



## Between Meir Dworzecki and Yehiel Dinur: *amidah* in the writing of Ka-Tzetnik 135633

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### ABSTRACT

The term *amidah* or Jewish resistance during the Holocaust has been controversial since its inception. Should it be limited to armed or at least active and collective operations, or should it include spiritual and moral responses? In his 1968 paper ‘The day-to-day stand of the Jews,’ Meir Dworzecki argued for the wider definition, and a similar approach is evident in Ka-Tzetnik’s *Salamandra* novels. This study employs Dworzecki’s perspective as a key for a close analysis of Ka-Tzetnik’s literary testimony. Read in tandem, these writers–survivors enrich our understanding of Jewish response and of the dynamics of early Israeli Holocaust discourse.

### KEYWORDS

Ka-Tzetnik; Dworzecki; Meir; *amidah*; Jewish Resistance; Holocaust

The 1968 Yad Vashem Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust marks a turning point in the development of the discourse on resistance. It brought forth the term *amidah*, which in Hebrew literarily means ‘standing up against’ or ‘steadfastness,’ and in English usually gains the problematic translation ‘resistance.’<sup>1</sup> For Meir (Mark) Dworzecki, a survivor–historian who spoke at the conference, *amidah* designates resistance not only in the popular sense of armed or unarmed underground and partisan activity, ghetto rebellions, and serving in the armies of the Allies. For Dworzecki, *amidah* is a

comprehensive name for all expressions of Jewish ‘non-conformism’, and for all the forms of resistance and all acts by Jews aimed at thwarting the evil design of the Nazis – a design to destroy the Jews, to deprive them of their humanity, and to reduce them to dregs before snuffing out their lives.<sup>2</sup>

The title of his talk, ‘The day-to-day stand of the Jews,’ captures Dworzecki’s view of *amidah* as the behavior or conduct of the Jewish individual and public under Nazi rule, which manifested itself in the psychological, moral, spiritual, and cultural domains.<sup>3</sup> Not all scholars shared Dworzecki’s perspective. In a critical review of the conference published a year later, Luci Dawidowicz, unimpressed with the scholarly quality of many of the studies presented at the event, observes that ‘the word “resistance” was being semantically strained’ beyond its conventional definition as an ‘active form of warfare,’ and that ‘speakers tried to demonstrate that Jews resisted more than they had

been given credit for.<sup>4</sup> A similar point was made during the conference by Sara Neshamit, a survivor herself. ‘Not every act performed in order to remain alive falls under the category of resistance,’ she observed.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies attempt to settle these differences by recognizing a ‘special form of resistance’ which responds to the different nature of the assault against the Jews.<sup>6</sup> Since the camps, as Roger Gottlieb observes, generated an environment dedicated to getting the Jews to ‘accept their death, a choice of life was itself an act of resistance.’<sup>7</sup>

In this study, I am interested less in the debates about the definitions of Jewish resistance or *amidah* during the Holocaust than in the opposing perspectives these definitions reflect. Dworzecki was motivated by the concern that the picture of the Holocaust available to the public and even to scholars is incomplete, not to mention distorted. The ‘open acts of rebellion,’ he explains, have been covered to some extent, while the ‘inconspicuous acts of resistance which constituted the chief expression of defiance ... this chapter still awaits thorough study.’<sup>8</sup> For this purpose, Dworzecki reviews various sources which document *amidah*, and he notes repeatedly how even survivors do not realize that humane acts of solidarity constitute an important part of their testimony, which they usually focus on the tragedies and acts of anti-Jewish violence.<sup>9</sup> Nachman Blumental’s paper at the conference similarly reviews potential sources for the study of *amidah*, and explains that while active resistance was overt and documented, passive resistance remained unheralded and unknown.<sup>10</sup> Dworzecki and Blumental’s concern is well-grounded in the attitudes which were prevalent at the wake of World War II, when, as Dan Michman observes, the understanding of Jewish resistance to the Nazis was shaped by the concept of resistance among the European underground movements. In Eretz Israel, ‘the fighters and revolutionaries were incorporated into the heroic myth of the Yishuv battling the British and the Arabs for independence.’<sup>11</sup> Even after the Eichmann trial, which allowed identification with the victims and mitigated the criticism of ‘sheep to slaughter’ in the eyes of Israeli society, ‘heroism was still perceived as a characteristic of armed resistance.’<sup>12</sup>

While the Nazi assault on Jewish life and body is self-evident, Dworzecki emphasizes that the Nazis’ purpose was also ‘to deprive the Jew of his human visage, break him spiritually, destroy his character, deprive him of all human feeling, and turn him into a creature ready to betray his brethren for a piece of bread.’<sup>13</sup> That is why the

resistance of the anonymous masses must be affirmed in terms of how they held on to their humanity, of their manifestations of solidarity, mutual help, self-sacrifice, and that whole constellation of manifestations subsumed under the simple heading of ‘good deeds.’

This is where Dworzecki’s approach to *amidah* differs from most accounts of the term. Yehuda Bauer, whose discussion of ‘resistance’ as *amidah* dates to the 1970s, defined it as ‘any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters.’<sup>14</sup> More recently, Bauer observed that his early definition ‘avoids dealing with individual acts of resistance, armed and unarmed, which have to be taken into account as an expression of the will of at least segments of Jewish communities or groups.’<sup>15</sup> Yet, even this nuanced version leaves out what Dworzecki finds most important in *amidah* – the daily ‘behavior’ or ‘conduct’ of anonymous Jews, their solidarity with other Jews – and Bauer’s discussion is still focused on both ‘collective’ and ‘act’: food smuggling; educational, political, medical, and religious activity; the conduct of the *Judenrat*, and mass

insubordinations.<sup>16</sup> Again, the story of the ‘simple Jews’ is left untold – a concern which Dworzecki voiced on different occasions over the years.<sup>17</sup> ‘Good deeds often are not very obvious,’ he notes. ‘Which survivor will remember to tell about his comrade in the ghetto who, when he was starving, gave him of his own bread or his bowl of soup, boiled a tin of water for him or simply consoled and encouraged him?’<sup>18</sup>

One survivor who does remember and in fact portrays on a large scale a panoramic picture of *amidah* is Yehiel Dinur, who published the *Salamandra* sextet (1946–1987) under the name Ka-Tzetnik 135633. Although stating, in his testimony in the Eichmann Trial, that he writes not literature but a ‘chronicle of the Auschwitz Planet,’ his books, with the exception of *Shivitti*, which is written as a personal journal, utilize literary conventions that prove especially instrumental in the presentation and memorialization of the very nuances Dworzecki was so worried about losing.<sup>19</sup> Literature has the privilege to place its focus on individuals and the clash of their perspectives and determinations with the forces which society applies to control them, as marginal as these clashes and individuals may be for the collective turn of events. The novelistic form allows Ka-Tzetnik not only to explore the most concealed and private struggles of Jews in the Holocaust, but also to incorporate them into the life stories of characters with which the reader can deeply identify, and into plot lines, which intersect with familiar historical events and which the reader can follow. Consequently, the facelessness and silence the Holocaust imposes on its victims can be penetrated, and voice and image can be recovered for those with whose untold story of spiritual, moral, psychological, and physical stand Dworzecki was most concerned: ‘the millions of anonymous Jews, who were not heroes of armed resistance and not those who failed morally – but just Jews, anonymous, agonizing and struggling for their life, their existence, their dignity.’<sup>20</sup> Formulating the manifestations of *amidah* in Ka-Tzetnik’s *Salamandra* books, while illuminating the significance of literature in their portrayal, is the aim of this study.

Yehiel Feiner was born in 1909 in Sosnowiec, Poland. From the Sosnowiec ghetto he was sent to Auschwitz in 1943, liberated in 1945, and immigrated that year to Palestine, where he changed his surname to the Hebrew Dinur (or De-Nur, Aramaic for ‘from fire’). ‘Ka-Tzetnik 135633,’ meaning concentration-camp inmate 135633, combines ‘Katzet’ for *Konzentrationslager*, the Slavic/Yiddish suffix ‘nik’ for vocation or a way of life, and the number tattooed on Dinur’s arm in Auschwitz. In 1946 Dinur published *Salamandra*, the first novel in a sextet by a similar title which relates the story of various members of the Prelesnik family – allegedly Dinur’s own family – in their struggle for survival in the ghetto and camp.<sup>21</sup> In the case of Harry Prelesnik, the protagonist of some of the volumes and most likely a fictional embodiment of Dinur himself, the story also includes the process of recovery and adaptation to life in Palestine and Israel after the war. The earlier volumes in the series – *Sunrise over Hell* (*Salamandra*, 1946), *House of Dolls* (*Beit habubot*, 1953), and *Atrocity* (*Kar’u lo Piepel*, 1961) – were widely circulated at the time in Israel, which, through them, had one of its earliest and most formative encounters with the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup> Dinur made a strong impression also during the Eichmann Trial, where his appearance as a witness exposed the man behind the pseudonym for the first time. His collapse on the witness stand and the dramatic substance of his brief testimony left Dinur’s mark on Israel’s collective memory of the Holocaust.

Discussing the *Salamandra* novels in the context of *amidah* may surprise readers familiar with Ka-Tzetnik’s work. Dinur owes much of his reputation to the naturalistic and

unusually explicit descriptions of depravity and brutality, from the killing of a baby in a ghetto bunker to the rape of Jewish boys and girls in the camp, from the Muselmann to cannibalism. These stylistic and thematic qualities contributed to Ka-Tzetnik's popularity among Israeli readers and to the inclusion of his work in the Israeli school curriculum, but they also evoked sharp criticism. Dan Miron identifies in Ka-Tzetnik's writing a contribution to the 'pornographization of the Holocaust,' to which Omer Bartov attributes this writer's popularity among Israeli youth during the state's early decades.<sup>23</sup> The most recent debate concerning Ka-Tzetnik follows Ari Libsker's 2008 film *Stalags*, which doubts the factuality of the camp brothel described in *House of Dolls*, where Jewish girls are given the status of a *Feld-Hure* and forced to provide sexual services to the Germans.<sup>24</sup>

The provocative, if not scandalous, dimensions of Ka-Tzetnik's work have been occupying the bulk of the recent discourse on the *Salamandra* sextet, and this may be one reason why critics and readers alike have generally ignored other, more concealed dimensions of his writing. In interviews which Galia Glasner-Heled conducted with readers, scholars, and educators about their experiences in reading and teaching Ka-Tzetnik, expressions such as 'insanity,' 'horrors,' 'morbidity,' and 'evil' were used often, and educators were concerned about the consequences of exposing the youth to the powerful reading experience these texts generate.<sup>25</sup> Compassion and solidarity, spiritual heroism and perseverance, individual and communal stand against the Nazis, even resistance, are nowhere to be found in the interviews. These terms do gain discussion in Iris Milner's extensive study of the 'gray zone' in Ka-Tzetnik's writing, and to some extent in Bartov's, although the two scholars reach the opposite conclusion: that, with some rare exceptions, Ka-Tzetnik portrays the Jewish community in the Holocaust as failing the moral test in its disintegration into individuals, who shed their humanity and social commitments while turning against each other in their struggle to survive.<sup>26</sup> In another study I dispute Milner and Bartov's findings in detail and argue that Ka-Tzetnik's texts are rich with acts of Jewish compassion and solidarity which he centralizes through his narrative art.<sup>27</sup> These acts, however, form only one among multiple manifestations of *amidah* which the *Salamandra* books explore and which are congruent with Dworzecki's perspective and categorization. Both the historian and the novelist are committed to relating 'the inconspicuous acts of resistance' of Jews in the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup>

To begin with, the very choice to write under the name Ka-Tzetnik 135633 expresses Dinur's commitment to telling the collective story of the anonymous Jews at the expense of his own. 'The author's name – you left it out,' Dinur was told when handing over the completed manuscript of *Salamandra*. 'The name of the author?!' he cries. 'Those who went to the crematorium wrote the book! Go on, you write their name: K. Tzetnik.'<sup>29</sup> Jeremy Popkin observes that Dinur's

use of the number tattooed on his arm at Auschwitz as an authorial name communicates two fundamental facts about his camp experience: that Auschwitz deprived him of the personal identity that would justify a claim to a proper name, and that the purpose of his writings is not to speak of his own experiences, but to record those of the other victims who did not survive to speak for themselves.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, according to Popkin, "Ka-Tzetnik 135633" is not a pseudonym, but the real identity of the author who wrote the words that were published as *Salamandra* and all

the books that followed,' and who insists that 'the story he tells is that of all the prisoners, and particularly of those who did not survive.'<sup>31</sup> Four decades after the publication of the first volume in the sextet, Dinur publishes *Shivitti* (*Tsofen: EDMA*, 1987), which is written in the first person and tells Dinur's own story during and following the lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) therapy he underwent in the 1970s. The name which Dinur chose to indicate on the cover is still Ka-Tzetnik. In a 'Curriculum Vitae' which Dinur composed for a 1993 handbook designed to facilitate the teaching of his books in Israel, he chooses to indicate his time and place of birth as Auschwitz, 1943, when the Kapo branded the number 135633 on his arm and hissed between his teeth: 'Here you were born! From now on this number is your name. This is the name they'll call you by to get on the truck for the crematorium!'<sup>32</sup> And when, in February 1945, the Red Army officer asked him for his name, he answered: 'My name was burned with all the rest in the crematorium of Auschwitz.'<sup>33</sup> Although it has been recently argued that Ka-Tzetnik's ability to represent the victims of the Holocaust is compromised by his own mimetic practice, his intention is as explicit as it is indisputable.<sup>34</sup> He writes in order to fulfill his oath to the dead – to tell their story.

In both substance and organization of his writing, Ka-Tzetnik's panoramic presentation of Jewish life during the Holocaust illustrates Dworzecki's perspective on *amidah*. The rebellion at the Metropoli ghetto, for example, is indeed rendered in the first volume of the sextet, but only briefly, and it is restricted to 'following the footsteps' of Sanya Schmidt, Ka-Tzetnik's heroine, as indicated in his preface to the 1946 edition.<sup>35</sup> The 'epic story' of the Warsaw ghetto rebellion (which serves as basis for Ka-Tzetnik's narration of the Metropoli ghetto rebellion) will have to wait for its 'artistic redemption,' Dinur explains in the preface his decision to marginalize the armed resistance that Israelis hailed at the time. Elsewhere in his writings, the idea of rebellion is rejected explicitly. While Ferber, a close friend of the Preleshniks, pleads, 'let's revolt as one man against the Germans,' Harry 'couldn't reconcile himself to the idea that after suffering so much in the ghetto, Sanya and Daniella should be killed by German bullets.'<sup>36</sup> Sanya rejects any thought of revolt, 'not because Sanya was a coward, but because of her overwhelming determination' that Harry 'survive the war.'<sup>37</sup> Likewise, in a passage rendering the final transport from the ghetto to Auschwitz in *Star Eternal* (*Hashaon*, 1961), Ka-Tzetnik realizes the futility and deadly consequences of physical resistance. 'How easy it would be now to break out of the herded columns,' he wonders. To 'spit a curse' and 'pitch headlong into the flaming sunset.' However, 'to die now is not heroic. The most heroic deed now is – to live.'<sup>38</sup> This is the principle guiding the Jewish response to the Holocaust in Ka-Tzetnik's writing, and it is complemented by an elaborated portrayal of Jewish daily stand in the ghetto and camp, which corresponds to Dworzecki's understanding of *amidah*.

One manifestation of *amidah* which Dworzecki discusses is 'Escapes from the Death Centers, Ghettoes, Transports and Camps.' Henry Baum, Harry Preleshnik's friend at the camp, risks his function and his life in an attempt to get himself and Harry released. They are caught, and Henry dies for his friend.<sup>39</sup> Lilka, Sanya's little sister, escapes the ghetto by use of foreign documents.<sup>40</sup> A similar opportunity was given to Harry who, in a manifestation of what Dworzecki calls 'Giving Up Chances to be Saved,' forgoes the opportunity because of his love for and commitment to Sanya.<sup>41</sup> In one scene of work in a ghetto factory, Zanvil Lubliner calls 'Jews! Sew them their shrouds! We will outlive them!'<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when Sanya rejects the possibility of rebellion so that Harry

can ‘survive the war,’ the Hebrew original for ‘survive’ is *yevale*, which is the term Dworzecki uses for ‘outlive’ or *iberleben*, an expression which was common in ghetto songs and speech.<sup>43</sup> It is remarkable, in fact, how tangible the correspondence is between Dworzecki and Ka-Tzetnik’s presentations of the Jewish stand during the Holocaust. Both historian and novelist focus their attention on the conduct of anonymous Jews in their daily struggle to survive in the ghetto and camp, and both give this material preference in detail, development, and centrality over armed resistance.

## Good deeds

*House of Dolls* opens with a dialogue in which Vevke the shoemaker asks Daniella why she did not join them for a meal the evening before. ‘You won’t make us any poorer,’ he continues. ‘An eighth mouth is no strain on a pot that feeds seven.’<sup>44</sup> This last sentence sounds almost impossible in the hunger-stricken reality of the ghetto, but it is typical of Vevke, who, as the technical supervisor of the shoe factory, was also able to secure employment for the young girl. He had saved and continues to save Daniella’s life, while having so little to share. His generosity in this case and in many others exemplifies ‘moral steadfastness’ or simply ‘good deeds,’ as Dworzecki calls them and on which he places the emphasis of his discussion in an attempt to secure the place of such acts in the historiography of the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup> Such manifestations of reciprocity and mutual help, and not the struggle of all against all, characterize Jewish conduct during the Holocaust according to Dworzecki, and this perspective gains rich expression in Ka-Tzetnik’s writing. Only a few instances can be specified here. Zanvil Lubliner the tailor helps Harry fill his quota of sewing at the ghetto shop, while risking himself for no reason but friendship.<sup>46</sup> An unnamed girl from Oświęcim is given refuge in an occupied apartment, where the residents, complete strangers, provide her with some food.<sup>47</sup> One tenant in that apartment is Fella, the beautiful young woman who keeps company with the *Judenrat* and shares the food she receives with her roommates.<sup>48</sup> Harry, a medic in the camp, treats the camp’s inmate as best as he can, shares his food with Zanvil and Tedek, and at some point redeems Zanvil from the deadly flogging in exchange for cigarettes which could save his own life in time of need.<sup>49</sup> Hayim-Idl shares his soup with the Rabbi of Shilev, and an inmate named Bergson gives his to Vevke the shoemaker.<sup>50</sup> These are merely some of the numerous manifestations of solidarity and moral conduct which Ka-Tzetnik renders in his narrative and which constitute, in Dworzecki’s words, the ‘heroism of simple, anonymous Shimon and Levi.’<sup>51</sup>

## Jewish survival, survival as Jews

The term *amidah* proves itself especially useful when applied as a response to Nazi persecution which is not only a response of Jews, but also a response shaped by Jewish values and traditions. Dworzecki suggests the general category of ‘the Will of the Jewish Community as a Whole to Maintain Jewish Identity,’ although Jewish identity and Jewish life mean different things to different individuals and communities. For religious Jews, maintaining Jewish identity meant ‘to live according to the religious commandments and customs’ despite the risks of persecution.<sup>52</sup> This is what Michael R. Marrus discusses as ‘Jewish religious expression under Nazism’ within the category of ‘symbolic resistance.’<sup>53</sup> The English

term ‘resistance,’ however, seems to be less suitable for capturing the struggle of the community to maintain Jewish identity than the Hebrew term *amidah*. More than Jewish religious practice in the ghetto pushed back, it persevered, endured, and illustrated how Jews stand for their beliefs in time of persecution.

During a night patrol throughout the ghetto, Harry Prelesnik stumbles upon a wooden shack occupied by an unidentified group of orthodox Jews. In the desperate atmosphere of the ghetto,

eyes wide and fiery, the fellowship was swaying as the participants pored over the tomes before them, the Rabbi’s voice now seeking in an exploratory keynote, to sound out the ways of the world, in quest of the borderline separating life from death: ‘*Where are the places of sacrifice in the Temple?*’

The fellowship responds ‘in concert, an ardent and infallible response ... : “*sacrifice holy in the highest degree*”?’<sup>54</sup> This group study within the circumstances of the ghetto demonstrates spiritual *amidah* in both act and substance. The very nightly activity, ignoring the risk of capture, expresses a commitment to maintaining Jewish identity and tradition even in these times of persecution. Moreover, it is no coincidence that the text studied in this scene is drawn from *Mishna Zevachim*, chapter five, which deals with sacrifice at the Temple. Ka-Tzetnik constructs here a parallel between the ancient practice and the death of Jews in the ghetto, an analogy which renders the Jews themselves as the sacrifice and their death an act of worship, which is incorporated into and explained by Jewish faith. When the Rabbi nods fervently, ‘as though in justification of the Judgment, with the martyr’s acceptance of the Measure of Love: “... *were slaughtered on the North side*”’; and the fellowship replies in a ‘common chord, full of a fundamental perplexity at the comprehensiveness of cause and effect: “*The sacrifice holy in a lesser degree are slaughtered in any part of the Court*”’ – both parties validate and accept God’s authority and choices for his people in the Holocaust.<sup>55</sup> A few days later, when the Germans capture Harry and send him to collect dead bodies, he finds the little congregation still seated around the table, shot to death.<sup>56</sup> They are also half-burnt, as is their shack and Torah Scroll, like a sacrifice at the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

For less stringent or non-religious Jews, according to Dworzecki, being a Jew in the ghetto meant following Jewish customs and cultural life, such as observing the holidays and providing Jewish education to children. Most importantly, ‘to be a Jew’ in the ghetto also meant ‘to have a conscience’ in the ghetto, to maintain moral conduct.<sup>57</sup> This is a fundamental principle of *amidah* which withstands the Nazi attempt to diminish the Jewish person and spirit to a working body ready to betray its most fundamental social commitments. In this moral sense, maintaining Jewish identity intersects with *Kiddush hahaim* (‘sanctification of life’), a term which is attributed to Rabbi Yitshak Nissenbaum of the Warsaw ghetto and indicates, as Shaul Esh observes, the general feeling among Jews that ‘victory over the enemy lay in their continued existence, for the enemy desired their extinction.’<sup>58</sup> Despite the seemingly general sense of the term, *Kiddush hahaim* ‘was often directed toward Jewish life, each man according to his understanding of the term ... desire of Jewish communities to preserve life of Jewish quality in the face of persecution.’<sup>59</sup> Bauer observes that ‘sanctification of life’ denotes ‘*meaningful Jewish survival*,’ and Yisrael Gutman similarly notes that this attitude towards Jewish survival in the Holocaust is rooted, especially among Eastern European Jews, in the history of the Jews as a persecuted

community, for which concern for the weak and mutual aid remained major characteristics also under the Nazis.<sup>60</sup> Jewish survival, then, exceeds the survival of Jews and even the continuous religious practice of Judaism under Nazi persecution. It draws on the most essential undercurrents and forces that shape Jewish identity and tradition.

In Ka-Tzetnik's writing, 'being a Jew in the ghetto' in the moral sense is illustrated through the numerous 'good deeds' which characters initiate, as discussed above. The issue gains an especially succinct dramatization in *Atrocity* through a dialog between Moni and Hayim-Idl, two Jewish inmates in Auschwitz. Caught in a failed attempt to steal some food for the Rabbi of Shilev, Hayim-Idl loses his function in the kitchen. 'You've as good as killed yourself and dragged the others along,' Moni, the novel's protagonist, reproaches Hayim-Idl for the act, which costs him a source of food and the risk of punishment, both deadly. 'You can't be a softy in the Katzet,' he observes.<sup>61</sup> 'But the heart, Moni, what about the heart!' Hayim-Idl replies passionately. 'We're Jews, aren't we? We are born that way and there's nothing we can do about it.'<sup>62</sup> Through this dialog Ka-Tzetnik places in opposition two approaches to survival in the camp: 'man is wolf to man' versus solidarity, compassion, and mutual help. While Moni advocates (although not necessarily practices) moral degeneration and the collapse of social reciprocity as a necessary means of survival, Hayim-Idl upholds a sense of human commitment, which withstands, as Dworzecki puts it, the Nazis' purpose to deprive the Jew of 'all human feeling, and turn him into a creature ready to betray his brethren for a piece of bread.'<sup>63</sup> More than simply humane, Hayim-Idl's courageous act of self-sacrifice in his attempt to feed the Rabbi reveals his commitment to his Jewish identity, his Jewish heart.

### ***Tselem adam***

The narrative focus which the *Salamandra* novels place on the Jewish masses and anonymous individuals is given explicit expression by Dinur himself. In the famous opening lines of his testimony at the Eichmann Trial, Dinur says that

the inhabitants of this planet had no names, they had no parents nor did they have children. They did not dress in the way we dress here; they were not born there and they did not give birth; they breathed according to different laws of nature; they did not live – nor did they die – according to the laws of this world. Their name was the number 'Ka-Tzetnik.'<sup>64</sup>

Here, again, Dinur's perspective is in line with Dworzecki's, who observes that the 'evil design of the Nazis' was 'to destroy the Jews, to deprive them of their humanity [*dmut enoshit*], and to reduce them to dregs [*avak adam*] before snuffing out their lives.'<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere Dworzecki's wording is 'deprive the Jew of his human visage [*tselem adam*].'<sup>66</sup> By *dmut enoshit* and *tselem-adam* (literally, both mean human figure or character) Dworzecki captures both the physical image of the Jew as human and the Jew's human image in the spiritual and moral sense. This is why 'the resistance of the anonymous masses must be affirmed in terms of how they held on to their humanity [*shamira al tselem adam*]' through their communal, personal, and moral commitments.<sup>67</sup> As a writer of literature, an art consisting of images, Ka-Tzetnik is able to sustain his characters' human image in both senses through the very qualities of his medium.

In *House of Dolls*, upon Daniella Preleshnik's arrival to block 29 of the labor camp, she sees 'countless human shadows draped in tatters, lying and sitting, wedged up against each



other. Rags on their feet. Rags on their heads. No telling of their sex or age. Skeletons. Skeletons beyond count.<sup>68</sup> This is one instance among many in which Ka-Tzetnik provides a close rendition of Jews deprived of ‘human visage.’ When ordered, ‘up on the boards!’ Daniella is barely able to find refuge with a ‘forlorn, sick old woman’ who ‘wearily lowered her head and didn’t let out so much as a sigh.’<sup>69</sup> Compassionately and wholeheartedly Daniella offers her little piece of bread to this unfamiliar and surprised woman. Realizing, as the dialog between the two unfolds, that the woman was only in ‘first term high school’ at the beginning of the war, ‘Daniella shielded her head with both hands, as if to ward off the horror swooping in her – *she is the same age as this old woman ...*’<sup>70</sup> By engaging in conversation with an unfamiliar inmate; by closely examining her appearance and compassionately offering her food; by revealing that this old skeleton is very much like herself and that she has a name, Renya Zeidner, who discloses a personal past and family ties – Daniella demonstrates her own humanity, and she regains a human image, *tselem adam*, for a person whom the Nazis had physically reduced to no more than a number tattooed on a decaying body. Daniella ‘reached out her arms to her and embraced her. The old woman lay on her bosom like the frail body of a sick child. Gradually her weeping subsided. She lifted her eyes and looked up at the tears streaming soundlessly on Daniella’s face.’<sup>71</sup> This act of physical and emotional bonding gives these girls strength and courage, and it maintains the humanity of both, not only in the world of the story but also through the textual effect on the reader. As this part of the story is told through the perspective of Daniella, the protagonist, her sympathy towards a fellow inmate also evokes ours.

Scenes of identification, in which the person behind the Ka-Tzet is realized, are common in Ka-Tzetnik’s narration of camp life. They capture the process of mental and physical initiation into the Auschwitz Planet and function as a literary device for retrieving *tselem adam* out of *avak adam*, human image out of human dust. When Harry Preleshnik arrives at the ‘Sakrau’ Labor Camp, he observes a mass of ‘specters drifting to and fro, ghosts from another world, all of one shape: a shaven skull; a lantern jaw; above, two gaping cavities in place of temples with two hollows below for cheeks – and bones.’<sup>72</sup> One of these specters addresses him and the voice rings familiar to Harry who struggles to identify the face. ‘You don’t recognize me, Preleshnik. Have I changed – that much? I am Shafran, Marcel Shafran ...’<sup>73</sup> Trying to reconcile the striking differences between the man he sees and the man he knew, Harry concludes that Marcel is a *dybbuk* who, ‘having migrated into an alien body, now communicated through it.’ In scenes of identification, Ka-Tzetnik orchestrates a dramatic process, which individualizes the anonymous masses on the level of the textual world and generates an effect of defamiliarization on the level of the readers’ response: it directs us to perceive anew the familiar image of the skeleton and recover the person within it.

Oskar Kahanov is caught stealing the hidden bread of a sleeping fellow inmate. Hung by his wrist from the block rafter, hands behind his back, Kahanov dies within a few hours. ‘Theft of bread violated an unwritten law of block comradeship,’ Wolfgang Sofsky indicates. ‘It was murder, and it was punished by murder.’<sup>74</sup> But Ka-Tzetnik does not allow us to fall into the Nazi trap of confusing cause and effect, where the victim is accused for a crime forced upon him by the circumstances of the camp. The narrator utilizes his poetic prerogative to explore in detail the mindset that brought this inmate to commit the theft. The piece of bread, called ‘pet bird’ – an expression reflecting the

food's emotional value for the inmates – captured Kahanov's attention, 'driving him plain out of his mind, making him lose all control of his senses.'<sup>75</sup> Trapped in the 'bird's' web, 'he slithered along hypnotized, crossing in the dark of night over to his neighbor's hutch. Hands quivering, he fumbled through the shirt,' but eventually he was caught, shaken and terrified.<sup>76</sup> Orienting the reader towards Kahanov's perspective invites understanding and sympathy toward an act considered immoral outside of the camp and deadly within it. The narrator demonstrates explicit compassion for Kahanov by providing us with the explanation that he had 'yielded to his lewd debauchery,' evoked by a piece of bread whose 'seductiveness led him on to the brink of the abyss.'<sup>77</sup> The solidarity between reader and character, which Ka-Tzetnik encourages in his narrative technique, is strengthened by his depiction of the bond between characters. Throughout the scene, interspersed with descriptions of Kahanov's final moments as a Ka-Tzet, Harry, Ka-Tzetnik's protagonist, continuously recalls the young Jew's elegant appearance before the war. The 'camping' whose 'face-remnants' were 'peering from the Auschwitz-mask,' is 'Oskar Kahanov in person! Business giant and jersey-and-tweed dictator on Poland's textile exchange.'<sup>78</sup> Looking at the 'one swinging from the rafters,' Harry sees 'a man, ensconced in a club chair at the Shafran residence one Wednesday, engaging the lady of the house in a French tête-à-tête.'<sup>79</sup> These impressions are made in Harry's mind, and Ka-Tzetnik, by recording the inner world of his protagonist – one of fiction's most distinguishable markers – regains for the deceased, even for a moment, some of the human image of which he was deprived in his brutal metamorphosis from a person into a nameless corpse.

### Different Ways of Struggle

The 1968 conference at Yad Vashem played a major role in introducing the concept of *amidah* into Holocaust discourse. However, as Boaz Cohen has recently observed, 'the concept of *amidah* had already appeared in the writings of survivor-historians in the late 1940s,' and it continued to appear throughout the 1950s in Israeli journals dedicated to the study of the Holocaust.<sup>80</sup> Dworzecki insisted in 1946 that 'there were Different Ways of Struggle,' as he titles a short personal essay relating his experience with various forms of *amidah* in the Vilna ghetto: bunkers, food smuggling, organized medical assistance in the ghetto, educational activities, heroic 'good deeds,' and expressions of moral and spiritual defiance. His essay also voices, even as early as the war's very conclusion, a grave concern for a balanced documentation of the Holocaust, which must account also for the 'simple Jew in the ghetto' and the millions who died 'without weapon in their hands' but not without a struggle.<sup>81</sup> This concern, as Cohen mentions, was shared by 'other significant voices,' such as Nathan Eck and Nachman Blumental, who also spoke about *amidah* in the 1940s and 1950s, when the Israeli Holocaust discourse was dominated by the opposition between armed resistance and 'sheep to slaughter.'<sup>82</sup>

To these 'other significant voices' of survivor-historians, we should add Yehiel Dinur, a survivor who perceived himself as a writer not of literature, but of a chronicle of the Auschwitz Planet. Through his literary persona and the novelistic form, this author is able to explore the most concealed manifestations of Jewish stand, the unnoticeable good deeds of anonymous Jews, the will to live against all odds, and the empowering bonds among complete strangers. The rich and continuous narrative of life under Nazi rule, the rendition of inner worlds and private dialogues, circumvent the fragmented

picture that often arises from discrete testimonies or documents and generate concrete plots and characters, a story and a world, of a greater potential for circulation and appeal. ‘You have not yet found how to convey the mute, anonymous, hidden heroism’ of the masses in their daily life in the ghettos and camps, Dworzecki reprimanded himself. ‘How did the millions of people stand up to the day-to-day trial?’<sup>83</sup> This is the story Ka-Tzetnik tells in the volumes of *Salamandra*.

## Notes

1. The papers given at the conference are collected in *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust*. For a discussion of the conference’s background, procedures, and contents, see Cohen, *Israeli Holocaust Research*, 208–25.
2. Meir Dworzecki, “The Day-to-Day stand of the Jews,” 153. For a survey of Dworzecki’s biography and a discussion of his scholarly contribution, see Cohen, “Dr Meir (Mark) Dworzecki.”
3. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 153, 190.
4. Dawidowicz, “Toward a History of the Holocaust,” 53–4.
5. “Debate,” *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust*, 66.
6. Tec, “Jewish Resistance,” 65–6. Dan Michman’s comprehensive discussion of the concept of Jewish resistance and the developments in the field presents ways to settle this terminological and ideological dispute. See Michman, *Holocaust Historiography*, 217–48.
7. Gottlieb, “The Concept of Resistance,” 335.
8. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 153.
9. Dworzecki makes this point also in *Mahanot hayehudim be’estonia*, 239. The issue has also been observed by Terrence Des Pres: ‘any sign of elementary humanness – pales to insignificance,’ in survivor testimonies, mainly because as a witness, ‘the survivor aims above all to convey the otherness of the camps, their specific inhumanity.’ *The Survivor*, 99.
10. Blumental, “Sources for the Study,” 47.
11. Michman, *Holocaust Historiography*, 217–18. See also Shapira, “The Holocaust,” 75–7.
12. Yablonka, *The State of Israel*, 226.
13. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 174. The Nazi assault against the Jews’ very humanity is central to Dworzecki’s understanding of the Holocaust. He makes a similar point in his *Mahanot hayehudim be’estonia* (239, 241), where an entire chapter is dedicated to *amidah* in the camps. The point is also made in his book on the Vilna ghetto, *Yerushalaim delita*, 127, 430.
14. Bauer, *The Jewish Emergence*, 27. Bauer’s italics.
15. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 119.
16. For Dworzecki’s reference to *amidah* as ‘conduct,’ see “Debate,” *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust*, 190. The Hebrew original reads *hitnahagut* (behavior). See “Debate,” in the Hebrew edition, *Ha’amidah hayehudit bitkufat hashoah*, 151.
17. This is a central theme in Dworzecki’s personal memoir, compiled of essays he published immediately after the war. See Dworzecki, *Bein habtarim*, 51, 52, 76. For a comparative discussion of the various versions of the texts included in the memoir, see Piekaz, *Sifrut haedut al hashoa*, 46–61.
18. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 174.
19. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, session 68, part 1. The website provides the complete protocol of the trial.
20. Dworzecki, “Ha’adam vехаhevera nokhakh hashoah,” 12. My translation.
21. The 1946 Hebrew edition of *Salamandra* was translated from the Yiddish original which Dinur wrote in Italy immediately after the war and was never published. For comprehensive discussion of the text and its creation in the context of Dinur’s biography, see Szeintuch, *Salamandra: Mitos vehistorya*.

22. For a discussion of Ka-Tzetnik's impact on Israeli society, see Miron, "Bein sefer le'efer"; Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism"; Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 3–11.
23. Miron, "Bein sefer le'efer," 156; Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism."
24. For some instances of this debate, see Libsker's film, *Stalags*; Karpel, "Akhen tmunot kashot"; Kershner, "Israel's Unexpected Spinoff"; Wallen, "Testimony and Taboo," 5–8.
25. Glasner-Heled, "Reader, Writer, and Holocaust Literature."
26. Milner, "The 'Gray Zone' Revisited"; Bartov, "Kitsch and Sadism," 63.
27. Rogovin, "Ka-Tzetnik's Moral Viewpoint."
28. Dworzecki, "Day-to-Day," 153.
29. Ka-Tzetnik, *Shivitti: A Vision*, 15–16.
30. Popkin, "Ka-Tzetnik 135633," 344.
31. *Ibid.*, 347.
32. Litvin, *Madrikh lamore*, 203. English translation for this passage appears in Ka-Tzetnik's *Kaddish*, 152.
33. Litvin, *Madrikh lamore*, 203.
34. Analyzing the social map of the ghetto and camp that Ka-Tzetnik draws, Galia Glasner-Heled observes a certain degree – more of an emotional weakness than ideology – of the author's identification with the perpetrator, while the Jews are portrayed in negative stereotypical lines. A gap, according to Glasner-Heled, is maintained between Ka-Tzetnik's perception of himself and of the victims he attempts and presumes to represent. See Glasner-Heled, "Et mi meyatseg Ka-Tzetnik?," 197.
35. Ka-Tzetnik, *Salamandra*, 9. The story of rebellion in this edition is limited to chapter 11, and the actual fighting is related in the last seven pages. In the 1971 edition of the book, which Dinur edited himself and which was translated as *Sunrise over Hell*, the description of the fighting is half as long.
36. Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 160.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Ka-Tzetnik, *Star Eternal*, 38.
39. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 242–8.
40. *Ibid.*, 105.
41. Dworzecki, "Day-to-Day," 160; Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 67–68.
42. Ka-Tzetnik, *ibid.*, 113.
43. Dworzecki, "Day-to-Day," 163; Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 160.
44. Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 7.
45. See, for example, Dworzecki's chapter on the *amidah* of the prisoners in his book on the Estonian camps. The chapter is dedicated to the documentation of numerous acts of compassion and solidarity as the behavioral norm, rather than the exception. Dworzecki, *Mahanot hayehudim b'estonia*, 239–255.
46. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 112–13.
47. Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 39.
48. *Ibid.*, 41. Dinur refers to Fella's moral character directly in his dedication on the Yiddish edition of *House of Dolls*. Addressing the photo on the cover (of a girl's exposed breast tattooed with *Feld-Hure* and a number which in the book itself is attributed to Fella), Dinur thanks the 'Jewish daughter,' who 'has not lost human image even at the bottom of the abyss,' for rescuing the diary on which the book is based (my translation). See Ka-Tzetnik, *Dos Hoyz fun di Lyalkes*. For a discussion of this dedication as a historical resource, see Szeintuch, *Salamandra*, 117–18.
49. Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 162–3.
50. Ka-tzetnik, *Atrocity*, 183.
51. Dworzecki, *Bein habtarim*, 76.
52. Dworzecki, "Day-to-Day," 160.
53. Marrus, "Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust," 95.

54. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 170–1. Italics in original. For a discussion of this passage in the context of the Yiddish literary tradition, see Szeintuch, “The Myth of the Salamander,” 117–20.
55. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 171. Italics in original.
56. *Ibid.*, 181–2.
57. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 160.
58. Esh, “The Dignity of the Destroyed,” 356. Nissenbaum is quoted in Ek, *Straying on the Paths*, 37.
59. Esh, “The Dignity of the Destroyed,” 356. Esh’s italics.
60. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 120. Bauer’s italics. Gutman, *Ba’alatah uva-ma’avak*, 79, 84.
61. Ka-Tzetnik, *Atrocity*, 200–1.
62. *Ibid.*, 202.
63. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 174.
64. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, session 68, part 1.
65. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 153; “*Ha’amidah behayey yom-yom*,” 121.
66. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 174; “*Ha’amidah behayey yom-yom*,” 137.
67. Dworzecki, “Day-to-Day,” 174; “*Ha’amidah behayey yom-yom*,” 137.
68. Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 141–2.
69. *Ibid.*, 142.
70. Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 144–5. Ka-Tzetnik’s italics.
71. *Ibid.*, 143.
72. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 130.
73. *Ibid.*, 131.
74. Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 161.
75. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 203.
76. *Ibid.*, 203.
77. Ka-tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 205, 203.
78. *Ibid.*, 203.
79. Ka-Tzetnik, *Sunrise over Hell*, 204.
80. Cohen, *Israeli Holocaust Research*, 218, 214.
81. See Dworzecki’s essay “Shonim hayu darkhei hama’avak,” in Dworzecki, *Bein habtarim*, 52.
82. Cohen, *Israeli Holocaust Research*, 213–14.
83. “Debate,” *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust*, 187.

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