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Subject

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<div align="center">Changes in the Definition of "Ghetto" Over Time</div>

Etymology of the word

The meaning of the term "ghetto" is disputable, which is proven by the fact that linguists and historians still do not have a universal version of the word's origin. Some state it was taken from Hebrew or Yiddish—others, that it comes from Latin or Italian (Liberman). Scientists, reference books, and even dictionaries also have the same controversies regarding the etymology of "ghetto". For instance, Oxford Dictionary offers the following version: "Early 17th century: perhaps from Italian getto 'foundry' (because the first ghetto was established in 1516 on the site of a foundry in Venice), or from Italian borghetto, diminutive of borgo 'borough.'" The dictionary also defines it as "a part of a city, especially a slum area, occupied by a minority group or groups," as well as highlights that historically it has meant a quarter in a city where Jewish people were living (Oxford Living Dictionaries).

Historical background

Despite the discussions around the origin of the word, the only fact that is commonly known is its first appearance. As the number of Jewish migrants in Italy, especially in Venice, increased in the fifteenth century, many Venetians felt uncomfortable about Jewish people living together with them. The situation was caused by different religious beliefs, as the Italian population was mainly Catholic. Because of this, the Venetian government decided to gather them in a restricted space in 1516. For that purpose, they signed a law, according to which all people of Jewish origin would live together on an island in Cannaregio called

Ghetto Nuovo. They were allowed to work in the city, but were obliged to come back to their living quarters at night. Though this separated residential area was not attractive to Jewish people, as it implied restrictions on their physical freedom, they were allowed to govern this location on their own (Duneier 17-20). As a result, according to Marcuse (180), despite the artificial isolation, people of Jewish origin managed to establish a new community.

Later on, the practice of creating Jewish ghettos spread over the whole of Italy, Rome included, and even Western Europe (Duneier 19-25). Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the definition of "ghetto" acquired a new shade of meaning. While previously it implied a forced residence, over time it began to resemble an ethnic neighborhood with mostly Jewish people in it. Such communities existed in Vienna, Cologne, Prague, Warsaw, and Frankfurt. At the same period of time, ghettos also appeared in the United States, namely in poor urban areas of New York and Chicago. Yet, the latter ones were not the best places to live, as they were flooded with gangs and were a vivid representation of poverty (Duneier 25-26).

Abrupt change of the concept of the ghetto during the Holocaust

The idea of a ghetto went in a different direction right after the beginning of the Second World War. Starting with the German invasion of Poland, Jewish people were forced to live in ghettos again beginning from October 1939. At this time, the situation got worse because of anti-Semitic stereotypes, intensified by Nazi Germany (Michman pp. 84-85).

In spite of the fact that ghettos were separated city areas (which means that partially the initial aim of such isolated spaces was preserved), Germans considered them as one of the steps in the "Final Solution," which was the plan to annihilate all European people of Jewish descent . Doing so, Germans were not only going to segregate Jewish people from other nations, but also make the first step to destroying the Jewish population. As soon as the

"Final Solution" was implemented in late 1941, mobile killing units called Einsatzgruppen started either to murder people of Jewish origin in ghettos, or send them to forced labor camps, killing centers, or concentration camps (Holocaust Encyclopedia).

When the war ended, the interpreter who worked with the commander of Einsatzgruppe B shared how the "Final Solution" was put into action:

> This is how the Jews were killed: The *Sonderkommandos* would arrive in a place immediately behind the frontlines. All the Jews were concentrated in one section, which was declared to be a ghetto. They were forced to wear a round yellow patch on their clothes as a mark of identification. After that they set up a *Judenrat*, which had to see to order and implementation of the *Kommando's* orders in the ghetto. Some of the Jewish men, mainly the intelligentsia, were immediately subjected to "special processing" [*sonderbehandelt*]; that is, they were shot. (Michman 103)

Therefore, ghettos took the meaning of concentration and extermination camps, or "death" camps. In view of this, the word was no more used to describe just a minor group of people living on a closed territory, but to represent the grim reality of war, as well as a terrible crime against the whole Jewish nation.

American ghettos

Nearly at the same time, by the end of World War II, some black neighborhoods were called "American ghettos" or "Negro ghettos." Along with entering American culture, the word gained a negative connotation and was used to define an outcast population—poor, unemployed, and marginalized people (Marcuse 181). Mostly, Negro ghettos were formed for similar reasons to Jewish ones: racial prejudices, cultural differences, and economic considerations (Wirth 230).

Up until the 1970s, Negro ghettos were notable for combining different layers of society—both poor African Americans and the working class. At the moment, they are a vivid representation of black culture and are associated with many facets, like drugs, poverty, unemployment, crime, black pride and authenticity, and hip-hop music (Pearson).

To conclude, despite the term "ghetto" having a common denotation of an isolated area where an outnumbered group of people live it still had different shades of meaning throughout history. The word was first used to define a part of a city where Jewish people were isolated, to being associated with killing centers during Nazi Germany, and eventually becoming a sign of African-American culture. Thus, over time, it gained more and more negative connotations. Yet, ghettos still exist in the USA, though more in the form of African-American neighborhoods.

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