

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: VIRTUAL LEGACIES: GENEALOGY, THE INTERNET, AND JEWISH IDENTITY

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As Jewish identities become more hybridized in what Manuel Castells calls a “network society,” genealogical research intensifies the questioning of how Jews identify and who identifies as Jewish. Jewish identities based on relation, location, and devastation develop out of genealogical research, especially when networks such as the internet increase access to information and communities of other researchers. Mining the internet for genealogical information and searching for heritage only add to the possibilities of Jewish identity, revealing Jewish kin, connections to a particular place, or the tragedy of the Holocaust—evidence of the ways in which the World Wide Web changes Jewish identity formation. The internet is a virtual gathering place for the commemoration and study of Jewish life and culture, even as its use challenges

conventional modes of Jewish community and identity formation. Through its treatment of the internet and Jewish identity, this dissertation explores new media and their cultural impact, arguing that new media enable penetrable and osmotic identities instead of reifying delimited parameters.

Using Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory," Hayden White's "emplotment," Vivian M. Patraka's "goneness," and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "hereness" as critical lenses through which to view Jewish genealogical Web sites, I show how the narratives on Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls, and personal genealogy Web sites and blogs reveal constructions of Jewish identity that have never before been articulated as viable options for forming Jewish communities. Jewish communities of relation, location, and devastation may resemble other Jewish communities, but they are unique in that they are virtual—their homes are online. The narratives found on each genre of Web site are functions of postmemory, in that they are the results of family lore, emplotted in order to tell coherent family histories. The "hereness" of postmemory confronts the "goneness" of much of the lives and times that compose Jewish culture, allowing for the creativity that emplotment requires. When Jewish genealogists search for their heritage online, they encounter communities of other genealogists who are just as eagerly emplotting their own genealogical narratives.

VIRTUAL LEGACIES:
GENEALOGY, THE INTERNET, AND JEWISH IDENTITY

by

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S JEWISH ABOUT JEWISH GENEALOGY?

NARRATIVE, MEMORY, AND RECLAIMING A JEWISH EXPERIENCE

"[...]we should at least want to know what kind of history the Jews have valued, what, out of their past, they chose to remember, and how they preserved, transmitted, and revitalized that which was recalled." (Yerushalmi xxxiii)

Jewish genealogy is marked by Jews' interest in their own families' heritages, driven by a need to know and a hope to remember. The unique place of Jewish genealogy within Jewish religion and culture seems to impel Jews to acknowledge their pasts, generation by generation. As much an intellectual pursuit as it is a personal, genealogy is the uncovering of biological, geographic, and cultural pasts. Genealogy—literally the study of genetic lineage—takes on a role in memorializing culture, whether the practices and values of communities as small as a nuclear family or as large as Benedict Anderson's nation-state. Different motivations and methods for conducting genealogical research result in different discoveries, but the goal is to reveal as much about a family's biological and social lineage, and thus legacy, as possible by tracing the lineage as far back as possible. In combination, why Jews conduct genealogical research,

how they do it, and what they gain from it—per Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s directive from *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* above—bring Jewish historical experience to life by naming the people who affected, and were affected by, the events of Jewish history that inform Jewish collective memory. In this way, Jewish genealogy diminishes history’s abstractness, or the nature of historians to gloss over details in favor of extrapolating a greater meaning. Instead, Jewish genealogy offers a concrete, sometimes tangible way of relating to Jewish history: ship manifests, birth and death records, municipal registries, photographs, and even travel routes demonstrate the real-life impact of historical circumstances. Margaret Mead writes that ancestry does not necessarily represent the past by which one belongs by birth, but the past to which one tries to belong by effort” (49). Jewish genealogy is thus a sign of the effort made to capture a distant past.

No recent historical circumstance is probably more abstracted, yet has more real-life impact, than the Holocaust, especially for Jewish genealogists. Holocaust memorialization increasingly stresses anti-genocide and anti-intolerance messages, rather than addressing the Holocaust itself. The former perspective on the Holocaust may diminish the power of lessons to be learned because it universalizes, or abstracts, experiences of prejudice and oppression. While this approach is important in getting many people of many backgrounds to relate to the horrors of the Holocaust and prevent them from happening again, the particularities of the Holocaust—its time, location, implications, and ramifications—lose significance. This concern is representative of the debate over methodology within the field of Holocaust education (Fallace; *Best Practices in Holocaust Education*), and for good reason.

Some scholars and people with interest in expressions of Jewish life and experience, such as Lawrence L. Langer, Peter Novick, and James E. Young, envision a paradigm shift so that Holocaust memorialization focuses on the particular details of the Holocaust. Such an approach likely makes Holocaust commemoration more personal and thus meaningful. In the effort to particularize the Holocaust, victims and perpetrators are identified and maybe even named, as opposed to being one of six million or part of a national party. Learning the details of these people's lives and experiences puts the Holocaust into terms that are understandable, permitting its emotional ramifications to be processed. An approach to learning about and commemorating the Holocaust that brings these details to light facilitates a personal relationship to the subject. For families to engage in Holocaust memorialization in this way, for example, they would probably want to know who of their family members fell victim to the Holocaust. Because Jewish genealogical research is a means for them to learn this part of their family history, its relationship to the Holocaust and Holocaust commemoration should be considered. In fact, the Holocaust may stimulate the conducting of Jewish genealogical research by raising questions to which the answers cannot be easily supplied.

Ironically, perpetrators of the Holocaust practiced their own version of Jewish genealogy. Nazis and their sympathizers used a rubric that looked over four generations for a Jewish ancestor in order to identify someone as "Jewish." Even if someone did not identify as Jewish, did not consider himself to practice Jewish customs or to hold Jewish values, if that person had just one Jewish great-grandparent, that person could be persecuted for being Jewish. As a result, many people who did not consider themselves to be Jewish suffered alongside many people who did. In contrast, by conducting their

own genealogical research, contemporary Jews assert themselves in the narratives of their own lives. Whereas Nazi ideology laid out a definition of Jewish identity during the Holocaust, doing Jewish genealogy allows Jews to define it for themselves. Similarly, whereas the Nazis carried out Jewish genealogy with brutality and poor logic, doing Jewish genealogy allows Jews the agency to exert their own humanity.

What follows in this introduction and subsequent chapters, however, is not a discussion of the issues related to the universalist and particularist approaches to Holocaust memorialization. Both are useful and have their merits. This dissertation instead focuses on the common denominator of Jewish genealogy and Holocaust commemoration: Jewish individuals taking the initiative to commemorate Jewish individuals. In the case of Jewish genealogy, perhaps encouraged by others or with others' help, one person undertakes the research and constructs a family tree. Accordingly, this dissertation concentrates on the grassroots, self-initiated, and self-published means through which individuals commemorate their families' legacies. Sometimes, the legacies do include the Holocaust, thereby allowing for Holocaust commemoration, too. This dissertation attempts to answer four areas of inquiry:

- (1) What does Jewish genealogy offer to researchers, besides answers to their research questions? What makes Jewish genealogy attractive to so many researchers?
- (2) How does Jewish genealogy change or reify definitions of Jewish identity and constructions of Jewish community? What innovations to Jewish identity and community formation does Jewish genealogy contribute?

- (3) What role does the Holocaust play in Jewish genealogy and Jewish genealogy's impact on Jewish identity? Does the Holocaust's role in Jewish genealogy signal—or perhaps reflect—its importance in other realms of Jewish life and culture?
- (4) How are the narratives that Jewish genealogists tell about their families appropriately studied through a lens of literary criticism? What happens to the narrative if more than one family member tells the same story?

In assembling the sources to answer these four sets of questions, I relied on texts conventionally claimed by scholars in literary studies as legitimate and viable: novels, short stories, memoirs, and archival documents. However, as my research progressed, I found myself turning to the internet¹ for most of my source material. I then realized that, as of the early twenty-first century, the most convenient, most accessible, most productive medium through which to begin genealogical research, narrativize it, edit it, and find an audience for it is the internet, particularly the World Wide Web (Web). The relative simplicity of creating and editing a Web page truly makes the internet an ideal outlet for grass-roots endeavors: anyone with access to a computer and a connection to the internet can develop a Web site, devoting as much time, money, and energy as one wants. Because the internet seems to be the easiest venue through which to find and share information, a fifth set of questions joins the four asked previously:

- (5) How does the internet transform Jewish genealogy? How does the internet recalibrate Jewish identity and community formation? Why does the internet seem to elicit the Holocaust as a defining feature of Jewish identity? How

¹ The World Wide Web is a part of the internet, yet “Web” and “internet” are used almost interchangeably to describe certain texts. Per the nomenclature used by the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, “Web,” which is a proper noun, is capitalized and “internet” uncapitalized (Kirschenbaum).

does the internet revolutionize the study of texts? Can Web sites be considered under the same schema as conventional literary texts?

The answer to the last question is “yes:” Web sites can be studied through literary criticism in much the same way as conventional literary texts, although there are some caveats. The interactivity of the internet renders the texts of Web sites a somewhat different beast from more conventional texts. Ease of use is an important feature of Web sites, adding a dimension to literary criticism that may not necessarily exist for conventional texts. The more user-friendly a Web site is, the better it is; “user-friendly” refers to how easy finding information on the site is; how smooth navigating from page to page is; and how in harmony a page’s graphics, background, and font are. The “user-friendliness” of a book, however, does not adhere to these parameters. Formatting also requires a different consideration, as most Web sites adhere to simplified formatting principles, such as shorter paragraphs, more white space, easy-to-understand vocabulary, and hyperlinked references (Gauntlett; Rieder). Accordingly, certain formalist approaches may require rethinking in their application to Web-based texts.

Other approaches, such as reader-response theory, are more relevant. Because of how interactive the internet is, the responsiveness of users is especially important; reader-response theory, then, is crucial to understanding the texts of the internet. In the case of Web sites, “readers” become “users,” those who employ the functions of a Web site, as well as the words and images, to gain as much understanding of the site as possible. Users must interpret (Mailloux) the goals of the site while also interpreting its text. Thus, a reader’s—or user’s—response to a Web site takes place on two levels: the technology of the Web site, complete with its hyperlinks and other components, and the text of the

site, comprising the words and images. These two levels, by which is meant a Web site's technology and its text, compose the whole of the site, suggesting that reader-response theory is doubly important with regards to the internet. Reader-response theory certainly applies to the interactivity of Web sites, in that they require users to engage with their texts, to interpret actively what they mean, and to contribute actively to their functionality.

Because many Web sites depend on the interplay of their visual and verbal rhetorics, structuralism is also a particularly useful literary critical approach to the internet. W.J.T. Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* posits that text and images are equally fraught with political and ideological implications, partly because of their capacity to be interpreted in different ways. They are, writes Mitchell, "not perceived in the same way by viewers[...]; and they are not exclusively visual in any important way, but involve multisensory apprehension and interpretation" (24). Text and images are, therefore, rhetorically bound to a system of signs of which readers—or in this case, users—must be aware. Because different users react differently to rhetoric, a Web site must convey its message as clearly as possible, through its cache of signs. Users must be able to decipher the message in order for the site to resonate with them, so they must be able to understand the signs. Despite the internet's seeming peculiarity of form, format, style, and rhetorical devices, its interactive texts can unquestionably be viewed through a lens of literary criticism.

Focusing on three genre of Web sites for my research, I show that Jewish genealogy presents a paradigm of interactivity and hypertextuality, as well as another dimension of my research—identity performance. Web sites on which genealogists

conduct research, through which information about specific locales is disseminated, and on which genealogists share their research results compose the primary sources of this dissertation. I classify all of these sites as “Jewish genealogical Web sites,” but I acknowledge that they correspond to various parts of the process, from the very beginnings of research to the more in-depth research that follows to the presentation of findings. To distinguish among the three kinds of sites, I have developed names for each of them. I call the first kind of site—on which genealogists conduct research—“Jewish genealogical research Web sites.” I call the second kind of site—through which information about specific locales is disseminated—“cyber-shtetls,” a play on the Yiddish term for the communities where Jews lived and worked, mostly in Eastern Europe. I call the third kind of site—on which genealogists share their research results—“personal genealogy Web sites and blogs.”

Although many examples of Jewish genealogical research Web sites and cyber-shtetls are also personal Web sites, in that they were created and are maintained by a single person, they have scope greater than showcasing that person’s interests. Instead, these Web sites may be created on behalf of an organization or for the purposes of educating a community of researchers. Personal genealogy Web sites, in contrast, present information about their creators’ own research experiences and family histories. Blogs are convenient ways to update readers on progress made in research, for instance. A unique aspect of personal genealogy Web sites is that many include descriptions of creators’ “legacy pilgrimages,” trips they take to their ancestral homelands as the culmination of their research. The trips are like pilgrimages in their seriousness and how special they are for the people embarking on them. Travelers expect to learn more about

their ancestors by walking where they walked, seeing what they saw throughout their lives, and mourning them at their burial places. Many characteristics of the journeys also characterize traditional religious pilgrimages, though these legacy pilgrimages do not necessarily have religious overtones.

Audiences for each of the kinds of Web sites get more and more specific as researchers move through each of the stages of research. Jewish genealogical research Web sites typically attract researchers at the onset of the research project. They offer access to databases, documents, and other resources to help people conduct their research, not necessarily to share the results thereof. Cyber-shtetls draw researchers who have developed their family trees and are now interested in particular locations, narrowing the audience. As an intermediate step in genealogical research, these sites offer information about the places from which ancestors came, providing insight into the lives of the ancestors: what their livelihoods were like, their socio-economic status, their social networks, their political lives, and so much more. Finally, the personal genealogy Web sites and blogs usually appeal to researchers with interests in specific families or experiences, narrowing the audience even further. Users want to see the results of others' research endeavors; personal genealogy Web sites and blogs offer just that. As the research gets better defined, and the findings more detailed, so do the audiences.

Given that audiences for Jewish genealogical Web sites seek to learn more about themselves by learning about their ancestors, Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" serves as a useful critical approach to the use of these sites. In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, she explains postmemory as "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal

connection” and “shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (22). In other words, people have memories that are not their own, but rather their ancestors’, because the family stories they have heard and are unable to rationalize in some way supersede their own experiences. Hirsch limits “generational distance” to one generation—parents and their children—but Jewish genealogy often entails much greater generational distances. Particularly because “[p]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth” (22), and because genealogists base their research on family lore, Hirsch’s construction can be expanded to include several generations of distance instead of just one. This expansion means that a genealogist may fixate on the story of her great-grandparents who died in the Holocaust and use genealogy to illuminate the details of the horror they endured. Each Jewish genealogical Web site functions as a site of postmemory because of the ways in which its users reflect on the pasts of their ancestors.

To be sure, I do not intend to expand Hirsch’s definition of “postmemory” to include all experiences of all ancestors and all shared memories. Instead, I use postmemory to indicate the intensity with which Jewish genealogists embark on their research. They often hear stories from their parents, grandparents, or other family members that motivate them to find out more. The stories often have tragedies or traumas associated with them, the stress of which gets passed to the listeners of the stories, or the younger generations. The younger generations then carry the traumas with them as they attempt greater understanding and sensitivity. Almost like an obsession, the traumas experienced by their family members are at the forefront of their minds and may be evidenced in their behaviors. The way in which the traumas of the stories overwhelm

the younger generations and spur them on to authenticate what happened is at the root of Hirsch's postmemory. Jewish genealogists often act on the same impulse to untangle the fragments that compose the stories that children of Holocaust survivors act on.

Therefore, Hirsch's concept is an apt one for the study of Jewish genealogy.

JUDAISM AND JEWISH GENEALOGY

Judaism encourages Jewish genealogy through its emphases on *zekhut avot*, or ancestral merit, and collective memory. Religiously, historically, and culturally, much about Jewish experiences pertains to how the past helps to understand the present, whether through biological ancestry or social. Indeed, there is a Jewish imperative to know and commemorate one's ancestry (Yerushalmi; Rottenberg; Kurzweil; Kowitt). In fact, staff of the ancient Temples in Jerusalem followed strict genealogical guidelines (Rottenberg 60). The concern was that, without complete and accurate genealogies, ancestry could be forged, elevating the forgers to undeserved social and priestly positions or demoting others. This concern did not dissipate over time; histories of Jewish anthroponomy indicate that surnames were sometimes for sale (Kurzweil 212-213; Zax par. 25) or chosen because of the prestige associated with them (Livingstone 166).² After the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Emperor Joseph I and Napoleon issued their respective decrees that Jews take surnames, Jews sometimes chose—or were given—surnames that fell outside of the conventional naming patterns of the time (181;

² Alexander Beider, a foremost scholar of Jewish onomastics, articulates seventeen different types of surnames. These seventeen types derive from etymons for place of birth or residence, physical characteristics of the person bearing the surname, profession, and being the son or daughter of someone. In this way, surnames can provide genealogical information: where a person is from, what the person looked like, what the person did for a living, and who the progenitor of a family is. Beider points out that “contemptuous” surnames were probably given to the first bearers by an unfriendly official, while “prestigious” surnames were probably chosen by the first bearers themselves (107).

Kurzweil 209). Some families gained status with their newly acquired, yet unconventionally bestowed, surnames, and others lost status. Aberrations in the taking of surnames can confuse, disappoint, or pleasantly surprise later generations conducting genealogical research (Zerubavel 8, 25), affecting their sense of their families' legacies.

That Jewish culture places emphasis on lineage or pedigree suggests the priority given to genealogy. Sometimes, pedigree refers more to a non-biological affiliation than a genealogical relationship might intimate. For example, the children of a great scholar might be considered to have an important lineage, such as Rashi's three daughters, and so might the scholar's students, such as the men whom Rashi's daughters married (Wiesel 16-17). Miriam, Yocheved, and Rachel, as women in seventeenth-century France, could enjoy only so much esteem for being Rashi's daughters. Their husbands, though, gained employment as heads of esteemed yeshivas in part because of their association with Rashi; Dan Rottenberg in *Finding Our Fathers: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy*, the first English-language book on Jewish genealogy, states "[...]Rashi was simply a very good person to be descended from if you wanted to get ahead in the rabbinical world" (54). More contemporary claims to being Rashi's progeny, either through marriage or biologically—such as those of Judah Leow, also known as the Maharal of Prague; Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe; and Elie Wiesel, the 1986 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize—demonstrate that being able to trace a lineage of teachers and forebears is an important sign of stature. The more admired an ancestor or instructor, the more admired the descendant or student.

Also as this piece of Rashi's legacy demonstrates, genealogies of rabbis and other religious dignitaries persist in Jewish lore. Conventional Jewish wisdom offers, for

example, that people with the surname “Cohen” or its many variations descend from the biblical Aaron, a member of the Levi tribe and the founder of the priesthood. The pedigree of such an ancestry imports an etiquette of behavior that preserves a Cohen’s supposed virtue and righteousness. Because of the specialness associated with the name, some Jews adopted “Cohen” as their surname, despite not having any biological relationship to other Cohens (Powell par. 4). Genealogical research would indicate who is a “real” Cohen by uncovering how families attained their surnames. It might, for instance, indicate that a family took a name because of some desired outcome, such as evading conscription into the Russian army because members of the clergy were exempted from military service, and the name “Cohen” designates a priestly status. Learning this fact might indeed surprise a Jewish genealogist who previously believed himself to be descended from the priests.

In addition to the rituals associated with taking surnames, rituals associated with giving first names to children also indicate that ancestry plays an important role in Jewish identity formation. In Ashkenazic—Eastern European—communities, parents typically name their children after family members who have died. In Sephardic—Iberian—communities, parents name their children after living relatives. In both cases, names are not necessarily exact but may instead allude to those of family members by having the same first initial or the same meaning. Such naming practices are integral to Jewish genealogical research in two ways. First, children know who their ancestors are and can carry on their family traditions; second, genealogists are sometimes able to determine relationships based on names. If a researcher knows, for example, that someone follows an Ashkenazic naming tradition, then the researcher can likely identify who that person’s

grandparent or great-grandparent is, or at least how many generations removed they are. This technique is helpful if researchers have names but not exact relationships, and it can lead to other identifying information. Genealogically, first and last names can reveal significant parts of a family's history narrative, such as social status, ancestry, human characteristics, and more.

Published texts by rabbis and other scholars typically have a prefatory note detailing the author's pedigree. For example, *ArtScroll.com*, the Web site of a publisher of Jewish texts, hails author Abraham J. Twerski as a rabbi who "descends from an illustrious line of great Chassidic rabbis. Their wisdom flavors each of these must-have books" ("Books by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski"). This rather brief and vague description of Twerski's lineage defends Twerski's legitimacy as a writer, teacher, and rabbi. That he channels the excellence of his teachers through his writing likely encourages followers of chasidic Judaism to purchase his books. This focus on the lineage of Jewish religious leadership to prove credentials signifies the exigence of genealogy in Jewish culture. Although "genealogy" in this sense does not necessarily involve genetic lineage, it does imply a lineage followed from generation to generation.

Tanakh, the aggregate text central to Jewish liturgy, and Talmud, the collection of rabbinic commentaries on Jewish law, supply many directives for Jews to conduct genealogy. The references to genealogy in Tanakh are numerous and important, usually explaining the origins of people or reminding people to acknowledge their origins. One of the clearest examples of an explanation of origins is the "Table of Nations," found in Chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis.³ These chapters, through abundant "begot" statements,

³ As much as possible, and despite a lack of egalitarian language and approach, I rely on the Jewish Publication Society's new translation in *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* for citations from Tanakh.

trace eleven generations that include Noah and his descendants, providing the lineage of Judaism's progenitor, Abraham. This section employs genealogy as a method of validating the importance of Noah's role in Jewish memory. Later, Deuteronomy 32:7, part of "The Song of Moses," provides a reminder of the usefulness of ancestors' knowledge. Moses exhorts the "children of Israel" to

Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of ages past;
Ask your father, he will inform you,
Your elders, who will tell you:...

By telling children—metaphorical or biological—to pay attention to their elders' insight, this excerpt confirms that the legacy left by ancestors is instructive, that it contains information from which lessons can be learned. Indeed, in the Book of Job, one of Job's friends reminds him to learn from the experiences of his ancestors, which should teach him to be righteous and gain God's good favor:

Ask the generation past,
Study what their fathers have searched out—
For we are of yesterday and know nothing;
Our days on earth are a shadow—
Surely they will teach you and tell you,
Speaking out of their understanding. (Job 8:8-10)

In this case, the legacy from which Job can glean may not necessarily be of his direct ancestors, but of members of earlier generations who may have experienced some of what Job himself experiences. These passages from Deuteronomy and Job, and even the

“Table of Nations,” illustrate the significance of genealogy in Jewish ethos; if Jews do not know their genealogies, then they are unable to benefit from the experiences of their ancestors, or even to know who their ancestors are.

Another instance that both explains the importance of genealogy and reminds practitioners to consider their ancestry and their descendants is the prayer central to Jewish worship, the Amidah. In traditional prayer services, Jews are expected to recite the Amidah at least three times every day and on holidays. The liturgy invokes the Jewish forebears as models of righteousness and compassion, for which God has already granted them redemption:

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, God of our fathers and mothers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, and God of Leah, the great, mighty and awesome God, transcendent God who bestows loving kindness, creates everything out of love, remembers the love of our fathers and mothers, and brings redemption to their children’s children for the sake of the Divine Name.[...] ⁴ (*Mishkan T’filah* 48)

The prayer suggests that the “deeds” of reciters of the Amidah affect the characters and salvation of their children, and of their children, and so on. This notion reflects the Jewish tenet of *zekhut avot*, which teaches that a person’s integrity—who that person is and how that person lives—is a direct result of both their ancestors’ experiences and the person’s regard for those experiences (Rottenberg 61; Neusner 180). An allegory found in the Babylonian Talmud articulates this notion:

⁴ The basis for translations of Jewish liturgical texts, the languages of which are primarily Hebrew and Aramaic, is the Union of Reform Judaism’s prayer book, *Mishkan T’filah*, which, although bulkily, attempts to make the liturgy egalitarian.

Once he [Honi Hama'gel, or Honi the circle-maker] was travelling on the road, and he noticed a man planting a carob-tree. He asked him how many years it would take before the tree would bear fruit, and the man answered: "Seventy years." Honi then asked: "Art thou, then, sure that thou wilt live seventy years?" And the man replied: "I found carob-trees in existence when I came into the world, consequently my ancestors must have planted them. Why should I not also plant them for my children?" (Rodkinson 66 [Ta'anit 23a])

The carob trees, of course, represent legacies created by one generation and passed on to the next; the man similarly represents a generation that respects the legacies and has the foresight to pass them on. As carob trees produce an edible fruit with a wide array of uses, the allegory suggests that legacies, in bearing the fruits of the knowledge and experiences of one's ancestry, offer lessons and other benefits to those descendants who heed them.

Embodying these values, many Jewish holidays, festivals, and rites refer to ancestors' experiences. Although these ancestors tend to be immeasurably distant, Jewish liturgy does encourage Jews to think of themselves as their descendants, which the passage from the Amidah indicates. Scholars of Jewish life and history, such as Yerushalmi, describe the Jewish holidays of Chanukah, Purim, Passover, and other Jewish festivals as paradigmatic of Judaism's perpetuation of Jewish legacy, recalling the lives and deaths of Judaism's dignitaries. To observe these holidays, Jews traditionally perform certain rituals that evoke what their ancient ancestors withstood. For example, the lighting of candles throughout the eight-day festival of Chanukah serves as a reminder of the "miracle" that the little amount of oil used for light, heat, and cooking

lasted unexpectedly for eight days. Remembering what the candle-lighting represents leads to commemorating the reasons why limited amounts of oil concerned Jews at the time and why Jews were unable to obtain more oil. Thus, contemporary Jews recall the experiences of Jewish forebears and acknowledge the hardships along with the successes. Similarly, the symbolic gesture of refraining from consuming leavened food during Passover, as well as the performance of the Passover meal itself, ultimately commemorates the suffering of slavery and the joy of freedom experienced by other Jewish forebears. These examples demonstrate that attention paid to “lessons from the past” marks Jewish culture as reliant upon genealogy and its implications.

Practices of traditional Judaism, which include the lighting of candles and the observance of a special diet, reflect the emphasis it places on knowing one’s ancestry, no matter how distant. Even though Jews may not call this recognition of their forebears and their experiences “Jewish genealogy,” Jewish genealogy is clearly an integral component of Jewish life. Even though the practice of “Jewish genealogy” may not be as literal as tracing lineage to ancient times, the idea of acknowledging ancestry and “doing right by it” is very much a foundation of Jewish genealogical research. From biblical injunctions to midrashic reminders, from Jewish ceremonies to Jewish prayer, “ancestral merit” is a common motif throughout Jewish tradition, and attempts to live by it manifest as Jewish genealogical research. Judaism teaches its adherents to value their forebears, to recall the experiences of their ancestors, and to try to replicate their contributions with younger generations in mind. In fact, many Jewish genealogists claim that they undertake their research so that younger generations will know and appreciate their origins. For instance, Jewish genealogist Mark Fearer, when describing why he embarked on genealogical

research in the first place, asserts: “[b]ecause I would have given my right arm for similar information that someone would have compiled 100 years ago, I want to make sure this information is handed down for many generations to come” (par. 10).

WHY THE INTERNET?

Because the internet is a relatively new medium, and because it is in constant flux, the research on this medium is in constant development. Howard Rheingold’s experience of revising *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* not just once since its original publication in 1993 but twice, once in 1994 and again in 2000, indicates just how fast the internet grows and changes. This monograph is one of the first describing social uses of the internet. In it, Rheingold argues both that the internet has proven itself to be a large-scale platform for the development of social relationships and that these social relationships, though occurring in “virtual space,” become just as significant as “real-life” relationships. This dissertation picks up on these points and makes them relevant in a twenty-first-century context, instead of in Rheingold’s late-twentieth; the expansion of the internet and increased access to the internet represent just some of the changes across the millennium. Rheingold is correct in his assessment of the kinds of relationships fostered by the internet, and by focusing on a specific ethno-cultural community of users, I sharpen Rheingold’s concept of “virtuality.”

While the Web is certainly the most widely used part of the internet, its functionality is partly dependent on technological contributions from other parts of the internet (Leung 9-10). In fact, Jewish genealogical Web sites make use of electronic mail, computer conferencing, access to remote databases, and file transferring. “Contact

me” links, online courses, search features, and file sharing are all examples of how these components of the internet make Jewish genealogical Web sites possible. Indeed, all—and not just Jewish—genealogical Web sites need to ensure that each component works together to provide a trouble-free experience for users. Web developers aim for seamlessness, such that users do not encounter broken links or crashed pages. When users click on a link to take them to the ship manifest on which their ancestors appear, for instance, any misdirection or stalled application can be frustrating and discouraging.

According to David Gauntlett’s account of the development of the Web, found in “Web Studies: A User’s Guide,” Tim Berners-Lee created the Web to be the “elegant solution” to the entanglement of data, protocols, programming codes, wires, and cables that proved ““too much of a hassle for a noncomputer expert”” (Tim Berners-Lee qtd. in Gauntlett, “Web Studies” 5). Berners-Lee and his colleagues intended for the Web to be available to anyone with access to a computer to use the internet, and to use it cooperatively and noncompetitively. These goals may not have come to fruition—although many Web site designers work with each other in the citing of information or the development of technology, many designers compete with each other for donations, purchases, and visitors—but Jewish genealogical Web sites epitomize them. The sites refer to each other and share content, forming a strong intertextuality that more conventional texts cannot and do not rival.

The social and technical dynamics of the internet make it a great resource for exploring the presentation of self. Online communities form around the personae presented by their members. Authenticity—how close the personae are to who the members really are—or cohesiveness—how all the different personae presented by any

one member fit together to present a unified self—are not necessarily issues for members of these communities. In “A Home on the Web: Presentations of Self on Personal Homepages,” Charles Cheung calls the process whereby users identify themselves “impression management” (47). In most situations, users choose how to present themselves online, managing the impression they make on other users with whom they interact. Their use of the internet is as anonymous, invisible, or self-identifying as they want it to be: users have the freedom to do what they want with their identities. They can create alternative and multiple identities, emphasize a particular part of their identities, or divulge little-to-none of their identities, if they so wish (Turkle 178).

The irony of Jewish genealogical Web sites, however, is that they function as intended only if users present themselves as fully as they can: anonymity simply does not work on these sites. The only way to ensure that genealogical Web sites fulfill their purpose is for users to be un-anonymous, to articulate their identities rather than obscure them. For a genealogical Web site to work, users must provide their own information, which a Web site then makes available to other users conducting genealogical research. These Web sites subsist on the understanding that users are who they say they are, supplying information that is as accurate as possible. Creativity in self-presentation is fairly futile when engaging with a genealogical Web site, for authenticity and cohesiveness are goals of genealogical research. Most genealogists understand the necessity of being open about their identities, sharing what they know of themselves and of their ancestry with others. Such openness on the part of one genealogist “build[s] intimacy on the basis of trust” (Castells 11) that every other user is being just as open.

THE HOLOCAUST AND/ON THE INTERNET

According to Gregory L. Ulmer, author of *Electronic Monuments*, the internet makes possible for an individual's thoughts and feelings to become a collective's (xxii), and according to Manuel Castells in *The Power of Identity*, the world has become a "network society" (11). Such an efficient network as the internet enables many individuals to share their experiences and for collectives to arise. The creator of a Web site, for example, may interact with users who visit, and visitors may interact with each other, forming a community all because of common interest in the topic of the Web site. Furthermore, genealogists use genealogical Web sites' existing databases to research their families. After completing their individual family trees, they contribute them right back to the database. As more and more individual records become a part of the database, the community of users of the site accesses the same genealogical information, the same memories. The ways in which users help each other and share resources transform the individual experience of using the Web sites into a collective experience. The newly formed collective turns the Web site into what Ulmer calls a "vernacular shrine" (xiv), an unofficial, sacrosanct site of memory. Given the nature of genealogy to research the dead, Ulmer's description is an apt one for Jewish genealogical Web sites.

Digital media, specifically the internet, allows users to revise, update, and preserve, creating an ultimate commemorative environment. Ulmer's work explores how some Web sites, if not all, operate as sites of memory. He begins by arguing that conventional memorials are hybrids of texts and images (xiv), with "text" being defined as any "thing" that sends a message. Memorials also transform the amalgam of words, pictures, and materials into a safe, special, and bounded space. For memorials to fulfill

their functions as a community's way of commemorating (130), visitors must be familiar with each of the rhetorical components of text, image, material, and space, an issue with which Mitchell would agree. Hirsch suggests that memorial sites' "[t]ext and image, intricately entangled in a narrative web, work in collaboration to tell a complicated story of loss and longing[...]" (4). Memorials, especially on the internet, must generate the appropriate associations among design, experience, subject, and memory.

The same concerns are true of sites on the internet, because, as Ulmer repeats throughout the book, the internet is a "living monument"⁵ (155) by virtue of its propensity to preserve its content while simultaneously allowing the content and technology to evolve. The technology will not evaporate or otherwise disappear; thus, any information posted on the internet, and particularly on the Web, remains conceivably forever. In the case of internet memorials, users apprehend the virtuality of the medium and space and integrate this aspect into the commemorative process. According to Ulmer, the combination of images and texts on a memorial Web site creates an "aura" (62) that "point[s] to something more and different[...]" (65) than what appears on the screen. Users "recognize" (65) the commemorative value of the Web site, approaching it with a sense of heightened meaning.

In fact, Ulmer's aura functions similarly to the "symbolic aura" that Pierre Nora argues is characteristic of sites of memory. Nora writes, "[e]ven an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura" (19). Despite the sites' lack of materiality, Web sites that commemorate the Holocaust, as well as Jewish genealogical Web sites, underscore the importance of documents and records, which are quite material objects. Their virtuality

⁵Ulmer appears to use "monument" and "memorial" interchangeably.

lends itself to an imagination that imposes an aura, a sense that the sites “stop time,[...] block the work of forgetting,[...] establish a state of things,[...] immortalize death,[...] materialize the immaterial” (19). In 1989, when Nora published “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” the internet was in its infancy; accordingly, Nora’s frame of reference does not include the Web. However, because of the way in which the internet has revolutionized textuality, the Web sites are just as significant as the *lieux de mémoire* of which Nora does write. Jewish genealogical Web sites attempt to reverse the damage of forgetfulness by enabling the recovery of family histories.

Indeed, certain Web sites have become key sources for people interested in the Holocaust, even if the sites are affiliates of more traditional Holocaust memorials. For instance, in addition to *Remember.org: A Cybrary of the Holocaust*, *Holocaust Survivors*, *The Nizkor Project*, and *Holocaust Survivors and Remembrance Project*, the Web sites of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem are mines of information. Their enmeshing of text and image creates the symbolic aura heralded by Nora. From traditional Jewish icons to motifs evoking the Holocaust, the visual rhetoric lets visitors know that they have come upon a special space, virtual or not. The language used on the sites suggests an urgent need to remember what victims of the Holocaust experienced and the circumstances that allowed for such a travesty to occur. These sites memorialize the Holocaust by being the special places to which to turn, even if they do exist only virtually. They function as shrines, they emit an aura, they espouse a system of signs, and they do allow for the creation of communities surrounding their subject matter.

Remember.org (Figure 1), an online library of Holocaust resources, for instance, maintains that it is a

Holocaust community founded in 1995 to Remember, *Zachor, Sich Erinnern*.

Remember.org offers contributors (survivors, liberators, historians, and teachers) a place to connect and share the best research resources and stories through art, photography, painting, audio/video, and remembrance.

This mission statement makes clear the expectation for users to cooperate and communicate with each other, to form a community based on commemorating the Holocaust. The site's visual imagery grips visitors and alerts them right away to its subject matter of the Holocaust. In the top right corner, a flickering candle invokes Judaism's eternal flame and a *yortzeit*, or memorial, candle. Both images refer to the religiosity of the Holocaust's victims and to the idea that they died as martyrs. The Web site's logo resides in the top left corner. It has a black-and-white photograph of the site's inspiration—the creator's father—adjacent to a swatch of gray with the title of the site in white letters. The gray intimates smoke, especially because of the wisp-like design features, which could signify smoke from crematoria or the wiping away of a layer of ash spewed from the crematoria. The grayscale of the entire logo, with the exception of the site's subtitle which is in bright orange, alludes to the historicity of the Holocaust, that it occurred in the past. It also conveys the somberness of the subject matter. The orange of the site's subtitle calls attention to the uniqueness of what the site is: a "cybrary," a play on its existence in cyber-space and being like a library. Because of the way in which the images work in concert with the text, and because of the feelings of solemnity, *Remember.org* claims its place as a virtual *lieu de mémoire*.



Figure 1: *Remember.org* Main Page

Other appearances of the Holocaust on the internet uphold the design aesthetic that marries traditional Jewish images, tropes of the Holocaust, and a lexicon of sobering vocabulary. From barbed wire (Figure 2) to Hebrew words for “remember” (Figure 3), the rhetorical devices on almost every Web site that pertains to the Holocaust express their roles as commemorative. Jewish genealogical Web sites, although not expressly related to the Holocaust, exhibit the same visual and verbal rhetorics. They use the Holocaust as their hook—the point that brings users in—even if they claim to be about more than just the Holocaust, as *JewishGen.org* does. This leading Jewish genealogical research site asserts that, “contrary to public perception” (“Questions and Answers” ques. 9), the site has a scope broader than the Holocaust. However, one notes the subtitle of the site—“An affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust”—as well as the prominent link to Yad Vashem and the two links to the Museum of Jewish Heritage on the right side of the main page (Figure 4). These

references to the Holocaust imply that the site's purpose is, in fact, for Holocaust research, in contradiction to its statement mentioned above. The Holocaust is a driving force of most Jewish genealogy, so the presentation of these Web sites is often reliant upon imagery of the Holocaust. The Holocaust's presence on the internet contends with issues of representation and narrative in the same ways that conventional Holocaust memorials do.



Figure 2: *Zchor.org*'s Web Page with Barbed Wire Graphic ("We Shall Not Forget")

The Nizkor Project

**Dedicated to 12 million Holocaust victims who suffered and died
at the hands of [Adolf Hitler](#) and his Nazi regime**

Internet connectivity
courtesy [Vex.net](#)

[Search Nizkor](#) · [Site Map](#) · [Our Latest](#) · [Book Store & Bibliographies](#)

Holocaust Research Guides

[Auschwitz-Birkenau](#)
[Aktion Reinhard](#)
[The Leuchter Report](#)
[Willis Carter & the IHR](#)

The Holocaust Camps

[Aktion Reinhard](#) · [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#)
[Belzec-Belzen](#) · [Buchenwald](#)
[Dachau](#) · [Maidanek](#)
[Mauthausen](#) · [Nordhausen](#)

Places

[Canada](#)
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Special Features

[66 Questions & Answers About the Holocaust](#)
[The Techniques of Holocaust Denial](#)
[The Trial of Adolf Eichmann](#)
[Holocaust "Revisionism" or Holocaust Denial?](#)
[The Dentist of Auschwitz](#)
[Where Is John Ball?](#)

Nuremberg Trials

[Nazi Conspiracy & Aggression](#)
[Trial of German Major War Criminals](#)

[Link to Nizkor](#)

**Given the evidence ... why do people
deny the Holocaust?**

The cynical truth comes to us by way of an [obscure extremist group](#), which boasts:
***"The real purpose of holocaust revisionism is to make
National Socialism an acceptable political alternative again."***

People: from A to Z

[Adolf Eichmann](#) · [Adolf Hitler](#)
[David Irving](#) · [Fred Leuchter](#)
[Deborah Lipstadt](#)
[Ernst Zundel](#)

Organizations

[American](#) · [Austrian](#)
[British](#) · [Canadian](#)
[German](#) · [Israeli](#)
[Polish](#)

Shofar FTP Archives

[The Camps](#) · [Organizations](#)
[International Military Tribunal](#)
[People](#) · [Places](#)



The Nizkor Project
webmaster@nizkor.org

Nizkor is a Hebrew word which means "We will remember."

Figure 3: *The Nizkor Project*'s Main Page with Hebrew Word for "We Will Remember" ("Nizkor") and Image of a Flame

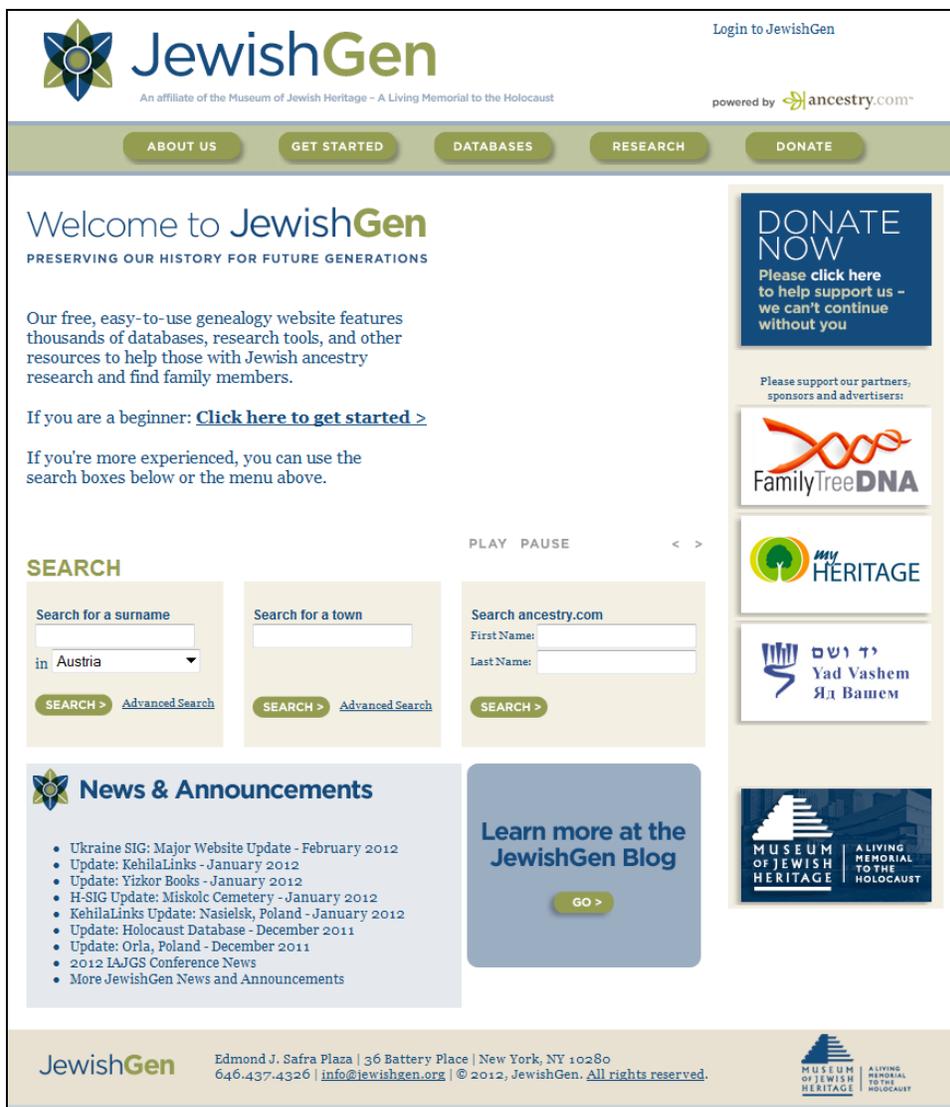


Figure 4: *JewishGen.org*'s Main Page with a Star of David Logo, a Link to Yad Vashem, and Two Links to the Museum of Jewish Heritage

JEWISH GENEALOGY AND THE HOLOCAUST

In *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity, and Community*, Eviatar Zerubavel writes that “our ancestral background affects not only how others see us but even how we experience ourselves. Indeed, knowing who our ancestors were is fundamental to our sense of who we are” (5). “Wholeness” (Lifton qtd. in 7),

“psychological integrity” (Owosu-Bempah qtd. in 7), and “spiritual affinity” (Nash qtd. in 6) are terms Zerubavel cites to explain the impact of successful genealogical research. When people know where they come from and who their ancestors are, they feel a greater sense of connection to themselves, their family members, and even members of their communities. Genealogy creates “links to the past” (22), an image that evokes the notion of interconnectedness. It creates a “continuum of descent” (20), implying that each and every ancestor’s existence plays a part in their descendants’ existence. This sense of continuity, of interdependence, allows for, as Zerubavel writes, “a way of experiencing even distant historical events quasi-autobiographically” (21). In other words, much like Hirsch claims about postmemory, our ancestors’ experiences become our virtual experiences, giving us a greater understanding of our places in the world.

Situations that put a chink in the continuum can be detrimental to one’s self-concept. Some situations, such as adoption and sperm donation, limit access to genealogical information; if biological parents wish to remain anonymous, their children may feel incomplete, as if breaking from their lineage renders they themselves broken. Other situations, such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the Holocaust, create similar ruptures in one’s ancestral chain. Slavery ripped children from their parents’ arms generation after generation. Sold to repay debts, as punishment for their parents’ indiscretions, or to make better workers without attachment to family, children thus did not know their parents, and eventually their places of origin, both of which are important clues for conducting genealogical research. The slave trade and its traumas thus make genealogical research for people of African descent very difficult once genealogists trace the most recent several generations. As Zerubavel argues, “[w]hen trying to trace their

ancestors, [descendants of African slaves] usually hit a ‘genealogical brick wall,’ as their African ancestral lines ‘[run] into dead ends in that mysteriously dark mausoleum called slavery” (Gates qtd. in Zerubavel 6). The tragedy of slavery is not just how it impacted those who were enslaved, but also their descendants who wish to know about their ancestors and subsequently about themselves.

The Holocaust has a similar impact on many Jews and Jewish genealogists. It created voids in Jewish family histories that are difficult to fill because certain practices separated or eradicated families. The death and destruction of the Holocaust are ubiquitous in the histories of contemporary Jewish families; no matter how distantly, almost every genealogist of a Jewish family confronts it in their research. A lack of knowledge of family members’ fates means that many Jewish genealogists hit a brick wall, too, after just a few generations. The challenge of Jewish genealogy is to break through the brick walls, to learn as much as possible about these missing branches, and repair the broken limbs. Maybe a genealogist knows that relatives died in the Holocaust but does not have any names. Maybe a genealogist knows the name of a relative but does not know how the person is related. Maybe a genealogist does not know anything but discovers names and relations during her research. These scenarios are typical of Jewish genealogists when they encounter the Holocaust as they trace their lineages: the Holocaust makes Jewish genealogy a complicated hunt for answers.

Many Jewish genealogists embark on their research out of a desire to counteract the effects of the Holocaust. The Holocaust left many people dead and families damaged, hurting chances for acknowledging them. Arthur Kurzweil, for example, exhorts in *From Generation to Generation: How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Family History*:

We must try our best to learn about those members of our families who perished during the Holocaust. We ought to know their names and to write them down on our family trees. We ought to print these family trees and distribute them to our family members so that everyone knows who perished and how we are connected to them. Their memories must live. (270)

Populating a family tree with the names and details of people killed in the Holocaust frustrates the goals of the Nazis to destroy en masse and remove names and faces from the roster of victims. Populating a family tree with the names and details of people killed in the Holocaust also ensures that their lives are remembered by later generations, further frustrating the Nazi's goals. Kurzweil suggests that Jewish genealogy uncovers the dead, giving their lives meaning in the present. Hirsch's work on postmemory becomes relevant in this capacity, too: as genealogists learn more about those relatives who perished in the Holocaust, their experience of the Holocaust is indeed generationally distant yet nonetheless traumatic. Although knowing what relatives went through during the Holocaust is different from feeling what they went through, Jewish genealogical research enables greater understanding of such experiences.

As argued above, Jewish liturgy is filled with references to Jewish forebears, instructing Jews to be aware of their ancestry and make good on it. While the significance of ancestry in Jewish thought and culture might be apparent, the importance of doing Jewish genealogy is not necessarily. However, to know one's Jewish ancestry is to conduct Jewish genealogy. The Holocaust poses a problem to this conception of Jewish genealogy because, for many Jewish families, it cuts off ancestry. How can someone conduct Jewish genealogy if she does not know her ancestry? In Kurzweil's

view, the Holocaust makes conducting Jewish genealogy all the more important. The Holocaust changed Jewish commemorative practices on a large scale, taking memorial traditions and inflating them to harness the immense tragedy of the Holocaust. Thus, when Jews attempt to remember their ancestors, to research their lineage, most cannot help but think of the Holocaust and what it left in its wake.

JEWISH GENEALOGY AND JEWISH IDENTITY

The narratives of Jewish experience told by Jewish genealogical Web sites indicate just how much constructions of Jewish identity have changed with the ability to research one's past. Traditional answers to the question "Who is Jewish?" include the answer given by Jewish law: if a child's mother is Jewish, then that child is Jewish, too. Some streams of Judaism, such as the Reform movement, acknowledge that a child can be Jewish even if only her father is Jewish. Judaism also allows for conversions, so someone without a Jewish parent can choose to become Jewish, thereby rendering her children Jewish, too. There are, of course, debates about what being Jewish actually entails: degrees of practice, approaches to Jewish theology, languages of prayer, and diet are among the concerns that nuance Jewish identity. Jewish genealogical Web sites nuance them even further, adding distant ancestry, ties to a particular location, and experience of the Holocaust to the mix.

Jewish genealogical research Web sites, for example, encourage all users with any Jewish ancestor to join its community. As genealogists conduct their research, they may encounter Jewish ancestry. They then turn to Jewish genealogical research Web sites. Most users of these sites identify as Jewish and expect to find that most, if not all, of their

ancestry also identified as Jewish. There are times, however, when someone researching her roots is surprised to learn that she has a Jewish ancestor. Then this situation arises, the researcher accesses the resources that distinguish Jewish genealogy from other genealogies. Welcomed by the Jewish genealogical community as an earnest researcher, she does not need to identify as Jewish in order to become part of the Jewish community. Instead, she joins a community based on familial relationships to Jews. Zerubavel writes that

[n]ot only does our genealogical vision of co-descent help connect in our minds various “relatives” (from siblings, through second cousins, to any other human beings) as individuals, it also seems to provide the mental cement necessary for constructing actual communities. In other words, it also constitutes a formidable basis for group formation. (46)

Zerubavel’s concept of “co-descent” means that more than one person descends from the same ancestor. In the case of research Web sites and their influence on community formation, “co-descent” means that more than one person descends from someone identified as Jewish. When these co-descendants come together for the purposes of researching their Jewish ancestors, they form communities of relation.

Cyber-shtetls allow for the development of a different kind of community, one based on shared interest in a particular place. Once researchers know where their ancestors come from, they usually research those locations. These ancestral homelands place a central role in Jewish genealogical research because they reveal a lot about ancestors’ ways of life. Industries, politics, occupations, neighbors, languages, and other aspects of day-to-day life are important to understanding how ancestors lived. Although

the ancestors may have moved to and from those places, and even though ancestry can be elusive, places persist. In *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs writes that “space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings” (140). With cyber-shtetls’ focus on disclosing as much as possible about each of their locations, the past may be able to be recaptured by imagination. When users congregate around cyber-shtetls to learn more about the originary homes, they form communities based on these places. They share research tips, photographs, and family stories, all in the interest of getting to know these places better. In this way, cyber-shtetls are virtual ancestral homes for people looking for the real things.

Personal genealogy Web sites attract genealogists with even more specific interests than pinpointing the place from which their ancestors came. Users visit the sites if they seek information about a family or a genealogist’s methodology. The sites usually provide family trees and narratives of the research that helped construct the family trees. They are the forums through which genealogists share their findings and their experiences as genealogists. Often, a personal genealogy Web site pays homage to the ancestors of the person who created it. An aura of death, as Ulmer and Nora might call it, pervades the use of these sites. Users may recognize experiences of tragedy that their own ancestors experienced; whether the Holocaust, pogroms, illness, or some other cause of death features in a family’s history, personal genealogy Web sites address the circumstances that caused what Zerubavel calls “ruptures” (82) in a family’s history. Catastrophes, whether widespread or personal, disrupt family history narratives, so much

so that some genealogists may think that conducting any more research is futile. The personal genealogy Web sites typically show that more research is, in fact, not futile, that periods of devastation do not need to stymie genealogical pursuits. The community of users of these sites comes together out of a commemoration of the devastation, but it evolves through acknowledging the perseverance of Jewish families.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Each chapter of this dissertation pertains to one of the aforementioned genres of Jewish genealogical Web sites: Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls, and personal genealogy Web sites. Despite this demarcating arrangement, the interconnections among the sites are remarkable. The sites reference each other, recommend each other, and host links to each other. This intertextuality—facilitated by hyperlinks—exemplifies just how much the internet revolutionizes literary studies. Instead of searching archives for material that explicates a text, such material is available merely by clicking a link to it. Translations, images, definitions, news articles, encyclopedia entries, maps, and other clarifying materials that would traditionally appear as annotations or in bibliographies are easily available from Web page to Web page. Therefore, although Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls, and personal genealogy Web sites have specific characteristics that differentiate among them, they refer to, build from, and interact with each other.

Because of this interconnectivity, I discuss each kind of Web site in an order that matches the order in which genealogists use them. I begin with Jewish genealogical research Web sites because these sites are Jewish genealogists' first resources, move to

cyber-shtetls, and conclude with personal genealogy Web sites. Jewish genealogical research Web sites provide clues, if not full-fledged answers, to many of the “when” and “where” questions of genealogical research. Once a researcher finds a place of importance—of birth or death, residence, marriage, exit or entry into a country, or education, for instance—the researcher may explore a Web site developed around the communities in this place. These sites’ sole purpose is to provide what are essentially tours of certain places. Through photographs, narrative, or both, these Web sites offer researchers more specific information than many research Web sites can provide. Personal genealogy Web sites represent the fruits of the labor of this genealogical research. They are forums for researchers to assemble and share the information culled on Jewish genealogical research Web sites and cyber-shtetls.

The first chapter, “Planting Roots and Adding Branches: Communities of Relation on Jewish Genealogical Research Web Sites,” argues that Jewish genealogical research Web sites generate communities of relation. Based on a sense of kinship, no matter how distantly related two people might be, these communities suggest an expansion of the definition of being Jewish. Strict interpretations of Jewish law dictate that if a woman is Jewish, then her children are Jewish. Other interpretations allow for a father’s Jewish identity to determine his children’s. However, Jewish genealogical Web sites indicate that this law no longer satisfies all aspects of Jewish self-identification. Instead, they allow for Jewish identities that enjoy relationships to other Jews, regardless of the number of generations removed or the exact relationship. “Jewish by association” is a new form of Jewish identity substantiated by Jewish genealogical research Web sites. Tomás R. Jiménez calls this phenomenon “affiliative ethnic identity,” whereby a person

identifies with an ethno-cultural community—such as the Jewish community—of which it is not a member through an immediate relationship to it. The person finds an entrée into the community, such as a distant ancestor, and latches on to it as a symbol of belonging.

There are two kinds of narratives on these sites. One kind is the narrative told by the visual and verbal rhetorics of the sites themselves, and the other kind is the narrative told by users in their quest for information. The first kind of narrative imparts how important Jewish genealogy is for Jewish continuity, suggesting that the only way for Jews to reclaim a past filled with persecution and oppression is to honor the ancestors who endured it. This narrative focuses on negative experiences as the impetus for conducting Jewish genealogy. The second kind of narrative is one of searching and inquiry. Structurally, these narratives are incomplete: the beginnings of the researchers' stories are extensive, as they explain what information they have and what information they seek. There are few climactic moments, in that researchers rarely follow up on their research questions with what results they garner, and thus there are few denouements that show how a family's story has been changed because of the search for information. Visitors to the sites get to know the researchers' goals and techniques, but rarely do they get a sense of their results. This chapter explores both kinds of narratives, arguing that instead of competing with each other, they complement each other.

As one delves deeper into Jewish genealogical research, ancestral homelands are often the next area of inquiry. Thus, Chapter Two, "Going Online to Go 'Home:' *Yizkor* Books, Cyber-shtetls, and Communities of Location," investigates the role of online *yizkor* books and Web sites devoted to specific communities, or "cyber-shtetls," in the

establishment of place as a seminal component to Jewish identity. Although Judaism as an ethnicity claims place as a defining feature—Ashkenazic Jews are from Eastern Europe, while Sephardic Jews are from the Iberian Peninsula, for example—towns of origin, ancestral cities, or generally “home” take on great significance when researchers are able to isolate such a place as relevant to their family histories. The virtual space that cyber-shtetls occupy on the Web is a surrogate for the real place: the shtetls represented literarily and pictorially by cyber-shtetls are no longer viable places to visit. Destroyed by circumstances of history, such as war or the Holocaust, the actual shtetls are “gone,” impossible to recreate. Instead, cyber-shtetls create a virtual world that gives a sense of what life might have been like.

Much like Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls communicate a narrative of loss. Hirsch and Nancy Miller write in their introduction to *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* that

[i]n the language of diaspora, originary homelands are not simply there to be recovered: already multiply interconnected with other places, they are further transformed by the ravages of time, transfigured through the lenses of loss and nostalgia, constructed in the process of the search. (3)

The people who put the sites together attempt to recover the communities of their ancestors, but such a feat is impossible. Cyber-shtetls tell a story about communities rich and full of Jewish life. Perhaps Jews struggled in these communities, but they struggled together and forged lives for themselves and their descendants. Politics, religion, industry, youth groups, the performing arts, and other aspects of what makes a community a community are hallmarks of the narratives conveyed by cyber-shtetls. War,

migration, epidemic, and other wide-scale calamities destroyed the Jewish presence in the locations, so what the cyber-shtetls portray is clouded by nostalgia, as Hirsch and Miller write. This second chapter looks at the mythos of cyber-shtetls in their construction of Jewish communities that are lost to the circumstances of history.

As Jewish genealogists put the results of their research into narrative form, they make use of personal genealogy Web sites and blogs to share what they find. The third chapter, “Tilling Sacred Ground: Legacy Pilgrimages, Digital Documentation, and Communities of Devastation,” probes these sites and claims that they exacerbate a Jewish identity based on victimization, even though they extol the persistence of Jewish life. The sites contextualize the data gleaned from Jewish genealogical research Web sites and cyber-shtetls by emplotting the lives and times of family members and filling in the gaps caused by the damage of adversity and persecution. Each of these sites makes clear that the family story has been affected negatively, that facts and personal stories got lost amid the devastation. Readers of these sites cannot help but grasp the sense of loss, even as the sites make their attempts at recovery. This point is what makes personal genealogy Web sites—and other Jewish genealogical Web sites—so ironic: their content relies on searches resolved and questions answered, yet the rhetoric expresses a laconic view of Jewish experience. In this respect, the two narrative threads on personal genealogy Web sites compete with each other for prevalence.

All three genres of Web site deal with the same issues of narrative, memory, and reclaiming of a Jewish experience. Hirsch’s “postmemory” and Hayden White’s “emplotment” account for the perspective and narrativization communicated on the Web sites. The sites express the perspectives of detectives, who use clues to search for

answers to their lives' questions. Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls, and personal genealogy Web sites all look to the past as a way to understand the present. Whether about people, places, or personal journeys, the Web sites provide narratives affected by trauma. The narratives are shaped by the experiences and family histories of the Web sites' creators, more or less telling a story about loss, inquiry, pursuit, and discovery. Emplotment enables the creators to put the pieces of their stories together into a cohesive narrative. The narrative is able to be read, understood, and related to by an audience of Web site visitors who share an interest or an ancestor. Visitors gain valuable insight into their own genealogical process when they encounter the narratives on these Web sites.

The durability of the internet facilitates the publication and posterity of these texts—Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls, and personal genealogy Web sites—while simultaneously allowing for updates, revisions, and interactivity. The pervasiveness of virtual media means that limitless audiences may come across these sites, building infinitely-sized communities and effecting ever-expanding identities. Virtual media engage an audience eager to find ways to belong and, more important, ways to identify as Jewish, thereby changing the shape of Jewish identity. Reconsiderations of relation, location, and devastation are foundations of Jewish identity. They revise and enlarge—and sometimes contradict—typical means of identifying as Jewish, signaling that the world of Jewish genealogy is making changes. The irony, of course, is that Jewish genealogy's goal is to demonstrate biological and legal relationships through official documentation, which therefore verify one's Jewish identity. Jewish genealogical research instead derives Jewish identities that have very

little to do with biology but with feelings of kinship, senses of belonging, and shared experiences of loss.

CHAPTER ONE

PLANTING ROOTS AND ADDING BRANCHES:

COMMUNITIES OF RELATION ON JEWISH GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH WEB SITES

“When the Nazis rounded us [the Jews] up and took us away, they took away our names and gave us numbers. Our [Jewish genealogists’] job is to get rid of the numbers and give them back their names.” (Kurzweil, Jewish Genealogical Society of Colorado)

When documenting a family’s heritage, a prime resource, and one that is often the first stop, is Jewish genealogical research Web sites. By visiting these Web sites, researchers find the information they seek, or else they learn where to go to find the information. On both accounts, Jewish genealogical research Web sites provide the foundations upon which researchers piece together a family’s heritage: networks of other researchers with similar interests and inquiries; ways to reach out to potential family members or landsmen; and databases from which to acquire and into which to deposit information. The stories told on these Web sites, then, are about the research process—the questions asked by researchers at the onset of their research and the methods they use to answer them. In fact, there are two kinds of stories on these Web sites: the first is the

narrative told by the sites themselves and the second is the narrative told by their users. The first narrative comprises the verbal and visual rhetorics of the sites; the second narrative comprises the texts of e-mails and posts made by visitors to the sites. The two narratives complement each other by evoking similar concerns of inquiry and journey. There is very little by way of resolution, however, as genealogical research is ongoing.

These Web sites allow for the formation of communities around the themes of Jewish genealogy and its concerns. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that communities are nebulous entities, that “members[...]will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). This statement could not be more true when related to the internet, especially to the Web. People who interact via the internet know that each other exists, or presume each other’s existence, but they may not ever know more than that, such as names, ages, genders, in what locations they are, or what they look like. This anonymity likely attracts users to the internet, for it allows for “impression management” (Cheung 47). In most situations, users choose how to present themselves online, giving other users as much information about themselves as they want, while maintaining as much privacy as they want.

Users who want to identify themselves to other users do so through usernames, e-mail addresses, avatars, network names, handles, or other digital identifiers, even though these distinctions may not be very elucidative for the average user. For internet users, the “image of communion” is equivalent to the sense that they establish bonds with each other “over the internet.” Although such bonds may be significant, users may never be able, or even want, to pick each other out of a crowd. The shared experience of using the

same Web sites and contributing to each other's use is enough for users to form a "virtual" community, one that exists in cyber-space but not necessarily in "real life." According to Howard Rheingold in *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* and Sherry Turkle in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, these virtual communities can, in fact, have more significant impacts on their members than real life communities.

Although Rheingold and Turkle may disagree on the impact of virtual communities, they do agree that they can foster meaningful and important relationships. Turkle focuses on the mechanisms by which virtual communities develop, and Rheingold focuses on what happens once the communities do develop. Turkle begins the discussion by questioning the usefulness or healthiness of forging online communities; she asks, "[...]is it really sensible to suggest that the way to revitalize community is to sit alone in our rooms, typing at our networked computers and filling out lives with virtual friends" (235)? In contrast, Rheingold celebrates his online interactions for the way they enhance his real life. He defies Turkle's image of a reclusive user by breaking through the boundaries between his virtual and real lives, such as when he attends a real-life funeral for a member of one of his online communities (32-37). There, he mourns the friend he met through the internet but included in his day-to-day life, and he congregates with several other members, putting faces and voices to names and user IDs. In such a situation, the lines separating the real world from a cyber-world blur, melding the two into perhaps a confusing social experience, as it certainly was for Rheingold at first (36).

In Rheingold's world, users generally choose to present themselves with digital identifiers—the markers of identity that users must create and input themselves—that

reflect who they are. In Turkle's world, in contrast, users sometimes choose to present themselves as differently as possible from who they are. One aspect of these presentations of self remains constant, however: each person's self-presentation needs to be consistent from time to time, from log-in to log-in, for the communities to succeed as part of the give-and-take of social order. Indeed, Anderson points out that communities affirm identities and reify ideologies (67, 84), but the only way for communities to have identities to affirm or ideologies to reify is by members offering them in the first place. If members' identities, or if the principles around which members build a community, change indeterminately, the community experiences a dissonance that may lead to fracture or dissolution. Online communities assume that the "honor system" guides their members; even if members purposefully misrepresent themselves, the misrepresentations need to accord with the communities' expectations. However, Jewish genealogical research Web sites expect that users tell the truth about themselves, that the information they make available is accurate and free of irony.

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH WEB SITES AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

In the case of genealogical research Web sites, the dynamics of identity management are especially salient, maybe because many of the concerns of anonymity and reciprocity become moot. Considerations of the boundaries between virtuality and reality, personae created specifically for online use and those enacted in real life, and social effects all emerge on genealogical research Web sites with the general beliefs that the boundaries are meant to be crossed, that the personae are true-to-life, and that the social effects are unquestionably beneficial. Users of genealogical research Web sites are

usually open about the details of their lives so that they learn about and from each other in pursuit of their family histories. These details include highly personal information: where they were born; where they grew up; and who their parents, siblings, spouses, and children are. Although sharing this information online is risky in a time of sophisticated identity theft schemes, for users to keep these details to themselves, present the details falsely, or otherwise obscure their identities would contradict their reasons for visiting the Web sites.

By definition, genealogical research Web sites are digital repositories for family legacies. These sites maintain hundreds of thousands of records of names, dates, locations, histories, religions, politics, etymologies, and other data in extensive databases. For the databases to function properly, users must be able to access data, and they must be able to provide data. Users must be able to identify other users, such that their digital identification system resembles Rheingold's more than Turkle's; communicate with them; collaborate with them; share research with them; and otherwise support them in their journeys to fill in their family trees. Genealogists who help other genealogists complete their family trees reciprocally help themselves to complete their own, by either ruling people out of their lineages or adding people to them. All of these dynamics lead genealogists who use the internet to possess confidence in each other that they have common goals and that they will treat each other's family stories with respect.

Prior to the internet's proliferation as a genealogical research tool, genealogists "pounded the pavement" to complete their family trees. After interviewing family members to collect information and leads for further research, they traveled to archives, wrote to offices of vital records requesting information, paid all kinds of fees for access,

leafed through pages of documents, transcribed the “important” information when photocopiers were unavailable, and drafted family trees by hand or with awkward computer software programs. The introduction and the development of the internet as a genealogical resource make these tasks infinitely easier. With the internet, researchers are able to receive feedback sometimes instantaneously; they do not have to depend on others to search multiple records: they can do so for themselves. They can communicate conveniently with family members and experts around the world.

Erin Einhorn describes her research process in *The Pages in Between: A Holocaust Legacy of Two Families, One Home*. Although published in 2008, at a time when the internet provided unprecedented access to genealogical research materials, Einhorn’s memoir hardly mentions the internet. Instead, she emphasizes the legwork she does, such as traveling from Philadelphia, PA or Detroit, MI to Krakow, Poland or Stockholm, Sweden; taking bus rides in unfamiliar countries; and completing document request forms in unfamiliar languages. Readers follow her on her journey, experiencing her anxieties, frustrations, and sadnesses along with her. Navigating foreign bus systems, negotiating with tour guides, and shuffling the paperwork necessary for completing her research may seem tedious and pedantic, but Einhorn does offer an engaging and comprehensive look into her endeavors to document her genealogy. Readers feel Einhorn’s dejection and defeat when she faces seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and they also share in her successes, such as when she finally works up the courage to meet the family that saved her mother during the Holocaust.

Genealogists might argue that Einhorn could have saved herself a lot of aggravation by concentrating her research efforts on using Web sites instead of by

juggling her professional life and travel to foreign countries. Genealogists who conducted the bulk of their research prior to the internet know how time- and energy-consuming such research can be. Surely, they wonder at Einhorn's strategies. In conducting her research in the "real world," as opposed to online, however, Einhorn demonstrates the importance of having a community of helpers. In fact, the way Einhorn amasses people and places throughout her genealogical search resembles the way in which communities form on genealogical research Web sites. The users registered on genealogical research Web sites, like the more than one million registered on *FamilySearch.org* ("News and Press"), 367,000 registered on *JewishGen.org* ("*JewishGen* FactSheet—Just the Facts..."), or the 8,600 subscribers of *Nu? What's New? The E-zine of Jewish Genealogy from Avotaynu*, comprise a network of researchers with expert-level knowledge in any given aspect of genealogy. They "commune" with each other in the tracing of their genealogies, giving advice, being sounding boards, or simply visiting the same Web sites. Ironically, Einhorn is a member of *JewishGen.org*, having donated translations of sections of the Bedzin, Poland *yizkor* book ("A. The History of Jews in Będzin" pars. 6, 24, 51, 85, 103).

The networks grow when genealogical Web sites connect users to archives and records previously only available by going directly to the institutions holding them and requesting to see them. For example, *Ancestry.com* (Figure 5) hosts links to various countries' census records, as well as the records for many parts of the United States ("Search Historical Records"). Clicking on any of these links allows users to enter information into data fields to search the records. Any user, anywhere in the world, has access to this service of *Ancestry.com*, so that he or she does not need to travel to the

particular country or state of interest and wade through its paper records, as Einhorn does. If any records exist, though sometimes for a fee, the database will produce digital copies of the records for users to read, print, and save online.



Figure 5: *Ancestry.com*'s Main Page

Sometimes, a contact made online through a genealogical Web site is more helpful than any person in real life. For instance, a user of *JewishGen.org* (Figure 4) in Chapel Hill, N.C. posted a request for help authenticating the whereabouts of two cousins whom she believed murdered in the Holocaust (Long). She recounts that upon learning that they are, in fact, alive in Sweden, she could not get the information she needed to locate them from the archives she visited and called, some internationally. Another user of *JewishGen.org*—in Stockholm—offered to help her because he had access to certain resources that she did not, and he succeeded in reuniting these long-lost family members. Because both users subscribed to the Lodz Area Research Group's electronic mailing list,

he saw her original post asking for help. He probably responded to her directly, rather than via the electronic mailing list, and they continued to communicate virtually.

Without their virtual communication, the woman's genealogical research would have remained incomplete, and her family tree missing some branches. Additionally, in order for the correspondent in Sweden to know what to look for, he needed information about the woman's family. This situation demonstrates the necessity of self-disclosure in any genealogical research, especially if someone conducts even part of the research on behalf of someone else.

Signifying the importance of using both real life and virtual resources, the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies maintains a Web site (Figure 6) that touts its annual conference for Jewish genealogists (*IAJGS—International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies*). Furthermore, a Web site hyperlinked to the main page's announcement provides comprehensive information on the upcoming conference for any given year, as well information on previous years' conferences. The site provides online registration services, which have registrants rely on the virtual submissions of their registration forms, presentation proposals, and payments to allow their very real attendance. By even supporting a conference-only Web site, the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies uses its virtual space to bring Jewish genealogists together in a real space for the betterment of their research and the field of Jewish genealogy. Conference-goers begin their conference experience online and make the transition to real life only when they walk into the conference site.



Figure 6: International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies' Main Page

In turn, the real-life conferences evoke the importance of virtual genealogical communities by sponsoring workshops on online research; designating volunteers to document their activities by posting virtual journal entries, known as Web logs or “blogs,” photographs, lecture notes, audio clips, and other forms of digital media; and allotting time for networking. International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies conferences clearly show how the organization’s virtual constituent communities—local Jewish genealogical societies, *JewishGen.org*’s Special Interest Groups, and families planning reunions, to name a few—benefit from materializing in the real world, and vice versa. During the 2012 International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies Conference, for instance, *JewishGen.org* foresaw that some members of its community would not attend and created a discussion group specifically for conference happenings. Various users reported on their experiences throughout the days of the conference,

summarizing their activities or information given. A few people at the conference blogged in real time, even, meaning that they posted content—thoughts, impressions, or summaries—on any given event during that event as it unfolded. Undoubtedly, future conferences will see people using forms of social networking, such as *Facebook.com*, *Twitter.com*, or *Lanyrd.com* to reach out to their communities.

Attending the conference also gives Jewish genealogists the opportunity to meet and share information with other researchers. Encouraging people to register for “the opportunity to network in person with up to 1,000 other colleagues and Internet [*sic*] acquaintances as passionate as you are about Jewish genealogy only comes once a year” (“Conference Firsts” par. 13), the IAJGS recognizes the significance of the online communities established by Jewish genealogists. Researchers and speakers come from around the world (Handler and Margol; Manson; Margol; Margol and Davis; Schamroth; Sternberg), many of whom communicate solely via the internet. As one *JewishGenner* who traveled from Tel Aviv, Israel to attend the 2009 IAJGS conference in Philadelphia, PA commented, “[...]It is always so great to visit with the people I correspond with over the year” (Feldman). Meeting contacts in person brings virtual communities to life; more than acknowledging this necessary interplay between virtuality and reality, conference organizers ensure its success.

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH WEB SITES AND COMMUNITIES OF ANCESTORS

In the Foreword to *Ethnic Genealogy: A Research Guide*, Alex Haley answers the perennial question, “why do genealogy?” He explains that an amalgam of personal histories—as uncovered through genealogical research—composes “history.” The

aggregate of family histories therefore contribute to an understanding of history more broadly. In other words, if not for the people who lived and acted during any given period of time, there would be no events or situations to make history:

[y]oung and old alike find that knowing one's roots, and thus coming better to know who one is, provides a personally rewarding experience. But even more is involved than uncovering a family history, for each discovered United States family history becomes a newly revealed small piece of American history. Stated simply: a nation's history is only the selective histories of all of its people. It is only through an unfolding of the people's histories that a nation's culture can be studied in its fullest meaning. (par. 4)

The "selective histories" to which Haley refers interconnect such that trends and relationships emerge to tell a story, a narrative of heritage, a depiction of family origins. Putting several depictions of family origins together elucidates a collective heritage. In other words, genealogical research weaves together personal histories to create a network of ancestors whose lives and legacies affect later generations. While living relatives may provide moral support and leads for researchers to follow in their never-ending quests for information, deceased relatives are the crux of a family tree. Although voiceless, ancestors speak through what remains of their lives: documents, photographs, heirlooms, and anecdotes. Until researchers put all of the pieces together, ancestry can be elusive.

Therefore, in addition to the virtual communities composed of other genealogists who use the same Web sites and electronic mailing lists, researchers rely on the virtual communities composed of their ancestors. Even though there is no possibility of researchers meeting face-to-face with all of the people they trace in their lineage, as

Maurice Halbwachs suggests in *The Collective Memory*, their lineage is very much a part of their real life communities. Halbwach's section, "Survivals from Extinct Groups" (123-124), explains that past events, actions, and personalities influence those of the present and, by extension, the future. Ancestors probably had little to no awareness of how influential their lives would be, and people in the present may not even be aware of these influences, but they are influences nonetheless.

Einhorn expresses this phenomenon as "haunting" (263-264). Einhorn knows that her ancestors—especially her grandparents and even her mother—serve as influences in her life, but she may not know exactly who or how, especially before embarking on her journey of self-discovery. After the research she conducts on her family's legacy, however, she gains insight into the family dynamics that perplex her—why her mother behaves in certain ways, for example—and into her own affectations. Einhorn's memoir explores, for good or for bad, how her family dynamics, personality traits, patterns of behavior, and other aspects of day-to-day life usually result from previous family dynamics, personality traits, patterns of behavior, and other aspects of day-to-day life. Indeed, many Jewish genealogists believe that their legacies hold answers to archetypal questions they may ask themselves in their real lives (Dardashti; Goldberg par. 8).

In addition to providing space for communities to develop amongst their users, genealogical research Web sites also help researchers manage these ancestral communities. Two aspects of genealogical research Web sites make them seem like perfect storage sites—virtual or not—for the details of one's family history. First, the act of contributing a family tree to any of the Web sites' databases ensures that researchers organize their research. Names, places, and dates of every family member, regardless of

generation, are integral to the creation of a family tree. With the typical concern of genealogists for the overwhelming accumulation of information (“First Timer”), which only leads to other concerns of note-taking, saving, and filing, genealogical Web sites compel users to systematize their processes. Most genealogical research Web sites ask users for, as examples, first, middle, and family names, as well as any suffixes; dates and places of birth; and occupations.

Furthermore, genealogical research Web sites may even allow for the uploading of digital images, such as photographs, picture postcards, travel documents, and other material that encourages better understanding of family members and thus of their legacies. These images serve to distinguish visually among family members, especially if some have the same names or used aliases. Because organizing genealogical research is so often overwhelming, matching these images with the family members to whom they pertain saves many genealogists—and their progeny—frustration and confusion. As a result, the arrangement and array of information on genealogical Web sites oblige users to sift through their research and make sense out of it.

Second, genealogical research Web sites guarantee that ancestors will never be “forgotten” or “lost.” As users document and archive their family members, they mark their family members’ places among the branches of their family trees. Later generations of genealogists will not have to embark on the same journeys of discovery because the information has already been gathered, organized, and, most importantly, preserved. Before the internet’s omnipresence, hard copies of materials suffered consequences of fire, flood, human error, or other difficulties, much like the fate of the 1890 United States census; now, however, and surely as the internet becomes even more developed,

researchers need not worry about preserving their research if they take advantage of the digitization advent. Eviatar Zerubavel's *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity, and Community* claims that remembering every member of one's lineage can be stressful (19-20); thus, the features that drive genealogical research Web sites alleviate such pressure.

The situation of the 1890 United States census serves as a cautionary tale of the pressure to remember and the lack of ability to do so, especially now that digitization exists and is a relatively easy task. In 1896, a fire damaged several volumes of census data. In 1921, another fire led to immense water damage of not only the remainder of the 1890 census, but also the 1830, 1840, 1880, 1900, and 1910 censuses. Furthermore, in 1932, during a clearing out of superfluous paperwork, Congress ordered the destruction of several surviving volumes of the 1890 census after receiving recommendations to do so from the Librarian of Congress. According to Kellee Blake in "First in the Path of the Firemen: The Fate of the 1890 Population Census," no one really knows why the librarian and ultimately the Chief Clerk of the Bureau of the Census considered these records useless and appropriate for removal (par. 15). As a result of these natural disasters and what are likely human errors, very little of the 1890 census exists. Needless to say, the United States National Archives now preserves the remaining data in microfilm with the intention of transferring the material to a digital format.

With the same eye towards preservation, *Ancestry.com* tells users that its services allow them to record their legacies by developing family trees, creating photo albums, and posting stories, all of which "time can't erase" ("Build a Tree: Your Photos"), as if time did erase something of their ancestors. Genealogical research Web sites prevent the

deterioration and discoloration that these documents often face as they age. However, genealogical research Web sites are only effective in this regard if researchers digitize the materials by scanning them as images. Many databases contain digitized documents already, and there are increasingly simple ways of digitizing what remains, so the process should not be too taxing. Even though technology may change and Web sites may undergo revisions, the information hosted by the Web sites remains the same. In fact, there are some online services—such as *Internet Archive*'s Wayback Machine (“The Wayback Machine”)—that enable users to access archived versions of the Web, including Web sites that may not exist anymore. Any information posted to the internet, therefore, is accessible into perpetuity, thereby preserving family records for an equally long time.

Jewish genealogical Web sites not only make genealogical research infinitely easier, but they also offer solutions to core concerns of researchers. The relatively open exchange of information on genealogical Web sites, the need for researchers to organize their findings to make full use of the sites' resources, and the nature of the internet to preserve its content render the internet an ideal “place” to conduct genealogical research. Relationships—with other researchers, relatives, or resources—that develop through online genealogical research alleviate any loneliness or isolation that could ensue during hours of research conducted from a computer. Relationships, too, enhance genealogical research, not just the researcher, through their creation of a network of others interested in genealogical research. The usefulness of genealogical research Web sites depends on the various communities of researchers, families, and ancestors that exist in a virtual state, separated from “real life” namely because of location and time. An ironic aspect of

these virtual communities, however, is their potential to “crossover” into the real lives of researchers through face-to-face meetings at conferences and family reunions based on expansions of family trees.

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH WEB SITES AND JEWISH COMMUNITY FORMATION

The communities that form on Jewish genealogical research Web sites entail more than the interplay of virtuality and reality, more than bringing together Jews doing Jewish genealogy; the identification of ancestors as Jews plays a large role on Jewish genealogical research Web sites. That the users of these Web sites have Jewish ancestry in common is an issue over which users bond. No matter how distantly related a Jewish ancestor is, the researcher is welcomed into the Jewish genealogical community. The researcher on these sites assumes a special identity as descendent from Jews. All of those users who are “descendent from Jews” compose a community based on Jewish relation, and not necessarily Jewish identity. Not all people who do Jewish genealogy identify as Jewish, so not all of the users who are part of this community of relation are Jewish themselves.

Usually, the researcher finds an ancestor who did identify or is identified as Jewish, and the research turns to Jewish genealogical research Web sites to learn more about him. In the process, the researcher encounters communities of other Jewish genealogists who welcome the researcher as one of their own: they are all doing Jewish genealogy, even if they are all not Jewish themselves. The assumption is that they have at least one Jewish ancestor if they are doing Jewish genealogy. Zerubavel writes that “[s]ocial solidarity presuppose[s] a certain sense of commonality, and one of the most

elemental forms of social commonality is the image of two or more individuals jointly descending from a common ancestor” (34). Although the possibility is slim that two researchers on a Jewish genealogical research Web site descend from the same person, that the possibility exists at all is significant for those researchers who do not identify as Jewish. In other words, the community on Jewish genealogical research Web sites forms based on an idea that the genealogists are all related to someone who identified as or were identified as Jewish. The shared interest in Jewish genealogy—because of Jewish ancestry—is enough to shape a community of researchers. Thus, this Jewish community is not necessarily composed of Jews, but rather people who are related to Jews.

These communities of relation are significant not only because of the way they change the conventional approach to Jewish community formation. They are also significant because they bring together a limited number of people, rely on a “network of ancestors” in ways that other communities do not, and grant the Holocaust a prominent place in their ethos. In the world of genealogy, Jewish genealogists comprise only a small portion of the total number of genealogists. With fewer people around the world who have experience conducting Jewish genealogy, let alone have an interest in it, networking becomes important. As explained above, successful genealogical research depends on the expertise of others who have “been there, done that” or on the generosity of others who are willing to help in some way. Jewish genealogy is, by definition and like other “ethnic” genealogies, more specific than general genealogy, so the number of experts in a given area of Jewish genealogy or the number of generous people willing to help is proportionately smaller, as is the number of resources available. Thus, establishing a network of fellow Jewish genealogists is particularly important to maintain

momentum and achieve success. This community of researchers focusing on Jewish ancestry depends on its members to identify leads and forge relationships.

Second, a “network of ancestors” propels Jewish genealogy more spiritedly than it might general genealogy. With Judaism’s interest in heritage—indicated by the concept of *zekhut avot*, the importance of ancestry, and references in liturgy and ritual—many Jews value knowing who their ancestors are. Many Jews, though, do not know how to ensure their children, and their children’s children, know who their ancestors are, too. The internet solves this problem: because their children and their children’s children rely more and more on the internet for information and communication, Jewish genealogical Web sites provide a user-friendly and convenient way to collect family documents and narratives. Younger generations adapt to advances in technology, so they should be able to access and update their families’ materials.

Third, the Holocaust drives many Jews to want to preserve documents related to their families with a sense of urgency. Jewish genealogical Web sites offer not just communities of like-minded researchers or resources, but also communities of users who understand the motivation. The like-minded researchers probably feel a similar sense of resolve about conducting research related to the Holocaust: the relative lack of information makes finding a clue, especially one that leads to conclusiveness, that much more satisfying. Jewish genealogical Web sites are safe environments for genealogists to discuss the Holocaust’s effects on their families, to sort out conflicting documents or stories, to learn from other genealogists’ attempts at finding sources. Of course, not all Jewish genealogists encounter the Holocaust in their research in direct ways; they likely face the Holocaust when branching out to more distant family members. However, the

Jewish histories of expulsion, conversion, massacre, and forced migration, as well as survival and perseverance, seem to culminate into the Colossus of the Holocaust.

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH WEB SITES AND THE HOLOCAUST

Indeed, the ramifications of the Holocaust complicate Jewish genealogical research. A lack of reliable witnesses—who comprise the triad of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders—and a lack of complete records frustrate researchers. The shame associated with watching crimes against humanity without interceding, let alone committing or acting as accessories to these crimes, keeps witnesses from sharing their experiences. Moreover, those witnesses who are willing to testify may suffer from the “anxiety of fragmentation” (Felman 49). Shoshana Felman describes this anxiety in “Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching” as an overwhelming sense of what happened that impedes the telling of it because the witness fears not being believed, by flooding the witness with memories that may create a non-linear narrative, and in causing surges of emotion that consume details of memories. Jewish genealogists encourage researchers to make use of any available testimonies or interviews, and many start their research with these materials; however, progress often halts when trying to corroborate witness accounts with other evidence. Unfortunately, few records of Nazi crimes exist; even if perpetrators drafted lists of names of whom they killed in which massacre or who they confined to which labor force, they also destroyed many of them to eliminate evidence of their crimes.

Furthermore, any records kept by witnesses are likely in languages such as German, Polish, Russian, or Yiddish. Most Jewish genealogists need help accessing

these materials, including navigating the archives holding them and translating them. As Jews and their communities changed sovereignties frequently, their official languages changed, as did their names, citizenships, and sometimes religions. For example, Lisa Kudrow of *Friends* fame recently learned that her cousin, Yuri Barudin, took the Polish name “Bolesław” after surviving World War II and settling in Gdynia, Poland (“Lisa Kudrow” 25:51-26:24). Kudrow’s father met Yuri as a small child in 1949 and had no knowledge of what happened to him. Kudrow learned of the name-change and, after sixty years, reunited her father with this branch of their family. For Kudrow to acquire this information, she needed the help of Polish speakers to translate documents at the state archives in Gdynia, Poland and to communicate with Bolesław. While Kudrow was fortunate to have professional genealogists trace her family for broadcasting on the television show, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, most Jewish genealogists must rely on their networks of family members and contacts to achieve the same success.

Jewish genealogical research Web sites and their users therefore attempt to guide other users through the resources that are available to overcome the complications of language, changing national borders, and missing information. Jewish genealogical research Web sites feature material unique to these concerns, such as the *Jewish Web Index*’s pages on the Holocaust (“Holocaust”), languages (“Languages”), and names (“Names—All About Them”); or the Web site of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s International Institute for Jewish Genealogy’s resources on standards for recording genealogical data (“Standards;” Mokotoff). Non-Jewish-specific genealogical research Web sites typically do not give a lot of space to these concerns, if at all, sometimes with merely a page dedicated to Jewish genealogy-in-general. *FamilySearch.org*’s page,

“Jewish Family History Resources,” on which *JewishGen.org* is a listed resource seems to be a perfect example of this sort of cursory acknowledgement of special concerns of Jewish genealogists.

Nina Wakeford suggests that Web sites, much as other media do, proffer a semiotic approach to community development (34). In “New Media, New Methodologies: Studying the Web,” she writes that iconography is one of the strongest ways Web designers control the kinds of identities to which a user relates (35-36). Thus, although most Jewish genealogical Web sites claim that the Holocaust is not the driving force behind their creation, the verbal and visual rhetoric of the sites suggests otherwise. *JewishGen.org*, for instance, responds to the “public perception” that the Holocaust is at the center of its purpose by stating that, contrary to this perception, the site actually focuses on twentieth-century Jewish history, which the site loosely defines as beginning in the 1880s (“Questions and Answers” ques. 9). The public perceives the Holocaust to be so important to *JewishGen.org*’s function, though, because the Web site has been an affiliate of New York’s Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust since 2003. If users arrive to *JewishGen.org*’s main page, where mention of the affiliation appears as a subtitle in the heading, they naturally associate *JewishGen.org* with the Holocaust.

Other aspects of the Web site channel the Holocaust as its impetus: all four stories posted on “Success! Stories of Connections” consist of descriptions of what happened to the narrators’ family members during the Holocaust as pinnacle moments in their families’ legacies; the site’s “Frequently Asked Questions” includes a section devoted to Holocaust research (“15. Holocaust Research”), which itself has three subsections; the

topic of the Holocaust has one of the highest number of links of the fifty-six topics listed on its index of informative files (“*JewishGen* InfoFile Index”); and *JewishGen.org* hosts a “collection of databases containing [more than two million entries] about Holocaust victims and survivors (“Holocaust Database”). *JewishGen.org*, then, highlights the Holocaust as a focal point of Jewish genealogical research.

Another example of a Jewish genealogical research Web site that both signifies the importance of the Holocaust to its users and is a good starting point for Jewish genealogical research, is that of the International Institute of Jewish Genealogy. The first project listed on its Web site, for example, is Sallyann Amdur Sack’s “A Genealogical Reconstruction of Destroyed Communities” (“Research: Overview” par. 4). Clicking through to a description of the project reveals that it

...proposes to mobilize genealogical science and skills to recreate destroyed Jewish communities throughout Europe, primarily by reconstructing the webs of kinship that bound the victims to others living in their community (and beyond) on the eve of the Holocaust....In this way, the individuals on these trees will be restored to their place on the Family Tree of the Jewish People and will cease to be a “Lost Generation.” (“Research: A Genealogical Recreation of Destroyed Communities” par. 2)

Not only does the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy list this project first, but it also began this project during its year of launching. That the inaugural project is a response to the Holocaust suggests just how important the Holocaust is to the mission of the organization. As stated on the Web site, “the Institute aspires to enrich and advance the work of individual family historians and, at the same time, make a meaningful

contribution to the future of the Jewish People by nurturing and enhancing its roots” (“Mission” par. 3). Although the Holocaust is not a part of the mission statement, it clearly provides exigence for the work of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy. Although the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy is mostly an academic initiative, rather than a practical or communal resource—the Institute distinguishes between scholarly genealogical research and “applied genealogy” (“Research: Overview” par. 1, par. 3)—its activities are more than useful for Jewish genealogical research. The Web site provides access to several project reports and tools that increase Jewish genealogists’ successes.

If, as Arthur Kurzweil maintains in the epigraph to this chapter, the purpose of Jewish genealogy is to identify the millions of unnamed victims of the Holocaust, then Jewish genealogy fills the empty branches in some Jewish Americans’ family trees. Undoubtedly, personal stories of the Holocaust—of children being taken from their mothers upon arrival to concentration camps, of families splitting up in the hope that at least one member would survive, of false identities taking precedence over true identities—are part of the legacies of many Jewish families. Jewish genealogical research Web sites make these stories readily available, as users post their stories hoping that another user has helpful information. The posts, questions, and other resources on the Web site of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, the *Jewish Web Index*, and *JewishGen.org* likely captivate users and spark emotional responses that non-Holocaust-related genealogical research likely does not engender.

CHAPTER TWO

GOING ONLINE TO GO “HOME:”

YIZKOR BOOKS, CYBER-SHTETLS, AND COMMUNITIES OF LOCATION

The production of hereness in the absence of actualities depends increasingly on virtualities. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 169)

Online *yizkor* books and shtetls—“cyber-shtetls”—give access to the places in which Jewish life flourished that are otherwise inaccessible, primarily because of the Holocaust. These resources attract users who seek information about a specific place, generating Jewish communities based on location. Much like the communities of relation discussed in Chapter One, these communities evidence changes in contemporary Jewish identity formation that expand on the answers to the questions of what makes for a Jewish community and who is Jewish. Instead of focusing on a Jewish way of life or Jewish lineage, these communities concern where a person comes from. From as microcosmic as which street in which neighborhood to as macrocosmic as the region in which a particular dialect is spoken, where a person considers “home” to be leads to a sense of community that may supersede kinship as a defining feature, especially in the

wake of the Holocaust when the concept of family irretrievably changed. Accordingly, online *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls give people who are searching for “home” a place to go. The space that they occupy on the Web is a surrogate for the real thing.

Just as Benedict Anderson’s newspapers forge communities, these Web sites offer users an experience that is “replicated...by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence [they are] confident, yet of whose identity [they have] not the slightest notion” (35). The resultant “communities of location” are so salient in Jewish life and culture that Yiddish has a set of words to describe people who come from one geographic place. A person who comes from the same place as another person is called a *landsmán*; the community of people coming from the same place is a *landslayt*; and an organization of all the people who come from the same place is a *landsmanshaft*. *Landsmanshaftn*—more than one *landsmanshaft*—were central to the development and well-being of Jewish immigrant communities from the late 1800s to the late 1990s in the United States, Israel, and other places where Jews relocated (Kliger 406). Regardless of kinship, that two people could have had the same teacher or gone to the same butcher or shared the same idiomatic expressions made them feel more comfortable in their new and often difficult surroundings. For some *landsmen*, in fact, these communities based on place came to replace communities based on kinship. Gershon Zik, for example, writes in a description of the global network of *landsmanshaftn* from Rozhishche, Ukraine that “[i]t is as though we were all one family” (*Rozyszcze* 53). For a *landslayt*, the common experiences in or memories of a particular place are foundations for communal identity. *Landsmanshaftn* thus develop their social activities and other programs out of a sense of this communal identity.

JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF LOCATION

The issue of geography is nothing new to Jewish life and culture. Some of the most basic alignments among Jews pertain to where those Jews are “from.” Jews often navigate through the Jewish world by determining if someone is Ashkenazic or Sephardic or are from the American South or the Lower East Side. By playing “Jewish geography,” Jews better understand each other’s perspectives and personalities. Communities of location suggest cultural practices, language and slang, food ways, dress, and even behavior. The appeal of *landsmanshaftn*, indeed, is this very idea that places affect ways of life. Jews from Siedlce, a medium-sized Polish industrial town close to the Polish-Belarusian border (*Sefer yizkor li'kehilat Shedlits*), for example, lived differently than Jews in Flonheim, a small rural town in southwestern Germany (“Flonheim”). These differences are significant enough for each community to establish a *landsmanshaft* devoted to its members living in exile. The members of a *landsmanshaft* understand each other’s customs and dialects, all because they came from the same place.

Part of what raises the “Jewish question” is the way in which Jews claim their Judaism. According to Michael A. Fishbane, there are two primary ways that Jews can be Jews: belief and ethnicity. Belief refers to the covenants between God and Abraham in Genesis 17 and God and Moses in Exodus 20 that lay out the expectations God has of Abraham’s and Moses’ descendants, who will eventually be known as Jews. If someone believes and adheres to the covenants, per interpretations of them, then that person is Jewish. Ethnicity, on the other hand, suggests that someone born into Judaism is also Jewish. However, ethnicity has two components: biology and geography (Sokolovskh and Tishkov 190-191). Being born into Judaism satisfies the biological component. In

other words, according to most streams of Judaism, someone with a Jewish biological mother is also Jewish. A presumption is that Jewish mothers will transmit Jewish belief and practices to their children, thereby raising children who are Jewish both through ethnicity and belief. Other streams of Judaism, it should be noted, maintain that Jewish fathers and Jewish grandparents can also determine someone's membership in a Jewish community. In this way, biology—being born of Jewish parentage—generally satisfies a criterion for being Jewish.

The second component of ethnicity—geography—makes an appearance in Fishbane's work, although he does not make a direct link between being born into Judaism and where that person is born. He emphasizes that the word "Judaism" comes from the region of the Mediterranean where Judaism as a system originated. Judea as a location is just as important to the development of Judaism as the expulsions from it. Bordered by hills and bodies of water, Judea was under the control of various empires that regulated its religious expression and day-to-day activity. Many aspects of Judaism developed in direct response to this territorial management. In fact, Judaism can still be seen as a direct response to its geographical centers. Delineations between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Judaism begin with differentiating between place and then distinguishing among consequent practices. In as much as Judaism is based on the belief in the Torah as the leading authority on Jewish tradition and law and on ancestry, it also depends on place as a characterizing feature. This issue of location as satisfying a criterion of being Jewish becomes more important as the internet makes explorations of those locations easier and more illuminating.

Landsmanshaftn exemplify the concept of community of place; their reason for being is, in fact, to foster communities of location. Known as mutual aid or benevolent societies, they organized social events, provided health insurance, held fundraisers, offered burial plots, and sent money and other resources to their *landslayt* “back home.” Eventually, according to Hannah Kliger in “The Continuity of Community Landsmanshaftn in New York and Tel Aviv,” members of *landsmanshaftn* realized that efforts to help their communities in Europe were futile because of the devastation wrought by World War II and the Holocaust (407). They then turned their attention to publishing items that would remind them of home, that would preserve in some small way what Hitler and his supporters sought to eradicate. As Rosemary Horowitz writes in “The Transformation of Memory in On-line *Yisker* Books,” “[t]he books are proof that Hitler’s final solution to exterminate the Jews failed” (41). *Landsmanshaftn* took it upon themselves to mitigate any damage caused by the destruction of the Holocaust, the decreased numbers instigated by emigration, and the changes in lifestyle triggered by modernity.

Prior to the ubiquitous use of the internet to find this information, *landsmanshaftn* maintained and offered the most complete information about their communities. Because many of the physical, geographical communities in which Jews lived prior to the Holocaust have been destroyed, they cannot be visited: not to see how the Jews lived their lives, not to learn about developments in those places, not to experience what life is like there now for Jewish progeny. Vivian M. Patraka calls this phenomenon “goneness” in *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust*. It is the feeling that the destruction of the communities and the people living in them has far greater

ramifications, that the destruction precludes any kind of reconstruction, renovation, or reparation, that there will be no later generations to carry on. Patraqua quotes performance artist Leeny Sack as someone who performs the “gone”—that which really cannot (or should not?) be performed: “I sit inside the memory of where I was not” (5). Sack’s statement refers to the idea that later generations feel the trauma induced by the Holocaust, even though they did not experience it directly for themselves and they have no way of experiencing it for themselves. What existed before and during the Holocaust is gone, never to “be” again. Goneness is different from “absence” in that absence implies the possibility of reappearance, whereas goneness negates such a possibility. In light of goneness, communities of location that arise from online *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls are even more special because there are no physical points of reference. All of these communities are communities based on virtualities.

There are materials, though, that provide insight into the lives of Jews over the centuries. First are visual depictions. These are entirely dependent on the technology of the times. In other words, prior to the advent of photography, there were no photographs; prior to moving pictures, there were no films. Thus, these materials are fairly limited in their scope. The Yiddish film industry, for example, reached its peak in the 1930s (Hoberman) and by and large were not “period pieces,” thereby depicting contemporaneous scenes instead of what could have been in the past. Photography, on another note, was limited by the bulkiness and expense of the equipment. Families had portraits taken when they could afford to do so, usually at times of joyous life cycle events, such as when a couple married or a child was born. The scarce family photographs that still exist offer a lot of information if viewers know what they are

looking at. The clothing worn by subjects alone suggests the date, location, climate, and social class, all of which Jewish genealogists often long to know about their ancestors. However, these signs are hard to decode because there are so few references to help, particularly for viewers who are unfamiliar with them in the first place. Other visual media, such as news reels and postcards, are driven with a different kind of rhetoric, so they are often harder to decipher. Regardless, there are not nearly enough of these materials to enable a thorough understanding of Jewish life, especially without the subjects around to explain.

The second kind of materials that provides clues to how Jews lived before the Holocaust is “source materials.” These often comprise documents that, at the time they were drafted, facilitate Jews’ day-to-day activities: town charters, meeting minutes, school records, health records, personal diaries, contracts, invoices, and other materials to which scholars would typically turn. These documents are fantastic resources, but, unfortunately for Jewish genealogists and other researchers, many were destroyed along with the buildings that contained them, many have sustained damage over time, and many come, like the photographs and other visual images described above, with no explanation or cultural contextualization.

ONLINE *YIZKOR* BOOKS

A third resource, and one of the foci of this chapter, falls under the generic title “Jewish memorial book,” or *yizkor* book. Although the above two kinds of sources—visual materials and source materials—are contemporaneous in that they portray the time at which they were crafted, *yizkor* books are mostly retrospective in nature. They

combine visual images with documentary sources with explanations and are their own kind of source material. Though sometimes considered faulty by historians because of their reliance on personal narrative, the wealth of information contained in *yizkor* books is unparalleled. Peppered with nostalgia, *yizkor* books attempt to flesh out, at least on paper, the communities they memorialize. *Yizkor* books do come with limitations—of “authenticity,” of language, of the number that exist—but they are significant enough for the New York Public Library and the National Yiddish Book Center to devise a system to digitize hundreds of them and make them available through the internet. These texts provide their readers with the memories of where they were not, in that most readers have no direct experience with what *yizkor* books contain, and they will never have such direct experience. They rely on *yizkor* books to tell them what life was like because there are almost no other ways to gain that information. In this way, *yizkor* books epitomize the effects of gone-ness.

Most of the extant 1,600 *yizkor* books compose special collections in museums and libraries around the world, further limiting access to them. With the advent of the New York Public Library and National Yiddish Book Center’s digitization project, one need not visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the British Museum, or Yad Vashem. Instead, one can visit the Web site of the Yizkor Book Project and browse over 600 *yizkor* books, scrolling through page by page. Granted, the system commissioned by the New York Public Library and National Yiddish Book Center is bulky and inconvenient: pages can only be enlarged if users download a special plug-in, for example. Nonetheless, every page—even each blank page—has been scanned and is accessible for free through the New York Public Library’s Web site. The project not only

gives unprecedented access to *yizkor* books, but it raises awareness of their existence, which also raises awareness of the existence of the Jewish communities.

Yizkor books are a phenomenon of Jewish culture. Few, if any, other cultures publish records like these, especially with such strong effects on their cultural memory. They enable readers to mourn for the loss of life and culture while perpetuating their memory. They traverse the spectra of sacred and profane; anguish and pride; life and death; destruction and perpetuation; and personal experience and communal memory. Characterized by these paradoxes, *yizkor* books have two main purposes, encapsulated by what opens the 1976 English addendum to the *yizkor* book of Rozhishche, from Psalm 78:

May the pages of this book speak to the generations to come:

“That they should make them known to their children;

That the generations to come might know them, even the children which should be borne;

Who should arise and declare them to their children.” (*Rozhyszczce* 5-6)

First, the citation of Jewish liturgy intimates that the *yizkor* book is a text to be taken as seriously as any other liturgical text. Second, the references to children and generations advise that the book contains an inheritance to be bequeathed perpetually. Thus, *yizkor* books are a “liturgical-martyrological” (Baumel 150) form of Jewish literature, and they perpetuate the memory of communities that, for all intents and purposes, no longer exist.

Following in the tradition of liturgical-martyrological literature, *yizkor* books both sanctify the Jewish communities destroyed by the Holocaust and revere them. David

Sohn, in his foreword to a Bialystoker *yizkor* book—for there are three *yizkor* books dedicated to this city—writes that the book is

not alone a chronicle of our Bialystoker martyred dead that brings to the reader the annihilated hometown in all its phases; the book is also the “Tree of Bialystoker Life,” which blooms and flourishes the world over. If but this alone is attained—if this volume enables the reader to experience in his memory the resurrection of the Bialystok hometown and to continue, in day-to-day living, our glorious Bialystoker heritage—then, indeed, has my goal been achieved and my endeavors in having realized this colossal [*sic*], difficult undertaking amply rewarded. (*Bialistok* 10)

In this excerpt, references to martyrs, the tree of life, and resurrection imply the cultural significance of Sohn’s initiative to put the book together, and he obviously considers Bialystok to be worthy of celebration. The language used in this *yizkor* book and others have a religious quality, matching the artwork of their covers, frontispieces, and title pages. The imagery in Chelm’s 1981 *yizkor* book’s frontispiece (Figure 7), for example, reflects the themes of martyrdom and worship (*Sefer ha’zikaron li’hehilat khelem* 6). From the top of the page to the bottom, every image conjures Jewish religiosity. Among the images are the hands reaching out of the flames, which convey the sacrifice made by the people of Chelm; the scroll showcasing the title of the book, which recalls a Torah scroll; the candles on either side of the scroll, which are reminiscent of the candles lit on Shabbat and other holidays; and the aged man in the cemetery, who resembles Moses reading the Tanakh. In these ways, *yizkor* books reflect

a liturgical-martyrological approach to remembering Jewish communities and memorializing the effects of the Holocaust.



Figure 7: Frontispiece for the 1981 Chelm *Yizkor* Book

However, their effects on communal memory are probably the most significant at this point in their historiography. With so little known about their communities, *yizkor* books shape what is remembered about them. For instance, the Lomza, Poland *yizkor* book tells a story about a rabbi who fled the town for Vilnius instead of staying to comfort his community when the Russians arrived (*Sefer zikaron li'kehilat lomzah* 120; ctd. in Shapiro 19). The book depicts the rabbi as a selfish coward. Chaim Shapiro, a critic of the book and a Lomza *landsman*, challenges the story by stating that the rabbi's flight was merely a ruse to thwart Russian soldiers from killing him for forsaking Stalinist values (20). According to Shapiro, the rabbi stayed in Lomza after all, hiding from the Russians and Nazis. Without anyone to substantiate Shapiro's version, readers cannot possibly know which to believe as the true version. However, one can assume that the rumor mill was so strong that either the Lomza *landsmen* who compiled the *yizkor* book or Shapiro was willing to pass on a fabricated story. Without Shapiro's challenge to the *yizkor* book, readers would have no idea that there are conflicting versions, leaving Lomza remembered as its *yizkor* book portrays it, potential inaccuracies and all.

That there may be conflicting views of how a community functioned signifies that *yizkor* books are not necessarily the most historically judicious. Indeed, Shapiro instructs, "on reading a *yizkor* book, first check the ideology of the editors and writers. You can be sure that they will twist the facts to their fancy, to suit their ideology." Perhaps such editorial bias seems obvious given the method of publishing *yizkor* books, but for people who seek to immortalize the homes to which they can never return or

replicate, or for whom the books provide their only insight, the biases are probably difficult to discern and reconcile. As a way to lessen any effects of bias, some communities have multiple *yizkor* books that are compiled by different editorial committees and provide an alternative communal history, in addition to the *yizkor* books with multiple editions that contain revisions or amendments. The Baranowicze *yizkor* book, for example, corrects mistakes made by including errata (107).

Despite any controversies in or challenges to the content of *yizkor* books, *yizkor* books are designed to indicate the importance of community. In addition to the socio-religious rhetoric described above, *yizkor* books contain rhetoric highly evocative of communality, bringing their readers together to connect to the communities. The forewords and other prefatory comments in *yizkor* books demonstrate how important the communities were to the people who wrote them. Additionally, there are whole sections in many *yizkor* books devoted to rituals and traditions of specific communities. For example, the Ratno *yizkor* book includes a photograph of its community's *tashlikh* ceremony (*Ratneh* 39) (Figure 8), performed by the Pripyat River in Ukraine (*Ratneh* 38-40). Although the photograph obscures the faces of the participants in the ceremony, readers see how central the river was to the community, as well as how vibrant the religious life was. Similarly, a photograph and description in Dobrzyn's *yizkor* book depicts the community's amateur theater company (*Iyarti* 118) (Figure 9). One sees both men and women on stage, as well as varying styles of clothing. The play they are rehearsing is Jacob Gordin's *God, Man, and Devil*, according to the caption, which suggests that a segment of community held progressive perspectives on religion and the secular art of Yiddish theater (117-118). By including looks into the social fabric of their

communities, *yizkor* books submit to the importance of communal life. Rhetorically, *yizkor* books show that *landsmen* valued being part of their *landslayt*, evoking a similar pride in community in readers.



Figure 8: The Tashlikh Prayer at the Pripyat River (*Ratneh* 39)



Figure 9: Production of God, Man, and Devil at the City's Amateur Theater (*Iyarti* 118)

Because one of the directives of *landsmanshaftn* is to maintain records of their communities—of births, marriages, community leaders, and other significant events and people—they were in tune with their essential qualities. This familiarity on the part of *landsmanshaftn* grew to be a great comfort after the Holocaust, when the imperative to mourn for the dead was felt more keenly. In this way, *yizkor* books are not just commemorative texts but also repositories for community activity, records of what happened when and to whom. Censuses, such as the one in the Novy-Targ *yizkor* book (*Sefer novi-targ vi'ha'svivah* 31), indicate that *landsmanshaftn* were organized enough to compile and preserve the information and that they had their fingers on the pulse of their communities. In the same vein, one of the most sought-after sections of *yizkor* books is the necrologies: lists of people, organized by family name, who died during the

Holocaust. The necrology listed in the Gorzd *yizkor* book (*Sefer gorzd* 351) (Figure 10), for instance, lists family name, first name, and family members. For those family members whose names are unknown, their roles in the family are stated. As an example, the twelfth line reads “Srulovitz Elkhanan, his wife and two children.” This family, like the others on the list, died in the Kovno ghetto and in concentration camps. The necrologies provide the proof of death, albeit without details, that some Holocaust survivors needed for closure. They also allow for the dead to be mourned as appropriate in Jewish tradition. In short, for those researchers who want to know about the communities, *yizkor* books are the clear primary source, despite any shortcomings as described above.

**רשימת תושבי גורזד אשר ניספו בגיטו קובנה
ובמחנות ריכוז**

וולפוביץ דוד, אשתו שרה-בילה, הבנים : דב, ואהרון,
הבנות : מלכה ודבורה
וולפוביץ בטי, (בת שמואל)
וולפוביץ רחל ושפרה, (שתי בנות של מרדכי)
רטנר שפרה, (מבית מלמד), בעלה ושני בנים
שינברג דינה, (בת רחל ויעקב)
בוקנץ רחל, (בת דוד לם)
טרויב פרידה, דינה וישעיהו, (בני שמואל)
שולמן יוסף-הלל ואשתו ינינה
פרק נפתלי, אשתו פרידה ושני ילדים
בליס שבת
שרולוביץ אלחנן, אשתו ושני ילדים
בלומה ופסיה, (בנות של בן-ציון יעקב)
סוקולסקי בת-שבע, (מבית אָרנשטיין) ובעלה
הילקוביץ חיה-שרה, (בת בנימין)
אשר סימה, (בת אליהו)
גוטמן אריה, (בן מנחם)
לאַנג אהרון, (בן יששכר)
לאַנג בונה וקונה, (שתיהן בנות יששכר)
לוריע אתי, (בת יהושע-יעקב) ובעלה
מייסכוביץ אליהו ואשתו פאָניה
ברכר יעקב, פליט מגרמניה, גר בגורזד ב-40-1938

Figure 10: List of Gorzd Residents Who Perished in the Kovno Ghetto and in
Concentration Camps (*Sefer gorzd* 351)

One reason why researchers largely ignore *yizkor* books as viable sources is that the language of publication for most *yizkor* books is Yiddish—a language not commonly

spoken, especially by generations of Jews who grew up in non-Yiddish-speaking societies, such as in the United States, Canada, Israel, or Argentina. Other languages, such as Hebrew, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Czech, and German, pose similar problems. Many Jewish immigrants who fled European persecution chose not to speak the languages of their assailants, which also may have been one of their native languages. Instead, they spoke the languages of their new homes, whether they be English, French, Hebrew, or Spanish. With so many potential users unable to read *yizkor* books, the texts get set aside.

Of course, this linguistic limitation reveals an irony of *yizkor* books. If younger generations are unskilled in the languages in which *yizkor* books are published, how are *yizkor* books able to teach them about their ancestral homes? For whom are *yizkor* books published, if the languages of publication only alienate future generations? The Targowica *yizkor* book, like many *yizkor* books, has a dedication in English, although the rest of the book is in Hebrew and Yiddish. At least with the dedication, readers will learn of the potential of the book's usefulness, hopefully piquing their interest enough to learn the languages. The dedication reads:

To our Children,

To you, our children and grandchildren, who have not heard very much about your parents' past—a world unknown to you, and sometimes strange, even odd.

To you, most of whom did not have the privilege to see and know your grandparents, to hear from their mouths stories about their world, about sorrow and grief, troubles and hardships, that were afflicted upon them in the darkness of the Diaspora:

[...]

It brings out from the depths of oblivion the happenings of your forefathers and tells of their spiritual, social, and cultural world. In this book you will find also a description of the Holocaust in which every Jewish family in the Diaspora suffered, and about which the survivors rescued from hell, relate. Indeed, this townlet and this way of life no longer exist.

Please, look through this book.

Your Parents (*Sefer Trovitz* 452)

Almost every other *yizkor* book is multi-lingual, like Targowica's, representing an identity politics even more complicated than implied by turning to the languages of places of refuge. Jewish immigrants faced questions about which language to use, particularly after the Holocaust, but their descendants do not. As is wont in any immigrant community, use of the "native" language diminishes over time, in favor of the "host" language, which becomes the native language of later generations. Accordingly, most descendants of contributors to *yizkor* books are illiterate in the languages of publication. How, then, are they to understand the material in *yizkor* books in order to pass the knowledge on to their descendants? A direct result of post-migration Yiddish and Hebrew illiteracy is that these books frequently sit unrecognized as the goldmines that they are.

However, as the New York Public Library and the National Yiddish Book Center make *yizkor* books—and their translations on JewishGen.org—available online, more readers realize their significance and make use of them, bringing the Jewish communities to light and edifying what they mean in contemporary Jewish life. According to

JewishGen.org, the project to translate *yizkor* books has enabled “hundreds of completed or partially completed translated books online” (“Research”). Many of the translations were commissioned by researchers who, frankly, could not understand the original languages and either found volunteers to donate their time and language skills or paid someone to translate the necessary sections. As *yizkor* books average 600 or so pages, translating them requires time, energy, and dedication. However, the value of these translations is immeasurable as more and more potential readers are unable to access them because of language barriers.

CYBER-SHTETLS

Similarly, volunteers have donated countless hours to developing Web sites dedicated to the “vanished communities.” “Cyber-shtetls,” not to be confused with the undeveloped and crude site for Ladino and Spanish-language Jewish culture (*Cyber-shtetl.com*), resemble *yizkor* books in the way that they host an array of information, including virtual tours, photographs, descriptions, travelogues, cemetery maps, and some personal narratives. The tables of contents of *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls do look similar to each other: histories of the towns and descriptions of the towns during World War I, between the two World Wars, during the Holocaust, and after liberation. However, unlike *yizkor* books, these sites present more current data obtained by volunteers who most likely travel to the places. For example, the cyber-shtetl for Dusetos, Lithuania features photographs of the town’s lake (Figure 11) that were taken in 2007 (Stern). By having these photographs, supplemented with an explanation that the town has a yearly event on the lake, visitors to the site gain an understanding of what life is like in Dusetos

now. Ironically, the pictures sit between a series of photographs that commemorate the dead: above the Lake Sartai photographs are pictures of the grave markers of two Jews—a father and his son—who died while trying to cross a frozen Lake Sartai, and below is the photograph of a memorial to Dusetos Jews who died during the Holocaust. Placing the beautiful and calming Lake Sartai pictures between these photographs breaks up the funereal tone that they evoke. As users make more trips to the actual towns, they can continue to take pictures of the lovelier parts of the towns, like the Lake Sartai photographs, and upload what information they have. If they take more photographs, if they chart more of the cemeteries, if they meet current residents—all of these feats can be added and shared. Cyber-shtetls allow for virtual travel to these communities. They give as full a picture as possible of what Jewish communities are like so that people do not need to make the trips and go through the effort of finding affordable flights, tour guides, accommodations, translators, relevant archives, and other components (Bartman; Cuckle; Frankel; Posner) of these veritable pilgrimages, themselves.

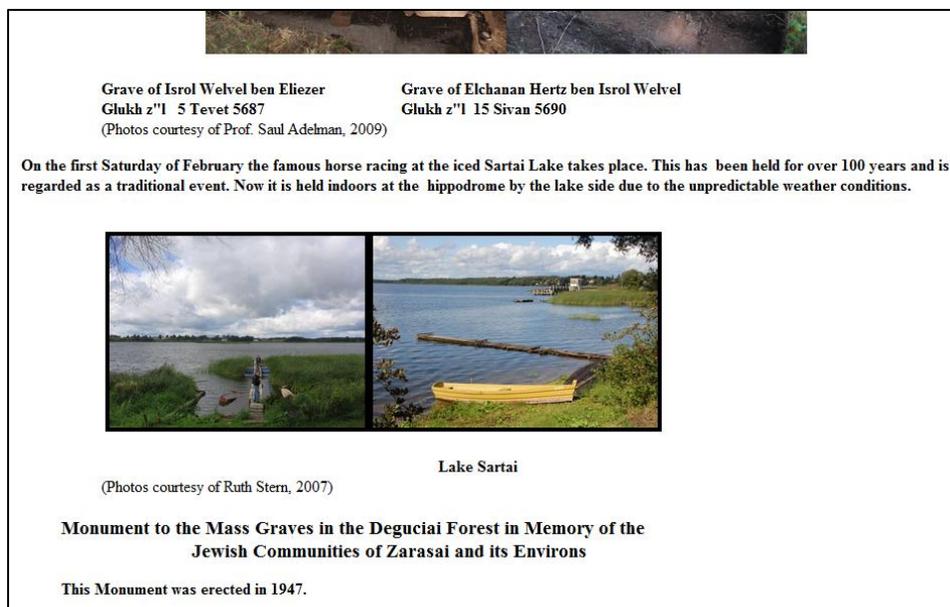


Figure 11: Pictures of the Lake in Dusetos, Lithuania

Although many Web sites detail the history and life in various places around the world where Jewish life thrived, the largest compendium of such sites is hosted by *JewishGen.org*. Its project, called “KehilaLinks” as of August 2011, is a project facilitating web pages commemorating the places where Jews have lived. KehilaLinks provides the opportunity for anyone with an interest in a place to create web pages about that community. These web pages may contain information, pictures, databases, and links to other sources providing data about that place. (“JewishGen KehilaLinks” par. 1)

Prior to August 2011, *JewishGen.org* used “ShtetLinks” as the project’s title. Fearing that users would prioritize Ashkenazic communities over Sephardic or other Jewish communities, *JewishGen.org* was careful to remind its users that “shtetls”—the insular communities in which Jews lived—are not just an Eastern European phenomenon, but there are similarly insular Jewish communities in other regions of the world (“JewishGen

ShtetLinks” par. 2). These non-Eastern European sites are just as remarkable in their generation of communities of location as traditional “shtetls.” The KehilaLink for Harbin, China (Figure 12), for instance, includes several transcripts of interviews with Jews who lived in Harbin and their descendants, photographs of families and community activities, maps of the city as its borders and sovereignty changed, and even some audio clips of sounds of Harbin (*Harbin*). This site evokes the same sense of community of location as the *yizkor* books discussed above, appealing to users who probably have some kind of vested interest in learning more about the communities.

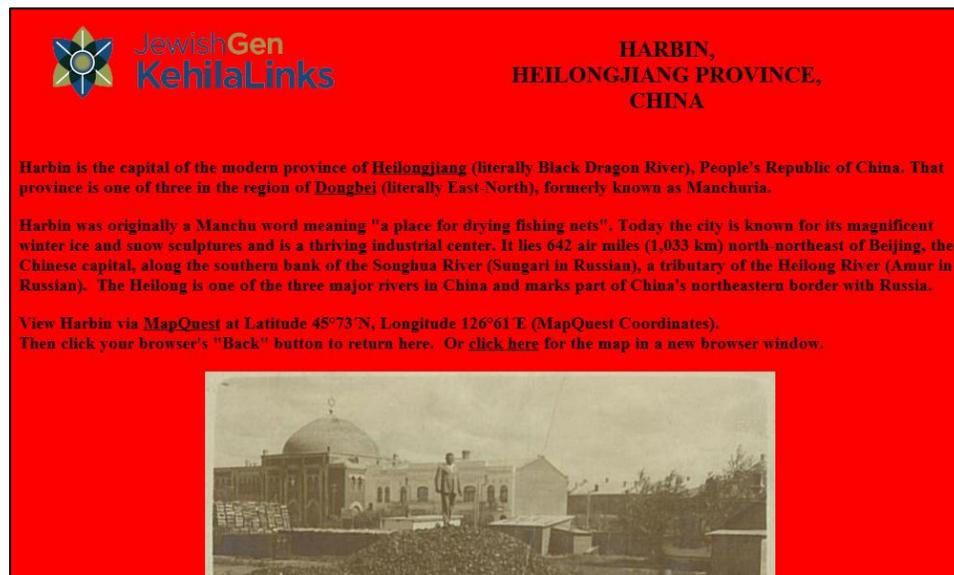


Figure 12: Harbin, China’s Cyber-shtetl

In fact, cyber-shtetls—a name which also comes with the disclaimer that not all Jewish communities immortalized online are Ashkenazic, that “shtetl” is being used to describe any Jewish community that exists within a greater non-Jewish community—may serve as a substitute for *yizkor* books in certain situations. Not only is publishing online

easier than publishing a *yizkor* book in hard copy, but the information is tractable, more easily verifiable, and much more widely accessible. The British Isles section of KehilaLinks solicits assistance in “record[ing] all Jewish Communities [*sic*] in the United Kingdom in order to preserve the information for posterity” (*Jewish Community Records-United Kingdom*). While this KehilaLink offers more information on communities that are no longer in existence, it wishes to increase its offerings on current communities. Its editor—David M.R. Shulman—maintains that members of the communities themselves are able to expand on the information already posted. This philosophy leads to the same exigence for cyber-shtetls as for *yizkor* books: members of communities are the best sources of information about them, as they live the communities’ histories and can corroborate each other’s memories. However, the immediacy of having something posted online, versus the length of time taken by the publishing process, makes cyber-shtetls a more convenient outlet for this kind of information.

KehilaLinks, although an extensive collection of cyber-shtetls, does not hold a monopoly on online communities of location. Indeed, non-KehilaLinks sites are just as interesting and provocative of a sense of a community. Zabłudow, Poland’s cyber-shtetl (Figure 13), for example, hosts a large array of information, yet just one person compiled it all (*Zabłudow’s Memorial Website*). Tillford Bartman, the developer of the site, includes links to sites other than his own to give a fuller picture of life in Zabłudow. The Luboml, Poland cyber-shtetl provides a “virtual exhibit” (Figure 14) of what Jewish life was like by hosting photographs that take users through the town, showcasing both special places and mundane, both of which are important to day-to-day lives (*Remembering Luboml*). These Web sites, like other cyber-shtetls, create a sense of

community that surrounds what life must have been like, highlighting the towns' pasts while bringing them into the present. Visitors to the sites come to them to learn about their ancestral homes, and the sites offer as much as possible, which is sometimes all that is available.

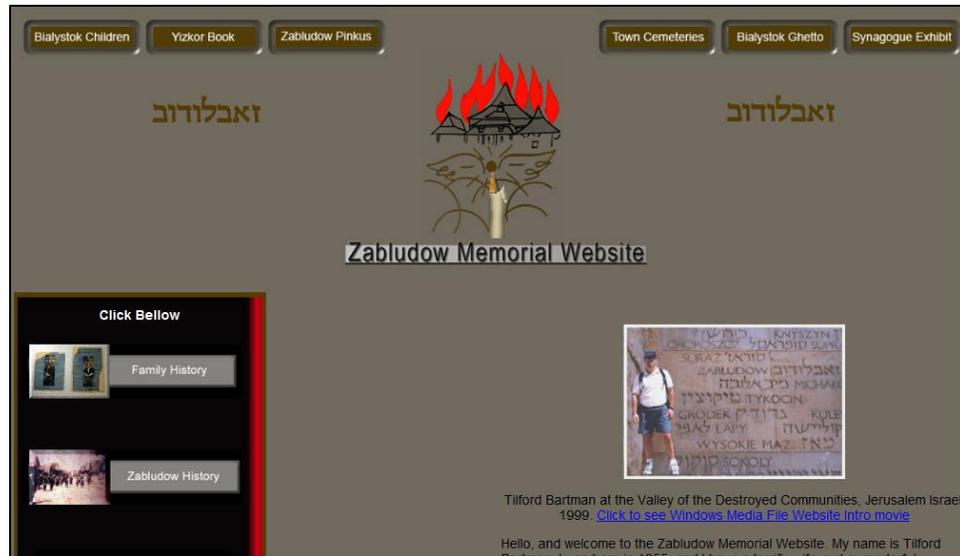


Figure 13: Zabludow, Poland's Cyber-shtetl

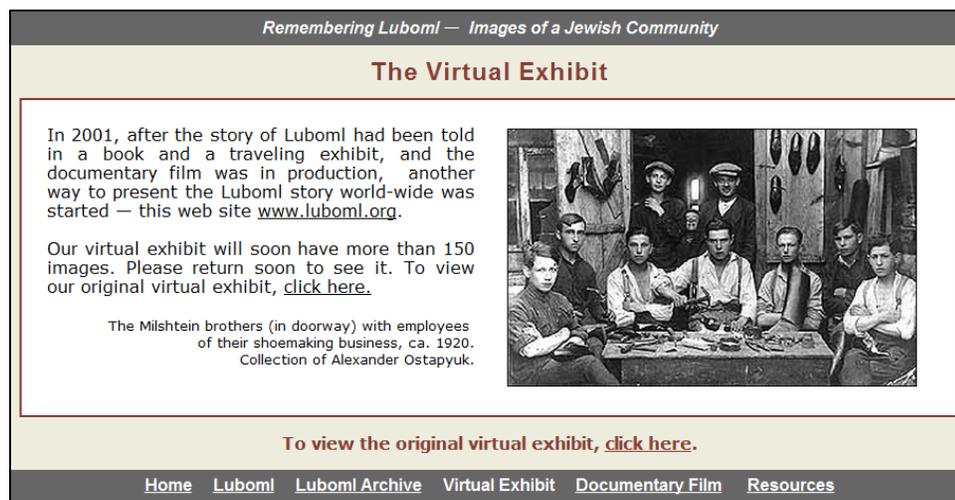


Figure 14: Luboml, Poland's "Virtual Exhibit"

The Lampert Family Foundation’s site on Oradea, Romania (*Oradea Jewish Community*) (Figure 15) represents another model of a cyber-shtetl. It is not only devoted to narrating the past and present of the Jewish community in that city; it also looks to the city’s future. It is a rallying point for people concerned with reinvigorating Jewish life in Oradea. The site has pages dedicated to educating Romanians about its Jewish history, creating a Jewish museum and learning center in Romania, and raising funds and awareness about the Foundation’s initiatives in Oradea. In this way, Oradea’s cyber-shtetl attempts to secure its future by making itself integral to the Oradea *landslayt*.

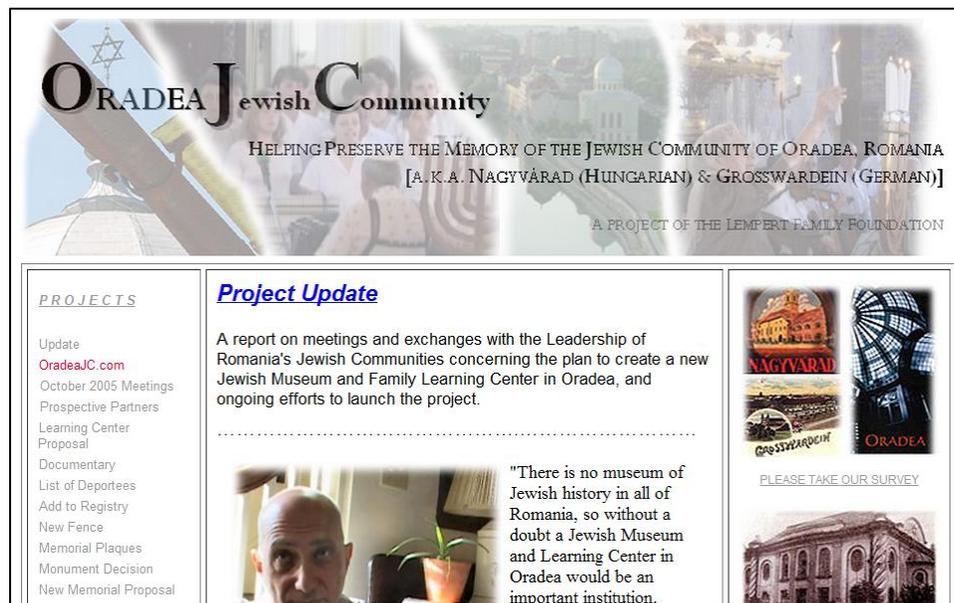


Figure 15: Oradea, Romania’s Cyber-shtetl

Many of the places immortalized by cyber-shtetls do not have a Jewish presence, let alone knowledge of their Jewish legacies. The Lampert Family Foundation seeks to change the situation, and so does the now-”retired” Jews of Cuba Web site (*The Jews of*

Cuba) and the cyber-shtetl of Vinnitsa (*Vinnitsa Region Jewish Community*). They emphasize the places' pasts, but they also speak to their futures, especially the future of Jewish life. *Oradea Jewish Community* and *Vinnitsa Region Jewish Community* express a hope for donations to build museums and memorials. A purpose of all three sites is to see Jewish life return to the communities. For these cyber-shtetls, documenting the past is not enough; they must also predict a future for Jewish life, for once they memorialize their origins and their futures, they can "dwell in the present which is assumed to be part of a continuous way of life" (Mead 30). There happen to be Jews still living in each of these places—though fewer and fewer every day—and, while some cyber-shtetls may end up ignoring whatever Jewish presence remains in favor of recording their histories, *Oradea's*, *Cuba's*, and *Vinnitsa's* respective cyber-shtetls take them into account by addressing their needs, too.

By hosting images and descriptions of the towns, narratives about life in the towns, and other materials, cyber-shtetls truly offer a safe space for Jews to visit—even if the space is on the internet. As physical places, the shtetls are awkward to visit, uncomfortable, perhaps, because of the ghosts of the past. Cyber-shtetls, on the other hand, more than acknowledge the histories of the towns. Their Jewish heritage is a jumping off point for cyber-shtetls' development, even if the towns' current residents ignore their heritage. Cyber-shtetls base their existence on goneness—on the Jewish legacies that have been silenced and neglected after having been destroyed by the Holocaust. Web sites that trace these pasts and maintain records of them for posterity respond to goneness by putting the legacies online, by making sure that people searching for information will find what they seek.

WHAT'S GONE IS...HERE

Patraka's concept of "goneness" implies the need for representation (4): that which is incomprehensible almost begs for attempts at making it comprehensible. Representations of the gone, according to Patraka, adhere to roughly three principles. First, they reveal deliberations over what exactly is being represented, as well as how it is being represented. They intimate that the representers are conscientious of the emotional and intellectual intensity of what is being represented, and they recognize the socio-political factors that influence them. Second, representations of the gone distinguish between history and memory as epistemological categories, as they may appear to be incongruent or at odds with each other. Third, they reflect a tension between the tangibility of representation and the intangibility of the gone, of what the Holocaust, in this case, made gone. *Yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls fulfill these principles and complicate them, fulfilling Patraka's conception of representations of goneness.

Relative to the first principle of deliberating over the content of the texts, *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls show that they are self-conscious about what they memorialize, as well as how they memorialize it. The gone are the places in which Jewish people lived, as well as the Jewish people themselves. Because of the attachment between the people and the places, *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls cannot represent the places without including the people, too. They depict both the lost geography of Jewish life and the lost demography of Jews. They portray the people who lived in the communities, as well as their daily activities. They showcase the towns in terms of their social significance to the sovereignties at large. They express the essence of the *landslayt* in as many of their own

words as possible. Moreover, almost all *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls follow the same structure for content. There are sections on the communities' beginnings, pre-World War I and inter-War histories, World War II experiences, and "where are they now?" Using a template indicates that editors make conscious decisions to conform, that their process of representing the communities signals a distinct choice. The rhetoric, too, indicates a choice to portray the communities through lenses of religiosity and martyrdom. The artwork, the language, and the structure all convey an understanding of what is being represented and how.

Yizkor books and cyber-shtetls, as in the second principle of distinguishing between history and memory, problematize distinctions between history and memory. Many sections appear to be historical in nature: they provide chronologies of earlier times, and they give off a sense of objectivity that other sections do not. Those other sections are very clearly reflections on certain parts of the community and are couched as memoirs. Maurice Halbwachs calls this latter approach a "remembrance" (69), for it is "a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered." In other words, in order to imagine the gone, especially for people who lived it, one must consider the past based on what information is available in the present, which, of course, has been influenced by the past. Both *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls represent communities with what information is available, creating a narrative of Jewish life that is probably accurate but might not be. The memories that are published in *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls become history because there is no way to verify them.

Editors of *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls bring the past to light by blurring the boundaries between history and memory, and by doing so consciously.

The third principle entails describing the indescribable. *Yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls exhibit just how complicated the situation is. One of the defining features of goneness is the lack of ability to understand what is gone. The effects of the Holocaust, for example, are incomprehensible. However, because of goneness and because of just how incomprehensible the Holocaust is, there is an urge to find some way to comprehend it. Patraha writes: “It is the goneness of the Holocaust that produces the simultaneous profusion of discourses and understandings; the goneness is what opens up, what spurs, what unleashes the perpetual desire to do, to make, to rethink the Holocaust” (7). The sections in which writers recount what happened to the communities during the Holocaust is one way that *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls manifest as a rethinking of the Holocaust, as a way of understanding what happened. *Yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls represent the gone of Jewish communities, attempting to recreate lives and lifestyles that are impossible to recreate fully. This tension encapsulates the spirit of *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls.

In fact, *landsmanshaftn* intended *yizkor* books to be “relics” of their communities (Horowitz 40), and cyber-shtetls are well on their way to act as relics, too. They—and especially *yizkor* books—are an unchanging representation of Jewish communities, and they are, for all intents and purposes, all that is left of the communities. Horowitz maintains that “[i]n addition to their value as texts, these books [are] valued as icons. They [are] seen as a tangible representation of the hometowns” (40). Without any other way to know what the communities were like, readers have only *yizkor* books and cyber-

shtetls on which to rely for hints to their heritage. The films and other resources described above may fictionalize social norms, may not reference a particular ancestor, or may pose too many unanswered questions. *Yizkor* books depict life in these communities in the words of the people who lived it, while cyber-shtetls add a picture of the communities' contemporary life.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work on heritage in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* confirms that these publications convey a "fixed and unchanging meaning or value" (Hall qtd. in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 76) because they are an unalterable representation of Jewish communities that no longer exist. Although the Web is relatively easily amended, making cyber-shtetls quite alterable, there is very little material with which to make changes. Perhaps more material on the communities will come to light as archives are made available, but, for the most part, there is nothing else to add to *yizkor* books, and no one to add it even if there was. Accordingly, how these volumes represent the communities is how those communities will be remembered.

Yizkor books and cyber-shtetls exemplify Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's concept of "hereness," which stands, at least semantically, in direct opposition to PatraKa's "goneness." Hereeness implies the existence of an object—in this case, a location—that can never really be experienced. It means that an encounter in or with that place depends on the encounter's context, that *yizkor* book readers or cyber-shtetl visitors are different at each instant of their lives, and that their "visits" are the sums of their life experiences and the communities' histories. This instantaneity means that their perspectives on the locations vary according to what is available to them at any given point in time. In other words, hereness recommends that the reader, viewer, or visitor appreciate the object for

what it is, rather than what it was. *Yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls are what is “here,” and what they represent is “gone.” Therefore, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s hereness breathes life into the communities of location that result from *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls, bringing them into the present. To Patraka, however, this effect is an impossibility, because goneness precludes the ability to be in the present.

Taken together, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s “hereness” and Patraka’s “goneness” allow for the ambiguities of how *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls represent communities. *Yizkor* books attempt to reconstruct the past, while cyber-shtetls attempt to shed light on the past by exhibiting the present. *Yizkor* books’ reliance on memory leads to questions of authority and authenticity, while cyber-shtetls’ reliance on currency leads to questions of exigence. For Alex Gisser, a traveler to Lunna, Belarus in 2003, the ambiguous relationship between the past and present in the shtetls results in a sense of hereness in the wake of goneness. Gisser writes that he is “convinced that Lunna still has[...]a significant amount of Jewish karma” (par. 12), that despite the current lack of a Jewish physical presence, the vibrancy of Lunna’s Jewish community still resonates. He feels a presence—the hereness—even though the Jewish community is actually gone. Goneness and hereness truly complement each other, particularly in the context of the Holocaust and the communities it destroyed.

Given the synergy between Patraka’s goneness and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s hereness, online *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls allow for the communities to regain and retain significance in Jewish life and culture. Users of the Web sites pursue information about the communities they represent, and this information is often of a personal nature. Where did my ancestors come from? Which rabbi did my grandfather follow? Was my

aunt involved in a Zionist youth group? In what industries could my family possibly have been involved? *Yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls offer answers to these questions, expanding the borders of their communities to encompass an infinite number of members world-wide. The communities based on place generated by these Web sites offer Jews and others a new, technology-dependent way of identifying with each other. Like the communities of relation in Chapter One, these communities of location change the face of Jewish communality from actual to virtual, from what is here to what is gone and vice versa.

Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin caution in *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* that “[o]ne should not confuse the memorial books [or cyber-shtetls] with the towns they commemorate” (14). Because of the effects of gone-ness and here-ness, there really is no danger in such confusion. Visitors to the Web sites are well aware that there are no other options for learning about the Jewish communities, and they enter the sites with enough wherewithal to realize that no text can repair the damage caused not just by the Holocaust, but also by migration and modernity. That said, as online representations of the communities, *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls do provide a place to go, a site to visit, and a community to join. So, while these texts are not to be substitutes for the communities that no longer exist, they do forge a new kind of Jewish community—one based on, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett articulates in the epigraph, virtualities instead of actualities.

CHAPTER THREE

TILLING SACRED GROUND:

LEGACY PILGRIMAGES, DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION, AND COMMUNITIES OF DEVASTATION

It's important that a child know from where she's come. (Goldstein 52)

A final step in genealogical research is creating a publishable family history. For Jewish genealogists, this step comes after working with Jewish genealogical Web sites and after exploring relevant cyber-shtetls. Once genealogists are able to put all the puzzle pieces together—who came from where and when—they contextualize the data to narrate the lives and times of family members. Often, these narratives are self-bound booklets, put together as heirloom pieces to be passed from parent to child. However, as in many other fields, online publishing appeals to many genealogists as instantaneous, easy-to-edit, and perpetually accessible. Online, family history narratives take the shape of personal Web sites or Web logs (“blogs”), both of which feature text and digital images to tell the story of one’s Jewish genealogical research journey. These Web sites document the work undertaken by genealogists to uncover their family histories, serving as both resources from which other genealogists can learn to improve their own research and

archives through which families can preserve their legacies. This twin purpose of being didactic and (auto)biographical, in addition to their content, renders these sites important genealogical artifacts and good indicators of self-identification.

These two characteristics of Jewish genealogical personal Web sites and blogs are the results of countless hours of research on genealogical Web sites, such as *JewishGen*, and going through cyber-shtetls, such as the *yizkor* books posted on the New York Public Library's Web site. The sites also tend to include, as travel becomes more and more affordable and locales once inaccessible to travelers become more and more tourist-friendly, information collected during trips to visit ancestral homelands, as well as descriptions of those trips. Marjorie Goldberg of *Our Family Story* (Figure 16), for instance, describes her visits to various ancestral towns throughout her Web site, which includes family trees, necrologies, cyber-shtetls, and other products of genealogical research. Moreover, these trips are usually transformative. In "The Web and the Reunion," Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer write that their trip to Chernivtsi, Ukraine "seemed to help authenticate, confirm, and detail a past that had haunted them" (66). Coming home with answers to open questions provides relief from uncertainty and unwieldy imaginations. Coming home with answers also demonstrates that genealogical research does have a pay-off, that there is an ultimate goal.



Figure 16: *Our Family Story*'s Main Page

The first-person point of view—the researchers are the authors of the Web sites and blogs, as well as the narrators of the family stories found on them—places the sites along the spectrum of memoiristic writing. Autobiographical in nature, except for when the writers do refer to others, they allow their narrators to express themselves relatively unencumbered by editors or publishers. They are the forum through which genealogical researchers share their findings. Readers come to the sites or blogs seeking help with their own research or to learn more about their own families. A third-person narration might put too much distance between the reader and the writer; second-person narration might condescend to readers' senses of their own research abilities (Brown and Gilman). Genealogical personal Web sites and blogs maintain a first-person frame narrative style, not just because they are, ultimately, autobiographies, but because they attract a community of researchers who want to know about the narrators' experiences.

Another characteristic—this one related to content rather than style or form—entails the laconic elements of Jewish family histories. Tragedy and hardship pepper the stories of many migrants, but Jewish families also contend with state-sponsored episodes of persecution and adversity. The narratives on personal Web sites certainly consider these episodes, particularly because such privation affects the continuity of Jewish life and culture. Conversion, expulsion, and death are common aftereffects, and all Jewish families, no matter how distantly, experience their impacts. Hasia R. Diner in *We Remember with Love and Reverence: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*, points out that much of Jewish tradition, especially as it is observed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, reflects upon persecutory times:

Memorializing tragedy underlay the Jewish tradition as it came down to the Jews[...]. At the broadest level, [Jews] understood their history as a series of catastrophic events. These included two expulsions from their homeland in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., the Crusades with their bloody extirpations of the Jews of the Rhineland, the expulsion from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, the vast massacres in Poland in the seventeenth century, the pogroms that commenced in the 1880s in Russia and sent so many of their families to the United States, and the quite recent mass murders that place during and after World War I.[...]The cycle of the Jewish calendar also moved from the recollections of one historic trauma to the next, each resonating with tales of past suffering and with liturgies that admonished Jews to always remember. (3)

Diner goes on to include the Holocaust in the litany of Jewish communal tragedies; Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs indicate that the Holocaust is currently the most salient of them.

Jewish family narratives mostly refer to the Holocaust in specific terms, rather than merely alluding to it. Marjorie Goldberg's *Our Family Story*, for instance, refers to the Holocaust directly: "Many of our Fine ancestors perished in the Holocaust. In fact, if it were not for the photographic collections we would have no record of them at all" ("The Fine Family of Bialystok" par. 5). Jarrett Ross writes on his blog, *Sephardic Genealogy*, that he always felt disconnected from the Holocaust, that the Holocaust did not have an impact on his family history. However, he discovers through his genealogical research that, in fact, the Holocaust annihilated entire branches of his family tree. He "soon learned this is common in almost every Jewish person's tree" ("Meeting Cousins" par. 2). Even the early lack of connection to the Holocaust in Ross' identity paradoxically signifies some sort of connection: commenting on its absence demonstrates that Ross thought about the Holocaust and what it meant to him prior to finding a genealogical connection. Other Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs make similar assertions as Goldberg's and Ross', signaling the importance of the Holocaust to the development of Jewish identity.

LEGACY-PILGRIMAGES AS GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Genealogists often make trips to lands of origin in order to have direct access to local archives, to get a better feel for their ancestors' experiences, and to pay homage to those ancestors. They usually schedule their trips after completing the bulk of their

research. The trip must be prepared for: researchers need to know where to go and what to see. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller offer in the Introduction to their *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and Politics of Memory* that “[t]he ability to travel after the end of the cold war and the fall of the iron curtain,[...]in combination with specialized Web-based technologies, have rekindled desires for reconnection with lost personal and familial pasts” (3). The desire turns into action, and many genealogists make the journeys to the lands of the parents’, grandparents’, and great-grandparents’ generations.

By tracing the steps of their ancestors, researchers hope to reconstruct past histories, retrieve lost communities, activate historic sites, and discover their origins (Hirsch and Miller, Preface xi). Such inquiries entail journeys of self-discovery. With questions about their family histories and lives’ purposes, the journeys take them from naïveté to elucidation, from indifference to sensitivity, as they trek across the world for the answers they seek. Because of the sanctity with which the characters travel to where they think they will find answers—the largely Eastern European, traditionally Jewish, and irreparably devastated communities of their ancestors—these trips can be considered “legacy pilgrimages.” In fact, Nancy Miller considers her trip to Kishinev, Moldova to be a pilgrimage (257). Instead of going on a pilgrimage to conventional sites of religious or spiritual significance, Miller, like other travelers, made a pilgrimage to sites of familial, personal, and cultural importance. The unknown or unacknowledged legacies of their ancestors’ generations compel them to travel, rather than a sense of religious obligation or a desire to grow spiritually. These latter compulsions seem to develop during or after traveling (Kugelmas 404-405). Certainly, legacy-pilgrimage narratives are not particular to Jewish identity formation, as members of other ethnic groups embark

on similar searches for identity. Nevertheless, the particularity of the Holocaust renders Jewish legacy-pilgrimage narratives a necessary addition to a discussion of how genealogical research affects Jewish identity.

Legacy pilgrimages stem from developments in the tourism industry that enable these kinds of trips. They fall under what is broadly and alternately called “roots tourism” (Timothy), “heritage tourism” (Millar), “legacy tourism” (McCain and Ray), “tourism of return” (Hirsch and Miller, Introduction 17; Miller 265), or “memory tourism” (Bartoletti; Sturken). Because many Jewish legacy pilgrimages pertain so strongly to the Holocaust, another set of terms has been developed to encompass the kinds of journeys that Jewish genealogists undertake: “dark tourism” (Ševčenko 244; Sturken 283) “trauma tourism” (Ševčenko 244), and “tragic tourism” (Sturken 283). Although legacy pilgrimages are simply trips to places important to one’s family history, many Jewish legacy pilgrims visit sites that they associate with some kind of wound or wrong. Hirsch and Miller argue that “[t]o some extent the desire for return always arises from a need to redress an injustice, one often inflicted upon an entire group of people caused by displacement or dispossession, the loss of home and of family autonomy, the conditions of expulsion, colonization, and migration” (7). Events of the Holocaust include each of these wrongs, and then some, prompting Jews to want to recover their ancestral pasts all the more so.

Descriptions of Jewish legacy pilgrimages predominantly feature in memoirs and novels. In each genre, the protagonist attempts research at home but is compelled to travel to Europe to unshroud certain mysteries of her or his life. An early example of such a memoir is Nora Frenkiel’s 1989 “Return to Poland: A Skeptic’s Journey,” a

Washington Post article in which Frenkiel describes her visit to her father's Polish village. Rebecca Goldstein's 1995 novel, *Mazel*, features main character Sasha encountering the mysteries in her own past when her granddaughter announces her engagement. Helen Epstein travels to the Czech Republic to learn more about the women in her family in her 1997 *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's Past*. Jonathan Safran Foer's self-named main character in his 2003 *Everything is Illuminated* goes to Ukraine to determine how his grandfather survived the Holocaust. Readers follow Daniel Mendelsohn on his legacy pilgrimage, also to Ukraine, to find out the fates of six members of his family tree in his 2006 *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*. Erin Einhorn in her 2008 memoir, *The Pages in Between: A Holocaust Legacy of Two Families, One Home*, travels to Poland to find the childhood home of her mother and to learn parts of her mother's life story that her mother purposely omits when she tells it. In the 2008 *The Girl from Foreign: A Memoir*, Sadia Shepard challenges the convention of going to Eastern Europe and travels to India to uncover her grandmother's Bene Israel roots. A final example of a legacy pilgrimage in memoir form is Ariel Sabar's 2009 *My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search for His Family's Past*. In it, Sabar traces his father's journey from the Kurdish Iraq of his birth to Israel to the United States. In all of these legacy pilgrimage narratives, a result is satisfying closure: the protagonists' relationships, though complex, are resolved; the answers found; family members convinced; and identities developed.

Indeed, the texts suggest that legacy pilgrimages are transformative. In "Pilgrimages, Reenactment, and Souvenirs: Modes of Memory Tourism," Marita Sturken claims that the very idea of a pilgrimage "implies a kind of personal transformation"

(284). Simon Coleman and John Eade's introduction to their *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* reiterates that pilgrimages create social and psychological transformation (2). Genealogists who travel to their ancestral homelands have perceptions about the places and what they will find there that are sometimes authenticated, sometimes contested. Before the legacy pilgrimage, the "pilgrims" have questions; afterwards, they may have some answers. Frenkiel writes, "I promise myself this will not be a trip about death, but about the possibilities of reconciliation" (F8 par. 5). Hirsch and Spitzer, moreover, explain the impact of such a journey on people making a legacy pilgrimage:

The visit provided them with an opportunity for the rediscovery of vaguely remembered or subsequently learned-about[...]sites—family residences, neighborhoods, streets, schools, classrooms, parks, and playgrounds. And it enabled them to search and reclaim personal documents that had been lost or never formally acquired—birth certificates, certificates of marriage of parents or grandparents, residential or property records. In so doing, it allowed them to certify, in concrete and material fashion, both to themselves and to others, an identity that had been severed from its foundation through expropriation and displacement. The retrieval of documents and addresses, the visit to sites, seemed to compensate momentarily for the vagueness or insufficiency of memory. It seemed to help authenticate, confirm, and detail a past that had haunted them, and for some of them it held out the hope of some form of repair. (66)

Marjorie Goldberg states that her legacy pilgrimages have afforded her relationships with many cousins that she did not know before ("The Zavelsky Family of Glukhov: 'Our

Origins Were in Glukhov” pars. 8-9). She also expresses that the journey changed her: “We returned from our eastern European visit different people with a greater appreciation for America and a great respect for our ancestors” (par. 10). Renée Eve Levie returns to her own place of origin and discovers why her father was arrested and deported—having left France when she was four years old, she has very little memory of her birthplace, so her pilgrimage paid homage to her own legacy, in addition to her parents’. According to her narrative on *Memories*, she leaves France with a “heavy heart” but is thankful for the knowledge that she acquired from the people from her past (pars. 52-53). Family members cannot be brought back, and perhaps all mysteries cannot be solved, but bloggers do report coming home with more than what they left with.

Legacy pilgrimages contribute to genealogical research by filling in any gaps that more traditional research leaves. Andrew Mendelsohn of *Mendelsohn/Shea Family*, and brother of the aforementioned Daniel Mendelsohn, begins his legacy-pilgrimage narrative with the statement that “it was almost a foregone conclusion that one day we would return to Bolechow [Ukraine], as throughout our childhood we were bombarded with ‘tales of the old country’ by my grandfather and mother” (“Going Back” par. 2). He goes on to say that the stories almost never agreed since different storytellers tell different stories, as is conventional wisdom in the study of oral tradition. Going on his legacy pilgrimage provided him the opportunity to test the accuracy of some of the stories and correct in his mind others.

Just as the Mendelsohns experience, when trying to form a cogent family history narrative, genealogists must negotiate several different factors that impede their work. Epstein offers that

In most families, there are multiple versions of the family story; the larger the family, the more various the versions. In my family, as in many families of Holocaust survivors, it is difficult to construct even one. There are too few relatives. They possess few documents. Disaster has dispersed them. Moreover, each has designed his or her own strategy for coping with the destruction of the world into which they were born. One forgets, another attenuates, another denies key parts of the narrative.[...] (164)

The ellipses in genealogical research is frustrating, making legacy pilgrimages more of an important part of the process. For example, Rebecca Fenning of *A Sense of Face* does not know much about her great-great uncle Iszo (“Iszo, ca 1900?”). In his case, according to Fenning, there are too few relatives, as Iszo did not marry or have children, and he was estranged from his nine siblings. Iszo may have died in the ghetto in Opole, Poland after his 1941 deportation from Vienna, Austria, but Fenning has no way to know. In contrast to many other Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs, Fenning’s blog takes a very different tack at describing her legacy—by posting photographs of her ancestors and writing narratives that explicate them in some way—and signs of a legacy pilgrimage do not appear in her posts. However, Fenning does comment on the Holocaust in some of her posts, mostly in reference to branches of her family tree that she “thought [were] mostly dead” (“The Acht Brothers, 1891” par. 4).

NARRATIVE EMPLOTMENT OF FAMILY HISTORIES

The lacunae that result from a lack of documentation or family lore lead genealogists to develop family histories that make sense nonetheless. If research

furnishes conflicting or no information, complications to family history narratives ensue, and genealogists need to work out what seems to be the most likely. For example, different sources may claim different birth dates for the same person. Genealogists create narratives that flow from one part to another, that can be read as a coherent story, that express the point of view of the genealogists and their informants. Fenning, for example, acknowledges time and time again that she does not know various pieces of information but prefers to imagine her relatives in certain ways: in reference to a photograph of her grandmother and great-uncle (Figure 17), Fenning states that

Because I like to concoct stories, I like to think that this picture was taken in Baltimore, when Ethel and her parents were visiting Arthur at college. Art was 12 years older than my grandmother and she idolized him. That's why she's making this pleased as punch, silly little bunny face, while he is humoring his baby sister even though he feels like he's too old for this kind of thing. ("Ethel and Arthur, ca 1927" par. 2)

In this way, Fenning shows that sometimes genealogists must devise narratives from any tenuous evidence that results from their research. Fenning's "concoction" may be wholly inaccurate, but at least she provides some context for the relationship depicted in the yellowed photograph.

ethel and arthur, ca 1927 redux



Figure 17: “Ethel and Arthur, ca 1927”

Hayden White would call this method of narrativization “emplotment,” in that genealogists take events in their families’ histories and string them together to create a cohesive, comprehensive story of what happened. He posits that “narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by what would otherwise be a list of

facts is transformed into a story” (38). As with the above example of Fenning’s contextualization of her grandmother’s photograph, Fenning could have simply stated, here is a photograph of my grandmother with her brother; they are twelve years apart; he went to college in Baltimore. These are the facts as Fenning knows them. Instead, she offers a possible situation that would have seen the two siblings come together. This situation then explains the disparate facial expressions and fills in some other gaps. The key, however, is that the story is really of what *may* have happened, considering that Fenning may have a different perspective from another one of her family members. Each family member, let alone the genealogist among them, has his or her own point-of-view on events in family histories, driven by each family member’s own life experiences.

The Mendelsohn brothers’ narratives exemplify this concept of “competing narratives” (White 38): what Andrew presents in a modest Web site, Daniel publishes in a 500-page book. Andrew’s narrative seems to focus on the time he spent in Europe with his siblings, but Daniel’s narrative mentions relatively little about his relationships with his brothers and sister. Andrew tells his narrative through photographs, while Daniel’s text includes few pictures. Emplotment accounts for the two different stories being told about the same trip, the same sites, the same people, and the same happenings. In relation to Holocaust narratives, as Andrew’s Web site and Daniel’s memoir are, White makes the point that none of the competing narratives is to be taken more seriously than another or dismissed more readily. As long as “the events themselves” (39) or a “critical study” of those events feature in the narratives, rather than commentaries on the events, they are to be considered as appropriate and “true” as each other. Narratives can be dismissed, according to White, “only if (1) it were presented as a *literal* (rather than a

figurative) representation of the events and (2) the plot type used to transform the facts in a specific kind of story were presented as inherent in (rather than imposed upon) the facts” (39-40). In other words, the narratives found on Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs are emplotted, for they are the stories told by particular storytellers and may not be told the same way by others, and no matter how accurate the filler material is, readers can accept them as research-based family history narratives.

In contrast to the Web sites and blogs for which emplotment is an issue, Jim Yarin, on his *Efron Family History* Web site, provides very little narrative. Instead, he lists rote genealogies and transcriptions of documents. His “Index and Descendents [*sic*] Chart” (Figure 18) tells who descended from whom, when and where they were born, where and when they died, and some other information. One learns, for example, that Chaim “Jaime” Efron was born in 1852 in Amdur, Belarus and died in Dominquez, Entre Rios, Argentina. He married Maria Masha (Malka) Brechansky, and they had seven children, all for whom Yarin lists places of birth and death, spouses, and children (98-102). To be fair, Yarin does title this information a “chart,” and that format presents data only. In fact, the Web site itself provides a “family history,” not a “family history narrative,” so visitors should not expect for most lacunae to be filled. On many of his pages, he cites the sources for much of the narratives he writes, including Sam Efron’s *Saga of the Efron Family* (“Chapter 1 Tsinne and Leib Efron of Amdur” par. 3), Yedidia Efron’s *Amdur, Mayn Geboyrn Shtetl [Amdur, The Town of My Birth]* (par. 11), and “an email from a member of the Goelman family” (par. 12). By diligently citing his sources, Yarin deflects responsibility for emplotting the histories of the Efron families he researches and moots the issue of appropriateness.

.....2	Chaim "Jaime" Efron b: 1852 in Amdur, Belarus, d: 1925 in Dominguez, Entre Rios, Argentina
.....	+ Maria Mashe (Malka) Brechansky b: 1854 in Amdur, Belarus, d: 1925 in Dominguez, Entre Rios, Argentina
.....3	Severo (Shevach) Efron b: 1873 in Amdur, Belarus, d: 1957 in Basavilbaso, Entre Rios, Argentina
.....	+ Maria Mashe Edelcopp b: 1876 in Brisk, d: 1947 in Basavilbaso, Entre Rios, Argentina
.....4	Israel Efron b: 1896 in Dominguez, Entre Rios, Argentina, d: 1979 in Buenos Aires, Argentina
.....	+ Ana Arcushin b: 1902 in Basavilbaso, Entre Rios, Argentina, d: 1947 in Buenos Aires, Argentina
.....5	Norberto Efron b: 1940 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, d: 1996 in Buenos Aires, Argentina
.....	+ Graciela Silvia Leff
.....6	Carina Andrea Efron
.....	+ Fernando Urtubey
.....6	Adrian Mariano Efron
.....	+ Maria Silvia Fox
.....5	Julio Cesar Efron b: 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, d: 1989 in Buenos Aires, Argentina
.....	+ Mabel Hilda Saer
.....6	Diego Efron
.....6	Viviana Efron

Figure 18: Sample Page of “Efron Family History: Index and Descendants Chart”

Narrative emplotments of family histories create stories that are cohesive and draw on personal experience that the narrators—Web site and blog authors in this case—want others to read and engage with. Emplotment is the result of the narrators’ distinct perspectives and intentions for posting. Chaim Freedman’s self-named blog has both emplotted and non-emplotted portions. Often, Freedman announces when the facts-only family history ends and the narrative begins, such as in his “Memoirs of Rokhel Luban—Festivals” post. This post is about his mother, Rokhel Lubin, and he begins by providing rote details of her birth and death: “Born 1898 Trudoliubovka, Ekaterinoslav Province, Ukraine. Died 1979 Petah Tikvah, Israel” (par. 3). He then tells his readers to expect a narrative: “Now I will write about the Yom Tovim by my parents” (par. 4). By making this announcement, Freedman alerts his readers to the shift in tone and intention. At first, Freedman seems concerned with the data, but ultimately he wants his readers to know about his mother, to gain understanding of her experiences, and to form an image of her.

Family historian Sandra MacLean Clunies calls this process “turn[ing] the flat facts into a rich picture.” Indeed, emplotment of family histories rounds out the bare facts, enabling readers to reflect on families’ lives and times.

DIDACTICISM AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO JEWISH GENEALOGY

Rather than offering family history narratives, some Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs intend to educate their visitors. Thus, there are two kinds of Web sites and blogs: those that share family histories through data or narrative form, and those that help other genealogists work through their research challenges. Steven Baral’s *From a Vanished World* Web site (Figure 19) is a good example of the former kind of Web site or blog. It hosts several pages worth of family photographs accompanied by brief narratives. Presumably, Baral wants the site to both memorialize his family, especially those who died during the Holocaust, and serve as an online hub for others interested in the Baral, Feuer, and Erlich families. Juxtaposing this kind of Web site is Schelly Talalay Dardashti’s blog, *Tracing the Tribe: The Jewish Genealogy Blog* (Figure 20), the goal of which is to “become...the place where [visitors] can ask, and get real answers, when [they] have genealogy questions so [they] can find out more about [their] heritage” (“What to Expect from Tracing the Tribe” par. 3). Indeed, Dardashti’s blog is full of informative and educational posts, such as “Lost Forever: Family Stories Not Passed Down,” which makes suggestions for preserving family stories from older family members; “Jewish Vikings? A DNA Mystery,” which discusses research that indicates that people who have Jewish and Scandinavian ancestral origins share a genetic marker;

and “Geneabloggers: Seventeen New Family History Blogs,” which announces new blogs on genealogy that may be helpful to researchers.

The photographs you are about to see were collected and edited by my Father, Mr Martin Baral. The photographs show members of the Baral, Feuer and Ehrlich Families from Cracow Poland and the vicinity, most of whom perished in the Shoah. Had it not been for the heroism of my Grandmother, Franka Baral, who saved 6 children under the most adverse circumstances, I would not be here today.

Steven Baral

To contact Steven Baral or the Baral Family, please e-mail stevebaral@aol.com

Ada Ehrlich
Hungary towards end of 1943

Village near Niregyhaza
Ada Jucika Aneta

Cracow, Poland.
before 2nd World War

Cracow Ghetto
1941

Figure 19: From a Vanished World’s Main Page



Figure 20: *Tracing the Tribe*'s Main Page

The two kinds of Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs do not necessarily stand in opposition to each other as much as they are complements of each other. To find all of the photographs Baral posts, for instance, Baral needed to learn to which resources to turn; Dardashti's blog, or Philip Trauring's *Blood and Frogs*, could very well been his starting point. Both blogs offer instructions and recommendations for how to conduct genealogical research, and while both may include personal narratives of how they conducted their own research, neither has family histories. These blogs do, as Trauring writes on his welcome page, function as guides through the layers of Jewish genealogical research and resources:

This web site is a place to learn about researching your family roots, particularly Jewish family roots. While many of the articles on this web site apply equally to people of all origins, almost all posts will focus on the issues applicable to those

researching Jewish family members. The goal of this site is to educate those interested in finding out about their family history about the resources available and the techniques that are useful in doing research.

What Trauring provides on his blog does indeed educate readers about Jewish genealogy. His experiences shape what he posts, such as the forms he makes available to his readers. Trauring intends for the forms—from the Sibling Form to the Ancestor Location Form—to help organize genealogical research; they worked for him and his research, so they could potentially work for others, too.

Some sites do mix both genres: that of the didactic Web site and blog and that with family history narratives. *Sephardic Genealogy*, for example, offers research tips and reports of Ross' experiences using certain resources, but it also includes descriptions of his family and ancestral origins. His December 8, 2011 post recommends that researchers use Facebook as a means of connecting with family members. He writes of his own success using Facebook and then explains how to get started:

I quickly found Facebook was an easy system to manipulate for my genealogy research. For all intensive [*sic*] purposes it has become something of a World Directory. It took patience but led to amazing discoveries, many which you can read in my previous post “Meeting Cousins.” Here is how to manipulate Facebook to find living relatives and expand your tree.[...] (par. 3)

Ross, as do others who maintain Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs, believes that he has knowledge to offer other researchers. In fact, Ross' blog is a rare find among Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs: its focus on Sephardic Jewish ancestry, especially lineage that traces to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, makes it unique (“Jarrett

Ross” par. 3). Other blogs, such as *Tracing the Tribe* and *Blood and Frogs*, do include information relevant to Sephardic research, but they are not dedicated to that area of research in the same way that Ross’ blog is.

Even some Web sites and blogs that purport to focus on family history narratives can teach a lot. Goldberg, like Ross, posts an abundance of family history information, yet visitors to *Our Family Story* can learn how to conduct their own research, too. The purpose of *Our Family Story* is, as Goldberg writes, “to share the many facets of our heritage” with “family members worldwide” (“Welcome to Our Site...” par. 2). Despite being a virtual central location for her family’s photographs and narratives, the site hosts pages on research resources (Goldberg, “Research Resources”), and the narratives themselves are didactic. For example, Goldberg tells of how she used the American Red Cross’ International Family Tracing Services to search for relatives: “At our request, The Red Cross made a thorough attempt to try and locate the siblings of Leon Fine and the children of German Fine, but were not successful. We still have hope that one day we will find descendants” (“The Fine Family of Bialystok” par. 6). Although the Red Cross was not able to find the relatives, just the mention of this technique communicates that the Red Cross is a viable resource. In this narrative of her research, Goldberg subtly teaches her readers how to conduct their own research.

Elizabeth Handler of *A Jewish Genealogy Journey: Researching My Husband’s Roots* shares her specific perspective as someone who turns from “regular” genealogy to Jewish genealogy. Her blog highlights the differences in research techniques, as well as the different resources available for Jewish genealogy. Her fourth blog post (Figure 21), made on June 28, 2011, details the engravings on two of her husband’s great-

grandparents' gravestones. Handler acknowledges that the gravestones are bilingual, with English and Hebrew text. She also encounters the idiosyncrasies of the language used on Jewish gravestones: both of them contain acronyms of lines from Psalms and abbreviations indicating life-cycle events. While telling the story of her own research into what information the gravestones convey, Handler educates her readers and makes suggestions for what to do when they encounter the same issues.



Figure 21: Elizabeth Handler's Blog Post on Her Husband's Great-grandparents' Gravestones

Most genealogists conduct their research as a way to learn about their ancestries, to know what their legacies are. However, as mentioned previously, genealogy functions on reciprocity: the information one researcher provides another researcher usually leads to more information being provided in return. If one researcher finds a genealogical connection to another researcher, such information is mutually beneficial, for example.

In other words, genealogy is informative; it is didactic; it is based on cyclical relationships between teachers and learners in which teachers become learners, and vice versa. The Web sites and blogs that come out of Jewish genealogy epitomize just how instructive it is. *Tracing the Tribe, Blood and Frogs, Sephardic Genealogy*, and others solicit readers' contributions through "contact me" links and space for readers to leave comments after each blog post. *A Sense of Face* even has a link that reads, "Hello, relatives! Send me pictures!" As much as Fenning's family gains from her Web site, she relies on the submissions to continue her research. Without more information, her research would be stymied, unable to develop the branches of her family tree any further.

Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs are fast, easy, and accessible ways for researchers to publish the information they discover. As a means of reaching the broadest audience possible, the sites attract visitors looking to supplement their own family research with the research conducted by others, as well as visitors who want merely to learn how to conduct research. The sites have two roles: to connect family members to each other and to be didactic. Often, the sites meld the two roles and provide a wealth of information regarding particular family genealogies and the process of genealogical research, all at the same time. Marjorie Goldberg's relatives found her Web site, *Our Family Story*, recognized a branch of their family tree described on it, and made contact to establish that they are indeed relatives ("Lost and Found: The Fine Family"). In this way, her Web site is a connector. The relatives also may have learned about the towns that Goldberg describes, such as Bialystok, Warsaw, and Ciechanowiec ("Our Ancestral Towns: Bialystok;" "Our Ancestral Towns: Warsaw;" "Our Ancestral Towns: Ciechanowiec"). In this way, her Web site is an educator.

Some of the sites and blogs, of course, are one or the other: an informative publication or a teller of family history. Dardashti's blog, *Tracing the Tribe*, for example, is an informative publication. Dardashti includes almost no information about herself, let alone her family history. The information she does provide highlights her credentials for writing a blog on Jewish genealogy. Dardashti covers an array of topics, from a list of resources for researching the Jewish presence in Appalachia ("Judaism in Appalachia") to information about leading archive Jewish Records Indexing-Poland (JRI-Poland) (WDYTYA: Gwyneth Paltrow and JRI-Poland") to announcements about upcoming genealogy events ("New Jersey: Climbing Jewish Family Trees, Jan. 9-11"). Indeed, Dardashti "explore[s] new resources, materials and methods, provide[s] information on communities, investigate[s] high tech innovations to make research easy, and talk[s] to the people who make it all possible" ("What to Expect from Tracing the Tribe" par. 7). She enables her readers to conduct their own research by giving them the tools and links to the resources with which to do so.

On the other side of the coin is a Web site like Baral's *From a Vanished World*—a teller of family history. Perhaps Baral hopes that members of the families depicted in the photographs on his site will reach out to him, but, for the most part, the photographs and captions serve to narrate what happened during the Holocaust, to which of his family members, and when. Captions, such as "SAMEK BARAL and his Brother-in-law (MOTTEK ERLICH) shortly after being liberated from concentration camps and reunited in 1945. Soon after returned to Krakow, Poland" (page 15), may not provide a lot of information, but they do describe who is in each photograph and a general idea of what befell them. With almost every photograph on the site's twenty pages captioned in this

way, Baral tells the story of his ancestors' experiences just before the Holocaust, during the Holocaust, and in the first decades after the Holocaust. Such information is more useful to visitors who want to make a family connection than to those who expect to learn research techniques.

Many Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs communicate stories of researchers who travel to their ancestral homes to see, to touch, to commemorate the streets where they walked, the homes and cities where they lived, and sometimes the graves where they lie. These researchers desire to experience as much of what their relatives did in context—in the environment—as opposed to *in situ*—in photographs or stories (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 19). By going to the places from which their families come, Jewish genealogists do contextualize their family histories. Hirsch and Spitzer write that their trip to Czernowitz turned what seemed to be a virtual place, a concept based on photographs, history books, and cyber-shtetls, into a “three-dimensional, tactile entity” (67). What these two scholars experience on their trip and what their parents and grandparents experienced are likely not the same, as life goes on and environments evolve. However, visiting places of ancestral importance does offer insight into family histories that otherwise would not be gained. The climax of Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* proves this point: upon returning for the second time to the house in which his great-uncle's family was said to have hidden, Mendelsohn discovers the trap door that leads to the hiding place (481). He is finally able to understand the “story whose details are now vanished; a story not so far from the truth, as it turned out. It had taken [him] all this, the years and the miles, had required that [he]

come back and see the place with [his] own eyes before the fact, the material reality, allowed [him] to understand the words at last” (482).

As Mendelsohn’s trip did for him, the trips take on many of the same qualities of pilgrimages: transformative, special, meaningful, a journey, feeling like it is compulsory yet is actually voluntary, and sacred. On searches for their legacies, Jewish genealogists who make these pilgrimages approach them as almost spiritual endeavors. Touring around places such as Eastern Europe is like being on hallowed ground: the presence of their ancestors echo as genealogists pay homage to them. Dardashti writes that her legacy pilgrimage to the Catskills evoked strong memories of “friends from long ago, of far away places, of travelling somewhere in my grandfather’s car, filled with people and grey with cigar smoke” (“At the Catskills Conference: Going Back” par. 4). Legacy pilgrimages are thus important components of genealogical research; for Jewish genealogists, visiting towns of importance is the culmination of arduous research that pushes beyond the brick walls caused by the Holocaust and other devastating moments in a family’s history.

Almost all Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs, as should be the case because of the nature of genealogy, maintain a strong focus on the dead. While living parents or grandparents do fall into the category of “ancestors,” genealogists seek information about ancestors that go further back in their lineage. They want to know more about the lives of the ancestors who have died, who are no longer able to provide pieces of the family history narrative. By researching these ancestors and publishing information about them on their Web sites and blogs, genealogists preserve the memory of their lives. As Trauring asks, “[i]f we don’t tell the stories of those family members of ours that

died[...], who will tell their stories” (“Yad Vashem’s Quest” par. 3)? As Fenning, Baral, Goldberg, and others answer, genealogists will tell the family history narratives.

Dardashti recounts that her family’s oral tradition claims that her ancestral roots are Sephardic (“At the ICJG: Sephardim in Eastern Europe” pars. 2-3). Indeed, after much research, she documented her family’s origins in Lerida, Spain. By posting the story of her research, not only does Dardashti ensure that later generations of her family will have access to this information, but she also teaches her readers about Sephardic genealogical history.

Even though this branch of Dardashti’s family faced the hardships wrought by the Spanish Inquisition, the Holocaust is probably the most significant cause of disaster that Jewish genealogists encounter when compiling their family trees. Goldberg acknowledges that only the Red Cross was able to track down descendants of some of her ancestors; the Holocaust had dispersed her family members without accessible records. Trauring’s and Dardashti’s blogs have posts dedicated to overcoming research hurdles caused by the Holocaust. In fact, Dardashti quotes another genealogist, Jeffrey S. Malka, who claims that “[a]bout twenty-five years ago, if you came from Eastern Europe, you were told you can’t do any research” (qtd. in “At IJG: Sephardic Research” par. 1). Malka refers to the obstacles that researchers often face as soon as they get to the time period of the Holocaust. At the time to which Malka refers—the 1980s—records were not available, travel was unaffordable and impractical, and no one was around to offer any leads. With families destroyed by the Holocaust, family trees suffered.

What Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs demonstrate is that family trees can be made whole, despite devastation, through research. The sites attract users of the

internet who are looking for techniques to conduct their research. *Tracing the Tribe* routinely gets comments, as does *Blood and Frogs*, indicating that they have generated communities of readers who turn to them for support. The sites' autobiographical qualities, their didacticism, and the way in which readers find their own experiences in them appeal to readers who seek out others who can share their research experiences and family history narratives. Commonality is what makes communities; unfortunately, this community of Jewish genealogists has death and destruction in common. From expulsions to forced conversions to mass murders, Jewish family histories are fraught with devastating circumstances, as many of the Web sites and blogs indicate. The narratives of both family histories and research experiences encapsulate the kinds of tragedy encountered by Jewish communities over time, thereby bringing together readers with interests in the tragedies.

CONCLUSION

HOW TO TELL A FAMILY HISTORY:

POSTMEMORY AS NARRATIVE LENS; EMPLOTMENT AS NARRATIVE

TECHNIQUE

The emotional effects of diasporic dislocation and relocation also have led many of us in the twenty-first century to recapture, in writing, family memories and stories, in order to rescue lost legacies, to restore connections suspended by time, place, and politics.

(Hirsch and Miller, Introduction 10)

Jewish genealogical research Web sites, cyber-shtetls, and personal genealogy Web sites and blogs reveal constructions of Jewish identity that have never before been articulated as viable options for forming Jewish communities. Jewish communities of relation, location, and devastation may resemble other Jewish communities, but they are unique in that they are virtual—their homes are online. Using the internet to conduct genealogical research allows for a re-imagining of what being Jewish means: Jewish legal definitions, theological perspectives, and religious observances are no longer enough for some people to identify with Jewish communities. Instead, Jewish ancestry, a connection to a particular location, and a focus on hardship drive these online Jewish communities.

There is sometimes overlap, in that research Web sites may feature pages devoted to specific places or cyber-shtetls may host family histories, but, for the most part, each genre of Web site encourages its own kind of Jewish community: Jewish genealogical research Web sites sustain communities of relation; cyber-shtetls foster communities of location; and Jewish personal genealogy Web sites and blogs support communities of devastation.

How do users know which community is the one they encounter when they visit a particular Jewish genealogical Web site? The Web sites' visual and verbal rhetorics are potent. They imply, if not outright state, how users will come to communicate and commune with one another. The *Jewish Web Index*, for example, lets users know that relationships are the most important part of its community of users. Ted Margulies, the creator and editor, starts his site with the unattributed quotation: "If we go back far enough, we're all related" (*Jewish Web Index* par. 1). He also refers to visitors as "cousins" ("Family—Yours and Mine" par. 1). Such rhetoric suggests that all of the site's users are part of one big family, that, through the genealogical research tools posted on the *Jewish Web Index*, users will discover that they are related to each other. Of course, being related has its own implications, as Eviatar Zerubavel explores in *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity, and Community*. As reported in Chapter One, he writes that "[s]ocial solidarity presuppose[s] a certain sense of commonality, and one of the most elemental forms of social commonality is the image of two or more individuals jointly descending from a common ancestor" (34). Visiting the *Jewish Web Index* and assuming the notion that all the visitors are related leads to a community of people who think they are already part of an unseen, unknown family. Thus, this Jewish genealogical

research Web site imparts a community of Jewish relation—a community of users who come together because they are related to someone who (is related to someone who...) is Jewish.

The other genres of Jewish genealogical Web sites convey their own rhetorical stances. The imagery on cyber-shtetls is logically place-oriented, mostly telling the story of places as they were, not necessarily as they are now. It attracts visitors who seek others with an interest in a place, forming a community of people who all have a connection to that place. Each cyber-shtetl is devoted to a particular location, and its rhetoric signals the losses of ancestral ways of life and the towns as users would want to know them. *JewishGen.org*'s volunteer-led research project “KehilaLinks”—“kehila” being the Hebrew word for “community”—provides several examples of cyber-shtetls, most of which contain the same kind of information and maintain the same rhetorical perspective. From histories to personal reflections to even travelogues, cyber-shtetls attempt to round out what cyber-shtetl visitors know about the place. For instance, the cyber-shtetl for Bialystok, Poland displays the following description:

From the beginning of the 1800s to the Holocaust, Bialystok was a prominent Jewish City [*sic*]. The Jewish share of the population for most of that period ranged between 50 and 75 percent. Among major cities of Poland, Bialystok clearly had the highest percentage of Jews. While Vilnius (Wilno) was considered the “Jerusalem of the North,” Bialystok was a major “entrepreneurial zone” for Jews. Even so, Bialystok had the largest number of Synagogues [*sic*] per capita in Poland while the region has one of the oldest Synagogues in Tykocin and had the famous wooden Synagogue in Zabłudow. (*BIALYGen Homepage*)

The description, like almost all the content on the page and on other cyber-shtetls, is written in the past tense, driving home the idea that the Bialystok as visitors' ancestors lived in it no longer exists. It puts the Holocaust at the end of a timeline of Jewish life in the city and suggests that Jewish life would have continued to thrive if not for the Holocaust. Such rhetoric predominates on cyber-shtetls, even those with content that depicts the locations more contemporarily.

Notably, there are some cyber-shtetls that depict communities relatively untouched by the Holocaust. The cyber-shtetl—part of the KehilaLinks project—for the British Isles (*Jewish Communities and Records—United Kingdom*) (Figure 22), for example, is one such Web site; it also follows a different model than the sites that do have a focus on the Holocaust, in that there is very little narrative material on the site. Instead, this cyber-shtetl offers databases for researching Jewish communities in the British Isles. It “contains some 5,000 pages including details of more than 1,200 congregations and includes current communities and those that no longer exist” (par. 1). Its rhetoric includes “communities that no longer exist,” implying a sense of loss that is similar to the cyber-shtetls that pose the Holocaust as a defining moment, though not for the same reasons; the communities of the British Isles that no longer exist likely diminished over time because of migration and assimilation. In contrast, the cyber-shtetl—also a KehilaLink—for Basavilbaso, Argentina (*Basabilbaso—Lucienville, Argentina*) (Figure 23) offers that the community, established by Baron Maurice de Hirsch in the 1890s, allowed many Jewish families “to escape persecution in their old countries and[...]to start a new life” (par. 2). This statement gives a different sense of the community—one that engenders optimism rather than sadness. These cyber-shtetls, and those that present what

the communities are like now, though sometimes without a Jewish population, break the mold of most cyber-shtetls by not mentioning the Holocaust. They are nonetheless significant in their concentration on specific places and attraction to users with interests in those places.

The screenshot shows the homepage of JCR-UK (Jewish Communities & Records - United Kingdom). At the top, there is a logo with a Star of David and the text "JCR-UK Jewish Communities & Records". Below the logo are seven buttons for regional filters: England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, and Gibraltar. A navigation menu on the left contains links for Home, What's New, 1851 Anglo-Jewry, All-UK Database, Medieval Communities, Susser Archive, IAIGS Cemetery Project, About JCR-UK, Acknowledgments, Bibliography, Discussion Group, Donating/Helping, JGSGB, FAQ, Links, Search JCR-UK, and Contact Us. The main content area includes a date stamp "Latest revision or update to this page: 16 March 2012", the title "Jewish Communities and Records - United Kingdom", a paragraph stating the website contains 5,000 pages with details of over 1,200 congregations, and a call to action for user help. A "Search the Database" button is prominently displayed. Below it, a note states that the 1851 Anglo-Jewry database has been added to the site, covering about 90% of Jews in the British Isles in 1851 with 29,000 entries.

Figure 22: British Isles' Cyber-shtetl



Figure 23: Basavilbaso, Argentina’s Cyber-shtetl

Personal genealogy Web sites and blogs emphasize the hardships endured by ancestors, whether the Holocaust, pogroms, illness, or the stress of migration. Photographs and hand-drawn images are the most prominent visual effects that communicate personal genealogy Web sites’ and blogs’ viewpoints. For example, Marjorie Goldberg’s personal genealogy Web site, *Our Family Story* (Figure 16), opens with sepia-toned and black-and-white photographs, implying that the people in the pictures are long lost to the past. As Marianne Hirsch brings to mind in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, sepia and black-and-white tones suggest nostalgia for the past and a recognition that the people in the photographs no longer exist. Goldberg acknowledges the hardships faced by her ancestors: “Our ancestors through their insights, courage and struggles to overcome many obstacles [*sic*] have made possible the way we live today” (*Our Family Story* par. 1). Not only did her ancestors struggle, but they struggled to overcome obstacles, and not just one obstacle, but many.

Goldberg's choice of words highlights the struggles of her ancestors, although not until visitors go through the site's pages do they learn that the Holocaust is one of the main obstacles ("The Fine Family of Bialystok" par. 5). On many personal genealogy Web sites and blogs, the Holocaust takes center stage as the one defining hardship endured, but other hardships do play a role. Together with the acknowledgement of deceased relatives, such indications of hardship convey that Jewish family histories are full of devastation.

In addition to the rhetorical narratives on these Web sites, each Web site has another narrative—that told by the users of the Web sites and the content itself. Important to note, a Web site's visual and verbal rhetorics are different from its content; they do not necessarily contradict each other but rather supplement each other. For example, *JewishGen.org*'s rhetorical narrative tells the story of finding relatives, but the narratives told by the site's users are generally ones of the search for those relatives. For the most part, users visit *JewishGen.org* when they embark on their research, and their posts to the mailing lists indicate that they are in that stage of genealogical research. Representative of the kinds of requests for help issued by *JewishGen.org*'s users is Heather Highman's post to *JewishGen.org*'s electronic mailing list. In it, she asks for help in locating information about her aunt's death:

I live in the U.K. and am researching my Aunt Annie.Ana Yarmalinsky/Stefan. She was married to Stefan de Jurgielewitz, in Paris, and then again when they came to England. I have their Marriage [sic] certificate.

I know that she died in New York, and as she was born here in 1900, she was in 80s.

Could some kind person, please point me in the right direction, where to look for her death announcement, as her nephew and my cousin[...]doesn't have any of her details.

In contrast, the Web site shows what can happen when the research is successful, which encourages and inspires users to continue. Janette Silverman, for example, thanks the *JewishGen.org* community for translating a document that ultimately put her in touch with someone who might provide clues into her ancestry (Silverman). This find might not appear to be much of a success because of its tentativeness, but Silverman seems pleased with her progress. In this way, the two kinds of narratives—of the search for answers and of the receipt of them—are different yet connected, supporting each other's positions. Rhetorically, the Web site imparts closure, yet that is just what users seek.

The narratives told by users or the Web site content are both infused with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and emplotted by way of Hayden White's theory of historical narrativization. Postmemory is the effect of learning about ancestors' experiences over and over again. Particularly for family members one generation removed from each other, and especially for memories of traumatic experiences, ancestors' memories almost become one's own. Hirsch describes postmemory as "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). In other words, according to Hirsch, a second-generation survivor of the Holocaust internalizes the memories of the generation who actually experienced the trauma by imagining what the experience must have been like and assuming her parent's feelings of pain, sadness, distress, and anxiety. Because there are

holes in such postmemories—postmemories are what Hirsch calls “fragmented” (23)—a descendent often feels confusion, too; trying to get to the “truth” of the experience is difficult given the nature of memory, let alone postmemory.

The same dynamics of postmemory exist for many genealogists as they do for second-generation survivors of the Holocaust, Hirsch’s primary population of focus. They have heard family stories—traumatic or not—so many times that they become relentlessly obsessed (23) with the stories, wishing to uncover any untold details and flesh out the story. Family stories often taken on mythological proportions, heightening genealogists’ sense of need to conduct research, to know and share the “real” story. Jewish genealogical Web sites are full of postmemories, from the postings on research Web sites’ mailing lists that attempt to piece together a family story to the reflections posted on cyber-shtetls to the family histories shared on personal Web sites. Genealogists are likely more than one generation removed from the ancestors whose stories are being remembered, and the degree of uncertainty surrounding the postmemories may be more intensified than that of the second generation. Regardless, the Web sites provide ways to learn more about postmemories, share them, and solidify them as family lore.

Jewish genealogical research Web sites narrativize users’ searches for answers. On the main page of *JewishGen.org*, a link takes beginners to four-step instructions for how to get started with research on the Web site: first, novices should interview their family members; second, they should take *JewishGen.org*’s beginning-level online course; third, they should enter their families’ information on the JewishGen Family Finder, a system whereby users can identify other users who are searching for the same surname; and fourth, they should join relevant discussion groups hosted by

JewishGen.org. None of these steps explains what to do with information once users find it; the search itself is the Web site's thrust, so what to do with results of the search are beyond its purview. However, the site does offer some personal stories through its Success! program. These relatively few stories feature narratives of finding relatives—the result of “successful” research. Their purpose is to show newer researchers that finding answers is possible, that the search will not be fruitless.

Postmemory plays a role here, as the impetus to conduct genealogical research. The search for an explanation of a postmemory is vital to understanding how people come to be genealogists. Jerry Touger, for example, recalls that

From conversations with my mother, I knew that my grandmother's sister and her husband were believed lost in the holocaust [*sic*]. I also knew that one of this sister's sons had emigrated to the United States just before World War I, but he and his wife had died childless in the mid-sixties. My sporadic efforts to find a Gricha Corenfeld—or Korenfeld—or Kornfield, as the son in the United States had spelled it—had proved futile. I was uncertain even of his parents' names. My mother had dimly remembered that her mother's sister's name was “something like Marin.” She did not know the husband's name at all. We did have a picture—presumed to be of the sister, her husband, and three small children—taken shortly before or after my grandmother came over in 1903. But the picture just had the single word Polonsky—my grandmother's maiden name—penciled in Russian on the back. Trying to find out anything more seemed like an exercise in futility. (par. 7)

Touger is thus dealing with two layers of postmemory: his own and his mother's. He remembers hearing from his mother that his great-aunt and great-uncle died in the Holocaust, but the language he uses conveys a lack of certainty: from "remembering" to "knowing" to "believing." Touger moves from the ambiguity of memory to the assurance of knowledge to the possibility of doubt inherent to belief. Touger is many steps removed from the truth, but his postmemory tells him a potential truth. His mother, too, struggles with postmemory: she cannot precisely remember her aunt's name, but she has a vague sense of what it might be. Photographs and family lore are the resources on which Touger relies, until he turns to *JewishGen.org* and other genealogical research tools. Through them, he learns that his great-aunt and -uncle—and their descendants—survived the Holocaust by moving further and further east into the Soviet Union. This discovery turns Touger's postmemory on its head, showing the fragility of postmemory and value of genealogical research.

Cyber-shtetls reference postmemories in a slightly different way: locations become the foci instead of relations. These Web sites contain many transcriptions of postmemories; personal reflections and transcriptions function as postmemories in the way they are transmitted from generation to generation, as well as in the way they communicate information about the locales. Much of the content on cyber-shtetls tries to evoke what the towns were like before migration, pogroms, wars, and the Holocaust decimated them. Many maps in the digitized *yizkor* books are hand-drawn, suggesting that they were drawn from memory. They then become sites of postmemory, eliciting for later generations the memories of their drawers. The same is true about the recollections published in *yizkor* books and posted on other cyber-shtetls: the way in which they reflect

upon the past—with holes and fragments—also renders them sites of postmemory. Cyber-shtetls are the culminations of people’s memories of a particular place during a particular time, and they become all that remains of that place in that time. What one publishes in *yizkor* books and what one posts on cyber-shtetls is what one’s descendants will internalize as the truth, for there is no way for the descendants to learn for themselves. As sites of postmemory, cyber-shtetls present the intense memories of the people who contribute to them, memories of a life destroyed for the reasons mentioned above. Visitors to the cyber-shtetls assimilate the memories into their own collection of memories. Stronger than “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg), these postmemories are tied to the traumatic circumstances that extinguished the possibility of recreating the experiences that compose the memories.

For instance, the cyber-shtetl for Kedainiai, Lithuania (Figure 24) relies on vignettes from former residents to describe life in the town. The “history” of Kedainiai is presented as the memoir of Boruch Chaim Cassel, the grandfather of the Web site’s editor. Writing about himself, Cassel tells his reader:

As a Keidaner of at least the fourth generation, the author of this memoir took it on himself to investigate the history of the city, using a number of historical sources, and to present the “lineage” of a poor-but-proud community. Thus he feels that he has done his duty to his native city and his countrymen, and that he has also contributed to the overall history of the Jews of Lithuania. (par. 4)

As a memoir, the historical nature of the piece is dubious; Cassel states that he uses a number of “historical sources,” but perhaps he also mines the memories of his landsmen. This history is one of the only histories of Kedainiai that exist, so Cassell’s memories

shape what readers know of the town. Cassell's memories become everyone else's—especially his family members'—postmemories. Much of the rest of this cyber-shtetl comprises memoirs, too, and those memoirs are also postmemories. Chaim Yakov Epstein, for instance, writes in his that he is not ““100-percent' Keidaner” (par. 1) but that his father and grandfather lived and died in Kedainiai. He argues that his love for the town and his experiences there as a child render him fit to recount what life was like. He offers stories about the drafting of Jewish boys into the Russian military, floods that swept through the town before every Passover, and fires that put the entire town at risk of destruction. Based on what Epstein himself writes of the relatively little amount of time he spent in Kedainiai, his readers must surmise that he may be recounting the recollections of other people, such as his parents and grandparents, instead of his own. In this way, Epstein's stories are also his postmemories, rather than his memories, and they become his readers' postmemories, too.

[Click here to join the JewishKeidan email group](#) / [Click here to support the Keidan Memorial Fund](#)

'A Hole in the Heart'



It was said that if a Jew from Keidan was traveling, and someone asked where he was from, he would puff out his chest and poke a finger at his heart, replying proudly, "Me? I'm a Keidaner!" And so forcefully would he poke that it looked like the finger might go right into his chest. Thus people took to calling them "Keidaner mit griblen in hartzn" -- Yiddish for "Keidaners with holes in their hearts."



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This site is about Keidan, where my grandfather was born. Known today by its Lithuanian name, [Kedainiai](#), it is a town like many others, with a library, a chemical plant and some 28,000 residents, none of them Jews. But for 500 years, from the mid-1400s until [Aug. 28, 1941](#), it was home to an important Jewish community, with scholars, merchants and artisans. An aristocratic legacy helped foster a pride that made Keidan stand out in the world of the old Russian Pale. Every shtetl was special to its inhabitants, but Keidan had what in Yiddish is called *yikhes* -- a lineage, a pedigree.

Here you will find stories, documents and images relating to Keidan, an ongoing effort to preserve the memory of the community that once thrived there. Through these pages, *Keidaners and their descendants who now live all over the world can thus reach*

Figure 24: Kedainiai, Lithuania's Cyber-shtetl

On personal genealogy Web sites and blogs, postmemories and their substantiations appear as the main content. In the sharing of family histories, children often attempt to sort out the postmemories they acquire from their parents. According to Hirsch's definition of "postmemory," traumas or losses can be as real to children as to their parents, grandparents, and other ancestors. Zerubavel offers that "[s]uch a remarkable existential fusion of one's personal history with that of the communities to which one belongs[...]helps explain the tradition of pain and suffering [...]as well as the personal sense of shame" in descendants of those who suffer (*Time Maps* 3). Part of one's legacy is the stories one hears about family members' experiences, both good and bad. Genealogy allows one to flesh out the stories, determine some of the truths behind them, and come to terms with them, if need be. The more traumatic the family story, the more difficulty one has in resolving it. Similarly, the more uncertain the family story, the more

difficulty one has in tracing it. Personal genealogy Web site and blogs are the forums through which one tries to reconcile such family stories. In this way, postmemories are very much the impetus for these sites and blogs.

On *A Sense of Face*, Rebecca Fenning epitomizes the aspect of uncertainty in postmemories. All she has are photographs with very little by way of explanation. Thus, she develops her own descriptions, based on what she already knows of her relatives and what seems to be depicted in the photograph. In Fenning's post on February 3, 2012, "Chaje and Michael, 1889," writes a story about her great-great-great-grandfather, Michael Pfenig, although she claims not to know about him. She writes: "Michael's legacy lived on in the 'M' names and middle names given to his children and grandchildren, but I have never heard any stories about him, which is a little bit strange for the erstwhile Pfenigs who are big tellers of stories" (par. 3). Despite never hearing stories about him, Fenning is able to recount his arrival in the United States in 1889. Through genealogical research, Fenning found the ship manifests for Pfenig and his youngest daughter, Chaje, and is able to reconstruct their travels, filling in some holes where needed. Although Fenning states that she never heard any stories about Pfenig, which would preclude having postmemories about him, she does know some details about him through the Jewish naming rituals she describes. Her postmemory of Pfenig may be vague, but it does enable her to narrate part of his life story.

Such narration is dependent upon emplotment. White explains that although "narrative is regarded as a neutral 'container' of historical fact" (37), it is actually fashioned with poetics and rhetorics (38). The way in which a narrator strings together historical facts makes the narration what it is; the narrator tells the story in a way that

befits the narrator's goals. Does the narrator want to tell a story that is heartening or one that elicits pity? Does the narrator want to tell an origin story or a story of destruction? As can be seen on Jewish genealogical Web sites, sometimes these stories are one and the same: the story Elizabeth Handler writes of her husband's family describes a father who leaves his wife and child in Hungary to immigrate to the United States in 1910. What could be a story of the devastation of a family is actually the story of a family's salvation, for, in 1911, Karolin Handler joins her husband, bringing with her a son, mother-in-law, and sister-in law. Handler surmises that Josef Handler made enough of a success of himself to bring these several family members to live with him ("Wedding Wednesday," "Tuesday's Tip"). Instead of telling a tragic story of a family broken apart by migration, Handler tells a story of reunion. So what distinguishes the kinds of stories from each other? According to White, the distinctions lie in the way the facts get filled out, the way the narrator puts them together to create a coherent story. The "filler" expresses the poetic and rhetorical techniques that convey the kind of narrative that the narrator wishes.

On Jewish genealogical research Web sites, emplotment can be a deterrent to finding the facts. Users of these sites seek information. They may have postmemories, as described above, that lead them on a research path, but assumptions may steer researchers in the wrong direction. Instructions to beginning researchers tell them to "start with what they know" ("1. Getting Started" par. 4), but sometimes what they know is insufficient or inaccurate. For example, *JewishGen.org* cautions users to be sure of their ancestors' lands of origin before embarking on the research. "Be aware," the site warns, "that when someone says their family was from, for example, 'Vilna' or 'Minsk,' this probably means that they were from some small town in Vilna or Minsk *guberniya*

(province), and not the city itself (just as someone from ‘New York’ is not necessarily from New York City)” (“11. Finding Your Ancestral Town” par. 2). Not knowing the place of origin or having the wrong one, as well as a host of other errant leads, can be very defeating to a genealogist. When records cannot be found for a particular ancestor, genealogists feel as if that ancestor never existed. They then rely on postmemory and family lore to substantiate that ancestor’s existence. The employment of postmemory, then, takes on a crucial purpose for Jewish genealogists: in some cases, the family stories heard as children are the only sources with which to proceed, even if they are missing information or contain incorrect information. The employment—the way in which the story is told—is what makes them very real to genealogists.

Employment appears on cyber-shtetls in similar ways: the stories may have inaccuracies, exaggerations, or suggest other biases, but they are very real to the tellers of the stories, and subsequently to the users of the sites. Because the communities commemorated by cyber-shtetls no longer exist, the Web sites provide some of the only insight into what life was like in them. Sometimes, more than one person remembers the community in different ways. How do visitors to the cyber-shtetls determine which narrative to believe? White argues that employment leads to “competing narratives” (38): stories composed of the same facts yet told differently. The anecdote about Lomza in Chapter Two is a wonderful example of how competing narratives affect the way a town is remembered. In one of the Lomza *yizkor* books, the story is told about a rabbi who disappoints his community by fleeing to safety and leaving his congregants behind when the Russians come for him (*Sefer zikaron li’kehilat lomzah* 120). In contradiction to this story, Chaim Shapiro submits that the rabbi went into hiding and that the story of his

flight was created to prevent his adversaries from persecuting him. These two stories rely on the same facts, yet they are emplotted very differently; one story depicts the rabbi as betraying his congregants, and the other story depicts him as wily in the evasion of his persecutors. How will the facts be remembered? Because this cyber-shtetl does not include Shapiro's rebuttal, and because the town's other cyber-shtetls (*Lomza*; *Lomze*; *Lomzshe*) make no reference to the situation at all, the story emplotted to defame the rabbi is the story that persists in readers' knowledge of Lomza.

Personal genealogy Web sites and blogs make clear that the narratives presented are memoirs of their authors, that they are emplotted as a "means of vision or comprehension, not a mirror of something independent" (White 48). In other words, the narratives are the avenues through which the narrators sort out the facts for their own peace of mind. Almost by definition, personal Web sites and blogs present their authors' inner thoughts and existential questions. The thoughts and questions resonate with readers because they are universal, in spite of sometimes being specific to the narrators' families. Creators of personal genealogy Web sites and writers of blogs ask, as Shelley Talalay Dardashti does in *Tracing the Tribe: The Jewish Genealogy Blog*, how can I find out who I am and where I come from if I have no one to ask? I have "the hint of a place name on a river, an unusual family name, and nothing much else..."—where do I go from here? Who else is in my situation, and can we help each other? ("What to Expect from *Tracing the Tribe*" pars. 1-3). The people behind the Web sites and blogs do their best to answer the questions, even if they do so with personal accounts of their own genealogical research.

The personal accounts employ emplotment as their narrative technique. Similar to the way in which Elizabeth Handler's blog posts, described above, are emplotments of her husband's family's story, Andrew Mendelsohn's personal genealogy Web site is an emplotment of his family's. Chapter Three points out that Mendelsohn's brother, Daniel, creates a competing narrative, emplotting the same information in a very different way. Daniel's book contrasts Andrew's Web site not just in how well-developed each is—*The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* is weighty while the *Mendelsohn/Shea Family* is relatively underdeveloped—but also in the way each brother tells the story. For Andrew, the time spent in Europe with his siblings looking for clues to his great-uncle's life story seems to impart the importance of spending more time with family, while for Daniel, the importance lies in what they find. On the Web pages devoted to the family's legacy pilgrimage, Andrew recounts his postmemory of his grandfather and great-uncle's relationship in just a few paragraphs ("Going Back"); Daniel recounts his postmemory over the course of several chapters. Daniel's narrative is emplotted in the best possible way for a book: telling the story in the way that he does builds suspense, maintains readers' interest, and allows for character development. On the other hand, Andrew's emplotment is good for a Web site: succinct, intermingled with graphics, and elucidative of Andrew's perspective. In other words, personal genealogy Web sites, such as Andrew Mendelsohn's, present narrative emplotments that represent the interests of their narrators, heightening the therapeutic quality of maintaining such sites.

The result of using postmemory as a narrative lens and emplotment as a narrative technique in genealogical research is that heritage becomes all the more real. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that "[h]eritage[...]is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the

mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct. Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life” (149). Instead of relying on family lore to substantiate one’s ancestry, genealogists seek to authenticate what they have heard or gleaned throughout their lives. Genealogical Web sites allow genealogists to “exhibit” their knowledge through the emplotted presentation of facts. Ancestry—the people, places, and experiences of one’s genealogical past (Zerubavel, *Ancestors and Relatives* 4-7)—is the culmination of the dead and defunct. However, it is very much alive for the people in search of it. In this way, ancestry gets a “second life” through genealogical research; ancestry becomes an authenticated, tangible influence on one’s life.

Hirsch and Leo Spitzer investigate this phenomenon in *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*: through genealogical research, legacy pilgrimages, and self-exploration, Hirsch and Spitzer uncover how Hirsch’s ancestry reverberates throughout her own life. Accompanied by Spitzer, Hirsch travels with her parents to their ancestral homeland of Chernivitsi, Ukraine. They hope to understand Hirsch’s own postmemories of the traumas endured by her parents as they suffered the consequences of World War II’s political turmoil, including deportation, ghettoization, mass murders, and forced labor. As Hirsch and Spitzer write, by visiting Chernivitsi, their postmemories “gained substance, dimensionality, texture, and color” (137). “And as we walked about this landscape of memory,” they continue,

the streets became animated with the presence of people from that past: long-lost relatives, friends, neighbors, Lotte and Carl [Hirsch’s parents], young, in their

twenties—ghosts emerging from the shadows between the buildings, conjured up by recall and narration, by our being there, by our presence and witness. (138)

Hirsch and Spitzer's legacy pilgrimage to Chernivitsi makes Hirsch's postmemories real by filling in lacunae perhaps caused by her parents' reluctance to relive their experiences. However, going to Chernivitsi together allows them to revisit them in the safety of the company of loved ones. As a result, they—Spitzer, Hirsch, and her parents—are able to come to terms with their ancestry together: "Our 'return' journey there together had been affirming and enabling" (167). Spitzer and Hirsch reflect upon their account of the legacy pilgrimage by concluding that "[b]y reconnecting with that past world, with its qualities and ideals, returnees hope not just to recover some of what they or their parents lost, but also, counter-factually, to be able to imagine what might have been,..." (293). In this way, the past has recourse on the present (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 149; Halbwachs 67, 69), reviving ancestry and illuminating one's heritage.

What Hirsch and Spitzer encounter is the tension between Vivian M. Patraka's "goneness" (4) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "hereness" (153). The Holocaust, specifically, left goneness in its wake; the destruction of Jewish lives and cultures also destroyed the lives and cultures to come, into perpetuity. Hirsch's postmemories—transmitted by her parents "through narrative, affect, or behavior" (Hirsch and Spitzer 300)—are reactions to the goneness: without a clear understanding of what her parents withstood, Hirsch feels a need "to enhance and enlarge their narratives" (167), to "mark a spectacular and invisible absence in order to remember who once was and what once happened" (Patraka 4). Hirsch knows that the world in which her parents lived can be neither replicated nor revisited, an effect of the goneness that Patraka describes.

However, for Hirsch, the postmemories are very influential in her life; in that way, they are very much “here,” challenging just how “gone” they actually are. By searching for her heritage, Hirsch and Spitzer “produce” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 153) the hereness of the people and places found in Hirsch’s postmemories. The tension arises when gone-ness and hereness cannot be reconciled, such as when Hirsch’s mother revels in the memories of her family’s tile stoves (293-294). The stoves are here; they exist and can be seen, touched, photographed. However, the context in which Hirsch’s mother remembers the stoves cannot ever be captured (295). She remembers how they resourcefully and suddenly became tools of efficiency and security during the “bad times” (294), yet Hirsch and Spitzer point out that the stoves’ purpose was to be energy-efficient. Not necessarily negating Hirsch’s mother’s memories, such information puts the memories into another context. In this situation, the gone-ness of the lives and times of the Chernivitsi of the first half of the twentieth century clashes with the hereness of both the material items that persist and the prominence of certain memories and postmemories.

When conflicts between gone-ness and hereness do arise, memories and postmemories are not to be discounted. Instead, they are to be taken for what they are: a family’s legacy that has been passed down from generation to generation. Authenticated or not, legacies are what makes families unique. They are proof of how people enact and endure history; the emplotted narratives that compose family histories reveal what family members consider significant about their experiences. Michael Karpin writes in

Tightrope: Six Centuries of a Jewish Dynasty that

[t]his link between the annals of [a family] and historical events offers us an opportunity to weave the private and personal tales of family members into the

known historical tapestry, giving us new perspectives and insights. It is a mirror in which almost any family can find its own historical reflection, a mirror that enables each of us to look back and observe our antecedents against the backdrop of their period and to see how our own values and beliefs have derived from them.

(ix)

Genealogy is thus not just the determination of a family line; it is also the stories and values that affect that family line. The culmination of Jewish genealogy is Jewish identity formation, for, as Steven Lasky affirms, “each accounting of one’s life experiences adds to the fabric and texture of our collective Jewish memory” (par. 6).

This research focuses on Jewish genealogy and its effects on Jewish identity, yet it likely applies to other “ethnic” genealogies, particularly those communities that have traditions surrounding persecution and victimization. Doing a cross-cultural study of similar genealogical Web sites would provide answers to questions regarding the impact of the internet on communal identity, and it would show how contemporary groups deal with the traumas of their pasts. African genealogists, Native American genealogists, and genealogists of other cultural groups that acknowledge suffering in their collective pasts would make good case studies, much in the same way that Jewish genealogists are the case study in this dissertation.

Although scholars, such as Zerubavel, write about the influence of ancestry on identity, research into specific applications—the practice of genealogy and what it means to those doing it—would enlighten the field of genealogy and heritage studies as a whole. A general interest in genealogy flourished after *Roots* was broadcast in 1977 and *Holocaust* aired in 1978. Now, thirty-five years later, *Who Do You Think You Are?* has a

growing audience. These facts do not explain the impact of genealogical research. They merely indicate what has led to spurts of interest in ancestry and roots tourism. Knowing how genealogical research affects collective identity, rather than what affects interest in genealogical research, may help clarify community relations and values.

More particularly, each chapter—the first on Jewish genealogical research Web sites, the second on cyber-shtetls, and the third on personal genealogy Web sites and blogs—leaves room for extended research. A study of the community of users of Jewish genealogical Web sites would lead to greater understanding of the dynamics of communal identity and Jewish “affiliative” identity (Nelson ctd. in Hirsch and Miller, Introduction 13; Jiménez) that are at play. How do communities of relation bear out in real life? Must they remain online to maintain legitimacy? Do members who self-fashion their Jewish identities explore Judaism in other ways? Answers to these questions would indicate just how significant Jewish communities of relation are in contemporary terms.

Also, the ways in which memory features on these sites would be an interesting exploration. Many users of Jewish genealogical research Web sites rely on postmemories to get them started on their research. Do these postmemories reflect goneness, hereeness, or both? How often can researchers authenticate their postmemories? Does authenticating them—or not—impact the researchers in some way? Genealogists’ postmemories are the pinnacle of their research, so learning more about their dynamics may clarify the growth in interest in genealogy. Maybe the more complicated the postmemory, the more likely someone is to turn to genealogical research to resolve it.

One of the resources to which genealogical researchers turn is online *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls. They are widely understood to provide fodder for historical,

demographic, and political research, but other disciplines can extract useful information from them. Namely, *yizkor* books have rarely been the subjects of literary criticism. The second chapter contributes to this research area, although its focus on community formation route it away from narrative theory and toward identity politics. Some of the chapters in Rosemary Horowitz' 2011 volume on *yizkor* books, *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meanings of Yizker Volumes*, shed light on the sociological and literary impacts of *yizkor* books. In other words, studying online *yizkor* books and cyber-shtetls as literature is still an underdeveloped area, but there are innumerable possibilities for further research.

With the shift from traditional book publishing to digital publishing, the future of *yizkor* books is online. Cyber-shtetls are necessary contributors to genealogical research, and mostly because they are accessible online. However, only one essay in Horowitz' collection broaches the internet, and it does so in a historiographical way, simply pointing out that some *yizkor* books have online versions. The "wiki" potential of cyber-shtetls is an understudied yet burgeoning aspect of online information dissemination. People from all over the world can make their materials available to an internet audience, which is much more convenient than *yizkor* books' typical publication process of soliciting submissions, sorting through them, and compiling them. Looking at the ways in which cyber-shtetls come together likely verifies what this dissertation proffers about Jewish communities of location, though from the creation side, rather than the end-user side.

The third chapter touches upon legacy pilgrimages as a component of personal genealogy Web sites and blogs. Legacy pilgrimages and the literature that results from them would be a wonderful extension of Chapter Three. As travel becomes easier,

making the world smaller and more accessible, heritage tourism becomes more prevalent. The novels and memoirs inspired by such journeys make for fascinating explorations of identity and personal narrative. Sometimes epic in its execution, such as Daniel Mendelsohn's memoir, legacy pilgrimage literature's portrayal of the hero, the characters met along the way, the obstacles overcome, and the suspenseful resolution are all worth looking at more closely.

Generally, this dissertation's focus on digital media reflects a trend in the humanities that is expected to grow. Textuality and intertextuality take on quite different implications than traditional text-based studies do. Instead of footnotes, Web pages have hyperlinks; instead of turning pages, users click through to other pages; instead of black letters and white space, the internet offers a multitude of font and background colors, as well as other visual and aural "tricks." What do these differences between online texts and traditional books imply about the Web and the people who use it? How do animation, video, and other technological features affect one's reading of the text they accompany? What else can the internet offer as technology advances? These questions and their answers compose a good part of internet studies and will evolve as the internet gains even more prevalence.

The four primary fields of study that influence this dissertation are media studies, heritage studies, Jewish studies, and literary studies. Yet there are so many more directions in which this research could go; the commemorative capacity of Jewish genealogical Web sites and blogs, differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic genealogical research and resources, and even issues of gender are all possible avenues for continued work. Cultural studies, broadly defined, is made of innovative, instructive

approaches to identity and community formation, whether through communities' literary endeavors or through their cultural practices and traditions. This dissertation explores the Web sites as both literature and cultural practice, and attempts to be both innovative and instructive. In the end, the internet has enormous influence over the quest for heritage; Jewish genealogy, with all its intrinsic complexities reaps its benefits.

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- . *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

RACHEL LEAH JABLON

Comparative Literature Program • 2116 Tawes Hall • College Park, MD 20742
rjablon@umd.edu

EDUCATION

University of Maryland; College Park, MD

Ph.D., Comparative Literature, Anticipated May 2012

Dissertation: "Virtual Legacies: Genealogy, the Internet, and Jewish Identity"

Director: Sheila Jelen

The internet allows for new kinds of Jewish identities, ones that transcend national and linguistic borders but revolve around shared kin, interest in specific locales, and experience of the Holocaust. Jewish genealogical Web sites, cyber-shtetls and online *yizkor* books, and personal genealogy Web sites and blogs signify the internet's appeal as an accessible, indelible, and adaptable means of Jewish self-representation.

Jewish Studies Graduate Certificate, Dec. 2004

M.A., Comparative Literature, May 2004

Thesis: "Playing for the 'Center': 'Marginal Modernism' in Sh. An-sky's 'Der Dybuk' and Zora Neale Hurston's *Polk County*"

Director: Miriam Isaacs

University of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, PA

B.A., *Cum Laude*, Comparative Literature with Distinction, May 1999

LANGUAGES

Hebrew (fluent)

French (proficient)

Yiddish (near-fluent)

Arabic (literate)

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

"Report on the Fifteenth Annual ALSC Conference: Seminars: Historicisms." *Literary Matters: The Newsletter of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers* 3.1 (Winter 2010): 12-13.

"Undergraduate Writing Skills; Or, Whatever Happened to Basic Grammar?" *Professors Professing: Higher Education Speaks Out*. Special issue of *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 84.4 (Fall 2004): 57-58.

"Witnessing as *Shivah*; Memoir as *Yizkor*: The Formulation of Holocaust Survivor Literature as *Gemilut Khasadim*." *Journal of Popular Culture* 38.2 (2004): 306-324.

"Teaching Ethnic American Literary Anthologies." *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 7.4 (Winter 2003): 107-111.

Book Reviews

African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism by Alicia A. Kent. *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 27.1 (2010): 227-228.

ACADEMIC HONORS

Ann G. Wylie Dissertation Fellowship, University of Maryland, Jan.-May 2009
Scholar-in-Residency, Holocaust Awareness Institute, Univ. of Denver, Aug. 2006-Apr. 2007
Summer Seminar Residency, American Academy for Jewish Research, June 2006
Dissertation Fellowship, Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver, Jan.-Aug. 2006
Dorot Research Fellowship, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, June-Aug. 2005
William Brigman JPC Award for Best Graduate Student Essay, 2004
University Teaching and Learning Certificate, University of Maryland, May 2007

TEACHING AND EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

University of Maryland; College Park, MD

Undergraduate Advisor, The Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies, Aug. 2010-present

Visiting Lecturer, Hebrew Language and Culture Program, Aug.-Dec. 2010
HEBR 111: Elementary Hebrew I (2 sections)

Instructor, Comparative Literature Program, Aug. 2002-May 2005
CMLT 235: Introduction to Literatures of Africa and the African Diaspora (5 sections)
CMLT 270: Global Literature and Social Change (1 section)
CMLT 214: Film, Form, and Culture (2 discussion sections)

Facilitator, Intergroup Dialogue Program, Student Intercultural Learning Center, Aug. 2002-May 2003; Aug.-Dec. 2005
EDPL 338K: Socio-economic Status Dialogue (1 section)
EDPL 298: Muslim Women-Jewish Women Dialogue (1 section)
EDPL 298: Black-Jewish Dialogue (2 sections)

Instructor, First-year Writing Program, English Department, Jan. 2001-Aug. 2002
ENGL 101: Introduction to Academic Writing (4 sections)

University of Denver; Denver, CO

Scholar-in-Residence, Holocaust Awareness Institute, Aug. 2006-Apr. 2007
JUST 3700: The Holocaust through Film (2 sections)
JUST 3703: Special Topics: Holocaust Literature (1 section)

Posen Visiting Lecturer in Secular Jewish Culture, Center for Judaic Studies, Jan.-June 2006
JUST 3703: Special Topics: Modern Hebrew Literature (1 section)
JUST 2702: Jewish Identity in the Diaspora (1 section)

Arapahoe Community College; Littleton, CO

Instructor, English Department, Aug.-Dec. 2007
ENG 121: English Composition I (1 section)

PRESENTATIONS

Conferences

“*Yizkor* Books: Must-Reads for Jewish Genealogists”
International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies; Washington, D.C.; Aug. 2011

“Between History and Imagination: The Case of *Yizkor* Books”
“Borderlines;” University of Maryland; College Park, MD; Mar. 2011

- “Songs of the Jewess: The Role of Music in the Novels of Emma Wolf”
Society for the Study of American Women Writers; Philadelphia, PA; Oct. 2009
- “Jewish Legacy-Pilgrimage Literature: ‘It’s Important That a Child Know from Where She’s Come’”
Association of Literary Scholars and Critics; Denver, CO; Oct. 2009.
- “Crossing the Boundaries of Memory: *Yizkor* Books and Jewish America”
“Complicating the Compass: Displacing Directionality within American Studies;”
University of Colorado; Boulder, CO; Sept. 2008
- “The Internet, the Holocaust, and Virtual Jewish Communities”
“Text and Techne;” University of Maryland; College Park, MD; Mar. 2008
- “The Re/liability of Holocaust Memories between Subjective Truth and Historical Accuracy I: Memoirs, Films, Museums,” Chair and Respondent
Association for Jewish Studies; Washington, D.C.; Dec. 2005
- “Tess Slesinger’s and Gwendolyn Brooks’ Abortion Testimonies: The Confused Narrators in Slesinger’s ‘Missis Flinders’ and Brooks’ ‘the mother’”
Society for the Study of American Women Writers; Philadelphia, PA; Nov. 2006
- “From Holocaust to Hollywood: The Manipulation of Identity in Three Films”
Literature/Film Association; Towson, MD; Nov. 2006
- “Cultural Interplay in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*: Paule Marshall’s Fleeting References to Non-Barbadians”
American Women Writers of Color; Baltimore, MD; Nov. 2004
- “Witnessing as *Shivah*; Memoir as *Yizkor*: The Formulation of Holocaust Survivor Literature as *Gemilut Khasadim*”
Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association; San Antonio, TX; Apr. 2004
Winner of the 2004 Brigman *JPC* Award for Best Graduate Student Essay
- “Elie Wiesel’s *Night* as Paradigm: Holocaust Survivor Memoir as *Gemilut Khasadim*”
UMD Graduate Research Interaction Day; College Park, MD; Apr. 2003
Winner of Award for Best Presentation for Panel
- “The Academic Imperialism of Norton Anthologies: Canonization and ‘Teaching the Conflicts’”
“Expanding the Interdisciplinary Conversation;” University of Utah; Oct. 2002

Invited Talks

- “Ever Heard of a *Yizkor* Book? Required Reading for Jewish Genealogists and Community Historians”
Jewish Genealogical Society of Colorado; Boulder, CO; Jan. 2011

SELECTED CAMPUS SERVICE

Arapahoe Community College; Littleton, CO

Participating Instructor, Diagnostic Writing Project, Composition Program, Aug.-Dec. 2007

University of Denver; Denver, CO

Planning Committee Member, SHEMA: Sounds of Jewish Culture, Nov. 2006-Mar. 2007
Faculty Member, Story Circles, Partners in Learning, Division of Student Life, May 2006

University of Maryland; College Park, MD

Member, Academic Planning Advisory Committee, Aug. 2003-May 2004
Senator, University Senate, May 2003-May 2004
Member, Committee on Student Conduct, University Senate, Sept. 2002-May 2004
Board Member, Honor Council, Office of Judicial Programs, Aug. 2000-May 2006

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Nominations Committee Member, Jewish Genealogy Society of Greater Washington (2011)
Nominations Committee Chair, Jewish Genealogical Society of Colorado (2010)
Literary Committee Member, Mizel Arts and Culture Center (2009-2010)
Selection Committee Member, Jewish Learning Initiative Grant Program (2009-2010)
Board Member, Roots and Branches Foundation (2008-2009)
Board Member, Yiddish of Greater Washington (2005-present)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (2009-present)
Association for Jewish Studies (2005-2006; 2007-2008)
Society for the Study of American Women Writers (2006-present)
Literature/Film Association (2006-present)
Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (2003)
Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society, Sigma Circle (2002-present)

REFERENCES

Sheila Jelen, Associate Professor of English

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