

Ka-Tzetnik 135633: Historical Depersonalization and the Celebrity Witness

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I Heard Someone Say
Paul Celan

I heard someone say there exists
in the water a stone and a ring
and over the water a word
that lays the ring over the stone.

I saw my poplar go down to the water,
I saw how her arm reached down to the deep,
saw her roots pleading upward toward heaven for night.

I did not hurry after her,
I only picked up from the earth that crumb
that has the shape and loft of your eyes,
I took from your throat the chain of remarks,
which I laid round the table on which the crumb lay.

And saw my poplar no more.

I. Introduction

Of the many categories of media that attempt to represent the period between 1939 and 1945, the work of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 stands as perhaps the least likely and the least canonical entry point into the historical realities of what is commonly referred to as the Holocaust. Publishing under a pseudonym derived from the German acronym for camp inmates (KZ, for *Konzentrationslager*) followed by his tattooed serial number, 135633, the author was uniquely positioned to inform Israelis (including the children of many survivors, as well as those who were living in the Yishuv and not directly impacted by the *Sho'ah*) about camp experiences—with his first book appearing in 1946.¹ Over the next forty years, Ka-Tzetnik produced a total of six works that are commonly published in Israel as the sextet *Salamandra: A Chronicle of a Jewish Family in the Twentieth Century*.² Each book concerns a different aspect of Ka-Tzetnik's life during and after his time in Auschwitz, reenacted through his fictionalized persona, Harry Preleschnik, and two of the books allegedly focus on what he believes to have been the experiences of his younger siblings.³ Despite the popularity of the books and the singular celebrity of their author in Israel, the books have proved immensely controversial among scholars and readers alike due to the perceived vulgarity and literality with which they represent camp

¹ Galia Glasner-Heled, "Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik," *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 111.

² Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997, para. 9.

³ Jeremy Popkin, "Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym," *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 343-4.

experiences, their depiction of mental illness in relation to survival and trauma, depictions of Jewish complicity in the suffering of their fellows, and the centrality of sexual themes throughout the series.

Though largely criticized by scholars, Ka-Tzetnik's works occupy a unique space in the history of Holocaust literature. The books first appeared amid a "culture of silence" in Israel, during which many survivors chose not to speak publicly or even privately about their experiences within the camp system. As such, the first two books—entitled *Salamandra* and *House of Dolls*—proved to be formative of some early conceptions of the Holocaust experience by the children of survivors who did not discuss their experiences. The author of these books, which were not originally published as either fiction or memoir and seem to have been received as rather a mix of both,⁴ retained his anonymity under a pseudonym until 1961, when his appearance at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem revealed him to be Yehiel De-Nur.⁵ These aspects of De-Nur's elusive personal history, as well as the historical position of his books in time, preserve him as a point of interest in studying the Holocaust and its literature. As this essay will show, there is more even than that to distinguish De-Nur from many other writers of the period.

The historical and literary merits of the books have been largely contested, as this essay will show, and scholars have more or less dismissed them from the Holocaust canon. Despite this ostensible rejection, Ka-Tzetnik's sextet seems to have sustained popularity in Israel, and selected books have been translated from the Hebrew into

⁴ Ibid., 345.

⁵ Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997.

English, Yiddish, German, Polish, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic.⁶ Some scholars view his works, at worst, as pornographic kitsch that panders to young, excitable audiences at the expense of the reputation of survivors; others, at best, see him as a messenger attempting to represent his deceased family in the form of a literary memorial.

In order to unpack the complexity of the many subjects that converge around the figure Ka-Tzetnik 135633, this essay will attempt to address the books themselves (focusing on *House of Dolls*, *Piepel*, *Shivitti: A Vision*, and *Phoenix Over the Galilee* specifically), with an emphasis on the theoretical questions they pose and the historical impact of the books in Israel. The components of this investigation will include an analysis of the position of the author's identity as a framing mechanism for the reception of the books; an attempt to unravel the ontology of testimony and the role of the witness; a comparative look into various literary representations of the Mussulman; a discussion of the ways in which Jewish complicity is depicted and debated in Holocaust literatures; a reconstruction of the various forms of sexual violence that took place during this period based on historical documentation; and a discussion of the ways in which the books have been politicized in Israel. Each of these elements figure significantly into Ka-Tzetnik's works, but they also form some of the central questions of what is at stake in representing the Holocaust.

With all of these moving pieces, this paper will be anchored by the themes of dehumanization (the dismissal basic human needs and rights) and depersonalization (the subsequent loss of identity) throughout, and the range of consequences these can have on subjectivity, narrative constructions, and cultural conceptualizations of history. In

⁶ Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997.

opposition to the anonymization of victims, accounts, and narratives, this paper will argue for the preservation of the individual, named self against the generalizing emplotments of history that are pliable to the large-scale goals and tastes of nations. Using the work of Ka-Tzetnik as a central point of discussion, this paper will develop this position with an attempt to argue for the viability of the imagination as a tool for coping with trauma via the production of personal narratives, especially in the way that such subjective richness can provide fertile narrative grounds by which survivors could lay new roots in a modernized, volatile world. The exclusion of the personal, the subjective, from national emplotments of history risk that such widespread violence could occur again, in the sense that the reduction of the personal continues the way that violence has been justified by dehumanizing others. By acknowledging the individual traumas of the past, along with their philosophic implications, the human race acknowledges a global, nationless responsibility that everyone holds to ensure that genocide is never repeated.

II. “Planet Auschwitz” and the Bifurcated Self

As an historical figure, Ka-Tzetnik himself poses many interesting questions about the nature of testimony and the position of the witness—pointing, in particular, to the inextricable nature of these supposed opposites. By the standards of conventional firsthand storytelling, his *Salamandra* sextet seems to reject many central tenets. When the books were published, they were not identified as either fiction or memoir, and the author views them as a “chronicle of the planet Auschwitz”⁷ that speaks for the dead. Regardless of how they were marketed, the books appeared in Palestine (Eretz Yisra’el)⁸ and, later, in the state of Israel, during a time when Holocaust narratives were not in large circulation for various political and cultural reasons. In their refusal to claim a single author, the books did not lose credibility among young Israelis but seemed rather to gain it due to the author’s use of the KZ pseudonym followed by his tattoo number. This leads into further questions about identity, wherein the suspense around the author’s personal identity was not resolved until 1961 when the author testified at the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem and revealed himself to be Yehiel De-Nur. The revelation of Ka-Tzetnik’s identity was coincident with, as Michael Levine has termed it, “the unprecedented advent

⁷ Here Bartov quotes Ka-Tzetnik’s own testimony, given on the witness stand at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik’s Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997, para 22.

⁸ Within a Hebrew context, Palestine is referred to as Eretz Yisra’el (the land of Israel) prior to the declaration of statehood.

of a legal narrative.”⁹ At this formative moment in Israeli history, as the world watched, De-Nur experienced the collision of his two identities (his pre- and post-incarceration selves); a confrontation with Adolf Eichmann, the man who personally sent him to Auschwitz; the enormous task of verbalizing legal testimony when he had before provided textual representations written outside of his own point of view; and, under the pressure of all of these factors, De-Nur ultimately fainted on the witness stand.

The aforementioned issues surrounding De-Nur’s identity and position as a witness to genocide begs the further development of the relationship between fiction and testimony, showing that the two are not clearly distinct opposites but actually dialectical components of the same process of narrativization. As Yael Feldman has observed, “the opposition between documentary realism and mediated recollection, raw testimony and literary reconstruction, is not so final after all.”¹⁰ Taking this into account, this section will investigate the role of the imagination in the construction of testimony and the many ways in which the mind of the subject can interfere with (or assist in) the production of historical accounts. In De-Nur’s case especially, such an investigation leads into a discussion of mental illness and of survivor’s guilt in particular—culminating in an examination of the ways in which the imaginative reconstruction of past traumas can lead to personal healing and, perhaps, into large-scale healing by ensuring that the injustices of the past are never forgotten by modern citizens.

Due to the authorial ambiguities described above, combined with his works’ representations of sexual violence and Jewish complicity, many have contested the

⁹ Michael G. Levine. *A Weak Messianic Power: Figures of a Time to Come in Benjamin, Derrida, and Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 35.

¹⁰ Yael Feldman, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway? Ideology and Psychology in the Representation of the Shoah in Israeli Literature,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 228.

viability of the works as appropriate (or accurate) entry points for modern readers to access the historical reality of the Holocaust. However controversial, the work of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 claims a unique position in the history of Holocaust literature. Following the liberation of the camps in 1945, displaced survivors across Europe were left with a limited understanding of who among them had survived, or didn't, and to where they should proceed. De-Nur was among this number, and spent an amount of time, like many others, recuperating in a Displaced Persons Camp (DP Camp) in Italy,¹¹ in which he likely heard the stories of other people in the Camp that were outside of his personal scope of experience, and which fed into his *Salamandra: A Chronicle of a Jewish Family in the Twentieth Century* works.¹²

The first installment appeared in Hebrew in 1946, but it was not until 1948 that Israeli statehood was declared and its doors officially opened to Holocaust survivors around the world. At this time in Israel, however, many survivors were reticent about their experiences and lived separately from the people of the Yishuv;¹³ consequently, the publication of Ka-Tzetnik's works in Hebrew privileged them as Israeli-accessible representations of a Holocaust experience. Witness accounts of the Holocaust, either written or verbal, were rare due to the political position of Israel as a foundling state attempting to define itself in opposition to the traumas of the past. About the tenuous relationship between the Holocaust and emergent Israeli ideologies, Omer Bartov has observed:

¹¹ Milner, Iris. "The 'Gray Zone' Revisited: The Concentrationary Universe in Ka. Tzetnik's Literary Testimony," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society* n.s. 14 no. 2 (Winter 2008), 113.

¹² *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³ The cumulative result of three *Aliyahs* (translating literally to ascensions), or migrations, to Israel beginning in the late 1800s, the New Yishuv is indicative of the Jewish population in Palestine (Eretz Israel) prior to the declaration of Israeli statehood.

Since the state of Israel was presented as the definitive and only possible answer to the (destruction of the) Jewish Diaspora, and because the new Israeli Jews—armed, aggressive, and victorious—were depicted as the polar opposite of the defenseless, weak, and submissive Jewish victims of European persecution, identifying with one’s ancestor’s in Exile was ideologically a contradiction in terms, especially so far as young Sabras (Jews born in Israel) were concerned. (Bartov para. 11)

For young Israel, the very fact of recent victimhood had the potential to undermine the national position of heroism and strength. However, Ka-Tzetnik’s books defiantly circulated among young readers especially, resulting in “the common view in Israel of Ka-Tzetnik as an icon of Hebrew-language representation of the Holocaust.”¹⁴ Publishing under the pseudonym Ka-Tzetnik 135633 seemed to only enhance his celebrity, rather than dissuade people of his credibility as a single author—especially given that his works appeared so soon after the liberation of the camps, with little time to gain enough information to possibly fabricate an experience from hearsay.¹⁵

On the whole, Ka-Tzetnik’s sextet was not only among the first Holocaust narratives to appear in Israel, but also uniquely positioned to claim credibility as a universalized Holocaust narrative in his use of the KZ pseudonym, followed by his tattoo number. In this way, Ka-Tzetnik’s retention of a pseudonym is seen as a faithful rendition of the Lager experience, in which real people were reduced to anonymous numbers that could be treated in any manner that served the advancement of the Reich. This may be seen as an act of solidarity and compassion that, as Jeremy Popkin has noted, is in keeping with the notion that “only the deliberate abandonment of any claim to personal

¹⁴ Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik’s Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997, para. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., para. 25.

identity can convey the truth of what Holocaust victims experienced.”¹⁶ By this line of thinking, the author’s choice to remain anonymous was not meant to generate mystery around his works, but to accredit them to all those who experienced Nazi-enforced depersonalization in the camps.

Other readers have not viewed Ka-Tzetnik’s works so favorably. The first three books—*Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel*—proved to be deeply polarizing for scholars and readers alike. One of the primary criticisms lodged against the books is the prevalence of sexual themes, particularly in the case of the latter two which depict, in particular, the institutionalized sexual abuse of children within the Lager system. Instead of considering the texts as breakthrough testimonies during a time of historical repression, Bartov sees the books as consciously engineered to garner attention and celebrity for the author, and their treatment of rape as a part of this mechanism:

In the 1950s and 1960s Israeli youngsters often read Ka-Tzetnik because he was the only legitimate source of sexually titillating and sadistic literature in a still puritanical and closed society, with the result that the Holocaust somehow became enmeshed in their minds with both repelling and fascinating pornographic images. (Bartov para. 2)

By this argument, Ka-Tzetnik’s works have severely damaged public conceptions of the survivor at a time when such conceptions were precarious (and often suspicious) in the first place. By eroticizing the Holocaust and marketing it to young Israelis who had only a limited understanding of the historical reality of the Lager, Ka-Tzetnik may be seen as deliberately corrupting modern conceptions of the historical past. Given this perspective,

¹⁶ Jeremy Popkin, “Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym,” *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 354.

Bartov's appraisal of the works as "kitsch" that is culpable of "contaminating survivors" is a conceivable one.¹⁷

Some have taken this line of argumentation further, positing that Ka-Tzetnik's work was not only disgraceful to the survivors, but also corruptive to the forming sexuality of Sabras in Israel. In 2007, an Israeli filmmaker named Ari Libsker produced a documentary, *Stalags*, that details the history of an underground literary genre that emerged in Israel in the early 1950s. This genre concerned itself with the writing of pornographic scenes occurring between a powerful, often blonde, Nazi woman and a Jewish man incarcerated in the camps. These scenes entail the torture and rape of the victim until, finally, the victim wins out and rapes and murders his captors. The proposed ramifications of this genre, in the early days of Israeli statehood, suggest that many Sabras (and, later, children of survivors) read these works during the "culture of silence" and accepted them as historical reality, possibly "[reinforcing] their fantasies about the terrible events... generated by the reluctance of adults and surrounding society to speak about the Holocaust."¹⁸ A further proposed consequence of these works is that the burgeoning sexualities of these young Israelis were morally and psychologically influenced by the depravity that titillated them when no other pornographic materials were available.

In the trailer for *Stalags*, Libsker's documentary, a man is interviewed with his face blacked out onscreen and his voice distorted to hide his identity. The anonymous man claims that his father was a survivor, and had one of these novels hidden away in

¹⁷ Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997, para 33.

¹⁸ Galia Glasner-Heled, "Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik," *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 121.

their home. The man found it and read it during his pubescent years, causing, as he claims, aspects of the Holocaust and its torture systems in particular to become fetishized to a degree of obsession that lingers into the present day. Though a government task force recalled all the books and sought them out for destruction, the man in the trailer nonetheless drags out a stack of probably a hundred of these books.¹⁹ These *Stalags* novels were, of course, dehumanizing accounts of events that did not occur, but Libsker cites Ka-Tzetnik's *House of Dolls* as the root cause for this genre, claiming that the book revealed that there was a market for exploitative Holocaust literature. However, the *Stalags* genre is notably distinct from *House of Dolls*, given that there are only two scenes sexually explicit scenes in the latter over the course of a full-length book; whereas the *Stalags* works focused on sexual and violent acts exclusively. Further, the role of fictionality in each of these seems to come from very different places: Ka-Tzetnik's voiced intention was to present his younger siblings' stories as he understood them, and the *Stalags* works seem to have been created merely to generate profit.

Others have viewed Ka-Tzetnik's inclusion of sexual violence as brave, asserting that the works take a stand for many victims whose testimonies were silenced. As is all too common cross-culturally, many survivors of sexual violence were reluctant to give testimony about their experiences, and, by this line of thinking, Ka-Tzetnik's books insist on the inclusion of rape and pedophilia in modern discussions of the Holocaust. Recalling that the works are intended to represent the experiences of his younger siblings, with whom he was never reunited after their separation in the ghetto, the idea that people could receive sexual gratification from his work must have been far from De-Nur's mind

¹⁹ A full version of this documentary could not be obtained, but the trailer can be viewed by following this link, or by searching "Stalags Ari Libsker Documentary" on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2htNs9d_6q8

at the time of writing (otherwise, he is worse even than Bartov condemns him for). Bartov describes the books as pornography and, as it turns out, the genre is a difficult one to define on a unanimous plane. As an attempt to create such a definition, aggregated from various sources, Miryam Sivan suggests the following:

...the creator's intent to endorse, condone, or encourage degrading or abusive sexual behavior; to degrade women for male sexual entertainment and gratification... to produce sexual feelings and actions in the consumer; to elicit the release in fantasy of a compelling impulse... Not one of these intentions is relevant to Ka-Tzetnik's *House of Dolls* or *Piepel*. (Sivan 208)

Though, naturally, elements of her definition are debatable, her point is well taken as it relates to De-Nur and the question of authorial intention. Though the personal subjectivities of writers are inaccessible to their readers, one can nonetheless gather from the author's statements that his intention was not to sexually arouse his readers, but rather to demonstrate the extremism of Nazi depersonalization tactics and tortures, and, likely, to produce in the reader the same degree of outrage and repulsion that the writer felt. As will be discussed in detail later on, De-Nur may have imagined the traumas of his siblings in sexual terms not only due to this expediency of emotion, but perhaps also due to mental illness and survivor's guilt.

In an attempt to illustrate the kinds of explicit representations that would warrant such polarized perspectives, a few scenes stand out in particular. As has been mentioned, the second book of the sextet, *House of Dolls*, dramatizes the experience of a young girl who is forced to work in an Auschwitz brothel in service to the German soldiers. Prior to "Enjoyment Duty," the girls are forcibly sterilized in the so-called "Science Institute." Ka-Tzetnik describes the girl, Daniella's, post-surgical experience this way:

It wasn't until late in the day that Daniella felt the pain begin to let up. The savage fire which had been raging in her lower abdomen subsided somewhat. The

scorching heat that had been through her vagina still fulgurated and lapped within her full strength. The focus of the pain—at first concentrated on one point where it drilled with a white-hot drill—dulled somewhat as the pain spread throughout the body. (Ka-Tzetnik 154)

In this passage, one may find evidence of Ka-Tzetnik's unflinchingly literal depictions of the physical conditions of the Lager—another criticism often lodged against the author. This is the only time in the book that the word “vagina” appears outright, and, notably, it is within a medical, as opposed to a sexual, context. In this description, the female body is presented as a particular site of Nazi violence, due to the way that the vagina is conceived of as an instrument for both the advancement and purification of the Reich as well as its undoing. As the next section will explore in detail, issues of Jewish procreation, and miscegenation in particular, were dealt with expressly in the Nuremberg Laws toward the end of preserving Nazi biopolitical positions. As we'll see later, the kind of sexual violence that Ka-Tzetnik renders in these works may not align exactly with historical reality; still, Ka-Tzetnik positions female sexuality here as yet another aspect of Jewish life that was exploited to benefit the Aryan agenda, in the form of the gratification of German soldiers.

Although the passage mentioned above contains the only overt reference to female genitalia, sexual abuse and rape do not escape representation. Further in *House of Dolls*, Ka-Tzetnik describes Daniella's first term of “Enjoyment Duty”:

“German soldiers will teach you!” Out of the loud debauchery rises the hoarse, heavy voice of the German croaking in her ear. Her eyes are shut. The voice has a rubicund, drunken face, a leather jacket: “13”... *“German soldiers will teach you!”* The face of the Neanderthal mummy is lying on her, pawing at her, licking her face. She lies bound as in a cage, knees astraddle, unable to move a limb. Can't escape. Sparks. (Ka-Tzetnik 168)

In addition to containing Daniella's perspective, through the third person limited, this passage also contains another important voice: that of the Master Kalefactress, a female German criminal whose prewar prison sentence was redirected to a position of relative power in Auschwitz. This was a very common practice throughout the concentrationary system, as much of the existing societal infrastructure of the time (including the prisons) was repurposed to suit wartime scarcity as well as the ambition of Hitler's megalomaniacal construction projects (hence the call for *Labor Kommando*, and other forms of forced labor). Upon entering the Auschwitz brothel, the Master Kalefactress interprets the girls' fearfulness as vain shows of propriety, and consistently berates them with the warning, "*German soldiers will teach you!*" Here, the Kalefactress's words surface in Daniella's consciousness as she is raped—perhaps indicating the degree to which Lager depersonalization techniques have advanced in her psyche.

The presence of empowered German criminals also plays an important role in Katzetnik's third work, *Piepel*, the story of a seven-year-old boy who is forced to work as both maid and sexual servant to the Block Guard of his appointed barrack. Criminals, historically, were frequently appointed as Block Guards, and, in *Piepel*, the guards pass the young boy, Moni, hand-to-hand in exchange for various goods from each other which, due to their privileged positions within the camp, only they are able to procure. In what is probably the most visceral and heart-rending scene in the book, Moni describes a night with the "Block Chief":

I knew that if it weren't for the fact that the Block Chief was all worked up just then, my eyes would never have opened again. He kept me alive just so he could shoot his load. And then, with the last ounce of strength in you, you try to keep the love-making going and to keep the Block Chief's mind off your life with all the love-tricks you learned in your year in Auschwitz... And again you tear open your eyes. Again your throat is in the clamp of the Block Chief's hands. Don't

you know what the Block Chief screams then? Is it only once that you've heard it? By this time you've stopped knowing what you're in for until the Block Chief has shot his load. Then you're torn between two fears: if you draw out the love-play, you're terrified at the thought of dozing off in the middle; if you end the petting and fondling too soon, you're terrified at the thought that the Block Chief will croak you for it as soon as he's done. (Ka-Tzetnik 111)

Here, the departure from the first person into the second seems to indicate the way that Moni evacuates his own subjectivity as he is traumatized. This method of self-evacuation is present in both Moni and Daniella's depictions. Following her encounter with the "Neanderthal mummy," Daniella's mind proceeds into a series of flashbacks and vague introspections that do not directly relate to the trauma she is experiencing; similar to the way in which Moni's mind detaches from his first-person identity to consider the circumstances of an unfortunate other. Throughout *Piepel*, Moni manifests an imaginary friend that he can alternately admonish, comfort and pity; while Daniella's mind surges through fragments of memories and speech that attempt to explain her current situation. Both coping methods may be seen as associated with the author himself in his predilection for anonymity in the presentation of his texts, in the sense that both Daniella and Moni attempt to evacuate their own subjectivities in order to deflect some of the personally erosive effects of trauma.

Despite this similarity, the way that Moni's abuse is described contains many notable departures from the techniques used to describe Daniella's. In *House of Dolls*, the language is very formal and contains words such as "fulgurated" and "Neanderthal"; whereas the above passage from *Piepel* is rife with such coarse slang as "shot his load" and "love-play." One possible explanation for this may be that the books were published by different companies—though they were both translated by Moshe M. Kohn—and, unfortunately, the American market for Holocaust media does not display a remarkable

taste for the philosophic or the artful. Given that *Piepel* was released after *House of Dolls* (with first publications in English appearing in 1956 and 1961, respectively), it is possible that the latter publisher sought a wider market by amplifying the degradation of the events depicted. The first three works of the sextet, notably, seem not to have been translated by someone chosen by the author, as occurred with later works in the series, but rather by the publishing houses involved.

Another significant disparity between the styles of *House of Dolls* and *Piepel* is an obvious one: their difference of point of view. *House of Dolls*, the second novel of the sextet, is in third person, and renders Harry (Ka-Tzetnik's fictionalized persona) as a character in the narrative with whom she maintains a relationship in the ghetto, prior to her deportation to Auschwitz. During their time together in the ghetto, and even after a Nazi *Aktion* has separated them, the narrative alternately focalizes through Daniella and Harry's perspectives. *Piepel*, on the other hand, is written in first person and contains only a peripheral mention of Harry, as Moni is still too young to have very clear memories of his pre-incarceration life. Other than *Shivitti: A Vision*, the final work in the series and one that will be discussed at length later in this section, *Piepel* is the only book written in the first person and, arguably, may also be the furthest from the personal experience of the author. Without Harry's presence in the book, the first person seems only to be accomplished by the total removal of the author himself from the events described, and in this way Ka-Tzetnik is able to inhabit Moni's mind more fully than Daniella's.

The first novel, titled *Salamandra*, concerns the author's experience specifically, as depicted through his fictional persona, Harry Prelesnik. While aligning with what

little is known about the facts of De-Nur's personal experience in Auschwitz, *House of Dolls* and *Piepel* stand far outside of the author's conceivable scope of experience. Though he may have heard the stories of other survivors in a Displaced Person's Camp, De-Nur never saw his siblings again after they were separated in the ghetto and, further, the historicity of the conditions that Daniella and Moni experience in these books is dubious. Despite these layers of removal, the author continued to attest their absolute truth as the voices of the dead. Given these discrepancies, in combination with the possible damage the works may have done to the disparate population in early Israel, the dismissal of these works from the canon seems based on their incongruity with historical reality and their social impact upon publication. However, the works were written out of reverence for his family and as a way to mourn their destruction, and in this way constitute a form of personal narrative that engages the imagination in pursuit of healing. Possibly overwhelmed by his experiences, emotions, and suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, De-Nur may have imagined his siblings' suffering and torture in sexual terms due to the expediency with which such representations might raise a reaction in the reader—possibly one that is meant to match the extremity of feeling in the author. By externalizing these imagined narratives—though the author would never have described them as such—De-Nur presents a story to his larger community in the hope that it will be acknowledged, read, and integrated into the wider narrative of that community so that his family will not be forgotten. It is perhaps because they are narrative in form—and thus pliable to the subjective faculties of the imagination—that the author could glean meaning from them that might work his trauma into the greater narrative of his life and culture, after it has been blasted apart by trauma and separation. As such, the *Salamandra*

sextet can be argued to constitute another form of historical knowledge, despite their fictionality, in the way that they reflect the grieving process of one survivor as he attempts to cohere a bifurcated self into a unified present tense.

For many survivors of the Holocaust, the impulse to bear witness was intense and immediate. Though notably few accounts were published in Hebrew, as has been noted, many were published in Yiddish, French, English, and Italian. When so many people had been oppressed both physically and emotionally in the camps, the prospect of telling one's story earnestly to credulous listeners may have presented a first step toward healing. Susan Brison, a philosopher and trauma theorist, has written extensively about the long-term effects of trauma and near-death experiences (and about survivors of rape in particular), but her methodology is useful in a discussion of trauma generally. Brison argues that the license of survivors to mentally reconstruct their past traumas is crucial to "making them [the memories] less intrusive and giving them the kind of meaning that enables them to be integrated into the rest of life" (Brison 54). By claiming agency over one's traumas by deliberately remembering them, delivering them narratively and controlling the way in which the memories are mediated, one may gain back some of the trust they lost in the world when they experienced the trauma by reclaiming subjective agency. As Brison notes: "When trauma is of human origin and is intentionally inflicted... it not only shatters one's fundamental assumptions about the world and one's safety in it, but it also severs the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity" (Brison 40). At its best, telling one's story and seeing it received by other people may regain some of that prior trust and inner stability, as well as mend some inner rift between the pre- and post-trauma self by creating meaning. In this way, narrativizing

trauma can serve a personal function for the survivor. As we'll see later on, the delivery of one's lived trauma in the form of legal testimony may take on both political and personal dimensions—particularly in the case of Ka-Tzetnik 135633, in his appearance at the Eichmann Trial of 1961 in Jerusalem.

In order to demonstrate the urgency of the documentary impulse, quotes from a few survivors in relation to their narrative experience of memory seem pertinent. Each one seems to crystallize a different aspect of this impulse and, as such, warrant our attention. In his preface to *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi describes the need as he felt it in the camps and afterward:

I recognize, and ask indulgence for, the structural defects of the book. Its origins go back, not indeed in practice, but as an idea, an intention, to the days of the Lager. The need to tell our story to 'the rest', to make 'the rest' participate in it, had taken on, for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse, to the point of competing with our other elementary needs. The book has been written to satisfy this need: first and foremost, as an interior liberation. (Levi 9)

By his invocation of “the rest,” it is not clear if Levi means to imply other Jews who were not affected by the *Sho'ah* or if he means the rest of the world generally, and perhaps Europe in particular. What is clear, however, is that Levi's description conjures a certain barrier of experience between “the rest” and those he speaks for when he says “our” that may be bridged by the reciprocal processes of shared narrative. By speaking in the first person plural, Levi seems to imply the communal need to speak as individuals in the face of a depersonalizing environment. The conditions of this environment include the dismissal of basic human needs such as nutrition and hygiene, so it is interesting that Levi ranks the need for testimony among these primal functions and that the ultimate aim of this function is “as an interior liberation” in the sense that Brison denotes. By delivering

one's personal story to willing recipients, one may be delivered from trauma by finding a new place in a world that had before denied their personal identities and histories, as well as their reality as human beings.

This sense of advocating a level of humanity that has been oppressively denied appears in many survivor testimonies. Tadesz Borowski, a Pole who was incarcerated in Auschwitz, describes this denial as a “mockery” of basic human rights that, in so doing, warps the ennobled position of man into a justifiable slavery that plans the erasure of these slaves from public knowledge once they have served their purpose. It is against this possibility that Borowski, remembering a time prior to the liberation when it was unclear as to who would win the war, proposes testimony as an important opposition:

Work, during which you are not allowed to speak up, to sit down, to rest, is a mockery. And every half empty shovelful of earth that we toss on to the embankment is a mockery.

Look carefully at everything around you, and conserve your strength. For a day may come when it will be up to us to give an account of the fraud and mockery to the living—to speak up for the dead. (Borowski 116)

Here, Borowski clearly cites an inability to exercise free will as a part of this “mockery,” but seems also to indicate that forced participation in this dehumanizing scheme (i.e. the shovelfuls of earth likely representative of the covering of mass graves) stands as a further transgression against the will of man. In this quote as well as Levi's, one sees Borowski compelled toward a communalized point of view. The use of the word “you” may have been a silent reminder to the narrator himself, but may also have referred to the prisoners generally. Finally, when Borowski cites the possibility “to speak up for the dead,” the narrator extends the position of the witness outside the scope of the immediate trauma, and places it within the larger narratives of history. By advocating for the dead, upon whose backs these labor projects were completed, the narrator combats the idea that

the official history of this event will also contain the same degree of “mockery” and dehumanization.

The predilection for a pluralized point of view seems rooted in the restorative powers of narrative, as mentioned above, but also seems to be rooted in the techniques of the Lager system that were designed to erode the subject’s consistent sense of self, with a view to keeping these subjects pliable to the shifting tactics of the Reich as it saw fit. Such techniques may include, for example: the standardized, striped uniforms, the replacement of a subject’s name with a number, the position of guards and officers throughout the Lager, the daily ritual of lining up for counting and appraisal during *Selektions*, and the constant threat of violence that could erupt at the least provocation. The aggregated psychological effect of these techniques may be part of the reason why so many survivors’ testimonies tend toward the collective voice or the first person plural, in the sense that *Häftlinge* were all treated with these techniques that conflated individual diversity into a dehumanized position. It is in the face of this collectivization that many survivors attempted to preserve their individual selves. Continuing this thread, Robert Antelme, a member of the Resistance in occupied France and a survivor of Buchenwald, describes the moment when the SS called his name before conferring his number:

I shall forever be trying to reconstruct that same principle of identity the SS sought to establish yesterday in making me reply yes to my name to assure myself that it is indeed me who is actually here. But the evidentness of this fact will continually slip away, just as it slips away now. (Anteleme 34)

Here, Anteleme clings to his name as a link to his pre-incarceration self, distinguishing himself from the “principle of identity” that sorts him as another number among many. In presenting testimony that is written from their own point of view and attributed to their

own name, survivors participate in the world outside of the Lager on a public level and, thereby, renew their post-incarceration selves as individuals instead of as numbers.

In the cases of both personal and legal testimony, questions of subjectivity, mediation, and responsibility are always at play. Such questions take on particularly high stakes in representations of the Holocaust, when the circumstances and experiences conveyed may appear outside of the realm of human limits. In the foreword to his memoir, *The Human Race*, Robert Antelme writes simultaneously of the impulse to bear witness as well as the seemingly improbability of achieving it:

...but we had only just returned, with us we brought back our memory of our experience, an experience that was still very much alive, and we felt a frantic desire to describe it such as it had been. As of those first days, however, we saw that it was impossible to bridge the gap we discovered opening up between the words at our disposal and the experience which, in the case of most of us, was still going forward within our bodies... And then, even to us, what we had to tell would start to seem *unimaginable*. (Antelme 3)

In describing his experience as “still very much alive,” Antelme invokes the incredible urgency of the documentary impulse. Then, post-liberation with the ability to narrate, the enormity of the trauma recalled engulfs the boundaries of language. Particularly in the case of camp survivors—who endured physical depletion to the point where many could not speak at all, and who lived among an incredible “confusion of languages” that did not always include one’s own—the renewed ability to communicate freely would seem like an incredible advancement.²⁰ Nonetheless, by Antelme’s account, attempts to constrain such overwhelming experiences to ordered, sequential language causes the memories to approach the “*unimaginable*.” In this sense, the concept of the unimaginable is paired with the prognosis of the untellable, and this seems a strict condemnation indeed.

²⁰ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1993), 38.

Further in his foreword, however, Antelme goes on to describe the role that the imagination can play in the reconstruction of traumatic memories toward the aim of bearing witness:

This disproportion between the experience we had lived through and the account we were able to give of it would only be confirmed subsequently. We were indeed dealing then with one of those realities which cause one to say that they defy imagining. It became clear henceforth that only through a sifting, that is only through that self-same imagining could there be any attempting to tell something about it. (Antelme 3-4)

Just after describing memories of Buchenwald as “*unimaginable*,” Antelme refutes this dismissal by posing the imagination itself as a tool to assemble and narrativize traumatic memories. By deliberately reconstructing the traumatic past in their minds, the witness may find the ability to compartmentalize or organize their memories into a less overwhelming coherence and, thereby, to present them to the external world in a manner in which they will be received, understood, and believed.

Though debates about the ability of language to represent experiences that seem beyond human limits proliferate, including Adorno’s famous dictum about poetry after Auschwitz,²¹ the fact nonetheless remains that denying a survivor the possibility to narrate their own experiences due to the poverty of language stands as a theoretically-based dismissal of the right of the survivor to bear witness—and, perhaps, thereby to gain some of the benefits that narrativizing memory may afford, as Brison has proposed. In his work, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben has logically refuted the argument that language cannot satisfy the task of bearing witness to

²¹ The prominent theorist and member of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno, once said that it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz—implying, for many, the impossibility of beautiful art for its own sake after such inhuman depths have been realized in human history. Adorno himself later reversed his statement. Miryam Sivan, “‘Stoning the Messenger’: Yehiel Dinur’s *House of Dolls* and *Piepel*,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 212.

the unimaginable: “On the contrary, only if language is not always already communication, only if language bears witness to something to which it is impossible to bear witness, can a speaking being experience something like a necessity to speak.”²² Here, Agamben contends that no experience comes linguistically encoded, and so with any testimony it is the job of the witness to arrange their experience meaningfully into sequential language. If experiences were already language, if testimony came without the mediation of the subject’s mind, then there would be no need to speak at all—the testimony could testify for itself. Understanding the importance of personal testimony by Agamben’s logic, it is possible to understand that the witness is not facing the impossible in the act of conveying their experiences, but actually answering the impulse they’d already felt to tell their own story in the way that they see fit. In this way, traumatic memories are not dormant things untouchable by language, but actually possibilities for healing that are animated by language with the intervention of the imagination.

By Agamben and Antelme’s logic, the relegation of Holocaust experiences to the realm of the unimaginable consigns the possibility of meaningful testimony to silence and suppression. The loss of such testimonies would be two-fold, entailing not only the denial of a survivor’s possible healing through storytelling, but also historical denial in the sense that lived experiences of the Holocaust would not spread from the mouths of those who experienced them but rather, and perhaps more dangerously, through dominant national presses that risk telling a sanctioned, universalized Holocaust narrative. In dismissing the personal, the subjective, from publicly recognized discussions of the Holocaust, society again imperils what was (and is) really at stake in genocide: individual people. However,

²² Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 65.

the inclusion of personal testimony within official channels accepts the vulnerabilities of the individual human mind—including the shortcomings of memory, as well as of language, in the presentation of a lived past experience. As has been established, however, the subjective imagination plays a crucial role in cogently assembling emotionally dispersed memories.

In the case of Holocaust testimonies and narratives, the notion of the imagination is a tricky one to include. For Holocaust deniers, the invocation of the imagination and of subjectivity may seem an entrance point for the refutation of witness testimonies. For Anti-Zionists in particular, the negationist movement relies on the assertion that witness testimonies are fabricated in order to exaggerate the need for a Jewish home in Palestine (Eretz Israel).²³ On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the imagination's function in the formulation of testimony may facilitate a further examination of the ways in which testimony can affect personal and national identities. It is to this end that a discussion of Ka-Tzetnik's *Salamandra* sextet can serve to further scholarly interpretations of Yehiel De-Nur's personal transformation into a symbolic celebrity survivor in Israel, as well as the role of his works as they have been implemented in the formation of Israeli nationalism.

With Ka-Tzetnik's works, the concept of testimony and the place of the witness are particularly pertinent. Throughout his life, De-Nur published only under the name Ka-Tzetnik 135633; thereby privileging the inmate (KZ) aspect of his himself as his foremost identity to the reader's mind, his former name and life having been deprived of him in Auschwitz. Secondly, De-Nur claims accountability not only for his own traumatic

²³ Jeremy Popkin, "Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym," *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 345.

narrative, but, far more so, “to record those of other victims who did not survive to speak for themselves.”²⁴ In this way, Ka-Tzetnik’s works seem to stand alone in their rejection of a personalized author, and in their claim to give testimony for people other than the writer—specifically, in the case of the *Salamandra* books, to bear witness for those who endured extreme sexual abuse by the Nazis and ended their lives by their own hands, and for those who did not survive the state of the Mussulman. In order to approach such incendiary subjects, it may be useful to establish what exactly is meant by the word “testimony” as it is understood in relation to its supposed antithesis, “perjury”—or, more aptly in this case, fiction.

This dualism is expertly evoked by Jacques Derrida in his work, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, which examines the relationship between the two outside of a simple binary, viewing them instead as inextricable parts of the public speech act. Anchored by a discussion of Maurice Blanchot’s short story, “The Instant of My Death,” Derrida argues overall that it is not the job of the witness to confirm or share empirical knowledge, but to use their specifically personal knowledge “to *make truth*... where the witness alone is capable of dying his own death, testimony always goes hand in hand with at least the *possibility* of fiction, perjury and lie.”²⁵ The concept of “making truth” may seem like an oxymoron, but in fact the idea agrees with what has been established about the faculty of the imagination to verbalize trauma specifically. Though Derrida explores the metonymic relationship between fiction and testimony, he nonetheless acknowledges that outright public lies still remain possible. As he indicates, because it is the witness alone who has lived their own experience and thus is the only person who can

²⁴ Jeremy Popkin, “Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym,” *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 344.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida. *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 27.

attest to them, the witness retains the ability to knowingly ply their memories to suit their own personal aims. The latter here would constitute perjury, which includes the warping of personal experiences and memories into a narrative that does not align with the lived past. In either case, the conventions of fiction remain in place in the production of testimony at least insofar as they serve as a shared structure through which a memory can be externally conveyed to and understood by listeners or readers—even, or especially, in the conveyance of so-called “unimaginable” experiences that might not be accessible to those who did not live them.

When it comes to Yehiel De-Nur, the question of testimony becomes even murkier in two ways: one, that De-Nur continued to write under his pseudonym even after his identity had been revealed at the Eichmann Trial, thereby continuing his refusal to personally own his testimony to the public eye; second, that his works were not categorized as either novel or memoir at the time of publication, and that the author claimed that the work was utterly true regardless of how it was categorized.²⁶ In order to understand what may be at stake in both of these factors, a further understanding of witness accountability within the fiction-testimony dialectic may be a useful starting place. Developing his concept of testimony, Derrida goes on to describe the responsibility of the witness in offering their experiences to the public:

And, above all, he would have to be certain of the distinction between a testimony and a fiction of testimony: for example, between a discourse that is put forward seriously, in good faith, under oath, and a text that lies, pretends to tell the truth, or goes so far as to simulate the oath itself, either with a view to producing a literary work, or, further, by confusing the limit between the two in order to dissolve the criteria of responsibility. (Derrida 35-6)

²⁶ Jeremy Popkin, “Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym,” *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 345.

Here, Derrida attests to the listener's or the reader's right to know whether or not the testimony they are receiving should be understood through the frameworks of either lived experience or fabricated narrative; the former being "in good faith," and the second feigning "good faith" in order to assure that their story will be earnestly received while retaining the possibility, in the case of empirical refutation, of claiming that the story was knowingly fictionalized and so the testifier cannot be held accountable for any misunderstanding on the reader's part. With the pseudonymous publication of his first book in 1946, Jeremy Popkin claims that Ka-Tzetnik may be viewed as guilty of the latter in his "attempt to claim the privileges of both genres [novel or memoir] and to avoid their disadvantages at a time when the stakes in the debate about the representation of the Holocaust were not yet clear."²⁷

In addition to his use of a pseudonym, another major criticism of Ka-Tzetnik's work as a vehicle for earnest testimony cites the work's use of the third person, as opposed to the first person of conventional memoir. Derrida notes that the use of the third person denotes a work of literature, in the sense that an artistic tool is introduced deliberately into the production of the account.²⁸ Others, however, have deviated from this stance in claiming that the use of artfulness when crafting testimony can actually make its contents more accessible to readers:

Artistic stylization is designed to diminish, rather than enlarge, the gap between the texts and the historical events they attempt to represent. Under the protective shield of both a literary persona and a literary textual construction, an unbearable truth is more accessible and more easily approached. (Milner 115)

²⁷ Jeremy Popkin, "Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym," *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 345.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 38.

Here, Iris Milner attests that De-Nur's unconventional narration actually enhances the author's mobility in terms of representing different aspects of his experience—in fact, the experiences and emotions that may have been among the most painful. By granting the imagination further license in the production of testimony, Milner argues, the author is actually able to present a closer version of the “truth” by distancing himself from it via a narrative device. Jeremy Popkin expands on this point, acknowledging the historical newness of Holocaust testimonies in general at the time that the title book of the series, *Salamandra*, was first released:

His [Ka-Tzetnik's] strategy for dealing with the experience is quite unusual among Holocaust survivors. Ka-Tzetnik was one of the first survivors to cast his story as a coherent narrative, and he had to invent his own literary strategy, rather than following already established models. At the time when he wrote *Salamandra*, it was not yet clear that the first-person narrative written by a named author would emerge as the normative form for the Holocaust story. (Popkin 345)

Combining the Milner's and Popkin's arguments, it becomes clear that De-Nur's use of a pseudonym, in conjunction with the processes of the imagination, allowed him to better access and represent his own memories and reactions by layering distance between them and his present self. In this way, the author's incarcerated self, denoted by his acronym and number, remained the only version of himself that could testify for his experiences in the Lager.

The relegation of his public self to the world of the depersonalized victims who died without their individual identities was not to last forever, and the public acknowledgement of his personal identity caused both mental and physical reactions from the author. The revelation of the author's identity came fifteen years after books first appeared in Israel, and six years after *House of Dolls* first appeared in English. Notably, this pivotal moment in De-Nur's personal history was concurrent with a

crucially formative event in Israeli history, especially when “the full sessions of which were broadcast live on national radio...psycho-revolutionizing [Israeli’s] self-perception” by taking a tangible stand against Nazism in an Israeli national court.²⁹ Given this context, the transformation of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 into Yehiel De-Nur in the public eye may have been bound up with a burgeoning sense of Israeli empowerment against the traumas of the past; despite this seeming correlation, De-Nur continued to publish only under his pseudonym until his death—indicating, for some, an inability to conquer his past.³⁰ By this understanding, De-Nur’s retention of his incarcerated identity at the public level, especially in post-Holocaust Israel, “claimed no victory over the death camps,” and thus the books came to be seen as having the potential to shore citizens up in the past when they needed to be looking toward the future.³¹ This new understanding of Ka-Tzetnik and his books had more to do with the Israeli project of nation building and less to do with the author personally, and the final chapter of this essay will delve more deeply into the position of the *Salamandra* sextet in relation to the project of Zionism.

It is worthwhile, however, to pause briefly in order to develop some of the historical context of the Eichmann Trial. Adolf Eichmann, one of the primary architects of the system that transported Jews to extermination and labor camps across Europe, was tried in Jerusalem under the Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law, which was enacted in 1950 and, previously, had mainly been applied to survivors living in Israel who held functionary positions in the camps (more on this topic will be given in the next

²⁹ Idith Zertal. *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 92.

³⁰ Galia Glasner-Heled, “Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik,” *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 124.

³¹ Jeremy Popkin, “Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym,” *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 346.

section).³² Eichmann was captured in Argentina, and brought to Israel where he gave 275 hours of pre-trial testimony,³³ and was personally “on the stand from June 20 to July 24, or a total of thirty-three and a half sessions. Almost twice as many sessions, sixty-two out of a total of a hundred and twenty-one, were spent on a hundred prosecution witnesses who, country after country, told their tales of horrors... from April 24 to June 12.”³⁴ Under the direction of David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, the Trial has largely been viewed as an effort to establish the power of the nascent Israeli court system and to ideologically reinforce Zionism in the Middle East against the surrounding Arab oppositions.³⁵

When Ben-Gurion announced Eichmann’s capture and impending Trial, the national media immediately engaged with the story and its implications for the people of Israel. A newspaper, *Ma’ariv*, developed the nationalistic dimension of the Trial in an article published the day that Ben-Gurion announced Eichmann’s capture:

...from the mounds of ashes of the burned, from all the anonymous, nameless buried, rose the silent cry that shattered Israel: The greatest nations on earth could not catch him. The young men of Israel – did. In the battle with the Jewish mind, with our strong will to catch him, with the courage of Israeli security men – he failed [for all his satanic cunning] ... And justice will be done now. Justice befitting a country and a Jewish state, millions of whose potential builders and soldiers were butchered on Eichmann’s order. (Zertal 96, cited from *Ma’ariv* 24 May 1960)

³² Idith Zertal. *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95.

³³ “The Devil is a Gentleman.” *60 Minutes*. New York: Jewish Media Fund, 1997, 1983. Recorded television segment. VHS.

³⁴ Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 223.

³⁵ Idith Zertal. *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97-8.

It is interesting that this *Ma'ariv* article describes the “millions” who perished in the catastrophe as Israel’s “potential builders and soldiers”—namely, as people who belonged in the Zionist state and who could have served it profitably. By framing the Eichmann Trial as an Israeli event and issue, *Ma'ariv* ignores the myriad of countries that were affected by the Holocaust and the multi-nationalism of the victims. This national position is reflected in the distribution of the witnesses who were selected to testify at the Trial: “There appeared one witness each from France, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Italy, Greece and Society Russia; two from Yugoslavia; three each from Rumania and Slovakia; and thirteen from Hungary.”³⁶ This is a fairly representative sample, nation-wise, but “All but a mere handful of the witness were Israeli citizens,” and they were not chosen from the many who applied to testify, but were selected specifically by the prosecution.³⁷ Some argue that all of these factors point to the intention of the Trial to strengthen international ethos of Israel in relation to its enemies, serving as a public fulcrum by which Ben-Gurion could maintain political leverage on the global scale.

As has been mentioned, early Israel began with a marked attempt to distinguish the traumas of the past from the emergent Zionist position of heroism and strength, which is one of the reasons that the Holocaust was not largely discussed. Due to this reluctance to speak about the victims of the past, the testimonies given at the Eichmann Trial constituted some of the earliest public acknowledgments of the scope and gravity of the Nazi extermination system. Witnesses were selected “from hundreds of hundreds of applicants,” based on, as Hannah Arendt has noted, “the predilection of the prosecution

³⁶ Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 225.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

for witness of some prominence, many of whom had published books about their experiences.”³⁸ Ka-Tzetnik was among the witnesses called upon to testify, and was addressed by the judge as “Mr. Dinoor.”³⁹ Even as he publicly stood in the name Yehiel De-Nur, the author still insisted on his KZ-self as a communal entity, in conversation with those who passed away in Auschwitz. Upon revealing his identity, the courtroom discussion proceeded this way:

In the trial, Dinur was asked by the judge: “Why did you hide behind the pen-name Ka-Tzetnik?” To which he replied: “It is not a pen-name. I do not see myself as an author who writes literature. This is a chronicle from the planet of Auschwitz, whose inhabitants had no names, they were neither born nor bore any children; they were neither alive nor dead. They breathed according to different laws of nature. Every fraction of a minute there revolved on a different time scale. They were called Ka-Tzetnik, they were skeletons with numbers.” (Bartov para. 23)

De-Nur’s statement tacitly refutes any idea that he is an artist, “an author who writes literature.” Instead, he is a “chronicler” who continues to speak for the dead, the inhabitants of another planet—for all its cruelty, hatred, and inhumanity—could not possibly be earth. After giving less than ten minutes of testimony, most of which goes on in this stark and meandering fashion, De-Nur lost consciousness on the witness stand.⁴⁰

³⁸ Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 224.

³⁹ Alternative spellings of the author’s name include Dinur, Dinoor, and De-Nur; the latter is the most common.

⁴⁰ The real-time translation in the footage of the Trial differs somewhat from what Bartov has written here, but not significantly. A full video of De-Nur’s testimony at the Eichmann Trial can be found at this link, or by searching “Yehiel De-Nur” on YouTube (though, given the video description posted here along with a strange intruding graphic in the footage, it seems that whoever uploaded this video may not have done so for benign reasons): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0T9tZiKY14>



De-Nur being taken from the stand by Israeli guards.

Scholars have interpreted De-Nur's testimony and fainting spell in various ways. In recounting the testimony of "a writer, well known on both sides of the Atlantic under the name K-Zetnik,"⁴¹ Hannah Arendt wrote the following:

He started off, as he had done at many of his public appearances, with an explanation of his adopted name. It was not a "pen-name," he said. "I must carry the name as long as the world will not awaken after the crucifying of the nation... He continued with a little excursion into astrology: the star "influencing our fate in the same way as the star of ashes at Auschwitz is there facing our planet... even Mr. Hausner [the lead prosecutor] felt that something had to be done about this "testimony," and, very timidly, very politely, interrupted: "Could I perhaps put a few questions to you if you would consent?" Whereupon the presiding judge saw his chance as well: "Mr. Dinoor, *please, please*, listen to Mr. Hausner and to me." In response, the disappointed witness, probably deeply wounded, fainted and answered no more questions. (Arendt 224)

To begin with, Arendt's belief that the author had addressed the question of his identity before does not seem right. In none of the other (English) scholarship on Ka-Tzetnik is there any mention of a public, named appearance on the author's part prior to the Trial.

⁴¹ Alternative spellings of the author's pseudonym include K. Tzetnik, Ka. Tzetnik, K-Zetnik, and Ka-Tzetnik; again, the latter seems to be the most common. Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 223.

Arendt may have mentioned this in order to bolster her point that the prosecution mainly appointed “celebrity” witnesses that had already captured national attention and were thus easier to mobilize toward nationalistic aims, and this point is well taken, but this statement seems unfounded. She then frames his quotes in an obliquely sarcastic manner—a reaction which might make sense for a reporter who had been sent to cover a Trial of international attention and significance, in which, conceivably, testimony this vague and mystifying might be understood to have no place. However, given the wider context of De-Nur’s personal history and mental exhaustion on the public stand, his instinct to verbalize the imagined, the cosmologies and theologies he has developed in the intervening years in order to explain his experiences to himself, may make sense.

Shoshanah Felman interpreted De-Nur’s inability to continue his testimony quite differently than Arendt did, aligning more with the process of the imagination. As opposed to Arendt, who appeared to perceive his testimony as marginal and performative, Felman saw it as collusive to the author’s tendency toward a communal, universalized narration of the Holocaust:

K-Zetnik faints because he cannot be interpellated at this moment by his legal name, Dinoor: the dead still claim him as *their* witness, as K-Zetnik who belongs to them and is still one of them. The court reclaims him as *its* witness, as Dinoor. He cannot bridge the gap between the two names and the two claims. He plunges into the abyss between the different planets. On the frontier between the living and the dead, between the present and the past, he falls as though he himself were a corpse. (Levine 34, citing Felman 149 in *The Juridical Unconscious*)

Felman’s interpretation points to the collision of the author’s two identities specifically: De-Nur indicating his present, named self, and Ka-Tzetnik representing all those who perished in Auschwitz and did not live to testify. The attempt to speak as De-Nur, the individual, submerged him again in the voices of the past, and he collapsed under the

pressure of attempting to reconcile this internal manifestation of “the other planet” with the immediate, tangible context of the courtroom.

In an interview given for a piece about the Eichmann Trial on *60 Minutes*, De-Nur himself provided another explanation for his behavior. De-Nur was personally connected to Eichmann, having been told that he was granted a visa to leave Poland until Eichmann entered the room and “tears up the papers”—and, consequently, including De-Nur on the next deportation to Auschwitz.⁴² Over time, De-Nur claims that he built up an image of Eichmann in his mind that was proportional to his empowered position to send anyone to death at a whim—in a sense, dehumanizing Eichmann in his mind in order to understand how someone could be so inhuman. Upon taking the stand, De-Nur says, he saw Eichmann—this small, frail man sitting behind glass as a defendant—and he was not this apotheosized figure with the power of death, but a man just like himself and like all the other men present there.⁴³ This, for De-Nur, was the most terrifying realization of all: that it was not only Adolf Eichmann who could wield his power so cruelly, but that all men, by the fact of their humanity, are capable of depersonalizing others to the degree that their destruction seems justified.

With all of this at play, the developing understanding of the role of the imagination in Ka-Tzetnik’s works is two-fold: on one level, that the imagination allowed De-Nur to connect with the “planet Auschwitz” so that he could write about not only his own experiences, but also those of the people he lost, thereby functioning as a vehicle for his grief; secondly, that so many years of imagining Eichmann and other SS had led him to forget their real-life humanity, relegating them only to that realm of the dead, “planet

⁴² “The Devil is a Gentleman.” *60 Minutes*. New York: Jewish Media Fund, 1997, 1983. Recorded television segment. VHS.

⁴³ Ibid.

Auschwitz,” whose conditions were not mentally reconcilable with the present world and its inhabitants. The lines of these breaks coincide with the bifurcation of the author’s identity, and, on all levels, the theme of dehumanization leading into depersonalization is incredibly pronounced. For De-Nur, the Eichmann Trial became a confrontation with the realities of the past and its players, and, in the end, De-Nur was overwhelmed and could not consciously inhabit that space. [could go in to stuff about “Partial Recall”] [This fact constitutes another form of historical knowledge—but one that cannot be drawn from a timeline or from annals, but from an analysis of the imaginative space as a uniquely insightful zone that, for a survivor, can yield the kind of meaning that can allow them to integrate their past traumas into their narrative present. In this way, a future is possible by acknowledging the path that leads out from the renewal of the subjectivity—where before the individual had been desubjectified—and into the possibility of peace on both the inner and the interpersonal levels.

III. Representations of Sexual Violence

For the children of survivors and other Israeli readers, the experience of reading Ka-Tzetnik 135633 proved to be an appalling look at life in the Lager—comprising, for some, their total understanding of what a camp experience was. It is for this reason that many of De-Nur's critics raise the question of his work's historical and literary merits, asking whether or not readers who are historically and culturally removed from the events of the *Sho'ah* can actualize the horrors of the books in their own terms, and thereby understand an aspect of camp experience. Such a question is particularly pressing as De-Nur's works often deal with a particularly sensitive aspect of camp life: sexual abuse.

The second and third books of the *Salamandra* sextet, which ostensibly deal with the fates of his younger sister and brother, present the horrifying circumstances of sexual slavery within the camps. In *House of Dolls*, De-Nur's most widely translated book, the young Daniella is taken from the ghetto in a girl's *Aktion* to work in a brothel in Auschwitz. In *Piepel*, Moni, a boy of about seven, is separated from his father upon entering Auschwitz to serve as *piepel* to the block guards—that is, to be both maid and sex slave to a high-ranking German prisoner in Auschwitz. Though neither work is notably explicit in terms of imagery or overtly sexual language, Daniella and Moni's camp experiences are defined by their position as utterly subjugated sex objects that serve the whims of German men. As we'll see later, the historicity of such positions within the

camp system is dubious; however, it appears that De-Nur's emphasis on sexuality functions more as a symbol of humiliation and suffering than as a way to express what his siblings really went through—which, as neither of them survived the war, he could not have known in detail. As has been suggested, De-Nur's propensity to trust this symbol as an expedient means of evoking emotion from the reader may be rooted in mental illness and survivor's guilt.

As has been addressed, these two books exhibit differing styles of representation, which, in their divergence, constitute further evidence of the author's inability to reconcile his own identity with the traumas of the past, and his continued insistence on anonymity. As has been mentioned, the publication of the books with the Ka-Tzetnik byline offered a universalized (or universalizable) version of Holocaust reality, and the inscriptions inside of the English editions of these two works in particular demonstrate the intended scope of the events as they are depicted. *Piepels* contains two inscriptions, both of which frame the reader's reception of the work:

Piepels... boys whom the Block Chiefs of Auschwitz selected for their sexual orgies. The recorder of this account does not know the origin of the name 'Piepel', who coined it, or in what language it originates. Be that as it may, in Auschwitz the name was as familiar as the names Bread and Crematorium. (Ka-tzenik)

K.Z. (German-pronounced Ka-tzet) are the initials of the German term for concentration camp. Every K.Z. inmate was 'Ka-tzetnik Number...' the personal number branded into the flesh of the left arm. The writer of *Piepels* was Ka-tzetnik 135633. (Ka-Tzetnik)

Both of these inscriptions—which may or may not have been personally approved by the author prior to press—claim immediate historicity for the events depicted, as well as credibility for their author as someone who has lived the experience. The section of this

essay that concerns the history of sexual violence against males specifically go into further detail about the existence of *piepels* and their role in the camps, but, for now, suffice it to say that claiming universally that all camp inmates were aware of *piepels* is a rather grand claim. Notably, this inscription uses the word “account” to describe the book, thus framing the work as a non-fictional representation of historical reality. Particularly, the use of the word “account,” given that the work is in the first person, seems to suggest that the book was written *by Moni himself*. Given that this is in the beginning of the book, the reader may’ve forgotten this paratextual framing by the time they reach the end of the book, at the time of Moni’s death. Again, this may have been a marketing technique on the part of the publisher. Similar to the way in which *Piepel* is framed, the inscription inside of *House of Dolls* positions its protagonist as representative of a female Lager experience:

THIS GIRL—

forced from her home, forced into prostitution for Hitler’s legions, forced to watch the deliberate and grotesque annihilation of her loved ones...

THIS GIRL—

one alone of the six million who were plunged into the living hells of Bunchwald, Dachau, Auschwitz... but through the vivid, terrible narrative of her individual torment you will know the story of all who were caught up in this holocaust...

THIS GIRL—

witness to and unwilling participant in one of the most shameless moments of inhumanity that man has ever known... (Ka-Tzetnik)

The inscriptions inside of *Piepel* and *House of Dolls* both demonstrate the role that De-Nur’s pseudonym played in the reader’s reception of the work as presenting a historical reality. The inscriptions diverge, however, in the terms by which they self-identify the form of the text provided. *Piepel* is presented as an “account” while *House of Dolls*, in the second part of the inscription, is purported to be an “individual narrative.” As has

been mentioned, the term “account” implies instant historicity; whereas the word “narrative” seems indicative of something much subjective, something utilizing the conventions of fiction to render its story legible to readers whether it is historically verifiable or not. Again, different companies published these books, but this discrepancy seems telling. It is important to note as well that the books are not paratextually categorized as being fiction, memoir, or historical nonfiction. Given all of these ambiguities, it is useful to launch into an investigation of the historical realities of sexual abuse during the period of the Holocaust. This framework will be useful to understand, first of all, the general relationship of female sexuality to the continued identities of nations, the specific position of Jewish sexuality within the Nazi biopolitical schematic, and, finally, the role of all of the above in the development of Israeli nationalism.

To begin, sexual violence and the female body play a unique role in warfare and cultural continuity, on both symbolic and literal levels. Rape is an unfortunately common means of subjugating a conquered population, despite its explicit classification as a war crime. As Nomi Levenkron has noted, “Until just a few years ago, rape was considered an insignificant byproduct of armed conflicts—traditional soldiers’ wages”.⁴⁴ In the case of war, rape serves not only as a means of physical domination but also of symbolic domination. Miryam Sivan illustrates the extent to which this symbolic effect can destruct personal and national identities in saying that “rape has come to represent literally, figuratively, and allegorically, the depths of an individual’s and a nation’s

⁴⁴ Nomi Levenkron, “Death and the Maidens: ‘Prostitution,’ Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rachel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 13.

helplessness.”⁴⁵ Domestic structures are arranged by human sexuality, accommodating reproduction and cooperation in the raising of offspring, so the invasion of the family unit, via the female body, is a violation of the home in a way that combat isn’t. Culturally, the female body is held as a site that must be protected, and in the case of invasion it is one of the first sites to be dominated. Such an act shames the men of the invaded population, and putrefies the possible dignity of defeat into deep humiliation. Levnekron continues, “Perhaps more than any other wartime trauma, rape is perceived as the scene of the violent encounter between the personal trauma and the collective trauma”.⁴⁶ In this way, rape is not only a tactic of undocumented war on the front, but also a symbolic fracturing of what makes the home, and thus the population, whole.

In Nazi ideology, sexuality holds a unique position as a biopolitical issue. Though Nazism originates as an answer to economic struggles, one of its central ideals became the purification of the German population in pursuit of an Aryan state. This included the eradication of what had been deemed to be corruptive genetic components within the German citizenry that included the mentally ill, homosexuals, and the Jewish population. In this way, the unified German nation was regarded as a kind of biological body in itself, containing certain bacteria that endangered the health of that body. In his book, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Roberto Esposito points out the degree to which the metaphor of the purification of the body saturated German politics: “[Nazism] demanded that politics be identified directly with biology in a completely new form of biocracy”.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Miryam Sivan, “‘Stoning the Messenger’: Yehiel Dinur’s *House of Dolls* and *Piepel*,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 200.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁷ Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 113.

Toward this aim, Fritz Lenz, a geneticist and member of the Nazi Party, developed a manual titled *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene) that outlined the separation of the population in biological terms, and dubbed Hitler “the great German doctor” who was to cure the Aryan nation of any biological impurities.⁴⁸ Beginning with concerns of miscegenation and separation, as encoded in the Nuremberg Laws, this extreme form of biopower eventually categorized certain populations as degenerate and, as a result, justifiable for extermination in the interest of the health of the greater whole: “To say that the degenerate is abnormal means pushing him toward a zone of indistinction that isn’t completely included in the category of the human”.⁴⁹ Giorgio Agamben echoes this notion as well, stating how the dehumanization of the populace in favor of an abstracted, biologically separable whole allowed for a Nazi biopolitic so absolute that it coincided with thanatopolitics—the politicization of death itself.⁵⁰ Evidence of this extremity can be found in the word “hygiene” as it is used in Lenz’s *Rassenhygiene* manual, and into the use of “showers” as a pretense for sites using Cyclon B. The very arrangement of systemic extermination implemented by the Nazis is rooted in the ideology of purity, and the metaphor of unified Germany as a purging body extends across this ideology.

Ending in a policy of generalized extermination, the role of genetics in Nazism began at the site of the home, and, more specifically, the site of fertile female body. With the home as the constitutive unit of the nation and the woman as the bearer of future generations, invasions of the individual body advanced Nazi control of Germany’s genetic makeup. In attempting to separate from and eventually rid the German body of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 82-3.

any non-Aryan impurities, measures were taken to ensure that the further procreation of these undesirables within Germany's borders could not take place. Such measures took the form of forced sterilizations and abortions, which began with the passage of the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring) in 1933—a law that concerned people with disabilities that could be genetically inherited.⁵¹ Further, Ellen Ben-Sefer notes, “Forced sterilization laws soon applied to couples if one of the partners was an ‘Aryan’ German and the other was Jewish or a *Mischling* (half-Jewish)”—this at the same time that Himmler promoted the *Lebensborn* program of “pure blood” selective couplings among Aryans.⁵² To demonstrate the scope of these policies, approximately 350,000 people were sterilized during World War II—including the sterilization of between 385 and 500 children “based solely on racial background”.⁵³

Policy was also developed in regards to *Rassenschande* (race defilement), which was considered one of the most treasonous crimes that a German man could commit. It is clear sexual encounters with Jewish women were never approved of by the Nazi administration or, especially, institutionalized in the camps as it is dramatized in Katzetnik's *House of Dolls*.⁵⁴ However, the issue of sexual assault in the form of rape is not entirely excluded from the history of this time period. Many German men deviated from official Party ideologies in their individual actions. As Hannah Arendt has pointed out,

⁵¹ Ellen Ben-Sefer, “Forced Sterilization and Abortion as Sexual Abuse” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 158.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁴ Helene J. Sinnreich, “The Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 108.

“Nazi officials... prided themselves on belonging to a movement, as a distinguished from a party, and a movement could not be bound by a program”.⁵⁵ Given this sort of attitude, it is conceivable that the imposition of the sexual will onto the subjugated person was one clear way to deliver the message of that movement in terms of interpersonal domination—even if the Party did not sanction those forms of violence. Helene J. Sinnreich calls this phenomenon “center-periphery relations,” wherein Nazi-empowered German men may have acted counter to administrative ideologies while out of the sight of their superiors. Some men on the periphery may have chosen to exacerbate their already violent actions, presuming they would go unnoticed, while, on the other side of the spectrum, others chose to aid or even hide Jews themselves—a nearly equal crime. Though some of these instances may have been reported back to Berlin, “we can only uncover departures from Nazi orthodoxy only through victim testimony,” and, as is all too common in any instance of sexual abuse, many women were wary of coming forward with their experiences.⁵⁶

In *House of Dolls*, Daniella—the younger sister of De-Nur’s literary persona, Harry Preleshnik—is taken to work in the “Joy Division” of a labor camp, where she is forced into sexual situations with the German troops who pass through the area. The German word *Feld-Hure*, or field whore, is tattooed between her breasts, along with her serial number. If the soldier feels that the girl’s performance is nonchalant, stiff, or in any way unsatisfactory he only has to report her number to the Master Kalefactress (block guard) for punishment. In this way, the girls not only have to physically receive the

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 43.

⁵⁶ Helene J. Sinnreich, “The Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 109.

power that is wielded over them, but to express it with the outward appearance of pleasure. This measure of control, which forces both victim and perpetrator to participate actively in the exchange of power, is ultimately dehumanizing for Daniella, on top of the other trying aspects of life in the camp, and she ends up feigning an escape attempt so that the camp's border sentries open fire on her.

For Daniella, the question of sexual abuse does not begin with incarceration in the camp, but in the ghetto beforehand. Fella, another girl with whom Daniella had been hiding in the ghetto, makes the following remarks about the difference between their sexual enslavement in the camp and their previous vulnerability in the ghetto:

“They’ve stamped us to show that we belong to the German government. From now on no one is allowed to touch us. We’ll work for the Germans, and in exchange they’ll feed us. From now on, till the end of the war, we’re the property of the German government. Anyway, we’ll have somebody looking after us. Not like in the ghetto where we were public property, and anyone who could handle a smattering of German could do as he liked with us.” (Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls* 127)

As has been shown, Jewish women were likely subject to sexual abuse by Nazi aggressors on the front, but these women were also vulnerable to assault from people in the ghettos who protected them, hid them, or otherwise engaged with them. As Zoë Waxman has observed, many more women went into hiding or attempted to pass as Aryans in order to avoid deportation due to the fact that Jewish men were easier for Nazi officers to find. This was largely due to the fact that most German men of the time had been drafted into war, and so any men out of uniform were conspicuous on the streets; secondly, German men were not circumcised, and so any man who was suspected of

being Jewish was ordered to expose himself for verification.⁵⁷ Women thus had a generally easier time of blending in, under the guise of forged papers or protective (and often dangerous) friendships with Nazi women or merchants. Under these circumstances, many women—either in attempting to pass as Aryans or in hiding—engaged in sexual relations to assure their own safety. Testimonies have been given on both ends of the spectrum, some describing instances of molestation by their protectors while in hiding, and others who experienced the coerced exchange of sexual favors for food, documentation, or other needs.⁵⁸ The unfortunate reality is that whenever people are forced to go underground in order to survive, there are always people waiting to take advantage of them. Citing Marion Kaplan, Zoë Waxman describes a specific incident of sexual abuse in hiding:

Kaplan also points to other perils of going into hiding in Germany: “Some young women even resorted to exchanging sex for shelter, including working in brothels in Berlin.” But she also notes a *Rassenschande* (race defilement) court case involving Jewish women in hiding and reports that the women convicted of exchanging sex for shelter were then murdered. (Waxman 126)

It is known that some women who passed as Aryans on the public level worked in brothels that served German men, and, further, that some women in hiding (voluntarily or involuntarily) engaged in sexual intercourse that crossed the racial boundaries prescribed in the Nuremberg Laws, and were consequently removed from the German biopolitical body under the banner of genetic purification and racial hygiene.

Though Daniella’s experience in the Joy Division (referred to by inmates as the “Doll House”) is vividly rendered, many historians have proved that Jewish women never

⁵⁷ Zoë Waxman, “Rape and Sexual Abuse in Hiding” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 126-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

experienced the kind of Party-sanctioned servitude that Daniella does in *House of Dolls*. The Nazis, however, kept excellent records of program-approved violence against other people who were deemed unfit for the purified Reich, and much is known about the implementation of camp brothels in this context. These *Sonderbauten* (or “special buildings,” an SS euphemism for brothels) first began to appear in July 1942, with the first one opening at Mauthausen in annexed Austria. The idea came from Heinrich Himmler, who, upon visiting the nearby quarry where prisoners extracted granite for Hitler’s plans to redesign many major German cities, “did not want to accept that the efficiency of camp prisoners was only 50 percent compared to civilian workers”.⁵⁹ Though it seems obvious that this decreased productivity was due to malnutrition and poor hygiene, Himmler believed that it was sexual frustration that stalled the pace of work: “In his opinion, denying the necessity to ‘provide’ women to satisfy sexual needs of male camp prisoners would be *welt-und lebensfremd* (out of touch with the world and life)”.⁶⁰

By the end of the Third Reich, brothels had been opened in ten of the major concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Monowitz, despite the ineffectiveness of brothel visitations as an incentive for camp workers. From Nazi records and witness testimonies, Robert Sommer has reconstructed the nationalities of these forced sex workers: out of about 210 total female inmates, 114 were German (“88 were registered as asocial prisoners, nine as political prisoners, and four as criminals”), forty-six women were Polish, three were either Polish or German, fourteen were of Slavic origin, and one

⁵⁹ Robert Sommer, “Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 46.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

was Dutch. Eleven of these women “can be identified as prisoner guards and accountants for the brothels”.⁶¹ Interestingly, the records indicate that sixty-six percent of these women were placed in the brothels as *punishment* for asocial behavior, while brothel visitation was provided to privileged male inmates as a *reward* for work. Women were forced to make their bodies available in order to increase male productivity in the camps, and, as a result, both men and women were humiliated under the demeaning constraints of Nazi authority. Compared to the total number of Jews who suffered atrocities at the hands of the Nazis, statistics like these may seem pithy, but one may argue that the suffering of even one person is one too many and that each individual’s story belongs to the greater narratives of history. Including questions of gender and sexuality in discussions about this period brings these stories forward, thus preserving an aspect of the Holocaust that is often overlooked in scholarship.

As has been noted, De-Nur wrote these books as a way to mourn the family he lost during the Holocaust, and, given this perspective, it seems that the author intends *House of Dolls* to be not only a kind of monument but also to demonstrate his own sorrow and anger regarding the loss of his sister. Due to the time period at which these works were published, however, the books had a wider impact than on just De-Nur himself. For the children of survivors whose parents were reticent about their experiences, the liberation of the camps was followed by a pervasive culture of silence in which many of the children did not know what their parents had been through.⁶² As a result, the experience of reading *Ka-Tzetnik*, for many, constituted a first glimpse into the horrors their parents endured. This glimpse, which was not published as either fiction or

⁶¹ Ibid., 52.

⁶² Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in *Ka-Tzetnik*’s Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997.

nonfiction, proved a shocking and explosive look at life in the camps for many reasons. De-Nur's works are sparsely written, unadorned, and often blunt about emotionally delicate circumstances. It is for this reason that many of Ka-Tzetnik's critics ask the question of whether or not readers who are historically and culturally distanced from the events of the Holocaust can appropriate the horrors of the book in their own terms—in other words to imagine them significantly and personally, but also as accurately as possible. As Ka-Tzetnik's work deals so heavily in sexual themes—particularly, the dramatization of sexual violence in circumstances in which, historically, it did not occur—such a question is particularly pertinent.

Galia Glasner-Heled conducted a study in which she interviewed several readers of De-Nur's work and took a narrative approach to understanding how these people integrated the content of De-Nur's books into their understanding of the Holocaust in general. As she notes, “[Ka-Tzetnik] had a strong personal impact on the members of the generation of Israelis who were teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s, and many of [the interview participants] remember his book as their first and most devastating encounter with the Holocaust”.⁶³ Her research was particularly relevant as, at this time in 1994, the Israeli Ministry of Education was considering reissuing the books for distribution in public schools and many scholars, as well as interview participants, greatly opposed the measure. One participant, Malka Tor, describes her feelings this way:

There is something very callous, something very crude, uh, unpitying, isn't there? It's as though he's saying 'This reality is so...pitiless that I'm not going to spare you anything. I will give you the naked facts.' And when this is your first actual encounter with the Holocaust, there's something terribly traumatizing about it, isn't there? Something very... very, very penetrating. Very profound... you're reading about real events It's really touching the truth... the bleeding flesh. (116)

⁶³ Galia Glasner-Heled, “Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik,” *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 113.

Tor felt that Ka-Tzetnik's works conveyed historical reality, and, significantly, the lack of artfulness and skill exhibited by the writer enhanced the verisimilitude of the books. They were obviously not art, so they had to be something else, and, for many, that artlessness signified reality. Dorit Sharir, a coordinator for the project to distribute Ka-Tzetnik's books, echoes Tor's feelings: "With Ka-Tzetnik—it is without embellishment, no restraint, the whole story of what happened".⁶⁴ Furthermore, as Heled notes, "The phrase 'without embellishment' recurs in all these interviews"—implying that the artlessness of the text was invoked by every participant, regardless of their position on the Ministry's initiative or the books themselves.⁶⁵

In terms of Ka-Tzetnik's works as a means of accessing the historical reality of the Holocaust, Tor's and Sharir's position is certainly not the only one that appears in the interviews as well as the scholarship generally. One of the interviewees, Porat, said the following when asked whether or not she believed that Ka-Tzetnik's books "misrepresent" the Holocaust:

No. Piepels happened and a houses of dolls happened [*sic*]. There's no doubt about that... He made the subject inaccessible because of the overdose... There is something dark in his books, something about dark and human evil. Dreadful things that happened to people, and perhaps they don't tell us everything, he certainly doesn't say everything. I don't think he helped create a breakthrough in the public's consciousness of the Holocaust. He blocked consciousness... When you read his stories, you might, indirectly, develop a negative attitude towards the survivors. Because if these people were saved, and this what they went through, and they were saved, then who exactly are these people? (Glasner-Heled 125)

Here, Porat acknowledges the historic reality of sexual abuse during the Holocaust—though, as has been shown, the sanctioned brothels did not include Jewish women, as is

⁶⁴ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

portrayed in *House of Dolls*—but still argues that his books deny the reader a viable inlet to the everyday life of the camps. In Porat’s view, Ka-Tzetnik’s books are still capable of delivering a historical rendition of the events of the Holocaust, but the events *themselves* are too horrifying to look at head-on, and so must be mediated by more traditional literary techniques or possibly retrospective reflection in order to be realistically digested by a modern reader—in other words, the events must refract through a lens that might give the events some kind of meaning. Here, the brutally literal and artless way that Ka-Tzetnik renders Auschwitz yields a reader who does not want to imagine something so terrifying, as opposed to the way that other authors have written about camp life in more artful ways that may be more inviting to a reader. In *House of Dolls*, the humiliation and shame that Daniella suffers due to sexual and emotional violence is heartbreaking to read. For some, it seems that the horrors she suffers, amplified by the bluntness of their rendering, bar the reader from accessing the version of Holocaust reality that De-Nur is trying to present. From this point of view, Ka-Tzetnik’s sextet is an ineffective beginning to a frank conversation about the Holocaust and its implications in Israel; instead, it is a gratuitous and violating experience for the reader.

The same notion is brought up in Tor’s account of reading Ka-Tzetnik, wherein she mentions that the reader feels “penetrated” while reading. Citing the writer Haim Be’er, Heled evokes the feeling of violation that many readers endure: “You mustn’t overwhelm someone. What this is, to put it as vulgarly as possible, is the feeling of being raped... It’s as though he [Ka-Tzetnik] is throwing you [into the Holocaust]. They [other writers] take me into hell”.⁶⁶ In his statement, Be’er goes on to make the distinction that

⁶⁶ Ibid., 127.

other writers on the Holocaust lead the reader gently through the horrors they depict, easing them in, whereas Ka-Tzetnik throws people into that historical reality unapologetically. Furthermore, in saying that reading the books causes “the feeling of being raped”, Be’er equates the experience of reading about rape with the experience of rape itself—at the emotional or mental level. Miryam Sivan, a Holocaust historian, countered this argument in saying that “those who read Ka-Tzetnik’s works as voyeuristic... or who feel sexual arousal and not moral outrage, or feel themselves raped, trivializing the victim’s pain, do so... not because of any inherent content or quality of the text”.⁶⁷ In Sivan’s view, Be’er’s belief that the books are inconsiderate of the reader—causing shame, humiliation, and vulnerability to the degree that a person who’s been raped might’ve experienced—is ultimately dismissive and trivializes the experience of those who actually have endured sexual abuse. Given how often the metaphor of violation and penetration came up in the interviews, however, one still wonders about the impact of the books in delivering an emotionally devastating picture of camp life that, for many, was representative of the emotional gravity that was experienced by those who were really in the camps.

In addition to holding the reader at arm’s length from the horrors they depict, Porat’s statement indicates another possible consequence of the books. By including sexual abuse in his rendition of concentrationary reality, Ka-Tzetnik introduced the idea that many survivors endured not only hunger, verbal degradation, and unthinkable work conditions, but also the additional torture of forced sex labor. Whenever the issue of sexuality comes into play, cross-culturally, it seems that the question of shame and

⁶⁷ Miryam Sivan, “‘Stoning the Messenger’: Yehiel Dinur’s *House of Dolls* and *Piepel*,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 207.

complicity is never very far behind. In post-war Israel, many Holocaust survivors had a difficult time integrating with existent society there, so the added possibility of sexual deviance added a new dimension of stigmatism to an already complex social space. Nomi Levenkron describes the tepid reception of abused women back into Jewish communities wherein “modesty was women’s principal or even their only admission ticket into the collective... Sexuality defined the boundaries of the collective and therefore held within it the danger of this boundary being breached”.⁶⁸ Levenkron’s understanding of the way that sexuality defines the collective synchronizes with what has been established about the way domestic structures are arranged in peacetime, and how wartime rape is an effort to break up society at the level of the family unit. Speaking to the other side of this, Levenkron evokes the way that victims of wartime rape were often seen as somehow complicit with the enemy, having broken that crucial cultural boundary, and thus had to suffer disgrace as well as, for many, “severe emotional traumas, unwanted pregnancies, and venereal diseases”.⁶⁹ Such were the social and physical ramifications for women who came forth with their experiences or whose experiences had become public knowledge under other circumstances; certainly, many more women did not speak out and their stories are lost to time.

By adding a sexual dimension to a conversation about the Holocaust that was still in its beginning stages, Ka-Tzetnik’s books were in danger of casting all survivors into this kind of stigmatized position (as well as, some argue, sensationalizing the issue of

⁶⁸ Nomi Levenkron, “Death and the Maidens: ‘Prostitution,’ Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 24.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

sexual abuse among the youth of the Yishuv).⁷⁰ As Holocaust survivors were migrating to Israel and mixing the Jewish population in Palestine, the Yishuv, the question of how to form a new national identity was also in balance with the volatile understanding (and misunderstanding) of everything that occurred within the ghettos and the camps just a few years earlier. Heled qualifies Porat's attestation that Ka-Tzetnik's books present a "negative image of the survivor" as in conversation with Israel's burgeoning nationalism, as well as with the rights of the individual to harbor their own stories: "Porat suggests that we do not need to understand and know everything that had happened in the Holocaust... She thinks that the privacy of the survivor should be respected and protected, but there is also the question of protecting the self and the society, which is shaped by memory".⁷¹ By this understanding, it is not only the survivor's right to keep their stories to themselves if they wish, but possibly also in the interest of the collective to do so. At this pivotal point in Jewish culture, the people have the power to decide how they wish to proceed, reorganize, and form themselves both socially and individually. By deciding to leave certain destructive parts of their history out of collective memory, a more cohesive and forward-thinking society might be possible—one that was not still contending with the ineffable horrors of the past every day. Such an approach, however, silences not only Ka-Tzetnik but other survivors whose story may be suppressed by this approach to forming a collective Israeli memory of the Holocaust. One interviewee, the daughter of a survivor, said:

...and when I reached high school and first encountered Ka-Tzetnik, I knew that my mother... I just realized that my mother was survivor. It was unmistakable...

⁷⁰ Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997.

⁷¹ Galia Glasner-Heled, "Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik," *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 125.

His story was a tremendous catalyst, to start asking my mother more questions. (Glasner-Heled 115)

In this statement, the daughter makes no claim as to the historicity of Ka-Tzetnik's works, but insists upon their importance in opening a conversation between her and her mother that, ostensibly, was a nourishing and healing process for both parties. To deny survivors—whether they be survivors of sexual abuse or not—the possibility of giving testimony seems an extension of the violence that was wrought in the first place, and entails the further destruction of the victim's sense of self, as person with a speakable history that others can hear, accept, and frankly acknowledge.

Though discussions of gender and sexuality have largely been excluded from scholarly analysis of the Holocaust until recently,⁷² Ka-Tzetnik's books *House of Dolls* and *Piepel* seem to insist that sexual abuse remain integral to the study of this period—especially given that his was one of the first widely read survivor narratives. Though it seems unlikely that he knew nearly as much as we know now about the extent of sexual violence during the Holocaust, even given what he may have been told while in a Displaced Persons Camp post-liberation, De-Nur nonetheless attempts to represent the possible consequences of those situations for Jews at this time. Whether or not Jews experienced sexual enslavement the way that Ka-Tzetnik portrays it in these books is highly contested, crystallized perhaps by two divergent viewpoints. Miryam Sivan, who seems to believe that the stories are true, advocates De-Nur's social responsibility in voicing the repressed stories of the Holocaust: "Only because his siblings suffered this abuse, not Ka-Tzetnik himself, could he write about it. Shame and social censorship did

⁷² Nomi Levevknron, "Death and the Maidens: 'Prostitution,' Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rachel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 28.

not stifle him.”⁷³ Omer Bartov, on the other hand, contends that Ka-Tzetnik’s books (as well as his ambiguous persona) were deliberately engineered to acquire singular celebrity for their author, and, toward this aim, capitalized on this transitional period in Jewish history: “The excitement evoked in young readers by such pulp fiction stemmed both from the encounter with forms of human activity kept tightly sealed from them by the puritanical nature of pre-1967 Israeli society, and from the fact that the central site for these actions was the concentration camps”.⁷⁴ As for the author himself, he continued to vouch for the veracity of the works as corroborative with historical reality in his insistence that he spoke for the victims of Auschwitz, for those who did not live to testify for themselves. Whatever the motivation for writing these books, the disparate reactions listed here indicate that much has been written in response to these books—in particular, in response to their reception in the state of Israel at a politically formative time in its history.

The attempt to implement the books on a governmental level by including them in nationalized curricula seems at odds with much of the public and scholarly opinions that have been previously discussed, and the result forms a shifting picture of Israeli attempts to arrange a society that is both future-minded and rooted in the traumas of the past. Early conceptions of Holocaust survivors, the process of the Eichmann Trial, and the unique position of Ka-Tzetnik’s books in Israeli culture all point toward the way that anonymized testimonies—that is, testimonies which are lumped invariably together—can be politically wielded in such a way as to result in further violence.

⁷³ Miryam Sivan, “‘Stoning the Messenger’: Yehiel Dinur’s *House of Dolls* and *Piepel*,” in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochel G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 212.

⁷⁴ Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik’s Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997.

The survivors who testified at the Eichmann Trial—deliberately selected though they may have been—constituted some of Israel’s most concrete firsthand conceptions of the Holocaust. As has been previously discussed, De-Nur’s books are largely understood to have broken the silence surrounding the issue in 1946, with both internal (on the part of the author) and external (on the part of the nation) implications. By spurring public conversation about the Holocaust, the books left an indelible impression on the minds of young Israelis at a politically and socially formative time for the state of Israel. Thus, the Ministry of Education’s initiative to teach Ka-Tzetnik’s books in the 1990s can be understood as an intergenerational transmission of Holocaust narratives that, given the institutional context, seem to be mobilized toward maintaining a consistent understanding of the books—and, thereby, the events they represent—through time, in pursuit of social hegemony. Glasner-Heled understands the initiative this way:

Some Israelis who grew up in the 1950s may expect [Ka-Tzetnik] to play a similar role in the life of the younger generation, a generation that knows too much and whose attitude towards the Holocaust is rational and increasingly processed, becoming distanced from the original experience. (Glasner-Heled 120)

By this line of thinking, Ka-Tzetnik’s books seem to have been reinstated in public understanding for the very reason that they are explicit, haunting, and appropriately brutal in their descriptions of the Lager. In trusting that the next generation will react as strongly as the previous generation did to the version of historical reality presented in *Salamandra* and *House of Dolls*, the Ministry apparently believed that the books would shock into action “a society that seems to be rather ‘accustomed’ to the Holocaust today.”⁷⁵ The goal seems to entail the promotion of Zionism: that is, to teach Ka-Tzetnik’s books in order to

⁷⁵ Galia Glasner-Heled, “Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik,” *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 121.

intensify the youth's reactions to the Holocaust, so as to reinforce its intended lessons of protection, reactivity, heroism, and anti-victimhood.

As has been well established, Ka-Tzetnik's books are not exactly congruous with historical reality as we now know it. Modern students, the Israeli students to whom his books would be distributed in school, now have a wealth of information with which to attempt to conceptualize the horrors of the Holocaust; such resources are antithetical to those available to the first generation of children following the survivors. Another one of Glasner-Heled's interviewees said, "You can't compare their knowledge of the Holocaust to what I knew about the Holocaust, can you?"⁷⁶ Some argue that the equation of the world represented in the sextet *Salamandra: The Chronicle of a Jewish Family in the Twentieth Century* with historical reality had serious consequences for the already tenuous social position of survivors in Israel. Dramatizing the extremity of the Lager experience and the perceived immorality with which some people managed to survive—while most did not—further destabilized the social position of many survivors who were already marginalized from the people of the Yishuv by national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. These social prejudices were coincident with the aggrandizement of the anonymous dead, wherein the approximated six million victims were legally granted Israeli citizenship en masse.⁷⁷ This symbolic gesture made toward the dead, running counter to the non-assimilation with which the living were greeted, further presents the notion of depersonalization as a tool by which the events of the past are emplotted in national narratives. Successive generations in Israel now, clearly, have much more information and testimonial material by which to attempt to understand the period of the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁷⁷ Idith Zertal. *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

Sho'ah for themselves, but the Ministry's decision to circulate the books in official curricula constitutes an effort to repeat the ignorance of the past in favor of emotional reactionism.

Among the goals of financial and defensive security, another was the promotion of the social bond among Israeli citizens in opposition to their enemies. Zertal further argues that many laws established in the 1950s and early '60s—such as the Nazi and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law (1950) and the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Law (1953), among others—were designed “to fuse the mass of immigrants from more than a hundred countries into a national collective, driving a common memory and sharing a single vision of the present and future.”⁷⁸ This is certainly no small project, and the scope and emotional gravity of the Holocaust was well suited to the elicitation of social bonds between survivors, Zionists, and Sabras alike—a level of coherence that, significantly, could be legally and governmentally directed. Zertal posits that the aim here was to condition the population into militaristic obedience and loyalty—essentially, to prepare young Israelis for the glory of self-sacrifice.⁷⁹

This agenda was explicitly realized in a 1994 reissue of *House of Dolls*, a special edition sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Education. This special edition volume included an addendum written “by Yitsak Sadeh (commander of the pre-state defense organization, the Haganah) published originally in 1946.”⁸⁰ Sadeh's essay was accompanied by what was purported to be “an authentic photograph of Paella, heroine of

⁷⁸ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁰ Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997, para. 23.

the book *Bet ha-bubot*’ portraying a woman whose bare chest carries the tattoo: FELD-
HURE.”⁸¹ Bartov provides an excerpt of Sadeh’s essay:

Night. On the wet sand my sister stands before me: filthy, her clothes in disarray, her hair disheveled, barefoot, her head bowed – she stands and weeps.

I know: Her flesh is stamped with the tattoo: “for officers only.”

And my sister weeps and says:

Comrade, why am I here? Why was I brought here? Am I worthy of the young and healthy lads who risk their lives for me? No, I have no place in the world. I should not go on living.

I hug my sister... and say to her: You have a place in the world, my sister, a special and unique place. Here, in this our land you should live, my sister. Here we will give you our love You are dark and beautiful, my sister. You are dark, for the suffering has scorched you, but you are beautiful, as beautiful to me as beauty itself, as sanctified to me as sanctity itself...

I know: The villains have tortured her and made her barren...

I say to her:... We love you my sister; you carry all the glow of motherhood within you, all the beauty of womanhood is in you. To you our love is given, you will be a sister to us, you will be bride to us, you will be a mother to us...

For these sisters of mine – I am strong.

For these sisters of mine – I am brave.

For these sisters of mine – I will also be cruel.

For you [I will do] anything – anything.

Bartov interprets this haunting letter as simultaneously indicative of the time in which it was written—recalling that, in 1946, survivors began to immigrate illegally into Palestine with the help of Aliyah Beth—and the future-minded justifications for Zionism in the Middle East:

...they [the survivors] were accepted by those who wished to see themselves as their saviors, accepted not only (or even primarily) as individuals but as the irrefutable legitimization of the struggle... to fight one’s enemies as if they were the Nazis, to fear defeat as if it could only spell another Auschwitz... For weakness was the chief characteristic of those very same Jews whose genocide had made survival into the highest moral imperative and any action ensuring it not only permissible but noble. (Bartov para. 31)

⁸¹ Ibid.

To begin, a Hebrew reissue of *House of Dolls* that included an alleged photograph of its indisposed heroine denotes the desire to immediately authenticate the contents of the narrative as historically accurate. This would deepen inevitably the impact of the books, further proving to soldiers and citizens alike what is at stake in defending the Homeland—all the while, significantly maintaining the binary between Diasporic and Israeli Jewry, with the latter cast as hero and savior. In supplying the extremes of the *Sho'ah*, as embodied by the violated female form and reproductive abilities, the Ministry of Education seems to endorse the notion that cruelty against one's enemy is "moral" and, further, "noble." It is also significant that this letter was written by a prominent leader of the Hagadah, an early defensive group known for its brutality, in that these words obliquely identify the enemy straight from the defensive lines; even in 1946, without Ben-Gurion's sanction, one sees the equation of Arabs and Nazis as a justification for extreme military measures.

The theme of depersonalization is well articulated in Ka-Tzetnik's personal history, as has been discussed, but the question of the author's personal identity and acclimation to Israeli society has not yet been fully explored. Even after emerging as Yehiel De-Nur, the author continued to publish pseudonymously until his death. This seemed to further degrade the image of the survivor, in the way that he came to symbolize the kind of survivor who was unable to leave their traumas in the past. Dan Michman, chief historian at Yad Vashem,⁸² expressed his opinion that "in some way Ka-Tzetnik symbolizes the unwillingness to leave it behind and move forward. He represents

⁸² Yad Vashem is Israel's official monument to the victims of the Holocaust, erected in 1953 through the Yad Vashem Law passed by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament).

the desire to remain... in that terrible event. To drag it on.”⁸³ One possible implication of casting De-Nur, and other survivors, as irreparably mired in the past, is that their presence is not conducive to the developing Zionist future. Here, the tension between the traumatic, victimized past and the heroic, armed future is keenly felt.

By including Ka-Tzetnik’s books in public schools and reissuing them with new paratextual frameworks, the books were appropriated by the Israeli government in order to emplot the traumas of the past on the national level toward the aim of social coherence and national security. It is only by the further desubjectification of the witness that large-scale emplotments such as these are possible, justifying cycles of violence that begin with the lauding of the collective dead and result in the sacrificial aggrandizement of dying for one’s country. In particular, the implementation of the female body—as both as a literal and symbolic representation of the nation’s constitutive unit, the home and family—toward this aim constitutes further violence against survivors and De-Nur himself by denying the possibility of their individual testimonies. This is against De-Nur’s own project as, despite what his pseudonym might suggest, Ka-Tzetnik was very much in favor of spreading individual testimonies. The author saw himself as a conduit for a myriad of deceased voices, not as a single channel for the master narrative of Auschwitz. In this way, the modern reader’s earnest attempt to read survivor testimonies for what they are, and to acknowledge the traumas of the past, stands against this kind of historiographic emplotment.

⁸³ Galia Glasner-Heled, “Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik,” *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 123.

IV. The Figure of the Mussulman and the Problem of Naming

Building upon the themes of trauma, depersonalization and testimony that have been established thus far, the final chapter of this essay will analyze the process by which De-Nur was finally able to reclaim his identity after it was taken from him in Auschwitz. This process hinges on the author's ability, over thirty years after the liberation of the camps, to relinquish his concept of the "planet Auschwitz" and to integrate his past into his understanding of life on earth. Parallel to this movement, De-Nur was finally able to integrate his traumatic experiences into his present-tense self; he was finally able to publicly answer when someone used the name "De-Nur." In order to achieve this, the author made further use of the imagination in the process of writing and testimony, as the last two books of the series illustrate.

The first half of the *Salamandra* sextet focuses on the conditions and consequences of desubjectification in the camps and, in the second half, De-Nur focuses his attention on metaphysical interpretations of the Holocaust and a further investigation of his own identity. These questions come to the fore because De-Nur survived the state of the Mussulman—a condition that most did not survive—and resulted in his ability to tell the tale that went largely unspoken. This ability to testify—a sacred responsibility, as De-Nur describes it at length—is rooted in his survivor guilt, another probable cause of his inability to write in the first person under his own name. This distancing mechanism not only allowed him to process his own experiences and to convey what he believed to

have been the experiences of his siblings, but also to write under the KZ pseudonym that entailed the probability of destruction. As the final book of the series, *Shivitti: A Vision*, explores in detail, the author was not able to fully inhabit his own subjectivity until he underwent LSD therapy in 1978—that is, until he deliberately submerged himself in the chemically induced visions of his own imagination.

In order to understand how significant De-Nur's survival is in the face of the Holocaust, it is useful to establish a basic understanding of the physical and philosophic conditions of the Mussulman. In the hierarchy of the Lager, the Mussulmen constitute the bottommost wrung, as they are emaciated, too weak to work, often among the *Häftlinge* who have spent the duration incarcerated, and, due to malnutrition and the length of time they have spent there, have lost the will (or the physical ability) to wait in line for the thin soup, get out of bed for the *Selektions*, or engage in a conversation—much less, often, remember their own names. These are the extreme victims of the dehumanization effected by the Nazis, and so too are they the furthest from the vitality of their pre-incarceration selves.

Because they were no longer viable sources of production for the Reich, the Mussulmen were rooted out in *Selektions* for the crematoria, and so, coupled with their weakened condition, the survival of this state was incredibly rare. As Giorgio Agamben has observed, “The untestifiable, that to which no one has borne witness, has a name. In the jargon of the camp, it is der *Muselman*, literally ‘the Muslim.’”⁸⁴ The lowest of the camps, this group received their name because they appeared to have completely evacuated themselves—to be animate, but not cognitively present—and this was

⁸⁴ Spellings of this term vary widely. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 41.

compared to a Muslim's expression while in prayer. The term for the malnourished in Auschwitz seems inherently rooted in the racism of the camps and, sadly, the application of this term to individuals entailed their dismissal by both the *Häftlinge* and the SS. Because everyone was struggling to survive, the other inmates saw the Mussulman as someone with whom they could no longer work; the prisoners who "collaborated" saw them as easy targets against which to aggrandize themselves in the eyes of the SS; and the SS, finally, saw them as disposable and disgusting.⁸⁵ These people were seen as having given up entirely, despite the largely physical reasons for their status, and so everyone gave up on them.

The extreme figure of the Mussulman, exhibited in many photographs and footage taken during the liberation, may be part of the reason why survivors were received with such incredulity in Israel and why so many of their testimonies were repressed. The very fact of survival in contrast with the death of so many people was often interpreted as an act of collusion with the enemy, implying that these people must have done something wrong in order to survive.⁸⁶ This supposition is represented in the dichotomy between the functionaries, people in the camps who held positions that did not involve manual labor and often received higher food rations, and the rest of the inmates who did not receive these benefits and, consequently, were less likely to survive.⁸⁷ Primo Levi, in his last book, titled these two extremes *The Drowned and the Saved*, implying that those who died were the true witnesses of Auschwitz because they experienced it at its worst without going to the often culpable lengths that others did in order to survive. Agamben

⁸⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁶ Galia Glasner-Heled, "Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature: The Case of Ka Tzetnik," *Israel Studies* 12 num. 3 (Fall 2007): 125.

⁸⁷ Milner, Iris. "The 'Gray Zone' Revisited: The Concentrationary Universe in Ka. Tzetnik's Literary Testimony," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society* n.s. 14 no. 2 (Winter 2008), 113.

captures this specific angle of survivor's guilt: "This is the specific aporia of Auschwitz: it is the site in which it is not decent to remain decent, in which those who believed themselves to preserve their dignity and self-respect experience shame with respect to those who did not."⁸⁸ While, in the Lager, the Mussulmen were seen as having given up the will to live, those who exercised that will later felt the Mussulmen had actually responded appropriately to the ethical situation in Auschwitz—taking, for example, that if eating meant that someone else did not, then the ethical decision would be not to eat. But the human survival instincts, combined with the strength of the narrative impulse, are simply not programmed that way, and it is likely that the Mussulmen who appeared so placid may have done so due to physical and psychological depletion rather than moral superiority.

The many shades of Jewish complicity during this period are the subject of another essay entirely, but suffice it to say that degrees range loosely from the *Judenrät* (Jewish council members representing the ghettos and involved in selecting Jews for deportation during *Aktions*), the *Kapos* (people forced to oversee labor projects), other functionaries (such as cooks or office workers), and the *Sonderkommando* (teams almost entirely comprised of Jews, who were forced to aid in the disposal of corpses from the gas chambers)⁸⁹. It seems clear from this (admittedly reductive) list that those mentioned above are largely acting within the boundaries of the enclosed Nazi system; it is difficult to judge who is better and who is worse when everyone is dehumanized by their environment. Iris Milner has argued in favor of Ka-Tzetnik's books as a more humanistic representation of the hierarchical system of the Lager: "Contrary to the assertion that the

⁸⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 60.

⁸⁹ For a harrowing and moving portrait of the *Sonderkommando*, read Taduesz Borowski's "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen."

novels tend to exaggerate the dichotomy between functionaries and simple inmates... the works in fact cancel the difference between them and regard these options as two poles of an unbroken spectrum of dehumanization.”⁹⁰ The compassion with which De-Nur rendered this spectrum of human adaptations to atrocity may be due to the fact that he viewed it from the bottom up, as he himself survived the state of the Mussulman by hiding in a coal bin in the back of a van bound for the crematorium.⁹¹

De-Nur’s status as a survivor is defined by his escape from the crematoria, as his name exemplifies. Yehiel De-Nur was born Yehiel Feiner in Poland in 1917, and chose the name De-Nur for himself after making his *Aliyah* to Israel.⁹² The name, De-Nur, means “From the Fire” in Hebrew, standing as a direct reference to the crematoria and to the etymology of the word “holocaust” as well. The word comes from the Latin meaning for “burned offering,” rendering it a very problematic signifier for the events of this period. In describing his rejection of the word “holocaust” as a viable signifier for the period, Agamben invokes both its religious and historical nature: “Not only does the term imply an unacceptable equation between crematoria and altars; it also continues a semantic heredity that is from its inception anti-Semitic. This is why we will never make use of this term.”⁹³ In Israel, this period is referred to as the *Sho’ah*, “the Catastrophe,” a term that excludes the religious implications. Some have even taken issue with this terminology, claiming that “I do not like the word ‘shoah’; Shoah is a sudden event,

⁹⁰ Milner, Iris. “The ‘Gray Zone’ Revisited: The Concentrationary Universe in Ka. Tzetnik’s Literary Testimony,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society* n.s. 14 no. 2 (Winter 2008), 116.

⁹¹ Ka-Tzetnik 135633. *Shivitti: A Vision* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 42.

⁹² Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik’s Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” *Indiana University Press*, Jan 31 1997, para. 1.

⁹³ Spellings of this term vary widely. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 31.

whereas what happened had its own preambles.’”⁹⁴ By this line of thinking, attributed to the Israeli writer Ahron Appelfeld, even the word *Sho’ah* is an inappropriate signifier as it suggests that the large-scale extermination efforts of an entire people was an isoable event in history; whereas European Anti-Semitism had been “fermenting” for a long time and, indeed, this event would not have been possible without it.⁹⁵ As Peter Haidu rightly points out, “The naming of an event bears with it implications of various kinds: narratological, theological, historical, political, rhetorical, and philosophical.”⁹⁶ Understanding it this way, the words that one uses to describe the time period between 1939 and 1945 conveys much about one’s perspective on the issue, and the cultural framework within which these understandings operate.⁹⁷

Upon his arrival in Israel, De-Nur chose to live under a name that implied the conditions of his survival at the same time that he wrote under a pseudonym that indicated his depersonalization in the Lager. As has been shown, the intricacies of the relationship between these two identities manifest in his writing. Questions of the ability of the imagination to refute or reclaim the past, in connection with depersonalization and identity, crystallize in *Shivitti: A Vision*. Published in Hebrew in 1987, the final book of the *Salamandra* sextet describes De-Nur’s experiences in LSD therapy, a program that was designed specifically to treat the victims of the camps by the Dutch professor Jan

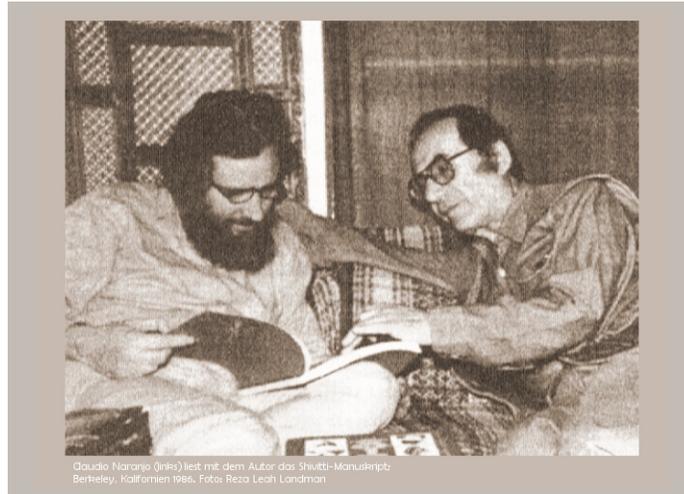
⁹⁴ Yael Feldman, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway? Ideology and Psychology in the Representation of the Shoah in Israeli Literature,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 232.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Peter Haidu, “The Dialectics of Unspeakability,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 279.

⁹⁷ If I may depart briefly into the first person, I’d like to say that I chose to use the word “Holocaust” in the construction of this essay because it is so commonly used in America. I debated about this at length, and ultimately decided that it was easier to be understood than to be politically correct. I want to stress that I mean no disrespect by this decision.

Bastiaans. After having his subjects lie naked in a darkened room after an injection of LSD, Prof. Bastiaans asked questions that provoked memories of the Lager experience and recorded their responses on tape.



De-Nur, on the right, pictured with Prof. Bastiaans

With this basic premise, *Shivitti* contains two discursive levels: one, the transcribed audio recordings of De-Nur as he underwent LSD and verbalized his hallucinations; and, secondly, De-Nur's commentary on the experience and how he began to interpret it once he came down. Though De-Nur is paratextually named at the beginning of each section, with the heading "LSD treatment of Mr. De-Nur," and self-identifies in both his verbal and written responses, the book was still published under the name Ka-Tzetnik 135633.

In *Shivitti*, the author witnesses mystical visions of Auschwitz, his experiences, and his deceased family, and considers these in relation to his identity. While describing his time in the coal bin in the back of the van to Prof. Bastiaans, De-Nur reenacts his plea to God:

I lift my eyes to the skies of Auschwitz and I see Nucleus on his throne, under his majestic mushroom dome. And the dome outgrows Auschwitz, his

birthplace, and is borne to the four directions of the celestial compass, till it has completely blotted out the sun and the firmament...

Oh, Lord, let me survive, Let me hold out... I took an oath, I made a vow to be their voice. Spare me, Lord, spare me! No one will be left alive. Oh, God, I'll be witness to your fulgent presence in the letters of your name! I'll be witness to your face in Auschwitz! Lord! Lord! (Ka-Tzetnik 41-2)

The Nucleus and mushroom cloud, among other symbols, occupy their own position in the unique arrangement of Ka-Tzetnik's personal mythos—one that cannot be fully explored here. In short, the "Nucleus" to which De-Nur refers is the god of Auschwitz, the singularity of evil that commanded the wills of men to harm each other and themselves. The Nucleus is the impetus of the "mushroom dome," the cloud of ashes that rise from the crematoria and darken the air. Seeing this, De-Nur recounts his promise to his Lord, the Hebrew God, that he will bear witness for all of those who could not do so for themselves; if survived, he would channel the voices of the dead into the world of the living so that they would never be forgotten. Given all of this background, De-Nur's choice to retain his KZ identity in favor of a personal name further indicates his intention to testify for the dead in the rejection of himself due to survivor's guilt. This rejection began when, after the liberation of Auschwitz, De-Nur returned to Poland and sought out the remaining copy of the only book he wrote before his incarceration, a book of poetry published under the name Yehiel Feiner, and burned it.⁹⁸

All of these aspects of De-Nur's identity and status as an author seem rooted in survivor's guilt, as has been discussed, and it is precisely this condition that Prof. Bastiaan's program was designed to treat. Throughout the first half of the book, De-Nur remains skeptical that the program will work and is more honest about his visions in his written analyses than in the transcriptions of his speech, by both his own and Prof.

⁹⁸ Omer Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust," Indiana University Press, Jan 31 1997, para. 4.

Bastiaans accounts, but a pivotal realization in the middle of the book sheds new light on the entire *Salamandra* series:

The number on top of this page of manuscript has just jumped out at me. I can't believe my eyes: I've filled dozens of folio pages with tiny letters without even realizing the newness of what I'm doing: I am writing in the first person! ... All I've ever written is in essence a personal journal, a testimonial on paper of I, I, I: I who witnessed...I who experienced...I who lived through...I, I, I, till half through a piece, I suddenly had to transform *I* to *he*. I felt the split, the ordeal, the alienation of it, and worst of all—may God forgive me—I felt like the Writer of Literature. But still I knew unless I hid behind the third person, I wouldn't have been able to write at all. And lo and behold, here I am in the thick of the manuscript and totally unaware of how naturally I am allowing—from the first line onward—the connection with *I*. (Ka-Tzetnik 135633)

Here, De-Nur becomes consciously aware of the process that has been advancing since the beginning of the book: with the advent of LSD therapy, causing him to mentally confront his past in the form of mystic visions, the author has subconsciously merged his pre- and post-incarceration identities into a unified, writing whole. He is able to stand in his own testimony, his own name, and to deliver it undeterred by fear of judgment and exposed individuality against the collective to whom he felt that his life was owed.

As he comes to terms with himself, so he also de-mystifies his experience in the Lager and reconciles the reality of Auschwitz as having occurred on the same planet as the one he now inhabits, a post-Holocaust world. There is a crucial turning point in De-Nur's visions, wherein he imagines one of the SS guards yawning in the morning over a vanload of corpses to be taken to the crematorium, and he understands that this man, the guard, is human too.⁹⁹ Under the influence of LSD, De-Nur finds the compassion and mobility of mind to see that this man is not yawning because is evil and without feeling, but because it is early in the morning and if De-Nur himself were in that situation, then he

⁹⁹ Ka-Tzetnik 135633. *Shivitti: A Vision* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 113-4.

might yawn as well.¹⁰⁰ In this way, spurred by a vision of a yawn, De-Nur realizes that *humanity* is capable of this kind of evil, and that it does not take supernatural or extra-terrestrial influence to drive man to such atrocious lengths. De-Nur develops his new understanding of “planet Auschwitz” as the planet earth in the afterword of the text:

Long ago I was a seeker of solitude, distancing myself from human contact and interference, so that I could be alone with Auschwitz. But nowadays Auschwitz has lumbered its way to everyone’s doorstep. Wherever there is humankind, there is Auschwitz. It wasn’t Satan who created the Nucleus, but you and I! (Ka-Tzetnik 107)

The extent of De-Nur’s survival guilt is exemplified by his desire to “be alone with the Auschwitz,” and, by extension, all those who died nameless in its crematoria. Here, De-Nur moves away from the mystified explanation of his experiences that he developed for himself over the years, in order to compartmentalize the past from the present, though this actually resulted in the continued presence of the dead in his life via his inability to integrate trauma into his post-incarceration life. In place of this, De-Nur moves toward the realistic, empirical realization that all the members of the Lager system were human beings, and so all understandings of humanity must be adjusted to accommodate for the possibility (and historical reality) of atrocity.¹⁰¹ This sentiment connects with De-Nur’s explanation of his loss of consciousness at the Eichmann Trial—an interpretation that was delivered firsthand in an interview given on 60 Minutes in 1983.¹⁰² Given that De-Nur underwent Prof. Bastiaan’s therapy in 1978, it is likely that this insight into his own behavior was only emerged after he had engaged in this practice. This means that, after

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ David Engel. *The Holocaust: The Third Reich and the Jews* (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000), 84-5.

¹⁰² “The Devil is a Gentleman.” *60 Minutes*. New York: Jewish Media Fund, 1997, 1983. Recorded television segment. VHS.

all, De-Nur was finally able to connect with empirical reality only after the deliberate exercise of his imagination at the chemical level.

Over the course of the *Salamandra* series, Ka-Tzetnik grapples with his past, his grief, and his identity—culminating, finally, in the author’s ability to integrate the past into the continued narrative of his life. The insights he gained about the reality of Auschwitz on earth, however, may have been less than comforting, as he realized that it had occurred not in another world but in the same one in which he now lived peaceably. The extreme events of the Holocaust, “an event at the limits,” have shown the ethical lows to which people can sink in order to survive, the form of the Mussulman who seemed (and was treated as) inhuman, and the degree to which people can be cruel to each other—indeed, cruel enough to bring the latter forms into existence. In this way, the dignity of the human species is lowered by the tactics of dehumanization and depersonalization; acknowledging this, De-Nur was able to reclaim his subjectivity and identity from these tactics by the processes of the imagination, memory, and the externalization of narratives to a willing listener.

V. Conclusion

Due to the extreme violence and dehumanizing conditions that Jews, and others, endured during the Holocaust, many have purported that the period is unrepresentable because of the non-survivor's inability to imagine such terrible conditions and the ineptitude of language to appropriately depict them.¹⁰³ This essay has argued, however, that the imagination actually facilitates this kind of representation, despite the problematic nature of this claim, by allowing the dehumanized individual to reclaim their subjectivity via the creation of testimony. By developing a narrative that is uniquely meaningful to the individual, it is possible to integrate trauma into the greater self-narrative of one's life, and so the relegation of extreme trauma to the realm of the unspeakable entails further violence against individuals who have already experienced dehumanizing conditions and, consequently, the loss of their identity.

Ka-Tzetnik's books crystallize this notion, in the way that they explore the rupture of identity between the pre- and post-incarceration selves, the conditions and ramifications of sexual violence against Jews, the figure of the Mussulman, and the subsequent process of reclaiming one's individuality from the chorus of voices that remain on that "other planet" he tried to represent both in legal and written testimonies. Though the historical veracity of his representations are largely contested, the work of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 remains an intriguing entry point into the historical realities of the Holocaust in the way that they pose questions such as these for consideration, and, moreover, insist that these difficult concepts remain integral to modern studies of the

¹⁰³ Saul Friedlander, "Introduction," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3.

period. In particular, the study of female experiences and sexual traumas during the Holocaust should not be swept aside, and neither should the earnest study of the Mussulman in modern scholarship.

During the Holocaust, Nazi tactics of dehumanization led to the depersonalization of the people they persecuted. This loss of identity, rooted in constant inhumane treatment, produced an immense narrative impulse in many survivors—an impulse to not only convey what they had been through, so as to inhabit their personal identities and experiences, but also to preserve the individual self against the generalizing modes of historiography. The imagination's function in the process of narrativizing memories is as a gateway that allows a survivor to reclaim their subjectivity from the desubjectified space of the Lager; whereas, on the cultural level, the viability of the imagination—that is, the subjective—may be dismissed in favor of timelines, chronicles, and annals as a superior form of “truth.”¹⁰⁴ Whether or not history is acknowledged as such, scholars such as Hayden White have argued that history is a narrative in itself, and thus is itself inextricable from human subjectivities and imaginative processes in the sense that many disparate events must be assembled into a coherent narrative. By this understanding, histories are nationally constructed narratives that are pliable to the cultural and political positions of the nation, and historical events can be emplotted in those histories more easily if the subjective is removed from them and refitted to suit the nation's tangible, forward-thinking goals in a generalized mode.

The danger of this, of course, is that historiographic representations of the past are necessarily inflected by the dominant wills for the future, which risk distorting the

¹⁰⁴ Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 44.

realities of the past. In this sense, the role of national memory in the construction of historiographic narratives entails the possibility—and, sometimes, the necessity—of forgetting and elision. Tadeusz Borowski's description of his fear that the Germans would win the war and efface its subjugating history from its annals reflects the cultural possibility of various emplotments:

If the Germans win the war, what will the world know about us? They will erect huge buildings, highways, factories, soaring monuments. Our hands will be placed under every brick, and our backs will carry the steel rails and the slabs of concrete. They will kill off our families, our sick, our aged. They will murder our children.

And we shall be forgotten... (Borowski 132)

Borowski's sentiment denotes the possibility that history will be rewritten by the conqueror, casting itself as hero and negating the history of the slaves whose labor constructed this new society. By denying the witness a position in historical representation, nationalized narratives prevail over the violence they have already wrought. Given this understanding, in addition to everything that has been established about the narrative processes of testimony, the subjective stands as an additional form of historical knowledge—despite the difficulties that this may suggest.

Overall, the many moving pieces of this issue point to the preservation of the individual, the subjective, in addition to the generalizing narratives of historiography. Taking only the latter, which are pliable to the positions and goals of the nations of who generate them, too often denies the uniqueness of individual circumstances and perspectives—indeed, the very conditions of personhood that are at stake in genocide. By including the individual and the imaginative in historical understandings of the Holocaust—despite the dubious veracity of these representations—history remembers

people instead of numbers, and stories instead of statistics. As Peter Haidu points out, it must indeed be both, as one contextualizes the other:

German sources reveal the bureaucratic complexity of the process of extermination, but they deal with people only in the aggregate. The situation is reversed in Jewish sources, which tell of particular experiences, but without grasping the larger process in which they were involved. (Haidu 280)

Understanding that the Nazi annihilation system dehumanized everyone involved, the importance of both testimony and documentation are crucial to not only reclaiming one's subjectivity from the traumatic past but also to understanding the degree to which real people can be treated as less than, thereby justifying further violence.

In what may be the culminating passage of his memoir, *The Human Race*, Robert Antelme insists on the fact of personhood despite the efforts of racism, hierarchies, and divisive violence among populations:

Yet there is no ambiguity: we're still men, and we shall not end otherwise than as men... It's an SS fantasy to believe that we have an historical mission to change species, and as this mutation is occurring too slowly, they kill. No, this extraordinary sickness is nothing other than a culminating moment in man's history. And that means two things. First, that the solidity and stability of the species is being put to the test. Next, that the variety of the relationships between men, their color, their customs, the classes they are formed into mask a truth that here, at the boundary of nature, at the point where we approach our limits, appears with absolute clarity: namely, that there are not several human races, there is only one human race. (Antelme 218)

Antelme's moving plea for unity and interpersonal equality—a condition that, he claims, is already existent among humanity but is broken down by the social constructions of racism and other forms of subjugation—demonstrates the survivor's ability to reclaim personhood from their desubjectified past, because their innate humanity cannot be taken from them. Narrative is one of the ways in which the traumatic past can be overcome in order to achieve an "interior liberation," a reclamation of personhood and culturally

reciprocal discourse, in a post-Holocaust world.¹⁰⁵ In effect, the depths of misogyny and racism that studies of this period conveys should not be taken as isolable extremes, but as examples of the extensive violence that the human race is capable of when divided into subhuman categories.

Against this, the study of the imagination as well as history stand as a reminder to never repeat the hatred and genocides of the past, in that they remind of us the value of the individual. A passage from *House of Dolls* depicts the depersonalization of the victims, on the other side of which we may draw a crucial conclusion:

Ranks of girls march along. Precisely six abreast. Each is vigilant not to step out of line or lag behind an iota. The gun barrels are fixed at them like the pupils of German eyes... The captives forgot where they came from. Forgot that once past, there had been years when they had lived. (Ka-Tzetnik 118)

The duty of modern civilization, then, is never to forget.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1993), 9.

¹⁰⁶ To view an interactive archive of the names, photographs, and histories of the known victims of the *Sho'ah*, please visit the Yad Vashem website, where you can also found a wealth of other materials such as video survivor testimonies: <http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en>

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