 February 1942 and 31 December 1942, Oskar Rosenfeld makes nineteen references to deportations, which he calls ‘outsettlements’. These nineteen entries also coincide with the timing of the transportations to Chelmno – that is, between February and May, and then in September. He never reveals whether or not he was aware of ‘Chelmno’ by name but he also acknowledges that transports are sent to Kolo. On 30 June 1942 he reveals some other information regarding Viennese Jews who were ‘sent
to Krakow and from there to an unknown destination’. Zelkowicz focuses on the impact of the deportations rather than recording them chronologically throughout 1942. But we must also be mindful that the type of diary that Zelkowicz kept did not contain daily entries in the same way that the other writers did; he chose to write more expansive pieces in reportage style. For Sierakowiak the rumours of deportations are threaded throughout his entries and are equally weighted against other news he hears. Nevertheless, it is Sierakowiak who alerts the reader to rumours of the imminent threat of the September deportations two months prior to the other diarists: ‘Children, the elderly, and those unable to work are supposed to be deported from the ghetto soon.’ Efforts by the ghetto inhabitants to find out what had happened to the deportees were frustrated by the Nazis, who sustained a campaign of deception in order to carry out the deportations with ease and efficiency. In January 1942 the *Chronicle* confirmed that the Nazis allowed deportees to take some 12.5 kilos of baggage and a little currency, some ten marks per person, on their journey. In addition, the Nazis continued to dupe the ghetto inhabitants by deliberately feeding them false rumours and lies regarding the fate of the deportees. The *Chronicle* entry for 10–14 April 1942 details a false report given by the Gestapo at the Baluty marketplace about a fictitious work camp where the deportees had been resettled.

In spite of the Nazis’ efforts to deceive, the *Chronicle* and the three diaries reflect a growing awareness that those sent from the ghetto were being systematically murdered. The first clue did not come from outside the ghetto at all, but from the deportation process itself. In early February the *Chronicle* makes an alarming discovery: ‘The resettlement in February was significantly more severe than the one in January; most of the guards ordered the deportees to throw away their knapsacks and often even the bundles they were carrying by hand, including the food supplies they had taken with them for the journey into the unknown.’ By April and May, speculation has grown and there is grave concern for the deportees. The *Chronicle* notes on 1 April 1942 that the ‘populace has not heard any authoritative statement on the question of deportation’ and that ‘something is in the air, and for the time being, no one can tell what it is’. This is echoed by both Rosenfeld and Sierakowiak, who also speculate about the nature of the transportations. Rosenfeld tries to see the logic behind what appears to be the illogical movement of people in and out of the ghetto. But logic fails him: ‘Today the ghetto is swarming with men and women from the surrounding countryside,
good looking faces. They are supposed to work. Thirty thousand in all are supposed to come. Why then are thirty thousand of the local population taken away? Nobody knows.”111 By May 1942 damning evidence continues to appear in the ghetto as a direct result of Nazi actions. Large shipments of clothing, luggage and personal items are beginning to be returned to the ghetto for sorting and cleaning before being transferred to Germany. On 29 and 30 April the Chronicle states that a ‘truck was fully loaded with luggage of various sorts, but chiefly with knapsacks belonging to the people recently resettled from the ghetto’. Repeat entries confirm that there are ‘Warehouses’, a vast amount of ‘Luggage’ and hundreds of thousands of kilos of clothing, bedding, furs, shoes, stockings, socks and neckties received in ‘Large Shipments of Baggage’ in the ghetto. Finally, on 19 May 1942, the Chronicle writes an article entitled ‘Where are the Jews?’ By 31 May Sierakowiak is also suspicious of the vast shipments of clothing being returned to the ghetto for further transfer. But by 13 May Rosenfeld already suspects the worst: ‘People are loaded, taken away and they vanish into the unknown like air.’ By June 1942 he understands that ‘a deportation had, no doubt, a lethal end’. On 17 September 1942 he notes that ‘clothing brought back as used material … apparently all gassed … that is no longer alive.’

It was the brutal and callous decision to deport the most vulnerable members of the community – the elderly, the sick and the children – in September 1942 that signalled the commencement of the most psychologically devastating period for the ghetto. The Chronicle reports in great detail Rumkowski’s announcement of the surrender of the elderly and the children of the ghetto.112 Between 5 and 12 September the Chronicle records at great length the intense distress felt within the ghetto over these last deportations. On 26 September it reports that ‘no one in the ghetto is over the age of 65 or under the age of 10’. But it is Zelkowicz who devotes the most time and space to recording the harrowing events of September in what he calls ‘those terrible days’. He begins on 1 September with a graphic and sickening description of the emptying of the hospital, the first phase of this liquidation, by posing a series of questions which suggests the degree of anxiety and concern:

Why are they throwing patients into the trucks like hunks of unkosher meat? Where are they taking them? ... During the war they had already ‘evacuated’ and emptied twice the hospitals ... Since the inhabitants have heard nothing to this very day, it is no
wonder that the gravity of the situation penetrated everyone’s consciousness in all its horror. ‘They’re doing another purge!’

The first inkling of what was to follow the hospital evacuation is heard once again from within the ghetto, from those Jews whom the Nazis had forced into Łódź from the surrounding towns. On 1 September, on the eve of the hospital evacuation, Sierakowiak records the mood of the ghetto and, more importantly, the way in which he learns of the outcome of these evacuations: ‘we already know from the stories of those brought into the ghetto how the Germans “deal” with the sick, a great panic has arisen in the city’. Zelkowicz confirms that a great deal can be learnt from Jews who are transported into the ghetto from surrounding towns. ‘When it comes to bad news, the voice of the masses is quite reliable’, he concludes. In response to the question concerning the hospital evacuation – ‘Will it end with that?’ – he is told the truth from those who already know:

The Jews from neighbouring towns who had recently reached the ghetto laughed bitterly at the naiveté of that question. They had already experienced this. They know, but refrain from saying, that things began this way in all the neighbouring towns. First they marked the victims, took the patients from the hospitals, afterwards they made off with children and the elderly ... at the end they reduce everyone to dust and ashes ... They are murdered in bizarre ways ... How well they knew the formula, these Jews from neighbouring towns.

The horror of the September deportations also confronts Rosenfeld: ‘By order from Berlin, outsettlement of all children between the ages of one and ten. Old people from sixty-five on without exception, also from the workshops ... This concerns about 18,000 souls ... Begging on knees, Just not the children, but fruitless.’ On Friday 4 September, Zelkowicz states with certainty the true meaning of the deportations: ‘If it were only a “deportation”. If only there were the slightest surety that the deportees would be allowed to continue living – even under the harshest conditions – the tragedy would not be so horrific.’ But Zelkowicz cannot reconcile this truth with his own conscience: ‘There is one solitary thought about that: they are going to certain death. How unbearable, how impossible to make peace with this thought.’ In reaching this conclusion, Zelkowicz also dispels the ghetto inhabitants’ long-held belief that a productive workforce would prove to be their salvation. By 5 September he has realized that they are all doomed: ‘Doesn’t it prove
that the Jewish worker is not needed and can go to hell? Today when Jewish labour is not needed, what right has the ghetto to exist? Why should Łódź be the only exception in the Warthegau?’

NEWS FROM OUTSIDE THE GHETTO WALLS

No matter how isolated the Nazis intended the Łódź Ghetto to be, it appears that some information was gathered from outside the ghetto walls. The most common means of securing information, however, continued to come from word of mouth sources, rumours spread by the vast number of Jews forced into the ghetto from the outer towns. What they revealed to the ghetto inhabitants was uncensored and freely communicated. What they relayed to Sierakowiak on 27 August 1942 was the full extent of the Final Solution: ‘They tell horrible stories about the murdering of thousands of Jews and bring only a few remnants [of their communities] into the ghetto. They were not allowed to take anything with them, and there are no elderly, children or sick among them. Those able to work and those unable were killed without distinction.’ It is quite clear that the amount of information gathered from newspapers, telephones and radios was extremely limited. The Chronicle makes no reference to them at all, nor does it mention any news of the war, but this could have been a consequence of its compromised nature and its attempts to avoid controversy. Sierakowiak had a keen interest in the war that raged outside the ghetto walls ‘because I hope that with it I will be liberated’. So he actively sought ways to find out about its progress. He makes repeated reference to the ghetto newspaper, a propaganda tool for the Nazis, but one which nevertheless provided him with some information. He makes no reference to illegal newspapers or other printed material. But on 21 June 1941 he confirms the use of illegal radios: ‘All “newsmen” have been arrested (that is, those who listened to the radio and were the source of political information in the ghetto). More than forty persons have already been locked up.’ But it seems that their use continued. Sierakowiak makes two more references to British radio reports, on 19 August 1942 and 23 November 1942. Rosenfeld also reveals some interest in the war but only makes one brief mention of it on 23 June 1942 when he speaks of ‘Russian units from the air’ and ‘German cities in ruins’. Zelkowicz shows no interest in the military war but remains preoccupied with the war that rages within the ghetto.

The postal service, which operated with comparative freedom in the
ghettos of Kovna, Vilna and Warsaw, was restricted and at best sporadic in Łódź. The Chronicle tells us that all postal services operated in and out of the ghetto intermittently up to 1944 but were disrupted for protracted periods of time in 1942 at the height of the deportations. Sierakowiak received personal mail up to the end of October 1941. He received letters and parcels, even by ‘registered’ post from his friend Lolek Leczycki in Warsaw. But he makes no reference to mail deliveries after that. Rosenfeld believes that interruptions to the postal service throughout 1942 wrought havoc with the ghetto inhabitants, who desperately sought to be connected with family and friends. Rosenfeld tells the reader that by 25 May 1942 ‘there is no mail inside the ghetto! ... No mail, no telegrams, no telephone, no messengers, all personal favours.’ Again, on 6 September, he laments: ‘Closed off from the world: no mail, no newspapers, no radio, no telephone, no gramophone’; on 7 November: ‘for eleven months mail ban’. But these restrictions did not seem to apply to all. Rosenfeld makes an oblique reference on 3 September 1942 to telephone usage by Rumkowski’s secretary Dora Fuchs, who he claims ‘controls all strings’.

Nevertheless, some news continued to penetrate the ghetto walls particularly about the activities in the Warsaw Ghetto. On 27 July the Chronicle recorded the rumours about Warsaw and Czerniakow’s suicide. On the same day Rosenfeld makes a strikingly similar entry in his diary: ‘Rumor, all Jews are to be evacuated from Warsaw … indeed, violent evacuation of ten thousand Jews a day at gunpoint and under shootings … The Eldest of the Jews in Warsaw – suicide. All of this is not strategic but Jewish matter.’ Throughout August 1942, Rosenfeld makes five entries about Warsaw, referring to the ‘expulsions’, although he appears to be unaware of Treblinka. He does not initially cite his source of information. However, on 9 October he records that some refugees arrived from Warsaw with more devastating news: ‘News from Warsaw. Of the remaining 490,000 Jews all but 30,000 were lately evacuated, families totally atomized, deliberately, completely. Dissolution of this Yishuv.’ By September 1942 the diarists and the authors of the Chronicle deduced from sources within the ghetto that the deportations spelt death. They did not, however, appear to have a clear understanding or to have been able to fully accept the implications that this really had for all European Jewry. What they were able to reach was a limited yet comprehensive understanding of its implications for the ghetto inhabitants of Łódź.
THE WARSAW GHETTO

By 1939, on the eve of the outbreak of war, Poland was home to 3.5 million Jews, approximately 10 per cent of the total population and one of the largest communities of its kind in the world. About one tenth of them, numbering 350,000, lived in Warsaw, capital of Poland and a cultural metropolis of pre-war Jewish intelligentsia, both religious and secular.115

In the spring of 1940, the Nazis established the Warsaw Ghetto, confining more and more of the Jewish population within its boundaries and finally sealing it on 16 November 1940. By March 1941 the ghetto population had reached its peak of 445,000 making it the largest concentration of Jewish life throughout occupied Europe. The ghetto covered 2.4 per cent of the area of Warsaw but housed 30 per cent of its population.116 The appalling living conditions that resulted could best be described as a ‘gradual extermination’ process.117 However, the vibrant intellectual life that had characterized the Warsaw Jewish community before the war turned its creative efforts inwards, within the confines of the ghetto.118 This initially took the form of ‘self-help’ organizations that initiated social and relief aid such as soup kitchens, cultural/artistic activities and education programmes. With the onslaught of the mass killing campaign, however, ghetto inhabitants who were members of different political groups (predominantly the youth organizations) began to turn their energies towards the clandestine organization of a unified resistance movement.119 On 19 April 1943, when news reached the Jewish underground of an impending final liquidation of the ghetto, an uprising of some 750 resistance fighters began.120

This chapter concerns the period just prior to this uprising, when the systematic mass killings had begun to inflict its toll on the Jews of Poland and Lithuania. In order to understand the type of information that was available in the Warsaw Ghetto between June 1941 and the beginning of 1943, and the ways in which that information was attained, the diaries of four individuals have been selected, all men of influence and considerable authority: Adam Czerniakow, Emmanuel Ringelblum, Abraham Lewin and Chaim Kaplan.121 All four men shared some common characteristics; they had all lived and worked in pre-war Warsaw, were highly educated, held positions of responsibility, were socially well connected and were prodigious record keepers.122
THE DIARISTS AND THEIR DIARIES

Adam Czerniakow, an industrial engineer by profession, was appointed Chairman of the Jewish Council, first by the Polish Mayor of Warsaw on 23 September 1939 and then by the Nazis on 3 October 1939. He was 59 years of age when war erupted, well established in his career, and had considerable administrative experience at local government level. He was an advocate for Jewish artisans and craftsmen and was active in Jewish affairs as well. In Hilberg’s view he was not a radical thinker – ‘his idealism was restrained’ – and he did not strongly align himself with any particular political ideology and was considered ‘too non-observant for religious orthodoxy’.

Czerniakow’s diary reflects the type of man he was and the pre-war life he led. His daily entries are short and terse. Carefully considered, factual, precise and informative, they rarely reveal any deep inner thoughts. For the most part, these diary entries provide details of the administrative work he undertook in his professional capacity as head of the ghetto’s Judenrat, the appointments he had, people with whom he dealt, the escalating problems confronting the ghetto’s daily struggle against starvation, the raging typhus epidemic, the problems resulting from the increasing population density and a shrinking ghetto area, and his struggle to satisfy the competing demands of the Nazi ruling authority and the ghetto constituents. These entries also reveal Czerniakow’s obsession with administrative detail and his restraint or lack of interest in voicing personal opinions that might be interpreted as controversial. He does, however, reveal considerable interest and knowledge regarding the progress of the war. Czerniakow’s role as head of the Jewish Council was not without controversy. Some in the ghetto saw him purely as doing the Nazis’ bidding, while others believed he failed in his responsibility to his constituents by not alerting them to the true nature of the deportations. Even his suicide at the commencement of the deportations was viewed as being morally ambivalent. Some saw the taking of his own life as an act of cowardice, while others accepted it as an act of moral defiance against the Nazis.

In contrast to Czerniakow, the historian Dr Emmanuel Ringelblum embraced change and new ideas. In his youth he joined Poale Zion, a new left-wing Zionist movement, and remained committed to its ideals throughout his life. As a historian he became a proponent of the ‘new’ field of social sciences which observed and analysed social reality in its everyday expression, believing that one learnt from present-day realities. He maintained a love of Yiddish and was a founder...
of the Warsaw branch of YIVO (Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut, or Institute of Jewish Research, primarily known by its Yiddish acronym). His life’s work was to see its greatest expression in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he instigated and spearheaded the organization of the ghetto’s underground documentation centre, the Oneg Shabbat archives, which arose out of his self-help initiatives. The archive was designed to document every aspect of Jewish life in the ghetto for posterity. From early 1940 until 1943, over sixty volunteer collectors and writers worked on the Oneg Shabbat archives. In order to ensure the survival of their work, the documents were buried deep under the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto; he first canisters were buried in August 1942, the second lot in late February 1943 and a third cache in April 1943. In addition, Ringelblum also kept a personal journal which was discovered after the war, buried in one of the rubber-sealed milk canisters, together with many of the Oneg Shabbat papers. It is this journal that is referred to here.

Commencing in January 1940, Ringelblum wrote expansive and perceptive notes in journal form in an attempt to cover the full scope of life in the ghetto. There are eleven sections or chapters, ten of which are divided by the month, with few intermittent daily entries between June 1941 and December 1942. The last chapter covers the period from July to December 1942.

In many ways Abraham Lewin and Chaim Kaplan were similar to Ringelblum. Both men were modern thinkers, teachers and social activists. By the time he was in his mid-20s, Abraham Lewin began to distance himself from the strict orthodox world of Ger Hasidism and embraced Zionism. From 1916 he worked as a teacher of Hebrew, Biblical Studies and Jewish Studies at a private Jewish secondary school for girls, the Yehudia School. It employed leading Polish and Jewish scholars, including Emmanuel Ringelblum. Lewin was considered an outstanding teacher, an intellectual and a creative thinker, carving out an impressive career as an innovative educator and administrator. He soon rose in the ranks and became School Secretary and Treasurer. He travelled to Palestine in 1925 and 1926, and seriously considered making aliyah. He remained at the school until the outbreak of war.

With the confinement of Warsaw’s Jews in the ghetto, Lewin became an important activist in the civil activities of the ghetto, working in the Jewish Social Self-Help organization. His social contacts were extensive and he used this to great advantage as a key executive member.
of Ringelblum’s Oneg Shabbat network. Only a part of his diary was recovered in the buried boxes of the Oneg Shabbat. Three additional sections of his diary were recently discovered in the archives of Yad Vashem. The surviving fragments of Lewin’s diary are in two sections. The first, entitled ‘From the Notebooks’, commences on 26 March 1942 and concludes on 12 June 1942. The second, ‘Diary of the Great Deportation’, commences on 22 July 1942 and concludes on 16 January 1943. Lewin was deported to Treblinka in the days following his last diary entry.

Chaim Kaplan was 60 years of age when he was forced to live in the Warsaw Ghetto. Like Lewin, he had received a traditional Talmudic education in a Yeshiva but later became a Zionist and modern educational leader. Kaplan made a name for himself as the founder of an innovative elementary Hebrew school in Warsaw which was the first to teach the modern Sephardic dialect rather than the biblical Ashkenazi. He was the school’s principal for forty years, during which he published educational periodicals and wrote Hebrew textbooks. Kaplan was an active participant in the Society of Writers and Hebrew Journalists in Warsaw. His sense of Judaism was based on ‘national and historic allegiance rather than on traditional observances’. He was well travelled and had visited the USA in 1926 and Palestine in 1936. Some considered him to be an introvert, yet an independent thinker and a scholar, not forming any strong allegiances with political parties or individuals, although he had many acquaintances. Kaplan’s diary is the only surviving one to have been written entirely in Hebrew.

Kaplan commenced his diary on the first day of the war, 1 September 1939. There is a five-month period between 3 April 1941 and 8 October 1941 that is missing from the English edition. Other than this period there are almost daily entries until 4 August 1942. It is believed that he and his wife were sent to Treblinka shortly after 4 August.

Each diarist possessed his own particular value system, one that was incubated in his pre-war exposure to different social, political and religious ideas, a conditioning that greatly influenced his own sense of identity and how he viewed the world, so the interpretation of events by these four men varies accordingly. These writings provide us with some important insights into everyday life in the Warsaw Ghetto, the complex process of uncovering information and the extent to which that information was assimilated into a form of conceptualized understanding of the fate of European Jewry.
SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Unlike the Łódź Ghetto, a great deal of information flowed through the walls which surrounded the Warsaw Ghetto. A prodigious amount of written and verbal communication passed between Jews, Poles and even Nazis. The information it brought was comprehensive. It alerted the ghetto inhabitants to the mass exterminations taking place in the death camps and in addition brought news of the war raging outside the ghetto. This was of great interest to many of the ghetto inhabitants who believed that a speedy end to the war would be their only salvation.

From the start of the Nazi assault on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, Czerniakow was in receipt of information regarding the progress of the war. He passes no judgment on these facts; he simply records them. He tells the reader that ‘a newspaper special on the war’ provided initial reports on the conflict. On the next day he received ‘conflicting news reports; Brest and Litovsk and Bialystok are said to have been taken. The loudspeakers are silent.’ Throughout this period Czerniakow makes four more entries in his diary about the progress of the war. They record the fall of Odessa on 17 October 1941; the English bombing of Lubeck, Rostock and Cologne on 29 April 1942; the fall of Kerch with the capture of 40,000 Soviet prisoners on 14 May 1942; and on 21 June 1942 he notes that ‘Tobruk and Bardia fell. Sevastopol is still holding on.’

Ringelblum also follows the events of the war, but unlike Czerniakow he does comment on its progress, particularly on the Soviet front. He notes that ‘there have been a series of German communiqués describing victories in Russia recently. However, after the German communiqué of 12 July 1941 announcing that “they” were at the gates of Kiev the populace lost its confidence in the communiqués.’

He is also privy to English communiqués, noting in mid-September 1941 that they have ‘recently been full of descriptions of sabotage in various countries occupied by the German army.’ He records the prevailing mood of the people in the face of an apparent lack of progress by the Allies: ‘the latest victories of the Germans – the encirclement of Moscow, the defeat of Timoshenko’s army – have called forth a huge wave of pessimism among Jews’.

Although Czerniakow makes extensive reference to ‘newspapers’, ‘telephones’ and ‘postal services’ (letters, parcels and telegrams), all of which were sanctioned, yet controlled by the Nazi authorities, he does not appear to use them to obtain covert information. He had access to the ‘legal’ newspapers, the Jewish Gazeta Zydowska, Nowy Kurier
Warszawski, the Polish Warsaw newspaper, and Krakauer Zeitung. On 21 April 1942 he reveals the existence of underground newspapers, without naming them, when he is admonished about their circulation by Brandt, a Nazi official. These newspapers were not the only contact he had with the outside world. Czerniakow often mentions phone calls from his office. In fact, he informs us that Nazi officials intervened in order to assist him in obtaining telephones for the Jewish Council. The post office was also operating in the ghetto and in receipt of large numbers of parcels that were sent to the ghetto inhabitants but often confiscated by the Nazis. Czerniakow tells us that ‘the police appeared at the post office and requisitioned 6,000 parcels’, and ‘during September 15,000 parcels, with an estimated value of several million zloty, were requisitioned’. Czerniakow also mentions the receipt of telegrams. His only mention of a radio occurs on 9 August 1940, when he claims that ‘a radio was discovered in a cellar and a report was made to the SS’. Other sources suggest that radios remained in existence and were used by the underground throughout the period under review.

Ringelblum relied on a number of formal and informal communication networks to obtain his information. He also refers to letters, postcards, telegrams and parcels, and informs the reader about postal restrictions on articles leaving the ghetto, as ‘it is forbidden to write letters abroad, only postcards. This does not apply to Aryans’. But there do not appear to be the same restrictions on letters arriving in the ghetto. In September 1942, Ringelblum receives two letters: one from Lublin, warning about a Jewish Gestapo agent, Szamek Grayer, being sent to Warsaw; and another from Wlodawa, concerning a sacrificial ‘altar’ being set up in Warsaw. The letters also mention the arrival of a collaborator to help in the extermination. Letters appear to arrive from all over Europe. Abraham Lewin hears of letters arriving from Sweden, Paris, Germany, Austria, Berlin and Czechoslovakia. They bring important international news, of bombing raids over German cities and the expulsion of French Jews from Paris. Some are written in a form of code but others are openly informative. The Czech letter informs Lewin of the assassination of Heydrich. Letters also arrive from the Polish provinces. In a similar way, the post office and its operations are detailed early in Kaplan’s diary, also confirming that letters are constantly being received. He mentions a private letter from Switzerland on 23 October 1941. On 23 March 1942 he explains that letters to the Lódz Ghetto, now incorporated into the Reich, would no longer be transmitted. He also received a letter telling him that every day 1,100 Jews are evacuated from Lvov.
Ringelblum explains how telephone messages are coded to assist smuggling operations. Lewin tells the reader that telephone calls are received from Krakow, and that telegrams also reach the ghetto pleading for assistance with messages such as ‘Save us! Help Us!’

Ringelblum, Lewin and Kaplan also place great reliance on the extensive and informative underground press. Ringelblum mentions illegal Polish newspapers and literature three times, and says that they are ‘distributed in the ghetto a little at a time. The importers are, partly, Polish policemen, street cleaners.’ He also mentions the distribution of the social democrat paper, The Hammer. He speculates that the Polish publication Barykada Wolnosci (Barricade of Freedom) used to be printed and distributed in the ghetto but cannot verify it. In addition, he informs the reader about illegal Jewish ghetto political publications and the frequency of their distribution, although he does not name them.

Lewin, too, is a prolific reader of newspapers, notably the German paper Reich. From it he reaches a significant conclusion regarding the fate of the Jews: ‘The Germans mean to continue their lawless actions and to fulfill Hitler’s message about the extermination of the Jews ... He even extended the extermination program further, to those Jews who live outside the continent of Europe.’ Kaplan is equally well informed by the press but exercises a more critical assessment of its contents. He keeps abreast of the progress of the war from a variety of sources, and assesses its implication for the Jews. He reads a number of newspapers, particularly Nasz Przeglad, the Jewish Polish-language newspaper, and Warschauer Zeitung. Zyd, the ghetto paper, and Gazeta Zydowska are referred to in October 1941. He appears to read the Nazi propaganda paper Der Sturmer, as he records in his diary on 10 October 1941, criticizing its illogical premise based on Jews, race and blood. He refers to the Berlin and Krakow press, without naming the newspapers but inferring that much of their reporting is inaccurate. He also mentions the illegal papers, naming Das Blettl on 20 April 1942 and the cessation of the Bundist Bulletin on 4 May 1942.

Radio reports are first mentioned by Ringelblum in his March 1942 report. The radio report of Friday 26 June 1942, however, receives special mention. It reveals the BBC announcement about the mass murders at Belzec and Chelmno and claims that 700,000 Jews have been murdered in these camps. In this journal entry, Ringelblum implies that the underground archive has ‘dealt the enemy a great blow, that the OS [Oneg Shabbat] had fulfilled a great historical mission
in alerting the world to Hitler’s plan to annihilate Polish Jewry. Tragically this was not the case and the enemy was not dealt a decisive blow. He overestimated the international response.

On 18 October 1941, Kaplan refers specifically to five major radio broadcasts, the Russian and English broadcasts concerning the Nazi advance on the eastern front. On 9 December 1941 he notes the announcement of the war between Japan and the USA. On 22 December 1941 he records a radio report announcing the retirement of Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch and on 4 May 1942 the news that the Allies have begun an offensive on the eastern front, pushing the Nazis out of Kharkov and Smolensk. This is in spite of the fact that on 19 December 1941 he notes that all radio broadcasts are illegal: ‘The broadcasts over the British radio, which we hear secretly at the risk of our lives, add even more fuel to our imagination.’ Lewin reveals that radio reports were also occasionally heard from within the German offices: ‘I know a Jewish electrician who works the whole week for the Germans ... this Jew listens all week to radio announcements from London and Moscow, even from America.’

For Ringelblum, Lewin and Kaplan the most important method of receiving and spreading information concerning their fate was by word of mouth. As occurred in the Łódź Ghetto, thousands of Jews were continually being transported into the Warsaw Ghetto from surrounding areas and from the west. And as demonstrated in the Łódź Ghetto, they too brought additional information with them. But the main concern that Adam Czerniakow expresses regarding the influx of Jews is his struggle to accommodate them all. ‘Probst called that 2,000 Jews from the district will be resettled in Warsaw, April 1–4. We must make the necessary arrangements’, he notes on 19 March 1941. He does not mention them as a source of reliable information. But the other diarists do.

All four men constantly mention the rumours they have heard or been told – sometimes from very reliable sources. Ringelblum even describes how German soldiers, recovering in a Warsaw hospital, openly spoke of the progress of the war and questioned the merit of the Russian campaign. In his report of May 1942, Ringelblum describes how 200,000 uniforms stripped from the bodies of German soldiers were brought to the Warsaw Ghetto, and explains what they revealed:

The uniforms were horribly lousy and blood drenched. From the number of them, one can imagine how many hundreds of thousands and millions of men fell on the Eastern front during the winter.
Many of the blouse pockets contained surrender appeals from the Soviets. The pockets contained in addition letters from friends and family that give a glimpse into the moods of both the soldiers and those they left behind in the hinterland.156

On 26 March 1942, Lewin relates the amount of information he obtained in half-an-hour by walking around the ghetto talking to those who had recently arrived or who had overheard information from others. Three different individuals, all of whom had recently arrived in the ghetto, tell him of the slaughters in Lublin, Slonim, Zdunska Wola and Leczyza. Two of them were eyewitnesses and the third received information in a letter. His diary entries are full of references to this: ‘Two Jews told me today ...’ or ‘a Jew with accurate information’ or ‘One of my informants ...’ or ‘Refugees from ... told me that all the remaining Jews were deported’. The range of informants is also diverse. On 10 May 1942 he reveals that he has a source who works in the headquarters of the Jewish Police and, in addition, he has a source who is ‘an official in the Jewish community and comes into contact almost every day with Polish official circles. Another works in the German offices on a daily basis.’

Czerniakow repeatedly mentions ‘rumours’, particularly those concerning the disturbing news of ‘deportations’ and the liquidation of the ghetto. But unlike Ringelblum, Lewin and Kaplan he views them with scepticism and disbelief. As early as 27 August 1941, he notes a rumour about ‘expelling part of the Jewish population from the ghetto’. He is assured by German officials that ‘this did not originate with the Germans’ and he seems to accept this. However, the rumours persist. On 22 December 1941 he notes ‘a possible deportation of 120,000 Jews from Warsaw’. On 19 January 1942 he records that ‘Auerswald has been summoned to Berlin. I cannot shake off the fearful suspicion that the Jews of Warsaw may be threatened by mass resettlement.’ In his daily contact with the German officials they occasionally hint at what is fast approaching, but Czerniakow either does not want to or cannot believe. On 31 January 1942 he records that ‘Probst informed me today, in connection with a certain official speech, that the future looks grim for the Jews.’ Again, on 13 March 1942: ‘Probst told us to compare the situation of the Jews in Warsaw with what is going on in the east, etc.’ But there is no indication as to whether or not he believes or really understands the full implications of this.

Throughout February, March and April 1942, Kaplan records information he has received – from eyewitnesses, exiles who have come
to the ghetto, and secret messengers – concerning deportations, death squads, exterminations, the method of murder, the number killed, and the communities that have been wiped out. On 7 April 1942 he records:

Now eyewitnesses have come who were able to slip away and reach the Lublin community in our ghetto. What they reported was so horrifying that we began to wonder if they were exaggerating, for surely human beings created in the image of God would be incapable of such evil deeds. The fact is that reality surpassed imagination ... The information I have gathered came by word of mouth.

In May 1942, Ringelblum devotes a full page to describing the invaluable, courageous work of the underground Jewish female couriers, Chajke and Frumke, who would be dispatched across the countryside with important information. These young women, he claims,

carry out the most dangerous missions. Is someone needed to travel to Vilna, Bialystok, Lemberg, Kowel, Lublin, Czestochowa or Radom to smuggle in contraband such as illegal publications, goods, money? The girls volunteer as though it were the most natural thing in the world ... They travel from city to city, to places no delegate or Jewish Institution has ever reached, such as Wolhynia, Lithuania. They were the first to bring back the tidings about the tragedy of Vilna.157

OBSERVATIONS OF GHETTO LIFE

Ringelblum’s journal entries are detailed, sober observations of ghetto life, devoid of emotional embellishment. On 26 August 1941 he notes the impact of ghetto life on the sense of one’s mortality: ‘there is a marked, remarkable indifference to death, which no longer impresses. One walks past corpses with indifference.’ At times he is cryptic, referring to the Germans as ‘they’, and occasionally he is ironic: ‘Jews pull wagons now, they are cheaper than horses.’ Ringelblum comments extensively on internal ghetto affairs. The battle against starvation and the typhus epidemic are viewed as interconnected: ‘patients don’t die of typhus really, but because of their weakened condition’, he notes in his journal entry of August 1941. The typhus epidemic is ‘destroying us and them’, adds Kaplan on 10 October 1941.
Besides bringing in much-needed food, smuggling also allowed an exchange of information. Ringelblum views smuggling as a necessary evil and writes that “thanks to it we have sufficient means of subsistence”. He is well acquainted with its modus operandi, implying that he may use the smugglers as disseminators and retrievers of information. Czerniakow, too, is acutely aware that smuggling and a thriving black market between the ghetto inhabitants and the Poles is rife. But he does not see it in the same way that Ringelblum does. Czerniakow has been instructed by the Nazis that “the smuggling of people and commodities is to stop ... several thousand Jews are escaping from the ghetto monthly, spreading typhus”. He appears to accept this and tries to act upon it. Kaplan dislikes the immorality of the profiteering smugglers, but perceives their actions as an unfortunate necessity of ghetto life: ‘were it not for the smugglers, we would certainly have starved to death’.

Ringelblum is scathing about perceived collaborators and their influence: ‘Gancwajch, the head of “the Thirteen” speaks fairly well and won over some people who knew nothing of his scoundrelly deeds’, he comments in June 1941. He is aware of informants and sees the need for secrecy. In his own journal he refers cryptically to the Oneg Shabbat only twice, using the initials OS. Lewin, too, passes moral judgment on the actions of perceived collaborators – ‘those Jews whose hands are stained with Jewish blood’, the ‘sad complicity of the Jewish police’ and the Judenrat – as ‘individuals who are not fit or suitable to be at the head of a Jewish community and this the greatest in Europe’. Lewin’s diary reveals astute, often critical observations of ghetto life and the people who were part of it. He takes care to give specific addresses, names and ages of people he meets. Lewin was, in Emmanuel Ringelblum’s words, concerned with ‘accuracy and precision in relating facts’.

What most characterizes Lewin’s diary, however, is the importance he gives to recording Jewish massacres throughout Poland and Lithuania and their staggering death toll. His diary is a litany of death and destruction. In order to try and understand his present predicament, Lewin often draws analogies with past events, employing biblical terms, such as ‘apocalypse’, and historical references to past pogroms such as Chmielnicki’s in the seventeenth century and Kishniev in 1903. He also draws heavily upon Jewish literature. But the sheer enormity and scope of the annihilation prohibits analogies and renders incomprehension. ‘It is hard to bring out the words with mouth or pen’, he writes on
14 June 1942.\textsuperscript{163} Again, he refers on 31 July 1942 to ‘The tenth day of the slaughter that has no parallel in our history’. On the eve of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) on 21 September 1942 he believes that ‘those who are far away cannot imagine our bitter situation. They will not understand and will not believe that day after day thousands of men, women and children innocent of any crime, were taken to their death ... Almighty God! Why did this happen? And why is the whole world deaf to our screams?’ Kaplan has an intense relationship with his diary, which he perceives as an important extension of himself. On 13 November 1941 he refers to it as ‘my life, my friend and ally. I would be lost without it. I pour my innermost thoughts and feelings into it, and this brings relief.’

By 18 October 1941, his commentary has taken on a hauntingly prophetic tone: ‘A Nazi victory means complete annihilation, morally and materially, for all the Jews of Europe.’ This comes two months prior to Abba Kovner’s Vilna declaration, mostly viewed as the first significant moment of self-appraisal and conceptualization.\textsuperscript{164}

Between October 1941 and August 1942, Kaplan presents a daily chronicle of Jewish life in the ghetto. His observations on life and death are, on occasion, tragically comic. In describing the death carriages on 9 October 1941, he claims that ‘at times it is difficult to distinguish who is pushing whom, the living the dead, or vice versa’.

Kaplan is sustained by his writing – ‘I will not silence my diary’ – and the optimistic belief that it is a valuable historical document for a future community. On 31 July 1942 he proclaims that ‘my utmost concern is for hiding my diary so that it will be preserved for future generations. As long as my pulse beats I shall continue my sacred task.’ Finally, his concern for his diary transcends his own mortality. His last written words are: ‘If my life ends – what will become of my diary?’

DEPORTATIONS, DEATH CAMPS AND TOTAL ANNIHILATION

Information in the form of rumours concerning the death camps in Poland and the imminent destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto circulated continually amongst the ghetto inhabitants. However, the radical idea of a Final Solution for the Jews of Europe was still inconclusive and inconceivable to many. But for some, like Ringelblum, Lewin and Kaplan, the mounting evidence was irrefutable, although difficult to believe.

Czerniakow struggled with the notion of indiscriminate mass
murder. He makes six pointed references to Treblinka throughout this period. The first reference is made on 17 January 1942, when he believes that ‘those fit for work would be sent to a camp in Treblinka’. He notes five other transportations which are sent there with workers, clerks, tradesmen and equipment. He does not question what it is that they are building. It seems likely that the transportations provided the labour and equipment necessary to convert Treblinka into an extermination camp – but this sinister purpose remains a mystery to him.

On 18 March 1942, Czerniakow hears ‘alarming news from Lvov (expulsion of 30,000 people) Mielce and Lublin’. On 1 April 1942, he hears that ‘ninety per cent of the Jews [are] to leave Lublin within the next few days’. He must have sensed the significance of this, or why mention it? Czerniakow expresses neither denial nor confirmation about these rumours and continues to concern himself with internal administrative matters. Nevertheless, he continues to record the rumours.

On 15 May 1942 he claims ‘that the city is full of rumours about deportations. Tens of thousands are being mentioned. Purposeful work under such conditions is worthy of admiration. And yet we are doing it every day. Tears will not help us.’ His stoic work ethic provides some consolation, as does his belief in work as a form of salvation. However, on 18 May 1942 he notes with some certainty: ‘besides all this, persistent rumours about deportations. It appears that they are not without foundation.’ Again, he does not pursue the matter.

In late July 1942, Czerniakow asks the Nazi officials about the panic and mounting rumours surrounding deportations. On 20 July 1942 he is assured by them that it is all ‘quatsch und unsinn’ (utter nonsense). He asks if he can reassure the population and is told that he can do so, and he chooses to believe this ‘official’ version of events from middle-ranking Nazi bureaucrats, rather than the speculative reports circulating throughout the ghetto, and despite what his own intuition might have told him. He may have maintained a deluded belief that compliance would buy the Jews more time, and with it some hope of salvation. Perhaps his sense of helplessness and hopelessness paralysed his response. For some time he continued to delude himself. By 23 July 1942, when the start of the deportations to Treblinka made this no longer possible, he was in despair. When he was ordered to provide a list of children’s names for deportation, Czerniakow committed suicide with a cyanide capsule he kept in his desk drawer.

Ringelblum records rumours concerning deportations as early as
26 August 1941. In this instance, Ringelblum believes it is to alleviate the typhus epidemic. However, he soon hears more sinister reports about deportations and he begins to believe them. He is informed by Gancwajch ‘that the Germans are readying a project that will call for the resettlement of all the Jews now in the General Government etc., in the East, somewhere in Polesia. One of these days, he says, the project will be set.’\textsuperscript{167} He receives two reports of people being sent to Oświęcim (Auschwitz). By November 1941 he is aware of mass executions in Lithuania. By 12 April 1942, false rumours are circulating about an extermination squad of foreign contingents, including Lithuanians and Ukrainians, that has come to Warsaw. In this same journal entry, Ringelblum first mentions Treblinka as a penal camp where 164 German Jews were sent and where most of them were exterminated. His May 1942 entry makes a detailed report on the condition of Jews in Lithuania, Kovno, Shavli, Riga and Vilna, with a comment that cultural life continues in Vilna. Ringelblum appears also to know what is happening in Bialystok. He reports mass slaughters and the continued rumours of the deportation of 150,000 to 200,000 people from Warsaw.

The May 1942 entry contains Ringelblum’s first summary statement about total annihilation: ‘Never in history has there been a national tragedy of these dimensions ... the very victory that means the complete annihilation of Jewry from the face of Europe, if not of the whole world.’\textsuperscript{168} By June 1942, both Ringelblum and Kaplan have a full grasp of the Nazi methods of extermination, as Kaplan confirms that ‘some are shot; some are burned; some are poisoned with lethal gas; some are electrocuted’. Ringelblum receives the same information from gravediggers who escaped from the death wagons. He is able to reach the following conclusion:

The extermination is being executed according to a plan and schedule prepared in advance. They’re following this plan: The ‘non productive’ elements, children up to the age of 10 and old people over 60, are locked in sealed railroad cars, which are guarded by German detail and transported to an unknown destination. Generally, the transport goes towards Belzec, where every trace of the ‘resettled’ Jews disappears.\textsuperscript{169}

Eyewitnesses also provide Lewin with more devastating news of massacres. On Wednesday 3 June 1942 he records that ‘A woman by the name of Wermus returned from Sosnowica, near Parczew. She said that very many Jews in these areas had been murdered by electrocution. She
puts the number at 2,500.’ In late June 1942, Ringelblum notes that he cannot find any historical analogy that fits the current predicament: ‘History does not repeat itself. Thousands upon thousands of Jews are being systematically murdered according to a preconceived plan, and no one seems to take our part.’ Like Ringelblum, Kaplan also understands the unprecedented nature of this catastrophe and its systematic organization: ‘There is no similarity between physical destruction which comes about as a result of a momentary outburst of fanatical mobs incited to murder and this calculated governmental program for the realization of which an organized murder apparatus has been set up.’ In the final section of his journal, Ringelblum asks why the Jews didn’t resist the great deportations to Treblinka: ‘Why did we let ourselves be led like sheep to the slaughter?’ He calls for continued armed resistance, whilst analysing with great precision the German strategy aimed at deceiving the population: ‘Deception, propaganda, lies about the resettlement to the east and the suddenness of the operation all contributed to quashing opposition.’ Kaplan and Lewin also understand the degree of Nazi secrecy and deception in carrying out their mission. ‘Whatever happens or is done is cloaked in total silence’, Kaplan asserts on 25 June 1942, while Lewin claims on 15 January 1943 that in this way the Jews ‘were rounded up and herded into train wagons, which means they were taken away to their death to Treblinka or Oświęcim’.

In addition, Ringelblum blames the unpreparedness of the Jewish populace and the fear of collective punishment. Lastly, he accuses ‘Jewish collaborators, the Jewish police and their assistants’ of being German accomplices in the resettlement programme. Tragically, in the final entries to his journal in December 1942, Ringelblum talks of hideouts among the Christian population as the only possible means of survival. He concludes that ‘whether this is true or not, only the future will tell’.

Like Ringelblum, Lewin is aware of Treblinka and Oświęcim as death camps and mentions them on 23 May 1942 as places ‘from where there is no return’. On 3 July 1942 he also reveals knowledge of Chelmno and its ‘operations’: ‘One can calculate easily when the last Jew in the ghetto will die if the war and the occupation last, God forbid, for several years – even if the Germans do not apply the methods used in Chelmno.’ On 5 July 1942, Lewin names Sobibor, where ‘there are no living Jews – they are killed’, and on 11 August 1942 he states that ‘those deported to Treblinka are going to their death. In Warsaw,
there is a Jew by the name of Slawa who has brought reports of Treblinka. However, it is the eyewitness report he hears on Friday 28 August 1942 that is the most convincing. This report is given by David Nowodworski, who has returned from Treblinka. He confirms that all those taken there were murdered. Again, on 25 and 26 September 1942, Lewin recounts the eyewitness report from Rabinowicz, another who has returned from Treblinka. He details the method of execution, although the exact type of poison is incorrect: ‘the women go naked into the bath house – to their death. What are they killing them with? With simple vapor (steam). Death comes after six or seven minutes.’ On 16 October, Lewin has difficulty believing the truth: ‘have they really murdered a community of 310,000–320,000 Jews in Treblinka? It is so hard to believe in this appalling and terrible truth, but we cannot escape the knowledge that it is the truth.’

On 8 December 1942, Lewin realizes that ‘to judge by Hitler and Rosenberg’s speeches we have to face the possibility of the complete annihilation of every Jew in Europe.’ On 29 December 1942 he concludes that ‘Hitler has murdered an entire people ... Hitler has already murdered five, six million Jews’.

For people like Ringelblum, Lewin and Kaplan, the implications of what was happening with the Warsaw Ghetto spelled the end for European Jewry. Czerniakow’s understanding of the ramifications of the ghetto deportations can best be explained by his suicide.

FROM KNOWLEDGE TO UNDERSTANDING

Ghetto inhabitants caught up in these cataclysmic events faced the immediate challenge of understanding the nature of the atrocities that now confronted them on a daily basis. How could they make sense of these inexplicable events, anticipate what awaited them in the following days and months, regain control over their lives and improve their chances of survival? In reality, most could not.

The most common psychological responses for those confronting the horrors and uncertainties of daily life in the ghettos and the threat of deportations were denial and disbelief. The historian Walter Laqueur observes that for Jews trapped within these circumstances, the ‘denial of reality, the psychological rejection of information which for one reason or another is not acceptable’ is up to a point a ‘normal defence mechanism’. But in a situation that involves not just the loss of the individual’s life but the annihilation of an entire group to which
that individual belongs, additional factors come into play. Those with the capacity to see beyond their own fate and that of their family, to what lay in store for an entire people, were required to confront and address a new set of circumstances. This required a line of reasoning that moved from the known to the unknown; where knowledge of past experiences – whatever subjective understanding that knowledge might be to the individual – informed his or her understanding and acceptance of the unknown. For most people, what was possible and what was not possible to understand throughout this period was therefore grounded in their collective knowledge and understanding of past experiences. In the context of the Final Solution, the systematic and total extermination of an entire people was beyond human experience and therefore beyond comprehension. There simply was no point of reference.

Those few who were able to understand the true nature of the threat facing European Jewry exercised a form of reasoned judgment, one which moved beyond the personal or what could be considered ‘normal’ psychological defence mechanisms of disbelief and denial. The ability to exercise such judgment was influenced by a range of factors pertaining to the individual’s own understandings and predisposition; these included religious beliefs, a sense of historical awareness and ideological orientation which enabled the acceptance of radical new ideas.

In effecting this judgment, it was necessary to deal not only with a context beyond human experience, but also with an orchestrated campaign of Nazi deception which was an integral element in the implementation of the genocide. Victims were trapped in a world of deliberate Nazi obfuscation. Deception played an important role in the smooth operation of the killing machine, necessary for the orderly marshalling and transportation of its victims. A postcard hauntingly conveys the failure to understand the cataclysm within which its victims sought meaning:

I am sending you this postcard to tell you that I will travel tomorrow morning eastward to an unknown country. I am travelling with courage and in good health, but it is beginning to be cold and winter will be harsh ... My dears, be brave and do not worry, I might find family there. I leave you with heartfelt kisses, your daughter and sister, Esther.175

It was impossible for all victims to reach a full understanding of the Nazi master plan; to expect that they would do so fails to grasp the grim reality of their lives. There were no means by which they could
gain credible evidence necessary for acquiring knowledge of this magnitude. From mid 1941 until 1943 when a conceptualization of total destruction was reached, it was often the result of circumstantial guesswork and intuition. These conclusions were rarely based on ratified hard evidence or the wisdom of hindsight.

Abba Kovner’s declaration to the Vilna underground, one of the key surviving documents from this period, is indicative of this process, an intuitive judgement call which had the purpose of a rallying cry for armed resistance, rather than a reasoned conclusion based on extensive evidence.176

This chapter has sought to explore the range of understandings reached by the victims. Their immediate concern was understanding the daily reality they faced – in the first instance this meant the ‘deportations’ and what their real purpose was; it meant understanding the fate that awaited all of them in the days ahead. Their understandings were varied and ranged from total denial and disbelief, and an acceptance of the stories deliberately spun by the Nazis, to a realization that many would die although some might survive; an understanding that conditions would only get much worse in the ensuing days and months; and, ultimately, that the Nazis intended to wipe out every Jew in Europe.

There was another process underway, to which this discussion has sought to direct attention. In addition to the ultimately futile attempts to comprehend the fate that awaited them was the will to record, to bear witness to the murderous crimes that engulfed and overwhelmed them. By documenting and recording the atrocities that they witnessed and succumbed to on a daily basis, they sought to give a meaning to their fate; they sought to leave a record that would serve justice in a future world, one that would be passed on to the next generation and that would contribute to the enduring life of the Jewish people. In this they shared the same ambitions of those who survived into the post-war period: to move the recording and preservation of personal experience into the public domain and into the collective consciousness.

NOTES


7. R. Stahlecker, *Official Secrets* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998), p.227. Breitman attributes the first use of the term ‘Final Solution’ and its true meaning to Walter Schellenberg in May 1941; it was then used by Herman Göring in his directive to Reinhard Heydrich on 31 July 1941. It was one of many euphemisms the Nazis used to refer to the extermination of the Jews.


11. Browning, *Path to Genocide*, pp.86–121. Although Holocaust scholars such as Browning, Marrus and Bauer are in general agreement on this issue, it is Browning who provides the most comprehensive analysis of this period.


16. Y. Arad, I. Gutman and A. Margaliot (eds), *Documents on the Holocaust* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999), p.433. This was the proclamation by the Jewish Pioneer Youth Group in Vilna, calling for armed resistance, 1 January 1942. Authorship is attributed to Abba Kovner.


26. D. Patterson, Along the Edge of Annihilation (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1999), p.34. Patterson informs us that diary writers Emil Dorian and Yitzhak Katznelson ‘were careful to point out that the Nazis had made the writing of diaries and other Jewish texts illegal’.
34. The term ‘Holocaust’ was used as early as 1942 by the British and American Allies but did not become standard reference for the extermination of the Jews until decades later. Some historians credit Elie Wiesel with giving the term its present meaning in the late 1950s. The Hebrew word Shoah has found currency with contemporary scholars. The Yiddish word Khurbn was used by witnesses writing in Yiddish during and immediately after the war. Its origin predated 1939 and was used to describe great catastrophes. See http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/faq/details.php?topic=01. The term ‘genocide’ is attributed to the lawyer Raphael Lemkin. He introduced the word in his 1944 book, Axis Rule in Occupied Europe. When Lemkin worked as an advisor to the Americans at the Nuremberg trials he was able to get the word ‘genocide’ included in the indictment against the Nazis, but it was yet to be recognized as a ‘legal’ crime. After Lemkin’s return to the US he lobbied to have ‘genocide’ included in international law. The ‘Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide’ was adopted by the United Nations on 9 December 1948. See http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/history/lemkin/.
35. Dawidowicz (ed.), Holocaust Reader, pp.289–93. Dawidowicz discusses this attitude. The difficulty of confronting the inevitable was met with different forms of denial, ranging from total rejection of the truth to belief in the Nazi ‘promises’ of better living and working conditions.
39. Roskies, Against the Apocalypse.
47. David Roskies notes this distinction in Roskies (ed.), Literature of Destruction, p.382.
48. Patterson, Along the Edge of Annihilation, p.16.
51. Patterson, Along the Edge of Annihilation, p.33.
52. Kruk, Last Days, p.47.
54. Polonsky (ed.), Cup of Tears, p.183.
55. Z. Kalmanowitch, A Diary from the Ghetto in Nazi Vilna (Tel Aviv: Moreshet, 1977). See also Dawidowicz (ed.), Holocaust Reader, pp.225–33.
56. Kalmanowitch, Diary from the Ghetto in Nazi Vilna, diary entry for 27 December 1942.
57. Kermish (ed.), To Live with Honor, p.704. This passage was composed by Gustawa Jareka.
59. Ibid.
60. Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust, pp.25–6.
65. On 23 August 1939, Molotov and Ribbentrop signed the Non-Aggression Pact between the Soviet Union and the German state, which saw the partition of Poland between the two countries. In accordance with this pact the Soviets annexed the Baltic states and invaded Poland on 17 September 1939. Germany, however, attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. For its implications on the plans for the Final Solution, see Browning and Matthäus, Origins of the Final Solution.
66. Arad, Ghetto in Flames, pp.20–7; Levin, Littuaks.
67. See Kruk’s diary entry for 5 July 1941, in Kruk, Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania. See


71. See introductions to both diaries for biographical entries.


75. See Kruk’s diary entry for 5 July, 1941, in Kruk, *Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*.

76. Ibid., diary entry for 31 August 1941.

77. Ibid., diary entry for 26 January 1942.

78. Ibid., diary entry for 16 November 1942.

79. Ibid., diary entry for 28 December 1942.

80. Ibid., diary entry for 27 October 1942.

81. Ibid., diary entry for 5 September 1942.

82. Ibid., diary entry for 30 October 1942.

83. Ibid., diary entry for 1 January 1942.

84. There is an unexplainable discrepancy between the date that this public statement was made by these governments on 17 December and the diary entry date of 15 December.


86. Ibid., diary entry for 26 November 1942.

87. Ibid., diary entry for 30 October 1942.

88. Ibid., diary entry for 31 December 1942.


90. For a discussion of the Łódz´ Ghetto, see Dobroszycki (ed.), *Chronicle of the Łódz´ Ghetto*; Horwitz, *Ghettostadt Łódz´*; Trunk, *Łódz´ Ghetto*.


92. See ibid., pp.30–61, for transfer of ethnic Germans to Łódz´.


94. Dobroszycki (ed.), *Chronicle of the Łódz´ Ghetto*, p.xxv.


96. Hochstadt (ed.), *Sources of the Holocaust*, p.116. See document titled ‘Plan for the solution of the Jewish question by mass gassing’, 25 October 1941, Berlin. The letter was drafted by Dr Erhard Wetzel and details the ‘Brack’s remedy’, the use of gas for mass extermination, first used in the Nazi euthanasia programme. The letter was circulated to Brack, Eichmann, Lohse and Rosenberg.


100. Dobroszycki (ed.), *Chronicle of the Łódz´ Ghetto*, p.xvi.

101. Dobroszycki claims that there is no evidence to suggest that the Nazis were aware of this document: see ibid., p.xvii.
102. Ibid., p.ix. See also Horwitz, *Ghettostadt Łódź*, pp.16–21. The contentious nature of Rumkowski’s leadership is reviewed by many historians including Isaiah Trunk and Yehuda Bauer. Rumkowski was also criticized by his contemporary in the Warsaw Ghetto, Adam Czerniakow. See Czerniakow’s diary entry of 17 May 1941, where he refers to Rumkowski as ‘replete with self praise, a conceited and witless man. A dangerous man too, since he keeps telling the authorities that all is well in his preserve.’


105. Parts of Zelkowicz’s translated works are found in the writings of Trunk, Adelson, Lapides and Web, and Dawidowicz. The original collection of Zelkowicz’s Yiddish writings form part of the Nachman Zonabend collection in YIVO. Copies are kept at Yad Vashem. Zonabend recovered Zelkowicz’s writings in the ruins of the ghetto. A comprehensive English edition of all his work is sadly lacking.


107. Adelson (ed.), *Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*.

108. The Chelmno extermination camp was located in the Kolo county, but other information was clearly false. See S. Krakowski, *Chelmno: A Small Village in Europe: The First Nazi Extermination Camp* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009).

109. Auschwitz was located near Krakow.

110. See Sierakowiak, diary entry for 9 July 1942.

111. See Rosenfeld, diary entry for 18 May 1942.

112. For a transcript of Rumkowski’s address, see Arad, Gutman and Margaliot (eds), *Documents on the Holocaust*, p.283. See document 129 for Rumkowski’s address on 4 September 1942 concerning the deportation of the children from the Łódź Ghetto.

113. See Rosenfeld, diary entry for 4 September 1942.

114. See Sierakowiak, diary entry for 18 June 1941.


120. Ibid., p.365.

121. Katsh (ed.), *Scroll of Agony*; J. Kermisz, S. Staron and R. Hilberg (eds), *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1968); Polonsky (ed.), *Cup of Tears*; Sloan (ed.), *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*.

122. Details concerning the pre-war lives of these men are discussed in the introductions to each of their diaries.

123. Kermisz, Staron and Hilberg (eds), *Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, p.2. Czerniakow does not mention his appointment by the Nazis. This information is ascertained in the introduction by Josef Kermisz.

124. Ibid., p.27.


126. For a comprehensive overview of Ringelblum’s work, see I. Gutman (ed.), *Emanuel Ringelblum the Man and the Historian* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006); J. Kermisz (ed.), *A Commemorative Symposium in Honor of Dr Emmanuel Ringelblum and His Oneg Shabbat Underground Archive* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1983).

127. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?* pp.5, 388. After the war only two of the caches were found.

128. Sloan (ed.), *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*.

129. The English translation of Ringelblum’s notebook was edited by Jacob Sloan in 1958. It
does not contain the full manuscript. Sloan notes that it was impossible at the time to secure access to the full text, either the original in Warsaw or the copy in Israel. He does not indicate the extent of the omissions; nevertheless, his text does provide insight into Ringelblum’s thoughts and perceptions.

134. Preiss and Ben-Sasson, ‘Twilight Days’.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid., pp.13–14.
138. Ibid., p.7.
139. Sloan (ed.), Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, p.198.
140. Ibid., p.213.
141. Ibid., p.221.
142. Czerniakow, diary entry for 3 June 1941.
143. Ibid., diary entry for 24 June 1941.
144. Ibid., diary entry for 15 October 1941.
146. Czerniakow, diary entry for 9 October 1941.
147. Ibid., diary entry for 2 September 1941.
148. Ibid., diary entry for 8 October 1941.
149. Gutman, Jews of Warsaw, p.147.
151. Ibid., p.246.
156. Ibid., pp.266–7.
157. Ibid., p.273.
158. Ringelblum, journal entry, January 1942.
159. Czerniakow, diary entry for 3 September 1941.
162. Porat, ‘Vilna Proclamation’. Kovner’s proclamation was made as a call to arms in a ‘quasi’ public address to the underground. Kaplan’s was made within the private domain of his diary.
165. Y. Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.145–7. While Gancwajch was a known Jewish collaborator, Bauer notes the rarity of this type of Jewish collaboration. He attributes Gancwajch’s attitude to his belief that German victory was imminent and that he was attempting to secure a future for himself.
166. Sloan (ed.), Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, p.263.
167. Ibid., p.291.
168. Ibid., p.300.
169. Ibid., p.310.
170. Ringelblum and his family were shot by the Gestapo on 7 March 1944. See Kassow, Who Will Write Our History?, pp.384–5.
173. Gutman, Jews of Warsaw, p.217. Gutman cites the Bund newspaper Oyf der Vakh (On Guard) which ran the story, 'The Jews of Warsaw are murdered in Treblinka.'
176. Cesaran (ed.), Final Solution, p.156; Porat, 'Vilna Proclamation'.
Confronting the Truth in a Period of Transition, 1944–1946

Sutzkever’s prophetic words mark the dilemma that was to confront Jewish survivors in the earliest period of liberation. How could survivors confront life while still living in the shadow of death, in a space that Paul Celan hauntingly referred to as ‘the black milk of daybreak’? As the full realization of the greatest tragedy to engulf European Jewry unfolded, emergent survivors responded to the horrific legacy of the ‘Final Solution’ in the same way that they had during the mass murder campaign itself. The prodigious outpouring of Holocaust survivor testimonies, reports and memoirs that emerged in the years from 1944 to 1946 followed the same imperatives and patterns of writing and collection established in clandestine organizations in the ghettos; criteria that continued to emphasize the striving for objectivity and the assembling of accurate documentation for posterity. The onset of liberation however placed another layer of complexity onto what now became ‘survivor’ narratives.

While these early survivor works understandably reveal a preoccupation with the enormity of communal devastation that now confronted them, these writings also show us something of how they made sense of their own survival and immense personal loss. In their efforts to understand and articulate their own experiences survivors
often expressed their personal grief and anguish within an all encompassing metanarrative, one that directly addressed the great crime committed against them all. For these survivors, the individual and the collective experience co-existed within a ‘double consciousness’, a shared space with little division between personal accounts and the public record. Survivors’ strong impulse was towards judicial reporting of everything they witnessed and personally experienced while memories were still fresh. The imperative was to produce a documented record of what they perceived was a common shared experience, one in which the plight of the individual represented what was universal. Survivors felt duty bound therefore to list the deportations, killing sites and the names of as many victims and perpetrators as possible. What strikingly characterizes these earliest written accounts is their immediacy and raw physicality, the assault on the senses of ghastly sights, acrid smells and horrifying sounds. The reader is struck by visceral descriptions of murder on an unprecedented scale, with recurring images of mass shootings, ovens burning and the screams of the dying.

Context influences testimony. Early survivor writings are therefore inextricably bound to the rapidly changing, often contradictory nature of this three-year period and reflect the dynamics that shaped it, particularly the new and often strained relationship between the survivors and their liberators. The years from 1944 to 1946 are complex ones in which we can see a series of paradoxes – all of which demonstrate both the continuing suffering of Jews at a time when Europeans were celebrating liberation and the marginalisation of their voices and testimony even as the war came to an end and measures were taken to hold the perpetrators of the Holocaust to account.

Prior to liberation, death camp escapees, underground couriers and members of the resistance movements were desperate to stop the killings and therefore felt compelled to reveal to the outside world the nature and scale of atrocities, the systematized operations of the Final Solution and its intended deadly outcome. For those who wrote about the Holocaust at this time, the challenge was to make the Allies and the remaining remnants of European Jewry aware of the scope of the Final Solution, to believe the unbelievable and to act against it. However, liberation and survival not only brought to the fore the extent and totality of the tragedy but its personal nature and its most painful realities. Amongst the millions who died were the parents, siblings, spouses and children of each and every survivor as well as their extended families, closest friends and acquaintances. This loss was
compounded by the inability to perform ritualistic mourning according to tradition and social norms. With rare exceptions, every vestige of communal life that was known and nurtured was destroyed. In order publicly to confront and deal with the deeply human implications of this tragedy, a major psychological transition had to occur that saw them move from a state of disbelief to one of full realization and acceptance. As this chapter reveals, for those who went public, this was initially articulated by exposing the scale of the tragedy on its broadest and deepest communal level. By dealing with the collective experience they also inadvertently dealt with the individual and highly personal one. They became both the object and the subject of their accounts.

To some extent this preoccupation with the totality and extent of the crime was also perpetuated by the Allies, but for somewhat different reasons. From the survivors’ perspective the Allies demonstrated little interest in the personal tragedy of individual survivors. The defeat of Nazism, the physical rehabilitation and repatriation of displaced persons and the arrest of key perpetrators understandably preoccupied the Allies throughout this period. In prosecuting the perpetrators and as evidence to unprecedented crimes the Allies showed a greater interest in the number of murdered victims, the sites of extermination and the German military’s chain of command than in the continued suffering of survivors. No doubt that the world needed to learn of these atrocities and evidence reveals that there was considerable public interest in their gruesome and macabre details. When the Russians liberated Majdanek in July 1944 they invited American journalists in to photograph the horrors they discovered there. As a result, *Life* magazine devoted a photographic essay on the massacre of what it called ‘several hundred thousand’ Jews in the camp. When Cyril Charters, a member of the liberating British forces, sent a letter home from Bergen Belsen on 15 May 1945, he commented that ‘the other day you told me you were going to see a film of Belsen “Horror” Camp. Many people throughout England will see the film. Few will have missed seeing the pictures in the papers.’

Survivors also wanted to see perpetrators punished. But what became a crucial issue for the survivors was how they lived through and survived the Final Solution. This received scant attention from the Allies as it was of little consequence to them. But it took on great importance to the survivors who sought meaning in their own survival. They had to find answers to the profound questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ they survived when six million did not. In a climate of perceived Allied
indifference to this matter, many survivors feared that the larger ethical, moral and historical issues concerning ‘their’ tragedy and ‘their’ survival would be eclipsed and forgotten:

And if the annihilation of the Jewish people belongs among the most horrible events of history, still, we know – this too will be forgotten. Grass will grow where inexhaustible suffering and martyrdom were earlier enacted. Where once the mass graves were, children will play games and the fathers will pursue their occupations. But in the hearts of Jews this question will never cease to be asked – how was it possible?15

So how did survivors articulate and conceptualize the different facets of their personal and communal loss during this time? And how did they validate their own survival in the midst of total destruction? To answer these questions a number of survivor works published throughout 1944 to 1946 have been selected because they best reflect the different stages of conceptualization that occurred throughout this turbulent period. The selected works come from different genres, including two memoirs, two reports (one of which includes a collection of other survivor testimonies), and the first editorial from a survivor Yiddish journal Fun Letstn Khurbn (From the Last Destruction) which commenced publication in Munich in August 1946.

As survivors emerged from within different contexts and at different times they engaged in different forms of discourse employing the various written forms that seemed most appropriate to them and their audiences at the time. Conditions and circumstances therefore dictated the style and format in which they wrote and published. Death camp escapees from Treblinka and Auschwitz who, in 1944, felt compelled to tell (what they believed was an unknowing and uncaring world) of the Final Solution, as a public appeal for assistance, a call to arms and as a warning to others of impending annihilation, had to write their contemporary reports in secret relying on publication and dissemination through clandestine underground operations. By 1946 the liberated survivors, either free living or in the DP camps, had a different perspective on the world they now inhabited, the liberators who now controlled it and how and where they wanted to live. As one survivor recalled some decades later, ‘East Germany became part of the Russian zone and the Americans gave us a choice, come with us or stay with them. I decided to get going. I came across the Jewish Brigade and they took me to Italy.’16 And they had a thriving survivor press in addition to discrete publishing houses that could
and did publish their ideas and opinions under their own direction and in a variety of formats.\textsuperscript{17}

The number of memoirs that began to emerge from 1944 onwards, the different languages in which they were written and their diverse publishing locations bear testament to the strong desire felt by a significant number of survivors, no matter where they found themselves following their liberation, to communicate their experiences to others. As survivors emerged and began to reassemble their shattered lives, some immediately began the process of consolidating and trying to understand their experiences in written form, one that they believed would not only give meaning and purpose to their survival, but would explain an unprecedented experience to the outside world. A number of these reflections found their way into print, to meet the needs of their authors to communicate beyond their own circles and in an attempt to reach a wider audience.\textsuperscript{18} The obsessive drive for survivors to write, collect, document and publish their work did not go unnoticed at the time: ‘With this preoccupation with their immediate past has come a heightened historical sense that is responsible for the almost passionate devotion of the DPs to the collection of historical and material data on ghetto and \textit{kotzet} [camp] life and death. Every DP is a private document centre and every DP camp has an historical commission.’\textsuperscript{19} Memoirs were not the only means by which survivors expressed, in written form, an understanding of their past experiences and the predicament they found themselves in, following liberation. A burgeoning survivor newspaper press soon emerged in the DP centres and major cities of liberated Europe. Clearly the need to provide a public voice for the survivors was seen as an important and urgent matter and, in following a long standing pre-war tradition that encouraged a vibrant, often politically charged Jewish press, survivors took it upon themselves to provide the means by which to address their own communities and others on matters of great current importance.

Survivor-generated newspapers and journals first began appearing as underground papers in November 1944.\textsuperscript{20} By 1945, survivor newspapers were beginning to garner a considerable presence in Europe, one that was to endure into the early 1950s. They varied in length, duration, frequency and style. A makeshift handwritten bulletin entitled \textit{Techiyat Hametim} (Resurrection) was first issued in Buchenwald on 4 May 1945. Some, such as \textit{Dos Fraye Vort} (The Free Word), \textit{Landsberger Lager Cajitung} (Landsberg Camp Newspaper) – later to be called \textit{Yiddishe Tsaytung} (Yiddish Newspaper) – and \textit{Undzer Veg} (Our Way),
were full tabloid papers published weekly for the duration of the camp or organization’s existence; others appeared more infrequently, depending on need and resources. They were predominately written in Yiddish but a few appeared in other languages or incorporated other languages in some editions, particularly Hebrew, Polish, Hungarian and German. In Leipheim, with a large group of Hungarian Jews, a Hungarian paper was issued, titled *A Miszavunk* (Our Word). In Berlin a German weekly, *Der Weg* (The Way), was published by the Jewish community. A Hebrew paper, *Nizoz* (The Spark), also appeared weekly and was issued by the Munich Central Committee. On some occasions, as in *Undzer Veg* issued by the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in Bavaria, English supplements were issued, and in the case of *Undzer Sztyme* (Our Voice), issued by the Central Jewish Committee in Bergen Belsen, editorials were written in English. The editors of these papers were eager to address their English-speaking liberators on matters that they deemed highly significant at the time; in the case of *Undzer Veg* it was the lack of Jewish witnesses at Nuremberg and for the Bergen Belsen paper it was the need for a Jewish homeland.

Although this contemporary press was not primarily concerned with memorialization and commemoration or with trying to shape the events of the past into a meaningful historical framework, it did nevertheless publish, between 1945 and 1948, some 276 articles about the period under Nazi occupation. Many papers, therefore, regularly published stories about and photographs of the concentration camps, ghettos, resistance fighters and uprisings. However, they were equally concerned with addressing the difficulties that survivors confronted in the present; with bringing social cohesion and unity to a dislocated, transient, deeply traumatized people and, in the process, preparing them for a future life beyond that of being ‘Displaced Persons’. Most papers regularly ran lists of missing persons, provided general DP camp news, made public announcements, documented and photographed visiting dignitaries such as General Eisenhower and David Ben Gurion, and, in the case of some papers such as the *Landsberger Lager Cajtung*, *Undzer Veg* and *Undzer Sztyme* (Our Voice), also sought to provide political agency by writing opinion pieces that commented on political matters as well as reporting on international events deemed important to the welfare of the survivors.

It is difficult, however, to quantify the exact number of publications that appeared in this period. The YIVO Institute’s microfilm collection of Jewish Displaced Persons periodicals from the 1940s is not
a complete collection but nevertheless lists and has examples of some 135 newspapers, bulletins, magazines and periodicals, while Atina Grossman estimates that in occupied Germany alone, from 1945 to the early 1950s, some ‘eighty journals and newsletters as well as some 300 books were published’, and Tamar Lewinsky claims that as many as 150 mostly Yiddish newspapers were published in Germany between 1945 and 1950.24

A shortage of paper, Yiddish type and printing presses meant that survivors had to become particularly innovative and enterprising in order to publish their papers. Many newspapers used Latin type instead of Yiddish/Hebrew letters and relied on Polish phonics rather than YIVO transliteration.25 This entrepreneurial spirit was recognized at the time by Koppel S. Pinson, who wrote in 1947 that ‘it soon became the ambition for every camp to have its own camp newspaper’.26 He also observed that ‘the people at Belsen who issued the first Jewish paper in Germany after liberation on 12 July 1945 wrote out the entire issue in handwriting and then photographed it and printed it from the photographs’.27

Clearly there is great diversity in both written form and content of all survivor documents from this brief yet highly charged period. Nonetheless, through a close reading of a select number of these documents comes an identification of three significant conceptual themes and responses: ‘messengers of the truth’, ‘recording their own history’ and ‘heroic resistance: a paradigm for survival’. These themes emerge concurrently following the pattern of liberation and post-liberation. The selected works often reveal more than one conceptual theme at any given time, and all of these themes expose the collective scale and scope of the tragedy and appropriate responses to it. Couched within these responses are the stories of individual survival.

While escapees from the death camps attempted to alert others as early as 1942, by 1944 these ‘messengers of the truth’ understood the full extent and scale of the Final Solution. Their first response was a compulsion to reveal this terrible truth in detailed written form to a global audience in the hope that the Allies would bomb the camps and halt the transportations, and that the remaining European Jews would actively resist deportation. Secondly, in ‘recording their own history’, survivors responded to both the limited public survivor discourse within the non-Jewish world and the tenets of their own historical tradition. They undertook to reconstruct and document their own history through the collection and publication of survivor testimonies and
memories. In this way the extent of the catastrophe was clearly defined on a communal level and by implication documented the individual tragedy. Finally, ‘heroic resistance: a paradigm for survival’ examines the early emergent voice of Jewish armed revolt and civil resistance by those who took part in it, not only as the only appropriate means to counter the Final Solution but as an argument against the pervasive notion of the passive victim. In this we see the important connection made between heroic resistance and individual survival. Throughout this three-year period there is the impetus to document the struggle to live and not just to record how the six million died. In doing so, it made a transitional leap from conceptualizing mass murder to individualizing survival.

THE END OF HOSTILITIES AND THE QUESTION OF LIBERATION

The complexities for our liberators in sorting out the unprecedented chaos were enormous; but it could not be expected of the average British army officer who had been sent off to fight a war that he should be able to grasp fully the significance of the term ‘displaced person’. That was precisely what we were, displaced persons. The question was, where could we be placed? For the moment we were still in Belsen, and very slowly exchanging our preoccupation with death for a new concern: life. (Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen)

For Europe’s Jews the process of liberation was a complex, prolonged and often contradictory affair. On 26 August 1944, General Charles de Gaulle ‘paraded triumphantly with his Free French troops down the Champs Elysees’ in a liberated Paris. Yet throughout August 1944, daily transportations sent 68,000 Jews from the Łódź Ghetto in Poland to the gas chambers at Auschwitz Birkenau. Thus, whilst cities such as Paris were celebrating liberation, Jews in the east were still being exterminated en masse. The seismic shift from brutal incarceration to liberation took approximately one year to reach all those trapped within Nazi-occupied territories. Different areas were liberated at different times and by different Allied armies. By early 1944 the Nazi grip over Europe was loosening, although liberation did not reach all parts of Europe until after the Nazi regime finally capitulated on 8 May 1945. One survivor recalled the bitter irony of his predicament at the time: ‘I was not liberated until the 9 May, Berlin was taken, the war had ended, Hitler was dead and I was still in the camp.’

For a small number of Holocaust survivors, liberation came as a result
of their own making as they escaped concentration camps and ghettos. These escapees often tried to alert others to the true nature of deportation. Their liberation could hardly qualify as ‘freedom’. It was conditional and compromised, as they struggled to stay alive in what was still hostile territory. For the vast majority of survivors, the timing of their liberation and how they were subsequently treated were contingent upon where they were located, what their particular circumstances presented and who their liberators were. One female survivor recalled that the safety she initially felt with her American liberators evaporated following the arrival and handover to the Russians: ‘When the Russians came they were full of vodka and victory. Women were not very safe. This was 1945 and we were nobody’s property, nobody claimed us. I decided to get out.’

Even when the war was over and there was a deliberate attempt to bring the perpetrators to justice, there was little public interest in what Jewish survivors had to say about the crimes committed against them. This was most evident at the International Military Tribunal which opened proceedings on 21 November 1945 in the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg to prosecute twenty-three leaders of the Third Reich. The charges that the Allies laid were broad rather than specific – determining that the Holocaust be subsumed within the general category of ‘crimes against humanity’. This was in spite of the fact that Jews were the Nazis’ principal targeted victims. As a consequence, in its eleven months of historic and unprecedented deliberations, and out of the ninety-four witnesses called to testify, the International Military Tribunal called only two witnesses who were discernibly Jewish, Samuel Rajzman and Abraham Sutzkever, and a third, Severina Smaglevskaya, a former inmate of Auschwitz Birkenau, who spoke specifically of Jewish women and children murdered at Birkenau. Her testimony did not clarify whether she was Jewish or not. Testimony of the Final Solution was therefore mostly provided by non-Jews. The absence of Jews as witnesses at this historic trial has been discussed by historians such as Michael Marrus, Lawrence Douglas and Donald Bloxham. But the lack of Jewish witnesses was immediately criticized by prominent survivors at the time, as evident in articles in the survivor press. On 20 November 1945, Levi Shalitan, the editor of the newspaper Undzer Veg wrote the leading article in a special English supplement of the paper, that was entitled ‘We Accuse: A Word to the Judges at Nuremberg’. It expressed anger and dismay over the matter and voiced general survivor concerns regarding the outcomes of the trial and its ability to
fulfil survivor expectations: ‘What are the crimes of the accused? Against whom were they committed? Who will stand as witnesses against these sons of destruction?’ The fact that it was written in English makes clear just who the audience was that they were trying to address. Nevertheless, Jewish witnesses did play an active and committed role in assisting the Allies with the indictment of hundreds of war criminals and collaborators across Europe. This was achieved through written depositions and eyewitness accounts, mostly collected by Jewish survivor organizations.

The defeat of Nazism and the establishment of new forms of government and of social order over its territories were unquestionably positive developments which restored a sense of order and purpose to many Europeans. It would be easy to assume, therefore, that for survivors of the Holocaust, liberation heralded the emergence of a new and better Europe. And it is undeniable that the defeat of Nazism saw the immediate threat of total extermination removed, but for the Holocaust survivor this was not yet a period of stability and Europe was not a peaceful sanctuary. In the aftermath of six years of unprecedented bloody warfare, however, liberation came at a price both for the liberators and the liberated. For the Holocaust survivor in particular, this period presented a new set of challenges.

The immediate post-war period brought with it enormous political upheaval, territorial disputes and the dislocation of millions of civilians. The difficulties of this period were compounded by the priorities and contested political agendas that consumed and constrained the liberators. Political tensions emerged which strained the uneasy alliance between the Soviets and their western allies, as the USA, Britain and France began to fear the growing threat of an emergent communist superpower. The USA and its European allies nevertheless struggled to reconstruct a shattered infrastructure, house and repatriate millions of displaced persons and deal with the legal and political ramifications of a criminal Nazi state. The perceived sluggish response to the Jewish predicament by the Allies incensed the World Jewish Congress, which claimed that Nazi victims were ‘being treated with a callous and shameful neglect and indifference’, as reported in *The Times* on 21 July 1945. The liberators initially faced the challenges of inadequate resources, poor organization and the problematic repatriation of many survivors who were unwilling to return to their countries of origin. ‘There was only death and desecration in Łódź. There was nothing there and no reason to go back’,
recalled one survivor. This was particularly true of those originating from countries now under the rule of the Soviet Union. Historians differ on points of emphasis here; however, they generally agree that this transition from occupation to liberation saw the Allies under-prepared and overwhelmed by the extent of human suffering that they encountered. As another survivor recalled, ‘They [the Americans] cried like babies when they entered our camp – they never expected to find what they did.’

Whilst the liberators struggled to deal with the physical extent of the human catastrophe, Holocaust survivors emerged from within different contexts, places and times to embrace their freedom, yet to face the full realization of what had befallen them. Many of the initial problems they confronted were unique to their predicament. Firstly, liberation did not ensure survival for those who were already close to death and beyond help. Thousands still died of starvation and disease in the first days and weeks following liberation of the camps. This fact was poignantly expressed by one survivor: ‘My best friend died two days after liberation. His last words to me were we did survive them didn’t we. At least he got a grave, we buried him.’ In Bergen Belsen alone, in the first six weeks after liberation, 13,000 inmates died, in spite of medical assistance. An additional 11,000 were hospitalized and deaths continued to occur at the rate of 55 per day thereafter. The deeply personal implications of this tragedy were expressed by one Bergen Belsen survivor who heartbreakingly recalled that ‘my brother died in my bed eight days after the war ended. He was ten years older than me, and I was left alone.’ Michael Marrus concludes that ‘40% of the Jewish DPs liberated in Germany perished within a few weeks after the arrival of the Allies’. International relief organizations were ill-prepared for the scale of the human catastrophe, and the military were often called upon to assist with physical rehabilitation and DP camp organization, a task for which they were also ill-equipped, and which they were often reluctant to perform. As one senior American military officer made clear, dealing with survivors was not part of his original commission: ‘I stated simply that the Army came to Europe to fight the Nazis and not to stand guard over their victims.’

The first camps for ‘Displaced Persons’ (DPs), as they were now called, were often established on the sites of former concentration camps, with many Holocaust survivors finding themselves confined for a second time, often alongside hostile non-Jewish inmates and guarded by unsympathetic liberators. Conditions inside these camps were
often appalling. So incensed was Dr Leo Srole by what he saw when he first toured the DP camps in 1945 as Principal Welfare Officer of Team 311 of UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) that he resigned his post in protest against the treatment of Jewish survivors by the Allies. In an article published in *The New York Times* on 6 December 1945, entitled ‘UNRRA Aide Quits: Sees Jews Abused’, he accused the Allies of deliberate dereliction of duty and moral responsibility and of ‘refusing to face the problem of thousands of refugees fleeing for their lives from pogroms in Poland to the safe haven of displaced persons’ centres in the American zones in Germany’.

This situation changed following similar protests and the damning Harrison report commissioned by President Truman and presented to him on 1 August 1945, to investigate claims of Allied anti-Semitism. The importance of the Harrison report cannot be overestimated, as it led to a change in government policy which resulted in better treatment of Jewish DPs. It was published in full by *The New York Times* on 30 September 1945, amongst other newspapers. It expressed the same anger and resentment felt by the Jewish DPs themselves. One of the most explosive charges that Earl G. Harrison made was this:

> As matters now stand, we appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them. They are in concentration camps in large numbers under military guard, instead of the SS troops. One is led to wonder whether the German people, seeing this, are not supposing that we are following or at least condoning Nazi policy.

Harrison also emphasized the disparity between the way in which the Allies treated the surrounding German population and the appalling living conditions experienced by the Jewish survivors: ‘It is difficult to understand why so many displaced persons, particularly those who have so long been persecuted and whose repatriation or resettlement is likely to be delayed, should be compelled to live in crude, overcrowded camps while the German people, in rural areas, continue undisturbed in their homes.’ The Harrison report also gave unequivocal support for 100,000 entry permits to Palestine. In short, Harrison supported the establishment of separate camps for Jewish survivors that would in turn become transit centres for further emigration. Atina Grossman points out that as a consequence of the Harrison report, by late 1945 the American zones in Austria, Italy and especially Germany had become ‘magnets for Jewish survivors fleeing renewed persecution in
the homelands to which they had briefly returned, as well as for Zionist organizers seeking to prepare them for aliyah to Palestine. In 1945, Munich had become the unofficial centre for Jewish survivors. Grossman observes that ‘one of the great ironies of history’ was that a country which had successfully pursued a judenrein policy became ‘under the occupation of the Allied powers a sheltering haven for several hundred thousand Jews’. The first all-Jewish DP camp in the American zone was soon established at Feldafing, situated some twenty miles outside Munich. By the summer of 1946, three of the largest camps reserved exclusively for Jewish DPs were in the American-occupied zone of Bavaria. They were Feldafing, Landsberg and Föhrenwald.

Nonetheless, Jewish Holocaust survivors still had to fight for recognition and the right to self-governance in their own camps. Not all Holocaust survivors ended up in Displaced Persons camps. Grossman calculates that some 20 per cent of all Displaced Persons in Germany were ‘free living’, choosing, as she notes, to ‘leave the protective (restrictive) confines of the camps’ and to set about re-establishing their lives on their own terms, albeit with continuing support from the US Military (especially in Bavaria) and the ‘JOINT’ (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). As one survivor explained, ‘life had started to go on and I decided not to live in the camp any more. I was well enough to move on.’ However, many of those survivors who were freed from the camps also faced physical hardships and life-threatening challenges. In returning to their past homes and attempting to reclaim confiscated properties they often confronted high levels of anti-Semitism. This was particularly true of Poland. On arriving back in her home town of Łódź in late 1945, one survivor recalled being accosted by Poles and asked: ‘what are you doing here, we thought we got rid of you, we thought they had killed you all’. A Polish government report claimed that between November 1944 and October 1945, 351 Jews were murdered by Poles. The Polish government was forced to pass legislation that made attacks on Jews punishable by death, or life imprisonment. But it was the Kielce pogrom of July 1946 in which forty-one Jews were murdered on a ‘blood libel’ charge that convinced many surviving Jews to flee Poland: conservative estimates claim that, as a consequence, some 62,000 Polish Jews fled Poland in July, August and September of that year. Even in a defeated and subdued Germany there were reported episodes of anti-Semitic attacks. The Yiddish survivor newspaper Undzer Vort published an article on 5 April 1946 about German police entering a
DP centre in Stuttgart and shooting dead one Jewish DP and wounding four others. The article claimed that the ‘matter was under investigation’. Survivors encountered hostile and belligerent local populations throughout the towns and cities once occupied by the Nazis. This hostility also often came from the US and British military occupying forces. The press regularly ran stories about Allied belligerence. The New York Times published many articles about the matter, and two such reports in particular stand out: one on 21 December 1945 entitled ‘Britain Denies Abuse of Jews’ and another on 3 May 1946: ‘US Soldiers Accused of Anti-Semitism’. Clearly the encounters between Jewish survivors, their liberators and neighbours remained a vexed and complex affair.75

Anti-Semitism was not restricted to those countries that had been subjugated by the Nazis. In Britain, George Orwell, writing for the Contemporary Jewish Record in April 1945, expressed the view that ‘anti-Semitism is on the increase and it has been greatly exacerbated by the war’.76 According to Leonard Dinnerstein, the same anti-Semitic trends were prevalent amongst the American public at that time. He cites polls taken during and immediately after the war in the USA that ‘characterized 5 to 10 per cent of Americans as rabidly anti-Semitic and 45 per cent as mildly so’.77 In Australia, hostile public opinion expressed in the newspapers of the day was less than favourable to Jewish immigration.78 Many Holocaust survivors, therefore, had just cause to believe that Europe and the Allies remained hostile to their presence and indifferent to their plight. So within this perceived climate of indifference and hostility the survivors confronted another reality: that even in the shadow of the greatest tragedy to befall European Jewry, the non Jewish world remained entrenched in its pre-war hatred of the Jew.79

What ‘liberation’ meant was a complex issue, with very different meanings for the survivors on the one hand and the liberators on the other. This can be seen in the competing representations of survivors within the two groups. For the liberators who had little direct experience of the Holocaust, survivors were seen as people who had become dehumanized as a result of their experiences. They had been so debased that they could never return to normality. Survivors were either pitied or scorned, or, at the most extreme end of the spectrum, reviled: ‘With few exceptions, the people of the camp [Landsberg DP Camp] themselves appear demoralized beyond hope of rehabilitation. They appear to be beaten both spiritually and physically, with no hope incentives for the future.’80 This view was often shared by the contemporary media and
by numerous dignitaries who made tours of inspection of the liberated camps. After a British parliamentary delegation visited Buchenwald shortly after its liberation by the Americans, it reported that ‘such camps as this mark the lowest point of degradation to which humanity has yet descended. The memory of what we saw and heard at Buchenwald will haunt us ineffaceably for many years.’

The military often shared these views, some taking it even further. General Patton’s diary entry of 15 September 1945 refers to the Jewish DPs as being ‘lower than animals’. The New York Times, however, did run an article in which Patton’s behaviour and attitude were brought into question. In ‘The Case of General Patton’, published on 3 October 1945, it gently chastised him but was at pains not to belittle his war record or his integrity: ‘The US government will not tolerate in high positions in our part of occupied Germany any officers, however brave, however honest, who are inclined to be easy on known Nazis and indifferent or hard toward the surviving victims of the Nazi terror’ (emphasis added).

Jewish communities in the free world (including the Yishuv) were also sceptical about the survivors’ ability to return to a normal life after all that they had experienced.

Not all of those exposed to the Jewish survivors shared this view, however. Some, such as Koppel Pinson, the educational director for Displaced Jews in Germany and Austria for the American Joint Distribution Committee between October 1945 and September 1946, showed compassion and considerable insight: ‘For the Jewish DPs the war has not yet ended, nor has liberation in the true sense really come as yet. Their problems still unsolved, their future not in their own hands, they still consider themselves at war with the world and the world at war with them, and they feel they must maintain a totalitarian conception of unity at all costs.’

Dr Leo Srole, who later became UNRRA Welfare Director of the Landsberg camp, shared Pinson’s view: ‘The “liberated” victim today, twenty months later, is still captive and still in jeopardy. There was a change also in the hero. Incredibly, the solicitous rescuer has become the camp-keeper, cold and unfriendly. The happy ending has been reconverted into tragedy. The victims still await final rescue.’ But the survivors saw and portrayed themselves in a very different way. They projected a collective image of a regenerated community, ready to engage in life and to rejoin the living. The Jewish survivor press which, as previously noted, flourished in the American and British zones of occupation throughout this period, enforced this view of a reformed and energized people, in stark contrast
to the Allied depictions of lethargic survivors living in self-inflicted squalor and filth. In its opening editorial on 8 October 1945, the Yiddish weekly newspaper Der Landsberger Lager Cajtung carried the bold headline ‘Landsberger jidn tretn on cu der arbet’ (Landsberg Jews march on to work). The article further proclaims on its front page:

Di arajnfirung fun a najem sejder – der erszter szrit cu produktiwizacje. Zajt mer wi a woch cajt forn togteglech idiszhe jungelajt baj wind und rogn inn wald arajn, kdej cu hank holc un farzogen dem landsberger jiszuw mit brenmaterial af winter. Zajt wochn kern jidishe menszn di gasn un placer fun di kazarmes, wu s’z untergebracht der landsberger jidisher jiszuw, firn arojs dem mist, wos kla-jbt zich togteglech on funsnaj, machn zojber di latrinen un tuen op ale szmuicie arbtn, wos zajnen nojtik, kdej cu zichern di rejn-lechkajt in lager.

[The introduction of a new order – the first step towards productivity. For more than a week now, Jewish youth trek daily through wind and rain into the forests to chop firewood to give the Landsberg community material to burn for winter. For weeks now, Jewish men have been cleaning the streets ... taking out the garbage on a daily basis, cleaning the latrines and have undertaken all dirty work to secure sanitation in the camp.]87

The survivors had not only to deal with their own physical and psychological recovery, but also to counter public perceptions that they were passive and beyond redemption, and therefore unable to undertake basic tasks. Schools and hospitals were soon established in the DP camps, largely run by survivors themselves.88 In a similar way, committees of self-governance were set up and Jewish leaders often showed initiative, authority and independence. A case in point occurred in the Bergen Belsen DP camp when the 34-year-old Auschwitz survivor and camp leader Josef Rosensaft courageously defied the British authorities by refusing to send DPs from Belsen to another camp (Lingen) that lacked basic amenities. He was put before a British military tribunal but was subsequently acquitted and resumed his ‘unofficial’ leadership position.89

The need for a Jewish homeland took on greater urgency in this early post-war period when many Holocaust survivors found themselves displaced, dispossessed and stateless.90 Jay Howard Geller contends that while the ‘same divisions that beset Jewish politics in pre-war Poland replicated themselves to a large extent in the DP camps’, it was the overriding concern at their status as ‘Displaced Persons’ that galvanized
the Jewish DPs to form ‘regional and zonal committees throughout the occupied zones to agitate for the right to emigrate to Palestine’.\(^\text{91}\) In furthering this point, Hagit Lavsky claims that it was the ‘intensely Zionist politicization of life in the (DP) camps that drew survivors into public life, fostered a new sense of belonging and created an organic civil society that could be transferred to Palestine’.\(^\text{92}\) In many cases, the DPs organized training camps for a future life in Palestine.\(^\text{93}\) Such a camp emerged in Buchenwald. Named Kibbutz Buchenwald, it was an agricultural commune formed by some of the survivors of Buchenwald who had the intention of going to Palestine. The majority of its members were originally Zionists but others joined out of necessity, rather as a default position with the realization that Europe no longer provided a viable alternative homeland for them:\(^\text{94}\) ‘Most of us are Zionists of old; the rest, through prison and suffering have come to the realization that the only place for us is in our own national home’.\(^\text{95}\) Members of this collective recorded their sense of hope and invigoration at the prospect of a new and productive life: ‘Through our physical labour in this Kibbutz, we have meant to demonstrate that we are not yet destroyed, but that we still have a will to live and to build.’\(^\text{96}\)

In the midst of all this social reconstruction and political activity, survivors had to confront and address what were profoundly personal tragedies as well as broader ones affecting the whole Jewish community. As this chapter reveals, they did so through their commitment to documenting and comprehending the magnitude of the crimes they had witnessed; to recording the number of victims they had seen tortured and murdered; to identifying the places and methodology of mass murder; and to naming perpetrators and collaborators, often including the sadistic trademarks of particular criminals, even the nicknames they were given by the victims. In all this they acted as key eyewitnesses, willing and able to point the finger at those who had to be held accountable. But they were also at pains to identify and name those individuals who resisted, those whose heroic exploits had to be remembered and revered, whose actions provided an important counter narrative to that of the perpetrators.

**MESSENGERS OF THE TRUTH:**
**FROM CONCENTRATION CAMPS TO THE GHETTOS**

In early 1944, eyewitness documents emerged from the occupied territories that revealed the most horrific details of mass murder, its
implementation and its unprecedented scale. In 1944 two of the earliest and arguably most important witness documents of this type were published and disseminated. The first was a memoir written by a Treblinka escapee and survivor, Yankl Wiernik. The second was a report delivered by Auschwitz escapees Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler.97

The fact that in both cases these reports were written by death camp escapees, one from the Operation Reinhard camps and the other from the largest death camp in operation in occupied Europe, is highly significant.98 These escapees could reveal the truth of the Final Solution because they had been caught up in it and survived. Exposing the death camps was the first step in revealing the great crime and the criminals responsible for it – thus playing a crucial part in the survivors’ developing conceptualization of the Holocaust. The first phase of this conceptualization involved an understanding of the nature and process of systemic mass murder and the individuals responsible for its organization and implementation.

Wiernik’s A Year in Treblinka was written shortly after his escape from Treblinka on 2 August 1943. It was dispatched from Warsaw to New York via London by the remnants of the underground Coordinating Commission on 24 May 1944.99 By December 1944, Wiernik’s memoir had been translated from Polish into Yiddish and published by the Jewish Workers Union in New York. Its impact at the time was considerable. In a letter he wrote to Professor Ber Mark on 20 January 1960, Wiernik recalled: ‘I did not expect any rewards although newspapers in the free world made a business out of it.’100

Wiernik’s testimony is the most detailed report of the extermination process and internal operations at Treblinka to have been written at that time. Although it was not the first account of the camp’s existence to reach Warsaw or the first document to contain a map of the camp,101 Wiernik’s report and map are distinguished by his intimate knowledge of the internal layout of both sections of the camp and its extermination process – one which few inmates survived or were able to describe. The historian Yitzhak Arad maintains that Wiernik’s was the first survivor eyewitness report of the operations of the Treblinka extermination camp to emerge from Poland in published book form.102 In spite of this, neither Wiernik nor his report was used as evidence for the prosecution at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. The Soviets called Treblinka survivor Samuel Rajzman to the stand and quoted from the report written by their war correspondent Vasily Grossman, who travelled with the Red Army at the time they liberated
the Treblinka camp. Treblinka was the first Aktion-Reinhard extermination camp to be reached by the Red Army in July 1944, just before they reached Majdanek. In *A Writer At War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945*, authors Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova explain how Grossman constructed his report on Treblinka:

The Red Army managed to locate about forty survivors from the camp – some were in hiding in the surrounding pine forests. Grossman, who was allowed to go there, lost no time in interviewing these survivors and also local Polish peasants. His account, a careful reconstruction from these interviews of the experience undergone by the 800,000 victims, is generally regarded as his most powerful piece of writing.

The article, according to Beevor and Vinogradova, was published in November 1944 in *Znamya* under the title ‘The Hell Called Treblinka’. It was this article which was quoted at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. It was not until some years later that Wiernik was called as a key witness at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

When Wiernik wrote his account of Treblinka, the camp was no longer in operation and had been dismantled by the Nazis, and thus the purpose of his writing could not have been to halt its operations. Rather, his account served both as a criminal indictment against the perpetrators of the Final Solution, whom he sought to name, and as a public record of those who died there. He wrote on behalf of the dead and constituted himself as their messenger. Wiernik states his purpose in the first page of his report: ‘The world must be told of the infamy of those barbarians, so that centuries and generations to come can execrate them. And it is I who shall cause it to happen.’ Wiernik’s sense of mission is driven by his compulsion to tell the truth: ‘That is what I am living for. That is my one aim in life.’ Indeed, he justifies his own survival by his compulsion to bear witness: ‘I must live to tell the world about the barbarism and all those foul deeds.’ Wiernik is able to express his own survival in terms of his relationship with the dead.

Although Treblinka had been shut down by the Nazis, when Vrba and Wetzler wrote their report on Auschwitz Birkenau in 1944 it was at the height of its deadly operations and preparing to receive mass deportations from Hungary. When they delivered their report about Auschwitz Birkenau in Zilinia Slovakia on 25 April 1944 to a group of Jewish community leaders, Vrba and Wetzler were driven by a sense of urgency and a wish to pre-empt the deportation and thwart the Nazis’
plans. They believed that if the ‘truth’ of the camp was revealed in all its deadly detail, then the Allies would act and the Hungarian Jews would resist deportation and be saved. Regrettably, Vrba and Wetzler’s report did not achieve its initial aim. But by November 1944 the report had reached the USA. The American War Refugee Board reacted promptly by translating and publishing the report. Vrba and Wetzler’s testimony presented the American public with the first extensive eyewitness evidence of the operations and scale of Auschwitz Birkenau. The War Refugee Board issued a full report that demonstrated a level of understanding previously lacking. Whilst it equated all victims equally, ‘Jews and Christians alike’, it did grasp the magnitude of the crime they were now confronting: ‘this campaign of terror and brutality which is unprecedented in all history’. It still claimed that it ‘is difficult to believe’, but conceded that the ‘evidence clearly substantiates the facts’. It also referred to ‘extermination camps’, thereby differentiating them from labour camps – a distinction not readily understood at that time. Finally, it states that ‘these reports present a true picture of the frightful happenings in these camps. It is making these reports public in the firm conviction that they should be read and understood by all Americans.’ Nor did Vrba and Wetzler’s work prompt American government intervention to save the remaining Jews. However, the fact that their eyewitness report was given prominent coverage by the American press in November 1944 generated extensive comment and had a considerable impact on contemporary public consciousness. The Vrba and Wetzler report was also received in evidence at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, although in keeping with the Allies’ preferences for a ‘paper over people’ approach to testimony, neither Vrba nor Wetzler was called as witnesses for the prosecution.

In their reports, Wiernik, Vrba and Wetzler clearly articulate the systematic processes involved in executing the Final Solution. Both documents report the number of victims murdered in the camps. In this way the nature and scope of the crime is defined and quantified. Wiernik stressed the relentless and continual process of deportation and death in Treblinka, where the ‘number of transports grew daily and there were times when as many as 20,000 people were gassed in one day’. This was mass murder on a gigantic scale which threatened total annihilation. In a similar way, Vrba and Wetzler give a detailed account of the systematic organization involved in murdering thousands of people each day at Auschwitz Birkenau and the methods
used in disposing of their bodies. Their report details the ways in which prisoners were classified by number and colour-coded triangles. The number was tattooed on the forearm and the coloured triangle sewn onto the clothing on the left breast. The colour of the triangle indicated the level of ‘criminality’. Jews were identified by a special triangle that was turned into a Star of David by adding yellow points. The report states: ‘Prisoners receive consecutive numbers upon arrival. Every number is only used once so that the last number always corresponds to the number of prisoners actually in the camp. At the time of our escape, that is to say at the beginning of April 1944, the number had risen up to 180,000.’ The Nazis’ officious record-keeping system which dehumanized and subjugated the victim allowed Vrba and Wetzler to keep an accurate tally of incarcerated prisoners. This numerical system of classification also enabled them to keep a record of the transports that arrived at the camp from different locations; Vrba and Wetzler claimed that they ‘were able to reconstruct fairly clearly their order of succession and the fate that befell each separate convoy on arrival’. By their own hand, the Nazis’ obsession with bureaucracy actually contributed to their own criminal indictment.

In direct contrast to the Nazi system which was designed to dehumanize and to remove the individuality of their victims, survivors sought to identify and name the perpetrators. By giving a face and a name to the perpetrators, Wiernik the witness made the criminal an individual who must be held responsible for his actions, not just a faceless member of a large killing machine. He names and identifies six senior Nazis who gave direct orders, adding the name of the dog that one Nazi used to murder individuals who personally displeased him. He also names Heinrich Himmler as a visitor to the camp, although he admits that he did not personally see him. For Wiernik, the role of perpetrator also extends to include non-Germans who worked for the Nazis. He thus names and incriminates six Ukrainian guards, providing physical descriptions and identifying characteristics, including the fact that two of them wore German uniforms. Wiernik also includes Jewish collaborators in his indictment against perpetrators. In the circumstances that were found in the camps, ‘there is always the need for Jewish executioners, spies, stool pigeons. The Germans managed to find them, to find such vile creatures as Moshko from the vicinity of Slonim, Itzig Kobyla from Warsaw, Chaskel the thief, and Kuba, a thief and a pimp, both Warsaw born and bred.’ These people were, in his view, ‘depraved’ types, able to be exploited by the Nazis.
It was only by listing and describing the various components of the great crime they had witnessed, by counting the number of transports, quantifying the number of victims, naming and identifying the perpetrators, their accomplices and collaborators, that Wiernik, Vrba and Wetzler were able to come to an understanding of how the Final Solution could be executed with such devastating consequences. In a way, they had to deconstruct it, to break it down into its different components, before they could understand and conceptualize it as a whole.

The naming and identification of perpetrators remained a key component of the thousands of testimonies and historical questionnaires devised and collected by the central committees established by Jewish survivors throughout the occupied zones in the post-war period. Their thoroughness in this regard led to the indictment and prosecution of hundreds of war criminals. Again this initiative was undertaken by the survivors themselves who worked in cooperation with the Allies in such matters, providing sworn affidavits that could be used in a court of law even though they were not necessarily called to testify in person. For the survivors it was important that the judicial process should restore a sense of justice and the rule of law. In this the Allies were in agreement. For the survivors it was recognition by the non-survivor world that a great crime had been committed. This recognition played some part in the ability of the survivors to come to terms with the totality and enormity of the crimes committed against them, even though they realized that it could not compensate for their own individual loss. Acknowledgement was also voiced in an article in Undzer Shtyme, published by the liberated Jews in the British zone – Bergen Belsen DP Camp, on 2 October 1946: ‘the criminals await the sentence after the trial, and there is some consolation and a lesson in that … [but] the thousands who survived still suffer’.

The International Military Tribunal rightly indicted and convicted the leaders of the Third Reich as those who sanctioned, enabled and empowered others to undertake mass murder, even though most of those who sat in the dock at the Palace of Justice never actually committed the physical act of murder, nor were many of them personally known by the victims. The survivors understood that public recognition and condemnation of the leaders of the Third Reich, their administrators and bureaucrats, and the enactment of their punishment was an important step in the process of judicial retribution. Yiddish writer and newspaper editor Levi Shalitan commented in a special English supplement in Undzer Veg on the importance of justice being meted out to
the perpetrators: ‘The [Nuremberg] trial shall be the last warning. It must be proved that there is order and justice in our world. No one can again presume a world without justice and without judges.’ For the Allies this closed the matter. But for the survivors, the judicial process at the International Military Tribunal did not go far enough: it lacked moral restitution. And it did not clarify the distinction between criminals and murderers. For the survivors, identification and articulation of who the murderers were was an attempt to bridge this moral divide. This required public confrontation and a final reckoning with those perpetrators, accomplices and collaborators seen by survivors to have blood on their hands, those who rounded up the Jews, denounced them, brutalized and tortured them, pulled the trigger and pushed the victims into the gas chambers.

Wiernik, Vrba and Wetzler reveal in graphic detail the execution of the Final Solution at its most systematic efficiency and the individuals who orchestrated it. The little that they reveal about themselves is only there to serve a greater purpose: that of speaking on behalf of those who could not. Wiernik tells the reader what his occupation was – ‘I am a carpenter by trade’ – but this only serves to justify his survival. He evaded the gas chambers because he was useful to the Nazis: ‘as long as they needed me they would not kill me’. His account suggests, however, that his survival in the camp was an affliction, a burden, as he was ‘destined to witness the sufferings of our brethren and look at their tortured corpses’. He refers to the dead as ‘our children, our brothers and sisters, our fathers and mothers’. He is deeply connected with their loss and they are a part of his. So there is no need to speak of his own loss as distinct from that of others. Neither Vrba nor Wetzler reveals any personal details at all – apart from the fact that they held ‘privileged positions’ in the camp, which enabled them to gather the necessary information. In part, this could be due to the fact that when these reports were made public the world was officially still at war and, in the eyes of the Nazis, Wiernik, Vrba and Wetzler were fugitives. But rather, their concern and the first stage of survivor conceptualization involved comprehending and addressing the scale and scope of the tragedy they had managed to survive and they sought above all to document and to bear witness, as ‘messengers of the truth’ to the horrors they had seen and personally experienced.

Mass murder did not occur only in the concentration camps. For Abraham Sutzkever, the task of recording and documenting the destruction of Vilna began in the ghetto and culminated in the writing
of his memoir in 1944, immediately following his liberation. As a result of his own survival and his commitment to recording the events that engulfed him, Sutzkever exemplifies the continual process of documenting the history of destruction both during and immediately after the Holocaust. In Sutzkever we see a developing conceptualization that moves beyond an understanding of the practice of mass murder to an awareness of the full implications of the Final Solution – a conceptualization which incorporated the total annihilation of European Jewry and the entire destruction of its culture and history.

By the time the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 and occupied Vilna two days later, the then 28-year-old Yiddish writer and resistance fighter Abraham Sutzkever was already an accomplished, published author of Yiddish poetry. Throughout his incarceration in the Vilna Ghetto he assiduously documented and recorded the destruction of Jewish Vilna. He wrote more than eighty poems throughout this period, comprising some of his most poignant and beautiful works. In July 1942 he won the ghetto’s Writers’ Association literary prize for his haunting poem ‘Child of the Tomb’, and in February 1943 he composed ‘Kol Nidre’, a poem that vividly described the liquidation of the ‘small ghetto’ on Yom Kippur 1941.

Sutzkever’s reputation and literary status gave him considerable authority within the Vilna Ghetto, an authority that enabled him to coordinate a range of activities aimed at strengthening the historical record of the destruction of Vilna and fortifying clandestine civil and armed resistance. In collaboration with other members of the so-called ‘Paper Brigade’, an elite literary group conscripted by the Nazis to sort books and artefacts, he risked his life to smuggle hundreds of rare and valuable books, manuscripts and documents, hiding them from the authorities. He also used the opportunity to move outside the ghetto to obtain illicit weapons, helping to arm the underground resistance movement, of which he was an active member.

On 12 September 1943 Sutzkever fled the ghetto and escaped to the Naroch forest where he joined the Voroshilov Brigade of partisan fighters. Throughout this period he kept a record of testimonies that documented crimes committed by the Nazis. On 12 March 1944 the Soviet army flew him out of the Naroch forest to Moscow, only to have him return to Vilna in July 1944 after its liberation by the Red Army. He immediately set about retrieving lost documents, establishing a Jewish museum – the Museum of Jewish Art and Culture – and recording his memoirs, incorporating testimonies from other survivors whom
he had previously interviewed. Sutzkever temporarily remained in the Soviet Union, appearing as a witness for the Soviet prosecution at the International Military Tribunal on 27 February 1946, a testament to his enduring status and recognition by the Soviets as a reliable witness. There he testified to the destruction of Jewish Vilna. He requested that he be permitted to give his testimony in Yiddish, the language of the victims. This was denied: he was instructed to deliver his testimony in Russian, one of the four official languages. In 1947 he settled in Israel, where he continued to write poetry and prose.

Sutzkever’s memoir concerning the destruction of the Vilna Ghetto and the mass murder of its inhabitants is one of the earliest to be written for publication, but it is not the only one about Vilna to be written in the immediate post-war period. Others include Yosef Musnik’s Dos Leben Un Di Likvidatsye Fun Vilner Geto (Yiddish; The Life and Liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto) in 1945, Ruzhka Korczak’s Lebavot Ba-Efer (Hebrew; Flames in Ashes) in 1946, Rabbi Efroim Oshry’s Bleter Vegn Vilne (Yiddish; Pages About Vilna) in 1947 and Mark Dworzecki’s The Struggle and Fall of Jerusalem of Lithuania: History of the Vilna Ghetto in 1948. The first draft of Sutzkever’s memoir took the form of a fifty-three-page document which was written in Yiddish sometime in 1944 – that is, within a year of his escape from the Vilna Ghetto on 12 September 1943. It was to be incorporated in the ill-fated Black Book of Russian Jewry collated and edited by two members of the Literary Commission of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman. The book was ready for publication by early 1946, but for political reasons and amidst a wave of Stalinist anti-Jewish sentiment it was scuttled before it was printed. Sutzkever’s Yiddish memoir, however, survived and was published in book form in Paris in 1946 and in Buenos Aires in 1947. The material provided for the Black Book forms the basis of the later editions. It is this original material from 1944 that is under discussion here.

Sutzkever shared Wiernik, Vrba and Wetzler’s commitment to name and identify perpetrators. He did so with precision and considerable literary skill, employing his ability as a writer to highlight and emphasize particular characteristics of four key Nazis who were in charge of operations in Vilna and its immediate surrounds: Khingst, the Gebietskommissar; Schweinberger and Weiss, whom he referred to as ‘professional murderers’; and the Sturmbannführer Neugebauer. Indeed, Sutzkever named these four during his testimony at the
International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. He also gave clear and exact descriptions of Murer, Degner and Kittel. Sutzkever claimed that the Nazis gave orders to execute the Jews but that the executions were largely carried out by ‘others’. He states that ‘on the contrary, it was preferable for the Germans simply to direct it; others should perform the slaughter itself’. These ‘others’ were Lithuanian collaborators but Sutzkever was mindful of their status in 1944 as Soviet citizens, and in what must be an attempt to appease the Soviet authorities he always differentiates them as ‘German Lithuanians’.

Sutzkever’s portraits of the perpetrators go beyond establishing their criminality. They present the brutal, sadistic face of Nazism. As in his testimony at Nuremberg, Sutzkever exposes the perverse nature of the perpetrators and the extent they went to in degrading and debasing their victims:

Several Jews were once late for work: to punish them and set an example, Degner selected a row of twenty men ... and commanded them to run around an airfield for one kilometer. The ten who came in first, he said, would be allowed to live; the rest would be shot ... The miserable men ran with every ounce of their strength ... But Degner had tricked them: he shot the ten who finished first and ‘had mercy’ on the rest.

But for Sutzkever it was Kittel who was the ‘most zealous’ in his work. During the ghetto’s liquidation, Kittel ordered a piano to be brought into the yard. He proceeded to play while the massacre took place. When a young boy threw himself at Kittel’s feet, he pulled out a revolver and shot the boy with his right hand while continuing to play with his left.

Sutzkever was never incarcerated in a concentration camp. His experiences of and exposure to the Nazi assault and of mass murder were thus different from those who survived the death camps and the gas chambers. In a short paragraph under the subheading ‘Ponary’, Sutzkever provides a description of a site of mass murder. In this case it was not a gas chamber but a place of natural beauty deep in the forests that was perverted into a site of mass, systematic shootings and subsequently a mass grave. Sutzkever was not an eyewitness to this event and so incorporates the testimonies of three others: Motel Gdud, Khiena Katz and Solomon Garbel, who were eyewitnesses to the mass shootings. Both Gdud and Katz escaped death as they were wounded rather than killed, later crawling out of the pits of the dead and returning to Vilna to expose the truth of Ponary. The third, Garbel, was taken to Ponary by Weiss to dig
pits to bury the dead. Here as elsewhere, Sutzkever undertakes to provide his own accounts and to document the experiences of others, recording their testimonies in the process of constructing a full history based upon the ‘truth’ of eyewitnesses.

Even though Sutzkever lacked direct exposure to the death camps, he had seen and experienced enough to convince him of the genocidal intent of the mass killings and to see them as part of the evolving process of absolute and total annihilation. The mass killings were no longer random, spontaneous pogroms but carefully orchestrated operations conducted with military precision, on a scale which had never been experienced before. By 1 January 1942, Sutzkever was one of a group of Jewish resistance fighters led by Abba Kovner who issued what was to be known as the ‘Vilna Proclamation’, the call for armed resistance and, more importantly, the declaration that includes these statements: ‘Hitler intends to slaughter all the Jews of Europe. We are among his first victims.’ Sutzkever includes this document in his memoir, revealing an understanding of what is now known to be the first stage of the Final Solution, the activities of the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile death squads that carried out these mass shootings. He thus pinpoints how the Final Solution evolved. The move from death squads to gas chambers not only expedited the process of mass killing, but also removed perpetrators from direct involvement with the victims, creating what the Nazis believed was a necessary expediency and distance between the two.

By 1944, Sutzkever’s analysis of two key components of the Final Solution signals a new phase in its conceptualization. The first was the realization that its success hinged on the ability of the Nazis to dupe their victims and to ensure that mass murder was ‘conducted in secret. No one should know about it, so that those who were still alive would not try to hide.’ Deception and duplicity thus played a crucial part in the success of the Final Solution. Secondly, Sutzkever realizes the scale of this total campaign against the Jews. He understands that this ‘totality’ was not limited to physical annihilation, but that every vestige of Jewish existence, past and present, had to be obliterated. In addition to physically exterminating the Jewish population, the Gestapo took up the task of destroying its morale and disgracing Jewish history for all eternity. For the Gestapo this was every bit as important as the physical extermination itself.

Like Wiernik, Sutzkever records the zeal with which the Nazis tried to erase all physical evidence of their crime. Even in death there would be no remnant of Jewish existence. When the number of victims of
Ponary exceeded 100,000 an order came from Berlin: all the bodies of those who had been murdered were to be burned. Special secret instructions with the details of how the burning of the bodies was to be organized were sent with the order.\textsuperscript{150}

Sutzkever does not reveal specific details of his own personal loss; rather, he chooses to record the loss of others and includes their testimonies in his memoir. In fact his memoir is a collection of testimonies interspersed with a selection of his own experiences, revealing again the duality that existed between the individual and collective experience. In this way he not only develops a meaningful history of the scale and depth of the tragedy, but also highlights the individual struggle to survive, physically and spiritually, which was to become so significant a part of survivor writing in this period.

**RECORDING THEIR OWN HISTORY**

The collection and publication of survivor testimonies by individual survivors such as Sutzkever had become more systematized and organized by 1946. Survivors rapidly established Central Commissions of Liberated Jews throughout the occupied zones.\textsuperscript{151} These not only became a focal point for social reconstruction and political activity, representing the ‘surviving remnant’ to the authorities, but their historical commissions set about methodically recording a factual history of the Jewish tragedy from the survivors’ perspective. This was in response to both the perceived lack of Allied interest in the victim experience and the tenets of a self-directed Jewish historical tradition.\textsuperscript{152}

In this regard the Munich-based Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the American zone of Germany was particularly active.\textsuperscript{153} The fact that it was located in Munich again confirms that the capital of Bavaria had become the most important centre for liberated Jews in the American zone in Germany.\textsuperscript{154} The decision to open a Jewish Historical Commission was taken on 28 November 1945 and it opened its doors in December 1945.\textsuperscript{155} By May 1947 the Central Historical Commission in Munich coordinated fifty-nine local sub-branches throughout the American zone. Run and operated by survivors, it became one of the many important centres for the historical documentation of Jewish victim experiences of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{156}

The testimonies collected by these organizations are different to the memoirs published in this period, as they do not attempt to derive personal meaning from the past or to understand the nature of the
experience. But there are also some striking similarities. Dalia Ofer comments that within these testimonies ‘the narrative superstructure is similar in all of them’; that they ‘relate a quasi-historical process leading up to the deportations and killings’.157 She likens the testimonies to the ‘chorus in a Greek tragedy’, a ‘voice [which] echoes and reinforces the anxiety about the inevitable climax’.158 Similar to many of the early survivor memoirs, they recount a ‘collective destiny’ rather than emphasize an individual tragedy. These testimonies followed a superimposed, predetermined pattern as they attempted to collect facts about the past in order to document and record what happened in a pragmatic, objective and judicial way. Testimonies collected and collated in this way varied in length, and typically they ranged between two to five pages; however, some could run to sixty pages. This was dependent upon the individual giving the testimony, the person collecting it and the events being recorded. Clearly these testimonies were constituted with the specific purpose of collating a vast body of credible evidence from the recitation of facts known to the informants. In this they served an important function. And they certainly established the groundwork for Holocaust historiography that was to follow.

These documents were often offered as sworn statutory declarations, given in the presence of an authoritative co-signatory. Some of these testimonies were tabled as legal documents in the prosecution of alleged war criminals or in the pursuit of claims for restitution. The Wiener Library in London and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem house many such testimonies. They would typically adhere to a legalistic format with a highly structured index. The following example illustrates the content, form and structure of these documents:

1. Index number: P. 111.h. (Ghetto Kowno, Lithuania) No. 1036/a
2. Title of Document: Lithuanian Ghetto Guard KLIMANISKIS
3. Date: 1940 and later
4. Number of pages 1
5. Language: English
6. Author or source: Moses Tartak (late of Raudondvarys nr. Kowno) Munich
7. Recorded: on 14.7.1948 at the Union of Lithuanian Jews in the US Zone of Germany, Munich
8. Received: From the former Association of Baltic Jews, London 1958
9. Form and Content: Author states under oath that he knew Vytautas Klimanski very well. He was born in Michalinova,
district Kowno, and employed as a postal clerk in a Kowno suburb. After the Nazi occupation he joined the Partisans and took part in the pogroms in SLOBODKA (Viliampole) when hundreds of Jews were killed. He also participated in the murder of ten Jewish families in RAUDONDVARYS. Author further saw how Klimanskis shot two of his cousins in Michalinova; Moses and Simon Reibstein. Later, when the author was in the Kowno Ghetto, he encountered Klimanskis once again and witnessed many of his brutalities.159

Another type of testimony, the ‘Historical Questionnaire’ was also collected by the same survivor organizations. By posing specific, short-answer questions these questionnaires were more highly structured, as they sought detailed, factual information regarding the informant’s knowledge of the community in which he or she lived and the events that occurred there during Nazi occupation. Typically the questionnaire began with short questions regarding the status of the town from which the informant came. How many Jews lived there before the war? What was the main source of income? Which and how many Jewish organizations operated in the town? Questions then progressed to what happened when the Nazis entered the town. When were the first ‘actions’ taken against the Jews? How many transportations left the town? How and when did the final liquidation occur? How did the non-Jewish population behave throughout the war? Did the Jews stage an uprising? How many Jews from that town survived the war? How many survived the camps and who saved themselves through other means? The completed questionnaires would run from approximately two to six pages, depending on the detail provided by the informant.160

Both types of testimony were an attempt to rescue information from living memory, in part to reconstruct a factual history of what had happened to the Jews of Europe throughout the war and what had been lost as a result of it. In the absence of other forms of documentation – many of which were assiduously destroyed by the Nazis – and the perceived lack of interest by the Allies, this provided the only alternative that survivors believed was credible and that would stand the test of time. Even though these documents did not move beyond recording the facts, there is a clear synergy here between the collective nature of recording and the role of the individual within it.

The collection and dissemination of historical documentation reached an important milestone with the publication of Fun Letstn Khurbn (From the Last Destruction), a historical periodical about
Jewish life during the Nazi regime, issued by Munich’s Jewish Historical Commission. Although Fun Letstn Khurbn was an important component of the emerging survivor press of the period, it differentiated itself from articles in the survivor newspapers that focused on contemporary, political issues. Its mandate was to publish ‘historical material and documents which are intertwined with the experiences of our people under Nazi rule’. In short, it assembled and collated an impressive collection of testimonies, ghetto and camp folklore, photographs, historical reports and accounts by eyewitnesses. It attempted to cover the scope of victim experiences, documenting the breadth of the tragedy and how those caught up in it both lived and died. It was, however, highly selective in what it chose to publish. Curiously, it made no mention of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, although it made extensive mention of resistance and the revolts in the other ghettos. In a similar vein, it made no mention of the experiences of Jews of Western Europe. Its focus was distinctly on those from the east. There are other omissions too. Ada Schein attributes this to editorial imperatives that chose to focus on ‘narratives of destruction and survival and to tell the story of the uprisings in the smaller ghettos which had received less public attention’. It clearly reflected the bias of its chief editor, Israel Kaplan, and its key instigator and major figure, Moshe Feigenbaum. Its first thirty-six-page edition was published in August 1946. Two more editions followed in the same year. By 1948 it had produced ten editions and reached a print distribution of 12,000.

It is important to understand that the journal’s appearance at this time was also in response to the perceived climate of indifference and lack of historical interest in the Holocaust that was evident in the non-survivor world at that time. Moshe Feigenbaum’s searing editorial in the first edition of Fun Letstn Khurbn, the only editorial to appear in the three editions of 1946, makes this point abundantly clear. He lays out the main concerns confronting the Jewish survivor community and the reasons for the journal’s significance. The community’s first major concern, he claims, was the Allies’ poor response to Jewish victimization and the deeper historical implications that this carried. He felt very strongly the important responsibility that the survivor witness bore in the creation of a historical legacy of the Holocaust. Feigenbaum begins his editorial with a series of rhetorical questions;

Fil nokh tsevishen undz fregn: Tsu vos zeynen undz noytik di historishe komisiye? Vert mn dokh farfleytst fun a mabul mit dokumenten vegn yidn oyfn nirenberger protses; vos me shteynt
gezogt, kenen mir, yidn do nokh tsugeben? Hobn doku di groys-
makhtn tsunoyfgeklibn a riz-material vegn der natzi-epokhe, to 
vos far a role kenen do shpiln nokh a bisl dokumenten, vos mir 
veln hayvezen oyftsuzamlen?

[Many among us ask: Why is there a need for an Historical 
Commission? Aren’t we overwhelmed with a deluge of documents 
about Jews at the Nuremberg trial? What can we Jews add to this? 
Haven’t the Superpowers already collected an impressive amount 
of material about the Nazi epoch, so what sort of role can a few 
more documents which we will manage to collect, play?]

Feigenbaum perceived that the documents retrieved by the Allies and the 
witnesses called to testify at the International Military Tribunal were 
primarily concerned with the perpetrators, with indicting and convicting 
war criminals, and therefore had little or no interest in recording and 
documenting the Jewish experience or highlighting the extent of Jewish 
suffering: ‘Di groysmakhtn take ongezamlt a rizn-material; zey hobn ober 
veyt nisht in zinen dos yidishe problem. Zey hobn kodem kol in zinen di 
eygene interesn’ [The superpowers have indeed collected an impressive 
amount of material; however they don’t have the Jewish problem deep in 
their thoughts. They have, firstly, their own interests in mind.] His con-
cerns were echoed and debated elsewhere in the survivor press at the time. 
On 12 December 1945, K. Shabtai, the ‘special correspondent’ repre-
senting the paper Undzer Veg at Nuremberg, wrote that he and others 
were bitterly disappointed with the manner in which the Jewish compo-
nent of the trial was administered, claiming that it ‘was handled like a step 
child, cast about by everyone but claimed by none’. In another publication 
entitled Bamidbar (In the Desert) published in Föhrenwald, M.D. Olihav 
wrote on 23 July 1946: ‘In Nuremberg one hears the figures but does not 
see the pictures.’ Feigenbaum refers to non-Jewish ‘neighbours’ who 
witnessed the Jewish extermination in their own lands and who could ‘for 
historical purposes objectively recount our tragic life from those days 
of annihilation’. But they do not do so. Rather, he insists that they 
‘minimize the Jewish tragedy, they change it and when possible they 
defile it’. To illustrate his point, he refers to a speech made by Churchill 
in the British parliament in February 1945. Feigenbaum claims that in his 
address Churchill comments: ‘it is spoken about [the Yiddish word that 
Feigenbaum used here is shmuest, as in ‘spoken of lightly’] that the Nazis 
murdered three million Polish Jews’. Feigenbaum confronts this with 
outrage:
Dos zogt a premier fun an imperie, velkhe halt di gantse velt eyn-geklamert in di negl fun ir shpionazh un veys vegin der kenster geshe’enish in der velt; dos zogt a mlukhe-man in der tseyt ven poyn iz shoyn biz der veykhsel zibn monaten frey ... ersht der yid-disher tsentral-komitet in poyn muz nemen dem koved tsu venden di hoykhe oyfmerkzamkeyt fun Churchill meldndik im, az nisht nor, ‘vi men shmuest’, nor s’iz leyder a troyeriker emes, az di natzis hobn umgebrakht drey million tsveyhundert toyznt poylishe yidn.

[So says a Premier of an empire, which holds the entire world in awe and whose intelligence agency knows of even the smallest events in the world; so says a statesman in a time when Poland was already liberated for seven months ... Firstly the Jewish central committee in Poland must have the dignity to take the highest representation to Churchill, to tell him, that ‘it is not just spoken about’ but it is regretfully a tragic truth that the Nazis exterminated 3,200,000 Polish Jews.]

At the end of the first year following liberation, Feigenbaum concludes that Jewish survivors must become the historical resource for documenting their own experiences. If historical reconstruction is left to others, the history of the Jewish tragedy will quickly be eclipsed and forgotten. The victims’ past must be rescued in order to secure an accurate historical future. ‘Dokumentirn di blutike epokhe muzn es mir yidn aleyn’ [documenting the bloody epoch must be done by we Jews alone], he states in his editorial, and continues:


[We the ‘Sherit Hapletach’ (surviving remnant) the surviving witnesses, must procure for the historian the sources that will enable him to reconstruct and create a clear picture of what happened to us.]

Deriber iz far undz fun umgehoyern vert yede gevis eydes fun a geratevetn jid, yedes lidl ufn di natzi-tseytn yedes shprikhvor. Yeder epizod un vits, yede fotografye un velkhe nor shafung, sey ofen gevis fun literature unsey oyfen gevis fun kunst, kurts, als vos ken nor baloykhtn dem martirer-veg fun undzer tragishen dor.
For us it is of tremendous value that every rescued Jew who is an eyewitness records every song from the Nazi times, every saying, every episode and joke, every photograph and every artefact; anything from literature and art; in short, all that can enlighten about the martyrs from our tragic generation.

Feigenbaum’s editorial highlights the ability of some survivor witnesses to perceive the magnitude of their experiences within a larger historical framework, and to be driven by a profound sense of historical mission that acted in direct response to a disinterested and distracted public. He concludes his editorial with a directive to all survivors: ‘tsu shteln zikh in rshus fun der historishe komisiye ven nor er vert dertsu farbetn’ [to report to the Historical Commission when called upon to do so].

Feigenbaum’s 1946 inaugural editorial demonstrates a further development in survivor understanding and conceptualization. The concern is no longer solely with numbers, statistics and places of extermination, or with the perpetrators, although they remain an important feature of all Fun Letstn Khurbn editions. The selection of articles published in Fun Letstn Khurbn reveals a determination to rescue the Jewish world that was lost during the Holocaust, a cultural and spiritual world that was destroyed along with its six million victims. In providing this information, he, like others who wrote and published their works in this period, reconciled their own personal struggles within the broader framework of a comprehensive history. In recording how Jews had lived, resisted and survived, they articulate also the heroic dimension embedded in their survival. Each edition of Fun Letstn Khurbn contains stories of physical and spiritual resistance, courage and defiance in every walk of life. In doing so, this journal demonstrates the emerging importance of the heroic component within the survivor experience. Even in the midst of documenting the details of mass murder, identifying perpetrators and the drive to record the history of destruction and the world it sought to destroy, survivors always recorded acts of heroism and its implicit connection with survival.

HEROIC RESISTANCE: A PARADIGM FOR SURVIVAL

For survivors the shadow of death imposed itself upon their survival and continued existence. They struggled to explain and justify their lives when six million of their brethren lay dead, many anonymously in mass graves. Many felt the burden of survival as an inseparable bond with the dead. At the time of liberation, Dr Zalman Grinberg articulated the
ambiguity of survival in his address at the liberation concert in St Ottilien in May 1945:

Millions of the members of these communities ... have been annihilated. What is the logic of fate to let us then live. We belong in the common graves of those shot in Kharkov, Lublin and Kovno, we belong to the millions gassed and burnt in Auschwitz and Birkenau, we belong to those tormented by milliards of lice, the cold ... we are not alive – we are still dead.165

Samuel Gringauz’s address at the Landsberg DP camp Yom Kippur service on 17 September 1945 echoes the sentiment expressed by Grinberg: ‘We, who feel ourselves closer to the dead than to the living do not really require a special memorial service. We say “Yizkor” in the morning and in the evening, we say “Yizkor” while awake and also in our dreams ... we do not really require a special memorial service.'166

In both cases, Grinberg and Gringauz stress their organic bond with the dead and the struggle to reconcile this with their own survival. While many survivors did succumb to irreconcilable despair and despondency following liberation, many of the leaders of the DP communities became committed to make the past serve the needs of the present. For some, the past became the very reason to go on living:

They used ... every brutality to wipe us out physically ... to still forever our hopes and aspirations, our heritage. Those of us who survive are bleeding still ... There are some among us who say it is too late for redemption. It is true, it is impossible to bring back the dead. But those of us who remain, those who are the last remnant of our people, must once more have hope ... for the revival of all those moral, ethical and cultural values which we hold so dear, and without which the world would plunge into barbarism ... We must struggle ... We must strive to rise again. We owe that to the memory of our dearly beloved dead ... who had the same yearnings. We owe it to them to spend our remaining days in creating ... a worthy life once again.167

Some survivors rose above their pain and sorrow by looking to the future as an answer to the past. They set about building a new life and a new world for themselves in response to the concerted attempt at destroying their past. While their bond with the dead was not diminished, it was transmuted into a positive and productive outcome, as a moral and spiritual duty to the dead. This explains why they were able
to set about rebuilding their lives but it does not fully explain how they went about vindicating their survival. How and why were they spared? How were they able to articulate and validate their own survival at a time when they struggled to express their own loss?

Yankl Wiernik’s *A Year in Treblinka* examines this issue further and clarifies the way in which he vindicates his survival. Wiernik concludes his report with a dramatic re-enactment of his escape from the death camp and his physical assault on the Ukrainian guard who chased him into the woods and fired upon him. The bullets whiz past but do not wound him. One bullet pierces his jacket but stops there. He realizes that the guard’s gun has jammed and he seizes the opportunity to kill the guard with an axe he fortuitously grabbed from the guardhouse during his escape. Wiernik tells us that the guard, unrepentant, curses him with ‘a vile oath’. In almost biblical terms, he overcomes all obstacles put in front of him, and by his own hand and in an act of self-empowerment he wins his freedom. His final act is one of heroic survival and revenge. Although Wiernik’s last act is self-determined, he tells us that it was all preordained by the dead he left behind in Treblinka: ‘The long processions, those ghastly caravans of death stood before our eyes and called for vengeance. We knew what this earth hid beneath its surface. We were the only witnesses of it. In silence we took leave of the ashes of our fellow Jews and vowed that out of their blood an avenger would arise’ (emphasis added). In a more profound sense, the emergence of a heroic conclusion to Wiernik’s testimony provides a redemptive means by which the victim does not survive just by chance or circumstance, but by a directed act: one that he executes with the imprimatur of the dead. They have empowered him and he survives with their consent. In fact, he acts on their behalf. Wiernik does not survive just for himself, but for the victims who cry out for an ‘avenger to arise’. When the arm of a corpse is seen protruding from a pyre of ashes and pointing menacingly to the heavens – ‘calling for retributive justice’, as Wiernik sees it – he implies that he is not acting alone.

Wiernik’s claim that ‘higher powers’ were directly implicated in his survival serves as a means of self-justification. He survives by his own hand, but he claims that greater forces were at work here; that his bond with the dead empowered him to act decisively. However, heroic endings also provided others with a model of survival and ultimate victory over their oppressors. At the time Wiernik wrote his report, the countries of Europe under Nazi occupation were still locked in a life-and-death struggle for their own survival. Wiernik was living proof
that resistance and revolt were legitimate, necessary and plausible means by which to achieve freedom. Nazi might was not invincible and freedom was there for those who were prepared to seize it. For the Polish underground in particular, who published and disseminated Wiernik’s report in 1944, this was a powerful message indeed.

In a similar way, Abraham Sutzkever also advocates self-empowerment and self-determination through acts of armed revolt and resistance, although he does not make the same direct connection with it being executed through the power of the dead. Sutzkever, however, extends the notion of resistance to include civil disobedience. Sutzkever sees the Nazis’ intention ‘to wipe from the face of the earth five centuries of Jewish culture in Vilna’ as a call to arms of a different kind. When Sutzkever tells us that the ‘people of the ghetto read books’, he makes the connection between spiritual defiance and civil acts of resistance.

As a protest against total spiritual and physical annihilation, the people of the ghetto linked their cultural activities with heroic resistance:

On October 1st 1941, 3,000 people were taken out of the Vilna Ghetto to be slaughtered. On 2nd October the library lent out 90 books. On 3rd and 4th October a massacre took place in the second ghetto. On 5th October the library lent out 421 books. By November 1941 the population of the ghetto had been reduced by 40% but the library’s circulation was up by a third. According to information from the library, literary classics and children’s books were in the greatest demand. By November 1942, when the ghetto had been in existence for hardly more than a year, the number of books circulated by the library reached 100,000. The library arranged an evening of celebration in honor of the occasion and awarded books as prizes for the first and last borrowers.

Sutzkever implies that cultural resistance imposed a moral and spiritual victory over Nazi oppression and the threat of total annihilation. It enabled the victims to internally transcend the physical limitations of their precarious existence. But it did not ensure survival. For this, armed revolt provided the only possible means of survival and victory over the Nazis. Sutzkever dedicates some twenty pages to the details of the Vilna Ghetto’s armed revolt. Here Sutzkever is a proponent of a sustained, deliberate armed struggle as the only answer to the threat of total and absolute destruction. What he had witnessed led him to the belief that acquiescence and attempts at accommodating Nazi demands
were futile. Even though they were unable to thwart the Nazis’ final destruction of the Vilna Ghetto, he does not see this destruction as failure on the part of the resistance movement. On the contrary, he devotes considerable space to describing their triumph over adversity. When Sutzkever states that at the end of the battle, ‘weapons in hand, they went into the Rudnitsky Woods as a standing partisan unit’, he extols those who resist. They stand heroically undefeated. Following this he names the ‘heroes’ who fell in battle, as fighters not as victims. Their courage in the face of overwhelming military might has earned them eternal glory. ‘Many brave, pure and fearless people lie in the forests surrounding Rudnitsky and Naroch’, he writes of the partisans who continued the fight in the forests. ‘May their names shine with eternal memory and glory.’

Sutzkever’s message is clear. One has to fight for survival and the right to choose the manner of one’s death. Sutzkever justifies his own survival through acts of heroic self-determination and armed revolt. But Sutzkever also unites his own survival with a higher cause, that of the Soviet victory over fascism. For Sutzkever the Soviets were also victims of fascism – ‘they were no better off than the Jews’ – and he leaves no doubt that the Jews were supported in their struggle against the Nazi invaders by Soviet citizens, partisan groups and the Red Army. Ultimately it is the resistance fighters turned partisans who help to liberate Vilna with a leading contingent of the Red Army. In 1944 the Soviets were allied with the west in the struggle against the Nazi invaders. Sutzkever’s singular interpretation of the Soviet position regarding the Jews in 1944 was understandable at the time, although it does not stand up under current historical scrutiny.

When Sutzkever wrote his memoir he was still a Soviet citizen under Soviet jurisdiction. His own experiences indicate that assistance from different Soviet groups was forthcoming, although it was not as widespread as he leads the reader to believe. As with Wiernik, Vrba and Wetzler, Sutzkever aligns his own survival with that of serving a higher cause. In all four cases, individual survival is perceived as part of a greater struggle. In order to fulfil the aims of that struggle they had to engage in active resistance in which their own survival was a key component. Wiernik, Vrba, Wetzler and Sutzkever were driven by specific missions that provided them with a powerful justification for their individual survival and also enabled them to reconcile and understand why they were destined to survive. In a similar way, Feigenbaum’s directive in *Fun Letstn Khorbn* to all survivors to contribute to the creation of a
historical legacy for future generations also gave purpose and meaning to the survivors. They survived so that others would know.

Marek Edelman’s fifty-three-page memoir of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, *The Ghetto Fights*, reiterates the previous authors’ justification for survival as serving a greater purpose. For Edelman, the members of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Warsaw Ghetto ‘were all fighters for the same just cause equal in the face of history and death’, and he was one of them. During the ghetto’s uprising, Edelman was one of five leaders of the commanding organization (the ZOB, the Jewish Combat Organization) and served as its deputy commander. He was the only commander to survive the April 1943 uprising. Together with other surviving fighters he fled the ruins of the ghetto by escaping through the sewers and remained in hiding on the Aryan side. Like Yankl Wiernik, he too fought alongside the Polish underground in the Polish uprising in Warsaw in August 1944. Following liberation, Edelman studied medicine in post-war Łódź, later specializing in cardiology. He lived in Warsaw until his death in 2009.

Edelman published his memoir in Warsaw in 1945. The English translation first appeared in New York in May 1946. It has been reissued in subsequent publications under variations of the title, the most recent by Bookmarks in 1990 and 1994. Edelman enjoyed something of a celebrity status in his native Poland. In part this is due to his interview with the Polish journalist Hanna Krall and her published account of it in *Shielding the Flame* in 1977, and his continued involvement in the Polish Solidarity movement of the 1970s and 1980s. By that time he had become a symbol of contemporary Polish resistance to its oppressive communist rulers. However, outside Poland, Edelman’s heroic status, resulting from his exploits in the Warsaw Ghetto, is not without controversy. His account of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is not part of mainstream Israeli discourse on the topic, although his contribution to the uprising is well documented by leading Israeli historian and fellow ghetto survivor Israel Gutman, and his loyalty and bravery were lauded by fellow ghetto fighter and commander Yitzhak Zuckerman. According to one interpretation, Edelman’s political affiliation with the secular, non-Zionist Bund tainted his credentials in the eyes of the Zionist establishment. In Israel, Edelman is not viewed with the same esteem as other ghetto fighters and partisans such as Abba Kovner, Abraham Sutzkever, Yitzhak Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin, who were clearly affiliated with the Zionist cause and who chose to make their home in Israel rather than stay in Poland or Lithuania.
Nevertheless, Edelman’s memoir distinguishes itself as the only account of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to be written and published in the immediate aftermath of the war by a commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization. It therefore provides a particular point of view regarding the underground operations of the uprising written at that time and can lay claim to presenting an authoritative view on the events, albeit a view tinged with a particular political bias: that of the secular Bund organization of which Edelman was a member. While Edelman’s account of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising reads like a battle hymn to the fighters, a close reading of The Ghetto Fights reveals Edelman’s two main concerns regarding the Jewish revolt: firstly, his role as a political advocate for the Bund and its involvement in the uprising; secondly, the response of the Jewish victims to Nazi persecution, deportation and mass murder.

Unlike the earlier survivor accounts that sought to name the perpetrators, Edelman rarely names or describes individual perpetrators; rather, they take on the form of a collective persona. Individual victims, however, are named and judged by their actions and deeds, both good and bad. This represents something of a conceptual turning point, one that moves away from descriptions of mass murders and naming those who perpetrated them, to one which solely describes acts of courage, defiance and resistance by the victim. Edelman’s memoir represents a growing interest in publicly acknowledging the identity of those who sacrificed their lives or survived through heroic acts of resistance. He does, however, both name and shame those who collaborated with or who displayed weakness in confronting the enemy. But again, like Wiernik, Vrba, Wetzler and Sutzkever, Edelman reveals little about his personal life and background. We learn of his areas of responsibility in the underground and his involvement with the Bund – those matters which were crucial to the cause he supported. For Edelman, individual strength was derived from commitment to the ideals of the collective.

Edelman recounts the courageous and selfless struggle of a small band of fighters, who were outnumbered and poorly equipped, against a highly disciplined military machine. His memoir is composed of a series of heroic vignettes, epic stories of individuals pitted against insurmountable odds. His final two pages are dedicated to the bravery of five resistance fighters with whom he had daily contact. But Edelman is also highly critical of many of his fellow ghetto inhabitants. He condemns the Jewish Council’s passivity and complicity, and the lack of resistance to Nazi oppression by the Jewish population throughout
the ghetto’s existence; he condemns without reservation Jewish collaborators. Edelman blames Warsaw Jewry for being ill-prepared. He asserts that disunity and factionalism contributed to Nazi domination and the ease with which the Nazis could enforce their will over the population. He maintains that the ghetto inhabitants, unlike the members of the political underground, did not see the full implications of the deportations and that ‘they did not believe’.

Edelman demonstrates that by 1945 some Jewish survivors had begun to examine survival by conceptualizing and codifying different modes of victim and survivor behaviour. Like Sutzkever, Edelman was not a camp survivor but a member of a ghetto’s underground resistance movement. And, like Sutzkever, Edelman marks a move towards acknowledgement and recognition by survivors of their own actions and the actions of others from within their own community. Edelman is able to understand the reasons why many could not and did not undertake acts of resistance. To some degree he is able to mitigate victim passivity. He concludes that dehumanization, starvation and Nazi prevarication provided a psychological barrier and a culture of fear that inhibited feelings of self-worth. By extension, he maintains that in the light of the extreme conditions in which the victims were placed and the threat of collective punishment, resistance was rare, late in getting started and difficult to execute.

Nevertheless, Edelman is unable to condone victim timidity and complacency. He expresses disdain for those Jews who went passively to their death in the gas chambers: ‘we were ashamed of the Chelmno Jews’ submissiveness, of their failure to rise in their own defence’. From this position, Edelman not only elevates the resistance fighters to the status of heroes, but he also blames the victims for their demise and the manner of their death. Indeed, Edelman describes the fighters of the April uprising as being ‘invincible’ and displaying ‘superhuman efforts’. So while we see recognition and understanding of survival here, it is survival that is uncompromisingly heroic and confrontational; it is survival that is imbued with a sense of duty and to serving a higher cause. In the case of Marek Edelman it served the purpose of a collective armed struggle against annihilation. In an extension of this belief, Edelman contends that a meaningless death was a dereliction of duty and responsibility. Only an honourable death had meaning, and that was a death engaged in the active struggle for survival, one that was driven by a set of ideals. When a group of resistance fighters was heard to sing the ‘Internationale’ in the ghetto on 1 May 1943, Edelman
proudly claims that ‘even in the face of death they were not abandoning their ideals’. For Edelman, ideals and duty were pivotal in both serving a purposeful life and attaining a meaningful death. At the close of his memoir he links the two: ‘Those who were killed in action had done their duty to the end, to the last drop of blood that soaked into the pavements of the Warsaw Ghetto.’

INDIVIDUAL SURVIVAL AND THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Throughout the period 1944 to 1946 there is a marked similarity in the Jewish survivors’ response to the complex and changing dynamics of the hostile world they inhabited, the audiences they sought to address and the public record they felt compelled to establish through the written word. Throughout this tumultuous period the priorities and actions of survivors and non-survivors were often contested as they negotiated new pathways in what were vastly different worlds. Cooperation between the two was often out of necessity and expediency rather than mutual support or shared goals. It was this strained and tenuous relationship between the two groups that galvanized many surviving witnesses to testify publicly in writing, an act which many survivors understood had to be driven and directed from within their own communities. As a consequence, eyewitness reports were written, thousands of testimonies were collected, memoirs were published and a burgeoning survivor press emerged as representatives of this ‘surviving remnant’.

Throughout this period, what comes through most clearly is a distinct survivor ‘voice’, one that strove to make sense of their own survival amidst the horrific events they were still trying to fully understand. Survivors felt compelled to communicate their experiences to the outside world, a world that they perceived as remaining indifferent to their plight. It was also a ‘voice’ that engaged in political discourse. And it was a ‘voice’ that was beginning to conceptualize the personal tragedies by confronting the communal legacy of the Final Solution. Through their own vibrant press the survivors urged the Allies to establish once and for all a Jewish homeland, and they actively sought justice for the crime committed against them.

Survivors came to a comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of this crime, and of how it could have happened, by a process of deconstruction – by breaking the crime down into its key components. This included a more nuanced and critical understanding of the perpetrator, which involved distinguishing between collaborators,
criminals and murderers. For some, like Sutzkever, this understanding encompassed the full implications and totality of the Final Solution.

When the war was almost over, and soon after hostilities finally ended, it was the figure of six million dead that imposed itself on the lives of the survivors. It was survival that then had to be vindicated and this also meant deconstructing it in a way that could be understood. In response to this, the heroic exploits of camp escapees such as Yankl Wiernik and resistance fighters such as Marek Edelman and Abraham Sutzkever were put up for the public’s edification. They were able to provide a representation of ‘survival’ that was self-sacrificing and therefore heroic. In this way they were able to prove that they were worthy of survival, as a means of speaking on behalf of those who could not and as a means of honouring the dead. However, Edelman also demonstrates that by 1945 the internal examination of survival by some survivors had ventured into new territory. By analysing victim responses in a way that elevated the status of the fighter and maligned those who collaborated and shamed those who went passively to their death, Edelman passed clear judgment on a particular kind of survival and a particular type of survivor.

In order to survive, they had to resist. For resistance to succeed, individuals had to be self-reliant, self-determining and confrontational in the manner of Wiernik, Vrba, Wetzler, Sutzkever and Edelman. But as survivors such as Sutzkever and the collected writings in *Fun Letstn Khurbn* demonstrate, resistance took two different forms. While it was armed revolt that provided a model for victory over the Nazis, it was civil resistance that provided succour for the spirit and the soul. Both forms were extolled as virtuous and appropriate, but it was armed confrontation that proved to be venerated above all others. It provided the way forward through an aggressive, active model of survival.

In the case of all the writings examined here, survival was also shown to serve a greater cause, one in which the individual’s survival was crucial for Jewish continuity. This gave meaning to survivors’ lives, but it also placed their individual survival within a larger framework. They could justify survival and come to terms with it in a way that linked their lives with a greater good. And although there were those at the time who cautioned against the development of a ‘cult of heroism’ that was developing not just around the resistance fighters but enveloping the six million victims, the notion of an assertive model of survival was emerging. It was a model of survival that suited a hostile, uncertain post-Holocaust world. Ultimately, their individual
survival and their collective tragedy were expressed in a broader shared narrative. It was one that linked fundamental issues concerning life and death with the victim and survivor’s place not only within the Final Solution, but also in the world that immediately came after.

NOTES


16. The names of interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity. Interviews were all conducted by the author in March 2004 in Melbourne as part of an MA thesis entitled ‘From Displaced Person to New Australian’. This interview was conducted with ‘Sarah’ on 21 March 2004.
23. A. Schein, “‘Everyone Can Hold a Pen’: The Documentation Project in the DP Camps in Germany”, in Bankier and Michman (eds), Holocaust Historiography in Context, p.127.
27. Pinson’s claim is inaccurate. It did not take into account the first publication in Buchenwald on 4 May 1945. But his understanding of the entrepreneurial spirit is correct.
30. There are extensive references to this period. For an overview, see the following: Bardgett, Cesarani, Remisch and Steinert (eds), Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Europe; W.J. Hitchcock, Liberation: The Bitter Road to Freedom, Europe 1944–1945 (London: Faber, 2009); T. Judt, Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945 (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); K. Lowe, Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War Two (London: St Martin’s Press, 2012); Wyman (ed.), World Reacts to the Holocaust.
34. ‘Anna’; interview with the author, 24 March 2004.
36. Bloxham, Genocide on Trial, pp.57–89.
37. Ibid., p.103; Douglas, Memory of Judgment, p.78. Bloxham states that she was a non-Jewish Russian national. However, David Cesarani claims that she was a Jew who concealed her Jewish identity. See D. Cesarani and E.J. Sundquist (eds), After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.21–2.
38. Douglas, Memory of Judgment, p.78.
39. Bloxham, Genocide on Trial, pp.80–7; Douglas, Memory of Judgment, p.78; M. Marrus, ‘The
Holocaust at Nuremberg’, Yad Vashem Studies, 26 (1998), pp.5–41. Marrus mitigates the lack of Jewish witnesses by concluding that the IMT nevertheless established crucial facts about the Holocaust and issued the first non-Jewish public proclamation of the figure ‘six million’, giving it authority and legitimacy.

40. Shalitan, ‘We Accuse’.


45. For a discussion on the rise of the USSR as a new communist superpower, see Judt, Postwar, pp.129–96.


49. Wyman, DP, pp.6.1–85.

50. ‘David’, interview with the author, 26 March 2004. See also Wasserstein, Vanishing Diaspora, pp.1–35. For an excellent overview of the situation that the British encountered at Bergen Belsen, see Steinert, ‘Jewish Survivors, Displaced Persons and Germans’.


54. Marrus, Unwanted, p.332.


57. Ibid., pp.135–6.


59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p.139.

61. Ibid., p.140.

62. Ibid., p.141.

63. Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope, p.20.


65. Ibid., p.135.


71. Wyman, DP, p.143.


74. Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope, p.254.
76. G. Orwell, Anti-Semitism in Britain, Contemporary Jewish Record, 8, 2 (1945), p.163.
80. US Major Irving Heymont, personal letter, 19 September 1945, Landsberg, Germany. See Heymont, Among the Survivors, p.5.
82. Cited in Marrus, Unwanted, p.333.
84. Pinson, ‘Jewish Life in Liberated Germany’.
86. This is a consistent view presented by Ze’ev Mankowitz. See Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope.
87. Author’s own translation.
88. Heymont, Among the Survivors, pp.11–12.
89. Reilly, Belsen, p.84.
92. As cited in ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Vrba, I Escaped from Auschwitz; Wiernik, A Yor in Treblinka.
98. Treblinka was one of the Operation Reinhard death camps and Auschwitz was the largest concentration camp in occupied Europe. There are many reliable histories about these camps. See, for example, Y. Arad, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); R.J. van Pelt, The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); L. Rees, Auschwitz: The Nazis and the ‘Final Solution’ (London: BBC Worldwide, 2005).
99. Wiernik, A Yor in Treblinka. The exact date is given in the preface to the Yiddish edition. This date is corroborated by Arad in Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, p.364.
100. Original letter kept at the Ghetto Fighters House in Israel.
101. Arad, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, p.364. The Polish underground had received reports as early as July 1942 from a member of the Armia Krajowa who was employed at the Treblinka train station, although they failed to act upon these reports. See ibid., p.352; I. Gutman, The Jews of Warsaw 1939–1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt, trans. I. Friedman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), p.253.
102. Arad, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, p.364. This claim is also made by the publisher of the Yiddish edition of Wiernik’s account.

104. Beevor and Vinogradova (eds), *Writer at War*, p.381.

105. See www.nizkor.org.


108. Ibid., p.15.


112. Ibid.


117. Ibid., p.338.


119. Ibid., p.18.


122. Ibid., p.31.

123. Ibid., p.12.

124. Ibid., p.8.


126. See Herman Kruk’s diary entry for 6 May 1942, in which he records that Sutzkever read his poem ‘Child of the Tomb’ to a public audience in the ghetto; and Kruk’s diary entry for 2 July 1942, in which he records Sutzkever’s Literary Award for poetry: H. Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, trans. and ed. B. Harshav (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.280, 316.


130. Ibid. Benjamin Harshav speculates that it was Sutzkever (who had hidden several pages of the diary concerning the Wittenberg affair from the Soviet authorities) who sent 380 pages of Kruk’s diary to YIVO in 1948. See introduction to Kruk’s diary, pp.xlviii–lix.

137. Professor David Patterson, personal correspondence with the author, 2 March 2007.
139. Patterson believes that Sutzkever wrote this version for Grossman and Ehrenburg first, then expanded upon this original version for further independent publication. Personal correspondence between Patterson and the author, 22 March 2007. Closer examination of the Paris edition (1946) corroborates this view.
140. Patterson (ed.), Black Book of Russian Jewry, pp.241–61. In a postscript to Sutzkever’s text, Patterson confirms that Khingst was Gebietskommissar of Vilna; Schweinberger was in charge of the shootings at Ponary until 1942, when he was recalled to Berlin; Wess was chief of all prisons in Vilna and, beginning in 1942, was in charge of the Sonderkommando unit at Ponary and was known as the ‘Master of Ponary’. In 1943 he worked in the Jewish Section of the Gestapo. See ibid., pp.369–70.
141. Marras, Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, pp.197–201.
143. Ibid.
144. Ibid., p.252.
145. Ibid., p.258.
146. Ibid., p.246. Conservative estimates put the number murdered at Ponary at 70,000.
147. Ibid., pp.246–8. Herman Kruk interviewed six eyewitnesses to these murders at Ponary. See his diary entry for 4 September 1941. However, Jews were not the only ones to witness these mass executions. See also the account of Lithuanian Gentile Kazimierz Sakowicz. Y. Arad (ed.), Ponary Diary 1941–1943 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
153. All English translations from Yiddish are by the author.
155. The first Historical Commission was established, however, in the DP Camp Belsen on 10 October 1945. See Jockusch, ‘Folk Monument’, p.32.
156. Document held at Yad Vashem, YV 02/888.
157. Historical questionnaires are held at Yad Vashem in the MIQ file.
159. Porat, ‘The Vilna Proclamation’.
164. The first Historical Commission was established, however, in the DP Camp Belsen on 10 October 1945. See Jockusch, ‘Folk Monument’, p.32.
165. Ibid., p.33; Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope, pp.214–21.
166. Ofer, Community and the Individual, p.521.
167. Ibid., p.522.
168. All English translations from Yiddish are by the author.
164. Both are cited in Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope, p.249.
165. Cited in ibid., p.192.
166. S. Gringauz, “‘Zakhor’: Rede, Gehalt Yom Kippur, Dem 17 September in Beyt Tfila Fun Lager Landsberg” ['Remember': Speech Given on Yom Kippur on 17 September in the Synagogue in the Landsberg Camp], Landsberger Lager Tsaytung, 8 October 1945.
168. Wernik, A Year in Treblinka, p.46.
169. Ibid., pp.44–5.
171. Ibid.
172. Ibid.
173. Ibid., p.287.
174. Ibid., p.290.
175. Ibid., p.281.
178. Ibid., p.85.
180. Yitzhak Zuckerman was a commander of the ghetto underground, stationed outside the ghetto throughout the April 1943 uprising, and acted as their contact. See Gutman, Jews of Warsaw, p.359.
182. See the introduction to Edelman, Ghetto Fights.
185. Zuckerman, Surplus of Memory, pp.298–9. Zuckerman makes generous reference to his contemporary, with at least twenty-eight references to his involvement in the uprising and his bravery and loyalty as a fighter and commander. Gutman, Jews of Warsaw. Gutman makes at least eleven references to Edelman’s memoir and corroborates his status as a fearless commander of the Jewish underground.
188. Edelman identifies one of the Schutzpolizei by his nickname, ‘Frankenstein’ (Ghetto Fights, p.49), and names the German Commissar of the ghetto, Dr Auerswald (ibid., p.48).
189. Ibid., p.50.
190. Ibid., p.44.
191. Ibid., p.43.
192. Ibid., pp.76–7.
193. Ibid., p.89.
194. Ibid., p.87.
By the end of the twentieth century, Holocaust survivors had consolidated a social position as authoritative witnesses to the truth. The ‘Holocaust survivor’ as a cultural figure now inhabits a central place within the public consciousness. But this was not always the case. In the early post-war years, survivors had to claim an identity for themselves and to validate their own existence in the shadow of the six million. While there was public interest in the horrors and outcomes of the Second World War in this period, little was understood about the plight of the survivors, and a conceptualization of what the Holocaust meant was still being developed. Public affirmation of survivor testimony is dramatically different now to how it was then and this is because of a number of important developments.

The past three decades have seen an unparalleled interest in the issues of ‘memory’ as a focus of historical, psychological, social and cultural investigations. Memory studies which examine the links and disjunction between history and memory, documentation and testimony have flourished. At the same time, recent studies have focussed on the interplay between ‘trauma’ and ‘memory’ and the changing status of victimhood. ‘Trauma’, a term once confined to clinical psychiatry, now inhabits contemporary social and political discourse as an important indicator and arbitrator of moral truths and social justice. The recent growing practice of individuals reclaiming past experiences of pain and suffering through the testimonial and commemorative act of ‘public performance’ reflects a growing interest in and expression of a contemporary culture that now values and seeks to engage with victims. All of this indicates that ‘memory’, ‘testimony’ and ‘victimhood’ have become important elements of contemporary culture and historical inquiry.

At the very centre of this development sits the Holocaust. In this memory culture, ‘narratives of suffering and of survival, epitomized by
first-hand Holocaust testimony, take prime position and value’. The broad-based contemporary interest in ‘trauma’ narratives and ‘memory’ works and the centrality of Holocaust survivor testimony have helped to foster large-scale projects aimed at the preservation of Holocaust memory. Major programmes initiated by institutions around the globe have recorded tens of thousands of Holocaust testimonies and published hundreds of survivor memoirs. Arguably the best known of these programmes, the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education (formerly the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation) established by Hollywood film-maker Steven Spielberg in 1994, has alone recorded some 52,000 testimonies.

By the early-to-mid 1990s, however, some historians began to interpret this growing contemporary interest in and preoccupation with the Holocaust and its various representations in ways that contributed to and perpetuated a popular misconception: that Holocaust survivors have only recently undertaken to speak and write candidly of their experiences and that few, if any, did so in the immediate aftermath of the war; that throughout the 1940s they silently went about reconstructing their lives and re-establishing their shattered communities, in cities and countries as far away from the ravages of Europe as possible; and that this ‘surviving remnant’ quietly went about the very private business of living, too traumatized to speak openly of events once deemed to be ‘unbelievable’.

It is true that in the immediate post-war period of the mid-to-late 1940s there were many survivors who were unable or unwilling to engage with an audience that did not share or understand the brutality of their past. Many survivors also lacked the predisposition to attempt coherently an articulation of their experiences through the idiom of spoken or written language. However, one of the greatest obstacles confronting survivors at the time was what they perceived as a disinterested and distracted public not yet willing or able to fully engage with them, banishing them to what Elie Wiesel called ‘another type of exile’, where survivors were ‘kept apart from the rest of society by invisible barbed wire’. Primo Levi summed up what he perceived was the public’s attitude at the time, in an interview he gave some years later:

At the time, people had other things to get on with: building houses, looking for jobs. There was still rationing, cities were in ruins, the Allies were still occupying Italy. People didn’t want to
hear [about the camps], they wanted other things, to dance, to party, to bring children into the world. A book like mine and many others that came after were almost like a discourtesy, like spoiling a party.¹⁰

A consensus among a number of historians is that this survivor perception was indeed a reality; that a pervasive lack of non-survivor audiences in the immediate post-war period was a major disincentive, inhibiting survivors from speaking openly and publicly of their experiences.¹¹ Some historians take this argument further by claiming that many survivors were actively discouraged from discussing their experiences with non-survivors. Zoe Waxman cites the example of Auschwitz survivor Kitty Hart’s experiences on arriving in Britain. As soon as she disembarked at Dover, Hart was told by her uncle (a non-survivor), that ‘on no account are you to talk about the things that happened to you. Not in my house, I don’t want my girls upset. And I don’t want to know.’¹²

Survivors experienced similar responses in Israel and in the United States. In writing about survivors of the Holocaust in Israel, Hanna Yablonka documents the experiences of Ruth Bondy, who survived Theresienstadt and Auschwitz before arriving in Israel:

But we had to talk and talk until we spilled it out. But no one wanted to listen. The only stories that found a listening ear were about dolls’ houses, who was able to listen to the other horrors? The listeners lowered their eyes as if something too intimate was being confided in them, too private, something one doesn’t mention in public. We learned quickly: be an Israeli when you go out and a camp inmate in your home. No, not in your own home either – why impose on your nearest and dearest? – so just keep it buried away in your heart.¹³

Beth Cohen also gives many examples of disengaged encounters between newly arrived survivors and their non-survivor hosts in the USA: ‘We started to tell, nobody wanted to listen. And if somebody listened, they thought that we told them stories, that it is not true. From the first minute I spoke … When I came to America, when I told the people, they thought I’m crazy … they didn’t want to listen.’¹⁴ Cohen also examines the reasons for this lack of non-survivor audiences in the USA. She cites one example of a former social worker who remarked: ‘we had no sense of the Holocaust as we know now, with a capital H. We really didn’t understand what people were telling us.’¹⁵
Nevertheless, many survivors did speak of their experiences, but within their own reconstructed communities. As one Auschwitz survivor explained, ‘We spoke to each other, Katzelters [former camp inmates] always make friends, they have a common understanding, they just know.’ They established their own social networks and support structures where they were able to retain links with others who shared similar experiences, those who understood and accepted without qualification what they had endured. These networks, termed landsmanschaftn (a Yiddish word meaning the organization of people from the same geographic region), established fraternal links with a common cultural bond. They were, in essence, self-help and mutual aid societies harking back to a cultural tradition that had developed in many pre-war European Jewish communities. Most importantly, they gave voice to survivors within a secure, protective framework. In Melbourne, Australia, which saw the Jewish community double in size between 1947 and 1961 as a result of post-war immigration, these grass roots organizations flourished. By 1953 over a dozen landsmanschaftn were established and active in Melbourne. The story was similar in other countries.

It can also be argued that by the late 1940s the public had to a large degree been overexposed, overwhelmed and therefore desensitized, to some extent, to the unprecedented horrors of the war through the media; newsreels, newspaper articles, graphic images and reports from the numerous war crimes trials conducted across liberated Europe were continually thrust before the public eye. This point of view is corroborated in a review of the book *Odyssey Through Hell* which appeared in *The New York Times* on 8 September 1946: ‘Unfortunately, the world has been vaccinated against horror, at least on the printed page. It has swallowed horror in small doses and large over so many years that it has developed an immunity to it and an aversion to being reminded of it.’ The author of the review, Daniel Schwarz, also warned that in developing this ‘immunity, we risk the danger of becoming like the perpetrators, who too “became accustomed to it”’. Annette Wieviorka attributes the Eichmann trial in 1961 as being the first major engagement between survivor and non-survivor audiences: ‘for the first time since the end of the war, the witnesses had the feeling that they were being heard’. Henry Greenspan also believes that many survivors did want to speak in those early years, but agrees that few wanted to listen. This idea is validated by the groundbreaking work in 1946 by the non-survivor American psychologist David Boder
who toured the DP camps and visited the Jewish Community Centres throughout France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany, interviewing over 100 survivors and, for the first time, tape-recording their stories.24 While Boder’s landmark collection of oral testimonies received a poor public response when published in book form in the USA in 1949 under the title *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, he also noted at the time that he had no lack of willing participants ready to tell him of their experiences.25 While Boder’s work in collecting oral histories may have been ahead of its time, the notion that many survivors did seek an audience with non-survivors is also confirmed by others such as Katie Louchheim, who, writing in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1985, recalled her time as an American relief worker in the Feldafing DP camp. She ‘was faced with such an urgent carousal of unbelievable stories’ that she concluded: ‘I wish I were a typewriter’.26

The issue of public audience engagement with Jewish survivors’ testimony throughout this period is therefore a complex and vexed one. Whether it was disengagement, distraction, a lack of understanding or simply a shutting-off as a result of an overexposure to the graphic horrors of an unprecedented genocide (what others, including David Cesarani, have termed ‘compassion fatigue’),27 the fact remains that many Holocaust survivors did not encounter broad-based receptive public audiences in the 1940s.28 But that does not mean that there was no audience at all, or that their experiences were not recognized or validated in other ways.29 Understandably, the nature and scope of the audience was vastly different from what it is today. But in the complex political and social climate of the early post-war years, many Jewish survivors were nevertheless precluded from sharing their experiences within the public domain. Their time was to come some decades later. However, that was not the case for everyone.

The myth of ‘collective silence’ fails to recognize or acknowledge the prodigious efforts by a significant number of Jewish survivors who wrote and published their memoirs in those first years after the war. As this chapter will reveal, those who wrote memoirs at this time came from a select group that was recognized as having a particular moral authority which entitled them to speak when many could not. The extent to which these memoirs did or did not engage non-survivor audiences is one issue, but, more significantly, these memoirs were important to the survivors themselves. They influenced the way in which Jewish survivor communities of this early post-war period understood the Holocaust and what it meant to be a ‘survivor’.
A TIME FOR REGENERATION AND REFLECTION

The years from 1947 to 1949 are particularly noteworthy for a number of reasons. They marked a distinct period of transition for those who lived through the Nazi onslaught towards a new life. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 gave many survivors hope for regeneration and reconstruction. It also gave survivors a sense of empowerment, self-determination and security; a sense that they could once more assume responsibility for their lives and their future. As one survivor recalled at the time:

We were all standing in the middle of the camp and singing *Hatikvah*. It was wonderful ... We were proud, and we felt that we had something to hang on to. We are people like every other people. All of those years we had felt we were nothing. All those names we were called, even before the war, feeling like second-class citizens in Poland and in Lithuania. We never felt that we belonged there. So [the creation of the State of Israel] gave us a big boost, that’s for sure.30

A large number of survivors were in the process of leaving Europe, immigrating to new countries and commencing new lives.31 From the middle of 1946 the rate of marriages amongst DPs was already dramatically higher than in the local populations. According to one report it was ‘27.4 per 1,000 while the parallel rate in the Bavarian population was 2.8 per 1,000’.32 Ze’ev Mankowitz interprets the high marriage rate as being indicative of a desire ‘to invest once more in the future’.33 But it was also a desire to reconnect with familial and community values of the past, a way of re-establishing kinship and escaping the pain of loneliness and isolation. Entering into the ritualistic bonds of matrimony was a direct counteroffensive to the Nazis’ desire to obliterate Jewish life and tradition. Even when belief in God was shaken, a sense of Jewish identity was not.34

Following this demographic trend, the birth rate was also dramatically higher than in those of the corresponding local populations. This carried great significance. ‘Pregnancy and maternity’ were, in the words of Atina Grossman, ‘emblems of survival, signs that they were more than just “victims”’.35 By the end of 1946 nearly 1,000 babies were born each month to Jewish DPs.36 Grossman points out that not only was the Jewish birth rate extremely high in comparison to the German population, but also that the infant mortality rate of ‘this battered and displaced refugee population’ was ‘phenomenally low’.37 There were
also very few illegitimate births amongst the Jewish DPs. Grossman states that in 1947 the records announce the Jewish birth rate peaking at 50.2 per 1,000 compared with 7.6 per 1,000 for Germans. What is most important here is the ‘trend and the drastic contrast’. It demonstrates a determination to survive and regenerate and the pressing need to re-establish secure communities. It was also an adaptive and fitting form of retribution, one that looked to the future rather than the past. This was the counterpart to the ‘passionate, political Zionism that gripped virtually all survivors’.

In spite of being locked in a ‘unique transitory society’, survivors now began to contemplate their future in light of their past. There was also some time for reflection. And it was during this period when they tried to establish a sense of ‘community’, ‘home’ and ‘family’ that some survivors placed on public record a reconstruction of their past that would have lasting consequences on the shaping of survivor identity. In doing so, they consciously made the transition from private victim to public survivor.

**MEMOIRS OF THIS PERIOD**

This chapter makes an in-depth investigation of six Jewish survivor memoirs of this period, looking particularly at what they came to represent. They were selected because they are emblematic of a survivor perception of the Holocaust that presented a particular and revered figure of the ‘survivor’, one who could and did speak out whilst focussing on some particular experiences as the ones of greatest significance. These memoirs promote behaviour patterns of an exemplary nature that were first defined by these survivors themselves, at a time when their re-emerging communities desperately sought social cohesion, security and direction from within. These memoirs endorse a coherent, universal moral vision, one that must remain incorruptible, resolute and defiant in the face of total human devastation. Such a vision underpinned a model of behaviour from the past which would suit the needs of the future; one from which survivors could move forward with surety, purpose and self-respect. And it was a model of behaviour that provided them with an identity which affirmed humanity while negating timidity, passivity and the loss of dignity. It moved them from the status of powerless private victim to empowered public survivor. Through these memoirs, the defining characteristics which contributed to the early creation of such a core survivor identity, the modes of
behaviour which underscored it and its public representation are identified.

With few exceptions, the Jewish survivors’ conceptualization of the Holocaust that emerged at this time was clearly defined by their direct and immediate confrontation with the horrors of the Final Solution. Saul Friedlander sees this limited conceptualization as an attempt at this time to impart meaning through a larger framework of ‘catastrophe and redemption’, a redemptive yet oppositional model linking the Holocaust and the death of six million to the birth of the State of Israel. In turn, he sees the specificity of this framework linked to an ‘isomorphic, historically specific representation, that of “catastrophe and heroism”’. He acknowledges that, for a number of reasons, these structures dissipated some two decades after the Holocaust, but that they did offer effective ‘frameworks for meaning’ at the time. These frameworks also reflected an uncomplicated level of understanding of the Holocaust prevalent in the wider non-survivor world, and the level of acceptance and tolerance of certain modes of behaviour within survivor communities.

It is in these memoirs that we see the emergence of two iconic Holocaust symbols, Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, as the main ones that represent the opposing forces of institutionalized mass murder on the one hand and self-sacrificing heroic resistance to it on the other. These symbols quickly became institutionalized and ritualized, and by 1947 were already being commemorated by both Jewish and non-Jewish communities that had suffered under the hands of Nazism.

The six memoirs under examination are not the only ones to be published in this period, nor were they only written by Jewish survivors. They form part of a much larger corpus of published survivor literature from this period that can be found in major public libraries, institutions and museums around the world. It is worth noting that currently there is no comprehensive and complete list of all Jewish survivor memoirs published throughout the mid-to-late 1940s. A sampling of institutions with searchable catalogues and databases such as the Library of Congress, YIVO and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the United States, Yad Vashem and the Ghetto Fighters Museum in Israel, the Wiener Library in the United Kingdom, and the Melbourne Holocaust Museum and Monash and Melbourne Universities in Australia all produce interesting and compelling sets of collections. A search through these catalogues
reveals a substantial number of memoirs published in this period in disparate locations around the globe, ranging from Wroclaw and Koblenz to larger cities such as London, Paris, Warsaw, Łódź, Munich, Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna, Rome, Turin, Moscow, New York, Budapest, Montreal, Buenos Aires, Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv, Luxemburg and Melbourne. Notably, Warsaw, Paris, New York and Buenos Aires emerge as major publishing centres. The languages include Yiddish, English, Polish, Hungarian, French, German, Italian and Hebrew.

Attempting to quantify the total number of Jewish survivor publications from this period is a challenging task, made all the more difficult for a number of reasons, not the least of which are their global dispersion and linguistic diversity. This situation is further complicated by the differences and discrepancies in library acquisition and cataloguing policies by institutions that hold these works. Understandably, libraries and historical and memorial institutions therefore have selective and eclectic selections from this period. In addition, it is often difficult to distinguish between ‘survivor’ memoirs and those written or compiled by ‘non-survivors’ who collected survivor narratives at the time. This brings to light the more complex and perhaps contentious issue of just what defines a ‘Jewish survivor’ memoir from this period. When entering search terms such as ‘Jewish’, ‘survivor’, ‘Holocaust’ and ‘memoir’ into catalogues and databases, what emerges is an interesting blurring of identities. A book entitled Ash un fayer: Iber di Churbos fun Polin (Ash and Fire: Across the Destruction of Poland), written by a Jewish non-survivor, the Polish-born American Bund leader Jacob Pat, and published in Yiddish in New York by CYCO Bicher Ferlag in 1946, is a result of his travels to Poland and his involvement in talking to survivors, collecting their stories and gathering historical information. It was reissued in English, as Ash and Fire, in 1947. Another example is the interesting collection of Jewish and non-Jewish survivor narratives collated into one anthology by German-born Jew Eric H. Boehm, who served in the American army during the war and was later stationed in Berlin. While his collection We Survived: The Stories of Fourteen of the Hidden and Hunted of Nazi Germany includes the testimony of Rabbi Leo Baeck and Jewish socialist Jeanette Wolff, it also includes the narratives of a number of non-Jews who heroically opposed Nazism. And how do we classify those memoirs written by Jews who escaped Nazism shortly before the onslaught of the Final Solution but who still experienced a short period
of incarceration in a concentration camp – for example, Leon Szalet’s
Experiment ‘E’: A Report from an Extermination Laboratory?\(^49\)

In spite of this challenge, an indication of the number of memoirs
published in different countries is nevertheless revealed in a number of
works. The article ‘Some Books on the Jewish Catastrophe’, written in
English by Philip Friedman and Koppel Pinson and published in January
1950, provides an overview of nearly thirty significant memoirs, journal
articles and reports to appear throughout the 1940s.\(^50\) It lists an eclectic
selection of works from the period and should be read in conjunction
with two other essays that Friedman wrote in Yiddish in 1948 and
1950.\(^51\) In his 1948 essay, Friedman speaks of ‘hundreds’ of written
works, and by 1950 this has become ‘thousands’.\(^52\) All works listed by
Friedman and Pinson in ‘Some Books on the Jewish Catastrophe’ are by
Jewish authors, with the exception of Eugen Kogon’s
*Der SS-Staat: Das
System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (1946). Ewa Kozminska-
Frejlak records that in the years 1945–47, thirty-five books were
published in Poland (of which twenty-nine were under the auspices of
Jewish institutions).\(^53\) In a book edited by Geoffrey H. Hartmann,
*Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, Annette Wieviorka
cites the number of French survivor memoirs published in Paris, from
the time of liberation to the end of 1948, as ‘about a hundred’ but gives
a fuller and more extensive bibliography in her landmark French
publication *Déportation et génocide: Entre la mémoire et l’oubli*
(Deportation and Genocide: Between Memory and Oblivion).\(^54\) Robert
Gordon states that ‘at least fifty-five accounts of deportation’ were
published between 1945 and 1947 in Italy, and this number includes a
few that were fictionalized, nineteen written by political deportees and
eleven by military internees. Of these, six were written by Jews.\(^55\)
In *The Jews Are Coming Back*, Manuela Consonni lists the number of
personal narratives published in Italy about the concentration camps
as eleven in 1945, fourteen in 1946 and three in 1947.\(^56\) For a
comprehensive list of all the Yiddish books published in Buenos Aires
between 1946 and 1966 under Mark Turkow’s *Dos Poylishe yidntum*
(Polish Jewry) series, one should consult Jan Schwarz’s excellent
article in *Polin*, Vol. 20.\(^57\) In it he lists the 175 books published in that
total period, seventy of which were published in a four-year period
from 1946 to 1950. A large number of these fall within the survivor
narrative genre.\(^58\) In Palestine, Am Oved – the major publishing house
of the Histadrut – commenced a series in 1942 entitled *Min Hamoked*
(From the Fire). Up until 1949 it alone published eighteen books in the
series, as well as a number of pamphlets and anthologies. While many were written in Hebrew by non-survivor writers who interviewed survivors, many were written by survivors themselves. The aim of the series was to document and record the lives of Nazi victims in the camps and ghettos, Jewish heroism and suffering and the struggle to survive. A comprehensive list of early and recent personal narratives by Hungarian survivors is published in a bibliography compiled and edited by Randolph Braham and Julia Bock. From these studies estimates concerning the overall number of survivor memoirs published in this period would be in the vicinity of a few hundred.

It is important to note that Yiddish appears to be the language of choice for many Jewish survivors, even if they were conversant in other languages. This reveals a conscious desire to express the unprecedented scale of the catastrophe that devastated East European Jewry. Yiddish was their language and it was the Jews of the east who not just spoke it but lived it. Bearing witness in Yiddish was therefore a contemporary, cultural act of resistance and rebellion against the forces that sought to obliterate it and the life it represented. It maintained an important link with the lost communities and cultural activities of the past. For those able to write in Yiddish it particularized the importance of the Jewish experience of the Nazi genocide and imbued it with cultural meaning. It also implied that they were interested in writing specifically for their own communities as part of an attempt to come to terms with the tragedy that had befallen them and to impart an understanding of what it all meant. Therefore, writing in Yiddish had overarching historical and cultural significance, both for survivors living within their own communities and for those non-survivor Jews living beyond them. But it also restricted broader readership. While many Jews in the diaspora may have spoken Yiddish at the time, not all could read it. In order to reach a wider Jewish and non-Jewish audience in the USA, Canada, Britain and Australia it was necessary to publish in English. In a similar way this was applicable for survivor memoirs written in languages other than Yiddish. A significant number of Jewish memoirs therefore also appeared in English in this period. Including those under examination in this chapter, some other notable examples are Renya Kulkielko’s Escape from the Pit, published in New York by Sharon Books in 1947, Bernard Goldshtayn’s story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Finf yor in Varshever getto (Five Years in the Warsaw Ghetto), first published by the Bund in New York in Yiddish in 1947 and reissued in English under the title The Stars Bear Witness by
publisher Victor Gollancz in 1949; and Eugene Weinstock’s *Beyond the Last Path*, published in New York in 1947 by Boni & Gaer. All were reviewed in *The New York Times*. But many more works remain untranslated, hampering further historical investigation and no doubt compounding the all-pervasive myth of post-war silence.

Jewish survivor memoirs from this later period of the 1940s indicate a particular concern to document both the devastation wreaked by the Final Solution and the heroic exploits of the resistance fighters in the ghettos and forests. This reinforces Friedlander’s notion that an understanding of the Holocaust at this time was initially framed by the binary elements of ‘Catastrophe and Heroism’. Titles which portrayed these elements include: Bernard Goldshtayn’s *Finf Yor in Varshever getto* (Five years in the Warsaw Ghetto), mentioned above; Shmerke Kaczerzinski’s *Khurbn Vilne* (The Destruction of Vilna), published in New York in 1947; Jacob Kot’s *Khurbn Byalistok* (The Destruction of Bialystok), published in 1947 in Buenos Aires; Mordechai Shtrigler’s *Majdanek: buch eins funem tsikl ‘Oysgebrente licht’* (Majdanek: book one from the cycle ‘Extinguished Light’), published in 1947 in Buenos Aires, and his subsequent work, *In die fabrikn fun toit* (In the Factories of Death) in 1948; Renya Kulkielko’s *Escape from the Pit*, also mentioned above; Moshe Kaganovich’s *Der Yidisher onteyl in der partizaner bavegung fun Soviet Rusland* (The Jewish Participation in the Partisan Movement of Soviet Russia), a capacious collection of stories of partisan survivors published in Rome in 1948; Simcha Poliakewicz’s *A Tog in Treblinka: Khronik fun a Yidishe lebn* (A Day in Treblinka: Chronicle from a Jewish Life), published in Buenos Aires in 1948; Rafa’el Rayzner’s *Der Unkum fun Bialystoker Yidntum* (The Destruction of Bialystok Jewry), published in 1948 in Melbourne; Mikhail Lev’s *Partizanshe vegn* (The Ways of the Partisans), published in Moscow in 1948; Israel Tabaksblat’s *Zichroynes fun di Katzeltlagern* (Memoirs from the Concentration Camps), published in Paris in 1949; and Rachel Auerbach’s *Der Yiddishe Oifshtand – Varshe 1943* (The Jewish Uprising – Warsaw 1943), published in Warsaw in 1949.

**THE SIX MEMOIRS**

Primo Levi’s first published book, the autobiographical *Se questo e un uomo* (If This Is a Man), is generally acknowledged as a masterpiece within the literary canon of Holocaust memoirs. This is testament to both its enduring literary stature and contemporary interest in its
profound exploration into the moral vicissitudes of the human condition in extremis. By the end of his life in 1987, Levi had become a prolific and distinguished prize-winning author of Holocaust literature.\(^6^7\) Hence Levi’s account of his experiences in the Auschwitz labour sub-camp Monowitz-Buna is by far the best-known of the six memoirs under close investigation here. But it is important to note the stark contrast between Levi’s recent recognition and the type of recognition his book received then, and from whom, when it was first published.

Levi’s manuscript was initially rejected by a number of publishers (including Einaudi, which went on to publish *Se questo e un uomo* in a revised and improved edition in 1958).\(^6^8\) Finally, a small publishing house, Francesco Da Silva, run by the anti-fascist ex-resistance fighter Franco Antonicelli, enthusiastically agreed to publish the work. When *Se questo e un uomo* was released on 11 October 1947 in Turin it had a small print run of 2,500. This in itself was not uncommon at the time.\(^6^9\) In the first few months following its release the book received a number of favourable reviews.\(^7^0\) Most notably, two stand out. The first of these was by the well-known Piedmontese literary critic Arrigo Cajumi and appeared on the front page of *La Stampa* on 26 November 1947. Entitled ‘Immagini indimenticabili’ (Unforgettable Images), it praised Levi as a gifted writer.\(^7^1\) The second review, by Italian writer and ex-partisan fighter Italo Calvino, appeared in the communist daily *L’Unità* on 6 May 1948 under the heading ‘Un libro sui campi della morte’ (A Book about the Death Camps). Calvino applauded it as a ‘magnificent book’.\(^7^2\) Clearly Levi’s work resonated with some of the cultural elite. In spite of this, it sold a meagre 1,500 copies – not a disaster by the standards of the time, but hardly a raging success.\(^7^3\) In contrast, Italo Calvino’s fictionalized novel about resistance fighters, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (The Path of the Spider’s Nest), also published in October 1947 and – interestingly enough – by Einaudi, sold over 6,000 copies and won the Premio Riccione.\(^7^4\) The disparity between the two is significant. Of the six accounts written and published by Italian Jewish deportees in Italy from the period of liberation up to 1947, Levi’s was the only one authored by a Jewish man.\(^7^5\) In addition, Calvino’s novel was a robust, gritty story of anti-fascist partisans fighting the enemy, painting a clear, uncomplicated picture of a grass-roots uprising resulting in a ‘victors over vanquished’ narrative. This appealed to the early post-war Italian public which was seeking to throw off its fascist legacy with heroic tales of muscular resistance: ‘the partisans did much to salvage Italy’s tarnished image and give the Italians new faith
in themselves’.76 In contrast, Levi’s memoir posed profound questions about the human condition and the individual’s ability to resist moral depravity, under circumstances yet to be fully understood. It too was about resistance, but of a different kind. In many ways Levi was ahead of his time, and yet he was very much a part of it. And although it was known that he was also part of the resistance movement, it was not something of which Levi himself was particularly proud, obscuring the fact rather than parading it.77 Also, neorealist writers such as Calvino were already part of Italy’s new breed of recognized literary talent. Levi was not. In the words of one of Levi’s biographers, ‘Levi had no standing’ in such a world.78

In the same year that Levi published his book in Italy, two other Auschwitz survivors, Dr Albert Menasche, a Jewish doctor from Salonica, and Olga Lengyel, a medical assistant from Cluj, Hungary, had their memoirs published in English in New York.79 Under the title Birkenau: How 72,000 Greek Jews Perished, Menasche recounted his experiences as a member of the men’s orchestra in the Birkenau death camp and his forced deportation to other labour camps. Lengyel’s memoir was written in Hungarian, but first published in French in Paris under the title Souvenir de l’au-delà, but in English under the revised title Five Chimneys. In it she described her experiences as a medical practitioner in the women’s barracks in Birkenau.

Menasche’s memoir, published in English in the USA by Isaac Saltiel, received considerable public recognition when first published in Greece, where he remained before immigrating to the USA in 1951.80 Lengyel’s memoir, published by Ziff-Davis, was listed twice in The New York Times as forthcoming on 25 June and 30 July 1947, and received two favourable reviews in The New York Times and one in The Washington Post.81 While The Washington Post called her work a ‘cool, unembittered and objective report by a beautiful young woman who survived years of beatings and starvation at the very hearths of the five death furnaces at Auschwitz’, the two reviews in The New York Times placed her memoir alongside those by two resistance fighters: Eugene Weinstock’s Beyond The Last Path and David Rousset’s The Other Kingdom. The reviewer, Charles Poore, equated Lengyel’s work with Rousset’s, describing the books as two stories of ‘human bravery’. He admitted that Lengyel’s memoir was ‘not as brilliantly and stylistically written as Mr Rousset’s’, but added that ‘it gives a good deal more precise material’.82 Interestingly, none of the reviews mentioned Lengyel’s Jewishness as the cause of her incarceration; indeed, the
Washington Post review incorrectly claimed that she was a Christian married to a Jew who volunteered to go to Auschwitz. As was common at the time, Lengyel's memoir was meshed together with the likes of Weinstock's and Rousset's into a meta-narrative of heroic opposition to Nazism. The particularity of the Jewish experience was often overshadowed by national narratives that sought to exalt the fight against fascism. Lengyel's memoir has been reissued several times over the years, with subsequent issues bearing an inscription from Albert Einstein: 'you have done a real service by letting the ones who are now silent and most forgotten speak'.

In 1948, Dr Gisella Perl, a gynaecologist from Sziget Transylvania, also had her memoirs published in English in New York by International University Press. Under the title *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, Perl recounts her experiences in Birkenau as a forced assistant to the infamous Dr Josef Mengele whilst she was also tending to the needs of the other incarcerated women. The circumstances of her arrival in the USA in 1947 and the granting of her citizenship are documented in an article in *The New York Times* on 13 March 1948. The article does not make mention of the interrogation she received by US immigration officials and the accusations of collaborating with Mengele. Rather, it tells the reader that Perl was by then a well-known speaker, lecturer and fundraiser for the United Jewish Appeal and an 'ambassador of the six million', as she referred to herself. It was in this capacity that she befriended Eleanor Roosevelt, who encouraged her to return to practising medicine and who endorsed the first edition of her memoirs. Perl's story was made into a film for television, *Out of the Ashes*, in 2003.

The years 1948 and 1949 also saw the release of two important Yiddish publications. *Fun Beyde Zaytn Geto Moyer* (On Both Sides of the Ghetto Wall) by Vladka Meed was published in New York by the Educational Committee of the Workman’s Circle in 1948, whilst *Tsivshin falndike vent* (Between Tumbling Walls) by Tuvia Borzykowski was published in Warsaw in 1949. Meed, who immigrated to the USA in 1946, had her memoirs translated into Spanish in 1959, into Hebrew in 1968 and into English in 1972. In 1949, Borzykowski left Poland and immigrated to Israel, where he joined Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot. His work was translated into Hebrew in 1950, and an English edition was published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad in 1972. Both memoirs record the experiences of these two authors as members of the Jewish Resistance during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
These harrowing, personal accounts provide the reader with an opportunity to assess just how these survivors made sense of their immediate past, experiencing events that had been considered unbelievable, and how they conceptualized these experiences between 1947 and 1949 – a period during which the propinquity and rawness of the Holocaust was still an open wound. At a time when survivors were rebuilding their lives and reconstructing their shattered communities, these six made the conscious decision to record their experiences for posterity. Levi alone went on to have an illustrious career as an acclaimed writer, and while the others continued to bear witness to their past in other ways, none of them went on to publish any other substantive work about their Holocaust experiences. There are marked similarities within the works of these six survivors, however, and all of them shared a commitment to bear witness by producing, through the idiom of written language, a lasting testament to their Holocaust experiences. Most importantly, these six memoirs were selected because they bring together the most salient features and elements of the survivor’s conceptualization of the Holocaust throughout this period. They offer a clearly defined level of understanding which underscored the development of an ‘exclusive’ yet empowering survivor identity.

AUTHOR PROFILES: DIFFERENTIATION, STATUS AND A QUESTION OF ‘PRIVILEGE’

From the outset, these six survivors were differentiated from other victims and survivors by their professional status, educational background and/or their activism and political convictions. Central to all six authors were the privileged positions they attained as educated professionals within the Auschwitz concentration camp complex or as political activists within the Warsaw Ghetto resistance movement. In this context, ‘privilege’ brings with it positive human values and responsibilities, as we shall see. However, the term ‘privileged Jews’ has also been a contentious one, drawing considerable debate and condemnation from those who believed that ‘privilege’ served self-interest only and came at the expense of others. In more recent years, researchers have arrived at a more nuanced understanding of the complex ethical dilemmas and moral ambiguities confronted by those considered ‘privileged’ Jews in the camps and ghettos – what Primo Levi alluded to as the ‘grey zone’.90

Even though they claim to be like every other victim and subject to
the same fate, these six survivors are clearly set apart by virtue of who they are and what they did. As Waxman points out, ‘the majority of the early witnesses had either held important positions in the Jewish resistance movements or positions of some degree of privilege in the concentration camps’. Furthermore, it was their professional status or their activities in the resistance that enabled them to make informed decisions, albeit within limited options, which in turn enhanced their chances of survival. The psychologist and Auschwitz survivor Leo Eitinger interviewed many other Auschwitz survivors who ‘credited their survival to their ability to make decisions’. It enabled them to exercise ‘some control over their lives’. It gave these six survivors the advantage of choice and opportunity. Who they were and what they did in the camp and ghetto empowered them.

When Albert Menasche’s number was selected for the gas chamber in Auschwitz Birkenau, it was his own actions together with his professional status that saved his life: ‘A sudden inspiration saved me. I began to shout ich bin arzt (I am a doctor). The answer was an immediate one. We need doctors. For the time being, I was safe.’ This was not the first time that Menasche was able to save himself by virtue of the professional privilege afforded to select individuals. When he arrived at Birkenau on 8 June 1943, as part of the mass deportation of Greek Jews sent to Auschwitz, and was stripped of all his possessions, Menasche asked to retain two important documents: his Diploma of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Toulouse and his ‘first prize as flute player from the conservatory in the same city’. Even though Menasche tells us that as a ‘free and respected citizen [he] had ceased to be’, and that in his place was ‘häftling 124,454’, he immediately differentiates himself from the pack. He makes clear to the reader that he is not just any ‘häftling’ but a professional, a man of letters and a gifted flautist. This not only bestows status on Menasche, but it also empowers him with the privilege of choice. Menasche is then able to make the conscious decision initially to become a member of the elite men’s orchestra rather than declare his interest in serving as a medical practitioner: ‘Doctors were also very much in demand at Birkenau but I learned that as far as “organizations” were concerned, it was better to be a musician than a doctor.’ There is no doubt that members of the Auschwitz orchestra commando were privileged. Auschwitz historian Danuta Czech points out that ‘they wore white suits and were better nourished because they worked in the kitchen’. The main Auschwitz camp’s orchestra was established in 1941 and Jews were not allowed to
perform in it, but the orchestra at Birkenau – which Albert Menasche joined upon his arrival in 1943 – began functioning in the summer of 1942 and did not impose restrictions against Jewish musicians joining its ranks.98 Czech cites the testimony of one of the orchestra members who recalled the status enjoyed by the Birkenau orchestra: ‘Our glorious music room became a place of pilgrimage for the SS as well as [a reason] for the camp’s prominence. We play cheerful melodies almost nightly in our bloc. The SS likes to celebrate birthdays with lots of pomp.’99 To a large extent, the essence of Menasche’s assertive actions in exercising choice and self-determination were replicated by the other five survivors. Each in turn was able to draw on different aspects of his or her personal status, educational background or social positioning in the social hierarchy of the camp and ghetto world that assisted in their survival. Eitinger observed that those fortunate enough to get positions in Auschwitz ‘where they could maintain their personal norms and values by continuing their pre-arrest occupation and thus work for and help others had the best chances to survive and to avoid Auschwitz’s ethically devastating atmosphere’. In an interview with Philip Roth in 1986, Primo Levi discussed the pressing urge and need to perform purposeful work:

At Auschwitz I quite often observed a curious phenomenon. The need for lavoro ben fatto – ‘work properly done’ – is so strong as to induce people to perform even slavish chores ‘properly’. The Italian bricklayer who saved my life by bringing me food on the sly for six months hated Germans, their food, their language, their war; but when they set him to erect walls, he built them straight and solid, not out of obedience but out of professional dignity.100

Like Menasche, both Perl and Lengyel make very clear the importance of their professional status as medical practitioners. On the second page of her memoir, Lengyel tells the reader that she was ‘devoted to medicine’ and that she ‘attended the University in Cluj and had qualified to be her husband’s first surgical assistant’.101 Similarly, Perl informs the reader that prior to her deportation she was doing the work of ‘several gynaecologists who had gone with labour battalions’.102 In addition, both authors paint idyllic pictures of pre-war life, their social standing and the important roles that their husbands played in their respective communities. Perl devotes two chapters to this period, Lengyel one. Like Albert Menasche, these women unmistakably establish from the outset who they are and what they represent. Neither woman regards
her gender as a mitigating factor here, although it is evident that these two women had the opportunity to enter a male-dominated profession long before the outbreak of war. Their status is clearly based on their social class, which gave them access to a level and quality of education that enabled them to enter the medical profession. When forced into the cattle cars destined for Auschwitz, Lengyel pointedly tells us that her co-travellers ‘were mostly people of culture and position from their community. Many were Jewish doctors or other professional men, and members of their families.” 103 Lengyel undoubtedly identifies with them.

Both women arrived in Birkenau as part of the Hungarian deportations of May 1944. 104 Perl declared her professional interest immediately upon arrival at the camp. When Dr Mengele ordered that ‘Jewish physicians step out of the lines!’ Perl answers the call. 105 She was then informed by another SS officer that she has now been designated as the camp gynaecologist, a duty she undertook with the same unshakeable moral convictions and professional integrity that marked her past pre-war practice. While Perl was given the job of medical practitioner, Lengyel seized the opportunity by exercising self-determination and a degree of risk-taking. She directly addressed an SS doctor, a punishable act in itself, and offered to be his assistant. Following this she became ‘a member of the infirmary staff’. 106

Primo Levi also benefits from his educational background and professional standing. However, this is not something which Levi asserts in the same immediate and direct way as the previous three authors. Levi is more self-effacing, preferring to step back from centre stage. So, while he does not make much of it, Levi’s education and profession are crucial to our understanding of his survival and the manner in which he conceptualized his predicament and responded to it. One of Levi’s biographers, Carole Angier, corroborates this and implies that Levi deliberately used his status in order to survive. 107 Levi therefore allows the details of his education and profession to emerge through the course of his narrative – sometimes openly, more often by implication – instead of making the point directly from the outset. And like the other survivors under discussion here, he was able to converse in more than one language, a great asset in an environment where language confusion was a major obstacle to survival. 108 Levi does not exhibit or parade his credentials as overtly as Menasche, Perl or Lengyel, but we the readers do become cognizant of their importance to his spiritual and physical survival.
Primo Levi, the anti-fascist partisan, arrived at Auschwitz on 26 February 1944 following his capture by the Italian fascist militia on 13 December 1943 and a brief internment at Fossoli, near Modena. Levi made little of his brief life as a partisan, recalling in *The Periodic Table* that ‘we were the most disarmed partisans in the Piedmont, and probably the most unprepared’. Nevertheless, his decision to join a poorly armed, untrained partisan unit in the mountains of the Val D’Aosta was ‘a courageous, considered, moral act with potentially mortal consequences’. He also made the conscious decision to declare himself a Jew when captured by the Italian militia, partly because he knew that as a partisan he would probably be summarily executed, but also ‘out of an irrational digging in of pride’. He wanted them to know that ‘rotten partisan though I was ... but nonetheless a partisan, was a Jew, that the Jews have the resolve to fight’. In an interview conducted one year before his death he also mused over the irony of this decision: ‘I was recognized and owned up to being a Jew, out of silly pride. Yes it was silly, as events demonstrated later, but I wanted to make the point that not only Christians but Jews too were fighting Fascism. I was deported to Auschwitz.’ Although Levi’s incarceration in Monowitz-Buna, a labour sub-camp of Auschwitz, spared him the experiences of the Birkenau extermination camp, he was still subject to the same limitations of existence that confronted Menasche, Perl and Lengyel and the precarious nature of that existence. Prisoners deemed unfit to work were speedily dispatched to the gas chambers at Birkenau. Documents which reveal the exact number of prisoners who were selected from satellite camps such as Monowitz-Buna and sent to Birkenau do not exist, but, according to historian Shmuel Krakowski, other sources imply that the numbers were significant.

When Levi proclaims, ‘I have learnt that I am Häftling. My number is 174517’, he echoes the sentiment of Albert Menasche. He too is stripped of his name and identity, and like Menasche he must find the strength within himself to remain human, and he does so through the execution of small yet meaningful human acts. Although he often attributed his survival to luck and circumstance, it was his ‘deep reservoir of cultural humanism which sustained him when loss of life and reason seemed certain’. When Levi undertakes to tutor fellow inmate Jean the Pikolo in Italian by reciting Dante’s ‘Canto of Ulysses’, he reveals a great deal about himself. The selection of this tract is therefore significant for a number of reasons and much has been written about it. In essence, Ulysses, who has been banished to the gates of hell, provides
a valuable moral and spiritual lesson of active resistance for Levi and his fellow inmates. And although Levi cites the ‘hole in his memory’ that allows him to select only certain extracts, it is the selection of these tracts that is important: ‘So on the open sea I set forth’, a signifier of direct personal action, followed by ‘to venture the uncharted waters’, to challenge and push the boundaries imposed by others, and, most importantly, to

Think of your breed; for brutish ignorance  
Your mettle was not made; you were made men,  
To follow after knowledge and excellence.119

Levi tells us that reciting this stanza was ‘like hearing it for the first time: like the blast of a trumpet, like the voice of God’.120 For Levi, the redemptive power of this heroic narrative is what defines us as human beings, the ability to rise above the forces of evil and to negate the dehumanization of Auschwitz. Ulysses’s message to his men is also the message that Levi wishes to impart to the ‘häftlinge’. And Levi senses the urgency of transmitting this message to Jean the messenger before it is too late, for ‘tomorrow he or I might be dead’.121

When Levi claims that Steinlauf and Lorenzo were able to remain ‘outside the world of negation’ by resisting moral degradation, he recognizes and acknowledges the redeeming characteristics of spiritual resistance.122 What emerges is a complex picture of a well-educated man of great moral convictions whose schooling, human values and cultural sensibilities allow him to transcend the physicality of the camp and survive morally intact. Levi is a man of great emotional intelligence who may identify with the other inmates in the camp, while clearly differentiating himself from them.

It is only in response to the young Shlomo’s question regarding his profession that Levi confesses ‘Ich Chemiker’.123 What Levi tells us about himself is learnt mostly through his interactions with others, through his own observations of their actions and deeds, and through his acute, nuanced understanding of their engagement with their environment.124 And when Levi has the opportunity to work in the laboratory as a chemist (‘I am one of the three chosen’, he tells the reader), he seizes upon it. His professional status offered him the chance of survival: ‘I can save myself if I become a Specialist and I will become a Specialist if I pass a chemistry examination.’125 Levi recognized that those ‘who are able to preserve their dignity and self assurance through the practice of a profession in which they are skilled’ remained
humanely intact and had a greater chance of survival.\textsuperscript{126} Coping mechanisms that were based on integral and positive value systems aided survival and post-war recovery.\textsuperscript{127} Levi’s professional status, social class and human values set him apart from many of the other ‘häftlinge’ in the camps, but they also place him in the same social strata and cultural milieu as Menasche, Perl and Lengyel.

Vladka Meed and Tuvia Borzykowski were different from the other four in that they were not university-educated professionals. It was not their professional status from which they derived their authority, but rather their roles and actions in the underground. Assertive, proactive risk-takers, they demonstrated initiative and the ability to make sound decisions. Their actions could only be recognized as courageous, heroic and self-sacrificing. They also saw themselves as agents of change. In particular, Borzykowski recalls the reasoning behind this: ‘Our main strength came from the indomitable will to face the enemy with arms in hand. Thus we hoped to cause a radical change in the life of the ghetto, lift the spirits of the oppressed people, awaken their pride.’\textsuperscript{128}

Unlike the previous four survivors, Vladka Meed and Tuvia Borzykowski were never captured, deported or incarcerated in a concentration camp. Both Meed and Borzykowski were members of the Jewish Fighting Organization, an underground resistance movement in the Warsaw Ghetto. Both were political idealists. Meed was a member of the Bund – a socialist, secular, non-Zionist organization – while Borzykowski was a member of Halutz (an organization which prepared young men and women for emigration and communal living in what was then Palestine) and its affiliate, Zionist socialist Dror.\textsuperscript{129} In both cases, Meed and Borzykowski committed themselves to directly confronting the enemy, as determined by their respective organizations. For Meed this meant the dangerous job of being an underground courier, living with false papers on the Aryan side of Warsaw while she endeavoured to secure arms and smuggle them into the ghetto, and to find suitable hiding places for Jews fleeing the ghetto.

The reality of the Final Solution enabled Meed to cross the boundaries of what normative society had traditionally accepted as suitable roles for women. Prior to the onslaught of the Final Solution, women were not perceived to be in mortal danger; it was thought that the Germans, a highly civilized people, would adhere to traditional gender norms and would not harm women and children. Jewish men were therefore perceived to be the ‘traditional’ targets. It is true that in the early stages of the war it was mostly men who were rounded up, deported and sent
to labour camps. However, the Final Solution changed all that, and with it the private and public patterns of behaviour in which individuals, particularly women such as Meed, engaged. Like many other women at the time, Meed took on the role of resistance fighter in response to circumstances that had drastically altered the rules of the game. For Borzykowski, who became a combatant, taking part in the April 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and later in the failed Polish insurgency to liberate Warsaw in August 1944, the role of resistance fighter was a more straightforward trajectory that led him to move from ideals to action.

What set Meed and Borzykowski apart from other survivors was their self-sacrifice, and their interest in bettering the lives of others through military interventions and dangerous confrontations with the enemy. This is what gained them recognition and status in the ghetto and thereafter. Following the first encounter between the resistance fighters and the German army, Meed contends that ‘the ghetto was proud of the event ... The Germans received their first blow at the hands of the contemptible Jews.’ It was these confrontational, heroic actions that earned individuals such as Meed and Borzykowski their privileged status, rather than empty rhetoric. Actions spoke louder than words.

WHO HAD THE AUTHORITY TO SPEAK, AND WHY?

Within the broader setting of post-war Europe, recognition of the particularity of the Jewish experience of suffering was not necessarily based on ‘historical truth’, as Pieter Lagrou argues. In his view, Holocaust survivors only gained ‘legitimacy and public attention’ when they could identify with ‘universal values of patriotism, anti-fascism and humanism’. As Tony Judt points out, the ‘resistance myth’ was clearly fomented across Europe in the years 1945 to 1949, and ‘thus to be innocent a nation had to have resisted and to have done so in its overwhelming majority, a claim that was perforce made and pedagogically enforced all over Europe, from Italy to Poland, from the Netherlands to Romania’. Even when the historical record begged to differ, Judt maintains that the heroic resistance narrative emerged throughout Europe as an expedient means for governments to re-establish civil order and to provide political legitimacy, social cohesion and some form of moral decency where none had previously existed.
often embedded in national narratives of ‘collective martyrdom and resistance’.\textsuperscript{132} While this reflects a reluctance to acknowledge the distinctive nature of the Holocaust and also a reluctance to give particular recognition to Jewish survivors at the time, it clearly established a social code and moral framework that validated certain modes of wartime behaviour within a post-war world, with clear implications for Jewish survivor communities. The historian and Holocaust survivor Shalom Cholawski points out that specifically within the She’erit Hapleth it was the ex-fighters who had the social standing to assume leadership roles: ‘the position of the partisans and ghetto fighters among the Holocaust survivors derived not from their numbers but from their authority’.\textsuperscript{136} Leo Eitinger adds that it was also the ‘positive value systems’ of some Auschwitz inmates that ‘could not only enhance their survival but also their post-war reactions’. Whether they were resistance fighters or concentration camp survivors, it appears that there was a direct correlation between the post-war authority of those who assumed leadership roles and their wartime experiences and actions.\textsuperscript{137}

All six survivors in this study had the necessary credentials and predisposition required to undertake certain privileged positions of responsibility in the camps and ghettos. While these positions brought them a degree of prestige and credibility, it was not the leadership roles or the positions of responsibility per se that gave them the moral authority to speak on behalf of others in the post-war era. It was, rather, the moral values that those positions represented and the manner in which they conducted themselves in discharging their duties that had the greatest influence on post-war Jewish survivor identity. Thus it was a combination of the type of position they held and the positive human qualities that they brought to these positions that continued to be recognized and validated by other Jewish survivors in the post-war period.

Olga Lengyel illustrates this point. In the last three chapters of her memoir she details her escape from the Death March, her liberation by the Russians and finally her contemplation of the legacy of survival.\textsuperscript{138} In 1945, Lengyel emerged as a 34-year-old medical practitioner and former member of the Auschwitz underground resistance. These facts alone differentiated her from many other survivors and gave her instant recognition. However, it was her self-sacrificing leadership style in Birkenau that provided the template for others. As fellow female prisoners joined her in a last bid for freedom, ‘they were frightened,
but they continued to follow me’. Lengyel gave clear direction and exercised influence. Finally, when her own life was under threat she revealed a fearless tenacity for self-preservation: ‘it was either his life or mine. I seized one of the bottles lying nearby, and with all my strength I swung it against his skull.’140 The quality of Lengyel’s actions ensured survival and came as a result of her own initiative and sound judgment – pragmatic decisions made for the greater good as well as her own. These qualities were indispensable for individual and communal survival in an uncertain post-war world.

Like Lengyel, the other five authors had a strong sense of self-worth. This was initially derived through their vocational status, cultural background and personal predisposition, which encouraged and enabled them to act and behave within certain moral boundaries during the war. This was further enhanced by the nature of their experiences and their responses to them. But these in themselves would not have perpetuated a lasting moral authority over other survivors in the post-war period. More importantly, who they were and what they did had to be recognized and validated by other survivors who approved of their behaviour and the qualities they represented. The level of collective affirmation bestowed on select individuals at this time was subject to a code of conduct that saw certain individuals, their actions and the groups to which they belonged to be valued more highly than others. This was in part the result of a larger, more complex social structure, one that was initially imposed during the war by the Nazis but continued to exert its own authority over post-war survivor communities by the survivors themselves.141

This social structure initially consisted of large social groups that were established in the camps and ghettos by the Nazis according to nationality, or through loose contractual requirements. For example, Albert Menasche clearly identified with the Greek Jews of Salonica who were all sent to Birkenau over nineteen transports between March and August 1943.142 Similarly, Lengyel and Perl were sent to Birkenau as part of the Hungarian deportations of 1944. They could identify with each other through nationality, language and cultural background in a limited capacity and often had only intermittent contact with each other, through necessity or circumstance. However, these large groups often acted as conduits for the establishment of more significant smaller groups.143 It was these groups which impacted most importantly on the social positioning of their constituents. The formation of these smaller groups in the camps and ghettos occurred when individuals who were engaged in similar activities, tasks or duties shared common experiences,
friendships or political ideology. Individuals in these groups shared a common human language and a commonality of purpose. They were often united by a shared moral vision.145

In particular, the social bonding that occurred between women in the concentration camps illustrates what Myrna Goldenberg terms the ‘connectedness, nurturance and care giving’ that is evident in many of the women’s memoirs from this period.146 Gisella Perl derived great moral strength from the friendships she forged in the camps with fellow medical personnel and other female inmates. She credits her ability to engage in positive, normative conversation with her fellow prisoners as a source of personal strength and as a reminder of all that was decent and human, acting as an inspiration to those for whom she cared and with whom she worked: ‘I believed then, and still believe, that talk was the greatest blessing, the only boon in those hopeless prison days. I saw women forget their pain, their fever, the beatings they received and all the physical suffering under the soothing effect of warm, friendly, understanding words.’147 Goldenberg goes on to suggest that social groups amongst women in the camps often functioned as surrogate families and that such bonding was a great aid to survival. While bonding of this kind was not exclusive to women, it was harder to find amongst men.148 Primo Levi may prove to be one exception to Goldenberg’s premise, for Levi demonstrates the great civilizing influence that human interaction, contingent upon a sense of decency, trust and sharing had in a world deprived of moral values.

Post-war identification and public affirmation of particular groups of survivors was derived from the moral authority they first gained in the camps and ghettos. For it was the ethical and moral values that members of these groups came to embody that ensured that their constituents had credibility and a respected social positioning in the post-war Jewish world. These values were carried forward into survivor communities that sought and needed moral benchmarks and a re-establishment of acceptable ethical norms. In the same way, Jewish police, members of the Judenräte in the ghettos and camp Kapos were despised during the war and continued to be viewed as collaborators in the immediate post-war period. A more nuanced understanding of the role of the Judenräte has only recently emerged with the work of historians such as Yehuda Bauer, who argues that it is a misrepresentation to view all Judenräte members in this way. In his view, one cannot generalize about them, as their roles were complex and compromised, and varied from ghetto to ghetto.149 But at the time, members of the
Jewish police, the *Judenräte* and the *Kapos* were tainted; they were bunched together and seen to be united by common activities and a commonality of purpose that were perceived as being self-serving and morally ambivalent. In most cases they were seen to be driven by self-interest and personal gain. Vladka Meed contends that the majority of the Jewish police were ‘looked upon as enemies by the rest of the ghetto, as outcasts of whom nothing but the worst could be expected’. Albert Menasche describes the *Kapos* as sadistic supervisors ‘who tormented the prisoners gleefully’. Some subgroups did redeem themselves, however, but only through acts of self-sacrifice and heroic deeds. Such a case presents itself with the actions of the Auschwitz Birkenau *Sonderkommando*, those teams of prisoners who serviced the gas chambers, removed the corpses, burnt the remains and prepared the gas chambers for the next load of victims. Their role was generally seen by others as reprehensible. But their revolt on 7 October 1944, in which they bombed, set fire to and destroyed Crematorium IV, secured their status as heroes. None survived the revolt. But the strength of their moral actions did.

In this way, survivors and the groups to which they belonged were labelled either good or bad by what was seen as the moral values that motivated their actions. Moral classification as such was arbitrated by the survivors themselves, who had either benefited or suffered as a result. These moral markers determined the group’s collective identity and what that identity came to represent, both during the Holocaust and immediately after. Individuals who contributed to groups that were self-sacrificing and beneficial to others were deemed morally heroic, as they remained humanely incorruptible. And so the doctors, the fighters and, in Primo Levi’s case, specific individuals whose ‘humanity was pure and uncontaminated’ contributed to the construction of a post-Holocaust public survivor identity that was morally robust and could be universally accepted. While Levi does not dwell much on the notion of group identity, he does present individuals such as Steinlauf, Lorenzo and Alberto as models of positive adaptation. And he emphasizes the strength he derived from personal identification with those whose morals and ethics remained intact: ‘Thanks to Lorenzo I managed not to forget that I myself was a man.’ Levi creates a subgroup of his own, but this was not instigated so much by common activities or political ideology as by a shared moral vision, in the same way that resistance fighters who fought in the ghettos, partisans who fought in the forests and Jewish doctors who struggled to save lives in the camps
shared a moral vision, although many also shared common activities and, in many cases, political ideology. Echoing Levi, Gisella Perl stakes her claim to remaining morally intact by retaining her sense of human dignity: ‘I would come out of the apathy which had enveloped me for the last two months and show the Nazis, show my fellow prisoners that we could keep our dignity in the face of every humiliation, every torture ... Yes, I was going to remain a human being to the last minute of my life – whenever that would come.’\textsuperscript{156} This moral fortitude gave them ‘survivor credibility’ within a post-Holocaust Jewish world still coming to terms with the context in which these survivors first emerged and now existed. And this in turn gave credence to the writing and publication of their memoirs. This defined who these survivors were, not just by professional status but through their actions and moral values, both of which were to have a crucial bearing on their own re-emerging communities. To a certain degree this also reflects the values that were promoted in the non-survivor Jewish world.

A case in point is the collection of thirty-three survivor memoirs edited by the writer and former director of the American Joint Distribution Committee in the American zone of Germany, Leo W. Schwarz, and published in New York in 1949 by Rinehart & Company under the title \textit{The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People}.\textsuperscript{157} Although not wholly comprised of heroic resistance tales, the selection does carry a striking number of stories of this kind by ex-partisans and ghetto fighters including Sutzkever, Edelman, Meed (Miedzyrzecki), Bielski, Goldstein and Wiernik, as well as those by Jewish doctors such as Mark Dworzecki, formerly from Vilna (but by then living in Paris), and George Wellers, a Russian-born French citizen from Paris; Polish Jewish intellectuals such as historian Pawel Wiedermann and the former librarian Samuel Glube; and the inaugural editor of the journal \textit{Fun Letstn Khurbn}, Moshe Feigenbaum. In his preface, Schwarz outlines his reasons for publishing and selecting this collection, bringing together a shared understanding of heroic resistance (in the preface he compares the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising with the ‘glorious record of Dunkirk’ and ‘Stalingrad’) and of the moral values of men and women who ‘never betrayed their humanity’. The book received great acclaim in the press, with \textit{The New York Times} hailing it as ‘extraordinary’ and a ‘book to lift the spirit, to inspire renewed faith in the human race’.\textsuperscript{158} Again we see a recurring identification with the universal values of physical courage and spiritual resilience.

Following liberation, those individuals who endured the camps
and ghettos as professionals or members of the intelligentsia were often able to return to their pre-war professions and the status those positions supported. Sometimes their social standing was enhanced by their experiences. They carried with them a degree of prestige and credibility which gave them a level of social esteem that empowered many to undertake post-war positions of responsibility when opportunities presented themselves. George Weller not only resumed practising in Paris but became active in the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine. Kovno Ghetto survivor Dr Shmuel Gringauz became inaugural chairman of the Camp Committee at the Landsberg DP camp and was active in its Yiddish newspaper, *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung*, together with Dr Rudolf Valsonok, another former Kovno Ghetto inhabitant and member of the resistance. Many undertook important historical work within the newly established Jewish Historical Commissions that sprung up all over liberated Europe. In particular, those who belonged to resistance groups or partisan units, such as Abba Kovner and Avraham Sutzkever, returned from the ghettos or the forests with a newly created elevated standing in the public eye. To a large degree this obsession and engagement with armed resistance was a post-war response to the ‘crushing burden of victimhood’ and the ‘torment of helplessness’. Cholawski claims that partisans and ghetto fighters became the ‘uncrowned leadership core of Polish Jewry’ among the She’erit Hapletah in the immediate post-war period. Many had taken part in the Brichah (the illegal mass movement of Jewish refugees) and were active in the DP camps in Germany, Austria, Italy, Romania and Cyprus. Many carried the imprint of pioneering Zionism with them and established a number of aliyah kibbutzim. By as early as mid-1946, forty such ‘training farms’ were scattered throughout the DP camps of post-war Germany.

Albert Menasche reclaimed his freedom and also his pre-war status and dignity as soon as he was liberated from Dachau by the Americans in April 1945: ‘the Häftling 124,454 was dead. Doctor Albert Menasche was reborn.’ Following his repatriation to Salonica, Menasche briefly served as president of the Jewish community, which constituted only a handful of survivors, and tried to rebuild the devastated community. Menasche was then 44 year of age. In a slightly different way, Gisella Perl stresses how her own role continued after the war. On the day of her liberation, 15 April 1945, she was in Bergen Belsen tending to the needs of a pregnant Polish woman undergoing a difficult and complicated labour. Perl had not abandoned her calling:
'I must save this Partisan mother. I must save her.' When the British entered the camp she pleaded with the British officer in charge to supply her with basic medical equipment. Her pleas were quickly answered: 'Half an hour later I had the water, the disinfectant and could wash my hands and perform the operation, not as a helpless prisoner, but as a doctor.' Perl’s authority as a doctor was never in question. And while she claims to have been a ‘helpless prisoner’, she never doubts her own ability or integrity to uphold the responsibility of her station, either in Auschwitz or Bergen Belsen: ‘I knew why I had been spared. I was responsible for those women ... I had to remain alive so as to save them from death ... I was their doctor.’ When dealing with both the Nazis and her British liberators, Perl presents herself as the consummate professional, in practice and principle. She leads by example. And although the guilt of her own survival and the pain of knowing that she had to destroy life in order to save another remains forever with her, when the hour of liberation arrives, Perl remains the same mature professional with a belief in her obligation to serve the needs of others above her own. Characteristically, she proudly claims to have delivered ‘the first free baby born in Bergen Belsen’.

Primo Levi was to remain in the Auschwitz camp complex until his day of liberation on 27 January 1945. Like Menasche, he marks the moment of regeneration from slave labourer to free man. But for Levi the moment comes just before liberation, when as men working together they share bread equally for the first time: ‘It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from “Häftlinge” to men again.’ Before the Red Army entered the camp, Levi committed himself to re-engage in the business of living. When he was able to cook a meal, feel the warmth of the stove and realize that liberation was a distinct possibility he was filled with a sense of quiet renewal: ‘We felt at peace with ourselves and with the world.’ Levi re-entered the world as an independent, free-thinking 26-year-old chemist, a profession he was to continue back in Turin for the best part of his life. When Levi comments on the delayed burial of Somogyi to accommodate the needs of the living – ‘the living are more demanding; the dead can wait’ – he is also commenting on post-war existence as a time for continuity and re-engagement with the here and now.

When Tuvia Borzykowski was liberated in Warsaw by the Red Army in January 1945 he was in his mid-30s. He also marked this period as one
of transition from combatant to free man: ‘my room was no longer a hiding place but a place where I lived as a free man’. But it was from being a combatant that Borzykowski derived his authority. By this time he had proven himself as a fighter; as a fearless, self-sacrificing member of the Jewish resistance who displayed qualities of leadership and authority. These qualities enabled him to continue in an educational role in Poland in the immediate post-war years until his immigration to Israel in 1949.

Vladka Meed was 22 years of age when she was liberated by the Red Army in January 1945 in the small town of Grodzisk in Poland. Like Borzykowski she had made her mark as a courageous member of the Jewish resistance in Warsaw: ‘For two years we had done what we could to support the Jewish survivors on the Aryan side.’ Meed’s role in helping other Jews served as a cohesive model for post-war reconstruction. Self-help and unity were the only way forward: ‘In times of danger it was best to be united.’

Menasche, Perl, Lengyel, Levi, Borzykowski and Meed all fitted clearly within the overall survivor demographic, one that saw 33 per cent of Jewish adults in Europe survive compared to 6–11 per cent of Jewish children, the very young and the very elderly being the most vulnerable. More importantly, they represent a select component of it. These survivors were able to secure their moral authority through their membership of particular groups that had their social positioning, values and motives validated by other survivors. These six epitomize the social profile of the type of survivors who immediately rose to positions of responsibility and public life in the post-war Jewish communities of liberated Europe as well as throughout the diaspora. They did so because of who they were before the war and, more importantly, how they conducted themselves during the war, throughout their ordeals, and what that represented to the Jewish world at the time.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE HOLOCAUST: THE OUTER LIMITS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In order to assess the contribution that survivors’ memoirs of this period made to the early construction of a survivor identity, it is important to investigate the way in which the Holocaust was understood at the time, and then how the survivors conceptualized their experiences of it. The way in which the wider world understood the Holocaust at that time did not always reflect the survivors’ own interpretation of events or
their points of emphasis, although there were also striking similarities.

These six survivors defined their experiences of the Holocaust in terms of the Final Solution. It was a particular understanding of the Holocaust not uncommon at the time, one that was expressed and interpreted through its oppositional outer limits. Some of them experienced and survived Auschwitz, the ultimate expression of the Final Solution; the others participated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which posed the greatest opposition to it. For these survivors, Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising emerged as defining features of the Holocaust: what could be termed the most ‘horrible’ and the most ‘heroic’, representing the outer limits of human experience.

Just as these memoirs set out a framework for the Holocaust that focussed on its most extreme forms and events, they also established a particular counter-narrative that centred on survival and resistance. As a result of this type of conceptualization, only those who confronted the full brunt of the Nazi onslaught and managed to remain morally whole and human in the face of all the horrors Auschwitz represented and/or were engaged in resistance activities in the camps, ghettos and forests were deemed to be ‘true’ survivors.

That Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising should have assumed this iconic significance so soon after the war’s end is not surprising, given the sheer size, scale and intent of Auschwitz’s operations and the unparalleled heroic battles of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt.182 Ironically, Auschwitz – the largest and most proficient Nazi death camp – also left the greatest number of survivors, often identified by the distinguishing tattoo branded on their forearm. The historian Robert Jan van Pelt estimates that 100,000 Jews left Auschwitz alive but that many died on the Death Marches or in other camps. He further estimates that tens of thousands lived to see liberation.183 Although Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians, who failed to give it immediate worldwide publicity, its survivors were found in many of the other camps liberated by the British and the Americans, predominately Buchenwald, Bergen Belsen and Dachau, as well as hundreds of other slave labour camps and satellite camps throughout Europe.184 These survivors were living proof of the operations at Auschwitz, testifying that it was ‘the worst camp’ of all.185 The Operation Reinhardt extermination camps had been effectively demolished by the Nazis to eradicate all evidence of their role in mass murder.186 They also had very few survivors. The absence of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka from
the immediate post-war trials also gave Auschwitz greater prominence.\textsuperscript{187} Although Majdanek was captured largely intact by the Soviets in July 1944 and immediately revealed the horrors of the extermination camps, it was much smaller in scale than Auschwitz and it also had very few survivors.\textsuperscript{188} By July 1944 the Allies were more intent on destroying the Nazi empire than they were in documenting and revealing the ordeals of the victims. News of the liberation of Majdanek, however, did break in leading newspapers. The \textit{New York Times} front-page lead story, ‘Nazi Death Killing Laid Bare’, hit the news stands on 30 August 1944, paving the way for what the public were to confront with the liberation of Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{189}

Warsaw had the largest ghetto in occupied Europe, with a population peaking at 445,000 in March 1941.\textsuperscript{190} Its uprising in April 1943 was the largest single sustained show of resistance throughout occupied Europe, in which approximately 750 ghetto fighters fought German army contingents for longer than a month, the same period of time it took for the whole of Poland to capitulate. Yehuda Bauer claims that the number of fighters was indeed greater – ‘there were hundreds of others of whose identity and number we have no information’ – and concludes that it was in fact the ‘uprising of the whole ghetto, not just a group of fighters’.\textsuperscript{191} The sustained length of the battle itself received immediate wide public recognition in the press, throughout Poland and beyond.\textsuperscript{192} It was the ‘first quarter of a large capital city in the occupied countries from which the Germans were expelled, the first to wave the banner of revolt and the first into which the Germans could not enter’.\textsuperscript{193} Resistance fighters who survived were able to escape from the ghetto and continue the struggle in the partisan movement.\textsuperscript{194} Many also continued their activism and partook in the Polish uprising in Warsaw in August 1944.\textsuperscript{195}

The significance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was quickly recognized by both the Jewish and non-Jewish world.\textsuperscript{196} Throughout the 1940s the uprising was publicized and memorialized around the world at commemorative ceremonies, in public monuments and through the written word.\textsuperscript{197} The Polish Jewish poet Julian Tuwim composed his manifesto, \textit{My, Żydzi polscy} (We, Polish Jews), in New York in late 1943 as a public plea for a monument to be erected to the heroes of the ghetto revolt. By 1944 \textit{My, Żydzi polscy} had reached hundreds of thousands of Polish refugees in Russia. Its impact was not insignificant, according to Soviet Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg.\textsuperscript{198} Of greater significance, though, was the event which took place on the first anniversary
of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on the steps of the New York City Hall on 19 April 1944. What James Young called the ‘largest single Holocaust memorial event during the war’ attracted over 30,000 Jews. The crowd was addressed by the Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and other prominent Jewish leaders. It honoured the ‘memory of the fighters and martyrs who died in the uprising’.199

In the same year, the first anniversary of the uprising was also commemorated in Australia, at public meetings in Melbourne and Sydney. Speakers who addressed the gatherings included Labour politician Arthur Calwell and Rabbi Falk.200 In 1944 these commemorative rallies were not organized or attended by survivors but by local Jewish communities with the support of non-Jewish citizens. The uprising therefore had an unprecedented and immediate impact on Jews in the diaspora and, to a significant degree, non-Jews.

Three years later in New York, on 19 October 1947, tens of thousands of people came to witness the dedication of a site for a future monument by Mayor O’Dwyer. The inscription read: ‘This is the site for the American memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Battle, April–May 1943, and to the six million Jews of Europe martyred in the cause of human liberty.’201 The event received considerable coverage in the press. The New York Times dedicated its editorial to it two days later: ‘It is fitting that a memorial to six million victims of the most tragic mass crime in history, the Nazi genocide of the Jews, should rise in this land of liberty.’202 While the monument was never built, the plaque with its dedication remains, also signifying the way in which the event took on the American ideals of freedom and liberty.

On 19 April 1948, Nathan Rapaport’s Warsaw Ghetto monument was unveiled in Warsaw, on the fifth anniversary of the uprising. It gave ‘public shape to Holocaust memory in the post-war era’.203 With the tacit approval of the Soviet authorities and the consent of the Warsaw Arts Committee it was positioned on the corner of Zamenhof and Gesia Streets, ‘the latter already renamed M. Anielewicz Street’ in honour of the young resistance leader.204 However, the bronze statuary was unveiled one month earlier in Paris at the site of Rapaport’s foundry. Reports praising its symbolism and breathtaking beauty were delivered and published in the French press by Parisian art critics, with the monument leaving the French capital to great acclaim for its permanent site in Warsaw.205 James Young notes that the critics’ reviews did not distinguish between the event that the memorial was commemorating and the art representing it. These critics therefore also served
history, by recognizing the ghetto fighters and the uprising well beyond the Jewish world.

In 1947, Auschwitz was reopened as a museum by the Polish government, with some 170,000 visitors in that year alone and with 100,000 visitors recorded in 1946, one year before its official opening.206 And although the Polish government appropriated Auschwitz as a symbol of Polish martyrdom, rather than a site of Jewish suffering and extermination, the name of Auschwitz became etched in the public’s mind as a site of unprecedented mass murder.207 Of Auschwitz’s important place in the historical landscape, Robert Jan van Pelt argues that because Auschwitz was the last extermination camp to be in operation, it was also the camp remembered best. In his words, ‘Auschwitz became a synonym for Holocaust.’208 In the same year, the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising were being remembered and honoured around the world by Jewish communities in the fourth year of commemorations marking the ghetto’s revolt. Both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Auschwitz were being inextricably linked as central symbols shaping the cultural and commemorative landscape of the immediate post-war period.

This timely positioning of Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising within the Jewish public consciousness by the late 1940s gave public affirmation to those who experienced them and survived. In this way the public’s recognition of Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto as the symbolic epitome of mass extermination and heroic resistance, together with the now-emerging survivors’ memoirs of them, served to reinforce, inform and validate each other. Most importantly, it enabled these survivors to try and fill the void left by the wider world’s disproportionate yet understandable preoccupation with the perpetrator and diminished view of the victim, as well as the survivors’ own sense of guilt over their own survival. Levi Shalitan expressed this sense of survivor guilt in an article he wrote for the Feldafing DP camp Yiddish newspaper, *Dos Fraye Vort*, on 3 May 1946. He was quoting from an address he made at a Warsaw Ghetto commemoration: ‘A people cannot live off Treblinkas and Majdaneks – thanks to Warsaw can this people live again.’ It expressed the view of many who struggled to make sense of their own survival. In his *Apologia of a Physician*, Mark Dworzecki laments over the searing sense of guilt inflicted by his own survival. His conscience asks: ‘How did you manage to survive when six million did not?’ ‘I don’t know ... I myself cannot understand it. My thoughts drive me mad.’209 In 1947, Samuel Gringauz made a similar
claim when he articulated the sense of unresolved tensions felt by survivors over the fate they did not share with the six million:

It is not unusual for Jews to look back with a sense of shame and feelings of guilt at the years of the great catastrophe when millions of their people helplessly clung to life and went unresistingly to their deaths. As a young man said to me in a poem he sent me in the concentration camp before his death:

Cowards we hang on to life
As sheep we go to the slaughter.210

The survivors' burgeoning sense of guilt was an affliction which did not go away.211 What troubled them most was their inability to have made a difference in any meaningful way, and it was this sense of helplessness and powerlessness which, Mankowitz argues, 'lent the heroism of the ghetto fighters its special quality'.212 The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising quickly became the symbol of heroic redemption and gave survivors an uncomplicated answer to the question of survival.

The sense of the Holocaust as articulated by these survivors was, to a large degree, shared by the Allies and the wider world by the late 1940s. The non-survivor world similarly understood the Holocaust through the outer limits of the Final Solution. However, this was an understanding dictated more by the perpetrator than by the survivor witness. So the focus of the wider world's understanding was skewed towards the crimes committed, the number of murdered victims and the punitive measures required to punish the perpetrators, and the restoration of order and – in the case of the western Allies – democracy throughout Europe.213 With few exceptions, the Allies did not view the victims or survivors as distinct individuals, but rather as an indistinguishable, powerless, amorphous mass.214 This notion of the victim was further compounded by the historic use of a compiled documentary film, Nazi Concentration Camps, as evidence at the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal. It was, as Lawrence Douglas points out, a ‘wholly new method of documenting criminality’ and the first time that film was used as proof of ‘criminal wrongdoing’.215 However, it reinforced and visualized the victims as dehumanized beyond redemption. Such documentaries did nothing to empower the survivors.

By the late 1940s, key perpetrators from Auschwitz such as Rudolf Höss and Joseph Kramer (who later went on to be Kommandant of Bergen Belsen) and the Warsaw Ghetto liquidator Jürgen Stroop were in the hands of the Allies.216 They held centre stage as they were
compelled to testify in their own war crimes trials, while survivor witnesses were often relegated to the sidelines. Stroop’s perversely elegant, leather-bound report, ‘The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw is No More’, was filed by the USA as an exhibit for the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg on 13 December 1945. It gave an explicit account of the ghetto revolt and its ruthless suppression. Stroop never denied the authenticity of the report. But again this supported and elevated a perpetrator point of view.217

At the same time, one cannot overstate the extent to which documentary films and newsreels, together with perpetrator testimonies from numerous other war crimes trials, alerted the world to the magnitude of the horrific crimes executed by the Nazis, and focussed the public’s attention on the camps and ghettos.218 Although the world was yet to fully grasp the complexity of the concentration camp system and to distinguish between labour camps and extermination camps, it was most noticeably Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that captured the public’s attention. And although graphic images of Dachau, Buchenwald and Bergen Belsen were never far from the public’s eye, it was Auschwitz survivors (many of whom were found in these camps) who were set apart from the others, recognizable even to those who viewed all survivors as one collective indistinguishable entity.

Four of the six memoirs under close discussion here deal with Auschwitz, emphasizing the physical suffering and the moral decay it inflicted upon its victims. Each memoir, however, places a slightly different emphasis on these issues. For Menasche it was the sheer scale of the camp’s operations, its extensive death tally and the extent of the heinous crime. For Lengyel and Perl it was the immorality that the camp fostered, and for Levi it was the annihilation of the human soul. All, though, reinforced the idea of Auschwitz as representative of a world that had become inherently evil; a world in which the individual had to actively resist in order to survive physically and spiritually intact.

Albert Menasche’s experience of Auschwitz was framed by his sixteen-month period in the Birkenau complex between 8 June 1943 and 28 October 1944, a peak period of mass exterminations in which Birkenau became its most proficient. By June 1943 all four crematoria at Birkenau were operational. It now had the greatest capacity to murder its victims and dispose of the bodies. As the other death camps were decommissioned, Auschwitz became the main destination for the extermination of Europe’s remaining Jews. Between April 1943 and
November 1944 some 750,000 Jews arrived at the gates of Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{219} ‘All I describe I saw with my own eyes’, explains Menasche the witness.\textsuperscript{220} Although the world now knows a great deal about the operations of Auschwitz Birkenau, that was not the case when Menasche published his memoirs. He therefore felt compelled not only to record his personal experiences, but also to document the extent of the crime. Hence he recorded the Hungarian transports of May 1944, the arrival of the surviving Łódź Ghetto inhabitants in August 1944 and the Theresienstadt deportees in October 1944. He also supplied hand-drawings of the general layout of Birkenau and Crematorium III. Similarly, both Lengyel and Perl’s experiences of Auschwitz Birkenau were calibrated by events that occurred there over a six- to eight-month period from May 1944 to November 1944 and January 1945. All were witness to Birkenau’s most deadly expression of the Final Solution. And even though Levi never witnessed mass murder in the gas chambers of Birkenau, the threat of mass extermination was clearly implied. ‘Is it true what one hears of selections, of gas, of crematorium?’ he asks.\textsuperscript{221} Although Menasche, Lengyel and Perl were subsequently deported to other concentration camps, it was their period in Birkenau that shaped and directed their narratives and dominated their memoirs.

Unlike Menasche’s preoccupation with the scale of Birkenau’s operations and his efforts as material witness to ‘tell the facts’, Primo Levi’s interests as a witness lie elsewhere. He does not try to recount the scientific exactitude or otherwise of rubber production at Buna, which in fact did not produce one ounce of synthetic rubber throughout its operations, or the specific chronology of events. Nor does he deliberate over descriptions of the physical layout of the camp, its structure or dimensions. Levi is concerned with the human predicament in its midst; the relationship between human beings and their environment and their ability to survive within moral and humane boundaries. In this, Lengyel and Perl share Levi’s concerns. Both women contemplate the loss of human dignity, the ‘sub human existence’\textsuperscript{222} that they were forced to endure, and how ‘only human beings with exceptional moral stamina could remain honest and good’.\textsuperscript{223}

On arrival at Auschwitz, all four entered a paradoxical ‘topsy turvy world’, as Lengyel called it: one that was highly structured and confined, yet chaotic and absurd; a world dominated by meaningless rules and regulations that served no purpose other than to humiliate and debase the inmates. ‘Rites to be carried out were infinite and senseless’, Levi explains; endless roll calls were a means of ‘slow death’,
echoes Lengyel. In all, this paradoxical world was an inversion of universal moral values in which all four were witness to the outer limits of human depravity on the one hand, and manifestations of human courage and spiritual survival on the other. For medical practitioners Perl and Lengyel, the oppositional, contested practice of medicine between the Nazis and the Jewish doctors was most acute. Jewish doctors in Birkenau struggled to remain healers as they confronted many difficult ethical challenges that compromised their core beliefs. Perl performed illegal abortions on women in order to save their lives. And while the figure remains difficult to quantify, estimates of the number of women she saved as a result of these actions could be as high as 1,000. Her efforts in this regard did not go unrecognized at the time and were reported in Partisan Review by Hans Meyerhoff in 1948. Nevertheless, the torment of having to terminate pregnancies in squalid, filthy conditions haunted her for the rest of her life, even though she understood the necessity of her actions. In the view of David Patterson, it was a case of saving one life rather than condemning two to death: ‘They did not do so in an act of murder. Rather they did so to prevent two acts of murder.’ In an interview Perl gave in 1982 she explained her motivation. Once she learnt what happened to pregnant women she ‘decided that never again would there be a pregnant woman in Auschwitz’, and ‘if I had not done it, both mother and child would have been cruelly murdered’. Lengyel also explains the cruel and brutal irony of these abortions: ‘And so the Germans succeeded in making murderers of even us. To this day the picture of those murdered babies haunts me. Our own children had perished in the gas chambers and were cremated in the Birkenau ovens, and we dispatched the lives of others before their first voices had left their tiny lungs.’ In order to save a life they had to make the painful decision to take a life. The historian and medical practitioner Tessa Chelouche maintains that ‘for prisoner doctors to remain healers was profoundly heroic and equally paradoxical’. Both Perl and Lengyel engaged in acts of what could only be described as sabotage, acts that jeopardized their own safety. Doctors such as Perl and Lengyel were constantly forced to compromise their ‘personal integrity and professionalism by stealing, lying to the Germans, faking diagnoses or laboratory tests or changing them in order to save fellow prisoners’. Irena Strzelecka confirms that ‘Hospital work was one of the few jobs in the camp which prisoners performed with dedication and commitment.’ And while the Nazis politicized the practice of medicine to serve
the Nazi creed, they too, at times, had to recant. Lengyel insists that the Germans used the blood of Jewish internees for transfusions to the wounded Wehrmacht soldiers, conveniently choosing to ignore the fact that Jewish blood was inferior and tainted. Chelouche concludes that the Holocaust differs from other instances of genocide in that it involved the active participation of both medicine and science: ‘The Nazis medicalized politics as much as they politicized medicine.’

According to Perl and Lengyel, the lives of Jewish women in Auschwitz were further imperilled by their gender. While rape by the SS in the death camps was rare, sexual humiliation and degradation by Nazis of all ranks were common. On the other hand, both women are highly judgmental concerning sexual impropriety instigated by female prisoners and are quick to point the finger at those who resorted to prostitution for personal gain and short-term security. Both women demonstrate that while they too could have gained from sexual opportunism, they refrained from doing so. Lengyel devotes an entire chapter entitled ‘Love in the Shadow of the Crematory’ to the lewd and licentious activities of other women. Lengyel and Perl distance themselves from these acts, remaining morally intact. They remain observers. Neither Menasche nor Levi makes a point of describing acts of sexual misconduct. It remains the provenance of the women to do so, but largely as a means of confirming their own moral integrity while providing an instructive model of behaviour.

This oppositional and contrary world view was not restricted to the inmates of the concentration camps. Both Meed and Borzykowski portray a treacherous world of informers, blackmailers and individuals with shifting allegiances: ‘You had to look out for yourself, if you did not want to be the next victim.’ This was a world in which moral incorruptibility was a highly prized yet rare human trait. And within this contrary world emerges an unambiguous heroic narrative that negates victim passivity and timidity, rewards assertive and confrontational behaviour, upholds clear moral values and imparts a sense sacrificial communal engagement for the common good. Both Meed and Borzykowski posit a case for unity and social cohesion: ‘None of us acted on his own, each was responsible for the others, and all painful problems were resolved with a view to the common good.’ Here the resistance fighters provided a model of survival that was pure and untainted. It was unquestionably a defiant model of survival that provided enduring metaphors for the post-war reconstruction of survivor communities.
The world of Auschwitz was not without its own heroes. Menasche and Lengyel both witness the revolt of the Sonderkommando in October 1944. Menasche recalls that “singing the Greek National Anthem three hundred Greek Jews buried themselves beneath the debris of their crematorium”. He concludes this episode by recalling that “the bodies of the heroes were burning”. They also record individual acts of physical courage and heroism in which individuals single-handedly confronted their oppressors. They become heroic by association. When Perl claims that “I am a partisan too, a partisan fighting against Nazis by saving the lives they intended to destroy, by saving the future through keeping the young and strong women alive”, she places herself alongside the likes of Meed and Borzykowski. So does Lengyel when she volunteers to join in underground activities at Birkenau by acting as a courier for a French resistance cell. And even though she maintains that “we were not heroes and never claimed to be”, she devotes an entire chapter to the dangerous activities of the underground.

Resistance was also expressed through various channels of human behaviour. Lengyel explains that the conditions under which they were forced to live in Auschwitz provoked acts of resistance of a different order:

When the employees of ‘Canada’ detoured items destined for Germany to the benefit of their fellow internees, it was resistance. When labourers at the spinning mills dared to slacken their working pace, it was resistance ... [when] we passed letters from one camp to another it was resistance. When we endeavoured to reunite two members of the same family ... it was resistance.

For Levi, spiritual resistance and the ability to resist moral degradation provided the benchmark by which to gauge human adaptation and marked those who were ‘saved or drowned’. Levi’s understanding of ‘resistance’ is far more complex and nuanced than the others and certainly challenges stereotypical notions of ‘heroic’ resistance. For Levi, heroes could be found in the most unlikely places, undertaking seemingly the smallest human acts. A case in point is Lorenzo:

In concrete terms it amounts to little: an Italian civilian worker brought me a piece of bread and the remainder of his soup ration every day for six months; he gave me a vest of his, full of patches; he wrote a postcard on my behalf to Italy and brought me the reply. For all this he neither asked nor accepted any reward, because he was good and simple and did not think that one did good for reward.
As a consequence, Levi is eternally indebted to Lorenzo, not just for his physical survival but for what Lorenzo came to represent:

> I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today ... not so much for his material aid, as his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror; something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving.\(^{246}\)

Through Lorenzo, Levi learns an important lesson. By resisting moral degradation and by remaining human, he was engaging in an act of defiance, courageous in its own way, arguably no less so than of those who took up armed struggle.

In a world that was multifarious, highly adversarial and contradictory, a chaotic world that cultivated and sustained a culture of death, these six authors ensure that ‘survival’ emerges as the pivotal motif, one that was in stark opposition to the prevailing environment in the camp and ghetto. And within this epic struggle to survive, a paradigm for ‘resistance’, in all its forms, was defined and articulated. These six survivors want the reader to understand that they were really witnesses to – and the embodiment of – ‘resistance and survival’.

\[\text{‘WE LIVED TO RESIST AND WE RESISTED TO LIVE’: A NEW PARADIGM FOR SURVIVAL}\]

When Olga Lengyel makes this claim, she implies that resistance and survival are existentially linked. Not only does she challenge the long-held notions of Jewish timidity, compliance and cooperation, but she also tears away a nineteenth-century argument that Jews were fundamentally powerless and apolitical.\(^{247}\) And while Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt were later to criticize the failure of the Jews to resist the Nazis, implying that they were complicit in their own demise, survivors such as these six were living testament that this was not so.\(^{248}\) Resistance and survival were not only indicators of a Holocaust experience that was in direct confrontation with the enemy’s ultimate intent of a Judenrein world, but it destroyed once and for all the pervasive notion that the Jews were powerless. Learnt behaviour that taught Jews to comply with the authorities was no longer applicable. Historian David Baile argues that Jews had always fought for their survival through
periods of oppression, using a variety of means at their disposal, but that nothing in their history equipped them for the Nazi plans for total extermination. What these six survivors demonstrate is that while they were ill-prepared for the unprecedented Nazi onslaught, they resisted with equal tenacity and force, surviving spiritually and physically. They had moved from a state of powerlessness to one of personal empowerment. Not only were they witness to this shift in power but they were either directly or indirectly part of it.

For resistance and survival to become inextricably linked required a redefinition of victimhood, one that did away with the idea of the passive victim and replaced it with a model of an adaptable, assertive individual whose emotional intelligence, human dignity and moral courage were not crippled or deformed by a polluted environment. Such a model also demonstrated that military strength could invert the status of victim and perpetrator, the powerless and the powerful. When the Jewish Fighting Organization committed itself to armed struggle in the Warsaw Ghetto, it made the Germans its victims and made them feel the vulnerability of the weak and powerless. Borzykowski tells us that ‘as a result of those and many other exploits, the Germans lost their sense of safety’. And when Steinlauf instructs Primo Levi that he must continue to wash and bathe himself, even in the midst of the dirt and squalor of the camp, he provides Levi with an important lesson about the retention of human dignity through small, meaningful acts, and its role in augmenting a human being’s spiritual resistance:

We must not become beasts; even in this place we can survive, and one must survive to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization ... We still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our strength for it is the last – the power to refuse our consent ... We must walk erect, without dragging our feet, not in homage to Prussian discipline but to remain alive, not to begin to die.

Steinlauf teaches Levi that to remain human is the last defence against imposed inhumanity. Spiritual survival is manifested through the preservation of human dignity. The ‘power to refuse our consent’ is an adaptive model of resistance: one that did not depend upon physical confrontation but upon an individual’s personal resilience and inner strength.

While these memoirs depict the precarious nature of human life in the camps and ghettos, they are ostensibly about the active struggle to
survive, spiritually and physically. As survivors, these authors had the moral authority to reject the tag of ‘passive victim’ and assert a different model of Holocaust experience. For them, spiritual, moral and physical survival was in itself the ultimate act of defiance and resistance.

In this instance, ‘resistance’ is the result of the struggle between two contested states: the imposition of order over chaos, and good over evil; the individual’s ‘inner’ self that strives for control over a meaningful, moral existence and the harshest ‘external’ threats that constantly seek to destroy it. This conflict is between a desire for a physical existence with moral order and meaning, and an evil world determined to subvert it. Heroic resistance is a selfless, often sacrificial act that can stem from a sense of spiritual, moral obligation to oneself and others and may involve physical acts of defiance resulting in militant opposition to external forces. It bestows meaning and purpose whilst liberating from despair and a sense of futility. And while this conceptualization of resistance is ostensibly about life and how to live it, what also emerges is a central belief concerning death.

The importance of being able to choose the manner and timing of one’s death, one which imparts meaning, became an important signifier of ‘heroic resistance’. A purposeful death is liberating and empowering, but, more importantly, it is morally redemptive, negating what Borzykowski called the ‘shame of passivity’. It also denies the Nazis their ultimate victory of inflicting a meaningless ‘ugly’ death, one of their determination, one in which even the memory of that death and the life it represented are obliterated. A death driven by ideology and a belief in ideals greater than one’s own mortality was seen to be sacrificial and linked to immortality. Borzykowski recalls what the Yiddish poet Itzhak Katzenelson told him on the eve of battle in the Warsaw Ghetto: ‘I am happy that I am going to die together with halutzim. We are to perish in the knowledge that the Jewish people will live forever.’ A heroic, honourable death was a higher form of resistance, for it ensured eternal life by transcending one’s physical existence, liberating one from the finality of death itself. It was a death driven by a sacred purpose, one which supported the idea of eternal life and Jewish continuity. In drawing upon a model of resistance and survival that was at times physically confrontational, morally robust and – most importantly – enduring, these six survivors are representative of an emerging public survivor identity that would ensure Jewish survival and continuity in an uncertain and hostile post-Holocaust world.
THE SURVIVOR AS PUBLIC WITNESS

The concept of ‘survivor’ as represented by these memoirs fits within the broader perception of what it meant to be a ‘survivor’ in the late 1940s. These six survivors were able to move from the realm of ‘private’ to ‘public’ witness because they shared an understanding of survival that was not challenged by survivor communities. In some cases they also meshed well with other national ‘heroic’ narratives that had taken hold in post-war Europe. The type of survivor who was publicly venerated and the type of experience that was publicly validated were inextricably linked.

These six public witnesses are representative of those recognized as ‘true’ survivors because they shared a similar social profile to those individuals who rose to positions of responsibility in the post-war survivor communities. The experiences that they validated were of a particular nature, imbued with specific moral values. What emerges as a ‘survivor concept’ from these memoirs is the public validation of a particular type of survivor and the selective nature of his or her experiences. These determined the emergence of an ‘exclusive’ and ‘prescriptive’ survivor identity by the late 1940s. Those who survived while in hiding or fled to the relative safety of neutral countries, or those not occupied by the Nazis, did not during this period constitute part of the Jewish public’s equation of a ‘true’ survivor, one who had experienced the full brunt of the Nazis’ Final Solution. Even as late as the 1970s, the term ‘Holocaust survivor’ referred only to one who had survived death and witnessed death. The term particularly referred to survival in the death camps.\textsuperscript{257} And while it is true that the post-war Jewish communities did include in their numbers those who returned from the Soviet Union, children and adults who miraculously survived whilst in hiding or with false papers, and those who found sanctuary in countries that were not occupied by the Nazis, this was not so much a result of unilateral group identification. Rather, it was to accurately record the extent and diversity of the Jewish tragedy, to understand what was lost and what was salvaged and what was needed for communal reconstruction and restitution. It also lent gravitas and political agency to the case for establishing a Jewish homeland. Such people were no doubt seen as ‘survivors’, but of a different order. In a speech made to the DPs in the Landsberg camp, David Ben Gurion told the survivors that ‘in the coming struggle you will play a decisive role ... You must do it, for you are an enormous factor. You are not only
needy people; you are also a political force. So while all these survivors were acknowledged and accounted for, at this time they were not seen as forming part of the core of what should be ‘public’ survivor identity. Within the survivor communities, the notion of who was a ‘true’ survivor was more clearly defined and limited in its public representation.

Personal deprivation, hardship and loss were recognized as genuine victim experiences by those forced into hiding or living outside the direct sphere of Nazi influence. But they did not correspond with the public’s affirmation of ‘true’ survivor experiences. Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising became emblematic of the Holocaust experience, as did those survivors who experienced similar camps and ghettos and who undertook different resistance activities. A more complex understanding of what constituted being a ‘survivor’ was to develop in the ensuing decades, bringing with it a broadening out and inclusiveness to the term ‘survivor’. But this also problematizes the notion of who is a ‘survivor’, and brings with it new controversies. The current expansion of the term ‘survivor’ is seen by some as being too inclusive and thereby devaluing its true currency. The categorization and affirmation of ‘hidden’ survivors has only recently occurred. Children who survived because they were in hiding have only recently been ascribed the status of ‘survivor’. Their plight and their silence is now the subject of intense historical and psychological interest.

Gunnar Paulsson, in his book Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945, reviews the historiography of resistance. He argues that the concept of ‘evasion’ has largely been ignored. Even in the broadest discussions of resistance, ‘escape’ and ‘hiding’ are rarely included. Studies of attempts by Jews to save themselves through active evasion are largely absent. Although Paulsson acknowledges the landmark work of Yehuda Bauer, Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski in extending the notion of resistance to include spiritual and moral acts of defiance, he still contends that they largely ignore ‘evasion’. Paulsson makes a cogent case for including active evasion as a subgroup of resistance. He credits the 28,000 hidden Jews of Warsaw throughout 1940–45 as having taken part in active resistance. But Paulsson’s work was only recently published, in 2002. Attempts to categorize and define survivors therefore remain a contentious issue. In addition, the category of ‘victim’ has recently been extended to include those who fled Europe or were persecuted after Hitler’s rise to power in 1933.

In more recent times, particularly in the past twenty years, there
has been a marked change in the social profile of survivors who have published their memoirs and in the public representation of the survivor. Recently published memoirs reflect not only a broader range of survivor backgrounds, but also deal with people who had very different Holocaust experiences. Written memoirs are no longer the only means by which the deposition of testimony and memory can occur. In short, there is now widespread public affirmation of different types of survivors of different backgrounds, with a diverse range of Holocaust experience represented in written, oral and visual forms. But this was clearly not the case in the 1940s, when public representation favoured those individuals with a particular type of social profile and whose experiences resonated with the survivor and, in some cases, non-survivor communities.

If we examine remembrance and commemorative activities undertaken throughout the 1940s, certain aspects of their recent past had the greatest public significance for a survivor community still in a state of transition. In analysing the commemorative activities in the mid-to-late 1940s, a complex picture of remembrance emerges. Commemoration took different forms. The survivors struggled with the obligation to remember the dead and the need to celebrate survival. Commemoration of the dead was painful for the survivors but an uncomplicated duty. The writing and publishing of Yizkor books commemorating whole towns that were destroyed, listing and naming families and individuals who lived there, offered a collective expression of personal loss. As discussed previously, the rapid establishment of landsmanschaftn also fulfilled a multitude of social responsibilities and went some way towards replacing lost kinship. Commemorations that marked the destruction and liquidation of towns and ghettos often came under the jurisdiction of these landsmanschaftn, but sometimes specific commemorative events were organized by the Zionist groups active in the DP camps, or the Central Committees established to assist in the social and political reconstruction of the Jewish community. Memorial plaques were erected in public areas in some of the DP camps, and while the many newspapers and journals of the survivor press were primarily concerned with pressing contemporary issues confronting the survivors, they also regularly featured testimonies and numerous articles about the martyred dead, and ran announcements of different commemorative events.

Remembrance and honouring the dead was seen as a sacred obligation. But what was to form the basis of survivor identity? Who was
a survivor? And how could they celebrate survival in the shadow of the six million? The post-war world of the 1940s was quick to confer public recognition of all six million victims, but this was not the case for all survivors. For them, the question ‘How did you survive?’ begged qualification. What emerged was the enduring authority of the camp and ghetto experiences. This was most closely scrutinized by the survivors themselves. Those who survived the horrors of the camps and the deprivations of the ghettos held public ownership of survivor identity, an identity that was defined by combining the opposing elements of the most horrific and the most heroic components of it: an identity of mythic excess validated by popular appeal. It was a collective identity that was readily accepted and shared by other survivors, for it was intrinsically linked to a specific, singular historical representation that linked the corresponding elements of ‘catastrophe’ and ‘redemption’. Such a collective identity ensured that the survivor was represented as a heroic entity, for it was survival after direct confrontation with the enemy, not through evasion or subterfuge. It thereby negated the view propagated by the perpetrators, and to some extent the Allies, that still viewed the survivors as helpless victims.

When resistance fighters first began arriving in Eretz Israel towards the end of the Second World War, they were received as conquering heroes. Such was the case with the arrival of the first partisan fighter from Vilna, Ruzka Korchak, who fought in the ghetto underground and later with the partisans. She addressed public rallies and conventions and her speeches, like those of the ex-fighters who soon followed her, Yitzhak Zukerman, Eliezer Lidovsky, Chaika Grossman, Zivia Lubetkin and Abba Kovner, were published and widely disseminated. However, this was not the case for all Holocaust survivors who arrived on the shores of Eretz Israel in the latter part of the 1940s. In those early years, expressions such as ‘refugees’, ‘banished’, ‘deportees’ and ‘human dust’ were used freely by Israelis to describe Holocaust survivors. Given that Holocaust survivors constituted over 70 per cent of the total immigration population during the first two years of Israel’s existence as a state, and that between December 1947 and July 1949 some 80 per cent of the country’s immigrants had survived the Holocaust, it is important to understand that, at the time, only a handful made any positive impression on the Israeli psyche. But that is not to say that the Holocaust was not a major part of Israeli discourse during that period. Dalia Ofer argues that the Holocaust was never far from the public’s attention. The resistance fighters,
however, had a distinct advantage over other survivors. Their acute ‘historical awareness’ not only gave them a sense of their place in history, but their actions also validated their place in Israeli society, elevating them to a position of collective moral authority.278 A distinct link between the heroics of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the pressing needs of the Jewish state was clearly articulated. It was a link used to underscore the need for strong self-defence.279 By being able to preserve documentation concerning the Jewish Fighting Organization’s leadership role in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (and the role of the Zionist organizations in it), and to have it smuggled out of the ghetto to London before the ghetto was destroyed, ensured that the resistance fighters were able to provide evidence of their heroic role in leading armed combat against the might of the Third Reich. This documentation formed the basis of one of the first books about the uprising, that was published in Tel Aviv in 1944.280 Others were soon to follow. Although writers such as Mark Dvorzecki and Nathan Eck, with direct links to the underground movements, were quick to point out in their writings the need to recognize and acknowledge other forms of resistance, it was the voices of the resistance fighters that largely went unchallenged.281

Throughout the 1940s the ex-fighters quickly established themselves in Eretz Israel through their particular political parties, published their memoirs and in some cases established kibbutzim that were dedicated to the commemoration of the Holocaust.282 Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was arguably the first Holocaust Memorial to be established in Israel in 1943, when its founders – who were members of the Hashomer Hatzair movement – immediately adopted the name after hearing of the heroic stand taken by the uprising’s commander Mordechai Anielewicz, a member of the same Zionist movement.283 Other ‘memorial’ kibbutzim quickly followed. In 1949 the surviving leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising established the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz in western Galilee. Its archive in the Ghetto Fighters House was opened in 1950.284 By 1951 it had published the first Holocaust research journal, Pages for the Research of the Holocaust and the Revolt.285 Arguably this positioned the heroics of the fighters at the centre of Holocaust commemoration long before institutions such as Yad Vashem were able to gain a foothold on the commemorative scene. According to Boaz Cohen, Yad Vashem struggled in its early years to consolidate its commemorative position in Israel.286 Dalia Ofer sees the emerging discourses connecting the Holocaust, the diaspora and Israel as
complex and multifaceted. Different agendas put forward by ‘survivor’ historians, and the mandate set by its founding director, Professor Ben-Zion Dinur, who favoured a broader approach to the Holocaust and its place in Jewish history, also weakened its commemorative position in the early founding years. And while the problematic nature of Yad Vashem’s early agenda remained a contested issue between ‘survivor’ historians such as Rachel Auerbach and their ‘non-survivor’ counterparts, the ex-fighters were able to link ‘the centrality of the Jewish armed resistance to Israeli identity’. While there was a deliberate attempt to publicly affirm and commemorate specific modes of behaviour such as moral courage and heroic acts, there was also a conscious move throughout the late 1940s and well into the 1950s to suppress the less desirable elements of survival from the wider public discourse while dealing with collaborators and informers through the Jewish courts and, where necessary, through the non-Jewish judiciary. Collaboration and cooperation with the enemy were expunged from acts of public commemoration. These were matters to be dealt with but not commemorated. This was not just a preoccupation in post-war Europe. The Israeli courts also played their part. Idith Zertal claims that throughout the 1950s, dealing with collaborators became something of a ‘national obsession’ within Israel. What remained, therefore, was a public reverence for the dead and untainted survival. It was a public model of survival that was imbued with distinct, incorruptible moral values. Survival became ‘heroic’ when it could endure the most extreme brutalization with impunity.

However, a public identity defined by these terms and as represented here was highly selective, exclusive and restrictive. It served the needs of the Jewish world at that time and in many ways reflected the concerns and ideals associated with ‘heroic’ survival in a post-war world. It provided a core public identity that gave moral and spiritual meaning to physical survival. Through this form and structure survivors could initially define and understand themselves and what they went through, even though their terms of reference were understandably constrained. But in doing so it also publicly silenced those survivors for whom such a model of survival was not applicable, or who lacked the personal agency or representational status to make their past communal property. Although survivors always spoke to each other within the confines of their own organizations, many of their public voices at this time were diminished. They had to await a later time and place to be
heard and publicly affirmed as a ‘Holocaust Survivor’ at a time when their status as ‘victim’ could be recognized and accepted in the same way.

NOTES

3. For a review of the contentious status of victimhood, see C.J. Dean, Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim after the Holocaust (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
5. J.K. Olick, The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility (New York: Routledge, 2007). Olick claims that suffering has become a key criterion for inclusion in the national polity where ‘pity is elevated to the level of political principle’ (p.16).
7. See http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/.
12. Waxman, Writing the Holocaust, p.95.
15. Ibid., p.184.
17. For a landmark essay on the literature produced by the landsmanshaftn in the USA up to
From Victim to Survivor

27. Cesarani and Sundquist (eds), After the Holocaust, p.5.
33. Ibid.
42. A. Grossman, ‘Victims, Villains, and Survivors: Gendered Perceptions and Self-Perceptions
This is corroborated by the early work undertaken by Holocaust survivor and historian Philip Friedman. See R. Stauber, ‘Philip Friedman and the Beginning of Holocaust Studies’, in Bankier and Michman (eds), *Holocaust Historiography in Context*, pp.88–9.


58. On the significance of the Polin series, see also Smith, *No Silence in Yiddish*, p.58.


70. Ibid., p.238.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.


80. For biographical information, see the website of the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies, www.sephardicstudies.org.

82. Poore, ‘Books of the Times’.


104. Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, p.16.
109. Angier, *Double Bond*, p.288. Levi does not provide the exact date of his arrival at Auschwitz only of his capture on 13 December 1943.
119. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, p.119.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., p.121.
122. Ibid., p.128.
123. Ibid., p.37.
126. Ibid., p.53.
132. Ibid., *On Both Sides of the Wall*, p.121.
139. Ibid., p.218.
140. Ibid., p.221.
142. Ibid., pp.102–4.
145. Ibid., p.104.
150. The Kasztner trial in Israel served as a metaphor for collaboration with the enemy. See R. Stauber, *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), pp.79–80. Dalia Ofer also claims that this view was perpetuated in Israel throughout the 1950s. See Ofer, *‘Strength of Remembrance’*.
155. Ibid.
163. Saf and Gutman (eds), *She’erit Hapletah*, p.235.
164. Ibid., p.254.
168. Ibid.
169. Ibid., p.65.
170. Ibid., p.173.
172. Ibid., p.166.
173. Ibid., p.167.
174. Ibid., p.178.
176. See introduction in ibid.
178. Ibid., p.259.
179. Ibid., p.252.
184. Van Pelt, Case for Auschwitz, p.165.
185. Ibid., p.167.
188. Van Pelt, Case for Auschwitz, p.154.
189. Cited in ibid., p.156
191. Bauer, Jewish Reactions to the Holocaust, p.128.
193. Ibid. 
194. Ibid., p.215.
195. Ibid., p.276.
198. Cited in Young, Texture of Memory, p.164.
199. Ibid., p.288.
201. Young, Texture of Memory, p.289.
203. Roskies, Dividing the Ruins, p.82.
205. Young, ‘Biography of a Memorial Icon’, p.83.
208. Van Pelt, Case for Auschwitz, p.80.
211. Fassin and Rechtman claim that the notion of ‘survivor guilt’ appears for the first time in the early writings of Bruno Bettelheim. See Fassin and Rechtman, Empire of Trauma, pp.71–6.
213. There is extensive literature concerning war crimes trials and their dominance over this period. Although there are different interpretations of the impact these trials had on Holocaust consciousness at the time, the authors generally agree that the Jewish witness was of secondary importance. See Bloxham, Genocide on Trial; L. Douglas, The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); M. Marrus, ‘The Holocaust at Nuremberg’, Yad Vashem Studies, 26 (1998), pp.5–41.
214. Gordon, ‘Which Holocaust?’ Although Gordon is primarily concerned with Primo Levi, his discourse begins with a comprehensive historiography of the period in question and the lack of victim recognition in post-war Europe.
216. Ibid., p.72; van Pelt, Case for Auschwitz, pp.225–92.
220. Menasche, Birkenau, p.51.
221. Levi, If This Is a Man, p.58.
222. Perl, I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz, p.56.
223. Lengyel, Five Chimneys, p.110.
228. Patterson, Moral Dilemma of Motherhood, p.20.
232. Ibid., p.15.
237. Meed, On Both Sides of the Wall, p.22.
239. Lengyel, Five Chimneys, p.174; Menasche, Birkenau, pp.89–94.
240. Menasche, Birkenau, p.93.
241. Ibid., p.94.
From Private Victim to Public Survivor

244. Ibid., p.167.
246. Ibid., p.127.
250. Borzykowski, *Between Tumbling Walls*, p.44.
251. Levi, *If This Is a Man*, p.47.
252. A. Goldberg, ‘*If This is a Man*: The Image of Man in Autobiographical and Historical Writing During and after the Holocaust’, *Yad Vashem Studies*, 1, 33 (2005), pp.381–430.
258. L.W. Schwarz, *The Redeemers* (New York: Straus & Young, 1953), p.51. According to Ze’ev Mankowitz, the term ‘She’erit Hapletah’ was inclusive. It referred to all those who had survived, regardless of where or how. But it did not define cultural identity. Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, p.2.
271. Friedlander, *Memory, History*, p.44.
276. Ibid.
278. M. Brog, ‘Victims and Victors: Holocaust and Military Commemoration in Israel Collective Memory’, *Israel Studies*, 8, 3 (Fall 2003), pp.65–99; B. Cohen, ‘Holocaust Heroics’; Stauber,
Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate.


282. Ibid., p.39.


287. Ofer, ‘Strength of Remembrance’.


Conclusion

This book challenges two popular misconceptions about Holocaust testimony: first, that the Eichmann trial was a watershed in the public emergence of the survivor witness; second, that the current growth of interest in survivor testimony confirms that survivors have only recently spoken of their past experiences in any meaningful way. A different reading of the evidence suggests that the explosion of interest in the Holocaust witness that came with the Eichmann trial signalled the creation of a more receptive, broad-based audience, rather than a sudden willingness and desire on the part of the witness to testify. While the Eichmann trial was a seminal moment in the development and acceptance of the 'public' face of the witness, witnessing did not begin with the trial. It is true that the Eichmann trial opened the way for the non-survivor world to define and understand the Holocaust through survivor witness testimony. But, as this study demonstrates, survivors already had a very clear sense of who they were and what the Holocaust meant, long before Eichmann was captured in May 1960. The strong impulse to bear witness to what was happening to the Jews emerged and developed in the 1940s. Throughout an intense and turbulent eight-year period from 1941 to 1949, victims and survivors endeavoured to give form and meaning to the events that shaped and defined the Final Solution.

In the immediate post-war period, national meta-narratives of heroic resistance to Nazi oppression were endorsed in countries that were caught up in the murderous business of total war. The singular message was clear: they had all struggled and suffered under fascism. Within this paradigm, nations and individuals could proclaim their common victimhood, whether this was a historically accurate claim or not. The recasting of the past into one of collective innocence provided an acceptable framework for European countries to re-establish civil order, reclaim political control and attempt moral rehabilitation. Acts of compliance and collaboration with the Nazis were expunged from the collective, national memory. Jewish survivor accounts that meshed
well with mythic national resistance narratives were acknowledged, and some attracted public attention and acclaim at the time – arguably a partial recognition of sorts – although in many cases the particularity of the Jewish experience was obscured or deflected. That the specificity of Jewish suffering was not that important to others at the time is to some degree understandable, given the social and political upheavals across the post-war world. But it was of paramount importance for the Jewish survivors.

Bearing witness throughout the critical eight-year period covered by this book was part of an ongoing individual and communal process that sought to understand the genocide that was committed against Europe’s Jews. The individual and the collective were embedded in each other as a shared experience, coexisting in a common space that did not differentiate between private experience and public record. What happened to each and every victim and survivor, his or her family and his or her community was deeply personal and at the same time inextricably communal. The Jewish experience of the Holocaust did not end when wartime hostilities ceased in 1945. Survivors continued to be subjected to anti-Semitism, enmity and suffering. The years from 1941 to 1949 must be viewed as a single entity in which different stages of understanding were reached by victims and survivors. Throughout this period, witnesses engaged in a developing and transformational process through which they came to a definition of survivor identity that carried over and sustained them through the 1950s. By the time Eichmann stood trial in 1961, the witnesses were well prepared and ready to tell the world what the Holocaust meant to them and what their role was as survivors.

The developing conceptualization and representation of the Holocaust by the Jewish witness during this eight-year period has as its central focus an understanding of and direct response to the Final Solution, an event that posed an unprecedented physical threat to European Jewry. Emphasis here is on the Final Solution, rather than the more generic term ‘Holocaust’, as the specificity of this radical plan to exterminate European Jewry was the mainstay of all attempts at understanding and witnessing by those who experienced or survived it, throughout the period of this study and indeed for years to follow. Many individuals caught up in the Final Solution sought to attach meaning to the catastrophic events that shaped their daily lives. What emerges is a concept of the witness which passes through several transitional stages as ‘knowledge of’ and ‘response to’ the events and circumstances of the Final Solution changed.
This book has conceptualized three stages in the transition of the witness from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’. Initially the witness emerged to confront and try to understand the Nazis’ unprecedented plan as it moved from persecution to mass killings to total annihilation. In the first stage, accounts were written in secret by ghetto inhabitants who observed and documented their daily efforts to stay alive. Even though they could not yet fully understand what the Final Solution really meant for European Jewry, many felt compelled to testify to its devastation and to leave a record for posterity. Their struggle was an act of political agency and consolidated the witness as a resilient force that would not be silenced by the Third Reich.

In the second stage, the emergent survivor witnesses confronted the truth of the tragedy that had befallen their communities and how they were to make sense of their own loss within it. By 1944, newspaper articles, magazines and journals across the free world were awash with articles and graphic descriptions about mass exterminations and death camps. Information about the implementation of a systematic mass murder campaign was widespread. But ‘information’ does not easily or readily translate into ‘knowledge’. For survivors, the Final Solution could not just be known, but had to be understood. Understanding came firstly from within their own communities and then moved to a wider recognition and acceptance of its implications for the whole of Europe. This imperative galvanized some witnesses to testify to the magnitude of the crime and identify the criminals who had perpetrated it. In this way they expressed their own personal loss as part of the collective experience. In some cases these witnesses were not yet liberated and were also appealing to the Allies to intervene before all was lost. This period sees the first published narratives of armed resistance, in which survival begins to take on heroic dimensions.

By the end of the 1940s the identity of the Holocaust witness had moved away from the notion of passive victim to that of heroic survivor. The implications for Jewish communal life in a post-Holocaust world meant that questions pertaining to ‘survival’ had to be dealt with. How could anyone have survived such an unprecedented mass murder campaign aimed at total annihilation unless they were either exceedingly ‘heroic’ or ‘corrupt’? These testimonies were therefore individual expressions of what was deemed a positive response to a collective experience, even though contemporary understanding of what that meant was limited and did not embrace the breadth of victimhood that we now recognize.
The Holocaust witness was initially born out of conflict and perpetual struggle, reacting against forces that deliberately sought to silence his or her voice throughout the war or inadvertently marginalized and obscured the Jewish witness in the post-war world. To borrow the words of sociologist Fuyuki Kurasawa, the witness confronted five ‘sets of perils’: ‘silence’, ‘incomprehension’, ‘indifference’, ‘forgetting’ and ‘return’. But the Jewish witness remained intrinsically connected to that part of Jewish heritage that honoured the drive to record, remember and narrate the past. What commenced as a sacred injunction to remember became a secular responsibility not to forget. In direct opposition to what they were experiencing, witnesses retained an unshakeable belief in the need to serve justice and restore a sense of moral order.

The writings of victims and survivors both during and immediately after the war were often directed at an audience that had been alive throughout the war and with whom they shared living memory. But it was also an audience that some felt had abandoned them. Olga Lengyel wrote: ‘I know that the world must share the guilt collectively. The Germans sinned grievously, but so did the rest of the nations, if only through refusing to believe and to toil every day and night to save the wretched and dispossessed by every possible means.’ These survivors believed that their audience had to shoulder the burden of collective responsibility in repairing and rebuilding a world that had gone terribly wrong.

Public survivor identity was initially shaped by the selective and exclusive validation of certain experiences. The result was a survivor paradigm that matched the way in which the Holocaust itself was seen, through one defining and singular term of reference – namely, the total destruction of European Jewry. From as early as 1944, some survivors who confronted and survived the Final Solution were imbued with a sense of heroism and purpose. This notion was consolidated and reinforced in the 1940s and sustained through the 1950s. It resonated well with the forging of a new Israeli identity, one that negated passivity and advocated a strong, ‘new’ Jew in place of the failed, weak one of the diaspora. The framing of a heroic survivor narrative was not only purposeful and forward-looking but offered an acceptable format for explaining, with honour and dignity, how anyone could have survived when six million did not.

Rather than reflecting docility and passivity, witness testimonies and publications throughout this eight-year period reveal a cohort of socially engaged and politically active individuals. Witnesses projected
a communal voice through writings and publications that commenced as clandestine operations under the Nazis in the camps and ghettos and continued in the DP camps and the Jewish Historical Commissions. They deliberately looked for ways to communicate with each other and share their experiences and their concerns as a means of maintaining social cohesion and unity in their fractured communities. To think otherwise is to betray the efforts that these witnesses had to make in their struggle to tell their side of the story, and to fail to understand why they did so.

Many survivors were leaving Europe and re-establishing their lives by the late 1940s, and there was a sustained effort by some to write and publish their memoirs throughout the 1950s. Survivors continued to bear witness in this way, although not with the same intensity or in the same numbers as had occurred throughout the 1940s. Some of these later publications, however, were particularly significant. Elie Wiesel’s first memoir, *Un di velt hot geshvign* (And the World was Silent), was published in Yiddish in Argentina by Mark Turkow in 1956 and later as *La Nuit*, a revised French version, in 1958. The English translation *Night* was published in 1960 to great acclaim. Primo Levi reissued his *Se questo e un uomo* (If This Is a Man) in a revised form in 1958; the book appeared in English in the same year and in German in 1960. Although not a memoir, the novel *Le Dernier des Just* by French-born Jewish ex-resistance fighter André Schwartz-Bart, published in France in 1959 and subsequently translated into English as *The Last of the Just* in 1960, told the story of a Jewish family’s journey from the time of the Crusades to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Schwartz-Bart’s book won the Prix Goncourt, was promptly translated into a dozen other languages and went on to sell over one million copies.

Writers of the calibre of Levi and Wiesel arguably opened the door to wider audience interest in survivor and Jewish narratives. The quality of their writing and the profound way in which these authors articulated their concentration camp experiences put their books in a class above many survivor memoirs. But these were the exceptions rather than the rule. There was a continuing market for books about the Nazi era. John Hersey’s bestseller *The Wall*, a novel about the Warsaw Ghetto (published in the USA in 1950) and Lord Russell’s acclaimed *Scourge of the Swastika* (published in the UK in 1954) are just two examples from many that reflect this type of interest. Neither of these authors was a survivor and neither was Jewish, but both men were
established public figures with authorial credibility and their books had a ready audience.

The success of *The Diary of Anne Frank* points to a developing public interest in a particular type of victim experience. Originally published in Dutch as *Het Achterhuis* (The Room Behind the House) in 1947, the book received greater recognition when it was reissued in English in 1952. By 1955 a dramatized version of the diary had won a Pulitzer Prize and by 1959 it had also been made into a successful Hollywood film.8 This growth of interest in the victim experience can in part be attributed to the passage of time. *The Diary of Anne Frank* is a certain kind of victim narrative, and one that is very different from that of a ‘survivor’. The diary is neither heroic nor horrific; there are no death camps, no ghettos, no mass shootings. It does not shock or astound. It is the story of a young, innocent girl’s life in hiding from the Nazis. Her story connected with people in a way that was not confronting and was yet profoundly human. Although readers already knew the fate of the main protagonist, they were spared its harrowing details. In many ways *The Diary of Anne Frank* is not so much a Holocaust story as a generic ‘victim’ account that elicited sympathy and resonated well with a broad general audience. In his memoir *Dying for Jerusalem*, Walter Laqueur recalls that the appeal of the diary lay in the ‘emotional outpourings of an adolescent girl that only indirectly made comment on the tragedy. The fact that there was so little that was specifically Jewish in this book enhanced its appeal ... and made it possible for many others to identify with her.’9 In a similar way, Bruno Bettelheim believed that

the worldwide acclaim given her story cannot be explained unless we recognize in it our wish to forget the gas chambers and our effort to do so by glorifying the ability to react into an extremely private, gentle, sensitive world, and there to cling as much as possible to what have been one’s usual daily attitudes and activities, although surrounded by a maelstrom apt to engulf one at any moment.10

‘Human kind cannot bear too much reality’, wrote the English poet T.S. Eliot in the first of his *Four Quartets* (‘Burnt Norton’, 1936). Audience acknowledgement, public recognition and a comprehensive understanding of the Final Solution evolved through a complex process of cognitive development. Witnesses found validation and appreciation within their own communities long before the particularity of the Jewish
experience gained widespread currency in the non-Jewish world. In its formative stages, this development also saw the concept of ‘witness’ progress from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’. By the end of the 1940s, the roles of witness, victim and survivor had combined into a new identity that represented survival as continuing and enabling. In this way the witness was able to defeat once and for all the ultimate aim of the Final Solution: the eradication of a Jewish future.

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10. Solotaroff-Enzer and Enzer (eds), Anne Frank, p.186.
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