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LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND POLITICAL SOLIDARITY IN RICHARD GLAZAR'S
TREBLINKA MEMOIR *DIE FALLE MIT DEM GRÜNEN ZAUN*

Richard Glazar was born in Prague in 1920 into a non-religious Czech and German-speaking Jewish family. He was transported to Theresienstadt in September 1942, and a month later from there to the Treblinka extermination camp, where he survived as an 'Arbeitsjude' before escaping during the prisoner revolt of 1 August 1943.¹ After the war, he wrote a testimony in Czech, for which he was unable to find a publisher. Eventually, having settled in Switzerland after the Prague Spring, he produced his own German version of the text, published in 1992 as

¹ 'Arbeitsjude' was the term used by the SS to refer to the Jewish worker-prisoners, and was often adopted by the prisoners themselves, including by Glazar. Historians of Treblinka tend to use this term or other ones considered more neutral (for example, 'jüdische Arbeitskommandos'). The strict division of labour between prisoners such as Glazar, who worked in the 'Lower Camp' sorting the possessions of the Jews arriving on transports, and those who worked in the gas chambers and crematoria of the 'Upper Camp', meant that the camp had a proliferation of terms for the different labour details. Since the success of the camp resistance depended on creating solidarity and unity of purpose between the different prisoner groups, I have chosen to use the term that Glazar uses for the prisoners collectively ('Arbeitsjuden'), despite its origin in the language of the perpetrators.

*Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun.*² The Czech text was published finally in 1994.³ The German-language text begins with a brief account of living in occupied Czechoslovakia and a few words about passing through Theresienstadt, but the bulk is concerned with a detailed description of Treblinka, the structure and operation of the camp, the labour of the Jewish worker-prisoners, the characters of the SS personnel, and above all the preparations for the prisoner revolt. It ends with a description of his escape and perilous journey home via a work detail in Germany, which he survives by passing as a non-Jewish Czech forced labourer.

In her account of the history of the Czech manuscript, Zuzana Jürgens has shown that Glazar used it as a memory aid when giving evidence at post-war trials, to the extent that he was able to cite whole passages verbatim.⁴ Thus, his memory becomes inextricably entwined with the retrospective process of writing and with the necessity to give form and meaning to the experiences. Jürgens shows that Czech critics have had difficulty in discussing a text that claims the authority and authenticity of testimony while at the same time acknowledging its qualities of literary shaping and linguistic sophistication.⁵

² Richard Glazar, *Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun: Überleben in Treblinka* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993). Further references to this text will be made in the main body as *Falle*.

³ Richard Glazar, *Treblinka, Slovo jak z dětské Říkanky* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994).

⁴ Zuzana Jürgens, 'Zeugen und Erben der Geschichte: Der Holocaust in der tschechischen Literatur (Richard Glazar und Jáchym Topol)', in *Nach dem Vergessen: Rekurse auf den Holocaust in Ostmitteleuropa nach 1989*, ed. by Magdalena Marszałek and Alina Molisak (Berlin: Kadmos, 2010), pp. 219–32 (p. 223).

⁵ Jürgens, p. 223.

Expanding on the idea that writing is a means of liberating oneself from trauma, Jürgens shows how Glazar's text refers to and exploits aspects of textual genres associated with life and survival rather than death, with agency rather than passivity, and with the self-assertion of a named individual rather than the unprecedented erasure of the memory of a people.⁶ This leads to a broader point about the kinds of knowledge that testimony texts arising from such an extreme situation make available to us. What knowledge we have about the camp through survivor testimony is dependent on the successful development of the prisoners' political solidarity: the knowledge is not neutral, but is structured by the conditions of the camp and the necessity of resistance. Without the prisoner revolt and a small handful of escapees, we would have practically nothing to go on, but every testimony we have is structured at the level of syntax, imagery, and narrative by the experience of agency, activity, will to live, solidarity, and escape.

Thus, knowledge itself is already a form of resistance, but we are also left with an immense disjunction between the focus and preoccupations of the testimonies and the experiences of the vast majority of the victims: the survivors are the extreme exception to the rule. One of the things that makes texts like Glazar's so difficult is the terrible conflict between the need to construct a first person voice that narrates agency and survival, and the agonizing awareness of the inadequacy of this form of storytelling to grant any kind of access to the experiences of over eight hundred thousand victims, who were killed within an hour or two of arrival. It is the most extreme example I have come across of a chasm between survivor testimony and the experiences of the majority of victims.

This leaves us with specific responsibilities in reading the survivor texts. The reader must always be conscious of the conditions of their production and how their narratives are

⁶ Jürgens, p. 224.

structured by the experience of resistance and active individuality in contrast with the mass of victims, while at the same time never succumbing to the temptation to see these victims as simply passive and anonymous. The description of prisoners' activities and, as I will show in the case of Glazar's text, their identities and language use, are coloured by the overall narrative structure of self-assertion, survival, and resistance.

I am concerned here with Glazar's self-translated German text, which I will read as an original text in its own right. It displays a number of interesting linguistic and stylistic features that allow us to explore issues of language mixing and identity work amongst the prisoners. Language diversity is a small but important feature of his testimony, a level of discourse that acknowledges the linguistic consequences of mass deportation and concentration of people from across Europe in the confined space of the camp.

One of the features of Holocaust testimonies, in whatever form, is that they tend to gloss over the linguistic variety and hybridity of the ways in which concentration camp inmates communicated.⁷ Drawing on Primo Levi's comments about the creation of a new language in Auschwitz, scholars have tried to recreate the mode of communication that is often referred to as 'Lagersprache', a hybrid form of speech that arose in a situation in which multinational and multilingual populations were concentrated in small spaces and subject to the imposition of specific linguistic norms.⁸ German was the language of administration and command, and,

⁷ Recent research has begun to address this gap in our knowledge: *Interpreting in Nazi Concentration Camps*, ed. by Michaela Wolf (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

⁸ Zaia Alexander, 'Lagersprache through the lens of Primo Levi's essay on translation: "Tradurre ed essere tradotti"', in *Interpreting in Nazi Concentration Camps*, ed. by Michaela Wolf (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 79–86; David Gramling, 'An Other Unspeakability: Levi and Lagersprache', *New German Critique*, 39.3 (2012), 165–87.

depending on the camp, specific victim languages (for example Polish or Yiddish) predominated among particular groups of inmates. Hybrid languages arose as a means of communication, but also as a way of talking about situations and events that had no equivalent in life outside the camp. After liberation, testimonies would for the most part be written or spoken in a standard, national language, reflecting publication priorities, the languages of the justice systems, and the desire to communicate with broader audiences. Thus, the variety of hybrid modes of speech in the camp system is concealed in the effort to communicate, and something of the radicalness of the Nazi assault on language and identity is lost, as well as a sense of the linguistic strategies employed by the prisoners themselves in resistance.

No retrospectively composed testimony can recreate this linguistic situation entirely, and most do not try. They are not composed in a language that reflects the prisoners' hybrid forms of communication and the linguistic forms through which the experiences were shared with their fellows, but instead, in Alan Rosen's words, in a 'medium that is intact', rather than fragmentary, namely the prestigious languages of education and publishing in the nation-states reconstituting themselves after the war: 'What one sees (or reads) then is the Holocaust filtered through civilized discourse, the Holocaust as it were, according to the coherence of a single cultured tongue.'⁹ This retrospective composition means that the testimony is framed by the assumptions and modes of expression of the linguistic and cultural context of its formulation, so there is an extra layer or layers of meaning-making present in the text.

Some texts do contain hints or traces of multilingualism or hybridity, and reading for these features — whether direct citation of a language different to the main language of narration, or the presence of idioms, unusual syntax, or vocabulary that indicate the influence

⁹ Alan Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance: The Holocaust, Multilingualism, and the Problem of English* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 6.

of other languages — can give us at least an impression of the communicative situation and the strategies employed by the prisoners. One has to be careful when discussing testimonies as historical records of multilingualism and translation processes, though, as the retrospective shaping of the testimony in its writing means that references to language diversity are also deliberate narrative strategies, rather than simple reminiscences.¹⁰

Glazar's text illustrates a specific situation: groups whose roots lie in the linguistic world of Austria-Hungary are being transplanted via Theresienstadt to the different world of north-central European, Yiddish- and Polish-speaking Jewry. This causes tension amongst the Jewish prisoners, as many of the SS are Austrians or Sudeten Germans and speak in an identifiably similar way to prisoners like Glazar, whereas the 'Ukrainian' or 'volksdeutsch' SS auxiliaries share cultural coordinates with the Polish Jews: the prisoners display prejudices towards each other arising from these cultural distinctions and the associated stereotypes, and the text documents the strategies they employ to overcome them.

Glazar's German text is unusually complex in the way it handles the multilingualism of the inmates. Speakers are identified through the languages they speak and the way they produce hybrid forms in particular situations, power structures and resistance to them are communicated through specific forms of speech, and conflicts between different victim groups and their developing solidarity are characterized through multilingual and hybrid speech. The text characterizes a variety of different groups that interact within and beyond the spaces of the camp: the different specialist prisoner work details, the German and Austrian SS, the SS auxiliaries, and the Polish resistance, black market traders, and other civilians in the surrounding area. The Jewish prisoners come from a number of different countries and backgrounds, but Glazar's text divides them into two distinct groups: Polish and Soviet Jews,

¹⁰ A different perspective is taken in sociological-historical studies of translation and interpreting in concentration camps (such as Wolf, *Interpreting in Concentration Camps*, cited above), which rely on testimonies as historical sources.

whose common linguistic reference point is Yiddish, and those, such as Glazar, who have been transported to Treblinka via Theresienstadt, and whose cultural world is Czech and Austro-German.

Glazar's rendering of the prisoners' multilingualism in the text is structured by a specific political narrative of increasing solidarity and unity, overcoming differences and crossing cultural boundaries in order to create the conditions for resistance and revolt. For this reason, the portrait of the linguistic situation in the camp is determined by the direction of the narrative, starting with a situation of incomprehension and hostility between the prisoners, reflected in their language use, and culminating in the creation of a new, hybrid language in which they are able to talk about their situation and plan their resistance. For this reason, one should be careful when using the text as a source for understanding the linguistic situation in the camp, as Glazar's picture of it is a retrospective construction of his narrative and political position; but even with this in mind, the text gives us a remarkable insight into the dynamics of communication between the SS, the auxiliaries, and the prisoners themselves, and into the ways in which power was exercised and resisted in and through language.

After a brief historical introduction to the Treblinka camp and the survivor testimonies, I will concentrate on three aspects of Glazar's exploration of multilingualism in his text: how judgments about language are connected with judgments about identity; how the Jewish inmates respond through parodic performance to the hegemonic German of the SS; and how linguistic hybridity accompanies the developing solidarity of the prisoners in the preparation of the revolt.

Testimonies from Treblinka

The *Aktion Reinhard* camps represent perhaps the most extreme test case of the possibility or impossibility of victim testimony to bear witness to acts of atrocity. In the three extermination camps normally grouped under this label (Belżec, Sobibór, Treblinka), approximately one and a half million Jews, plus smaller numbers of other victim groups, were murdered between October 1941 and November 1943.¹¹ That number is itself impossible to process, but other numbers seem easier: estimates vary, but from all three camps between one hundred and one hundred and forty victims survived. We can imagine this number of people in a room together, but set against the number of those who were killed, it is smaller by such an order of magnitude that it seems to intensify the sense of incongruity between what can be known and what cannot.

By contrast with the Auschwitz complex — with its relatively large number of survivors, its easy accessibility to visitors, the number and variety of testimonies and the extent of other documentary and physical evidence, its politically committed survivor organisations, its high profile international commemoration, and its history of international public debate and occasional scandal — the *Aktion Reinhard* camps seem hard to grasp in any meaningful way. Limited documentation and physical remains and a small number of testimonies are almost all that we have to help us to understand these camps, their history and operation, and the experiences of the innumerable victims.

Of these three camps, Treblinka is the best known and documented, with the largest number of testimonies by survivors and other witnesses, and with an established memorial and

¹¹ On the ‘Reinhard’ camps, see Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); *Der Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, 9 vols (Munich: Beck, 2005-2014), VIII (2008): *Riga-Kaiserwald, Warschau, Vaivara, Kauen (Kaunas), Płaszów, Kulmhof/Chełmno, Belżec, Sobibór, Treblinka*, ed. by Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel.

visitor centre.¹² Recent archaeological excavations have added to our knowledge of the development of the physical spaces of the camp and the material culture of the prisoners and personnel.¹³ Nevertheless, the attempt by the SS to destroy or conceal all traces of the camp once its operations were wound up in the autumn of 1943 means that we are dependent on testimony by former prisoners and other eyewitnesses.

The nearby forced labour camp, often referred to as Treblinka I, continued in operation until the summer of 1944, when the Red Army arrived. Its history is different, as was its size and the structure of its prisoner population (to a large extent Jewish and non-Jewish Polish civilians, with smaller numbers from other nationalities) and the chances of survival: of approximately twenty thousand prisoners over the three years of its operation, about half survived. This in itself is an appalling statistic, but this discussion is concerned with the extermination camp, Treblinka II, in which upwards of eight hundred thousand Jews were killed between July 1942 and October 1943. Considering the immense number of victims, the camp staff was small: thirty to forty German and Austrian SS and around one hundred auxiliaries, mostly collaborating Ukrainians, Balts, or Soviet ‘Volksdeutsche’, many of whom were former Soviet POWs who had been offered the opportunity to serve as guards: their status was thus subordinate to the SS. They were usually referred to collectively by the prisoners as ‘Ukrainians’ or ‘Trawniki’, after the training camp near Lublin where they had received instruction; victim testimonies often refer to them as exceptionally brutal and corrupt.

¹² Witold Chrostowski, *Extermination Camp Treblinka* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004); Chris Webb and Michal Chocholatý, *The Treblinka Death Camp: History, Biographies, Remembrance* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2014).

¹³ See Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions* (Cham: Springer, 2015).

About seventy prisoners survived, and the testimonies of a small number of them — for example, texts by Yankiel Wiernik, Chil Rajchman, Samuel Willenberg, and the subject of this essay, Richard Glazar — form the core of our knowledge about the camp, the killing processes, and the prisoners’ resistance and revolt on 2 August 1943.¹⁴ Some eye witness accounts by escapees were collected in the ‘OyNEG Shabbos’ archive in the Warsaw Ghetto¹⁵ while the camp was still in operation, while other survivors gave testimony at post-war trials of SS personnel, and others wrote or spoke about their experiences, drew plans of the camp, produced artworks, or wrote extended autobiographical accounts. Their works are in Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew, Czech, and German, and have been translated, mediated, excerpted, anthologized, and republished on multiple occasions. Interviews with two survivors, Richard Glazar and the ‘Barber of Treblinka’, Abraham Bomba, were included in Claude Lanzmann’s

¹⁴ Yankiel Wiernik, *Rok w Treblince / A Year in Treblinka* (Warsaw: Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, 2003); Chil Rajchman, *The Last Jew of Treblinka: A Survivor’s Memory 1942-1943*, trans. by Solon Beinfeld (Pegasus Books, 2012); Samuel Willenberg, *Surviving Treblinka*, ed. by Władysław Bartoszewski, trans. by Naftali Greenwood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). Further testimonies have been collected in Alexander Donat, *The Death Camp Treblinka: A Documentary* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979).

¹⁵ The documentation collected by Emanuel Ringelblum and the OyNEG Shabbos archivists is collected in *Archiwum Ringelbluma: Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, 34 vols (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny / Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2013), XIII: *Ostatnim Etapem Przesiedlenia jest Śmierć. Pomiechówek, Chełmno nad Nerem, Treblinka*. A selection of documents in English translation can be found in Joseph Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor! Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives ‘O.S.’ (‘OyNEG Shabbath’)* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1986).

film *Shoah* (1985), testimonies which Lanzmann contrasts with his secretly filmed conversation with the SS officer Franz Suchomel, who had served at Treblinka.¹⁶ Gitta Sereny's book about the former commandant Franz Stangl, *Into that Darkness* (1974) is another important contribution to knowledge.¹⁷

These precious testimonies are the foundations of our knowledge about the camp, and of the evidence we have to set against the attempt by the SS to conceal the crime, as well as the legacy of this cover up in post-war Holocaust denial. As such, they have for the most part been employed as historical documents, and have been read using methods that extract corroborable evidence from them or treat them as objectively reliable eyewitness testimony.¹⁸ This is all the more important given that the evidence left by the perpetrators, whether in the form of contemporary administrative documents or trial testimony, is partial and slanted, concealing as much as it reveals. Nevertheless, employing the texts as historical documents neglects other kinds of reading that are less concerned with consolidating historical fact than with revealing other kinds of knowledge that may be hidden below the surface. This essay will consider one such issue, namely the way a survivor text deals with the multilingualism of the prisoners, the communication situation in the camp, and the overcoming of mutual suspicion in the name of solidarity and resistance.

Language and Identity

¹⁶ Glazar's own interview in *Shoah*, held in part on a terrace overlooking the Rhine at Basel, a setting charged with symbolism, has attracted less critical attention than Bomba's.

¹⁷ Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (London: Deutsch, 1974).

¹⁸ For example, Webb and Chocholatý, *The Treblinka Death Camp*.

Glazar's written German is still inflected with the Austro-German usage that reflects his bilingual upbringing in Prague, though he does not emphasize this when directly quoting his own German speech or rendering his conversations with fellow prisoners in Czech into German. However, Austrianisms like 'fesch' are used to describe the appearance of the 'Arbeitsjuden' with their clothes stolen from the dead (*Falle*, p. 24): a layer of irony that I will return to. The German-speaking Jew whose speech is most thoroughly characterized in terms of his place of origin is Glazar's fellow Prager, Hans Freund, whose language Glazar describes as 'Prager Dajtsch' and a 'Böhmakeln' that even other German speakers cannot easily understand. Freund is also the focus of many of the conflicts between the Bohemian Jews and their Polish and Soviet counterparts; he is argumentative, articulating criticisms of the Polish 'Ostjuden' as 'Schieber' and 'Betrüger' (*Falle*, p. 86) who are no better than their non-Jewish compatriots. The characterization of this figure allows Glazar to define aspects of his own identity and difference from the other Jews, while at the same time distancing himself from certain kinds of prejudice and opening a door to an exploration of neglected aspects of his own Jewish upbringing.

Glazar and Freund have roots in the same German-speaking world as many of the SS men, some of whom are characterized through their speech and manners, such as the Sudeten German Karl Seidel, whom Glazar describes ironically as a fellow 'Landsmann' of himself and Freund (*Falle*, p. 56). To an extent, the German of the *Aktion Reinhard* camps — the spoken language of the SS personnel, rather than the bureaucratic language of official documentation — was Austrian-inflected, with many of the higher-ranking officers belonging to that close-knit group of Austrians gathered round the Triestine protégé of Himmler, Odilo Globocnik,

and which included two commandants of Treblinka, Irmfried Eberl and Franz Stangl.¹⁹ For this reason, Glazar's German is not available as a resource for resistance, but is instead compromised by its closeness to the language of the perpetrators. This explains his resort to irony in his use of words like 'fesch' or his description of Seidel as a 'Landsmann': it is a form of irony that expresses a striving for distance without being able to achieve it.

The fact that Glazar and Freund do not speak Yiddish, are unfamiliar with the Jewish prayers and rituals, and come from highly assimilated backgrounds, attracts the contemptuous label 'jeckes' from their Yiddish-speaking fellow prisoners. Unlike theirs, Freund's language is clearly influenced by the Christian context in which he has lived: when the Polish Jews start to sing the prayer Shema Yisroel, the central affirmation of Jewish faith, before the backdrop of corpses being burnt, Freund exclaims 'Jes Marja, sie sind drauf eingestellt, sie haben sogar für das Verbrennen einen Song!' (*Falle*, p. 36). This mutual contempt, expressed in tellingly sarcastic language on both sides, is at the root of the conflict that has to be overcome before the revolt can succeed: do the Yiddish-speaking Polish Jews possess a more 'authentic' identity than the Bohemian and German counterparts, or are they backward and passive, preferring to lament rather than act? Do the two groups actually have any common ground, or are they both too influenced by their stereotypical view of the other?

On his arrival in the camp, the disorientation felt by Glazar's autobiographical narrator at the scene of extreme and incomprehensible violence is compounded by his inability to communicate effectively with the members of the work detail that he is assigned to and on

¹⁹ Many of these men had met and collaborated in the euthanasia institutions within the Reich, and were transferred together to the *Aktion Reinhardt* camps: see Sara Berger, *Experten der Vernichtung: Das T4-Reinhardt-Netzwerk in den Lagern Belzec, Sobibor und Treblinka* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013).

whom he will depend for his survival. His first instructions are issued by a Kapo in a Yiddish that he doesn't understand; the first word of a prisoner that we read in the text is 'tojt' (tot), when Glazar asks what has happened to the other members of the transport he arrived with (*Falle*, p. 12). The Kapo then begins to Germanize his Yiddish so that Glazar, and his reader, can understand: 'Irgendwie hat er das, was er spricht, dem Deutschen angepasst. Viele Worte verstehe ich, den Rest denke ich mir hinzu' (*Falle*, p. 13). So Glazar's rendering of Yiddish in this text is always a compromise with German, reflecting on the page something of his conflicted identity.

Glazar records the Polish Jews' use of language in a way that suggests that specific experiences or attitudes can only be described using Yiddish. For example, the terms 'jüdische Mojre' (Jewish fear, *Falle*, p. 92) is used to suggest that there is a specific, ingrained experience of subservience in the face of persecution that has to be overcome, and the repetition of the word 'tojt' in speech suggests that the killings involve more than the deaths of individuals, but also the annihilation of a culture and the linguistic means of talking about this experience.

The Polish Jews see the German and Austrian Jews as a privileged but inauthentic group that can't decide whether they are Germans or Jews. Glazar reproduces this distinction in his use of language, for examples referring to the Berliner Kapo Mannes as 'one of us', identifying himself with a group who do not fit a clear category:

Niemand würde glauben, dass die metallene scheppernde Stimme einer so kleinen Gestalt gehört, dass dieses Berliner Deutsch von keinem SS-Mann, sondern von einem der drei Unseren kommt, die für die SS deutsche Juden und für die Ärmsten hier jüdische Deutsche sind. (*Falle*, p. 44)

Mannes is described as trying to organize a column of labourers into a proper marching formation, in order to protect them from assault by the SS guards, but the Polish Jew Adrian reacts to this compromise with the perpetrators with contempt: ‘Oj, Kapo Mannes, was biste für a’ Jid. Dajtscher Jid biste? Jiddischer Dajtsche? Eh Jecke biste!’ (*Falle*, p. 44).

The Polish Jews also play up to their reputation as thieves and smugglers: Glazar occasionally uses Yiddish-inflected phrases to render their speech, in a cynical parody of anti-Semitic assumptions about Jewish cowardice and greed. For example, a Jew called Willinger is shown praising the plunder of rich transports to the extermination camp in terms of a desirable lifestyle choice: ‘Wozu ein Haus, ein Grundstück — bei uns immer etwas, was du schnell mitnehmen könntest. Eppes kla’nes in die Tasch nei’ (*Falle*, p. 73). At moments like these, it is hard to tell whether Glazar is recording his own prejudice and disgust at Willinger’s cynicism through a contemptuous parody of Yiddish speech, or whether Willinger is responding to an impossible situation through a parodic performance of anti-Semitic assumptions.

A key to understanding this issue can be found in Glazar’s portrayal of Hans Freund, who expresses explicit prejudices against ‘Ostjuden’, their language, and their manners. In his characterization of Freund, Glazar distances himself from negative attitudes towards the Polish Jews: Freund represents the side of himself that has to be overcome in order to develop the political solidarity that is necessary for the revolt to succeed. An argument between Freund and a group of Polish Jews summarizes the conflict and mutual incomprehension that needs to be resolved, but also raises the issue of Jews adopting anti-Semitic attitudes from the oppressors. The argument breaks out over a trivial but telling issue to do with the meaning of ‘civilized’ manners in this place of death. Freund loses patience with the way the Polish Jews eat the food left behind by Jews who have been murdered:

‘Herrgott, hört schon auf mit der Fresserei!’ [...] ‘Co tie to obchodi, Chonsa²⁰ — was geht dich das an, Hans?’, kommt die Antwort von der Pritsche auf Polnisch. ‘Es geht mich an, und zwar sehr, kann euch nicht mehr anschauen, wie ihr da schon ‘ne ganze Stunde fressst.’ — ‘Noo, bist doch in Treblinka,’ der übliche Spruch. — ‘Jesusmaria, müsst doch nicht wie das Vieh,’ Hans bekommt rote Flecken an den Wangen. ‘Jesusmaria...’ ahmt jemand spöttisch das Fluchen von Hans nach, ‘... was ist das für a Jidd, wie ist er nach Treblinka gelangt?’ Andere schließen sich an: ‘Ja, ja — ist Eppes Besseres — a intelligenter Czech — und macht das auch, auf intelligente Weise.’

‘Ihr Bande — dreckige, polnische!’ says Freund in response, ‘Ich hass euch, wenn ihr es also wissen wollt, so wie ich die dort hasse, für alle eure Drehs, Mogeleyen...’ The reply is, ‘Jud Antisemit — hält es mit den Dajtschen!’ (*Falle*, p. 99).

Irony and Sarcasm

The text sets up a situation in which the inmates are divided into two hostile groups, both identified using linguistic markers that are refracted through Glazar’s narrator’s own language: one that is identified with the Polish-Ukrainian-Russian space, and looked down on as little better than criminals, and another that is identified with the German-speaking world, and considered to have abandoned its Jewish roots. On one level, this text sets up a conflict between

²⁰ This is Glazar’s spelling of the Polish phrase ‘Co cię to obchodzi?’ (What do you care?). Glazar’s spelling of Polish in this text is often phonetic, affected by Czech orthography, in the same way that he renders Yiddish using German spelling rules. I will not point out these issues every time they occur.

two different central European cultural spaces and explores the conflicted situation of the respective Jewish communities, which they bring with them to Treblinka.

Nevertheless, there are two ways that the Jewish prisoners find to differentiate themselves from the perpetrators and to find common ground that they can work with: firstly, through parody, performance, and sarcasm, and secondly, through developing hybrid linguistic forms. The Jews' sarcasm — the deliberate undermining and parody of the language and gestures of the SS — is the response of the subaltern to the hegemonic language of the oppressor. This sarcasm is qualitatively different to a form of irony associated with the SS auxiliaries, who deal with their disorientation through drink and a melancholic longing for home, expressed in folksong:

Das trunkene Gejohle eines in der Dunkelheit nicht sichtbaren ukrainischen Wachmanns irgendwo nahe dem grünen Stacheldrahtzaun geht in eine schleppende Melodie über: '... w podweczer my hulali, Natascha cilowala mene — in der Abenddämmerung schlenderten wir, da küsste und küsste mich Natascha...' (*Falle*, p. 98)

This parody of a romantic cliché — the distant singing in the twilight of a romantic song about kissing in the twilight, with layers of distance, longing, and mourning for loss — is entirely incongruous here. The 'Ukrainians' are trying to preserve something pure in the face of Treblinka, unable to acknowledge that there is nothing that the camp has left uncorrupted: the perpetrators' desire to preserve a sense of 'inner distance' is not an act of resistance to the Holocaust, but what makes it possible in the first place.

The victims' irony is more self-aware, an active response to a situation in which structures of power and oppression are enacted in language, and where there is no space for uncorrupted speech. Treblinka is a world of euphemisms and cynicism, with everyday words

(‘Schlauch’, ‘Dusche’, ‘Frisierstube’, ‘Lazarett’, *Falle*, p. 17-18) applied to parts of the murder machinery, even the name of the camp sounding friendly (*Falle*, p. 25). Almost everything that happens is described in a tone of aggressive sarcasm, from the SS guards’ commentaries on the prisoners’ actions, appearance, and manner to the arguments between the prisoners themselves. Glazar himself refers to his fellow ‘Arbeitsjuden’ as ‘kecke Jungs aus dem Reich des Verderbens und des Todes’ (*Falle*, p. 31), kitted out in the best clothes of the murdered victims. His use of the word ‘fesch’ to describe the appearance of the SS men is a way of coping through irony with the problem created by their common Austro-German heritage: ‘[Kurt] Franz ist vom Beruf Koch, von der Anlage her ein fescher Chefkoch’ (*Falle*, p. 53).

The figure of the ‘Scheißkapo’ epitomizes the situation that the Jewish prisoners find themselves in. One prisoner is selected for duty, timing the others in the latrines, ostensibly so that they cannot conceal conspiratorial conversations. But the SS guards create a figure who embodies their contemptuous view of the victims, and who stands guard over them. The prisoner they choose is nicknamed Tölpel, and is the individual who is least able to ape the guards’ military manners. Glazar shows that the inability or unwillingness of the Jewish prisoners to march or stand to attention, in other words, the way they embody for the SS Jewish physical weakness and disrespect towards German ideals of manhood, is especially likely to bring out the guards’ sadism. Here, a prisoner named Mosche is beaten for his inability (or unwillingness) to march in military style:

Die SS-Männer, die Deutschen, militärisch gedrillt, bringt diese Unfähigkeit zu einer geordneten, disziplinierten Bewegung bis zur Besinnungslosigkeit auf. Das sieht doch aus, als ob dieser Mosche, irgendwo von Rembertow, wie er da hüpfte statt einem echten Laufschrift, sich über das alles lustig macht. (*Falle*, p. 81)

The SS perceive this performance as a parody, but it is an enforced parody: Mosche has no choice but to adopt an attitude that ridicules the manners of the powerful, because the SS cannot see him in any other way. In exercising overwhelming power over the bodies of the inmates and the language used to define them, they create the figures that mock them.

The ‘Scheißkapo’ is the epitome of this form of victimization:

‘Lalka’ [= Kurt Franz]²¹ sucht sich Tölpel aus, ein kleines Kerlchen, in dessen Glatzkopf vielleicht nicht mehr alles in Ordnung ist. Lalka mustert ihn, wie er vor ihm geduckt in Hab-Acht-Stellung steht, die Hosen an seinen verkrümmten Beinen ausgebeult. ‘Ja, du bist der Richtige.’ (*Falle*, p. 123)

He is dressed by the SS in clothes looted from a prisoner transport in a grotesque parody of a synagogue cantor, with a long black kaftan and fur hat with a silver crescent moon on it, with a whip in one hand and a heavy alarm clock hung around his neck (*Falle*, p. 123). He speaks in a mixture of Yiddish, Polish and German — though many of the features of the German, and some spelling that reflects his Czech — come from Glazar’s German narrative and his attempt to orientate his reader:

No jazda, wychodzic — los, raus! Panie, pan już tu siedzi więcej jak dve minuty — mein Herr, du hockst hier schon länger als zwei Minuten — Mosche, wenn der Lalka kimmt [...] So schießt, Chaverim — Freunde, aber ihr seid hier schon zu viele. Kuba, gaj rojs — geh raus

²¹ SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Franz, who eventually replaced Franz Stangl as camp commandant in August 1943 after the prisoner revolt, and oversaw the demolition of the camp, was nicknamed by the inmates ‘Doll’ (Polish: ‘Lalka’).

oder lass mich 'ne Papirosa drehen! Hast kein Tabak? Dann musst du raus. A' besserer Gast.
(*Falle*, p. 124)

This linguistic performance, from the mouth of a character driven half mad by the situation and dressed in a manner that pushes to an extreme the Nazi caricature of Jewishness, seems to be the ultimate expression of hopelessness and acceptance of the oppressor's power.²²

However, the prisoners also exploit the oppressive, defining gaze of the SS as a way of developing resistance strategies. They perform in ways that the SS expect of them; in order to survive, they adopt the characteristics of anti-Semitic caricature. For example, when a humane Kapo pretends to beat a prisoner, the prisoner performs an exaggerated parody of cringing cowardice: 'Oj, ojoj, oj mir, Herr Chef' (*Falle*, p. 100). Hans Freund plays the obsequious Jewish shopkeeper, exaggerating his Prague accent and servile manners:

²² Other survivors have described this figure, an image of humiliation and degradation of Jewish identity that stands as an emblem of the operation of power in the camp. Yankiel Wiernik states that his name was Julian, and refers to him as the 'Scheissmeister' [sic] rather than 'Scheißkapo'. Wiernik's portrait is more sympathetic than Glazar's, describing Julian as a 'poised and quiet man', who had once been a factory owner (Wiernik, p. 37). A different portrait is provided by Samuel Willenberg, who created a striking sculpture depicting the 'Scheissmeister' raging defiantly against God, rather than as the embodiment of defeat that he appears to be in Glazar's and Wiernik's texts. An image of the sculpture, and an interview with Willenberg about it, can be found here: <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/interviews/willenberg.html> (last accessed 20 February 2018).

Heute kriegen sie alles gratis. Persianer, Biber, Bisam, alles für die SS-Gnä'frau und für die Nutten auch. Wer kann schon heute in Großdeutschland mit der Firma Hans Freund, Damenmäntel, Treblinka, konkurrieren? [...] Jawohl, Herr Unterscharrfirra, Breitschwanzlperrisian. (*Falle*, p. 57-58)

In particular with the Polish Jews, Glazar comes close to rendering the prisoners' voices in terms of a clichéd 'Judenjargon', rather than showing sensitivity to their speech. But Glazar's text seems to me to be doing something different: showing how a form of resistance develops through language use, in a situation in which there is little option but to respond to the language and assumptions of the oppressor in order to survive and create spaces for communication and resistance. Through this specific form of sarcastic appropriation of cliché, the prisoners open spaces for communication and ultimately resistance within and against the all-encompassing language of power in the camp: it is not independent or outside the structure of power, and is in itself a product of the oppressor's power to define, but it offers a mask allowing the prisoners to develop agency, solidarity, and a shared identity.

Language hybridity

There are other opportunities for resistance too: where the identity parodies provide a disguise, the language mixing makes available a means of communication created by the prisoners on their own terms, and which reflects and enables the process of overcoming conflict and developing solidarity. The SS auxiliary guards themselves speak and issue orders to the prisoners in a striking hybrid language: when an SS man orders the prisoners in German to sing a song ('Singen, ein Lied!') the auxiliaries take up the command and articulate it in a speech of mixed linguistic elements and obscenities:

[D]en Befehl zum Singen übernehmen die Wachmänner in Schwarz von den grünscharzen und grüngrauen SS-Männern und dehnen ihn johlend aus: ‘Singeen dawaj, job twoju mat, los, ficke deine Mutter szpiewaj, kurwa twoja matj, singe, Hurensohn!’ Vom Ukrainischen geht das Gejohle ins Polnische über. Die Kapos und die Vorarbeiter mit gelben Armbinden heulen und hüpfen neben ihren Kolonnen her. (*Falle*, p. 43)

What Glazar here calls Ukrainian is in fact Russian; this misnaming presumably arises from the prisoners’ tendency to use the word ‘Ukrainian’ for all of the SS auxiliaries. This passage gives us an image of a grotesque carnival procession, with the German voice of authority triggering an outburst of carnivalesque violence expressed and transmitted in many languages. In this passage, Glazar depicts a multilingual performance that demonstrates in exemplary form the power dynamics of the German occupation of multilingual Central Europe.

In response, the prisoners themselves begin to speak in a ‘Gemisch aus slawischen Sprachen’ (*Falle*, p. 58), mingling Czech, Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian, creating their own means of expression appropriate to the situation, filled with obscenities and sarcasm like the speech of the ‘Ukrainians’, but also with expressions of solidarity: for example, when the preparations for the uprising are being made, the words ‘Przyjaciele, Chaverim, Freunde’ are used to address the assembled fighters (*Falle*, p. 136).²³ The resisters begin to use the

²³ The Polish, Yiddish, and German words for ‘friends’ have different connotations in this context: in particular, the Yiddish ‘Chaverim’, with connotations of ‘comrades’, connects the Treblinka resistance to the political solidarity of the Left Zionist groups that formed the nucleus of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance, many of whose members had been deported to Treblinka after the Uprising of April/May 1943.

oppressors' language against them: Glazar describes his comrades as 'Malocher und Schlaumeier' when they successfully smuggle goods in and out of the camp, turning negative Yiddish and German words into positive ones (*Falle*, p. 133).

The prisoners' language begins to take on a form that they can all understand, with common vocabulary elements from Slavic languages, stripped of grammatical specificities and mingled with Yiddish, here overlaid with Glazar's German glosses. In this sequence, a prisoner is trying to give his friend the strength to get up in the morning and carry on: I reproduce Glazar's spelling here:

'No, kurwa twoja matj – Hurensohn.' Das Schimpfwort gilt dem, der beim Bettenmachen die Decken von der oberen Pritsche einem direct ins Gesicht ausschüttet. 'Do cholery jasnej – reine Cholera', der eine verliert beim Stiefelanziehen das Gleichgewicht und reißt zwei andere mit. 'Heniek, Prosze tebe – ich flehe dich an, steh auf, du musst, nimm dich zusammen!' Jemand spornt seinen fiebrigen Kameraden an. 'Hab ka Kojach – habe keine Kraft mehr.' Die Antwort in Jiddisch geht in den Stimmen anderer unter. (*Falle*, p. 66)

The German reader here may well not know the Polish expletive 'cholera' (dammit!), and may read this passage as a claim that Heniek is suffering from cholera and therefore cannot get up; the fact that this sequence is followed directly by comments about overflowing excrement buckets and the danger of infection might support this reading. It seems that the obscenity-laden language of the prisoners and the guards is no longer simply metaphorical, but actually reflects something important about the abject reality of the place: the word 'Scheiße' is spoken, snarled, shouted, whispered constantly, by both prisoners and guards, and the exchange of standard obscenities in Slavic languages about other people's mothers takes on a genuinely

disturbing force amongst men whose families have recently been murdered in front of their eyes and whose bodies they may have had themselves to loot and burn.

Glazar traces these linguistic strategies in parallel to the gradual development of the prisoners' political solidarity: they need a shared language for the extremity of the situation, which leads to a shared sense of identity, breaking down their geographical and cultural divisions. They reach this understanding of themselves through irony and language mixing: there is a good example of this in a moment in which the prisoners are discussing the quality of merchandise that arrives in the transports, and which they have to sort into piles as first or second class goods. One of Glazar's colleagues declares he will now only smoke first class cigarettes, and then takes the idea in an unexpected direction:

Nie czloweku — nein, Mensch, jetzt rauche ich nur die erste Sorte [...] Ja, ja, so, so — für uns nur die erste Sorte, pierszi Gatuniek. Überhaupt, wir sind alle pierszi Gatuniek — erste Sorte. Haben sie sich doch von allen Juden uns ausgesucht und herangezüchtet als erste Gattung.
(*Falle*, p. 97)

As far as I can establish, 'pierszi Gatuniek' is a pure creation of this mixed language. Glazar capitalizes the noun 'Gatuniek' in the German manner, emphasizing its oddness, as well as its etymological relationship to the word 'Gattung'. The bitterness of this self-description as new Jewish elite overseeing the destruction of their people becomes the root of their self-image as fighters. It is possible that Glazar is always misremembering and misquoting Polish words ('gatunek pierwszy' would be the Polish phrase), but it would have been easy enough to check while writing. So this seems to me to be a deliberate strategy: Glazar's German text contains traces of the linguistic situation in the camp, filtered through his retrospective reconstruction, in which he also has to deal with the issue of writing in the same Austrian-inflected German as

many of the SS men. So the linguistic strategies in the text are as much about thinking through difficult issues connected with identity as they are about documenting the speech of the prisoners.

It is notable that Glazar puts the most despairing speeches in the mouth of Hans Freund, who, with his Prague German, his cynicism and self-hatred, and his prejudices against the Poles, is something of a negative foil for Glazar's autobiographical narrator:

Recht geschieht uns [...] Ich meine uns hier, nicht die Polnischen. Immerfort haben wir gewartet, herausgeredet haben wir uns mit diesem und jenem. Hosenscheißer sind wir, schlimmer als die Polnischen hier, weil sie zeitlebens so waren — Händler von abgestandenem Wasser, Schieber und Betrüger. Aber wir, die wir hierher wie aus Amerika kamen, verstanden es, hätten den andern in die Fresse hauen können, waren doch so gebaut. Nun, so lange haben wir über alles sinniert, zu lang geplaudert, alles vorbereitet, und dabei haben wir aufgehört Menschen zu sein. Wie Schafböcke standen wir heute dort, sind nichts mehr wert. Alles haben sie schon aus uns herausgeschlagen. (*Falle*, p. 86-87)

Freund's death is not narrated directly, but other prisoners report after the revolt that he had given up, seeing no way out after the death of his family and wanting nothing more than to die. In terms of the narrative, he represents the side of Glazar that has to die so that Glazar can find a way of living.

Glazar and his friend Karl Unger manage to escape and find their way out of Poland, eventually posing as non-Jewish Czech forced laborers, and surviving the war in a work detail in Germany. On this journey, they reestablish their identity as Czech, even though this is still a disguise as they pass for non-Jews, returning at the end to the security of their language. This final part, while describing Glazar's liberation and the way he reestablishes a sense of identity

and agency, also shows how boundaries are drawn again between the languages that had mixed in the camp. Glazar and Unger identify themselves as distinct from the Polish civilians they meet, and even have some fun at the expense of an American Army Rabbi, who can only speak ‘gebrochen Deutsch-Jiddisch’ and whose helmet doesn’t fit: ‘Er scheint in der Uniform mehrfach zusammengefaltet zu sein. Der Helm — der Topf — nimmt sich bei ihm besonders komisch aus, weil er einen zu kleinen Kopf hat.’ ‘Das soll also ein jüdischer Feldkurat sein’, says one of Glazar’s companions (*Falle*, p. 190). Through this mockery, they distance themselves from the image of awkward Jewish physicality, of not quite fitting anywhere, that the SS had both created and mocked in Treblinka. In effect, Glazar here kills the image of Tölpel the ‘Scheißkapo’ in himself.

So the text enacts in its narrative the linguistic crisis brought about in the camp, as well as the restoration of linguistic norms after liberation: norms that are necessary for the kind of restorative identity work that the survivors will have to do in the contexts in which they find themselves, but that will make real communication of the experience, and the language in which the prisoners articulated the experience to each other, impossible.²⁴

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²⁴ There is an interesting misprint in the 2008 edition, on the page describing the Jewish chaplain. Glazar cites the famous headline of the US Army newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, for 8 May 1945: ‘NAZIS QUIT: Doenitz Gives Order.’ But here it becomes ‘NAZIS QUIET’ (*Falle*, p. 190). This inadvertent image of the silencing of the Nazi voice of command makes a rather satisfying end to a text about the power of language to define and control.

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