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History and Politics - Perspectives of Space in Emanuel Ringelblum and Reuven Ben- Shem's War Writings

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A Note on Translations and Names

This dissertation is based on the printed versions of Emanuel Ringelblum's diary in both Yiddish, the original language, and Hebrew. However, as the Yiddish books have a few entries missing and some are organized differently, I chose to specify / rely on the Hebrew pages in the footnotes. This was necessary because the Hebrew version is more recent and contains the complete ensemble of both Ringelblum's daily diary and his writings in hiding. Unless otherwise noted, what is quoted in the dissertation was translated by me relying on both the versions in Yiddish and Hebrew unless a quote appeared only in the Hebrew edition.

All of Ben-Shem's texts were originally written in Hebrew and all translations are mine.

In some quotations, I provided the original language along with the translation and my intention was to enable authentic words to convey their full meanings to those who understand the languages. Equally, in the translations, I tried to stay as close as possible to the original wording, structure, and punctuation because in most cases these also represented a state of mind, which I tried not to lose in translation. Any changes or clarifications were put in brackets and likewise, I used the ellipsis to indicate that parts in a text were not translated.

I retained original spellings of names of cities and people, in Polish except for familiar places such as Warsaw, Auschwitz, and conversely, people such as Ringelblum and Reuven Ben-Shem. For other languages, I followed the English spelling version.

I decided to use the name Ben-Shem rather than Feldschuh, because many references use his pen name in Hebrew or English. His name and those of his family members pose a problem as they appear under different forms in various sources. For example, at *Yad Vashem*, his diary is catalogued under his original name: Feldschuh which seems to be the way Ben-Shem himself spelt it and as it appeared in the testimony page he dedicated to his wife, Pnina (Perla). Ben-Shem's first name, Reuven, also has different versions: Reuven, Ruben, Rubin and so on. The same ambiguity is relevant to Ringelblum, although his name has fewer variations. Here I used 'Emanuel' and if any source spelt the name differently, I used the source's spelling. The same is true for other references in this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine whether there was evidence in the writings of Emanuel Ringelblum's daily historical diary and Reuven Ben-Shem's personal war accounts, that they had understood Nazi manipulation of space, during World War II, as paradigmatic historical and political steps leading to annihilation. In view of the stages of shrinking ghetto space, were Jews able to intellectually and/or emotionally deduce the final point of this manipulation of space - the total extermination of the Jewish population? In other words, the extent to which the two writers showed conceptualization of the historical events taking place.

Using Henri Lefebvre's theory, I sought to determine whether documentation was the diarists' response to declining space, an attempt to create a historical and political counter-paradigm. I will be asking what kind of space is presented and whether writing about it was actually claiming back the physical space. Was writing a predicted outcome to space being squeezed? What was the relationship between physically narrowing spaces and writing about them?¹

By examining the events related to space, I suggest a different way of studying and researching the Holocaust. The assumption is that this historically unprecedented event should be observed through the lens of those who experienced it. Employing their point of view, how they comprehended what was happening, may expose gaps in perceptions that made these occurrences inconceivable, and therefore, unpredictable. Did the lack of historical or other precedents impact how the concept of the Final Solution was grasped as it developed during World War II?

Initially, the very idea of recording events was for Ringelblum completely natural. After all, he had introduced this method of studying history, by recording events from the perspective of the common people, long before the war. Furthermore, his personal experience with the first events of displacement introduced by the Nazis in Zbąszyń, certainly convinced him that the war between Poland and Germany had to be documented as it was happening. Ringelblum estimated that such records would be invaluable sources of reference once the war ended and the time to research it

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 17.

came.² Indeed, Ringelblum's first notes from the early months of the war indicate that he intended them to be some sort of field notebook for future research.

Concerning Ben-Shem's diary, it appears that it is more complex to define the reasons he kept a personal account in which he documented events he underwent. Ben-Shem was preoccupied with history but, unlike Ringelblum, not with its research. However, Ben-Shem made use of Jewish history as a political tactic mainly to educate the youth hoping to establish a Jewish state. In this respect, although Ben-Shem was less interested in historical academic research, he regarded Jewish history as raw material for political achievements.

In an interview with Ben-Shem's son, Nekamia, the latter stated that he had no knowledge of his father writing a diary prior to the war.³ Indeed, it seems Ben-Shem started keeping a diary some time near the beginning of the war but the notebooks were mostly written while in hiding, from February 1943 until at least July 1944, when he left his hiding place for Lublin that had already been liberated by then. According to Nekamia Ben-Shem, his father had grown greatly attached to his notes and managed to keep them with him and even bring them to mandatory Palestine in 1945.

It could be claimed that in many respects, studying Ben-Shem's and Ringelblum's diaries is a manifestation of how Ringelblum envisaged what historical research was all about. According to Ringelblum, information from diaries, such as Ben-Shem's, was essential in order to understand the experience from within. Indeed, the *Oneg Shabbat*⁴ team had sought to collect for its archive documents of this type, diaries that allowed a peek into writers' states of mind representing the human experience. Despite the political chasm between the two, Ringelblum being a Communist while Ben-Shem, a high middle class intellectual affiliated with the right, one thing stands out, Jewish history defined their personal identity, and both derived from it moral as well as political inspiration.

The importance of this topic comes from its focus on understanding the point of view of people who lived through World War II. Initially, Ringelblum documented what was going on as a routine practice that he had adopted as a historian long before

² Emmanuel Ringelblum, Letter to Raphael Mahler, 14.11.1938, in יגואר – יהודים, יחסי פולנים – כתבים אחרונים, יחסי פולנים – יהודים, יגואר 1944 - אפריל 1943 *Last Writings, Polish-Jewish Relations, January 1943-April 1944*, Jerusalem: Yad-Vashem, Ghetto Fighters' House, 1994, (Hebrew), p. 304.

³ Interview with Nekamia Ben-Shem, 17.6.2017.

⁴ Emmanuel Ringelblum, op. cit., p. 3-22. The *Oneg Shabbat* Archive, or the Ringelblum Archive, was an underground archive established in the Warsaw ghetto to document life during the war.

the war. His historical approach and methodology were strongly influenced by communist doctrine, which argued that history was the result of material conditions that in turn influenced society's production. However, as time went by, the purpose of his writing changed, from gathering information for future research to collecting evidence against the Nazis and disseminating information to the outside world. This was mingled with a growing recognition that for the Germans, the economic value of Jews was insignificant.⁵

It seems that the changes in the diary's contents reflected a development in Ringelblum's socio-communist world views, a notion that has not yet been addressed thoroughly. This dissertation seeks to elaborate on these changes as they show how the war challenged Ringelblum's beliefs that there was a link between political activism and studying Jewish history and that when economic injustices toward Jews were resolved, Jews would be able to thrive. The war reversed these ideas as it became clear that Jewish history whether one studied it or not, was incapable of being a source of knowhow. That is, despite the calamities that characterized Jewish history, Nazi style annihilation, could not have been predicted from these records. As for economy and materialism, it appears that Ringelblum gradually concluded that because Jews were at the heart of the issue, the Germans conceived economic considerations as redundant.

If Ringelblum's writings were extensively researched, Ben-Shem's notes have only relatively recently resurfaced. I first learned about the existence of these documents from a short review about the diary in an article by Amir Haskel, that led me to look up the diary at *Yad Vashem*.⁶ Reading parts of the diary sparked great interest and with the consent and encouragement of my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Marcela Sălăgean, I decided to research both these diaries. When I started the research, in September 2016, it was generally agreed among researchers that Ben-Shem's diary had been written while he was in the ghetto but as the research progressed, the document raised a lot of questions that will be addressed later in this dissertation. I am

⁵ Idem, -1939 ספטמבר (Diary and Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, September 1939 - December 1942), Vol 1, Jerusalem: Yad-Vashem, Ghetto Fighters' House, 1999, (Hebrew), p. 423.

⁶ Amir Haskel, "ד"ר ראוּבֵן פֶּלְדְּשׁוּ (בן שֵׁם) וְהַיּוֹמֵן הַגִּטּוֹ" (Dr. Reuven Feldschuh [Ben-Shem] and The Archived Diary), 18.9.2011, (Hebrew), accessed, 20.6.2020. <https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/noar/yoman.pdf>. Accessed 13.03.2017. Haskel is a Brigadier-General and a Holocaust researcher.

now almost certain that the majority of documents were written in hiding and parts that can be read were edited at least three times, possibly by different people, although it appears Ben-Shem himself was involved, to some extent, in most of these endeavors.

According to Ben-Shem, his motivation to document came from his need to record what had happened to him and his family. Ben-Shem's writings are unusual as they were written in Hebrew, a language familiar to most Jews, particularly men, who had received Jewish education, but not as a modern spoken language. Ben-Shem wrote in exquisite Hebrew, and occasionally added words or expressions in Yiddish, Latin, Polish and German, all languages in which he was proficient. The deciphered part of his diary consists of seven-hundred typed pages, most of which are legible. The first page of one of his original handwritten notebooks (it appears there were three such notebooks) contains a will giving instructions what to do with the manuscripts in case of his death and it being found by others.

There are many theories explaining diverse motivations for writing diaries, but the link between the notion of writing as a paradigmatic reaction to shrinking physical spaces has not been examined as such. The issue of Ben-Shem's and Ringelblum's writings and their attitude to documentation and history provides information about how they viewed their responsibility or the task that they had undertaken – to look at historical events and try to learn something from them in order to derive some insight, knowledge, tactics to cope with the situation in the ghetto.

There seems to be little research that has sought to discover in personal accounts, whether these were meant to be historical or not, if writers were able to perceive in the manipulation of spaces introduced by Nazis, a historical and political paradigmatic pattern that encompassed in it, their annihilation. The question whether writings about historical events, in diaries or accounts, as a reaction to the shrinking of space has not been the focal point in research. Nor has the quest for embedded messages, space wise, in the narratives concerned.

This dissertation claims that despite the evident difference between the diaries, both deal directly with history, and more specifically, with the collapse of traditional concepts about history as a result of what happened in the Warsaw Ghetto. It is easy to characterize Ringelblum's diary as a historical document. The problem may arise when examining Ben-Shem's diary. It is a personal account and as such, his historical approach is much more elusive. Yet, it appears that history-wise, there is a

compatibility between these diaries if only because the historical events during World War II were so extreme.

In these diaries, both writers seem to have experienced a sensation that they themselves had been alienated by history and had become outsiders to human record. To my knowledge, the question whether Ringelblum and Ben-Shem understood the relationship between changes in space or whether their documentation in addition to being one form of reaction to the hardship, was also a response to space manipulation has not yet been addressed.⁷

Two texts researched were Emanuel Ringelblum's daily diary which he started at the end of October 1939 and whose last entry seems to have been written around January 1943. I relied on both the Hebrew and Yiddish versions (the original written in Yiddish), because the latest printed Yiddish version is still not entirely complete. In addition, short passages from *Writings in Hiding* will also be discussed. The second document was written by Reuven Ben-Shem as a type of a diary that was probably written mostly in hiding and discussed events of the war.⁸ Sections used for narrative analysis were deciphered by the author himself and perhaps others as well in later years when he lived in Israel. These include the period between November 1940 and April 4, 1943.

The *Yad Vashem* archive contains the following materials:

- Manuscript 1: the original scanned version of the diary, which has 330 photographs (most pages contain both sides of the notebook) of the original handwritten manuscript, size similar to A4.⁹ These are the three notebooks that constitute Ben-Shem's writings.
- Three other scanned files which contain a handwritten version of the deciphered diary on letter notebooks, size A5 and which may have been written by Mrs. Lilly Goldenberg, a family friend.
- Manuscript 2: 439 photographed handwritten pages from November 1940 until July 20, 1942.

⁷ Amos Goldberg, *Trauma in the First Person, Diary Writing During the Holocaust*, Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2017, p. viii-ix

⁸ Moshe Kol, "ד"ר ראובן בן-שם (פלדשוה)" (Dr. Reuven Ben-Shem [Feldschuh]), *Massuah, a Yearbook on the Holocaust and Heroism*, no. 9, Tel Aviv: Massuah, April 1981, (Hebrew), p. 45. Kol wrote that Ben-Shem told him he had begun writing the diary in the ghetto itself on shreds of paper, as small as a match box.

⁹ Out of these pictures, 87 are shredded or erased notes of different sizes and a copy of Anka Grupińska's article summing up her interview with Emilka (Shoshana) Kossower Rosenzweig.

- Manuscript 3: 46 pages, from 20.7.1942 until sometime in August 1942.
- Manuscript 4: 248 photographed handwritten pages, from November 1942 until April 4, 1943.
- Deciphered Diary: 700 photographed typed pages, size similar A4, machine-typed and containing documentation from November 1940 until April 4, 1943.

1. Research Aims

- To investigate the shrinking space of the ghetto, asking whether Jews were able to intellectually and/or emotionally deduce the final point of this manipulation of space, namely, a total extermination of the Jewish population.
- To investigate the impacts of this space on its inhabitants, analyzing the social, psychological, and physical aspects of this unique situation in the history of humankind.
- To investigate any precedents to Nazi actions, and the way this lack of precedent impacted the Jews' conception of the Final Solution as it was forming during World War II.
- To determine according to the writings, how challenges of space manipulation were met by Jews and to what extent the two writers showed conceptualization of the historical events they witnessed.

2. Research Questions

- Were Jews able to intellectually and/or emotionally deduce the final point of this manipulation of space, namely, the total extermination of the Jewish population?
- What was the impact of this unique situation in the history of humankind, on the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, socially, psychologically, and physically?
- How did the lack of any precedents to Nazi actions impact Jews' conception of the Final Solution as it was forming during World War II?
- How were challenges of space manipulation met by Jews and to what extent did the two writers show conceptualization of the historical events they witnessed?

The study takes an interdisciplinary research approach, asking historical questions while using text analysis methods, namely close reading, and narrative

analysis to interpret thematic issues in Emanuel Ringelblum's daily diary and Reuven Ben-Shem's writings. Close reading and narrative analysis allow elaboration as to whether concepts of space diminution, history and politics were initially conceived as linked to one another, and whether this link was understood as fatal. In addition, by analyzing original texts, it is expected to uncover whether writing and documenting was a means by which the writers claimed back Jewish space.

This involves applying narrative analysis approaches and close reading to authentic texts through thematic mapping - checking for contents – what is mentioned, debated, etc., but also what is not recorded and what was avoided. Structural analysis addresses the manner, that is how a story is told and focuses on narrative devices but also on language representations thus exploring their capacity to embody an event as well as to symbolize an agent.¹⁰ As a critical model, the structural approach produces an additional tier that contributes to forming a more reliable picture of what is described.

Nonetheless, both writings are documents, whose authors showed a great deal of awareness of the responsibility of the written word and a high degree of commitment to the role their writings might play for posterity. Narrative analysis and close reading, methodologies which originated in probing literary texts, are dominated by literary theory reflecting the approach that stories or narratives mirror human experiences in the manner they were conceived. In addition, how a story is presented in writing reflects not only what the narrator chooses to expose but what story he tells himself.¹¹

Both diaries actually manifest the borders of epistemology: how does one know, and how can one be sure that what one knows is authentic. Yet, it appears that the ontological body that the writers formed, their descriptions and the manner they analyzed what they encountered, as well as relationships attributed to them, appear to have shattered knowledge as they perceived it while documenting events. Both seem to have understood as events were happening, that the big picture and its significance, may have escaped them and that they may have been misinterpreting these events.

¹⁰ Catherine Kohler Riessman, "Narrative Analysis", in: *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life*, Nancy Kelly, Christine Horrocks, Kate Milnes, Brian Roberts, David Robinson (editors), Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield, 2005, p. 2-3.

¹¹ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, USA: Sage, 2008, p. 107.

In that sense, it seems that what was recorded was the process of losing the ability to understand. The research sought to expose that from life in the ghetto and how it was experienced, it was impossible to predict the Germans' intentions, not in the present, let alone the future. The speed with which events took place confused the notion of past and present. In many respects, the past became the present because the present was stretched over a longer period than usual, thus ceasing to fulfil its purpose. The present did not lead to a future - the future was death. Following the change in the subjective structure of time, both writers seem to have experienced a colossal collapse of humanistic patterns of reasoning.

This research employed thematic analysis of narratives according to the table below, to reveal by close reading, contents through which I intended to explore what each writer chose to put on paper and how it was presented. Using the thematic approach of Gareth Williams, a British sociologist, who coined the term "narrative reconstruction", I looked at the narratives as manifestations of reflections mirroring crisis: guilt, responsibility, explanation, unpredictability, intelligibility, etc. With close reading, I looked at contexts as well as vocabulary choices, which in thematic analysis, are not broken down and researched per se.¹²

In the following table, I divided the work into thematic topics that deal separately with how the diary writers discussed the notion of space manipulation or implementation of lebensraum (living space) in Warsaw in particular. The diaries were scanned for information reflecting their points of view regarding the nature of actions and how and if the concept of space changed as a result.

¹² Ibidem, p. 59.

See also: Gareth Williams, "The genesis of chronic illness: narrative re-construction", *Sociology of Health and Illness*, Vol. 6 No. 2, 1984, p. 177.

Main Theme: Space Manipulation						
Issues/ concepts	Destruction of the individual.	Destruction of communities - society, family, man.	Blurring boundaries: private & public; dead & alive, personal & communal.	Converting the value of man as such, to one's work capacity.	Denial of the right to exist.	Documentation and bureaucracy as control.
Germans	Marking Jews visually.	Massive scale displacements.	Altering the nature of dwellings, streets, points, ¹³ cemetery.	Workshops (shops) and the Umschlagplatz.	Deportations to death centers.	Documentation as control - Extensive official and non-official documentation – photographic as well as bureaucratic.
Ringelblum	Documenting difficulties encountered, particularly before the ghetto was sealed.	Documented information he acquired including inside Warsaw itself.	Documented beggars, food snatching, starving children, smuggling, movement, violence, cemetery.	Documentation downsized significantly - presented deceit, hope and horror. Style of writing changed.	Ringelblum wrote little about deportations. Style of writing indicated great distress.	Documentation as a Jewish space - showing the Jewish point of view. As long as Ringelblum was alive, he documented. Implementation of documentation was challenged particularly during deportations, because of conditions.
Ben-Shem	Hardly related to it.	Was a refugee himself at the beginning of the war. Alluded to refugees he knew personally and to life in the points.	Similar to Ringelblum but also related to private households and smells.	Provided a detailed account of life at Schilling's almost on a daily basis.	Ben-Shem wrote about an encounter with a refugee who escaped from Treblinka.	Writing and expressing opinions was part of his personality. Conditions in the ghetto made him turn to sporadic documentation. It became central in hiding and he constantly edited his notes almost until his death in 1980.

¹³ Lea Prais, *Displaced persons, Refugees in the Fabric of Jewish Life in Warsaw September 1939-July 1942*, Jerusalem: Yad-Vashem, 2015, p. 314. The "point" was a name given to hostels in the ghetto where refugees forced into the ghetto were housed. They became notorious for their extremely terrible living conditions.

This methodology allowed me to address the question of gaps in comprehension as well as verify patterns and modes of reaching conclusions from events. That is, were people who experienced Nazi oppression able to conceptually understand that the historical and political pattern of exclusion contained the notion of annihilating the Jewish people on the one hand, and on the other, whether documentation was a reaction to space shrinking.

3. Chapters Overview

Chapter one consists of a literature review addressing the link between politics and history in modern Jewish thought. It explains the centrality of the concept of history in the Jewish world from the late 19th century. The review focuses on Simon Dubnow's central role in establishing and disseminating the idea that researching Jewish history was linked to political activism. His influence on Jewish masses particularly in east Europe was central and his approach reached way beyond the academic circle. The subchapter looks at the influence Dubnow had on formulating Reuven Ben-Shem's attitude to history as well as Ringelblum's, who according to Kassow, "... followed in the footsteps of Dubnow, although in tragically different circumstances. By recording the most painful chapter of Polish Jewish history in all its detail and variety, a task carried on not by one historian but by a dedicated collective..."¹⁴.

The second chapter addresses the phenomenon of bearing witness during the World War II and afterwards. It deals with reasons people immersed themselves in writing diaries, testimonies, personal accounts as well as establishing historical commissions even during the war itself. I explored what motivated people to write during the war and showed the link between the development of personal commitment to bear witness on the one hand, and democratization of personal accounts as well as their infiltration into academic research as part of the implementation of Dubnow's call to record on the other hand.¹⁵

In addition, the development of approaches to testimonies as historical records was discussed. The controversy regarding testimonies revolved around the notion of their validity as accurate and reliable factual documents one could use when

¹⁴ Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007, p. 386.

¹⁵ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust documentation in early postwar Europe*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, Kindle edition, locations 552, 876.

conducting a historical research. Echoes of this controversy are presented including Hayden White and Saul Friedländer on the one hand, and on the other, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's groundbreaking work regarding the unique value of testimonies as human records versus the impositions set by historiography for veracity in the forensic sense.¹⁶

The third chapter presents findings from the diaries and interprets their significance in terms of space. First, I presented what Lebensraum consisted of in Warsaw, how space manipulation introduced by the Nazis affected Jews' living experiences. Second, I inspected the political-historical purposes of writing and documenting events. I began with a presentation of the private arena of the city of Warsaw, relating to one intimate activity – the act of writing, that is, what each diary writer said about his own writings: Ringelblum, about his purposes in starting a diary and establishing the *Oneg Shabbat* archive, and Ben-Shem whose observations were more personal.

In the next part, I focused on the disintegration of space, from the micro to the macro. This sub-chapter addresses the private sphere starting with marking Jewish bodies which breached their anonymity and exposed them publicly. This was followed by a discussion of spaces in private dwellings. The public sphere discussed encircling the ghetto with a wall and street scenes revolving around the notion of photography. Finally, I look at how the ghetto crumbled into the Umschlagplatz and shops.

Next, I discussed the decree inflicted on Jews to wear a Jewish identifier, particularly focusing on Warsaw where a third of the population was Jewish. When it was first introduced, the armband, a wide white sleeve ribbon with a star of David, it affected relationships in the city instantly. The impact was so radical that rather than the city being defined as a space, it was the body of Jews that became one. This means their armbands rendered them into objects that were, at the same time, part of the city and yet, being barred, they were abused by both Poles and Germans. Armbands created the effect of robbing Jews of their human nature and individuality while turning their bodies into another space to be violated. In this way, while donning the Jewish symbol

¹⁶ Dori Laub M.D., "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening", in Dori Laub M.D and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony, Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, USA: Routledge, 1992, p. 59-63.

See also: Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching" in Dori Laub M.D and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony, Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, USA: Routledge, 1992, p. 5-6.

was an individual, private edict, it relocated Jewish privacy into public display thus breaching the notion of what might be considered intimate and making it public.

I then discussed what was supposed to remain hidden from the public eye. Reality of life inside dwellings remained to a large extent indeed private because both writers were reluctant to expose it in their writings. Conversely, the vast majority of ghetto inmates suffered from a lack of privacy and intimacy inside their places of residence. Ringelblum never wrote accounts of the private sphere because his diary was written as things happened. Not only was it unethical to violate people's privacy by writing about them in his diary, but also such contents were not considered historical in the purest sense of the word. Instead, Ringelblum wrote about the public sphere and scarcely offered glimpses into the private sphere. However, his *Oneg Shabbat* workers conducted private interviews with ordinary people, which also included personal details. The contents of these accounts were used by *Oneg Shabbat* researchers to reconstruct historical occurrences rather than private cases.

Ben-Shem's accounts were different because it seems most were written down when he was in hiding. Although he did not provide a large number of individual portraits, it appears that he elaborated on the lives of only a handful of people he knew for certain were dead when he edited his diary for publication. Additionally, it is the personal nature of Ben-Shem's notes that enabled him to provide portraits of individuals as this did not present a genre wise concern.

Both writers alluded to the loss of intimacy in the private as well as public arena. Furthermore, their texts revealed how life in the ghetto steadily and violently eroded notions of public and private. Living conditions in the ghetto made space a chaotic and abstracted realm. What characterized life was that space was no longer a panopticon, but rather a utopia or dystopia, a space that was out of synchronization and a space that was opposed to harmonization . The ghetto became a space that was the opposite of lebensraum, it became a death zone, an area whose physical conditions produced death while its human element thrived through not only physical struggles but also by writing.

The next step in Nazi policy was to enclose the ghetto with high walls and lock Jews inside. While this was again a division of the city, the manner in which Poles and Jews were separated was much more specific and clearer. The ghetto itself was planted in the heart of the city impeding the movement of Poles and certainly Jews. Strangely enough, the wall was accepted among Jews, because separating them from Poles made

their enemy, the Germans, clearer while protecting them from abuse inflicted by some of the Polish population. Although Jews initially thought German forces would be banned from ghetto streets too, it turned out they were wrong. The latter continued to penetrate this space although, on the whole, in much smaller numbers.

While there was some protection from violence and arbitrary abuse during that period, the situation in the ghetto resembled more and more that of a panopticon, not only in its structure but also effectively. German policy quickly created large scale hunger followed by a wave of epidemics, which ended with a staggeringly sharp increase in death numbers. The focus of life in the ghetto shifted from ongoing violence to daily survival and coping with steadily increasing hunger and disease. Unexpectedly, this changed when liquidation began and the shops versus the Umschlagplatz were introduced as two opposing sites: life and death. Shops, which represented life in this newly distorted universe, redefined notions of privacy and public on the one hand, and on the other, life and death. To all appearances, life in shops was deadly yet relatively exhilarating in comparison to the Umschlagplatz. What mattered in shops was being there as this was conceived to guarantee life, not food. Obviously, privacy was a never mentioned luxury in these conditions, but it was the communal that offered some comfort.

The public sphere of the ghetto is explored through the lens of photography. Ringelblum and Ben-Shem both chose to adopt the notion of photography, which they considered to be an accurate and objective medium to represent the course of life in the ghetto. Though neither of them had a camera, both strove to provide verbal descriptions to replace images with words. From their point of view, images spoke louder than any other form of representation, which is why many of their descriptions focused on the visual. There were no "misunderstandings" here between Jews and Germans who also revered photography and as Ringelblum testified, "They photograph everything"¹⁷ and guards as well as German policemen owned cameras.

The German passion for photography was met with a Jewish response of abiding to descriptions that relied on the visual as representation of the objective and impartial. In this respect, both parties regarded the image as the most loyal and trustworthy means to represent reality. Nonetheless, the complexity of representation, particularly visual representation becomes evident through an analysis of imagery of

¹⁷ Emmanuel Ringelblum, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

the public sphere. Indeed, not all German attempts were meant to present Jews as degenerate, but what the Ministry of Propaganda sought to record had a preconceived intention of representing what they considered deplorable about Jews. Jewish verbal imagery, striving to imitate the visual by refraining from introducing interpretations or emotions, achieved its goal as it exposed the effects of denying human beings their means of existence. Meanwhile they also revealed how difficult it was to remain impartial in view of ongoing deterioration. In this sense, Jewish verbal imagery became the missing captions for Nazi imagery.

4. Theoretical Considerations

This dissertation used Henri Lefebvre's theory as a general framework to discuss aspects of space in the diaries of Emanuel Ringelblum and Reuven Ben-Shem. According to Lefebvre, the production of space rests on three interdependent factors:

1. Spatial practice, which describes the physical; where and what kinds of social activity takes place.
2. Representations of space; how space is conceived abstractly through plans, designs, drawings, etc., all produced by agents of authorities such as engineers and architects. It is a system of signs and codes used to organize and direct spatial relations. It is where agents of authority produce an abstract image of space in terms of knowledge, ideology and culture.
3. Representational or lived spaces, where one experiences space through senses, memory, feelings and which may also involve writing and art.¹⁸

Lefebvre's model emphasized the tension between these three spaces as a result of pressures that shape people's lives from above, authorities over their subjects. Lefebvre appears to draw an analogy between the notion of space and biological forms, in which space is what happens under or inside a given form. In other words, space is not a pure form, but an ensemble of phenomena that define that form. Therefore, if space is always social, then not only does society produce things in a space but society's production defines space.¹⁹ The concept of space in this dissertation attempts to explore the relationship between the physical space of the Warsaw ghetto, an area that was formed by tearing apart an already given space, Warsaw;

¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 38-39

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 93-94.

representations of space exercised by German occupants and lived space, how it was conceived within the confined space of the ghetto through the war writings of Emanuel Ringelblum and Reuven Ben-Shem.

Unlike the experience of ghettos in medieval Europe, spatial practice in the Warsaw ghetto or as the Germans referred to it, the Jewish quarter, was meant to isolate Jews and cut off any dialectical relationships between them and their surroundings. Furthermore, material wise, residents of the ghetto became dependent on German occupation forces who allocated almost nothing to Jewish existence. Ghetto residents were expected to make do with extremely meager resources allocated to them while becoming totally separated from the bigger space that contained them. Moreover, the notion of negotiations with authorities, a capability Jews have perfected over years of exile, was in most cases ridiculed in the Warsaw ghetto as Germans paid little attention to the needs of their prisoners. If and when negotiations of this sort occurred, the Germans often did not hesitate to lie to and deceive Jews.

The second space, the space of representation, was made up of restrictions including decisions about the space's shape, structure and accessibility. Restrictions barred inmates from vital means of survival, not only food, but also other commodities such as fabric and even first aid services. Any movement of Jews or goods in and out of the ghetto was forbidden whereas German and auxiliary forces could go in and out of the ghetto more or less as they pleased. These restrictions were violated both by Jews and their guards. Jews would attempt to smuggle food, materials and at times even people while guards either exercised their power over smugglers in a most brutal manner or cooperated with them in return for bribes. The ghetto was also a type of a model for how Germany dealt with Jews, which was the reason that often and despite an official ban, guards turned a blind eye to the circulation of Wehrmacht soldiers in and out of the ghetto.²⁰ In contrast, on the other side of the ghetto gates, there were flocks of Poles who waited outside for Jews who were allowed out to pick on them.

The lived space of the Jews in the ghetto was deadly in every respect. The ghetto was a no man's land, where anyone could act out their whims on Jews. In addition, its small area was constantly challenged by dumping more and more people inside yet providing no resources to accommodate these displaced people.

²⁰ Time Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, Kindle edition, location 822-831. Cole discussed movement obstructed places that were due to physical barriers but also invisible barriers, such as disease-stricken areas or areas where certain brutal gendarmes were on post.

Furthermore, housing facilities inside the ghetto could not accommodate their inhabitants which meant that pressure on existing dwellings was huge resulting in several families residing in one apartment impacting on sanitation as well.

Nowhere was the bond between location and the formation of identity more visible than in the ghetto or as Lefebvre put it, "... each living body *is space and has its space*: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space."²¹. In other words, there is a mutual impact between place and the social and psychological development of one's identity. Environmental and social psychologists maintain that an individual's self-identity is closely linked to place identity because it is created by a multitude of experiences in spaces.²² Therefore, spaces play a significant role in personal development, which directly influences society's social formations, cultural practices, and political actions.

Furthermore, Lefebvre's theory also explains how the private arena is affected by the public realm and how, one, in many ways, reflects the other. Lefebvre claimed that in the relationship between outside and inside, it is the outside that influences how the inside is organized because the outside embodies the rules governing space.²³ Indeed, in the Warsaw ghetto, the outside gave the tone to the inside, as the chaotic nature of ghetto streets was reflected in the private sphere.

On the one hand, rules introduced inside the ghetto created a Jewish space, but on the other hand, dynamics resulting from disciplinary restrictions in the ghetto in reality had turned that Jewish space into an unsustainable realm. Ghettoes in general and Warsaw included, seem to have been aimed at showing how degraded Jewish existence was. The streets of Warsaw certainly demonstrated this, but so too did the insides of dwellings whose conditions were so appalling that they imposed a new form of intimacy, wholly unfamiliar not only to Jews but to humans in general. How these conditions affected the lived space of both Ringelblum and Ben-Shem, will be analyzed through their war writings.

²¹ Henri Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²² Steve Kirkwood, Andy McKinlay, Chris McVittie, "The Mutually Constitutive Relationship between Place and Identity: The Role of Place-Identity in Discourse on Asylum Seekers and Refugees", *Journal of community & applied social psychology*, J. Community Appl. Soc. Psychol., 23, Wiley Online Library, 2013, p. 456.

CONCLUSIONS

With regard to the first research question, inspection of the writings showed that it took Jews some time to understand the connection between the Nazi historical and political paradigm of space shrinking and the final goal of organized murder. On the contrary, life as it was conducted in the ghetto was often conceived of as certainly deadly, but this was attributed to deliberately meager conditions provided for Jewish survival. In other words, death was conceived as a result of conditions and not mere incarceration in confined spaces. The diaries also revealed that challenges of space manipulation were not addressed as such, and Jewish responses did not derive from spatial changes introduced by the Nazis but related first to acute shortages in materials and later, extermination.

Another research question was how the lack of any precedents to Nazi actions impacted the Jews' conception of the Final Solution as it was developing during World War II. This approach to lend importance to the relationship between quality of space and its effect on Jews, led to creating a correlation between life conditions in the ghetto to the growth of written documentation including the *Oneg Shabbat* archive. However, this reversed when space diminished. When deportations began, perspectives changed as extreme shortages of food and other supplies became secondary because downsizing living spaces implied that life itself was denied. Simultaneously, with space reduction, writing was affected conceptually as well as effectively. As previously mentioned, the incredible events in the ghetto denied any privacy and at the same time brought people to the end of their tether. In such conditions, it was not only almost impossible to write, but to most people, it seemed superfluous in view of the atrocities around and urgency to find ways to survive.

Thus, regarding the last research question, how challenges of space manipulation were met by Jews and to what extent the two writers showed conceptualization of the historical events they witnessed, it seems that writing, a highly valued notion, became distinctively dependent on space shrinkage. When space was reduced beyond the point of Jews being denied their human characteristics as a paradigmatic approach, that is, when officially no significance was lent to the notion of family, when individuals were solely "meat" for deportations or slave labor, when their flesh and blood ceased to count, most individuals were unable to resume life. In

this respect, it was not only the physical annihilation of so many, but to those who remained alive, torture, loss and helplessness, had killed them while still breathing. In other words, the creation of the ghetto universe followed by the process of shrinking it led to reducing spaces to the boundaries of one's body thus killing people before they were physically dead.

The novelty of this research lies in creating a model that combined diary scrutiny relying on Lefebvre's theory in *The Production of Space* and employing narrative analysis as well as close reading techniques to understand the relationship between space versus conditions that permitted the production of space. Studying these diaries showed language operating as a spatial vehicle to introduce order into chaos. In relation to Ringelblum and Ben-Shem, although writing seemed to function as a predictable response in view of their professional careers, the uniqueness was embracing the idea of writing diaries rather than other forms. The literary value of diaries initially allowed continuity as they permitted an indefinite ending, that is, the form had no literary impositions. One could begin a diary although finishing did not depend on formulating some coherent ending but was rather independent of contents.

As previously mentioned, Lefebvre's model introduced an approach resting on three interdependent factors.²⁴ According to this model, the diaries were studied for contents reflecting their capacity to function as a Jewish space, using narrative analysis and close reading techniques. Two categories were studied: the private and public realms and how they were represented in the diaries.

As both writers' most preferred prism was photography, recording life in the ghetto as if it had been filmed and photographed, texts were analyzed accordingly. This proved to be challenging when it concerned the private sphere since the notion of visibility was not consistently used in this realm. Beginning with an examination of what the writers said about their own documents, it appears that what was important for both was representing occurrences in the ghetto in the most objective fashion. Whereas Ringelblum elaborated on his methodology emphasizing the means employed to achieve authenticity through words functioning as a camera, Ben-Shem expressed his aspiration to represent the ghetto faithfully but provided no methodology, since the diary was initially written to tell his family what he had underwent, and he relied on his reputation as proof of his texts' veracity.

²⁴ Henri Lefebvre, op. cit., p. 38-39

The second research question dealt with understanding the impact of this unique situation in the history of mankind, on the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, socially, psychologically, and physically. The space of representation consisted of an array of limitations, both physical – barring all kinds of materials and movement thus affecting lived spaces, that is, non-Jews were relatively free while Jews had to succumb to the consequences of incarceration. Lefebvre's theory which addresses the spatial relationship between the outside and inside makes it possible to explain how the restricted area of the ghetto provided inadequate housing facilities not only for Warsaw's Jews but to an additional population, refugees for whom dwelling circumstances were the worst. Apartments as well as refugee centers were no longer family centered; instead, they were overcrowded with strangers preventing even a single moment of peace and quiet. In fact, it was impossible to form any sense of belonging in the ghetto. Space was defined by severe deficiencies that had a devastating outcome on the physical and psychological capacities of people to endure and resulted in extreme pressure on individuals, families, and society at large.

Nonetheless, the private sphere was not revealed, but insinuated in Ringelblum's diary, while Ben-Shem discussed his family and other people's domestic affairs occasionally, also referring to his own self-image that had been affected by his inability to provide for his family. Still, it appears that neither of them regarded the private sphere as history, which was another reason such information was absent from Ringelblum's historical diary while present in a limited manner in Ben-Shem's.

Lefebvre claimed that in the relationship between the outside and inside, the former embodied the rules governing space and influenced how the latter was organized. Hence, psychoanalyzing space would reveal what he referred to as "bourgeois space"²⁵, separation to the point of repression between the intimate and extrinsic. Examination of the Warsaw ghetto hints at a reverse of "bourgeois space" as by definition the ghetto was an obstructive place designated for Jews and consisting of disciplinary restrictions aiming at ruining Jewish spaces. In this way it appears that ghettos, including the Warsaw ghetto, were geared to exhibit how degenerate Jewish existence was.

By using verbal-visual representation, a paradox was created as close reading of texts revealed. As well as presenting a surgical image of the ghetto, they managed

²⁵ Ibidem, op. cit., p. 315.

to avoid the personal and replace it with typological representation of an array of phenomena starting with begging in different forms. In this way, the privacy of the individuals described was preserved as rather than referring to them personally, they became representatives of a phenomenon. In addition, the act of photography enabled viewers to remain emotionally distant. This was not always successful as some cases were too touching and tragic as exemplified by the case of beggar-children Ringelblum and Ben-Shem mentioned more than once. Nonetheless, their efforts also projected on Nazi efforts to do the reverse, as their photographic documentation of the war was meant to represent Jews in the worst possible light. This included staging scenes as if Germans protected Jews or the later attempt to make a documentary about the ghetto, a film that was anything but a documentary, because it included an assortment of staged footage to portray Jews as complete degenerates.

The disintegration of spaces was manifested most blatantly when the ghetto was torn into pieces leaving three separate and distinct compounds whose nature had drastically changed: the remains of the large ghetto that neighbored the Umschlagplatz and the brush makers' shop, the main shop area in the middle of the former ghetto and Többens' shop in what used to be the southern part of the former ghetto. Two opposing yet similar spaces were created, new in their purpose and form: the Umschlagplatz and the shops. The former represented torture and death and the latter, life, although tortuous, life. In this dissertation I chose to relate only to the shops, particularly Schilling's, where Ben-Shem found refuge from deportation.

Lefebvre spoke about the parallel and mutual relationships between the outside and inside as well as the importance of separating them. Shop compounds represented the opposite where there was no separation, particularly during the great deportation. Existence was on a knife's edge because people were literally being hunted, first outside shops, and very quickly inside too. Human relationships such as family were abolished altogether as men were regarded as a sheer commodity. Fear of death drove people, the wild, consisting of many women and children and the 'legal' to stick together, sleep in shops, hide their existence in a desperate attempt to hold onto life. This led to the collapse of any notion of visibility including privacy and intimacy which became completely exposed contributing to obliterating any humane traits of Jews.

What this dissertation shows is the relationship between visibility and spatiality as introduced by the Nazis. The concept of Lebensraum consisted of defining

what should appear in space and what should be banished. Just as it had been important to make Jews visible by forcing them to wear armbands for example, it was this same visibility that became intolerable and led to their annihilation. This did not happen before their visibility had been exposed in a most degrading manner, exploiting them in every sense, starting with satisfying Nazi fantasies about Jewish pervasiveness through making them subsist in inhumane conditions, turning them into slaves and finally murdering them. This series of mirror effects created in Jewish zones helped Nazis to internalize the foreignness of Jews as boundaries between the inside and outside were abolished in different ways.

Ringelblum and Ben-Shem relied on visibility, but their documentation testified that they were not lured into this trap of appearances. They showed how squeezing humans into a cage-like existence while depriving them of vital resources did not reflect on Jews in particular but on any human beings in the same circumstances. Whatever mirror reflection the Nazis tried to introduce, their texts exposed the distorted and pervert aspects of such attempts. If the Nazis abolished boundaries, by relating to phenomena in the ghetto typologically, Ringelblum's narratives as well as most of Ben-Shem's were able to reestablish dignity. The surgical gaze they adopted was able on the one hand to preserve individuals' anonymity while, on the other hand, exposing what people had been reduced to. The same effect was achieved when they refrained from discussing private households and yet recorded how they suffered in the ghetto. Adhering to what was visible in their texts was able to mirror the private, because many strove to be seen and noticed; being visible turned out to be their only chance of survival.

The diarists examined clearly manifested tensions between the urge to record and avoid violating and degrading that which they were recording. Close scrutiny of the relationships introduced between space and visibility, in relation to aspects of the public-private, personal-communal, and intimate-extrinsic, may provide unique and valuable points of view to further understand the nature of experiences during the Holocaust and their spatial significance. The conceptual gaps the victims experienced, along with frequent changes in thinking patterns as exhibited by the Germans made it impossible for the Jews to comprehend the events around them²⁶.

²⁶ Boaz Neumann, *גוף שפה, מרחב, מרחב, מרחב, מרחב* (The Nazi Weltanschauung, Space, Body, Language), Haifa: Haifa University Publishers, 2002, (Hebrew), p. 97.

This dissertation contributes to knowledge in a number of areas. First, as already said, Reuven Ben-Shem's diary-testimony-memoire has never been researched in any doctoral thesis.²⁷ This entailed archival work to explore his personal life as well as events discussed in his deciphered version of the original manuscript which, unfortunately, at this point, remains mostly illegible. In this respect, studying Ben-Shem's diary was a huge undertaking for its historical references as well as placing this work in line with other such works. In the course of working on my research, I found information supporting the thought that at least some parts of the manuscript were written in hiding. As mentioned previously, this information was already published in 1982 by Joseph Kermish and Laurence Weinbaum's 2010 article mentions it as well.²⁸ Yet, as Weinbaum suggested the manuscript might be synchronous, in later research, Ben-Shem's diary was treated as such. I shared my findings with my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Marcela Sălăgean, to whom I wrote on January 22, 2019. In October 2019, when contact was established with Dr. Bella Gutterman from *Yad Vashem* who was working on the scientific edition of Ben-Shem's diary, I shared this information with her as well.

Second, introducing close reading and narrative approaches to the analysis of spatiality in these diaries specifically, enabled an exploration of subtexts, investigating not only how information was presented but also exposing what appeared to be the writers' choices of what not to discuss. This interdisciplinary methodological approach encompassed cultural and epistemological narrative analysis, which enabled unearthing meanings and implications the writers attributed to the conceptual world from which they came, on the one hand, and on the other, revealed their struggles to bridge it with what was unfolding before their eyes.

Their texts, or rather their act of writing initially originated from a favored typical Jewish reaction to hardship since the late 19th century when Dubnow first formulated this theoretical approach to documentation. For Ringelblum, embarking on this venture of recording, choosing the diary format, including its developments, was linked not only to the abundance and speed of events but also to his declared historical purposes. For Ben-Shem, it appears that the mere existence of the deciphered version

²⁷ Nadav Menuhin, "הזעקה גברה על כוונתי: זהויות וערכים במבחן בכתבי השואה של רחל אירבך וראובן פלדשוה" (*The Cry Overcame My Intentions', Identities and Values Under Trial in the Writings of Rachel Auerbach and Reuven Feldschuh*), 2015, Jabotinsky Institute, Tel-Aviv, 475 – 8כ, (Hebrew).

²⁸ Joseph Kermish, "בשולי 'פנקס הרשימות' של בן-שם" (Margined-notes to Ben-Shem's 'Note-Book'), *Massuah Yearbook*, Vol 10, Kibbutz Tel Yizhak: Massuah, 1982, (Hebrew), p. 52.

of his original diary indicated the degree to which the six years of the war had haunted and marked his life before, because it was seen through the prism of the war, and after, as a consequence of the war.

Irrespective of their differences, the texts revealed the tension between memory and history. Ringelblum wrote for the sake of history, but the nature of events confounded history and memory especially in his *Writings in Hiding*, when practically all Jews in Warsaw had disappeared. Ben-Shem appears to have been compelled to write because of memory, to be remembered and after the war, for the sake of history as testimonies received more and more attention as historical records.²⁹ In this sense, the personal and communal met as the history of individuals, at least during the Holocaust, confounded and conflated with that of community.

Ultimately, the attempt to record the whereabouts of Jews during the war through verbal photography as the ultimate means of objective representation, showed that the term objectivity was understood differently by each of them. Thus, it seems that to get a better picture, combining Ringelblum's scientific approach with Ben-Shem's emotional and psychological observations, produced more precise imagery of the ghetto. Indeed, Ringelblum himself was well aware of the deficiencies one narrative could create, and in this respect, the amalgamation of both in this dissertation, serves Ringelblum's methodology, to have many people with different approaches write about the same event so that in the end, a more faithful report emerged. If photography cannot do without captions, Ben-Shem's narratives may be regarded as the missing captions of Ringelblum's concise and condensed narratives.

Key Words: Diary, Testimony, Politics, History, Holocaust, Warsaw Ghetto, Writing, Jewish Space, Narrative.

²⁹ Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence, Time and Justice*, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2012, p. 15-16.

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