Spiritual Resistance and Empowerment in Ghettos and Transit Camps during the Holocaust

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“To be creative during the Holocaust was also to protest. This showed that the Germans could not break [the Jewish] spirits¹.”

– Alexander Bogen²

In order to understand how Jewish individuals used cultural activities as a tool of spiritual resistance and empowerment, it is important to recognize what it meant to spiritually resist against the Nazis. The ultimate goal for the Nazis officials was the complete destruction of the European Jewry. They sought to break the Jewish spirit and erase their influence from European societies. Eventually, they sought to exterminate the Jews altogether from the European soil. Therefore, any actions taken to undermine the Nazi goal were acts of resistance. Whereas armed resistance was used to lessen the influence of the Nazis, spiritual resistance was used to empower the European Jewry. It was used to gain control and exercise power over the situation the Jews were subjected to. The creation of the arts and the involvement in the cultural activities in the transit camps and ghettos was an act of spiritual resistance because, for the most parts, these activities were banned by the Nazis. Despite the fact that the production of culture in camps and ghettos meant deportation to death camps, Jews continued to partake in cultural activities. The reason behind the risk was simple: it empowered them. The arts served as vehicle of hope. The arts provided them a platform for self-expression and creation of community and self-identity. It allowed them to voice their opinions against oppression and create a sense of normalcy. It allowed them to fight against powerlessness and restore momentary control over their state of living. All these factors nourished their souls, strengthened their spirits, and reinforced their will to live. Through the usage of the arts, these factors helped to undermine the impact of the Nazis' goals for complete extermination. As a result, these factors empowered the Jewish spirit and helped them resist the Nazis. The following sections will provide examples of the ways in which the arts were used for empowerment and spiritual resistance against the Nazis' desire for the elimination of the Jewish people.

Lyrics of Resistance, Melodies of Hope

Music in transit camps and ghettos was an agent for expression of emotion and a platform for communication. When they were hungry, they sang. When they were working, they sang. When they were sad, the Jews sang. Music became a way to express anger. Lyrics such as the one presented below allowed the Jews to question the actions of the bystanders and the perpetrators.

And you stand there looking on
With folded arms
And you stand there looking on
While our town goes up in flame³.

Street songs such as these were popular among the Jews. Considering that street songs were composed using existing melodies, it was easier for the Jews to remember the rhythm of the song. Singing is an agent for expression, and songs such as this provided the Jews with an opportunity to voice their thoughts. By singing to voice their opinions, the Jews were able to gain therapeutic release. Through singing, they were able to express their ideas and their emotions. They were able to connect with other

Jews, experiencing the same forms of anger and betrayal. This contributed to the strengthening of connection between Jews and provided them with the necessary support to live through the horrors of the Holocaust. Through this support, coupled with the factor that singing allowed the Jews to express their feelings, they felt empowered. This empowerment became a tool for spiritual resistance against the Nazis who sought to eliminate the European Jewry.

During the Holocaust, songs were created so that the surviving generation of the European Jewry could remember the horrors that were inflicted upon their ancestors by the Nazi regime.

When you will be liberated, dear Jews
Tell your dear children
Of our pain and hell
Of our suffering and death⁴

It was hoped that the Jewish children would become the generation that survived the atrocities of the Nazi regime. Thus, it became important for the adults to ensure that the children remember the atrocities inflicted upon their people.

When you grow old, my little one,
May you remember this song
How from thousand, one Jew remained,
Oh, evil Germans, unjust murders,
Who slaughtered your father, destroyed your mother
Oh, remember it, do not forget it, you must never forget it⁵.

It became important for the adults to teach children the implications of the Nazi action against the European Jewry. Finally, it became important for the adults to ensure that the injustice committed against them was not forgotten by the world. In order to ensure that they were not forgotten, they sang songs that explained their state of living, their inner emotions, and their utmost desires. Since songs are easier to remember, it became an agency for the Jews to convey their pain to others. Furthermore, it became a tool for the Jews to remember and be remembered. It allowed them to navigate through the psychological and physical pain, and it provided them a short escape for their desolate realities in ghettos and camps. By shortly escaping their realities, they hoped for a better future and a free future for the Jews. This indulgence in hope was of particular importance for Jews because it strengthened their desire to live. The hope and desire elicited by songs and music during the Holocaust empowered the Jews and prompted spiritual resistance against the Nazis.

Further examples of the ways in which singing helped the Jews resist against the Nazis can be examined in Martin Rosenberg's "Judischer Todessang" (Jewish Death Song). During his internment in Sachsenhausen, Rosenberg composed this choral work which is based on a popular Eastern European Jewish folk song called "Tsen Brider" (Ten Brother). The familiarity of the tune and the rhythm of the song made it memorable for the Jews in Sachsenhausen. Composed in 1901, the theme of the original folk song highlights the historical reality of the deaths of Eastern European Jews. The original song, consisting of ten verses therefore, recounts the story of ten Jewish brothers, all of whom were dying one by one.⁶ In 1942, Rosenberg used the tune and the theme of the song to tell his version of the disappearing Jews. Unlike the original song, Rosenberg starts "Judischer Todessang" with the sound "bom bom bom," followed by the death of the tenth brother, and the chorus. The song ends with the monologue of the last remaining brother, screaming, "We never hurt anyone!"⁷

According to Aleksander Kuliseiwicz, a non-Jewish political prisoner in Sachsenhausen, the “bom bom bom” was supposed to be delivered using a varying range of emotions such as anger, resignation, hope, and optimism⁸. By putting more emphasis on these sounds, Rosenberg hoped to convey feelings without putting it into words. This allowed the song to become powerful because it elicited emotions from the listeners prior to the singing of the lyrics. The lyrics of Rosenberg’s version is powerful itself, when compared to the original version. Whereas the original song simply declared that the Jewish brothers are dying, Rosenberg’s version explicitly stated that the Jewish brothers are all murdered⁹. By changing the chorus from “Play me a little song/In the middle of the street” to “Play me a little song/They are taking us to the gas¹⁰”, Rosenberg made an unambiguous connection between the usage of the gas chambers and the murder of the Jews. With a simple change in the lyrics, Rosenberg was able to allude to the horrors of the Nazi regime and make a deliberate testimony against Nazi crimes.

The atrocities committed against the Jews are furthered exemplified through the structure of the song itself. Whereas the original song contains ten verses, Rosenberg’s version includes only two verses. The shortening of the song serves to allude to the fact that the Nazis were killing off all the Jews at an extraordinary rate. Therefore, the structure of the song mimics the reality of the Jews during the Second World War. While in the past it would have taken longer for ten brothers to die, under the German rules, the Jewish people perished at a faster rate. Through “Judischer Todessang,” Rosenberg was able to highlight the fate of the Jews and emphasize the Nazi criminality. Since the Jews were not free, this freedom of expression was taken away from them. However, with Rosenberg’s help, the Jews were provided with a cultural tool that helped them express their realities under the Germans. Due to this, “Judischer Todessang” became a tool of empowerment and a tool of spiritual resistance.

The performance of Giuseppe Verdi’s requiem in Theresienstadt during the Red Cross visit in 1944 is cited as one of the examples of the usage of music as a tool for Jewish spiritual resistance. The requiem mass is one of the hardest and most powerful choral work¹¹. The requiem itself is musically and emotionally demanding. All those who performs the piece needs to understand the Latin text, as well as the precise usage of instruments. For Rafael Schacter, the conductor for the requiem, this was a challenge. Considering that his orchestra consisted of amateur artists, he spent long hours perfecting the sound. Schacter undertook the task of teaching Latin to the choir and perfecting the sound of the instrument repeatedly while individuals were constantly being deported from Theresienstadt every day.

As with the case in any other transit camps, the Jews here suffered from hunger, malnutrition, and extreme exhaustion. Despite the hunger, the coldness and the dampness of the basement where they rehearsed, the Jews continued to attend the practice sessions because it was way to return to a sense of normalcy¹². Singing something as powerful as the requiem allowed the Jews in Theresienstadt to feel a sense of liberation. It permitted them to have a purpose amongst the chaos and overcome hunger and fear. More importantly, it allowed them to harness power through Verdi’s requiem to denounce the Nazis.

The requiem was the centrepiece of performance dedicated to the 1944 Red Cross visit in Theresienstadt. With the performance, the Jews wanted the Red Cross to see beyond the orchestrated propaganda that claimed Terezin was a city given to the Jews by the Fuhrer. As a result, the Jews wanted it to be powerful, and they wanted it to be their statement to the rest of the world. The requiem starts with the lyric “Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.” During the rehearsal, Schacter enforced the

understanding that this line was to be used to honour all the Jews that have perished under the Nazi rules¹³. Members of the choir and the orchestra were urged to sing with someone in mind, and sing for someone they have lost¹⁴. Therefore, from the commencement of the rehearsal, the requiem became powerful tool of expression for the Jews because it was dedicated to honour the Jewish individuals who have been dehumanized and murdered by the Nazis.

Aside from dedicating the requiem to the dead, the Jews dedicated the performance to the living as well. Performing the requiem was a way for the Jews to sing to the God so that He may alleviate them from the horrors of the Nazi regime¹⁵. Due to this, lyrics such as “Liberate me, O Lord” adopted new meaning. It became a prayer to the rest of the world to save the Jews from the atrocities of the Nazis¹⁶. Schacter wanted this to be the most powerful line during the performance. By emphasizing this line, the Jews were able to express themselves and their grievances. Because this was to be performed in front of Nazi officials like Adolf Eichmann, the requiem became an agent for the Jews to speak to their oppressor without any retaliation.

With the Latin lyrics, Schacter and the orchestra members denounced the Nazis. By singing, “That day, day of wrath, calamity, and misery, day of great and exceeding bitterness/when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire,” the Terezin Jews asserted the understanding that no one can escape the day of judgement¹⁷. With the help of these words, the Jews reminded the Nazis that they will face their Maker, and that they will be judged harshly for their actions. These words, then, were used to convey the message that ultimately, the Jews and the Nazis were all the same. In the end, all shall be judged, and in the end, justice will be granted to everyone. Those who have been wronged will be rewarded, and those who committed the wrong will be punished. Typically, the Jews would not have been able to express these ideas without facing the threat of deportation. However, with the Latin words and the powerful orchestral performance, the Jews were able to speak against the Nazi brutality. The requiem granted the Jews an opportunity to express themselves in front of Nazi officials and delegates from the Red Cross. Because they were able to make this statement without immediate punishment, the requiem acted as an agent of spiritual resistance for the Jews.

Music is an important part of any culture. It helps us express, it helps us feel, and it helps us connect with each other. When all else fails, we often turn to music to speak for us or speak to us. This has always been a cultural truth for the human race. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the Jewish people turned to music to cope with the desolate realities in ghettos and camps. During the Holocaust, singing became a way to express oneself. Simultaneously, it became a way to condemn the Nazis and the oppressive measures they utilized against the Jewish people. Singing and music became a way to attain normalcy, a manifestation of hope, an agent for psychological healing, and a form of resistance and empowerment for the Jews in Europe.

Smiling to Forget, Laughing to Criticize

The act of creating theatrical work and its presentation in front an audience was an important practice in the camps and ghettos during the Holocaust. Similar to the creation and performances of music, theatre became a form of personal expression. Furthermore, it became a literary tool to criticize of Nazi regime.

Satirical works allowed the Jews to highlight the absurdity of the Nazi regime, while simultaneously promoting the understanding that the Jews will be able to overcome Nazi persecution. One such example of satirical performance is known as The Last Cyclist. The inspiration for The Last

Cyclist comes from a joke that was popularized during the First and the Second World War. The joke goes something like this: The first person states, “The Jews and the cyclists are responsible for all our misfortunes!” The second person counters the statement by asking, “Why the cyclist?” to which, the third person states, “why the Jews?”¹⁸ This joke highlights the absurdity that there is no rationale behind blaming the Jews for anyone’s misfortune. The theme of absurdity that one group can be blamed for the misfortune of the majority is effectively illustrated in *The Last Cyclist*. Written by Karel Švenk, the cabaret tells a story where individuals escape from a mental asylum and assume control over the state government. The ruler of the new government, Rat, begins to blame the cyclist for all the havoc and chaos caused by the asylum escapee. Rat’s government depicts the Cyclists as international conspirators and as the root of all societal evil¹⁹. Because everyone came to believe this about the Cyclists, Rat orders his men to draw up a list of people who need to prove that their ancestor, for last six generations, were pedestrians. Those who are unable to prove their ancestry are taken to the Island of Horror. Through this process, Rat manages to exterminate all Cyclists but one, Borivoj. After finally capturing Borivoj, Rat and his men wish to send him to the moon; however, Borivoj accidentally fires the spaceship that was created to kill him. His clumsiness with the spaceship sends off Rat and his men to space, where they eventually die²⁰.

From the content of the cabaret, it is evident that *The Last Cyclist* is an allegory of the Third Reich. Rat embodies Hitler, the Cyclists represent the Jews, the list created by Rat draws inspiration from the Nuremberg Law, and Island of Horror alludes to the camps and ghettos used for the internment of the Jews. Through Rat and his men, Švenk was able to criticize the Nazi regime. The combination of allegory and satire in *The Last Cyclist* allows Švenk to ridicule the Third Reich. This usage of satire and allegory is of particular importance because it allowed Švenk to mock the Nazi official and undermine their authority, without facing any immediate physical threat. Thus, with the creation of this cabaret, Švenk was able to make a political comment against his oppressors, which provided him with an opportunity to fight against his own powerlessness under the Nazi regime. Because the usage of satire and allegory provided him with the necessary strength to take a political stance against the Nazis, these literary devices allowed him to restore momentary control over his state of existence. As a result, *The Last Cyclist* became Švenk’s tool for spiritual resistance and empowerment.

The Last Cyclist is humorous in nature. The absurdity of the play allowed the Jews to laugh and forget about their desolate conditions in the camps. For a moment, it transported the Jews into a different reality altogether²¹. Through laughter, the Jews of Theresienstadt enjoyed each other’s company and created a sense of community²². Through laughter, they created a sense of normality. Through laughter, they coped with the reality of Theresienstadt, and through laughter, they ridiculed the Nazi regime. In a way, laughter and humour became a response and a statement to the Nazis, who were desperate to break the Jewish spirit. It became a way for the Jews to assume control over their powerless way of living. As a result, it became an agency for empowerment and a tool for spiritual resistance against the Nazis.

One of the famous children’s plays from Theresienstadt is called *Brundibar*. *Brundibar* presents the audience with a story of two siblings who are too poor to buy milk for the mother; in the story, the milk is the only medicine that can cure their ailing mother²³. In order to earn enough money to buy milk, the siblings begin to imitate the performance of an organ grinder named *Brundibar*. Being the mean character that he is, *Brundibar* chases the siblings away, who join few animals and other village children to sing a lullaby. This collaborative performance allows the siblings to earn enough money to buy milk for their mother. Unfortunately, *Brundibar* steals all their money. By working together, the

animals and the children catch Brundibar, regain the money, and chase him out of the town. The cabaret ends with the children singing a song of their victory over the evil.

Hans Krása and Adolf Hoffmeister created the cabaret to mirror the struggle of the Jewish people throughout human history²⁴. Because of the timelessness of the cabaret, during the Holocaust, the play came to represent the struggle for survival of the Jewish people in the Nazi regime. As a result, the character Brundibar came to represent Hitler and the Nazi empire, and the children personified the Jewish prisoners in camps and ghettos²⁵. Therefore, the defeat of Brundibar, the source of evil in the play, became important because it highlighted the theme that good always overcomes evil. It further highlighted the understanding that through unity, the underdogs can find strength and triumph against the evil that is trying to break their spirit and cause misfortune²⁶. These allegorical representations provided morale and courage for both the children and the adults in Theresienstadt. Along with promoting unity, it provided them with the hope that the Jews will overcome the adversity that is inflicted upon them by the Nazis. It provided the hope and the understanding that survival is possible and that “one day, [they] will be free²⁷.” This hope for survival was furthered by the last song of the cabaret which states,

Dictator will be defeated
United we'll win our stand.
We shall give good example
To all people in this land²⁸.

This song became an anthem for the Jews in Theresienstadt. Because music provided individual Jews with a platform for personal expression, this song became a mantra that they will survive the hardship inflicted upon them, and they will become examples of the way in which individuals can overcome adversity.

The Nazis attempted to destroy the European Jewry by dehumanizing them. However, the performance of Brundibar allowed the Jews to demonstrate their humanity, as well as their creativity. With the usage of the allegories, they were able to demonstrate the Jewish will to survive. It inspired individual to hope, which is one of the most powerful tools for spiritual resistance. By condemning the Jews into the subhuman category and by inflicting pain upon them, the Nazis sought to destroy their spirit. However, because cabarets such as Brundibar instilled hope and promoted the will to survive, it became a tool for empowerment. The presence of personal empowerment facilitated spiritual resistance against the Nazis by counteracting their policy to break the Jewish spirit.

As stated hope was one of the most powerful coping mechanisms for the Jews during the Holocaust. Therefore, cabarets were created so that it could provide the Jews with enough hope to survive just another day. The last cabaret, which will be discussed in this section, is called The Emperor of Atlantis. The Emperor of Atlantis was written in Theresienstadt by Victor Ullmann in 1944. Like the previously discussed playwrights, with The Emperor of Atlantis, Ullmann aimed to provide the Jews in Terezin with a hope. Alongside, he aimed to reduce the bitterness experienced by the Jews towards Hitler and towards the concept of death.

The Emperor of Atlantis tells a story of an emperor who was able to harness the power of Death. Because of the Emperor's ambition to win the universal war, he manages to destroy the naturalness phenomenon of dying and recreates it to that death is more mechanised²⁹. This upsets Death. Following the Emperor's final decree that everyone will fight each other so that there are no survivors remaining,

Death goes on strike. As a result, no one is able to die, which causes the Emperor's realm to dwindle into chaos. Death makes an offer to the Emperor stating that he will resume his job, only if the Emperor sacrifices himself to Death. In order to ensure that chaos in this realm ceases, the Emperor chooses to sacrifice himself. With the death of the Emperor, Death resumes his job. The cabaret ends with Death warning, "Thou shalt not take Death's name in vain³⁰."

It comes as no surprise that, similar to the cabarets discussed thus far, *The Emperor of Atlantis* is an allegorical work. Here, the Emperor represents Hitler. Similar to Hitler's implementation of the Final Solution and the usage of gas chambers and mass shooting to mechanize the process of death, the Emperor harnesses the power of Death to mechanize death and cause destruction in his realm. Similar to the subjects of the Emperor, the Jews living under the Nazi regime began to harbour bitter attitude toward death and the process of dying since it is the cause of their untimely demise³¹. Through this cabaret then, Ullmann wanted to reduce the bitterness of the Jews towards death itself. In the cabaret, he allowed Death to state, "I am the greatest celebration of freedom³²." With this, he wanted to demonstrate that the process of dying is a natural part of every living organism's life cycle, and that it is not something to be feared³³. Ullmann provides further consolation that death is not to be feared by making Death state,

I am the one who delivers you from
pestilence; I am not the pestilence.
I am the one who brings release from
suffering;
I am not the one who leaves you suffering³⁴.

These lines become powerful to the Jews who faced the possibility of death every day. Through these lines, death is depicted as an "unavoidable existential reality," which makes it easier for individuals to accept that death is the natural consequence of being born into this world³⁵. By naturalizing death through these lines, Ullmann shows that death should not evoke fear and that it should not be perceived as menacing. Depicting the process of dying as a natural phenomenon allowed Ullman to evoke faith among his audience. Through faith, the Jews would have been able to face death with humility and bravery. The presence of this faith, thus, became the tool for spiritual resistance against the Nazis' attempt to use death to instil fear and exterminate the European Jewry in camps and ghettos.

Throughout the play, the audience is shown that the Emperor evoked Death's name in vain. The process of death was mechanized, and the value of the natural phenomenon was reduced. This reduction of the value of death then was considered the ultimate reason for dishonour and disrespect towards other humans³⁶. Through Death, Ullmann teaches his audience that despite all the wrongs that have been committed against them, the Jews should not wish death upon their oppressors because wishing ill upon others would indicate that they are evoking the name of death in vain. It would signify that they are disrespectful of human lives. Ultimately, this would place them on the same moral ground as their oppressors, which will diminish the distinction between moral and immoral individuals³⁷. With this message, *The Emperor of Atlantis* became a guide for the Jews to maintain and preserve their morals despite all the hardships they experienced. Because this cabaret created a distinction between morality and immorality through Death and the Emperor, and because it promoted the adoption of the moral high ground, it helped the Jews assume an honourable position when compared to their Nazi oppressors. This became the motivation for Jewish empowerment under the Nazi regime and an agent for spiritual resistance.

Similar to *Brundibar* and *The Last Cyclist*, *The Emperor of Atlantis* instilled hope in its audience. In the cabaret, order returns to the realm after the death of the Emperor. Since the Emperor is the personification of Hitler, this play introduced the possibility of hope that Jews will be able to return to their normal state of living after the death of Hitler³⁸. Because the mechanization of death ceased to exist after the death of the Emperor, the cabaret introduced the possibility of a future where the Jews can die in a timely manner, through natural causes. The presence of this hope allowed the Jews to entertain the idea that there is a possibility of a better future. Hope provided them with an opportunity to realize that no matter how powerful someone is, they will fall, and their fall would provide freedom for the Jews. Hope permitted them to continue to psychologically fight to live another day so that they can come closer to the day when Hitler falls. Since hope was able to evoke feelings such as this, it was a tool for spiritual resistance. Because *The Emperor of Atlantis* enabled the Jews to hope, it was a vehicle for spiritual resistance.

For the most part, cabarets created during the Holocaust were satirical, humorous, and allegorical in nature³⁹. These were the dominant literary devices because they enabled the Jews to discuss and criticize the atrocities of the Third Reich. The literary devices enabled the Jews to laugh so that they can gain temporary release from their grim realities. Furthermore, these devices enabled the Jews to hope for a better future, which promoted their psychological strengths and encouraged their will to survive. Thus, these literary devices provided the Jews with coping mechanisms to endure the horrific conditions imposed upon them by the Nazis officials. Through cabarets, these literary devices became the tool for Jewish empowerment and spiritual resistance against the Third Reich.

For the next Generation

For the Jews in transit camps and ghettos, children represented hope. It was hoped that the children would carry forward the Jewish cultural practices and traditions. Because ghettos like Konvo banned pregnancy, surviving children were seen as the last generations of Jews who could preserve its culture⁴⁰. In order to ensure the survival of the Jewish culture and the children themselves, Jewish adults turned to education. Education was seen as a “sacred” mission that benefited both the adults and children⁴¹. The prominent understanding was that those who educated, protected their souls from becoming bitter, and those who were being educated were protecting their souls from facing emptiness⁴². Thus, clandestine education was provided to the children in camps and ghettos in order to provide both the teachers and the students with structure⁴³. Dedicated individuals, who adopted the role of an educator, constructed curricula in order to preserve humanity in children and promote Jewish culture through them⁴⁴. By educating the children, adult Jews hope to promote moral values and provide psychological and emotional strength needed to ensure the survival of the children⁴⁵. Because education provided an opportunity for the preservation of the Jewish culture, the educational practice counteracted the Nazis’ desire to eliminate the Jew and his culture. Thus, the educational opportunities provided to children became an agent for empowerment and spiritual resistance against the Nazis.

Education of the Jews during the Holocaust can be divided into three categories. The first category of education allowed Jewish children to gain knowledge that makes an individual “intelligent.” To attain this forms of knowledge, lectures and discussions were of particular importance⁴⁶. The topic for discussions and lectures varied from history to philosophy to language studies to sociology⁴⁷. With the help of these discussions, the adults helped the children to broaden their intellectual horizon. Though this form of education and knowledge was important, the residence of ghettos and camps aimed

to implement the second category of education. The second category of education promoted every aspect of the Jewish culture. Here, education included the learning of Jewish history, either through discussion or through storytelling⁴⁸. This form of education encouraged the transmission of the Zionist tradition and the thorough understanding of the Hebrew language⁴⁹. The third category of education dealt with the instillation of character values in children. For this form of education to be successful, the educators used concerts, drawing, and theatrical performances for lesson delivery. Performances of children on a cabaret like Brundibar, is an example of the third category of education.

Character education through the usage of art was ultimately the most important form of education because it engaged the students in such a manner that they were able to forget their miseries, temporarily. Thus, arts were used for this particular educational purposes because it encouraged the exploration of children's creativity, imagination, and self-expression⁵⁰. The use of arts, such as drawing, poetry, and theatrical performances, allowed the children to understand that beauty can be found even at the most unpleasant and horrific spaces⁵¹. Using the arts as a method of education allowed children to escape their desolate state by focusing inwards to explore their imagination and fantasies⁵². Moreover, using the art as an educational platform allowed the Jewish children to have an outlet for the physical and the psychological trauma they experienced daily, under the Nazis' oppressive rule⁵³. Along with learning character values, the arts became a form of therapy and a mechanism for coping for the children.

One of the prominent figures known for using the arts as method of education is Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. Upon her arrival in Theresienstadt, she assumed the role of educator for the children. As their teacher, Dicker-Brandeis urged the students to be free⁵⁴. As a result, children began to draw sceneries that they associated with freedom⁵⁵. Older children began to use the arts as platform to document the atrocities of the Nazi regime. The surviving students of Dicker-Brandeis state that the urge to draw and the urge to document became the defining factor that promoted the children's psychological strength and will to stay alive⁵⁶. Because it became a way to make their voices heard, the arts and its continuous usage encouraged a sense of empowerment among the children. Prior to her deportation to Auschwitz, Dicker-Brandeis hid the works of art created by the children in two separate suitcases. The content of the suitcases show 5,000 pieces of work, created using whatever tools were available to the children⁵⁷. Each piece is unique, and each piece captures a sense of individuality. From the drawing depicting the rising sun through barred window, symbolizing a desire to escape and a desire for freedom⁵⁸ to the mere scribbles and cut out shapes on pieces of paper⁵⁹, each piece was signed by the children. This communicated the idea that they mattered and they were someone in the world that desperately tried to reduce them to numbers.

The purpose of the Nazi regime was to exterminate the Jews and the Jewish culture. However, by providing education to the Jewish children, the Jews presented a counteraction to the Nazis. The education provided to the children created a space for socialization and the promotion of a community identity⁶⁰. With the support of education, both children and adults created a sense of normalcy when their lives were being uprooted and destroyed. Education allowed for transmission of cultural and religious heritage, and it allowed for the preservation of Jews traditional practices the Nazis sought to destroy. Education through the arts enabled children to express their emotions, explore their imagination, and create a sense of self-identity. Finally, education promoted the hope for a better future among the adult and the children of ghettos and camps. Because education promoted hope, transmitted Jew culture, and created somewhat of a positive experience for the Jews, it was an agent for empowerment and spiritual resistance during the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Cultural sphere often emerged in the camps and ghettos through the initiatives of the Jewish residence⁶¹. Even in places such as Theresienstadt, where cultural activities were promoted for propaganda usage, cultural sphere emerged only when the spiritual needs of the residence needed to be sustained. In most camps and ghettos, Jewish residence engaged in the creation of the arts, despite the danger it posed to their lives. Individuals in the most “liberal” camps such as Theresienstadt also faced the danger of immediate deportation to death camps regardless of the fact that the Nazis tolerated the Jewish cultural atmosphere in Terezin. The simple reason behind this is that the Jews indulged in the practice of arts in order to maintain their needs for cultural stimulation. The Jews also indulged in the creation of the arts in order to leave a mark on this world. Considering that the Nazis wanted to destroy all traces of the European Jewry, these factors were not acceptable. As a result, they sought to destroy anyone who dared to indulge in the arts.

The Jews indulged in cultural practices to document the criminality of the Nazi regime. Thus, supplies were smuggled in from the outside world. Works of arts were hidden away within the ghetto and camp walls and ceilings, in hopes that someone will find them someday and understand the true reality of the Jews and the Nazi regime⁶². Most of the examples provided here come from Theresienstadt. Although Theresienstadt was similar to the transit camps and ghettos throughout Europe, it was also special in a sense that it was used by the Nazis as a tool for propaganda. To depict to the Red Cross that camps and ghettos are created by the Nazi official to better the lives of the Jews, cultural activities were tolerated, to an extent. Due to this, individuals here had more opportunities to perform cabarets and orchestral work. It is due to this that a greater number of documentation of the arts survives from Terezin. This being said, it would be inappropriate to state that cultural spheres were not documented in other ghettos and camps. Surviving songs from Lodz and Warsaw, and clandestine picture of classrooms in Konvo are few examples that demonstrate the presence of a cultural sphere in ghettos and camps throughout Europe.

One of the prevalent themes encountered during this research is the testimonies of survivors stating that cultural reproductions such as songs, cabarets, and drawings helped them stay alive⁶³. Many survivor states, that through the arts, they were able to express their thoughts, their idea, and their emotions. This was important to them because it protected the Jews from hatred and nourished their souls against isolation and loneliness⁶⁴. The arts allowed the Jews to create a sense of normalcy and return to their former existence of living. It affirmed the existence of humanity in each and every Jewish individual, and it kept their spirits alive during one of the most difficult situations. Involvement with the arts provided opportunities for interaction with one other, which helped to battle the feeling of complete isolation and alienation⁶⁵. Through the arts, the Jews were able to sustain hope and create a sense of self. Through the arts, the Jews were able to indulge in nostalgia and satirize the actions of the Nazi leaders. These empowered the Jews by restoring a sense of control and counteracting the feelings of fear and helplessness. As a result, the active engagement through participation and the creation of the arts acted as a form of spiritual resistance against the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Notes

- 1 David Engel and Eva Fogelman. *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*, edited by Yitzchak Mais and Barbara Lovenheim, (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2007), 57.
- 2 Alexander Bogen was an artist, partisan, and former ghetto resident of Vilna.
- 3 Eliyana R Adler, “No Raisins, No Almonds: Singing as Spiritual Resistance to the Holocaust,” *Shofar* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 56.
- 4 Adler, “No Raisins, No Almonds,” 61.
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