

The Warsaw Ghetto Workshops: Perspectives of Space and Time in Emanuel Ringelblum and Reuven Ben Shem`s Diaries

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Abstract: In this paper, I analyze the notion of time and space in the small factories of the Warsaw Ghetto, commonly known as shops, through a close reading of the diaries written in the Ghetto by Emanuel Ringelblum and Reuven Feldschu Ben Shem. In the Warsaw Ghetto of July 22, 1942, there were but two options for Jews: being deported to Treblinka or "postponing" the death sentence by becoming a shop worker. As long as one worked in a shop, one's life — and only one's life, not his family's — was spared for a while. The authors of the diaries who will be presented, both worked in the shops, and in their writings, they exposed how space and time became significant oppressing factors. As I will show, every familiar perception was challenged in this space of an imposed slave-like existence.

Keywords: Jews, 2nd World War, Warsaw Ghetto, Treblinka.

Rezumat: În această lucrare, analizez noțiunea de timp și spațiu în micile fabrici din ghetoul din Varșovia, cunoscute în mod obișnuit ca magazine, printr-o citire atentă a jurnalelor scrise în ghetou de Emanuel Ringelblum și Reuven Feldschu Ben Shem. În Ghetoul din Varșovia, în 22 iulie 1942, nu existau decât două variante pentru evrei: să fie deportați la Treblinka sau „amânarea” condamnării la moarte devenind muncitori în magazin. Atâta timp cât cineva a lucrat într-un magazin, viața cuiva — și numai viața cuiva, nu a întregii sale familii — era cruțată pentru o vreme. Autorii jurnalelor care vor fi prezentate au lucrat în magazine și în scrierile lor au expus modul în care spațiul și timpul au devenit factori opresivi semnificativi. După cum voi arăta, fiecare percepție familiară a fost contestată în acest spațiu al existenței impuse asemănătoare sclavilor.

Cuvinte cheie: evrei, al Doilea Război Mondial, ghetoul din Varșovia, Treblinka.

Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the notion of time and space in the small factories of the Warsaw Ghetto, commonly known as shops,¹ through a close reading of the diaries written in the Ghetto by Emanuel Ringelblum² and Reuven Feldschu Ben Shem.³

In the Warsaw Ghetto of July 22, 1942, there were but two options for Jews: being deported to Treblinka or "postponing" the death sentence by becoming a shop worker. As long as one worked in a shop, one's life — and only one's life, not his family's — was spared for a while. The authors of the diaries who will be presented, both worked in the shops, and in their writings, they exposed how space and time became significant oppressing factors. As I will show, every familiar perception was challenged in this space of an imposed slave-like existence.

Ringelblum was a Jewish historian, an author of a historical diary in the ghetto, the founder of Oneg Shabbat archive,⁴ a relief worker and a political activist of the Left.⁵ Ben Shem was a teacher, journalist and a political activist of the Right. While Ringelblum's diary is kept in a serious tone, representative of his ideals as a historian and archivist, Ben Shem's diary is largely personal, containing descriptions of events and scenes in the ghetto, as well as his personal experiences. Both diary writers managed to temporarily secure their own and their families' life in the ghetto by becoming workers in ghetto shops. In addition to Ringelblum's position as an Aleynhilf worker (a relief worker), he was also employed at the shop of Hallman both of which contributed to his temporary immunity from deportation. As for Ben Shem, in the first months of the deportations, he was employed at the workshop of Schilling but had no official work papers till about September 18, 1942, a few days before the first wave of deportations had stopped.⁶

¹ The shops were small factories. In this article the workshops will be referred to by the term "shops" because this is how both diary writers referred to them. Details will follow.

² E. Ringelblum *Diary and Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, September 1939 - December 1942*, Yad-Vashem, Daf-Noy Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1999 (Hebrew).

³ R. Feldschu (Ben Shem), Record Group 0.33, *Testimonies, Diaries and Memoirs Collection*, File Number 959-III Deciphered, Yad-Vashem Archive (Hebrew).

⁴ V. Nizan, "Politics and History in Emanuel Ringelblum's War Diaries. Emanuel Ringelblum between the Two World Wars", *Journal of Global Politics and Current Diplomacy*, Center for European Dialogue and Cultural Diplomacy, issue 2, 2016, p. 16. The archive is a collection of documents gathered at the Warsaw ghetto which contains official documents, pamphlets, diaries, research papers etc. which were collected by Ringelblum and his crew during their incarceration in the ghetto.

⁵ S. D. Kassow, "Ringelblum Emanuel", *The YIVO Encyclopedia*, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Ringelblum_Emanuel, accessed: 16 Dec 2018.

⁶ R. Feldschu (Ben Shem), op. cit., p. 416. There were two big waves of deportations to Treblinka, the first was from July 22, 1942 - September 21, 1942, and the second was in January 1943.

The diary writers' entries about the elusive nature of time and the uncertainty of space demonstrate the twisted cosmos created in the shops of the ghetto. Both write about how the factories, which were regarded as safe grounds, were frequently and abruptly raided, an experience which left people in a frantic state, unable to react or even grasp the chaotic events. In such episodes, the sensation that time was racing at the speed of light gave way to periods when it felt like time was very slow.⁷

Despite the fact that the diaries of Ringelblum and Ben Shem are very different, they both express the constant sense of confusion, rapid and sudden shifts between feelings of safety to experiencing danger, suffocation quickly transforming into the welcome moments of relief. Yet the diaries make it clear that although the circumstances of life in the shops were overwhelming, they were also relatively "good" in comparison to the fate of those who were murdered or were still waiting in inhuman conditions at the Umschlagplatz.⁸ In the sea of impossible choices that the Warsaw ghetto inmates have had to face, the shops stand out as significant microcosms.

The Workshops

The workshops were small factories under German ownership that were established in the Warsaw ghetto. Their establishment was in the interest of both the Germans and the Jews. The Germans realized that the growing shortage of products and supplies could be alleviated if they used the Jews that they were holding in captivity to meet the demand.⁹ In contrast, the Jewish Council was interested in such factories as means to relieve poverty in the ghetto, earn money to maintain the ghetto and pay the Germans for the meager foods that they allowed into the ghetto.¹⁰

⁷ A. Goldberg, *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing During the Holocaust*, Kineret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2012 (Hebrew), p.173. Goldberg discuss the sensation of time standing still in Victor Klemperer's diary when the later reports about such feelings in August 6, 1942 when deportations and violence in general became a routine which led to a sensation of indifference. According to Goldberg, such reports show that the present takes over consciousness thus preventing it from distinguishing the dreadful abnormality of the situation.

⁸ The Umschlagplatz was a German term and referred to a train platform where Jewish deportees were held and then loaded onto train wagons going to death camps.

⁹ W. Grunner, *Jewish Forced Labor Under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938-1944*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p, 263. Grunner specifies how it was impossible to replace the Jewish workers in some factories as they were practically the only skilled workers in certain professions.

¹⁰ P. Friedman, "The Jewish Ghettos of the Nazi Era", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1954, p. 76, Indiana University Press. www.jstor.org/stable/4465209. Friedman, one of the first historians to research the Holocaust and a survivor himself, writes that the Governor of Warsaw, Ludwig Fischer and Governor General Frank declared in an address in Lvov (On April 1, 1942), that ghettoization was a means to exterminate Jews by starving them.

In February 1941, the German authorities gave their permission to establish such factories, but not many Jews were attracted due to the deliberately low salaries offered to the Jewish workers. It remained preferable for most to seek other means of supporting themselves and their families.¹¹ Even when the shops tried to tempt people into working there by providing them with a daily portion of soup, the numbers remained low.

This situation changed around the winter of 1942, when rumors about deportations and other atrocities that had been taking place around Poland reached the Warsaw ghetto. Jews assumed that if they worked in the shops, their whole family would be protected. Still, in June 1942, a month before the deportations, there were only about 70,000 people registered at the shops.¹² Only toward the end of July 1942, when trains packed with Jews were making their daily journey to Treblinka, that the demand to be accepted to a shop increased sharply.

At this point, shop workers were in fact slave laborers: they were not paid, and, in many shops, no food was supplied.¹³ They worked 10-12 hours a day, and the conditions at the shops were harsh. In addition, they had to live in a commune of sorts, in designated areas where their shops ordered them to stay. Accordingly, people had to leave their homes and belongings behind and move into the shops' compounds on very short notice. In most cases, the given houses were in a dreadful condition and many people have had to squeeze into a small space.¹⁴

On January 9, 1943, Heinrich Himmler arrived in Warsaw and was dissatisfied with the number of Jews who remained in the ghetto (about 50,000), many of whom were "wild".¹⁵ He ordered to reduce the numbers immediately, and that was the reason for another German raid, on January 18, 1943. The attempt to deport more Jews to Treblinka was, this time, welcomed by resistance and caused the Germans casualties and dead. Therefore, the Germans decided to remove the shop workers to the area of Lublin first and then liquidate the ghetto. Tobbens, the owner of the largest ghetto shop, was appointed to the position of the Jewish deportation commissar. He tried to

¹¹ Y. Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943, Ghetto-Underground-Uprising*, Yad-Vashem, Jerusalem, 2011 (Hebrew), p. 150-151.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 158.

¹³ H. Dreifuss (Ben Sasson), *Warsaw Ghetto – The End, April 1942 – June 1943*, Yad Vashem, 2017 (Hebrew), p. 173.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 177.

¹⁵ S. D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007, p. 339. "Wild" and "legal" refer to the status of the remaining Jews in the ghetto. The "legal" were people who were granted with a number from the German authorities which provided them with work, housing and some food. The "wild", those without numbers, were denied of everything.

convince Jews to volunteer for deportation to the Lublin camps where they would continue to work in the factories, but his efforts were not successful. It was only after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in May 1943, that the Warsaw ghetto shops were moved to the Lublin camps.¹⁶

Between 3-4 November 1943, the Lublin camps were liquidated, and between 42,000-43,000 people were shot in what the German referred to as "Aktion Erntefest", Operation Harvest Festival.¹⁷

The Changes in the Ghetto Topography after Deportations Began

As soon as the deportations began, the Warsaw ghetto was diminished dramatically and torn into separate areas between which it was forbidden to move unless one had a permit.¹⁸ On July 22, 1942, when the first convoy of Jews left for Treblinka, there were about 370,000 Jews in the ghetto. The Germans decided on the quota of about 7,000 Jews a day which were destined to be deported to Treblinka. At the end of September 1942, when the first wave of deportations ended, about 55,000-60,000 Jews remained in the ghetto, half of whom were "wild". The other half were "legal", mostly shop workers.¹⁹ The Warsaw ghetto had, in fact, turned into a series of islands where life resembled more to that of a work camp rather than a ghetto.²⁰

The Umschlagplatz was located in the northern part of the ghetto and was formerly a train platform used for the transportation of goods. The area was converted into a gathering point for Jews destined for deportation and the buildings around became detention centers where Jews were held before being loaded onto cattle carts going to Treblinka.²¹ The Umschlagplatz bordered with what remained of the original ghetto. In this area, the majority of residents were Jewish Council workers, police, relief workers and about 20,000 "wild" residents. The area was adjacent to the brush makers' shop located in the south east corner of this quarter.²²

The southern part of the ghetto which even before July 1942 was separated from the main ghetto by a bridge over Chłodna street, was returned to the Polish authorities except for where Tobbens had one of his shops. In this way, the Tobbens shop and its workers became an island in the Polish territory.²³

¹⁶ H. Dreifuss (Ben Sasson), op. cit., pp. 356-366. In her book, Dreifuss elaborates on Tobbens' different tactics to convince Jews to move to the camps of Lublin.

¹⁷ W. Grunner, op. cit., p. 271.

¹⁸ S. D. Kassow, op. cit., pp. 340-341.

¹⁹ H. Dreifuss (Ben Sasson), op. cit., pp. 143.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 257.

²¹ Y. Gutman, op. cit., p. 344.

²² Ibid, pp. 431-432.

²³ Ibid, p. 432.

The main shop area was at the center of what the ghetto used to be. This paper focuses on this area, because both diary writers were working in this compound, each in a different shop, Ringelblum at Hallman's and Ben Shem at Schilling's. Both of them became workers in those shops in the early days after the deportations began. This area bordered slightly with Polish houses and on most sides with the destroyed, empty houses of the ghetto.²⁴

Space and Time in the Workshops According to the Diaries **How Space and Time Were Conceived**

About a month before the deportations began, rumors that shop workers might be saved, rumors that were encouraged and spread by the Germans themselves, created a lot of tension in the ghetto and started a frenzy to acquire a shop permit. It appears that Abraham Lewin, a diary writer and a member of Oneg Shabbat archive, managed to convey it in a single word: "Shopomania,"²⁵ the feverish atmosphere in the ghetto created by people desperately trying to become shop workers.

In June 1942, a month before the deportations, Jan Tobbens, one of the owners of a shop on Leszno street, held a small party for his employees. He raised a toast while stating the following: "...I hereby formally announce that... you will remain the last..."²⁶ This declaration was received with dismay by Ben Shem as he and others "...understood the tone of the speechmaker who wasn't laughing or kidding at all, nor was he even astonished. He simply stated what he was authorized to say, that is, because of their great and efficient work, the Jews working at the firm will get a prize... the extension of their lives for a while... but in the end everyone will be shot."²⁷

Ben Shem's choice of words stresses not only his own astonishment at the fact that the shop owner said such blunt things in the open but also that Tobbens himself seems to have accepted this as a totally natural development. Ben Shem further reports that after the event people were very alarmed and called the Jewish Council to inquire about the meaning of Tobbens' declarations. Officials at the Community scolded them, claiming that such reports frightened them and that in reply to their inquiries about this information, the Germans told them that Jews had better "...mind their own business and refrain from thinking about what the Germans intend to do..."²⁸ The reaction from the Jewish Council infuriated Ben Shem who wrote that the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ A. Lewin, *Mi-Pinkaso shel ha-More mi-Yehudiya* (From the Notebook of the Teacher from Yehudiya), Beit Lohamei ha-Geta'ot, 1969 (Hebrew), p. 92.

²⁶ R. Feldschu (Ben Shem), p. 304.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 305.

Community was totally wrong, naïve and had failed to perceive the cynicism in what the Germans were saying.²⁹

Ringelblum also reported in his diary about the growing restlessness in the ghetto in relation to the rumors about deportations from Warsaw, and he provided revelatory information when he pointed out that in order to be accepted to a shop, one had to pay about 500 Zlotys.³⁰ Not only that, but a person who wanted to work there had to provide his own working tools such as a sewing machine. The fact that employees rather than employers had to provide the working equipment was not a novelty; already in June 1942, it had become current practice, having been adopted early on by the shop owners.³¹ However, in the pandemonium of the summer of 1942, having working tools was almost like possessing a treasure.³²

Ben Shem's entry from the first day of the deportation illustrated what Lewin was trying to characterize by coining the term "Shopomania", that is, the frenzy of the ghetto inmates to obtain a work permit at the shops.³³ When huge amounts of police forces ransacked the ghetto, Ben Shem, like many others, was running around the ghetto to try and obtain documents that would save his family and himself. His entry from July 21st, 1942, recounts that the JOINT officials, Daniel Guzik, Yitzhak Gitterman and the General Zionist activist, Menachem Kirszenbaum as well as himself, went to Tobbens shop managers to try and obtain more work permits.

In this entry, Ben Shem refers to the idea of shops being a safe haven using sarcastically the term "this paradise",³⁴ while explaining that this solution "... would grant us with life for a certain time."³⁵ In the same passage, he further relates to the shops as a divine creation, "... an opening appeared an eye of a needle, he gave, and through it, Jews would already infiltrate their elephant survival hopes."³⁶ Ben Shem's metaphors refer not only to the size of the space and consequently, to the time left, but also to the space's qualities.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ E. Ringelblum, op. cit., p. 378.

³¹ P. OPOCHINSKY, *Sketches from The Warsaw Ghetto*, Hakkibutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv, 1970 (Hebrew), p. 185. In his reports about life in the ghetto, OPOCHINSKY dedicates a passage to the shops and he reports that if one came to the shop with his equipment, when he wanted to leave, his equipment was confiscated.

³² Y. Gutman, op. cit., p. 338. People who could bring their own working tools had better chances to be accepted to the shops.

³³ See footnote 25.

³⁴ FELDSCHE (Ben Shem), p. 329.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The "paradise",³⁷ was, in fact, the size of "an eye of a needle"³⁸ versus the size of the Jews' hopes which were as big as an "elephant".³⁹

The vocabulary chosen suggests multiple contradictions: the shops which were referred to as a paradise and a divine creation can actually be seen as the opposite: "...Is there a way out of this hell?"⁴⁰ asks Ben Shem, frustrated. In the "competition" between the hellish characteristics of the shops and the slim chances of survival they offered, it was hope that won. However, the prospects of being accepted to a shop were as small as a needle's eye, while the size of the hopes made the tiny space of the needle's eye a huge "opening"⁴¹ in people's minds. This suggests that "the opening"⁴² it gave was in fact the hopes that people clung onto, rather than the actual space of the shops. Hope became the divine gift as it was vital to instil energy necessary to those trying to survive.

When Ben Shem left Tobbens' empty handed, he felt that "time was a burden," and that "now every minute counts".⁴³ This idea, expressed in the diary, presumably appeared in his mind while he was hurrying through the chaotic streets of the ghetto, filled with police forces, now kidnapping people on every corner. "I mustn't wait..."⁴⁴ he wrote, emphasizing the pressure, felt especially in the terrible moments when he himself was grabbed by the Jewish police who demanded from him to accompany them to the Umschlagplatz. "...Sweat covered my body and wetted my shirt. At that moment, I saw myself lost and my family buried", he writes.⁴⁵ Even though Ben Shem talked his way out of this arrest, his accounts exhibit the twist of time and space which were directly linked to the situation. At that moment, time was truly running out for Ben Shem but in his mind, it seemed to have stopped once he was arrested, only to start racing again as soon as he was released.⁴⁶ Being arrested made Ben Shem cross, in his imagination, from the world of the living to the world

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 336.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 329.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ G. Miron, "The "Lived Time" of German Jews under the Nazi Regime", *The Journal of Modern History* 90, March 2018, The University of Chicago, pp. 136-138. In this article, Miron discusses the phenomenology of experiencing time subjectively which is directly influenced by the ability to react and anticipate the future. When Ben Shem is arrested, he loses control of his time, he already imagines his family and himself dead. In other words, time stands still for him. Once his is released, time flows again because he is active, he can relate to the future.

of the dead. His release aligned him again with the evading time while both (time and him) attempted simultaneously to reach a space where there was still time – the shop.

A Safe Space?

The Jewish police, which was, at least at the beginning, the one responsible for providing the daily quota of Jews for deportations, found it harder and harder to come up with the right number as the ghetto's population was dwindling daily.⁴⁷ When they failed, it was the Ukrainian and Latvian auxiliaries with the SS that were called in.⁴⁸ Often, they would turn to the shops to find the amounts of people needed for the daily quota. First, they went after the "wild" inside the shops, many of whom were women and children, but when it was hard to find them, shop workers themselves became the target, and little notice was given to the workers holding proper documentation or not.

In his entry relating to the shops, Ringelblum provided a broad and complex picture of the phenomenon, alluding to the fact that although the space of shops was viewed by the vast majority of Jews as a safe hiding compounds, in the reality of the ghetto, the shops were also a trap.⁴⁹ Despite that, being a shop worker was much better than being "wild", having no "... roof over one's head or food tickets."⁵⁰ This understanding may explain why in September 1942, Ringelblum reported that the cost of becoming a shop worker rose to about 2,000 zlotys, a clear evidence to how desperate the people of the ghetto had become.

As the shop compounds were considered safer, in an attempt to protect relatives, shop workers refrained from going back to their houses at the end of the work day and, instead, remained with their families in the factory compounds for the night.⁵¹ The Germans were well aware of that and Ringelblum reported how shops turned into traps when the SS and Ukrainian auxiliaries hunted down Jews inside the shop's housing grounds in addition to the factories themselves. When German forces invaded the shops, they often conducted selections. First, it was the workers' documentation that counted but later it was how people looked that became the criterion which determined their fate.⁵² Ringelblum also pointed an

⁴⁷ H. Dreifuss (Ben Sasson), *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁸ E. Ringelblum, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

⁴⁹ Y. Gutman, *op. cit.*, p. 345-347.

⁵⁰ E. Ringelblum, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 407.

accusing finger at some shop owners, such as Hoffman and Brauer, who contributed their share to the men hunt.⁵³

One of Ben Shem's diary entries offers a detailed glance into such a raid. On the 24th of August 1942, while he was working at the shop, they suddenly heard many shots close by. The initial instinct was to run away but one of the shop foremen ordered them all to keep working as they were being watched by Ukrainians who were standing on the roofs. "Suddenly the air literally trembled... they came for us..."⁵⁴ Ben Shem wrote about how the Ukrainians were walking around, examining their work and how frightening it was. He was so stressed that he accidentally pounded a nail into two of his fingers, but he did not dare to stop working because he feared he would be noticed. Then, the invaders went into the manager's office, a break that gave him a chance to remove the nails. A short while went by and the managers, pale, all emerged together with the "murderers"⁵⁵, and the selection began.

According to Ben Shem, Jewish policemen appeared out of nowhere and the Ukrainians "...smiled at us a hunter's smile..."⁵⁶ One of them made a slight movement with his finger and both the Ukrainians and the policemen ran to the houses for a search. Ben Shem described how worried he was about his wife and child who were hiding inside the shop under the huge saw with other women and children. For three hours, all of them had to stand up in the sun and watch those heart-breaking scenes of the selection.⁵⁷ Like Ringelblum, Ben Shem describes the efforts people around him were making in order to look "fit" for work. In that raid, a hundred people were marched off to the Umschlagplatz.

As soon as the Ukrainians and the SS left, Ben Shem's frantic search for his wife and child began. "...I ran madly to the first basement, throwing out every obstacle on the way... and shouted: Pnina, Josima! There was no answer. I kept yelling...I ran to the small warehouse and I found my wife and daughter trembling, scared, their eyes confused..."⁵⁸ This entry is concluded

⁵³ Ibid, p. 404.

⁵⁴ Feldschu (Ben Shem), p. 404.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 405.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 404.

⁵⁷ K. Mandoki, "Terror and aesthetics: Nazi Strategies for Mass Organization", *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 5 June 2009, Routledge pp.78-79. doi.org/10.1080/14735789909391490, accessed 18 Dec 2018. According to Mandoki, when people are in extreme situations and "psychological and perceptive distance" disappears, fear takes hold of people and they stop seeing each other. Mandoki's observation may explain how the personal hardship takes over the sensitivity to the other in the event of the selection and the fact not many people mourn those who were captured.

⁵⁸ Feldschu (Ben Shem), ps. 406-407.

by pointing out that "Today, there is hardly any wailing at the shop... They took the old and husbands whose wives and children were already taken on Black Friday. Now there was no one left to cry or mourn the kidnapped."⁵⁹

In both Ringelblum's and Ben Shem's descriptions, the space of the shop steps beyond its existence as a physical space. Additionally, we are presented with a new space — the slave worker's body as it is being scanned for signs of age and exhaustion and treated as a surface, a commodity. If the selection at the shops shows how spaces can expand, shrink and shift, the same is true for time. The three hours Ben Shem mentions became an eternity not only while the event was really happening but also when recalled in writing.⁶⁰

The Living Grounds

As mentioned before, shop workers did not remain in their own houses but moved to buildings allocated to their shops. People were now forced to depart from their homes and leave behind most of their possessions, to settle in other people's homes, homes whose former owners were in many cases already murdered. Those flats, especially the ones which belonged to people who were deported to Treblinka, were in an extremely bad shape and often bore the signs of the atrocities inflicted on the former residents.⁶¹

The apartments were crowded, ruined, unsanitary, and lacked privacy. People had to make do with what was given to them and, among other discomforts, that meant sharing the space with others.⁶² The private sphere was no longer separate, and the traditional family unit was replaced with a fragile comradeship. However, the frequent raids and inhuman conditions created mistrust and tensions.⁶³ Simultaneously, the repeated raids forced the "wild", many of whom were women and children, to hide in inhuman conditions for long periods of time.

In his diary, Ringelblum writes about how the Germans took no notice if the allocated flats were empty or not and the orders to move out came, like almost everything else in the ghetto, abruptly and brutally. "They gave half a

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 407. Black Friday refers to August 21, 1942, in which many women and children were found and taken away leaving the fathers to mourn them.

⁶⁰ A. Goldberg, op. cit., p. 235. Goldberg claims that writing in such a traumatic period reinstates order into the world because it "revives" the notion of time but, at the same time, it denies it as writing confronts the writer with terror again.

⁶¹ H. Dreifuss (Ben Sasson), op. cit., p. 269. Dreifuss elaborates on the very poor housing – sanitary infrastructure was lacking, in some apartments there was no electricity or gas, some had their doors and windows removed, etc.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ S. D. Kassow, op. cit., p. 304. Kassow brings the angry words of Israel Lichtenstein about Ringelblum hiding with his family at the shop of Hallman.

day to move out..."⁶⁴ wrote Ringelblum while pointing out that unlike other shop owners, Hallman, his shop owner, treated the residents humanly: rather than throwing them out, he negotiated with the house committees to allow a gradual removal from the flats.

On the 18th of August 1942, Ben Shem, who was charged with the job of cleaning the new flats allocated to Schilling, described his shocking entry into the new living space. As he explains, about two weeks earlier, the residents who used to live in those houses were violently deported to Treblinka: "...for the first time in my life I entered apartments whose owners have been kidnapped or killed ... in each flat a different lifestyle ...each object still warm... In many apartments we found the tables set, cooked food in the kitchen..."⁶⁵ The following day brought an even closer encounter with such a space. Ben Shem and his neighbor were preparing their own new flat, and Ben Shem wrote that he stayed in the apartment all night long, familiarizing himself with the previous owners. "...I read his papers, certificates, his diary and the man had become close to me... and he too was kidnapped and didn't have the chance to fulfil his dream... Pasensztajn and I ... are destroying the order the man had put in his flat ..." ⁶⁶

This diary entry shows how shop workers were in constant contact with death. Forced into the space of people who had just been murdered, served as a vivid and constant reminder of what lies ahead for them. "Now Pasensztajn and I will inherit him. Who knows for how long..."⁶⁷ wrote Ben Shem illustrating how the new space functioned like a time capsule. By being housed in place of the dead, shop employees were reminded that their days were numbered too. Ben Shem's lines about "destroying the order..."⁶⁸ show that, in a way, he too felt as if committing a crime. Not only was he invading someone else's space and touching his belongings but also, through adapting the flat to the new residents and throwing out the previous person's possessions, he was erasing any sign that may have been left of that person's existence.

⁶⁴ E. Ringelblum, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

⁶⁵ Feldschu (Ben Shem), p. 389.

H. Dreifuss (Ben Sasson), *op. cit.*, p 178. Dreifuss cites the same passage from Ben Shem's diary to elaborate on the deteriorating situation in the ghetto. Shop workers were ordered out of their living quarters often and the more the ghetto's population dwindled, the more often they were ordered into houses whose former owners have been deported to Treblinka.

⁶⁶ Feldschu (Ben Shem), p. 390.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusions

My paper concentrates on the time and space in the factories of the Warsaw Ghetto, as experienced by its workers — or slave-laborers. As I show in my paper, this angle can prove itself crucial on the quest to understanding the manipulation of rational reasoning conducted by the Nazis on the Jewish population, tortured with the hope that their death verdict may be negotiable.⁶⁹ By squeezing people into the designated spaces of the shops, the rational concepts of time and space were stretched in opposing directions, thus enabling the Nazis to create new "values" that distorted not only the victims' perception of reality but also the very idea of what a human being was, a factor that affected both victims and perpetrators.⁷⁰

The process of encircling Jews into smaller and smaller spaces involved speedy, frequent, brutal and surprising waves of attacks which deformed the fabric of human perception. Both the notions of time and space were dramatically altered. In the mind of the victims, the relativity of space and time depended on how their mind grasped the experiences. The diary entries presented show that the more the space shrank, the slower the time seemed to be moving but less time remained. Simultaneously, the speed, force, surprise and extraordinary path of events, remained so shocking, that they left people with no time to react, let alone reflect on what was happening. Unable to digest the rapid and inconceivable course of life in the shops left its inmates no choice other than hanging onto familiar reasoning in a world that functioned according to an unfamiliar logic.⁷¹

Despite the fact that initially the idea of the shops and their living quarters represented a deviation from recognizable norms, when the spaces fulfilled their initial purpose, that is, the shops were work grounds and the houses, a retreat, Jews thought and felt there was a certain logic in their

⁶⁹ Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishing, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 129-130. Bauman point out that the Jews were manipulated into thinking that their death verdict depended on some rational logic, a strategy that proved successful because Jews could not conceive their death verdict to be final and senseless. On p. 138, Bauman brings the example of Rumkowski, head of the Jewish Council in Łódź and others in this position who despite the incriminating evidence against the Germans, genuinely believed that the productivity of the ghetto factories would convince the Germans that Jews were necessary and change their attitude towards them.

⁷⁰ A. Goldberg, op. cit., p. 21. In his book, Goldberg discusses the idea that the torture the Nazis have inflicted on their victims actually altered the nature of the species of humans. The pressure killed the man before he physically died.

⁷¹ B. Neumann, *The Nazi Weltanschauung, Space, Body, Language*, Haifa University Press, Maariv Library, 2001 (Hebrew), pp. 243-244. Neumann discusses the change in the German language from metaphorical to literal. One of the difficulties that Jews faced was to internalize this change. Time and again they were exposed to existence of such places as Treblinka, but the information was too difficult to digest.

twisted existence. However, when the spaces stopped fulfilling their initial purposes and became a trap set by the oppressors, the spaces and their representation of time left collapsed. The constant terror of mingling between the space of the dead and of those still-alive created a unique universe of sheer chaos of which nature appears to be exactly the opposite of a “divine creation”, as the shops were initially perceived. It might be said that the “success” of the Nazis was constructed on the base of such twisting of basic human realities and perceptions.⁷²

⁷² Ibid, p. 97. Neumann discusses here the incapacity of victims to understand Auschwitz because the process of figuring out what was going on proved futile as it involved trying to understand a new world using the concepts of the old world.