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Our Jewish Lublin Roots: What do They Mean to Us? Preliminary Findings from an Exploratory Online Study*

Abstract: This article describes two aspects of an exploratory international online study conducted by written questionnaire in the years 2021–2022. One focus of the study was on the personal importance/meaning participants ascribed to their Jewish Lublin roots. A second focus was on the role Lublin stories played in participants' lives, i.e., the presence/absence of such stories in family life, the age/stage of life when Lublin stories were first heard, the content and tone of these stories, and whether a relationship could be detected between the narratives heard and importance ascribed by the participants to their Lublin roots. The participants were those who, or whose ancestors/families, originated from Lublin but left the city decades ago, mostly during the twentieth century. These participants now live in countries around the world. Preliminary quantitative information and qualitative analyses hinted at differences among the study's sixty respondents. These differences were most often associated with (a) the period of history during which respondents or their families left Lublin; (b) how closely/directly the lives of those who left had been touched by events of the Holocaust; and (c) how much time had elapsed, and how many generations came, between those who left Lublin and their now-living descendants. Selected results are discussed.

Keywords: Jewish Lublin heritage, family narratives and adult identity, descendants of Holocaust survivors, postmemory.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo Żydów lubelskich, narracje rodzinne i tożsamość dorosłych, potomkowie ocalałych z Holokaustu, postpamięć.

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Introduction

Philosophers have grappled with the concept of identity, or self, for many centuries.[1] In more recent times, researchers from other academic disciplines have also made it a focus of study.[2] While there is no agreement as to the precise definition of these intangible terms, psychologists, on the whole, have come to view identity as some form of mental representation of self that may include global and/or specific, conscious and/or unconscious, personal and/or social, qualities. Moreover, these qualities are not necessarily stable self-representations across one's life span.[3]

Studies have also focused on identity as it relates to heritage, which UNESCO has defined as "our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations," adding that our heritage is a "source of life and inspiration."[4] The focus of this area of research has often been on relatively recent immigration patterns and on immigrants' adjustment to their adopted countries.[5] While not centrally related to the main themes of the present study, these studies have suggested that the best long-term adaptation patterns by immigrants are usually promoted by a strong new-country national identity combined with a strong ethnic identity where one's heritage and link to one's roots are maintained.[6]

Researchers studying, more specifically, Jewish diaspora migrations have focused either on early immigrant associations or hometown societies

[1] Daniel Sollberger, "On Identity: From a Philosophical Point of View," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* 7 (2013), 1:29.

[2] Guenther L. Corey, Emily Wilton, Rachel Fernandes, "Identity," in Virgil Zeigler-Hill, Todd K. Shackelford (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (2020), 2136–2145, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311765669_Identity [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024]. See also Sanaz Talaifar, William Swann, "Self and Identity," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (28 Mar. 2018), https://oxfordre.com [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024].

[3] Ibid.

[4] UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972), https://whc.unesco.org [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024].

[5] Peter F. Biehl, Douglas G. Comer, Christopher Prescott, Hilary Soderland (eds.), *Identity and Heritage: Contemporary Challenges in a Globalized World* (Cham, 2015). See also Feng Hou, Grant Schellenberg, John Berry, "Patterns and Determinants of Immigrants' Sense of Belonging to Canada and Their Source Country," *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series* (2016), Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2016383-eng.htm [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024]; as well as Jean S. Phinney, Gabriel Horenczyk, Karmela Liebkind, Paul Vedder, "Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective," *Journal of Social Issues* 57 (2001), 3:493–510.

[6] Ibid.

in the United States (e.g., the *landsmanshaftn*),[7] on diaspora Jews' relationship/connectivity with Israel[8] or have had, as their main subject, recent Jewish migrations.[9]

The present study

Lublin had once been an important center of diverse Jewish life, learning, and culture, with the Jewish community comprising one third of the city's pre-Holocaust population. The vast majority of Lublin Jews, however, did not survive the Shoah. Most of those who did, as well as those who left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century, settled abroad. Since the early 1990s, a dedicated group comprising Lublin's "Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN" [The Grodzka Gate – NN Theater][10] has worked tirelessly to recover and piece together information about the once-vibrant Lublin Jewish community and to honor it. An aspect of this work has included the fostering of rich relationships with former Jewish Lubliners and their descendants across the globe, resulting in an international community of people who are highly engaged with their Jewish Lublin heritage. Inspired by this, the present author wondered whether Lubliners and their descendants, in general, including those who do not necessarily form the wider global Brama Grodzka community and those who may not be members of Lubliner groups or organizations (e.g., hometown immigrant societies like *landsmanshaftn*) where these exist, would also show high levels of interest in their Jewish Lublin roots. Thus, an exploratory study was designed to (a) sample the diversity of meaning the now-dispersed living Lubliners and their descendants ascribe to their Jewish Lublin legacy and

[7] See, e.g., Nathan M. Kaganoff, "The Jewish Landsmanshaftn in New York City in the Period Preceding World War I," *American Jewish History* 76 (1986), 1:56–66.

[8] Alain Dieckhoff, "The Jewish Diaspora and Israel: Belonging at Distance?," *Nations and Nationalism* 23 (2017), 2:271–288. See also Robert A. Kenedy, Uzi Rebhun, Carl S. Ehrlich (eds.), *Israel and the Diaspora: Jewish Connectivity in a Changing World* (Cham, 2022).

[9] Sam Andrews, "Iraqi Jews and Heritage under Threat: Negotiating and Managing an Identity from Afar," *Diaspora* 20 (2011), 3:327–353. See also Robert A. Kenedy, "The Jewish Diaspora from France to Montreal: Situational Identity and Multi-Centered Diasporas," in Laura De Pretto, Gloria Macri, Catherine Wong (eds.), *Diasporas: Revisiting and Discovering* (Oxfordshire, 2010), 71–79.

[10] For a description of the "Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN" and a fuller history of Jewish Lublin, see their website teatrnn@tnn.lublin.pl [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024]. For Lublin's Jewish history, see also *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, yivoencyclopedia.org [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024].

(b) allow participants to share their views on the importance this legacy played in their lives and in the formation of their identity as adults in society. Unlike the focus on recent immigrant groups, the present study's participants were living Jewish Lubliners and descendants of Lublin Jews who, or whose families, left Lublin decades ago. Most were born, and all presently reside, in countries around the world, including Israel.

Additionally, as occurs with most other populations, Jews' representations of their historical past influence their constructed present identities.[11] A second exploratory aspect of the study, then, was to see whether, and to what extent, the stories/narratives heard about Lublin, as people were growing up, played a role in influencing their adult identity and the meaning they now ascribe to their Lublin heritage. Thus, the study examined the tone and content of Lublin narratives heard by the study's participants, at what age these were first heard, and how prominent these stories were in the lives of participants' families.

The following two quotations, taken from written personal narratives about Lublin life, and unlike each other in tone and content, may serve as illustrations of the differences in stories possibly heard by the study's participants:

> We had a beautiful park in Lublin, the Ogród Saski, with wide paths, fountains, comfortable benches. There were trees and flowers everywhere. The park shared its charms with us in all seasons. On summer week-ends, an orchestra often played. In autumn, the leaves and chestnuts gave off a wonderful scent. And in winter, we used to walk with snowflakes falling on us and all around us. We always had so much to talk about. We were young, in love, and dreaming of a happy future. And we adored our city.[12]

> "How come you are carrying a basket today . . . You're always telling me what a big sin it is to carry anything on the Sabbath." Babbe's lips began to tremble. She lowered her eyes. Her bad arm . . . pressed against her chest, began to shake . . . She began to cry. I reached out and took her basket from her arm. She didn't try to stop me. When I looked inside, I was so revolted by what I saw that I threw the basket into the gutter. Babbe had every reason to be crying. If I could have, I would have cried with her. But I was too angry. I shook with rage and my guts felt on fire. At that moment, I could have burned down the whole world. Babbe and I stood facing each other, drowning in shame . . . "I don't want you to beg! Do you understand?

[11] Ira Robinson, Naftali S. Cohn, Lorenzo DiTommaso (eds.), *History, Memory, and Jewish Identity* (Brookline, 2015).

[12] Hela Wais, prewar Lublin memories. During the Nazi occupation of Lublin, the author, as a young woman, escaped to the USSR, later settling in Canada. Unpublished memoir (Toronto, 1991).

> I don't want to eat begged bread! I would rather starve to death!" . . . After this humiliation, I decided to look for the quickest way out of Lublin . . . I felt that the whole city knew I ate begged bread.[13]

Method

The study was completed through an online written questionnaire in the years 2021–2022. The questionnaire, developed by the author, was accessed online, through a widely disseminated link. The questions were written in English, but respondents were invited to reply in a language of their choice. The questionnaire asked for factual/demographic information and for respondents to share their family histories in their own words. Throughout the questionnaire, people were asked to rate themselves (from 0 to 5) on a number of scales relating to the importance they placed on their Lublin roots, to what extent their Lublin roots influenced important life choices and their views of themselves as adults in society, how prominent Lublin stories were in their family life across generations, etc. Primarily, however, respondents addressed, and elaborated on, the study's themes in their own words and in sentences and paragraphs of any length. In this way, the study's approach was largely qualitative, relying heavily on respondents' written self-report answers. The responses to sixty returned questionnaires were then closely examined and, in a bi-directional approach, drawing on Grounded Theory and other qualitative methods,[14] analyses sought to detect important themes and trends from the written content provided by the respondents.

The study itself was announced and promoted internationally on the "Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN" website, on social-media pages, through Jewish genealogy groups around the world, through Holocaust museums and organizations, through Lubliners' groups, and through internal posts of a variety of Jewish clubs and organizations that might have Lubliners, or their descendants, as their members. We attempted to cast as wide a net

[13] From Szloma Renglich, *When Paupers Dance: Coming of Age in Pre-World War II Poland*, trans. Zigmund Jampel (Montreal, 1988), 128.

[14] For an introduction to Grounded Theory, see Ylona Chun Tie, Melanie Birks, Karen Francis, "Grounded Theory Research: A Design Framework for Novice Researchers," *SAGE Open Medicine* 7 (2019), https://typeset.io/papers/grounded-theory-research-a-design-framework-for-novice-16ls1blk7d [retrieved: 5 Apr. 2024]; see also Barney G. Glaser, Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Mill Valley, 1967). For an introduction to other qualitative research approaches, see Patrik Aspers, Ugo Corte, "What Is Qualitative in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Sociology* 42 (2019), 139–160.

as possible in order to find not only Lubliners and descendants who were members of Lubliner organizations, but also to reach those without such links. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, with its accompanying lockdowns when clubs and organizations suspended in-person meetings, meant that we had to rely strictly on electronic announcements and promotions of the study, perhaps not reaching important segments of the target population.

Results

Profile of the sixty respondents:

Gender of respondents: women – 60%; men – 40%.

Age of respondents: 61–70: 35%; 71–80: 30%; 51–60: 20%; 41–50: 7%; 81–90: 5%; 31–40: 3%; no one under age 31 or over age 90 responded.

Respondents' current countries of residence: USA – 35%; Israel – 30%; Canada – 12%; France and UK, each – 6%; Australia – 5%; Belgium, Germany, and Brazil, each – 2%.

Respondents' countries of birth: USA – 26%; Israel – 22%; Poland – 18%; Canada and France, each – 6%; UK and Australia, each – 4%; Belgium, Switzerland, USSR, Germany, Peru, Brazil, and Argentina, each – 2%.

Personal connection to Lublin: born/raised in Lublin – 5%; descendants of those born/raised in Lublin – 95%.

When did respondents or their families leave Lublin? Of the small number of those born/raised in Lublin, half said they left immediately before WWII and the Nazi occupation of Lublin. The other half said they left after WWII. As the absolute number of those born/raised in Lublin was very small, they were included in the larger group of respondents who were descendants and who fell into the following four distinct groups:

(a) those whose families **left Lublin long before the Nazi occupation of the city**, i.e., before 1930, most leaving earlier than this in the twentieth century (40% of respondents);

(b) those who, or whose families, **left immediately before WWII and the Nazi occupation of Lublin**, mostly in response to a clear risk of war (25% of respondents);

(c) those who, or whose families, **escaped from Lublin while the city was already under Nazi occupation**, most fleeing eastward to the Soviet Union (22% of respondents); and

(d) those who, or whose families, **left Lublin post-WWII**, mostly before 1960 (13% of respondents). This last group was relatively small and represented a mix of complex situations, e.g., hiding or passing as non-Jews in Lublin or surrounding area during the entire Nazi occupation, escaping from Lublin during the occupation but returning to the city while Lublin was still under occupation, or escaping during the occupation and returning to the city post-war.

When examining the above breakdown, it seemed reasonable to assume that those in groups **(b)**, **(c)**, and **(d)**, in addition to having had families who left Lublin later than the families of those in group **(a)**, could be viewed as having, or having had, families who had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust, i.e., by a more immediate risk/threat to life itself.[15] This led the author to ask whether responses provided by the above four groups to questions of meaning and identity, as well as the Lublin stories they reported hearing, would differ from group to group in some meaningful ways. A decision was then made to break down participants' responses according to the above four groups and to examine whether differences among these groups could be detected.

Personal significance of Lublin roots and identity as adults. As to the set of questions pertaining to the personal significance of Lublin roots and the extent to which these roots played a role in a respondent's present identity as an adult in society, a pattern seemed to emerge. When combining the ratings to this set of questions for each participant, each rating themselves on scales from 0 to 5, the average rating for those whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century was approximately 2.5, whereas the average for the other three groups (i.e., those whose families may be considered as having been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust) was approximately 3.5, with the group whose families escaped during the Nazi occupation of Lublin averaging the highest, almost 4.00. This seemed to suggest that those whose families had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust experienced their Lublin roots as playing a more important role in their lives, and in their identity formation, than those whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth

[15] The author is in no way implying here that those families who left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century and were settled abroad by the time of the Holocaust were left untouched by it.

century.[16] Interestingly, one participant whose family did leave early in the twentieth century stated that, "We all need to be from somewhere . . . knowing about your roots helps understand who and what you are."[17] Another participant whose family also left early in the twentieth century wrote, "I view myself as a granddaughter of Poland, and of the Lublin district in particular." Many in this group, however, indicated that Lublin had only become significant for them in the relatively recent past as they had become interested, more generally, in family genealogy.

In contrast to those whose families left Lublin early in the twentieth century, examples of frequent answers by the group whose families escaped during the Nazi occupation of Lublin were as follows: One respondent writes,

> I am aware of having been born not that many years following the Lublin world's destruction and that I would have/could have been a product of my parents, yet lived in a very different world, had the Shoah not happened . . . My identity was totally shaped by my Lublin roots, Poland, and the Shoah.

Another writes, "I . . . feel a strong connection to the city that my parents so loved. My roots are planted there." Yet another writes,

> knowing my parents' Lublin stories, being always aware that their dreams and plans had been cut short by the Holocaust, hearing about the large numbers of relatives who did not survive and whose presence in my life I was deprived of, made Lublin and my Lublin roots prominent in my mind.

It is important to note that, in the combined group of those whose families had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust, a very small number of respondents did state that, although Lublin was/is significant in their lives, it mostly holds significance because of the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust and the resulting trauma the participants absorbed from their parents. For example, one respondent writes, "The Holocaust . . . has shaped much about who I am, how I grew up, and who I have become."

[16] Due mainly to the small numbers of participants falling into each subgroup of respondents, the quantitative results reported in this article were not subjected to complex statistical analyses that would indicate *statistically significant differences* between/among groups of participants. The term *statistical significance*, when applied to quantitative comparisons, is a term that refers to agreed-upon statistical result probabilities. The present results, then, should not be interpreted as indications of statistically significant differences.

[17] All participant quotations are provided with participants' permission to be quoted anonymously.

Influence of Lublin legacy on important life choices. In response to the question about Lublin heritage influencing important life choices, the 0 to 5 scale ratings followed the same pattern as those in the section above, with the average scores about a point lower. But even in the group whose families left Lublin early in the twentieth century there were those who stated their Lublin roots had a significant impact on their life choices. For example, one person writes, "I did not grow up religious, however my grandparents from Lublin were religious. I am certain that this has played a role in my return to a more traditional Jewish lifestyle." Another person writes, "Knowing my family's history and the murder of my extended family made me very sensitive to racism and to the plight of Palestinians. I feel compelled to speak out at all injustice." A third writes, "My ethics and values, which I perceive as being similar to my Lublin family, underpin my entire existence."

Examples of responses to the above question, from the groups whose families were more directly touched by events of the Holocaust, are: "I try to combat hatred and antisemitism in all forms because of my parents' history." A second person writes, "having had two parents victims of the war in their flesh, their hearts, their beings, us, their children were their revenge, we could not disappoint them . . . this fact leads me in particular to work for the refugees."

An interesting point to note here is as follows: As stated above, differences did emerge among the groups in their ratings of how much Lublin roots influenced their life choices. Despite this, across all groups, there were respondents who indicated that their Lublin roots have inspired them, especially as adults, to learn/study more about their family history and the history of the Holocaust. Moreover, many stated they are active in social-justice work as a direct result of their Lublin roots.

Stories about Lublin: When first heard and from whom. With respect to the question of when participants first heard about Lublin, over 30% of those whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century said that, if they heard stories about Lublin at all, they usually heard them in adulthood, often as they or their children embarked on a family-history project—a project often initiated by their child's school assignment. Those in this group who did report hearing Lublin stories in childhood said they had heard these from a grandparent or a great-grandparent.

Contrary to the above, the other three groups reported hearing Lublin stories at a much younger age, and none reported they had heard about

Lublin as late as in their adulthood. The respondents in these three groups usually heard stories from a parent, who, most often, was a Holocaust survivor. In the group of those whose families escaped from Lublin during the Nazi occupation, over 92% said they had first heard about Lublin at such a "very young" age, in such "very early childhood," that they cannot remember a time when they "did not hear." To quote respondents from this group, one writes, "I have heard about Lublin all my life . . . I have never visited Lublin, but I am familiar with the names of the streets . . . as if I had lived there." A second writes, "I just always knew." A third respondent writes, "Because I grew up on Lublin stories, they became part of my life." A fourth one states, "Lublin was always part of the 'landscape'." A fifth one writes, "I heard stories about Lublin all my life. My parents spoke often about their life in Lublin. They were very close with their Lubliner friends. I . . . spent time with them and . . . heard their stories, their experiences. I . . . absorbed it all." And finally, "Since we had no family, friends replaced family and a lot of friends were Lubliners, so we heard a lot of stories about Lublin . . . We lived a very full secular Jewish life—always reminded about our roots."

Stories about Lublin: What sort of stories people heard. The stories respondents reported hearing about Lublin can be characterized as, and grouped into, the following: (a) mostly positive/uplifting stories, stories of a happy life; (b) mostly negative/sad stories, stories of a difficult life; (c) a mix of positive and negative stories; and (d) no stories heard at all.

The stories characterized as positive included ones of accounts of generations of close, loving Lublin families; of descriptions of carefree prewar Lublin youth; of Lubliners' love for the city; and of pride in Lublin as an important center of learning and culture.

The stories characterized as negative most often carried themes of extreme economic hardships (sometimes due to early parental loss), and references to accounts of antisemitism. For example, one respondent writes, "my father was 13 when he lost his parents; they were seven children; he left the region to find work . . . in salt mines . . . he decided to leave Poland at age 16." Another respondent writes, "My father said that when he went outside the Jewish area, he was harassed by gentiles . . . [who] would pull at [what] he wore and curse him, so he made a decision to leave Poland and . . . left at age 20."

Stories characterized as a mix of positive and negative stories heard by participants were often reported as accounts of difficult economic times,

either early in the twentieth century, or later, during the worldwide economic Depression. These stories, however, were often mixed with happy memories of a personal, and family, life.

When looking at the sixty respondents as a whole, 38% reported hearing what could be characterized as mostly positive stories; 15% reported hearing what could be characterized as mostly negative stories; 27% reported hearing a mix of the above; and 20% reported that they had heard no Lublin stories at all as they were growing up.

Those respondents who reported hearing no Lublin stories while growing up described this state of not-hearing as one of great personal loss and lingering sadness. To quote one respondent, "Not much . . . my grandmother [only] starts existing on the boat to America." Another respondent writes,

> My aunt didn't want anyone to know that she was born in Europe. She actually slapped my Mom in the arm when my Mom mentioned it by accident when I was about 10 years old. My aunt hated talking about it. Apparently, it wasn't uncommon in her day because she was looked down upon for being an immigrant. She had an accent and had to learn English.

When looking more closely at whether differences could be detected in the kind of Lublin stories heard, among the four groups broken down according to **when their families left Lublin**, some interesting differences emerged. These differences, at times, seemed counterintuitive. For example, only those in the **group whose families left Lublin early in the twentieth century** reported hearing what could be characterized as mostly negative stories, while a negligible fraction, in this group, said they had heard mostly positive ones. A few individuals, in this group, did say they had heard a mix of positive and negative Lublin stories. It is also interesting to note that the great majority of respondents who reported hearing no stories at all were found among those whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century. This included families who left both for Palestine and for other destinations.

When looking at the stories heard by **those whose families left Lublin later and whose lives had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust**, the results seemed almost reversed. Here, a strong majority reported they had heard mostly positive stories, some reported they had heard a mix of positive and negative stories, and not a single person reported hearing what may be characterized as mostly negative Lublin stories.

Conversations/stories about Lublin and their role in family life. With respect to the extent to which narratives about Lublin had been prominent in a respondent's home life, what stood out immediately was the high average rating by the group whose families escaped Lublin during the occupation. On a scale of 0 to 5, the average rating for this group was 3.5, with the other groups averaging up to two points lower. The following are examples of quotes from the group whose families left during the occupation of Lublin: "my parents spoke about their Lublin roots so much, it was often a topic of conversation." Another person writes, "my mother . . . would go into minute details of her life in Lublin." Yet another person says, "My dad would recount endless stories about his home and family so we could almost picture the vibrant life." And finally, "It was important for my dad to talk about where he grew up and what life was like as a child, teenager, and young adult."

Example quotes from those whose families left immediately before the occupation were as follows: "My mother was never able to tell me about her family until 1990. She had terrible feelings because she was the only survivor." Another person writes, "It was always difficult for my father to talk about his life in Poland mainly because of those who disappeared there."

Finally, examples from those whose families left earlier in the twentieth century were: "My parents were not the immigrants. As a first generation American, my dad didn't . . . talk much about whatever his parents told him of their childhoods." And another writes, "Not really, as my mom didn't know." Interestingly, one person in this group did write, "I spoke to my mother and her siblings frequently about Lublin." But many, in this group, said that Lublin stories, as well as their Lublin roots, played absolutely no role in their relationship with their parents or in their family's life.

As far as the prominence of Lublin stories in respondents' relationships with their children, the three groups whose families can be viewed as having been more directly affected by events of the Holocaust averaged over 2.5 on the 0 to 5 scale, while those whose families left earlier in the twentieth century averaged around 1.0.

Examples from the above first three groups are: "I definitely talked about Lublin." Another person writes, "not so much when my daughter was young . . . but much more now." A third person says, "Yes, it is important that my children know where their grandparents were born and about their past." Yet another person writes, "My . . . daughters went on a youth

group trip to Poland. I always believed it was important for them to see." And, "Yes, I've done my best to tell the same stories to my son."

In contrast to the above, examples from the group whose families left earlier in the twentieth century are: "I told them a little and showed them photos, but it's five to six generations back and it's distant for them." Another person writes, "Yes, from the standpoint of explaining my identity and our family history." But another says, "I have one son, and I made sure he knew about his family's connection to Poland." Many, in this group, however, stated that Lublin itself played no role at all in their relationship with their children.

Lublin stories seem to have been less prominent in people's relationships with their grandchildren. The average, on a scale of 0 to 5, was approximately 1.0 for the groups whose families had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust, and 0.5 for the group whose relatives left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century. The number of responses to this question, however, was relatively low as some said they had no grandchildren while others stated their grandchildren were far too young to raise family-history issues with them.

Relationship between Lublin stories heard and importance ascribed to Lublin roots. Participants' ratings to questions of how prominent Lublin stories were in their families across generations were combined for each of the groups separately (i.e., for the groups differentiated according to when their families left Lublin). These aggregate ratings showed that the group whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century averaged 1.6, with respect to the prominence of stories in family conversations. The other three groups (i.e., those whose families had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust), on the other hand, averaged ratings above 2.00, with the group whose families escaped during the occupation showing the highest average rating of 2.85.

Ratings to all questions that can be viewed as pertaining to meaning and identity were also combined separately for each of the four groups differentiated according to when they or their families left Lublin. These aggregate ratings revealed that the group whose families left earlier in the twentieth century rated an average of 2.58 on the scales of 0 to 5, while the other three groups (i.e., those whose families had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust) revealed ratings above 3.00, with the group whose families escaped during the occupation providing the highest average rating of 3.68. Therefore, looking at the ratings in this

larger aggregate form again hinted at the greater role Lublin stories and Lublin roots played in the identity formation of those whose families had been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust.

Despite the above aggregate ratings hinting at group differences, an important point to note about the above comparisons is that, across all groups, those respondents who stated they had heard Lublin stories as children said that these stories had a strong impact on their lives as adults. For example, echoing what many of these participants wrote, one person said, “Lublin has always been a part of me.” Another participant said, “my identity was totally shaped by . . . Lublin.”

Discussion

It is important to remember that the present study had not been designed as a highly controlled laboratory study that would provide definitive answers. Rather, its method and overall approach were exploratory, with the results best viewed as giving us a preliminary “taste” of the importance/meaning people ascribe to their Jewish Lublin roots. The results also provide a snapshot of the narratives participants reported hearing about Lublin during the time they were growing up and the role these narratives played in family lives across generations. Given the exploratory nature of the study, what can be detected in its results that may point to possible interesting areas for further research and exploration?

The present study did not compare the responses of the study’s participants with those of Jewish descendants from other cities nor with responses of descendants of non-Jewish Lubliners. Still, despite the absence of these comparisons, the respondents of the present study expressed what seemed like an overall high degree of interest in their Jewish Lublin roots—interest in both their personal family histories as well as in the history of Lublin itself and its pre-WWII Jewish community.

The seemingly high degree of interest expressed by this study’s participants is encouraging and heartening. It may, however, in part, be accounted for by the self-selected nature of the study.

First, the study was promoted with the help of Jewish organizations around the world. In this way, we ran the risk of reaching only those people who were already somewhat engaged with their Jewish heritage. An extreme example of this can be seen in our attempts to enlist Israeli participants. We had virtually no response from potential Israeli

participants until the leadership of the Israeli Lubliners group helped promote the study. This then resulted in Israeli participation. But, as most of these Israeli respondents were members of the Israeli Lubliners group, a group with strong ties to “Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN” in Lublin, we can assume that they would evince high levels of interest in their Lublin roots.

Second, participation in the study was voluntary. Consequently, it may be reasonable to assume that those with an already-existing relatively high level of interest in their Lublin roots were the ones who were motivated to complete the questionnaire. Conversely, we cannot know why those who chose not to participate did so.

Third, as this study was publicized and conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, during multiple local lockdowns when no in-person gatherings took place, we had to rely solely on electronic communication both for the publicizing of the study and for the gathering of data. This meant that only those who could be reached through social media, through electronic announcements, etc. could be informed about the study and invited to participate.

And, fourth, even if reached and informed about the study, this was, after all, an online study necessitating at least some computer literacy. Whom, and how many people, the study missed in this way can only be speculated. For example, did we miss the very elderly Lubliners? Are there other pockets of Jewish Lubliner communities we might have neglected by making the study an online one?

Another set of the present study’s limitations can be attributed to the limited number of respondents on whose replies our impressions are based. Only sixty questionnaires were returned in an intact enough form to be considered for any sort of analysis. And, while we are able to learn much from the people who responded, rigorous quantitative statistical analyses of data became difficult or impossible when attempting to examine and compare subgroups of respondents. The numbers in some of these subgroups were too small for meaningful quantitative comparisons.

Other issues to take into account, in terms of limitations of the present study, are related to language. The online questionnaire was written in English and necessitated at least a rudimentary understanding of the language or, alternatively, the technical computer skills to translate the questionnaire online. This, too, may have prevented some from responding. Moreover, while people had the option of replying in a language of their choice, almost all chose to reply in English, even when this may not

have been their strongest language. This situation may have created misunderstandings. Regardless, as this was a study that allowed respondents to express themselves at length, the close reading of the written content allowed for much to be gleaned from respondents' answers.

Despite the above-described shortcomings, the results of the present study do hint at the possibility that a relationship exists between the narratives about Lublin the participants heard as they were growing up and the meaning they ascribe to their Jewish Lublin roots. The results also hint at some within-group differences. The sort of stories participants heard and whether they heard them at all, as well as at what age they heard these stories, differed among the subgroups of respondents, as did the acknowledged influence of Lublin roots on participants' current identities and on their lives as adults. In all, compared with the group whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century, those participants whose families can be viewed as having been more directly touched by events of the Holocaust (a) stated they had heard more positive stories about Lublin as they were growing up, (b) said they had heard these stories at a younger age, (c) seem to have passed these stories on to their children more frequently, and (d) expressed a stronger influence of Lublin roots on their life choices and identity as adults.

Some remarks about the above subgroup differences. It may be interesting to speculate what accounts for the above subgroup differences. One obvious difference is that the group whose families left Lublin earlier in the twentieth century left the city, purely, earlier in time. This difference, and its possible implications for Jewish-history education, will be addressed in a separate section below.

Another difference, pertaining more specifically to the narratives people reported hearing as they were growing up, may seem, at first, counterintuitive. Those whose families had been touched more directly by events of the Holocaust, especially those whose families escaped from Lublin when the city was under Nazi occupation, reported hearing much more positive stories about Lublin, reported they had heard these at a much younger age, and most often reported having heard these stories from a Holocaust-survivor parent.

The above results may be viewed by some as contradicting the results from many post-memory studies of children of Holocaust survivors. Those studies often point to the intergenerational transmission of trauma in families of survivors and to trauma being the dominant inheritance of

these children.[18] Diane Wolf, however, based on her study of children of Holocaust survivors, states that trauma does not necessarily dominate the memories of these children and that traumatic memories are often part of a more heterogeneous array of both positive and negative memories, with the positive memories as prominent as the negative ones. She states that it is important to note that stories told by survivors containing difficult, traumatic subjects are often, at the same time, mixed with stories of heroism, helpfulness, bravery/courage, friendship, and community.[19] Moreover, focusing exclusively on the negative aspects of inherited memories (i.e., on the trauma) robs both those telling the stories, as well as those hearing them, of their agency. Holocaust-survivor parents, she states, as most other parents, exercise choice as to what Holocaust-related information they share with their children and at what stage in a child's life they share it.[20]

In the present study, it may be tempting, at first, to interpret the positive Lublin stories, told by those who had been touched more directly by events of the Holocaust, as, perhaps, a tendency to idealize, to sentimentalize, their prewar Lublin lives that had been so utterly ruptured. As seen in Diane Wolf's findings, however, these sort of interpretations may serve to "pathologize" the narrators of these stories and to further reinforce distorted views that trauma is the only psychological inheritance Holocaust-survivor parents pass down to their children.

Passage of time and implications for Jewish and Holocaust education. The differences in responses, between those whose families left earlier in the twentieth century and those whose families left later, may indicate that the further we travel in time from the stories about Lublin told by those who actually lived those stories, the more these narratives and the role they play in our lives diminish. These differences in responses, along with the fact that no one under age thirty-one replied to the present study's questionnaire, could indicate that passage of time itself may be an important factor to consider with respect to both Jewish-history and Holocaust education.

To illustrate the above, we may want to note the results of a recent international survey published in 2023 and carried out by the American Claims Conference. This survey revealed dramatically high levels of ignorance

[18] Diane Wolf, "Postmemories of Joy? Children of Holocaust Survivors and Alternative Family Memories," *Memory Studies* 12 (2019), 1:74–87.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

about the Holocaust, in Western countries, by those born after 1980. Gideon Taylor, the body's president, stated that if more Holocaust education is not provided to all students in schools, "denial will soon outweigh knowledge, and future generations will have no exposure to the critical lessons of the Holocaust."[21] Similarly, one can say that without historical education about Jewish life in Poland, in Lublin and the Lublin region, our knowledge and memory will remain as only faint traces or disappear altogether. In this regard, the outstanding work of "Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN" in Lublin is to be highly commended as it recovers, pieces together, and commemorates the vibrant Lublin Jewish community and Jewish life that had once been so much part of the city's fabric.

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