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Notes of Defiance: Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, Diana Blumenfeld, and the Question of Cultural Genocide

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Introduction

Following the end of the Second World War, in December 1945, the Central Historical Commission (CHC) was established in Munich by the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the U.S. Zone.[1] Its purpose was to document the atrocities of the Holocaust using any available sources, ranging from photographs to testimonies, and from reports to folk songs. The word to describe this process in Yiddish is *hurbnforshung*—in English, "destruction research." Researchers traveled through the postwar refugee camps, gathering first-person resources and innovating ways to distribute them. The goal was not merely documentation: it was to ensure that the weight of memory shaped the future. The CHC understood that remembrance is an ongoing, active process that informs justice, identity, and resistance against erasure. Their work laid the foundation for contemporary Holocaust research.A future of remembrance is about more than recalling the past; it is about ensuring that cultural memory remains a force against future oppression.

[1] EHRI (2013). *EHRI - Central Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the US Zone*. Available at: https://portal.ehri-project.eu/authorities/ehri_cb-1048.

This paper examines the Holocaust's dual impact on Jewish music: as a tool for survival and as a symbol of cultural resilience. By exploring the lives of Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and Diana Blumenfeld, this essay demonstrates how music functioned both as a coping mechanism and as resistance against the Nazi regime's attempts at cultural genocide. Structurally, it is divided into four main sections. The first argues the importance of recognizing 'cultural genocide' as a critical aspect of the Holocaust, in addition to the more obvious element of physical genocide. The second explores the lives of these two musicians during the interwar period, revealing early signs of an impending cultural genocide. The third discusses the lives of the two women during the Holocaust and demonstrates how, despite their particular circumstances, they were able to survive by using music as a coping mechanism. The fourth and final section recounts the legacies of these women and illustrates how Jewish music has survived and grown since the Holocaust.

Section One: Cultural Genocide

The concept of cultural genocide emerged directly following the Holocaust, first used by Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944 in the same book which established 'genocide' as a widely used legal term.[2] However, cultural genocide is yet to be defined clearly in international law. The term eludes concrete definition since, as Elisa Novic writes, "on the one hand, it relies on a broad definition of culture and, on the other, it sticks to the concept of genocide, which is defined very narrowly in international law."[3]

The absence of an official legal definition has created a gray area, wherein legal experts have sought to uncover distinct elements or features of the processes which contribute to cultural genocide. Historically, cultural genocide has been viewed as a supplemental process to genocide, but is increasingly viewed as its own entity. In *The Concept of Cultural Genocide: An International Law Perspective*, Elisa Novic outlines some commonly used definitions of cultural genocide offered in lieu of one with international legal merit. The first definition Novic explores is Lemkin's, who coined 'genocide' as a legal term, and did so largely on the basis of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust.[4] Lemkin defined 'cultural genocide' as a subsidiary to the process of genocide. This definition views the destruction of physical representations of a people to be the prominent feature of cultural genocide.

A more contemporary definition offered by Novic was conceived by Yvonne Donders, and views cultural genocide, rather, as a distinct process. Cultural genocide is here defined as:

> the destruction by the State or State organs of the culture of a

[2] Leora Bilsky and Rachel Klagsbrun, "The Return of Cultural Genocide?" *European Journal of International Law*, Volume 29, Issue 2, May 2018, 374.

[3] Elisa Novic *The Concept of Cultural Genocide: An International Law Perspective*. Oxford University Press, 2016, 2.

[4] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2019). *Coining a Word and Championing a Cause: The Story of Raphael Lemkin*. Ushmm.org. Available at: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/coining-a-word-and-championing-a-cause-the-story-of-raphael-lemkin.

> community in its broad sense of the term, including the 'distinctive spiritual material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group,' encompassing, 'in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.'[5]

The Jewish experience during the Holocaust fits this definition on many levels. The destruction of "distinctive spiritual material," including the destruction of countless synagogues and places of worship, most definitely took place before and during the Holocaust, the most prominent example being *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, a series of pogroms in November 1938 during which the Nazis destroyed many Jewish synagogues, businesses, and homes. [6] The destruction of "intellectual [...] features of society" also applies to the Jewish condition as, in September 1935, the Nuremberg Law ensured that no Jews could attend state schools or continue their professional careers. Jewish "ways of living together" were also altered, undeniably, by the Holocaust, most critically through the forced removal of the Jewish population from their homes and into ghettos and concentration camps.[7]

In *Cultural Genocide*, Lawrence Davidson defines cultural genocide as the "purposeful destructive targeting of out-group cultures so as to destroy or weaken them in the process of conquest or domination."[8] In elaborating on this picture of cultural genocide, Davidson offers a genealogical account of its origins. First, Davidson notes that every person, and by extension every culture, belongs to their own tiny corner of the earth. For all affairs which occur beyond these local corners, individuals rely on second-hand information. This exposes an associated danger: distance allows for false news to spread for lack of a better, proximal source. Instinctive emotional sensitivities among individuals can worsen this effect. When false news spreads, and individuals feel that they or their livelihoods are threatened, they are more susceptible to manipulation. To solidify this narrative, Davidson quotes Descartes: "many things… extravagant and ridiculous to our apprehension are yet by common consent received and approved."[9] Ideas and beliefs that might seem absurd or irrational to individuals can nevertheless obtain wide acceptance in society; in this sense, emotional appeal, rather than logic, prevails.

This narrative has clear parallels with the treatment of the Jewish culture under Nazi occupation. Nazi propaganda during this period suppressed alternative, local news sources and

[5] Novic, 4.

[6] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2019). *Kristallnacht*. Holocaust Encyclopedia. Available at: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Lawrence Davidson. *Cultural Genocide*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012, 1.

[9] René Descartes . *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. John Veitch. New York, NY: Cosimo, 2008, 15.

directly exploited emotional sensitivities among local populations.[10] Within Germany, embarrassment over the loss of the First World War, as well as the sheer extent of war reparations demanded at Versailles, left Germans defensive of their home and national pride, and therefore ripe for emotional manipulation. Overseas fears also played a role, rallying the Allies towards an early policy of appeasement toward Nazi expansion. This process laid the groundwork for both cultural and physical genocide.

Overall, the Holocaust can be considered a case of both broader genocide and cultural genocide specifically. Some may argue that the use of the term 'cultural genocide' does not apply to the Holocaust: in this view, the tragic deaths of the Jewish people caused the loss of Jewish culture, rather than the independent or supplemental process of cultural genocide. Instead of making this argument, I propose instead that it is necessary to discuss cultural genocide when analyzing the atrocities of the Holocaust because it was not just people that were targeted: it was their lifestyles, their beliefs, their music, and their intellectual and cultural histories. The Holocaust was more than just a physical attack on a people, and there is more to the story than just the physical deaths of six million Jews within Europe. Viewing the Holocaust as a genocide with both physical and cultural components allows us to acknowledge, in full, the direct attempt by the Nazis to eradicate Jewish culture.

Understanding cultural genocide as the systematic destruction of a community's cultural identity provides a critical lens for analyzing the experiences of Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and Diana Blumenfeld. Both women's lives demonstrate how the Nazis targeted Jewish culture not only through physical violence but also by suppressing Jewish music, art, and intellectual life. Despite these efforts, their use of music as a means of both survival and resistance illustrates the resilience of Jewish culture even in the face of systematic destruction.

Section Two: Prewar Jewish Life

Before the Second World War, the Jewish people had resided in Germany for centuries and had, to some extent, assimilated into German society. Many Jews spoke German, felt German, and worked alongside their non-Jewish counterparts. By 1933, less than 1 percent of the entirety of the German population were Jews, but 70% of these lived in urban areas.[11]

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch was born in 1925 in Breslau (then part of Germany, now in Poland), the youngest of three sisters. Describing her

[10] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *The Press in the Third Reich*. Ushmm.org. Available at: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-press-in-the-third-reich.

[11] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (n.d.). *Jewish Communities of Prewar Germany*. Available at: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-communities-of-prewar-germany.

childhood, she writes, "[t]here was no particular emphasis on being Jewish. We were a typical completely assimilated Jewish Liberal family."[5] Besides synagogue attendance on the high holidays and yearly celebrations of Passover, the family carried out their lives as any other non-Jewish resident of their town would. Her family focused on culture, which included learning to speak French and play musical instruments.[12]

Anita's love for music came from her mother, whom she portrayed in her autobiography *Inherit the Truth* as a "fine violinist." [13] She played cello, while her sisters Marianna and Renate learned piano and violin respectively. She writes, "We were a trio and as a special treat I was occasionally allowed to take part in the weekly quartet sessions at home."[14] In these sessions, the music was predominantly classical.

While her home life was calm and happy, Anita could sense that something was amiss, although she could not put her finger on what was wrong or why. [15] Her first experience of antisemitism came at school, when the non-Jewish students would not allow Anita to wipe the board because they did not want to "let the Jew have the sponge" while spitting at her and calling her a "dirty Jew." [16] As she watched her friends emigrate due to worsening segregation in Germany, Anita wondered what the path of her family would look like in the future. Her father remained optimistic that the situation in Germany would improve, meaning that by the time the family made the decision to emigrate, the borders to most nations had been closed to German Jews.

Her musical journey also began to increasingly suffer from the widening German restrictions against Jews. Because of the new laws, no German cello teachers were willing to risk having a Jewish student. Prior to the official outbreak of the war, Anita found a loophole that would soon be closed: she went to study in Berlin with a cellist named Leo Rostal. She expressed in her memoir that "[i]n retrospect, I much admire my parents' decision to send a mere child off on her own to a big city like Berlin. It was in reality the only way I could have had cello lessons."[17] What was supposed to be an eight-year tutelage, however, was soon cut short. The devastating pogroms of *Kristallnacht* in 1938 saw the destruction of Jewish synagogues, homes, and shops, and the mass deportation of Jewish men to concentration camps. After *Kristallnacht*, she wrote that "every day that came to an end with

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[12] Anita Lasker-Wallfisch. *Anita Lasker-Wallfisch – Inherit the Truth.* Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2013. Available at: https://www.hmd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/survivor_stories_anita_lasker_wallfisch_1.pdf.

[13] Lasker-Wallfisch. *Inherit the truth, 1939-1945: the documented experiences of a survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen*. London: Giles De La Mare, 1996, 17.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 20.

[17] Ibid., 19.

one's family still intact was a kind of achievement."[18]

As the world quickened towards war, Anita's life began to shift. In a letter to her sister on June 3, 1939, she describes the urgency with which Jews were fleeing Germany. The letter also includes a poignant moment in her musical journey: in a little music shop, a man had given her a piece of music called "Kol Nidrei" by Bruch, a piece based on a text recited at the start of Yom Kippur.[19] The bookstore owner had said that if she had refused it, he would have been compelled to throw it away.[20]

The destruction of musical pieces like "Kol Nidrei" by Bruch was part of the larger trend of literary and cultural destruction under the Nazi regime. The most prominent example was the book burnings which took place in 34 cities and centers of learning throughout Germany, starting on May 10, 1933. The literature targeted was any penned by Jewish, liberal, or leftist authors–what were considered to be "un-German" books. Long after this initial incident, the Nazis continued to raid book stores, warehouses, and libraries for such literature.

The high levels of censorship within Germany, and later the other Nazi-occupied nations, represent an important trend in cultural genocide: the destruction of "intellectual... features of society," as cited in Donders' definition of cultural genocide.[21] These 'features' include everything from books to music to synagogues, all of which the Nazis targeted. The targeting of "Kol Nidrei" is especially symptomatic of the extent to which the Nazis would go to limit Jewish culture. This piece was not even written by a Jewish composer; it only referenced a Jewish text. From the very beginning, the Nazis' relentless campaign to not only end Jewish lives but erase Jewish culture illustrates the far-reaching scope of their cultural genocide, where even a composition merely inspired by Jewish tradition was deemed unacceptable.

Diana Blumenfeld

While Anita's Lasker-Wallfisch's musical career was still in the cradle, Diana Blumenfeld's was on the rise. As a prominent figure within the Jewish community of Warsaw, Diana already held a unique role in Jewish society. With a distinctively low alto voice, she inspired many of Warsaw's famous songwriters to create new pieces to suit her unique tone.

In 1923, she married Yonas Turkov, another prominent Yiddish performer. The two were a part of the social and cultural elite of Warsaw, and he was a much-loved public figure for his acting. He was, as one source notes, "on his way to becoming one of the most successful actors of the inter-war

[18] Ibid., 18-19.

[19] Ibid., 21.

[20] WRTI (2020). *The Melody of Yom Kippur in Max Bruch's KOL NIDRE*. Available at: https://www.wrti.org/arts-desk/2020-09-27/the-melody-of-yom-kippur-in-max-bruchs-kol-nidre.

[21] Novic, *The Concept of Cultural Genocide*, 4.

Yiddish theatre world."[22] Their marriage marked a merging of two powerful artistic forces within the Yiddish theater world, positioning them at the center of Warsaw's cultural life. The couple's home became a gathering place for Jewish artists, intellectuals, and actors, contributing to the artistic renaissance of Warsaw's Jewish community. Yonas' acting and Diana's musical prowess complemented each other, creating a powerful artistic synergy that became emblematic of the thriving Yiddish theater scene in Poland.

Beyond her role as a vocalist, Diana was celebrated as a dramatic actress within Warsaw's main Yiddish theaters, performing in plays that ranged from traditional Jewish dramas to avant-garde productions. She was a frequent performer at the Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater (*Varshever Yidisher Kunst-teater*, or VYKT), a venue dedicated to both preserving and innovating Yiddish drama. Her performances in plays such as "Yoshe Kalb" by I. J. Singer highlighted her versatility and ability to embody both musical and dramatic roles. The photograph that shows Diana (center) alongside her husband Yonas (left) and fellow actress Ester Goldinberg (right) captures not only a moment in the play but also the spirit of Warsaw's thriving Jewish cultural scene in the interwar period, shortly before the start of the Second World War.[23] Her skill in bringing characters to life, combined with her rich voice, created unforgettable performances that attracted audiences from across Poland and beyond. Blumenfeld's artistry was emblematic of a broader cultural awakening among Warsaw's Jewish community, positioning her as a symbol of both artistic innovation and cultural continuity. These performances were more than mere entertainment: they were powerful expressions of Jewish identity and resilience, at a time when cultural expression held a vital place in the Jewish community.

Source: Eilat Gordin Levitan

The couple were continuing their rise in the social stratosphere when the Nazis invaded Poland. Before the war, Diana and Yonas were on their way to the highest reaches of society; in a short period of time, their careers were turned upside down. The couple was forcibly relocated to the Warsaw Ghetto.

The persecution of Diana and her husband is a clear demonstration of the relationship between cultural and physical genocide –the suppression of Jewish excellence in theater and

[22] Music and the Holocaust. *Diana Blumenfeld*. Available at: https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/warsaw/diana-blumenfeld/.

[23] Eilat Gordin Levitan. *Warsaw Theater*. Available at: http://www.eilatgordinlevitan.com/warsaw/w_pages/warsaw_theater.html.

music, through indirect as well as direct means. Examples of the persecution of Jewish excellence can be seen throughout the Holocaust, but most starkly in the biographical accounts of significant Jewish intellectuals and spiritual leaders at the onset of the catastrophe. [24] This cultural persecution also manifested itself in education: any teachers who did not teach Nazi propaganda in schools were replaced with academics who were willing to obey the rules of the regime.[25]

Section Three: The Holocaust

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and Diana Blumenfeld had differing experiences during the Holocaust, but both found ways to use their musical talents to survive, both physically and spiritually. While Diana found solace and strength in the Warsaw Ghetto, where her performances inspired fellow prisoners and preserved a sense of identity amidst destruction, Anita's musical talents secured her a position in the Auschwitz orchestra and had enabled her survival.

The Warsaw Ghetto, where Diana and her husband found themselves, had a population of about 460,000 people, with an average of eight to ten people per room.[26] This population was also quite diverse: there were both religious and non-religious Jews, as well as Jews who did not realize or recognize their Jewish ancestry but were nonetheless persecuted by the Nazis.

In 1941, the Warsaw Ghetto fostered a creative culture that manifested itself in the creation of various cultural institutions as well as the continuation of the careers of various Jewish musicians. One such musician was Blumenfeld, who continued her career as a vocalist, though not without change. Having entered the ghetto, she began to sing songs that were relevant to the Jewish experience under Nazi occupation, the most famous of which were the Yiddish songs "*Kulis*" (Coolies), "*Di Broyt Farkoyfern*" (The Bread Seller), and "*A Yid*" (A Jew).

"Kulis" offers a powerful case in point. The title is a derogatory term referring to an enslaved person. Both Jews in concentration camps and those performing forced labor in the ghettos were, in a meaningful sense, enslaved. Diana most likely sang this song in the ghetto as a statement of Jewish sentiment. (You can hear a recording of Diana singing the song "Kulis" here.) She not only performed at the various cafés that had formed in the ghetto, the most famous being the "Sztuka" café, but she was also a recurring performer in the various Yiddish theaters that arose within the bounds of the ghetto. Venues like Femina, Eldorado, and the Nowy Teatr Kameralny, though modest and constrained, served as makeshift stages where she used her voice to inspire and console those around her. Her performances

[24] Facing History & Ourselves. *Controlling the Universities.* Available at: https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/controlling-universities.

[25] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *The Role of Academics and Teachers*. Available at: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-role-of-academics-and-teachers.

[26] Imperial War Museums. *Daily Life in the Warsaw Ghetto*.Available at: https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/daily-life-in-the-warsaw-ghetto.

during this period were not only acts of survival but also defiant reminders of a rich cultural heritage under threat. Even in the darkest moments, Blumenfeld's art became a beacon of hope, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit.

Diana continued to inspire various composers, including Jewish composers, many of whom were trapped in the Warsaw Ghetto. One example is the female composer Pola (Paulina) Braun. Braun was a famous songwriter in Warsaw prior to the onset of the war and wrote in both Polish and Yiddish, frequently for the theater. Forced to reside in the ghetto, she, like Blumenfeld, altered the topics of her songs to focus on Jewish experience. Indeed, Diana and Pola worked together often until the latter's tragic death in the Majdanek concentration and extermination camp in November 1943. Diana and her husband were able to escape the liquidation and survive the war.

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch had a markedly different experience. She continued to live in Germany during the early stages of the Second World War. Before she was conscripted to work by the Nazi government, she was still able to attend a school specifically for Jews. This decision forced her to limit her cello studies, due to both the demands of school and the absence of cello teachers who were willing to teach a Jew. In a letter to her eldest sister from 1941, who had emigrated to England just prior to the outbreak of the war, Anita wrote, "I suppose you think that I am pursuing my cello—far from it!"[27] Eventually, she found a way to resume lessons with a teacher who had the coded name of "Eierbauch" in her letters and the actual surname of Auerbach. Throughout her letters, Lasker-Wallfisch discusses the concerts that she performed in during this time. Soon after, her parents were deported to Ibisca, near Lublin.[28] She was sixteen years old when she saw them for the last time.

While conscripted to work in a factory, Anita and her sister Renate were caught aiding the escape of French prisoners of war by printing false passes. When trying to escape with their own false passes, the two sisters were caught by the authorities, arrested, and convicted for their role in the French escapes. Anita's sentence was eighteen months. She spent a year in a prison before being forced to sign a 'voluntary' transfer paper that would result in her relocation to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

As Anita arrived in Auschwitz, she was 'processed' by a Jewish woman forced to manage new arrivals. Here, music once again changed the course of her life:

> I will never know what prompted me to tell her that I played the cello. It might have seemed a superfluous piece of information under the circumstances, but I did tell her, and her reaction was quite unexpected. 'That is fantastic,' she

[27] Translated. Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth,* 34.

[28] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth,* 46.

> said, and grabbed me. 'Stand aside. You will be saved, you must just wait here.'[29]

The next moment she describes is the one in which she met Alma Rosé, who was the leader of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz at the time of Anita's arrival. She was initially confused as to who Alma was – she was dressed so well that it was impossible to tell if she was a guard or a prisoner herself. Upon meeting Anita, Alma repeated the same remark – "you will be saved" – and promised her that she would be given an "audition."[30]

Alma Rosé was the niece of famous composer Gustav Mahler. Mahler, alongside Alma's family, converted to Christianity as a way to further their musical careers.[31] However, Alma was still persecuted as Jewish during the Second World War. She was initially placed in the medical experimentation block in Auschwitz, but once Nazi officials realized that she was a famous violinist, she was transferred to Birkenau, where she was made conductor of the women's orchestra.

Alma quickly began to use the orchestra as a way to save as many people as possible. She would hold 'auditions' for participation, and whenever someone had any kind of talent at all, she would give them a role, whether as a player, a music copyist or even an assistant. Alma was a famously strict conductor and leader, but this was for two good reasons. One was that it was necessary to please the SS guards to survive, and so the orchestra needed to be unquestionably good. The second, however, was that this tough attitude provided something for the members of the orchestra to focus on other than their circumstances in the concentration camp. As Anita records in her memoir,

> with this iron discipline she managed to focus our attention away from what was happening outside the block, away from the smoking chimneys and the profound misery of life in the camp, to an F which should have been an F#.[32]

Alma Rosé did not survive Auschwitz after becoming ill (the source of this illness is debated), but her legacy lives on in the members of her orchestra.

Anita's position in Alma's orchestra was particularly beneficial because she was the only cellist within the camp. Being in the orchestra gave her some leverage in its own right, but being the only one able to play the bass of the music resulted in even more. Anita recounts two clear examples of this in her memoir.

The first moment is when she contracted typhus. In concentration camps, illness was rampant due to the horrific conditions. When

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[29] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth*, 72.

[30] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth*, 72.

[31] Charles S. Maier. "Christianity and Conviction: Gustav Mahler and the Meanings of Jewish Conversion in Central Europe." Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 11, ed. Dan Diner. Göttingen/Bristol, Conn.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012, 127-148.

[32] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth*, 78.

Anita fell ill, she was sent to the sick block, called the Revier. There, sick prisoners underwent random 'selections': the SS officers would decide who was well enough to 'pass' and who would be killed. She recalls this moment of decision: "I was mainly unconscious, although I have a vague memory of seeing some SS men at the end of my bunk, and of hearing someone say, 'this is the cellist', and moving on."[33]

The second moment is when she was able to use her leverage to gain a more advantageous position for her sister within the concentration camp. Due to her position, she succeeded in persuading the camp manager to make her sister a camp messenger, giving her greater security. As Anita puts it, "I was pretty sure that she would not have me 'put away' (for want of a better word) for my audacity, since I was irreplaceable as the only cellist in the camp."[34]

Anita's experience in Auschwitz demonstrates how, during the persecution of the Jews, some were able to find creative mechanisms of survival. Because of her musical talent, she found a route to survival through the orchestra. It is important to note that the reason Anita had leverage within the camp was because the Nazis viewed her as beneficial to themselves: she could provide them more quality entertainment as the only cello player in the orchestra. Nevertheless, this leverage put her in a slightly more favorable position than that of the other prisoners – and in the rare position where her life was regarded with a small sum of value by the Nazis. This illustrates that, although Jewish music and culture was severely persecuted, Jewish musicians could still use their skill and excellence to survive.

Anita's role in the orchestra highlights a poignant paradox: while their music was used to entertain SS officers, it also provided a sense of community and psychological resilience for the musicians. This duality underscores the complexity of survival mechanisms within the concentration camps. In this sense, Primo Levi's notion of the 'grey zone' becomes essential in understanding the moral ambiguity and compromised agency of individuals forced to take on particular roles to ensure their survival.[35] Levi introduces the 'grey zone' to describe a place where the clear boundaries between victim and perpetrator blur. According to Levi, life in camps could not be reduced to the simple binary of oppressor and oppressed; instead, Nazi tactics sought to implicate victims in acts of complicity, thus problematizing their ability to recognize their own subjugation and domination.

Within the 'grey zone,' individuals, such as those who performed in camp orchestras, were thrust into roles that required a degree of collaboration with, or service to, their oppressors. Levi argues that such roles cannot be judged with conventional moral standards, as these individuals were navigating an "infernal environment" where survival frequently depended on some level of

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 80-1.

[35] Stef Craps. "The Grey Zone." *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*. Available at: https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/1266#text

compromise.[36] These morally ambiguous roles spanned from minor functionaries performing administrative duties to the *Sonderkommandos* (translated as "Special Squads," work units made up of prisoners*)*, who, in an extreme case of forced complicity, were tasked with operating the crematoria. For Anita, the orchestra was a lifeline in the most literal sense, yet it was also a source of internal conflict. Her musical performances, while technically preserving her life, carried an unavoidable moral cost. Performing for the SS officers, Anita's music was co-opted, its beauty twisted into a tool of the oppressors; yet for Anita and her fellow musicians, it became a vital means of survival, community, and brief reprieve from brutality.

As the arrival of the Red Army to Auschwitz drew closer, Anita was transferred to the Bergen-Belsen camp. There was no orchestra at the camp, and so she had no access to music, much less other basic necessities. In her memoir, she describes the difference between Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen: "Auschwitz was a place where people were *murdered*. In Belsen they *perished*."[37] She was ultimately liberated at the camp by the British Army.

Section Four: Legacies

Having narrated the stories of Lasker-Wallfisch and Blumenfeld during the Holocaust, it is necessary to recognize the resilience of their musical influence and of Jewish culture more broadly following the war.

At the end of the Second World War, Diana Blumenfeld and her husband, Yonas, were dedicated to the immediate revival of the Jewish culture of Poland. The couple was instrumental in the formation of the Association of Jewish Writers, Journalists, and Actors, which Yonas chaired.[38] The first event organized by the group was a concert held in liberated Lublin, the first of its kind following the Holocaust. Held in a previously occupied area, Diana, alongside her husband, was responsible for bringing Jewish art back to the land that was taken from them during the war. Steinlauf writes,

> In 1944, with the Red Army still fighting German forces throughout Poland, Yonas Turkow and Diana Blumenfeld appeared in liberated Lublin, 'like Noah's dove returning with tidings,' to stage, 'like an

[36] Ibid.

[37] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the truth*, 91.

[38] Music and the Holocaust. *Diana Blumenfeld*. Available at: https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/warsaw/diana-blumenfeld/.

> extraordinary religious act,' a concert of Yiddish songs that marked 'the beginning of Jewish theatre art after the flood.'[39]

Apart from this concert, Diana toured the Displaced Persons camps throughout Germany and gave concerts to survivors, in what Stonehill Jewish Song Archive describes as performing "among her own."[40] She is also known to have performed in Warsaw and around Poland, as well as on Polish radio.

However, Diana and her husband quickly realized that the environment in Poland was no longer the home they knew. Yonas wrote about this feeling in the diary he kept at the time: "Today Warsaw no longer belongs to me; my yesterday was cut down, and my tomorrow? Better not to think of it - here… Warsaw, my Warsaw - for me you are dead!"[41] Following their departure from Poland, Diana began touring throughout Europe and the Americas, as well as in Israel, before settling in New York, where she died in 1961.

On her journey, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, following her liberation at Bergen-Belsen, was relocated three miles from the original camp, to what had previously been a German military establishment.[42] Besides wanting to leave the displaced persons camp and find a new home following the war, her wish was to find a cello.[43] Eventually, that wish came true when one of the officers found an abandoned cello nearby. She expressed her relief:

> I was over the moon. It was an early birthday present. [...] I soon started to scratch away, and news spread round the camp that I was 'operational' as a cellist again. That was far from the truth of course, but it didn't matter.[44]

Her new cello and her ability to create music again not only brought her extreme joy, but it also led to happiness throughout the camp. The cello was no masterpiece – it was in a state of disrepair that made it difficult to play. Yet the mere prospect of playing was a light in the darkness.

After receiving this cello, Anita was asked to accompany Lady Montgomery, a British woman at the camp, to another displaced persons' camp where there were Italian prisoners of war that happened to also be musicians. With these Italian displaced people, she formed a "concert party" and traveled through various displaced persons'

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[39] Michael C. Steinlauf. "Jewish Theatre in Poland." In *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Volume 16: Focusing on Jewish Popular Culture and Its Afterlife*, eds. Michael C. Steinlauf and Antony Polonsky. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003, 89.

[40] Stonehill Jewish Song Archive. *Diana Blumenfeld*. Available at: https://stonehilljewishsongs.wordpress.com/diana-blumenfeld/.

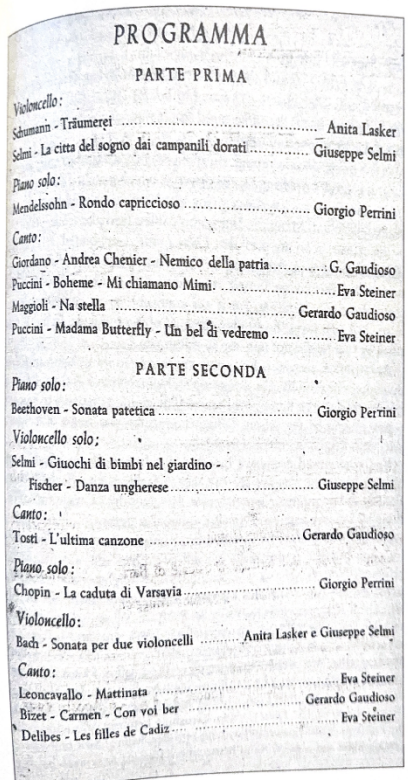
[41] Music and the Holocaust. *Yonas Turkov*. Available at: https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/warsaw/turkov yonas/.

[42] Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth*, 100.

[43] Ibid., 110.

[44] Ibid., 111.

camps to perform. Later, Eva Steiner, a singer who was also a part of the Auschwitz orchestra, joined the group.



PROGRAMMA

PARTE PRIMA

Violoncello:
Schumann - Träumerei ..... Anita Lasker
Selmi - La citta del sogno dai campanili dorati ..... Giuseppe Selmi

Piano solo:
Mendelssohn - Rondo capriccioso ..... Giorgio Perrini

Canto:
Giordano - Andrea Chenier - Nemico della patria ..... G. Gaudioso
Puccini - Boheme - Mi chiamano Mimi. ..... Eva Steiner
Maggioli - Na stella ..... Gerardo Gaudioso
Puccini - Madama Butterfly - Un bel di vedremo ..... Eva Steiner

PARTE SECONDA

Piano solo:
Beethoven - Sonata patetica ..... Giorgio Perrini

Violoncello solo;
Selmi - Giuochi di bimbi nel giardino -
Fischer - Danza ungherese ..... Giuseppe Selmi

Canto:
Tosti - L'ultima canzone ..... Gerardo Gaudioso

Piano solo:
Chopin - La caduta di Varsavia ..... Giorgio Perrini

Violoncello:
Bach - Sonata per due violoncelli ..... Anita Lasker e Giuseppe Selmi

Canto:
Leoncavallo - Mattinata ..... Eva Steiner
Bizet - Carmen - Con voi ber ..... Gerardo Gaudioso
Delibes - Les filles de Cadiz ..... Eva Steiner

"Belsen, July 1945. Programme for a concert given by a group of musicians assembled by Lady Montgomery to entertain Displaced Persons' camps" (Lasker-Wallfisch, 1996, 119)

Anita left the displaced persons' camp eleven months after liberation, in March 1946, and moved to England. She became a professional musician, married a pianist by the name of Peter Wallfisch, and had two children. Three of her family members, her son and two of her grandsons, also became professional musicians.

Conclusion

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch's and Diana Blumenfeld's journeys are but two demonstrations of the remarkable survival of Jewish culture, and in particular the survival of Jewish music. The first section of my paper sought to establish and clarify the distinctiveness of cultural genocide, focusing on the importance of acknowledging the attempted erasure alongside physical genocide. The second section illustrated the vitality and vivacity of prewar Jewish culture, in particular its strength and diversity. The third section outlined the various attempts at erasure which the Nazi regime perpetrated against Jewish musicians, and the responses that kept Jewish musicians alive, through the experiences of my case studies. The fourth and final section discussed the legacies of these case studies to demonstrate how Jewish music survives and thrives in a post-Holocaust world.

Exploring the failed attempt at cultural genocide during the Holocaust calls into question the validity of the use of legal terminology in such tragedies. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch wrote in her book:

> Is it possible to apply law in the conventional sense to crimes so far removed from the law as the massacre of millions of people, which were perpetrated

in the cause of 'purifying the human race'?[45]

Her words underscore the need to expand our understanding of justice beyond conventional frameworks, to recognize the resilience of cultural expressions that defied erasure even as the Nazi war machine sought to exterminate the people to whom that culture belonged. The image of genocide in the popular imagination is one of destruction without real prospects—the state relentlessly rolling forward, over any and all opposition. But the experience of the Jewish people during the Holocaust, and all those who supported their resistance against extermination, attests to the very real prospects of resistance in the face of totalitarianism; just as there is, in Arendt's phrase, the 'banality of evil,' there is also what we might wish to call the *banality of good*.[46] These are the small, quotidian acts of resistance that, in their totality, work to preserve and defend a living cultural legacy by protecting its performers, cherishing its unifying power in challenging times, and articulating that music as an active act of resistance. The profound resilience of music and culture, like embers, can ignite anew—even after near-extinction. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch's and Diana Blumenfeld's music is more than a memory: it is a lifeblood, a defiant resurgence that honors a world nearly erased.

These forms of resistance are both admirable and difficult to understand within the prevailing legal frameworks of genocide. Legal definitions tend to focus on quantifiable harms—above all, the loss of life—but cultural genocide strikes at the heart of identity, memory, language, art, and culture. Culture, after all, is not quantifiable; we cannot easily ask what it means for a culture to die, except if all of those who share it also perish.

Legal definitions of genocide, as I explored in the first section, emphasize a clear victim-perpetrator relationship, whereas cultural genocide is a frequent consequence of persistent and systemic oppression, where identity itself, as I have sought to demonstrate, is gradually targeted and eroded. The kids of resistance I have described here do not mitigate against genocide in the traditional, physical sense, but they do resist cultural genocide. In consequence, to grasp the full impact and resilience of Jewish culture in the face of the Holocaust, we must go beyond legal frameworks and consider cultural genocide as an attack on the very essence of communal existence. Cultural genocide and the struggle against it, as I have shown through Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and Diana Blumenfeld, resist the confines of law, for it is a quiet battle fought in whispers, memories, and songs that echo long after silence has fallen.

Understanding the insidious power of cultural genocide is as crucial today as it was when Raphael Lemkin coined the term nearly a century ago. Recognizing its presence and appreciating its antecedents—such as those outlined in Umberto Eco's model of ur-fascism–is not just an intellectual exercise but an essential act of

[45] Ibid., 127.

[46] Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. London: Penguin Books, 2006 (reprint).

vigilance. [47] The ever-evolving nature of authoritarianism casts a long shadow, capable of silencing cultural expressions just as readily as it enables explicit acts of violence. Only through this awareness can we truly resist both the overt and covert forces that seek to erase entire peoples from history.

Nifrad MiKayin: A Story of Ancient Israel

Shira Eliaser studies Torah and Talmud through the lenses of gender, contemporary life, and sustainable halakhic living alongside traditional commentary and midrash.

Author's Note:

Growing up in an age where Yael was one of the more common names for girls in American Jewish day schools, I have always been surprised by the extremes of opinion surrounding Yael, the powerful Jewish action hero in the book of Judges. I was always taught that Yael was a femme formidable, a hero of the ancient world who seized her chance to lay low a villain who had escaped justice for too long. It is almost impossible to find a sympathetic portrait of Yael in the Christian world of Western art and literature, whereas Judith, her sword-wielding Hellenistic counterpart, receives notable attention. Art historians will quickly assure me that much of the paint spilled on Judith's behalf is done in praise of her womanly wiles, with or without her trademark fashion sense. However, the Sages in the Babylonian Talmud take a not wholly dissimilar attitude towards Yael, courtesy of the poetic language which the prophetess Devorah uses in her praise. The powerfully literate Orthodox women who taught me did not think this way:

Devorah uses the language of power, of destiny, and of motherhood. Yael does also, which led me to imagine an instinctive sympathy between the two women.

I therefore wished to explore Yael's origins. She herself was not an Israelite: Why therefore did she raise a hand against our nearly indestructible villain? What drove her on in the quest for a better future?

The *derashah* I received from my teachers answered those questions with a single verse, the one that suddenly breaks the action of a very exciting battle scene with an offhand comment about Yael's husband, Hever the Cainite. The descendants of Cain were the smiths of the ancient world (Genesis 4:22), and they were based primarily in the Judean territory of the south (Samuel I 15:6). The biblical map begs the question: what was Hever the Cainite doing on the battlefield of north (Canaan)?

> *Now, Hever the Cainite deliberately separated from Cain, from among the descendants of Hovav, Moshe's father in law. He*

[47] Umberto Eco (1995) "Ur-Fascism." The New York Review of Books.

pitched his tent as far as the oak at Tza'ananim, that is up by Kedesh. (Judges 4:11)

Separated.

Deliberately separated.

No one ever asked me if I wanted to be deliberately separated.

Not a day goes by that I do not ache for my sisters, my mother, the good wives of my brothers.

There was singing in the tents of the women, and if one woke up in the dead of the night, there was always a baby crying and the sound of its mother crooning and soothing it back to sleep.

In Tza'ananim, I am always alone.

The music of the forge has long since ceased to ring beautifully in my ears. Our ancestor was Tuval-Cain, chosen one of the god Kothar, who first forged brass and iron for the children of men. My people, the Cainim, have always been smiths, but we have not always been traitors to the gods and merchants of death.

My grandmother would sooner have seen me in my grave than sent off with a man such as Hever-Kasaph. She was devoted to Elit, the mother goddess, mighty wife to Eil Elyon, true king of the gods. To see my husband in service to Yavin of north Canaan, who promoted Ba'al over Eil Elyon and seated Ashtoreth as his consort, would have torn her in two.

In the south, when my nieces danced me to the wedding canopy and called me Yael the Graceful, I had four bond women to share my burdens. They were good women, merry and kind, and when Resheph struck me with illness, they nursed me back to health like my own mother. When Hever the smith took service with King Yavin of Canaan – that worthless worm of the Ba'al – and my mother spit in my face and called me dead, they comforted me all the long way to the north.

Now they are in the kingdom of Mot, all four, and there is no one to comfort me in this lonely place. Enu, the old one, was poisoned by foul water, where the soldiers camped in the swamp, and Aia died of the fever that swept the army thereafter. Kirsa and Kinar died in childbirth, brought to bed by the soldiers who used them. In Canaan, only the master of the house is required to give consent. That weak man – my husband never could deny Sisera anything.

I tried to raise the infants they left behind. I wrapped them in blankets and soothed them and cooed to them. But the babies were sickly, and one cannot find a good herb woman in the train of Sisera. When Sisera saw how I cared for the boys, he sent me boys from the battlefield, more prisoners, to be my slaves. They carried water for me, and baggage, and they put up my tent and the smith's tent every time the army moved. But the older ones were rough and tough and cruel and had no need of a mother. They serve my husband

now at his forge. The youngest was a good boy, and I miss him dearly. He was so willing and helpful and anxious to please. But he was a beautiful child, and Sisera took him, too.

I put up my own tent now, every time.

For two years now, we have pitched our tents in the shadow of Mount Tavor, the tallest mountain in Canaan. The glory of Eil Elyon crowns the mountain peak with thunder. My sisters in the south burn offerings at the shrines, for our mighty ancestresses are descended from Hovav the Priest and his seven daughters, first in the confederation, acolytes of the God Most High. I will burn alone, if that is His will.

…Not quite alone. The twelve tribes of Israel, who came north from Egypt and west from Kadeish Barnei'a, have settled across the country, and they know that Ba'al, Master of the Great Hose, is not the king over heaven and earth. They have been our allies from the days of Hovav and his oldest daughter. My husband came to Yavin, King of Canaan, to help Sisera grind them into the earth. Since that day, my sisters have called me the Wife of That Traitor, and no one sends word to Yael of her nieces and nephews. But there is peace between Yavin, King of Canaan, and the house of Hever the master armorer. I was given him to wife.. He is paid well. What can I do?

The tribes of Israel have risen in rebellion. Despite the summer's heat, five northern tribes have banded together and mustered a force, gone in the night up to the top of Mount Tavor. Sisera's entire camp thunders with the sound of nine hundred charioteers all shouting for their drivers and archers and spearmen. The whetstones in the armory shriek for blood, as forty thousand swords are sharpened for the glory of Anat. The rebels have the high ground, but they are armed with wood and stone and bronze, and Sisera has forty thousand men mounted in chariots of iron. By mid-morning the camp is empty, and Sisera's men have surrounded the mountain. There will be no way out, except through their spears.

We hear the roar of Sisera's men as the command is given to fall upon the mountain. In the dry heat of summer, the wadis lead up the mountain around the rocks like the gods' own roads. Gataru, my blind old one, spits after them from over her millstones. At least for a few hours, we will have peace, she says. Milku, my deaf one, brings the rugs out to beat as soon as the men are gone. She beats in time with the creak of the chariots, though she does not know it. She will not leave my tent when the men are about. She never speaks of what she has lost.

It should have been midday, with bright Shapsh at the top of her great ascent. But on that day, the windows of Heaven were opened, and gentle Pidraya fled before the thunderstorm of Eil Elyon, king of the gods and Ruler of the Most High. Within a quarter of an hour, the rain made rushing rivers of the mountain roads, and Nahal Kishon, that ancient brook, thundered down the mountainside in torrents. Ever's slaveboys, left behind by their master, raced down the mudslides on broken shields. I did not need to ask where

their master was. Iron chariots are not much use in a river of mud.

As midday turned into afternoon, the boys began to throw mud at my women, so I called them to heel and set them to packing. There was plenty of water for them to wash in, so there was no need for them to bring mud into the clean tents. Thus it was that I saw the man coming down the mountain. Had it not been for his red cloak, I would have thought him another one of my muddy boys. No sunlight gleamed off his bronze helmet, so plastered was he with mud and blood. His eyes were haunted and hollow. He had seen the destruction of everything he had ever loved, and his life had contracted to a circle of pain and blood, growing smaller and tighter by the hour.

I knew that face.

And inside me, my heart burned and crackled like the mighty lightning of Eil Himself. After fifteen years, I stepped out of my tent to raise my eyes to the monster who made a traitor of my husband, made my name a curse and a byword among my own kin, who laid low my maids and humbled my boys. In that moment, I knew I would deliver him.

“Turn in, my lord Sisera, over here. Come and hide. Have no fear. There, there. Here you’ll be safe. Come to Mother.”

The boys sluiced him down as if he was one of their own, a slave left behind by his truant Master. When he was clean and starting to shiver, I took him into my tent and covered him with a blanket. I wrapped him and swaddled him and hummed the song of the weavers. It had been my Kinar’s favorite song, but he would not have known that.

“Water,” he croaked, interrupting me in the middle of a note. “Please, my lady. Give me a little water to drink, for I am parched with thirst.”

Poor boy! Come from the field all parched and famished. “There now,” I told him. “I will take care of everything. What a day you have had! You lie and rest and I will bring you something soothing to drink.”

The cream was rising in the milk skins. I filled for him a cup so large it might have been a bucket. The storm of Eil did not reach Eilon Tza’ananim where we were camped, and the afternoon was wearisomely hot. Who doesn’t love a cup of warm milk when they are exhausted and ready for sleep?

Sisera grunted with approval when I put the great cup into his hands. He tossed away the cup when it was empty, too weary to wait for someone to come and take the heavy thing from him. Spoiled boy. I might have said something to him, but a noise from outside startled him and he pulled the blankets around him like a frightened child.

“There, there,” I hushed him. “The slaves are cleaning my lord’s tools and putting them away. There is no one here but my own people.”

“You!” he barked, and I actually turned towards the door to see if one of the rough boys had poked

his head in. The fact that General Sisera was addressing me did not even register, for that *You* was a man's word. "*Amod!"* he told me, as if I were one of his grubby soldiers. "Stand there at the door, and if anyone comes and asks whom you have in here, tell them no one."

How quickly he had dropped the "please" and "my lady"! But what could I do? I told him that everything was all right, and I made him comfortable with a fort of cushions and covered him with a blanket so no one could see who was inside. "They'll never find you here," I promised.

"By Anat, it's hot as ten hells under here!" Sisera complained.

"Shush, shush," I told him. "Lie quiet and rest. No one will see you if you keep still." Even then, he might have shaken off all the blankets in the stifling heat had not Gataru in the yard made a great squeaking creak with her millstones, as shrill as the wheel of a chariot crooked on its axle. Sisera subsided into his cushions, and I put another blanket on top of the pile.

He slept like the dead, that one.

The other maids were cowering outside the tent when I came out. They would not work in the same tent as that monster, and the terror on their twisted, ugly faces made me glad.

He was still asleep when I came into the tent, warm and comfortable in his pile of blankets. I could feel the heat radiating off of him as I set the tent peg to his temple. "Eil Elyon, King of the gods and Master of the thunder," I prayed. "Give me strength, and avenge me for one of my two maids!"

I took the workman's hammer in my right hand and swung with all my strength.
Men have called me cruel and heartless. They have said that I violated the laws of hospitality, which are sacred to the Hellenist gods. They say nothing about my maids and what was done to them in the name of suitable hospitality. But I did not long have to wait for the gods' judgment. The commander of the Israelites burst into the camp with the first rays of the blood-red sunset. He was called Barak, the Thunderbolt of Kedesh Naphtali, and I showed him the man he was seeking.

The music of the victory march swells from the massed armies of the Tribes of Israel. Among my people, the women go out to dance before the conquering hero, welcoming him home after a successful day in the field. But here the Thunderbolt of Kedesh Naphtali stands to the side while the women of Israel beat their timbrels and dance before a King Unseen, before Eil Elyon himself, who has been victorious over the King of Canaan and that upstart rain god Ba'al. He has brought a wise woman with him, a prophetess: men bow before her as if she is their chief. She has a beautiful voice, strong and powerful, the voice of a poet. She sings to Eil Elyon of strife and trouble, of generosity and sacrifice. She sings to the princes of Israel and sends news to Se'ir in the

thunder of the dancing women's footsteps.

The prophetess's words bring light to my heart. Se'ir is home to my only living child, my precious daughter, whom I sent off in marriage away from the soldiers as soon as she had grown hair enough to be a bride. The wings of the wind and the tremors of the earth will bring the good news to her from afar, that the upstart rain god has been put in his place and her mother is no longer the cowering wife of a traitor.

The *mevaserot,* the female sopranos whose high, carrying voices ululate national security news from mountain peak to mountain peak, follow after him in chorus. Their voices rise louder than a volley of arrows, louder than a waterfall, as they sing about the rescue of the unprotected villagers. Barak thanks each tribe by name, as well as the princes who fed and armed them. The soldiers cheer and laugh and return his thanks, blessing the prophetess and the general for their leadership, their fortitude, and their daring. The tribe of the wolf howls lustily in appreciation; the tribe of the auroch-ox adds a few verses of mock thanks to the seafaring tribes who "thought about" coming to our aid.

"Lo, they are even now still thinking about it!" catcall the men under the banner of the sun and moon.

"Praise their mighty intellects!" Devorah adds sardonically.

"Cursed is Meiroz," roars Barak, "who call their ignorance their justification, who cheer for bloodshed and rapine when it is comfortably far away, but protest when the roaring tide brings violence and blood to their own shores."

"Blessed is Yael, wife of the Master Armorer!" sings the prophetess, and there is a great echo of ululating from the edges of the field. My slavewomen are singing from the doors of the tent, and a crowd of women has joined them, rescued slaves and orphans, the wives and sisters of the Hebrew tribesmen. "From all the women in tents shall her praises rise!"

"For those within, who do not dare step out!" calls one woman.

"For those laid low by men who should have cared for them better!" calls another.

"For those forced to bow to power and serve wickedness!" calls Gataru, my blind one.

"For all those who have asked, *what can I do?"*

The holy woman acts out my story for all to see, and the men keep time for her, chanting as she sets the record straight. The men lean forward eagerly as she tells how I soothed the man to sleep with his bloody hands, how he tossed the empty

cup away and lay down to greet Death. Barak signals for me to come forward to the dais and accept the grateful thanks of the nation, and the men make way for me, bowing as if I was the wife of a general and not his executioner.

I never for a moment doubted the will of the gods. But perhaps I doubted the inclinations of men, who are none too quick to praise a woman for doing what they themselves wish they had done first. My mother says that it is not seemly for a woman to be praised in public, that such attention makes her haughty and selfish. She is not wholly wrong. I have been smiled on by the gods; I do not need these brave tribesmen to bow to me. But yes, I confess that I enjoy it.

The prophetess greets me like a daughter and pours blessings on my head. Everyone calls me "Wife of Hever," as if my husband were a friend to all of Israel and God Most High, rather than the friend of the silver coins, a traitor and a runaway. At the end of the meal, the Thunderbolt of Kedesh Naphtali intimates that if the smith were to return home after being so regrettably lost in the woods, they might, for my sake, be willing to overlook his treachery and pay him to work for the Israelites. Poor Barak is so disappointed when I tell him that between the battle and the unpaid debts, *Hever* has by now probably gone to the *kever*, the grave. If my sisters' many curses have caught him at last, I will weep for him, but I do not want him back.

I want to go home to my sisters.

Our caravan leaves for the south a week later. My slaveboys have all gone to Barak to learn the arts of war; he tells them that after they have decimated Yavin, King of Canaan, they will then go to the plow and learn the arts of peace. In their place, the prophetess gives me Old One Eye, whose soldiering days are over, and two maids and two young men whose farms were destroyed by the king of Canaan and have no homes to return to. One of the young men has a sister, and I take her into my service as well. The other young man cannot take his eyes off of Milku, but humbly promises to keep his hands to himself until I see fit to bless the match. He says she will make a fine wife, for she cannot hear and thus cannot scold. I will ask Old One Eye to teach him a few things about women.

I strike my tent with my own hands.

We travel south with one of the Benjaminite gangs who are returning to their town, and another six families from the south who want to reclaim lands that Yavin's men laid waste in the war. Old One Eye tells me that our wolf pack is on its way to close ranks with Shamgar ben Anat, that wizened old warrior whose might holds Israel's southern boundaries. We are a well-armed party, and with Yavin's men on the run from Barak, we are safer on the road than wayfarers have been in many a year. As the days pass since the great battle on Har Tavor, more and more travellers appear on the road. The princes of Ephraim overtake us on their swift mules halfway to Shiloh, and we give way

before the black banner of the charging bull. My young men cheer the noble chiefs with their malachite badges, but the soldiers of Benjamin wolf whistle at them rudely.

Later that day, as we approach the cistern at the crossroads, our caravan overtakes a palanquin, and our Benjaminites indicate that it is their turn to get off the road and make way for us. The driver is wary and the mules are spooked; they kick and rear and bray so that the palanquin is almost overturned. The Benjaminites laugh and taunt as the driver struggles to keep the whole thing from

tipping over; I see the curtains quiver and a face appear at the window. The old woman behind the veil sees the Israelite soldiers and lets out a wail.

I know that face. I know that voice. I never thought to hear it raised in agony.

There is already a crowd of travelers around the cistern, other Ephratim come to greet their returning brothers, a battalion of Naphtali on pilgrimage to Shiloh. Two Danite refugees in the train of Naphtali scream, and then my new slavegirl is screaming and running towards them, embracing them, spinning round and round and weeping through her smiles. She is their youngest sister who was carried off by Yavin of Canaan. We smile and cheer, and the Ephratim begin a chant of thanksgiving to the Lord of Hosts. The Danite embraces both his sisters, and shouts, “Blessings be to God Most High! I went into battle a man alone, and now I have two beautiful sisters, one for each arm!” The girls throw their arms about his neck and weep.

“See here,” says the Danite’s sister, lifting her head. “They reclaimed some of the property stolen from our farm, and we will use it to make a fresh start in life. We have grandmother’s lamp, and a great store of the fabrics that mother used to weave. See here, you can recognize her embroidery in the double layers of this cloak!”

One of the Ephratim buys the cloak on the spot to bring home to his wife. I see the work: the embroidery is truly remarkable. “We will be scarf

merchants!” the Danite promises, throwing a kerchief around my serving girl’s neck. “We will wear two scarves apiece to advertise our wares until every scrap of our patrimony is sold to the princes of Israel.”

The Danite begs to be allowed to buy his sister’s freedom, but how can I sell a girl whom I was given as a gift by the prophetess? I propose instead that all three of them work for me, and they can keep my house until they have enough to buy one of their own. In the midst of the hubbub at the crossroads, two scouts from the north ride up on swift mares, bringing news of victory to Shamgar ben Anat. Word flies from mouth to mouth: King Yavin is dead, his army decimated, his palace plundered to fund the reconstruction of the north. Seeing us gathered around the great store of dyed and embroidered fabrics, the scouts take out the treasures they have brought from Yavin’s

storehouses: ivory flutes and vessels of bone, soft and supple leathers shiny with oil, a fine cloak of green and blue wool, a wall hanging that the general's mother presented to the king on the occasion of his ascension to the throne.

I am told that all women are sisters, daughters of the same goddess, and therefore, as women, we should stand shoulder to shoulder against our men, demanding our rights, rallying for our safety, united as one to wipe out all violence against us. Perhaps somewhere in a deep, misty valley lies an isolated temple where moonstone priestesses live like this, but flesh-and-blood women do not behave this way. Show me a woman who does not rally around her father, her grandfather, her brothers, when daughters of a foreign god cry outrage against her people. I myself have cast a stone at that nasty little temptress who broke my brother's heart, and I would have followed it with my fist had she been fool enough to turn and fight me for it. But I hear the whimper of Sisera's mother as her weaving is passed around by the soldiers who killed her son, and it goes straight to my heart.

It is the same noise I made when my baby son died.

The driver of the palanquin eyes our crowd with fear, not daring to approach and take water for his parched beasts. He is too preoccupied with safety to offer any comfort to the bereft mother. I remember that look from the faces of Sisera's soldiers – the cold bitter calculation of men whose hearts have broken once too many and left only hard eyes and hard hands to survive in the world. He knows we will not let him live if he identifies himself or his lady, if he stands and makes his demands. And he wants to live. He wants her to live.

My other little son died from a snakebite. I chopped the snake in two with my own hands. I turned out the woodpile and killed the little snakes before they could grow fangs. But this is not a snake. This is a mother in distress. I cannot turn my back as she grieves. Not like the men of Canaan did when we moved on, leaving my poor baby scarcely cool in his little grave. That string of a mother's whimpering… with that sound, it all comes back.

I draw the water with my own hands. The scouts and travelers and princes around the cistern give way gladly, calling me Mighty Mother, Wife of Hever, Daughter of Anat. They give me the royal weaving freely when I ask to buy it, and will not take any money for it, even when I tell them it is not for myself. The reunited sisters dance a few steps ahead of me as I stagger back with my lordly bucket, as if we were back on the field of victory at Kedesh Naphtali and I were the conquering hero. It is very flattering and I enjoy myself greatly, but I cannot do what I mean to do with everyone watching me. So I send my slaves back to the Ephratim with a blanket of my own weaving, as a gift. It is, I regret, somewhat stained. The princes give a mighty cheer and seize upon it like a trophy of victory. Their bloodlust disgusts me, and it

makes what I am about to do easier.

While the slaves are filling our skins with water and loading them onto the donkeys, I carry the bucket of water to the palanquin. The driver stares at me, hostile and unblinking, but the mules paw and stamp to be watered, and he slowly puts down the trough for me to help. The mother of Sisera peeps through the curtains, and I pass the dipper of water through the window to her. When she has drunk her fill, I return to her the hanging that she wove for her son.

I think she has heard enough to know who I am. I do not know what she will do when I try to return to her this broken thing. I do not know what will happen to either of us. I only know that I must try.

So let all Thy enemies be lost, O Lord, and found again. May their enmity itself perish, and let them that love God be as the mighty sun when it rises. (Judges 5:31)

May the land lie quiet in the peace that comes from justice to all, and may we not have to wait forty years to see it.