

**The History of Zvi Spiegel: The Experience of
Mengele Twins and Their Protector During the
Holocaust and its Aftermath**

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in
It is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is
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Abstract

This thesis tells the story of Zvi Spiegel, who, at the age of 29, after serving in the forced labour units of the Hungarian army, was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944. Upon his arrival, Spiegel, a twin himself, was put in charge of the twin boys who were being subjected to medical experiments by Dr Josef Mengele. Over the months, Spiegel emerged as the boys' leader and saviour. In the aftermath of the war, rather than desert the young twins, he led them on a hazardous journey home to Hungary, over hundreds of kilometres in the midst of chaos and hardship. It was only forty years later that Spiegel reunited with the twins and his achievements were recognized publicly.

Through the unique story of Spiegel and his twins, the thesis aims to investigate three main topics, the first of which is Spiegel's evolution into a benign camp functionary. Contrary to the common perception of people who played positive roles in the Holocaust as natural-born heroic types, the evidence presented here shows that at least in the case of Spiegel, he *became* a helper. Spiegel did not arrive in Auschwitz as a righteous person; rather, having had to make decisions in the ever-complicated reality of the camp's grey zone, he gradually evolved into a benign functionary—but not without his limitations and doubts.

The role of group frameworks within concentration camps is our second focal point. The group created by Spiegel had a lasting impact on the lives of its members, over thirty child twins. As will be demonstrated, Spiegel and the group formed an essential part of the twins' experience in the camp and in many ways accompanied them throughout their post-war efforts to establish a new life.

The final topic relates to Holocaust representation and the image of the hero. In the 1980s, after a long period of silence and agony Spiegel finally shared his story with the public and was celebrated as the man who guided and saved the twins. But even at that stage he did not fully internalize a heroic narrative of the outside world. Spiegel's post-war life as a whole, and his reluctance to adopt the heroic self-perception, highlight the limitations of Holocaust representation and the inherently un-heroic nature of places like Auschwitz. Even if one chose to help others, it was impossible to escape the moral ambiguity, the all-pervasive presence of death and the collapse of human values.

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Introduction

“Zvi Spiegel was 29 when he entered Auschwitz with his twin sister. He was the oldest of the male twins and helped to save the lives of many of the youngsters who survived to come to Jerusalem today. After his story was told, the inquiry board asked all those in the audience that he had taken care of to stand up. One by one various sets of male twins rose, many of them now balding or gray, to hail the man they called in Hungarian ‘*Spiegel Bácsi*,’ or Uncle Spiegel. The audience broke into spontaneous applause.”¹

In 1985 a mock trial began in Jerusalem, accusing the notorious Nazi doctor, Josef Mengele, of crimes against humanity. The survivors present, most of whom were twins, had been the main subjects of Mengele’s medical experiments in Auschwitz-Birkenau between 1943 and 1945. Zvi Spiegel was one of them.² He and his twin sister Magda were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944 from their hometown Munkács in Sub-Carpathian Rus’ which was under Hungarian rule at the time.

Upon arrival, when Spiegel, aged 29, heard the guards shouting *Zwillinge, Zwillinge!* (twins, twins), he immediately identified himself as a twin. At that very moment Mengele arrived and saw Spiegel—who had formerly been an officer in the Czechoslovakian army—standing at attention like a soldier. Mengele immediately approached him, asked him about his background and appointed him supervisor of the younger twins in the Birkenau hospital sub-camp, known as Lager BIIf—*Häftlingskrankenbau*.

From that point, the course of Spiegel’s life changed forever. Beginning as a minor functionary in the camp, he emerged as the guardian of a group of twin boys. His position required him to escort the twins and bring them to the designated place in which the experiments were being conducted, and there to serve as Mengele’s translator. As time went on, Spiegel took on a much more formative role in the camp. He forged the twins into a unified entity, attended to their needs, educated them, comforted them and gave them hope, and on several occasions risked his own life to save theirs. Even though he did not believe that they would live to see liberation, in order to give the twins a spark of hope he promised to take them home one day.

¹Thomas L. Freidman, ‘Jerusalem Listens to the Victims of Mengele’, *New York Times*, 6 February 1985.

²Zvi is Spiegel’s Hebrew name; his full name was Ernst Zvi, and he was mostly known before and during the war as Ernő.

When Auschwitz was liberated on 27 January 1945, a group of approximately forty twins surrounded Spiegel, who was about to flee the camp, and reminded him of his prior commitment to them. Spiegel decided to fulfil his promise and led the twins on a journey across Poland, spanning hundreds of miles, arriving at the Soviet border, and traversing Slovakia, Hungary, Sub-Carpathian Rus' and Romania. Spiegel led the twins—as well as others who joined en route—on foot, by truck and by train amidst the chaos in the region in the war's aftermath. Eventually, after about six weeks, all the boys but one made it safely home to Hungary.

Unlike the general topic of medical experiments in Auschwitz,³ the story of the 'Mengele twins' has not yet been the subject of extensive academic research. In the popular sphere there have been a small number of publications and films about them, the most notable effort being LucceteMatalonLagnado and Sheila Cohn Dekel's book *Children of Flames* (1991), in which the authors document the experiences of a random group of eighteen twins, among them Zvi Spiegel and his sister Magda.⁴ While the book succeeds in drawing attention to the story of the twins and in describing their experiences in Auschwitz and its aftermath, the authors did not attempt to conduct any systematic scholarly research, nor does their work constitute a comprehensive study based on a wide range of sources.⁵

³One of the notable early attempts to write about the medical experiments was made by Alexander Mitscherlich, the official West German envoy in the Nazi doctors' trials in Nuremberg (1946). Mitscherlich and his colleague Fred Mielke wrote a book describing the trials: *Doctors of Infamy: The Story of the Nazi Medical Crimes* (New York, 1949). For other books discussing the Nazi doctors' medical experiments, see Naomi Baumslag, *Murderous Medicine: Nazi Doctors, Human Experimentation, and Typhus* (Westport, 2005); George J. Annas and Michael A. Grodin, *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation* (New York, 1992); William R. Lafleur, Gernot Bohme and Susumu Shimazono, *Dark Medicine: Rationalizing Unethical Medical Research* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2007); Vivian Spitz, *Doctors from Hell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans* (Boulder, 2005).

⁴LucceteMatalonLagnado and Sheila Cohn Dekel, *Children of flames: Dr Josef Mengele and the Untold Story of the Twins of Auschwitz* (New York, 1990).

⁵ Spiegel is also mentioned in Martin Gilbert's book *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London, 1986), 688, 755, 782. See also the article by Nancy Segal, which is discussed in Chapters II and VI; Nancy Segal, 'Holocaust Twins: Their Special Bond', in *Psychology Today*, 19: 8 (New York, 1985), 52-8; Yossi Sarid, *Pepiczek: He Didn't Know His Name* (Jerusalem, 2006), 39; Yehuda Koren and Eilat Negev, *In Our Hearts We Were Giants: The Remarkable Story of the Lilliput Troupe—a Dwarf Family's Survival of the Holocaust* (New York, 2004), 144-5, 179, 191; Gerald Astor, *The Last Nazi: The Life and Times of Dr. Josef Mengele* (New York, 1985), 99, and Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, 1986), 353.

Other popular publications include a memoir by Eva Kor, a twin herself, entitled *Surviving the Angel of Death;Pepiczek*, which tells the story of a 4-year-old twin in Auschwitz-Birkenau,⁶ and *In Our Hearts We Were Giants*, a book about a family of dwarfs who were inmates in Birkenau, and at a certain point were in the same barrack as Spiegel and the twins.⁷ In addition, there have been at least two documentary films made about the subject: *Rene and I* and *Leo's Journey: The Story of the Mengele Twins*.⁸

This thesis attempts to tell and analyse the story of a specific group of Mengele twins, albeit a large one. Around forty to fifty twins were under Spiegel's direct supervision in Birkenau, including a small number of dwarfs.⁹Focusing on the unique story of Spiegel and his twins during the war and in its aftermath, the thesis portrays his character through his evolution as the twins' leader, while describing the devastating circumstances that he and the boys experienced in Birkenau. Their journey home is then examined, as well as their attempts to rebuild their lives in the ensuing post-war years. We follow Spiegel and his boys into the 1980s and the 1990s, when several of the twins began recording their stories in detail, thereby making Spiegel a known figure and publicly recognizing his role as their saviour.

Eventually the dissertation aims to answer three main questions. The first one deals with Spiegel's evolution into a benign functionary in the camp and asks what was the process whereby he evolved into the twins' leader and saviour within the camp's grey zone. The second question addresses the role of a group framework within a concentration camp in general: What were the outcomes and after-effects of an attempt to form a unified group within a concentration and death camp? The third and final question deals with the heroic image and Holocaust representation: What were the long-term implications, in practice and representation, of being a survivor of the camp's grey zone as a group leader and saviour? Or, in other words, was Zvi Spiegel exempted

⁶ Eva Kor and Lisa RojanyBucceri, *Surviving the Angel of Death* (Terre Haute, Indiana, 2006); Sarid, *Pepiczek*.

⁷Koren and Negev, *In Our Hearts We Were Giants*.

⁸RoniScheib, *Rene and I* (Twin Pix Production, 2005). Shel Piercy, *Leo's Journey* (Infinity Films, 2001).

⁹ In barrack 14 there were an estimated number of 100 pairs of twins aged up to 60; see Franciszek Piper and WaławDługoborski (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ii (Oświęcim, 2000), 264. Spiegel was in charge mainly of the younger ones, who were estimated in some accounts at 40-60 boys. A detailed discussion of the topic is presented in Chapter II.

from the complexities of a post-Holocaust self-perception? What was the effect of the external cultural and political context in each period upon his self-image?

The history of Zvi Spiegel and the twin boys is a particularly appropriate narrative to recover and record at this moment in time. Firstly, it is a unique story within the context of Holocaust historiography; secondly, it is unacceptable to record such events solely from the perpetrators' point of view or as 'history from above'.¹⁰ The dark chapter of the Nazi medical experiments and of Josef Mengele has been told many times but it cannot be complete until the perspective of the victims has been taken into account. Their reactions, feelings and attempts to cope with their situation may, indeed, be said to lie at its core.¹¹

In the introduction to their book *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor*, the authors—each of whom brings a different perspective to the story of one Auschwitz survivor, Helen 'Zippi' Tichauer—claim that “we can never know enough about Auschwitz; every voice helps us understand better . . . because Auschwitz has become a symbol after the war to the horrors and evilness of the Holocaust, we need a broad mosaic of sources to paint a purposeful, clear and comprehensive picture of the past.”¹² This approach can clearly be adapted from the context of Auschwitz to a large number of topics related to the Holocaust. We are at a stage in Holocaust historiography where broadening the range of perspectives and narratives in our description of the different events is crucial in portraying, and coming closer to, a deeper understanding of the Holocaust.

The story of Spiegel and the twin boys throws light on a number of key elements within Holocaust studies that all demand explanation from the victims' perspectives: the experience of children within the concentration camps; the use of innocent human beings as guinea pigs for medical experiments; the complex structure of the Nazi concentration camps and especially the establishment of the prisoners' self-administration; the experiences of Holocaust survivors immediately after liberation;

¹⁰ Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York, 2010), 291.

¹¹ Biographies of Mengele include Gerald L. Posner and John Ware, *Mengele: The Complete Story* (London, 1986); Astor, *The Last Nazi* (1985). A few memoirs were written by Jewish doctors who had served as Mengele's assistants in Auschwitz; see Miklós Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: Eye Witness Account* (London, 1962), Gisella Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz* (New York, 1948), and Ella Lingens-Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear* (London, 1948).

¹² Jürgen Matthaus (ed.), *Approaching an Auschwitz Witness* (Oxford, 2009), 120.

their efforts to establish new lives, and, finally, the upsurge of testimonies, organizations and gatherings from the 1980s and their implications on the memory and representation of the Holocaust. The following section will aim to provide the necessary background for these various topics as well as discuss the research methodology and provide a general outline of the thesis.

The Racial State, the Nazi Doctors and Medical Experiments

When the twins reached Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazis' sole reason for keeping them alive was the fact that Mengele saw them as useful subjects for his medical experiments. The twins were not aware of the broader ideological and practical context underlying the experiments; they were similarly oblivious to the fact that they were part of a much larger experiment that aimed to establish a 'purified racial state'.

Racism, eugenics, racial hygiene and racial antisemitism had been emerging step by step as part of the European scientific and political discourse since the eighteenth century, and especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³ The belief that there were superior and inferior races and that human traits were inherited eventually led to the assumption that humankind could be 'designed' by human beings (scientists) and that there were people who were "unworthy to live".¹⁴ These ideologies flourished in Germany and came to dominate discourse in several scientific disciplines, especially in the Weimar Republic period (1919-1933). When the Nazis rose to power in 1933 these racial doctrines became state policy. From then on German aspirations towards racial purity were radicalized, eventually leading to genocide.

¹³ For the background of early European racism, see George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (London, 1978). For the background of eugenics, see Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Use of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, Mass, 1995); Dan Stone, *Breeding superman. Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian England* (Liverpool, 2002). For the origins of racial hygiene in general and in the German context, see Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies and others: Germany 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1987); Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989); Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide, from Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995).

¹⁴ The idea of "life unworthy of life" was first stated in 1920 by two German scholars who wrote the *Authorization for the destruction of life unworthy of life*—jurist Karl Binding and psychiatrist Alfred Hoche. They argued in favour of euthanasia for the incurable "feeble-minded". They were highly influential in Germany and provided the Nazis with a "scientific background" for their ideology. Friedlander, *The Origins of the Nazi Genocide*, 14-15, and Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 45-54.

It was not only the classification of society that was to be redefined, but also the criteria of what the nation consisted of, with preference given to ethnic exclusiveness over culture, language or citizenship.¹⁵ This racially purified nation was to be constructed as a homogeneous, harmonious community where conflict did not exist. The Nazis used the terminology of 'us' and 'them' to divide the communities of people in a Darwinian struggle for survival.¹⁶ As Peter Fritzsche has argued, Nazi success was based on the willingness of individuals to see the world through the lens of racial struggle.¹⁷

After establishing a racially conscious apparatus and special racial units in government, the Nazis still lacked respectable scientific backing. The same scientists who had provided the essential theoretical background to racial science in the pre-Nazi era were bound to play a key role once the Nazis were in power; science could justify the racial classifications and then provide the means and the personnel to implement the measures of 'racial purification'. And within the scientific community, one specific profession stood out among the others.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s there was growing support for the Nazis among key figures in the German academic world. When the Nazi party came into power, ethnocrats in the new state apparatus faced numerous issues, queries and misconceptions with regard to the new racial legislation. It was then that scientists were turned to for answers. Nazis appealed to experts in various disciplines from history¹⁸ to sociology, religious studies, anthropology and others. Among these, the physicians became more thoroughly Nazified and much sooner than members of any of the other professions.¹⁹

By January 1933, 6 per cent of all doctors in Germany had joined the Nazi Physicians' League. By 1942 more than 38,000 doctors had joined the party (50 per cent of all doctors in the country). In 1937 the proportion of doctors represented in the SS

¹⁵ Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven, 2010), 166-7.

¹⁶ Nathan Stoltzfus and Robert Gellately (eds.), *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 4-5.

¹⁷ Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 6.

¹⁸ Claudia Koonz argues that history was "the queen of racial science". See, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 203.

¹⁹ Michael H. Kater, *Doctors Under Hitler* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1989), 4. For an extended discussion of the reasons for the physicians' collaboration, see Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 126-39. Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 223.

was seven times greater than that of the average for other employed males in the population.²⁰ High-ranking Nazi doctors did not come from the margins of German medicine but often from the very pinnacle of the professional establishment. Henry Friedlander lists seventeen top medical experts involved in Nazi crimes, including distinguished university chairs of various medical specialities, hospital chiefs and other top medical administrators: “their names were a part of a who’s who of German medicine of the time.”²¹

Working within medical schools and prestigious institutes, these biologists, geneticists and physical anthropologists, as well as others from the medical milieu, conducted experiments in order to prove the inferiority of the Jews and other ‘alien’ groups within the racial state. It was from this background that Dr Josef Mengele emerged. He was trained at Frankfurt University under Otmar Von Verschuer, one of Europe’s foremost geneticists, an outspoken admirer of Hitler, and the future director of the prestigious Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity Teaching and Genetics in Berlin.²²

The period of 1933-1938 was characterized by the passing of laws aiming to alienate the Jews and the internal ‘enemies’ of the Aryan race. New legislation included ‘The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service’ (1933), the purpose of which was to dismiss all undesirable ‘non-Aryans’ from the civil service; ‘The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Progeny’ (1933), which prescribed the compulsory sterilization of people who were defined as “feeble-minded” or “socially feeble-minded”,²³ and the Nuremberg Laws, denying Jews equal civil rights and prohibiting marriage and sexual relationships between Jews and Aryans.²⁴ Once ‘racial’

²⁰ For detailed statistics on physicians’ numbers in the Nazi party, see Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, 65-70.

²¹ Friedlander, *The Origins of the Nazi Genocide*.

²² Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, 197.

²³ Altogether some 350,000-400,000 people were sterilized. The participation of race scientists, medical specialists and judges in the massive sterilization campaign helped assure citizens that proper procedure was being followed; see Stoltzfus and Gellately (eds.), *Social Outsiders in the Third Reich*, 10.

²⁴ There were two main purposes to the laws: first, to legalize and justify racial inequalities and, second, to compensate party zealots who were unhappy with Hitler’s conservative ‘drift’. Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge, 1991), 82.

groups were victimized under these laws, persecution was extended to additional 'inferior' groups, such as the 'asocial', homosexuals, Sinti and Roma.²⁵

1938 was a landmark year for the escalating racial measures against the Jews as well as for the other groups. Increasing propaganda by Goebbels and the Nazi party resulted in large-scale pogroms on the nights of 9 and 10 November, known as *Reichskristallnacht* (known in English as 'night of the broken glass'). During the pogroms hundreds of synagogues were set afire, 7,000 Jewish businesses were destroyed and 26,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps. Clearly, the Nazis were not willing to settle for merely revoking the achievements of the emancipation era but set new goals, aiming to achieve the total expulsion of Jews from the German landscape.²⁶

As war erupted, the opportunities to implement racial plans were exploited by a determined apparatus seeking ever more radical resolutions for the Jewish question, the Gypsy question and the matter of other races classified as inferior. Once again, as in the case of the Sterilization Law, the attack against the "racially inferior" began with those who were "infecting" the Aryan race from the inside, those defined as "lives unworthy of life". Again, medical scientists, led by physicians, psychiatrists and geneticists, had a seminal role in planning, implementing and justifying policy, only this time it involved mass killing, under the name "euthanasia".²⁷

It began on 18 August 1939, when the Reich Committee introduced the compulsory registration of all "disabled" newborn babies. Doctors and midwives were obliged to report instances of "malformed" children, which were then discussed by a team of doctors who would decide who was 'worthy' to live and who would be sent to a paediatric clinic to be killed by morphine, tablets or gassing.²⁸ However, the murder of

²⁵ For the Sinti and Roma persecution, see Günter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (New York, 2000); for the persecution of homosexuals, see Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle. The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York, 1986); for the persecution of the 'asocials' see Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 170-5.

²⁶ For the background of the November pogrom see *ibid.* 89-93.

²⁷ The programme to kill the mentally ill began in the winter of 1938-9, when the parents of a disabled child petitioned Adolf Hitler to bring about its death. Hitler instructed his personal physician, Karl Brandt, to consult with the child's physician. The child was eventually killed, and this case provided a model on which euthanasia actions would be carried out. See Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, 185-7. For Brandt's role in the euthanasia project, see Ulf Schmidt, *Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor. Medicine and Power in the Third Reich* (London, 2007).

²⁸ Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1994), 99-101.

the children was only the first part of a much larger operation, Action T4—adult euthanasia.²⁹ From October 1939 euthanasia forms, assessing each patient's race, state of health and ability to work, were sent by local doctors to psychiatric institutions and evaluated by forty-eight medical doctors, deciding who would live and who would die. From roughly 283,000 applications evaluated, 75,000 were selected. Hospitals at Grafeneck, Berenburg, Sonnenstein, Hadamar, Brandenburg and the castle of Hartheim were all specially outfitted with gas chambers. By August 1941, when Hitler stopped the gassing phase of the operation, some 70,273 individuals had been killed.³⁰ But the programme did not stop; it simply entered a reorientation phase resulting in an ever-increasing number of groups being murdered.³¹ In the period between 1940 and 1945, a group of dedicated bureaucrats, relying on medical experts, organized the murder of more than 200,000 psychiatric patients, camp inmates who had fallen ill, people suffering from major depression and those deemed asocial.³²

With the escalation of war, doctors felt free to further pursue their unlimited quest for knowledge and serve the state at the same time.³³ They filled a variety of roles that lay at the core of the extermination process: first, they were in charge of the camp selections, determining who could hold on to life as a prisoner and who would be sent to the gas chambers. The selections would be a part of the prisoners' life during their incarceration in the camp and they were often forced to parade naked before Nazi doctors, who would determine whether they were still fit enough to work—and hence could survive a bit longer.³⁴ Secondly, doctors were responsible for supervising medical

²⁹ The name T4 was derived from the office's street address, Tiergartenstraße 4. See Götz Aly, "Medicine against the Useless", in Götz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland* (Baltimore, 1994), 22.

³⁰ The halt came as a result of protests against the programme, especially by the Catholic Church. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, 189-91.

³¹ Aly, "Medicine against the Useless", 23. Early in 1941 a parallel programme for killing prisoners in concentration camps was initiated under the code name 14f13. Towards the end of the war an increasing number of people were considered useless under the categorization of the T4 staff. The group extended far beyond the mentally ill in what was called "wild euthanasia". See Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance*, 215; Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 161, and Aly, "Medicine against the Useless", 25.

³² The cessation of mass gassings and decentralizations of killing to the asylums themselves left a pool of experienced personnel available for mass murder on a vast scale. Ninety-two ex-T4 personnel were trained in the SS camp of Trawniki and then deployed in the context of 'Operation Reinhardt' (*Aktion Reinhardt*) to run the technical aspects of extermination camps: Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec. See Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 166.

³³ Kater, *Doctors Under Hitler*, 226.

³⁴ Baumslag, *Murderous Medicine*, 65.

technicians who carried out the gassing. They delivered the canisters of Zyklon B to the gas chambers in Red Cross cars, saw to it that the 'disinfectors' were protected with gas masks, and declared the 'disinfected' dead.³⁵

The most widely known role of Nazi doctors in the camps was that played in the notorious medical experiments. Although these constituted only a fragment of the comprehensive task of physicians in the concentration camps, they attracted the most attention at the Nuremberg tribunal for medical crimes. The merging of rational science and an extreme ideology raised numerous ethical questions that went far beyond the deeds of the Nazi doctors and thus were the subject of huge interest.³⁶

Strong links existed between camp experiments and academic research in university hospitals and institutes in Germany. Pathology laboratories located in concentration camps sent heads, skeletons, preserved organs and slides of victims to German universities.³⁷ Altogether at least twenty-six types of experiments were conducted for the purpose of research in concentration camps.³⁸ First, there were the experiments classified as 'therapeutic' by Telford Taylor, prosecutor in the doctors' trial in Nuremberg.³⁹ These included the efforts to cure malaria, typhus, epidemic jaundice and other diseases. Another category were experiments designed to assist the war effort; for example, testing the ability to survive in high altitudes or in low pressure for the air force; experiments testing the efficiency of sulfanilamide in healing wounds, and mustard-gas and phosphorus experiments. Other experiments were directly related to racial hygiene theories, some initiated by the regime, while in other cases the state

³⁵ Ibid. 68.

³⁶ Amy Hackett and Robert J. Lifton, "Nazi Doctors", in Michael Berenbaum and Yisrael Guttman, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington, ID, 1994), 303. Michael Marrus also claimed that the Nuremberg doctors' trial focused only on the medical experiments even though a relatively small number of physicians had participated in these acts. In his view they should have focused on the euthanasia program, where thousands of physicians jeopardized the medical profession; see, Marrus, *The Nuremberg Doctors Trial*, 114-116.

³⁷ Baumslag, *Murderous Medicine*, 17.

³⁸ Kaplan, *The Ethics of Evil*, 66.

³⁹ Telford Taylor, "Opening statement of the Prosecution", 9 December 1946, in George J. Annas and Michael A. Grodin, *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation* (New York, 1992), 70.

encouraged scientists to experiment in their own field of interest relating to racial theory.⁴⁰

Another type of experiment was conducted in order to prove the inferiority of the Jewish race and of other alienated groups. According to Michael Kater, Nazi medical researchers were guilty of making pseudo-scientific observations in the course of their genetic research in order to prove the dominance of heredity over environmental factors. They used false statistics, confused cause and effect and mistook symptoms for a certain condition in the effort to find supporting evidence for their hypotheses.⁴¹

The Experience of Children during the Holocaust

Ironically, the fact that Mengele used the twin children for his experiments gave them a chance to at least prolong their lives. Young children arriving at the concentration camps usually had no hope of survival as most of them were marched off directly to the gas chambers.⁴² Twins were among the few exceptions. Used as human guinea pigs, they were forced to live in Auschwitz-Birkenau under the 'protection' of Dr Mengele, who exploited them for his racial research. Living just a few hundred yards from the gas chambers, these children had to cope with unimaginable circumstances. Having been forcibly separated from their families, they had to adapt to life in Birkenau, which resembled nothing they had ever experienced before. In a harsh and violent environment, surrounded by death and subjected to arbitrary summonses to medical experiments, the twin boys had to make sense of the new circumstances and accustom themselves to this new, perverted reality.

Scholars in the past have acknowledged the need to distinguish the experience of child survivors from those of adults. Children were the most vulnerable group of Nazi victims and were subjected to persecution and eventually extermination in extreme numbers, to the point that only 10 per cent of Jewish children living in pre-1939 Europe survived the Holocaust. The history of Jewish children in Nazi Europe tells us, from the

⁴⁰ One of many examples in this context is that of the notorious Professor Carl Clauberg, who conducted his sterilization experiments in the infamous block 10 in Auschwitz, Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 271-278.

⁴¹Kater, *Doctors under Hitler*, 234-5.

⁴² Lynn Nicholas, *Cruel World. The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web* (New York, 2005), 392.

perspective of young people, how Jews became strangers in their own countries, how they were denied respect, lost their rights and, finally, were destined to be killed.⁴³

Most of these children had been born into a safe and secure world, which abruptly ended as the Nazis occupied their countries.⁴⁴ In the first stage of the war children, especially in Eastern Europe, either lived in ghettos or were sent into hiding in various places. Like adults, they had to adapt to these new circumstances in order to have a chance to survive. But they were far less mature than the adults and had yet to develop a clear sense of identity. The years in the ghetto were characterized by the efforts of Jews in different communities to organize their life within the walls and surrounded by barbed-wire fences. Children in these situations had to fight to survive, battle with hunger and struggle in a trap where waiting meant death and escape brought with it an even greater danger of death.⁴⁵ The catastrophe that marked the demise and total collapse of their former life began with the *Aktionen* in the ghetto and often ended in the concentration and extermination camps.⁴⁶ This was a moment when some children, either in an organized fashion or following individual initiatives, escaped to hiding places.⁴⁷

However, most children's fate was not to escape the *Aktionen* but rather to be deported by trains towards an unknown world which offered them only a slim chance of survival. As mentioned above, children were typically gassed upon arrival at the concentration and extermination camps. Those who passed through the portals of Auschwitz-Birkenau and survived the first selection became adult slaves in one or another part of the complex. From the moment they joined the slave ranks they had no choice but to act as the adult labourers that they were taught to be.⁴⁸ Altogether, the train journeys, selections, beatings, starvation, overcrowding, harsh labour conditions,

⁴³ Deborah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, 1991), 6.

⁴⁴ Paul Valent, "Child survivors: A Review", in Charlotte Kahn and Judith S. Kestenberg (eds.), *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing* (Westport, Conn., 1998), 1.

⁴⁵ Maria Hochberg-Marianska and NoëGrüss (eds.), *The Children Accuse* (London, 1996, Pol, 1946), introduction, 12.

⁴⁶ *Aktionen* was the German term for the gathering of Jews in the ghetto prior to deportation to the concentration, labour and extermination camps.

⁴⁷ Dwork, *Children with a Star*, 69.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 228-9.

and rampant disease and death were the devastating, unimaginable, daily realities of life for these children.⁴⁹

They 'Grey Zone' in Auschwitz-Birkenau and its Implications in the Aftermath

A further section of the thesis is devoted to Spiegel's role as a prisoner functionary. Although there have been a few books discussing the functions of the camp prisoners' self-administration and its importance to the totalitarian regime, they mostly focused on the elite echelon. These scholars settled for a generic description of the structure and of the functions of prominent prisoners within the camps' self-administration system, while not paying attention to the hundreds and thousands of middle- and low-level functionaries, who played an immense part within the camp machinery.⁵⁰

Spiegel's exact role is unclear and is discussed later at some length. Nevertheless, we can determine without doubt that he was a prisoner functionary, albeit a minor one, and thus had privileges and power to some extent. Through Spiegel's story this dissertation attempts to present, for the first time, on a comprehensive scholarly scale, a description of the moral, structural and physical conditions that faced these minor functionaries. We cannot understand the way the camp functioned in general and the grey zone specifically without understanding the pivotal role minor functionaries took in the prisoners' complex self-administration system.

When discussing Spiegel's role and choices as a prisoner functionary we are immediately drawn into what Primo Levi has described as the "Grey Zone" of the concentration camp system.⁵¹ Levi, himself a survivor of Auschwitz, coined the term Grey Zone in his landmark book *The Drowned and the Saved* in order to describe the "ill-defined outlines which both separate and join the two camps of masters and

⁴⁹ Ibid. 217. Another position obtained by children, mainly Jews, aged 12-15, in the camps was the notorious role of a *Piepel* (the source of the name is unknown); they were runners—the messengers and errand boys of the SS commanders. They were a privileged group because they served as the male lovers of their masters. As a result they obtained great power and were often feared by their fellow inmates. For more about this delicate issue, see Azriel Eisenberg, *The Lost Generation: Children in the Holocaust* (New York, 1982), 147-9.

⁵⁰ For a selection of books regarding the prisoners' self-administration in the camps, see: Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, NJ, 1997); Anna Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley, 1979); Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them* (New York, 1980; 1st edn. 1950); and David Rousset, *A World Apart* (1951; 1st edn. 1946).

⁵¹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and Saved* (London, 1988), 22-51.

servants.”⁵² He exemplifies the complex entity of the Grey Zone by describing the state of mind of the newly arrived prisoner in Auschwitz and what eventually awaited him or her: “One entered hoping at least for the solidarity of one’s companions in misfortune, but the hoped-for allies, except in special cases, were not there; there were instead a thousand sealed-off monads, and in-between them a desperate hidden and continuous struggle. This brusque revelation, which became manifest from the very first hours of imprisonment, often in the instant form of a concentric aggression on the part of those in whom one hoped to find future allies, was so harsh as to cause the immediate collapse of one’s capacity to resist.”⁵³

The highly complex prisoner self-administration system had been set up in the concentration camps to minimize resistance, to save SS personnel and to ensure order.⁵⁴ In general, the prisoners’ self-administration was divided into two main structures, one in charge of the residential area and the other responsible for the work commandos. The block personnel had a broad array of tasks that included distributing linen and daily rations, obtaining basic foods, procuring blankets, dishes, clothing and shoes, checking on hygiene and assisting sick prisoners.⁵⁵ The two leading positions of prisoner personnel in the residential area were the camp elder (*Lagerälteste*), who was in charge of the entire camp or sub-camp, and the block elder (*Blockälteste*), who was in charge of the prisoners in a single block. Under these two were the room chiefs (*Stubenälteste*) and a variety of assistants who helped keep prisoners under surveillance.⁵⁶ Spiegel was one of these assistants in block 14 in Lager BIIfat Birkenau. The work commandos were under the kapos.⁵⁷ These supervisors were excused from work; their only task was to divide the prisoners into groups and to push them to work harder. The head of this section was the chief kapo, who was usually responsible for the

⁵² Ibid. 27. Levi also discussed the role of the Jewish councils (*Judenräte*) in the ghettos through the deeds of the head of the Lodz *Judenräte*, Haim Rumkowski; see *ibid.* 43-51. In my discussion I only focus on the concentration camps, as these are relevant to Spiegel’s story.

⁵³ Ibid. 23-4.

⁵⁴ René Wolf, “Judgment in the Grey Zone: The Third Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt 1968”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 9: 4 (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 2007), 618.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 132.

⁵⁶ For a description of the structure of prisoner self-administration in the residential area, see Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 131-2; Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz*, 45-6; Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 58-62; and Rousset, *A World Apart*, 71-81.

⁵⁷ The term ‘kapo’ was also commonly used by prisoners to describe any camp functionary, that is to say, a prisoner with a job which offered both a measure of protection and some advantages in terms of accommodation or rations.

kapos in charge of the work details, the latter divided into head kapo and sub-kapos.⁵⁸ The category of prisoner functionaries also included inmates working in the various supply and service facilities. Work in the kitchens, laundries, storerooms and workshops allowed access to vital goods that could then be used to build up a network of *protekcja*, meaning the use of one's role in a certain area in order to obtain other privileges in exchange.⁵⁹

In Auschwitz itself the first prisoners to fill the leading positions in the self-administration were the German criminals or so-called 'green triangles'. These prisoner functionaries were distinguished by an armband: a mark of rank, privilege and power. Originally, non-Germans received armbands only in exceptional cases. When more and more functionaries were needed later and the percentage of Germans decreased, a Polish kapo was no longer a rarity in the camp and even some Jews received armbands.⁶⁰

After the war many reports emerged exposing the functionaries' behaviour in the camps. Witness statements and publications often contributed to the image of the functionaries as brutal sadists.⁶¹ Others, however, praised their courage and humanity in the face of adversity and danger.⁶² The accounts that portray the functionaries as brutal accuse them of using various cruel methods to achieve 'order' in the camp: appropriating food rations intended for prisoners; stealing their clothes; accepting bribes in exchange for better treatment; arbitrary singling out of prisoners for punishment; seeking victims to torment to death; preparing separate meals for themselves from stolen food and providing themselves with relatively luxurious living

⁵⁸ For a description of the structure of the working commandos see Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 132-3; Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz*, 47-8; Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 62-5, and Rousset, *A world Apart*, 71-81.

⁵⁹ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 134.

⁶⁰ Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 143, 162.

⁶¹ See, Rudolf Verba, *I Escaped From Auschwitz* (London, 2006; 1st edn. 2002), 57, 63-4, 82, 96-8, 108, 112-13; Jean Samuel, Jan-Marc Dreyfus, *Ilm'appelait Pikolo* (Hebrew trans.) (Or Yehuda, 2009), 20-1, 30, 40-2; Roman Frister, *Self-Portrait with a Scar*, (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1993), 279, 324-31, 341-2; Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (London, 2004; 1st edn. 1959), 17-19, 33, 36, 72-3, 92-3; Liana Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau* (Evanston, 1997), 51, 74-5, 81-4, 89, 160-2.

⁶² Verbatells about Franz, a good kapo who had saved his life; Samuel tells about Eddie, the good kapo, 38; Frankl mentions a decent block elder, 88-9; and Filip Müller says that the crematorium kapo Fischl "was no angel, but neither was he a murderer", and mentions that he gave them protection from the second kapo, who was an extremely malicious figure; see Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* (Chicago, 1999; 1st edn. 1979), 41-2.

conditions, especially in the higher echelons.⁶³ Often the prisoner functionary demonstrated loyalty by treating fellow prisoners as brutally as the SS did, and at times even exceeding their brutality.

Memoir writers and scholars have made a number of attempts to explain the collaboration of prisoner functionaries with the SS. The explanations vary, with some suggesting that the underlying motive was pure sadism. Others see collaboration as an opportunity to establish authority, which required extreme aggression; again others think it was merely a way of acquiring material goods that enabled one to survive. Furthermore, these functionaries may have identified with the aggressor to the point where 'conscience' equalled obedience to the dominant power.⁶⁴ In many ways Auschwitz-Birkenau and other concentration camps presented a morally twisted world in which prisoners functioning in a brutal manner represented the moral norm, unlike in the outside world.

In this sense, Spiegel and others who chose a benign path were unique and their attitude requires an explanation. Although Spiegel was only one case and his motives may have been singular, this thesis attempts to explore those motives and in so doing perhaps stimulate an academic discussion about the reasons for benign behaviour among prisoner functionaries in general.⁶⁵

As mentioned above, in the course of time the percentage of 'Aryans' steadily declined, which obliged camp administration in Auschwitz-Birkenau to entrust functions to Jewish inmates as well. According to the Verba-Wetzler report, by February 1944 half of the block elders in Birkenau were Jews, many of them known for their cruelty.⁶⁶ In the first few years after the war many of the Jews who had been camp functionaries arrived among the general wave of survivors to the newly established State of Israel. These individuals attempted to repress their past in the camps and establish a new life among the masses of Holocaust survivors in the country. But soon many of them realized that the dark period of the camp was still haunting them. There

⁶³Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz*, 46.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 80-2; Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, 144, 168, 170, 175-6, and Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 130-52.

⁶⁵ There are many examples of benign behaviour but, unlike in the case of the brutal functionaries, there are rarely any attempts to explain it—even though it was an integral part of the Grey Zone. For an example of some assumptions on the benign behaviour of a kapo, see Verba, *I Escaped from Auschwitz*, 88-9.

⁶⁶ Later the central administration ordered Jews to relinquish their armbands. Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, 169.

were cases in which some of these former functionaries, suddenly found themselves face to face with other survivors who accused them of being “Jewish traitors who lent a hand to the extermination of their nation”, as Knesset member and survivor, Mordechai Nurok put it.⁶⁷ Very soon the Israeli police were dealing with numerous complaints filed by Holocaust survivors accusing other survivors of being Nazi collaborators.⁶⁸

This led to the passing of the Nazi and Nazi Collaborators Law by the Israeli Knesset in 1950.⁶⁹ Although it was designed to enable the prosecution of Nazis and Nazi collaborators, Adolf Eichmann was the only actual Nazi prosecuted under this law. What is less known is that during the 1950s and up to the mid-1960s some forty people (only one non-Jew)⁷⁰ were prosecuted in Israel in what were referred to as the ‘kapo trials’.⁷¹ Even though these trials are an important reflection of the approach towards the Holocaust within Israeli society and especially within the political and judicial system, only a few scholars have dealt with the matter,⁷² a proof of the sensitive nature of the issue.⁷³

As these trials were taking place they were barely heard of in Israeli society, and were attended mostly by Holocaust survivors. Sometimes there were violent outbursts

⁶⁷ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993), 258. In an interview conducted for this research, Ephraim Reichenberg, who had been a twin inmate in Birkenau, related that as a taxi driver in Israel in the 1950s he once kicked out a passenger whom he recognized as his cruel kapo from Lager BIIId in Birkenau. This happened in front of an astonished crowd; see Ephraim Reichenberg, interview by the author, 31 March 2011.

⁶⁸ Hannah Yablonka, "The Law for Punishment of the Nazis and their Collaborators: Legislation, Implementation and Attitudes", *Catedra*, 82 (Heb.) (Dec. 1996), 139.

⁶⁹ The law authorized the State of Israel to bring to trial anyone who had committed crimes within the context of the Holocaust from 1933 to 1945, whether as a Nazi or as a Nazi collaborator. For a discussion of the law, see Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the politics of nationhood* (Cambridge, 2005), 58-64, and Yablonka, "The Law for Punishment of the Nazis", 141-5.

⁷⁰ This was the case of the Slovakian clerk Baniek, who was accused by the Israeli secret service of involvement in the deportation of Jews from Slovakia. More interesting is the fact that he fled to Israel as other Nazis did because, ironically, until 1950, there was no law for the punishment of war criminals. See *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷¹ Yablonka has obtained records of 21 of the 33 trials that took place during the 1950s. Thirteen of these ended in conviction and eight in acquittal. Until the mid-1960s five more trials took place, three ending in acquittal and two in convictions; see, *Ibid.*

⁷² See *ibid.* 135-52; Segev, *The Seventh Million*; Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*; Yechiam Weitz, "The Law for Punishment of the Nazis and their Collaborators as Image and Reflection of Public Opinion", *Catedra*, 82 (Heb.) (December 1996), 153-65, and Orna Ben Naftali and Yogev Tuval, "Punishing international crimes committed by the persecuted: Kapo trials in Israel 1950s-1960s", *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 4: 1 (2006), 128-8.

⁷³ Until today only six cases have been opened to the public. In 1995 there was a special decree sealing the other existing kapo trial records for seventy years from the day the trials ended; see *ibid.* 151.

against the defendants and their attorneys. Only a few trials were covered by the press; some not at all. A kapo trial was a “filthy and embarrassing story, and the papers did not want to get caught up in it.”⁷⁴ The only exception was *Omer*, a newspaper printed in simple Hebrew for new immigrants, illustrating the powerful and anguished internal discourse among survivors over the kapo trials.⁷⁵

In the trials the judges were confronted with the extremely complex dilemmas of those acting within the Grey Zone of the concentration camps. Several key questions constantly recurred in the courtrooms: were serving the Nazis or facing death the only alternatives? Similarly, was the subjugation of fellow prisoners the only option if one wanted to avoid punitive action? Could a Jewish prisoner refuse to carry out a task and stay alive? Did prisoners accept supervisory positions in order to help, rather than persecute, their comrades?⁷⁶

Within the limited scope of this introduction it is impossible to describe in detail the trials themselves or the verdicts passed by the judges. Nevertheless, one fact is worth highlighting here, namely, that the general demeanour of the judges was very critical towards the defendants during the 1950s, although they became much more reserved in the 1960s, following the Eichmann trial. According to Hanna Yablonka, this trial marked a key change in the attitude of Israeli society, leading to a less harsh or judgmental approach towards survivors who had had to cope with the extreme circumstances that they were exposed to.

This change had a direct influence on the judges of the kapo trials. The ‘choiceless choices’⁷⁷ which the kapos had to face were now looked at from a different perspective. The judges generally accepted the notion that it is impossible to evaluate the deeds of ordinary people who were fighting for their survival under such extraordinary circumstances. As stated by Justice Moshe Landau in 1964, in the appeal of Hirsch Barenblat, a Jewish policeman in the Bendzin (Będzin) ghetto who had been convicted by the district court: “It would be both arrogant and hypocritical on the part

⁷⁴Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 262.

⁷⁵ Hannah Yablonka, “The development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner, and Eichmann Trials”, *Israel Studies*, 8: 3 (2003), 12.

⁷⁶Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 72.

⁷⁷ This term was coined by Lawrence Langer not specifically for the functionaries but rather in a more general description of the impossible choices of an inmate in Auschwitz; see Lawrence Langer, “The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps”, in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (St. Paul, 1989), 224.

of those who never stood in the place of the victims and survivors and those who managed to escape from there, like the prosecution witnesses . . . to condemn the 'ordinary people' who did not rise to exalted moral heights because they were oppressed by a regime whose prime aim was to wipe their human image off the face of the earth."⁷⁸ Landau also disagreed with the district court regarding the appellant's 'selfish motives' in joining the Jewish militia and serving in it. "A person is close to himself and takes care of his own interests and those of his family", he stated. "The interdictions in criminal law, including the Nazis and Nazi Collaborators Law, were not formulated for rare, unique heroes, but for ordinary mortals with ordinary weaknesses."⁷⁹

The discussion of the kapo trials leads us to a number of important insights relevant to the thesis. First, there was an initial intolerance towards those who had taken part in the Jewish self-administration under the Nazi occupation, coupled with a definitive accusation of co-operating with the devil. This was especially true within the survivors' community and it affected political and judicial discourse. Second, the kapo affairs were an embarrassment to the Jewish State and thus suppressed in the public sphere. As time went by, especially following the Eichmann trial, judges increasingly realized the perverted nature of morality in the Nazi era, thus acknowledging the complexity of the kapos' situation and recognizing brutal behaviour as normative, to some extent, under the circumstances of the Nazi concentration camps.

The Return Home, Displaced Persons' Camps and New Destinations

As mentioned above, upon the liberation of the Auschwitz camp Spiegel was planning to set out on his own on the journey back to Hungary. Ultimately, however, he changed his mind, giving in to the twins' plea to take them home as promised. During the journey and upon arrival home, Spiegel and the twins, like other Jewish survivors, came face to face with the destruction of their families, communities, and their entire way of life. The unique journey upon which Spiegel and the twins embarked, along with their struggle to establish a new life after the one they had known had been destroyed, is another aspect of the story.

⁷⁸Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 77.

⁷⁹Ibid. 78.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the allies were confronted with the challenge of repatriating the enormous masses of people who were so brutally rearranged by the Nazis all across Europe.⁸⁰ It was within this framework that the Jews had to deal with the fact that the place where war and persecution had struck—their home and their belongings, their relatives, their community and their neighbourhood—in most cases no longer existed. Even the social, political and demographic makeup of the country they had come from had often been radically transformed by the war.⁸¹

The extraordinary reality that Jews faced while ‘returning home’ can be characterized by the following general features: first, antisemitism did not disappear from European societies after 1945. Pieter Lagrou has claimed that to suppose that antisemitism had suddenly evaporated in light of the evidence of the Nazi crimes would be to underestimate its inveterate nature in European societies.⁸² Although antisemitism was the necessary breeding ground for post-war hostility towards Jews in different European countries, it was exacerbated by the fear of loss of property and job positions.

Another distinct feature was the unwillingness of different governments and societies to recognize the special circumstances of the Jews as survivors of genocide. The concept of ‘Holocaust’ did not exist in allied countries in the 1940s. While engaged in rehabilitating their societies and national identities, European governments did not have the capacity to respond adequately to the Jews’ exceptional situation.⁸³

The refusal to acknowledge the Jews’ unique tragedy was a part of the American policy in DP camps until the end of the summer of 1945. The US army was loath to recognize Jews as a group that, in the wake of the war, had special needs. Many of the

⁸⁰ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 437.

⁸¹ Pieter Lagrou, “Return to a Vanished World. European Societies and the Remnants of their Jewish Communities”, in David Bankier (ed.), *The Jews are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to their Countries of Origin after World War Two* (Jerusalem, 2005), 21.

⁸² Ibid. 12.

⁸³ In western Europe any racial distinction between people was repudiated, and religion was regarded as a strictly private affair of the individual. For examples, see Frank Caestecker, “Reintegration of Jewish Survivors into Belgian Society”, in Bankier (ed.), *The Jews Are Coming Back*, 76-7, and Renee Poznanski, “French Apprehensions, Jewish Expectations”, *ibid.* 57. In central and eastern Europe under the Soviet occupation the demands for restitution and special recognition by the Jews were dismissed as “bourgeois logic”. For the situation in Romania see Ancel, “The Return of the Survivors from Transnistria”, in Bankier, *The Jews Are Coming Back*, 242. For Hungary see Alice Freifeld, “Identity on the Move: Hungarian Jewry between Budapest and the DP Camps in Hungary”, in Randolph L. Braham and Brewster S. Chamberlin (eds.), *The Holocaust in Hungary: Sixty Years Later* (New York, 2006), 190. For Poland see Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York, 2006), 28.

Jews in the DP camps in Germany, Italy and Austria, especially those originally from eastern European countries, refused to leave the camps in the mass-repatriation effort of the allies. What was perceived by Europeans as liberation was, for many Jews living in the poor facilities of the DP camps, a continuation of oppressive conditions. This led to a negative attitude towards the American 'liberators', as recorded by Dr David Wdowinski, a survivor in the Feldfaging camp, in October 1945: "I'm sad. Everything is getting me down. The general situation of the Jews, the attitude of our American liberators, the vast tragedy of our people . . . who can carry this burden, this overwhelming sorrow, this endless pain? There is no past, no present, no future . . ."84

The liberators were aware of the surviving Jews' difficulty in coping with the poor conditions of the DP camps, yet could also see their reluctance to leave. This ambivalence was interpreted as a negative and unappreciative attitude towards the liberators. The latter were unable to conceive the agony and personal tragedy that the Jews had undergone.

However, Jews in the DP camps, especially in Germany, began to claim recognition as a separate group and referred to themselves collectively as *she'erithapletah* (the surviving remnant), thereby giving expression to their unique identity, infused with a potent sense that they represented the dynamic centre of European Jewish life.⁸⁵ Their demands were slowly beginning to be heard in the international arena, especially in the USA. Following the report of Earl Harrison, President Truman's special emissary to the camps, efforts were made to accommodate Jews as a special case. Separate DP camps were created and more appropriate aid was provided.⁸⁶

As time passed, the destination chosen by most of the survivors was Palestine (the State of Israel from May 1948), while some found themselves emigrating to Western countries, especially the USA.⁸⁷ Spiegel himself emigrated to Israel, as well as some of the boys, whilst others settled in the USA and a few stayed in Europe, mainly in

⁸⁴ Dr David Wdowinski was an important figure in the Jewish underground movement in Warsaw. The quote is from Zeev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge, 2000), 22.

⁸⁵ Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope*, 286.

⁸⁶ For a full description of Harrison's journey to the DP camps, see *ibid.* 53-64.

⁸⁷ An estimated 350,000 survivors had made their way to Israel by the early 1950s; nearly 140,000 immigrated to the USA and several thousand went to other countries. See in Beth Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Post-War America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2007), 15.

Hungary. A different sort of challenge awaited them in the newly established State of Israel and in post-war America as they attempted to re-establish their lives in societies that desperately wanted to move forward without addressing the past atrocities.

Most survivors arrived in Israel in the midst of the War of Independence (1947-1949). The fighting often reminded them of heroic myths from Jewish history, in which the fighters of the ghetto had been given a place of honour. It was in this context that the distinction between the brave ghetto fighters and the ordinary survivors was first established. The collective voice of Holocaust survivors as heard in the DP camps was silenced.⁸⁸ The end of the war did not change the basic attitude in Israel towards the survivors. People did not want to hear their stories and the typical question that they were often faced with was, "Why did you survive?"⁸⁹ According to Sharon Kangisser Cohen, "they were accused of passivity, going like sheep to the slaughter, and staying alive by ignominiously complying with Nazi decree."⁹⁰ They were treated as a homogeneous group that was expected to fully assimilate into the general society regardless of their extraordinary circumstances.⁹¹

A similar attitude awaited survivors in post-war USA, albeit in very different social and economic conditions. American society was largely unsympathetic to their pain and, once again, their plight was overshadowed by the pervasive need of post-war society to move forward. America was caught up "in the post war mood and anxious to leave World War II behind"⁹². American troops had also returned home and were eager to rejoin society. It was expected that the Jewish survivors, like other newcomers, would be glad to leave their past behind and be grateful to be in the United States.⁹³

⁸⁸ Hannah Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War* (Basingstoke, 1999), 59.

⁸⁹Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 155.

⁹⁰ Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel: Finding Their Voice: Social Dynamics and Post-War Experiences* (Brighton, 2005), 7.

⁹¹ According to Anita Shapira this could be demonstrated by the demand that young child survivors should be assimilated among 'healthy' Israeli-born youth in order to make sure that their passive attitude imbibed in the Diaspora would disappear; see Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (New York, 1992), 332-4. The general assumption that the survivors didn't speak has been lately challenged, as discussed in Chapter V.

⁹²Beth Cohen, *Case Closed*, 174.

⁹³ Beth Cohen, *Case Closed*, 175. According to Hasia R. Diner, contrary to common belief, American Jewry was quite outspoken regarding the Holocaust in the post-war era, although they used a different terminology than the second generation. See Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York, 2009), 365-90.

More than forty years would pass before the survivors, especially the young ones, would start to talk again, but this time in a completely different atmosphere.

Methodology: Survivors' Testimonies and the Dilemmas of Memory

According to Christopher Browning, there are some scholars who reject survivor testimony because of “factual accuracy” issues. For some topics, however, “that would mean foregoing any attempt to write their history at all . . . there are topics too important to be passed over simply to avoid the challenges of using survivor eyewitness evidence.”⁹⁴ The only way to provide a detailed description of the story of Zvi Spiegel and the twins is by relying predominantly on their testimonies. The Nazis did not document the nature of life in the twins’ barracks; camp records do not reveal their feelings, state of mind, relationships, or everyday routine.

In addition to oral accounts, the present analysis is based on archival documents, which add further facets to the picture described in the survivors’ recollections. Various types of documents have been used—first, those found in the archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu), which holds Nazi documentation regarding the twins in Birkenau (among others). These documents were compiled by the Hygienical and Bacteriological Office of the Waffen SS Southwest and contain formal descriptions of the medical tests carried out on the twins. The lists of tests and results help us outline the picture of the medical routine that the twins underwent in Mengele’s laboratories.⁹⁵ Moreover, the Auschwitz archive has a number of important documents that help clarify Spiegel’s role in the camp.⁹⁶

The other set of documents is post-war material mainly from the Yad Vashem Archive in Jerusalem, the International Tracing Service Archive,⁹⁷ the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive in Washington, the archives of the DEGOB (Hungarian

⁹⁴ Christopher Browning, *Collected memories: Holocaust History and Post-War Testimony* (Madison, Wisconsin, 2003), 38.

⁹⁵ APMOB, Records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg Inst./67, 69, 73.

⁹⁶ APMOB, List of Bonuses, Birkenau Men’s Camp, D-Au II-3a.

⁹⁷ The International Tracing Service (ITS) serves the victims of Nazi persecution and their families by documenting the fate of the victims and preserving this information in its archives at Bad Arolsen. Apart from keeping historical records, the ITS processes and traces requests and makes the archive accessible for historical research. The ITS archive stores 26,000 metres of various types of records. For the full mission statement see their website, <<http://www.its-arolsen.org>>.

National Committee for Attending Deportees), the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny) and the Budapest Holocaust Memorial Centre (HDKE).

The YadVashem sources help us reconstruct Spiegel and the twins' journey home. These documents were issued initially by the Red Army to permit Spiegel to travel with the twins. There are additional stamps and comments on these papers, added by different Jewish organizations at various stages on their way home.⁹⁸ The documentation from DEGOB and ITS enables us to trace the steps of some of the twins in the period following the Holocaust. Furthermore, there are letters sent by the twins to Spiegel after having arrived home following their journey together. These letters throw light on their experiences in the immediate post-war period and portray their special relationship with Spiegel and with one another.

The Budapest Holocaust Memorial Centre had provided some essential accounts and documentation from the Auschwitz period and the journey home, the most important being the "Auschwitz Diary" by László Kiss. Kiss was part of the Spiegel group in Birkenau and wrote this diary in May 1945, describing the life of the twins in the camp's hospital. The Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw has further supplied essential documentation regarding the situation among the Jews in the places that the twins passed in Poland on their journey.

A further source used in this thesis, especially for the period between the 1980s and 1990s, is television and newspaper reports and articles, describing gatherings of the twins and the Mengele mock trial, as well as a surprising number of articles written about Spiegel's story.⁹⁹

Oral accounts played a crucial role in this research. These fall into two main categories: the first include video and audio interviews in three archives—YadVashem, the Fortunoff archive at Yale University and the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California.¹⁰⁰ In addition, there are

⁹⁸ These documents are part of a collection given by Spiegel to YadVasem and can be found at YVA, 0.15.H/142.

⁹⁹ The twins possess many of these documents themselves. Peter Somogyi from Pleasantville, New York, has quite an impressive personal archive, which I was able to use.

¹⁰⁰ For a description of the establishment (1982) and methods of the Fortunoff Archive at Yale, which consists of 3,600 video testimonies, see Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, New York, 2006), 107-11. For the establishment (1994) and methods of the Shoah Foundation Institute Archive, which today consists of 52,000 video testimonies, see "About Us" on the website of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute: <<http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/theinterview.php>>.

the testimonies which were given in the Mengele mock trial, and which are located in the YadVashem Archive. The second category of oral testimony includes interviews that I have conducted specifically for this research. The task of locating the living twins whose experiences could be relevant to this story was extremely difficult. Many of them had changed their names and their addresses or had not been in contact with the 'twin social network' since the mid-1980s—or had never been a part of it in the first place. The archives did not reveal their current address, nor did the oral testimonies. It was, furthermore, impossible to know who was still alive. Eventually, thorough research led me to some of the twins, and the face-to-face interviews proved essential in bridging the gaps in the video accounts.

One of the great challenges was deciding who to look for; at first Spiegel seemed to have made the task easy for a future scholar, having noted down a list of the more than thirty twins who had gone with him from Auschwitz to Krakow. However, I soon discovered another list, which he had compiled upon leaving Auschwitz, and the two lists did not fully agree.¹⁰¹ Moreover, as the research progressed it became clear that there had been twins who had not joined Spiegel on the journey for various reasons, but who had been under his supervision in Birkenau and often mentioned him in their testimonies.

The different types of lists and the twins' various encounters with Spiegel are explored in more depth below, but at this point it is worth noting that the oral accounts used in my research include altogether twenty-two testimonies of twins from different archives and eleven interviews which I have conducted with twins. I have additionally conducted a series of interviews with Rachel, Spiegel's wife, an Auschwitz survivor herself, which provided useful material for the chapters regarding his life after the war. Further interviews have been conducted with other family members, friends, neighbours, and with people involved in the twins' gatherings in the 1980s and 1990s.

Oral History: Challenges and Opportunities

According to Raul Hilberg, we can pinpoint two peak periods in the gathering of oral history information regarding the Holocaust, both of which consisted mostly of Jewish testimony: first, during the years 1944-1948, statements were collected in newly liberated France, Poland and Soviet territories. The second surge was in the 1980s and

¹⁰¹ An explanation for the reasons is given in Chapter III and in the Appendix.

1990s,¹⁰² and marked a new age in Holocaust survivors' testimonies as many people wrote their memoirs only after retirement and after their children had grown up.¹⁰³

The use of oral accounts presents the scholar with great challenges as well as opportunities. According to Paul Thompson, the reason for the true distinctiveness of oral history is that it presents itself in an oral form. Voice recording produces a far more reliable and accurate account of an encounter than purely written record. All the exact words used are as they were spoken. Unlike writing, spoken testimony will never be repeated in exactly the same way. This very ambivalence brings it much closer to the human condition.¹⁰⁴ Thompson further points out that the evidence of oral history is also distinctive in being normally retrospective over a longer-time span. Neither contemporary nor historical evidence is a direct reflection of physical facts or behaviour. Facts and events are reported in a way which gives them social meaning. The information provided by interview evidence of relatively recent events, or current situations, can be assumed to lie somewhere between the actual social behaviour and the social expectations or norms of the time.¹⁰⁵

In the following I examine a few major issues regarding oral history which were relevant to this dissertation and which must be addressed in order to understand the methodology applied in it. The first issue of *memory* lies at the core of the challenges presented by oral accounts. Spiegel and the twins recalled events that had happened at least forty years before. Moreover, already back when the events occurred (1944-5), they naturally had different perspectives as they had come from different backgrounds, were of different age, and their positions in the camp were diverse. When interviews go back that far in time, in addition to the basic element of the biological deterioration of memory, there is the possibility of distortions influenced by subsequent changes in values and norms, which perhaps quite unconsciously alter perceptions.¹⁰⁶ It is generally accepted that the memory process depends on that of perception. Immediately after an event occurs, it does seem we can remember a great deal more than later on. But this lasts only for minutes. The process of discarding, which is the counterpart of selection, continues over time. According to Thompson, this clearly

¹⁰² Raul Hilberg, *Sources of Holocaust Research: an Analysis* (Chicago, 2001), 47. Hilberg himself had a lot of reservations about the use of oral history; see *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London, 2005), 7.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York, 2000), 125-6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 128.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 128-9.

presents a problem for oral history. “But the initial discarding is by far the most drastic and violent, and it affects any kind of contemporary witness.”¹⁰⁷

The issue of *trauma*, typical to Holocaust survivors, presents the memory with further challenges. To the survivor, the Holocaust is not ‘past’—it did not end at ‘liberation’; time does not ‘heal all wounds’.¹⁰⁸ In such cases it is difficult to mark the beginning and end of a set of events. “The nature of trauma means the experiences of survivors are resistant to any final narrativization.”¹⁰⁹ It is, therefore, incumbent upon us in determining the credibility of the oral testimony of survivors to take into account the effect of psychological trauma on the testimony. According to Lawrence Langer, testimonies include both story and plot. The story is the chronological narrative and the ‘plot’ is memory combined with details engraved in moments of trauma. Langer claims that the role of the interviewer often appears to be to bring the witness back to the story: “What happened next?” Survivors are often both willing and reluctant to proceed with the chronology.¹¹⁰

Once we accept that memory and its limitations present major obstacles for the oral historian, there are two complementary ways to deal with it. The first is developing methods to evaluate the sources, and the second is acknowledging the subjective nature of oral accounts, which is a challenge but which also lies at the core of the uniqueness and advantages of oral history.

The first issue to be addressed is the credibility of oral interviews. This is especially important for the methodology applied in this dissertation—reconstructive cross-analysis together with a single life-story narrative. In the cross-analysis method “the oral evidence is treated as a quarry in which to construct an argument about patterns of behaviour or events in the past”.¹¹¹ Several steps must be taken in assessing the oral material: the first is checking the internal consistency of each interview; the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 130-1. Thompson here elaborates on the actual biological process that generates memory and its distortion.

¹⁰⁸ Dori Laub and Marjorie Allard, “History, Memory and Truth: Defining the Place of the Survivor”, in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Re-Examined* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1998), 801.

¹⁰⁹ Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 119. In the same vein, we should adopt Henry Greenspan’s notion that everything that survivors say in an interview should be considered part of their recounting. Henry Greenspan, *On listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* (Westport, Conn., 1998), introduction, 12.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT, 1993), 174-5.

¹¹¹ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 271.

second, cross-checking with other sources; and the final stage is placing the evidence in a wider context.¹¹²

The issue of *subjectivity* is eminent in understanding the challenges and opportunities that oral history presents. According to Lynn Abraham, whilst oral history produces useful evidential material in the form of description and factual information, the oral history narrative itself has considerable significance in that it is a way whereby people articulate subjective experiences about the past through the prism of the present.¹¹³ For our matter the question of present and past is essential. As the dissertation consists of interviews from different periods, time and the external environment are critical factors. Spiegel himself had his first comprehensive interview in 1984 in a totally different environment and context than in the 1950s in Israel, and of course the 1940s, when the actual events occurred.

According to oral historian Luisa Passerini: “We should not ignore the fact that the raw material of oral history consists not just of factual statements, but is pre-eminently an expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations but also the dimensions of memory, ideology and subconscious desires.”¹¹⁴ Alistair Thomson presents a powerful example of the impact of the culture and public discourse on oral recollections of the same people in different time spheres in his research on mine diggers who were a part of the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) in the battle of Gallipoli in the ‘Great War’ (WWI). He focused on their narratives during wartime, the post-war period, and the 1980s and 1990s. Thomson’s starting point was his family, which had been a part of the Anzac elite; hence he had been raised upon the myth of heroism of the Anzac in the Gallipoli battle. “My family war myth shows how only some experiences become highlighted in remembering, while others are repressed and silenced. They also reveal how some ‘private’ memories attain public significance, both within the family and beyond.”¹¹⁵

In his research Thomson discovered different narratives that evolved among the mine diggers through time. These diggers were of different class and were confronted with a mixture of private and immediate public memory as well as the general public

¹¹² Ibid. 272-3.

¹¹³ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, 2010), 7.

¹¹⁴ Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge, 1987), 17.

¹¹⁵ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford, 1994), 3.

myth upon their return and through the years. Unlike others, some of them did not embrace the heroic image attributed to the war veterans but instead had bitterly painful recollections. Thomson concluded from their narratives that “our public remembering and private inner stories often seek to compose a safe and necessary personal coherence out of the unresolved, risky and painful pieces of past and present lives”.¹¹⁶ This is the reason we must be aware that every testimony is recorded at a precise moment in time and, as such, may be affected by political and ideological contexts that, like all contexts, are bound to change.¹¹⁷“Yet stories rarely provide complete or satisfactory containment of threatening experiences from the past. Our attempts at composure are often not entirely successful and we are left with unresolved tension and fragmented, contradictory identities.”¹¹⁸

Thomson adds that our memories are risky and painful if they do not fit the public myth, so we try to compose them in a way so as to ensure that they will accord with what is publicly acceptable. Recognition is essential for social and emotional survival; the alternatives of alienation and exclusion may be psychologically devastating.¹¹⁹ This brings us to the subject of the ‘free’ self. According to Abrams, in theories of the self there is a tension between two approaches: the freedom of the individual in action and words and the reliance of the individual upon culture for discourses, models and language. It is in light of this tension between the power of culture and the power of individual agency that the oral historian must analyse the oral accounts.¹²⁰

In the below discussion, which sets the framework in which I evaluated the different meanings—those discussed verbally and the hidden ones in Spiegel’s and the twins recollections—two fundamental methodological points can be highlighted: the first is that, in order to reconstruct the individual memories, I adopted the above-mentioned cultural approach. According to Thomson, the basis of this approach is that

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 10.

¹¹⁷ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 137.

¹¹⁸ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 10.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 11.

¹²⁰ Abrams, 48. Passerini powerfully exemplified this notion in her research regarding the Turin working class in the fascistic era in Italy. Passerini states that “in self-representation, narrative forms are repeated, though not in a deterministic way, by age and gender. The single story-telling strategies variously combine the narrative resources available, including stereotypes, taking account of division of labor and power as well as individual circumstances”; see Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, 17.

there is no simple equation between experience and memory, but rather, memory is a process in which certain experiences 'become' remembered in certain ways. Only a selection of an individual's myriad experiences are recorded in memory and for each of these there are a range of ways in which the experience might be articulated.¹²¹

The second methodological underpinning of this analysis was the notion that the subjective nature of the different recollections ought to be treated not as discrepancies but rather as a reflection of the complex reality that confronted Spiegel and the twins in the Holocaust and its aftermath. Paul Thompson argues that this approach is essential in utilizing oral history to its maximum potential: "oral history brings unexpected rewards to a historian who is prepared to appreciate the complexity with which reality and myth, objective and subjective, are inextricably mixed in all human perception of the world, both individual and collective."¹²²

Up to this point the methodology of using oral accounts was described in generic terms, and references were made to both Spiegel's and his twins' accounts. At this point it seems useful to analyse the methodology distinct to each. The fact that the twins were adults recollecting their childhood experiences is unique and deserves attention, while the fact that Spiegel's figure is approached in this dissertation from a biographical perspective is also methodologically significant.

Child Testimony

Although the general considerations regarding the use of survivor testimony apply also to child testimony, one should bear in mind a number of special problems in relation to the latter category. In the immediate post-war years, child survivors were hardly recognized in the literature.¹²³ The situation has changed since the 1980s, in that the literature of child survivors has significantly expanded. The children, already reaching their fifties and sixties (in the 1990s), experienced an awakening; they began to talk and to meet in gatherings, and there has been a proliferation of books and articles about them and by them.¹²⁴

In an attempt to address the question of using child testimonies in scholarly research, Deborah Dwork has argued that there is an exceptional degree of reliability in

¹²¹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 8.

¹²² Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 135.

¹²³ Paul Valent, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1994), 277.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 110.

the great majority of such accounts. She raises the issue of trauma but sees it as an 'advantage' because traumatic events are more vividly remembered.¹²⁵ Another challenge in this context is mentioned by Paul Valent, who argues that even when memories are retrieved, they are associated with the child's 'double world' in the traumatic situation. Valent states that it is only when there is full liberty to explore the personal judgements and meanings frozen within the situations that memories may display their full emotional impact and allow true integration.¹²⁶

A further challenge for the historian is that the children, many of whom told the story forty years later, perceived their experiences as unimaginable to others;¹²⁷ they simply did not believe that people would be capable of grasping their story. Nevertheless, many survivors felt a hunger for memories, holding on to them as if to a lifeline. Reading, talking to others and visiting the scenes of wartime experiences triggered a flood of memories. The role of the historian is to subject these testimonies to theoretical analysis and logical interpretation, that is, to check them in a standard way, in order to be able to use them.¹²⁸

The fact that many twins have told their stories several times in the past thirty years was an advantage and an obstacle at the same time. On the one hand, such stories were well organized and recollected, as the survivors had to make an effort to make sense of their experiences and to try to remember as much as they could. On the other hand, they presented two main challenges: firstly, when the interviewer tried to ask questions which did not relate to the general theme that the twin had discussed in his story on previous occasions, some were reluctant to go down that path. Secondly, in order to fill the gaps some twins adapted elements of the stories of others, thus making it difficult to know whether certain details were in fact recalled by several survivors or were merely recycled.

The solution lay with the diversity of the accounts used in my thesis. Although the twins were separated by time, geography and cultural context, their narratives of the main events and of Spiegel's role as their protector were very similar.¹²⁹ A case in

¹²⁵ Dwork, *Children with a Star*, 40.

¹²⁶ Valent, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust*, 282-3.

¹²⁷ Dwork, *Children with a Star*, 34-5, and Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 136-7.

¹²⁸ Dwork, *Children with a Star*, 34-7.

¹²⁹ This phenomenon, only to a much greater extent (292 testimonies), is mentioned by Browning regarding his research of the Starachowice labour camp. See *Remembering Survival*, 4-5. Browning also points out that the common assumption that an early testimony is more

point is the above-mentioned unique recollection by László Kiss, a twin who had been under Spiegel's supervision. Written down in May 1945, Kiss's narrative resembled in its main elements the testimony of others from the 1980s and later.¹³⁰ Another important document is the account given by István and József Laufer, in September 1945, which also resembled the twins' later narratives.¹³¹ In addition, there were the recollections by those twins who had stayed in Hungary and did not participate in the gatherings in Israel and the USA. A further source was Spiegel's initial testimony, which he gave in the early 1980s at the request of the Israeli police, and a few other testimonies from the early 1980s that were recorded before the tidal wave of gatherings and testimonies. Finally, we have the recollections of Yoel Alon, who had been a member of Spiegel's group and who had distanced himself from all gatherings or stories told by twins throughout the years.¹³² All of the above accounts bore a resemblance to one another, thus making it possible to draw a detailed picture of the events that had taken place in Auschwitz and its aftermath.

In general the twins have found it more difficult to remember the journey home because of the chaotic circumstances surrounding it. Nevertheless, there has emerged a consistent narrative recounting the main stages of the journey, and the documents issued along the way, as well as the letters sent by the twins to Spiegel after arriving home, have filled most of the gaps.

Regarding the post-war period there were two methodological challenges. One was the difficulty of reconstructing Spiegel's thoughts and feelings because he barely spoke about his Holocaust experience. The second challenge had to do with the limitations of language and representation used by the twins and especially by Spiegel,

reliable than, and preferred over, later ones is not always valid. In his book he discovered that sensitive issues such as rape and revenge killing were discussed more frequently in the later testimonies. See *ibid.* 9, and Browning, *Collected Memories*, 47.

¹³⁰ Kiss wrote down his recollections on the request of his uncle after having returned from Auschwitz to Budapest, and named it "Auschwitz Diary". Today it is held at the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest (Holokauszt Emlékközpont); *Auschwitznapló*, Budapest, 20 May 1945, ref. no. 2011.167.1.

¹³¹ Account of István and József Laufer, DEGOB (National Committee of Care for the Deported), Székesfehérvár, 21 Nov. 1945, Protocol no. 3564. (The original document is located in the archive at the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest.)

¹³² Alon, a 9-year-old child named Karl Brichta at the time, would become an Israeli diplomat after the war and serve as ambassador to his native country, Hungary, in the mid-1990s. He totally isolated himself from the twins and their gatherings or recollections, talking in an organized fashion about his experiences for the first time in an interview by the author in Jerusalem, 2 January 2012.

which had to be translated to the present world but which described a totally different entity comprised of totally different values and norms. These issues were not only methodological but also stood at the core of the third question researched in this thesis, namely, Spiegel's post-war self-perception as a former prisoner functionary and the twins' saviour—all within a changing cultural environment.

The solution to these challenges was to use accounts given by those in Spiegel's immediate environment that described his behaviour and demeanour. The thesis further portrays a few significant events which were essential in understanding Spiegel's difficult position. Regarding the last period of his life from the 1980s onwards, his accounts and interviews were the main sources for analysing his thoughts. This latter point leads us directly to the issue of the biographical approach used in the dissertation.

Writing a Biography and its Challenges

The classical distinction between history and biography and the greater importance accorded to history in the classic world were generally accepted until the end of the seventeenth century. From then on this notion was challenged and biography became a recognized genre within the historical field. Nevertheless, the low status of biography and the scepticism surrounding it remained dominant until the last few decades, when a 'biographical turn' could be detected. Until then, the debate over the capacity of biography to provide a full and sophisticated interpretation of the past leaned heavily towards the sceptics.¹³³

In the 1980s and 1990s the similarities between microhistory and biography were becoming evident. In both, an individual's life came to be seen as able to shed light on whole groups who had tended to be ignored by historians in the past. In the last decade the new and expanded sense of the importance of biography within history has become evident in some general works exploring the nature and practice of history. It has been recognized that biography has the capacity to cut across a number of different

¹³³ Of course this notion is a simplified one as modern biography and the attitudes towards it have evolved since the 17th century. For a full description of the history of biography, see Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (New York, 2010), 7-26.

kinds of historical fields and approaches and to bring them together in ways that other historical approaches cannot.¹³⁴

When writing his book *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest*, Paul A. Levine claimed that “it would be both folly and distortion of history to claim that Wallenberg’s own personality did not play a decisive role in shaping not only the course of his life, but also of the historic choices he made in Budapest . . . even the political historian must recognize that history is shaped not only by events; it is also shaped by individuals.”¹³⁵ Levine’s argument emphasizes the importance of the biographical background of individuals in many historical situations.

Levine—like David Crowe, who wrote about Oskar Schindler and his motives, or Hillel Levine, who researched the deeds of Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese diplomat who saved thousands of Jews in Lithuania, or others who wrote about Holocaust rescuers—discussed at some point the inner motives and soul of the rescuers.¹³⁶ Whether they had a broad range of sources or a narrow one, at the stage of analysis they engaged in psychological and sociological assessments in their effort to answer these biographical questions. This task was part of the endeavour to write the story of Zvi Spiegel and the twins.

According to feminist historian Paula Backscheider, the main, and most difficult, challenge in any biography is precisely this, namely, how best to understand and portray the personality of a subject and find the appropriate form for depicting a life. On this question her own views changed; while she began with the assumption that all biographers should have a theory of personality which includes insights from development psychology, she ended up rejecting this position. The demands of biography as literary work, the dynamic nature of the relationship between the biographer and his or her subject, and the many ways in which insights into a

¹³⁴ Ibid. 24-5.

¹³⁵ Paul A. Levine, *Raoul Wallenberg In Budapest: Myth, History and Holocaust* (London, 2010), 36.

¹³⁶ See David M. Crowe, *Oskar Schindler: The Untold Account of his Life, Wartime Activities, and the Story Behind the List* (Oxford, 2004). Hillel Levine, *In Search of Sugihara: The Elusive Japanese Diplomat who Risked his Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust* (New York, 1996). Another example of a biographical book regarding a rescuer in the Holocaust is Enrico Deaglio’s *The Banality of Goodness: The Story of Giorgio Perlasca* (London, 1998), which tells the story of the Italian businessman who pretended to be a Spanish diplomat in summer 1944 in Budapest, hiding thousands of Jews in Spanish extraterritorial buildings. In the latter book the author had the rare advantage of being able to interview his biographical hero, thus limiting speculation, but not avoiding it completely in his need to assess his protagonist’s words.

personality might be derived from that relationship as well as the numerous different ways in which a life can be read and written, made her reject her earlier views as she came to feel that single development theory was adequate to meet all the demands that a biography required.¹³⁷

Barbara Caine complements this notion by adding that biographers might need to establish the identity of their subject, but there are so many social and historical issues concerning what their own world might allow a person to be, as to make a single focus on personality inadequate.¹³⁸ In that context the biographer has to be aware of the dynamics and unpredictable nature of a life story. According to Simone Lässig, sociological research has demonstrated that a life can hardly be planned, that only few biographies are the result of intent, how deeply individual courses of life can be shaped and changed by epochal uncertainties and external, political reputes, and to what extent “biographical meaning” and intentional action are constructed or inferred only in retrospect.¹³⁹

With regard to her latter statement, Lässig claims that people portrayed should not be understood as having emerged out of themselves, but as part of the social group(s) in which they were educated or into which they were elevated.¹⁴⁰ Mark Roseman agrees with Lässig but claims that the situation is far more complex when writing a biography of a Holocaust survivor. For Roseman, contextual biography means that a subject can be illuminated by reference to his or her context. But as normally understood, it implies a reasonably stable relationship between context and subject. In the case of a survivor, there are at least three sets of context, those before the Holocaust, those during, and those after. The end of the war in particular constituted a dramatic reversal of the previous conditions of experience. For the first time it was possible to

¹³⁷ Paula Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (New York, 2001), xiv. According to Caine (*Biography and History*, 91), those who didn't give up the idea of a specific theory of personality are mainly psychoanalysts who claim a close connection between biography and their field. For one of the landmark attempts at writing psychohistory, see Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (Norton, 1958). For a major critique of psychohistory, see David E. Stannard, *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (New York, 1980).

¹³⁸ Caine, *Biography and History*, 91.

¹³⁹ Simone Lässig, “Introduction”, in Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York, 2008), 7.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

communicate openly about what had happened.¹⁴¹ The persecution was past, but the past became a persecutor. The various diasporas where the survivors arrived constituted greatly differing remembering communities and contexts. As a result, memories were reshaped or articulated in particular ways, and the later context reshaped the earlier biography.¹⁴²

In describing the story of Spiegel in the Holocaust and its aftermath, this dissertation relies heavily on historical resources, whether documents or other artefacts or oral interviews and accounts from different periods. The dominant component in analysing Spiegel's deeds is the above-mentioned contextualized biography, which is at times interwoven with an attempt to understand his motives and personality.

The challenge was in unfolding as many layers as possible in the story, detecting sources around the world, whether human or archival ones. Eventually the process of uncovering this specific history led me to an enormous amount of material, sufficient to fully reconstruct the narrative of Spiegel and the twins. In order to finally answer the research questions the challenge was to reconcile this vast material and the numerous insights of others regarding Spiegel with the biographical facets of his character. This resulted in an analysis primarily based on a body of historical sources interwoven with reasonable sociological and psychological assessments, as explained below.

Chapter Layout

In the thesis Spiegel's life is divided into six main periods, according to the main landmarks of his life, and the chapters reflect this division. Chapter I describes his childhood and life up until deportation to Auschwitz. Spiegel spent most of his life before the war in Munkács, Sub-Carpathian Rus'. The chapter discusses the unique atmosphere of Jewish life in the region under Czechoslovakian rule between the two world wars.

I draw an outline of life in the Spiegel family, as well as in the broader context of Munkács, in order to examine the background that influenced Spiegel's character, values, traditions, and moral vision. In 1938, Spiegel was drafted to the Czechoslovakian army. This was a critical period in the region's existence as control shifted from the

¹⁴¹ Mark Roseman, "Contexts and Contradictions: Writing the Biography of a Holocaust Survivor", in Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York, 2008), 211.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Czechoslovakians to the Hungarians, who were later to become Nazi allies. Spiegel would then become a Hungarian soldier and after the outbreak of World War II served in the Hungarian army's labour units. The chapter concludes with Spiegel's return home from labour service, only to share the general fate of the entire Jewish community in Sub-Carpathian Rus' after March 1944.

Chapter II describes Spiegel's arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau and his appointment as the 'twins' father'. In this chapter everyday camp life is presented as experienced by the young male twins of Lager BIIf. The thesis describes the development of the special relationship between Spiegel and the child twins, and between the children themselves. Most of the twins' time in Birkenau was spent waiting to be summoned to the medical experiments conducted by Mengele and his staff. I explore the nature of these experiments, their effect on the children, and Spiegel's role as the middleman between Mengele and the twins.

The third chapter begins with the attempt to describe in detail the experience of this unusual group of children, housed only a stone's throw away from the crematoria of Birkenau. It continues with the critical period of September-October 1944. At that time a traumatic selection took place in the twins' barrack, and the younger children were taken to be murdered in the gas chambers. I examine Spiegel's pivotal role during this tragic event and the important effects of the selection on Spiegel and the twins in the aftermath. The final part of the chapter describes the liquidation of Auschwitz, liberation of the camp and Spiegel's decision to accompany the boys home.

Chapter IV focuses on this unique journey, characterized by the severe conditions of a harsh Polish winter, a hostile environment, lack of transportation, dreadful physical conditions and a lack of certainty as to what lay ahead once they arrived home. Although what the group went through is very difficult to describe, I follow them throughout most of the journey and include the chronology, the experiences and their state of mind crossing thousands of miles in devastating conditions. The chapter continues with the arrival of Spiegel and the twins at their old homes, and how, confronted for the first time with the outcome of the Jewish tragedy and similar to other Holocaust survivors, they had to begin a transition from their old life into a new one.

A few years later Spiegel, like many survivors, found himself in the new State of Israel. The fifth chapter describes his efforts to re-establish his life while repressing the

past. In this period Spiegel led a dual existence, living a seemingly normal life with his family in Tel-Aviv and working as an accountant at a theatre on the one hand, and being constantly haunted by his Auschwitz experience on the other. This period was characterized by painful incidents within Israeli society regarding Jewish functionaries at the camps. The chapter describes these affairs and their effects on Spiegel's self-perception, along with the effects his community and family had on his apprehensions and self-rehabilitation efforts.

Chapter VI begins with the transition phase that Spiegel experienced on his way to full exposure. This phase followed the dramatic changes within Israeli society in its perception of the Holocaust, from the Eichmann trial all the way to the Six Day and Yom Kippur Wars. By the end of the 1970s Spiegel was ready to tell his story, even though the first instance of him doing so happened by coincidence.

In 1979 the Israeli police, who were working on the Mengele case, approached Spiegel for information about his memories of the infamous doctor. There, for the first time, Spiegel recounted his story, which was published in 1981 in *Life Magazine* in the USA.¹⁴³ As soon as the story was out, several twins identified Spiegel, told their story in detail and acknowledged his role as their leader and saviour.

Chapter VI continues with a description of the 1980s, which saw a flood of Holocaust testimonies in general, and within the twin survivors' community in particular. The pivotal event that stimulated the resurgence of memory among the twins to an even greater extent was the Mengele mock trial, which took place in Jerusalem in 1985. The chapter ends with a description of the last years of Spiegel's life, until his death in 1993. In that period his story was out in the open; he was being mentioned in books and newspapers articles and was visited on a regular basis by some of the twins.

I conclude my thesis with a discussion of the lessons and legacy of Spiegel's story. While it is difficult to draw any general conclusions from such a unique story of extraordinary circumstances, Spiegel's figure nevertheless represents a shared human virtue, having acted in the darkest of realities on the loftiest of moral principles. It is my hope that his story will contribute a new piece to the mosaic of this precious human phenomenon

¹⁴³ David M. Friend, "A Scream from a Fiery Pit", *Life Magazine* (June, 1981), 49.

Chapter I

Between Tranquillity and War—The Early Life of Zvi Spiegel

Ernst (Ernő) Zvi and Magda Spiegel were born on 5 January 1915, in the midst of World War I. In light of the war situation their mother, Sarah Spiegel, had been convinced by her family to leave her hometown of Munkács and give birth in Budapest.¹ The Jews and non-Jews of Munkács alike fled the city in large numbers, first in 1914 and then in 1915, as a result of the approach of the Tsarist (Russian) army;² the city was not considered a safe place, especially for a pregnant woman carrying twins. Sarah's husband, Israel, was by then in Franz Joseph's army, fighting for the Habsburg Empire.³ After a few months in Budapest Sarah decided to return with her babies to Munkács in Sub-Carpathian Rus', where most of the greater Spiegel family lived.

I. Childhood in Munkács

Sub-Carpathian Rus' is located in east central Europe on the southern slopes and in the adjacent valleys of the Carpathian Mountains. Until 1919 the region was a part of the multinational Kingdom of Hungary, lying on the north-eastern edge of the country. It gave home to a multiplicity of ethnic groups, primarily Rusyns (63%), but also Magyars (15.4%), Jews (12.8%), Czechs (2.9%), Slovaks (1.8%), Germans (1.8%), Romanians (1.7%), Roma (0.9%) and others.⁴ Historically the majority Rusyns had lived in small villages and worked in agriculture: in 1910 89.6% of Rusyns were farmers, shepherds or woodcutters.⁵ It was a poor region with high rates of illiteracy.⁶ It had been divided by the Hungarian government into four main districts: Ung, Ugocsa, Bereg and Máramaros, each consisting of

¹ Magda Zelikovich, interview in Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, video recording HVT-3568, Yale University Library, Tel Aviv, 17 June 1993 (hereafter [FVA]).

² Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' and Mukachevo—1848-1948* (New York, 2007), 108.

³ This was not a rare phenomenon as all in all some 300,000 Jews served in the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I, of them 25,000 were officers; see Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology* (Detroit, 1996), 459.

⁴ These figures are based on the 1930 census carried out by the Czechoslovakian government. See Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848-1948* (London, 1978), 15.

⁵ Ibid. 14-15.

⁶ In 1910 only 22% of the Rusyns over the age of 6 could read and write; see *ibid.* 15.

expansive rural areas and a few towns. The largest ethnic groups in the urban parts—and those who made up the petty bourgeoisie and the class of civil servants—were the Jews, Magyars and, in the twentieth century, the Czechs and the Russians.⁷

Munkács was the largest city in Sub-Carpathian Rus', located at the centre of the region in the Latorytsia River valley. The Jews made up almost half of the population in Munkács (11,313 of 26,102 in 1930),⁸ and although many were living in poverty, they played an important part in the economic life of the city. Until World War I the Jews of Munkács (like the rest of Carpathian Jewry) were segregated from the outer world and had no significant ties to the Jews in the rest of Hungary, who were more assimilated. The Jewish Enlightenment had not made its way to Sub-Carpathian Rus'. There were limited influences that penetrated into the Jewish community, most notable among them being the Hasidic movement, which had arrived from Galicia.⁹

The onset of World War I caused great difficulties for all Sub-Carpathian residents, Jews and non-Jews alike. The population was hit by epidemics, and there was a decline in the male population, which in turn meant the growth of the number of widows and orphans, many of whom were Jews.¹⁰ It was only in 1920, after Sub-Carpathian Rus' had changed hands a few times, that the region finally came under full Czechoslovakian rule.¹¹

The outcome of the war was especially dramatic for the Jews of Munkács and its surroundings as they were confronted for the first time on a large scale with the challenges of modernity. The rise of nationalism in general and of Zionism in particular; the strong communist presence in the region; growing Jewish involvement in public life with an assortment of Czechoslovak and local parties, and the fact that their economy, which had been fully integrated into the Hungarian one, now had to adjust to the modern Czechoslovak system, are just a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Raz Segal, *Days of Ruin: The Jews of Munkács during the Holocaust* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 2011), 124. In Munkács records mentioned Jews already back in the middle of the 17th century, as they were needed by the local administrators of the new ruler of the Bereg region, Count Lothar Franz Schoenborn. Herman Dicker, *Piety and Perseverance: Jews from the Carpathian Mountains* (New York, 1981), 5.

⁹ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 7.

¹⁰ Ibid. 106.

¹¹ Magocsi, *The Shaping of National Identity*, 85-102.

few examples of the new reality that the Jews of Munkács had to face.¹² This was the environment into which Zvi and Magda Spiegel were born. Their father, Israel Spiegel, was an accountant in a distillery in Munkács, and their mother stayed at home, as most women of the traditional community did at the time. Their family enjoyed relative prosperity, especially in comparison to the poverty surrounding them.¹³ “In Munkács it was a big deal for a Jew to have a permanent job. The situation in the Sub-Carpathian Rus’ was very bad. People were very poor. But our situation, thank God, was not too bad; one could say it was even good,” recalled Zvi Spiegel.¹⁴

After a difficult start that saw the constant fluctuation of officials positioned in the region, the Jews of Munkács learned to recognize and value the benefits afforded them by the Czechoslovakian state and they soon became its loyal citizens and advocates within Sub-Carpathian Rus’.¹⁵ The Spiegel family also subscribed to these sentiments as Israel Spiegel, like others, opened up to new ideas while maintaining his Orthodox beliefs and lifestyle. First of all, after elementary school he sent his daughter Magda to the trade college in Munkács, which was a non-Jewish institution serving the general public.¹⁶ A year later Zvi followed Magda and began his studies at the college. However, Israel’s tolerance of new ideas had a limit, and when he saw Magda escorted home from school by a non-Jewish boy, it was the last time she ever set foot in the college.¹⁷

¹² See Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 177-8, 192-4, and Aryeh Sole, “Subcarpathian Ruthenia: 1918-1938” in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. I, (Philadelphia, 1968-1984), 126. According to Sole, this was a slow transition from the feudal capitalistic system of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as two-thirds of the Jewish population of the region still lived in rural areas at the beginning of the 1920s, and their main income was from agriculture. Later on they benefited from the introduction of more efficient methods of farming; see *ibid.*

¹³ In the words of the wealthy publisher Robert Maxwell, who was of Sub-Carpathian origin: “Ruthenia—I have not come across any greater poverty in the world”. See Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 219. For another description of life in a middle-class family in Munkács, see the memoir of Gustav Schonfeld, *Absence of Closure* (2008), 12-65.

¹⁴ Zvi Spiegel, interview in Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, video recording HVT-3830, Yale University Library, Tel Aviv, 11 January 1993.

¹⁵ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 132

¹⁶ Magda Zelikovich, FVA. Generally Jews were dominant in the educational institutions of the region at the time. For example, in 1920-1 Jews comprised 72 per cent of the students of the province but only 10 per cent of the total population; see Sole, “Subcarpathian Ruthenia”, 144.

¹⁷ As recalled by her son, Israel Zelikovich, in an interview by the author, Haifa, 24 August 2011.

As for Zvi, it was apparent that he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps and become an accountant. This was the period where he first explored his natural gift for dealing with numbers and his flair for order and punctuality. After a few years he graduated the college, having successfully fulfilled all the requirements for the final exams.¹⁸ Zvi was not only interested in numbers, which is reflected in the fact that once he even enrolled in a dancing school, to the despair of his father, who eventually talked him out of it.¹⁹

The fact that this was an era of transition in Munkács is most apparent from the establishment of the Hebrew Gymnasium. This was the jewel in the crown of Munkács Jewry "and considered an achievement of all Czechoslovak Jews and a kind of identity card".²⁰ The establishment of the Gymnasium was a part of the strengthening of the Zionist movement in Munkács. But as mentioned above, it still remained a traditional community and a stronghold of the hasidic movement.²¹ At the time of the establishment of the Gymnasium in 1924, the rabbi of Munkács was Hayyim Eleazar Shapira, a powerful and ultra-conservative figure. Rabbi Shapira felt that he needed to fight modernization, the most threatening manifestation of which was the Zionist movement in his eyes.²² When on 11 August 1924 the cornerstone for the new Hebrew Gymnasium was laid, Rabbi Shapira gathered his Hasidim in his synagogue and proclaimed a ban on the entire staff of the new school, as well as on the parents planning to send their children there.²³

Among those parents were Israel and Sarah Spiegel. Israel Spiegel was intrigued by the ideas of Zionism and he decided that his two younger boys, Dov (Tibi) and Yehuda, would go to the Hebrew Gymnasium.²⁴ What is interesting is that when Zvi reached the appropriate age in 1927, the Gymnasium already

¹⁸ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

¹⁹ This detail was related by Magda to her son Israel. See Israel Zelikovich, interview by the author, 2011.

²⁰ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 167. For more about the history of the Hebrew Gymnasium see Sarah Udi, "The History of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Munkács" (Heb.), MA thesis, Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 1972. At first the authorities did not approve of the Gymnasium, as they did not believe that studying modern topics in Hebrew was feasible; see *ibid.* 57.

²¹ In the Gymnasium the pupils were exposed to a much larger extent to Western culture, as described by Peretz Litman, who studied in the Hebrew Gymnasium, in his memoir *The Boy from Munkács* (Heb.) (1996).

²² Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 146-7.

²³ *Ibid.* 173.

²⁴ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

existed, but he was nevertheless sent to the trade school. This can be attributed to a few possible reasons; first, since he was the oldest son, it was his responsibility to study his father's profession and possibly take over his position one day. Second, like other Jews in this traditional community, Israel Spiegel may have needed some time to act in the face of the powerful Orthodox forces of the Jewish establishment. Eventually he did so and paid a price for it, as recalled by Zvi: "in Munkács there were fanatics. My poor father, he didn't lie. And the rabbi of Munkács cursed him for sending my brothers to the Hebrew Gymnasium."²⁵

All in all these were good times for the Spiegel family. The four siblings were very close to one another, their father was successful in his job and there was a general sense of cautious openness to new ideas in complementing the Orthodox way of life. This attitude corresponded with that of many Jews in the town, where Jewish life was thriving in the interwar period. There were various voluntary organizations, a Jewish section in the municipal library, a Jewish sports club established by the Maccabi Association, and a publishing house called Nekudah; the community was also visited by many important Jewish figures.²⁶

In 1936 the two eldest children in the Spiegel family, Magda and Zvi, were moving on. Magda married Nachman Zelikovich, a yeshiva student from Slovakia. They soon had a son, Shmuel, and lived close to Magda's parents while making their living from Nachman's sweet factory. Zvi, like other Jewish men in the area, was drafted to the Czechoslovakian army, a fact that would in part prepare him for his future role, which back then he would never even dream of.

Unlike his father's generation, where many Jews had tried to avoid going to the Hungarian army, Zvi and others were willing to serve the Czechoslovakian state. After he was drafted the authorities found out that Zvi had graduated trade school with distinction, and he was soon sent to the officers' academy.²⁷ In the officers' course Zvi stood out with his command of languages and his general broad education and intelligence. Even though he had to endure harassment for

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 167-8. These important figures included Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the establisher of the Zionist revisionist movement, Berel Katzenelson, a leader of the Yishuv in Palestine, the famous author Max Brod and others; see *ibid.* 168.

²⁷ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

his Jewish background in the form of occasional antisemitic comments, he looked back on this as a meaningful experience in his life.²⁸

Zvi finished officers' course and was sent home. When he was next called up for duty, the situation had dramatically changed, in the region as well as in the army. The relatively quiet period of Czechoslovakian rule was over and Zvi, together with all the other Sub-Carpathian Jews, was now to pay for their co-operation with the former regime as the Hungarians once again took control. This meant that upon his return Zvi was no longer a soldier of the Czechoslovakian army but of the Hungarian one.

II. In the Hungarian Labour Units

The year of 1938 brought about a dramatic change in the political and social setup of Sub-Carpathian Rus'. The changes were initially a result of the Munich agreement, signed on 30 September 1938, that forced Czechoslovakia to give up the Sudetenland—the border areas in Bohemia and Moravia inhabited by three million ethnic Germans—to Nazi Germany. This was the first step in the destruction of Czechoslovakia:²⁹ it became a federal state and after a few months of negotiations Sub-Carpathian Rus' gained autonomous status within it. Later Hungary demanded the cession of some parts of Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Rus' that were inhabited primarily by Magyars. On 2 November 1938 Germany and Italy decided that one-third of the area of autonomous Sub-Carpathian Rus' would be annexed to Hungary, including Munkács.³⁰

In the same year the general situation of Jews in Hungary began to radically deteriorate. 1938 represented the beginning of anti-Jewish measures in the country. On 29 May the parliament approved the legislation of Law number 15 (better known as the First Jewish Law) that limited the proportion of Jews in the Hungarian economy and professions to 20 per cent.³¹ In 1939, the Second

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Magocsi, *The Shaping of National Identity*, 237.

³⁰ This was a result of the First Vienna Award (the Second Vienna Award was the acquisition of northern Transylvania), whereby Hungary acquired from Czechoslovakia a territory of 4,630 square miles with a total population of 1,075,600; see Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, vol. 1 (New York, 1981), 130.

³¹ Nathaniel Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews: Policy and Legislation 1920-1943* (Heb.) (Ramat Gan, 1981), 104. For the full background to the First Jewish Law see *ibid.* 94-113.

Jewish Law was adopted, defining who was a Jew for the purposes of the law and restricting further the economic as well as political and academic participation of Hungarian Jews.³²

Despite the anti-Jewish legislation, the reaction of most of the Jews of Munkács to the return of Hungarian rule was positive. This was especially true for those who remembered with nostalgia the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.³³ But soon enough it became apparent that this Hungarian regime had a different attitude towards the Jews.³⁴ In general life went on, but accompanied by harsh measures such as the prohibition of kosher slaughter and the closure of Jewish educational institutions, including the Hebrew Gymnasium, as well as physical harassment.³⁵

The new and hostile environment, stood in stark contrast to the earlier experiences of the Jews of Munkács. As part of the anti-Jewish laws, many Jewish business owners had to give up their business and found themselves working for non-Jews, primarily their own former employees, who had now become the owners.³⁶ Many of the economic problems within the Jewish community were caused by the constant decrease in the number of men as more and more of them were drafted to the Hungarian army's labour units, especially from the summer of 1941 onwards.³⁷ The Spiegel family was greatly affected, as by 1942 all of the men except Israel, the father, had left. Magda's husband, Nachman, and Tibi were serving in labour units; Yehuda, the youngest brother, had managed to flee to Budapest and was staying there under a false identity, and Zvi had by then been

³² The consequences of the new law were mainly economic. Figures for the actual number of Jews who were practically affected vary, but it is estimated that 40,000 positions changed hands. For a detailed description of events preceding the passing of the law and its aftermath, see Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews*, 114-57.

³³ Segal, *Days of Ruin*, 31.

³⁴ For a description of different Jewish recollections of the annexation of the region to Hungary see Ilana Rosen, *"In Auschwitz we Blew the Shofar": Carpatho-Russian Jews Remember the Holocaust* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 2004), 33-42.

³⁵ See *ibid.* 36. For a full description of the anti-Jewish measures see Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 251-63.

³⁶ Segal, *Days of Ruin*, 35.

³⁷ Another significant event that occurred in the summer of 1941 and further deteriorated the situation of Jews in Hungary was the adoption of the Race Protection Law by Parliament. The law determined who was a Jew and banned interreligious marriages between non-Jews and Jews. The significance of the law was that for the first time it affected 100,000 people who were in effect non-Jews, but had Jewish descent, many of whom were now defined as Jews even though members of a Christian church. See, Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews*, 180.

gone for a few years; having been deprived of his rank as officer in the army he later joined the labour units. “With the political change in 1938 my officers’ base was transferred to Michalovce. We were all very happy to receive the Hungarian army officers’ badge”, recalled Zvi. But it was not long before there was a change in attitude: “eventually only the non-Jews received their badges. I didn’t get mine, because you needed to present proof that you were not Jewish. They told me they had made a mistake by accepting a Jew to officers’ school.”³⁸

As part of the anti-Jewish measures within the army it was decided in April 1939 that all Jews, primarily officers, would be dismissed from active service.³⁹ Soon after this Spiegel experienced a further decline in his status, to the point where he found himself in what he described as a “work camp”.⁴⁰ This was the beginning of a chain of traumatic experiences—his service in the labour service unit.

The idea of a labour service system was conceived in 1938, and came into effect in 1939. According to Article 230 all Hungarian citizens aged 21 and over who were classified as unsuitable for military service could be obliged to take part in “public labour service”.⁴¹ In fact, this became a decree aimed at “unreliable” elements, among them Jews and communists. Although the instructions issued by the minister of defence on 23 September 1939 were designed to enforce the anti-Jewish laws within the armed forces, the status of Jews in both the military and the labour service system remained fundamentally the same until April 1941.⁴² According to Spiegel during this period there was a rise in antisemitic harassment by Hungarian soldiers: “the non-Jews would constantly insult me. I was nicknamed the ‘genius’. This didn’t help me as I would answer someone’s question and would immediately be insulted by the others.”⁴³

³⁸ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

³⁹ Randolph L. Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System: 1939-1945* (New York, 1977), 6-7.

⁴⁰ This was probably a kind of ‘training camp’ and a stationary stage before the incorporation of the labour unit into their actual assignment. For a description of such a “training camp” see the memoir of Asher Shfray, *From Breakdown to Captivity: My Story in the Labour Unit in Nazi Hungary, 1943-1945* (Heb.) (Bnei Brak, 1989), 21-9.

⁴¹ Ibid. 5.

⁴² Ibid. 11. Jewish labour servicemen were already segregated from non-Jews and organized in separate units back on 2 December 1940. These discriminatory measures lacked any legal basis, which was subsequently supplied in the Executive Decree of 1941, see Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews*, 203.

⁴³ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

After Hungary's entry into the war against Yugoslavia in April 1941 the labour service was transformed and the status of Jewish recruits changed radically for the worse.⁴⁴ This was reflected not only in the more aggressive antisemitic attitude of many of the commissioned officers and guards attached to the field companies, but also in the increasingly blatant discriminatory treatment of Jews on the official level. They were, among other things, gradually deprived of their uniform and compelled to wear the telltale yellow or white armbands, which made them open targets for abuse.⁴⁵

Zvi Spiegel personally experienced this deterioration: at the end of 1941 he was assigned to a mobile labour unit based in the Ukraine. The conditions under which the Jewish servicemen worked and lived in Ukraine were especially bad due to the maltreatment and vicious antisemitic attitude of most of the company commanders and guards, but also because of the SS units who were rampaging in the area.⁴⁶ These atrocities appear in Spiegel's recollections as he regularly mentioned the constant abuse: "we had an officer who began every morning with a series of beatings. Any mistake would entail immediate punishment. He was infamous, his name was Almási."⁴⁷

Spiegel lists a few different work locations from the period that he spent in the labour service from the end of 1941. Among these were Ruda-Krasnaya, Novgorod and Kiev, from where Spiegel claims they walked all the way to Chernobyl.⁴⁸ The distance between the latter two cities and the former two is about 700 kilometres, a fact that can give us an indication of the length of the journey that these servicemen had to undertake under harassments and physical abuse, suffering from a shortage of food and harsh weather.

After about five years in the army and a year and a half in labour service in the Ukraine, Spiegel was finally released from duty and was allowed to return to his hometown, Munkács. He arrived home, exhausted and overwhelmed by the experience, in September 1943, just before the festival of Rosh Hashanah.⁴⁹ In his recollections Spiegel referred to the period in the Ukraine as physically

⁴⁴ Ibid. 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 19.

⁴⁶ Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System*, 32.

⁴⁷ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

⁴⁸ Zvi Spiegel, transcript of interview by Elisheva Shaul, Yad Vashem Archive, 033C/82, Jerusalem, 1984 (hereafter YVA), and FVA interview.

⁴⁹ Spiegel, YVA.

worse than Auschwitz, which may indicate the condition he was in upon returning to Munkács. There he was reunited with his sister Magda and his parents, and enjoyed a relatively quiet period until March 1944, when things changed forever.

At this point it is worth noting a few facts about Spiegel's early life which could be of assistance later on in analysing his actions in Auschwitz and its aftermath. First, it is important to take into account the warm family environment in which he grew up. It was a tightly knit family: ties between the siblings were extremely strong and the house as a whole was a haven of security, love and affection.⁵⁰ Second, his was a tolerant family, although conservative at times. This sheds some light on the values with which Spiegel was brought up, and which were quite liberal in comparison to those of the general surroundings. It is important to note, at the same time, that political awareness in the house was basic at most. Third, and most relevant to our subject, was the fact that, from early on, Spiegel was educated to respect authority. This explains why he followed in the footsteps of his father to study at the trade college while his brothers were sent to the Hebrew Gymnasium. In addition he strove to please his superiors, performing in a meticulous and precise fashion, both at the college as well as in the army. This brings us to the next point—the fact that, having served in the army, Spiegel was well acquainted with, and had learned to appreciate, military discipline and order, as he would state in a later comment. This point is crucial as, unlike his brothers, who had trained as teachers, Zvi had no experience with children but was aware of ways to 'educate' subordinates.

Finally, it is important to take a closer look at the years that Spiegel spent in the labour units. Unlike many other Hungarian Jews, who arrived in Auschwitz after having been subjected to full oppression for a relatively short period, Spiegel (like others in the labour units) was by then already familiar with the hardships of surviving under torture, lack of food and slave labour coupled with constant uncertainty of the future.

⁵⁰ This description is based mainly on Magda's testimonial. According to her son Israel, she would talk a lot about the special bond they had back at home in Munkács. See Israel Zelikovich, interview by the author.

But before arriving in Auschwitz Spiegel still had to go through the short and traumatic period of ghettoization and deportation that took place in Hungary from March 1944.

III. Ghetto and Deportation⁵¹

On 19 March 1944 the German forces invaded Hungary as a result of Hitler's concern that the Hungarian leadership was considering a way to leave the axis.⁵² The German invasion took the Jews of Sub-Carpathian Rus' by surprise. They had expected the region's takeover by the Soviets and did not see the tragic turn of events coming. It appears that most of the community did not realize the true meaning of the developments and the danger that they were facing.⁵³

From this point on the situation of the Jews of Munkács underwent a rapid deterioration, culminating in their deportation in May 1944. According to Raz Segal, Jewish life in the city during the German occupation can be divided into three periods: the first month before the establishment of the ghetto, the short period of ghettoization and, finally, the deportations.⁵⁴

The Germans arrived in Munkács on 20 March 1944; after having solidified their hold on the city together with their Hungarian allies they began to impose a series of anti-Jewish measures, which immediately made their intentions clear. These measures included a curfew, imprisonment of respectable communal figures, prohibition of the use of public transport, and the obligation for Jews to wear a yellow patch on their clothes.⁵⁵

Parallel to the anti-Jewish legislation, an *Einsatzkommando* headed by Adolf Eichmann, was already planning the details of the deportation of

⁵¹ The deportation of 1944 was preceded by a mass deportation of the so-called "alien Jews" from Sub-Carpathian Rus' in the summer of 1941, some of whom were murdered in the massacre at Kamenets-Podolsk, where 23,600 Jews were shot by an SS unit. See Judit Fejes, "On the History of the Mass Deportations from Carpatho-Ruthenia in 1941", in Randolph L. Brahm and Attila Pók, *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty years Later* (New York, 1997), 305-28. According to Fejes this was a "grand rehearsal" for the final deportations of 1944.

⁵² The Germans were also upset about Hungary's failure to fully contribute to the war effort and its dilatory tactics regarding the 'solution of the Jewish question' in Hungary. See Brahm, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. I, 362-82.

⁵³ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 282.

⁵⁴ Segal, *Days of Ruin*, 69.

⁵⁵ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 284.

Hungarian Jewry.⁵⁶ According to this plan the Jews of Sub-Carpathian Rus' and Northern Transylvania were the first to be deported. This was no coincidence as both regions had been returned to the state in 1939-40 after a twenty-year separation and, since neither was considered part of the motherland, the deportation of their Jewries would be met with less hostility or would even be supported by the Hungarian public opinion.⁵⁷

On 16 April 1944 the concentration of Jews into ghettos in Sub-Carpathian Rus' began. In Munkács the Jewish council (Judenrat) published an order for all Jews to move into one of the designated ghetto areas. They were allowed to take with them personal belongings of no more than fifty kilograms.⁵⁸ The ghetto was surrounded by a fence designed by the teachers of the Hebrew Gymnasium.⁵⁹

It took two days to move all but a handful of the Jews of Munkács into the ghetto.⁶⁰ Having avoided the fate of their co-religionists around Europe for almost five years, the Jews of Munkács (and of greater Hungary as a whole for that matter) were now trapped in a cycle leading to deportation. Since 1943 had been a relatively quiet year for the Jews of Munkács, the conditions in the ghetto meant a shocking deterioration. The overcrowding was unbearable: in some houses twenty-five men and women were crammed into a single room. The sanitary conditions were intolerable and there was a constant shortage of food. The eruption of a typhus epidemic made things even more difficult. On top of these inhumane conditions the Jews suffered constant abuse from the Germans and the Hungarians.⁶¹

At the time of the Spiegels' move into the ghetto, the family consisted of Israel and his wife Sarah, Magda and her son Shmuel, who was 7, and Zvi, who had returned from the labour unit six months earlier. During the short period in the ghetto they were moved to different locations three times. "The conditions were unbearable. We had to live with total strangers in crowded rooms. These

⁵⁶ The details of the deportation plan were finalized only in May but the basic decision had already been agreed upon a month earlier; see Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. II, 596.

⁵⁷ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 283.

⁵⁸ Segal, *Days of Ruin*, 78.

⁵⁹ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 300.

⁶⁰ For a description of the transfer to the ghetto see Yigal Vilfand (ed.), *Being Human: The Story of Abraham and Tsipke Levanon* (Heb.) (Ein Hashofet, 2012), 9.

⁶¹ Segal, *Days of Ruin*, 81.

were difficult times,” Magda remembered.⁶² According to her testimony, sometime during their stay in the ghetto the family was separated from Zvi and they were reunited only later, during the deportation to Auschwitz. As Zvi does not mention anything about the ghetto besides the fact that he left it with his family, we do not actually know what happened to him in that short period.

On 9 May 1944 the German and Hungarian ‘dejewification’ authorities in Munkács finalized the details of the deportation of the Jews of Sub-Carpathian Rus’ and Northern Transylvania.⁶³ In Munkács it was the Jews from the surrounding villages, who had been locked up in the yard of a brick factory in the city, who were first deported to Auschwitz on 15 May; the place was then ready for the transfer of the local Jews. On the same day Magda, Zvi, their parents and little Shmuel made their way, together with the rest of the Jews from the ghetto, to the Sajovits brickyard. The transition was traumatic, as recalled by Magda: “we were abused on the way. The Hungarians were even worse than the Germans. When we were moved to the brick factory they were overjoyed. The Hungarian gendarmes beat us up on the way. They would torture especially the elderly, who had difficulty following their orders. Beforehand they took all of our property. They even took my wedding ring.”⁶⁴

The Jews of Munkács keenly remembered the few days spent in the brickyard on their way to the cattle trains. They were constantly searched for valuables, and in some cases women and children would be stripped naked publicly during a search. In the course of the searches female virgins were identified and handed over to the guards, who would subsequently rape them. Some people committed suicide while others tried to find hiding places but they were informed on and discovered in most cases.⁶⁵

The first transport of Munkács Jews left the brickyard on 19 May. By 24 May the last transport had departed and Munkács was declared free of Jews.⁶⁶ It was sometime during the day on 23 May that the Spiegel family made its way to the assembly point and from there was loaded onto a train towards an unknown

⁶² Magda Zelikovich, FVA.

⁶³ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. II, 601.

⁶⁴ Magda Zelikovich, FVA.

⁶⁵ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 298.

⁶⁶ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. I, 541. The deportations from zones I and II (Sub-Carpathian Rus’ and Northern Transylvania) ended on 7 June 1944; within 24 days 289,357 Jews in 92 trains had been deported—see *ibid.* vol. II, 606.

destination. After the anguish they had suffered during their month in the ghetto and the escalation in the brickyard, all they wanted was to leave. Like the other Jews, they did not know, or did not grasp, what or where Auschwitz was. "Nobody knew the destination. We just wanted to get out of there," recalled Magda and added, "We went on the train, eighty members of our greater family. We were happy at first that they were taking us to work in another place."⁶⁷

During the train journey the condition of Israel, Magda and Zvi's father, quickly deteriorated. He became weak and sick and barely survived the harsh conditions, as Magda explained: "There were only small windows. It was freezing. I managed to get hold of some water but didn't know who to give it to, my son or my ill father. Eventually I gave it to my father as Shmuel was feeling okay."⁶⁸

After a three-day journey (including a stop in Kassa, Slovakia) the train suddenly came to a halt and the doors opened.

⁶⁷ Magda Zelikovich, FVA.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Chapter II

Between Mengele and the Twins: Spiegel Becomes the Zwillingsvater in Auschwitz-Birkenau

On 28 May 1944, at around 2 o'clock in the morning, the extended Spiegel family arrived from Munkács at the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ironically, the devastating conditions that Zvi and Magda had experienced during the journey to the camp had made them impatient to arrive.¹ They did not know anything about Auschwitz; all they had been told was that they were being transported to a labour camp in the east.

Once the train had stopped they were immediately confronted with the chaotic nature of the camp. "There were SS men and people in striped outfits shouting and rushing us off the train,"² Magda recalled. The extended Spiegel family tried to stay together. There were eighty of them, from three generations, mainly women and children.³ But once they were off the train their unity collapsed: they lost one another as men and women were separated. That was the last time that Zvi and Magda saw their father, as he was too sick to stand in the line. Magda was sent to the women's line with her mother and with Shmuel, her six-year-old son. Zvi was in the line designated for male arrivals. They were all soon to be confronted with the notorious selection process.

I. Reception in Birkenau: The Twins and the Selection Process

Starting in July 1942, all Jewish transports arriving in Birkenau had to undergo selections. People were ordered to disembark from the train, to leave their belongings on the ramp and to line up, women and children separate from the men. Once in line, they had to file in front of an SS doctor, who made a quick assessment of the physical condition of each prisoner and determined whether he or she would be able to work. With a movement of the hand he would send some to one side, meaning work, while those whom he waved to the other side were taken directly to the gas chambers. About 20 per cent were chosen to be

¹ Magda Zelikovich, FVA.

² Ibid.

³ Magda Zelikovich, interview by Adina Ben-Shemesh, Yad Vashem Archive, 0.3C/116, Haifa, 1985.

registered at the camp in this manner, and all the rest—mainly the old, the ailing and mothers with children—were killed in the gas chambers within the next few hours.⁴

In the midst of all the disorder and confusion, Zvi suddenly heard SS men shouting, “Zwillinge, Zwillinge”(twins, twins). “I don’t know what happened but suddenly I raised my hand,” he recalled. “I said I was a twin too. He asked where my twin was. And I said that her name was Magda Zelikovich and she was in the females’ line.”⁵ Spiegel could not explain in hindsight why he chose to reveal that he was a twin: “it happened by accident, I don’t know if it was my good or bad luck.”⁶

Having been picked, he was led to the women’s line by an SS officer, who urged him to find his sister.⁷ When they found Magda the SS officer ordered her out of the line. “What about my child?”, she asked, and the officer asked back, “Who is this child and who is this woman?” Magda told him that they were her child and her mother.⁸ In a kind voice, the officer asked her to hand her child over to her mother and ordered her to leave the line and join them. That was the last time Magda and Zvi saw their mother and it was Magda’s last moment with her beloved son, Shmuel.

Shmuel and his grandmother were marched off, along with the others, towards the gas chambers. On the way to the extermination complex the SS men escorting the victims sought to allay their fears about the future.⁹ As the group arrived at one of the four extermination sites of Birkenau, they were handled by the *Sonderkommando*, a special prisoner unit which performed all the auxiliary work, including ushering the victims into the gas chambers and removing and

⁴ Franciszek Piper, “The Mass Extermination of the Jews,” in id. and Teresa Swiebocka (eds.), *Auschwitz, Nazi Death Camp* (Oświęcim, 2007), 167.

⁵ Zvi Spiegel, YVA.

⁶ Avi Katzman, “My Eighty Twins,” an interview with Zvi Spiegel, *Ha’aretz* (5 January 1991).

⁷ According to Magda’s testimonies the person who led her brother to her was Mengele himself. Zvi testified that he had only first met Mengele in the men’s hospital and mentioned an SS officer who had taken him to Magda. As both knew Mengele very well it is hard to be certain which of the recollections is more accurate on this point.

⁸ Zelikovich, FVA.

⁹ Piper, “The Mass Extermination of the Jews,” 167.

burning the corpses after the gassing.¹⁰ First, the SS men ordered the victims to undress in a changing room and to leave all their belongings there. They were then hurried into the gas chambers and after the doors were shut, specially trained SS 'disinfectors' would drop Cyclone B into the interior, thus killing the victims inside within a few minutes.¹¹ Between the years 1940-1945, 1.3 million people passed through Auschwitz and its sub-camps, among them approximately one million Jews, most of whom were killed in the gas chambers.¹²

As twins, Zvi and Magda were spared, at least for the time being, from that fate. After Magda was drawn out of the line, the two were separated prior to being assigned sub-camps designated by gender. Zvi was gathered with five other pairs of twins that were on the same transport, and they were taken into the BIIf section of Birkenau, which was the inmates' hospital sub-camp (*Häftlingskrankenbau*). Upon arrival they were ordered to stand in a line and were told that an important figure was going to come and observe them. Spiegel immediately stood at attention as he saw the figure arriving. He was then approached by the man for the first time: SS Hauptsturmführer Dr Josef Mengele asked Spiegel if he had once been a soldier. Spiegel confirmed that he had been a soldier in the Czechoslovakian army, to which Mengele replied, "From now on you are in charge of the twins; you should know about anything that happens to them."¹³ "And that's how I became the twins' father [*Zwillingsvater*]", Spiegel recalled.¹⁴

As mentioned above, Spiegel arrived at Birkenau at the end of May. He was one of the first twins at Lager BIIf, as Jews from his area of Sub-Carpathian

¹⁰ Ibid. 169. For further reading on the tragic fates and the conditions which the *Sonderkommando* dealt with, see, Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven and London, 2005), and Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*.

¹¹ Piper, "The Mass Extermination of the Jews," 167.

¹² Franciszek Piper, "The Number of Victims," in id. and Swiebocka (eds.), *Auschwitz, Nazi Death Camp*, 195. The total number of victims is estimated at 1.1 million people, but according to Piper the number might turn out to be higher.

¹³ Spiegel, YVA.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Rus' were the first among Hungarian Jewry to be deported.¹⁵ The group of twins continued to grow until July, when the Hungarian deportations came to a halt.

Unlike Polish Jewry, the Jews under Hungarian rule had not experienced a long process of dehumanization or ghettoization. Only after the German invasion in March 1944 did a quick process of ghettoization begin, followed a few weeks later by deportations to Auschwitz.¹⁶ "Life wasn't all that terrible", recalled Tom Simon (né Somogyi, an 11-year-old twin at the time) regarding the situation in his hometown, Pécs, before the German invasion.¹⁷ Hungarian Jewry, especially in the rural areas, did not know about the existence of extermination camps and any rumours regarding them were dismissed. "We arrived in Birkenau in the morning; we didn't have a clue what this place was," recalls Ephraim Reichenberg, who was 16 upon arrival at the camp.¹⁸ There were enormous misconceptions about the place, as described by József Laufer, who was deported at the age of 14: "that area where the trains pulled in looked quite appealing at first blush."¹⁹

As the children peeped through the windows after the train had stopped, they had a lot of questions for their parents, who were trying to make sense of what they were witnessing themselves. "Everyone wanted to look, and there were those huge chimneys, such black smoke . . . well, 40-50-metre-high black smoke. My poor father said: 'It must be a mechanized bakery,'" recalled György Lusztig, who was 18 years old when he arrived at the gates of Birkenau.²⁰

The stories of most child twins' arrival in Birkenau resemble Spiegel's experience. The main difference was that they were children or adolescents and thus their parents were much more involved. The Somogyi twins, Peter and Tom, were only 11 on the day of their arrival at the camp on 6 July 1944. When they got off the train their mother told them to say that they were 9 years old, as she

¹⁵ Sub-Carpathian Rus' was classified as "operational zone I" for the deportations to Auschwitz, hence the Jews of the region were the first to be deported, starting from 15 May 1944. See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 137-8, 153.

¹⁶ For an extensive description of the Holocaust in Hungary, see Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

¹⁷ Tom Simon, interview by the author, Toronto, Canada, 13 July 2011.

¹⁸ Ephraim Reichenberg, interview by the author, Beer Sheva, Israel, 31 March 2011.

¹⁹ József Laufer, interview by Anna Gergely, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 50517-9, Székesfehérvár, Hungary, 11 November 1999 (hereafter SFI).

²⁰ György Lusztig, interview by Pal Salamon, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 50657-19, Budapest, Hungary, February 28, 2000.

thought they would be treated better as young children. When they heard the shout “Twins, twins”, the parents had to decide within seconds whether it would benefit their children if they voluntarily declared them as such. “My mother stepped forward, saying, ‘These are twins’. My sister objected. My mother had this hunch that it would be better for us,” Tom Simon recalls.²¹ Shaul Almog, at the time a 14-year-old named Sándor Salamon, remembers that when they were lined up for the selection process, a woman shouted, “‘Who has twins?’ My mother immediately pointed me and my brother out.” Almog recalls that he and his twin brother, Tibor (Tibi), were very angry with her.²²

Some parents were reluctant to declare their children as twins, as in the case of the Taub family. Yitzhak and Zerach Taub and their parents arrived at Birkenau from the town of Tokajin north-east Hungary in early May 1944. Hearing a soldier shouting “twins, twins”, their mother forbade them to step forward. Only at the third call was she convinced. It is hard to imagine what went on in the minds of the parents forced to make immediate decisions about the fate of their children in uncertain circumstances, but the fact that most of the twins clearly recall their parents’ reaction upon hearing “twins, twins” tells us how traumatic this moment was.

Some siblings were picked out by the guards based on their similar looks, as in the case of László (Laci) and Ephraim Reichenberg and György (Gyuri) and István (Pista) Kun. These two pairs looked alike but were not twins. “We were attacked by two men in striped uniform, who brutally drew us out of the line. We tried to resist but it didn’t help. As we scuffled, one of them told us in Yiddish that we would be saved by getting out of the line,” recalled Ephraim Reichenberg.²³

Having been moved to a separate area on the reception ramp, the twins were examined by an SS officer, in most cases Mengele himself.²⁴ If Mengele

²¹ Simon, interview by the author.

²² Shaul Almog, interview by Noga Gilad, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 27835-13, Holon, Israel, 2 February 1997.

²³ Reichenberg, interview by the author.

²⁴ Since the name Mengele became infamous many survivors have recounted that he had been the one conducting selections upon their arrival. Indeed, he was often there but he was part of a shift system where doctors took turns on the ramp. With regard to the twins, he was often called upon when they were discovered in a transport, so the

decided that he wanted them for his experiments,²⁵ they would have to wait for other twins in the transport to arrive and would then be transported by an ‘ambulance’ to the inmates’ hospital in section BIIIf. These were the first moments that the children began to reflect on their situation. They were in an unknown place, hundreds of miles away from their reasonably safe homes, surrounded by shouting, screaming, crying and dogs barking everywhere—and, above all, they had been abruptly separated from their families and found themselves all alone. “I was alone in the truck,” recounted Yitzhak Lazarowitz, who was 16 when he and his twin sister, Gila, arrived at Birkenau. “They had taken my sister with the twin girls. I was waiting all alone. I was getting scared. What do they want from me . . . where are they taking me?”²⁶ Some of the twins stayed together (those of the same gender) but they, too, recall the anguish and the feeling of loneliness, as stated by Tom Simon: “We got out of the line and were taken by ambulance; we were alone there. That was the last time I saw my mother and sister. The ambulance took us to the F Lager. I was scared; I didn’t know what was happening, then I started to cry.”²⁷ Zerach Taub mentioned the loneliness but also the physical conditions and the hostile environment: “We were hungry, thirsty and dirty. Suddenly we were alone. Until now all the family had been together, we had each other’s support. And all of a sudden we were alone, two 11-year-old kids, surrounded by furious people filled with hatred.”²⁸

This was the reality that confronted these young children when they entered the gates of the men’s hospital at BIIIf. As for Spiegel, he also had a lot to cope with. After three years in the Hungarian army’s labour units, a month in the ghetto in Munkács, a long trip in a cattle truck to Birkenau and an anguishing separation from his mother, father and twin sister, Spiegel now had to pull himself together and acclimatize to a new reality which did not resemble

fact that most twins remember him from the first moments is plausible. See Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 26-31.

²⁵ According to the Taub brothers they stood in a line with several twins who were then all sent back by Mengele to the ordinary line and only they were chosen. See Yitzhak Taub, interview by the author, Rishon Le’zion, Israel, 23 June 2011, and Zerach Taub, interview by Peter Handwerker, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 00631-16, Krakow, 28 January 1995.

²⁶ Yitzhak Lazarowitz, interview by Miriam Thau, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 15331-13, Bnei Brak, Israel, 20 May 1996.

²⁷ Simon, interview by the author.

²⁸ Z. Taub, SFI.

anything that he or the other twins had experienced in the past: the reality of the Nazi KL (*Konzentrationslager*), Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Auschwitz 1940-1945: Establishment and Structure

KL Auschwitz was the biggest of the Nazi concentration camps. Established in May 1940, it was originally meant to solve the problem of overcrowded prisons in Upper Silesia, where the SS were carrying out mass arrests among the Polish population.²⁹ Until March 1941 Auschwitz's sole purpose was the internment of prisoners (mainly Poles) who were regarded as a threat to Nazi rule in Poland. The camp had 10,900 prisoners housed in twenty brick buildings.³⁰

On 1 March 1941 SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler came to Auschwitz and ordered the establishment of another camp in a nearby village named Brzezinka (Birkenau in German).³¹ The construction of the Birkenau site began in October 1941, and by the end of the year the overcrowded conditions of the prisoner population in the main camp were pressing the SS to speed up the building work and to prepare the camp for the arrival of inmates on a massive scale. It is likely that in the period between October 1941 and March 1942, Himmler designated Birkenau as the main site for the annihilation of European Jewry.³² As a result, the construction plan was adjusted in the summer of 1942: the camp complex was now to hold 200,000 inmates and to contain four mass extermination facilities, each one consisting of a crematorium and a gas chamber.³³

The camp itself was built in stages and the first section, BIa, was ready in mid-1942 while the last section was completed only in December 1943. The camp was divided by a main road which split it into two large sites. On the right of the main road was site BI, and to its left BII. Each site was divided into several sections separated by a fence and with different entrances. BI consisted of

²⁹ Danuta Czech, "Origins of the Camp, its Construction and Expansion," in Piper and Swiebocka (eds.), *Auschwitz, Nazi Death Camp*, 21.

³⁰ Czech, "Origins of the Camp," 27.

³¹ On Himmler (1900-1945), see Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler* (New York, 2012).

³² Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford, 2010), 261-4.

³³ Czech, "Origins of the Camp," 33.

sections BIa and BIb, which had been set up in summer 1942, and in May 1944 both housed women inmates.³⁴

Section BII comprised six residential sections along with a warehouse for items seized from the Jews before their extermination.³⁵ The first section to be established here was BIIe, the Gypsies' family camp (*Familienzigeunelager*), which was occupied from February 1943. The next sections, which were established in July 1943, were BIIId and BIIIf. Section BIIId was the main camp for working men in Birkenau (*Männerlager*) and camp BIIIf, as mentioned above, was the inmates' hospital, where Spiegel and most of the boy twins were detained. In August 1943 BIIa, a quarantine camp (*Quarantänlager*), was built for newly arrived prisoners, and in September section BIIb was established for families from the Theresienstadt ghetto (*Familienlager Theresienstadt*), which was liquidated in July 1944.³⁶ The barracks in BIIc initially served as a warehouse for property confiscated from the arriving Jews, and in May 1944 it was converted into a transit camp for Hungarian women who were found fit to work. In December 1943 section BIIg (Kanada II) was set up, consisting of thirty wooden barracks which were used as temporary storage for the stolen goods. The section also included a delousing station ('sauna' in the prisoners' jargon).

Arriving at Lager BIIIf, the twins would pass through the main gate, which was located in the northern end of the section. This part of the camp was situated by Lagerstrasse B, the main path leading to the 'sauna' and Crematoria IV and V. A bit further to the north, on the other side of Lagerstrasse B, lay section BIII (Mexico in the prisoners' jargon), which, from June 1944, accommodated Hungarian women who hadn't gone through selections and hence were not registered in the camp.³⁷ To the west the twins could see the Canada section of BIIg and to the south-west they had a glimpse of Crematorium III through the trees. Exactly opposite the main entrance, at the southern end of

³⁴ For the full description of the establishment of sector BI see *ibid.* 80-8.

³⁵ For the full discussion regarding sector BII see *ibid.* 89-97.

³⁶ The story of the Theresienstadt family camp will be elaborated upon in the following chapter; for a more detailed description of the Czech family camp see Nili Keren, "The Family Camp," in Yisrael Gutman and Daniel Berenbaum (eds.), *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Washington, DC, 1994), 428-40.

³⁷ The BIII sub-camp was given the nickname 'Mexico' because its barracks had no floors, beds or bunks. The prisoners had nothing but blankets and someone thought they looked like Mexican Indians. See Dwork and Van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*, 336.

the section, was the end of the train tracks and the unloading ramp, which were completed in May 1944. Finally, completing the picture to the east was Lager BIIe, the Gypsy family camp. This was the 'landscape' that awaited the twins arriving from the selections on the ramp.

II. Registration: Spiegel and the Twins Arrive at the Men's Hospital

The twins' experience began in the registration barracks at section BIIe. They were first disinfected after handing in their clothes and were rushed into the showers. "They told me to take off my clothes and to get in the shower. This was the first time I had ever appeared nude in public. Imagine, I was a yeshiva boy,"³⁸ recalls Kalman Bar-On, who arrived at the camp with Judith, his twin sister, aged 14. After the shower the twins were given their new identity in the camp—their numbers. A number was tattooed on their left forearm, and from now on this was to be their new name, in what was the peak of the dehumanization process confronting prisoners in Birkenau. The name one had been given by one's parents no longer existed and was replaced by a term which represented the new reality—one was a *Häftling* (prisoner) and a possession of the SS.³⁹

Even though the twins had been stripped of their former identity, they were still left with a few reminders of their old life, especially their own clothes, which were given back to them after disinfection. Their hair was shaved off their body from the chest down, while the hair on their head was left untouched. In addition, the twins were marked as such by a label bearing the letters ZW (*Zwillinge*—twins) attached to their prisoner uniform on the chest and arm.⁴⁰ After this procedure was over, the boys were handed over to Zvi Spiegel, who at times appeared in the reception barracks. This was the case when the 9-year-old Alon (né Brichta) twins arrived in Birkenau on 10 July 1944. Yoel Alon (back then Karol Brichta) remembers that while being tattooed, he noticed that the number written on the registration paper differed in one numeral from the one tattooed

³⁸ Kalman Bar-On, interview by the author, Ramat Hasharon, 30 August 2011.

³⁹ The procedure of tattooing numbers onto the prisoners' arms was unique to Auschwitz and began in 1941 as a result of high mortality and the difficulty of identifying the corpses. Jewish inmates in Birkenau were first tattooed in 1942, and by 1943 all inmates had tattoos; see Tdeusz Iwaszko, "Reasons for Confinement in the Camp and Categories of Prisoners," in Piper and Swiebocka (eds.), *Auschwitz, Nazi Death Camp*, 22-4.

⁴⁰ Otto Klein, interview by the author, Geneva, 1 July 2011.

on his arm. Alon pointed this out, and Spiegel intervened and saw to it that his number would be corrected. “This was the first encounter I had with Spiegel,” recalled Alon.⁴¹

What Spiegel’s official role was is difficult to determine. We know that his task included registering the twins upon arrival and delivering them when called in for medical experiments, as well as being Mengele’s Hungarian interpreter and occasionally translating into Czech during the experiments.⁴² But did he have an official position in the prisoners’ self-administration system? The twins themselves do not agree about his exact role in their recollections. Naturally, as children, they probably did not know what his official role was, but it is interesting to note the way they perceived his position. Most of the twins remember him as the twins’ kapo (*Zwillinge Kapo*).⁴³ As already mentioned in the introduction, prisoners used the term ‘kapo’ as slang in the camp, in order to describe prisoner functionaries in general. Spiegel was probably not a kapo, at least not in the context of the twins’ barrack, as kapos were the heads of the labour units, outside the living quarters of the camp. This nevertheless shows us that the twins saw him as a figure with power who drew his authority from Mengele himself, as mentioned by a few of them. There were some who in hindsight insisted that he did not have any official position and initiated all his actions voluntarily.⁴⁴ In his testimony Spiegel himself says that he was officially referred to as *Zwillingsvater* (the twins’ father) by the Germans: “as each transport arrived, the SS man would shout ‘*Zwillingsvater*’ and I would have to go to the section’s gate and collect them.”⁴⁵ In another interview Spiegel indicated that he had the letters ZV (*Zwillingsvater*) on his shirt, unlike the ZW sign that the other twins wore. Spiegel also claimed that he was the *Zwillinge und Zwergvater*,

⁴¹ Yoel Alon, interview by the author, Jerusalem, 2 January 2012.

⁴² See Spiegel, YVA and FVA. These roles are also mentioned in Klein, interview by the author, 2011; Simon, interview by the author, and Peter Somogyi, interview by the author, Pleasantville, New York, 16 July 2011.

⁴³ See Y. Taub and Klein, interviews by the author; Kiss, “Auschwitz Diary”; Lusztig and Almog, SFI; and Leo Lowy, interview by Michelle Critoen, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 12495-1, Richmond, USA, 28 February 1996.

⁴⁴ See Bar-On and Reichenberg, interviews by the author. Bar-On, it has to be noted, was assigned to work in the SS offices of BIIf, hence, unlike the majority of the twins, he spent most of his time away from the barrack and had less interaction with Spiegel.

⁴⁵ Spiegel, YVA.

which meant ‘father of the twins and dwarfs’.⁴⁶ The documentation preserved in the Auschwitz Museum Archive does not indicate an official position of a *Zwillingsvater*, but we can assume that after having been put in charge of the twins, Spiegel was given the title ‘twins’ father’ by the SS or perhaps by Mengele himself, as they wished to mark him as the person in charge of the twins.⁴⁷

As the ‘twins’ father’, Spiegel’s position within the barrack resembled that of *Stubenältester* (room chiefs), who were the assistants of the *Blockälteste*. His tasks in the barrack included the ongoing registration of new arrivals, the distribution of food and supervising the twins. He reported on these duties to the *Blockälteste*, as did other room chiefs. But unlike an ordinary low-ranked functionary, Spiegel had been appointed directly by the head physician of Birkenau, Dr. Mengele, and in some matters even reported directly to him, or at least was in direct contact with him during the experiments. This was totally different from the regular chain of command in Birkenau. An incident described by Tom Simon can exemplify this point. “One day Mengele appeared in the twins’ barrack. He was in a good mood and wanted to show off. He told Spiegel to line up all the twins. After that he said to him, ‘I will demonstrate to you how good my memory is’, and he pointed out all the twins that he had personally selected on the ramp. Then he looked at Spiegel with satisfaction and left the barrack.”⁴⁸ This recollection expresses Spiegel’s odd situation: on the one hand he was on the lowest level in the scale of the prisoners’ self-administration but at the same time he was regularly addressed by Doctor Mengele, who was one of the most influential figures in Auschwitz. That he was a low-ranking functionary is supported by the fact that he was not entitled to most privileges granted to the prisoner ‘elite’. Spiegel slept in the same bunk beds as the twins and with the twins, ate the same food as them and did not possess any special goods for trade or other purposes. Yet he did have a few privileges, at least potentially: from the

⁴⁶ Spiegel, FVA.

⁴⁷ The only reference to a *Zwillingsvater* in secondary literature can be found in Lifton’s book, *The Nazi Doctors*. But Lifton does not indicate his source for the statement that “an older child or an adult from among the twins, generally known as the *Zwillingsvater* would be put in charge and would become in effect the block chief”. For one, this is not accurate as there was a *Blockälteste* as in other barracks, and we can assume that Lifton heard the term from Spiegel when interviewing him. See Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 348.

⁴⁸ Simon, interview by the author.

fact that he distributed the food we can assume that he had access to larger portions if he wanted them; he was less restricted in his movement in section BIIIf, although he and the twins were always escorted by an SSsoldier to the experiments in BIIe; he received, at least once, a coupon of one Reichsmark to buy cigarettes in the camp canteen (*Häftlingskantine*);⁴⁹ and, according to his sister Magda, he would send her new clothes with other prisoners—which indicates his access to goods and his ability to use the clandestine system in the camp.⁵⁰

Concluding the discussion of Spiegel's role we can draw the following picture: Zvi Spiegel was appointed the 'twins' father' by Mengele, who wanted someone to deliver the twins to him for experiments and to give them some protection from the hostile environment of the camp. Within the twins' barrack Spiegel was subordinated to the *Blockälteste* and functioned as his assistant. The twins themselves were not familiar with the term *Zwillingsvater*; hence most assumed he was a kapo—a term frequently used to describe a prisoner in charge of others. The most obvious evidence throwing light on this question appears in László Kiss's "Auschwitz Diary". In the document written in 1945, Kiss—a 15-year-old twin himself—refers to Spiegel as a kapo, a clear indication that he was generally perceived as such.⁵¹ Spiegel never mentioned the term 'kapo' when talking about himself, although he is likely to have been aware of the fact that at least some of the children saw him as a kapo. His reluctance to use the term, and the fact that the twins were at first cautious about using it, bring us to the subject of post-Holocaust representation among survivors and the general public, which will be discussed in Chapter V.

Spiegel now faced a new reality, the unknown and hostile environment of the concentration camp, but had already been made responsible for more than

⁴⁹ There are two documents indicating that Spiegel received a coupon worth one Reichsmark to buy cigarettes in the prisoners' canteen. The first has no exact date on it but does state 1944-1945, and is titled 'Smoking card (*Raucherkarte*) for *Häftlingskantine* 1'; see documents supplied by Zvi Spiegel, Yad Vashem Archive, 0.15.H/142, 16. The second document details the distribution of 825 Reichsmarks to 456 prisoners on 22 December 1944. The prisoners received between one to six Reichsmarks depending on their status in the camp. Spiegel, who is mentioned there, like the others, by his camp number A-7729, received one Reichsmark; see APMOB, List of Bonuses, Birkenau Men's Camp, D-Au II -3a/1952, inventory no. 72635, 2824-2826.

⁵⁰ Magda Zelikovich, YVA.

⁵¹ Kiss, "Auschwitz Diary".

forty children and adolescents—and a very specific responsibility: to make sure that they were available at all times as guinea pigs and to see to it that they were not physically harmed. His brief said nothing about taking care of them. However, the reality that confronted him upon meeting the children was far from simple.

New twins arriving at barrack 14 were often surrounded by the other children, who were curious to know who they were and where they came from. Unlike other prisoners ‘welcomed’ in Auschwitz by hostile peer prisoners and especially the kapos in the barrack, the twins experienced a different atmosphere. The other children surrounding them gave them a little bit of comfort—as did Spiegel’s attitude. He welcomed them, showed them around the barrack and tried to provide them with food or something to drink, as it was summer and they had an exhausting train journey behind them. “After we arrived we first met Spiegel. We thought we would die of thirst, as we hadn’t had any water for days on the train. Spiegel had a cup of tea that he had saved for himself from the morning. He kindly offered it to us. That was our first encounter with him,”⁵² Yitzhak Taub remembered.

The warm welcome, however, did not make the questions about their parents’ fate go away. Most of the twins cannot forget the moment when they were confronted with the horrifying news. Typically for children, the twins already resident in the barrack would not allow them any time to digest the situation and would immediately break it to them. “As soon as they saw us they asked: ‘Who did you come here with?’ We answered: ‘With our parents.’ Then they asked: ‘Which way were they sent?’ And we told them the side they had had to take. Then they pointed out the window; the crematoria were not far away from us. They showed us the huge chimneys and said: ‘After the gassing your parents are most probably burning there now,’” József Laufer recalled.⁵³ Upon hearing the news the twins had mixed reactions. On the one hand they were devastated and some recall crying for three days, but, on the other hand, being children, they found it difficult to grasp the magnitude of their disaster, as described by Shaul Almog: “Immediately they pointed at the crematorium and we saw the flames and the smoke. They told us, ‘You see those people marching

⁵² Y. Taub, interview by the author.

⁵³ J. Laufer, SFI.

from the rail tracks? They are going to the crematorium.’ We started to cry. We cried. But a child still doesn’t know how big the disaster is. Our thoughts were focused on what we would eat.”⁵⁴ Almog and his brother Shlomo, like some of the other twins, had come to Birkenau before Spiegel. Once Spiegel took charge, he tried to control the process of breaking the bad news, as told by Tom Simon, who arrived on 10 July 1944: “The first day when we arrived, Zvi Spiegel would not tell us what had happened to our parents. We always wanted to know what had happened to them. After the third day he told us what had happened, we cried, and after that it was routine: the transport comes and then the crematorium burning. He comforted us. He told us that unfortunately we would not see our mother again. He had to tell us sooner or later.”⁵⁵

Spiegel was acutely aware of the children’s need for emotional support from the very first days after becoming the *Zwillingsvater*, as exemplified in Simon’s testimony. But it did not take long before he was also confronted with the need to make decisions regarding the fate of the twins, thereby risking his own life. On 17 June 1944 four pairs of twins arrived in section BIIf from the Székesfehérvár ghetto. The newcomers to barrack 14 were routinely registered by Spiegel: György and Márton Lusztig (born on 13 December 1926), István and József Laufer (born on 8 December 1930), and László and Endre (Bandi) Kiss (born on 10 May 1928). And then came the turn of the Kun brothers, György and István. As Spiegel recalled, “I took one of them and asked him, ‘When were you born?’ And he tells me the date and I automatically write down the same date of birth next to the second name, and suddenly the boy corrects me. [György was born on 23 January 1932 and István on 17 December 1932.] Naturally, I became nervous, because I knew what happened to Jewish children who were not twins.”⁵⁶ The two looked alike and were dressed alike, but were not twins although picked out as such in the selection. Spiegel consulted with a Jewish doctor who was around, BIIf being the prisoners’ infirmary, and the two decided on one date that the twins should follow. In his “Auschwitz Diary” László Kiss records what happened next: “After the selection they took the eight of us to the “F” Lager. Here, the twin-capo, Ernő Spiegel . . . and the twins already there

⁵⁴ Almog, SFI.

⁵⁵ Simon, interview by the author.

⁵⁶ Spiegel, YVA.

welcomed and surrounded us. The Kun children, then about 12, announced, that they were not twins, but the Capo told them, they should definitely pretend to be twins and on the data survey they should dictate the date of birth of one of them only.”⁵⁷ Such decisions were typical reflections of reality in Birkenau. Simple decisions became a matter of life and death in the camp and in many cases, as in this one, the decision would affect not only one’s own life but that of others as well. Spiegel’s decision to save the lives of little children, who were inmates like him, may sound simple. But as he said, “If Mengele had found out, he would have immediately shot me in the head.”⁵⁸

These were the first steps of Spiegel and the twins in the camp. The majority of the twins arrived in Lager F between 17 May and 10 July 1944.⁵⁹ Pair after pair they showed up in the confines of the men’s *Krankenbau* (hospital), where they were practically the only healthy inmates—an especially gloomy place, even in the context of Birkenau as a whole.

The Auschwitz Hospital System

As mentioned above, the men’s hospital camp, BIIf, was established in July 1943. The origins of the camp hospital system that functioned in Auschwitz can be traced back to the infirmary set up in the pre-war Tobacco Monopoly building in the second half of June 1940, a few days after the arrival of the first transport of Polish political prisoners from Tarnów.⁶⁰ Later the infirmary was moved to the main camp and in its final phase consisted of four blocks, for convalescents, contagious diseases, surgical operations and internal medicine respectively. As the various parts of the Birkenau camp were constructed from 1942 to 1944, different areas were designated as prisoner hospitals. The first of these, in the

⁵⁷ Kiss, “Auschwitz Diary”.

⁵⁸ Spiegel, YVA.

⁵⁹ There had been twins before under Mengele’s supervision, especially in the Theresienstadt family camp in BIIf and in the Gypsy family camp in BIIf. The date 17 May refers to the arrival of Hungarian twins in BIIf. Some twins came after 10 July, but in very small numbers. The last twins recorded as having arrived in section BIIf on 29 September were Jenő and Zoltán Hauptman from the Theresienstadt ghetto; see Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle: 1940-1945* (London, 1990), 718.

⁶⁰ Irena Strzelecka, *Medical Crimes: The Hospitals in Auschwitz*, *Voices of Memory* 3 (Oświęcim, 2008), 7.

new men's camp in BIb, opened in May 1942. In July 1943 the hospital barrack in sector BIb was transferred to the new men's hospital sector at BIIf.⁶¹

The existence of the hospitals in Auschwitz can be divided into two main phases.⁶² In the first phase (1940-1941) the hospitals were characterized by the inmates as a place of refuge where they could find shelter and "die in peace". Within a short time, however, prisoners came to identify the hospital exclusively as a place of death. Most prisoners, even the seriously ill, tried to avoid hospitalization. Until spring 1942 the prisoners in charge of the hospitals were German criminals, who terrorized the other inmates and often brutalized and killed them. The second phase (1942-1944) was characterized by a growing need for manpower for the German wartime economy. As a result, the conditions in the hospitals improved, especially from 1943. Prisoner doctors were now in charge of the self-administration and many of them showed great initiative in providing sanitation and medical supplies, even though the hospitals in Auschwitz never offered real, effective treatment for prisoners. In addition, there was always an extermination function to the hospitals, and until November 1944 the SS doctors conducted selections among the inmate patients (only among Jews after August 1943) on a systematic basis.⁶³ The SS physicians in the camp were the final link in the decision-making chain determining the means of extermination of sick prisoners in the camp infirmaries or in ordinary residential blocks.⁶⁴

Generally, the inmates' hospitals were subordinated to division V of the camp SS administration—the Chief Garrison Doctor (*Abteilung V—Standortarzt*)—and were thus headed by SS camp doctors (*Lagerärzte*). The duties of the camp physician included admitting and discharging prisoners from the infirmary, performing diagnoses and recommending treatment, and sending prisoners to the dentist. They checked the medical condition of newly arrived prisoners; they were also obliged to certify the quality of meals from the kitchen camp and to provide medical supervision at the prisoners' infirmaries.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid. 7-8.

⁶² Irena Strzelecka, "Hospitals," in Gutman and Berenbaum (eds.), *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, 382-3.

⁶³ Strzelecka, *Medical Crimes: The Hospitals in Auschwitz*, 9-11.

⁶⁴ Lasik, "Organizational Structure of Auschwitz," 245.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 253.

Furthermore, the majority of the doctors in division V conducted medical experiments during their service in the camp. Among the SS camp doctors it was the character and deeds of the infamous Josef Mengele that stood out.

Josef Mengele

Mengele was transferred to Auschwitz in May 1943 on his own request. Some of the landmarks of his pre-Auschwitz life had already paved the way to his activities at the camp.⁶⁶ Mengele was born in the Bavarian town of Günzburg on 16 March 1911, the eldest of three sons of Carl and Walburga Mengele. Young Josef grew up in a Catholic family enjoying considerable wealth gained in his father's foundry for manufactured farm equipment. Nothing in his childhood could predict his becoming a zealous Nazi; he was mainly interested in arts and music and displayed an active community spirit by joining the Red Cross. As a teenager Mengele became more and more interested in natural sciences and after graduating high school he enrolled as a student of philosophy and medicine at Munich University. During the years in Munich, Mengele developed a political awareness and was not indifferent to the growth of the Nazi party. In the academic dimension he had a strong interest in heredity and eugenics, and soon enough became a fanatical advocate of its principles. The man who gave Mengele his first real push in the academic world was Professor Theodor Mollison, who used to boast about being able to tell a Jew just by looking at his face. In 1935 Mengele received a PhD in anthropology for his thesis entitled "Racial Morphological research on the lower jaw section of four racial groups". On 1 January 1937 he was appointed research assistant at the Third Reich Institute for Heredity, Biology and Racial Purity at the University of Frankfurt. This was a turning point in his life as he met there the famed geneticist, Professor Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer. In many ways a direct line can be drawn from this period to his time in Auschwitz.

Von Verschuer was an admirer of Hitler and greatly influenced his favourite student in this respect. Mengele adopted the Nazi race theories and joined the Nazi party in May 1937 (membership number 5574974), and the SS a year later. In July 1938 he received his Medical Doctor degree and became a

⁶⁶ My description of Mengele's life up until his Auschwitz appointment is based on Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 1-19.

licensed practitioner of medicine. By the late 1930s Mengele had fully identified with the Nazi doctrines on human genetics as taught in Germany at the time.⁶⁷ It was already back then that he developed an interest in twin research. Von Verschuer himself used twins in his research and saw it as “the most efficient method to verify the existence of heredity traits in human beings, especially diseases”.⁶⁸

Mengele’s academic career was flourishing, but in other aspects of his life the war caused a major rupture. In June 1940, five weeks after he married Irene Schonbein, the war erupted and he was drafted into the Wehrmacht (the German army), and a month later he was relocated upon his request to the Waffen SS. At first he spent a few months in occupied Poland, attached to the genealogical section of the Race and Resettlement Office, where he and other SS doctors were to examine the racial suitability of the inhabitants of the newly conquered territory. In June 1941 Mengele had his first experience of battlefield action when he was posted in the Ukraine, and was later awarded the Iron Cross second class. In 1942 he joined the medical corps of the Waffen SS Viking Division. While in Russia he was once again awarded the Iron Cross, but this time it was the first class. These decorations were to increase his prestige in Auschwitz among the SS staff, who were not used to serving together with a ‘war hero’. Later, towards the end of 1942, Mengele was reassigned to the headquarters of the resettlement office in Berlin. He was in contact with Von Verschuer, who persuaded him to find a placement in Auschwitz. Upon his request he was transferred to the camp in May 1943.

Mengele came to Auschwitz surrounded by a special aura because he had practically arrived from the front and had voluntarily chosen the place—as it presented opportunities for his research. Verschuer applied for and received funding from the German Research Society for his student’s work.⁶⁹ Already in the first months of his service in Birkenau, Mengele established the image of a radically efficient SSdoctor, as he cleared the camp during a severe typhus outbreak by sending 600 Jewish women from the same barrack to the gas

⁶⁷ Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 7-15.

⁶⁸ The quote is cited in Helena Kubica, “The Crimes of Josef Mengele,” in Gutman and Berenbaum (eds.), *Anatomy of the Auschwitz*, 318.

⁶⁹ Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 341.

chamber and disinfecting the other barracks in its proximity.⁷⁰ Officially, his position was camp doctor of section BIle, the Gypsy camp, but as part of his duty he worked in other sections of Birkenau as well, and in November 1943 he became Birkenau's chief physician.⁷¹

Mengele exploited the unique opportunity that the camp provided for him in the quick and easy access to subjects in large numbers, especially identical twins.⁷² Although his experiments covered a range of fields from bacteriology to bone marrow transplants, their principal purpose seems to have been to unlock the secret of creating multiple births of children with genetically engineered Aryan features. The Nazi regime was interested in increasing the birth rate by a manipulated increase in the number of twin births. Mengele conducted research in that area but his real interest lay in perfecting and preserving the best features of the Aryan race: blue eyes, blond hair and healthy bodies.⁷³ In the first year of his service in Birkenau Mengele conducted his experiments mainly on Gypsy twins and from September he would also select Jewish twins from the family camp at BIIf and bring them to his lab, which was located at the Gypsy camp behind barrack 32.⁷⁴ He ordered the establishment of a kindergarten for the children taking part in his experiments in barracks 29 and 31, and for all Gypsy inmates under the age of six. We have no documentation concerning the number of Gypsy twins involved in Mengele's experiments at that stage,⁷⁵ but it is clear that his research gathered momentum in spring 1944 when the Hungarian Jews arrived, and the twins were now directed to the men's hospital in section BIIf.

⁷⁰ For a full description of the incident see Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 25-6.

⁷¹ Strzelecka, "Experiments," 358.

⁷² Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 348.

⁷³ Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 31.

⁷⁴ Strzelecka and Setkiewicz, "The Construction, Expansion and Development of the Camp," 90.

⁷⁵ Kubica mentions that one of the documents indicates seventeen pairs of identical twins of both genders. According to other accounts cited by her, there were twelve pairs of twins alive on the day of the liquidation of the Gypsy camp. See Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 321.

III. Within the Nazis' 'Mad House': LagerBIIf and the Twins' Barrack

The men's hospital section consisted of fifteen wooden barracks and three more were added later. Barracks 1-11 and 17 were Swiss-type constructs with floors, ceilings and windows, while barracks 12-15 were the normal horse stable variety.⁷⁶ The BIIf hospital sector held an average of 1,500-2,000 prisoners throughout 1944. Barrack 1 was the administrative building, where the offices of the camp physician and the orderlies, the camp elders' room, the hospital office, the pharmacy and the lab were located. Most of the other barracks held patients, the majority of them Jews, except barrack 7, which was designated for German prisoners. Later on barrack 7, together with barracks 12 and 16, accommodated prisoners who were incurably sick.⁷⁷ The prisoners called these the death barracks, as inmates were sent there to die from throughout the labour and hospital camps.⁷⁸ Barracks 2 and 15 had been turned into experimental blocks. In barrack 2 blood was drawn from twins and dwarfs, and it was in the operating room of this barrack that Jewish prisoners who were experimented upon by Dr Schumann (X-ray sterilization) were castrated. In the latter half of 1944 a room was set up in barrack 2 where abortions were performed on newly arrived female prisoners.⁷⁹ As the sub-camp consisted of 18 wooden barracks, as opposed to 30-32 barracks in BIIf, BIIfc and BIIfe, it only took up half of the allocated territory in the northern part of the section. The other half was an empty field known in the prisoners' jargon as the *Fussballplatz* (football ground).⁸⁰

Over the years there have existed different versions of which barrack accommodated the majority of male twins from July 1944. According to Irena Strzelecka and Helena Kubica, from the Auschwitz Museum, the twins were held in barrack 15, as this became Mengele's primary experimental block after the

⁷⁶ Irena Strzelecka, "The Hospitals at Auschwitz Concentration Camp," in Piper and Długoborski (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central issues*, vol. 2, 303.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ For a description of barrack 7 during its stage as a 'death barrack' see Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, 205-7.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 303-4.

⁸⁰ Klein, interview by the author.

liquidation of the Gypsy camp.⁸¹ On the other hand, in Mengele's biography Ware and Posner mention barrack 14 as the twins' barrack but do not cite their source.⁸² The twins' own recollections in this matter were not quite reliable as they mentioned different numbers as their barrack's location.

After assessing all the available evidence it can be concluded that the twins were accommodated in barrack 14. This assessment is based on two major sources: the first is a set of documents issued by the Hygienic and Bacteriological Office of the Waffen SS South-West stating the results of various tests performed upon the prisoners. In these documents the location of the twins is indicated as barrack 14, at least from August to November 1944.⁸³ The other piece of evidence appears in the memoirs of Dr. Miklós Nyiszli, whose role in Birkenau was to perform autopsies for Mengele, and who was in a position to observe the location of the different experimental subjects. In his memoir, Nyiszli explicitly states that the twins were accommodated in barrack 14.⁸⁴ Based on these two sources, we can clearly establish that barrack 14 was the male twins' barrack in the men's hospital section from July 1944 onwards.

Barrack 14

Even within the unusual environment of Birkenau, barrack 14 could have been regarded as an especially peculiar place. The Nazis' twisted mind had created a barrack which accommodated a population of people (mainly Jews) divided into groups according to a kind of logic, including the reasons for their imprisonment or their use in the camp. They were aged 4 to 60, and included healthy and sick people. Some were designated for experiments and some were there for hospital treatment; they spoke different languages, were from different countries and cultures, and some of them had physical deficiencies, for example, they were dwarfs. Among the inmates of the barrack the largest group were the twins.

⁸¹ See Strzelecka, "The Hospitals at Auschwitz," 303-4, and Helena Kubica, "Children and adolescents in Auschwitz," in Piper and Długoborski (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central issues in the history of the camp*, vol. 2, 264.

⁸² Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 35.

⁸³ For examples see APMOB, records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg. Inst./69, inventory no. 106154, 46/520, 48/516, D-Hyg. Inst./73, inventory no. 106158, 51/589, 51/591, 52290-1, 52/1094-5, 52/285.

⁸⁴ Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: Eye Witness Account*, 58.

There is no official account on how many twins underwent Mengele's experiments in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and specifically in barrack 14. Twins were located in a few different barracks and sections from July 1944. Jewish twin girls and small boys aged 7-8 were housed in wooden barrack 1 at the BIa women's camp. Infant twins were placed with their mothers in barrack 22 of the women's hospital in section BIa.⁸⁵ Until the liquidation of the Czech family camp (BIIf) and the Gypsy camp (BIIf), twins could be found in the confines of those two as well.⁸⁶

According to different prisoner accounts, in barrack 1 (BIa) there were between 200-350 twins of both genders.⁸⁷ Barrack 14 at BIIf accommodated the older boy twins and the adults, even though there were exceptions and we know of at least one 4-year-old boy, Peter Kleinman. The number of twins in barrack 14, which included pairs as well as those born as twins who were alone (mainly because they had been separated from their sisters), is also uncertain. Helena Kubica of the Auschwitz Museum estimates their number to have been over 100, based on a recollection by Otto Klein, who was interviewed for this research, and on an undated handwritten document listing the names of 125 prisoners, most of them twins. Fifty-two of them were aged 14 and under.⁸⁸ Contradicting Kubica's estimate is the figure of forty-nine twins given by Danuta Czech in the *Auschwitz Chronicle*. Czech bases her estimate on a few documents from August and September 1944, which contain detailed lists of people deployed for work in section BIIf. Based on these lists, on 1 August there were 108 prisoners intended for research purposes located in the prisoners' infirmary at the BIIf camp. They included forty-nine twins or prisoners who had a twin.⁸⁹ According to other

⁸⁵ Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 321-2.

⁸⁶ On the orders of Josef Mengele seventy twins from the Theresienstadt family camp were saved from the gas chambers in the first phase of the liquidation of the camp in March 1944. See Strzelecka and Setkiewicz, "The Construction, Expansion and Development of the Camp," 97.

⁸⁷ The exact number of twins in that barrack is unknown. Elzbieta Warszawska, a prisoner who worked as a nurse in the barrack, testified that there were about 350 twins aged 2-16 of both genders living there. According to another account there were about 200 children in barrack 1; see Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 322.

⁸⁸ The list was sent to the Auschwitz Museum in 1965 by former prisoner Robert Weitz; see Kubica, "Children and adolescents in the camp," 264.

⁸⁹ These figures appear in various documents, as shown in Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 676, 688, 698, 703-4.

twins' accounts, the numbers vary from fifty to 100 twins.⁹⁰ Of the fifty-four twins about whom this research has established data, forty-one were 16 or younger on the day of their arrival. While Spiegel was the only one in that list who was above the age of 25 (he was 29 at the time), most survivors have pointed out the fact that there were a few twins older than him—some of them in their sixties.⁹¹

Besides the twins, there were other inmates in barrack 14 who had been selected for medical experiments. According to Spiegel's recollection, there were eight dwarfs among them,⁹² including Abraham and Miki Ovitz, who arrived at the barrack in August 1944. In the Ovitz family there were ten siblings, seven of them dwarfs. The family, which was known in Transylvania for its circus shows, was deported to Birkenau in May 1944, and they were first accommodated together in section BIIb. When the two brothers, as well as other family members, were moved to barrack 14, they shared bunks with the twins.⁹³ Another two dwarfs well recalled in the barrack were Ludovit Feld (referred to as 'Uncle Lajos' by the children), a 40-year-old painter from Košice and the sole survivor of his family, which had consisted of fifteen normal-sized members who had all been killed in the camp, and 'Uncle Lówi', a stationary shop owner from Aszód in northern Hungary. The latter was described by György Lusztig with the following words: "he was apparently a dwarf as well, but poor him, he was more of a cripple. He could only move around with two crutches." Lusztig also mentions the fact that Lówi needed assistance: "We helped him dress up, I and my brother; we took care of him . . . and things like this. There were many things there."⁹⁴ Lusztig's comment about "many things there" refers to the variety of people with abnormalities that stayed in the barrack alongside the twins, as recalled by

⁹⁰ Tom Simon, interview by Robert Gould, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 03085-2, New York, 7 June 1995; Lusztig and Lazarowitz, SFI.

⁹¹ Almog, Lusztig and Lowy, SFI.

⁹² Spiegel, FVA.

⁹³ For a description of the Ovitz family's experiences in Birkenau see Koren and Negev, *In Our Hearts We Were Giants*, 71-199. The dwarf family is further mentioned in almost all of the twins' testimonies used for this research, including my interviews with Simon, Somogyi, Lusztig, Reichenberg, Y. Taub, M. Alon and Y. Alon.

⁹⁴ Lusztig, SFI; uncle Lówi is also mentioned by Kiss in his "Auschwitz Diary".

Mordechai Alon: "I remember a pair of adult twins from Germany; one of them had a large gland on his face. There were all kinds of people with deficiencies."⁹⁵

At the other end of the barrack there were sick prisoners of various nationalities, some of them also used for experiments. Some twins remember a group of Red Army soldiers from the Asian part of the USSR.⁹⁶ These prisoners, along with some Greek inmates and others, were infected with sexually transmitted diseases, mainly syphilis and gonorrhoea.⁹⁷ "I remember, they would queue up every day in the barrack and some material was injected in their sexual organs," said Alon.⁹⁸ Other inmates in the barrack had been hospitalized with skin diseases and were also from a variety of nationalities including French, Dutch and Czech.⁹⁹

In his books *If This is a Man* and *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi describes the "incommunicability" of the atmosphere that awaited many of the prisoners arriving at the gates of Auschwitz. Levi refers especially to those inmates who did not speak German or Yiddish, whose inability to communicate significantly reduced their chances of survival.¹⁰⁰ In this sense barrack 14 was no exception; it truly resembled a "Tower of Babel", where each group was segregated mainly by the inability to speak to the other groups.¹⁰¹ Luckily, the twins had one another and thus could talk in Hungarian, but they rarely communicated with other groups in the barrack. "No way, we couldn't communicate with anyone; these people were not even Hungarians, and we could only talk to each other", remembered György Lusztig.¹⁰² Although they had communication problems, the twins could barely recollect any kind of harassment or mistreatment by the adult inmates, as they were protected by

⁹⁵ Mordechai Alon, interview by Ronit Vilder, Yad Vashem Archive, 0.3/12655, cassette number 5756, Jerusalem, 27 December 2005, transcript p. 22, and Mordechai Alon, interview by the author, Jerusalem, 8 January 2012.

⁹⁶ M. Alon, YVA.

⁹⁷ Simon, interview by the author, and Kiss, "Auschwitz Diary".

⁹⁸ M. Alon, YVA.

⁹⁹ Almog, SFI.

¹⁰⁰ For his own incommunicable experience see Primo Levi, *If This is a Man* (London, 1996; first edn. 1958), 44-5. For a discussion of the phenomenon in broader terms, see his book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 68-82.

¹⁰¹ The term "Tower of Babel" was used by Primo Levi to describe his experience in the Lager in *If This is a Man*, 44.

¹⁰² Lusztig, SFI.

Mengele's order. This is exemplified by their description of the *Blockälteste* in charge of the barrack. The twins recalled two different people who served as *Blockältester*. Due to the discrepancies in the survivors' descriptions it is difficult to construct a unified image of the two, but all agreed on the fact that they were mean and brutal towards the inmates. One of the *Blockältester* served in the twins' barrack for a long time. He was accommodated in a special room designated for the block elder, and was a political prisoner. "He was very tough. Kind of Prussian. If, for example, someone moved during roll call (*Zählappell*), he could make him do frog leaps for half an hour, sometimes having to hold a brick in his hand", recalled Mordechai Alon, and added, "but he never picked anyone from among the twins; nobody messed with us."¹⁰³ But there were exceptions, as sometimes the *Blockälteste* couldn't resist the temptation, as told by György Kuhn: "he was a terribly wild man . . . Once I found a lighter which was built into a cigarette case. I asked my older mates what I could do with it. They told me to give it to the *Blockälteste*. Maybe he would treat me kindly as a result. So I gave it to him. We stood in a line beside each other, and he came to me and gave me such a huge biff that the whole row fell over. This was the gift for what I had found."¹⁰⁴

Although such incidents were few and far between, the twins were not exempt from the verbal violence of the *Blockälteste*, as described by György Lusztig: "He was in his fifties. He was a very harsh man and very rude. He had a crooked staff. He walked up and down the barrack. He was always talking, we did not understand. Most probably he was telling us how to behave and what would happen if we misbehaved."¹⁰⁵

As explained above, barrack 14 was characterized by the unique and peculiar diversity of its inmates. The barrack's physical appearance resembled many of the inmates' barracks in other sections in site BII, but not without a few unusual features. The barracks in Birkenau were typically wooden stables with entrances at both ends, divided into eighteen stalls originally intended to house fifty-two horses. The first two stalls served as rooms for the prisoners' functionaries and the last two were used for storing buckets for excrement. The

¹⁰³ Alon, YVA.

¹⁰⁴ György Kuhn, interview by Judit Papi, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 50338, 6 Budapest, October 1995.

¹⁰⁵ Lusztig, SFI.

other fourteen stalls contained three-deck bunk beds or sleeping platforms, each intended to sleep fifteen prisoners. The total number of inmates per barrack was over 400.¹⁰⁶ In its external appearance barrack 14 in BIIIf was exactly the same, but inside there were a few differences. Firstly, it was less congested: two to four inmates slept on one bunk (rather than five), depending on their age.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the twins had a few bunks specially allocated to them. Those pairs who were together could sleep next to their twin brother.¹⁰⁸

Upon being introduced to life in barrack 14, the twins had little time to contemplate their new circumstances. Sooner than later they were approached by Spiegel, who would tell them to prepare for their first meeting with Dr Mengele. The twins were about to realize the sole reason for their being held in the camp: they were to be the human guinea pigs in Mengele's notorious experiments.

IV. Mengele's Guinea Pigs: The Twins and the Medical Experiments

Auschwitz and its sub-camps were the scene of various medical experiments conducted by SS physicians. Sterilization experiments were undertaken by Professor Carl Clauberg and Dr Horst Schumann. Clauberg had developed a method of non-surgical sterilization and experimented mainly upon Jewish women in block 10 of the main camp. Like Clauberg, Schumann, an MD and a *Luftwaffe* (air force) lieutenant, was searching for the best method of mass sterilization. Performed in Birkenau, his experiments included the exposure of women's ovaries and men's testicles to X-ray.¹⁰⁹

Another type of experiment was related to the research of diseases caused by starvation. Johann Paul Kremer, a professor of anatomy from the University of Münster, chose extremely emaciated and exhausted prisoners in the clinic at block 28 in the main camp. At first they were examined, then put to death, and their organs were taken out and used by him for research. Kremer was assisted by the head physician of Auschwitz, SS Standortarzt Eduard Wirths, who, together with his brother, conducted experiments related to the research of

¹⁰⁶ Tadeusz Iwaszko, "The Housing, Clothing and Feeding of the Prisoners," in Piper and Długoborski (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues*, vol. 2., 54-5.

¹⁰⁷ Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 322.

¹⁰⁸ Bar-On, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁹ Strzelecka, "Experiments," 348-57.

cervical cancer. Women in block 10 with signs of pre-cancerous changes in their cervix were operated on and their cervix was removed and sent to a laboratory in Hamburg for examination. Other experiments in Auschwitz included testing the effectiveness of new medicine, efforts to unmask the various methods of malingering that were becoming widespread among German soldiers in the summer of 1944, and the use of the skeletons of Jewish inmates for exhibition at the Reich University in Strasbourg.¹¹⁰

As mentioned above, Mengele's experiments focused on twins and the physiology and pathology of dwarfism. Mengele and his medical staff—who were chosen from among prisoners with a medical background—applied a wide range of special techniques in the experiments; these included anthropometric measurements using precision instruments to determine the size and length of the twins' heads, noses, hands, shoulders and feet; blood and urine tests; dental and ophthalmological and X-ray examinations, and psychiatric evaluation.¹¹¹

The following description of the experimental process is based on the perspective of the twins and Spiegel and focuses on their reactions to the experiments in their aftermath and while waiting for the next one to take place. As the first step in the procedure an order was sent to Spiegel to prepare the next set of twins for experiments; this usually occurred a day before the actual experiment took place. "I would receive a note with the relevant names. Obviously they needed to be disinfected and had to take a shower, and then we would wait for the SS man to come and pick us up", Spiegel recalled.¹¹² According to Zvi Visel, who was 14 when he and his twin brother, Syzygy, were deported to Birkenau, another aspect of the preparation was eating before the experiments, in order to arrive at the lab in good shape.¹¹³

The location where the SS man took Spiegel and the twins depended on the type of experiment. The most frequent examinations were the anthropological measurements and blood and urine tests, and took place on the grounds of the Gypsy camp (BIIE), behind barrack 32. In November 1944 the

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 361-7.

¹¹¹ Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 323.

¹¹² Spiegel, YVA.

¹¹³ Zvi Vizel, interview by Moty Hefetz, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 36204-13, Beer Sheva, Israel, 16 November 1997.

location of these tests was changed to the laboratory in barrack 15 at BIIf.¹¹⁴ For the measurement procedure Mengele used the services of Dr Martina Puzyna, a former assistant to the eminent Polish anthropology professor, Jan Czekanowski. Puzyna was supplied with the latest Swiss precision measuring instruments and was ordered to note every detail, including the distance from the nose to the ear, the distance between the ears, eye colours and the like.¹¹⁵

The twins were always measured in pairs. If they were of different genders they were reunited in the experiment room. First they were told to undress, and then they had to wait in the consulting room, described by György Lusztig in the following words: “It was like an old, primitive surgery . . . There was a white bed with wax-cloth . . . as there were probably people who were examined lying down . . . There was a table, and a typist. And there was a little cabinet with some equipment inside.”¹¹⁶ The ‘typist’ was Janina Prazmowska, a Polish prisoner employed by Mengele in the laboratory in addition to Puzyna and Dina Gottlieb, a Czech Jew, whose task was to produce comparative drawings of the individual body parts of twins, dwarfs and other experimental subjects.¹¹⁷ The measurement procedure could take hours, as the twins were examined thoroughly several times. The twins recall this part of the experiments as exhausting, annoying and, for some, very frightening, as in the case of Kalman Baron: “I was afraid. There was a stone bed. I was constantly given orders: take off your clothes, lie on your stomach, now turn on your back. I never knew what was coming—a needle, a cold stethoscope or something else.”¹¹⁸ As part of the tests the twins were photographed either by Mengele himself or often in the photo workshop in the main camp.¹¹⁹

The blood tests were performed in the same lab and up to 20 cm³ of blood was collected from each pair of twins.¹²⁰ The blood, as well as the urine, stool and saliva samples, were sent off to the lab at the SS Hygiene Institute in Rajsko.

¹¹⁴ Kubica, “The Crimes of Josef Mengele,” 323.

¹¹⁵ Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 36-7.

¹¹⁶ Lusztig, SFI.

¹¹⁷ Kubica, “The Crimes of Josef Mengele,” 323.

¹¹⁸ Bar-On, interview by the author, 2011.

¹¹⁹ See, Klein, interview by the author, 2011, and Kubica, “The Crimes of Josef Mengele,” 323.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 324.

According to Helena Kubica, Mengele performed blood transfusions between twins as part of his morphological tests, observing their reactions.¹²¹ As some of the transfusions were not preceded by blood cross-matching, they often led to complications. Such cases were not recorded in the research reports but Leo Lowy, who was experimented upon with his sister, recalls an incident that was related to blood transfusion: “One traumatic experience that I had was when they brought a sick German soldier who had been injured into the lab. They put us side by side onto a bed and they drained my blood to his because it matched. By the time they finished with me I was so weak I couldn’t get up; they gave me a piece of bread to make up for the lost blood.”¹²²

For many twins the ophthalmological examinations were often the most painful, at least physically. Drops of an unknown liquid were put in their eyes, causing agonizing pain and in some cases temporary or even permanent damage to their eyesight, as in the case of Otto Klein: “They put some liquid in our eyes. It hurt. It burnt and we couldn’t see for days. I have problems with my eyes to this day. The doctors have told me it was a result of what they had done to me during the war.”¹²³ The eyes were also often swollen after the experiments, and the twins became aware of their own situation when looking at their brothers, as described by Zerach Taub: “On the day after the tests I told my brother Yitzhak that his eyes were swollen, and he answered: ‘So are yours’.”¹²⁴ In the dental tests, performed in barrack 15 in BIIIf (as were the eye tests), the twins had plaster casts made of their jaws. Tom Simon cannot forget the sensation in his mouth: “The impression of the teeth was a terrible experience for me. They put sulphide in my mouth and left it to dry. That was the worst part.”

¹²¹ Ibid. In the Auschwitz Museum archive there are a large number of documents signed by Mengele requesting these analyses. For the example of a blood test see a request from 6 October 1944. The form is signed “Der 1. Lagerarzt (a, d, f), KL Auschwitz II” (head physician of Auschwitz II), which was Mengele at the time. The reply from the Hygiene Institute contains the blood results of ten individual twins from barrack 14; see APMOB, Records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg. Inst./69, inventory no. 106158, 51/589-591. For an example of the results of a urine test performed on eighteen individual twins on 14 September 1944, see APMOB, Records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg. Inst./69, inventory no. 106154, 48/516.

¹²² Lowy, SFI.

¹²³ Klein, interview by the author.

¹²⁴ Z. Taub, SFI.

The more hazardous experiments included X-rays, crude surgeries and wounds deliberately inflicted on the twins in order to compare their reactions. As these rarely appear in the research records, we can assume that most twins did not undergo such experiments. One exception is the case of the Reichenberg brothers. In his recollection, Ephraim, who was 16 at the time, says that his brother László had a “singer’s voice” unlike his, which was quite poor. Mengele wanted to explore the reasons for this phenomenon and preformed some kind of surgical procedure on their vocal cords. As a result, Ephraim lost his voice completely and Laszlo died of laryngeal cancer in 1946.¹²⁵

The duration and nature of Mengele’s pseudo-scientific experiments can be exemplified by the document of a weekly evaluation of three pairs of twins (Klein, Oppenheimer and Brodt) between 29 July and 5 August 1944. The document, preserved in the Auschwitz Museum archive, is the record of clinical and psychiatric tests conducted on these three pairs, stating that the investigations were carried out “at different times of the day during work and play to avoid intimidation”.¹²⁶ It consists of three parts: part A lists personal details, part B contains the details of physical and neurological examinations, and C psychiatric questions and tests. Part B reveals the highly detailed nature of the physical examinations as different parts of the human body were broken down into numerous smaller sections to be examined. In addition, this part contains an investigation of twin births in the family’s history and detailed questions regarding the health of, and cause of death among, relatives. The analyses in part C vary from attention span and memory to mathematical skills, logic, emotional life and “instinctive perversions”. At the end of the test an evaluation is given for each twin, ranging from “normal psyche” to “mentally deficient” or “feeble-minded”. When I interviewed Otto Klein, he did not recall these evaluations, probably because they had not been presented to the twins as one comprehensive test.

When discussing the medical experiments, the figure of Mengele often takes a central place in both the twins’ and the interviewer’s mind. Mengele

¹²⁵ Reichenberg, interview by the author. In 1984 Ephraim underwent a surgical procedure in Germany where a device was installed in his throat enabling him to speak, albeit in a dull voice.

¹²⁶ For the full document see APMOB, Records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg. Inst./67, inventory no. 106152, 46/501-520.

became an infamous figure only in 1958, and from then on scholars as well as the general public have been preoccupied by the desire to know more about the 'angel of death'.¹²⁷ In his book *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimonies*, Henry Greenspan claims that "survivors do not recount in a vacuum but always to an actual or imagined audience of listeners".¹²⁸ He adds that what the survivors will say often depends on their perception of their listeners' expectations, hopes and fears.¹²⁹ While Josef Mengele was, by all accounts, a war criminal who played a central role in the Auschwitz death factory, descriptions of his personality in the survivors' accounts and scholarly essays, as well as his image among the general public, seem to reflect strikingly different perceptions. The first shows a man who was fond of his subjects, especially the little children among them. According to several accounts, mainly of adult prisoners, Mengele gave the children sweets and chocolate after the experiments and they referred to him as Uncle Pepi. He was not portrayed as a caring person, but rather as cynical; nevertheless, these descriptions suggest that he was well liked by his young subjects.¹³⁰ On the other hand, Mengele was described as an unpredictable figure who had vicious outbursts on numerous occasions, including physical abuse of prisoners.¹³¹ When asked about Mengele, the twins from barrack 14 were not unaffected by the above images or the expectations of the interviewer. In one case a twin described Mengele as quite decent during the experiments, but then added without elaborating, "although he was a huge sadist".¹³² In another case a twin said, without being asked, "No, he never gave us sweets; I think that was for the girl twins."¹³³ The task of the researcher in such instances

¹²⁷ Mengele did not become a well-known figure immediately after the war. It was only in 1958 that he gained notoriety, partly thanks to a German author, Ernst Schnabel, who had learned about Mengele's activities in Auschwitz while doing research for a book on Anne Frank. Survivors from all over the world began to speak out and provided testimony for German legal inquiries; see Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 338. These inquiries began in the same year that Hermann Langbein, the well-known former Auschwitz prisoner, took the file that he had compiled on Mengele to the Ministry of Justice in Bonn, West Germany. See Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 118.

¹²⁸ Greenspan, *On listening to Holocaust Survivor*, 30.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 35, 37, and Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 320.

¹³¹ Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 45-8; see also the outburst described by Lingens-Reiner in *Prisoners of Fear*, 106.

¹³² Lusztig, SFI.

¹³³ Y. Taub, interview by the author.

is to try to separate the representation of the myth of Mengele as 'angel of death' and focus, in a more factual manner, on the details presented in the twins' accounts regarding him.

As it is not the aim of this paper to provide a biography of Mengele, my focus in analysing the twins' accounts of him is on the extent of his presence in their day-to-day life and in their minds, as part of a wider effort to explore their general physical and mental existence in Birkenau.

Mengele was a figure that the twins were regularly exposed to. They mostly saw him during the medical experiments, as he sometimes performed them himself (especially measurements and questioning) and was present as an observer in other cases. The twins who were children at the time recall that on these occasions he treated them politely, usually simply giving them instructions and telling the typist what to write. None of the accounts used for this research mention any incidents where Mengele abused the twins either verbally or physically. On the contrary, two twins mention positive personal experiences that they had with him. Zvi Vizel remembers that Mengele once saw him and his brother in the camp, greeted them with a hello and asked how they were.¹³⁴ The Somogyi brothers recall that they spoke German and could recognize the melodies that Mengele used to whistle. The doctor was impressed by the two 9-year-olds as he thought they were precocious (their records said they were 9 when in fact they were 11), and referred to them as the "intelligentsia".¹³⁵

Zvi Spiegel's accounts can be considered particularly important in this matter, since he probably had the most contact with Mengele among the twins. As mentioned above, he served as Mengele's interpreter during the experiments when the latter was present. In this position Spiegel had the opportunity to observe the twins as they underwent the different tests and witnessed Mengele's attitude towards them. According to Spiegel Mengele was not much of a talker: "He wouldn't speak much, at least not to me. He did speak to those poor beautiful women who were there but not to me. He just asked the twins questions and I translated them to Hungarian."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Zvi Vizel, interview by the author, Modi'in, Israel, 2 January 2012.

¹³⁵ Simon, interview by the author, and Peter Somogyi, interview by Leslie Fass, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 10472-3, Pleasantville, New York, 24 December 1995.

¹³⁶ Spiegel, FVA.

Even though Spiegel does not recall any violent acts committed by Mengele, he remembers the constant fear in his presence. When asked if the children had been afraid of Mengele, he said: "Of course. Who wasn't? I was very much afraid of him. He was more than god in the camp."¹³⁷ As for the children, some of them also recall being afraid of him, while others say that they don't remember being intimidated by his presence. "He wasn't aggressive, but our fear of him was great," Yitzhak Lazarowitz remarked,¹³⁸ while Zerach Taub added, "the fear of Mengele was the worst. That was awful."¹³⁹ Tom Simon said that he had not been afraid of him, as "I couldn't imagine why anyone would want to hurt me".¹⁴⁰ Other twins did not recall any particular feeling that they may have had towards Mengele specifically.

We can thus conclude that Mengele's presence was a part of the twins' life but was not their main preoccupation. This is clearly reflected in the account given by László Kiss in his "Auschwitz Diary". As mentioned, the diary was written back in 1945, a long time before Mengele became infamous for his crimes. In the entire report, his name is mentioned only once, in the final sentence, where Kiss simply writes: "The twin experiments were led by Dr Mengele".¹⁴¹ This indicates that the doctor was well known to the twins but, unlike in later recollections, he is not presented as significant from their perspective. On the other hand, regarding the medical experiments themselves the twins had a lot to say in 1945 as well as in the 1980s and 1990s.

Generally speaking, the twins of barrack 14 in the men's hospital recall the physical abuse related to the experiments as minor compared to the emotional burden that they caused. As mentioned above, the twins remember the experiments as annoying, unpleasant and painful at times, but they mostly overcame the physical abuse within days. This is confirmed in Spiegel's account, where he says, "The majority of the things they did to them in the experiments didn't hurt the children physically. They were mostly questioned, measured and examined."¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Lazarowitz, SFI.

¹³⁹ Z. Taub, SFI.

¹⁴⁰ Simon, interview by the author.

¹⁴¹ Kiss, "Auschwitz Diary".

¹⁴² Spiegel, FVA.

The mixture of the emotional and mental effects of the experiments, together with the physical implications, which were not negligible, appear constantly in the twins' accounts. They were in constant uncertainty regarding their fate; they did not know what the experiments were for, when they would occur and where, and what their nature would be. "We didn't know what the purpose of these experiments was or why they were doing all those examinations. We were completely uninformed, we were not told anything . . . All we knew was that we had to participate in some examination", József Laufer recalled. Back from the experiments, the twins were reluctant to share with one another their experiences and preferred to suppress their feelings as life in the Lager had taught them, as explained by Otto Klein: "We didn't talk about the experiments too much. In Birkenau there were no answers so you were better off not asking questions."¹⁴³

The most disconcerting thoughts that preoccupied the twins regarding the experiments were purely existential. Their fears became even more concrete when in August 1944 the former autopsy room in Lager BIIIf became an experimental room as Mengele had moved the autopsy room to a well-equipped facility in the compounds of Crematorium II. "The worries and fear of the twins was the greatest when the dissecting room behind the morgue in the 'F' Lager was turned into a room for twin examinations in August. There was a rumor that the twin experiments will end in dissection," László Kiss recalled in his "Auschwitz Diary". These concerns were not totally baseless. The ultimate stage of Mengele's experiments was a comparative examination of the internal organs of corpses. Mengele would order the killing of the subject by lethal injection or phenol to the heart. Then the corpse would be examined in the autopsy room first by Dr Jancu Vexler and later by Dr Miklós Nyiszli.¹⁴⁴ According to Nyiszli, "since it was necessary to perform a dissection for the simultaneous evaluation of anomalies, the twins had to die at the same time".¹⁴⁵ The fact that if a twin died his pair was also sentenced to death was known to the children and added to their fears and concerns.

¹⁴³ Klein, interview by the author.

¹⁴⁴ Strzelecka, *Medical Crimes*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁵ Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: Eye Witness Account*, 58.

In general we can conclude that the medical experiments cast a looming shadow over the twins' lives both at the time that they were carried out and in-between examinations. Although they describe them in hindsight as physically bearable, the twins were deeply affected by the situation, as told by Leo Lowy: "The whole system was not normal. We were not okay in our behaviour, feelings and mood. The abnormality of the whole situation was insane and scary."¹⁴⁶ But the experiments, which took place every few days, were only one part of the twins' experience in Birkenau; in between were endless moments where Spiegel had to deal with a group of idle children, surrounded by the unbearable environment of a concentration camp and within a few hundred meters of the gas chambers.

¹⁴⁶ Lowy, SFI.

Chapter III

Life and Death in Lager F: Spiegel Emerges as the Twins' Leader and Protector

Although over the years the historiography of Auschwitz has covered nearly all aspects of the place, particularly its structures and functions, it seems that scholars struggle to portray everyday life in the camp. According to Jürgen Matthaus, “We have but a faint idea . . . what those who were lucky enough to get registered as prisoners went through during the days and nights, the weekdays and weekends in Auschwitz.”¹ Matthaus attributes this problem to several facts: most importantly, that few survived to tell the story; secondly, most survivors were completely overwhelmed by their experience, and, third, a large proportion of survivors arrived at the camp at a late stage, spending a relatively short period of time there, and therefore did not come to have a full insight into the key elements of the inmates' life.² As a significant number of twins who were in Lager BIIf survived the war, and since they were mostly kept in an acceptable physical state, the limitations that Matthaus mentions can partly be overcome in their case, although there are other problems that arise in portraying their life in Birkenau.

I. A Meaningless Existence: Life and the Environment of Death in Lager BIIf

Much has been written about the twins' experiences regarding the medical experiments but not their everyday life. Their day-to-day routine is usually described in brief and only as a background to the horrors of the experiments. However a thorough analysis of the twins' accounts reveals that their life in the camp was dominated by mundane daily events. Although in most cases the interviewers conducting oral history research were primarily interested in the experiments, a careful observation of the recollections indicates that the twins'

¹ Matthaus (ed.), *Approaching an Auschwitz Witness*, 119.

² Ibid.

experiences, feelings and traumas were shaped by the peculiar daily routine in the camp, while the experiments only played a marginal role.

Numerous memoirs and monographs have been written about Auschwitz over the years. In these books the description of the inmates' life routine in the camp mostly focused on the experiences of those who were in the labour units. There is an obvious if horrible reason for this: most inmates who were unable to work did not survive; either they were sent to the gas chamber in the selections upon arrival at the camp, or they fell victim to the camp selections as their physical state began to deteriorate and they were no longer able to work. In this sense the situation of the twins, especially of the children and the adolescents among them, was unique, because at least until the end of September 1944 they were exempted from compulsory labour duties.³ They were to be exclusively at Mengele's disposal, had to be available for the experiments at any time, and in an acceptable physical condition. This led to a situation where the twins spent the majority of their time in Birkenau 'doing nothing'. In what follows I will attempt to describe the experience of young boys caught in the midst of a concentration and extermination camp with seemingly endless time on their hands, and to analyse Zvi Spiegel's efforts to help the children cope with this 'meaningless existence'.⁴

As mentioned above, the twins were generally in a better physical condition than other inmates. They were under Mengele's protection and were perceived by other inmates as enjoying some kind of immunity, as described by Gisella Perl, a Jewish prisoner doctor who assisted Mengele: "In another barrack Dr Mengele kept his other pets, the twins. To be a twin in Auschwitz seemed the maximum of good fortune. They were the chosen ones, the highest caste, and the spoiled darlings of the SS Doctor. They got the easiest jobs and superintendents of our various 'institutions', they did not have to appear in roll call, they received clothes, and shoes and better food, their hair was not cut, and they were safe from being put to death in the usual fashion—by fire."⁵ Although Perl's description is inaccurate, it exemplifies the general perception of the twins among their fellow inmates as the fortunate ones.

³ Kubica, "The Crimes of Josef Mengele," 323, and see Spiegel, FVA.

⁴ A term used by Kalman Bar-On in his interview with the author.

⁵ Perl, *I was a Doctor In Auschwitz*, 132.

According to the twins' own accounts, they received the same rations as other inmates but would enjoy some additional food provided by Mengele from time to time. "We didn't starve. In the hospital they made sure we received our food", Zvi Vizek recalled.⁶ The twins do remember food being an issue as normally they had to settle for a cup of black coffee and a piece of bread with a cube of margarine in the morning, then soup for lunch (called *Dörrgemüse* in the camp) and some kind of porridge for dinner.⁷

A typical day for the twins would begin early in the morning with the notorious roll call (*Zählappell*). The prisoners would line up in proximity to their barracks, where they would be counted in order to make sure the total matched the figure recorded in the inmates' registry office (*Häftlingsschreibstube*).⁸ These roll calls would take place regardless of the weather and often during them inmates were exposed to arbitrary tortures. The twins were not exempt from the morning roll calls but were generally protected from punitive measures and random violence. As most twins did not work, they were exempt from the night-time roll calls and were counted while lying in their beds.⁹

What did the twins do between the morning and night roll calls, on the days when they were not undergoing medical experiments? This was a major concern for Zvi Spiegel, as he was supposed to keep them under control in case they were summoned to Mengele's labs. Some of the adolescents and the older twins worked in the section adjacent to BII. The younger twins, however, had practically nothing to do. Spiegel mentioned 25-35 children, whose only occupation was to remain waiting for the experiments.¹⁰ Consequently the survivors remember wandering around their corner of the camp and being constantly confronted with the presence of death. As a hospital, sector BII contained a lot of corpses of inmates from all parts of the camp. In addition, barracks 12 and 16, designated for incurable inmates waiting to be sent to the

⁶ Zvi Vizek, interview by the author.

⁷ Lusztig, SFI.

⁸ For more about the roll calls in Auschwitz, see Irena Strzelecka, "The working day for Auschwitz Prisoners," in Piper and Długoborski (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central issues*, vol. 2., 65-70. For a description of the roll calls and the importance of the *Häftlingsschreibstube*, see Matthaues (ed.), *Approaching an Auschwitz Witness*, 20-3.

⁹ Alon, YVA.

¹⁰ Spiegel mentions 20-25 children in the YVA interview, and talks about a larger group in the FVA interview.

gas chambers, were always surrounded by piles of corpses. “Sometimes the pile of bodies was so huge; we were guessing if one of them used to be a man or a woman . . . they were there, naked, without clothes”, recalled György Lusztig.¹¹

The presence of death was not limited to sector BIIf because it was also close to Crematorium IV. The twins recall watching the convoys of Jews on their way to the gas chambers, hearing them shout later, and constantly suffering from the smell of the burning corpses.¹² They ultimately got used to these surroundings and adjusted to reality, but not without paying a heavy emotional price: they became apathetic and detached. Leo Lowy described this state of mind: “I will never forget how attuned we got to seeing dead bodies. These are people who were brought in at 2 p.m., most of them alive, and the next day they were dead. They were brought out and I would walk through the barrack and see piles of 15-20 feet of dead bodies from the night. I saw guys throwing them on trucks. What amazed me was that I could walk by a pile and not be moved emotionally—as if it was lumber. We were all numb. Even though alive, we were numb and we sort of accepted what was happening.”¹³

II. The *Zwillingsvater*: Education Within a ‘Death Factory’

This was the framework in which Zvi Spiegel had to work as the *Zwillingsvater*; a group of around thirty children, most of them aged between 9 and 15, torn out of their former life, exhausted from the medical experiments, surrounded by an environment of death, developing an emotional numbness, uncertain regarding their destiny and almost totally unoccupied—all within the general malignancy of Birkenau.

As described at the beginning of the chapter, Spiegel was pleasant and kind to the children from the moment of their arrival, but his initial idea to gather them together as a group and keep them occupied, as he explained, a practical reason: he did not want them to scatter in different directions and not be available for the experiments when summoned. By the time when the majority of the twins arrived in the camp (July 1944), Spiegel had already begun to develop a sense of responsibility for their well-being. One of his first decisions

¹¹ Lusztig, SFI.

¹² Almog, SFI, and M. Alon, YVA.

¹³ Lowy, SFI.

was, as mentioned above, to make the twins learn each other's name.¹⁴ In the atmosphere of Birkenau, where human life was almost worthless, this was an unorthodox request. Spiegel was taking his first steps in providing some kind of a group framework, and for the children to call each other by their names meant that they had to care about their fellow inmates. The next, and greater, challenge was to occupy the twins in their free time.

Schooling

Spiegel had no resources to provide an educational platform. Being an accountant, he had no pedagogic experience, nor did the SS provide him with any books, or a physical space for that matter. At this point it is worth mentioning that there were other known efforts at schooling within Birkenau and other camps. Naturally, as most camps did not admit children, these efforts were rare but they nevertheless indicate the attempt to establish some kind of normality under the anguishing reality of the Nazi concentration camp. Lisa Anne Plante, in her study of schooling during the Holocaust, mentions a few examples of efforts to educate children within the camps.¹⁵ In the Westerbork transit camp there was a class for little children who were supervised by a group of female teachers, who mainly played games with them and taught them songs. In Płaszów the children were provided with books saved from burning that were smuggled by prisoners into the children's barracks; there they would read them and pass them on. In Buchenwald, 3-400 boys lived in block 66, where the block elder organized a choir school. Later the choir performed in front of the SS, thus prolonging their life.¹⁶

In Bergen Belsen Hanna Lévy-Hass (31), a Yugoslavian Jewish teacher, took upon herself the task of teaching 110 youngsters in the children's hut in unbearable conditions, as she described in her famous diary: "It is not easy to work without any kind of book and I have to write subjects on dozens and dozens of little pieces of paper . . . they got hold of pencils and paper in whatever way they can, selling their bread ration, or doing some other kind of deal, or

¹⁴ Simon, interview by the author.

¹⁵ See Lisa Anne Plante, "We Didn't Miss a Day: A History in Narratives of Schooling Efforts for Jewish Children and Youths in German Occupied Europe," Doc. of Education diss. (University of Tennessee, 2000), ProQuest 9973490, 279-354.

¹⁶ Ibid. 279-81.

simply stealing from each other.”¹⁷ The school in Theresienstadt, which had been encouraged by the Nazis, was continued within the compounds of Birkenau at the Czech family camp in section BIIB.

The family camp at BIIB was established in September 1943 for Jews transferred from the ghetto of Theresienstadt near Prague. The purpose of the family camp was to prove to the International Committee of the Red Cross that the rumours regarding the extermination of the Jews were false. Prisoners in that camp were kept alive without conducting selections and were allowed to maintain an almost normal life routine.¹⁸ The Nazis appointed Freddie Hirsch, already an admired educator in Theresienstadt, as a kapo in the camp, and taking advantage of his special position, Hirsch put himself in charge of the children’s barrack. It was in this barrack, numbered 31, that children would appear every morning for a day of school. They were divided into groups and had three hours of lessons, plus sports activities every afternoon. Hirsch’s staff included educators who had already worked with the children in Theresienstadt. Without access to any books, they nevertheless tried to teach their pupils history, astronomy, literature, mathematics and other subjects. Eventually eight books were smuggled into the barrack and were hidden in a secret closet.¹⁹

Hirsch, an experienced educator from the pre-war days, was the driving force behind this endeavour. He chose the teachers, arranged for food and medicine for the children and made sure that all their needs were met. He was admired by both the children and the staff. Having had limited education himself, he emphasized the importance of order, discipline, hygiene and, above all, caring for the children.²⁰ On 7 March 1944 the first group of prisoners from Theresienstadt were murdered in the gas chambers. Hirsch had been urged to lead an uprising within the camp a few days earlier, when the Nazis’ plan was exposed, but the thought that his actions could endanger the children was too much for him and he committed suicide.²¹

¹⁷ Quoted *ibid.* 291.

¹⁸ Keren, “The Family Camp,” 428-30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 433-7. Another detailed description of schooling in the Czech family camp can be found in Plante, “We Didn’t Miss a Day,” 346-9.

²⁰ Keren, “The Family Camp,” 430-1.

²¹ *Ibid.* 436.

After Hirsch's death the school continued to function until the second group of arrivals from Theresienstadt were killed on 1 July 1944. A proof of the fact that the Nazis were aware of, and even encouraged, this schooling effort was an incident which occurred on 30 April 1944. It was the eve of Passover and a Seder night was under way, with stories being told and songs sung. According to testimonies, Mengele heard the singing when he arrived at the barrack, but allowed the prisoners to proceed with the Seder.²²

Lisa Anne Plante notes that children who had participated in camp schools remembered that in some cases the teachers were people who typically would not have taken on such ordinary or young pupils. A case in point was Professor M. Loève, a great French mathematician and a familiar name to all those interested in probability theory, who found himself teaching algebra to 11-year-olds in the Drancy transit camp. Lucien Duckstein, a child survivor from Paris, recalled: "He has got hold of a black board and some chalk, and every morning from ten until noon, he teaches us algebra. A dozen of us make up his class."²³ Lucien grew up to be a professor of mathematics and the teacher-student relationship forged in the camp was to last for several decades.²⁴

Plante is one of the few scholars to dedicate significant attention to Spiegel's educational initiative in Birkenau.²⁵ Spiegel's school differed from those mentioned above, first and foremost because he was an accountant with no background in education. He tried to establish some kind of an improvised framework, teaching the twins various subjects, primarily mathematics, geography and history. The curriculum additionally included story-telling as well as learning the camp rules.²⁶ As Spiegel did not have any materials to use, he relied on his memory and discussed the topics verbally. The children recalled him sometimes giving them mathematical exercises. "I used to be a good student, but it had all disappeared. When Spiegel gave us maths exercises one day in the football field, I didn't even know how to add two plus two together—it was all

²² Ibid. 437.

²³ Quoted in Plante, "We didn't Miss a Day," 286.

²⁴ Ibid. 288.

²⁵ Ibid. 350-3.

²⁶ See interview with Spiegel in YVA; Somogyi, SFI; Y. Taub, interview by the author, and Alon, YVA.

gone,” Mordechai Alon recalled.²⁷ These lessons were conducted in the football field or in the barrack if it was raining. In addition, Spiegel encouraged the twins to play games, and some remember that they had a stack of cards which was used for playing poker. From time to time, naturally, the children didn’t get along. Small fights would erupt and Spiegel would see to it that the fighting stopped and the children made friends again.²⁸ The survivors recall his demeanour as mostly calm, as related by Yitzhak Taub: “he would treat us gently and carefully . . . he was very polite to us.”²⁹

The children were generally allowed to walk freely around section BIIF. They would usually go into other barracks to look for family members and would often find themselves in the area of the football field on the other side of their sector. Spiegel recalls providing them with old rags tied into a rounded bundle that they used for playing football.³⁰ The football field was well remembered by the majority of the twins for another reason: having goal posts and even benches for spectators, the pitch was the scene of occasional football games on Sundays. This was an unusual sight, not only because of the absurdity of football being played in Birkenau a few hundred meters from Crematorium III, but also because there were games between prisoners and the SS guards. The twins remember uniforms, a crowd cheering and the effort of trying to peek from their own living quarters, as they were not allowed to be present at the games.³¹

Solidarity

As time went by Spiegel became more and more involved in the life of the child twins in the camp. He took part in most of their interactions with the Germans and with other privileged prisoners. The children knew that if they needed anything they could immediately turn to Spiegel. “He would take care of

²⁷ M. Alon, YVA. The lessons are also mentioned in the testimonies of Y. Taub and M. Alon, interviews by the author, Lusztig, SFI, and by Spiegel himself in FVA and YVA.

²⁸ Bar-On, interview by the author.

²⁹ Y. Taub, interview by the author.

³⁰ Spiegel, FVA.

³¹ Regarding the prisoners’ teams see Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 37-8, and the account of Sandor Schwarcz, “Auschwitzikrek” (Auschwitz Twins), *Holokauszt Emlékközpont* (Holocaust Memorial Museum in Budapest), doc. no. 782V11, Debrecen, 1945.

everything; he organized us, comforted us and made sure that we had all we needed," Zvi Vizel recalled.³²

One of the ground rules that Spiegel established was that the children had to share with one another any commodity that they possessed, especially food. In addition, he taught them that they had mutual responsibility for the safety of one another. An incident that happened one day to Yitzhak Lazarowitz exemplifies the challenges of teaching children the virtue of solidarity within Birkenau. As the men's hospital was separated from the Canada section by only an electric fence, the children would often go to the fence and the prisoners from Canada would throw them food or other goods. Approaching the electrified barrier was very dangerous as the camp guards shot anyone in its proximity. One day Lazarowitz nevertheless decided to take the risk in order to receive a piece of sausage: "I got a large piece that was worth a lot of money, which meant life in the camp. When I entered the barrack with it, Spiegel, our kapo, saw me and started to shout at me. He took it from me and said that I deserved a punishment, a beating. He called the twins and I was spanked lightly on my bottom by all of them. It was a symbolic punishment. Then Spiegel cut the sausage and gave each twin a piece. He did me a favour and gave me a double portion."³³

Such values of sharing and solidarity were contrary to the norms among most prisoners in Birkenau. The children knew that and at times had difficulty understanding why they needed to share when people surrounding them did the opposite. When recalling the above incident, Lazarowitz mentioned that he had been very angry at Spiegel. When the interviewer asked him why, he explained: "Because I saw there were other people with good organizing skills who knew how to get food. The goods were thrown in from all around. Everything had a value and I was as quick and good at it as the others."³⁴ Lazarowitz, an assertive child, had observed others improving their own situation in the camp and had difficulty understanding why he needed to act differently.

The above example tells us something about the challenge that Spiegel faced as he tried to inculcate values which, in an ordinary educational

³² Visel, SFI.

³³ Lazarowitz, SFI.

³⁴ Ibid. For a description of the camp's black market system see Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence*, 101-6.

framework, would be the norm but in Birkenau went against the ‘first take care of yourself’ approach adopted by the majority of the inmates. According to Anna Pawelczynska, one of the main objectives of the Nazi concentration camp was to shatter the cohesiveness of a prisoner group, thereby creating an environment that was threatening to the inmates from within as well as from without.³⁵ It is probable that within the considerably protected environment of the twins’ barrack Spiegel had a better opportunity to create a unified group than anywhere else in the camp. On the other hand, we have no reason to assume that without Spiegel’s leadership and social awareness the twins would have established any kind of unified social structure characterized by solidarity and mutual support. The children were not completely isolated from the rest of the camp, as indicated by Lazarowitz’s statement, and for the most part would have probably kept their goods to themselves. Once Spiegel had laid down the rule it became common knowledge that everything had to be shared, as described by Tom Simon: “We got some milk that others didn’t. The unwritten rules were that we should share the milk with the older kids.”³⁶

Forty-one years later, in the Mengele mock trial in Jerusalem, the participating twins were observed and interviewed by Nancy Segal, an American social psychologist specializing in twin research. She noticed that at the reunion the male twins appeared to recall one another’s name and faces more readily than the women. Segal attributed this phenomenon to the fact that the men had been organized in a community under Spiegel’s leadership in Birkenau whereas the women had lacked either organization or leadership.³⁷ She mentioned the fact that some of the women felt left out as the other twins did not recognize them, while watching the “Spiegel boys” recognizing one another and exchanging shared memories.³⁸

Segal’s observations reflect the importance of Spiegel as a pivotal character who, on the surface, organized the boy twins into a group but who, on a deeper level, also gave them a sense of belonging and solidarity. Like Freddie Hirsch, Spiegel unified the twins mainly by his devotion on the one hand and his

³⁵ Ibid. 44.

³⁶ Simon, interview by the author.

³⁷ Segal, “Holocaust Twins”, 56.

³⁸ Ibid. According to Segal, the term “Spiegel boys” was coined by one of the twins in the interviews that she conducted with them; unfortunately she does not recall by whom.

emphasis on boundaries, order and solidarity on the other. Unlike Hirsch, however, Spiegel must have acted according to his intuition and childhood values rather than on the basis of any prior educational experience.

Comforting

Another challenge that Spiegel had to deal with was the emotional ups and downs experienced by the children. As mentioned above, the twins became quite numb and indifferent to their horrific surroundings; they adapted to their new life routine and, as children often do, accepted reality as it was. However, problems occurred when, on occasion, this routine was dramatically upset by certain events in their surroundings. One such traumatic event occurred at the beginning of August 1944, just as the twins were starting to reconcile themselves to the anguishing life of the camp. On 2 August, after the evening roll call, a camp curfew was ordered in Birkenau and a barrack curfew in the Gypsy family camp (BIIE). Later that evening trucks drove into the camp and 2,897 defenceless women, men and children were taken to the gas chambers and murdered, and the Gypsy family camp was 'liquidated'.³⁹ The twins living in proximity to the events could not forget that night. "They were beaten and thrown onto the trucks . . . One could see it well, see it clearly; it was during the night. All the screaming, wailing, moaning . . . this entire monstrosity, it just happened," György Lusztig remembered. On that night the crematorium ovens were not operating, so the corpses were incinerated in a nearby pit.⁴⁰ The twins remember seeing the huge fire created in the pit and wishing that night would be over already.⁴¹ In such situations Spiegel would try to comfort the children and give them some parental warmth. He would tuck them into bed, telling them that everything would be okay and promising to take them home one day. ⁴² Spiegel himself recalled how difficult these moments had been and how helpless he had sometimes felt: "I remember one time when a little boy cried. I told him, 'don't worry, in a few days we are going to be liberated'. I tried the best I could. They were little children

³⁹ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 677.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See M. Alon, YVA and Lusztig, Almog, Somogyi and Simon, SFI.

⁴² See Z. Taub, SFI, and Reichenberg, interview by the author.

looking for their moms, and I told them that we would all be together soon. This was a white lie, but what could I do? He was only 7 years old.”⁴³

Family

Some of the children, like Spiegel, had the good fortune to have family members alive in the camp. Whether it was a twin sister who was kept for the experiments or one of their parents, other siblings or someone from their distant family, the twins made great efforts to find them. One of the initial steps some of them took was to try to locate relatives via the camp’s clandestine mail system. This system was described by László Kiss in his “Auschwitz Diary”: “Letters (slips of paper) were tied around small stones with strings pulled from clothing. These were thrown over the fence to the neighbouring camp. If it did not get to the addressee, it was thrown on. Naturally only a few of the letters got to their destination, especially if the writer of the letter didn’t know in which camp the addressee was. However, some of the letters arrived at their destination, as happened in our case from the C lager to F lager.” Using this method Kiss and his brother Bandi managed to contact a few of their relatives in the nearby sub-camps.⁴⁴

One day, as Yitzhak Lazarowitz was approaching the fence separating the hospital camp from the Canada section, he saw a group of women sorting out the clothes plundered from the victims. Lazarowitz shouted to them: “Are there any twins among you?” Suddenly his sister, who had heard his voice, replied. “As there was quite a distance, we couldn’t really hear each other, so we just waved to one another.”⁴⁵ Lazarowitz informed the other boys that the female twins were working in Canada and from then on those who had twin sisters used to wave to the girls every day. These long-distance meetings provided the twins with some kind of comfort and gave meaning to their existence in Birkenau. The same could be said of those who saw their mothers. After the liquidation of the Gypsy camp, female inmates were accommodated in the compounds of section BIle; among these women were the mothers of some of the twins who had been left alive in the selections. Mordechai Alon remembers when he and his brother

⁴³ Spiegel, FVA.

⁴⁴ Kiss, “Auschwitz Diary”.

⁴⁵ Lazarowitz, SFI.

Yoel first saw their mother through the fence: “she was able to sneak a note to us saying that she would come to the fence at a certain time . . . then we saw her across the barbed wire. Her head was shaven but we could still recognize her. We couldn’t hear her but we could clearly see her. One day my brother told her that I was calling him all kinds of bad names.”⁴⁶ This story is a good indication of how young the children really were. 11-year-old Yoel, even in the midst of Birkenau, immediately slipped back into his role as a child upon meeting his mother, asking her to intervene in a brawl that he was having with his twin brother.

In his testimonies, Spiegel himself never mentioned meeting his sister, but according to her recollection they had one meeting four months after their arrival in the camp. Magda Zelikovich (née Spiegel) was assigned to be the cleaner of Mengele’s office in section BIa. Every morning Magda had to clean the room and make sure that everything was in place. After she finished cleaning she worked as a nurse in the women’s hospital. In her testimony Magda remembers one day having had to escort, along with a few other nurses and some SS men, an inmate who was being taken on a stretcher to the Auschwitz main camp for an operation. Magda recalls asking for, and being granted, permission to look for her brother. “The meeting with my brother was very emotional. We were so happy that we still had one another. We knew we wouldn’t have anybody else if we were to survive. This meeting gave me strength to carry on.”⁴⁷ What Magda refers to as Auschwitz was probably section BIIf in Birkenau, which had an operating theatre; she would have had no reason to ask about her brother or try to find him elsewhere.

Protection

The ability of the twins to move about freely within their sub-camp and to contact people from other sections as well as to trade goods was not at all self-evident in Birkenau. The camp was a dangerous place to wander around, especially for children, as it presented a hostile environment full of inmates who would do anything to survive and guards who were eager to harass prisoners. The reason why the twins were relatively safe was that the other inmates and the guards, as

⁴⁶ M. Alon, YVA.

⁴⁷ Zelikovich, FVA.

well as the children themselves, were aware of their special position as 'Mengele's property'. The twins felt protected and immune to the consequences of their deeds, even if those were illegal under the camp rules. "I would throw things over the fence into section BIIe. I was not afraid. I gave food to other prisoners there. I was caught only once but they didn't touch me. There were a kapo and an SS guard there but they just carried on talking. I did have some fear of what would happen but in the end they didn't do anything," Mordechai Alon remembered.⁴⁸ The more dangerous incidents occurred when the twins were among other inmates and not in the compounds of the men's hospital. In those cases they needed to be explicit about their special status, as happened once to Leo Lowy. Lowy smuggled himself out on a cart taking a labour unit as he wanted to get out of section BIIIf. "I came close to being badly beaten . . . we went to another camp to do some work. Two drunken soldiers took us to a little room and started beating us. I found a way to be the last one, as they were beating us one at a time . . . When it was my turn, and this I will never forget, I just blurted out the word *Zwilling*, and they never touched me; they froze. They knew I was special, that I was needed for Mengele. So I went outside. I was almost delirious. The guys thought I had gone mad."⁴⁹

Lowy's recollection proves that Mengele's name and twin research were well known around Birkenau, and that the guards, as well as the inmates, were afraid of him. The fact that the twins were his guinea pigs meant that no one had the right to harm them. This included the twins themselves: they also had to avoid getting hurt as it would put them at risk; they would have to deal with Mengele's fury, which could end in their death. On the other hand, children are not always aware of the physical risks that they take and at times are even intrigued by possible danger. This was a further reason that Spiegel wanted them gathered in one place and occupied; he knew that he would have to bear the consequences of any damage to their body—as happened in the case of the Fogel twins, who were known as mischievous boys and who tended to get into trouble. One day it was raining and as the boys were playing with the electrified barbed wire one of them burned his head. When they were taken to the experiments Spiegel covered for them saying that an accident had happened. He also

⁴⁸ M. Alon, YVA.

⁴⁹ Lowy, SFI.

prepared the twins to tell the same story when asked, and afterwards gave them a good dressing down.⁵⁰

Whether it was thanks to Mengele's protection or Spiegel's supervision, the boy twins of barrack 14 in section BIIf had some sense of security, at least from the random abuse or killings that occurred elsewhere in the camp. Their existential fears were focused on the medical experiments and the fact that not everybody survived them. Spiegel himself was more aware of the dangers and did everything in his power to keep the twins out of trouble. But neither he nor the children could see what was coming: their sense of immunity was about to be shattered and Spiegel was soon to play his most dramatic and most critical role as the twins' saviour.

III. The 'Selection': The Twins Face a New Reality

"When was I really afraid? One day they came and announced a block closure. Then a group of German doctors headed by Dr Thilo entered our barrack. Thilo conducted a selection among the twins. My brother and I were nine years old and we were selected to die. They undressed us. The fear was intolerable. Spiegel tried to comfort us somehow, but all signs indicated that this was it. I was scared to death."⁵¹ This description by Mordechai Alon is one of many given by the twins regarding their sole experience of the notorious camp selections. This selection changed the situation, both mentally and physically, in barrack 14, for the twin boys as well as for Spiegel himself.

Camp selections in Auschwitz-Birkenau

The basis for conducting selections among prisoners and then killing them by phenol injection or in the gas chambers was a directive issued in the spring of 1941, bringing concentration camp prisoners within the scope of the second stage of the so-called euthanasia programme ('14 f 13'). This directive was in force for non-Jews until 27 April 1943 and for Jews until October 1944.⁵² The

⁵⁰ This story is mentioned in Lusztig, SFI. The Fogels are also mentioned in my interviews with Reichenberg and Vizel.

⁵¹ Y. Alon, interview by the author.

⁵² Franciszek Piper, "The Methods of Mass Murder," in id. and Długoborski (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940–1945*, vol. 3, 103-4. For more about operation '13f14' see n. 31 in the Introduction.

selections discussed in the following were restricted to registered prisoners, unlike the mass murder of Jews who were killed upon arrival in the framework of the programme for the total liquidation of the Jewish people. The Jews selected to be murdered in the gas chambers were never registered in the camp and were usually sent immediately to their deaths.

By 1942 selections of registered prisoners had become an important element of the annihilation mechanism of the camp. The selections were carried out in the camp 'hospitals' and ambulatory clinics although they were frequently held in other parts of the camp in various circumstances too.⁵³ The SS high command ordered that all those who seemed unlikely to return to work or who had been in the camp hospital for a longer period of time were to be killed under the 'euthanasia' programme. There were also repeat selections of new arrivals who had already been admitted to the camp as capable of work; during the shower preceding registration the SS looked for people with disabilities or physical defects as well as for pregnant women who had not been spotted during the selection upon arrival. Prisoners chosen in the selections were usually held for several days in special barracks or rooms, universally known in the camp as 'death blocks'. As a rule, the prisoners kept there received no food or water at all. As mentioned above, in Lager F barracks 12, 16 and later 7 were used for this purpose and were universally remembered by the twins. According to estimates, over 100,000 of the approximately 400,000 prisoners registered in the camp died in the gas chambers.⁵⁴

The events leading to the selection

By the summer of 1944 Dr Mengele's mood was becoming gloomy as he came to realize, sooner than many of his colleagues in the camp, that the Germans had all but lost the war. His wife Irene could sense this change of mood in his correspondence with her and decided to go to Auschwitz and cheer him up.⁵⁵ Irene was set to leave Auschwitz after a one-month stay on 11 September 1944. However, she contracted diphtheria and later suffered from complications. She remained in the camp hospital for more than a month, much of the time delirious

⁵³ Ibid. 104.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 111, 115.

⁵⁵ Posner and Ware, *Mengele*, 54.

with high fever. Mengele, who was extremely worried about her condition, visited her three times a day.⁵⁶ The fact that he was distracted by his wife's condition enabled Dr Heinz Thilo, head physician of the men's hospital at BIIf, to act more freely within the camp.

Like Mengele, Dr Heinz Thilo was born in 1911. He joined the Nazi party in 1930 and was granted his doctor's licence in 1937. In 1941 he was assigned to the Waffen SS and in July 1942 he arrived at Auschwitz. From November 1942 he served as a physician in the men's hospital in section BIIf, where he later became head physician, filling this post until 7 October 1944.⁵⁷ Thilo was also second in command to Mengele in the Gypsy hospital camp, which consisted of two barracks. He used to perform malaria experiments in barrack 22.⁵⁸ In 1943 Thilo was frequently seen together with Mengele at the arrival ramp, as the two were highly involved in the selection process. In December 1943 Thilo set up a special block for sick prisoners of German nationality and a small ward for the more 'interesting cases'. The sole purpose of this was to improve his medical knowledge. Block 7 at BIIf was renovated and became known as Thilo's block.⁵⁹

According to different witnesses, among them Spiegel himself, Thilo had some kind of rivalry with Mengele and did not like the fact that he kept the child twins alive in the compounds of section BIIf.⁶⁰ Thus when Mengele was preoccupied with his wife's sickness Thilo was primed to make a move.

The Twins' Selection

The exact date of the twins' selection is difficult to establish. As the killing did not actually occur, it was not documented and thus we can only make an estimation based on the twins' evidence and by tracing the selections that took place in the men's infirmary around that period. In their recollections the twins all mention autumn 1944 as the time of the selection. More specifically we have Spiegel's testimony, which indicates that the selection took place at the end of September or the beginning of October, but certainly before the *Sonderkommando* revolt of 7

⁵⁶ Ibid. 56.

⁵⁷ Jeremy Dixon, *Commanders of Auschwitz: the SS officers who ran the largest Nazi concentration camp* (Surrey, 2005), 196-8.

⁵⁸ Strzelecka, "The Hospitals at Auschwitz," 306.

⁵⁹ Dixon, *Commanders of Auschwitz*, 197.

⁶⁰ Spiegel, FVA.

October 1944 (see below).⁶¹ Another fact that can help us identify the date was the Nazi tendency to hold selections in the camp during Jewish festivals.⁶² According to Danuta Czech's *Auschwitz Chronicle* three major selections took place in Lager BIIf in September-October 1944; the first was on 19 September, the second day of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year);⁶³ the second selection was on the eve of Sukkot, 2 October 1944,⁶⁴ and the third on 16 October, a week after the end of the Jewish High Holiday season.⁶⁵ As concerns the date of the twins' selection, 16 October can be ruled out for two reasons: firstly, it was after the *Sonderkommando* uprising and, secondly, Dr Thilo had ceased to serve as camp physician on 9 October and had immediately been transferred to Gross-Rosen, hence was not in Birkenau on the day in question. We are thus left with the two former dates. Another piece of evidence can help us rule out 19 September: in their testimonies the Taub brothers say that they were transferred to Lager A along with a few other twins.⁶⁶ Zerach Taub indicates that on Yom Kippur 1944 (27 September) the two of them were still together with the rest of the group in the men's hospital camp.⁶⁷ On the other hand, when his brother, Yitzhak, was asked about the 'infamous twin selection', he had no recollection of such an event, and it is not mentioned in Zerach's testimony, either.⁶⁸ Thus we can conclude that the twins' selection took place between 28 September (a day after Yom Kippur) and 8 October (a day before the revolt)—probably on 2 October, the eve of Sukkot.

The evidence regarding the actual events of the selection are of great significance as we rarely have testimonies from people who were chosen to die

⁶¹ Spiegel, YVA.

⁶² For example, on the eve of Yom Kippur 1943 (8 October), SS doctors conducted a selection where several thousand Jews from sections BIId and BIIf were sent to the gas chambers on the same day; see Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 502.

⁶³ On that date the SS doctors conducted a selection in the prisoners' infirmaries. 330 Jews from Lager BIId and 65 boys from Kaunas in BIIf, who had been brought to the camp on 1 August, were selected. They were all killed on the same day; see, *Ibid.*, 713.

⁶⁴ On 2 October (the Jewish festival of Sukkot), during a selection in BIIf, another 30 prisoners, adolescents from Kaunas, were singled out among others; see *Ibid.*, 720. On the same day Dr. Thilo conducted a selection in the men's quarantine at BIId—this could indicate that he was conducting selections on that day.

⁶⁵ On 16 October 1944, 600 prisoners who had been selected by an SS Doctor in the men's infirmary in section BIIf were killed in the gas chambers of Crematorium III; see, *Ibid.*, 733.

⁶⁶ See Z. and Y. Taub, SFI.

⁶⁷ Z. Taub, SFI.

⁶⁸ Y. Taub, interview by the author.

in these selections; naturally, they did not live to tell the story. It is interesting to note that the descriptions regarding the selections all come from the younger twins, who were chosen for death, while the older ones (excluding Spiegel), who were not sentenced to the gas chambers, either only mention the incident briefly or ignore it altogether. The young ones, however, recall the selection in elaborate detail and regard it as the most traumatic experience they had in the camp, or in their entire life for that matter.

It all started at daybreak. First an order was issued by Dr Heinz Thilo to seal the barracks. Then a group of SS doctors, headed by Thilo, entered the twins' barrack and ordered everyone to take off their clothes.⁶⁹ As was usual practice, the SS physicians set up a stick at a certain height and made the children walk past it. Those who passed underneath were to be sent to the gas chambers while those whose head touched the stick remained alive. Seeing this, the children stretched their necks to try and reach up to the bar.⁷⁰ After this drill they all knew who was sentenced to death. "We all had these boards, paperboards, in our hands during the selection . . . and if your board was taken from your hand that meant you had to go to be executed soon."⁷¹ The older twins avoided the fate of the young ones, and those young children who were physically developed also had the fortune to escape the death sentence. This was what happened in the case of the Klein brothers, who were only 12 at the time but were chosen to live, while Yitzhak Lazarowitz, who was 15, was selected to die.⁷²

Approximately half of the twins, as well as two dwarfs, were selected for gassing.⁷³ At the end of the process the names of those selected were written down on a piece of paper and they prepared for the next step:⁷⁴ to be transferred to one of the adjacent barracks designated for those who were to be taken to the gas chambers. The atmosphere during the selection itself was described as tense but quiet, with sounds of crying breaking the silence from time to time.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ The fact that it was Thilo who conducted the selection is mentioned in Spiegel, FVA, 1993; Lazarowitz and Somogyi, SFI, and Simon, interview by the author.

⁷⁰ This description appears in Simon, interview by the author, although he mentions a string instead of a bar. This method, applied regularly by the doctors, is mentioned in Piper, "Methods of Mass Murder," 111.

⁷¹ József Laufer, SFI.

⁷² See Klein, interview by the author, and Lazarowitz, SFI.

⁷³ Koren and Negev, *In Our Hearts we were Giants*, 144.

⁷⁴ Somogyi, SFI.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

After the doctors left the barrack and while the children were waiting to be transferred, the twins claim they knew that they were about to die. "We were doomed. It was obvious as we had seen a lot of selections. For example, we had witnessed all of the liquidation process in the Gypsy family camp," recalled Yoel Alon.⁷⁶ "We didn't have any illusions. Every night we saw the destination that people were marched to," said Yitzhak Lazarowitz.⁷⁷ The children talked between themselves about their destiny. In retrospect, some describe despair and fear as their dominant feelings while others claim that they were so numb that they barely felt anything. As József Laufer explained, "I ought to mention at this point that at that time the result of the selection didn't really matter to us, as we actually thought that there was no chance for any of us to leave the camp anyway."⁷⁸ Peter Somogyi was the only twin who described a sense of anger and the will to resist: he had planned to use a knife he had and kill a German soldier on the way to the gas chambers.⁷⁹

But the process was yet to be completed and the separation from the elder twins, together with hours of waiting for their sentence, contributed to a deterioration in the children's mental and physical situation. Yitzhak Lazarowitz remembers the moments they left their barrack: "I had a piece of bread left. I didn't need it anymore. I told the twins who were staying that they could have it. But I asked them to promise me that if they saw my sister the next day, they wouldn't tell her I had been selected for the gas chambers."⁸⁰ Spiegel once again tried to comfort the young ones but this time it was an almost impossible mission, as recalled by Yoel Alon: "Spiegel told us we shouldn't give up hope, but even he couldn't comfort us at that moment; we all knew what a selection was."⁸¹

After being transferred to the 'death barrack' the children were emotionally and physically drained. The doors of the barrack were sealed and no one was allowed to enter or leave. According to Shaul Almog, a lot of crying could be heard at the time.⁸² All too often in the past the young twins had seen the trucks arriving at the 'death barracks' to take those who had been selected the

⁷⁶ Y. Alon, interview by the author.

⁷⁷ Lazarowitz, SFI.

⁷⁸ József Laufer, SFI.

⁷⁹ See in Somogyi, interview by the author, and Somogyi, SFI.

⁸⁰ Lazarowitz, SFI.

⁸¹ Y. Alon, interview by the author.

⁸² Almog, SFI.

day before for liquidation in the gas chambers, only this time they were the ones waiting for the truck. Tom Simon described this experience as “the low point of my life”, while Yitzhak Lazarowitz remembers hearing from all around the famous Jewish prayer ‘ShemaYisrael’.⁸³

After long hours of waiting there was a sudden development, as described by Lazarowitz: “So we were waiting for the truck that usually came for the ones to be executed. But all of a sudden the door of the barrack opened and Spiegel told the twins to go back to their beds. We couldn’t believe it. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, a minute before death.”⁸⁴ What happened while the young twins were locked up in the ‘death barrack’?

The only source we have is Spiegel himself, along with twins who heard rumours circulating in the camp a few days after the incident. Spiegel describes the sequence of events in the following words: “After the children were transferred from our barrack I somehow managed to open the bolted door and run outside towards the camp gate. It was dangerous because the SS could shoot whoever was running around like that. At the gate I approached the guard in the booth and told him that I was Spiegel, the *Zwillingsvater*, and wanted to speak to Mengele. He let me speak to Mengele on the phone and I told him that Thilo had come and taken away some twins. Mengele immediately gave an order to release the twins and with that the big affair ended.”⁸⁵ It is worth mentioning that a few days later, on 9 October, Thilo was dismissed from his duties in Birkenau and, as mentioned, was transferred to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Although there is no documented evidence, we can tentatively assume that this had to do with the incident.

To come back to Spiegel, his act was nothing less than suicidal in the context of Birkenau; breaking out of the barrack during curfew, running across Lager F from barrack 14 to the entrance gate a few hundred yards away, and approaching a German guard requesting to talk to Mengele—which Spiegel described as “saying you wanted to speak to God”⁸⁶—were all extremely dangerous for a camp inmate. In hindsight Spiegel said he had no idea why he hadn’t been shot at any one of those stages. Analysing this event we can

⁸³Simon and Lazarowitz, SFI.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ The testimony is based on Spiegel’s interviews in YVA and FVA.

⁸⁶ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of Flames*, 86.

speculate that, despite the dangers, there could have been a few factors which contributed to the success of Spiegel's act. Firstly, it seems plausible that because Spiegel regularly escorted the twins to the experiments, some of which took place outside the compounds of Lager F, the guards recognized him as the 'twins' father'. Secondly, and as a consequence of this, Spiegel was perceived in some sense as Mengele's assistant and thus had a special status in the eyes of the SS personnel. Finally, we can assume that the guards, who were aware of the selection, suspected it was Thilo's initiative, and feared that there would be consequences for themselves if Mengele's 'guinea pigs' were executed.

When asked by the interviewer why he had acted the way he had, Spiegel, although acknowledging that "it was a big thing to do", admitted—as always in his interviews—the fact that he had been driven by a pragmatic motive: "he always warned me that if something happened to the children, he would hang me".⁸⁷ Bearing in mind this threat, Spiegel acted as if he had nothing to lose and thus went on a 'suicidal mission' to save the young twins, as well as himself. When the twins asked Spiegel a few days later how it could be that they had been released, he simply responded by saying that "Mengele had called off the selection".⁸⁸ This was neither the first nor the last time that Spiegel would turn out the twins' saviour, but for the twins it was this deed, along with Spiegel accompanying them on the journey home, for which they were the most thankful. In the words of Tom Simon, "I will never forget that if it hadn't been for him running to call Mengele I wouldn't have lived to see liberation."⁸⁹

Reflecting on the events of the twins' selection we may draw a few conclusions. Deborah Dwork has argued that trauma is an 'advantage' in the context of child testimony because traumatic events are more vividly remembered; hence child recollections are exceptionally reliable.⁹⁰ In many ways the abortive selection exemplifies Dwork's point. The recollections regarding the selection took up a large portion of the general testimony of the younger twins. Although it was a single event, the twins often focused on it in their stories, to a greater extent than on the medical experiments, which were ongoing. In addition, the selection was remembered in greater detail than any

⁸⁷ See Spiegel, YVA.

⁸⁸ As stated by Peter Somogyi in his interview by the author.

⁸⁹ Simon, interview by the author.

⁹⁰Dwork, *Children with a Star*, 40.

other experience in the camp, and the different testimonies were very similar on this point both in their general storyline and in the smaller details.

Secondly, the guards' behaviour and Mengele's reaction to Spiegel's act reveal a lot about Spiegel's status in the camp; he was probably better positioned than he ever admitted after the war, at least in the perception of the Germans. The reasons for his reluctance to discuss his status will be analysed in Chapter V.

Finally, the twins' testimonies concerning the selections provide a rare insight into the camp selection system, leading to a more accurate understanding of the experiences of the inmates in this respect. When Jürgen Matthaus claimed that "Because Auschwitz has become a symbol after the war to the horrors and evilness of the Holocaust, we need a broad mosaic of sources to paint a purposeful, clear and comprehensive picture of the past", he referred to the fact that the famous landmark images of a place, in this case Auschwitz, could mislead us into believing that everything has already been said about it. The notorious selection process that the Jews underwent upon disembarking the train at Birkenau is one of the best-known images of the Holocaust in general and of Auschwitz specifically. One could assume that every angle of the selections has been heard and covered from both the perpetrators' and the victims' perspective. However, focusing on the in-camp selections we may highlight some new elements of the experience, which, while resembling in certain respects the selections on the ramp, was very different in others, as apparent from the twins' case.

Unlike the victims on the arrival ramp, the inmates undergoing selections were well aware of the purpose and result of the process. They were faced with a situation where there was no hope or illusions regarding their fate. Even the twins, who, unlike other inmates, did not expect the selection to occur, immediately recognized the pattern of events, having observed other selections in the past.

The other clear difference was the duration of the process. The newly arrived victims usually faced their tragic end within a few hours or less.⁹¹ In the case of the camp inmates the process could last up to several days, spent mostly in the barracks designated for those doomed to die. Auschwitz survivors

⁹¹ For a description of the killing process see Franciszek Piper, "The Methods of Mass Murder," 169-75.

consistently recalled these barracks after the war, and the twins' recollections enable us to portray a 'death barrack' from the point of view of those inside, who had been sentenced to be gassed. Their mixed emotions, confusion, despair, numbness and physical exhaustion paint a ghastly picture of the last days of those awaiting death.

The Aftermath of the Selection

October 1944 was a month of transition in Birkenau in general and within the twins' microcosm in Lager BIIIf. The peak period of the mass extermination, which began in May 1944, had come to an end.⁹² By the autumn of 1944 the Nazis had either exterminated or imprisoned most of the Jews they could lay their hands on. Sometime towards the end of September or the beginning of October 1944 an order issued by Himmler demanded the immediate halt of the mass extermination of Jews.⁹³ The order did not, in fact, arrive in Auschwitz until a month later; according to Danuta Czech, the killing with Zyklon B gas was stopped on 2 November 1944. From then on selected prisoners were shot to death in the gas chambers or on the grounds of crematorium V.⁹⁴

In general the selection had brought about rapid changes in the twins' life. First, and above all, their sense of immunity had disappeared. The fact that they had been so close to being executed had proved to the twins that nothing was guaranteed in a Nazi concentration camp. This fact became more apparent as the medical experiments began to take place less and less frequently. Spiegel, in fact, claims to have last seen Mengele at the end of October 1944.⁹⁵ Other twins do not mention the last time they saw Mengele, but do note that after the selection barely any experiments were conducted.⁹⁶

As part of the new policy, and due to the reduction in the number of medical experiments, the twins began to take part in the different work squads

⁹² Andrzej Strzelecki, *The Evacuation, Dismantling and Liberation of KL Auschwitz* (Oświęcim, 2001), 66.

⁹³ Testimony of Kurt Becher, Himmler's former confidant, at his trial in 1946. See, Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 71 n. 18.

⁹⁴ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 743.

⁹⁵ Spiegel, YVA.

⁹⁶ See Somogyi, SFI, and Y. Alon, interview by the author. There are indications that Mengele continued with his experiments as late as December. In the *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 760-1, it is stated that 11 female dwarfs were probably killed as a result of experiments that Mengele performed on them on 7 December 1944.

operating in the camp. While the older twins were assigned to the ordinary labour units, the younger twins were compelled to do all kinds of arbitrary jobs which had no practical purpose, as described by Yitzhak Lazarowitz: “They told us we all had to work. Only the youngest ones were exempted. So what did we do? We cleared up the rubbish in the camp, the leaves and pieces of paper that were on the floor, to make sure the camp was clean. Later some of the older ones were taken to work in the laundry room.” Spiegel himself was assigned then to work in what Lazarowitz referred to as the laundry room but was actually a clothing chamber (*Bekleidungskammer*).⁹⁷

The fact that Spiegel was assigned to work in the clothing chamber is recorded in his testimonies but can be traced in the camp documentation as well. In early November 1944 a few work commandos from Lager BIIIf were subjected to a ‘Typhus fever blood sample test’. A document from 5 November orders the test to be carried out on prisoners in the boiler commando, as well as the laundry, clothing chamber, kitchen, bread stockroom and canteen commandos. Spiegel’s number is listed among those mentioned in this document.⁹⁸ Two days later the results of the test arrived from the lab, and this time Spiegel appears with six other prisoners in a document titled ‘The clothing chamber’.⁹⁹ Together with Spiegel two pairs of twins also worked in the clothing chamber (Salomon and Steiner) and two other inmates who were Polish Jews and were not twins. All of the seven men were 20 years old and above. In his recollections Spiegel mentions that their job, which they performed in the Canada section, was to sort the finest clothes of the Jewish victims and prepare them for shipment to Germany. But more interesting was Spiegel’s role: he was in charge of the group and was assigned to be the registrar of the work detail.¹⁰⁰ For his efficient work he was rewarded with a coupon to buy one cigarette in the prisoners’ canteen.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷Lazarowitz, SFI.

⁹⁸APMOB, Records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg. Inst. D-Hyg. Inst. /75, inventory no. 106160, 56/36.

⁹⁹APMOB, Records of the SS Hygiene Institute, D-Hyg. Inst. /75, inventory no. 106160, 54/36.

¹⁰⁰ Spiegel, FVA.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. The collection of documents given by Spiegel to Yad Vashem contains the coupon that was given to Spiegel. The document has no exact date on it but does state 1944-1945, and is titled ‘Smoking card (*Raucherkarte*) for *Haftlingskantine 1*’; see documents supplied by Zvi Spiegel, YVA, 0.15.H/142, 16. The document states Spiegel’s block number as 13—this might indicate the number of the block where he worked, or there may have been a change in the numbering of the twins’ barrack.

This indicates, once again, that Spiegel fulfilled his duties assigned to him by the Germans in various capacities in a very efficient way, a matter which will be discussed later in the thesis.

As a result of the fact that the twins and especially Spiegel were now working most of the day in different locations, the framework of the group was not as tight as in the pre-selection period. The twins were taken to medical experiments from time to time (at least until early December) but generally the period from November to the end of December is hardly mentioned in their recollections. On 11 December 1944 the group framework was further weakened when twenty-two individuals from among the twins in the barrack were transferred to Lager BIId, the main men's labour camp in Birkenau.¹⁰²

To conclude, the selection had a substantial impact on the twins' lives in Birkenau. Along with the feeling of vulnerability that affected their mental state, they had to get used to the new physical circumstances: they were assigned to work, their leader was not around during the day, the medical experiments—the sole purpose of their existence in the camp—were becoming more sporadic and, finally, the group was broken up and some of them were taken to an unknown destination in mid-December.

Towards the beginning of January the twins were about to live through their last month in the camp, a period that presented new challenges involving, once again, appalling life-and-death decisions.

IV. The Twilight of the Auschwitz Period: Stay or March?

Having won the battles on the Eastern Front, Soviet troops were rapidly approaching central and western Poland in the summer of 1944. By August, the distance between Auschwitz and the nearest of the three Red Army bridgeheads located in Poland was only 200 kilometres.¹⁰³ As a result, the period between August and December 1944 saw the SS authorities in Auschwitz organizing and developing the initial plans for the evacuation of prisoners and making preparations for the potential pedestrian evacuation of those inmates whom they wished to keep on exploiting for as long as possible.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See, Kiss, "Auschwitz Diary".

¹⁰³ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 59-60.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 91.

The rapid removal of Slavic prisoners from Auschwitz in early August clearly marked the start of the evacuations.¹⁰⁵ However, the large-scale evacuation of the camp inmates only began in January 1945, when the fate of Auschwitz was permanently sealed with the Red Army launching its Vistula-Oder offensive eight days ahead of schedule.¹⁰⁶

Evacuation

With the impending approach of the front towards Silesia and the Auschwitz region, the Nazi authorities had to make a decision regarding the fate of the inmates of the concentration camps. To leave them behind would have meant depriving the Reich of considerable work force and, what is more, it would have contradicted all their previous undertakings to prevent prisoners in concentration camps and other places of internment from ever being released. As a result, by mid-January the SS had begun the mass evacuation of prisoners from Auschwitz.¹⁰⁷

At this point there were approximately 67,000 prisoners at Auschwitz, over 31,000 of them in the main camp and Birkenau and 35,000 in the thirty subsidiary camps.¹⁰⁸ The prisoners claiming awareness of the Nazis' plans, was described by Gisella Perl: "Suddenly towards the end of December, rumours started to run through camp life like wildfire. Auschwitz was being evacuated. Thousands and thousands of half dead slaves were thrown into cattle cars and carted off, god knows where. The nights were loud with air raid alarms. Allied planes crossed the skies over our heads and the rumours became louder, more optimistic, more probable. The Russian counter offensive has started."¹⁰⁹

Once it became clear that the camp was being evacuated, the inmates tried to assess the situation. There were some prisoners who preferred to be evacuated to the Reich as they saw that option as their best chance to escape

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 84.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 119. The final evacuation of Auschwitz was actually set in motion by an order issued on 21 December 1944 by Fritz Bracht, Gauleiter and Reich commissar for Defense of Upper Silesia. The instructions were to evacuate from Upper Silesia all POWs, forced laborers and concentration camp inmates and transfer them to Germany; see Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches: the Final Phase of Nazi Genocide* (London, 2011), 79.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 120, 128.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 65.

¹⁰⁹ Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, 139.

certain death. They tried actively to get onto the evacuation transport lists. Others thought that staying behind would be better, believing that it was preferable to risk extermination there, as at the same time they also stood a better chance of being liberated sooner.¹¹⁰

Eventually most prisoners in the Birkenau labour sections (mainly BIId) were forced to join the marches westwards. The situation at the men's hospital at BIIf was different. On 18 January, around midday, the physicians in the hospital were given orders to list the prisoners of each barrack under three different categories: those able to march 50 kilometres; those able to march 3 kilometres to the Auschwitz railway station, and those unable to march.¹¹¹ Although the physicians were supposed to determine the condition of the inmates, in effect, as appears from the twins' testimonies, they asked each prisoner to decide for themselves.¹¹²

This was a point where once again children or adolescents were supposed to promptly make a decision about what they knew was a matter of life and death. Tom Simon describes the events of that day: "There was a call for whoever wanted to join the march. They said you could stay or go. This was one of the things that happened in those days; you had no idea what was better, to march or to stay. A lot of the older twins did go because they assumed that anybody staying behind would be shot. The Germans were leaving and they didn't want to leave any traces or evidence. We felt that we were too young to walk."¹¹³ The exact number of twins who stayed behind is unknown. The only indication that we have is from György Lusztig's testimony; he claims that altogether thirty-two twins stayed in Lager BIIf, mostly the young ones.¹¹⁴

Spiegel, once again, had pragmatic considerations at first and, like the rest of the older twins, he wanted to join the marches, as to be left behind in the camp was perceived by many as a certain death sentence:¹¹⁵ "On January 17 there was an order, all to attend a roll call! Of course we wanted to go, we were afraid to stay there because we heard from those who came from other camps

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 128.

¹¹¹ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 785-6.

¹¹² See Klein and Simon, interviews by the author, and Lusztig, SFI.

¹¹³ Simon, interview by the author.

¹¹⁴ Lusztig, SFI.

¹¹⁵ Blatman, *The Death Marches*, 81.

who were shut down, that those who stayed behind were shot.”¹¹⁶ But once again Spiegel was destined to stay with the young twins: “Suddenly an SS man approached me and said: you are staying with the kids. Apparently I didn’t have much of a choice.”¹¹⁷

This was actually not the first time that Spiegel’s benign actions followed an earlier decision to do what was best for himself rather than worry about the twins. Eventually these decisions were either overturned by his conscience or, as in this case, he was forced to act differently by the Germans. This moment captures the tension with which Spiegel lived, trying on the one hand to follow his own survival instincts while acting with full commitment and dedication as the twins’ leader on the other hand. This point will be further discussed in the context of his crucial decision to lead the twins home after the war (Chapter IV).

Of the twins who joined the march, some did so out of their own choice but others, who, as mentioned above, had been transferred to other sections, were forced to go. In the case of Zvi Visel this meant separation from his brother Syzygy. Zvi, who, along with his twin brother, was among those who had been transferred on 22 December to Lager BIId, fell ill and was transferred back to the hospital camp in January. When the marches began, his brother Syzygy, who was still in BIId, was forced to join them while he stayed behind.¹¹⁸

László Kiss, who was also at BIId, describes in his diary the events that led to the twins of that section joining the marches:

“On January 18, the reveille took place unusually early. When we got dressed they announced that the whole camp would be marched off. Of course we weren’t told where to. Everyone was allowed to take two blankets and we were given one and a half kilograms of bread, 100 grams of butter and 300 grams of tinned meat to last us an unspecified period of time. It was probably about 11 o’clock when we set out on the highway, which was covered in deep snow. After we had walked 15 kilometres there were no longer recognizable rows, just a stretching

¹¹⁶ Although Spiegel states 17 January as the date this roll call occurred, it actually took place on 18 January, as formerly cited in Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, n. 104; see also Spiegel, YVA.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Zvi Visel, SFI.

mass of people accompanied by SS-men with their machine-guns and rifles. After 25 kilometres the people started dropping. Whoever fell and couldn't stand up anymore was left there and either froze or was shot by the SS-men bringing up the rear. We marched like this all afternoon and all night without a rest until 1 o'clock the next afternoon. By evening we thought if we had to walk another 5 kilometres, we would surely collapse of exhaustion and hunger. But after this we were to go maybe five or six times that distance, but we made it after all. We arrived at Gleiwitz at about 1 o'clock on January 19."¹¹⁹

The first marches left on 18 January 1945. This was after a few days of confusion regarding when to begin the actual mass evacuation. A reply given by Himmler, probably on 12 January, announcing that not a single healthy prisoner should be left behind, generated the actual order given by the senior SS and police commander in Wroclaw, SS-Obergruppenführer Schmauser, a few days later. In compliance with this order, from approximately 56,000 prisoners from the main camp, Birkenau and 28 of the subsidiary camps set off in columns on a westward march through upper and lower Silesia. About 2,200 inmates from several of the sub-camps were transported by rail directly to camps in the Reich.¹²⁰ For the 8,000 prisoners left behind in the main camp and Birkenau, a new reality began where, once again, life and death were separated by a thin line.

Last Days in Birkenau: 19-25 January

Once the massive columns of prisoners had departed from Birkenau the situation in the camp changed dramatically, as most of the SS men had also left to escort the pedestrian evacuation columns. The few thousand prisoners who remained in the camp were facing uncertain circumstances that resulted in death for many of them.

The watchtowers in the main Auschwitz camp and in Birkenau were manned by SS guards up until 20 or 21 January, after which most of them left. The camp area, however, was still patrolled by both larger and smaller SS detachments. It was these SS men who were supposed to carry out the order,

¹¹⁹ Kiss, "Auschwitz Diary," 1945.

¹²⁰ Blatman, *The Death Marches*, 81.

issued on 20 January 1945 by ObergruppenführerSchmauser, to annihilate all remaining prisoners in Auschwitz. According to Andrzej Strzelecki there seem to be two explanations as to how so many prisoners left behind at Auschwitz escaped death: partly the slackening of discipline within the SS and partly the general confusion, even panic, spreading rapidly among German troops now forced to retreat from Upper Silesia.¹²¹

Even though the order was not put into effect, a situation where SS troops were coming and going created a dangerous environment. The illusion of freedom was the inmates' biggest enemy, as recalled by Zvi Visel: "We suddenly felt like free birds. We began to wonder around and go into SS areas. We cut the fence to the adjacent Canada camp and took some goods. There were a few Russian POWs there, who began to go wild and shoot bullets in the air with a rifle. The Germans came back the day after, and declared a curfew in the camp. Then they isolated the Russians and shot them to death in the canal between the hospital camp and Canada camp (BIlg)." ¹²² This incident is also mentioned by Danuta Czech in her calendar, where she points out that it was carried out by a unit of SD personnel that returned to Birkenau on 22 January. On this day the same formation also shot to death prisoners who walked about in the camp or attempted to escape.¹²³

The rapid advance of the Soviet forces to the perimeter of Auschwitz meant that a lot of valuable goods had to be abandoned. Among other things, the Nazis were unable to take with them the plundered possessions of Holocaust victims stored in the thirty barracks of the Canada section, which they had previously made frantic efforts to remove. Many of the twins remember being assigned to work in the Canada II section on those days, as related by György Lusztig:

"We were taken there . . . there were huge storehouses and we had to move things from there to the railway carriages. There were these bales that often weighed 50-60 kilograms, and of course there were many people . . . us, the twins, were there, the children; we were all carrying

¹²¹ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 207-8, 211, 214.

¹²² Visel, SFI.

¹²³ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 798.

those bales. The carriages were very far, approximately a kilometre away, or 800 meters, we had to drag those things . . . and we were beaten heavily, chased by dogs . . . so frightful. It was a horrible, horrible thing.”¹²⁴

Tom Simon also remembered the demanding task but pointed out the change of mood among some of the guards: “Towards the end we were recruited to do some work. There was a camp on the other side called Canada . . . they decided to have the whole thing burn and we were recruited to do it and it was winter. We had to push the carts with the belongings and it was tough but I recall two SS men passing some sugar to us when their officer didn’t look.”¹²⁵ The SS set these barracks on fire on 23 January 1945, so the Soviet soldiers would not lay their hands on the masses of looted items that were still left, and also to cover up the atrocities they had committed. The barracks burned for five days.¹²⁶

The other main operation implemented by the Nazis in order to cover up their deeds was the blowing up of Crematoria II and III with the underground gas chambers on 20 January, as well as the removal or destruction of most of the camp documentation.¹²⁷ In that context a few days earlier, on 17 January, Dr Mengele liquidated his experimental station in section BIIf and took with him the ‘material’ acquired from the experiments he had conducted on twins, dwarfs, and cripples.¹²⁸ As part of the effort to cover up their deeds, the Nazis took with them on the death marches those who possessed delicate information regarding the function of Auschwitz, among them prisoners who had undergone medical experiments.¹²⁹ Again, only the chaotic nature of the events can explain the fact that the twins were not executed.

It is interesting to note that Zvi Spiegel is missing from the recollections of the twins about these last days. Spiegel himself rarely mentioned the period before liberation in his testimony. It might have been that due to the chaos reigning in the camp he was unable or unwilling to keep the twins under his supervision. Most of them, with the exception of Tom Simon, only remember him

¹²⁴ Lusztig, SFI.

¹²⁵ Simon, interview by the author.

¹²⁶ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 211.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 784.

¹²⁹ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 113.

appearing again when they were liberated in Auschwitz.¹³⁰ The only indication we have of what might have been his state of mind is his reluctance to stay with the twins at the time and his plans to leave on his own after liberation. It could have been that he had simply had enough of taking care of others and was now concentrating on his own survival. This could also have to do with the fact that, as part of his role as the ‘twins’ father’, he had been present at the medical experiments and was in possession of a lot of incriminating evidence about them. The Nazis’ tendency to ‘look after’ prisoners in sensitive positions during the evacuation period may have also informed his decision to keep a low profile. Another explanation may be found in Spiegel’s only reference to the last days, where he claims that “nothing was organized”.¹³¹ Spiegel was a man who appreciated order; it could have been that under the chaotic circumstances he had difficulty functioning as the twins’ supervisor, a challenge that he would overcome on the journey home. The next event that Spiegel mentions in his testimony was the final episode that the twins experienced in Birkenau: the march to Auschwitz.

In the Midst of a Death March—25 January

“At the end of January all remaining prisoners were collected by the SS and German gendarmes. We had to line up once more, but didn’t really understand why. Then they asked us who wasn’t capable of marching, or walking. Some stepped out of the line; well they were shot in front of us immediately. Then they asked us one more time: is there anyone who is not capable of marching? Of course there were no entrants the second time. Then we were forced to march towards the Auschwitz camp.”¹³²

This recollection by József Laufer refers to the much-remembered incident that occurred on 25 January 1945, during the last wave of evacuation from Birkenau. It was on this day that the Nazis committed their last massacre in Birkenau, when they murdered 300 sick Jews in the camp.¹³³ At 2 p.m. an SD division arrived in the women’s camp at BIe and in the men’s hospital at BIIf.

¹³⁰ See Simon, interview by the author.

¹³¹ Spiegel, YVA.

¹³² J. Laufer, SFI.

¹³³ Blatman, *The Death Marches*, 82-3.

Approximately 150-200 men and women were marched towards the gates of Birkenau. Some of the prisoners who couldn't walk by themselves were shot on the spot, as described by Shaul Almog: "my brother wanted to say that we couldn't walk, but as soon as we saw they shot three inmates who claimed they were unable to march, nobody said a word."¹³⁴ Tom Simon remembers that there were rumours that they would all be shot in the nearby forest,¹³⁵ which caused some of the inmates to hide when the SD troops ordered everyone to leave the barracks. This was the strategy of the Alon brothers, who had moved a few days earlier to their mother's barrack in section BIIe, as told by Yoel: "when the German soldiers came and ordered everyone to the roll call we were terrified, and so we decided to hide in the barrack. We stayed there until liberation."¹³⁶ The rumours that Tom Simon refers to and the fear of the Alon brothers were not ungrounded, as the behaviour of the SD men clearly indicated that they intended to shoot the prisoners outside the camp in accordance with their former orders.¹³⁷

Shaul Almog describes the surprising turn of events that followed: "Suddenly the guards escorting us were approached by a motorcycle. Next thing you knew people were shouting, 'the Germans are gone!' They just got into a car and left us alone."¹³⁸ The detachments that were supposed to carry out the execution order were now in danger of being surrounded by the Soviet army and thus decided to abandon their assignment and withdraw.¹³⁹ They gave the prisoners an order to continue to march towards the main camp; some prisoners followed the order while others went back to Birkenau.¹⁴⁰ The twins kept together and marched on towards the main camp. At night-time they arrived at the gates of the main camp of Auschwitz. Almog describes the events in the following words: "We were in an awful shape. Skinny, hungry and exhausted, we looked more like 8-9 year-olds. We didn't know anything. We just marched on until we arrived at the gates of Auschwitz."¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ Almog, SFI.

¹³⁵ Tom Simon, Yad Vashem interview, 0.33C/108, 1985.

¹³⁶ Y. Alon, interview by the author.

¹³⁷ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 213.

¹³⁸ Almog, SFI.

¹³⁹ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 213.

¹⁴⁰ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 800.

¹⁴¹ Almog, SFI.

Liberation

The twins who headed on their own for Auschwitz arrived in the middle of the night. There was no electricity at the time in the camp so people were groping around in the dark, their only priority to find a place to sleep. By this time the twins had already made the unconscious decision to stay together. According to Tom Simon it was natural, after a few months together as a community, that the twins would choose to retain their group outside the compounds of BIIf. Eventually they found an empty room in one of the living blocks and fell asleep immediately.¹⁴²

On the day of 26 January the Red Army was fighting battles against the Wehrmacht in the vicinity of the camp, and there were a few air raids that announced the arrival of the Soviets.¹⁴³ Meanwhile the priority of the prisoners in the camp was to acquire some food. According to some of the twins, the older inmates broke into the camp warehouses and emptied them of the food left behind.¹⁴⁴ The uncertainty of the situation was intolerable. The twins feared that the Germans could be back in any minute,¹⁴⁵ but the sounds of battle were getting closer, as described by György Kuhn: “Only one thing comforted us; that the shots and shelling sounded very close to us . . . Everybody thought that they had escaped because the Russians were so close, only days or maybe hours away.”¹⁴⁶

The task of liberating Auschwitz was entrusted to the 60th army of the First Ukrainian Front. The first scouts of the four infantry divisions taking part in the Auschwitz operation reached the Monowitz camp on the eastern perimeter of Oświęcim before noon on Saturday 27 January. Soviet troops took over the town centre of Oświęcim at noon that same day. By 3 p.m. they had arrived at the

¹⁴² Simon, interview by the author.

¹⁴³ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 801.

¹⁴⁴ For example, see Almog, SFI.

¹⁴⁵ The prisoners were still under the impact of the incidents from the past days when some SD units suddenly appeared in the camp. This happened not only in Birkenau but also in the main camp a day before (25 January); an SD unit arrived at the gates and ordered all prisoners to line up. They isolated the Jews in the last row and looked prepared to massacre them. Then a turn of events similar to what happened in Birkenau occurred as they were suddenly approached by an automobile with SS men, ordering them to depart and to send the prisoners back to their blocks; see Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 801.

¹⁴⁶ Kuhn, SFI.

main camp and Birkenau.¹⁴⁷ József Laufer describes the moment from the perspective of the twins: “In the morning someone came in screaming that the Germans had returned. We were all shocked. They were wearing white sheets over their uniform—you know, it was snowing then—and only when they came closer did we recognize the red star on the front of their caps. This was a very touching moment; we were liberated.”¹⁴⁸

After over seven months of being exposed to the horrors of Birkenau, subjected to medical experiments and surrounded by the presence of death and violence, the child twins of barrack 14 in section BIIIf had lived, against all odds, to witness liberation. But nothing was the same for these twins, who had arrived in Birkenau a few months earlier as young, innocent children, surrounded and protected by their families. By now most of them were alone without any family, mentally and physically exhausted, wondering what the future held for them. The only thing that they had was one another, but in the uncertain, chaotic environment of post-liberation Auschwitz they had no idea how they would get out and, more important, how they would reach their homes hundreds of kilometres away. In these circumstances they had no doubt: they had to turn to the only adult they could trust—the ‘twins’ father from Birkenau’, who by now was merely one of many liberated prisoners who desired to go home and look for relatives as soon as possible.

¹⁴⁷ A total of 231 soldiers died in the Auschwitz operation, 66 of them within the camp zone; see Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 219.

¹⁴⁸ J. Laufer, SFI. Upon entering the camp the Soviets found 48 corpses on the grounds of the main camp and in Birkenau 600 corpses of male and female inmates who had been shot to death or died otherwise in the last few days; see Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 805.

Chapter IV

The Journey Home: In the Midst of Chaos

Following the liberation of Auschwitz, over 200 children below the age of 15—many of them twins—were found among the thousands of surviving inmates in various blocks.¹ The Russians advised the children, similarly to the older prisoners, to leave if they were capable of doing so, as the situation was highly uncertain. Spiegel himself thought that there was a good chance the Nazis would be back and deemed it best to leave as soon as possible. These apprehensions, which were shared by many liberated inmates in Auschwitz, seem totally justified if we bear in mind the chaotic conditions that prevailed in the short period following the official evacuation of the camp. As mentioned in Chapter III, there were a few incidents during these days of different German units entering the camp and brutally murdering individuals or groups of inmates at random. Even though the arrival of the Red Army increased the sense of security among the inmates, many still believed that it was best to leave for one's home country as soon as possible.

I. The Decision: 'Uncle Spiegel, You Promised to Take Us Home'

As soon as the 'Spiegel boys' realized that the Russians were allowing them to leave, they were anxious to get out—but they had no practical plan until they heard that Spiegel was preparing to leave. At this point, the twins' recollections regarding the exact sequence of events differ. The point of disagreement is whether it was they who approached Spiegel, requesting to join him, or whether he himself proposed the idea. Furthermore, in the case of those who claimed to have approached him, there are some disagreements over his response. Did he immediately agree? For our purposes this point is important as it may throw light on Spiegel's decision making and motivations in his period of transition from being the 'twins' father', officially appointed by Mengele, to an individual survivor with no 'mandatory obligations'.

First, it is worth mentioning that, like the twins, Spiegel himself recalled comforting them and promising to take them home when the war was over (even

¹ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 221.

though he did not believe they would live to see liberation).² According to Otto Klein, Spiegel kept his promise voluntarily: “We met Spiegel again on 27 January. He said, ‘I’m going on foot, who wants to come home with me?’”³ György Lusztig recalls that they met Spiegel—who, as mentioned earlier, was not with the children during the last days—in Birkenau, where he gathered the twins in one block and later organized them into a group for the journey. Other twins do not mention who initiated the journey but recall Spiegel forming the group once again (as in Birkenau) and leading them out of Auschwitz.⁴

Another twin according to whom their return was arranged by Spiegel is Peter Somogyi. Somogyi claims that the twins did ask Spiegel if they could join him and he immediately agreed and told them they had to leave soon as the situation was unstable and could become dangerous again.⁵ Peter’s brother Tom Simon recalls the event slightly differently: “Next day we asked him to take us with him. At first he hesitated, it was too much of a responsibility; he didn’t know how things were. He didn’t know how he would manage. He was persuaded in the end and we set out towards Krakow on foot.”⁶

Spiegel himself, honest as usual, recalls: “As soon as the Russians arrived in the camp on Saturday, people started to leave. I met a Czech guy in Auschwitz and on the next day we were ready to go . . . then the children approached me and said, ‘Uncle Spiegel, you promised that after liberation you would take us home.’”⁷

Up to this point, Spiegel’s account resembles the description by Tom Simon. Spiegel does not mention any doubts he had: “then I told my Czech acquaintance, ‘Go! Go wherever you want. I am staying with the children.’ So I organized those who had gathered around me and I made a list, and we set out.”⁸ In this interview (1984) Spiegel does not talk about having had doubts, however in a later interview (1993) he does point out some of the concerns he had at the time: “I didn’t know where to go. Right or left? Actually, I knew nothing.”⁹

² Spiegel, FVA.

³ Klein, interview by the author.

⁴ See Almog and Visel, SFI.

⁵ Somogyi, interviews by the author, and SFI.

⁶ Simon, SFI.

⁷ Spiegel, YVA.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Spiegel, FVA.

Whether he hesitated to comply with the twins' request or not, it is obvious from Spiegel's testimonies that he was about to leave the camp with his friend before the twins approached him. Under the circumstances the decision to leave the camp alone seemed reasonable at the time, for a number of reasons: firstly, there was a lack of resources in the camp and on the roads, especially of food. Providing for thirty-one children in these circumstances seemed impossible. Secondly, it was winter and the chances of surviving the freezing conditions in Poland with no shelter were limited. Finding shelter was an almost impossible challenge, let alone finding accommodation for thirty children. Thirdly, there was the problem of transportation and orientation. Spiegel, like many non-Polish prisoners, was to journey across a country he had never visited and whose language he did not speak; a country devastated by a six-year war, with limited transportation options.

Finally, there was the matter of Spiegel's role and activity in the camp. In one of the interviews he claims that he wanted to leave because of the uncertain conditions. However, some of those uncertainties may have had to do with his previous position as a prisoner functionary. Although the twins saw him as their saviour and leader, other prisoners could have identified him as one of Mengele's 'assistants'. He could not predict how Red Army soldiers or Soviet officials would regard his conduct in Birkenau. Even though he did later approach the Soviets several times during the journey, in Auschwitz itself some prisoner could have pointed him out as Mengele's assistant. Although this is merely speculation, as Spiegel never talked about it, it might have been in the back of his mind as he was planning to depart.

In the different interviews Spiegel acknowledges the fact that some of his decisions regarding the twins (mainly the Kuhn affair—the brothers who were not twins—the selection and the journey home) were 'big decisions', but he always claims that they were instinctive and inexplicable. Analysing some of his 'choiceless choices' in Birkenau, one can understand what he meant. But the decision to take the twins home was made within a different framework. He now had the choice to leave without them. However, by this point the ostensibly ordinary man of the pre-camp period had developed a sense of personal responsibility, which counter-acted his rational decision to leave the children

behind and go home with his friend, or, in his words: “I felt an obligation towards them”.¹⁰

From the children’s perspective, fleeing with Spiegel was the obvious choice: “It was natural to go with him. Who else should have we gone with? We were only children, I was just 11 years old”, explains Peter Somogyi.¹¹ After the decision was made, Spiegel and the children made one last effort to acquire food, water, as well as bags to carry the goods. As the storage rooms were already being overseen by the Russians, the children could barely put their hand on any food but they did get hold of some bottles of water and pouches to carry them. Just before they left, Spiegel gathered the group together and, as in Birkenau, made the rules clear: “We walk, but we keep order! You will not disperse while we are walking. You listen to me.”¹² In hindsight Spiegel said he had drawn on his army experience at this stage: “I laid down the rules, just as if they had been troops I might have commanded in former years in the Czech army.”¹³

On 28 January, in the afternoon, Spiegel, along with a group of thirty-one children—adolescents and a few young adults—departed Auschwitz on a journey back home. The only certainty they had was their final destination—home, or what was left of it. Otherwise they had no idea what awaited them. They barely had food, did not know the way, and were surrounded by a local population that did not speak their language—and all under the harsh conditions of the Polish winter. The only thing they did have was one another.

The Twins’ Journey and Methodological Challenges

Before I describe Spiegel and the twins’ journey home, it will be useful to discuss the methodological challenges presented by this specific segment of the narrative.

First is the issue of memory or, rather, the limitations of memory. Although life in Birkenau included various unexpected events, generally it had a structured framework. The journey home stood in stark contrast to the monotony of events and landscape in the camp. The group was constantly on the move, stopping in numerous places for short periods, and they barely had any

¹⁰ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 95.

¹¹ Somogyi, interview by the author.

¹² See Spiegel, YVA.

¹³ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 95.

routine. In such circumstances the limitations of memory come into play to a larger extent. The twins had difficulty remembering the places they had passed, the time frames and the different participants. This can be exemplified by the fact that their stopover in Krakow, where they stayed for about sixteen days, was best recalled because they were accommodated in one facility and developed, again, some kind of routine. On the other hand, Rzeszow, a place some remember to have passed by, had no time frame to it and the twins practically could not remember what had happened there, nor the reason they had stopped there.

A further challenge is related to the fact that there are simply fewer accounts of participants in the journey than of survivors of Birkenau. The difficulties of establishing a precise list of twins who participated in the journey are presented in the following. But in any case, it is clear that some twins who had been in Birkenau did not join the journey for various reasons.

A third challenge is the lack of detail in Spiegel's recollection of the journey. In his accounts he only outlines the route in general and hardly goes into any detail regarding what actually happened on the way. He does not elaborate on his thoughts or judgments, nor on the different incidents that he saw as landmarks of the journey, as he did regarding the events in Birkenau (i.e. the selection).

How then, it is possible to meet these challenges and construct a coherent, accurate narrative? According to Deborah Dwork, two key elements have to be considered in the use of oral testimony—reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of the story being told, while validity is the degree of conformity between reports of the event and the event itself as recorded by other primary sources, such as documents, photographs, diaries and letters.¹⁴ These questions of reliability and, primarily, validity present us with the challenge of reconciling historical truth and Holocaust testimony.

The number of twin accounts of the Birkenau period, and the consistency between them, has helped establish a great degree of reliability and validity in the use of testimonies for this research. In reconstructing the journey, however, the above-mentioned methodological difficulties presented potential pitfalls in trying to meet the two criteria set by Dwork.

¹⁴ Dwork, *Children with a Star*, Introduction, 40.

Regarding the reliability of the accounts, the challenge was to establish a clear time frame and identify the main places where the group had stopped. By thoroughly analysing the different accounts one may conclude that a few themes appear consistently in the testimonies: the time frames that the twins suggest resemble one another; there is agreement about the direction in which they were moving, as well as about some of the main stops on the way, including Krakow and Przemyśl; finally, there were a few defining moments which, with the exception of one, are clearly recalled in all of the accounts.

Even though the main themes are generally consistent, the twins' recollections occasionally differ regarding the details. I have deemed it useful, at times, to present these variant narratives, especially when the differences were not merely related to memory but had to do, rather, with different interpretations of the situation. This was the case of the above-mentioned narrative of the decision by Spiegel to lead the children home. In other cases there were differences between the testimonies concerning certain details that were mostly related to memory. In such instances a decision had to be made in order to be able to construct the general narrative: which recollections were to be followed at any given point in the story?

The use of documents was crucial in determining the narrative at some points. This brings us to the subject of the validity of the accounts of the journey: the eventual discovery of a surprising amount of material made it possible to establish a clearer picture regarding the participants, the route, and Spiegel's efforts to obtain help from the different authorities. But still, it is important to note that the narrative of the journey could not have been written based solely on documents. On the contrary, the survivors' accounts stand at the core of establishing this unique story, with the documents providing much-needed factual information that is often missing from the testimonies.

II. The First Days: In the Midst of Chaos

When the twins left Auschwitz they were immediately confronted with the horrible conditions and the devastation of war outside the camp, as described by György Lusztig: "We had to cross a huge snowfield, cut through frontlines, pass

by burnt-out trucks, dead horses and dead soldiers, and the like. It was so cold, may have been minus 30.”¹⁵

From the very first moments of the journey Spiegel was faced with the difficulty of finding transportation for such a large group. He was advised by the Red Army to head towards Krakow, but he had no idea how they would get there. The solution, as in other cases, was to set out on foot and then to try to find more efficient means of transport.

Like the twins, many other inmates who were in a good enough physical condition fled from Auschwitz in the first days following its liberation.¹⁶ These people, together with others from the surrounding camps, struggled for the limited resources that were desperately needed for such a journey. One issue, for example, was accommodation for the group in the freezing conditions. An incident described by Zvi Visel regarding their first night outside the camp can serve as an example of the challenges facing Spiegel leading young children in such circumstances: “We arrived at a school. We found a corner to sleep in, but a group of doctors, who were former inmates of the camp, just came and took our place in a most inhumane manner. They all arranged a piece of meat for themselves but none for the children. Everyone only took care of themselves.”¹⁷

As early as the second day of the trek, the older members of the group understood that they would have to push the young ones, who had difficulty walking for hours in the snowy conditions, with barely any food. “In the morning we continued our journey, continued walking; we were singing with the children, sometimes kicking them, of course not offensively, but rather as if to say, ‘Come on! Don’t lie down!’ As many of them just wanted to lie down . . . so this is how we were walking . . . walking in the snow, huge snow . . . and sang songs such as ‘Cabbage, cabbage’, so, just like the soldiers, we had a rhythm to march to,” recalls György Lusztig, who, at 19, was one of the eldest in the group.¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, Spiegel’s group was mostly made up of young children, but there was so much to worry about and handle that they had to take a share of the responsibilities. On the second night they arrived at a farm, and the farmer allowed them to sleep in a wooden barn. Otto Klein describes the

¹⁵ Lusztig, SFI.

¹⁶ Strzelecki, *The Evacuation of Auschwitz*, 220.

¹⁷ Visel, SFI.

¹⁸ Lusztig, SFI.

incident that took place that night: “We slept in a country house between Auschwitz and Krakow and it was very cold. We slept on straw and we made a fire. And every child watched the fire at night—while lying on the straw. Suddenly the straw caught fire in the barrack, so we decided to quickly run away.”¹⁹ This incident exemplifies the fragile situation that Spiegel was dealing with, since the children, as in the camp, were not always aware of the consequences of their deeds.

In the chaos prevailing on the roads at the time, a group of children with a guide, heading for Krakow, was perceived as an asset by many leadless former prisoners walking towards the city. Somewhere along the way, Spiegel and the boys ran into a group of twelve Romanian women (from Transylvania) liberated in Birkenau. According to Spiegel, these women thought that by travelling with the group they might find their own children as other child survivors might join them.²⁰ Spiegel made a list of these women titled ‘Frauen’ (women), where he mentioned their *wohnort* (place of residence) and the Lager they came from.²¹ They were also joined by a number of male survivors, whom Spiegel listed in a separate document.²² Some of these men left the group in Krakow while others continued with them on the way home (see below). Spiegel explained his ‘obsession’ with lists claiming that he saw it as a key to the group’s survival: “I suppose it was my way of maintaining some form of control. Even at the camp I was obsessed with compiling lists and keeping the children in order.”²³

Keeping the core group of children together while walking was another challenging task, especially in the misty conditions. In such circumstances it was only a matter of time before someone would get lost. During the daytime on 30 January, Zvi Visel suddenly found himself separated from the group and all alone in “the middle of nowhere”. He met a Yugoslavian former Auschwitz inmate and the two walked together.²⁴ Whether Spiegel took the time to look for Visel and what his judgements were in such a situation is unknown as this affair does not

¹⁹ Klein, interview by the author. The incident is also mentioned in Lusztig, SFI.

²⁰ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 96.

²¹ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 15.

²² Ibid.

²³ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 96.

²⁴ Visel, interviews by the author, and SFI. At some point Visel arrived at a refugee centre. He decided to try to go back home. After a few months he arrived in his hometown, where he was reunited with his twin brother. The rest of the family, their parents and six siblings, had all been killed in the camps.

appear in other accounts, but it vividly demonstrates the chaotic nature of the journey and the fact that ad hoc decisions had to be made constantly by Spiegel and others.

On that same day, after Visel was lost, the group was fortunate enough to find transportation. However this lucky break came to a tragic end in an incident that appears in most recollections of the journey. As the group proceeded, Spiegel would stop at every field kitchen of the Red Army that they sighted and request food for the group. “Some agreed and some didn’t”, he recalls.²⁵ Apparently on that day a group of top Red Army commanders stopped their vehicle next to the twins and ordered the soldiers to transfer the children to Krakow. The group split up between the three army trucks and set off to Krakow. Suddenly the third truck had a crash—as it turned out, its driver was drunk. In the accident the group suffered its only casualty of the journey: Chaim Katz, the twin brother of Abraham Katz, 13, fell off the truck and died. Spiegel and the others did not know what to do; eventually they left the corpse behind and continued their journey. Another boy, István (Pista) Kuhn, was injured by a splinter in his eye and was taken to the hospital in Krakow.²⁶

Two conclusions may be drawn from this incident. Firstly, in the circumstances, great importance was attached to continuous progress, at least in Spiegel’s perception. He chose not to deal with the corpse—and the same was probably true for losing Zvi Visel—since he did not want to lose momentum, especially when he had managed to find transportation. Spiegel had to make quick decisions in those hazardous conditions, putting the interests of the group before that of a certain individual. Secondly, this incident exemplifies once again the proneness of the children’s memory to retain dramatic and traumatic moments. In some way or other it is mentioned in all but one accounts of the twins who participated in that stage of the journey.

As mentioned above, the group moved on immediately after the accident and within a few hours they covered more ground than they had by foot in two and a half days. It was late at night on 30 January when Spiegel and the boys arrived in Krakow—a city taking its first steps towards recovery after the long

²⁵ Spiegel, YVA.

²⁶ The description of Katz’s accident is based on the following accounts: Kuhn, SFI, and interview by the author; Lusztig, SFI; Simon and Klein, interviews by the author; and Spiegel, YVA.

brutal occupation. At this stage, Spiegel hoped to make full arrangements for the rest of the journey home; but further great challenges and changes awaited him and the rest of the group.

III. Krakow: Preparations for the Long Journey

Upon arriving in Krakow, Spiegel and the twins faced the new reality that was taking shape in the immediate post-war period in Poland. At the time, battles were still raging in the western part of the country, but most other regions had already been liberated and were experiencing a harsh aftermath. Since Spiegel frequently dealt with the Polish and Soviet authorities on the way, and since the group as a whole interacted with the local population as well as with different Jewish communities, it is worth mentioning a few characteristics of the immediate post-war period in Poland.

Poland in the Aftermath of the War

After six years of devastating war and occupation, the immediate post-war years in Poland were a period of social upheaval on a monumental scale. According to M. K. Dziewanowski, “when analysing the post World War II period, one must bear in mind that Poland suffered more severely from the war than any other allied country.”²⁷

The Poland that emerged from the war was a different country to the pre-1939 state. While one-third of the Polish population in the pre-war era had been made up of minorities, after the war the country became an almost homogeneous nation-state as a result of the German genocide of the Jews and the ensuing territorial and political changes.²⁸ Poland had a totally new appearance, having been reduced in size by one-sixth, moved westwards and with nearly 20 per cent of the population dead as a result of the war (three million Poles and three million Polish Jews).²⁹

²⁷ M. K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1977), 147.

Dziewanowski supports his statement by referring not only to the vast number of lost lives but also to the fact that 38 per cent of the country’s wealth had been destroyed during the war.

²⁸ Joanna Michlic, “The Holocaust and its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals”, in David Bankier, *The Jews Are back*, 208.

²⁹ Gross, *Fear*, 26. Up to 7 million Germans either fled or had been deported from the newly incorporated territories in the west. Half a million Ukrainians had been sent to

The Polish nation came out of the cataclysm not only numerically weakened, but in pain from its traumatic experience and the unexpected takeover by the communists, “with its communities shattered, family members lost and separated, and hundred of thousands of people orphaned, crippled, and made homeless”.³⁰ At the same time, according to Jan Gross, memoirs and diaries of the period record outpourings of vital energy and enthusiasm that somehow overcame the sense of loss and mourning in the wake of the war’s devastation. But the pure joy of liberation was laced for many with a sense of betrayal. Why did their sacrifice on behalf of a common cause count for nothing now?³¹ Gross refers to the fact that while the war was taking place the Soviets had already begun to take over the country from the local communist (workers’) party (PPR—Polska Partia Robotnicza). On 21 July 1944 a Polish committee of national liberation was established in Moscow under Soviet supervision. This was followed by the creation of the state administration over Polish territories. In their struggle for power the communists did not hesitate to use intimidation, terror, arrests and political murder.³²

It was within this framework that the 380,000 Jews who had survived the war (70 per cent returning from the Soviet territories) had to re-establish their lives. Already back in August 1944, when half of the Polish territories were still under German occupation, a group of Jews had assembled in the city of Lublin and set up a committee to help the remnants of Polish Jewry. This organization was soon to become the Central Committee of Polish Jews, originally called Committee to Help Jews.³³ It would later expand to other parts of Poland, especially the main cities. For our purposes the committee is important as it was crucial in providing aid to the ‘Spiegel boys’ as well as to other Jewish repatriates trying to make their way home. We will see below the numerous problems that it had to address while experiencing constant shortage in funds and resources.

the USSR by mid-1946 and another 150,000 were resettled internally in 1947. More than a million Poles had been repatriated by the end of 1946 into the Soviet republics of Ukraine, Lithuania and Belorussia, while half a million returned from the Soviet interior (more than half of them were Jews); see *ibid.* 22.

³⁰ Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (Pennsylvania, 2005), 150.

³¹ *Ibid.* 26.

³² Michlic, “The Holocaust and its Aftermath”, 209.

³³ Gross, *Fear*, 31.

While the PPR was ambivalent towards the Jews, the popular underground opposition perceived the communist takeover as the rule of Judaeo-Communism and the Jew as the political enemy of the Polish state.³⁴ The position of the surviving Jews within Polish society as a whole was precarious: they commonly lived in a state of fear, lack of physical safety and exposure to violence.³⁵ “Time and again returning Jews were greeted in their native towns on arrival with an incredulous ‘So,’ followed by their first name (as they and their Polish neighbours usually called each other by their first name), ‘you are still alive?’ And before long they got an unambiguous hint to clear out, or else.”³⁶ As a result, from very early on, Jewish committees in counties and voivodeships urged Jews to move to larger towns, but even there they were not safe, as the pogroms in Krakow and Kielce would prove later on.³⁷

Whether the predicament of Polish Jewry was fully grasped by Spiegel is hard to tell. But the fact that he aimed to move on as fast as he could, along with his intensive negotiations with the Jewish communities in Krakow and later in Przemyśl—together with a few interactions he had with the local Polish and Red Army authorities—tells us that he was aware to some extent of the disorderly, uncertain and dangerous nature of the situation that awaited Jews in Poland at the time.

First Days in Krakow

Krakow was liberated on 19 January 1945. The city itself had barely been damaged in the war and immediately after liberation the first Jewish survivors began to trickle in, primarily those who had been in hiding.³⁸ According to one contemporary report, among the first to arrive from the camps was a group of

³⁴ For the different views on this matter, see Michel Fleming, “Minorities, Violence and the Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland”, in David Cesarani, Suzan Bardgett, Jessica Reinisch and Johannes Dieter Steinert (eds.), *Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Europe After the Second World War, Landscape after Battle*, vol. 1 (London, 2010), 71-90; and Bozena Szaynok, “Anti-Semitism in Postwar Polish-Jewish Relationship”, in Robert Blobaum (ed.), *Anti-Semitism and its Opponents in Postwar Poland* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), 274-5.

³⁵ Michlic, “The Holocaust and its Aftermath”, 210-11.

³⁶ Gross, *Fear*, 36. In some instances there was no warning before the violence began as exemplified in Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998), 243-66.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 35.

³⁸ Abraham Wein and Aharon Weiss (eds.), *Pinkas Hakehillot, Poland*, vol. 3 (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1976), 41.

children from Auschwitz.³⁹ Showing up in Krakow on 31 January 1945, only four days after the liberation of the camp, the twins were certainly among the first Auschwitz survivors to have returned and were presumably identical to the group mentioned in the report.

According to the historian Joseph Tenenbaum, a native Pole who came back to tour the country in 1946, the new Jewish arrivals in Krakow “had no homes or quarters. Men lay on floors, streets, benches and pavements. Men arrived in Krakow and wandered about.”⁴⁰ Although Tenenbaum was visiting the city a year after the twins left it, his descriptions give us an authentic view of the harsh situation of Jews in post-war Krakow specifically and in Poland as a whole. Tenenbaum continues and writes about the grief and despair that the Jewish refugees in Krakow experienced when he describes a memorial that was held for the six million perished in the Holocaust: “Men, women and children, a whole community in tears, a sea of tears, great tears falling like molten wax of paper.”⁴¹

As part of the effort to provide immediate aid to the Jewish refugees who were gathering in the city, a so-called District Jewish Committee was established in Krakow. A report on the activities of this committee from 1 February to 31 October 1945 states that “Immediately after the liberation by the Red Army, the committee received the building at Długa 38, which partially began to serve as a refuge for those coming back from German camps and from hiding. Throughout February, March and April it provided lodgings to 400 people a day, including Jews from Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France and Greece.”⁴²

This building was the destination of Spiegel and his group when they arrived in Krakow. They were accommodated in a deserted hotel building attached to Długa 38, which was a part of the above-mentioned refugee centre. The place lacked any facilities so they had to sleep on the floor and later on straw and dirty mattresses that they found.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Joseph Tenenbaum, *In Search of a Lost People: The Old and the New Poland* (New York, 1948), 135.

⁴¹ Tenenbaum, *In Search of a Lost People*, 136.

⁴² Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (from hereafter [ZIH]), “Report on the activities of the District Jewish Committee in Krakow—February 1945 to 31 October 1945”, 303/II/75, 16.

⁴³ Jacob Feingold, interview by Joseph Huttler, Shoa Foundation, Int. code 44261, New York, 1998.

Spiegel's main priority was to arrange for transportation. On the very first day he went to the local city board, where he achieved two things, both of which appear in the document that was issued for him by the board: firstly, he received an allowance for himself and the twins and, secondly, the document—signed by the Office of the Mayor of the City of Krakow—grants him permission “to go to the War Commandant of the City of Krakow in order to receive a pass for a journey to Hungary. From our side we do not see any obstacles and we ask the security authorities to provide assistance to the above mentioned”.⁴⁴ From this statement we can assume that Spiegel had to deal with two stages of authorization so that the group could move on, the first being the local civilian authority and the second the security forces, primarily the Soviet army, which still controlled the roads at the time.

In the same document Spiegel states for the first time the names of the participants of the group. This list of thirty-two people who arrived with him in Krakow is the first of two lists in our possession. The second one is in his own handwriting (the first list is typewritten) and includes some new members while some names from the first list do not appear in it. The reasons for the changes in the lists will be discussed below but at this point it is worth taking a closer look at the list of those who arrived with Spiegel in Krakow and were about to set off with him on the next leg of the journey.

In the list of 32 names all were twins (including Spiegel himself). There were 11 pairs of twins and another 10 individuals who were not with their sibling for various reasons (mostly because they had twin sisters and had been separated from them in Birkenau). This confirms the fact that they left Auschwitz as a homogeneous group of twins who had been under Spiegel's authority back in Birkenau. This point is further demonstrated by the fact that 23 of the 32 names were between the ages of 10-15 at the time. This means that these children were not only under his custody on the journey but had made up the majority of the young twins' group in the camp, which had consisted of about 35 children. These were the same children that Spiegel had educated, protected, comforted and rescued in the selections. They perceived him as their leader and guardian.

⁴⁴ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 1.

The above point deserves further elaboration. The twins' sense of community in the camp was partly a result of having undergone a shared experience which could generate strong friendships. This, however, does not seem sufficient in itself to explain their loyalty to the group in such high numbers during the journey, as friendships between inmates in the concentration camps were not a rarity. In some cases these friendships did keep small groups of inmates together after the war as they set out on their journey home. What makes our case special is the fact that it was a relatively large group that kept together. We could take as an example the twin girls, who had also been accommodated together in Birkenau, and whose group, nevertheless, scattered after liberation.

All of the above underlines Spiegel's eminent role in forming a group within Birkenau and proves the point that even in the most inhuman conditions, where solidarity means weakness, a strong and determined character can generate a group with its own internal norms and isolated from the surroundings. Even after the coercive circumstances ceased to exist, the framework established in Birkenau proved to be sustainable, and all that the boys needed was their leader and a new shared goal—getting home—to replace the 'fence' in Birkenau.

After receiving the permits from the civilian authorities, it took Spiegel almost two and a half weeks before he could depart from Krakow with the group. His task was not only to obtain the travel permits but also to arrange for some means of transportation for the group, as well as to ensure that they would be assisted on the way by the different authorities and local Jewish committees. Meanwhile there was the matter of looking after the children but, unlike in Birkenau, Spiegel was mostly out of the house in Długa 38, leaving the group to their own devices during the day.

Długa 38

The conditions in the 'abandoned hotel' were becoming increasingly difficult each day. The waves of survivors appearing in Krakow presented an almost impossible challenge for the Jewish committee. In a report from February the Department for the Aid of Jewish Population claimed that 1,500 Jews had already registered in Krakow, among them 100 children. The same report stated that the

housing situation in the city was “very bad”.⁴⁵ This becomes apparent from a letter sent by the Temporary Committee to Help Jews to the head of the Krakow district on 15 February 1945. In this letter, among other things, they mention the situation in Długa 38: “the refugee building, which has the size of 450 sq. metres, was initially planned to house 200-300 people and must currently houses 1,000-1,200. Of course in such circumstances maintaining the sanitary norms on any level is very difficult if not impossible.”⁴⁶

The deteriorating conditions are mentioned in the twins’ recollections as well, as told by György Lusztig: “It had served as a hotel for the Germans. But it was so dirty and crappy and scabby . . . it was in a terrible state.”⁴⁷ One of the problems was that the survivors carried with them all kinds of diseases from the camps; dysentery, for example, was very common. People suffering from this disease often had difficulty reaching the toilets, a fact that caused severe sanitary problems at the place.⁴⁸

Things deteriorated even further after István Kuhn, who had been injured in the truck accident, arrived back from the hospital. Kuhn had been infected with lice in the hospital and the infestation quickly spread at the group accommodation facility. Within a few days many of the children were lying down most of the day, scratching their heads, which were now full of lice.⁴⁹ Otto Klein recalls that this problem would accompany them to the end of the journey.⁵⁰

The twins had practically nothing to do for most of the day, and their primary concern was the lack of food. The Jewish committee struggled in this area as well. In a report from 9 February, the Department of Provisioning and Trade states that “Due to complete exhaustion of reserves the department cannot provide the council with any food supplies to feed those returning from the camps. As an immediate measure 300 kilograms of bread have been provided.”⁵¹ Another report, from 15 February, states that “we have recently

⁴⁵ ZIH, Department for the Aid of Jewish Population by the Presidium of the Board of Ministers, Eighth report of activities— February 1945, 303/VIII/435.

⁴⁶ ZIH, Temporary Committee to Help Jews, Head of the Krakow District, letter of 15 February 1945, 303/IX/1186.

⁴⁷ Lusztig, SFI.

⁴⁸ Spiegel, YVA.

⁴⁹ Lusztig, SFI.

⁵⁰ Klein, interview by the author.

⁵¹ ZIH, Civic Council of Krakow, Department for Provisioning and Trade—Committee to Help Jews in Krakow, letter of 12 February 1945, 303/IX/1186.

received regular provisions of 250 grams of bread per person.”⁵² These reports indicate the scale of the problems that the re-established Jewish organizations had to deal with. The initial needs of the arriving survivors were too much for these committees, which were trying to establish some kind of aid system within a country devastated by war and caught within a chaotic transition of power.

As a result of the strict rationing, the group was provided with one meal a day, and they were to cater all other meals for themselves. In these circumstances the twins started to wander around the neighbourhood, knocking on doors and begging for food. Spiegel did not like this fact and told the children to stop, but they did not listen to him.⁵³

This was the first time the boys had direct interaction with the local Polish population. Naturally they recall the attitude with which they were received in the different houses. “A friend and I used to go into houses and tell them that we had nothing to eat”, recalls Saul Almog, adding, “We went into multi-story buildings. There were people who gave us some food and we would put it in our pockets and bring it back.”⁵⁴ Tom Simon experienced a more ambiguous response from the locals: “I recall barely having food in Krakow. We were forced to beg for food, so we went from door to door. When you are hungry and you have nothing to eat and you are told that this is the way you will get food, you do it. Sometimes the Russians gave us food, but sometimes we had to beg among the local population. They didn’t have much food themselves. Some were nice and some were awful.”⁵⁵

All in all the twins remember the period in Krakow as a waste of time. As they spent their days doing nothing but waiting for Spiegel to arrange their passes, they could not understand what was taking him so long. The conditions—both physical and mental—were deteriorating, and the sense of chaos in Długa 38 made the children anxious to leave for home. All they had in these moments were their thoughts about the future. “We were all wondering

⁵² ZIH, Temporary committee to Help Jews—Central Jewish Aid Committee of Lublin, letter of 15 February 1945, 303/ix/1186.

⁵³ Spiegel, YVA.

⁵⁴ Almog, SFI.

⁵⁵ Simon, SFI.

what we would find at home”, recalls György Kuhn. “Were our relatives alive? Was our house still standing? And what would our lives look like in the future?”⁵⁶

About to Depart: Changes within the Group

As mentioned above, it is uncertain whether Spiegel spent such a relatively long period in Krakow due to bureaucratic problems or lack of transportation. But two documents of the local Jewish committee dating from 8 and 9 February 1945 indicate the different obstacles that Spiegel and other refugees had to deal with. The first document provides a possible explanation as to why Spiegel did not leave as early as he wished. It is the first part of a letter already quoted above, written by the Temporary Committee to Help Jews to the head of the Krakow District in February 1945: “Until the 8th of this month we were able to repatriate the population arriving in our city, 200-250 people a day, and, notwithstanding their nationality, providing those capable of continuing on foot with financial assistance of 200 Zloty per person (from our own funds), and, if possible, with bread. From the 8th of this month the District Militia Headquarters and the District Office do not issue passes any more so the numbers are growing.”⁵⁷ This document shows us that Spiegel, who already had the approval of the civilian authorities to travel on with the group, may have met difficulties trying to leave the city, even though he found transportation after 8 February.

The second document, dated 9 February, indicates that the Jewish committee was urging the survivors to move out of the city: “I draw your attention to the fact that it is advisable to move Jews out of Krakow, westwards, as the opportunities for earning a living in Krakow are very scarce. In March we expect the arrival of tens of thousands [of displaced persons] in Krakow and it is better to move them [Jews] to districts where there is more space after the expulsion of the Germans and Volksdeutsche”.⁵⁸ What is important in this letter for our purposes is not the recommended destination (westwards), which refers to the Polish survivors, but rather the notion that, since Krakow would be

⁵⁶ Kuhn, SFI.

⁵⁷ ZIH, “Temporary Committee to Help Jews— Head of the Krakow District”, letter of 15 February 1945, 303/IX/1186.

⁵⁸ ZIH, “letter from City Housing Commission, Committee to Help Jews in Krakow”, 9 February 1945, 303/IX/1186. The “opportunities in the west” are a reference to the fact that the mass expulsion of ethnic Germans from the newly annexed western territories presented cheap housing opportunities for Polish Jews who wished to move there.

flooded by displaced people, it was better to encourage survivors to move on. This letter, then, serves as a complement to the first document, in which it was the Jewish committee that encouraged people to move on and assisted them in doing so.

On 10 February Spiegel received another travel permit, issued this time by the Krakow voivodeship (district)office. Spiegel was once again asking for assistance from the military, and this time from the civilian authorities as well, in the next leg of their journey to Munkács.⁵⁹ The reason for the issue of this document is unclear but we can speculate that it was another step within the bureaucratic maze created by the Polish authorities at the time. Although we do not possess a certificate from the security forces approving the planned journey, we can assume that it had been granted beforehand and this document may have been a replacement or reconfirmation of the permission to travel.

In his efforts to receive recognition and aid along the way Spiegel could not rely solely on certificates from the Polish authorities. In the circumstances on the roads at the time, the likeliest source of assistance were Jewish organizations. A document from 15 February 1945 proves that Spiegel had been successful in obtaining help and also indicates that the group was about to depart. This document, issued by the Temporary Aid Committee for the Jewish Community of Krakow, mentions the following: “We confirm that Ernest Spiegel, together with 32 children, is travelling to his homeland and we ask all authorities and committees to facilitate the journey for him and the children and provide them with assistance.”⁶⁰

The group finally left Krakow on 18 February, as mentioned by László Kiss in his “Auschwitz Diary”.⁶¹ All in all, the profile of the group that left Krakow was slightly different to the original one. Out of the thirty-six group members twenty-eight were twin pairs or individuals who had been born as twins. There were definitely nine pairs of twins among them. Twenty boys were aged 10-15, eight were aged 16-20, three were older than 40 (three of the four people who had joined the group on the way to Krakow), Spiegel was 30, and for four of them we have no data regarding their age. Of the thirty-six, all except one were former

⁵⁹ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid. , Document no. 2.

⁶¹ Kiss, “Auschwitz Diary”.

Auschwitz prisoners while the last person in the list (name unclear) had been liberated in Rybnik.⁶²

To conclude, this was a group of children, adolescents and a handful of adults, mostly from greater Hungary, who, with a few exceptions, had lived in the male twins' barrack in Birkenau. They were fully reliant on Zvi Spiegel, "whom we definitely saw as our leader on the journey", as stated by Otto Klein. As for Spiegel himself, he was once again caught in a complex situation, desperately wanting, on the one hand, to get home and see if any members of his family had survived, and, on the other hand leading a group of children who at this point were weak, relatively hungry, suffering from lice, and anxiously waiting to find their own families. It was in these conditions that the group departed Krakow, with no clear idea what the future had in store for them.

IV. On the Desolate Roads of Poland

Upon leaving Krakow the question that confronted Spiegel's group was what route they ought to take towards Hungary. In his testimony Spiegel recalls that he was focused solely on Munkács as their final destination, even though at least two-thirds of the group were from other parts of Hungary—primarily the central and western regions.⁶³ In fact, Munkács by then was about to become a part of the USSR as it was positioned in the north-east corner of the country, close to the border with the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ Whether at this stage Spiegel took into account the fact that the group consisted of children from all over Hungary, with a few from Czechoslovakia, is unknown, but he was to be confronted with the problem later on in the journey.

The logical route to take would have been southwards from Krakow towards the Czechoslovakian border and then eastwards to Munkács. In practice, however, the group started heading eastwards and quite a few twins remember that their destination was Lvov, which had been a part of Poland before the war and now belonged to the Soviet Union. "We were supposed to go to Lvov. I don't know why. That's what Spiegel said", recalls Peter Somogyi.⁶⁵ This perspective

⁶² See appendix for a full description of the changes in the two "Spiegel lists".

⁶³ Spiegel, YVA.

⁶⁴ Sub-Carpathian Rus' was officially and legally annexed to the Soviet Union on 29 June 1945. See Segal, *Days of Ruin*, 102.

⁶⁵ Somogyi, interview by the author.

given by Somogyi exemplifies the total trust that the children had placed in Spiegel. It is not necessarily a matter of memory but rather the perception of a twelve-year-old child who knew where they were going but had no idea why, as it was the responsibility of the adults to set the route.

The question ‘why Lvov?’ was answered by György Lusztig, who was 19 at the time: “Then we went to a railway station in Krakow and got on a coal train, the whole bunch of us. But then we realized that the train was going to Lemberg [German name of Lvov]. But Lemberg was in the opposite direction.”⁶⁶ Spiegel could also recall a similar incident, which we can assume was the same one as they both connected it to the period immediately following their departure from Krakow: “We went on a train that we were told was going towards Hungary. It was a freight rail transport carrying coal. This train took us for 200 kilometres.”⁶⁷ Travelling in coal cars took its toll on the group’s appearance: “Of course with all the coal . . . after half an hour we all looked like chimney sweepers”, remembers György Lusztig.⁶⁸

The above explanations by Spiegel and Lusztig point to the fact that the group had started out eastwards by mistake. We can assume that once Spiegel had realized this, he decided that their best option was to continue on to Lvov, which, being a big city, offered a better chance of finding transportation to Hungary. According to Lusztig, their original destination was Humennéin the Carpathians, in the eastern corner of Czechoslovakia—a large regional centre not far from Munkács or from the Hungarian border further south. This choice may suggest that Spiegel was already looking for a nodal point from which to direct the twins to their different destinations.

From the fact that the group, having been misinformed, ended up travelling for 200 kilometres in the wrong direction we can learn something about the turbulent circumstances at the time; Spiegel’s group was a minute fraction of the millions of refugees who were trying to make their way home across a Polish state struggling to recover after a devastating war.

⁶⁶ Lusztig, SFI.

⁶⁷ Spiegel, YVA.

⁶⁸ Lusztig, SFI.

Indeed, the conditions in post-war Poland were harsh. The country was going through monumental economic and social problems.⁶⁹ The retreating German army had left behind a scorched land, had looted the locals' property and destroyed entire regions.⁷⁰ It was under such circumstances that millions of refugees were trying to return home to or from Poland. Spiegel and his group had to prepare themselves for a difficult and long-winded journey across the country towards the eastern border.

On the Way to the Soviet Border

Travelling eastwards, Spiegel and his group passed through western Galicia and on towards eastern Galicia with its thousands of villages and small towns. This part of the journey presents one of the most challenging methodological problems in trying to establish a picture of what actually happened to the group and especially where. The methodological difficulties have already been mentioned above, but it is worth repeating the fact that a constant change of landscape, in an unfamiliar environment, while everything is happening fast, is extremely difficult for the human memory to process. With all that taken into account, I will try to carefully portray the sequence of events of the next phase of the journey, drawing on the documentation we possess and on elements that appear consistently in the different accounts.

As mentioned above, the group left Krakow on 18 February, after Spiegel had managed to obtain some money for the trip and to buy bread. These facts are confirmed by two receipts that Spiegel received, probably from the Jewish committee in Krakow, on 17 February 1945. The first receipt states that "The accountant will pay 10,000 Zloty for the journey of 32 children and their leaders,"⁷¹ while the second one says, "The accountant will pay Mr. Ernest Spiegel 1,320 Zloty for 33 loafs of bread for children from Slovakia for their journey".⁷² This money was used, according to Spiegel, to buy supplies on the

⁶⁹ Joseph Vincent Yakowicz, *Poland's Postwar Recovery, Economic Reconstruction, Nationalization, and Agrarian Reform in Poland After World War II* (Hicksville NY, 1979), 17-18.

⁷⁰ David Angel, *Between Liberation and Flight: Holocaust Survivors in Poland and the Struggle for Leadership, 1944-1946*, (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1996), 65.

⁷¹ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 9.

⁷² *Ibid.* Document no. 10.

way.⁷³ In addition they all had cans of food which they had received when stopping at a Red Army supply point.⁷⁴

After taking the coal train the group's first stop was probably Tarnow. They only stayed there for a few hours and left the city in trucks, according to Otto Klein's testimony. They next stopped in Rzeszow, where they were welcomed by the local Jewish committee. Historically this western Galician city had a flourishing Jewish community, which made up almost 40 per cent of its population in the interwar period.⁷⁵ After the war about 600 Jews, most of them not originally from Rzeszow, gathered in the city and established a local Jewish committee. The committee in Rzeszow provided accommodation to the survivors along with food, clothing and some money. They maintained a good relationship with the authorities but the attitude of the local population was hostile as in other towns in the region.⁷⁶

Rzeszow is mentioned in a few of the twins' recollections and in a document bearing the stamp of the local Jewish community. It was the same letter that Spiegel had received in Krakow from the temporary Aid Committee mentioned above. He presented it to the local committee in Rzeszow, they added their stamp and wrote the following hand-written note: "They have been seen! On the part of the city, there are no obstacles for the onward travel of the above-mentioned to their home country."⁷⁷ Although the peculiar phrase 'they have been seen' could suggest that the committee had been notified in advance of the group's arrival, this is most unlikely and probably simply indicates the excitement of the locals over meeting this unique group. Even though there is no date specified on the stamp, we can assume that Spiegel and his boys arrived in Rzeszow on 18 February and probably left the day after.

Their destination was Przemyśl, a small town located 80 kilometres from Rzeszow, 250 kilometres from Krakow, and only 15 kilometres from the new border between Poland and the USSR (today Ukraine). Like Rzeszow, Przemyśl had a thriving Jewish community before the war that made up 40 per cent of its

⁷³ Spiegel, YVA.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Wein and Weiss (eds.), *Pinkas Hakehilot, Poland*, vol. 3, p. 155.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 2.

population.⁷⁸ On 27 July 1944 the town was liberated by the Red Army, and a few days later 250 Jewish survivors gathered together and established a Jewish committee to provide aid to refugees and assistance in looking for survivors. In addition they set up an orphanage for children who had mainly been hidden in Catholic monasteries in the area and had now been located.⁷⁹

As Rzeszow and Przemyśl were only 80 kilometres apart, the question that comes to mind is why it took the group 24-48 hours to arrive in Przemyśl. The answer probably lies in the fact that they had major transportation problems, as we can assume from Otto Klein's testimony, who remembers having walked part of the way to Przemyśl.⁸⁰ What means of transportation the group used to leave Rzeszow we do not know, but having had to walk some of the distance was probably the reason that they hindered. What we do know is that they caught a train at some point on their way to Przemyśl.⁸¹

These frequent changes in the situation exemplify the complications that Spiegel had to deal with. Most individual survivors on their way home had to improvise in some way or other in order to progress towards their destination. Spiegel had to do so as well, but the fact that he was leading a group of over thirty children and adolescents limited his options, especially with regard to the means of transportation available to them. "Spiegel constantly had to make decisions. I felt he was the only one who could help us", recalls Otto Klein.⁸²

The decision to go to Przemyśl needs to be understood in a wider context; the town was in a relatively central position in the southern part of the newly established border between the USSR and Poland. It served as a stopover for repatriates coming back from the USSR to Poland and for survivors wishing to return primarily to Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. This fact appears in a January 1945 report of the Department for the Aid of the Jewish Population of the Jewish council in Przemyśl, which also reflects the challenges that the mass migration presented:

⁷⁸ Wein and Weiss (eds.), *Pinkas Hakehilot, Poland*, vol. 2, p. 424.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 440.

⁸⁰ Klein, interview by the author.

⁸¹ See Almog, SFI.

⁸² Klein, interview by the author.

“Every day groups of repatriates arrive in Przemyśl, which creates further difficult tasks for the Committee. The safety situation in Przemyśl and the district has been normalized. The authorities treat the needs of the Jewish population with understanding. The head of the district has given them 30 metres of wood. We have set up an orphanage, where 10 children have found refuge. Altogether 65 children are being looked after by the Committee. The kitchen is functioning and prepares 80 lunches every day. 25 per cent of the population are working, 25 per cent live off trade; the rest are not capable of working”.⁸³

There was also a broader context, which made the local circumstances in Przemyśl and other places along the border even more complex. In order to understand the full background to Spiegel’s actions during their stay in Przemyśl, it is important to briefly glimpse at the events in the Soviet Ukraine and near the Polish border at the time.

Already back in the summer of 1944, with the entry of the Red Army to western Ukraine and eastern Poland, representatives of the USSR and Poland had agreed to conduct a mass transfer of Poles from the Ukrainian USSR and of ethnic Ukrainians from Poland.⁸⁴ This was part of the ‘one nation—one state’ paradigm that was popular among Polish officials at the time. The population movements of the mid- to late 1940s took place in disputed territories characterized by a high degree of ethnic diversity, Przemyśl among them.⁸⁵

The plan was to begin the institutional transfer in 1945, but even before the formal implementation ‘spontaneous’ efforts to cross the border were made, especially by Ukrainians on the Polish side, whom the new, arbitrary border had cut off from their communities. As a result of these movements and the proposed transfer plan, the ethnic tension in the area reached its peak at the end of 1944 and in early 1945.⁸⁶ Eventually by the end of 1946 some 780,000 Poles and tens of thousands of Jews had been transferred to communist Poland and 483,099

⁸³ZIH, “Department for the Aid of Jewish Population by the Presidium of the Board of Ministers, Seventh report of activities—January 1945”, 303/VIII/435.

⁸⁴ Kateryna Stadnik, “Ukrainian-Polish Population Transfers, 1944-46”, 165 and also Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010), 326.

⁸⁵ Stadnik, “Ukrainian-Polish Population Transfers”, 166-7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 168-70.

Ukrainians had been dispatched from Poland to Soviet Ukraine, most of them by force.⁸⁷

It was under these circumstances that the group arrived in Przemyśl on 21 February 1945. They were immediately confronted with the local situation, as described by Saul Almog: “When we got off the train, we were standing in snow up to our knees. Two nuns approached us and led us to a convent. On the way some Poles were shouting ‘stinking Jews’ at us.”⁸⁸ This animosity experienced by Spiegel’s group was part of the reality with which many Jewish survivors were faced upon returning to their villages after liberation. The constant physical threat sensed by Polish Jewish survivors in their old villages ‘helped’ them decide that this was not their home anymore.⁸⁹ However, for a group of children hundreds of miles away from home in a totally unknown environment, it was yet another factor that added to their confusion, with some people swearing at them while others provided them with shelter.

At the convent the group was treated to food and drinks; they were given accommodation for a few days until they could move to the compounds of the Jewish community. “They took us to some room where there was only straw on the ground. We were covered in lice. We were just lying down on the straw and scratching our wounds. We knew we were still far away from home”, recalls Saul Almog.⁹⁰ Almog’s latter comment can suggest that the children were aware of the fact that although it had been almost a month since they had departed from Auschwitz, they were still far from home and not necessarily going in the right direction. That in itself, together with the physical conditions and the surrounding environment in Przemyśl, can tell us something about the exhaustion and despair among the group at this stage of the journey. These conditions affected some of the children more than the others. One of them was László Kiss, who had to leave the group to be hospitalized with enteric fever.⁹¹

Spiegel was probably aware of the desperate situation in which the group was, and of the fact that they relied on him to propose a feasible plan. As

⁸⁷ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 327-8.

⁸⁸ Almog, SFI.

⁸⁹ For the full discussion regarding the reasons Jews left their villages in Poland, see Angel, *Between Liberation and Flight*, 47-53.

⁹⁰ Almog, SFI.

⁹¹ See Kiss, “Auschwitz Diary”. In the diary Kiss describes the appalling conditions that existed in the hospital.

mentioned above, after realizing that the coal train was heading in the wrong direction, he decided to carry on to Lvov, where he assumed better transportation was available. Thus he was now concentrating his efforts on obtaining permission to enter the USSR, which was not an easy task in the conditions described above.

Already on the day of their arrival, Spiegel began making arrangements for crossing the border and approached the local Jewish aid committee to request help. Their representative stamped Spiegel's document from Krakow and added the following hand-written note: "We ask all military authorities to grant aid to a group led by Mr. Ernest Spiegel in their return to their home country."⁹² The fact that the writing refers only to the military authorities proves that this note was specifically written in order to assist the group in receiving permission to cross the border.

Spiegel may have also received financial aid for the group, as documents from the period reveal. A report by the Jewish council in Przemyśl regarding the distribution of money to Jewish repatriates between 15-27 February states that on 25 February a group of Hungarians received 500 Zloty from the council. The day after, another group of Hungarians received 1,400 Zloty.⁹³ In the same document there is a detail suggesting that it may have been Spiegel who received the aid mentioned on 26 February: on the same date there are two entries for the amounts of 200 Zloty and 300 Zloty, spent on the transfer of two foreigners to hospital.⁹⁴ As mentioned above, that was the day that László Kiss was hospitalized. This, together with the fact that the group left on 26 February, makes it likely that Spiegel arranged with the council for the hospitalization of Kiss and asked for financial support as they were about to depart.

As mentioned above, Spiegel and the group attempted to cross the border on 26 February 1945. Apparently they succeeded, as Otto Klein remembers: "We passed the border on foot and were discovered by Russian soldiers. We told

⁹² YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 2.

⁹³ ZIH, "Treasurer's Report—Jewish Council in Przemyśl", 15.02.45-27.02, 303/vii/176. This report also supports my claim about Przemyśl being an important centre for Jewish survivors—it mentions that money was distributed to Czechs, Romanians and other foreigners as well as Hungarians. This also appears in the next report, for the period of 28 February to 9 March, where significant amounts of money were distributed to Czechs, Romanians and Hungarians primarily for travel expenses.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

them we were returning from a concentration camp. But one of them, the officer, was especially nice to us and said that we were going in the wrong direction, that this was not the way to reach Hungary. It turned out he was Jewish and was willing to help us.”⁹⁵

V. Out of the Maze: Separation and Farwell

After a month of thwarted efforts, the group had finally had the luck to come across a Russian officer who, according to Otto Klein, was keen to help them.⁹⁶ The officer arranged an open wagon for them, attached to a cattle train going south-west towards the Polish-Czechoslovakian border. “We had to sit in an open wagon. It was like sitting on top of a table. And they told us the train would leave soon, but we just waited and waited . . . we had blankets and some other things, so we could cover ourselves. We were just sitting there and waiting for the train to leave. We could not do anything else. Finally the train left. On the opposite track there was a Russian train, it was cold as hell . . . As we passed by that train a Russian soldier lifted off my blanket and took it. He was waving with it as we left.”⁹⁷

The Columns Grow

Somewhere on the way, probably not far from Przemyśl, whether at one of the train stations or elsewhere, a large group of more than 100 refugees joined Spiegel and the children. This may have happened on the initiative of the Russian authorities, who were ‘stuck’ with these refugees and decided to make use of Spiegel’s leadership and merge the two groups. Spiegel himself mentions the incident in his recollections: “on the way I was joined by a group of people with a list in Russian which I had not written. They were mainly women and sick people who joined me when they saw that I was leading a group back home. Some stayed longer and some left earlier.”⁹⁸

Spiegel could not recall exactly where the list had been made and where the other group had joined him, but we do have some information that can help us reconstruct these facts: first, the list itself has been preserved (it is kept in the

⁹⁵ Klein, interview by the author.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Lusztig, SFI.

⁹⁸ Spiegel, YVA.

Yad Vashem archive as part of the set of documents donated by Spiegel). It was written on 27 February, around the day the group left Przemyśl.⁹⁹ The list contains the names of the twins as well, therefore, it must have been compiled after the refugees and Spiegel's group had been united. In addition Otto Klein remembered a large group of women and sick people from Greece and France that joined them in Przemyśl and travelled with them for three days.¹⁰⁰

As I have mentioned above in my discussion of the methodological challenges of reconstructing the journey, the majority of the twins remembered most major incidents. This fact was generally correct (see p. 6 of this chapter), with the exception of one such major incident—that of the large group of refugees joining Spiegel's group. Besides Spiegel and Klein, only Peter Somogyi mentions the fact that the group had grown bigger: "by the end we were almost 200 people", he recalls.¹⁰¹

There were twins who recalled that people had joined them along the way but most of them either did not mention the latter group, even though it was of a significant size, or, as in the case of those interviewed by me, did not remember this incident. The reason that some twins did not care to mention it may be due to the fact that they had no interaction with members of the newly arrived group, or, being separated on the train, they barely saw them.

In any case, this incident clearly indicates that the authorities as well as the refugees who ran into the group perceived Spiegel as a leader who was in control and knew what he was doing. His ability to impress as someone in control could perhaps be attributed to his service in the Czechoslovakian military and especially to the officer course he had completed, together with a few months' experience in Birkenau, where he was in charge of the twins' group under extreme conditions and within a strict framework.

Separation and Farewell

The above document further helps us establish the route that the group took towards the border. As it was handed to the Red Army command in Nowy Sącz, we can assume they stopped in the town or in its proximity. Nowy Sącz is located

⁹⁹ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 8, 8a.

¹⁰⁰ Klein, interview by the author.

¹⁰¹ Somogyi, SFI.

in the central part of southern Poland, about 40 kilometres from what was then the Czechoslovakian border; this means that Spiegel and his group had come back almost half of the way they had travelled from Krakow to Przemyśl in the previous days.

When they crossed the border it became apparent that at some point the group would have to split as they lived in different parts of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Sub-Carpathian Rus'. They probably had two stops on the way; at first in Humenné and then in Michalovce—both in Slovakia.¹⁰² The twins have different memories regarding the exact place where the group broke up as some remember it as having taken place in the latter two towns, but Spiegel himself claims that it was at the boarder crossing in Csap (Chop), which “had a major rail junction with trains going in different directions”. Csap was located at the junction of three borders (Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine at present), about 40 kilometres from Munkács. It made sense for Spiegel to choose this point to separate the group because of its pivotal position and its proximity to his hometown, Munkács.

Whether he had planned ahead or improvised we do not know, but Spiegel decided that the separation would be structured. He split the group into subgroups: one was to go with him to Munkács, and the others to Budapest and other parts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. “I selected the older twins and said to them, ‘you take him and him and lead them to their home’. I thought they could handle it as they were mature enough and they knew where their home was.”¹⁰³ Spiegel instructed each older twin as to what route he should take home and made sure they understood him. “He said, ‘boys, I am leaving’ and he waited until we got on the train. There were quite a few of us,” recalls Peter Somogyi, who was in the Budapest group.¹⁰⁴ Spiegel also asked each twin to write to him when they got home.

¹⁰² Humenné is mentioned in György Lusztig’s testimony. Lusztig skips the whole journey eastwards and claims that Humenné was their first stop after Krakow. As we have the documents alongside at least seven testimonies regarding the journey to Przemyśl, we can conclude that Lusztig confused the various stages of the trip and forgot parts of it; see Lusztig, SFI. Michalovce is mentioned in Otto Klein, interview by the author.

¹⁰³ Spiegel, YVA.

¹⁰⁴ Somogyi, interview by the author.

After a journey lasting a month and half out of hell in Birkenau, the twins were finally about to arrive home. The weeks of anxiety of the journey, in addition to the months spent in Birkenau, where they had dreamed about the moment they would be reunited with their families, were about to come to an end. But they were all aware of the uncertainty that awaited them. Who was alive? What was left of their old lives and how were they to be welcomed in their communities? These were questions they hoped would now be answered.

In the rush of the moment neither the boys nor Spiegel had the time for a dramatic farewell. 'Uncle Spiegel' was now in the same position as them, apprehensive but impatient to see what was left of his former life. Was Magda, his twin sister, alive? Were his brothers alive? Was their house in Munkács still there? What future lay ahead of him? He quickly said goodbye and departed with a group of twelve twins towards Munkács.

For some of the twins this was the last time they would see Spiegel for forty years, while for others it was the final goodbye. All they would be left with were the memories of Spiegel Bácsi from the Lager in Birkenau.

Chapter V

A New Life in the Shadow of the Dark Past

Having separated from the twins, Spiegel was on his own trying to construct a new life first in Europe and then in Israel. From the beginning it was obvious that he did his utmost to distance himself from the experience in Birkenau and to move on with his life. This chapter looks at his post-war efforts to reconstruct his life and put the past behind him—a task that eventually appeared to be more difficult than expected.

First we will follow Spiegel's footsteps in Europe all the way to his settling in Carlsbad, Czechoslovakia, where he lived with his wife and baby daughter, and had a promising job and a relatively large social circle. But this period was also characterized by his initial reluctance to talk or be involved in anything regarding his Auschwitz period. Whether it was his rejection of the efforts made by various twins to keep in touch with him, or his refusal to hear or share with his wife Holocaust stories, Spiegel was determined to suppress his memories

from the camp, and he displayed clear signs of emotional disturbance at this stage.

The second part of the chapter will deal with Spiegel's move to Israel, where he once again had to rebuild his life. On the one hand he succeeded for the second time in establishing a comfortable life for himself and his family but on the other hand his mental apprehensions appeared to grow and became more obvious to his surroundings. These apprehensions did not exist in a vacuum and were influenced to a large extent by the different spheres of his life. The first of these was the cultural sphere, where Holocaust memory in Israel in the 1950s was deeply affected by the survivors' discourse. Accusations of fellow survivors of collaboration with the Nazis were not uncommon and led to the Kapo trials and the Kasztner affair. These will be described below, together with an in-depth analysis of the construction of Holocaust memory in Israel in that period.

The second sphere to be examined is the communal one: Spiegel lived in a neighbourhood that was predominantly inhabited by Holocaust survivors. Contrary to the commonly held view that these people were silent at the time, it appears that the Holocaust was a constant presence in the neighbourhood—another fact that made it impossible for Spiegel to put the past aside. The third sphere was that of the family. Spiegel was married to Rachel (Anna) Hecht, who was a Holocaust survivor herself. Rachel would openly talk about her experiences while Zvi would try to silence her. The interactions between the two are analysed below in an effort to understand their effects upon Spiegel, who had to live with the ghost of the Holocaust constantly haunting his house.

At the end of the chapter, these spheres of influence will be integrated with the innermost soul of the survivor— in our case, Spiegel. At this point I will present the difficulties that Spiegel had to face in his self-perception, being a survivor of the camp's grey zone, along with the fact that he was the twins' saviour, a story he could not tell and was left to process all by himself. These complexities led to inner tension and misery, which he would not express to the outside world but which would become manifest in his own home. To sum up, this chapter aims at reconstructing Spiegel's early post-war self-perception and, on a more general level, highlights the gaps in Holocaust representation between the survivor of the grey zone who was a benign functionary and the outer world.

I. The Lost World

After Spiegel and the majority of the twins separated he was still leading a group of twelve twins towards Munkács. Like Spiegel, these children were from the area of Sub-Carpathian Rus'. With Munkács being one of the urban centres of the region, it made sense that these twins would follow Spiegel to his hometown. They stayed there for only one night, probably at a refugee centre.

When Spiegel and the twins, like other Holocaust survivors, arrived home, they were exposed for the first time to the magnitude of the destruction the Holocaust had caused. In discussing the experience of Holocaust survivors in that first confrontation with their lost past, it is important to understand the enormity of the changes that had taken place. According to Peter Lagrou, "the place where war and persecution had struck them (the survivors) in most cases no longer existed—their home and their belongings, their relatives, their community, their neighbourhood. Even the social, political and demographic make up of the country they had known was most often radically transformed by war."¹⁰⁵ This new situation has to be taken into account in addition to the devastating experiences that survivors had undergone during the war years. Moreover, they were returning to societies that were overwhelmed by the "turmoil war had created and by the challenge of reconstruction".¹⁰⁶ In these circumstances compassion for survivors of the Jewish genocide was not a part of the agenda in these societies.

Spiegel and the Twins Arrive in Munkács

The Soviet army had reached the crests of the Carpathian Mountains in August 1944. By October the Red Army was in full control of the region and by November the Communists were already making arrangements for its annexation to the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷ At the same time as the Germans and masses of local Hungarians were fleeing from the area, Jews were beginning to return. These survivors included people who had been in hiding, those returning from the camps in Poland (liberated before February 1945), as well as Jews liberated in concentration or forced labour camps elsewhere by the armies of the Western

¹⁰⁵ Lagrou, "Return to a Vanished World", 21.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 21-2.

¹⁰⁷ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 325.

allies, and Romanian and especially Hungarian Jews, among them hundreds coming back from Budapest (liberated in March-April).¹⁰⁸

Spiegel and the twins arrived in Munkács on 6 March 1945 and were among the first survivors to return to the city from the camps. The date of their return is known to us from a hand-written document issued for Spiegel by the Soviet authorities. The note states that Spiegel, along with twelve twins, is allowed to stay in the city for a few days and they are to join in the compulsory construction works.¹⁰⁹

Upon their arrival in Munkács the group separated again and at least one pair of twins did not leave the city with the rest of the children—who would depart with Spiegel after a very brief stay, as will be explained below.¹¹⁰ The first thing Spiegel did was to go to his old house, where he had lived all his life before war had erupted. “I found there were strangers living there. The new owners were scared to see me . . . they have taken it all over after the family was deported. They went out of their way to treat me nicely. They even gave me mail I have received. There were letters from several of the twins, telling me they have gotten home safely. There have been reports on how they accompanied their younger charges without any problems.”¹¹¹

That Spiegel had indeed received letters already upon his return to Munkács is unlikely, as for mail to arrive so promptly was almost impossible under the wartime circumstances. But we do know with certainty that letters arrived at his house in Munkács a few days later and were forwarded to his new location as he had already left the city. One of these letters has survived and can serve as an example of the twins’ attachment to Spiegel. The postcard was sent by the Somogyi brothers:

Dear Mr. Spiegel (Spiegel Bácsi)!

Pécs, 19. 03. 1945

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 6.

¹¹⁰ This fact appears in the testimony of Saul Almog, which mentions that he and his brother Tibor arrived in Munkács with Spiegel and the other twins; “there we separated from them and were directed to the train station”. See Almog, SFI.

¹¹¹ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 99.

We arrived from Pest (Budapest) by car on 11 March. We were welcomed by our three uncles, who had all escaped from forced labor. Now we're staying with them. Our hidden stuff is slowly turning up.

Best wishes,

Tamás and Péter Somogyi

Address: 27 Ferenc József Street, Pécs.¹¹²

This postcard has to be placed in context. The Somogyi twins (12) were taking their first steps in a new life, trying to grapple with the consequences of the war. In all the mayhem they were experiencing they still found the time to write a postcard to Spiegel and to post it, as if it were an obligation they were bound to fulfil. This communication—along with others, including the last letters sent to Spiegel by the boys in 1946—will be discussed in more detail below.

The fact that the new occupiers of his home welcomed Spiegel politely was not to be taken for granted, for many survivors in other countries had a very different reception. In Sub-Carpathian Rus' itself the experience of returnees upon meeting their old neighbours varied greatly¹¹³

But for Spiegel the sight of his house taken over by others was too much to handle: "Inside the house I didn't see any of our old furniture . . . It was awful, awful, simply awful."¹¹⁴ He only stayed in Munkács for one day and one night, then he ran away. "I couldn't bear to live in my old town anymore."¹¹⁵

Satu Mare, Romania

Taking ten twins with him, Spiegel left Munkács and headed southwards, towards Romania.¹¹⁶ On 12 March 1945 they arrived at the town of Halmeu (Halmi in Hungarian), which is located in north-western Romania, 70 kilometres from Munkács. Halmeu was only a stop on their way, as appears from a

¹¹² YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 15b.

¹¹³ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 327-8.

¹¹⁴ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 99.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ The Holocaust left Romanian Jewry in a critical situation socially, economically and physically. After the fall of Antonescu's dictatorship in 1945, there were 356,000 Jews in the country, compared to 757,000 before the war. For an exhaustive description of the situation of the Jews in Romania in the immediate aftermath of the war, see Liviu Rotman, "The History of the Jews in Romania: The Communist Era Until 1965" in Rafael Vago, ed, *The History of the Jews in Romania*, Vol. 5, (Heb.), (Tel Aviv, 2004), 44-66.

document issued to the group by the local Jewish community on the same day: “This is to certify that Mr Spiegel, accompanied by 10 deported children, has reported at the Halmei Jewish Community. We make a request to all Jewish communities to aid them as they travel along.”¹¹⁷

At that time Spiegel recalled having heard that Jews who arrived in Bucharest received grants from the Joint Distribution Committee.¹¹⁸ Eventually he left Halmeu, and whether he made the trip all the way to Bucharest is uncertain but he finally ended up for a few months in the northern city of Satu Mare (30 km from Halmeu, Szatmárnémeti in Hungarian).¹¹⁹ He was asked to stay there as the local Jewish community needed his skills as an accountant.¹²⁰ Spiegel does not mention where or when he and the last ten twins separated but we can assume it happened sometime between mid- to late March.

Up to the period in Satu Mare Spiegel had no information concerning whether his sister and brothers were alive. All this was about to change, as his twin sister Magda arrived in the city sometime in May 1945. Magda Zelikovich had been evacuated from Birkenau on 18 January 1945 and sent towards Germany. She ended up in Ravensbrück, the notorious concentration camp for women 90 km north of Berlin. In March 1945 she was transferred again to a small town in the vicinity, where she was liberated in April. She returned to Munkács and turned up at the family home like her brother had a few weeks earlier. Unlike Zvi, Magda was in a bad physical condition, and so she stayed for ten days lying in bed in her old house, hosted by the new tenants. They had been warned by a Jewish soldier from the Red Army not to do any harm to her. The soldier also managed to locate a cousin of hers in Munkács, who directed her to Zvi in Satu Mare.¹²¹

A whole year had passed since Zvi had pointed out Magda in the columns in Birkenau as his twin sister, and some ten months since they had briefly met in the men’s hospital in Lager BIIIf. It was only now that the two siblings were to be

¹¹⁷ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 6a.

¹¹⁸ Spiegel, FVA, 1993. In fact, in 1944-5 the JDC spent \$ 6,500,000 in order to assist 55,000 Jewish refugees in Romania alongside 51,000 poor members of the Romanian Jewish community. See Rotman, *The History of the Jews in Romania*, 56.

¹¹⁹ ITS Archive, Nominal List of Jews from Northern Transylvania who returned from deportation, World Jewish Congress, CM1/F-18-415/4.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Magda Zelikovich, YVA.

reunited—having shared the awful experience, which few were able to grasp back then, of being inmates in immediate proximity to Dr Mengele (Magda was his office cleaner for a while, as mentioned above). Zvi, who was not a man of exaggeration or dramatic descriptions, did not spare his emotions when he recalled the encounter: “I was shocked when I was reunited with my sister, Magda . . . My twin sister had been such a beautiful girl before the war. But she was completely changed, and in a terrible way. She had a beard all over her face . . . it was horrifying too look at her, and to remember how she had once been, so radiant and happy with her young son.”¹²²

During his stay in Satu Mare Spiegel received for the first time a comprehensive update regarding the fate of the larger group of twins, those who had made their way to Budapest after separating from him. The letter, which was written by György Lusztig (19) on 14 May 1945, begins with a short description of what had happened to the group after separation:

Dear Uncle Spiegel,

After we separated at the train station, the next morning I went into town with the boys and the local community gave us some food and five pengő each. Immediately after that, we were on the train on our way to Budapest. We arrived quite soon and on Tuesday afternoon we got off the train at the Keleti railway station. The joy was overwhelming when we arrived, even though deep in our hearts we feared that we wouldn't find anyone. We went directly to the Jewish community building in Bethlen Square, where we were disinfected and received new clothes. Then we went to look for relatives . . .¹²³

At this point Lusztig describes the emotional meeting he and his brother Márton had with their sister. He then updates Spiegel regarding those twins who were a part of the group in Birkenau but didn't travel back home with group:

¹²² Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 116-17.

¹²³ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document nos. 23-5.

The other day we met Tatu. He has seen the name of Öcsi's older brother on one of the lists, so apparently he is on his way home as well. The two Grosz brothers, Lala and Tibi, are also here in Pest somewhere. The two little Brichtas, together with their mother, have returned. Then I've seen the two Frankfurts too. Poor them, their brother was killed. The Arrow Cross shot him here in Pest. Laci Kiss [separated from the group when he was hospitalized in Przemyśl] and the two Laufers [separated from the group in Krakow when they came down with a typhus infection] are home as well. In brief we believe anyone with a little resourcefulness can make it home.

Concerning the boys who returned to Budapest together, he reports they are all safe in an orphanage in the city. From the final paragraph of the letter we can learn a few interesting things:

And you, Uncle Spiegel, how did you get home? Write to us as much as you can. And if you come to Budapest, visit us! Now one can get whatever one's heart desires, only everything has become very expensive. Budapest is becoming beautiful once again. The bridges have been rebuilt, the trams are running, all the coffee houses and stores have reopened, and the gas and electricity supply has been repaired. The newspapers have published many things on Dr Mengele and Auschwitz, we've read them.

Contact us as soon as you can! And visit us when you're in Pest!

We hope to see you soon. Hugs and kisses,

Your two twins,

Gyurika and Bandi

Our address: 22 Thaly Kálmán Street, district IX, Budapest.¹²⁴

From this we can learn that, unlike in the western Europe, Mengele's name was already known to the public in Hungary only a few weeks after the liberation of Auschwitz. It is clear, furthermore, that the Lusztigs are openly talking to Spiegel about the camp, which shows that, unlike him, they had no reservations about sharing their experiences in Auschwitz, a fact that will be discussed in the

¹²⁴ Ibid.

following section. Finally, we can sense the great affection that the two boys have for Spiegel: they refer to themselves as “your twins” and specifically mention their address (as did the Somogyi brothers), and the fact that they are keen to meet him should he come to Budapest.

In June, after Magda had been reunited with her husband they left Satu Mare together with Zvi to go to Budapest. In the capital Magda and Zvi finally met their other two brothers, Dov and Yehuda. Dov had survived the labour units of the Hungarian army and Yehuda had been in hiding in Budapest, having managed to arrange for a false identity. When the war was over Yehuda returned to Munkács (spring 1945), where he made efforts to reopen the Jewish Gymnasium. Due to the Soviet attitude to such denominational institutions, his endeavour failed and he moved to Budapest; there he initiated the establishment of Tarbut, a Jewish grammar school, where Dov joined him later as a teacher.¹²⁵

What is surprising about the short period that Spiegel spent in Budapest is that apparently he did not go and visit the Lusztig brothers, or any of the other twins. He does not mention any such meetings in any of his recollections, nor do the twins who were in Budapest at the time record any reunions. While we cannot totally rule out the possibility, we have no evidence of any response by Spiegel even in writing. The question that presents itself is why Spiegel avoided meeting the twins. Was it purely a matter of logistics, or was he reluctant to do so?

As the address of the Lusztigs was known to him and since we have evidence that he reported at the community headquarters in Bethlen Square¹²⁶, we can state with confidence that, had he made the effort, Spiegel could have found the twins. We are left with the conclusion that he was reluctant to do so. Although what follows is only speculation, we can try to reconstruct his reasons by drawing on the pattern of his behaviour from the end of the war to the 1980s. As early as May 1945, Spiegel was repressing different aspects of his wartime experiences. He did not want to have anything to do with memories of the period in Auschwitz. He had fulfilled his task with the twins and even though he had much affection for them, they were a part of the dark past. As it will become

¹²⁵Udi, “The History of the Hebrew Gymnasium”, 133. For an extensive description of the establishment and educational framework of the Tarbut School where some of the twins were eventually enrolled, see *ibid.* 133-42.

¹²⁶ See Records of Registration, DEGOB, June 1945, Zvi Spiegel—Record no. B4112.

apparent in another letter presented below, the twins were continually interested in the fate of one another and were excited by any news they heard about members of their group. However, it seems that Spiegel, who had experienced the events from a different perspective, had difficulty sharing his memories; this contrast will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

After a short sojourn in Budapest, Magda and Zvi heard of a new initiative by the Czechoslovakian government for the resettlement of Jews and others from Sub-Carpathian Rus' in the Sudetenland.¹²⁷ The background for the initiative was the mass exodus of 15,000 Jews from the Sub-Carpathian area after its official annexation to the USSR in June 1945. Of those who had emigrated, a significant number now moved to Czechoslovakia. Most of them found homes in Prague and its suburbs or in the Sudetenland, from where many German ethnic residents had fled with the retiring German army.¹²⁸ The vast majority of 3,200,000 Germans would later be deported in the mass ethnic cleansing operation implemented first 'organically' and then by the government of the newly established Czechoslovakian Republic.¹²⁹

In the wake of the expulsion the Sudetenland became abandoned, and the properties of the former ethnic residents were given to the new settlers. Among the first ones to receive property allocations were soldiers in the Czechoslovakian army corps, including Jews from Sub-Carpathian Rus'. Thereafter, the Czechoslovakian government began to transfer property in a systematic manner to Czechs and to Rusyn and Jewish immigrants from Sub-Carpathian Rus'.¹³⁰ Magda and her husband Nachman, and soon afterwards Zvi, took advantage of this opportunity and tried to re-establish themselves in the

¹²⁷ After the war in 1945 the Third Czechoslovakian Republic was established under the rule of Edvard Beneš. The republic existed for three years until the local Communist party took over in the February Coup. For a full description of these dramatic three years see, Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (London, 2009), 150-76.

¹²⁸ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 328-9.

¹²⁹ This was part of a wider campaign, first 'grassroots' and then institutional, for retribution, which in turn was a part of the national reconstruction effort announced by the government. For a description of the actual cleansing operations, see Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe* (London, 2001), 108-22. For a comprehensive overview of the years of retribution in Czechoslovakia (mainly Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia), see Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (New York, 2005).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 329.

classic and colourful spa city of Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary in Czech) in the Sudetenland.

Initial Efforts to Start Anew: Life in Carlsbad

According to Jelinek, “For Jews in Sub-Carpathian Rus’ living under Czechoslovakian rule seemed sometimes like paradise: some were able to acquire property, including well-stocked stores and workshops; others were appointed public administrators of the abandoned German property. One could easily become wealthy.”¹³¹ This description applies in many ways to the three years Zvi Spiegel spent in Carlsbad.¹³²

Being a pragmatic man, Spiegel quickly settled down in the city, found a job and an apartment, and got married. All of this dramatic transition took place within the span of a few months. At first Spiegel lived with his sister and found work at an accounting firm. He soon proved himself, as in Birkenau, an efficient, diligent, and meticulous employee. The owner of the firm, who lived in Prague, was so impressed that he made him head of the firm, in charge of all eighteen accountants. Spiegel was proud of his promotion and loved his work. What is interesting is that at the time many Jews were involved in the black market, a fact that made Spiegel angry as he “despised the fact that Jews were involved in illegal activities”.¹³³

Spiegel’s outstanding performance at work, and his quick move up the hierarchy as a result, together with his reaction to the illegal but widespread activities of the black market at the time, throw light on certain aspects of his character that may help us better understand his actions back in the grey zone of Birkenau and in the aftermath. Being a hard-working person who took pride in his job appears to have been a central theme in Spiegel’s life. In addition, his tendency for perfectionism and his desire to be appreciated by his superiors are noteworthy, as are his need to follow the rules and his belief that other people should do so as well. Some of these character traits are in agreement with the

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² A document found in the ITS archive states that Spiegel lived in Carlsbad from January 1947 until 1949, but according to his own account Spiegel had moved to the city already in 1946. See ITS, Spiegel Ernst, doc no. 396442.

¹³³ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 22-24 November 2010.

pattern of his actions in Birkenau, while others, such as his respect for rules, are not—a matter that will be analysed in my conclusion.

Another two defining events that happened to Spiegel in this period were his marriage and the birth of his daughter. Spiegel met Rachel Anna Hecht in Carlsbad when she was visiting friends who were providing him with accommodation. Rachel was one of nine children in a Jewish family from Svalava, located only thirty kilometres away from Munkács.¹³⁴ She was an Auschwitz survivor herself and was spending time at her brother's home in Prague. Soon after they met, Spiegel paid her a visit on one of his trips to Prague, and a few months later, on 27 January 1946, the two got married in the historical Altneu Synagogue in Prague.¹³⁵

Exactly a year after he was liberated from Auschwitz, Spiegel was already married, had moved into a new, comfortable apartment in Carlsbad and was doing exceptionally well in his career. On the surface he seemed to have moved on, but, according to his wife Rachel, there were clear signs that he was a troubled man. Firstly, Spiegel had a constant sense of insecurity on European soil. He kept telling his wife that they could never feel safe there again. This resulted in their mutual decision to emigrate to Palestine. But Spiegel, true to his character, refused to do so until a proper and recognized state of the Jews was established; the couple thus stayed in Carlsbad for the time being.¹³⁶

Secondly, Rachel sensed that her tendency to talk openly about her Holocaust experience made her new husband uncomfortable. "My husband didn't want to talk about Auschwitz. The only thing he told me back then was that he had been there. He didn't want to hear my stories. When friends came and talked about their experience he would walk away. He was totally healthy physically, but it took me a while to understand that he was emotionally disturbed." What Rachel did not know was that at the time Zvi was still receiving letters from the twins, and she had no idea what he meant to them.¹³⁷

On 9 September 1946 Spiegel received what we can assume was one of the last letters from the twins in the immediate post-war period. This was a

¹³⁴ A striking fact about Rachel's family is that all nine siblings survived the Holocaust.

¹³⁵ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010.

¹³⁶ Ibid. In fact, already in 1946, in their displaced persons' forum, Spiegel and his wife had filled in the rubric of their desired destination as Palestine. See ITS, A.E.F D.P. Registration Record, Ernő Spiegel, Registration no. 044925, 7 May 1946.

¹³⁷ See Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010.

letter from György Kuhn (12), who was at the time, together with his brother Pista, at a Zionist children's home in Zugló Street in Budapest. Like the previous letter, this one presents several important issues:

Dear Uncle Spiegel,

I was very happy to hear where you live and how you are. We are here in Pest. We are studying at the Jewish Grammar School. Uncle Spiegel—your brother is the teacher of my class. The two Lusztig brothers are also here in Pest. This week I was at home and met Laci Kiss and the two Laufers. I heard that you got married and that your sister is with you. The two Peterfreind brothers are here also and they are well. My father also sends you his regards. Now I will write to Kiss's address and he will also write to you . . . How have you been? We are okay, thank God. When will you come back to visit us? If you are ever here do come by . . .

I look forward to your response,

Many kisses to you Uncle Spiegel,

György Kuhn¹³⁸

This letter amplifies some of the tendencies that had already been pointed out in Lusztig's letter, but it will be useful to underline their significance. Foremost is the fact that, almost a year and a half after they had returned to Budapest, the twins were still in contact with one another and were functioning as a kind of social network. Second, although we cannot be certain that Spiegel never replied to these letters, Kuhn does give us a hint when he says "I heard you got married", which means he was probably informed by Spiegel's brothers about his situation and not by Spiegel himself. Third, from the fact that Kuhn sends Spiegel regards from his father we may learn that the twins were talking to others about their experiences and, more specifically, about Spiegel's importance to them. This is further evidence that, at the time, their experience and perception of the events, at least in the context of the group and their relationship with Spiegel, was something they wished to remember and not repress—a point which is further emphasized by Kuhn's encouragement to Spiegel to visit them.

¹³⁸ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 21.

In sharp contrast we have seen that, already in the immediate post-war years, Spiegel wanted to get on with his life at all costs, even if it meant losing contact with his 'boys'. He was reluctant to share with his wife any memories relating to the Holocaust, and appeared to her deeply disturbed by the subject. While the twins would lose contact with each other in years to come and would also gradually repress their memories of Birkenau, most of them kept on mentioning to their loved ones a ray of light from the dark period—Spiegel Bácsi.

As for Spiegel, after his daughter Judith was born in 1947 and the State of Israel was established, he decided to leave his comfortable life in Carlsbad and move with his new family to Israel in 1949. Ahead of him were challenging years of rebuilding his life while grappling with the shadows of the past, all in a new society haunted by the presence of the Holocaust.

II. The 1950s: Salience Inside and Silence Outwards—the Different Meanings of Repression

Zvi and Rachel, along with little Judith, arrived at Haifa Harbour in Israel on 18 October 1949, after a long journey by train from Carlsbad via Budapest all the way to Romania, and from there across the Mediterranean on a ship, which was filled mainly with Holocaust survivors making their way to the newly established Jewish state.

The reason the couple waited until 1949 to leave was Spiegel's insistence that they immigrate to Israel legally.¹³⁹ Before the state was established the most common way to move to Palestine was by illegal immigration. Spiegel's twin sister Magda had smuggled herself into the mandate via Cyprus. But Spiegel needed to do things in an organized and legitimate fashion. He wanted the state to be established first so that he could enter in an appropriate manner, through the front door, as it were.

Their first destination in Israel was a transit camp in Be'er Ya'akov designated for new immigrants, where they were temporarily accommodated in tents.¹⁴⁰ The conditions on the absorption site were harsh and after a major

¹³⁹ See Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010, and Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of Flames*, 133.

¹⁴⁰ For a background on the establishment of the *ma'abarot*, see Dvora Hacoheh, "The Veteran Yishuv and the Immigrants: Local authorities Versus Transit Camps" in Dalia

storm in the winter the Spiegels were moved to a brick building, where they lived with a few other families.¹⁴¹ Zvi was desperate to leave the absorption site and start a new life elsewhere. He went to different accounting firms in Tel Aviv offering his services free of charge, if only they would employ him.¹⁴² At last a large accounting firm headed by a German Jew hired him. As in the earlier instances, Spiegel quickly gained appreciation and was appointed to deal with a “very glamorous account—one of the largest theatres in Israel—the Kameri”.¹⁴³

After nine months in Be’er Ya’akov, Zvi and Rachel had saved enough money to buy a house in Tel Aviv, in Bitzaron Street.¹⁴⁴ Bitzaron was a housing complex whose residents were predominantly Holocaust survivors. Albeit a very modest arrangement, it was a significant upgrade compared to the absorption site in Be’er Ya’akov. The Spiegels lived in a one-bedroom apartment and shared an entrance with the Fisher family, who were Holocaust survivors from Czechoslovakia. László Fisher was a professor of engineering who, along with his wife, developed a close relationship with the Spiegels, becoming almost like family. Their daughter, Judith Fischer, a teenager in the 1950’s, is an important source of information for this period of Spiegel’s life.

Soon enough Zvi and Rachel made the most of their new lives in Bitzaron. In 1951 Zvi was recruited by the Kameri Theatre to be the head of their finance department. As their economic situation improved they expanded their apartment, adding another room and a balcony. In 1952 their second child, Israel, was born, and Zvi’s joy knew no limits. Zvi enjoyed his job at the Kameri and took much pride in it. It seemed that they were moving on from their life in Europe and especially the Holocaust. In Spiegel’s words, “I tried to forget the Holocaust. I kept telling myself how lucky I was. I never talked about what had happened to my family . . . we simply wanted to forget.”¹⁴⁵ Yet repressing the Holocaust was no simple task: the ghosts of the past were constantly surfacing in the cultural and social sphere as well as in the personal dimension of their life, as

Ofer ed., *Israel in the great wave of immigration 1948-1953*, (Heb.), (Jerusalem, 1996), 98-112.

¹⁴¹ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 16-17 February 2011.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 154.

¹⁴⁴ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames*, 202.

noted by Spiegel: “My feeling was that what had happened in Auschwitz was over and done with, yet there were times when I would get very depressed.”¹⁴⁶

Spiegel’s Self-Perception in the 1950s: External and Internal Impacts

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Spiegel’s experiences from the Auschwitz days to his efforts to establish a new life, it is essential for us to look closely at his retrospective perception of his experience in the Holocaust in different periods of his life. This topic must be analysed from three perspectives: the first is that of Spiegel as a Holocaust survivor in general; the second, his role as the leader and saviour of the twins’ group, and, finally, the fact that he was a part of the camp’s grey zone, being a prisoner functionary within the system.

There have been numerous discussions in the past regarding the silence, or lack thereof, among survivors in Israel and elsewhere in the 1950s.¹⁴⁷ Here I attempt to produce a multi-dimensional description of the different layers that constituted the retrospective experience of survivors—in our case, Zvi Spiegel. For any chance of understanding Spiegel’s reaction to the Holocaust—or that of any survivor for that matter—it is essential to examine the different elements affecting his or her perception, and not merely to note the fact that there was silence after the war.

In order to accomplish this, I will first analyse the public sphere in Israel in the 1950s as, even assuming Spiegel didn’t talk, it does not mean he didn’t listen. I will then present the communal environment and describe the presence of the Holocaust in the Bitzaron neighbourhood, where Spiegel lived throughout the 1950s. A further facet is the impact of the family, where the people closest to the Holocaust survivor deal with the issue within the four walls of their home. Finally, I will attempt to describe the inner world of the survivor himself, taking into account the effects of the former three dimensions on his perception. Naturally the latter component of the discussion will include some psychological

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ For more on the debate about silence in the 1950s and 1960s or, as it was labelled by Hasia Diner in her book *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, “the myth of silence”, see David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist (eds.), *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (New York, 2012). Although the essays in the book do not discuss Israel, they are useful for our subject as they prove that, although there was an abundance of information about the horrors of the Holocaust by survivors from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s, scholars and the public perceived this period as the “age of silence among survivors”.

interpretation as we are drawn into the more biographical aspects of the analysis. When trying to analyse the inner soul of the biography's hero, a degree of speculation may be unavoidable, especially in the case of Spiegel, who was defined by his silence in that period, and who left no diary or any other archival material from that period.

The Cultural Impact: Israel and the Holocaust in the 1950s

A comprehensive overview of the Holocaust and Holocaust memory in the 1950s in Israel is beyond the scope of this dissertation.¹⁴⁸ The present section only provides evidence that the Holocaust played a major role in Israeli discourse at least from 1951 and could not be avoided. In addition, I will focus on the events which may have influenced Spiegel's perception of himself as a Holocaust survivor, saviour, as well as camp functionary.

From the late 1940s through the establishment of the state in 1948 and up to the end of the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors arrived in Israel. In 1951 the number of survivors in Israel reached 360,000—one out of every two Israelis was a newcomer, and practically one out of four was a survivor.¹⁴⁹ This was a massive human presence; fully one quarter of the population had experienced in some form or other the horrors of the Holocaust.

In spite of these numbers, during the same years (1948-1951), discussion of the Holocaust and its survivors seems to have been absent from the Israeli scene. "The Holocaust was not taught in schools, nor was it a topic of research at the Hebrew University. In drama and theatre it was hardly mentioned: and when it was, it was mostly part of the background."¹⁵⁰ Nothing was done, moreover, on the governmental level to commemorate the Holocaust. The government's lack of emphasis on the Holocaust was evident from its delay in establishing a national institution or shrine in memory of the victims.¹⁵¹

A major reason for the absence of Holocaust discourse and the absorption difficulties was that the war of independence and the newly established state

¹⁴⁸ For a comprehensive overview, see Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 189-320.

¹⁴⁹ Porat, *Israeli Society, the Holocaust and its Survivors*, 344.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 345.

¹⁵¹ Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (London, 1983), 101.

displaced all other experiences.¹⁵² In fact most of the survivors arrived during conflict years (1947-1949) and many of them were recruited to fight in the war itself. Another major fact was that these survivors with all the hardships they experienced from the Holocaust through the displaced persons camps, the exodus (hazardous at times) to the new homeland and the absorption difficulties had a very modest “group weight” in proportions to their former struggles to live and establish a new state.¹⁵³

This reality soon changed as the Holocaust became a common issue, especially in the political and juristic discourse, gaining, as a result, increased media attention. The political sphere was first confronted with the problem through the restitution agreement with West Germany. Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion decided in 1951 to start negotiations with the West German government for reparations and compensation of the state as well as of individuals for the plunder of Jewish property during the Holocaust. The country was thrown into a storm of dissension as a result of the decision. For our purposes it is important to mention the widespread public meetings, rallies and demonstrations. Posters appeared on walls, advertisements in newspapers, and intellectuals were called on to support one side or the other.¹⁵⁴ The issue under debate was not only whether Israel should have any relations with the Germans, but also the emotional subject of the memory of the dead. The words of Holocaust survivor and historian Meir Dworzecki, who opposed the negotiations, exemplify the anguished debate: “If you ask me what I want to receive from the German people, I would say, a mother for a mother, a father for a father . . . my soul would be at rest if I knew that there would be six million German dead . . . if we do not have the ability to do that, then at least we have to do a historic thing that will pain them like the pain of blood—to spit in their faces.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Porat, *Israeli Society, the Holocaust and its Survivors*, 344.

¹⁵³ Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust*, 278.

¹⁵⁴ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 211. For a comprehensive overview of the restitution affair see the introduction by Yechiam Weitz to the book by Yaakov Sharett (ed.), *The Reparations Controversy: The Jewish State and German Money in the Shadow of the Holocaust 1951-2* (Berlin, 2011), 1-22. For a deeper analysis of the negotiations between Israel and Germany, see Ronald W. Zweig, “Repatriations Made Me’: Nahum Goldmann, German Repatriations and the Jewish World”, in Mark A. Raider (ed.), *Nahum Goldmann: Statesman Without a State* (Albany, New York, 2009), 233-54.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted *ibid.* 208.

The events reached their climax when the Knesset debated the issue on 7 January 1952. Protesters led by the head of the Herut party, Menachem Begin, and including many Holocaust survivors marched to the Knesset ignoring police barriers, armed with sticks, throwing stones, and, according to some, carrying tear gas grenades. As the demonstrators arrived at the Knesset, windows were broken, tear gas was fired by the police, and shouts of ‘murder, murder’ filled the air. By evening the police had regained order, but not before 200 people had been injured and 400 arrested.¹⁵⁶ The negotiations finally began in March 1952 and eventually the reparations agreement was signed; but by then Israeli society was already torn by the issue.

In the same year the Knesset decided to designate a memorial day called Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day—meaning this was to be a day commemorating not only destruction but also and especially the revolt against the Nazis.¹⁵⁷ In 1953 the Knesset passed the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Law concerning the establishment of Yad Vashem—the national historical institute for Holocaust memorialization and research.¹⁵⁸

Other major events, taking place on the legislative level first in the Knesset and then in the courtrooms, illuminate the question of the attitude towards survivors in Israel in the 1950s. This attitude was largely characterized by what is often referred to as the ‘survivor’s guilt’ syndrome. Scholars disagree about what generated this phenomenon, which consisted of a sense of blame and shame towards the survivors. According to Idith Zertal, the survivors’ inability to talk about Auschwitz ought to have been overcome with encouragement from leaders of the state, but what in fact happened was that the founders of the new

¹⁵⁶ For a full description of the events that day in the Knesset and outside, see *ibid.* 213-26.

¹⁵⁷ Roni Stauber, *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s* (London, 2007), 45-6. Another aspect of the dominance of heroism was, according to Weitz, to draw a parallel between ‘us’ and ‘them’—between the fate of the Jews in Europe during the 1940s and the world of the Israelis in the 1950s. See, Yechiam Weitz, “Shaping the Memory of the Holocaust in Israeli Society of the 1950’s”, in Yisrael Gutman (ed.) *Major Changes within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Ninth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, June 1993*, (Jerusalem, 1996), 504.

¹⁵⁸ Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust*, 84-5. For more on the establishment of Yad Vashem and its struggle for dominance in representation of the Holocaust in Israel in the 1950s, see Orna Kenan, *Between Memory and History: The Evolution of Israeli Historiography of the Holocaust, 1945-1961* (New York, 2003), 43-62. For the battle for its essence: research or commemoration, see Boaz Cohen, *Israeli Holocaust Research: Birth and Evolution* (New York, 2013), 134-9.

state tried to erase what they saw as the shameful memory of their mothers and fathers.¹⁵⁹ This shame, Zertal argues, was for “The Jewish people and for Jewish exile, which had brought catastrophe upon itself by not choosing the correct path in time: the path of Zionism.”¹⁶⁰

Hanna Yablonka disagrees with Zertal, arguing that “Holocaust discourse in Israel took place less on the dialectical level with the founding ethos than an internal discourse among the survivors that radiated outwards to the Israeli society”.¹⁶¹ In her understanding, then, the initial moral positions regarding the Holocaust were formulated by the survivors themselves, who went on to convey them to the larger society, rather than vice versa, as argued by Zertal.¹⁶²

According to the eminent Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld, who has written extensively about his experiences in the Holocaust and its aftermath, the sense of guilt afflicting the survivors is hard to define and took different forms over the years. He essentially attributes that shame to the enormity of the event, and to the fact that what had happened was so overwhelming that survivors had no strategy for processing their experience; nor did they fully understand it. There was, additionally, the shame of having survived and the feeling that one had not done enough as a survivor to ‘represent’ the dead.¹⁶³

The argument made by Yablonka regarding the survivors projecting the “guilt syndrome” into the juristic and legislative systems and then into the wider Israeli society is an essential prerequisite to understanding the kapo and Kasztner trials and their aftermath, when Jewish functionaries were perceived as Nazi collaborators. The kapo trials have already been discussed in the Introduction, but it is important to recall the context and mention some additional points.

From 1950 to the mid-1960s some forty Jews were prosecuted in Israel in what have been known as the ‘kapo trials’.¹⁶⁴ During these trials, survivors were accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes and collaborating with the Nazis. The term ‘kapo’ was associated with complicity to the point at which these survivors and their lawyers were attacked verbally and even physically during

¹⁵⁹ Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 57.

¹⁶⁰ Idith Zertal, *The Nation and Death* (Heb.) (Or Yehuda, 2002), 91.

¹⁶¹ Yablonka, “The development of Holocaust Consciousness”, 10.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Aharon Appelfeld, *Masot Beguf Rishon—Essays* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979), 109-14.

¹⁶⁴ Yablonka, “The Law for Judging Nazis”, 146.

the trials.¹⁶⁵ The kapo trials received scant media coverage and remained mostly an internal issue within the society of survivors. This leads Yablonka to argue “that the Israeli establishment may have internalized the concept of the survivor’s guilt.”¹⁶⁶ In fact, as shown in the Introduction, the state was ultimately drawn into these affairs, after survivors accusing fellow survivors of collaborating with the Nazis made constant allegations to the police.

The kapo trials were mainly attended by Holocaust survivors and the only newspaper that covered the trials extensively was *Omer*, a paper printed in simple Hebrew for new immigrants, illustrating the powerful and anguished internal discourse among survivors over the events.¹⁶⁷ One of the many survivors who was a regular reader of this newspaper was Zvi Spiegel.¹⁶⁸

Yablonka claims that “the importance of the kapo trials from a historical point of view lies in their clarification of the main issues on the public’s Holocaust agenda in the 1950s.”¹⁶⁹ They nevertheless remained mainly an internal affair of the survivors themselves. Unlike the kapo trials, the Kasztner libel case, which began in low profile, developed into an affair that drew the young country into controversy and adversity which shook its foundations. From the political sphere to the judicial system all the way to the mass media and the general public the Kasztner affair exposed the most delicate issues regarding Holocaust memory in Israel during the mid- to late 1950s.

Born in Cluj (Greater Hungary back then, Romania in the present) in 1906, Rudolf (Rezső) Kasztner served on the Committee for Aid and Rescue, a Zionist organization based in Budapest, which until 1944 was occupied with providing aid for Jewish refugees arriving in Hungary.¹⁷⁰ After the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944, and when the plan for the immediate extermination of Hungarian Jewry had been set in motion, the committee changed its focus to saving as many lives as possible. Kasztner believed he could save some of the Hungarian Jews by negotiating with the SS. In the span of a few weeks, while negotiations with Adolf Eichmann and his proxies were taking place, over

¹⁶⁵ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 262.

¹⁶⁶ Yablonka, “The development of Holocaust Consciousness”, 12.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ This fact appears in Rachel Spiegel’s interview by the author, 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Yablonka, “The development of Holocaust Consciousness”, 12.

¹⁷⁰ For a comprehensive description of the Kasztner affair, see Yechiam Weitz, *The Man who was murdered Twice* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1995).

450,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz. Kasztner managed to negotiate one trainload of 1,685 Jews to be transported out of Hungary to safety. He also succeeded in transferring about 15,000 Jews to Austria, thus saving their lives. Kasztner was aware that these negotiations were treated by some Nazi leaders as a possible channel to the Western allies; but he thought it would be a good move to take advantage of this, believing the Nazis in question, might be desperate to 'prove' themselves to the allies for the aftermath of the war.¹⁷¹

After the war Kasztner was accused by many Hungarian Jews of having arranged a 'train of the privileged', which consisted mainly of his relatives and friends while neglecting the masses of Hungarian Jewry.¹⁷² A second, even worse, accusation blamed him for deceiving the Jews of Hungary by ignoring other escape routes and rescue plans in order to save the handful of 'chosen ones'.

Kasztner emigrated to Israel in 1947 and immediately became involved in public affairs as a member of the ruling party, Mapai. In 1952 Malkiel Grunewald, a 70-year-old Jew living in Jerusalem, printed a regular carbon copy circular devoted to Kasztner. Grunewald, who had settled in Israel before the war but had lost his family in the Holocaust, was a right-wing underground activist who despised Mapai. When he devoted the 17th edition of his newsletter to an attack against Kasztner, the latter chose to respond and pressed charges for libel. In the ensuing legal proceedings, Grunewald was represented by a young lawyer named Shmuel Tamir, from the right-wing Herut party. Tamir was a man on a mission: he accused Kasztner of collaboration with the Nazis and at the same time challenged the ruling party about its actions, or rather lack of action, during the war years when it had led the Yishuv. When the trial began on 1 January 1954, no one could have predicted that it "would shake the young state to its foundations".¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ There has been a broad literature regarding the events in Budapest and elsewhere in Hungary in 1944, including Kasztner's actions and the controversy surrounding them. For some of these sources see Randolph L. Braham and William J. Vanden Heuvel (eds.), *The Auschwitz Reports and The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York, 2011); David Cesarani (ed.), *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944* (Oxford, 1997); Szabolcs Szita, *Trading in Lives? Operations of the Jewish Relief and Rescue Committee in Budapest, 1944-1945* (Budapest, 2005), and Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for sale? Nazi-Jewish negotiations, 1933-1945* (London, 1994).

¹⁷²Weitz, *The Man Who Was Murdered Twice*, 33.

¹⁷³ Yablonka, "The development of Holocaust Consciousness", 12.

By March 1954 the trial had become the focus of the public's attention. People crowded into the courtroom while hundreds and thousands clamoured outside until there was no other choice but to relocate the trial to a larger hall in the Supreme Court.¹⁷⁴ In June 1955 Judge Binyamin Halevy announced his verdict, finding Kasztner guilty and accusing him of "selling his soul to Satan".¹⁷⁵ Kasztner lost everything; the man who took pride in his rescue mission was charged with the worst crime—collaborating with the Nazis. An article described the despair Kasztner felt after the trial. He was quoted as saying: "if I had died in Europe I would have been declared as a martyr and streets would have been named after me, but I didn't have the luck to die. Everything I did was directed at saving more Jews, and when I saw the first train crossing the border to Switzerland I knew that my effort had not been in vain: the survivors could now go and live in their own country. Here in Israel they call me a traitor."¹⁷⁶ This article was published in *Ma'ariv*, a leading newspaper in Israel at the time. Zvi Spiegel was a regular reader of this paper.¹⁷⁷

In the summer of 1955 the Kasztner verdict gave rise to a fierce public debate regarding Jewish behaviour in German-occupied countries. Writers, intellectuals, public figures, and former ghetto fighters participated in the exchanges that took place mostly in newspapers and political publications. The terms *Judenräte*, 'collaboration' and 'selections' appeared regularly in the politically affiliated press after the trial.¹⁷⁸

In January 1958, four years from the inception of the case against Malkiel Grunewald, the Israeli Supreme Court overturned the verdict. The majority of the judges explained that "not every act of co-operation can be called collaboration and not every person who was in contact with the Nazis and provided them assistance can be denounced as collaborator".¹⁷⁹ Kasztner did not live to hear the acquittal; he was assassinated by fellow Jews in March 1957.¹⁸⁰ According to Yablonka, "His tragic death and the reprieve granted by the majority of the

¹⁷⁴ Weitz, *The Man who was Murdered Twice*, 134.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 245.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 270.

¹⁷⁷ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010, and Judith Richter, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 1 September 2012.

¹⁷⁸ Stauber, *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s*, 78-9.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Yablonka, "The development of Holocaust Consciousness", 14.

¹⁸⁰ Weitz, *The Man who was Murdered Twice*, 323.

Supreme Court judges led to Israel's gradual shedding of the 'survivor's guilt syndrome'. The devil alone remained guilty of all charges."¹⁸¹ The diminution of the syndrome became even more apparent during the Eichmann trial, which is discussed in the next chapter.

In concluding this discussion regarding the Holocaust discourse in the Israeli public sphere in the 1950s, a few points should be highlighted. Firstly, contrary to the common impression, the Holocaust seems to have occupied a central place in public discourse in Israel in the 1950s. From the restitution debate to the Kasztner affair, including the designation of the Memorial Day, the Sinai war and other events mentioned above, the Israeli public was constantly exposed to political, juristic and intellectual debates regarding the Holocaust, its moral implications and its forms of remembrance.

Secondly, the survivor community was highly involved in these controversies and was generating a debate of its own, resulting in the kapo trials. Their discourse influenced the political and juristic systems and through them the public, spreading a general survivor's guilt syndrome. The notion of survivor's guilt first spread within the survivors' community in the wake of the kapo trials, and later among the general public following the Kasztner trial. The terms 'kapo' and *Judenräte* became iconic labels of the victims' alleged collaboration with the Nazis.

Finally, on this note, we may do well to examine the terms 'heroism' and 'bravery'. The fact that Israel's Holocaust memorial day was named Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, and that its date was set to coincide with the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, tells us that bravery during the Holocaust was perceived solely in connection with the ghetto fighters. There was a lesson to be learned by Israeli society from the Jewish response in Warsaw, shapers of the contemporary discourse suggested, and the uprising became the centre of public attention during the 1950s. Left-wing Zionist parties, which were extremely influential at the time, were deeply concerned about the implications of blurring the distinction between the courses of action of the underground and of the *Judenräte* or other Jewish functionaries.¹⁸² This

¹⁸¹ Yablonka, "The development of Holocaust Consciousness", 14.

¹⁸² Stauber, *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s*, 87. The Zionist left-wing parties were engaged in a fierce public debate regarding the matter with the great poet, Nathan Alterman, who argued that the polarity of the *Judenräte* versus the underground

emphasis on physical armed resistance during the Holocaust prevented a realistic understanding of the desperate situation of the Jews in Europe and of their daily and hourly struggle, which required a different type of bravery,¹⁸³ as was the case with Spiegel in charge of the twins at Birkenau.

The Influence of the Holocaust Survivors' Compound

The second component affecting Spiegel's self-perception and Holocaust representation was the communal one. In the 1950s all sorts of communal and personal commemoration of the Holocaust existed in Israel, primarily among survivors. One of the most notable forms of commemoration were the communal Yizkor books,¹⁸⁴ devoted to the hundreds of Jewish communities annihilated by the Nazis and their collaborators. These books were already being published as early as 1946, both in Israel and abroad, almost always on the initiative of organizations composed of *Landsmanshaften* or hometown organizations comprising men and women from a particular town or region in central and eastern Europe. These organizations, which had traditionally been responsible for their members' burial, now felt obliged figuratively to bury their dead and erect for them a memorial of prayer.¹⁸⁵

From the 1950s onwards more than 90 per cent of all Yizkor books were published in Israel. A glance at the publication dates of several hundred Yizkor books shows that 1953 was the year that marked the beginning of a slow upward trend, peaking in 1967. This trend is also visible in other forms of communal commemoration, for example, memorial stones.¹⁸⁶ In addition, hundreds of organizations were established by survivors in the 1950s, differentiated by

was artificial and failed to portray the complexity of the situation experienced by the Jews in the ghettos. For more about the debate, see *ibid.* 86-96. For a comprehensive analysis of Alterman's views on the matter, see Dan Laor (ed.), *Nathan Alterman: Between Two Roads—Selection from a Diary* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1989).

¹⁸³ Porat, *Israeli society, the Holocaust and its survivors*, 347.

¹⁸⁴ Yizkor literally means 'remember'; it is the first word of a memorial prayer for the dead recited on Jewish festivals.

¹⁸⁵ Judith Baumel, "In Everlasting Memory': Individual and Communal Holocaust Commemoration in Israel", in Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (eds.), *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma* (London, 1995), 151.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 155.

members' country of birth, hometown or role during the Holocaust (e.g. doctors, camp prisoners, etc.).¹⁸⁷

Even though these forms of communal commemoration in the 1950s seem sporadic, among survivor communities the Holocaust was present in communal life on a daily basis. The Bitzaron compound where Spiegel lived was an example of this ubiquitous, daily presence. As mentioned above, the compound was mainly inhabited by Holocaust survivors; such enclaves were not a unique phenomenon at the time in Israel, as is well described by Amir Gutfreund in his partly autobiographical novel *Our Holocaust*: "In the neighbourhood the Holocaust—the Shoa—had never ended. People had settled there after the war with their memories, their stories, their grudges. Like a huge flock of storks, they came all at once and landed near the woods of Kiryat Haim, and there they remained. Sick people, confined by their memories."¹⁸⁸

In such an environment it was hard to avoid the all-pervasive presence of the Holocaust, which formed a crucial part of the identity of many inhabitants of the compound.¹⁸⁹ This fact is also apparent from the memories of those who lived in Bitzaron as children: "I didn't think that there were people in the world who were not Holocaust survivors", recalls Judith Richter, Spiegel's daughter. "Almost everyone had a number. We knew it was from the Germans, from there . . ." ¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, most people in the neighbourhood did not have grandparents or older siblings as they had been killed "back there", and in general, they barely had any relatives. "The term 'Auschwitz' was as common as 'Maccabi Tel Aviv'", added Richter.¹⁹¹

In these communities many people lived in two parallel worlds: their past and their present. "We spoke about the Holocaust with our neighbours. Each one told his or her story to some extent. My husband didn't like it", Rachel Spiegel,

¹⁸⁷ Hanna Yablonka, "Holocaust Survivors in Israel: Time For an Initial Taking of Stock", in Dalia Ofer, Françoise S. Ouzan and Judy Tydor Baumel-Schwartz (eds.), *Holocaust Survivors: Resettlement, Memories, Identities* (New York, 2012), 194.

¹⁸⁸ Amir Gutfreund, *Our Holocaust* (London, 2006), 31.

¹⁸⁹ In the USA this situation was rooted in the will of the survivors, as stated by Beth Cohen: "the newcomers sought one another. The structures varied but the intent was clear: they wanted the comfort of others like themselves", see Beth B. Cohen, "Survivors Tell a Different Story", in Cesarani and Sundquist (eds.), *After the Holocaust*, 188.

¹⁹⁰ Judith Richter, interview by the author, September 2012.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* Maccabi Tel Aviv is a well-known Israeli sports club.

Zvi's wife, recalled.¹⁹² This phenomenon has also been described by Judith Nave, the closest neighbour of the Spiegels, who was a teenager at the time: "in the evenings my parents would sit with their friends on the balcony and each of them would tell their experience from back then".¹⁹³ It was very common for people to be identified by their location in the camp. "He was with him in the barrack, they were together in the barrack, and all sorts of ties which connected people who had been together in the camp, were frequently mentioned in the neighbourhood. It was a common way of identification."¹⁹⁴

The presence of the Holocaust was frequently accompanied by the traumatic impact it had had on the survivors. "My friends would often tell stories about their parents screaming at night in their dreams", recalled Judith Richter.¹⁹⁵ A story told by Judith Nave exemplifies the lingering presence of trauma:

I remember that Rachel, Zvi's wife, took us to the cinema one day. Before the movie, back then, there used to be a news bulletin. It was a few days before Holocaust Memorial Day, so in the bulletin this fact was mentioned while in the background there were images of SS men and their dogs. Suddenly Rachel stood on her feet and started to scream: 'That's the way it was, that is the way it was!' She burst into tears and cried for a long time; we didn't know what to do.¹⁹⁶

Even though the above recollections of the all-pervasive presence of the Holocaust describe a sombre reality, the children remembered the neighbourhood as a happy place to live in. The Holocaust was a part of their life, notwithstanding the adults' efforts to spare them the details.

¹⁹² Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 16 November 2011.

¹⁹³ Judith Nave, interview by the author, Boston, 10 September 2012.

¹⁹⁴ Judith Richter, interview by the author.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Judith Nave, interview by the author. For some survivors the trauma was so deep that their lives were totally overshadowed by it, to the point that they had difficulty functioning on a day-to-day basis. A moving example is presented in Gila Almagor's autobiographical novel, *Aviya's Summer* (London, 1991). In it she tells the story of being brought up by a mother who was a former partisan and Auschwitz survivor, and who, she writes, "lived in a world of her own, as if she were with us but not one of us" (p. 37).

The desire to move on was apparent in the fact that people built homes, found jobs, had friendly gatherings and attended cultural events. Yet, in an environment where the majority of people had had some kind of experience “from back there” it was impossible to ignore the haunting memory of the Holocaust. Even if certain survivors wished to totally repress their story, it didn’t mean they could enforce this decision on others. What they could do of course was manoeuvre in such a way as to limit their exposure to others’ memories and pretend to have no personal ‘ghosts’—a pretence that, however, became difficult to keep up within the four walls of their home.

The Impact of the Family Circle

The final external influence upon Spiegel’s perception of the Holocaust and himself within it was his intimate family. The presence of the Holocaust within the Spiegel family home was attributable to Rachel Spiegel, who would often mention her experiences. “Zvi would silence me whenever I would talk about the Holocaust”, she said.¹⁹⁷ A well-known rule in the house was, “Mommy says you do not ask daddy about the war. He experienced awful things,” their daughter Judith recalled.¹⁹⁸ Life in their home was divided into two parts: the first until 4 pm and the second from then on, when Zvi came back from work.

Spiegel loved his job at the theatre and often worked overtime. When he got home he would read his newspaper and the family would eat dinner. It was self-understood that the children had to be home, as “kids don’t wander alone in the streets”.¹⁹⁹ “We had to be on our best behaviour once he was home”, recalled his daughter.²⁰⁰ Zvi was a loving albeit strict father who took great pride in his children. Their education was extremely important to him. He used to play with them, prepare their homework with them and read stories to them.

Family and friends perceived Spiegel as someone whom one could always be approached for help. Although he was very quiet and often stood aside and listened to others’ conversations, he was welcoming and kind-hearted. Judith Nave’s recollection of Spiegel matches these descriptions: “I saw him as a grey figure. I don’t recall him being engaged in intellectual discussions; he would just

¹⁹⁷ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, November, 2011.

¹⁹⁸ Judith Richter, interview by the author.

¹⁹⁹ This is what Spiegel used to tell his children, see *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

stand and listen. But whenever anyone needed help, it was obvious you came to Zvi.”²⁰¹

But despite his warm and calm personality it was apparent that he was deeply disturbed by something. He often suffered from headaches that were so bad that his wife would put sedatives in his coffee without him noticing.²⁰² On one occasion she made an appointment behind his back with the Kameri Theatre doctor, and told him about her husband’s condition. He was then persuaded to go to the doctor and confessed that he was worried he would go mad. The doctor prescribed some pills for him, which he took regularly from then on.²⁰³

As mentioned above, Spiegel was reluctant to talk about his Holocaust experiences even to his wife. “I was curious, I wanted to know,” Rachel explained and added, “He would tell and not tell. If he did say something, it was unwillingly. He waved away questions about his experience.”²⁰⁴ Judith Nave summed up what those close to him did know: “We knew he had been in Auschwitz, and once he even told my parents that he had known Mengele. But we didn’t actually know anything about his experience nor did we know anything about him being the twins’ ‘father’. We didn’t know they existed.”²⁰⁵

But even if Spiegel didn’t talk explicitly about his story, to his close family it was evident that the Holocaust had had a profound impact on his life. Whether it was the headaches or the fact that occasionally he would say, “I think I am going mad”, his daughter and especially his wife understood that the Holocaust and its memory placed a massive burden on his life as well as on theirs. Spiegel did communicate his experience occasionally through hints to his family; for example, he used to lie down on the floor during family gatherings and would say when offered a pillow, “it’s enough to have a roof over my head”.²⁰⁶ In the evenings he would teach Judith geography and history (as he would do with the twins) and would tell her to memorize everything as that was something nobody could take away from her in the future.²⁰⁷ During the Sinai war he was afraid of

²⁰¹ Judith Nave, interview by the author.

²⁰² Judith Richter, interview by the author.

²⁰³ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Judith Nave, interview by the author.

²⁰⁶ See interviews by the author with Judith Richter, Uriel Spiegel (Bar Ilan University, 2011), and Israel Zelikovich (Haifa, 24 August 2011).

²⁰⁷ Judith Richter, interview by the author.

the outcome and said that he would not survive another war. Finally, and most interestingly, he would at times, as his daughter remembers, mumble out of context, “those poor children”, probably referring to the twins.²⁰⁸

Spiegel’s image as a disturbed and, at times, depressed figure, as described by his daughter, wife and even himself, is absent from the recollections of members of the larger family. Uriel Spiegel (son of Yehuda, Zvi’s youngest brother) and Israel Zelikovich (son of Magda, his twin sister), his nephews, remember ‘Uncle Hershey’ as a warm, happy and funny figure. “He was my warmest and most loving uncle”, recalled Israel. “He had a great sense of humour”, says Uriel. “He always loved it when the house was full of guests.” And indeed it was so; although the initiative was usually Rachel’s, Zvi liked the presence of guests even if he would often keep quiet and passively listen to the conversations.

The fact that Spiegel was perceived in different ways should not come as a surprise. It is obvious from the descriptions of his most intimate family that he suffered pain and anguish on a daily basis, but at the same time he wanted to move on with his life and be a good father, husband and employee. When the family gatherings grew larger, Spiegel put on a metaphorical mask and set aside his apprehensions, performing as a relaxed and happy person. This was survival strategy on his part as only repression could enable him to function normally in the world outside his home as well as within it most of the time.

In the family dimension we have witnessed, then, the simultaneous absence and presence of the Holocaust in Spiegel’s home. On the one hand, there were Rachel’s stories, which were at times tuned down so as not to disturb the children too much, and on the other hand there was Zvi’s reluctance to talk, coupled with scattered hints to his experience and his clearly traumatized behaviour. The Holocaust was not a term to use or to talk about, at least from 4 pm when Zvi arrived home, but its presence was tangible; while seemingly life went on, it was obvious that the trauma persisted.

The above description reflects the perspective of the family; let us now move on to analyse Spiegel’s own perception of his Holocaust experience during the 1950s, looking at the cumulative impact that each of the other circles—public, communal and family—had on him.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Inner Conflicts of a Survivor

The following discussion of Spiegel's inner conflicts and the reconstruction of his self-perception regarding his role in the Holocaust take into account, as mentioned above, the different identities that Spiegel had developed within the context of his Holocaust experience: he was a survivor in general, the leader and saviour of a group of young inmates, and finally a prisoner functionary within the camp's grey zone.

In attempting to understand Spiegel's identity as a Holocaust survivor we may find the following statement useful as it throws light on the experience of survivors like himself: "Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world". These words by Jean Améry, an Auschwitz survivor who committed suicide thirty-three years after liberation, emphasize the gap between people who had lived through the Holocaust and those who had not.²⁰⁹ The notion that Améry expresses here is that for those who have experienced the Holocaust a full rehabilitation is impossible because they will never be able to feel secure or trusting again, regardless of the surroundings.

Spiegel, like others 'tortured' in the Holocaust, was anxious to put the terrible memories behind him and build a new and secure environment for himself and his family. He genuinely wanted to move on in life; in his own words, "I tried to forget the Holocaust. I kept telling myself how lucky I was."²¹⁰ This attitude was not unique to Spiegel; it appears in many survivor testimonies. The question is whether Spiegel was truly able to fully repress the Holocaust and move on. If we adopt the myth that the Holocaust was absent from the private and public dimensions, we can assume that survivors who chose to repress their experience must have been able to do so at least on the surface, as this was a joint effort of the survivor community, the political establishment, the press and the public, who all wanted to distance themselves from the event. In reality things could not have been more different; as we have seen, Spiegel, like other survivors, was constantly exposed to Holocaust discourse in all of the three spheres surrounding him.

²⁰⁹ Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits* (London, 1999; 1st edn. 1966), 39.

²¹⁰ Matalon Lagnado and Cohn Dekel, *Children of Flames*, 163.

As explained above, the public was highly engaged in affairs relating to the Holocaust and old wounds were constantly torn open, often by the survivors themselves. In his own neighbourhood and among friends, Spiegel was surrounded by people who kept reminding him of the events of the past. Whether it was sharing stories, coming across acquaintances from the 'barrack' or simply the fact that many people had numbers on their arm, the Holocaust was a part of reality in Bitzaron. Spiegel tried to avoid conversations about the camps by leaving the room when the subject came up or by commenting, "let's not talk about it",²¹¹ but such efforts meant that, rather than being a passive listener, he in fact took an active part in the discourse by trying to prevent it.

Within his family circle Spiegel had better control of the discourse, but only partly. His wife tended to talk openly about her experiences, and his efforts to put an end to these stories in his home had only limited success, and, more importantly, they further drained his energies as he struggled to repress his own past. Moreover, his remarks regarding his experiences, such as "poor children", "at least I have a roof over my head" and others, reflected Spiegel's need to communicate his memories at times.

An examination of the recollections of the twins demonstrates that, like Spiegel, they were eager to repress and move on as well. People around them knew they were Holocaust survivors, at work for example, but the subject was never brought up. The twins were reluctant to talk about their experiences even in more intimate settings; nonetheless, their loved ones were familiar with the main points of their stories.²¹² But there was one significant difference between Spiegel and the twins in their approach to the memory of the Holocaust—a difference that may be identified as the second identity factor impacting on Spiegel's post-war behaviour: the fact that he had been the leader and saviour of the twins' group.

When the twins started to build their own families some ten years after Spiegel, they had to decide what to tell their new wives about their memories of the Holocaust. Most of them did share their story with their loved ones but were reluctant to dwell on it. But during the interviews, if the wife was present, in

²¹¹ As mentioned by his wife Rachel on a few occasions in her interviews by the author, 2010 and 2011.

²¹² The reluctance to talk appears in the interviews I have conducted with Simon, Somogyi, Klein and Visel; and in Almog, SFI.

most cases she would mention having heard about Spiegel from the very beginning and that his name was repeated over the years and was present in their lives.²¹³ In some cases this was even passed on to the second generation, despite the fact that the twins were especially reluctant to talk about the subject in front of their children. “I grew up with the name Spiegel, ‘who was our father in Auschwitz’—as my dad used to and still remembers him. The way my father spoke about him brought him closer to me than most of my (murdered) family members,” said Andrea Szőnyi, the daughter of György Kuhn, who was one of the two brothers who were not actually twins and were saved by Spiegel (see Chapter II).²¹⁴

It is apparent from these testimonies that the twins had a ray of light to hang on to in their dismal memories of the camp and of the journey home. It was a spark of hope in the face of the monumental evil they had experienced. To paraphrase the words of Jean Améry, they were tortured but still had one tiny spot—or a person, in our case—that represented a safe haven in the world. This notion is reflected, from a different angle, in the recollection of Yoel Alon, who, aged 9, was one of the youngest members of Spiegel’s group in Birkenau: “when they started mentioning the term ‘kapo’ in Israel as a symbol of malicious deeds committed by some of the Jews during the Holocaust, I was surprised; the only kapo I had ever known was Spiegel, and he was a symbol of good for me.”²¹⁵

On the other hand, there was Zvi himself. He did not have a ‘Spiegel’ to lean on for comfort. The authority figure he had had before him had been Mengele. His memories were probably tainted by the image of the notorious doctor who was his superior in the camp, “more than god”, to quote his own words.²¹⁶ The absence of a mentor figure meant that Spiegel had no outlet for his experience of ‘torture’. One could ask, however: why did he not find inspiration in his own actions?

It is easy to look at the events in retrospect and declare that, since Spiegel was the twins’ saviour, he should have perceived himself as such. This raises another question: why did he not try to ease his despair by publicly sharing the story? But the task of a historian is not to look at the events in hindsight but

²¹³ See interviews by the author with Kuhn, Klein, Simon, and Somogyi.

²¹⁴ See letter from Andrea Szőnyi to Judith Richter, 2 September 2012.

²¹⁵ Y. Alon, interview by the author.

²¹⁶ Spiegel, FVA.

rather to evaluate them in their own cultural, social and political context—that of the 1950s in our case. We need to bear in mind that, as mentioned above, this was a time when bravery during the Holocaust, as perceived in the Israeli public sphere, was limited solely to the heroism of the underground fighters (primarily in the Warsaw ghetto). It was almost unthinkable that someone like Spiegel would perceive himself as a hero. In his immediate surroundings, the Bitzaron neighbourhood and his family, words such as bravery were not part of the discourse regarding the Holocaust. In this context it is perhaps easier to understand why Spiegel's role, or rather, actions, were not something he could go back to for consolation.

Sometime during the early 1950s a surprising incident happened, which exemplifies how detached Spiegel was from the role of 'saviour' attributed to him by the twins. The two Almog brothers, Shaul and Shlomo, who had been members of the group in Birkenau and had accompanied Spiegel on the journey all the way back to Munkács, moved to Israel in the early 1950s. "After arriving it came to our attention that Spiegel was living in Israel. We started looking for him, and finally we found out that he was the administrative manager of the Kameri Theatre in Tel Aviv. We paid him a visit, we introduced ourselves and he remembered us. Soon afterwards all contact was lost."²¹⁷

One would have expected Spiegel to embrace the two brothers, maintain contact with them and present them proudly to his family, as they specifically sought him out because they wanted to reunite with their saviour. In fact, not only did the contact not last, as Almog remarks, but Spiegel never mentioned this episode even in passing to any of his family members. It seems that this decision cannot solely be explained by his failure to grasp his own importance for the twins, as even if he did not perceive himself as a hero, or was convinced by the Almog twins' visit, it was still a story worth mentioning at least to his wife.

This leads us to the third and most problematic component in Spiegel's perception of his Holocaust experience: his having been a part of the camp's grey zone. This subject needs to be approached carefully as we have very little direct evidence from him regarding his feelings on the matter. The only explicit comment made by Spiegel at the time that we know of regarding functionaries in the camp appears in the recollection of his wife. Rachel mentioned a dramatic

²¹⁷ Saul Almog, SFI.

incident in which she told her husband that she had been a *Blockälteste* for a short period in the camp. “He was furious. He told me ‘this is the last time in your life you’ve mentioned that fact’.”²¹⁸ This reaction indicates that Spiegel was well aware of the implications at the time in Israel of openly talking about having been a functionary in a Nazi camp.

At this point it is necessary to return to the “survivors guilt” syndrome mentioned above, which ruled discourse in Israel in the 1950s. We know that Spiegel read *Omer*, the only newspaper regularly covering the kapo trials in detail. He was exposed to the controversy surrounding these people and later the term ‘kapo’ itself. He was aware of the verdicts sentencing them to imprisonment and, as mentioned in the introduction, even to death in one instance (a decision that was overturned by the Supreme Court). Later he read in *Ma’ariv* about the Kasztner trial, where a Jew who claimed to have helped save thousands was condemned for ‘selling his soul to Satan’. This is not to imply that Spiegel compared himself to Kasztner but the story of the functionary who perceived himself as a helper but was found guilty of collaboration probably did not leave him unmoved.

We can, moreover, add the fact that Spiegel himself might have been ambivalent about his role in the camp, caring for the twins on the one hand but following Mengele’s orders on the other. On one occasion he did share with his wife Rachel an incident which could give us an insight into his mind’s workings: he told her of a time when he had had to make arrangements for sending a child’s skeleton to Germany. He said he had felt some guilt for being involved in the process and for not being able to save him.²¹⁹ Spiegel witnessed the children undergoing the experiments, saw their daily struggle and had to manoeuvre between Mengele’s instructions and his own will to ease the children’s predicament. These circumstances need to be taken into account when analysing Spiegel’s perception of his role, or that of anyone else who had been part of the Nazi camps’ grey zone, even if in hindsight their role may seem clear.

Shamai Davidson, who has conducted extensive research on the position of Holocaust survivors in Israel, has stated that “for the survivor the worst

²¹⁸ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010.

²¹⁹ This story, which cannot be corroborated from any other sources, was told by Rachel to Hanna Moshkowitz, her niece, who lived with the Spiegel family for a year in the 1960s; see Hanna Moshkowitz, interview by the author, (Hertzelia, 20 February, 2010).

possible fears have been realized; therefore, he is condemned for the rest of his life to live with the dreadful and the impossible.”²²⁰ For him guilt was one of the ways in which the terror and anguish the survivor had experienced manifested themselves. This notion appears in Primo Levi’s book *The Drowned and the Saved*, where he dedicates an entire chapter to the sense of shame and guilt among Holocaust survivors after liberation. Levi attributes these emotions to a number of facts, among them his conviction that those who had lived to be liberated were not the worthiest individuals. “I felt innocent, yes, but enrolled among the saved and therefore in permanent search of justification in my own eyes and those of others.”²²¹ In addition he talks about the fact that most survivors did not feel guilty about what they had done but rather about what they had *not* done—primarily in terms of human solidarity: “almost everybody feels guilty of having omitted to offer help”.²²²

But Levi makes an exception to his argument; he thinks that prisoners who had used their power, if they had any, for a good cause were not tormented by guilt: “anyone who had the ability and will to act in this way, to oppose in this way or another the machine of the Lager, was beyond the reach of ‘shame’.”²²³ It is not entirely clear to exactly what deeds Levi is referring, but in general he means that people within the grey zone who defied the distorted moral values of the system and acted in a humane way were probably free from a sense of guilt after the war.²²⁴ This argument, which is more philosophical than scientific, does not seem to hold water, at least in the case of Spiegel. This question is at the core of our efforts to explain Spiegel’s self-perception in the 1950s; it gives us an idea of how confusing and ambiguous the camp’s grey zone was, to the point that a survivor who had performed actions which in the world outside the Lager represented noble values was uncertain and full of guilt regarding those actions.

Another inference that may be made from the latter point is that Spiegel’s case, albeit singular in some ways, can be used as a reinforcement of Hanna

²²⁰ Shamaï Davidson, *Holding on to Humanity, The Message of Holocaust Survivors: The Shamaï Davidson Papers*, ed. Israel W. Charny (New York, 1992), 55.

²²¹ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 63.

²²² *Ibid.* 59.

²²³ *Ibid.* 56.

²²⁴ Levi himself could not avoid the pitfall from which he warned in his discussion regarding the camp’s grey zone, where he argued that we tend to simplify history “but the patterns within which events are ordered are not always identifiable in a single unequivocal fashion”. *Ibid.* 22.

Yablonka's argument regarding the victim's guilt syndrome. Spiegel's self-perception was mainly informed by his uncertainty regarding his guilt, together with his understanding of the public sphere, which was probably mostly influenced by the kapo and Kasztner trials. He had been insecure about judging his past actions already back in Budapest when he had avoided visiting the twins. He had carried this sense of guilt with him from Europe, as did many other survivors. It had little to do with any indoctrination by the establishment as implied by Idith Zertal. This is not to say that he was not affected by the attitude of the public and political spheres, as were other survivors, but they were not the primary source of his anguish.

In conclusion, let us sum up the external and internal forces that shaped Spiegel's self-perception, putting him in an almost impossible position. The external forces included, firstly, the discourse of Holocaust survivors and later of the public, making an unambiguous judgement regarding the 'Jewish functionaries' in the Holocaust; secondly, a neighbourhood full of survivors and haunted by the tragedy. Finally there was his family, where his wife openly talked about her Holocaust experience and was anxious to hear about his. These external circumstances were accumulated in his internal world, which had been troubled to begin with by what he had seen and done in the camp. Spiegel was aware of his own merit in having taken care of the twins and leading them home. He had the letters sent to him by the twins after the war and later the Almog brothers also reminded him of his past heroism, but all of this was not enough to balance the other external forces, combined with his personal misgivings regarding his days in Birkenau.

It is clear that Spiegel, like many other Holocaust survivors, had not 'put Auschwitz behind him', but rather lived with the experience probably to the last day of his life. It seems that this haunting presence was something he tried to communicate, at least to his family, at times. His occasional comments of 'I am going mad' or the constant headaches are only two examples of the fact that he was almost anxious to find an outlet for his repressed memories and indicate that he was finding it difficult to move on. It seems, then, that the silence attributed to many Holocaust survivors in the 1950s and 1960s must not be seen in absolute terms and should be examined in depth as there exist various ways of

communication, which at times can only be detected after multiple examinations and only with sensitive listening.

In this context it seems no coincidence that Spiegel loved going to work, because it was probably the one place where he could detach himself from the Holocaust and its memories. This could also explain why one of his prime concerns during the 1970s was what would happen when he retired. This question, together with other factors, takes us to the transition years, during which Spiegel's life underwent some changes that would prepare him (albeit unconsciously) to tell his story openly at the end of the 1970s and reconcile himself to his role as saviour. But for this to happen there had to occur a change in the first dimension—the public sphere—that would stimulate the above shift. The discourse regarding the victims, the grey zone, bravery and other matters to do with the Holocaust was about to see a major transformation as Israeli society was increasingly exposed to the stories of the survivors—a fact that would change people's perception forever.

Chapter VI

An Outburst of Testimonies—The 'Twins' Father' is Recognized

The later part of Zvi Spiegel's life was characterized by a dramatic shift that occurred in his perception of his conduct in the Holocaust. This shift took place in the early 1980s, in an almost abrupt fashion. It began with his sudden willingness to talk about his Auschwitz experience and role, and continued with his emotional encounters with some of 'his' twins, leading up to his recognition—by himself, his family and friends, and the twins' community—as the twins' saviour in Birkenau and its aftermath. In addition, Spiegel's story appeared in several publications, both in the general media and in some books. This process ran parallel to the transformation that most of the twins underwent as they began to publicly tell their stories, establish organizations and participate in gatherings.

The present chapter focuses on this shift and its implications, examining the events surrounding the Mengele mock trial, a pivotal moment when Spiegel and some of his boys were reunited. It was at this stage that Spiegel and the twins came closer to a shared perception of the events in Birkenau and especially concerning Spiegel's role; yet this was only a partial overlap. For Spiegel the change brought relief on the one hand, but on the other hand he was still wary of any attempt to glorify him and his actions. His reservations are analysed in depth below, which will help us establish further facts regarding Spiegel's character. On a more general level, it will throw light on the extent of the crisis of Holocaust representation, which results from a gap between the survivor and the outer world in the perception and interpretation of his or her experiences during the Holocaust.

Our focus will then shift to the story of the forgotten group of Spiegel boys, those who stayed in Hungary after the war and had no knowledge of the reunions and hence underwent a very different process in grappling with their identity as Holocaust survivors and Mengele twins. The chapter will close with an epilogue describing Spiegel's final years, when his image as the twins' father assumed a central role in his life, as he was much in demand for interviews by

scholars and the press. During this phase he was approached by some of the twins who wished to establish an ongoing relationship with him.

Before examining the above-mentioned processes it is important first to describe the background—the period of transition in which the twins and Spiegel were influenced by the general changes in Holocaust discourse in Israel and the West. In this transitional period Spiegel faced new challenges and encounters in his life, which in a sense prepared him to ‘come out’ with his story and be acknowledged as the twins’ father.

I. The 1960s and 1970s: A Period of Transition

As in the former chapter, a prerequisite for understanding Spiegel’s inner process of change during the transitional period is an awareness of the general shift in attitude within Israeli society towards the Holocaust and towards survivors at the time. Within this context there were three major events that marked the change in the public’s perception of the Holocaust. First and foremost of these was the Eichmann trial (1961); it was followed by the Six Day War (1967) and especially the weeks of anticipation that preceded it, and finally the Yom Kippur War (1973).¹ Once again, it would be impossible within the scope of this dissertation to detail these events; I will only focus on the influence that they had on Holocaust discourse among the public and within the survivors’ community.

The Eichmann Trial

On 26 May 1960 the Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, announced the capture of Adolph Eichmann to the Knesset; Eichmann, who had managed the deportation of Jews from all around Europe to the Nazi death camps during 1942-4, was abducted from Buenos Aires in Argentina, where he had found refuge after World War II.² His trial, before a special bench of the Jerusalem district court, began in April 1961; the verdict, together with the death sentence,

¹ It is worth mentioning that the Munich terror attack in 1972, where 11 sportsmen from the Israeli Olympic team were murdered by a Palestinian organization named Black September, also had its impact. See Simon Reeve, *One Day in September* (New York, 2000), and Aaron J. Klein, *Striking Back: The 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and Israel’s Deadly Response* (New York, 2005).

² For a detailed description of these events, including the abduction operation, see David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London, 2004), 209-36.

was passed in December of the same year, and the hearing by the supreme court of the appeal submitted by Eichmann's attorney was held in May 1962.³ Following the rejection of the appeal and the subsequent denial of clemency by the president of the state, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the sentence was carried out on the night of 31 May 1962.

The emotional explosion set off by the sudden announcement of Eichmann's arrest expressed the almost unbearable anxiety of Israeli society over what they would discover.⁴ Many of the half million Holocaust survivors who lived in Israel in the early 1960s were involved in the Eichmann Trial. Their testimonies were heard by the majority of the public, which was deeply touched by the stories from the Holocaust.⁵ The trial became a major event in the lives of many Israelis. People queued for hours at the Beit Ha'am door to get in. Many schools cancelled their routine lessons to allow students to listen.⁶

Never had Israel lived the horror of the Holocaust as it did in those months. In the past the Eichmann trial was perceived as the beginning of a dramatic shift in the way Israelis related to the Holocaust, but, as I have shown in Chapter V, the survivors and others had already been shaping the discourse and perceptions of the Israeli public back in the 1950s. According to Hanna Yablonka the trial marked the culmination of the process whereby survivors had gradually changed the image of the Holocaust within Israeli society.⁷ The terrifying stories recounted in the trial led people to identify with the suffering of the victims and survivors.⁸ It was indeed a turning point in terms of the evolution of Israeli attitude to the Holocaust and its survivors, which would fully ripen in the 1980s.⁹

The main difference between the current events and the pre-trial era was that until the Eichmann trial the story of the Holocaust was presented to the Israeli society primarily in the generic context of a national disaster. The

³ For the events surrounding the trial and its effect on Israeli society, see Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, (Heb.) (2001, Tel Aviv). For a detailed account regarding the trial itself see the book by the chief prosecutor in the trial, Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (London, 1966).

⁴ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 327.

⁵ Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, 175.

⁶ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 350.

⁷ Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, 177-8.

⁸ *Ibid.* 361.

⁹ Anita Shapira, "What Ever Became of 'Negating Exile'?" In Anita Shapira (ed.), *Israeli Identity in Transition* (London, 2004), 90.

survivors and their personal stories were not part of the Holocaust narrative.¹⁰ One of the first immediate consequences of the trial was the recognition by Israeli society that the survivors, who had lived among 'us' for such a long time and had barely been noticed, were also victims of the Holocaust.¹¹ This point is exemplified in the words of Haim Guri, by then already a famous poet, who was part of the Sabra elite and who was deeply stirred by the trial: "people came up to us, grabbed us by the lapels and said: 'You want to hear what happened there? Well listen, I was there.' And the person speaking to you is no mere phantom or apparition but someone who lives today in Tel Aviv or Holon or Haifa or Ramle or KfarRuppin or LehavotHabashan or Kibbutz LohameiHagetaot."¹²

During the trial a number of moral dilemmas related to the Holocaust were investigated by the prosecution. Prominent among these were the question of 'sheep to slaughter' and that of the 'Jewish functionaries'—that is, the above-mentioned survivors' guilt syndrome. As a result of the different testimonies and a growing understanding that "the conditions defied description", the attitude of Israeli society had changed.¹³ Once again this change found expression in the powerful words of Haim Guri: "but we must ask forgiveness of the multitudes whom we have judged in our hearts, we who were outside that circle. And we often judged them without asking ourselves what right we had to do so."¹⁴

In several cases the prosecutor questioned the survivors about kapos. Vera Alexander, an ex-kapo, was asked, "Tell me, Mrs. Alexander, how was it possible to be a *Blockälteste* in Auschwitz and to maintain the stance of being created in God's image and maintain the image of a human being?" She answered: "It wasn't easy. It demanded great tact and much manoeuvring. On the one hand, one had to obey orders and fulfil them, and, on the other hand, to harm the prisoners as little as possible and to assist them." Alexander was later asked: "We have heard that you saved some people from death; explain how you did this." She answered: "There were cases after a selection where women had been selected for death, and I knew which block they were supposed to enter. I tried,

¹⁰ Ibid. 179.

¹¹ Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, 182.

¹² Haim Guri, *Facing the Glass Booth: The Jerusalem Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (London, 2004), 267.

¹³ Yablonka, "The development of Holocaust Consciousness", 17.

¹⁴ Guri, *Facing the Glass Booth*, 274.

not always successfully, to remove them from the ranks . . . this was not heroism on my part—it was my duty.”¹⁵

The testimony of Alexander and others exemplified the Jewish predicament in all its complexity—especially the dilemma of the Jewish functionaries who, as shown in Chapter V, were perceived as collaborators during the 1950s. According to Yablonka, this represented a shift in the legal context as well. A new category was created—“crimes against Jews”—to signify that the discourse had shifted from the survivors’ guilt to the murderers’ guilt in the Eichmann trial.¹⁶

Another aspect of Israelis’ perception that was challenged during the trial was that of bravery during the Holocaust. More than 100 witnesses testified; the great majority of them had not been partisans, ghetto fighters or heroes of one sort or another but were ordinary Jews who had done their best to preserve their human essence in the midst of the horror. The dominant notion of the 1950s that bravery was solely attributable to the ghetto fighters was side-lined as the different testimonies “enabled the Israeli public to begin to comprehend that heroism and resistance during the period of the Holocaust were not confined to physical opposition”.¹⁷

At the same time, the survivors themselves went through an ambivalent experience during the trial. There was a major difference between their public reaction to the trial and their private one. In public, from the time Eichmann was captured to the trial, where most of the audience were survivors, there was an astonishingly restrained reaction. But within their private domains the survivors were struggling with anxiety, nightmares and in some cases even depression.¹⁸ One of the main ways to bridge the calm public façade and their private apprehensions was for survivors to see themselves as a link between the new Israelis and the six million martyrs, their legacy and life.¹⁹

¹⁵ State of Israel, Ministry of Justice, *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann, session 71: June 8, 1961* (Jerusalem, 1992), iii. 1287.

¹⁶ Yablonka, “The development of Holocaust Consciousness”, 17. Hannah Arendt also raised the question of Jewish collaborators, primarily the Judenräte, albeit with a clearly negative judgment, in her famous account, *Eichmann In Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963).

¹⁷ Yechiam Weitz, “The Holocaust on Trial: The Impact of the Kasztner and Eichmann Trials on Israeli society”, *Israel Studies*, 1: 2 (1996), 20-1.

¹⁸ Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, 183.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 186.

There were numerous indications of the new social and cultural role of the survivors following the trial, including the surge of autobiographies and historical books about the Holocaust; the organizing of youth delegations to Poland; the outpouring of memorials in the form of Yizkor books in the diaspora communities, and the urge to shift the responsibility for Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day from the survivors to the general public.²⁰

In a broader context, the years during which the Eichmann trial took place were a period of crisis, the concluding years of the first phase in the history of the state. These were years when radical changes occurred in the political and cultural realm. In the political realm this period saw the Lavon affair (a grave security 'mishap'), which forced Israeli society to ask certain questions about personalities, institutions and concepts that had until then been beyond question. This brought about a change in the perception of heroic stereotypes. In the literary realm, these were the years of transition from 'the generation of 1948' to 'the generation of the state'. In their writings, the latter group began to focus on the confused and helpless anti-hero who came to replace the fighting pioneer who had primarily represented collective ideals rather than individual ones.²¹

The Holocaust became a core component of the newly constructed Jewish and Israeli identity, and survivors were now among the few communities to enjoy a unanimously positive reception in Israeli society, which was otherwise beginning to lose its sense of solidarity. This process intensified as Israelis were faced with the precarious existence of their country during the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath.

The Six Day and Yom Kippur Wars

On 22 May 1967 the Egyptian leader Jamal Abdel Nasser announced that his forces based at Sharem el-Sheikh were sealing the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli or Israeli-bound shipping. It was only a day after the Israeli cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, decided that Egypt's closure of the straits would be a just cause to declare war. From then until the actual eruption of the war on 6 June 1967 Israel went through what has been called a 'waiting period'

²⁰ For specific examples see *ibid.* 186-90.

²¹ Weitz, "The Holocaust on Trial", 23.

(*hahamtanah*) before the Six Day War.²² Many events of great importance for the history of the Middle East in general and Israel in particular occurred in that period and during the war that followed. For our purposes the importance of this period lay, as mentioned above, in its impact on the sense of vulnerability of the Israelis and, as a result, on their perception of the Holocaust.²³

According to Tom Segev, “The existential anxiety that gripped Israelis when the crisis erupted was real.”²⁴ The danger of war, publicized by the Egyptians as a war to destroy Israel, together with the absence of any real reaction from the international community to Nasser’s unilateral moves, gave rise to a growing sense in Israel of isolation and abandonment.²⁵ For many Israelis the feeling that “another Holocaust is being prepared for them by the rulers of Egypt” ignited their existential apprehensions.²⁶

After a hesitant speech on Israeli radio by Prime Minister Eshkol on 28 May 1967, Israelis had the impression that their leadership was in panic. In addition, Eshkol’s statement that Israel was working with the United States to solve the crisis peacefully confounded the public to an even greater extent. On the following day Ze’ev Schiff, a columnist in *Ha’aretz*, wrote: “It is amazing how a people who have suffered a Holocaust is willing to endanger itself once again.”²⁷

Suddenly there was a sense that the Jewish fate had reached the Jewish state, that the distinction between Jewish fate in exile and the fate of the Jewish people in their own land had not withstood the test of history. The state was no longer perceived as a guarantee against annihilation.²⁸ This resulted in an unexpected change, especially among younger people, who began to compare the Israeli state to a besieged ghetto. The idea that they too could feel overwhelming fear, or might have to face deadly attacks, brought them closer to their parents in

²² Eric Hammel, *Six Days in June: How Israel Won the 1967 Arab-Israeli War* (New York, 2003), 33. According to Michel Oren the waiting period began on 14 May, with the first reports of Egyptian troops entering Sinai. See Michel B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford, 2002), 75.

²³ For more on the waiting period and the Six Day War, see Oren, *Six Days of War*.

²⁴ Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, The War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (New York, 2007), 285.

²⁵ Shapira, “What Ever Became of ‘Negating Exile?’”, 97.

²⁶ Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (New York, 1981), 216.

²⁷ Quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, 132. Oren describes Eshkol’s radio speech to the public as staggering, rambling and barely intelligible; see *ibid*.

²⁸ Shapira, “What Ever Became of ‘Negating Exile?’”, 97.

particular and to European Jewry in general.²⁹ Eventually Israel stunned the world as it won the war, gaining massive territories from Egypt, Jordan and Syria, but the psychological effects and the feelings evoked during the waiting period were not reversible.³⁰

These feelings grew even stronger in the wake of the Yom Kippur War, when Israel was hit by an abrupt attack on the day of the holiest Jewish festival, Yom Kippur. On 6 October 1973 Egyptian and Syrian forces crossed the armistice line and launched an attack that shocked the Israeli leadership and public. By the end of the war Israel had managed to regain the territories that had been lost at the beginning and to defeat the invading armies. But this victory was preceded in the first days of the war by a genuine sense of fear that the country's very existence was in jeopardy, as stated by the defence minister of the time, Moshe Dayan: "we are facing the destruction of the third temple".³¹

Israelis were, yet again, comparing the current situation to the one the Jews had lived through in the Holocaust. This syndrome was not confined to the lay public but was also common among historians. It is exemplified by the words of the Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer in January 1974: "The basic causes that generated the Holocaust are still here . . . Egypt and Syria did not mean the invasion to stop at the 1967 lines . . . the destination for them is Dizengoff Square [Tel Aviv] and from there to the shore of the sea. We are still fighting the war of independence . . . this is our existential situation, we will confront it and stand up to it."³²

The heightened international hostility towards Israel and Zionism following the Six Day War and, later, the Yom Kippur War exacerbated the sense of isolation and greatly reinforced the changing attitudes towards the Holocaust.³³ The new conception of the Holocaust was, on the one hand, based on a distrust of foreign nations and an emphasis on their hostility towards Jews,

²⁹ Porat, *Israeli Society, the Holocaust and its Survivors*, 351.

³⁰ For some figures regarding Israel's one-sided victory see Oren, *Six Days of War*, 305-12.

³¹ Ehud Ben-Ezer, *Courage: The Story of Moshe Dayan* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1997), 255.

³² Yehuda Bauer, "After Yom Kippur 1973" (Heb.), in *Yalkut Moreshet*, 17 (Jan. 1974), 3-5.

³³ See Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (London, 1983), 142, and Eliezer Don Yehiya, "Memory and Political Culture: Israeli Society and the Holocaust", *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* (London, 1993), 152.

while on the other hand it strengthened the need of Israelis to connect with the Jewish people and heightened their identification with traditional Jewish culture.³⁴ With this shift of attitudes it became less necessary to devote as much attention to heroism and resistance in the context of the Holocaust. Instead there was a growing tendency to redefine such terms as 'martyrdom' and 'heroism' so that they would apply to all victims of the Holocaust, not merely those who actively resisted.³⁵

The change of attitude was apparent in different spheres: there was a significant increase in the establishment of new museums and institutes associated with the Holocaust; there was a growth in the number of Holocaust monuments erected in Israel; universities devoted more time and funds to Holocaust research, and authors of textbooks and other source material on the Holocaust began to dedicate more space to descriptions of persecution and of the extermination process itself.³⁶

By the late 1970s Israel was well into the process of adopting a new approach to the Holocaust, its survivors and the legacy of the diaspora. The public had acknowledged the complexity of the tragedy and the vulnerability of Jewish existence at the time.³⁷ It was in this environment that survivors like Spiegel went through their transition period. Almost twenty years after arriving in Israel, and more than thirty years after he left the gates of Auschwitz, Spiegel was about to undergo slowly and unconsciously a transition of his own that would lead him to the point at which he could finally 'escape' the grey zone of the camp and bring his story out into the open.

"A Sabra in our family?" Spiegel and the New Israelis

Let us now take a closer look at Spiegel's defining years of work at the Kameri Theatre, which shaped much of his identity in the transitional period (the 1960s and 1970s). There were two key factors that seemed to have motivated him to come out with his story in the early 1980s: first, his tense, even dramatic encounters with a true Sabra (his daughter's soon-to-be husband) and, second,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. 153.

³⁶ Ibid. 154.

³⁷ For an accurate and comprehensive analysis of the Israelis' attitude towards the Holocaust and its implications in the 1960s and 1970s, see Elon, *The Israelis*, 198-221.

his apprehensions regarding his forthcoming retirement.³⁸ Only within this biographical framework, interweaved with the above-mentioned general context, will we be able to bridge the gap between the silence and suppression of the thirty-five post-war years and the outburst of testimony and partial relief that followed.

From here on, as in the latter part of chapter V, our discussion will take a more heavily biographical approach. As I aim to analyse events that affected Spiegel on an unconscious level, prompting him to tell his story in the public, and then describe his state of mind in the aftermath, a more psychological focus is called for, which for obvious reasons cannot be verified in the same way as historical developments. These assumptions will nonetheless be made through a framework that strives to logically explain the speculations while incorporating some hard evidence that will help in establishing the full picture.

In the early 1960s the Spiegel family moved to a new apartment on Lincoln Street in Tel Aviv. They could afford it thanks to Zvi's success at the Kameri Theatre, the extra hours he worked as an accountant for some of Israel's most famous artists, and the restitution payments they began to receive from Germany.³⁹ The Kameri was his 'second wife';⁴⁰ he loved his work there and established close contact with the best-known figures of Israel's bohemian scene at the time. On his fiftieth birthday he received a book from the well-known poet Nathan Alterman with the following dedication: "Our dearest Mr Spiegel: a loyal employee of the theatre. A model of good taste and measures."⁴¹ When a group of actors and writers from the Kameri travelled to London, the great poet Avraham Halpi wrote to Spiegel, of all people, a postcard saying hello, asking how he was,

³⁸ The Sabras were the generation that succeeded the pioneer generation who had arrived mainly in the second (1904-1914) and third (1919-1923) *Aliyot* in the Land of Israel. At the foundation of the Sabra culture lay that of the pioneers, but the Sabras elaborated upon it, amplifying some of its features. Their aim was to create a new Jew who adopted new values of heroism and socialism and in that developing an anti-diaspora ethos. The myth of the Sabra was central in the Yishuv period as people frequently discussed the image of the members of the agricultural settlements who represented the Sabra culture. See Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Los Angeles, 2000), 255-6, 261-2.

³⁹ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, November 2011.

⁴⁰ A term used by his son. See Israel Spiegel, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 19 December 2012.

⁴¹ His daughter Judith has the book in her private collection. A part of Alterman's dedication was later engraved on Spiegel's tombstone after he passed away in 1993.

and requesting him to convey his regards to, and take care of, all the staff who had stayed at home.⁴²

“Everyone knew Spiegel”, recalls Shlomo Vishinski, who began his career at the Kameri as a young performing artist in 1967 (and eventually became a famous actor), “he was a very nice man. Always took care of us and made sure we weren’t cheated by the management. It wasn’t easy to work with actors, but he always managed to remain patient.”⁴³ For Spiegel the Kameri provided a haven from the memories of the past. It kept him busy and people did not try to engage him in discussions regarding the Holocaust, as recalled by Vishinski: “we knew he was a Holocaust survivor. We even knew that he was a Mengele twin. But he didn’t want to talk about it and we were embarrassed to ask; it wasn’t natural back then. We didn’t want to hurt him. But we all talked about it, just not in front of him. Until today, when I hear anything about the Holocaust, it immediately reminds me of Spiegel.”⁴⁴

But Spiegel would not only work at the Kameri; he also developed a genuine love for the theatre and regularly attended performances. “We would go to every new play basically. The premieres were especially exciting; we would dress up for them, and they were special events. Zvi always invited friends and family to come with us,” recalled his wife.⁴⁵ Zvi recommended new shows to his friends and knew how to appreciate the outstanding ones, although he would never analyse the characters or the script. This reveals an interesting dichotomy within his character: on the one hand he was a quiet man who was rarely engaged in intellectual discussions, but on the other hand he had a broad general knowledge, was up to date on events in Israel and the world, read a lot, had deep appreciation for quality plays and had good contacts among actors, poets and other figures on the Israeli theatre scene. This duality could imply that although on the surface Spiegel was a man of numbers, quiet and simple at first glance, beneath the surface lay a highly intelligent man who had much more intellectual capacity than initially assumed; a notion that could be of use in our efforts to explain his character and actions in Auschwitz and its aftermath.

⁴² See Avraham Hafi, “Postcard to Zvi Spiegel”, London to Tel Aviv, 29 April 1967.

⁴³ Shlomo Vishinski, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 19 December 2012.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, November 2011.

Spiegel, being a central European Jew by origin and in his taste, preferred the plays of European writers, such as Ibsen.⁴⁶ When he saw *He Walked Through the Fields*, based on the novel by Moshe Shamir (1947), he had difficulty grasping the character of the hero, who was a native-born Israeli, a Sabra.⁴⁷ For Spiegel, as for many other Holocaust survivors, the gap between themselves and the Sabras could not have been greater in terms of their mentality and way of life. Although these were the formative years when Israeli society was undergoing a transformation in its attitude towards the Holocaust and the Jewish exile, as shown above, for many survivors this was yet to become apparent. Their encounters with the Sabras were still confined to work, as in the case of Spiegel, and the two groups moved in separate social circles, and even more so family circles.

Spiegel also looked European in his appearance as he tended to wear a suit even in the hot Israeli summer, ate mostly European dishes, was a traditional Jew attending synagogue every Shabbat, and most of his intimate friends and family were of Czech or Hungarian origin and, like him, they were central European in their habits. Spiegel, moreover, had not served in the IDF as he had been too old when he moved to Israel, nor was he attracted to the military-oriented culture in Israel at the time, as the sight of soldiers, uniforms and wars frightened him, reminding him of the dark past.⁴⁸ These experiences shaped his encounters with Kobi Richter, his daughter's boyfriend, who was soon to become his son-in-law.

Kobi was born in 1945, a second son to Mira and Kalman Richter, who were pioneers and had taken part in the establishment of Kibbutz Ramat Yochanan on the eastern slopes of the Carmel Mountain. Richter was raised in an environment that stood in contrast in almost every way to the one Zvi Spiegel

⁴⁶ Judith Richter, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 19 December 2012.

⁴⁷ Moshe Shamir, *He Walked Through the Fields* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1989). The play, written in 1947, takes place in 1946. It deals with the heroic image of the Sabra (the native Israeli) through the figure of the protagonist, Uri, who returns home to his kibbutz after two years at college to find that his father had joined the British army and his mother is with another man. Then he meets Mika—a young Holocaust refugee—and falls in love. With Israel on the verge of statehood he is drafted to the independent armed forces, not knowing Mika is pregnant. For two other iconic plays that focused on and promoted the mythological image of the Sabra, see Yigal Mosinzon, *In the Negev Plains*, 1989 (Heb., written in 1948) and Nathan Shaham, *They will Arrive Tomorrow*, 1989 (Heb., written in 1950).

⁴⁸ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, November 2011.

knew. “I was raised in a typical Sabra family with no knowledge of the exile. My parents were model pioneers”, explained Richter, adding: “we spoke only Hebrew, we were always tanned and strong, and were taught in the kibbutz to be exemplars to the refugees from Europe.”⁴⁹ The different kibbutz movements placed at the top of their educational priorities the creation of a new Jew—the ‘Hebrew pioneer’ (*hechalutzha’ivri*). As a result there was an emphasis upon the values of physical labor, socialism and belief in communal life and equality. All of this was to be achieved by a clear anti-exile outlook.⁵⁰ Being educated in a kibbutz, Kobi Richter imbibed the ideology of the regeneration of the Jewish people and the Holocaust had no place in this defining ethos. “Before Zvi Spiegel, I had met only three Holocaust survivors in all my life, and I regarded them as strange creatures”, says Richter.⁵¹ In addition, as a ‘kibbutznik’ Richter was completely secular, had no respect for formal education (he did not have a baccalaureate) and was solely focused on his dream to become a pilot in the IDF.

Kobi met Judith Spiegel in 1966, when he was already a pilot and she was a human resources officer at the Ramat David air base. He first encountered Zvi in August 1967, two months after the Six Day War. The experiences of the two during the war could not have been more different. Zvi and Rachel lived through the waiting period with great apprehension and uncertainty about the future.⁵² Richter on the other hand was a pilot, confident of victory, and who took part in achieving it. Kobi recalls the reception he got: “I remember Rachel especially. Zvi was in the background. I would arrive, say hello and he would mind his business and I minded my own.”⁵³ Zvi never asked Kobi about his work in the military. “He was terrified of his uniform”, recalls Judith, who adds, “Kobi’s arrival was even more dramatic for my dad than he remembers. He brought noise, power and prominence.”⁵⁴ When Zvi understood that his daughter was about to marry Kobi he consulted with his brother Yehuda whether this was acceptable since the young man was completely secular, with no traditional affiliation.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Kobi Richter, interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 19 December 2012.

⁵⁰ Zvi Tsameret, “Education on the top of the Everest”, in id. and Aviva Chalamish (eds.), *The Kibbutz: The First Hundred Years* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 2010), 129.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, February 2011.

⁵³ Kobi Richter, interview by the author, 2012.

⁵⁴ Judith Richter, interview by the author, December 2012.

⁵⁵ Hanna Spiegel, interview by the author.

When the Yom Kippur War broke out, Kobi—by then a decorated pilot—happened to be at the Spiegels' house. He had to leave immediately, and Zvi and Rachel once again had to live through the despair of war with all their fears, this time worrying for him and their grandson Israel. According to Kobi these were the years when he began to develop a new attitude towards Holocaust survivors. His encounters with Judith's greater family, when some of the older relatives spoke about their Holocaust experience, made him realize that their passive bravery had preceded the active fighting of the redemption.⁵⁶

The process described by Kobi Richter overlapped with the general change that the notion of the Sabra was undergoing during the 1960s and the 1970s. The Sabra image was based upon the second generation of Zionist Israelis, the first generation to be socialized in the Land of Israel in the Yishuv period.⁵⁷ He was portrayed as a secular Jew emerging from the process of 'the rejection of the exile' by the pioneer generation (which preceded the Sabras). The Sabra culture was a new civil religion, which incorporated some elements of the Jewish tradition as well as new values of socialism and heroism into a new model of the Jew.⁵⁸ The Sabras spoke Hebrew, settled on the borders of Israel, cultivated the land and were in the forefront of the battle for the Jewish state.⁵⁹ They developed a new Hebrew dialect and accent, admired the physical appearance of the pioneers, and had a broad range of new cultural traditions—even a Sabra dance named *horah*.⁶⁰

The first voices criticizing the Sabra myth had already appeared back in the 1950s. This critique gained more strength in the 1960s and especially after the Yom Kippur War. The core Sabra values were questioned: the negation of the diaspora, the superior behaviour towards new immigrants, the abandonment of the Jewish tradition, and the brainwashing regarding Zionist values and martyrdom were all challenged in works of literature as well as in intellectual

⁵⁶ Kobi Richter, interview by the author.

⁵⁷ Oz Almog, *The Sabra*, 1. For a description of the first generation, the pioneers (*chalutzim*), see Yoav Gelber, "Shaping the 'New Jew' in Eretz Israel", in Yisrael Gutman (ed.), *Major Changes within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Ninth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, June 1993* (Jerusalem, 1996), 443-62.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 18-22.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that many of the Sabras were actually urban dwellers, as mentioned by Amnon Rubinstein in his book *From Herzl to Rabin: The Changing Image of Zionism* (New York, 2000), 162.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 233-5.

circles.⁶¹ Israeli society had been radically transformed by then: it had grown in size and had lost its family ambience.⁶² It had become more open, divided and polarized. The earlier dichotomies constructed by the Zionist narrative were met by a social reality that was becoming increasingly fluid, complex, and heterogeneous.⁶³

These tendencies may throw some light on the identity changes that Zvi and Kobi underwent, in which the native Israeli hero was adjusting his perception step by step while the Holocaust survivor slowly tried to come to terms with this new type of Jew. A pivotal point in the relationship of the two was reached in the mid-1970s; Kobi, who had completed his doctoral degree, decided that before returning to full duty in the army he wanted to study for a few months in a yeshiva. "This was the first time he [Spiegel] asked questions about what I was doing," recalls Kobi. "He asked me what he could buy me for my graduation, and I told him that I wanted a set of Mishnah. He blushed with joy. I really wanted him to appreciate this."⁶⁴

This was followed by another significant episode, which brought the two distinct personalities even closer. Zvi had a pen he had used in Auschwitz and on the journey home. He cherished it and kept on using it in his work at the Kamari Theatre. He once came to Kobi and told him what this pen meant to him, and asked him if he could fix it as it had just broken. "He gave me the pen to fix with shaking hands," says Kobi. "This was my first significant exchange with him regarding his experience in the Holocaust. I thought to myself, he was a silent hero, but I still didn't know anything about the full story. But the fact that he performed his job with great responsibility and that he was such a well-respected and caring father after having gone through the Holocaust made me think highly of him."⁶⁵

The process of slowly getting to know a Sabra and all he represented was a significant prerequisite to Spiegel's disclosure of his full story in the early 1980s. This is a classic example of history from below exemplifying broader

⁶¹ Oz Almog, *Farewell to 'Srulik': The Change of Values Among the Israeli Elite* (Heb.) (Haifa, 2004), ii. 791-802.

⁶² Rubinstein, *From Herzl to Rabin*, 181-2.

⁶³ Yael Zerubavel, "The Mythological Sabra and the Jewish Past", *Israel Studies*, 7/2 (Summer 2002), 136.

⁶⁴ Kobi Richter, interview by the author.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

social occurrences. Zvi's sense that Kobi was getting closer to his world by attending yeshiva, and Kobi's growing respect for him, allowed Spiegel to start feeling more comfortable with himself, telling pieces of his story. This rapprochement reflects the general shift that was taking place in both groups: on the one hand, in the attitude of the 'generation of the state', to which Kobi belonged and which had been influenced by the Sabra culture but was shaped to a great extent by the two wars and challenged the Sabra values, as mentioned above;⁶⁶ and, on the other hand, in the group of the Holocaust survivors, among them Zvi, who was gradually feeling more comfortable in his interaction with a 'representative' of the elite of the absorbing society—in this case Richter.

In addition to the transformative encounter with Kobi Richter, we may mention one more variable that played an important role in Zvi's transitional years: the fact that he was approaching his retirement. According to Israeli law at the time, men went into retirement at the age of 65. Spiegel was to turn 65 in 1980, a fact that had troubled him from the early 1970s. "He was constantly worried about what he would do. He felt he couldn't waste any time," recalls his daughter Judith.⁶⁷ For Zvi the Kameri was not only a haven but also a place of meaning where he could redefine himself as something other than a Holocaust survivor. These tendencies are typical in general of people approaching retirement but in the case of Spiegel and other Holocaust survivors they reflected an anxiety over whether their self-definition would once again rest solely on their Holocaust experience. In Spiegel's case this phenomenon also had to do with the timing of his retirement: it was just before the growth of general interest in the Shoah. Had he retired later he might have happily looked forward to being a 'famous survivor'. Instead, he retired in the 'limbo' period, when to be a survivor was not yet something which could fully occupy one's time.

According to psychologist Dan Baron, who studied them intensively, the Holocaust charged survivors with two basic responsibilities: the first, an obligation to remember, preserve and transmit this terrible experience from one

⁶⁶ For a detailed comparison between the two generations, see Anita Shapira, *Jews, Zionists and in Between* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 2007), 247-58.

⁶⁷ The fact that he was highly disturbed by his upcoming retirement is apparent in my interviews with Judith Richter, Rachel Spiegel, Israel Spiegel and Hanna Spiegel.

generation to the next. The second, to overcome what happened and serve as living evidence that the Nazi attempt at annihilation had ultimately failed.⁶⁸

But for Spiegel, at this stage of his life, the first component was irrelevant, at least to a large extent. On the other hand, the will to focus on the future and establish a new life was predominant in his mind. By the 1960s he had established for himself a reputation at the Kameri; he lived in an upmarket neighbourhood in Tel Aviv, his children were fully integrated in their social and academic circles, and the disturbing Holocaust discourse of the 1950s was fading. All these factors amalgamated into the belief that he had made himself a new life, and he had to hold on to it at all costs, as it shielded him from the past. In the 1970s it was already clear that this shield would not exist forever as Spiegel was a few years away from retirement and the children were in the process of establishing their own families and lives.

II. Where can I find Zvi Spiegel? The Story Becomes Public

Towards the end of the 1970s the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin ordered the Mossad to give Nazi-hunting higher priority. Among the cases Begin was interested in was that of Joseph Mengele, whom various Nazi hunters including Simon Wiesenthal had declared to be alive.⁶⁹ As a result of these claims the Israeli government had decided to reopen the Mengele file and try to capture the infamous Nazi doctor.⁷⁰ As part of these efforts the police were assigned to find survivors who knew Mengele and question them about him. One of the people they soon located was Saul Almog. Almog, by then in his late forties, was

⁶⁸ Baron, *Fear and Hope*, 348.

⁶⁹ After he fled Germany in 1949 Mengele lived in Argentina, where he became a successful businessman. As a result of the trial of some Auschwitz staff in Freiburg, West Germany, in 1959, an extradition request to the Argentinians from the Germans forced him to flee to Paraguay and from there in 1960 to Brazil. He died in January 1979 near Sao Paulo from a stroke he suffered while swimming in the sea. The Americans, Brazilians and Germans found his body after a co-investigation only in 1985. For the full story of his life following the war and the attempts to locate him see Posner and Ware, *Mengele*.

⁷⁰ In fact, according to Isar Harel, former head of the Mossad (1952-63), Israel had been close to capturing Mengele three times between 1960-2. See Tova Zimuki, interview with Isar Harel, *Davar*, 6 February 1985. According to David Cesarani, when Eichmann was captured in Argentina he was questioned by the Mossad about Mengele's whereabouts as they thought that, with their investigative resources concentrated in Argentina, they might be able to capture Mengele too. Eichmann had actually met Mengele in Argentina a few years before (the two did not get along) but lost all contact with him. See Cesarani, *Eichmann*, 218, 231.

the twin who had found Spiegel in the Kameri Theatre in the 1950s (along with his brother Shlomo, who by then was living in the USA—see Chapter V). After the police questioned him Almog suggested they should talk to Spiegel because among the twins he knew Mengele the best.⁷¹

“One day the police knocked on our door at the Lincoln apartment in Tel Aviv. They asked Zvi if he knew Mengele. They scared him. Then they explained what the questioning was about, and he said ‘wait a minute’”, recalls Rachel, his wife.⁷² Spiegel then brought out all the documentation that he had from the Auschwitz period and the lists he had produced on the journey home, together with the various documents he had received from the authorities. The fact that he chose to share these documents on this occasion can be attributed to the anxiety about any communication with the authorities, from which he had suffered since the war.⁷³ The officer, Menachem Rosak, was astonished and asked Spiegel to donate the documents “as part of the national legacy”.⁷⁴

Even though in all likelihood Spiegel did not speak to the police or show them the documents out of a genuine wish to do so, it was nevertheless a crucial threshold on his way to tell the story. We do not know the details of this episode but we do know that it would be the starting point for him to begin to reveal his story to the public.⁷⁵

In 1981, with the renewed interest in Mengele and the efforts to find him, *Life Magazine* in the USA decided to devote a large part of its June edition to the story of the Nazi doctor.⁷⁶ As part of this project they located twin survivors and sent a reporter to interview them and take their photo. In Canada, for example, they contacted Leo Lowy, who had been one of the ‘Spiegel boys’ in Birkenau. In Israel the police, who had questioned Spiegel about a year before, directed the *Life* reporter to him.⁷⁷ All we know about the interview is that it was conducted

⁷¹ Almog, SFI.

⁷² Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, 2010.

⁷³ This fear is mentioned in my interviews with Rachel Spiegel, Judith and Kobi Richter.

⁷⁴ Avi Katzman, “My Eighty Twins”, *Ha’aretz*, 5 January 1991.

⁷⁵ I have located in the Israeli National Archive a large portion of the police interviews with Mengele twins from the late 1970s. Presumably Spiegel’s interrogation is one of them, but unfortunately they are all classified until 2048 (for 70 years) as they contain confidential information about the twins who were interrogated.

⁷⁶ Friend, ‘A Scream from a Fiery Pit’, 49.

⁷⁷ As the police do not allow access to the files it is hard to determine the exact date (see n. 76), and since Spiegel’s wife did not remember when exactly David Friend, the

at his house, and that both Zvi and Magda were interviewed. What was the process that led to Spiegel's agreement to be interviewed? Was it a spontaneous decision or had he thought it through? Interviewed many years later, his wife could not recall his reasoning and was unable to answer these questions. In addition, both of his children were living in the USA with their families at the time, and knew nothing of these events. In the interview itself Spiegel, by then 66 years old and in his first year of retirement, revealed the fact that he had been the 'twins' father' in Birkenau and that he knew Mengele personally. Besides that there was no mention of his activities in the camp.

As mentioned above, Judith and Kobi Richter were at the time in the USA. They lived in Brookline, Massachusetts, and were engaged in their academic activities. They knew nothing about the *Life Magazine* article; nor did they know about the police questioning. "One day I was in the supermarket. On the cover of *Life Magazine* I saw there was an article about an Israeli satellite. While standing in the queue I flipped through the magazine looking for the article. Suddenly I see a picture of Zvi and Magda, and below it a short article; this was very surprising. Naturally, I bought the magazine," recalls Kobi Richter.⁷⁸ Kobi rushed home and showed Judith the article. At the age of 34 this was the first time that she had heard about her father's role in Auschwitz, albeit with almost no details. It took her by surprise; she was emotional and confused—why hadn't he told her before? Why hadn't her mother mentioned that he had been photographed and interviewed for this article?⁷⁹

This incident epitomises the meaning of silence during those years. A grown-up woman in her mid-thirties is exposed coincidentally to her father's role in Auschwitz through a magazine article. Not only had she had no idea of his role in the camp but she did not even know that he had been interviewed and that his story was being published. Although the article was far from detailed, hence Judith and Kobi did not have full insight into his role and deeds, there were others, such as Peter Somogyi, who only needed a trigger to reawaken their memories of Spiegel Bácsi—and to decide it was time to find their saviour.

reporter from *Life Magazine*, interviewed Spiegel, we only know for certain that the article was published in June 1981.

⁷⁸ Kobi Richter, interview by the author.

⁷⁹ Judith Richter, interview by the author.

Somogyi, by then 49 years old, had been one of the 'Spiegel boys' in Birkenau and a part of the group that returned home with Spiegel. A few years after the war he and his brother Tom were reunited with their father and emigrated from Hungary to Israel. After seven years in Israel, their father decided he wanted to leave the country and the twins went to university in London before moving to Canada. In Canada Peter worked as an electric engineer for Bosch until 1970, when he and his wife Anna decided to move to the USA.⁸⁰

In Canada (Montreal) as well as in Pleasantville, New York, people knew that Peter was a Holocaust survivor, but he refused to answer any questions about the subject. In fact the last time he had spoken about the issue had been on his honeymoon (1961), as related by his wife: "At first I asked him about the number on his forearm but he didn't want to talk about it. After the honeymoon he told me the full story. He talked a lot about Spiegel already back then."⁸¹ After telling her the story Peter asked her not to ask him about it ever again because he would not say any more.⁸² "For forty years I didn't talk; then a picture in *Life* of Zvi Spiegel changed everything."⁸³

Like Judith, Zvi's daughter, Peter was shocked to see the article about Spiegel Bácsi, which included a picture of him and his brother Tom that they had sent Spiegel after the war. Peter suddenly felt an urge to find Spiegel; as he explains, "I wanted to talk to him and to tell him I was here. I wanted to see again the person who had saved my life. I really wanted to meet him."⁸⁴ Determined to find Spiegel, Peter turned to the Israeli embassy in Washington for help; they gave him six addresses of people named Zvi Spiegel, and he wrote to each one of them. Finally a few weeks later he received a reply; he had found Spiegel Bácsi.⁸⁵

Spiegel wrote back to Somogyi telling him he was planning a visit to the USA to attend his son's wedding with Rina Nirenberg in Texas and to visit his daughter in Brookline. The two decided to meet while Spiegel was in Brookline. The meeting took place on 25 March 1982. The local press, which had heard

⁸⁰ Peter Somogyi, interview by the author.

⁸¹ Anna Somogyi in the author's interview with Peter Somogyi.

⁸² Peter Somogyi, SFI.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Peter Somogyi, interview by the author.

⁸⁵ Peter Somogyi, SFI.

about the story and was intrigued by it, was present at the meeting.⁸⁶ “There was a big hug. It was very emotional. I was very emotional. I was reunited with someone who had saved my life,” recalled Peter Somogyi.⁸⁷ It was in this meeting that Zvi started to detail parts of the story from Birkenau, albeit in fragments. “We sat all night. This was the first time I had really grasped the magnitude of his deeds,” Kobi Richter reminisced, adding, “this was thanks to Peter Somogyi, who kept telling us, ‘do you know who this man is and what he did for others? Do you know how many people owe him their lives?’ We were shocked.”⁸⁸

This meeting was a landmark in Spiegel’s life as it was the first significant encounter he had had with one of his twins since their separation in Csap in March 1945. True, he had met the Almog brothers in the 1950s but that meeting took place under totally different circumstances (see Chapter V). A comparison of the two encounters reveals a lot about the process of transformation that Spiegel had undergone in the span of thirty years, together with the general change that had occurred among Holocaust survivors and in the public. In the 1950s Spiegel was still a man defined by his fears. He feared for his and his family’s existence; he was troubled by the possibly negative perception of his role in Auschwitz, and he was focused on reconstructing his life and moving forward. By the beginning of the 1980s he was a retired man going through the transition period described above. His existential fears had been constrained at this point as he and his children were settled and had a secure life. Moreover, the general tendencies within Israeli society created an encouraging environment for survivors to take the first steps in revealing their stories. These tendencies were not confined to Israeli society but were typical of Western societies in general. The twins, now in their fifties and sixties, were about to become part of a broader phenomenon: the wave of testimonies, gatherings and survivors’ organizations.

⁸⁶ According to Somogyi the neighbours spread the rumour.

⁸⁷ Peter Somogyi, interview by the author, 2011.

⁸⁸ Kobi Richter, interview by the author, 2011. For a detailed description of the meeting, see Judy Foreman, “Reunited after Auschwitz”, *Boston Globe*, 26 March 1982.

III. The 'Twins' Father': Spiegel and the Twins Reunite

This chapter began with a characterization of the transition that Spiegel underwent within the changing cultural context in Israel at the time. This prepared the ground for the next period, beginning in the early 1980s, which saw a change in the survivors' role as they started coming out with their stories and eventually became bearers of the legacy of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

At this point it seems appropriate to describe in greater detail the events leading up to the Mengele mock trial and the trial itself, which was a defining moment in the twins' generation and led to the full recognition of Spiegel as the twins' father. Our focus will then shift towards the twins who had stayed in Hungary after the war and were, hence, isolated and unaware of these gatherings. These twins had their own alternative 'coming out period', and their case throws light on the importance of cultural context in the emergence of survivors' communities. Finally, the closing section of this chapter looks at the last years of Spiegel's life, when his—and the other twins'—heroism was fully acknowledged and survivors were expected to transform their legacy of victimhood into a myth of defiant resilience.

The Mengele mock trial was a result of efforts made by twin survivors to make their story known. These efforts were mainly concentrated within two geographical areas, the state of Israel and the United States. I have already described the events that transformed the perception of the Holocaust and the survivors in Israel in the 1970s. For an appreciation of the full picture it is also worth mentioning a few characteristics of the phenomenon in the USA. Naturally, the scope of this research does not allow for a detailed discussion, but since the survivors in the USA played a pivotal role in raising awareness of the Holocaust in general and of the Mengele twins in particular, a brief look at some of the main events may prove useful.

Holocaust Memory in the United States During the 1970s

As in Israel, by the end of the 1970s a change had taken place in the United States as Holocaust survivors, whose stories had generally remained unheard during

the post-war years, were given more and more attention and respect.⁸⁹ This had much to do with the change of the political and cultural environment in the USA and especially within American Jewry during the 1970s. According to Peter Novick, in those years American Jews developed an anxiety about Israel's security that was the single greatest catalyst of the new focus on the Holocaust in American Jewish consciousness.⁹⁰ The Six Day War and especially the Yom Kippur War prompted a change in the attitude of American Jews towards Israel and, within the context of a universal Jewish fate, the Holocaust.⁹¹ Tim Cole adopts the notion of silence in the immediate post-war years, but argues that a major component of the rising Holocaust myth among American Jewry from the late 1960s was related to a general phenomenon affecting ethnic minorities in the United States at the time. According to him, this was a period of ethnic assertion, which replaced the former silent assimilation, and it was within this context that American Jews discovered the Holocaust.⁹² But, as in Israel, some scholars in recent years have argued that these notions of silence were not correct and American Jews were highly engaged in Holocaust narrative in the post-war years.⁹³

Whether we adopt Novick's, Cole's or Diner's interpretation, it is apparent that interest in the Holocaust among Jewish communities and survivors became more prominent during the 1970s. The change was not confined to American Jews but was felt among the general public as well. Until the mid-1970s, although there was occasional interest in survivors, the standard American narrative

⁸⁹ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 102. As mentioned in Chapter V, the problem was not the silence of the American survivors but rather the lack of receptiveness to their stories. According to Beth Cohen they created their own social network, apart from the American Jews, where they talked about their wartime experiences, held Yizkor services, erected monuments and compiled memorial books. See Cohen, *Case Closed*, 155-73.

⁹⁰ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London, 2000), 168.

⁹¹ Ibid. 149-52. According to Dorothy Rabinowitz, the two wars mentioned above, along with the preceding Eichmann trial, were the predominant events in "closing the distance between American Jews and their awareness of the Holocaust"; see Dorothy Rabinowitz, *New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America* (New York, 1976), 193.

⁹² Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler—How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York, 2000), 12.

⁹³ The most comprehensive effort to prove that American Jews had much to say about the Jewish catastrophe between 1945 and the early 1960s, was made by Hasia Diner in her book *We Remember with Reverence and Love*.

depicted them as busy establishing new lives and raising children.⁹⁴ From the mid-1970s, however, the community of survivors attracted new interest among the American public. Various books appeared that portrayed the post-war efforts of the survivors to recover their lives after the atrocity they had suffered.⁹⁵

The year perceived as the watershed of this shift is usually identified as 1978. As the eminent American historian Raul Hilberg has explained, “Here, in the United States, something happened. We can almost pinpoint when. It was roughly 1978. Naturally such developments don’t really have a precise date on which they begin. And yet here was a Television play that the author, Gerald Green, could not have sold to any network five or ten years earlier. Here was a nationalization of the Holocaust by an executive order establishing a Presidential commission . . . Here we see multiplication of books about the Holocaust, of curricula about the Holocaust, of conferences about the Holocaust.”⁹⁶

Of the occurrences mentioned by Hilberg the most influential was the broadcasting of the miniseries entitled *Holocaust* on NBC. The nine-hour series was broadcast on four consecutive nights and was a huge success, drawing over one hundred million viewers. More information about the Holocaust was imparted to more Americans over those four nights than had been in the previous thirty years.⁹⁷ Critical responses to the miniseries of 1978, often voiced by survivors or their relatives, inspired new works of Holocaust remembrance that placed survivors at the centre of activity and gave them the opportunity to appear in public as authority figures.⁹⁸

By the end of the 1970s these men and women were well established in the United States. They had had families and their own children were becoming parents. The chain of generations broken by the Holocaust was in the process of

⁹⁴ Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (Oxford, 1999), 183.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Rabinowitz, *New Lives*.

⁹⁶ President Carter announced the appointment of a commission on 1 May 1978. The commission was to propose a national Holocaust memorial, which was eventually built in the form of the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum. For the full story of the establishment of the museum see Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggles to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1995).

⁹⁷ Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 209. The series put an end to a debate in America on the ability of the popular media to present the Holocaust effectively, and was followed by a surge of movies and TV series about the Jewish tragedy (*Escape from Sobibor*, *Triumph of the Spirit*, *War and Remembrance* and many others); *ibid.* 213.

⁹⁸ Shandler, *While America Watches*, 183.

mending. The survivors were no longer reluctant to make their past known or to establish a 'legacy'.⁹⁹

In Israel the political and cultural changes described above created a welcoming environment for Holocaust survivors. The Six Day and Yom Kippur Wars, along with prosperity and westernization, individualism and the fading of the Sabra ideal, deeply influenced the younger generation, who felt alienated and "turned to real or imagined integrative total environments of the past as anchor".¹⁰⁰ One of the implications of this process was an identification with the Holocaust survivors that generated a flood of testimonies.

Among the young generation the descendants of the survivors stood out. In the 1950s and 1960s many among the second generation did not want to hear the stories either because they were trying to protect their parents or because they strove to detach themselves from the event and get closer to the Sabras. The third generation, however, was now eager for their grandparents to share stories of the horrific past.¹⁰¹ Encouraged by the receptive attitude, the survivors in turn were ready to talk.¹⁰²

The Mengele Mock Trial: Holocaust Representation and its Limitations

One of the phenomena accompanying the surge of testimonies in the United States and Israel in the early 1980s was the establishment of survivors' organizations that held frequent gatherings. The first major international congress—and the biggest of them all—took place in June 1981. The idea of calling a 'world gathering' of Jewish Holocaust survivors and the initial efforts in this direction developed essentially in two geographical centres: in Kibbutz Netzer Sereni in Israel and in New York, USA.¹⁰³ In 1980 the office of the world gathering was set up. The goal of the convention was to transmit to the next generations a legacy rooted in a Jewish consciousness and traditional Jewish

⁹⁹ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 102.

¹⁰⁰ Jackie Feldman, *Above the Death Pits, Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity* (New York, 2008), 41.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 41-2.

¹⁰² Since 1980 more survivor accounts have been produced than in the period between 1945 and 1980; see Feldman, *Above the Death Pits*, 42.

¹⁰³ Netzer Sereni was a kibbutz established by a group of Holocaust survivors who had organized themselves for this mission already as prisoners in the concentration camp of Buchenwald in Germany. Judith Baumel tells the story of the kibbutz in her book *Kibbutz Buchenwald* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1994). Therein Baumel mentions the fact that the idea of the world gathering first came up during a discussion in the kibbutz.

history. In addition, the organizers stated that they wished to rejoice in survival and afford participants an opportunity to meet in one place and at the same time.¹⁰⁴

In order to notify as many survivors as possible about the gathering the organizers needed to be sure that the word was widely spread: brochures, leaflets, posters, notices and full-length articles were sent out to the world press, both Jewish and general, and special reports and interviews were provided for radio and television programmes. Eventually more than 250 members of the world press assembled to cover the event. Hundreds of interviews and articles appeared in publications throughout the world.¹⁰⁵

The congress proved a success even before it ended as close to 10,000 survivors attended (5,000 from North America, 3,000 from Israel and 2,000 from twenty-three other countries).¹⁰⁶ It also publicized the fact that Holocaust survivors were getting together in an organized manner. Moreover, it stimulated some of its participants to initiate further gatherings and set up new organizations. One such gathering occurred in 1983 in Washington and was attended by Eva Moses Kor, a 47-year-old real estate agent from Terre Haute, Indiana, who had, along with her twin sister Miriam, been subjected to Mengele's medical experiments in Birkenau.

Kor had watched the *Holocaust* miniseries in 1978; it evoked in her the need to come to terms with her past: "I went to the library. I looked for anything that might have to do with the Mengele twins and I found very little . . . I felt that I needed to verify and confirm what I remembered."¹⁰⁷ Eva came up with the idea that through sharing memories the twins could help one another remember. "I went to a survivors' reunion in Washington in 1983. I thought there would be a lot of twins there. I saw people with signs and their name on them, I said I will make a sign myself . . . I wrote 'Mengele twin experiments' on one side and my

¹⁰⁴ Samuel R. Mozes, "How the World Gathering was Planned", in Sam E. Bloch (Ed.), *From Holocaust to Redemption: Bearing Witness—World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors* (New York, 1984), 19.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 19-20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 23.

¹⁰⁷ Eva Kor, interview by Doris Lazarus, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Int. code 01917-5, Chicago, Ill., 2 April 1995.

name on the other . . . I was bombarded with questions about Mengele's twin experiments. Nobody knew anything about it."¹⁰⁸

Eva decided to seek the media's help in locating other twins. When it became clear to her that they were not answering her pleas she thought she might be more successful if she established an organization. She named it CANDLES (Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors) and appointed her sister, Miriam Ziger, as its vice president in Israel. Soon enough the two received some media attention and the twins began to contact them.¹⁰⁹

In 1983 Miriam and two fellow twins, Ephraim Reichenberg and Vera Kruger, decided to do more to promote the story of Mengele in Israel and to assist Eva in raising awareness of the fact that the infamous doctor was yet to be caught. They met with a family friend of Miriam's, Zvika Goldberg, who had set up a public relations office after graduating university. Goldberg came up with an idea: "I thought to myself, what will attract the media's attention? And then I told them, 'Let's conduct a trial. If Mengele is caught he will be brought in front of our court, and if not, it will be a mock trial which will draw attention to the fact that he is still free, and to the story of the twins.'"¹¹⁰

Goldberg approached Rafi Eitan, who was the prime minister's advisor on terror at the time and who had headed the task force that abducted Eichmann in Argentina in 1960.¹¹¹ Eitan enthusiastically welcomed the idea and the two spoke to Zvi Tarlo, the former chief of the Ministry of Justice (1969-76), and asked him to take on the role of prosecutor and set up the juridical framework for the trial. They wanted to assemble a respectable tribunal and in addition to Eitan they eventually succeeded in recruiting Telford Taylor, the former prosecutor in the Nazi Criminals' Nuremberg Trials, Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor in the Eichmann Trial, Simon Wiesenthal, the famous Nazi-hunter, and Yehuda Bauer, by then already a well-known Holocaust scholar.¹¹²

The main concern was how to gather the twins for the event. Goldberg was focused on attracting the press before the trial as a means to notify twins. "Many media agencies helped us and in that way we started to hear from the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Zvika Goldberg, interview by the author, Ramat Gan, 19 December 2012.

¹¹¹ See Cesarani, *Eichmann*, 230. Goldberg approached Eitan because he was the uncle of his friend (Noam Eitan); see Goldberg, interview by the author.

¹¹² Ibid.

twins,” he recalled.¹¹³ It was through the media that Peter Somogyi heard about the event: “Just before the trial Eva was interviewed on TV and talked about looking for twin survivors. My wife Hanna got in touch with her. I was curious to meet the other twins. We had lost contact and I wanted to be together with the others.”¹¹⁴ In the United States Eva Kor was in charge of locating the twins, while in Israel Goldberg had a staff of young students working on the task. Eventually they were able to locate about thirty twins, who attended the trial along with a few dwarfs and other victims of Mengele.¹¹⁵ Just a few days before the trial and as another means to raise awareness, Eva Kor headed a delegation of twins and members of the Israeli Knesset to Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹¹⁶

On 4 February 1985 the ‘trial-like’ event, titled “J’accuse”(I blame), opened at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, in front of a full auditorium and in the presence of sixty media bodies from all around the world (including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Der Spiegel*).¹¹⁷ Over the three days of the mock trial a variety of testimonies accusing Mengele of crimes against humanity were heard. The witnesses included twins, dwarfs, doctors and others who had either been subjected to Mengele’s experiments or had witnessed them.¹¹⁸

Although Mengele was already dead at this point (a fact that was not known yet) the trial had three main achievements: first, it put pressure on

¹¹³ Ibid. On 9 October 1984 the organizers held a press conference at the Larom Hotel in Jerusalem, where they announced the upcoming trial and called upon “the government of Israel, the free world and humanity as a whole to do everything to capture the notorious doctor and bring him to trial”. See “Forty Years After the Death Marches, the Mengele Twins will Walk Again in Auschwitz”, *Ha’aretz*, 10 October 1984. Simon Wiesenthal, who claimed that Mengele was still alive, encouraged the twins to focus their efforts on capturing Mengele. He made a few statements about the matter in that period; for an example see YVA, *Australian Sixty-Minute Report on Dr. Mengele*, 1985, item no. 4067100, where he claimed, “Mengele is living in a military zone in Paraguay”.

¹¹⁴ Somogyi, interview by the author.

¹¹⁵ Goldberg, interview by the author.

¹¹⁶ Various media groups covered the journey. See e.g. the TV news report by the Australian CBN in Yad Vashem Movie Archive, item no. 2948, 1985.

¹¹⁷ The extent of the international press coverage exceeded the organizers’ expectations. Goldberg said that they had hoped the Israeli TV would broadcast highlights of the trial each evening but in fact Israeli Channel One aired two daily reports about the event. See Goldberg, interview by the author.

¹¹⁸ Most of the trial was filmed and can be found in the YVA, file 0.33-item no. 2851 (it is presented in four parts and includes, in between sessions, interviews with spectators, witnesses and some members of the tribunal). Lately portions of the trial have been translated to English; see Michael Grodin, Eva Mozes Kor and Susan Benedict, “The Trial That Never Happened”, in *War Crimes, Genocide & Crimes against Humanity*, 5 (2011), 3-89.

different governments and agencies to open a case against him. Already during the last day of the trial the US General Attorney, William French Smith, directed the Justice Department to open the Mengele case and make every effort to find him. Israeli justice minister Moshe Nissim took the same step two days later. Eventually these efforts led to the worldwide investigation that ended in the recovery of Mengele's body in Brazil.¹¹⁹

The second outcome of the mock trial was the attention that it attracted among the public and in the press, efficiently raising awareness of the crimes committed by Mengele in general, and of the twins' story in particular. Its third achievement was the formation of a community of twins that enabled them to reunite, reconstruct their memories and eventually tell their individual stories. It is within this context that the encounters between Spiegel and his boys, and between the 'boys' themselves, need to be analysed.¹²⁰

When Spiegel first heard about the trial he immediately agreed to testify, albeit with no enthusiasm or excitement. On the contrary, as time passed he became anxious and was disturbed to the point that he was feeling physically unwell.¹²¹ In the days immediately preceding the trial a dramatic change occurred when he received a phone call. On the other end of the line was Otto Klein, who, together with his brother Frank (Ferenc), had been deported to Birkenau as a 13-year-old. The two were in Spiegel's core group in the camp and participated in the journey home as well. A few years after the war Otto's family emigrated to the United States but he was not issued a visa because en route he was hospitalized in Davos, Switzerland, having contracted tuberculosis.¹²² Eventually he stayed in Switzerland and settled in Geneva, where he opened a watch shop. "In Switzerland in the 1960s and 1970s nobody was interested in the Holocaust. The subject was ignored. I didn't talk about my experiences until

¹¹⁹ See Posner and Ware, 306-7. Another achievement in this context was an appeal by Pope John Paul II to the Paraguayan government to assist in the efforts to find Mengele and extradite him. See Yad Vashem Visual Archive, ABC (USA) news report about the Mengele mock trial in Jerusalem, 6 February 1985, item no. 25935.

¹²⁰ Already before the trial and within its context, there were quite a few small gatherings in different locations, which indicated that the twins' lives were about to undergo a major change. For example, a group of twins gathered in New York at the house of Mark Berkowitz and were interviewed by the CBS network. In Israel another group met in Miriam Zeiger's home in Ashkelon.

¹²¹ Rachel Spiegel, interview by the author, November, 2011.

¹²² Klein was interviewed by the Red Cross at Davos hospital; See ITS, Auschwitz Folder no. 169, pp. 150-6; *Gendarme Post*, Davos-Platz, 4 March 1950.

the meeting in Jerusalem in 1985”, recalled Klein, and added, “but all those years I kept thinking about Spiegel. I did have the information that he had moved to Israel and was an accountant.”¹²³ Klein heard about the trial from Eva Kor, who knew his brother in America. “I wanted to come to the conference. I felt I had to. It was a big thing for me,” he said.¹²⁴

Before attending the trial the Klein twins decided to meet Spiegel in private, as they were not certain he would be present at the event. Otto recalls: “I called him up and he was very happy. I told him we were two of his twins, Ferenc and Otto Klein. I visited him in his house with my brother. It was very emotional to see his face again. We talked about Auschwitz and especially about the selections. He was very welcoming. He had his family with him.”¹²⁵ This meeting would be the first of several to take place in the days following the trial.

In the trial Spiegel was one of a number of twins to testify and one of two from his core group (the other one being Zerach Taub). When he gave his testimony his boys had not yet had a chance to approach one another and engage in conversation. Whether it was due to the tight schedule or because they didn’t recognize one another, or perhaps because they felt unconfident in the new environment, they needed something to stimulate the meeting, and this trigger was Spiegel’s testimony.

Spiegel focused on three events in his testimony; first was the episode with the Kuhn brothers, when he had told the two boys to lie and say they were twins and had informed all the other twins about this and ordered them to cooperate. The second was the selection when he had run to call Mengele and saved the younger twins; and the third was leading the twins on the journey home.¹²⁶ The full meaning of this testimony for the Spiegel boys present at the trial can only be appreciated when one bears in mind the fact that, for most of them, this was the first time since living through these events that they had heard someone describe them first-hand. It was also the first time that most of them realized that Spiegel had saved their lives during the selection (although some had heard rumours already the next day in the camp; see Chapter III).

¹²³ Klein, interview by the author.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ See YVA, 0.33 item no. 2581, Part IV.

During his testimony Spiegel's demeanour was relatively calm as he told his story in an almost monotonous fashion, while Zvi Tarlo, the 'prosecutor' questioning him, seemed much more interested in the question of what kind of medical experiments he had undergone. Towards the end of the testimony the atmosphere changed as one of the panel members asked if any of Mr Spiegel's twins were present and if they could stand up. "There was an absolute hush in the crowd. People were absolutely amazed. I stood up. A lot stood up. And then we found out whom and how many people he had taken," recalled Peter Somogyi.¹²⁷ The audience broke into spontaneous applause.

Later that evening there was a dinner organized for all the twins. It was then that the Spiegel boys finally started to find each other and relate their stories. "I didn't remember all the names but suddenly I recognized their faces," Tom Simon said.¹²⁸ These encounters were observed by Nancy Segal, an American social psychologist specializing in twin research. She noticed that at the reunion the male twins appeared to recall one another's names and faces more readily than the women. Segal attributed this phenomenon to the fact that the men had been organized in a community under Spiegel's leadership in Birkenau whereas the women had lacked organization and leadership. She mentioned the fact that some of the women who were not recognized by the others felt left out as they watched the 'Spiegel boys' reunite and exchange shared memories.¹²⁹

In order to draw some general conclusions from these encounters, it is important to put them in context. This was a group, mostly of adolescents, that went through an extreme experience, in extraordinary circumstances, during the Holocaust era. In the midst of a death camp they were organized by an adult figure into a unified group with their own internal rules and values. Some of them shared the defining experience of the journey home after liberation, still within the group's framework, albeit in different surroundings. After having separated and arrived home, the majority of them continued to feel a need to keep in contact with the others, or at least to be informed about the fate of their peers. Eventually they were scattered around the world and started new lives,

¹²⁷ Somogyi, interview by the author.

¹²⁸ Simon, interview by the author.

¹²⁹ Segal, "Holocaust Twins", 56. This was also recalled and elaborated upon in a meeting I conducted with Segal in London in 2011.

and within their different cultural environments they suppressed their memories from the past in order to be able to move forward.

But during all those years of suppression, at one point or another most of them mentioned to their loved ones the figure of Spiegel Bácsi. The image of their saviour was part of their lasting memories, to which some of them held on for comfort. Even when they were finally reunited, it took Spiegel's figure to truly bring them together as a community once again. Not only did they hear his testimony but also, and more importantly, they identified themselves as a unified group through the gesture of standing up. It was then that events came full circle and they were once again, if only for a few hours, the Spiegel boys from Birkenau.

As we have seen in Chapter V, the twins' and Spiegel's post-war perceptions of their life in Birkenau were different. The twins had been children at the time, and they had dreadful recollections of losing their families, living within a death factory and being terrified of the medical experiments. Unlike Spiegel, they felt no moral ambiguity concerning their experience, and the memory of Spiegel and the group represented for them a ray of light in the haunting darkness of the Holocaust. Spiegel on the other hand had to deal not only with the deadly circumstances but also with the responsibility he had had for the children, the decisions he had made and the way his role might be interpreted in hindsight in Israel. Although the mock trial did bring Spiegel and the twins' perceptions closer, there still remained an unbridgeable gap that derived partly from the age difference but especially from Spiegel's position in the camp.

Spiegel was very excited in the meetings with the twins. He was emotional and in a good mood. "It was a big deal for us. After his testimony some of the twins approached me and said that I was like a sister to them because they saw themselves as his sons," recalled his daughter, Judith.¹³⁰ But with all the excitement, Spiegel found it difficult to process the situation, especially after having given his testimony: "he didn't know how to digest the fact that the twins stood up and he was applauded," Judith explained, adding, "on the one hand he was in a euphoric state but on the other hand he couldn't quite believe the whole thing. He said, 'Me a hero?'"¹³¹

¹³⁰ Judith Richter, interview by the author, 2012.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

According to Dori Laub, most survivors did not find peace in silence, even when it was their choice to remain silent. In his view, “survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed ‘external evil’, which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion.”¹³² In part this could be an explanation for the relief that Spiegel felt once the story was out and fully recognized. For almost forty years he had been engaged in a struggle to repress his memory.

This description could apply to the majority of survivors who kept silent, but in Spiegel’s case the doubts about his memories may well have been exacerbated by the ambiguity of his having functioned in the camp’s grey zone. Unable to share his memories of looking after the children and saving their lives, he was left alone in the struggle with his self-perception and with his apprehensions about how his role in Birkenau might be interpreted by others. Once the story was out and he was reassured by the reactions of the twins and the general public, Spiegel could finally find peace of mind and come closer to the twins’ perception of his role in the camp.¹³³

But then the question arises: why did Spiegel have difficulty comprehending what was happening to him in the trial and the surrounding events? It was almost as if he distanced himself from, and seemed especially uneasy about, the terms ‘hero’ and ‘saviour’ being applied to him. In his interview for the Fortunoff Archive (1993) a few weeks before he passed away, Spiegel talks about an ultra-Orthodox twin from New York who visited him every year. The previous Hanukah, he says, the twin brought his grandchildren to meet the man whom he perceived as a “righteous person, since only the righteous have the chance to perform such heroic deeds”. Spiegel immediately dismisses these comments and says they are nonsense, claiming that he is not righteous.¹³⁴ This attitude can also be detected in his previous interviews, where he talks about instinctive, ad hoc decisions in abnormal situations rather than lofty values or courage.

¹³² Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London, 1992), 79.

¹³³ According to Laub, “the event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one’s life” (see *ibid.* 85), meaning, in the case of Spiegel, reducing the level of fear and general anxiety.

¹³⁴ Zvi Spiegel, FVA.

These comments are partly a reflection of Spiegel's character, which will be discussed in the conclusion. But they also confront us once again with the gap separating the survivor from the outside world (those who had not experienced the Holocaust) in their perception of the event and, as a result, in its representation. In his book *Holocaust Testimonies* Lawrence Langer presents an 'unheroic' outlook, claiming that "many Holocaust commentators cling to a grammar of heroism and martyrdom to protect the idea that the Nazi assault on the body and spirit of its victims did no fundamental damage to our cherished belief that even in the most adverse circumstances character is instinctively allied to the good."¹³⁵ Langer argues that what we might name 'heroic' died in the Holocaust. He exemplifies this by analysing several testimonies of Holocaust victims, who refuse to see their will to survive as heroism; "for them remembering is invariably associated with a jumbled terminology and morality that confuse staying alive with the intrepid will to survival."¹³⁶ This moral ambiguity reflects a traumatized memory and has a deep impact on the witness's self-esteem, which is crucial for the construction of heroic memory.¹³⁷

The case of Zvi Spiegel stretches Langer's argument to the extreme, albeit partially confirming it. The main difference between Spiegel and the survivors discussed by Langer is the fact that his deeds, which were perceived as heroic by others, were not confined to surviving and prevailing but also included saving and leading. What is unique here is that the choice of words of Spiegel's interviewers, on various occasions following the mock trial, reflected the perception of the twins as it was at the time that the events were occurring in Birkenau. While a gap in representation typically exists in similar instances, here 'heroic' was the word used both by the present-time interviewers and by the twins back in the 1940s. In other words, on the one hand a shift had taken place in the post-war years in the perception of survival, the term having acquired the added meaning of heroism, which might indicate the limits of Holocaust

¹³⁵ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 162. This notion of seeking a redemptive end to the Holocaust was much more prevalent in the popular sphere, especially from the 1990s, as exemplified in the movie *Schindler's List*. According to Tim Cole, movies such as *Schindler's List* promote the message that "we can through cunning, goodness and ingenuity, defeat the Holocaust and bring salvation". See Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, introduction to the paperback edition, 17.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 176.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

representation.¹³⁸ On the other hand Spiegel's specific actions, namely, taking care of a group of children and risking his life for them, did not need to undergo such a shift in meaning in order to be perceived as heroism.

Yet Spiegel refused to think of himself as a hero and disregarded any attempt to glorify his image. In order to understand this we need to adopt for a moment Spiegel's position in the camp, and try to grasp his attitude from that perspective. He had not chosen his role, nor did he plan any of his actions in advance. He constantly had to react to events as they occurred—all this in a place where death was the default outcome of one's choices. Within this context Spiegel did his best to fulfil his duties while trying to make the children's life in the camp as easy as possible. In addition, like the other survivors in Langer's examples, he had a strong will to live. These three components (fulfilling duties, trying to help the children and wanting to survive) did not always coexist in peaceful harmony. For example, taking a twin to experiments did not help make his life easier; telling the twins to lie in order to save their lives was counterproductive for his own survival; and covering for mischievous twins who injured themselves was incompatible his role of providing healthy twins for the experiments. If we carefully observe this cycle of contradictions we can better understand Spiegel's complicated self-perception and his refusal to adopt the terminology of righteousness, heroism and martyrdom.

This was also a generational issue. For the children life in the camp was predominantly a life of fear, horror and experiments but still involved games, togetherness and even laughter occasionally; it was therefore easier for them to idealize it later. For Zvi, who was older and more acutely aware of what was happening it was a time of unimaginable terror and constant stress. He was aware of the potential impact of split-second decisions in a way that the children were not. So they could construct him as a 'hero' while he recalled his actions as those of a man acting on impulse, guided by instinct and not consciously heroic.

¹³⁸ For selected sources dealing with Holocaust representation and its limits, see Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, (London, 1992); Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*; Berel Lang, *Philosophical Witnessing: The Holocaust as Presence* (London, 2009); Michael Bernard-Donals, *Representation and Remembrance in the Wake of the Holocaust* (New York, 2009), and Dan Stone (ed.), *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology* (New York, 2012).

It is likely, then, that even in cases where the gap between the Holocaust's reality and the present world seems bridgeable in vocabulary and representation, this could be misleading, because for the 'hero survivor' the situation was much more complicated. In our case, contrary to Langer's argument, adopting some of the survivors' perceptions (namely, those of the twins) could logically lead us to believe in the innate 'goodness' of people like Spiegel; however, limiting our vision to this layer alone might be counterproductive in our efforts to portray the full picture, as the 'hero' himself confronts us with the complexity, ambiguity and unheroic nature of a place like Auschwitz. In other words, acknowledging the fact that Spiegel chose the 'benign' path as a functionary—as described in this dissertation—does not mean we can bypass the complex process he went through in making that choice (as will be further discussed in the Conclusion).

In summary, the Mengele mock trial had a major impact on the twins' community, the Spiegel boys and Spiegel himself. This was a defining moment where survivors would become witnesses and the bearers of a message. At the same time we need to take into account the fact that in the mock trial and its aftermath, especially during the 1980s, there was one large group of twins that was missing from the gatherings, publications and meetings. These were the twins who had stayed in Hungary after the war and never left the country. Among them were at least seven who had been in Spiegel's group in Birkenau. Their experiences as survivors evolved in a completely different environment, isolated from everything that was happening to their peers in the West.

The Cultural Context: The Case of the Hungarian Twins

Growing up as survivors in Hungary the twins who never left the country had to suppress not only their Holocaust experience but also their Jewishness. As part of the communist takeover of the country in the post-war years, and especially in the Stalinist era from 1948, Jewish communal life was strictly limited and contact with foreign Jewish communities, especially those in the newly established State of Israel, was brought to a virtual end.¹³⁹ Within a short time Judaism and Jewish

¹³⁹ Randolph Braham, 'Hungary', in David S. Wyman (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (London, 1996), 209-10. Between 1945-8 the problems of the 'Jewish question' and the Jewish genocide were in the very centre of Hungarian public debate. This is indicated by the fact that by 1948 hundreds of books, pamphlets and articles

culture became severely restricted. In the face of this anti-Jewish (and, in general, anti-religious) policy of the Communist establishment, many Jews tried to improve their lot by total assimilation. As a result a vast number of young Jews grew up in ignorance of the Holocaust or of their religious and cultural heritage.¹⁴⁰

György Kuhn, who had been in the men's hospital in Birkenau at the age of 11 with his brother Pista, and who had been told by Spiegel to cover up the fact that they were not twins, lived in Székesfehérvár with his father in the 1950s. Kuhn remembers that, while they occasionally talked about the Holocaust with other Jews, with the non-Jews they kept total silence. For example, he mentions the fact that whenever his father went to work he would cover his Auschwitz number with a plaster.¹⁴¹

Later Kuhn established a family and moved to Budapest. As mentioned above, this period (1950s-1970s) was characterized by a repression of Holocaust memory, which was not so much about ignoring the trauma, at least not solely, but rather it was rooted in the need to conceal one's Jewishness. Kuhn did talk about his experience to his wife and daughter quite early but everything he said was confined to the walls of their house, or, in his words, this was their "family secret".¹⁴²

László Kiss, author of the "Auschwitz Diary" who was 17 in Birkenau, repressed his memories as well. Unlike Kuhn, Kiss, who was a university lecturer, claims that he didn't talk about the Holocaust but if someone asked him he did not make a secret out of it.¹⁴³ In practice he barely spoke about his experiences to the outside world, but did communicate about them with his family. Unlike the survivors in the West, Kiss, like others in Hungary, had the option to visit Poland and Auschwitz. In fact, in 1957 he was in Poland on an

were published and plays were performed touching upon the Holocaust. The change that the Stalinist era brought about is evident in the fact that from 1948 to 1958 the Hungarian government prevented the publications of books and studies on the Jewish question and the Jewish persecution and genocide. See, Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology* (Detroit, 1996), 614-17.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 210. For more on the self-definition and identification strategies of Jews in Hungary in the immediate post-war era, see Viktor Karády, "On the Sociology of Social Trauma in Relation to the Persecution of Jews in Hungary", in Judit Molnár, *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European Perspective* (Budapest, 2005), 556-61.

¹⁴¹ Kuhn, interview by the author.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Kiss, interview by the author.

official trip as a university lecturer and he went to Warsaw and Krakow, where he felt so uneasy and depressed that he decided that visiting Auschwitz would be too much for him.¹⁴⁴ A few decades later, in 1976, György Kuhn went on vacation to Krakow with his family and took them all on an emotional visit to Birkenau.¹⁴⁵

Both Kuhn and Kiss had some contact with other twin survivors, especially the Lusztig brothers. György and Bandi (Márton) Lusztig were among the eldest of the 'Spiegel boys' (19) and were the ones who had led the 'Budapest group' back home after their separation at Csap in 1945. After the war the two made their careers in the meat industry, György in Budapest and Bandi in Érd. György kept in touch with László Kiss and György Kuhn during the post-war years. Kiss remembers discussing Auschwitz when they were together. They also talked about the fact that the Lusztigs visited Birkenau after the war while Kiss was reluctant to do so, as mentioned above.¹⁴⁶

Up until this point and approaching the 1980s, when the twins' gatherings and testimonies began on a large scale in the West, we can identify a few differences in the development of Holocaust memory between the Hungarian twins and the Western twins (especially those in Israel and the USA). Firstly, as mentioned above, the Hungarian twins were being socialized in a Communist environment, which resulted in the suppression of their Jewish identity and of the fact that they were Holocaust survivors. Second, and a result of the former factor, the way to preserve one's Jewish identity was often by talking about Holocaust experiences to one's family—it was an instrument to pass on some kind of Jewish heritage. Indeed, a close look at the recollections cited in this thesis reveals that the Hungarian twins talked more about their experiences than the Westerners before the 1980s, albeit only in a private context. Moreover, some of the Hungarian twins met with one another on a regular basis already in the 1950s and 1960s, and some even visited Auschwitz. Such encounters and visits did not take place in Israel or in the USA, at least not among the twins featured in this dissertation.

The final characteristic which was unique to the Hungarian twin survivors (as well as all other Holocaust survivors in the country) was the fact

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. (The site of the concentration camp had been open to visitors since 1947, when Auschwitz-Birkenau was declared a state museum.)

¹⁴⁵ Kuhn, interview by the author.

¹⁴⁶ Kiss, interview by the author.

that during the 1960s and 1970s Hungarian Jews made no efforts to develop a separate, articulated group identity.¹⁴⁷ The Jews who remained in Hungary after the anti-communist revolution of 1956 realized their potential in intellectual professions and middle-class positions in Hungarian society, rather than believing in a communist revolution that would erase once and for all the Jewish question, as some did in the pre-1956 era.¹⁴⁸ This could explain at least partially the reluctance of the Hungarian twins to make their stories public before the 1990s and the fall of the communist regime. While the twins in the USA and Israel were ready to talk and “declare their existence to the world” from the early 1980s, for those in Hungary the traumas of the past remained a private issue, as did Jewish identity as a whole.

As a consequence of the isolation of the Eastern bloc, when the Mengele mock trial took place in 1985 the twins in Hungary had no knowledge of it, nor were they aware of the reunions that followed in its wake. Even though the gradual change in Holocaust awareness and remembrance presented some opportunities for the twins living in Hungary to reunite, these meetings were conducted in a totally different environment and with no aspirations for publicity.

During the 1980s a memorial service for the local Jews who had been murdered in Auschwitz took place annually in the cemetery of Székesfehérvár. A group of six to eight twins from the Spiegel group made it their tradition to stay after the official ceremony on these occasions and to recall their days in Auschwitz.¹⁴⁹ However, this was a sporadic and spontaneous initiative that exemplified the isolation of the Hungarian twins and mainly represented some kind of a continuation of their former relationships rather than a new phenomenon. At the same time, it occurred within a new framework, which indicated their growing need to talk—a process that would ripen about a decade later.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ András Kovács, “The Jewish Question in Contemporary Hungary”, in Randolph L. Braham and Bela Vago (eds.), *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later* (New York, 1985), 219.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 218.

¹⁴⁹ Kiss, interview by the author.

¹⁵⁰ In fact, György Kuhn visited Israel in 1991 and managed to get Spiegel’s phone number. “I called him and a woman answered and said he wasn’t at home. Our stay was coming to an end; we had missed him”, he recalled in his interview by the author. As for

IV. Epilogue

The mock trial brought about a vast change in the position of the twins. Now that their story was public they were constantly in demand for media interviews, testimonies as well as different gatherings and events, including accompanying, as witnesses, youth delegations to Poland. The change was even more apparent in Zvi Spiegel's life, as he was now widely known as the 'twins' father'. Spiegel was interviewed by the eminent historian Martin Gilbert for his book *The Holocaust* and by Robert J. Lifton for his famous work *The Nazi Doctors*, and was featured in numerous TV interviews, newspaper articles and the like.¹⁵¹

Regarding his relationship with the twins, it is interesting to note that Spiegel was quite passive and let every twin determine the nature of his relationship with him. For some, such as the Somogyi and Klein twins, the mock trial was the last time they saw Spiegel. For others—for example, the Taub brothers and the above-mentioned *charedi* twin from New York (whose name I have been unable to find out)—the mock trial marked the beginning of a long-lasting relationship. Spiegel was by then such an established figure in the twins' community that even twins who had not been part of his group began to regularly visit him, as was the case with Menashe Lorenzi, who had been held in the women's camp in Birkenau.¹⁵²

the post-communist era (1989 and onwards) although the Holocaust was more widely discussed there were many efforts to cleanse history by disregarding the Hungarian role in the destruction of local Jewry in addition to focusing on the atrocities of the Communist regime in the country in the post-war era, including drawing a parallel between this regime and the Nazis. For a more detailed discussion, see Randolph L. Braham, "Hungary and the Holocaust: The Nationalist drive to Whitewash the Past", in id. (ed.), *The Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary and Romania During the Post-Communist Era* (New York, 2004), 1-42. See also Muriel Blaive, "The Memory of the Holocaust and of Communist Repression in a Comparative Perspective: The Cases of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic", in Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel and Thomas Lindenberger (eds.), *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust* (Innsbruck, 2011), 165-9.

¹⁵¹ See Gilbert, *Holocaust*, 688, 755, 782, and Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 353.

¹⁵² Spiegel tells of a twin who asked him to declare that he had been part of Spiegel's group, even though he was not on the lists. Spiegel refused, but this shows us that belonging to the Spiegel group had acquired a special meaning by then within the twins' community. See in FVA.

Although it may seem that by this point Spiegel had no reservations about discussing the Holocaust and his experiences, this was not the full picture. After the mock trial there was only one other occasion that he spoke in front of an audience, in his grandson's class. His son stated, moreover, that Spiegel was getting tired of the press interviews, "which had become a burden for him".¹⁵³ Finally, he still had not reached out to the twins' community and was not involved in any future gatherings. Even the personal encounters he had with his twins and others, which deeply touched him, were solely upon the initiative of the twins.

This is not to say that Spiegel was not somewhat relieved by, or even proud of, the general recognition of his role in Birkenau. What it does prove is that part of him was still reluctant to commit to being the carrier of a message as expected of him by the outer world. This was a period when his identity as a Holocaust survivor was predominant in his life, and although he coped with it better than he had expected in his pre-retirement years, he remained emotionally stressed and disturbed at times.

A story related by Spiegel's niece Hanna Moshkowitz exemplifies how complex all of this was for him. Hanna became a group guide for youth delegations to the camps in Poland. Before her first journey she came to talk to Zvi. According to her he would not hear of going back to Auschwitz like some of his twins had. When the two sat down to talk it became apparent that this was an impossible task for Zvi: "He couldn't speak. We both cried for most of the meeting. We didn't say a word," Hanna recalled, and added, "he didn't seem proud, nor was he relieved in my impression."¹⁵⁴ This encounter reflects accurately Spiegel's state of mind in his final years. On the one hand he found it difficult to revisit his memories, but on the other hand he was now willing to share his feelings with others.

Spiegel died on 2 February 1993 of heart failure. Ephraim Reichenberg, who was aged 16 in Birkenau and had lost his voice as a result of the Mengele experiments, wrote a eulogy on behalf of the twins. After detailing Spiegel's deeds in Birkenau and its aftermath, Reichenberg addressed the issue of his legacy: "in that place where human dignity was shattered and the human body

¹⁵³ Israel Spiegel, interview by the author.

¹⁵⁴ Moshkowitz, interview by the author.

was exterminated, they first and foremost aimed at destroying the human spirit. In that place, to take such actions, great courage and nobility were needed. For many Zvi was a hero, but I think that he was just a Human being! In the full sense of the word. Someone who preserved his humanity and honoured his fellow men even in such circumstances. His character has been engraved in our memory for eternity.”

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine three main topics: Zvi Spiegel's evolution as the twins' leader and saviour; the effect that the group framework had upon the twins, both in the camp and in constructing their lives afterwards; and, finally, the impact of Spiegel's role as the twins' leader and a prisoner functionary upon his own life, including the changes that his self-perception underwent within each cultural environment in different periods of his life.

"How we make sense of experience, and what memories we choose to recall and relate (and thus remember), changes over time. Memory hinges around a past-present relation, and involves a constant process of reworking and transforming remembered experience. Thus our remembering changes in relation to shifts in the particular publics in which we live, and as the general public field of representations alters."¹

The above statement by Thomson exemplifies the powerful influence of the time and moment in which an oral account is told, as was the case in this dissertation. In many ways the story of Zvi Spiegel could have been told backwards as the time and moment that the majority of the accounts were recalled was in the past thirty years; thus these sources represent that period as much as they tell the stories of the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath. For this reason the different layers of the findings of this dissertation were uncovered gradually and reached their peak in the later chapters (primarily 5 and 6). In these chapters the interaction between the dimensions of public, community, family and the 'self' of Spiegel proved helpful in evaluating the stories from Auschwitz and the journey through the filters of time, space, culture, politics and discourse. The following conclusion sums up the outcomes of the research, which culminates in an attempt to answer the third question regarding self-representation and memory.

The Evolution of a Benign Functionary within the Camp's Grey Zone

The first question this thesis has tried to answer was: Through what process did Zvi Spiegel evolve into the twins' leader and saviour within the camp's grey zone?

¹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 9.

Zvi Spiegel was raised in a tolerant family in which human warmth, dignity and affection were held in high regard. He was further influenced by his father's strictness and appreciation for order and efficiency. Upon his entering Auschwitz nothing in his prior biography could have predicted the fact that he would stand out among other prisoners. Eventually, he acted within the camp's system and abided by its rules, but in many ways resisted its terrorizing nature. In order to underline Spiegel's unique position, it could be useful to compare him to the more obvious type of resisters, those who were a part of the underground system in Auschwitz or other camps or ghettos.² According to Hermann Langbein, "by resistance we mean an organized activity with far reaching goals".³ There are a few generic characteristics that were shared by the underground resisters operating in the camps: these men and women belonged to a network, were motivated at least partly by political ideals, aimed not only to save people but also to hold up resistance as a value to the outer world; above all, at least on the leadership level, they attributed a historical significance to their deeds.⁴ None of these characteristics can be found in Zvi Spiegel.

Spiegel performed his actions alone and had no network or any kind of framework upon which to rely. Even more significant, he had no political agenda, nor did he perceive himself as a resister against the system. He did not evaluate his deeds and had no conscious plan to save or even ease the twins' lives. And yet he evolved into a benign functionary, ultimately risking his life for others, and was later recognized by a large group of fellow survivors as their helper and saviour. What were the factors that influenced this development?

On the one hand, there were certain external circumstances that played to Spiegel's advantage. The fact that he and the twins were 'protected' by Mengele

² Much has been written on resistance in ghettos and concentration camps. For selected sources, see Herman Langbein, *Against All Odds: Resistance in Nazi Concentration Camps, 1938-1945* (London, 1994); Ruby Rohrlich (ed.), *Resisting the Holocaust* (New York, 1998); Yehuda Bauer, *Jewish Reactions to the Holocaust* (Tel Aviv, 1989); Józef Garliński, *Fighting Auschwitz: The Resistance Movement in the Concentration Camp* (London, 1975); Yitzhak Zukerman, *Those Seven Years: The Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1990), and Arie Bauminger, *The Fighters of the Krakow Ghetto* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1985).

³ Langbein, *Against All Odds*, 52.

⁴ Most notable is the statement by Dolek Libskind, one of the leaders of the Krakow Ghetto Resistance Movement, who, in a meeting in November 1942, said, "we are fighting for three lines in history. Just so that it won't be said that our youth went like 'sheep to slaughter'." See "The Fighting resisters (HahalutzHalohem): The Journal of Jewish Youth in Ghetto Krakow—August-October 1943".

and that he was expected to keep the twins physically safe provided Spiegel a better starting point than other functionaries. It meant that he and the twins were in a relatively better physical condition than other inmates, received slightly larger portions of food, stayed in a less crowded barrack and were exempted from harsh physical work.

But these conditions are not sufficient to account for Spiegel's deeds, as the other functionaries in the twins' barrack were cruel and abusive (although they often restrained themselves). There were a few additional factors, which prove that Spiegel interpreted his job in a much broader way than initially intended by Mengele. First of all, Spiegel did not have to create an educational framework for the twins; his only task was to ensure that they appear, unharmed, at the experiments (to achieve this, he could have simply locked them up in the barrack). Not only did he eventually provide such a framework but he did so without asking for permission, something quite unexpected for a man of his disposition, at least in his early days at Auschwitz. Also, this was probably the first time in his life that he had to work with children; his decision to teach them and play with them was anything but natural.

Secondly, some of his actions, especially saving the Kuhn brothers' lives and leading the twins' home after the war, were in no way related to Mengele's expectations of him. This provides further evidence that at some stage he broadened the scope of his responsibilities well beyond what was expected of him. With these factors in mind, let us now summarize the reasons underlying the shift which ultimately led Spiegel to become the twins' leader and saviour.

At the beginning of my discussion of Spiegel's development into a benign functionary lay an exploration of his formative years. It was in this period that an interesting duality evolved in his character. On the one hand, he was raised in a very tolerant home open to new ideas in the changing world, and within a warm and protective atmosphere. On the other hand, Spiegel was greatly influenced by his father, a strict man, and grew to respect values such as discipline, authority and the fulfilment of one's obligations at the highest level of devotion.

After arriving at Birkenau and upon being appointed as the twins' father, Spiegel's natural response was to perform his duty and obey the authority, in this case Mengele. His initial decision to gather the twins and engage them in some educational activities was a reflection of his organizational skills, as he soon

realized that without such a framework the boys would scatter around and not be available for the experiments. At this point it is important to emphasize that a prerequisite for Spiegel's evolution in a positive direction was his adjustment to the system rather than opposition to it. This adaptability was his initial response, before other values from his formative years—such as tolerance, mutual responsibility, affection and human dignity—came into play. Spiegel grew fond of the twins and unconsciously started to take advantage of the system in order to help them. In other words, the structure he established, which was at first probably crucial for keeping the children under control, later enabled him genuinely to adopt the role of the twins' guardian, to the point where he was willing to risk his life for them on more than one occasion.

Spiegel had no background in education but his two younger brothers were teachers and devoted their lives to their vocation, a fact that might suggest that something in Spiegel's formative years did prepare him for becoming a guardian of children. But in forming the group Spiegel also made use of his army experience, establishing a clear and structured framework which left no doubt among the children as to who was in charge and what the rules were. Within these boundaries he was caring and affectionate towards the twins, allowing them to learn and play and to preserve some semblance of a childhood.

As the familiar framework collapsed during the last days of Nazi rule in Auschwitz, Spiegel became noticeably overwhelmed by the situation and underwent a minor crisis. When he was offered the opportunity to join the marches westwards, he opted to do so and leave the younger twins behind. This point is essential to our understanding of Spiegel. It was not that his values had changed; he would prove this continuity later by taking the twins home. His deep sense of responsibility towards them was undiminished, but when the structured framework collapsed Spiegel didn't respond well to the chaos—to the point that he instinctively chose to escape the difficulties by joining the marches. Eventually he was forced by an SD officer to stay, but until liberation in Auschwitz a few days later, he disappears from the twins' recollections. This shows that he was struggling to adapt to a chaotic situation where there were no boundaries and almost no authority.

The final decision that Spiegel made in the context of Auschwitz was to take the twins home. It is important to acknowledge, as already mentioned

above, that his initial response was to leave with a Czech man whom he had met around that time. It was the twins who asked to join him, confronting Spiegel with a moral dilemma which would eventually come to define his image among the twins—and probably for himself as well. He had now to make an ultimate decision whether to follow his natural inclination and leave or to take full responsibility for the children. As Spiegel was not part of a systematic framework at that stage, he had no one to make the decision for him and had to rely solely upon his own judgment.

On this occasion, above all, he acted on his own volition, by his own choice, with no external pressure; no one told him what to do, there was no constraining structure. Spiegel made an independent decision to accompany the boys' group, with all the values underlying this decision (mutual responsibility and human compassion primarily), and suppressed a dominant side of his nature, that based on obedience and efficiency without the self-perception of a leader. Once he had made the decision he was able to utilize his skills yet again, and, as he has pointed out in his recollections, he prepared the twins for the journey as if they were an army unit.

A few general conclusions may be drawn from all of the above. First, it seems clear that Zvi Spiegel was not a natural communal leader. On the contrary, his instinct was to follow and obey authority. Spiegel could only function within a system, had no political awareness and did not think of himself as a saviour figure. Second, and an outcome of the first observation, Spiegel's choice in Birkenau to perform his duty in a benign manner was not driven by leadership instincts or a motivation to resist the Nazis, but rather from core values that he had retained and that came to the fore in this particular setup. These values included compassion, love and human dignity, rather than the will to oppose an oppressive regime. Third, as long as Spiegel had to make decisions within the context of his role as the twins' father, he linearly evolved as a benign functionary. Once the formal authority collapsed, the situation became too complex for him, which resulted in him intending to leave the children behind.

This leads us to our final point: contrary to our natural inclination to glorify people who played positive roles in the Holocaust, the reality is that they often evolved into helpers. Zvi Spiegel did not arrive in Auschwitz as a righteous human being; he went through a process whereby he had to make certain

decisions in the ever-complicated reality of the camp's grey zone. These decisions revealed a complex picture of Spiegel evolving into a benign functionary but not without his limitations and doubts.

This last observation points to the importance of future research regarding prisoner functionaries who had some power to abuse fellow inmates but chose to negate the norms of the concentration camp and care for others. Unlike the history of the perpetrators, which has been occupying historians as well as scholars from other fields from the immediate post-war era to the present day, the history of helpers and rescuers has not been the subject of broad research.⁵ Since the 1990s and the publication of the landmark book *Ordinary Men* by Christopher Browning⁶ attempts to understand the perpetrators have been focusing more on ordinary individuals than solely on organizations and the higher echelons in the Nazi apparatus.⁷ As part of these efforts historians have started to pose questions regarding the evolution of ordinary people into mass murderers with a view to better understanding the nature of the Holocaust and other instances of genocide. In order to grasp and evaluate the full scale of human behaviour in the Holocaust, scholars of the field ought to attempt in the future to conduct comprehensive and interdisciplinary research (as happened in perpetrators' research) to better understand the evolution of helpers and rescuers at the time.⁸

⁵ There are two noteworthy books that have attempted a comprehensive research regarding altruistic personalities in the Holocaust; see Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York, 1988), and Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (London, 1995).

⁶ See Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York, 1992).

⁷ The early stage of perpetrators research was characterized by a dichotomy of the 'fanatical killers' of the Nazi upper echelons and the ordinary Germans. From the 1960s and especially with the publication of Raul Hilberg's landmark book *The Destruction of European Jews* (London, 1985) and Arendt's *Eichmann In Jerusalem*, the importance of the mid-level functionaries was recognized. The circle was fully closed during the 1990s as the actual 'simple' executors became a subject of broad research. For more about the historiography of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, see Jürgen Matthaus, "Historiography and the Perpetrators of the Holocaust" in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke, 2005), 197-215, and Olaf Jensen and Claus Christian W. Szejnmann, *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 2008).

⁸ Matthaus claims that the pioneer in using different disciplines in analysing the perpetrators' behavior, primarily social psychologists, "who until then had largely been ignored by historians", was Browning, in his book *Ordinary Men*; see Matthaus, "Historiography and the Perpetrators of the Holocaust", 206.

Within this framework the case of benign functionaries in the concentration camps could be especially important, as these people functioned in especially extreme circumstances. Spiegel's case is singular and one would do well to resist the temptation to generalize; but we do know of other benign functionaries who acted alone within the system, saving fellow prisoners.⁹ In the case of Spiegel and Freddy Hirsch (the children's kapo in the Czech Family camp; see Chapter III)¹⁰ these actions were self-motivated and were rooted in their conscience rather than in the will to resist or oppose the Lager system. Looking deeper into the choices, motivations and deeds of other, similar functionaries could be an important contribution to our efforts to better understand the moral complexity of the camps' grey zone specifically and to describing a phenomenon which formed yet another facet of the reality of the camps and the Holocaust in general.

The Implications of a Group Framework in Auschwitz-Birkenau and its Aftermath

The second question which this thesis has attempted to answer was: What were the outcomes and after-effects of an attempt to form a unified group within a concentration and death camp?

According to Shamaï Davidson, the eminent Israeli psychiatrist and an expert on Holocaust trauma, "the formation of a group [in concentration camps] enabled mutual support, mutual protection and sharing . . . the group helped to restore something of the lost sense of communality by creating a sense of belonging, restoring a feeling of identity, and preserving some links with the destroyed community and cultural past."¹¹

Davidson based his assessments on hundreds of interviews he had conducted with Holocaust survivors. The twins' recollections confirm his claims but also underscore the importance of the leader of the group. The formation of group identity was a gradual process in which Spiegel first provided the twins with a sense of belonging and solidarity; this was followed by the development of

⁹ For examples see Langbein, *Against all Odds*, 211-43, where he mentions quite a few cases of functionaries who acted in a benign way. See also Verbal *Escaped From Auschwitz*, 57; Dreyfus, *Il M'appelatit Pikolo*, 38; Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, 88-9; and Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, (1999), 41-2.

¹⁰ For the description of the schooling efforts of Freddy Hirsch, see Keren, "The Family Camp", 433-7; and Plante, "We Didn't Miss a Day", 346-9.

¹¹ Davidson, *Holding on to Humanity*, 135-6.

personal relationships between the individuals. It is important to bear in mind that Spiegel made his educational efforts under extreme circumstances: he was working with a group of around thirty children, most of them aged between 9 and 15, torn out of their former lives, exhausted from the medical experiments and surrounded by an environment of death. The emergence of a unified group with a collective identity and a shared ethos was outstanding but predictable amidst such hardships.

The process of group formation began when Spiegel conceived the idea to teach the boys various subjects, such as history and geography, to keep them occupied. The next step was providing them with some means of playing together, such as cards and a bundle of rags that was used as a football. But it was only after a while that one can identify measures which indicated that Spiegel had made a conscious decision that forming a group based on solidarity and mutual respect could actually be useful for the children, and perhaps for him as well.

The first indication of such an awareness was the fact that Spiegel made the children learn each other's names—a reversal of the policy of anonymity in the camp, where inmates were stripped of their identity and were reduced to the number tattooed on their forearm. The next stage was the arduous process of teaching them to share their food and any other commodities they laid their hands on. It was far from easy to explain to the children why they should follow a different set of values to those common in the camp. Indeed, at first some of them resisted this different moral system but as time went by sharing became common practice and a sense of mutual responsibility prevailed among the twins.

Towards the end of their imprisonment, as liberation was approaching and the initial group framework was collapsing, the tight bonds between the children came into play. The group played an essential role at this stage, fulfilling their need for belonging, human warmth and protection. This can be exemplified by the episode described in Chapter III, when the twins were moved to the main camp in Auschwitz on 25 January 1945. They were not accompanied by Spiegel at this point and had become scattered during the chaotic (and dangerous) march from Birkenau. But upon arriving in Auschwitz they immediately organized themselves in one barrack and revived the group on their own

initiative. At this stage it was still apparent that they were dependent upon Spiegel, as they approached him and begged him to allow them to join him on his journey home. According to the twins' recollections, they—understandably—felt vulnerable and Spiegel was the only adult on whom they could rely, hence their decision to place all their trust in him.

The fact that the twins voluntarily reorganized their group outside the camp's system demonstrates the profound impression that the group had made on its members during their life in the camp. Even more importantly, the connection between the twins did not come to an end there but lasted for years after liberation, as relationships among some of them were still strong.¹² This leads us to the later stage of the post-war period, where two main effects of the group framework and Spiegel's leadership upon the twins' lives may be identified.

The first impact became apparent during the years of relative silence, as described in Chapter V (1950s and 1960s). In those years the twins did tell their stories to their families but with no elaboration and quite reluctantly. Yet the name or figure of Zvi Spiegel already appeared in those recollections. As mentioned by one of the twins' daughters, "The way my father spoke about him brought him closer to me than most of my (murdered) family members." This attachment was also reflected in the efforts of the Almog twins to find Spiegel in the 1950s.

The twins' feelings and behaviour imply that memories of Spiegel and the group represented hope and comfort to them in their anguished recollections of the camp. These memories were only a segment of their dehumanized experience, but they were an important one—especially as they were adolescents who needed a sense of belief in community and human worth in order to reconstruct their lives. These findings concerning the importance of the group for the twins overlap with the psychological evaluations of Holocaust survivors who had experienced group solidarity and mutual support in the

¹² According to Jennifer Goldenberg, who has studied survivors who were adolescents in the Holocaust, "survivors who had no one began to gather together with other survivors, friends they made either during the war or afterwards"; see her article "Post-war Strategies of Adolescent Survivors of the Holocaust", *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 9(1) (March 2009), 21.

concentration camps; their memories of the group accompanied them throughout their life as a sustaining and humanizing influence.¹³

The full magnitude of the group framework, however, was only recognized in the 1980s, when Spiegel made the story public. At that point the twins' efforts to meet him added a new layer to the meaning of the group. It was during their reunion at the mock trial in 1985 (as described in Chapter VI) that the special bond became apparent, gaining further expression in the twins' recollections recorded during the 1990s and up until recent years. But, as mentioned above, it also came to the surface in the interviews given at the time to the American psychologist Nancy Segal and to the Israeli psychiatrist Shamai Davidson. He wrote: "the continuing deep attachment of some 'boys' to their leader was very much evident when they were interviewed by the author forty years later."¹⁴

To summarize, the group framework that Zvi Spiegel established in Birkenau had a lasting impact on the survival and rehabilitation efforts of its members, over thirty child twins. As described, Spiegel and the group formed an essential part of the twins' experience in the camp and in many ways accompanied them throughout their post-war efforts to establish a new life.

There is yet another conclusion that may be drawn from the story of the twins' group, albeit with a degree of caution. Before discussing this final point it is essential to remember that the SS aimed to destroy any potential sense of solidarity among the prisoners in the concentration camps, as mentioned in Chapter III.¹⁵ According to Anna Pawelczynska, one of the main objectives of the Nazis was to shatter the cohesiveness of a prisoner group, thereby creating an environment that was threatening to the inmates from within as well as from without.¹⁶ The process of dehumanization and the deprivation of victims of their identity were the main tools in isolating the inmates and in spreading disbelief in human values and in humanity as a whole.

¹³ Ibid. 141.

¹⁴ Davidson, 133.

¹⁵ For an elaboration of the structure of terror and the efforts to destroy solidarity and unity among the prisoners in concentration camps, see the following books: Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*; Pawelczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz*; Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*; David Rousset, *A World Apart*; Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, and Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.

¹⁶ Ibid. 44.

It is probable that, within the protective environment of the twins' barrack, Spiegel had a better opportunity to create a unified group than anywhere else in the camp. On the other hand, we have no reason to assume that without Spiegel's leadership and social awareness the twins would have established any kind of unified social structure characterized by solidarity and mutual support. They were not isolated from the rest of the camp and, as demonstrated in Chapter III, at times they did attempt to reject the values Spiegel aimed to instil in them. In addition, the female twins were assembled in similar conditions but lacked a leader and never formed a unified group.

The case of Spiegel and the twins' group, then, leads us to the conclusion that, in some circumstances, forming a unified group within Birkenau was an efficient tool for creating a haven, as it were, that would provide, to a limited extent, shelter from the concentration camp's distorted values and gloomy reality. A determined character, Spiegel decided to cultivate an enclave within the camp's hospital, consisting of children who were being taught human worth. Our case could throw light on the general importance of group formation and human relationships in rejecting totalitarian circumstances, and invites further research into the impact of unified groups among inmates of concentration camps or in other forms of oppressive imprisonment.

The Heroic Image and Holocaust Representation

The third question addressed in this thesis was: What were the later implications, in terms of both behaviour and self-representation, of being a survivor of the camp's grey zone and of having been a group leader and saviour? Or, in other words, was Zvi Spiegel free from the complexities of a post-Holocaust self-perception? What was the influence of the external cultural and political context in different periods of his life upon his self-image?

According to Paul Thompson, "the ability to make connections between separated spheres of life is an intrinsic strength of oral history in the development of historical interpretation. In studying the transition from one culture to another, in time, or through migration we can not only look at those cultures separately, but observe the paths that individuals took from one culture

to another . . . escaping from these conceptual boxes can produce strikingly new hypothesis even from a small scale study.”¹⁷

Zvi Spiegel’s post-war life is a powerful example of Thompson’s argument, albeit in a different context. Through the story of Spiegel we are exposed to the immense transitions which took place within Israeli society regarding the Holocaust and its survivors. These transitions were at the heart of the efforts to establish a national identity within the new state. Once we have interwoven Spiegel’s own experiences and perceptions in these transitions, the powerful influences that the cultural context had on a Holocaust survivor, especially a prisoner functionary, come to the fore.

What is even more striking is the fact that, through the path that Spiegel took in self-representation and in recounting his story, we get a clear grasp of his impact, and that of other survivors, upon national memory and identity, and on the changing perception regarding the Holocaust, its survivors, and the complex stories of the functionaries and saviours in the camps. What follows below is a summary of the main junctures which represent the shifts that had occurred in Spiegel’s self-perception, and of the connection of these junctures to the external contexts, as presented in the thesis.

As soon as he separated from the twins in March 1945, Spiegel made a decision to abruptly cut all ties with the children. They continued to write letters to him at least until late 1946, but Spiegel did not respond to them, nor did he visit any of the twins during his short stay in Budapest. This decision, together with the fact that, soon after they were married, his wife could sense that he was reluctant to talk about the Holocaust and was quite disturbed by it, proves that Spiegel wanted to move on at all costs.

Later on in my thesis I focused on Spiegel’s first years in the newly established State of Israel (1950’s). There, the cultural context came into play as the young country was in its first phase of dealing with the memory of the Holocaust. At the same time, survivors frequently accused each other of having been collaborators in the ghettos or camps. These accusations created a delicate situation for the legal system, whose representatives were trying to evaluate deeds that had been performed in an environment unknown to them and where unprecedented atrocities had taken place. The inquiries resulted in the kapo

¹⁷ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 257.

trials and in the Kastner trial, both painful episodes that generated the 'guilt of the survivor' syndrome.¹⁸

For Zvi Spiegel these years were characterized by an urge to move on and repress the experiences of the past. But his attempts to do so seemed unsuccessful: as discussed in Chapter V, he was a troubled man suffering from headaches and worrying he would go mad. When he was discovered by two of his twins in the late 1950s, Spiegel avoided further contact with them and said nothing about the incident to his family. When his wife once mentioned that she had been a prisoner functionary during the Holocaust, he became furious and told her, "this is the last time in your life you've mentioned that fact." In another incident Spiegel said he felt guilty for having assisted in sending a child's skeleton to Germany.

It is likely that Spiegel's apprehensions were fed by both the above factors: the external environment and his inner conscience. First, he was probably genuinely ambivalent regarding his experience in Birkenau. As mentioned above, Spiegel acted within the system, delivering the twins for experiments and contributing to their exposure to the atrocities committed by Mengele specifically and by the Nazi machinery as a whole. Spiegel had to bear the memory of these miserable children, who had abruptly lost their families (as he had) and were in despair regarding their future within the death factory that surrounded them.

As for the second dimension, the public environment, we do not have any oral accounts by Spiegel referring to any of the events. What we do know is that he read *Omer*, the only newspaper to publish extensive reports of the kapo trials, and that he read *Ma'ariv*, where the Kastner affair was widely covered, every day. I have argued that it is reasonable to assume that Spiegel, being exposed to the general atmosphere regarding the question of Jewish functionaries during the Holocaust, could not ignore it and had to live with its consequences, which were agonizing for him.

Spiegel, albeit ambivalent about some aspects of his experience in the camp, was fully aware of his role as the saviour of the twins. This seems evident

¹⁸ For the evolution of the guilt syndrome see Hanna Yablonka, "The development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel". For a full description of the Kastner affair, see Weitz, *The Man who was Murdered Twice*; and for more about the kapo trials, see Ben Naftali and Tuval, "Punishing International Crimes Committed by the Persecuted", 128-78.

as the twins themselves mention their deep affection for him in the letters they wrote in 1945-6, and in the late 1950s the Almog brothers even visited him in order to thank him and to see how he was. And yet he chose to remain silent, even to his wife. Unlike the twins, who told their loved ones about him, he never mentioned them in that period. It seems quite understandable why he felt he was going mad; along with the horrifying memories of the camp came the fear of how he would be perceived by people around him having been a functionary in Birkenau. The paradox here lies in the fact that, unlike many other functionaries, Spiegel was withholding the story of a saviour; it was his heroic deeds that he was unable to talk about. The point of listening to the unspoken in oral accounts was essential in the analysis of Spiegel's story. As suggested by Thomson, "Just as the stories of remembering reveal the particular ways in which a person has composed his or her past, these hidden forms of meaning can reveal experiences and feelings that have been silenced because they could not fit with public norms or with a person's own identity."¹⁹

During the 1960s and 1970s Spiegel was already settled down in his new life. He was an accomplished senior employee of the Kamari Theatre, was in a reasonably good economic situation and had a family he was very proud of. In addition, as a result of the Eichmann trial (1961) and later the Six Day War (1967) and Yom Kippur War (1973), the general attitude towards Holocaust survivors had begun to change among Israelis. Survivors were now among the few communities to enjoy a unanimously positive reputation in Israeli society, and the Holocaust itself was becoming a part of the core Jewish and Israeli identity. Furthermore, the perception of Jewish functionaries had changed as the complexity of their situation was recognized, and the blame was now directed to the perpetrators.²⁰

It was in these circumstances that Zvi Spiegel underwent his transformation period. His encounters with a true Sabra (his new son-in-law) and his apprehensions concerning his retirement indirectly prepared him to tell his story. Then, from the late 1970s until the mid-1980s, Spiegel experienced a rapid change in his situation. He came out with his story, was tracked down by

¹⁹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, 11.

²⁰ For selected literature on the change of attitude towards the survivors, see Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolph Eichmann*, 2001; Shapira, "What Ever Became of 'Negating Exile'?" ; Guri, *Facing the Glass Booth*, and Weitz, "The Holocaust on Trial", 1-26.

some of his twins and was finally reunited with a group of them in the Mengele mock trial in 1985. On this occasion a full closure seems to have been accomplished when Spiegel was publicly recognized as the twins' father, with all that this implied. From then on, until he died in 1993, Spiegel was a well-known figure within the twins' community and was a popular interviewee among scholars and especially the press.

Nevertheless, a close analysis of Spiegel's interviews and of the impressions of his environment leads to the conclusion that the transformation into a pronounced hero was not something he fully welcomed. Spiegel felt quite ambivalent towards the heroic narrative surrounding him. He was obviously relieved that people now recognized his efforts and deeds in Birkenau, but he still didn't perceive himself as a hero or a righteous human being.

Spiegel's attitude has highlighted the unbridgeable gap that separates those who have gone through the experience of the Holocaust from the rest of the world. This gap embodies the limits of representation regarding the Holocaust, which has been discussed frequently by scholars and Holocaust survivors in the past.²¹ Spiegel's case adds a new aspect to this crisis since, as the twins' saviour and leader, his self-perception would be expected to overlap with that of those around him, who had not lived through the Holocaust. This should be even more obvious as the twins themselves never had any reservations about recognizing Spiegel as a hero. One listens to the stories about his heroics without any degree of incomprehension, since helping miserable children in extreme circumstances seems to be the right thing to do and one should be praised for such deeds.

Notwithstanding all that, the hero himself did not fully internalize the narrative. For the reader this may be quite unsettling, as we wish for a full and redemptive closure to the story. But in fact Spiegel's post-war life as a whole, and his reluctance to adopt the heroic self-perception, tell us that Auschwitz cannot and should not be portrayed as a place of redemption, no matter what the case was. Even if one chose to help others, one could not get away from the moral ambiguity, the all-pervasive presence of death and the collapse of human values.

²¹ For selected literature regarding Holocaust representation, see Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*; Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation*; Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, and Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*.

By definition no true heroism could exist in Auschwitz, and the attempts to provide relief in our post-Holocaust world by presenting a redemptive narrative are understandable but stand in the way of our efforts to learn about the event and understand the complex situations faced by people like Spiegel.²²

For our subject matter a close analysis of cases such as Spiegel's and the twins' is essential. We should pay far more attention to accounts of the efforts made by individuals and groups to overcome the hardships of the camp while preserving their human dignity. Furthermore it is crucial to understand what motivated the people in Spiegel's position to help others and save their lives, and to try to draw educational conclusions from their cases. Spiegel did not choose to be in charge of the twins, and he would probably have been murdered had he refused Mengele's order. But once he had been appointed as the twins' father, he did have some room to manoeuvre and decide how to perform his duty. Unlike many Kapos, Spiegel often made choices that were meant to benefit the group rather than solely himself.

But all of this must not mislead us into whitewashing the sombre truth: alongside the efforts to preserve human values were the moral ambiguity of the grey zone, medical experiments, hostile prisoners, selections, gas chambers and corpses. Those rare instances of humane behaviour had nothing to do with glory or redemption, but rather were scant rays of light in a very dark chapter of the history of mankind.

²² For more about the redemptive narrative, which in many ways shaped Holocaust representation among publics in the western world in the past thirty years, see Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler*.

Appendix: The Spiegel Lists

The following appendix attempts to describe the changes that appeared in the second Spiegel list, which apparently contained the names of those who departed with him from Krakow, travelling eastwards. As mentioned in chapter IV, the first list had included thirty-one names; of these people, twenty-five were in the second list as well, continuing with Spiegel on the journey.

As for the question why three pairs of twins did not stay with the group, we have an answer regarding only one of these pairs, the Laufers. After the group's arrival in Długa 38, József Laufer, 15, became seriously ill and was taken to hospital, where he was diagnosed with typhus. His brother István stayed with the group at Długa 38, constantly looking for József in the meantime. When the group departed, he had not been able to locate his brother yet and so decided to stay behind.¹ Eventually István found József and was himself subsequently infected with typhus. The two stayed at the hospital in Krakow for two months and then joined a Romanian transport to Sátoraljaújhely (in northern Hungary, near the Slovakian border) and from there to Budapest. They arrived in Budapest around 24 April 1945, and from there returned home to Székesfehérvár²

The other pairs that split from the group were the Szlomowicz and Frankfurt brothers. The Frankfurt brothers left for the USA in 1946. I have been informed by the CANDLES organization that Leslie Frankfurt still lives in the Washington/Baltimore area but is reluctant to revisit his traumas.³

Although the group had lost six people, the number of those who moved on from Krakow had actually grown to thirty-six. Of the eleven who were not on the list created upon their arrival in Krakow, four people had joined the group on the way to Krakow: Matild and Jern Abraham, Marton Pollack and Mark Herman.

This fact is apparent from the hand-written list Spiegel compiled of the men who had joined them on the way to Krakow, where all four names appear.⁴ As they were adults and not a part of the twins' group, they probably tried to manage on their own in Krakow but later decided to depart with Spiegel and the boys.

¹ J. Laufer, SFI.

² "Account of István and József Laufer", DEGOB, 21 November 1945, Protocol no. 3564;

³ ITS Archive, György Frankfurt, emigration document F-6-2442, 8 Sept. 1949.

⁴ YVA, 0.15H/142, Document no. 15.

In the new list, next to the name of Mark Herman, his prisoner number in Auschwitz is mentioned: A-16338. In the *Auschwitz Chronicle* this number is included in the serial numbers A-16037—A-16535, which were handed out to 500 men who arrived from Hungary on 3 July 1944. These men were taken to one of the auxiliary camps that belonged to Auschwitz III. Another name on the list that has a number next to it is that of Marton Pollack (A-14529). This number was one of those registered in the camp on 15 June 1944.⁵

Regarding the other seven names on the list, I have been able to gather some data about four of them. One was László Kiss, who had managed to escape from a massacre during a death march, lost his brother Bandi in the woods, and arrived later in Krakow with a friend. “There we ran into our thirty-three fellow twins heading home, led by Ernő Spiegel”, he wrote in his diary.⁶ The others were Jacob Feingold, 18, and Andor Stadler, 16, who had twin sisters and had been part of the group in Lager BIIf in Birkenau, and Joseph Eckstein, who had met the group in Auschwitz and later again in Krakow.

To conclude, the profile of the group that left Krakow was slightly different to the original one. Out of the thirty-six group members twenty-eight were twin pairs or individuals who had been born as twins. There were definitely nine pairs of twins among them. Twenty boys were aged 10-15, eight were aged 16-20, three were older than 40 (three of the four people who had joined the group on the way to Krakow), Spiegel was 30, and for four of them we have no data regarding their age. Of the thirty-six, all except one were former Auschwitz prisoners while the last person in the list (name unclear) had been liberated in Rybnik.

⁵ Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle*, 646, 656.

⁶Kiss, "Auschwitz Diary".

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