

Translation and Memory from the Cremation Ovens in Poland to Freedom in Greece and the US: The Journey and the Manuscripts of Marcel Nadjary

By Keilah Gerber* & Marina Mortoza[‡]

*In a timeframe of 35 years, from 1945 to 1980, some manuscripts left by 5 Jewish members of the Sonderkommando were found buried near the crematories in Auschwitz-Birkenau. These prisoners were forced to do activities directly connected to the genocide, and because of that they were considered as bearers of secrets. Known as The Scrolls of Auschwitz, these manuscripts have been held as sources of high historical-social-psychological value. The narrative found in 1980 was written by a Greek Jew called Marcel Nadjary (1917-1971), the only amongst the authors to survive the Lager. The degradation of the papers demanded a long recovery work that recently produced two books: *Μαρσέλ Νατζαρή Χειρόγραφα 1944-1947* (2018) and *Marcel Nadjary's Manuscript November 3, 1944* (2020). The work of translation from Greek to Portuguese has allowed us to examine the paths in which a survivor of the Gray Zone builds his memories, in two different moments: at the time of the event, and a posteriori. Therefore, it is possible to identify what is kept and what changes in the subjective assumption of History itself, and in the way the author uses the words to narrate his memories and transmit the secrets he carried.*

Keywords: Marcel Nadjary, translation, testimony, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sonderkommando.

In this paper we will analyse the two remaining fragments of one of the survivors of the group of Nazi prisoners called *Sonderkommando* to observe how the memories he writes about are constructed through time. The fact that he left us the two fragments, one written during the development of the events, and one written a couple of years after the events took place but that narrates the same events, provides us with this unique opportunity. Marcel Nadjary, the Greek-Jew that left us the two manuscripts translated by and commented by us in this paper, was one of the few people that lived through this horrendous experience of belonging to the *Sonderkommando* group and that was able to register his story in paper. We start this article with a peep at the historical part of the *Sonderkommando* and the memory the survivors of Auschwitz-Birkenau left of it, we also mention a bit of the organization of the Greek-Jewish community at the same Camp and make a quick overview of Marcel Nadjary's background in northern Greece, where he was born and lived until he was captured, and of his path since. In the main text of this paper, we offer commentaries on Nadjary's two manuscripts: first on the one of 1944, when he was still a prisoner in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and then

*PhD Student, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil.

[‡]PhD in Classical and Medieval Literatures, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil.

on the one of 1947, when he had already been freed and recounts the same events he lived through *a posteriori*. These commentaries are based on the translation we did directly from Greek into Brazilian Portuguese, the first time they were ever translated into this language. Therefore, we also offer some insights of the translational work. We finish our paper with the hope it can bring some light to an understudied part of the History of the Extermination Camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau that is extremely important for understanding and combating violence that intervenes against the civilizing process.

The Memory of Auschwitz-Birkenau

It is widely known that the SS guards took pleasure in telling their Jewish prisoners that, despite the end, “we have won the war against you. No one will be left to testify, but even if one of you does survive, the world will not believe you. (...) they will call them exaggerations of Allied propaganda (...). We are the ones who will dictate the history of the Lagers” (LEVI, 2015). *Lager*¹ is the German word used to refer to the Concentration or Extermination Camps. Faced with imminent death and the quotidian vanishing of proofs of the Nazi barbarism, some prisoners tried to leave behind evidence and written record of what they saw and knew about the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”, a euphemism used to cover the truth: the genocide perpetrated by the Nazi.

The prisoners that had more to reveal, for they saw the facts up close, were part of a small group of complex status in the concentrationary system. They were members of the stigmatized *Sonderkommando*, the Special Commando, in Nazi irony. The term *Sonderkommando* was introduced in Auschwitz-Birkenau around September 1942, when the crematory ovens started to work; in other Camps different denominations were used to designate this group (GREIF, 2005). According to rumours, they were periodically eliminated. However, “research into the history of the *Sonderkommando* does not support this interpretation” (BARTOSIK, 2019, p. 4). Until mid-1944, it was the weakest and the ones caught doing something wrong that were mostly eliminated. After all, to guarantee the efficiency of the process, the Nazi needed to keep these groups in a more “permanent” status. Known as *Geheimnisträger*, “bearers of secrets”, they directed the newcomers at the *Lager* to the gas chambers, collected their objects left at the undressing room, took the bodies out of the chambers, cleaned the chambers, searched for valuables hidden in the bodies’ orifices, extracted golden teeth, cut long hairs, burnt the bodies, ground the bones that remained after the burning, and disposed of the ashes. One could question why they did not prefer death to performing such duties, but choosing death is not an easy enterprise. Zalman

¹The German word *Lager* is used by Nadjary in his 1944 manuscript and lesser times in the 1947 manuscript. However, he uses the Greek equivalent, στρατόπεδο, on more occasions. Nadjary keeps some words in German in both his narratives. In the 1944 one this use can be explained by the hurry in which the writing action had to be performed, but in the 1947 one this rush did not exist, which may highlight the lasting exchange of words of diverse languages during the imprisonment periods.

Lewenthal, a Jewish prisoner from the *SK*² murdered before the end of the war left it registered: “the truth is that one wants to live at any cost” (BROWN, 2015, p. 1). Besides, apart from the members of the *SK*, a few people were able to bear testimony of the final steps of those pushed into the abyss of death. Thus, if we did not possess such testimonials, these horrendous moments would be erased forever from the annals of History.

Given the nature of their work and the secrets they bore, the members of the *SK* were kept isolated from other prisoners. There are, however, registers proving that sporadic clandestine contacts happened. The members of the *SK* could be identified by their civilian clothing, marked with red ink, but what distinguished them the most was the strong smell of smoke that they exhaled (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). Positive that they would be killed at any moment because of what they knew, some *SK* members decided not to take the Nazi secrets to their grave. The greatest part of them was murdered, indeed. Approximately 2.000 prisoners were part of the *SK* in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The exact number of survivors after the Death Marches and the events that followed until the liberation of the Camps is unknown.

Under risk of being caught leaving evidence behind, some prisoners of this *kommando* buried, alongside the crematory ovens, as many teeth as possible, to ensure that, in the future, proof was found that millions of people had been assassinated there, and to corroborate their testimonies (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). It is fundamental to highlight the extreme risk these prisoners ran into to leave traces of what was happening. After all, as mentioned in the beginning of this text, the secret operation of the Extermination Camps was not supposed to be revealed. *SK* activities did not allow them the use of office supplies, like paper and pen, which they had to acquire. In their context, accessing stationary goods implied exchanging food rations or personal valuables for such items with whoever possessed them. Another way to get them was through the *Organization System*. In the vocabulary of the Camp, “to organize” meant to steal items from the Nazi system, which included the undressing room, where the newcomers left their valuables. However, it was forbidden to be caught bearing anything diverse from what was used routinely in Camp life, the penalty for that being costly, and thus both the “organization” and the writing had to be carried on in absolute furtiveness. Therefore, leaving their testimonies buried amongst the crematory ovens was a highly risky task which demanded planning, dedication, and bravery. This deed was, in consequence, an act of resistance, of great danger and, above all, an act that was only possible to those in a “privileged position”, that could access certain resources (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017).

Right after the demise of the Third Reich in 1945, the first manuscripts left by the Jews forced to work in the Nazi-death-machine were found. Named *Scrolls of Auschwitz*, they were accidentally uncovered from 1945 to 1980. However, as the *SKs* were deep into the Gray Zone of supposed “protekcja [privilege] and collaboration” (LEVI, 2105), these manuscripts were ignored to the point that one of them, found in 1952, was even lost (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). The

²We will use the traditional abbreviation *SK* to represent the word *Sonderkommando*. Nadjary uses the short *Sonder*, Ζόντεπ in Greek, in his 1947 manuscript.

ignorance of what had happened to the operators of the crematory ovens generated mistaken and accusatory interpretations, both from scholars and survivors (GREIF, 2005). The first inferences around the *SKs* derived from a few observations used to sustain generalizations that did not consider that they were themselves captives from diverse origins and formation. That meant that these people responded inevitably in distinct ways to the contingencies of the *Lager*, each one according to their own possibilities. It is estimated that around 30 manuscripts left under the soil of Auschwitz-Birkenau are still buried (HOPPER, 2017). Nowadays, we have knowledge of the testimonies of 5 members of the *SK*. Because of both the time they remained buried under adverse climatic conditions and the circumstances they were written under, these manuscripts offer fragmented and incomplete testimonies. Moreover, they present partial narratives, covering events that were still in course, from a restricted context, and written with openly declared hate to the Nazi, as it had to be (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017).

Despite Primo Levi's (2015) arguments that the testimonies of the *SK* members are "something set amongst lament, blasphemy, expiation and the effort of justification, of the recovery of oneself" (e-book), scholars have been following the lead of Gideon Greif in his analysis registered by Bignotto (2014): in the *SK*'s testimonies, despite their precarious survival condition, far from showing signs of incapacity of reflection, they all reveal a keen conscience of their tragic roles, of the position from where they speak. The historian Pavel Polian considers the *Scrolls* as the central documents of the *Shoah*, given the proximity of the eyewitnesses to the epicentre of the genocide (HOPPER, 2017). This opinion is shared by other scholars, that affirm that these manuscripts are an important-and-not-enough-read register of the *Shoah* (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). We also agree with such understanding, after all, the members of the *SKs* were themselves victims of the concentrationary context, subject to oppression, various kinds of arbitrariness, and frequent death threats. They are considered as victims put "on a special position, in which it was not only necessary to testify (...), but to speak from a place in which not even the hope to get heard was part of reality" (BIGNOTTO, 2014, pp. 244-245). It is from that place, doomed initially to silence and condemnation, that their testimonies emerge.

Aside from the lost manuscript of unknown authorship, the manuscripts found until 1962 are attributed to prisoners Zalman Gradowski, Zalman Lewenthal, Leib Langfus³ and Herman, or Hersz, Strasfogel⁴ (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a). On October 24, 1980, a group of students working on maintenance in Auschwitz-Birkenau found a leather briefcase buried next to the ruins of Crematory III (2). Inside the briefcase there was a bottle containing rolled papers. The students knew they had found something valuable and delivered it to the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (MMAB), that identified the author of the manuscript as a Greek-Jewish man named Marcel Nadjary. It was the last *SK* manuscript found since 1962. The state of degradation of the papers demanded a long recovery that

³In the first publications of the *Scrolls*, Leib Langfus had not been identified as one of the authors of these testimonies, and his narrative was identified as "The manuscript of an Unknown author". (BEZWINSKA, CZECH, 1973).

⁴This testimony was attributed to Chaim Herman till 2019.

culminated in two books: *Μαρσελ Νατζαρή Χειρόγραφα 1944-1947* (2018), written in Greek, and *Marcel Nadjary's Manuscript November 3, 1944* (2020), a trilingual version, in Greek, Polish and English.⁵ Marcel Nadjary was the only *Scrolls'* author to survive the *Lager*, and for this reason the Greek book contains a testimony written by him in 1947. The translation work of these materials from Greek to Portuguese has been allowing us to examine the ways in which the memory of a survivor of the Gray Zone functions, in two logical/chronological timeframes: at the very moment of the events, and *a posteriori*.

Through memory, experiences of the human organism are subjectivized, “that is, it becomes a narrative of events endowed with intentionality, inscribed in time and made comprehensible through the concepts of cause, motive, aim and purpose” (Costa, 2019, p. 104). This does not happen in a linear way, for memory, whose definition is variable and controverse in psychopathology, is not a photographic device nor a filming camera, which registers everything in a uniform way. Even “in normal conditions, it ‘fails’, it does not reproduce the object as it really is” (Bogochvol & Teixeira, 2017, p. 204). Forgetfulness and memory are part of an intricate web in which the subject is more an effect than the agent. Freud ([1930]/2020) evokes Rome, the Eternal City, when addressing the permanence of historical elements in the psychic apparatus. The extensive history of the Roman constructions, from its beginning, created layers that can still be found scattered, coexisting in relative harmony with modern buildings. It is possible to find ancient sections, rubble, ruins and, under the ground of the contemporary city, signs of its old buildings remain. Similarly, in the psychic apparatus, the past “can be preserved in the life of the soul and does not need, necessarily, to be destroyed” (p. 315). Some memories are more protected and preserved while others take the form of rubble, meaning that only traces of their passage are left over from the original construction. Therefore, there are layers of memories, preserved depending on favourable or unfavourable conditions, that coexist and are as important as what is operating in the present. Memory often works in cycles: there are times when evocation or reminiscence is prompted, for example, by a correlated experience, and there are times when forgetting is reinforced (Seligmann-Silva, 2021; Ricoeur, 2007). Memory may also be affected by a traumatic experience. Trauma is a Greek word – *τραύμα* – that means “wound” and that has been metonymically used to indicate that which causes the wound (Caldas, 2015) as well. Thus, trauma is a wound that affects language and memory, and that, at the same time, is a persistent memory about what caused the wound in the first place. If we are allowed an exaggeration of the formula, it would be as a combination of the contradictory pair ‘not remembering’ and ‘never forgetting’. To Psychoanalysis, trauma – a theory used to address the concepts of memory, trauma, and testimony – refers to a mark that points at a gap in the history of the subject that, at the same time, summons and fixes the subject to the point in which the trauma itself occurred. Consequently, and in the light of these characteristics, it must be said that “of course, the most substantial material for reconstructing the truth about the

⁵We have recently come across a French edition, released in June 2023 and translated by Loïc Marcou (Éditions Signes Balises). We haven't had the opportunity to read it until the deadline of this paper due to the incredible and most unfortunate difficulty to acquire it from Brazil.

camps is the survivors' memories." (Levi. 2015), and that is precisely the reason we decided to base this study in one of them.

The Greek-Jewish Community in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Leon Haguel, a Greek-Jewish survivor of Auschwitz, testifies that the Jewish prisoners from Thessaloniki spoke more Greek when in Auschwitz than they did at home, for they were in exile. One can consider that, both symbolically and in practice, the use of their mother-language defined the Thessalonian-Jewish prisoners' social and cultural barriers in relation to the others, establishing their Greek identity through the affectionate use of their own language as well (CHRONAKIS, 2018). Primo Levi (2015), an Italian-Jewish prisoner, in his book *If this is a Man*, designates the Greek Jews as "tenacious, thieving, wise, ferocious, and united, so determined to live, such pitiless opponents in the struggle for life" (e-book). They were not many, but they did know how to fool the others with their immobile and silent behaviour, like sphinxes. The presence of the Greek community was so marked that even the Germans respected them, the Polish feared them and, despite being hard, they had great national solidarity, they danced and filled the *Lager* with songs. Still according to Primo Levi's memories, the Greeks contributed to both the physiognomy and the language utilized in the concentrationary universe, adding vocabulary of Spanish and Hellenic origins, as well as a concrete and earthly wisdom. Most of the Greek-Jewish prisoners knew Hebrew but were not familiarized with Yiddish and the Slavic languages, which excluded them from those linguistic communities. They were called "cholera" (anger, the affection) and "korva" (whores) by the Polish and the rest of the Eastern European Jewish prisoners (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). About the Greek-Jewish community, Levi (2015) concludes that they were the "most coherent national group in the Lager and, in this respect, the most civilized" (e-book). Primo Levi's narrative refers to the Greeks in Auschwitz III-Monowitz, but the testimony of other prisoners corroborates his perception of the Hellenic community. The Greek Jews had fundamental importance in the organization of the Revolt of October 1944 (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a) and in participating in other resistance acts within the *Lager*, like escape attempts and the production of varied testimonies, including the creation of songs (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017).

Marcel Nadjary

Transliterating the manuscripts' author's name was one of the first issues we got stuck with during this process. The Greek original, Μαρσέλ Νατζαρή, has been transliterated in different ways. The closest transliteration to the Brazilian Portuguese would be Marcel Natzari, as it was recorded by Fleming in his book *Testimonies of resistance* (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a), but it is also possible to find the spellings: Nadjar, Nadjari (used by the MMAB), Nadsari, Nadzari,

Natsaris and Natzari. As the spelling “Nadjary” was his and his wife’s choice when they moved to the United States, we decided to adopt it in this work.

Nadjary was born in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 1917, son of the new recently-separated-from-the-Ottoman-Empire Greece. He studied in Greek schools and in the Alsheikh French school. He had Greek Christian friends: to Nadjary, “being Jewish” did not rival “being Greek” (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a; GREIF, 2005). In 1937, at the age of 20 years old, he was called to serve in the Greek army. His first mission was in 1940, when fascistic Italy invaded Albania (GREIF, 2005). In 1941, year of the German invasion, Nadjary returned to Thessaloniki and joined a military resistance group called ELAS: the Hellenic People’s Liberation Army⁶. In December 1943 he was caught by the Germans and taken to Averoff prison, where he was violently tortured and interrogated, and confessed that he was Jewish. In February 1944, Nadjary was transferred to Haidari Camp, close to Athens, from where, on April 2nd, 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau (CHARE; WILLIAMS 2019a; GREIF, 2005).

Upon arrival at the *Lager*, Nadjary was marked with the number 182669 (PŁOSA, 2020) and was put in a 30-day quarantine. Then he was designated to the SK. It was May 1944. Many members of this *kommando* were Greeks for, before the war, many had been into activities that allowed for their physically strong bodies (KIRSHNER, 2018). Nadjary was remembered by the other prisoners as a joker and a good mimic: some said he could make even the SS guards laugh. One can notice some doses of sarcasm in his 1944 manuscript, despite its brevity. Daniel Benahmias, another Greek Jew that was part of the SK, affirms that even the Polish Jews, that were always deriding the Greeks, liked Nadjary (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). After the liberation of the *Lager*, Nadjary returned to Greece and got married, in 1947, to Rosa Saltiel, a survivor herself, and in 1951 they moved to New York. According to his daughter Nelli, Nadjary rarely spoke of what he lived through as a member of the SK (HOPPER, 2017). He died in 1971, at the age of 54, in New York. We know, from the pages his children Nelli and Alberto dedicated to him, that he was a beloved father, an “excellent husband, a tender, hard-working person, a fighter, someone funny, the very soul of any group, a brave, strong, energetic man⁷” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 13, our translation). Nadjary, who died when his children were still very young, left them with flashes of his experience in the *Lager*, even though he said he would talk about it one day. Despite his silence about Auschwitz, the nightmares and certain sombre moments were always with him. As a legacy, Nadjary imprinted on his children that, despite his forced extreme experiences, he lost neither his humanity nor his faith, having always believed in resistance. Nelli and Alberto received not only their Jewish identity from their parents, but also their love for Greece, a country they visited

⁶The ELAS (Ελληνικός Λαϊκός Απελευθερωτικός Στρατός) was the military branch of the EAM (Εθνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο), the National Liberation Front, a left-wing resistance group facing the Germans from the occupation of Greece to 1945, when it was dismantled. It was the biggest of the Greek resistance armies. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ELAS>

⁷Εξάireτος σύζυγος, στοργικός, εργατικός, μαχητής, αστείος, η ψυχή της παρέας, γενναίος, δυνατός, παραγμένος. All the translations from Nadjary’s manuscripts are our own, unless noted otherwise.

three times with their parents, in 1956, 1961 and 1968. And even though Nadjary would not speak often of Auschwitz, he would not avoid telling his kids all sorts of stories of his childhood in his birthland. Their house was filled with Greek music and his love for the sea and fisheries.

The 1944 Manuscript

Scholars estimate that Nadjary's letter was written sometime between the end of October and the end of November 1944, weeks after the revolt which disabled Crematory IV (3) and when the Germans started to dismantle the *Lager* by Crematories II (1) and III (2), to eliminate the vestiges of their corpses-machine. To purge the revolt and the sabotage of Crematory IV (3), around 450 *SK* members were killed. This scenery of death and disappearance of memory was what motivated Nadjary to leave a register of his internment in the *Lager*. In the text he refers to a transport that arrived from Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia⁸, on the exact day he was writing (page 6 of the manuscript). The last transport that came from there arrived on October 28th, 1944 (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a). The day of November 3rd, 1944, is also mentioned in Nadjary's letter, on page 12. The citing of these two different dates may mean that the letter was not written at a single blow.

Nadjary buried a 6-page letter addressed to his friend Dimitrios A. Stephanides, nicknamed Mitso. The manuscript is in Greek, except by some instructions in German, Polish and French on the first page, with three diverse handwritings, which indicates that other people wrote in German and Polish (MACIASZCZYK, 2020). The writing is irregular and with undulated phrases, the strength Nadjary used is patent and reveals that the ink's supply was limited (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017). The analysis of some samples showed that two types of blue ink were used, which implies that he had to change pens during the process (MACIASZCZYK, 2020). Chare and Williams (2019a) observe that there is a certain lack of air in the writing, which denotes the rush in which the process was conducted. There is also an ambiguity in the use of verbal tenses and a lack of punctuation that make the text less fluid and harder to follow. In his letter, Nadjary spoke of his misfortunes, talked about his beloved ones, and passed on the last words and wishes of a man who predicted his hour was nigh.

Upon its uncovering, the manuscript was photographed in black and white, to have its state registered, with faded and tattered pages (CHARE, 2013). For a long time, most of the letter was unreadable. However, sometime after its finding, the MMAB started a thorough and time-consuming process of treatment and restoration of the pages, to clean and repair them, and to improve legibility (CHARE, 2013). Editions of the manuscript were published with what corresponded to 15% of the text, or what could be read with the naked eye (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a). From 2017 on the text gained media appeal for it underwent a very modern procedure which revealed parts of the writing that were nothing but stains in tainted paper. Russian historian Pavel Polian and Russian engineer

⁸Czech Republic was still Czechoslovakia at that time.

Aleksandr Nikityaev used a common desktop and an image-processing software, and thus were able to read digitalized copies of Nadjary's manuscript, received by them in the beginning of 2000 (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a). They exposed the manuscript to red, green, and blue light levels, and spectra filters (RGB). The text was more visible under the red light – in general terms, the manuscript had its legibility increased by 80 to 85% (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a). The treated version of the letter gained its first publication in 2013, in Russian, and its English version in the end of 2017, followed by the Greek version in 2018 (INGLE, 2019). The delay in the English translation of this manuscript, and of other texts concerning *SK* members' testimonies as well may indicate certain discomfort with the investigation of such matters within the Anglophone World (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2017).

During years, the Conservation Department at the MMAB used several modern digital devices of ultraviolet, near and far infrared bands, and X-ray fluorescence techniques without achieving satisfactory results (ZBIROHOWSKI-KÓSCIA, 2020). From 2014 on, in cooperation with Dr. Tomasz Łojewski, great part of the text achieved legibility with the use of an industrial monochrome camera with wide spectral sensitivity range (ŁOJEWSKI, 2020), which resulted, in 2018, in a version of the manuscript that was even more complete than the one obtained by the Russians. This version was published by the Museum in 2020.

Marcel Nadjary (2018) dedicates his letter to some of his dear friends “whom I always remember⁹” (p. 40) and to his “beloved homeland Greece¹⁰” (p. 40). The importance of remembering and being remembered is omnipresent throughout the letter. Concerning Smáro Efreμίδου, as an example, who would bring him food whilst he was locked up in Haidari, he asks Dimitrios to “tell her that Manolis hasn't forgotten her for a single moment and that unfortunately it seems that we won't be able to meet again¹¹” (NADJARY, 2020, pp. 53; 59). Nadjary managed to preserve a photo of her during the whole time of his imprisonment, hidden from the Nazi. To Mitso he asks: “Remember me from time to time as I remember you¹²” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 95). In many moments in the letter Nadjary reaffirms his Greek identity and his love for his country. He says that “at least as far as Greeks [are concerned], we're determined to die as true Greeks, as every Greek knows how to die, showing, till the last moment, and despite the superiority of the fiend, that through our veins runs Greek blood¹³” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 83), that to “whoever asks of me, say that I no longer exist and that I [died] like a true Greek¹⁴” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 95) and that “I will not live, let others live, my last

⁹που πάντα τους θυμάμαι.

¹⁰αγαπημένη μου πατρίδα «ΕΛΛΑΣ».

¹¹να της πείτε ότι ο Μανώλης δεν την ξέχασε καμία στιγμή και ότι δυστυχώς κατά τα φαινόμενα δεν θα μπορέσουμε να ξανασυναντηθούμε πια (NADJARY, 2020, p. 51; 57)

¹²Να με θυμάσαι από καμιά φορά όπως σας θυμάμαι και εγώ (NADJARY, 2020, p. 93)

¹³Τουλάχιστον για τους Έλληνες είμεθα αποφασισμένοι να πεθάνουμε σαν πραγματικοί Έλληνες όπως ξέρει να αποθάνει ο κάθε Έλληνας, δείχνοντας μέχρι τας τελευταίας αντάς στιγμάς παρά την υπεροχήν των κακούργων. Ότι στις φλέβας μας ρέει Ελληνικό αίμα (NADJARY, 2020, p. 81)

¹⁴Όποιος και να ρωτήσει για μένα να πείτε ότι δεν υπάρχω πλέον και ότι πήγα σαν πραγματικός Έλληνα (NADJARY, 2020, p. 93)

words will be: Long live Greece!¹⁵” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 101). Nadjary writes the name of his country in capital letters, ΕΛΛΑΣ, revealing his dedication to his homeland. This is a point to which Fleming draws attention (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a), for it was just in 1912 that Thessaloniki was freed from Ottoman rule and transformed, from a multicultural and largely Jewish city, into a nationalistic Christian place. Between 1912 and 1943, year of the deportation of the Jews to the *Lagers*, the First World War, the Big Fire of 1917, and other events occurred that marginalized Jews to a point to which Ladino¹⁶ was even forbidden to be used in public. Despite all the suffering, Nadjary, through his manuscript, shows us that he and others of his generation were proud of being patriotic Greek Jews.

In his letter Nadjary is also worried in narrating what was happening in Birkenau, reflecting that “the horrible things my eyes have seen are indescribable¹⁷” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 71). He comments that many of the newcomers to the *Lager* and selected to die did not have a clue about what waited for them, and that he would not confirm if they were going to have a shower or not, pretending not to understand their languages. He describes the undressing chambers and the “chamber of death¹⁸” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 59) – the gas chamber –, with its false showerheads. 3.000 people would enter in the chamber each time, for “Holding whips, the Germans forced them to collapse so as to fit in as many as possible, a real tin of sardines mad of people¹⁹” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 42). According to Dario Gabai, a Greek-Jew survivor of the *SK*, the most common finding amongst the belongings left in the undressing chambers were sardine tins, a typical Mediterranean food (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a). It is, therefore, a metaphor built from a particularly familiar element.

The prisoners were locked by the Nazi and gassed for 6 or 7 minutes till “they yield up the spirit²⁰” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 59). After half an hour the doors would be opened, and the *SK* prisoners would start their job. The bodies burnt without the help of any fuel “on account of the fat they contain. Each human being [produced] approximately just half an *oká* (640 g.) of ash, which the Germans forced us to pulverize, to sieve²¹” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 71). After that a car would take the ashes to Vistula River to be discarded, and “this way they eradicate every single trace²²” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 71) of their horrendous acts. When describing the “fine work that the Almighty wanted us to do²³” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 59),

¹⁵δεν θα ζήσω εγώ, ας ζήσουν οι άλλοι, η τελευταία μου λέξη θα είναι Ζήτω η Ελλάδα (NADJARY, 2020, p. 99)

¹⁶Ladino or Judeo-Spanish is a language like Castilian, used by the Sephardic Jews, expelled from the Iberic Peninsula in the 15 and 16 centuries.

¹⁷Τα δράματα που έχουν ιδή τα μάτια μου είναι περιγραπτα (NADJARY, 2020, p. 69)

¹⁸θάλαμος του θανάτου (NADJARY, 2020, p. 57)

¹⁹Με το μαστίγιο στο χέρι οι Γερμανοί τους ανάγκαζαν να συμπυχθούν για να χωρέσουν όσο το δυνατόν περισσότεροι ένα πραγματικό κουτί σαρδέλες από ανθρώπους (NADJARY, 2020, p.63)

²⁰παραδίδουν το πνεύμα (NADJARY, 2020, p. 57)

²¹λόγω τού λίπους που έχουν. Από έναν άνθρωπο δεν έβγαιναν παρά ½ οκά περίπου στάχτη και την οποία οι Γερμανοί μας ανάγκαζαν να την κοπανίσουμε, να την περάσουμε από ένα χοντρό κόσκινο (NADJARY, 2020, p. 69)

²²έτσι εξαφανίζουν το κάθε ίχνος (NADJARY, 2020, p. 69)

²³δουλειά που θέλησε ο Παντοδύναμος να πράξομαι. (NADJARY, 2020, p. 57)

Nadjary does not forget he would be judged. He ponders that “my dear ones, reading what work I was doing you will ask how I, Manolis, or anybody doing this work, was able to burn my coreligionists, I too at the beginning thought many times to enter the furnaces] with them and end [my life]²⁴” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 83; 89). However, something stopped him from doing so.

Nadjary did not have much expectation of living, after all, he lived daily with the elimination of the traces of Nazi’s actions and witnessed daily deaths, including those of members of the *SK*. He recognised the relevance and the danger of what he knew. In the end of the war an order arrived for the cease of the assassination of Jews but he knew that such law would not be valid for his group, “for us however, things are different, we have to [disappear] from Earth because we know too much about the inconceivable manner in which [Jews] were maltreated and murdered²⁵” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 77). He did not kill himself because “I wanted, and I want to live to avenge the deaths of Dad, Mom, and my dear little sister Nelly. I’m not afraid of death, is it even possible to be afraid after what my eyes have seen?²⁶” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 89). He says he does not lament that “I will die but because I won’t be able to get the revenge I want and I know [how to exact]²⁷” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 101). According to Nadjary, there were around 200 Greeks in the *SK* group of which he was a member. After the “Heroic Resistance”, the revolt of October 1944, only 26 survived. Nadjary also speaks of his cousin, Sarrika Houli, asking Mitso to take care of her in case she survives, for “all here suffer what one’s mind can’t imagine²⁸” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 95). This request he extends to “those who return from the Birkenau Camp²⁹” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 95; 101). He also donates the valuables of his family to Mitso, except from Nelly’s piano, which he says he would like to be given to his cousin Elias Cohen.

Nadjary asks Mitso to tell his kin, in case of any contact, that “the family A[vraam] Nadjary was put out, murdered by the civilized Germans (Nea Evropi^{30,31})” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 101). He estimates that around 1.400.000 Jews of diverse national backgrounds, were killed at Birkenau, a number which got extremely close to the real current statistics of 1,1 million victims (HOPPER, 2017). Facing so much death, Nadjary reflects “if there is a God and yet I have

²⁴ Αγαπημένοι μου θα πείτε μου διαβάζοντας τί εργασία έκαμνα, πώς μπόρεσα να κάνω εγώ ο Μανώλης ή ένας οποιοσδήποτε άλλος αυτή τη δουλειά καίγοντας τους ομοθρήσκους μου το έλεγα και εγώ στην αρχή, σκέφθηκα πολλές φορές να μτώ και εγώ μαζί τους να τελειώσω (NADJARY, 2020, p. 81; 87)

²⁵ Για μάς όμως το πράγμα διαφέρει, εμείς πρέπει να λείψουμε από τη Γη διότι γνωρίζουμε πολλά από τους αφάνταστους τρόπους κακοποιήσεως και σκοτωμών των (NADJARY, 2020, p. 75)

²⁶ Θέλησα και θέλω να ζήσω για να εκδικηθώ τον θάνατον του Μπαμπά, της Μамάς και της αγαπημένης μου αδελφούλας μου Νέλλης. Δεν φοβάμαι τον θάνατο, είναι δυνατόν να τον φοβηθώ μετά από τόσα που είδαν τα μάτια μου; (NADJARY, 2020, p. 87)

²⁷ Θα πεθάνω, αλλά ότι δεν θα μπορέσω να εκδικηθώ όπως θέλω και ξέρω (NADJARY, 2020, p. 99)

²⁸ Όλοι εδώ υποφέρουνε όσο δεν μπορεί να το φαντασθή νους ανθρώπου (NADJARY, 2020, p. 93)

²⁹ Όσους γυρίσουν από το στρατόπεδο του Μπίρκεναου (NADJARY, 2020, p. 93; 99)

³⁰ Nazi newspaper published in Thessaloniki during the Occupation (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019a).

³¹ η οικογένεια Α. Νατζαρή έσβησε δολοφονημένη από τους πολυτισμένους Γερμανούς (Νέα Ευρώπη) (NADJARY, 2020, p. 99)

always believed in Him and still believe that God wants it, let His will be³²” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 101). The hope his letter would get to Mitso’s hands reaching its destination, “is my last wish, condemned to death by the Germans because I’m of the Jewish Faith³³” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 113).

The 1947 Manuscript

Written in 1947 the “Χρονικό 1941-1945” is the second of Nadjary’s testimonies, and one of the few registered by a survivor of the *SK à posteriori* (HOPPER, 2017). He did not mean to have it published, but to use it as a means not to forget what he had experienced. Perhaps this is the reason why a topical writing style pervades it all over. According to his son, Nadjary feared people would not believe his words – a common issue for many of the survivors, especially in the first years after the liberation of the *Lager*. Despite being written in 1947, it was published posthumously in 1991, twenty years after his death. Though it was written 74 years ago, and published 30 years ago, this memory relate is little known, since it was written in Greek, and we have no information that it was translated into other languages (INGLE, 2019). In it, Nadjary includes drawings of the *Lager* but does not mention the manuscript buried amongst the crematories.

The 1947’s testimony starts with a topic that goes back to the year of 1940: “on October 28th, 1940, mobilization, village of Chorero Sidirokastro³⁴” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 51). The following topics are the same as this: not fully developed, and not fulfilling a complete and fluid narrative, functioning as a remembrance list. Nadjary points at events that preceded his capture by the Germans on November 30th, 1943. His arrest happened because of his association with the guerrilla group ELAS, that was resisting German Occupation. The interrogations he was put through to reveal information about the ELAS started on January 3rd, 1944, and were so violent that he fainted during the sessions. He was tortured for about a month, a dozen times, till “in the last interrogation that happened I revealed to them that I was Jewish and even my name (Marcel Nadjary)³⁵” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 58). Until this moment Nadjary had identified himself with his codename, Manólis Lazarídis. Not long after that, he was expropriated of everything he owned, including the ring his father gave him when they last said goodbye and he was sent to a prison in Haidari. The prison was getting increasingly filled with Greek-Jews till on April 2nd, 1944, they were sent in a long trip towards Auschwitz.

³²εάν υπάρχει Θεός και εν τούτοις πάντα πίστεψα σε αυτόν και πιστεύω ακόμα ότι ο Θεός το θέλησας γίνει το θέλημά του (NADJARY, 2020, p. 99)

³³είναι η τελευταία επιθυμία μου καταδικασμένος εις θάνατον από τους Γερμανούς διότι έχω Εβραϊκήν Θρησκείαν (NADJARY, 2020, p. 111)

³⁴Την 28^η Οκτωβρίου 1940, επιστράτευσις, χωρίον Χορτερό Σιδηροκάστρου.

³⁵κατά την τελευταίαν ανάκρισιν που έγινε τους απεκάλυψα ότι ήμουν Εβραίος και συνάμα το όνομά μου (Μαρσέλ Νατζαρή)

At first, the impressions from Auschwitz were good, “at first sight all seemed quiet and even the Germans that welcomed us at the station were quite good. We did not see them beating anybody else, on the contrary, they were all good³⁶” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 66). The scene’s purpose was to fool the newcomers so they would not resist and cause problems to the Nazi. Luggage was left at the station, men and women were organised “and then began the so-called selection³⁷” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 66). The doctor indicated with his little finger which direction each one should follow: “the elderly, the young children, the disabled and the malnourished to the left, and the young and robust to the right³⁸” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 66-67). Some healthy pretended to limp to escape walking to their destiny and, directed to the left, were taken in a truck to Birkenau, “and since then we have never seen them again³⁹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 67). The ones directed to the right were taken to Auschwitz, “we thought there was a lot of humanity in the Germans, since <work sets you free>, as they say. (...) the only thing troubling our hearts was the electrified barbed wire of the Camp⁴⁰” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 67). The Nazi brought in an interpreter so they could pose many questions to the newcomers that were inspected and taken to another place after that. During displacement, “we would walk like fools, observing everything around us and, above all, trying to see, in the faces of those who looking at us, some of our acquaintances, father, mother, our sister, but in vain⁴¹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 70).

The welcome scene ended right there. They were crammed together for a day and a half in a room called Zάona (Baths), the Nazi ordered them to take off their clothes, except the shoes, and to hand over any valuables they might possess, or they would be killed. It did not take long for them to start beating people. Some could swallow some small valuable object. They remained naked till next day, when they were marked, “they felt a lot of pain because of the marking of the number, but it was only the beginning (...) they even counted the number of gold teeth we had in our mouths⁴²” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 70). From the window of the building where they were they could see two chimneys that “released together a black smoke and a heavy flame that would give you the shivers. We asked what

³⁶Κατά πρώτην όψιν όλα φαινόταν ομαλά, και μάλιστα οι Γερμανοί που μας υποδεχθήκαν στον Σταθμό αρκετά καλοί. Δεν τους είδαμε να χτυπήσουν κανέναν, απεναντίας ήταν όλοι καλοί.

³⁷και τότες άρχισε η λεγόμενη διαλογή

³⁸γέρους, μικρά παιδιά, ανάπηροι και ραχητικοί από την αριστεράν μπάνταν, και τους νέους ρωμαλέους από την δεξιάν.

³⁹και έκτοτε δεν τους ξαναείδαμε ξανά.

⁴⁰σκεπτόμενοι ότι υπάρχει μεγάλη δόσις ανθρωπισμού στους Γερμανούς, αφού <Η δουλειά σε κάμνει ελεύθερον>, όπως τα λεν (...) Το μόνον πράγμα που μας στενοχωρούσε την καρδιά ήταν τα ηλεκτροφόρα συρματοπλέγματα του Στρατοπέδου.

⁴¹Προχωρούσαμε πάντα σαν χαζοί παρατηρώντας όλα τριγύρω μας και, προπαντός, προσπαθώντας στα πρόσωπα που μας κοίταζαν να δούμε κανέναν γνωστόν μας, τον πατέρα, την μάνα, την αδελφή μας, αλλά εις μάτην.

⁴²Πονούσανε αρκετά κατά το γράψιμο του αριθμού, αλλά ήταν η αρχή. (...) Μας μετρήσανε ακόμη και τα χρυσά δόντια που είχαμε στο στόμα.

that was. The other prisoners told us that it was an iron smelting plant⁴³” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 72). There was a new selection, and their bodies were completely shaved, they were disinfected and received a radish tasteless soup. In the end they received old, torn, and disproportionate clothes, “when we got dressed, one could not recognise the other. I laughed a nervous laugh⁴⁴” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 73). In sequence they were directed to the “*Lager Quarantine*”, where they remained for 30 days in three-story beds with grass mattresses and a few blankets. There they faced hunger and cold, and misery and weakness started to overcome them. During this period “diverse rumours began to circulate that the ones that had went left with the trucks when we got off the train had been burnt after being murdered. We obviously did not believe it⁴⁵” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 76). They imagined the Poles wanted them to be depressed in order to take their bread.

When they left the quarantine, they were informed that they would work in a good place, that it would be a lot of work, but that they would have a lot of food as well, and “all of us were very happy⁴⁶” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 76). There was yet a new selection, and they were sent to Block 13, “from which no one could leave alive. It was the block of *Sonderkommando*⁴⁷” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 77). Nadjary did not understand well what they were supposed to do, “but seeing the old *Sonder*, the way they looked at us, I had a small, passing fear, as if a great evil awaited me⁴⁸” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 77). As a matter of fact, this evil would come. Throughout the night, talking with one of the veterans, he started to “understand what kind of hell we had got ourselves into⁴⁹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 77).

On the first day, Nadjary was assigned to work in the courtyard levelling the ground, for the newcomers had been forbidden to enter the building from which the chimneys emerged. Suddenly a whistle blowed and all of them were put in the building. Then “we saw a door open and a mass of corpses right at the entrance. We had a lot of fear. (...) Thus each day they would put us to get a little bit more used to these scenes⁵⁰” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 80). The prisoners ventured to die,

⁴³ με δύο φουγάρα λίγο μεγαλύτερα από τα των λουτρών και έβγαζαν μαζί με ένα μαύρο καπνό και μια βαριά φλόγα που σε προκαλούσε το ρίγος. Ρωτήσαμε τι είναι. Μας είπαν οι άλλοι κρατούμενοι ότι είναι ένα εργοστάσιον λιώσεως σιδήρου.

⁴⁴ Όλα αυτά ήταν απολυμασμένα και συνάμα παλιότατα, σχισμένα, χωρίς φόδρες και δυσανάλογα επάνω μας. Όταν ενδυθήκαμε, δεν μπορούσαμε ο ένας να αναγνωρίσει τον άλλον. Γέλασα αρκετά από νευρικό γέλιο.

⁴⁵ Διάφορες διαδόσεις άρχισαν να κυκλοφορούν, ότι αυτοί που κατά την κάθοδόν μας εκ του τραίνου και πήγαν αριστερά με τα αυτοκίνητα τους είχαν κάψει, αφού προηγουμένως τους σκοτώσανε. Βεβαίως δεν τα πιστέψαμε

⁴⁶ Όλοι ήμασταν όλο χαρά.

⁴⁷ το οποίο δεν μπορούσε κανείς να βγη ζωντανός. Ήταν το Block του *Sonderkommando* (ειδικό κομμάντο).

⁴⁸ αλλά βλέποντας τους παλιούς του Ζόντερ, καθώς μας κοίταζαν, είχα σαν ένα περαστικό μικρό φόβο, σαν να με περίμενε ένα μεγάλο κακό

⁴⁹ καταλαβαίνω σε ποια κόλαση είχαμε μπει.

⁵⁰ βλέπουμε μία πόρτα ανοικτή και ένας όγκος από πτώματα στην είσοδο ακριβώς. Ο φόβος μας ήταν πολύ μεγάλος. (...) Έτσι καθημερινώς και περισσότερο μας βάζανε εις το να συνηθίσουμε στο θέαμα.

“but the [chance] to get revenge held us, to organize an escape (...). Since then, our conspiracy started, we begin to organize for a general attack⁵¹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 85).

There were 35 Greeks in Crematories II (1) and III (2), “the idiots of the crematorium, and of course we looked for nothing else but to make fools of ourselves⁵²” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 85). Since Hungarian Jews started to arrive, the crematories worked nonstop. Many prisoners arrived at the chamber with smiles on their faces, for they did not know they were being sent to their doom. The Nazi scene was made to fool people and it did fulfil its purpose. Some newcomers would give the SKs gold coins and they would accept it so they would not get to the Germans; other more mature captives would ask if they were heading to their deaths. After undressing themselves, “the Germans, to laugh, would tell them to take soap and their shoes with them (...) the main mass thought they would go have a shower, since there was a plate written Desinfektionsraum [disinfection] on the door at the entrance of the corridor⁵³” (NADJARY, 2020, p. 88). After being pushed inside the chamber and locked up, the gas was released, and “people understood they would die. All of them tried to get to the small door, and one would pass over the other. (...) People tried everything to save themselves, scrapped the walls with their nails. (...) The Germans observed everything from the hole and laughed. Why did they laugh?⁵⁴” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 89). An unanswerable question.

Nadjary’s team’s work started when the door of the gas chamber was opened. They collected the clothes to be sent to “Canada”. In the belongings of the murdered they found valuables and food. “We almost always stole everything, and we would give them [the SS] the things that were less valuable⁵⁵” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 90). The objects they stole were used to negotiate with the SS guards, thus “we had them in our hands, they did all we wanted for us⁵⁶” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 90). Despite the optimistic tone Nadjary uses, we know through other testimonies that some guards were more accessible, and that others would just execute the prisoner that was caught stealing. When they took the bodies from the gas chambers, they would realise that the victims “had in their faces fear, terror grimaces⁵⁷” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 91). The crematory ovens worked nonstop and the “batches would happen every 30 minutes or so (...) Every six hours or so the

⁵¹ αλλά μας κράτησε η που θα μπορούσαμε να εκδικηθούμε, να οργανώσουμε απόδραση (...). Έκτοτε άρχισε η συνωμοσία μας, αρχίσαμε να οργανωθούμε διά μίαν γενική εξόρμησιν.

⁵² ήμασταν οι χαζοί του κρεματορίου και εμείς βέβαια δεν ζητούσαμε τίποτε άλλο παρά να κάνουμε τους βλάκες.

⁵³ Οι Γερμανοί διά να γελάσουν τους έλεγαν να πάρουν μαζί τους σαπούνι και τα παπούτσια (...) Ο κύριος όγκος ενόμιζε ότι πήγαιναν διά να λουστούν, αφού στην πόρτα που ήταν στην είσοδο του διαδρόμου υπήρχε μια ταμπέλα Desinfektionsraum

⁵⁴ ο κόσμος καταλαβαίνει ότι πρόκειται να πεθάνω. Όλοι προσπαθούσαν να έλθουν προς την μικρήν πόρταν και ο ένας ήταν απάνω στον άλλον. (...) Ο κόσμος προσπαθούσε με οτιδήποτε να σωθή, γρατσούνιζε με τα νύχια του τα ντουβάρια (...) Οι Γερμανοί από την οπήν παρακολουθούσαν και γελούσαν. Γιατί γελούσαν;

⁵⁵ Σχεδόν όλα τα κλέβαμε και τα μράγματα με πολύ μικρήν αξίαν τα παραδίδαμε σε αυτούς οι οποίοι πάλιν πρυφά από τους ανωτέρους τους τα κρατούσαν δι' αυτούς.

⁵⁶ τους είχαμε υποχειρίους, μας κάμναν οτιδήποτε χατίρι θέλαμε

⁵⁷ είχαν στο πρόσωπό τους τον μορφασμόν του φόβου, του τρόμου

extraction of the ashes was performed⁵⁸” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 92). This “martyrdom lasted for around eight months and a half, waiting, from moment to moment, our redemption by death, but the wish of revenge kept us alive⁵⁹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 92-93).

Since they first joined the *SK* a revolt plan had being plotted. They exchanged several valuables for dynamite bananas, that were hidden, and a naive strategy to face the SS guards that held the crematoriums was planned. The idea was to overcome the Nazi by taking care of the crematoriums and then freeing the rest of the prisoners of the *Lager*. Several setbacks occurred and the revolt was delayed a few times. With the diminishing number of Jews being sent to Birkenau, the Nazi began to select people inside the *SK*, to delete their traces. The first one took 200 prisoners, and “the quicker the time passed, the faster we saw our ending arrive⁶⁰” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 94). Others were separated with guaranties that they would not be killed, just transferred to another function, “but the problem was obvious, where could they send them if not to extermination (for they served as *Sonder*)⁶¹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 94). On a Saturday, the selected ones set fire to Crematorium IV (3). The Nazi isolated the prisoners that were on Crematorium III (2), Nadjary included. The Greeks then decided to set the crematorium on fire, whilst the Poles, in special David “Oler and Strassenvogel, insisted that we should not do anything at all, for it would all be in vain. Then we gave up, for they were most of us⁶²” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 95).

Afterwards, Nadjary heard the mutiny started with the selection of a 100 Hungarians who were sent to the “Gipsy Camp”. Other 100 prisoners were selected, but there were Greeks amongst them that refused to answer to the summoning. A Greek screamed: “is the shower happening, yes or not?⁶³” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 96). Immediately the rest of them threw everything they had at hand in the three SS guards that were there, probably killing one of them. Some prisoners ran to the crematorium and set it on fire to disable it. The guards ran to Crematorium IV (3): the ones that set it on fire were killed when attempting to leave it. After fighting, seeing that they would lose, the other prisoners surrendered. When they saw the fire, the ones on Crematorium I understood it was a sign that the Germans had begun the killing of all the *SK* and decided to run, but the Germans surrounded them. The ones holding the dynamite bananas had no courage to use them, so the explosion on Crematorium II (1) did not occur. All were killed, and the prisoners “thought it was better to die outside than inside the

⁵⁸Οι φουρνιές γινόταν κάθε 30 λεπτά περίπου (...) Κάθε εξάωρον περίπου, γινόταν η εξαγωγή της στάχτης

⁵⁹Η μαρτυρική ζωή διήρκεσε περίπου 8½ μήνες, περιμέ νοντας από στιγμή σε στιγμή τον λυτρωμό μας στον θάνατο, αλλά μας κρατούσε στη ζωή η επιθυμία μας εκδίκησεως

⁶⁰Όσον ο καιρός περνούσε, τόσοσ Βλέπετε και το τέλος μας να έρχεται.

⁶¹Αλλά το ζήτημα ήταν φανερό, πού μπορούσαν να τους στείλουν, αν όχι για εξόντωσιν (επειδή υπηρετούσανε στο Ζόντερ)

⁶²Oler και Strassenvogel, επέμεναν να μην κάνουμε απολύτως τίποτα, διότι όλα θα ήταν μάταια. Υποκύψαμε μετά, λόγω ότι ήταν οι περισσότεροι

⁶³<Θα γίνη ναι ή όχι το ντου;>

rooms, a little bit later. We burnt them the next day⁶⁴” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 96). A couple of days later, new executions took place till there were only 100 *SK* members left, 26 Greeks amongst them.

As no more trains were arriving, the *SK* was set to demolish Crematories II (1) and III (2), with the help of some women. Nadjary tried, then, as he could, “to explain to Ninetta and to the other girls how the Germans killed so many millions, the system of operation, how we burnt the corpses. Even though they saw all of this in front of them, they could not believe⁶⁵” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 101). He wanted them to believe, for them, the members of the *SK*, “were sure we would not live, they would kill us, from the beginning, before freeing us, for our eyes had seen more than they should have⁶⁶” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 101). He wanted the secret he kept preserved and revealed to the world. On January 15th, 1945, they heard the Russians were getting closer. At night they heard explosions and gunfire, they thought that “the time of Auschwitz’s liberation was nigh, and the time of our end. (...) Our anguish was indescribable⁶⁷” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 102). On January 18th the evacuation of the *Lager* took place, but, whilst the other prisoners were leaving, the 100 *SK* members were locked up. When they realised the prisoners returned, they managed to escape the block and mingle with the rest. The Nazi looked for them twice but were not capable of locating them.

The *SK* members mixed with other prisoners on the Death March. The phalanx would move with around six or seven thousand people. They left several bodies through the streets; the stops to rest were rare and short; the cold, intense. At night, the prisoners were crammed in big walled properties, and tried to rest over mud and snow. The march continued for days till they were put in trains with open carts, where they faced “another martyrdom, the narrowness of the space, hunger, and thirst. We could not lose our strength and we were lost; we threw the dead ones from up the train⁶⁸” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 103). Some Greeks did not survive the trip. When they passed through Bern, the inhabitants threw them food. Some days later they arrived at Mauthausen where they had their hair cut, had a shower and just got clothes after a few days, the infamous stripped uniform. Around a thousand prisoners were sent to Melk, where they were set into forced labour. Nadjary got a double soup portion, for he put a lot of effort into the activity, to impress the command. However, even though he tried to be diligent at his work, he would be beaten constantly with a hose. Nadjary and Leon Cohen, another Greek Jew, were sent back to Mauthausen, and from there to Gusen II, where they found ways of avoiding the cold and the work. Despite considering the

⁶⁴Σκεφθήκαν καλύτερον να σκοτωθούν έξω παρά λίγο αργότερον, εντός του δωματίου. Αυτούς τους κάψαμε εμείς οι ίδιοι, την επομένη.

⁶⁵προσπαθούσα στη Νινέττα και σε άλλα κορίτσια να εξηγήσω το πώς οι Γερμανοί θανάτωσαν τόσους χιλιάδες, τον τρόπο της λειτουργίας, το πώς καίγαμε τα πτώματα. Αν και τα έβλεπαν μπροστά τους, δεν μπορούσαν να το πιστέψουν.

⁶⁶ήμασταν βέβαιοι ότι δεν επρόκειτο να ζήσουμε, θα μας σκότωναν από πριν, προτού ελευθερωθούμε, διότι τα μάτια μας είχαν ιδεί περισσότερα από ό,τι έπρεπε

⁶⁷Πλησίαζε η ώρα της ελευθερίας του Auschwitz και συνάμα το τέλος μας. (...) Η αγωνία μας ήταν απερίγραπτη

⁶⁸αλλά εκεί άρχισε άλλο μαρτύριο, η στενότης χώρου και η πείνα και δίψα. Δεν έπρεπε να χάσουμε τις δυνάμεις μας και πηγαίναμε χαμένοι, αυτοί που πέθαιναν τους ρίχναμε από πάνω από το τραίνο.

activities at Gusen II easy ones, “the cold, the sleeplessness and the fasting consumed us⁶⁹” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 107). Many times, there was nothing else to eat but hot water, so they learnt to eat coal and potato’s rotten peels, which they would hide in their shoes, and even grass. When they were caught hiding the rotten potatoes they were beaten. Even though, when the hunger was unbearable, Nadjary and Saul Molcho would do this repeatedly. From Gusen II they were sent once more to Mauthausen, where they remained for 4 to 5 days till a long phalanx was formed in the direction of Wels. Once more the tiredness, the hunger and the weakness followed them, making them eat whatever they found along the way, “we were together: me, Saul, Albert Jachon and Leon Cohen⁷⁰” (NADJARY, 2018, p. 110). Thus, Nadjary encloses his testimony, not letting us know how they got freed or how they went back to Greece, but highlighting he was not alone.

Brief Aspects of the Translation of the Manuscripts

This commentary on the texts is a quick analysis of Nadjary’s writing style, based on what could be apprehended from the first impressions of the translation of his manuscripts. Due to matters of space and time, there is no room here for a deeper study, which we plan to do soon. We understand translation as a rewriting process, essential to the mediation of the eyewitness’ narrative and a new audience, the Brazilian people in this case, in which one searches for the preservation of both the context and the political act that such testimony entails (Davies, 2018). It is quite a challenge when the structural characteristics of such different languages is considered.

The 1944 manuscript was written during Nadjary internment in Auschwitz-Birkenau, in a rush and hidden from the Nazi guards. The text reflects these circumstances: it is a very objective, disjointed text. It is a heap of facts with no seam to conduct the narrative. This characteristic reveals the hurry and the unfavourable situation, not adequate for intellectual activities of any kind.

Despite all technological improvements applied to the 1944 manuscript, many words could not be deciphered with clarity – and that explains the differences between the Greek and the Polish versions – and some holes remain in the text, which corroborates its incompleteness. This manuscript is a letter, which means it bears all the characteristics of this format: an addressee is appointed, instructions are given to him on how to dispose of the sender’s belongings, and, above all, there are both well-defined start and end, which is more than the 1947 one has.

The general impression of the translation of the 1947 manuscript is that one is watching a slideshow: each click reveals a scene, some scenes are left pending. As in the 1944 manuscript, there is no consistent narrative thread in the construction of the text. Nadjary does not continue an episode he started, breaking the narrative to start yet another episode, completely diverse and, many times, with no direct connection with the previous one. It is, though, important to bear in mind that the

⁶⁹μας έτρωγε το κρύο, η νύστα και η νηστεία

⁷⁰Ημασταν μαζί ο Ζαούλ, Αλβέρτος Τζαχόν και ο Λεών Κοέν

text was not thought to be read by strangers. Nadjary's goal was to register the events to retain the memory of what he lived and saw, from the Occupation of Greece to the Liberation of the *Lagers*. Not predicted by the author during the composition of the text, the reader is left with more doubts than certainties: how does this situation unfold, how did they solve this matter, amongst others.

The text of the 1947 manuscript is also very dry, as is the one of 1944: it is composed of a listing of facts; feelings and emotions are briefly mentioned, the author does not linger in debates around such matters. The text ends so abruptly that the reader has the impression the author got suddenly tired of the narrative and abandoned it. A very different ending is given in the manuscript of 1944, in which the author says his goodbyes to his dearest friend. Perhaps the reason why he rarely spoke about it and why he did not return to his writings to finish them is because perhaps that terror never ended for him. Besides that, in the year of 1947 little or nothing had been debated about the testimonies of survivors, the testimonial boom would only happen in the 1980's, some years after Nadjary's death.

Despite his laconic testimony, if compared to others left buried in Auschwitz, Nadjary himself mentions a reason for his dryness and objectivity: "He states after a summary of the process of extermination at Birkenau: 'The horrible things my eyes have seen are indescribable'. The word he uses here, which is translated as 'indescribable', is 'απερίγραπτα', which is etymologically linked to 'γράφω' (*grapho*), to writing" (CHARE; WILLIAMS, 2019, p. 114) The first letter of the word *απερίγραπτα* is an *alpha*, a vowel that sounds like "a". This *alpha* in the beginning of a word provokes a negative idea, it is the so-called "*alpha* privative". The preposition "*περί – peri*" confers the idea of circular movement, denotes the area around something. Thus, the conjunction of these three Greek syntagms in the same word would form a semantic unit that indicates something impossible to be written in those circumstances. Despite his attempts to create a representation, a body, to what he says, he cannot write. Thus, even though the world will not know Nadjary's reasons for his non-closures, his narrative is a treasure to the construction of the memory of the horrors lived by the peoples persecuted by the Nazi during Second World War, and his bravery in leaving these records to posterity is invaluable. In the end, he did get his revenge.

Final Thoughts

The Nazi lost the battle for the dictation of the history of the *Lager*. They failed because there were survivors that raised their voices and lent their bodies to testify. There is also a group of testimonies that overcame the Nazi's intentions of controlling the memory about the *Lager*: the relates, and other evidence the dead, left buried alongside the crematory ovens. The manuscripts found enshrouded in Auschwitz-Birkenau are an important record of the horrors of the Shoah, and they are still pending deeper analyses. They remind us of moments that we would prefer had never existed, but that did exist and cannot be ignored like the Nazi wanted. The register of this memory is under conservation, study, and translation,

not to be forgotten by the next generations, for this horror never to happen again. There are, however, some misconducts in these preservative acts. Thirty manuscripts still lie in the soil of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and they are not being searched for. Besides that, there is the issue of making the uncovered manuscripts properly readable and amply disseminated. After all, in a general way, what we noticed through research is that there is little interest in the sufferings of the operators of the crematoriums. The Nazi wanted them to be bearers of secrets: relegated to silence, shame and condemnation. However, as they knew their tragic role, they faced the risks of registering what they saw and do, raising the written word to an act of vengeance and resistance against Nazi's will.

In this sense, each testimony counts, for each is capable of throwing light in the events, dilemmas and inquiries. It is in this sense of recovering memory that Nadjary's manuscripts are invaluable. Nadjary's manuscripts confer materiality to his passage through *Lager*. His manuscripts contain the necessary marks so that whoever reads them will come to know not only the number marked in the Nazi records, but also the name and the history of Marcel Nadjary. If, on one side, we understand the context in which Nadjary registered the 1944 testimony, the same is not true for why he did not want to reveal the existence of the first manuscript while he was still alive. Translating these manuscripts into Brazilian Portuguese has posed challenges, but it has also allowed us to reveal the story of a Greek Jew who loved his homeland; who took the time to name, one by one, the Greeks he met throughout his misfortunes; who, despite not fearing death, did his best to survive and thus avenge, through the registering of memory, his testimonies, all the dead. This is a story worth telling, even in our mother language, Brazilian Portuguese.

References

- Bartosik I (2019) *The Sonderkommando revolt: October 7, 1944*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.
- Bignotto N (2014) As formas do silêncio. In: NOVAES, A. *Mutações: O silêncio e a prosa do mundo* (pp. 229-248). São Paulo: Edições SESC.
- Bogochvol A, Teixeira A (2017) Memória. In: Teixeira, A & Caldas, H. (Org.). *Psicopatologia Lacaniana* (pp. 201-235). Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.
- Brown A (2013) *Judging "privileged" Jews: holocaust ethics, representation and the "grey zone"*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2015.
- CHARE, N. On the Problem of Empathy. In Chare, N. & Williams, D. *Representing Auschwitz* (pp. 33-57). Estados Unidos/Reino Unido: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Caldas H (2015, outubro) Trauma e linguagem: Acorda. *Arquivos da Biblioteca*, n.11. Rio de Janeiro: Escola Brasileira de Psicanálise, pp. 89-100.
- Chare N, Williams D (2017) *Matters of Testimony: Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Chare N, Williams D (2019a) *Testimonies of Resistance: Representations of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Sonderkommando*. Nova York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chare N, Williams D (2019b) *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando: Testimonies, Histories, Representations*. Reino Unido: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Chronakis P (2018) “We Lived as Greeks and We Died as Greek”. In Antoniou, G & Moses, A. *The Holocaust in Greece* (pp. 157-180). Estados Unidos: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies P (2018) Filip Müller’s Sonderkommando testimonies: witnessing in translation. In: Davies, P. *Witness between languages: The translation of holocaust testimonies in context* (pp. 166-28). USA: Boydell & Brewer.
- Freud S (2020) O mal-estar na cultura. In *Cultura, Sociedade, Religião: O mal-estar na cultura e outros escritos* (pp. 305-410). Belo Horizonte: Autêntica (Obras incompletas de Sigmund Freud). (Publicado originalmente em 1930).
- Greif G (2005) *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz*. USA: Yale University Press.
- Hopper T (2021) ‘How Could I Burn Fellow Believers?’. Canada, 19 Oct. 2017. Disponível em: <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/how-could-i-burn-fellow-believers-read-a-real-time-account-of-the-auschwitz-gas-chambers-hidden-for-more-than-70-years>. Acesso em: 20 Ago. 2021.
- Ingle L (2019) *Witness and Complicity: The Scrolls of Auschwitz and the Sonderkommando*. (Dissertação de Mestrado em História). Estados Unidos: Liberty University.
- Kirshner S (2021) Witness to Genocide. *The Times of Israel* (The blogs Sheldon Kirschner). Israel, 6 Mar. 2018. Disponível em: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/witness-to-genocide/>. Acesso em: 20 Ago. 2021.
- Levi P (2015) *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, London: Norton & Company Ltd. (e-book)
- Łojewski T (2020) Legibility Enhancement of Marcel Nadjari’s Manuscript Through Multispectral Imaging (pp. 29-40). In ZBIROHOWSKI-KÓSCIA, W. (Trad.) *Marcel Nadjari’s Manuscript, November 3, 1944*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.
- Maciaszczyk M (2020) Technological Analysis and Description of Conservation of Marcel Nadjari’s Manuscript (pp. 19-28). In ZBIROHOWSKI-KÓSCIA, W. (Trad.) *Marcel Nadjari’s Manuscript, November 3, 1944*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.
- Maniatoglou da PFM (2008) *Dicionário de Grego-Português / Português-Grego - ΕΛΛΗΝΟ-ΠΟΡΤΟΓΑΛΙΚΟ / ΠΟΡΤΟΓΑΛΟ-ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΛΕΞΙΚΟ*. Lisboa: Porto.
- Nadjari M (2018) *Χειρογραφα: 1944-1947*. Grécia: Alexandria Publications.
- Płosa W (2020) Marcel Nadjari – An Eyewitness to the Mass Extermination of Jews in the Auschwitz Gas Chambers (pp. 11-17). In ZBIROHOWSKI-KÓSCIA, W. (Trad.) *Marcel Nadjari’s Manuscript, November 3, 1944*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.
- Ricoeur Paul (2007) *A memória, a história, o esquecimento*. São Paulo: Editora da UNICAMP.
- Seligmann-Silva M (2021) Posfácio. Habitar o “depois de Auschwitz”: A trilogia do inferno de Charlotte Delbo. In: Delbo, Charlotte. *Auschwitz e depois* (pp. 436-460). São Paulo: Carambaia.
- Zbirohowski-Kóscia W (2020) (Trad.) *Marcel Nadjari’s Manuscript, November 3, 1944*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.