

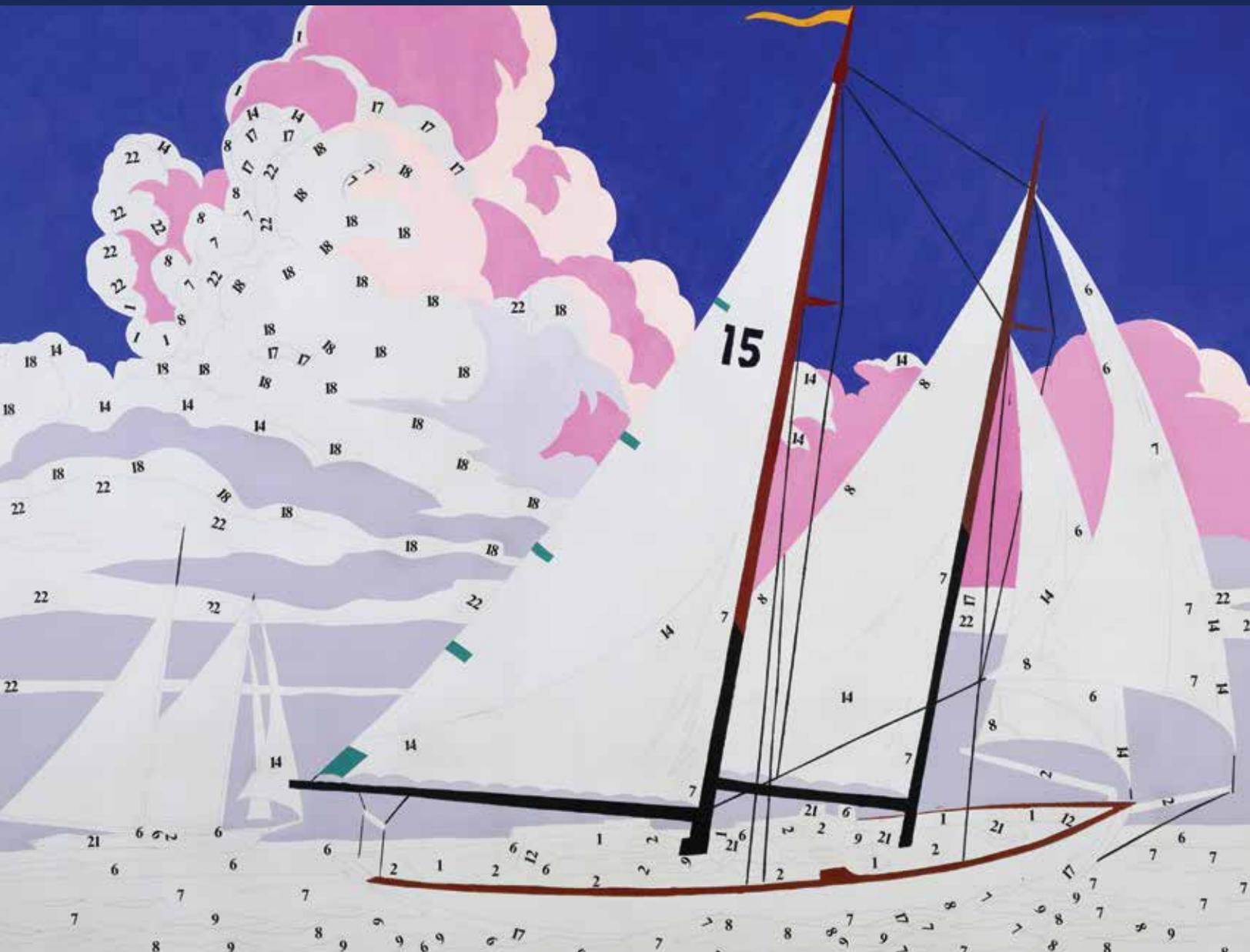
The Unfinished Issue

FALL 2020

AJS

# PERSPECTIVES

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES



# The Unfinished Issue

FALL 2020



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# From the Editors

When is a project finished? Scholars, artists, and artisans of all types have grappled with this problem for generations. Plato argued that every human project was only an incomplete imitation of an immaterial ideal. The ancient rabbis, too, saw Torah study as an infinitely generative project that could never be finished. On the other hand, for them, a physical tool or vessel could be finished simply by means of “a thought” -- the craftsman’s decision to stop working on the object automatically renders the object “complete” (b. Shab. 52b). Modern theorists ply us with enticing models for thought such as eternal recurrence, *différance*, unfinalizability, and rhizomatic expansion that all resist and defy completion. And yet novels continue to be published, paintings continue to be framed and hung, and symphonies continue to be played (even the unfinished ones). Scholarship continues to be filed away as articles and books, completed, and **are** represented by static lines on a CV, with only new projects, **often still in imagined form, listed as to be** “in progress.”

→ And let’s not forget about the “in progress” rule of Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, a tenure that seems to continue indefinitely, without any finishing date in sight. This, despite massive Israeli street protests against his rule. And so for us, **T**he concept “in progress” can prove to be both hopeful and daunting; hopeful for those scholars who experience the research and writing process as energizing; daunting for those who write under a cloud of anxiety that only lifts once the book or article is in print. And even then, the race to the next continues; **and one’s life’s work often remains unfinished even after one’s death.**

**a** ajs perspectives  
8:06 PM Aug 17

Love the reference. Gosh, that reminds me that I am so behind on Daf Yomi. So behind that I know I'll never finish. Getting anxious: gotta go for a snack. -MS

**a** ajs perspectives  
8:08 PM Aug 17

Chaya, I'm getting a nosebleed up here in the OED gods! Which reminds me, are your kids still watching British footy these days? At my house, it's all about hockey (the Vancouver Canucks). Might as well go downstairs to check the score. It's the playoffs, which means the best snacks in the house are housed in front of the TV this week, being guarded by my husband and son. Hope they haven't finished all the organic cheezies. Come to think of it, are cheezies -- those crunchy, cheese-flavoured snacks -- Canadian? I better try to find a good equivalent for our American readers. Gimme a few more minutes while I climb down the snack-food internet rabbit hole to figure out the code switching here...-MS

**a** ajs perspectives  
9:37 AM Aug 18

Isn't it spelled Chee-Z? I thought here they were pronounced chee-zeds. And I'm kinda insulted you didn't like all my theory references. -CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
9:49 AM Aug 18

Ah! Did you know he has an *unfinished* book on Marx? I need to work that in somehow...-CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
8:09 PM Aug 17

**Add:** “are”

**a** ajs perspectives  
9:42 AM Aug 18

Wait, “scholarship” is singular isn't it? Or is it one of those words like “the government” -- the government is taking a catastrophic decision? The government **are** taking a catastrophic decision? Ack! - CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
11:59 AM Aug 18

Mira, this is a REALLY fascinating insight, and I really do love how you connect the theme of this issue (and, honestly, all of our issues) to the Israeli political landscape, but I don't know -- and it really just could be me being oversensitive here -- I feel like it feels a *little* forced and possibly politicizes the issue in a way that may not be necessary? I think maybe take it out? -CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
12:13 PM Aug 18

Are you actually trying to suggest that without these lines this column is “apolitical”? Politicization, Shmolticization. Or as David Ben-Gurion famously said, UN-Shmu'en (well, he really said Oom-Shmoom, as in the Hebrew acronym for the UN. Did you know that Israelis always make their acronyms into whole words? Maybe we could have our next issue's theme be The Acronym Issue. Catchy, huh? I can see why you think the Israeli politics insertion might be a TINY BIT of shoe-horning...but really...I live and breathe Israel/Palestine and I think you underestimate how much our readers do -- or should -- too. -MS



Mira Sucharov & Chaya Halberstam

**a** ajs perspectives  
11:57 PM Aug 18

Did we manage to reference all the essays? I don't want anyone to feel left out. But people should read all of them anyway! And, frankly, no one really reads the editors' intro, so... -CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
8:13 PM Aug 17

Delete: "dynamic"

**a** ajs perspectives  
9:39 AM Aug 18

I liked dynamic!! -CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
12:17 PM Aug 18

I liked it too, but I was concerned readers would take it as generally "dynamic" – like Dy-No-Mite! and I wanted to hone in on the technical aspect of digital humanities. Speaking of Dy-No-Mite, the Norman Lear documentary was fascinating in terms of bringing to light the problematic racialized dynamics on some of his sets, especially Good Times. We could have another issue called The TV Guide (Issue)...?? -MS

**a** ajs perspectives  
12:25 PM Aug 18

TV Issue would be so good! Not really sure how we'd get the ancient Judaism research area involved but I'm confident we can figure it out! -CH

**a** ajs perspectives  
12:39 PM Aug 18

... or Medieval Judaism...

**a** ajs perspectives  
12:41 PM Aug 18

... or Modern Judaism before 1929...

**a** ajs perspectives  
12:42 PM Aug 18

But no worries! We'll figure it out! -CH

In this time of Covid lockdowns and unexpected duties of care – *never mind our own illnesses* –; many of us have struggled with finishing projects we had imagined would be completed by now. *Some of us have concluded, or come to the conclusion* that projects we had hoped to finish may never be completed. *Some of us may have felt daunted by the perceived gap between our own specific research interests and the enormous issues pressing down on us – also known as the "F--- 2020" phenomenon.* In other cases, we have been compelled to stop working on a project and *instead just* put it out there before we feel it is truly finished. But even *in* the best of times, we leave projects unfinished. Sometimes we do so intentionally, to embrace the unresolved and open-ended, blurring the distinction between making and unmaking. Sometimes we do so unintentionally—we run into *conceptual or empirical* dead ends or *simply* run out of time.

This issue of *Perspectives the AJSP* celebrates the unfinished, recognizing that even a *book or essay* project that has just begun is an achievement. Some of these essays explore projects we have left *unfinished* out of necessity: unfinished research interrupted by illness, an unfinished dissertation left behind in the wake of a successful career, or a job application abandoned by scholars overwhelmed by the odds. Others ask whether *something can ever be considered finished*—when do we finish *penning writing* our diary? When is an *interactive* dynamic digital project ever finished? When have we completed our ethnographic studies of a living people? Still other essays grapple with the practical and pedagogical implications of *incomplete* unfinished *study-abroad programs* courses and interrupted learning.

**a** ajs perspectives  
8:15 PM Aug 17

Chaya, how should we finish this? Endings are always the toughest part of our editors' column, aren't they? -MS

---

**a** ajs perspectives  
11:45 PM Aug 18

Let's come back to it after layout, but before it goes to proofs. -CH

---

**a** ajs perspectives  
11:45 PM Aug 18

OK, remind me... -MS

(with the help of Google Docs annotation)

# From the President

Noam Pianko



Today, well into the COVID pandemic, is a fitting moment to introduce an issue of *Perspectives* called the “Unfinished Issue.” With our professional and personal lives radically disrupted, we all probably have an inordinately long list of unfinished tasks and responsibilities. I am grateful to the *Perspectives* editors for choosing a theme that touches on a defining aspect of our lives today.

Fortunately, most people have been very sensitive to the new reality of “unfinished” business. Still, this is not an easy state for a goal-oriented person like myself. I find it hard to avoid the unease that comes as new responsibilities pile up with limited options for completing existing ones. Reminders of unfinished assignments, projects, or obligations trigger panic, guilt, and worry. I miss the sense of relief that comes with finishing a task and crossing it off the list.

One Hebrew expression has helped allay my own discomfort with the connotations of “unfinished.” Many years ago, an Israeli mentor ended a particularly contentious class debate with the words תם ולא נשלם (*tam ve-lo nishlam*). Unfamiliar with the expression (which colloquially means “to be continued”), I translated the words literally in my head—“finished (or perfect), but not completed.” The literal English translation puzzled me. In English, *finish* and *complete* are synonyms. The Hebrew, however, contrasts a temporary state of accomplishment with a distant and ideal goal of reaching “wholeness.”

תם ולא נשלם offers a much more nuanced way to recognize the incremental efforts to reach milestones. How differently might we approach unfinished things in our lives if we looked at them as perfect but not complete? Instead of rushing to check off tasks, we might focus more on appreciating the small accomplishments. Any completed task would come with the humble realization that we have not reached a final sense of wholeness.

This issue provides an opportunity for us all to grapple with everything interrupted in our lives and scholarship. I hope this exploration leaves us not with the sense of failure so often connected to “unfinished” business, but an appreciation that we can celebrate what we have finished even if some things remain to be completed.

Noam Pianko  
*University of Washington*



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This book award program has been made possible by generous funding from Jordan Schnitzer and Arlene Schnitzer through the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer Family Fund at the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation.



Rembrandt van Rijn. *The Great Jewish Bride*, 1635. Etching; second state of five. 8 9/16 in. x 6 7/16 in. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929



# The Unfinished Issue

# Ten Theses on Jewish Studies<sup>i</sup>

Martin Shuster

1. What is the utmost task for Jewish Studies in the academy right now? To understand its relationship to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. What does this really mean? To understand how the desires of the past affect the present but look entirely different when refracted from today's moment—the way in which funhouse mirrors distort their image. What makes this task especially difficult now? Late capitalism. What makes it difficult to realize that this task is difficult? Identity politics.
2. Jewish Studies creates jobs, linked intimately to the market. Books must be sold; classes must be filled. The market, however, perpetually actualizes a myth—the myth that identities are finished, existing outside of relations of recognition. (This is one way to understand Marx's sense of the "ghostlike" elements of modern capitalism, where the qualities the market has produced spectrally appear as inherent to the things in question.) What—or more accurately *who*—do we need to recognize *this*?
3. The point of Jewish Studies cannot be linked to the necessity of feeling the point of Jewish Studies, immediately or otherwise. Nonetheless, we might ask, where is the *impact* of Jewish Studies most felt? In the hearts of donors. Where is it least felt? Everywhere else. And the hearts of students? They do not feel Jewish Studies, they only "take" it. How could you explain all of this? Certainly not while standing on one leg, because in general—for the contemporary university—there is simply no leg to stand on. In this respect, to be fair, Jewish Studies is no more unique than any other discipline in the contemporary university. Life is much more than information.
4. An impact, say, of Chican@ Studies, Black Studies, and Jewish Studies? The concept of internal colonialism. One way to understand this concept—speaking all too

**The point of Jewish Studies cannot be linked to the necessity of feeling the point of Jewish Studies, immediately or otherwise.**

- abstractly—is to note that the desire for recognition by a majority always ravages a minority. In order to understand the significance of this concept in each field, however, simply trace the proximity of each discipline to whiteness.
5. The underground punk band KOSHER! once sang "We are the Jews, we nailed your god up on the cross, just to show you who's the boss." The motivational undercurrents behind KOSHER!'s lyrics can also be found in Jewish Studies, just without the humor. To the extent that KOSHER! is merely applying Nietzsche's aphoristic method to Nietzsche himself, remember that he stresses that the morality of resentment begins with a death on the cross.
  6. If disciplines are like trees, then Jewish Studies looks like a premier pine or olive tree ready for cutting and use, no matter the purpose. In reality, it is an old tree, so crooked that it is entirely useless for lumber of any sort, so much so that it will petrify and shatter any blade that tries to touch it. Remember, though, that when usefulness is prioritized above everything else, being useless can become a virtue. To understand this so as to move forward, just think of what sort of root system must support an old crooked tree. Jewishness or Judaism is this root system, never finished—tradition as mycelium.
  7. Every discipline is an answer to a question or series of questions. What is the question to which Jewish Studies is the answer? —*Why me?*—obviously. Just kidding. (I do not mean to suggest that Sholem Aleichem didn't understand funhouse mirrors, however

**Jewish Studies addresses the classical questions—  
theoretical and practical—around the concepts of  
God, antisemitism, redemption, and humanity...**

... albeit by analogy: he showed how the air quality around a tree can deeply affect our access to its roots.) Jewish Studies addresses the classical questions— theoretical and practical—around the concepts of God, antisemitism, redemption, and humanity (sometimes presented simply as God, world, and Jew). The answer to each, regardless at which level of meta-analysis your inquiry is operating, is the same, and can best be summed up in one word: anachronism.

8. Judaism as “the simultaneous presence of a youth that is attentive to reality and impatient to change it, and an old age that has seen it all and is returning to the origin of things” (Levinas). Whether it aims to run with the fads or to buckle against them, Jewish Studies also never quite fits in. This is why it is simultaneously too white and yet never exactly white. In large part this is because its subject matter is Judaism, but in large part it is also because its subject matter is oftentimes not really Judaism. I think here of Michael Jordan, who once noted that the imperative is always to take something that’s perceived as a weakness and turn it into a strength.
9. The Harvard philosopher Burt Dreben was once said to have said that “philosophy is garbage, but the history of garbage is scholarship.” (Saul Lieberman once introduced a Gershom Scholem talk with a similar formulation—Martin Kavka notes that Dreben’s first wife was Raya Spiegel, the daughter of Shalom Spiegel, a colleague of Lieberman’s at JTS.) I do not want to say the same about Jewish Studies. (I am not even sure I even believe it of philosophy.) But it does suggest the idea that the history of Jewish Studies can help us do Jewish Studies, in all subfields, better. (Compare to Robert Pippin’s suggestion that philosophy *just is* the history of philosophy.) What would it mean to do Jewish Studies better? To be honest that Jewish Studies is *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a late style.
10. Theodor W. Adorno once remarked that late style must always be understood as “the collision between the experience of aging and completely different historical situations.” Is the role of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* here merely rhetorical then? In part. But it also helps us to acknowledge that aging is a universal

phenomenon, one that applies equally to movements. Grasping the universality of this phenomenological point opens all Jewish sources—no matter how particular—towards universal aims. *Jewish Studies as unfinished in the same way that modernity is unfinished*. The next question: Could Judaism or Jewishness themselves be late styles? An overlooked significance of Mara Benjamin’s *The Obligated Self*. Jewish Studies wholly in command of itself but nonetheless turned against itself, commitment through alienation.

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**MARTIN SHUSTER** is associate professor of Philosophy and the director of the Center for Geographies of Justice at Goucher College, where he also holds the Professorship of Judaics and Justice. In addition to many articles and chapters, he is the author of *Autonomy after Auschwitz: Adorno, German Idealism, and Modernity* (University of Chicago, 2014); *New Television: The Aesthetics and Politics of a Genre* (University of Chicago, 2017); and *How to Measure a World? A Philosophy of Judaism* (Indiana University Press, 2021). Most recently he is the coeditor of *Logics of Genocide: The Structures of Violence and the Contemporary World* (Routledge, 2020).

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i Nietzsche once wrote that “most thinkers write badly because they communicate to us not only their thoughts but also the thinking of their thoughts” (*Human, All Too Human*). I mention this because the editors asked me to attach this little note to a piece that likely appears a bit out of place in these pages. The genre of “theses”— a genre into which this piece is intended to fit—has something in common with the aphorism as employed by Nietzsche and the fragment as employed by the Romantics who preceded him. If we might dare to compare this genre to mathematics, it aims to show less work, not more. I wanted to try my hand at writing a series of “theses” around Jewish Studies, inspired by figures like Schlegel, Nietzsche, Scholem, Benjamin, and Adorno (among many others). I am grateful to Mira and Chaya for running with the idea.



Unfinished Sampler, c. 18th century, Mexico. Silk embroidery on linen. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Bequest of Mrs. Henry E. Coe

## Mordecai's Manuscript: Progress and Predicaments

Harvey E. Goldberg

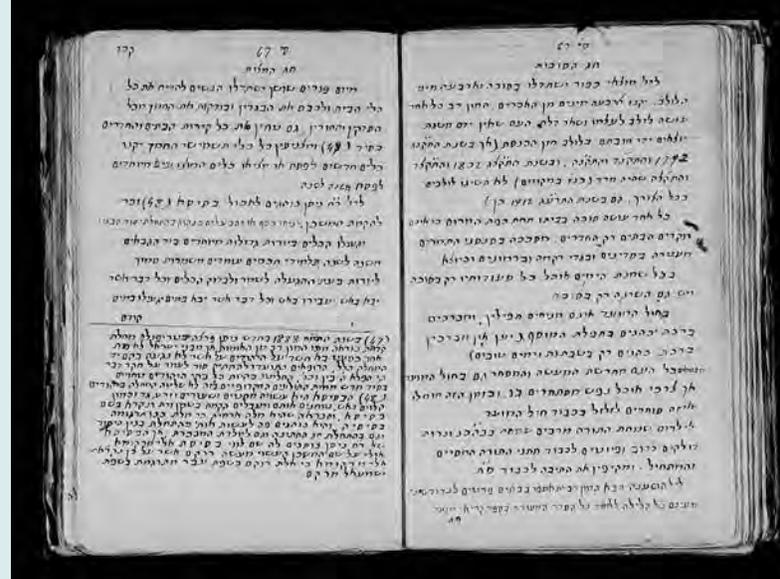
Musing over explanations for my “unfinished projects” led me to the inverse question: What accounts for unplanned success? In my anthropological and historical engagement with Jews from Libya, these opposite outcomes appear intertwined. The story begins over sixty years ago with my first encounter with Jews from the Middle East.

During a year-long Jewish Agency program, I spent six weeks in a moshav in Israel's northern Negev with immigrants from a mountain community southwest of Tripoli (Libya). Those weeks turned out to be the most interesting period of my year and I wished to learn more about Middle Eastern Jewry. Returning to BA studies in the fall of 1959, and unable to find courses related to the topic, I took the path of concentrating in anthropology.



*Mordecai Hacohen (second from left) when he was a dayyan in the rabbinical court in Benghazi in the 1920s. Courtesy of the World Organization of Libyan Jews*

Anthropology values the study of any group, but no instructor had an inkling about Middle Eastern Jews. In graduate school I studied basic Arabic while aware that the speech of immigrants in Israel differed from my classroom experience. I also gathered that there existed little research on Jews from Libya. Returning to Israel in September 1963 for dissertation fieldwork, I visited Shalva—the moshav that hosted me four years earlier—and was welcomed by Rabbi Gabriel Megiddish.



Higgid Mordecai (Tripoli), 66b- 67a.  
Collection of the National Library of Israel Jerusalem

Eventually I chose Porat—another moshav settled by small-town Tripolitanians—as my fieldwork site.

Like other research at the time, my inquiry first focused on the villagers' adjustment to Israel. Fieldwork, however, pushed me to consider their past as well. The Porat villagers' forbears already had made an appearance on the pages of modern Jewish scholarship in the work of Nahum Slouschz—a member of the circle of Odessa Hebraists that included Aḥad Ha-'am and Bialik—who was sent to Libya in 1906 by the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Guided by a local *ḥakham*, Slouschz visited the Gharian plateau south of Tripoli (home region of the Poratniks), and wrote of the Jews in what he called “the country of the cave-dwellers.”

After completing my dissertation, I wanted to explore further the history of Libyan Jews. In a 1968–69 pilot study in Israel I mapped customs and language features of the former Tripolitanian communities, attempting to tap historical dimensions of a region yielding few written records. That year, I also heard about an unpublished manuscript on Jews in Libya, lying in Israel's National Library. It turned out to be a 250-page Hebrew codex, in “Rashi script,” by Mordecai Hacohen, the person who guided Slouschz in the Gharian and through all of Libya's Jewish communities.

One-fifth of the manuscript describes the small communities that were precisely the topic of my research. After moving to Israel, I envisioned translating that section while adding a commentary, and approached the Ben-Zvi Institute with this plan. The manuscript reached Israel in the early 1940s and only a few researchers paid attention to it. A translation did not interest Ben-Zvi, but they suggested that I publish the whole manuscript. I hesitated; I did not perceive myself as a textual scholar, and the work was encyclopedic in scope. For example, it depicts local occupations and, when, mentioning the fauna of Libya, Hacohen enters his objections to Darwin's theory. He also refers to writings in Hebrew, Arabic, and Italian, describes contemporary Libyan society, and notes differences in the local Arabic of the Jews and Muslims. Ben-Zvi nevertheless continued to encourage me, and—with input from many specialists—*Higgid Mordecai* (Hacohen's title) appeared in 1978.

This success story, however, opened new challenges. Who might read the book?—a question relevant to the whole new field of modern Middle Eastern Jewry. Hacohen's discussions always began by describing

the wider society, and—in my judgement—contribute to general Libyan history. This perspective often is overlooked. Large-scale emigration from Muslim lands starkly reduced their Jewish populations, and the engagement with nation-building forces in Israel downplayed the immigrants' Middle Eastern backgrounds. Both scholars of Middle Eastern countries—if they mentioned Jews at all—and investigations by Israeli researchers, circumscribed the historic involvement of Jews in their societies of origin.

In 1980 I published the translation I first planned—focusing on small communities—while convinced that other parts of *Higgid Mordecai* also merited translation. Each required different academic strengths and collaboration. Some, like the workings of Tripoli's *bet din*, demanded knowledge of rabbinic sources, while discussions of how turn-of-the-century Ottoman reforms impacted local inhabitants—both Muslims and Jews and relations between them—needed a range of Middle Eastern specialists. My limited experience with Arabic, and complete ignorance of Turkish, were impediments to progressing on my own.

Various factors made such cooperation unlikely. A degree of academic courage was needed for a researcher residing, or working, in a Middle Eastern country to join a project with an Israeli anthropologist. As noted, there also were conceptual biases. Only a handful of veteran historians in Israel studied modern Middle Eastern Jewry; Hacohen's manuscript remaining unpublished so long exemplifies that. The struggle for, and drama of, national independence within North Africa easily relegated the topic of Jewish life to footnote-like status. But the history

of *Higgid Mordecai* includes an episode suggesting that this widespread academic *ignorance* did not reflect the realities of Jewish-Muslim existence in the area.

Part of *Higgid Mordecai* was published in Italian (Benghazi, 1924) when Hacoheh collaborated with orientalist M. M. Moreno, assigned to Libya by Italy's ministry of colonies. The translation was reissued by Darf Publishers in London (1987). Darf's owner, Libyan-born Mohammad Fergiani, owned a printing business and bookstore in Tripoli. In London, he published books on the Middle East, especially reprints of books on Libya—including the Cohen/Moreno volume. I inquired about Fergiani, and in 1992 a Tripoli-born Jewish friend in London arranged a meeting that resulted in Darf's reissuing my translation (*The Book of Mordechai*). Upon chatting with Fergiani, I discovered that his family originated from the Gharian region and his father knew the Jews there. The normalcy of this Muslim-Jewish interaction, recalled in a London office, has only gradually reached academic echelons.

For some time there has been growing interest within North Africa in diversifying approaches to regional history. An example is the 2005 publication by Dr. Khalifa al-Aḥwal of his enquiry into the Jews in Tripoli under

**The normalcy of this Muslim-Jewish interaction, recalled in a London office, has only gradually reached academic echelons**

Italian rule. In addition to representing a fresh intellectual orientation, this study draws on local archival sources that were not accessible to previous researchers. Its dual-track contribution was appreciated by Jews from Libya in Israel. This year, the World Organization of Libyan Jews (in Or Yehuda) sponsored a translation of the book from Arabic into Hebrew. No doubt, this coordinated project enriches all who are interested in learning about that community. Exploring the further research potential of "Mordecai's Manuscript" also invites interdisciplinary and transnational collaboration. Such development certainly would advance the study of Middle Eastern Jewry in general.

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**HARVEY E. GOLDBERG** is professor emeritus in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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For questions and further information, please contact Professor Matthias Lehmann, Chair of the review committee, at [mlehmann@uci.edu](mailto:mlehmann@uci.edu). Awards will be announced in mid-April 2021.

# Women and Talmud Study: An Unfinished Story

Marjorie Lehman

In a flyleaf of the Babylonian Talmud tractate *Hagigah* (Venice: Bomberg, 1525) I found a shocking ink drawing of a figure fully clothed with breasts exposed. There were two ink blotches in a darker color of brown ink. One served as a beard that covered the figure's face and a second covered the folds in the figure's dress. Both feminine and masculine in a Talmud, no less—I wanted the backstory (see figure 1). Who was this person? Was this a woman who wanted to be a man so that they could study Talmud? Did Talmud study turn this woman into a man? Or was this a man imagining himself as a woman?

An inscription in Italian found along with this image indicates that a woman scribed the message (figure 2). It is the clearest sign that a woman held this volume. Mention made of her uncle suggests that she might have been using the volume to send a message to him presuming that he would see it. Noting that she had already received two of his letters and thanking him for his “generous inclination” toward her, she mentions another individual. She seems to want to convince her uncle that this unnamed man does not have evil feelings for him and that he is a good man. The scrawl ends abruptly.<sup>ii</sup>

Did this copy of *Hagigah* belong to the uncle? Does this woman wish to get her uncle's attention in a book that her uncle used often? Possibly, the book was hers. Was she using the flyleaf of her own book as a place to pen a rough draft of an important letter? Was the letter referring to her uncle's love for her and her love for another man? Was she hoping to marry someone he thought unworthy of her? Or maybe she was referring to a talmudic discussion among men, inserting herself into the middle to convince her uncle that he needed to hear the substantive ideas expressed by this unnamed man who was not an enemy.

We look at Bomberg Talmuds for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they are textual witnesses of early



Fig. 1

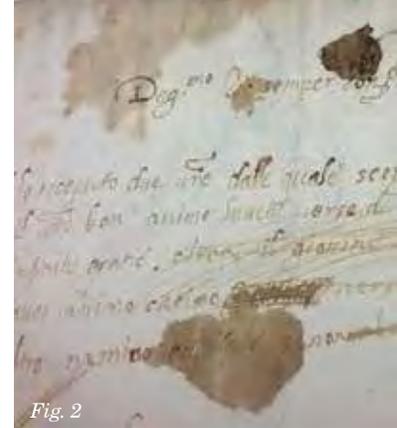


Fig. 2

*Tractate Hagigah* (Venice: Bomberg, 1525).  
Courtesy of Columbia University Rare Book Room

**Jewish book copies leave us many unfinished stories, including broken pathways as books traversed their way across the globe.**

versions of talmudic texts. An image on a flyleaf and an inscription in Italian might be easily dismissed as meaningless doodles, irrelevant to the scholarly task at hand. In truth, we do not know who this woman or her uncle were. We do not know exactly where and when the image and inscription were added to the flyleaf. But I cannot readily dismiss these personal flourishes. They remind me that book copies have individual stories and that some of those stories are about the people who scribbled androgynous images on their pages.

This image and inscription call attention to the presence of nonauthoritative “texts” in book copies, including inscriptions on title pages, on flyleaves, in bindings, and in the margins of books that breathe real life into them. Such additions remind me that copies of the Talmud were used and traded, bought and sold, preserved and passed on. They are clues as to who read and owned tractate *Hagigah* and a stark reminder that copies of Talmuds were not solely in the hands of a rabbinically literate male elite.

It is difficult to draw historical conclusions from one image in a book copy. This scrawled image and unfinished note remain frustratingly open-ended and unresolved. But by recording every nugget of information that we find in copies of Jewish books we turn what has remained largely unseen into a visible historical record. Some half-composed thoughts and figures in a copy of tractate *Hagigah* cannot tell their own full story successfully, but when aggregated with other peculiar inscriptions or ambiguous dedications enable us to tell another story about the Talmud than its transmission from teacher to disciple or

father to son. Making women visible builds a more nuanced picture of the Talmud's audience. It also prompts us to consider where copies of the Talmud were kept—in a *beit midrash* or in the Jewish home—posing questions regarding where women could be found if they had access to a volume of Talmud.<sup>iii</sup>

When I found this image in tractate *Hagigah* I was in the rare book and manuscript room at Columbia University inputting information into a database called *Footprints: Jewish Books through Time and Place*. The database is the brainchild of a scholars' working group that I cochaired at the Center for Jewish History, birthed to gather all of the information connected to the pathways of Jewish book copies from the time they left the printing house until the present day.<sup>iv</sup> Among the type of information that can be loaded into the database is evidence related to any woman who had a relationship to a book copy, identifying them not only as owners and readers, sellers and buyers, but as wives, widows, daughters and nieces, whether they are named or not.

Jewish book copies leave us many unfinished stories, including broken pathways as books traversed their way across the globe. Appearing in one century in a given place, and lost for two more, many books resurface or leave records in auction catalogues, estate inventories, or in other books, attesting to their existence. *Footprints* enables us to read thousands of unfinished stories alongside one another such that what is missing from one story might be completed in another ... or not. While I cannot uncover all of the details behind this woman wishing to be a man, or man wishing to be a woman, in tractate *Hagigah*, I do not have to solve the puzzle in order to record a fascinating piece of evidence.<sup>v</sup>

The unfinished story does not have to stop me from formulating compelling research questions related to Jewish women in early modern Europe prompted by such a discovery. And, while treating this copy of tractate *Hagigah* as important data for *Footprints*, I can, along the way, also construct my own hypothetical story where I imagine women, in fact, transmitting Talmud to their uncles.

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**MARJORIE LEHMAN** is associate professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at the Jewish Theological Seminary. She is the author of *The En Yaaqov: Jacob ibn Habib's Search for Faith in the Talmudic Corpus* (Wayne State University Press, 2012) and her new book, *Bringing Down the Temple House: Engendering Tractate Yoma* (Brandeis University Press) is forthcoming. She is also the co-project director of the digital humanities project, *Footprints: Jewish Books through Time and Place*.

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i Sarit Kattan Gribetz, "Consuming Texts: Women as Recipients and Transmitters of Ancient Texts," in *Rethinking "Authority" in Late Antiquity: Authorship, Law and Transmission in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Abraham J. Berkovitz and Matthew Letteney (London: Routledge, 2018), 191. I thank Sarit Kattan Gribetz for her insights regarding this image.

ii Many thanks to Federica Francesconi and Fabrizio Quaglia for helping with the translation.

iii Kattan Gribetz, "Consuming Texts," 179.

iv The codirectors of *Footprints: Jewish Books through Time and Place* are: Michelle Chesner (Columbia University), Marjorie Lehman (Jewish Theological Seminary), Adam Shear (University of Pittsburgh) and Joshua Teplitsky (Stony Brook University). See <https://footprints.ctl.columbia.edu/>.

v In *Footprints: Jewish Books through Time and Place*, ed. Michelle Chesner et al., footprint #979, creator, Marjorie Lehman, last modified by Michelle Chesner, <https://footprints.ctl.columbia.edu/footprint/979/>, July 7, 2020.



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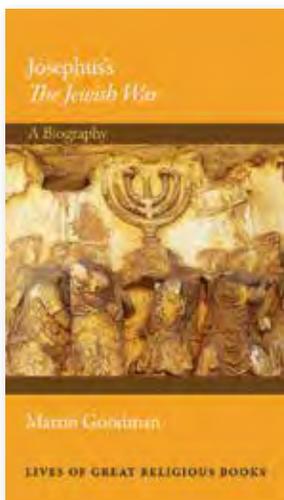
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Unfinished Quilt Top (honeycomb), c. 1940s. English and American calicoes. Diameter at longest point: 36 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Patricia Smith Melton



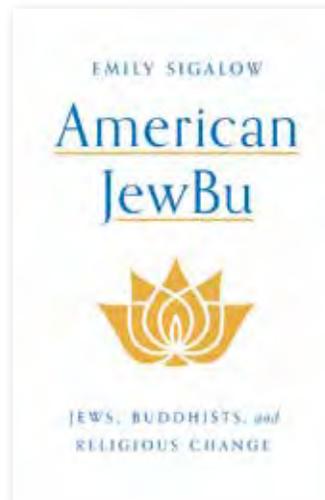
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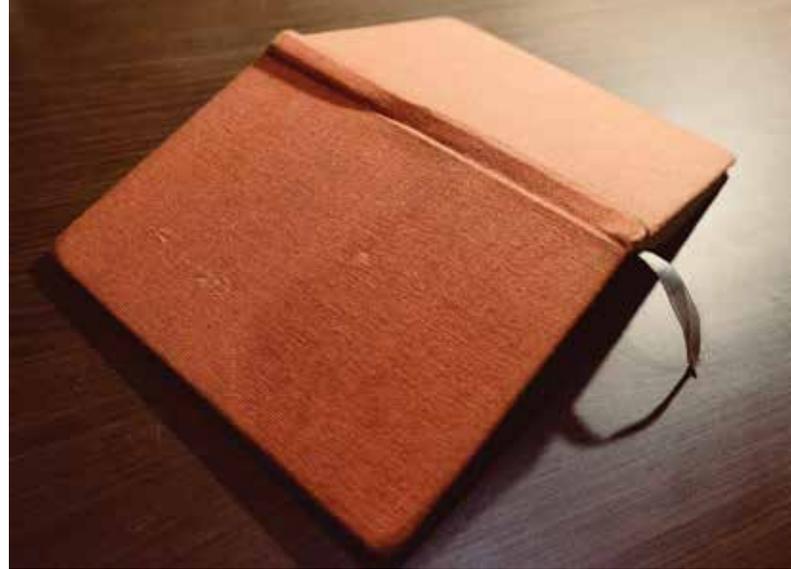
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The deadline for receipt of application materials is January 31, 2021

# "I Want You to Know Me but Not All of Me": My Unfinished Diary

Khyati Tripathi



*Courtesy of the author*

***"I feel very confident today. I somehow feel it will be fine and I'll be able to do my bit to keep my participant at ease. I somehow am not much 'scared' of her. I feel it'll all be fine."***

After the interview:

***"She was quite welcoming, and I felt comfortable (more than I did with the first one). There was one thing that perturbed me while interviewing, it was that she constantly looked at my hands. I somehow felt that she could guess through my hand movements and the shape of my fingers that something is wrong. Does she now know that I have rheumatoid arthritis?"***

The above two excerpts provide a good glimpse into the "conversations" I have with my diary. I am an interdisciplinary death researcher and it was eleven years ago that I initiated my quest to know about death. Just like any other field researcher, I also "own" a field diary which has over the years become my "secret keeper."

After having lost a dear friend at the age of fourteen, I was drawn towards the uncertainty of death and how it affects humans psychologically. While in the last eleven years I interviewed many people about their experiences of witnessing or coping with death(s) and could finish all my projects, my research diary always remained "unfinished."

Death rituals have always intrigued me. It was my interest in the cultural aspect of the rituals that drew me into the Jewish community. As a part of my PhD fieldwork, I interviewed Ashkenazic Jews living in London. Having worked in the area for many years, I was again preparing myself emotionally for the heart-wrenching narratives of the participants about deaths of the loved ones that

my questions reminded them of, deaths that had brought pain to them. For each narrative that broke me, my diary became my confidant.

I feel caged into the objectivity that a researcher is expected to embrace. One of the Jewish participants shared that he had put up a note on the side of his friend's hospital bed saying "he was there" only to find it in the same place after his friend died the same night. The imagery of that note being stuck in the same place did something to me. It shook me because I felt that a life was breathing by this note's side one day and the next day it was not. But I was handcuffed by researcher's objectivity and still had to put up an expressionless face.

Living alone in London away from my parents, I would talk about the deaths (that I became a part of vicariously through my participants' narratives) only with my diary. For others, it is just a small, dull orange-colored notebook, but for me, "she" has been a "person" I have confided in. She is aware of the emotional challenges I have had to face while pursuing these projects. She knows when I pretended to be a sensitive researcher even when I was writhing with frustration inside. She is the only one who knows how my heart wept when a participant narrated his daughter's death and showed me her photograph from among many that were kept in his living room.

But even though I have felt like emptying myself into the pages of my diary, I was skeptical about "finishing" it. I did not tell her every emotion of mine, I kept a few hidden. She knows me but I do not want her to know me thoroughly. Just like I said in the first few lines, I own it and do not want it to be the other way around. What if she knows so much that I start understanding my life through those written words in the diary? What if I

become so dependent on it that if, in whatever way, it gets lost someday, it takes away a part of me with it too?

I am scared of her because she has the potential to become the focal point of my world, but I do not want her to know that. Some days when I go to her, I feel anxious, like the day when I was emphatically told by a parish priest in London that being a cultural outsider, I was not the right person to explore the English Catholic death ways. Before deciding to explore the Jewish death rituals, I had wanted to understand the English Catholic death rites. I did not visit my diary for two and a half months after that because that was the day I felt dejected and unable to even consolidate my emotions into words and left my diary untouched for a long time. The first thing I wrote into my diary after returning was, *"I am coming back to you after almost two and a half months, but the reason is not laziness. It is my 'reluctance' to show you my weaker side and the fear of rejection that I have been anticipating."*

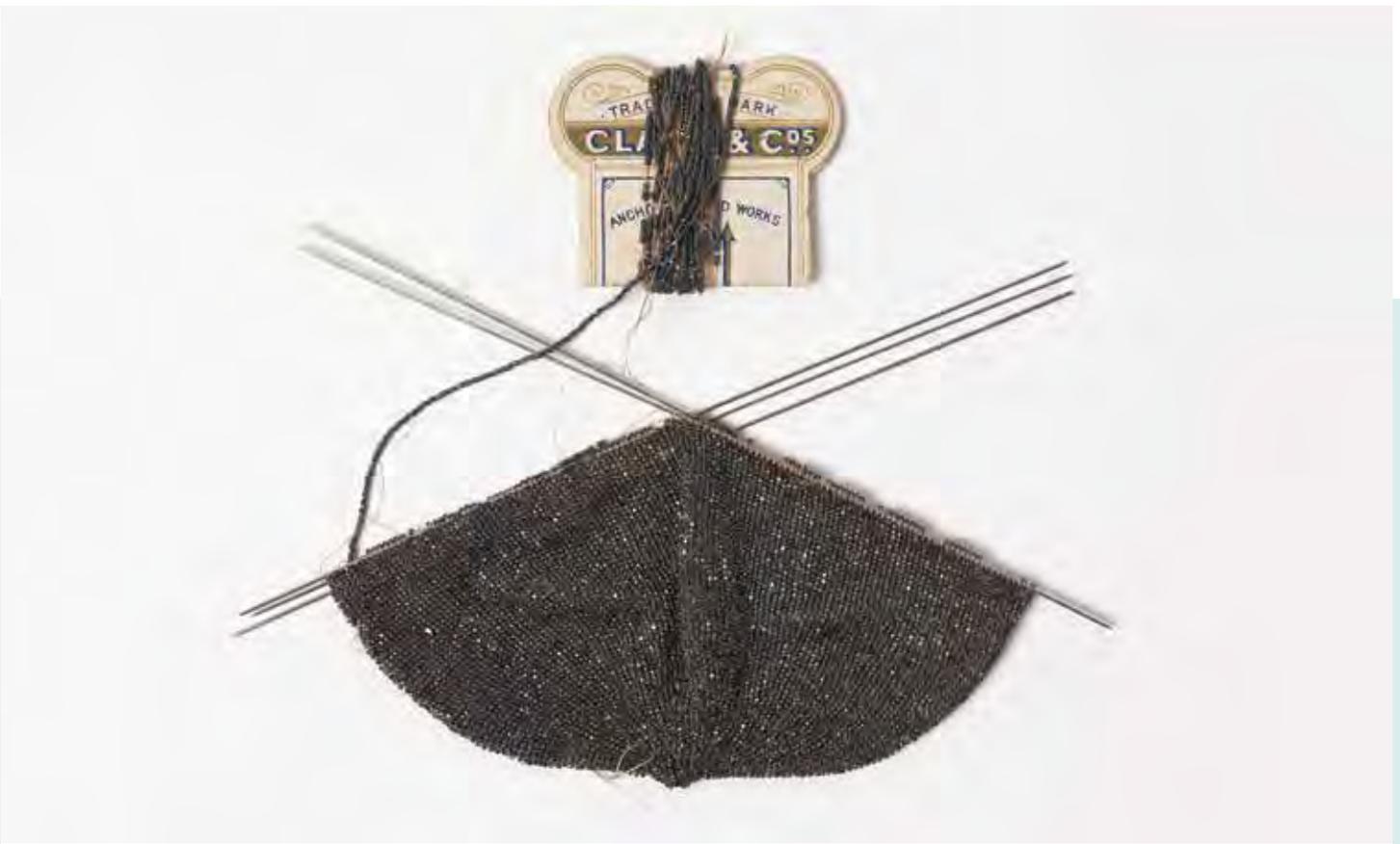
My relationship with this unfinished diary is ambivalent. I abandon her for months together and when I come back to her, I apologize to her for not being there the last few months. There are field experiences that have just stayed with me and never entered my diary because I was afraid

**For others, it is just a small, dull orange-colored notebook, but for me, "she" has been a "person" I have confided in.**

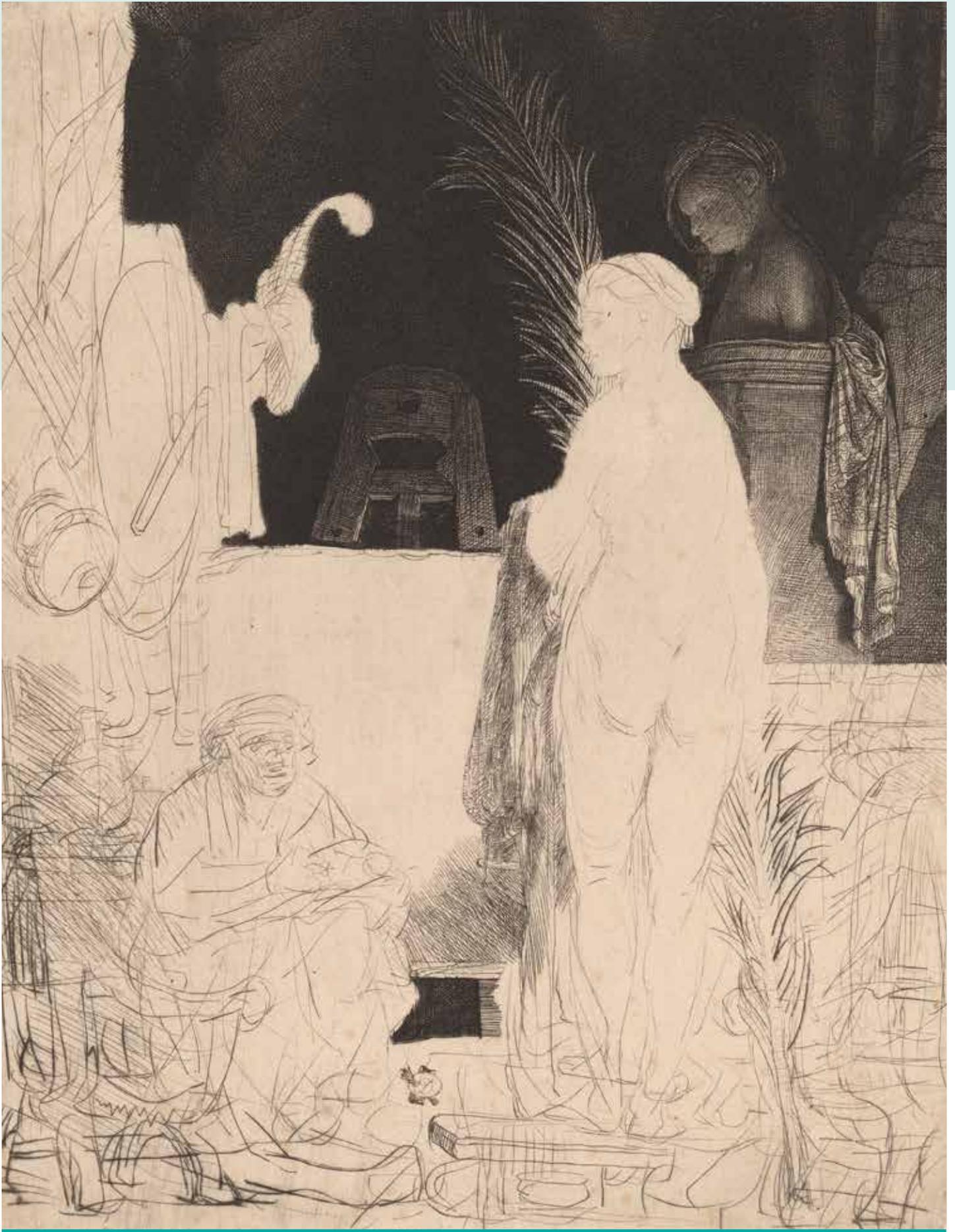
of consolidating those experiences in it. It is somewhat like my counselor with whom I share my feelings yet sometimes I am scared to show a side of me to her. I do not want to be perceived by my little diary as weak and vulnerable because those written words would not just become a part of my diary but remind me of my weak side each time I read it—they would really become a part of me. Having said that, my "unfinished diary" does not perplex me because I can control this "one-way" relationship. My diary is a listener, and as a speaker, I manipulate my words to selectively bare myself so that I can preserve my emotional equilibrium. I also believe that through my unfinished diary (that has no definite end) I strive to defy the finitude of life that death tries to cage us into.

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**KHYATI TRIPATHI** *is a senior research fellow in the Department of Psychology at the University of Delhi. She was awarded the Commonwealth split-site PhD scholarship for the year 2016-17. She is an ardent researcher in the field of Death Studies.*



Unfinished Bag (USA), 19th century. Silk thread, cut steel beads. 6 5/16 in. x 3 3/8 in. 1955-63-3. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum



Rembrandt van Rijn. *The Artist Drawing from the Model*, c. 1639. Etching, drypoint and burin. 9 3/16 in. x 7 3/16 in. National Gallery of Art, Print Purchase Fund (Rosenwald Collection)



יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם בַּיַּת יַעֲקֹב  
 מֵעַם לֹעֲזוֹת הָיְתָה יְהוּדָה  
 וְלִקְדֻשּׁוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּשְׁלַחֲתוֹ  
 הֵיטֵב רָאָה וַיִּנֶּס הִירָדֵן יִסָּב  
 לְאַחֹר הַהַרִים וַיִּקְדּוּ כְּאֵלֵי  
 וַיַּעֲבֹד כִּבְנֵי עֲזָאן מֵהַלְלֵי הַיָּם

# Halpern's Unfinished Poetry

Matthew Johnson

Last summer, I made a short research trip to the archives of the YIVO Institute in New York. I was hoping to find materials that could shed light on the early life and work of the Yiddish poet Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886-1932), one of the protagonists of my dissertation. Halpern was born in a small city in eastern Galicia and, in 1908, immigrated to the United States, where he became a leading and contentious figure in the development of Yiddish modernism. Before his immigration, however, he lived for nine years in Vienna, where he apprenticed as a sign painter, studied at the university, and became involved in the famed literary culture of fin-de-siècle Austria. This near decade was a formidable time in Halpern's life, but we still know relatively little about it.

Unfortunately, as is often the case with archival research, I came up short in New York. While I was sifting through Halpern's papers, I became disheartened by the incompleteness of the archive and by the erasures and losses that could be discerned, but not always filled in. My research on Halpern's life and work in Vienna is thus "unfinished," and it will remain on hold for at least the next several months, like so many other projects, because of COVID-19-related closures. In the archive, however, frustration and failure can often give way to surprise and excitement. Indeed, last summer, I did not find what I was looking for, but I was fascinated by what I did find in those grey boxes and manila folders.

The Halpern collection (RG 464) at YIVO contains, among other documents, a large number of newspaper clippings. Like many writers and public figures, Halpern would often cut out and save poems and essays that he had published in newspapers and magazines, as well as stories and reviews that concerned his work. Archives are full of such clippings, on yellowed and crumbling paper, and they rarely attract much notice. To my surprise, however, I learned that Halpern's clippings were not merely attempts at preservation, but were rather central to his process of (re-)writing. I noticed that he would cut

**This self-reflexive poem imagines the interior monologue of the performer before he goes onstage**

out his poems and glue them onto a separate piece of paper, and then correct, revise, and rewrite them by hand. He would blot and cross out lines, correct typos, change words, and sometimes insert entirely new stanzas—and he would do this *after* publication.

We tend to think of the published poem as a finished product and to consider the poem's themes, word choice, meter, and rhymes as inextricable parts of a complete whole. At the same time, despite the persistent myth of poetic inspiration, we recognize that a poem is usually the result of intense reading, drafting, and rewriting. With this in mind, literary scholars will often pore over handwritten manuscripts and scraps of paper to gain insight into the genesis of a poem, but the published version will almost always be granted authority. As I have suggested, however, Halpern's clippings and editing practice put pressure on this authority and call into question the finished quality of the published text.

Halpern's poem "Harlequin" ("Arlekin"), which makes use of the characters and tropes of commedia dell'arte, is a telling example. This self-reflexive poem imagines the interior monologue of the performer before he goes onstage; it recounts the pressures of the audience and reveals the loneliness and "darkness" of artistic pursuits. "Harlequin" was first published in the newspaper *Frayhayt* in 1924 and then in the posthumous collection *Moyshe Leyb Halpern* in 1934. At YIVO, we can find a third iteration: three sections of the poem cut out from the newspaper and glued onto a separate piece of paper. On this sheet, we can see blotted words and crossed-out lines and, between the second and third sections, a handwritten stanza in black and blue ink. On the left-hand side of the page, we can see additional handwritten lines, which are also crossed out in part, and the occasional



Clipping of "Arlekin" ("Harlequin"), Moses Leib Halpern Collection (RG 464), from the Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York

"O.K." in Latin letters. We can see, in other words, a new version of the poem—one that differs from both published versions. At first glance, Halpern's decision to rearrange the stanzas stands out, but even the minor changes open new ways to read and interpret the poem: for example, the deleted "perhaps" (*efsher*) lends the eleventh line more certainty; the replacement of "those paths" (*yene vegn*) with "over there" (*dortn*) clarifies the object of the speaker's animosity; and the addition of "in vain" (*umzist*) amplifies the poem's critique of aestheticist escape.

Halpern's clippings, including the third iteration of "Harlequin," demonstrate the unfinished quality of his poetry and raise numerous questions: How might these clippings inform our reading of his work more generally? Which version of a poem is "final"—and should this even matter? Which version should be translated? How did later editors and publishers understand and incorporate these postpublication revisions? These questions could also be brought into productive dialogue with recent scholarly debates about "textual instability"—as in Karen Emmerich's *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* (2017)—or considered in light of new editions of Emily Dickinson and Sappho, as translated by Anne Carson, which represent the textual and editorial histories of their poetry.

Finally, we might also ask how Halpern's lived experience shaped and conditioned his approach to writing, editing,

and publishing. After his immigration to the United States, Halpern dedicated himself to creative pursuits and refused more stable (and often more oppressive) forms of work. He experienced years of poverty, hunger, and illness, and his main source of income was often the small honoraria he received from newspapers. In *A Little Love in Big Manhattan* (1988), the scholar Ruth Wisse notes that the newspaper *Frayhayt*, which published "Harlequin," provided Halpern with his first and only steady income from writing. Yet even under these improved conditions, Halpern had to produce quickly to earn his still-meager salary. His archive shows that publication did not always mean the finalization of the poem, and that sometimes it just meant his next meal ticket. His worked-over clippings, in particular, prompt us to read his poems as unfinished texts that reflect the dynamic and incessant creativity of the poet, as well as the material conditions that held "completion" at bay.

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# A Mentsh Trakht, Un Covid-19 Lakht

Barry Trachtenberg

Since 2006, I've been writing in fits and starts a history of the *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* (*General encyclopedia*, Berlin, Paris, New York: 1932-1966), which is the first, and so far only sustained attempt to create a universal encyclopedia in the Yiddish language. When it launched in 1931 to celebrate the seventieth birthday of the Russian Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, it was planned as a five-year project that would result in ten volumes of general knowledge plus a supplemental eleventh volume on *Yidn* (Jews). Having begun in Berlin, Germany, in 1932, the *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* faced interruptions far beyond what its initiators could have ever imagined. The encyclopedia was interrupted by the rise of Nazism in Germany in 1933, the Spanish Civil War, the invasion of France in 1940, the Holocaust, and then by the reorganization of Jewish life after the war. The publishing venture involved hundreds of intellectuals, Yiddish cultural activists, and political figures from Europe, the United States, Palestine/Israel, South America, South Africa, and Australia. It brought together Yiddishists and Hebraists, Zionists and Diasporists, the religiously orthodox and secularists, and Jews of nearly every political stripe.

My effort to write a monograph on the encyclopedia has itself been defined by interruptions, although by ones far less earth-shattering. Some have been caused by global events (such as the 2008 recession and now the Covid-19 pandemic) while others have been much more personal in nature (ranging from the life-threatening to the nearly miraculous).

I began to write on the *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* when asked to contribute to a special 2006 volume of the *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* dedicated to Jewish encyclopedias.<sup>i</sup> I was just finishing my first monograph and this seemed like a viable second project.<sup>ii</sup> The subject was instantly compelling. In the last days of the Weimar Republic, a group of eastern European intellec-



*Algemeyne entsiklopedye logo. Courtesy of the author*

tuals and political leaders who had taken refuge in Berlin decided to launch a Yiddish-language encyclopedia for the roughly nine-to-ten-million Yiddish readers in the world. Their goal was to provide an encyclopedia that could serve as a tool for the modernization of Yiddish-speaking Jewry and as an assertion of their right to join the community of nations. Simon Dubnow himself referred to it as a "Bible for a New Age."

Soon after a specimen volume was published, the Nazis took power in Germany. As Jews, foreigners, and members of the Left, the encyclopedists were at triple risk of arrest and soon fled. Reestablishing themselves in Paris, they slowly began to rebuild their project, publishing on average one volume a year for the rest of the 1930s. They faced countless hurdles and obstacles, many of their own making (none of them, in fact, knew anything about publishing an encyclopedia) but even more because of world events. The Great Depression nearly bankrupted the project. Rising antisemitism caused many to relocate from country to country. The struggle against fascism, first in Germany and then in Spain, overtook their attention. Then came the war, the refugee crisis, the flight to America, and the Holocaust, which they observed from abroad.

By the end of the war, the original vision of imparting general knowledge to a mass reading public gave way

**On good days, I now have a few hours to myself to start working on part 3, but most of that the time is spent on email, advising students, and trying to not to read the news every twenty minutes.**

to the realization that Yiddish readers no longer required a universal encyclopedia in their own language. In the end, only five of the volumes follow the original plan; they halt partway through the letter *beys*. However, another seven additional Yiddish-language volumes were ultimately dedicated to the subject of *Yidn*. Taken together, the *Yidn* volumes chart the rise of European Jewish history and culture, its demise in the Holocaust, and its surviving remnants in the Americas. Four volumes also appeared in English translation as *The Jewish People: Past and Present*.

Writing this history has taken too many years, and it's not only because the archives are scattered around the world. Soon after starting on it in earnest, the Jewish Studies department at the university where I worked collapsed. I'd been hired in 2003 as the fifth member of a robust program. The economic crisis of 2008 gave the university the excuse to accelerate its cutting of tenure-track lines. By 2010, I was the last full-time faculty member and had to oversee its transition from a department to an interdisciplinary program. Soon after, my university decided to cut several major academic programs in a purge that made international news and occupied all of our time in resistance.<sup>iii</sup> When I finally took a research leave in fall 2012, I got to work. I deleted my Facebook account, tuned out the world, and was able to write a draft of the first third of the monograph, which covered the Berlin years.

Then the interruptions really began. Within weeks of finishing that section the following spring, a bicycle collision with a distracted motorist eventually led to three surgeries (one cardiac, two spinal). The following year, I was solicited by a press to write a history of the United States and the Nazi Holocaust<sup>iv</sup>, a topic that has fascinated me since my earliest graduate school days. My partner and I adopted a child (the aforementioned miracle), a process that took us several years and was worth every minute (and nearly every dollar we had). Two years later, we packed up our home and moved to a new university seven hundred miles south.

Now three and a half years into my new position, I've been granted another sabbatical, and thus another chance to focus on the encyclopedia. At first I made

terrific progress and wrote a draft of the Paris years. Then, within days of sending it to my editor, Covid-19 struck in force. My university's offices were shuttered. My daughter's kindergarten was closed. On good days, I now have a few hours to myself to start working on part 3, but most of that the time is spent on email, advising students, and trying to not to read the news every twenty minutes. The rest of the time I am trying to be a kindergarten teacher to our child, who is enrolled in a Spanish-immersion school. I've not studied Spanish since high school. We've built a garden, made a coronavirus piñata, and have scooted every street in our neighborhood. We've raised money for refugee families and delivered masks and gloves to food service workers.

As I write these words from my makeshift home office, I can see my spouse chasing a cat who has run outside for the umpteenth time. I've had to again remind our five-year-old not to barge into the guest room that doubles as my workspace. The other cat keeps climbing over my keyboard—thrilled to have me at home all day.

Soon after the Yiddish encyclopedists arrived in New York (after fleeing Paris by way of Marseilles and Lisbon) one of them quipped over the fate of their project, playing on a well-known saying: "a mentsh trakht—un Hitler lakht" (man plans—and Hitler laughs). I don't know if I'll ever get this book written. This time it's the coronavirus that's laughing.

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**BARRY TRACHTENBERG** is associate professor of History at Wake Forest University.

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i <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cmjs20/5/3>

ii <https://press.syr.edu/supressbooks/883/the-revolutionary-roots-of-modern-yiddish-1903-1917/>

iii <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/05/education/05languages.html>

iv <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/the-united-states-and-the-nazi-holocaust-9781472567185/>

# Religious Exit: An Incomplete Project

Schneur Zalman Newfield

"You should never strive for *shlaymus*, for completeness," proclaimed Rabbi Schwartz, the principal of my Lubavitch high school while stroking his long gray beard. "It's an illusion." He had in mind the attempt to achieve completeness by perfecting one's spiritual devotion through prayer and one's mastery of Talmud. I did not grasp the full meaning of his words then, but they came back to me recently as I pondered the incompleteness of religious exit—both that of my research subjects and my own—and of the study of religious exit itself.

Over the last ten years I interviewed seventy-four Lubavitch and Satmar men and women who left their communities as young adults, and the analysis of those interviews is the subject of my book, *Degrees of Separation: Identity Formation while Leaving Ultra-Orthodox Judaism* (Temple University Press, 2020). I discovered that although they made significant changes in their lifestyle, such as changing much of what they ate, what they wore, and aspects of what they believed, there were nevertheless important elements of their upbringing that stayed with them even years after leaving. While claiming to reject the theological arguments around gender roles and racial separation, they nevertheless maintained conservative views on such matters. Many also still held on to the revulsion towards pork ("*chazer!*") that they imbibed growing up. One Lubavitch woman I interviewed explained that pigs had a "disgusting personality," while others freely admitted that they had "irrational" fears and "psychosomatic" repulsion to the creature. Many interviewees spoke of still singing and being stirred by the Hasidic melodies of their youth or still returning to seminal texts from their communities. I concluded that the people I interviewed remained in a liminal state, forever having left their community of origin but never having fully integrated into the broader

**The key distinction among my interviewees is not how often they read the ultra-Orthodox press or visit their old neighborhoods, but what effect such actions have on their lives.**

American society. Furthermore, my research challenges the basic notion that exiters ever "complete" the process of exiting.

Among the people I interviewed there was a wide spectrum in terms of how much of their past they incorporated into their present life and the impact these inclusions had on their state of mind. Several seemed preoccupied by it and continued to feel traumatized by their upbringing. Many others seemed to manage quite well and clearly enjoyed the ways that they were able to incorporate it into their more secular lives.

The key distinction among my interviewees is not how often they read the ultra-Orthodox press or visit their old neighborhoods, but what effect such actions have on their lives. Several of my interviewees feel a consuming need to keep up with all the goings on in the ultra-Orthodox world, and their visits to the community can leave them in tremendous pain, tearing open deep wounds and causing them to relive their earlier internal debates and religious doubts. Many others, however, experience simply an ongoing curiosity about developments in ultra-Orthodox communities, and their visits with friends and family still in the community are enjoyable. What they all have in common is that none of them are completely free of their past. It was something that they were required to negotiate and continue to engage with.

The process of researching and writing my book has helped me realize the extent to which my own exit from Lubavitch remains incomplete. I continue to marvel at



Left: Photo of the author from around the time of his bar mitzvah  
Right: The author today. Photo by Shulamit Seidler-Feller

how aspects of my Lubavitch upbringing keep bubbling up to the surface, sometimes when least expected. The anecdote about my Lubavitch principal—who would probably be horrified to be quoted in such a publication, and especially by me—that begins this essay is a case in point. The truth is that the Talmud (Shabbos 21b) is correct that *girsā diyankusa*, the knowledge we acquire at a young age, makes a deep impression on us. My interest in classical Jewish texts and history began while still a foot soldier in the Rebbe’s army but persists in my secular life today. At my Conservative synagogue every Shabbos morning, sitting beside my wife and daughters, with women leading prayers and reading from the Torah on equal footing with the men, I sing along with the same Yiddish accent and sense of attachment to the tradition that began in the Lubavitch *shtibles* of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where women were out of sight and only male voices were heard. When I take an *aliyah*, when I’m called to the Torah, I maintain the Lubavitch practice of touching my *tallis* to the words that bookend the section of the *aliyah* before the reader begins, although this is not the practice of the community.

As I think about my book as a completed, published work at long last, I realize that the scope of my own research project is far from complete. After years of tracking down and reassuring sometimes nervous interviewees, arranging conversations at their homes or in local cafes; after enduring long days and sleepless nights poring over transcripts searching for patterns, there is still so much territory that awaits to be explored. We still do not know the differences in the experiences of Hasidic exiters from families with parents who joined the Hasidic community from the outside (*baal teshuvahs*) versus those from families whose parents were born into their communities (“*frum* from birth”). We still do not know enough about the relationship between leaving such communities and secular education. What percentage of Hasidic exiters ends up dating or marrying non-Jews and what effect do these relationships have on their own religious and cultural identity and ties with their families? My research thus far has focused on exiters from Hasidic communities.

What are the salient differences among such exiters and those from non-Hasidic, “yeshivish” communities and from ultra-Orthodox Sephardic homes? And there are still no longitudinal studies on this population. Do the findings that I and others have observed persist among exiters not only years but decades after they exit? These and many other questions await further studies.

It’s easy to view these cases of incompleteness—both of religious exit and of the scholarly examination of it—as a weakness, as a rebuke, or as a failure to get the job done. But we can also see it another way. The incompleteness of the transformation of the lives of religious exiters, myself included, allows us to not limit ourselves to the sterile choice of either maintaining the religious inheritance we were born into or forcing ourselves uncompromisingly into the outside secular world. It allows us the freedom to meld together diverse elements into a richer and more beautiful amalgamation. And the fact that no academic study is ever complete means that there is always room for additional scholarship and inquiry, that scholars need not rush to judgement, because there will always be future opportunities to pursue a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the object of analysis. After all, the Talmud (Hagigah 17a) teaches *tofasta meruba lo tofasta*, if one tries to grasp too much at once, one is liable to fail to grasp anything.

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**SCHNEUR ZALMAN NEWFIELD** is an assistant professor of Sociology at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY, and the author of *Degrees of Separation: Identity Formation while Leaving Ultra-Orthodox Judaism* (Temple University Press, 2020).

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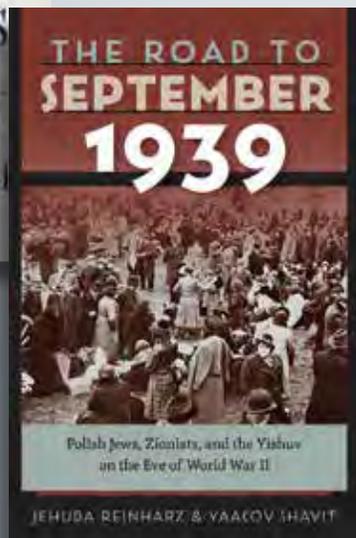
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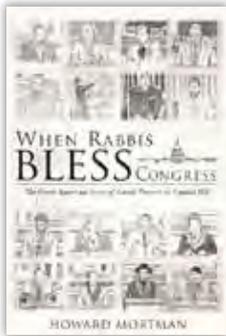
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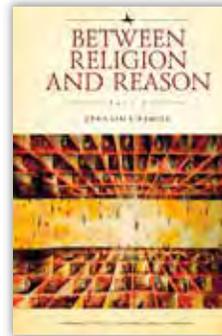
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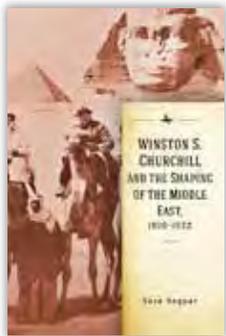
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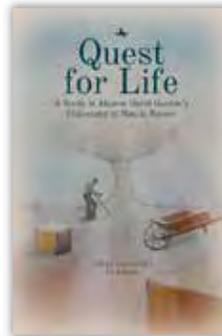


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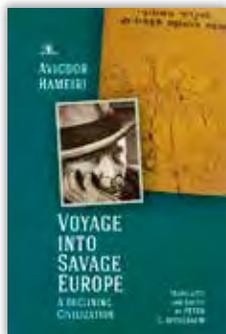
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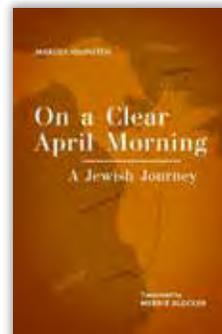
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## Amplifying Cheikh Pinhas

Christopher Silver

Eliaou “Elie” Pinhas Touboul recorded under various names over the course of his lifetime. For his 1928 sessions with the Columbia label, the Algerian Jew provided not one but two names to a French sound engineer: his own, Elie Touboul, and another, Pinhas El Saïdi, the latter an Arabic designation pointing to his origins in the city of Saïda. On his final recordings, made in 1945 for the Odeon label, he no longer required the geographic marker. Nor was a last name even necessary. He had become “Cheikh Pinhas”—the honorific a signifier of his mastery of Andalusian music and a testament to his own renown.

Touboul was a much-sought-after musician in his corner of western Algeria from the 1920s through the 1940s. Yet as I near completion of my monograph on the North African Jews who dominated the music scene in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in the first half of the twentieth century, he is nowhere to be found. Instead, my book tells the story of the region’s biggest stars and its largest cities, thinking anew about the Jewish-Muslim relationship, and what it reveals about Jewish history more broadly. Besides, Touboul left barely a trace. Or so I thought. In summer 2019, I revisited a rare source: I listened again to a recording of his drawn from my collection of North African 78 rpm discs. That August, I posted a digital transfer of the record to *Gharamophone*, an online music archive I founded in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Some months later, one Paul Elie Touboul reached out to me:

*It is just unbelievable for me to listen to the grandfather that I never knew [...] We only had one poor quality recording [...] All the discs have disappeared [...] I am his grandson and I bear his name.*

**His parents were among the first generation of Algerian Jews to be naturalized as French citizens under the Crémieux decree of 1870.**

Touboul’s septuagenarian namesake generously shared with me his grandfather’s small archive. These hundred-odd texts provide for a compelling narrative. But they also present a dilemma. What do I do with a belated encounter with a new set of sources that risk secondary—and perhaps more definitive—erasure if I do not find a place for them in my book? At the very least, I start to sketch out a biography.

Eliaou Pinhas Touboul was born on June 5, 1894, to Isaac Touboul and Aïcha Amoyal in Saïda, Algeria. His parents were among the first generation of Algerian Jews to be naturalized as French citizens under the Crémieux decree of 1870. Historian Benjamin Stora has come to regard that novel legal status as the first of “three exiles” to befall Algerian Jewry over the course of a century (the second being the abrogation of that very citizenship under Vichy rule and the third the near total departure of Jews from Algeria in 1962). But the Toubouls, like so many others, did not experience as neat a separation from their Arabophone and Muslim milieu as has been widely accepted. Isaac, for example, was a jeweler who catered to the popular classes, Jewish and Muslim. Like a great number of Algerian Jews in his particular profession, he was also an amateur musician, committed to the multimodal suite music born of al-Andalus. His son would follow in his footsteps.

As a child, young Elie was first apprenticed to the storied Jewish-Muslim musical tradition by his father. Over time



An eighteen-year-old Elie Pinhas Touboul with his violin, Saïda, Algeria (1912). Courtesy of the Touboul family



Elie Touboul dit Pinhas El Saïdi, “Ya saki ou s’ki habibi,” Columbia Records (Algeria), c. 1928. Courtesy of the author

he would become inseparable from it. The earliest-known photo of Touboul, taken in 1912, captures him in traditional dress, clutching his preferred instrument: the violin, played upright on the knee. The following year, he married Aziza Teboul (no relation) of Mascara. Their first child, Viviane, was born in 1914. Her siblings Isidore and Raymonde arrived after Touboul’s return from the Gallipoli campaign, during which he was reputed to have fashioned a homemade violin out of a jerrycan. In 1919, the family settled in the coastal city of Mostaganem. Isidore later reflected that his father, a deeply religious man, found the comparatively large entrepôt too Western and French for his tastes. Still, there was more business to be had there than in Saïda.

In Mostaganem, Touboul began to make his musical mark, first at Jewish and Muslim religious celebrations, and later at more formal, if intimate, concerts. Although traditional, he eschewed neither technology nor innovation. Sometime between 1928 and 1930, Columbia Records, directed in Algeria by a certain Mr. Dukan (a fellow Algerian Jew), tapped Touboul to record for the label.

“Elie Touboul-Pinhas El Saïdi” recorded approximately ten discs for the prestigious outfit. Among them was “Ya saki ou s’ki habibi” (Oh cupbearer, serve my beloved), a song-text from the core of the Andalusian repertoire.<sup>ii</sup> But in addition to accompanying himself on the violin, there was now a piano arrangement. More interesting still, he performed the piece in a mode with which it is now no longer associated. This innovative practice of employing a single sung poem across multiple melodies largely fell out of favor after World War II. In other words, Touboul’s Columbia recordings provide evidence of a tradition that contained more room for improvisation early in the twentieth century than it does today.

Following his Columbia sessions, Touboul’s star rose further still. As cultural anthropologists Ahmed Amine Dellaï and Hadj Miliani have shown, he and other Jewish musicians like Meyer Reboah and Isaac Benghozi were so in demand in western Algeria that the Mostaganemi poet Abdelkader Bentobdji castigated them for distracting Muslims from their religious duties and sowing *fitna* (discord) among them. But as devoted as the people of Mostaganem were to Touboul, he was to them. After the city suffered a devastating flood in 1927, the musician composed and recorded a song to commemorate the tragedy and honor the victims.

Like other Algerian Jewish musicians, World War II and the Vichy regime’s anti-Jewish statutes forced Touboul

from the public stage. He would return to the studio once more in 1945. Performing under the name of “Cheikh Pinhas,” those handful of recordings made for Odeon would be his last. On June 1, 1947, Eliaou Pinhas Touboul died in his adopted Mostaganem.

How do we amplify voices like those of Cheikh Pinhas? Scholars first need to learn how to listen for them—asking new kinds of questions and seeking new sources that may not be found in institutions or even on paper. We also must resist telos. This is not about mapping the inevitability of all three exiles of Algerian Jewry. Instead, this is the microhistory of a singular Algerian Jew who was nonetheless representative: one who was deeply embedded in his class and milieu, who resisted the separation that Crémieux was supposed to provide for, who remained closely linked to Muslims, and who recorded, like so many of his coreligionists, in Arabic.

Making Cheikh Pinhas audible once again has required “repatriating” his traces to those who know, care about, and feel connected to him, by using *this* century’s core technology and putting his music online. It has once again made clear to me the power of sharing scholarship beyond peer-reviewed publications. Finally, it lays bare the reciprocal and collaborative nature of our work. In our exchanges, Paul Elie Touboul revealed to me that “the

**It has once again made clear to me the power of sharing scholarship beyond peer-reviewed publications.**

notebooks of my grandfather’s musical compositions still remain in the cellar of the villa ... in Mostaganem.” In light of the pandemic, I may not make it Algeria anytime soon. Timing once again has seemed to preclude Touboul featuring prominently in my monograph. But his story deserves to be told, as do countless others. In this way, this project, of which the book is but one component, is destined to remain forever unfinished, and I am humbled by that.

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i <http://gharamophone.com/>

ii <https://soundcloud.com/gharamophone/elie-touboul-dit-pinhas-el-saidi-istikhbar-zidane-ya-saki-ou-ski-habibi-columbia-c-1928>



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# Journalism across Three Countries: The Karmela Bélinki Collection on Raoul Wallenberg

Mercédesz Czibalmos and Dóra Pataricza

In the 1980s, a Swedish-speaking Finnish Jewish journalist and researcher, Karmela Bélinki (b. 1947, Helsinki) conducted interviews with Hungarian Holocaust survivors rescued by the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. She contacted local journalists and many other civilians who knew about the acts of the Swedish diplomat—including some of the individuals who were rescued by him. Bélinki said to have met two to three hundred people who knew the individuals concerned, or who had been in contact with Wallenberg himself.

Wallenberg is well known all over the world, as he was granted the title of Righteous Among the Nations by the Israeli government. Yet, specific chapters about his life and deeds are still unknown. In Hungary, where he saved thousands of Jews, and in Sweden, his heroic deeds were acknowledged only in the 1990s. Memorials and monuments were erected in his honor, and streets and schools were named after him around the world.

Bélinki gathered her material by taking notes and recording some of these meetings, but was only able to use a small part of her material on the radio shows she produced. Supposedly, she was among the first to gather such material from these people. The interviews were conducted in English, French, Hungarian, German, Finnish, Yiddish, and Swedish. Among her informants were Sára Karig, who contributed to saving hundreds of Jewish orphans while working for the charitable organization of the Swedish Red Cross (and was given the Righteous Among the Nations medal by the Yad Vashem Institute in Israel); Dr. Judit Falk (who received a Schutzpass from the Swedish authorities); and former Chief Rabbi Dr. Ödön Singer. As Bélinki described, due to the political climate of the late 1980s, her visits to Hungary were risky. Yet, she was committed to meeting

**European funding possibilities are restricted; there are only a handful of foundations that would be willing to finance a project like this.**

people who could provide her with information on Wallenberg and his deeds. She met her informants—as she described—secretly, in a variety of places. They talked while walking the dog, at the railway station, in waiting halls of theatres, and even at the dentist in the midst of drilling noises.

After the process, Bélinki produced a few radio broadcasts for YLE (YLEisradio/General Radio in Finland) based on the material, and preserved the tape records. After searching her extensive archives, Karmela provided us with some of the cassettes on which she recorded some of her interviews. The cassettes were lying in her storage room for more than thirty years and have not been transcribed or digitized in any way. Our proposed project aims to process these materials and publish our analysis.

Altogether, we received more than forty cassettes, with over twenty hours of recordings, that are waiting to be professionally digitized and analyzed. Some of the recordings are hard to comprehend, hence their quality should be professionally improved. Bélinki's material belongs to the public as a significant part of global and local memory and the history of the Shoah, but also captures the atmosphere of 1980s Hungary exceptionally well.

Undoubtedly, the material is extremely valuable, and the project is of great importance. The only obstacle that must be overcome in order to realize the project is securing funding. However, when filing applications, we often felt that due to our background, as Hungarian Jews living in



Left: One of the houses under Swedish protectorate in Budapest District XIII—Raoul Wallenberg would have issued Swedish passports to its residents. The street is now named after Wallenberg. Photo by Dóra Pataricza

Right: Statue commemorating Wallenberg in St. Stephen's Park, Budapest District XIII, where Wallenberg issued Swedish passports, saving thousands of lives. Photo by Dóra Pataricza

Background: Unprocessed tapes. Photo by Mercédesz Czimbalmos

Finland, we are the only ones who understand the value of these sources. It seems that there is a lack of interest from the Finnish side because of the Swedish references of the project. The fact that the material was produced by someone belonging simultaneously to two minority groups—Swedish-speaking Finn and Jewish—significantly decreases the chances of ever finding a suitable grantor in Finland. The material is either considered too Swedish for a Finnish project or in the worst case, too Jewish, absolutely not relevant to Finland, the Jewish minority of which is around one to two thousand people out of a population of 5.5 million.

In Sweden, however, Karmela Bélinki is considered as a journalist of Finnish citizenship, regardless of the fact that her mother tongue is Swedish. At the same time, in Hungary there is a lack of funding for research and scientific life is strongly politicized. We are aware of the fact that in a country where independent research—especially related to cultural heritage and memory politics—is almost impossible, the project of two Jews living in a foreign country will not be funded. People who leave Hungary for various reasons are often considered “traitors.”

European funding possibilities are restricted; there are only a handful of foundations that would be willing to finance a project like this. There is no tradition of generous private donors either. Since most of the interviewees were Hungarians, their descendants most probably also live in Hungary with restricted financial possibilities. Thus we cannot expect contributions from them to process the material on their parents or grandparents.

Due to the lack of funds to implement the work in the most professional manner, we realized that researchers might find archival treasure troves that seemingly no one else appreciates. Until recently, our biggest fear was that the material will be lost. Right now, our greatest fear is that it remains unprocessed, and not available to be used to its fullest. Sometimes researchers have to accept that not all of their projects can be implemented right away. Even though we have not yet managed to secure the funding for the work, we remain persistent.

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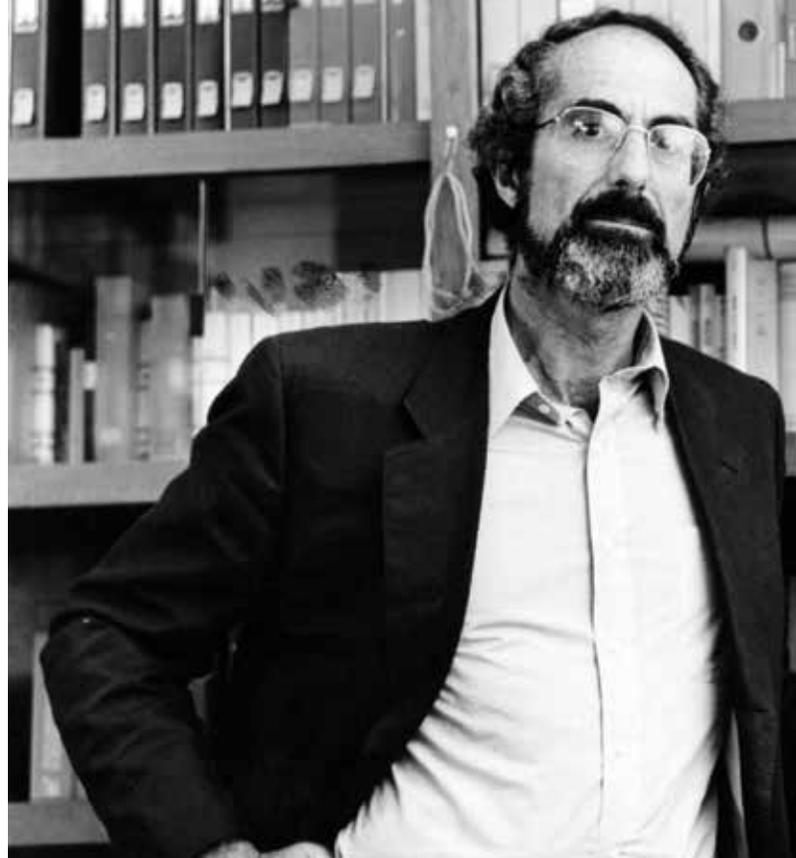
# The Unfinished Business of Philip Roth

Ira Nadel

While the complete works of Philip Roth exist in ten volumes from the Library of America and the majority of his novels remain in print as trade paperbacks, we lack the complete story of his life. This was a problem for Roth, who spent his final years outlining his life story. Eager to rebut Claire Bloom's 1996 memoir, *Leaving a Doll's House*, Roth hired a biographer, Ross Miller, but the arrangement proved unsatisfactory. By 2012, he'd chosen a replacement, preparing a series of lengthy documents showing exactly how he wanted his life presented. His story would have an ending, but it would be one he wrote. As the narrator in Alan Lelchuk's satirical novel about Roth, *Ziff: A Life?* (2003) asks, "Can Ziff have it both ways?" Roth emphatically answered "yes."

Roth had a fictional precedent: his 1986 novel *The Counterlife*, where Henry Zuckerman, brother of Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's alter ego, dies on the operating table but remarkably comes back. Henry starts as a dentist in New Jersey, but once revived, becomes a militant settler in the West Bank. Meanwhile, Nathan Zuckerman also dies, but nonetheless narrates his and his brother's story, although Henry will discover and edit *Nathan's* story in the end. The novel's unstable narrative is a set of counter-texts and counterlives, with multiple beginnings and endings. As Bernard Malamud wryly notes in his novel *Dubin's Lives*, "Life responds to one's moves with comic counterinventions."

Before he died, Roth prepared instructions, directions, and even guidelines for his biographer, seeking to control how his story was presented. Yet Roth believed that no life was ever finished: both *The Counterlife* and *Everyman* (2006), as well as *Indignation* (2008), are narrated by deceased protagonists. They are preludes to Roth's own determined attempts to control and revise the narrative of his life, to finish the unfinished business of living.



Between his "retirement," in 2010, and his death, on May 22, 2018, Roth prepared file after file for his new biographer Blake Bailey, each with a memorandum on how to read and use the material. He also prepared a series of private documents that outlined in detail what information should and should not be included. Several of their headings are "Money," "Marriage a la Mode," "Pain and Illness History," and a lengthy "Notes for My Biographer" (over three hundred pages). In these documents, he details the narrative he wanted told. In short, Roth sought to complete his own unfinished life from the grave, fearful of losing control of the story. A scene in *Everyman* epitomizes the effort: visiting a cemetery, the protagonist questions a gravedigger on his method. The man responds, "I dig front to back, and I dig a grid and as I go I use my edger to square the hole." This is exactly what Roth sought to achieve, providing an edger (his instructions) to square the hole (his life): "You have to keep it square as you go," the gravedigger reminds the unnamed protagonist and the reader (*Everyman*, 175).

Have other writers left similar directives? Certainly not. James Atlas began his biography of Saul Bellow with his subject's cooperation, but met increasing resistance after Bellow sensed that Atlas was writing an unsympathetic portrait. No instructions, just resistance. Atlas soon found



*Philip Roth visiting Primo Levi in September 1986 at his home in Turin, Italy. Courtesy of La Stampa and the Centro Internazionale di Studi Primo Levi, Turin, Italy*

**Before he died, Roth prepared instructions, directions, and even guidelines for his biographer, seeking to control how his story was presented.**

revealed his twenty-year affair with a student. Anticipating this revelation, Malamud's daughter published a memoir the year before the biography with details and even a new revelation: Malamud's wife had herself had extramarital affairs. Janna Malamud Smith's *My Father Is a Book* offers a multihued portrait; Philip Davis, somewhat hampered by the estate, paints largely in black and white.

Not every biographical subject, of course, is as prescriptive as Roth. A more hands-off approach was that of Samuel Beckett, who offered neither interference nor guidance when Deirdre Bair proposed writing his life. "I will neither help nor hinder you," he promised at the end of their first meeting in 1971, his neutral position ideal for any biographer.

Of course, every biographical subject wants to control their story after they've gone, finishing their unfinished business without the worry that others might do it improperly. Despite Roth's acknowledgement in his fiction that every life is always unfinished, he ironically sought completeness. But while not granted access to the special files and memoranda, I've found unexpected discoveries and new sources, some previously restricted until after his death. These have opened new avenues of understanding. Unlike my accounts of Leonard Cohen, Tom Stoppard, and Leon Uris, where access was unrestricted, writing about Roth is something of a roundabout process. But even with limited interviews and partial entrée into his world, a certain freedom emerges to offer readings and interpretations not encouraged or even permitted to the "official" biographer. Roth's faith in directing his biography was unbounded; he believed that his life would at last be told as he wanted. In this way, Roth became the actor, director, and producer of his own story, his own "ghost writer." But to date, his film remains unreleased and may, indeed, require editing.

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**IRA NADEL**, professor of English at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, has published *Biography: Fiction, Fact & Form* (Macmillan, 1984), *Joyce and the Jews* (Macmillan, 1989), and *Modernism's Second Act* (Palgrave, 2013), in addition to biographies of Leonard Cohen, Tom Stoppard, David Mamet, and Leon Uris. His account of Philip Roth will appear in 2021.

his subject feeling guilty about parts of his life and kept things secret. Unable to control his story, Bellow turned stubborn and prickly, attempting to shut down rather than redirect his story. Unable to withdraw permission, he simply lessened his cooperation. In Atlas's words, Bellow saw that "the biographer was the gravedigger."

The result made Bellow uncomfortable largely because it portrayed him as a crabby, vain, promiscuous, self-centered narcissist constantly in need of money to support his multiple ex-wives. Bellow's second biographer, Zachary Leader, did not have Atlas's problem: Bellow could no longer interfere (he died in 2005) and the estate wanted a new, more sympathetic life to replace the Atlas portrait. The biographer did so in two lengthy volumes of over 1,500 pages, presenting a life submerged by its facts. Roth strongly encouraged the writing of this second type of life.

Bernard Malamud never encouraged a biography. He may have sought control—he did have secrets—but for years after his death, the family opposed any life. But worry that Malamud's reputation was fading led to the family granting a British critic (Philip Davis) permission, and a completed biography appeared in 2007, twenty-one years after Malamud's death. In contrast to Malamud's anodyne public image, the biography

# An Ethnography of Jerusalem Street Cats, a.k.a. the Archives Are Closed

Ilan Benattar

During my spring semester trip to Jerusalem, I developed an extensive photographic catalogue of Jerusalem's stray cat population. Feline friendship has been my sole respite in this hour of social isolation. What was meant to be a period of intensive archival work has long since transformed from days spent squinting at fading manuscripts in high registers of Gallicized Ladino and Rabbinic Hebrew, into days spent coaxing hesitant street cats with an awkward and ad hoc mix of English and Hebrew mumbblings.

I came to Jerusalem in midwinter of this year with the intention of completing the lion's share of my dissertation archival work by the time I return in late May. I had spent a productive three-week-long "preliminary" trip to the National Library of Israel and the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in summer of 2019.

Returning confidently to Jerusalem in February, I hoped that my departure from a dreary New York winter would inspire a spurt of productivity. I joked with friends in the early weeks of my trip that the equally miserable Jerusalem winter—punctuated as it was by bouts of darkness and hail—seemed positively biblical. Never let it be said that historians can't predict the future, if only by accident!

As the "partial shutdown" in Israel became a "near-complete shutdown," the archives naturally closed their doors. It was only in the last several days before this happened that, sensing what was likely coming, I began furiously digitally scanning materials which I had been leisurely dissecting beforehand. It was not nearly enough. Once the archives shut, the stories I had been delicately tracing against the undefined mass of the archive began fading. The sharp edges of the debates which enlivened the central characters became blunt. As if with the button of a remote, the history was muted. Unable to return home early for lack of space to properly quarantine, isolated in a Jerusalem studio with my dissertation

**Returning confidently to Jerusalem in February, I hoped that my departure from a dreary New York winter would inspire a spurt of productivity.**

timeline radically upended, both my personal and professional futures had been thrown into question.

"But Ilan, don't you have enough to write *at least something?*"

The question kept me awake at night in the early days of mandated isolation and rattled around my head during daily circular runs around my block. I did my best never to stray further than the government-mandated limit of one hundred meters from my place of residence, even as the metric system is beyond my remit as an American. Sure, I told myself, I could definitely write something, but really what worth would it have at this point? What could it even say that wouldn't stop midsentence? Would my time be better spent reviewing the material I actually do have, even if ad nauseum?

Consider the experience of the central personality in my Jerusalem-based research, the Ottoman Jewish intellectual Avram Galante (1873–1961). For those who remember him today, Galante is perhaps best known as a prolific scholar of Ottoman Jewish history, folklore, and language. He began his career, however, as an educator, social activist, and journalist. This transition in his intellectual output and professional energies occurred around 1909. Following the Young Turk Revolution and the beginning of the Second Constitutional Period, he left Cairo for Europe. It seems that this move was catalyzed by a satisfaction that his liberal dissident journal *La Vara* (Cairo, 1905–1908) had been sufficiently effective in its strident opposition to the chief rabbi Moshe HaLevi, closely linked as he was to the conservative administration of the now deposed Sultan Abdulhamid II. I have



*Photos courtesy of the author*

often wondered what prompted this switch in career track and how his journalistic and activist experience influenced his later academic oeuvre. The vast majority of his voluminous works on Ottoman Jewish history were first published decades later, in the 1930s.

It is hardly an original observation that for those who lived it, the last several decades of Ottoman rule would have felt particularly turbulent. It has occurred to me in between weary bouts with my dissertation manuscript that my own difficulty weaving a historical narrative at this particular historical moment might perhaps grant some insight into the gap between Galante's activist and journalistic career and his major scholarly output. If the writing of history is indeed, as many have noted, an intimate negotiation between the past and the present, then it would make sense that a present in acute crisis would be a radically challenging context in which to think historically. To write history at a moment in which the material foundations of the future are in intense flux, in which the stakes around present realities have come into particularly sharp focus, is to be profoundly uneasy, consumed by feelings of urgency and imminence.

I can't know for certain if the present moment of converging crises brings me closer to understanding Galante's frame of mind, or if he indeed consciously sought the perspective of distance before engaging in deep historical reflection on centuries of Ottoman Jewish life. Still, it seems clear that as our present reality continues to pick up speed and months pass by in the span of days, assumptions will shift and the most pressing questions that now require historical interrogation will reveal themselves. All in due time.

In any event, most of what I have learned for certain in this profoundly uncertain moment, I have learned instead from my field study of Jerusalem street cats—pounce on opportunities as they arise, take care of your community, don't forget water (!), and rest in the shade when you need it.

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Jeremy Hutton - Classical & Ancient Near Eastern Studies  
Mark Loudon - German, Nordic & Slavic  
Tony Michels - History  
Steven Nadler - Philosophy  
Anna Paretskaya - Sociology  
Cara Rock-Singer - Religious Studies  
Douglas Rosenberg - Art  
Jordan Rosenblum - Religious Studies  
Nadav Shelef - Political Science  
Judith Sone - Jewish Studies  
Adam Stern - German, Nordic & Slavic  
Scott Straus - Political Science  
Jeanne Swack - Music  
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# The Profession

## Isolation and Illness before and after COVID-19

Jessica Carr

Before COVID-19 ground everything to a quick halt in the spring of 2020, I had already experienced sudden illness leading to an as-yet and indefinitely unfinished project. In summer 2017, I spent three months in Buenos Aires to begin research for my second book, a project on Jewish women's visual culture in Argentina. I met with Irene Jaievsky, the curator of Jewish women's artwork at the Museo de la Mujer (Women's Museum) in Buenos Aires, as planned, and she connected me to contacts with Jewish women artists throughout Argentina. I decided to spend some time in Córdoba. I interviewed two women, Alex Appella and Sarita Goldman. Alex became a major interlocutor about a community of Jewish artists, many of whom are women. Her collages and an art book traced family threads from Transylvania to the United States, Argentina, and—to her surprise—Israel. She learned she had one more uncle than she knew of, a secret uncle because he fled Transylvania for Mandate Palestine. The rest of the family individually made the decision to hide their Jewishness, until her great uncle revealed the truth. She uses multidirectional visual and verbal writing to tell narrative and metanarrative, underwritten by a distinct theory of time and heritage that cannot be rendered linear. Thus, my work for the second project began to take shape.

Upon my return, I began to reflect on broader ideas that emerged from my time in Córdoba: how Jews have seen themselves as part of local and national communities; how various communities have envisioned the impor-

**I prefer to say that my work is “indefinitely” on hold as a positive adaptive coping mechanism.**

tance of Jewish presence; how these women artists complicate any idea of national borders somehow containing or dictating Jewish life and practice. I thought about how Jewish women are doubly marginalized from the art world in Argentina as Jews and as women, and as residents of Argentina they are marginalized from histories and representations of Jewish communities throughout the world.

However my health rapidly deteriorated. I could barely walk. On my third trip to the ER, I was finally admitted. I learned that if they cannot determine what department of the hospital should treat you, it is difficult to be admitted. But when my heart rate had dropped to the 20s and I collapsed as I entered the hospital, they were able to admit me at last, for heart failure.

I received a diagnosis of E. coli. The bacteria had ravaged my body for six weeks, though antibiotics reversed many effects. Yet, I stayed for ten days and underwent tests in virtually every department of the hospital. Doctors told me, “you are in too much pain” and “you don't seem to be aware of how much pain you are having.” I left with an awareness that my body is not like other bodies, not before the E. coli and not after. I took a partial leave from teaching, then a semester of FMLA when I would have had a sabbatical. I was on medical leave for about eight months. I was de facto in near-total isolation.



*Digitally produced collage pages from Alex Appella, The János Book, English trade edition, 2006. Courtesy of the artist*

I got back to writing in late summer 2018 and completed my first book manuscript. My illness continued to affect my life, and I finally was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and some other conditions. I needed surgeries. My former partner and I ended a ten-year relationship. As two academics, we struggled to find work in the same place, and my “new” disability affected my needs and my personality. As he remained on the job market, life became untenable.

In the fall of 2018, I returned to Argentina. I broke my ankle in a freak accident, and this new physical burden broke me in good ways and bad. Although if I return to Argentina, I don’t expect to be in a car accident in the Andes again, I finally saw that I was trying to continue life in a pattern that did not match up with my abilities. I came to a conclusion: my research in Argentina must be on hold.

I prefer to say that my work is “indefinitely” on hold as a positive adaptive coping mechanism. It is psychologically less burdensome to see unfinished work, or the disruptions of a global pandemic, as “indefinite.” This refuses to overreach and see a hard situation as lasting “forever,” yet it also acknowledges uncertainty directly. I don’t know how much time I’ll need to be in a position to return to ethnography in another country. It’s ok to have limits and not to know how long they will last. When I first got sick, I wanted a timeline to recovery. Actually, I could not even have a timeline to diagnosis. My thinking had to shift. Accepting the deep contingency of our lives and uncertainty of how personal, national, and global situations

will play out, in many ways beyond our own control, is key to living adaptably and mentally healthy.

But accepting this personally left accepting this professionally. While I mourn the time and distance growing between the community of artists I met in Argentina, my tenure clock ticks on. I have to explain to my institution why the research I had planned won’t go forward for now, and what I’m doing in the meantime. The experience of Jewish women artists working in Córdoba—a major city but less populated and less famous than Buenos Aires—mirrors and brings to the surface the question of what it means to construct a Jewish visual culture from the margins. Geography, gender, and Jewishness pushed many *artistas judías* to the margins, but they have distinct insights from there. Disability pushed me to quotidian and academic margins. I want to learn more about the Jewish women working and working together in Córdoba, but I can’t for now.

But it’s not as if I can no longer think and write. As I move on to research that can be done from home, I am excited about new possibilities and I have a lot to say. But in explaining my trajectory, I do not relish needing to incorporate some disclosure of my personal health and struggle in my self-evaluation for my tenure file.

However, I don’t see any other way, and perhaps it is important that we do this. I hope that my disability will not be held against me. People tend to see me and assume that I’m “all better.” I know they think this because they tell me they’re glad I am. No, I explain, I am not all better and may never be. I’m better, but I am not who I

## The Profession

used to be. I worry that the dissonance between appearance and experience, the nature of unmarked disabilities, will affect how people read my narrative in my tenure file. These are worries that most people with disabilities have, and they're rooted in our ways of thinking about disability in general. There is not a world of abled/disabled. It's a spectrum, and most of us will be disabled somehow, perhaps only for a little while. If academics and all thinking could shift to expect contingencies, including disabilities, all of our lives would be improved.

My situation is a microcosm. We need to acknowledge that the patterns we plan for ourselves may change, and our institutions should help us adapt, not exacerbate the fear and shame that can come with health problems, diagnosed or undiagnosed. My health is stabler now, but COVID-19 represents a new contingency that I cannot control, in addition to being an unnatural disaster in the United States. How long will this sickness last? What will the changes in passport or border policies mean for all of us who seek to live, work, attend conferences, and more outside of our national borders?

For me, the quarantine felt familiar: enclosing myself at home to work within restrictive limits. This familiarity first made the transition easier for me than for my

**For me, the quarantine felt familiar: enclosing myself at home to work within restrictive limits.**

colleagues. Then, it brought up deeper feelings of frustration: How could I have finally recovered "enough" from food poisoning and some of the effects of fibromyalgia, only to break my ankle? Now I have two legs to stand on, but I must return to lockdown and a project that remains unfinished? However, the same support will get me through as before COVID-19: sympathetic friends and colleagues and a vision that "unfinished" may not mean permanent loss. The more I embrace that perspective, the more my resilience and possibilities appear before me. Now, not just my work but the research of every academic is indefinitely on hold. In this together, we can ask how illness and unfinished work provide insights and possibilities less visible from the perspective of our best-laid plans.

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**JESSICA CARR** is associate professor of *Religious Studies and the Berman Scholar of Jewish Studies at Lafayette College. She is the author of The Hebrew Orient: Palestine in Jewish American Visual Culture, 1901–1938 (SUNY Press, 2020).*



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# Confessions of an Unfinisher: or, In Defense of the Draft

Daniel Stein Kokin

I am an unfinisher. There, I said it. Of course, not everything I undertake remains undone. I finish off reviews, essays, dramatic presentations, and articles aplenty. (I got this out!) But with the *really* big projects, the endpoint often eludes. Why is that? What does it reveal about my scholarly *modus operandi*? And what might it say about our conventional understanding of finished and unfinished scholarship, including how we might reconceive them?

While the reasons I perennially get stuck are manifold, three aspects of my academic personality bear the greatest responsibility:

1) A broad, thematic approach to teaching, research, and writing that takes me across time and space; instead of selecting and mastering a specific terrain, I seem instead to be perpetually in motion between fields.

2) An inherent openness and curiosity vis-à-vis the predominant subjects of interest in whatever new environment I find myself.

3) A deep desire not to publish until I feel I have worked through projects properly. ("I think, therefore I tinker" might well be my own personal "cogito.")

Throw into the mix a series of dislocations prompted by both professional and family considerations—including their attendant stimuli—and you have all the makings of an unfinisher.

For years, I actively sought to resist the above inclinations, well aware of their likely professional consequences. But over time, I have increasingly come to appreciate and accept that this is simply who I am, in large measure because I observed that this was how others understood and engaged me. It was thanks to a college mentor's intervention that as a Judaic Studies postdoc at Yale I also found myself teaching the history and politics sequence



Meira Stein Kokin. *The Tinkerer at Work*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist

for that university's Directed Studies program. Thereafter, the University of Greifswald in Germany requested courses in rabbinic literature, though I had little prior experience in this domain. And, most recently, during a visiting stint at UCLA, I was approached by colleagues who proposed that I teach Israel Studies, yet another new terrain, which I gladly undertook. Yes, these opportunities distracted me from what in theory is my central focus, Christian Hebraism in the Italian Renaissance, but they all went well, proved immensely enriching, and fostered an interdisciplinary dialogue that will stimulate me for years to come.

As with teaching, so with research. At Yale I was an outlier in a program dominated at the time by the study of ancient Judaism, which prompted my research examining the origins of the legend of the lost tribes. (I realize in retrospect that I wanted to fit in.) Subsequently, my visiting stint as the Viterbi Professor of Mediterranean Jewish Studies at UCLA required delivery of a public lecture. Having previously presented my primary research there, I turned instead to a topic that had long intrigued me and on which I was at the time teaching a graduate seminar, the symbolic role of Rome in Jewish history and culture across the centuries. But what, then, to do with all the ideas that emerged from preparing that presentation? Flash-forward a year and now Israel Studies wanted a talk. Some recent programming I had developed on Israeli music had planted a seed, which I germinated into "Found in Translation: Foreign Songs and the Creation of Israeli Musical Culture." And so it goes ...

Perhaps I should have resisted the impulse to pursue these subjects, maintaining absolute focus, whatever the cost, on my main area. But, as I have learned, when the next pressing question or task calls, resistance is futile ... and also intellectually unsatisfying. For, whatever the subsequent revision and refinement, in my experience it is in the early stages of a new fascination or opportunity that the most innovative insights are likeliest to emerge. Why close myself off to them? Plus, though my approach has admittedly led to troves of “unfinished” work, it has in its own way also been quite productive.

Yes, 150 pages on the tribes in Josephus, the Pseudepigrapha, and early rabbis sit idle on my hard drive. But it was that draft that led directly to my “Toward the Source of the Sambatyon” (AJS Review 37, no. 1), in which I bring to light the Roman-Jewish polemics that lie at the root of the sabbatical river legend. Likewise, while I don’t know when I’ll manage to work through all the thoughts that emerged in the context of my Rome lecture, I am just shy of the finish line with a piece exploring one of them, namely why the Arch of Titus is absent from Benjamin of Tudela’s detailed description of sites of Jewish interest in the Eternal City. Indeed, I feel that my best work consists of articles extracted and polished from much longer drafts, much like stones from a quarry.

Reflecting on this aspect of my academic praxis, I think “finished” might to some degree be in the eye of the beholder: as my (thus far) incomplete books have facilitated a number of published articles, I can perhaps regard them as propaedeutic rather than (for the time being) aborted. And I also wonder if the “unfinished” itself might not merit more of a place in this Academia.edu age

**Indeed, I feel that my best work consists of articles extracted and polished from much longer drafts, much like stones from a quarry.**

of daily downloads. Our profession's obsession with the finished product (however clear its practical justification) reflects a time in which dissemination was dependent on physical publication and compels adherence to received notions (structural, chronological, thematic) as to what constitutes a coherent or well-shaped article, chapter, or book. Here, too, challenges abound: my draft ends up too long for an article, too short for a book. Or having examined A and B exhaustively, it adds little with regard to the requisite C. There are many pieces I would gladly share widely on the understanding that they present material not (yet?) fully worked through or shaped. Perhaps I am not alone.

To be sure, I do appreciate the pleasures of finishing and have no illusions that academia will change. But, nonetheless, it is tempting to imagine a Republic of Letters in which the draft, too, receives its due. *Tam ve-nishlam!*

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**DANIEL STEIN KOKIN** is currently a visiting scholar at Arizona State University. Among his ongoing projects is “Breach of Protocols: Revisiting Zion's Elders,” an academic performance re-examining and subverting the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

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i “Finished and complete.” It was common for scribes or authors to add this phrase at the conclusion of their texts and seemed, for obvious and ironic reasons, a fitting close for this one.



Unfinished Sleeve Band, 18th–19th century. Cotton and silk. 3 ¾ in. x 13 9/16 in. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum



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For more information please contact:

**Professor Sarah Ross**  
 Director of the European Centre for Jewish Music  
 Villa Seligmann  
 Hohenzollerstraße 39  
 30161 Hannover  
 +49-(0)511-3100-7120  
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# ABD for Life: Mired in the Margins or Finding Freedom at the Fringes?

Sharon L. Albert

Sixteen years ago, as an “all but dissertation” (ABD) PhD candidate with two young children, I began a one-year replacement position in the small liberal arts college where my spouse had a tenure-track job. I had been adjuncting, so it was great temporarily to have more security, even if it meant starting my newborn in daycare at six weeks old. Far in so many ways from the major research university where I’d been doing my doctoral work, and unlike anything I’d previously experienced in my education outside the United States, I loved the human element of a liberal arts college, the emphasis on teaching, engagement with students, collaboration with colleagues. I was sold.

I quickly realized that, at least for me, engaging actively in the college community was key to success. First of all, being an active and visible presence on campus is, in the absence of tenure, good for job security. By teaching whatever needed to be taught, attending campus events, participating in faculty development workshops, even serving on committees, I became less dispensable. Not only was I doing necessary work, but people knew me. Students filled my classes; faculty and staff colleagues recognized my hard work and commitment. Although I was working beyond my job description, I was making myself an integral part of the college.

It was also good for me personally. I was able to put my expertise and skills to good use, and I was able to continue to grow and develop as a teacher and a scholar. I made friends, and developed collegial collaborations in teaching and scholarship. I challenged myself; I grabbed opportunities and took on new responsibilities; I had fun.

But none of that was good for the dissertation. Even as I learned and grew and took my research in new directions, I did it all under the heavy weight of my unfinished doctorate. It took me ten more years to disengage fully

**It is particularly disappointing when I am marginalized by colleagues who claim to speak loudly for the disenfranchised, and by those whom I consider friends.**

from the PhD program. By then I was permanent faculty; teaching a full course load each semester, doing too much college service, and even occasionally publishing, particularly, but not only, in the scholarship of teaching and learning. It was an incredibly difficult decision finally to acknowledge that I would not finish, and not one I made lightly. By the time I formally withdrew from my graduate program, I was confident that not finishing was the good and appropriate choice for me for many reasons.

And yet, I had only begun to know the price of this decision. Aside from the not-insignificant financial costs of staying in academia without a doctorate—I get paid considerably less for doing the same job as others—I’ve also paid a heavy price in terms of career advancement and opportunities. The PhD matters.

The PhD matters in the academy. As academics, our job, arguably, is to question core assumptions, critique unjust power structures, and disrupt the status quo; and yet the structures of higher education are incredibly hierarchical. You need only read the news to see that, at least in common public wisdom, research universities take priority over teaching colleges; STEM fields take priority over the humanities; it doesn’t only matter that you have a PhD, but where it comes from and in what discipline. The PhD credential will always outvalue expertise and experience. I am not arguing here for a lowering of standards. Completing a dissertation, while an important rite of passage, does not in itself make one a good teacher, or even necessarily a good researcher or writer. Over half of the faculty in higher education today are contingent



*The author teaching a class on Islamic traditions. Photo by Paul Pearson*

faculty, many of us without PhDs, hired because we are excellent instructors with the necessary knowledge and training to teach well. We are already here; we are doing the work and doing it well.

The PhD matters to (some of) my colleagues. I am confident that it does not matter for many—I'd like to believe most—of my colleagues who consider me a full and equal member of the faculty, and would gladly see me and my fellow lecturers receive more equitable pay, sabbaticals, and other benefits. However, from others I face marginalization and exclusion. It is particularly disappointing when I am marginalized by colleagues who claim to speak loudly for the disenfranchised, and by those whom I consider friends.

Finally, and most ironically, the PhD matters to the world. We are in a moment when higher education is under siege, and pundits decry the irrelevance of the academy, particularly the humanities. Yet, when you want to burnish the prestige of your board of directors or to call in an "expert" to back up your case, that PhD looks good.

And still here I am, teaching a full course load and doing service and research like all of my colleagues. I have made my status a benefit. A bit more under the radar and with less to lose, I've chosen to be outspoken, to take chances, and, as much as I am able, to take advantage

of opportunities when they are available. Of those many opportunities, I am particularly proud of two: the work I have done to improve the status of lecturers at the college and my organization of a very successful campus-wide teach-in, "Understanding Trump's America," organized quickly following the Muslim ban in 2017.

It is June 2020, and I am writing this amid the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests against racism and police brutality. In many ways, my concerns here seem petty. I am very privileged, and arguably I have been very lucky. I have a stable position at an institution that treats its contingent faculty relatively well. I have been able to teach and to undertake research in new directions that interest me. Still, while I have found opportunities, there are many that have not been available to me. And the loss is not mine alone; there are at least a few things for which, had I the "right" credentials, I would have been able to do the job, do it well, and make a more significant difference. Perhaps it is time we reassess the hierarchies of higher education in America to make space for those arriving by different paths.

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**SHARON L. ALBERT** is a senior lecturer in the Religion Studies Department at Muhlenberg College.

# A Light unto the Nations? A Stalled Vision for the Future of the Humanities

Jonathan Dekel-Chen

For many academics, “no” can be a recurring companion. Negative reviews of manuscripts, refusals of grant submissions, and denied job applications are all things most of us encounter during our careers. Some rejections may be inevitable while other “nos” may surprise us.

In this spirit, I will assess here a professional failure that, quite literally, keeps me up at night. Starting in approximately 2015, I have invested substantial thought and effort trying to build partnerships in the academy whose goal would be the launch of an institutional initiative for what I call “Applied Humanities.” At core, I believe that scholarship in the humanities can, and must, contribute more to the betterment of humankind by proactively providing solutions to challenges facing communities today. Jewish scholars and scholars of Jewish Studies seemed a natural launch platform given what I presumed was a common predilection for healing the world, together with a healthy appreciation for boosting enrollments in our field. My hope (and plan) was to form a partnership with colleagues that could facilitate a multiyear pilot project at a Jewish scholarly institution; the pilot could then be upscaled in situ or elsewhere. I sought these partnerships among colleagues in North America and at my home university in Israel. Along the way, I communicated and met with dozens of fellow scholars and academic leaders to discuss my vision and, where relevant, their existing programs. After nearly five years, I ceased my efforts some months ago.

Before discussing why my proposal found insufficient traction, let me delve a bit deeper into the initiative. Given the many spiraling global crises in recent years, coupled with the shrinking landscape of humanities studies worldwide, there is an urgent need to deepen and widen the impact of humanities research on the formation of progressive policy, the domestic and transnational delivery of philanthropic aid, educational

**My proposal simultaneously addressed a growing recognition in the field that many graduates of MA and PhD programs may not find stable employment in the academy, regardless of their qualifications.**

programs, social justice projects, and many other real-world actions. I argue that Applied Humanities—meaning the purposeful application of outstanding humanities scholarship toward solving real-world problems—could help address these challenges and also ignite renewed public interest in the study of the humanities. The farthest-reaching component in my proposal was an incubator concept, similar in structure to incubators in the exact sciences. These incubators would foster cooperation between top-tier humanities faculty, graduate students, funders, practitioners, government agencies, nonprofits, and private interests, combining important scholarship with real-world practice. Products from these incubators, by design, would bring together scholarly expertise with action to address pressing social, economic, cultural, or policy issues. As an Israeli scholar keenly aware of modern communal histories alongside the legacies of philanthropy and political advocacy in the Jewish world, promoting the practice of Applied Humanities seemed both timely and a moral imperative.

My proposal simultaneously addressed a growing recognition in the field that many graduates of MA and PhD programs may not find stable employment in the academy, regardless of their qualifications. I hoped that a holistic Applied Humanities project could spark enhanced capacity training for humanities students at all levels. This would equip alumni to seek out socially conscious professional pathways that go beyond what universities typically offer in “career centers.” Surely, I thought, my forward-looking Jewish and Israeli colleagues would flock to this reorientation.

I hoped to mobilize colleagues for real-world action not commonly expected from the academy. This Applied Humanities initiative matches my own temperament and pull towards activism, not what scholars normally see as part of their professional toolbox or set of obligations. An honest retelling of this failed effort should account for my own faults that may have doomed the proposal. As in life, luck also matters in this postmortem. After a number of dead ends and nonstarters, for a moment in 2017–2018 the horizon seemed brighter. The president of the Center for Jewish History in New York agreed to convene a preliminary meeting of a steering committee meant to “map” possible futures of Applied History (and Humanities) with a distinguished group of potential stakeholders. In a deflating blow, however, the president stepped down suddenly (a few months before the planned workshop); the new leadership of the Center declined further involvement in the initiative, citing a need to refocus on its core missions. The leadership of my home university briefly supported the initiative in 2019, convened an ad-hoc exploratory committee, then without explanation never followed up.

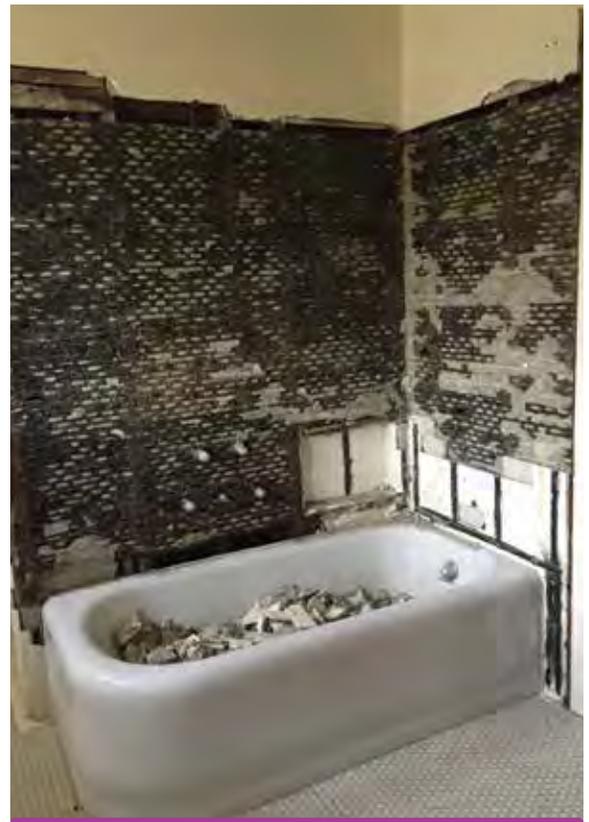
In the remaining space, I will conjecture from experience why the Applied Humanities idea has not gained traction.

I’ll call the first hurdle “the dilemma of perceived excellence” in elite graduate programs. Faculty and students in such schools are understandably fixated on delivering results for a generations-old promise: graduates who land prestigious academic jobs. Neither teachers nor students seem willing to substantively explore trajectories other than tenure-track appointments. Likewise, academic administrators worry that promoting an “applied” feature of graduate studies might imply scholarly inferiority. In fairness to academic leaders, they tend to be very busy and may not have bandwidth to think beyond the supervision of existing structures.

Academic siloing often impeded promotion of this Applied Humanities initiative. Siloing surely occurs all over the academy. But in Jewish Studies and among Jewish Studies scholars (at least those with whom I spoke about the initiative), it frequently seems cemented. I am also tempted to locate the roots of reticence to engage in Applied Humanities in what I see as ongoing fetishization of disciplinary, methodological, thematic, and chronological pods separating subfields throughout Jewish Studies as well as in the study of the humanities in Israel. Some of the above may seem surprising for those who rightly believe that Jewish Studies in recent years



Samantha Baskind. "Bibliophile on the Move"



Samantha Baskind. "Under Construction"

## The Profession

has prioritized interdisciplinary approaches. I am aware of this trend and participated in interdisciplinary projects that produced scholarly results greater than the sum of their parts. But as I found in this journey, a willingness to engage intellectually with someone from another subfield (i.e., interdisciplinary cooperation) evidently does not equate to a willingness to apply one's intellectual and practical tool sets for solving real-world challenges (i.e., Applied Humanities). A reason for this gap may be that most universities do not yet reward civic-academic engagement in their decision-making on career advancement. From what I've seen at my home university and elsewhere, students, scholars, and academic leaders find it nearly impossible to go beyond conventional postgraduation job placement approaches. There is little ability to see the unique potential of developing ideas and mechanisms of Applied Humanities within universities, even if many of them feel pressure from politicians and administrators to "prove" their worth.

I have not abandoned this initiative. I'm still excited about the possibility of what can happen and am open to partners who want to join me on the journey. But I'll confess, I'm running out of steam. There's only so much one person can beat his head against a wall.

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**JONATHAN DEKEL-CHEN** is Rabbi Edward Sandrow Chair in Soviet & East European Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he holds a dual appointment in the Department of Jewish History and in the Department of General History. He served from 2007–2019 as the academic chair of the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian & East European Jewry and is currently chair of the Russian Studies Department. Dekel-Chen's "Putting Agricultural History to Work: Global Action Today from a Communal Past" is the featured article in the Fall 2020 issue of the journal *Agricultural History*.

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in the area of History, Society, and Culture of Modern Israel



Dr. Levin earned his PhD in Hebrew and Judaic Studies/History from New York University in 2019 and was a Stroock Fellow at Harvard University's Center for Jewish Studies during 2019-2020. His interests include Middle Eastern politics, Modern Jewish history, U.S.-Middle East relations, and the histories of Israel and Palestine, particularly in global and transnational contexts. He holds a joint appointment in the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies and in the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies.

### KATE ROSENBLATT

in the area of Modern Jewish Religious Cultures



Dr. Rosenblatt first came to Emory as a Visiting Assistant Professor in 2017. She received her PhD in History from the University of Michigan, and her work focuses on modern Jewish history, American economic and political history, women and gender studies, and the intersection of politics and religion. She will be starting her position at Emory in Fall 2021 after the completion of a yearlong fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania's Katz Center for Advanced Jewish Studies. She will hold a joint appointment in the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies and in the Department of Religion.



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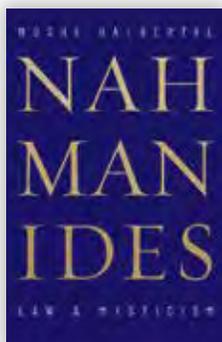
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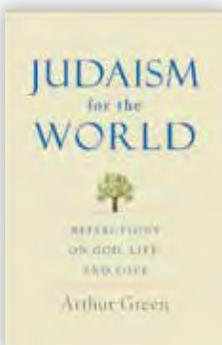
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Whereas Mizrahim have become more visible and prolific in Jewish and Israeli cultures, they are still underrepresented, even invisible, in Judaic and Ethnic Studies. In Israel and within global Jewish communities, Mizrahim have historically been constructed as 'Edot, ethnic groups, within a hierarchical discourse of Ashkenazi dominant culture. This has reduced a diverse group of people to essentialized objects of anthropological study, obscuring their complexity and interconnectedness. But once released from this binary paradigm, subjectivity and agency emerge, and the intersections of "the ethnic" within frameworks of gender, class, sexuality, queerness, and dis/ability can be rendered tangible.

We seek proposals from scholars who will explore and grapple with questions such as: What are the political, economic, and cultural challenges confronting people of Mizrahi descent? What are their struggles for inclusion and advancement in both Israel and abroad? How should we undo cultural myths and practices of exclusion? What should the critique of logical systems, categories and hierarchies in Israeli/Jewish culture be? What connections can we draw between the study of Mizrahim and that of Palestinians and other Minorities? How does one compare or translate ethnic relations and conflicts? How can we write new histories and narratives of Mizrahi experiences? How can scholarship on Mizrahim enrich conversations on ethnicity within Judaic Studies?

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# A Job to Do: Unfinished Monographs and Scholarly Identity off the Tenure Track

Sara Feldman

Six years after graduating with an award-winning dissertation, I have still not converted it into a book. Having heard numerous scholars' stories through my work in the academic labor movement and in several higher education settings, I now realize how deep the misconceptions run. Both aspiring and senior scholars need to realize how labor-market conditions influence academic publishing, especially first books. Specifically, non-tenure-track scholars do not have the research support and time needed for monograph completion and it is bad advice to tell them to do it for marketability's sake. Unfinished books, however, need not condemn us to the loss of our scholarly or intellectual identities.

Writing a first book is a challenge for anyone, and a tenure-track job provides crucial resources. Despite the stress and service requirements of an assistant professorship, occupying such a position gives one library access, mentorship programs, sabbaticals and research leave, travel funding, a book-buying budget, possibly a research assistant, and of course stable employment. Most PhDs will not get these jobs; the fortunate get full-time non-tenure-track (NTT) positions, and only the luckiest few get tenure-track positions.

In order to produce scholarly writing one should remain in the profession, so postdocs or visiting assistant professors must write job applications throughout the academic year. NTTs on one-year contracts vulnerable to nonrenewal do, too. Recent PhDs repeat this cycle annually until they find stable employment or despair. A single application can demand eighty pages of cover letter, CV, teaching portfolio, various "statements," writing samples, and more. This takes a great deal of research, writing, editing, and mental

energy away from book projects. Rationing self-funded conference travel may produce one paper a year and networking, but one might need the money for last-minute trips to interview at conferences (where it is sometimes too late to submit an abstract). Favored candidates spend dozens of hours preparing for campus interviews. The dejection of rejection exhausts young scholars who have come close. Only some can cope by writing.

Summer can be a good time to make progress on the book—when it is not devoured by months of apartment-hunting, packing and moving and unpacking, establishing oneself in a new job and home. Some postdocs and VAPs do this annually, some every few years, often on their own dime. Transition upon arrival adds at least one month to the preparation time for a new semester. We end our summer wandering around



*Courtesy of the author*



*Courtesy of the author*

**We hear early on that spending “too much time on teaching” threatens our scholarly success. But NTTs are hired to teach, not to publish.**

time on teaching” would be to endanger one’s employment and chance at a good life doing meaningful work. The sacrifice could be in vain anyway: library access is a teaching job perk.

Some readers might think that publishing a book will help an NTT hold onto their job, but scholarship is not typically a factor in renewal or promotion decisions. What can actually help is labor organizing: faculty unions are the best means of winning more job security and research support. Although NTTs might prefer to focus on their teaching and research and abstain from labor activism, this is unwise. I recall a tearful phone call from a lecturer who had crossed the picket line of fellow NTTs during our strike. Two weeks later, in mid-May, their department surprised them with nonrenewal. They wanted the union’s help to save their career, but there was nothing we could do. Perhaps a bigger strike could have won better protections. Leave union work to others at your own peril—in any collective action scenario, strength comes from high participation. Incoming NTTs should find, contact, and join the organizers immediately even if there is no union yet. Volunteering in a union to safeguard these jobs takes time away from research, but also protects it. A strong union could even win conference funding, allowing NTTs to meet face-to-face with book publishers.

When time allows for research, the book is not always its best use. The years it takes for an NTT to focus on the book constitute a long time for a job seeker to go without publications of any kind. Seekers of TT jobs need to add shorter, faster publications to their CVs in order to maintain their reputation as researchers. Dissertation-based articles should be limited for the book’s sake—most editors won’t want to publish a book if too much of it is already out in journal form, and new research avenues can revive a jaded scholar’s enthusiasm. I eventually got excited about writing eclectic papers on new topics, and now essays like this.

NTTs straddle the professoriate and living-wage movements. Embracing that identity recently has inspired me

campus picking up keys, talking to human-resources personnel, and finding classrooms. We sit in orientations (if offered), register new email addresses, learn new campus software, explore new bureaucracies, study new names and faces, and enroll uprooted children in school. The luckiest set up new offices and computers, and arrange for long-overdue health care. By September, it is time to update CVs and cover letters for the new application cycle.

When the applying-and-moving cycle is annual *and* the teaching is full-time, who can be a prolific writer? I warn recent PhDs not to waste these years applying for nonrenewable, one-year gigs of more than 1/1 teaching. I urge senior colleagues to stop advertising those positions, which harm morale and careers. Repeated removal from mentors, friends, partners, and communities takes an emotional and intellectual toll and can reduce one’s capacity for solitary activities such as writing.

We hear early on that spending “too much time on teaching” threatens our scholarly success. But NTTs are hired to teach, not to publish. Teaching loads for full-time NTTs and part-time adjuncts tend to be higher than for assistant professors. While teaching pays the bills and informs renewal decisions, it can also, under decent working conditions, be intellectually challenging, socially beneficial, and enjoyable. It ensures that we continue exploring our fields and connecting them to the contemporary and the local. Fortunately for students, lecturers realize that to heed warnings against “spending too much

## The Profession

**Unencumbered by careerist ambitions,  
I could return to my unfinished book as an  
engaged scholar.**

to write much more than I did under the pressure of a TT job I will not get. Nothing could have validated me more than when a Yiddish cultural activist that I hold in high esteem, Anthony Russell, called on the phone imploring me to help create a written record in Yiddish of the Black Lives Matter protests. In the ensuing weeks, I published that eyewitness account of police aggression and a piece for *Apikorsus*, wrote this essay, and helped friends with their drafts: an English-language narrative of the same protest, a narrative for promotion to full professor, a letter that workers addressed to management about racism in their nonprofit. Unencumbered by careerist ambitions, I could return to my unfinished book as an engaged scholar. Scholarship depends on working conditions, such as the relatively stable and thoroughly enjoyable

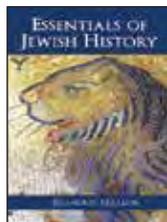


Courtesy of the author

job I was lucky to get. I have no regrets about my commitment to teaching or to labor activism. Valuable in their own right, these activities also help NTTs to secure the resources we need in order to write books ... and sustain our identities even if our books are never finished.

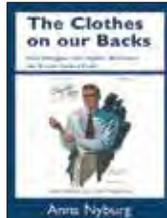
**SARA FELDMAN** is preceptor in Yiddish at Harvard University. She recently coauthored “Voices from Black Lives Matter Protests: פון בלעק ליווס מעטער פראָטעסטן with Zackary Sholem Berger and Anthony Russell for *In geveb* (June 19, 2020).

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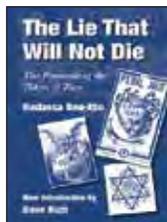
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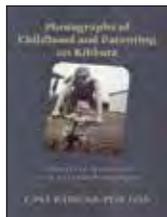
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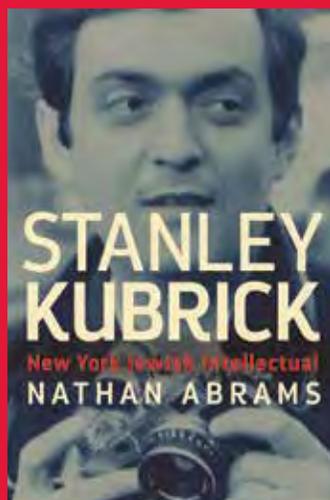
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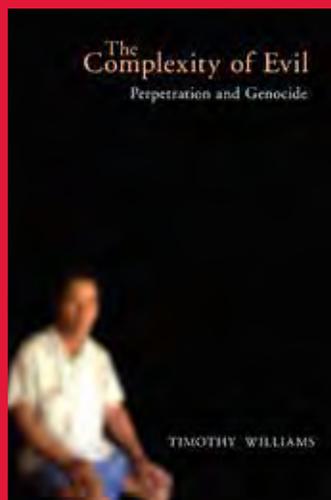
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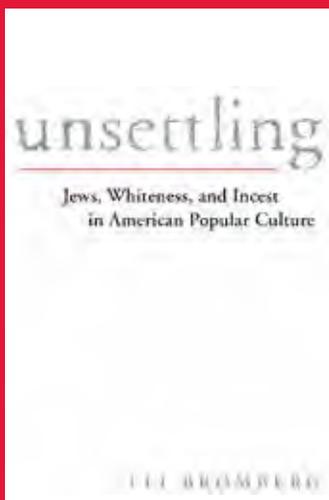
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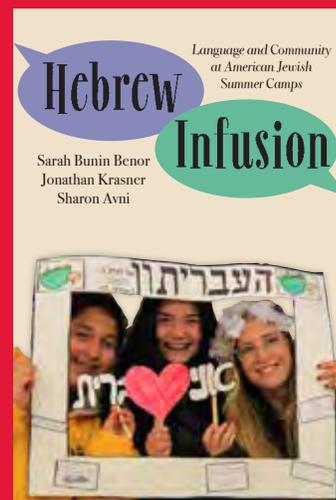
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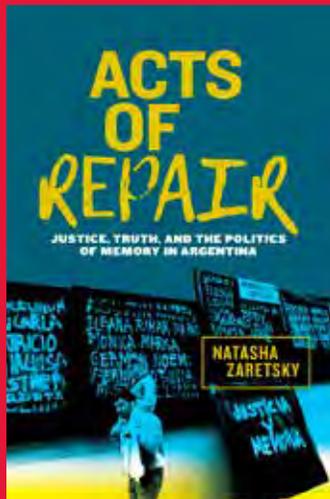
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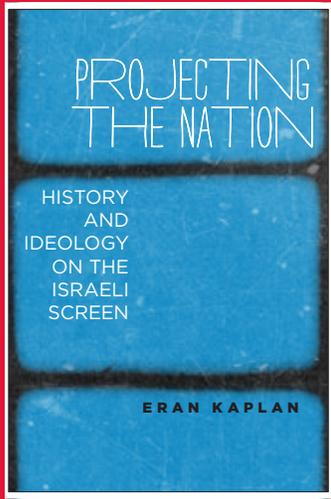
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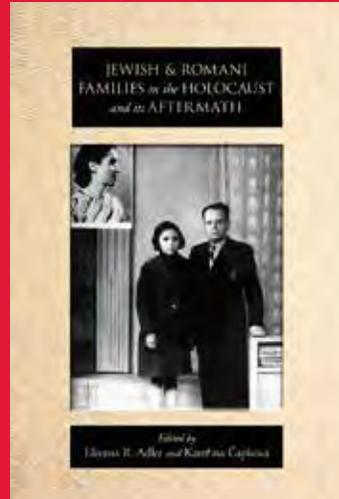
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# Chasing My Employment Tail

Rachel Leah Jablon

I can't remember the number of academic and academic-adjacent jobs I've partially applied for. I begin applications, but I rarely finish them. Sometimes, I forget to finish them; other times, I see "applications in progress" when I log in to apply for a different position. Most of the time, I regret not completing them. More than that, though, I regret the underlying reason why I don't. That I'm lazy is the easy answer; if that were all it is, I could overcome the challenge. The real reason is complicated, borne out of collapsed confidence and overwhelming odds.

I love reading a job announcement and envisioning myself in the position. I think of the ways my skills and expertise would contribute to the job, allowing myself to take pride in the PhD that seems irrelevant in my day-to-day work as a management analyst for a local government. I even allow myself to think that I bring qualifications to the table that other applicants couldn't possibly, for I have gained workplace skills in nonacademic settings that should make me more marketable. The balloon of optimism deflates when I consider my age, how long ago I graduated, what I've been doing with my time since then, and my competitors, a *mwah-mwah* echoing in my head. At this point, my goal is to be considered a viable candidate, and being selected for the position seems like a pipe dream.

I have no problem finishing the tedious parts of an application. Filling in text box after text box of personal, employment, educational, and demographic information is mind numbing but rote. I run into trouble when I get to the part where I need to upload documents, like a cover letter or writing sample: I freeze.

I stare at my monitor, willing my fingers to type something coherent, anything engaging, that contains a keyword that will pass the algorithm of the application tracking system. I reread the job announcement for inspiration, consider my options, and eventually click "save and continue later." By the time I muster the morale and

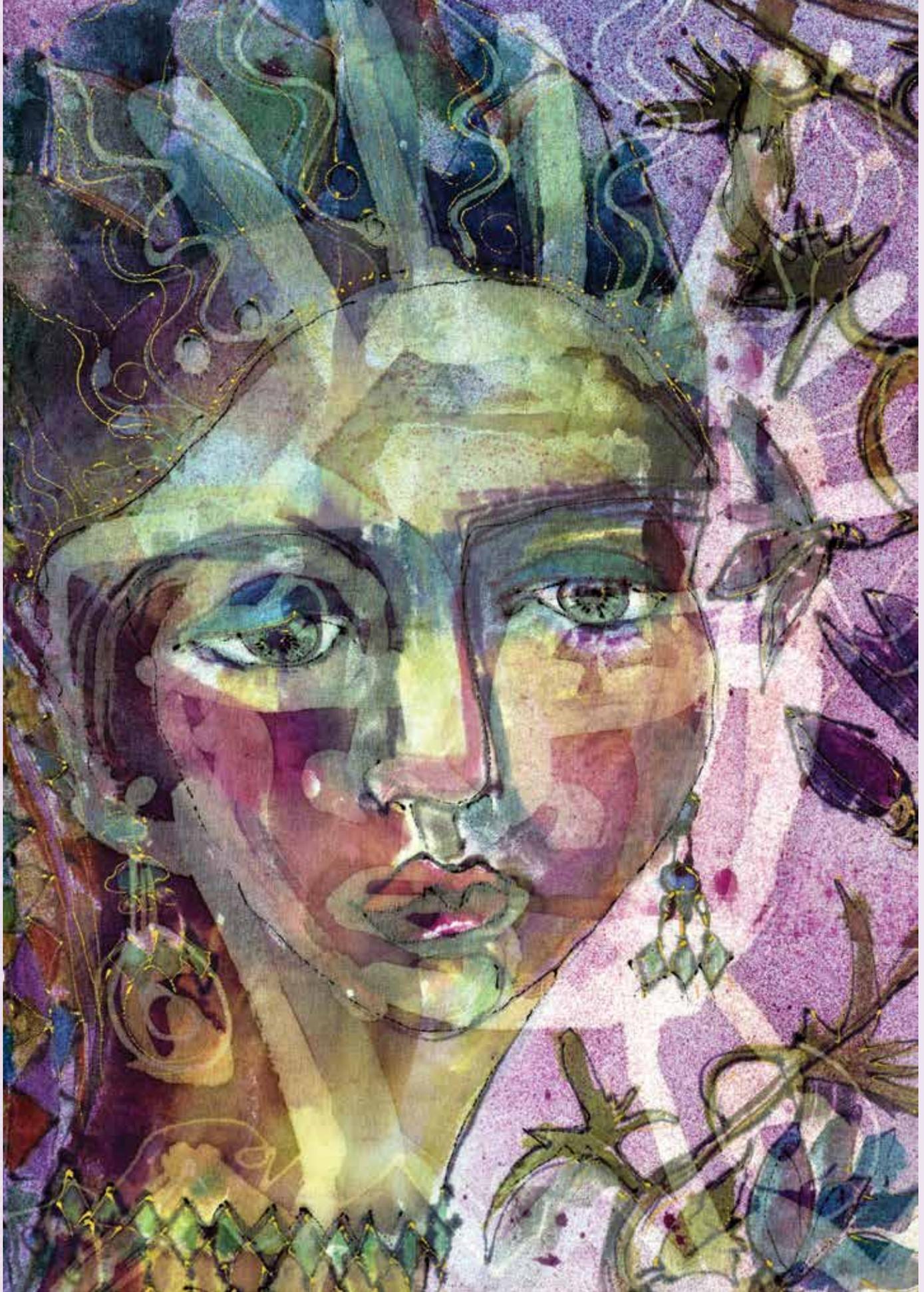
**I'm on the same market as applicants ten or more years younger than me, more recently graduated, and more willing to live like a grad student a little longer.**

energy I need to sit in front of a computer at the end of an exhausting day of sitting in front of a computer, sign back in to the application site, and work on the narrative portions of the application, I have little to no time until the job posting closes. Finishing the application feels like a losing battle.

It's the diminished returns. The amount of effort that goes into applying, let alone that went into my degrees, research, and teaching, doesn't pay off. I rarely get any feedback from prospective employers. Months can go by without any contact from the search committee: no "thank you for your application" and no "we regret to inform you." Most of the time, I find out I wasn't selected when I poke around an employer's website and see someone else's name next to the position. Discovering that I'm not even worth a rejection letter is further demoralizing.

There are some applications I've finished, of course, and I've gotten a few great interviews. My prospects seemed good! I've been screened by recruiters. I've had phone interviews, video interviews, and in-person interviews. I've flown across the country for the prized campus visit. My confidence boosts for a little while, and I think maybe I do have a shot at getting the job I want. This feeling of hope invigorates my job hunt, but only until reality sets in—or at least the reality of me applying and applying and getting a disproportionately low number of interviews. Theoretically, as someone recently reminded me, I suppose I do have as good a chance as any other applicant, but the lack of proof is disheartening.

I take advantage of as many mentoring and advising opportunities as I can. I want criticism of my application materials and interviewing skills to help me hone how



*Jan Janas. Beautiful Lady. Dyes on silk.  
Reproduced from The Fine Art of Painting on Silk (Schiffer Publishing, 2018). Courtesy of the artist*

## The Profession

I present myself on paper and in writing. In fact, I participated in the AJS Conference Mentorship Program at the 2019 conference: my mentor gave me good insight into the kind of positions I want, and I left San Diego feeling hopeful. Most of the feedback I get is positive, so I wonder where the disconnect is between my applications and my preparations.

I'm lucky that I have stability in my current job that affords me the time to get over my anxieties. I can take as long as I need without worrying about making ends meet. Although unrelated to my academic interests, the position is well paying, with good health care and retirement benefits. I don't know how I'll break the cycle of starting and not finishing applications, lamenting my chances, and questioning my qualifications, but at least I have a job to tide me over.

Maybe I would've been a better candidate years ago; now, I'm on the same market as applicants ten or more years younger than me, more recently graduated, and more willing to live like a grad student a little longer. However, I do want that job, and I *am* qualified for it. Besting my angst and working through the paralysis—or even pretending enough to finish the job applications I start—would at least get my foot in the door. Leaving applications unfinished reminds me of my insecurities; maybe finishing them will remind me that I am competitive, that my aspirations are reasonable.

---

**RACHEL LEAH JABLON** is an affiliate of the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Maryland. Her research interests include Jewish literary traditions, performance of identity, and memory.



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# What I Left Behind in the Move

Ethan Calof

I entered my master's program in 2016 to tell the stories of my great-grandparents, who fled Imperial Russia in the early twentieth century. I needed to understand the culture they'd left, the books they'd read, the dialogues in their communities, and the society they'd crafted. This need drove me. Two and a half years later, I emerged from the University of Victoria with a master of arts degree in Germanic and Slavic Studies and an over hundred-page thesis, "New Men for a New World: Remodelled Masculinities in Jewish-Russian Literature (1903-1925)." I felt that I'd received an answer to the questions that had originally inspired me to apply to grad school. I vowed to myself that I would take my thesis and drive it to publication in an academic journal.

Today, I'm in a different institution (Vanderbilt University), a different country (the United States), and a different program (PhD in English and Comparative Media Analysis and Practice). Accompanying all these changes is a new research focus, a new period, and a new sphere of study. I've moved from the early twentieth century Pale of Settlement to the twenty-first-century Jewish Diaspora, looking at a different point on the continuum of the Jewish experience. I spent my master's engaging in the lives of my great-grandparents. I'm spending my doctorate trying to untangle my own lived experience as a Jewish millennial, and how others in my shoes create a Jewish identity through media and cyberculture. My current project feels urgent and essential, and I'm thrilled to be able to pursue it.

In between April 2019 and Summer 2020, I relocated from Victoria to New York, spent two months in YIVO's intensive Yiddish summer program, moved from New York to Nashville, and did two semesters of coursework. I learned the language spoken by my great-grandparents, read Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde for the first time, and spent hours wrestling with the concept of the



*Top: Photo of the author's great grandparents  
Bottom: Photo of the author*

Anthropocene. What I *didn't* do was touch my master's thesis. Slowly but surely, the promise I made myself the summer prior has been squandered. While I'd never close the book entirely on publishing parts of my paper, it's gone on the back burner. I'm forced to conclude that I won't turn it into a publication any time soon.

What's changed? My major, research focus, period, and region are superficially different, but I knew that they would all change when I made my initial vow to publish. The difference is a fresh feeling of vulnerability upon entering the next stage of my career. I'm a graduate student. I don't have a track record in my discipline, or in any other discipline. Entering my name in the Vanderbilt library search bar returns zero results. Articles are used for job applications, conference invites and acceptances, invitations to collaborative groups, and all sorts of future opportunities. What would my academic future look like if my first piece of research to make it into a journal were in a field to which I no longer belong? Would my earlier work be less polished, weaker, reflect regressive thinking? Would it make me look like a less credible scholar? An impostor? The anxiety and insecurity have grown overwhelming and have prevented me from taking action.

## The Profession

**While I'd never close the book entirely on publishing parts of my paper, it's gone on the back burner.**

I've received conflicting advice from various mentors when I've brought my dilemma to them. One professor stressed the importance of a first publication for setting the tone of your career. They recounted a time where they were pressured into publishing a paper that didn't relate to their future research, and having to answer questions on what exactly their field was. Another professor made the case that any publication was a good publication. Even if it isn't directly relevant, you should always be growing and changing as a scholar. It feels as though I'm following the rules from a book I haven't read. It isn't abnormal for someone's work to shoot off in many different directions, and even though I see my work as part of a larger, clearer project, my path still has two different eras, fields, and regions. In the absence of an unambiguous policy on whether or not it's good for a researcher to mix up their disciplines, I've been paralyzed. No direction has been clear-cut, so I haven't chosen any. No action has meant no reworking of my master's thesis. I've moved onto fresher projects with fewer accompanying unanswerable questions.

Scholarship is never static, and you should never prevent yourself from research just because of preconceived notions of what's in your field or out of it. Several of the scholars I most respect don't restrict themselves to a single niche; one of my professors at Vanderbilt, Dr. Jay Clayton, works on Victorian literature and video game theory. Understanding the history of pogroms and revolutionary movements will always be incredibly relevant to contemporary American Jewry. The stories of fleeing the Pale of Settlement, of living in a Yiddish-

speaking community, of labor and revolution have been passed down to young Ashkenazim in North America and informed many of their—and my—political ideals. The Ashkenazic literary experience is a journey from Sholem Aleichem to Natasha Díaz, from Kadia Molodowsky to Michael Chabon. But we live in an academic climate where more and more PhD graduates aren't finding jobs. The barrage of hiring freezes following COVID-19 is only making the climate colder. It's just more pragmatic to focus on the research that I know will help my career than risk the investment in research that might not. You never really know how your CV will be received. You never *really* know if your old paper will still hold up.

Therefore, I'm leaving my master's thesis in the filing cabinet known as my Dropbox. I don't want to rule out returning to it later, but if I'm being realistic with myself, it'll stay there for years collecting cyberdust. My analysis of Jabotinsky and Bialik likely won't be a part of my first journal publication. It feels as though by saying goodbye to my work of two and a half years, I'm saying goodbye once more to my great grandparents and the world that I worked for two and a half years to enter. Ultimately, in the absence of certainty, I've accepted that fear of my perception as a graduate student will always affect the direction of my research.

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## The Unfinished Ethnographies of a Jewish Anthropologist

Rebecca Golbert

As I begin this essay, it is the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day. I am participating in a virtual program that culminates in the living testimony of Ernst Valfer, a ninety-five-year-old German Jewish refugee, child survivor of the Kindertransport, and a retired clinical psychiatrist. As a scholar, I have interviewed Holocaust survivors, yet Ernst Valfer's testimony models reflexivity and vulnerability in a way I have rarely seen. He turns a critical eye on himself, naming the fortress he built as a young boy to protect himself from trauma, whose walls he acknowledges will never be fully undone but which now allow in some shards of light.

The anthropologist Ruth Behar has written extensively about vulnerability and subjectivity, those of the communities we study and our own. Mixing autobiography and ethnography, her book of essays *The Vulnerable Observer* profoundly influenced my approach as an ethnographer and the ways I think about my obligations to the communities I have studied. However, what happens when life gets in the way, when I have failed in my obligations to write the stories entrusted to me, when I am so haunted by these failures, that my unfinished projects revisit me in my dreams? In those dreams, I complete the unfinished—the unpublished articles, the book from my dissertation, the postdoctoral research on Holocaust memory in Ukraine—that my waking moments never allow. Who am I if not the academic at the core of my self-identity and self-worth?

I am the executive director of an academic institute at UC Berkeley. As I have found my way professionally

within an academic setting, I have struggled to maintain my identity as a scholar. The demands of running an institute have precluded full engagement with my fields of expertise. I am an unfinished academic, lacking in my own eyes and those of others. My research sits unfinished in a doctoral dissertation, field notebooks, recorded interviews, file cabinets full of archival documents, an article cut from an edited volume, research papers written but not revised.

This chasm between my self-identity as a scholar and others' perception of me as an academic administrator was made most painfully apparent when students sought collaboration on a program for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. They were inviting a survivor of the ghettos in Transnistria; I have written on Holocaust memory in Transnistria. I proposed the possibility of introducing the event; they chose a historian of Francophone Jewry instead.

One recurring challenge has been that my work spans several areas of expertise—anthropology of Jewish identity, post-Soviet Jewry, Holocaust studies, mediation, and conflict resolution. I have experienced both the strengths and weaknesses of trying to be the anthropologist among Jewish Studies scholars, historians, or lawyer-mediators, and sometimes, the Jewish Studies scholar among other fields. Occasionally, translation has worked, as when I published an article (and won an award) in the *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* called "An Anthropologist's Approach to Mediation." However, disciplinary crossover has not always been appreciated. My article on Holocaust commemoration ceremonies in contemporary Ukraine, an invited chapter for an edited volume, was cut by the publisher; I was told simply that the anthropologist's lens on ritual and commemoration was not appreciated in a volume of essays by historians. I was so shocked I never resubmitted the article to a journal. I picked it up recently, with a thought to submit it in this moment of quarantine limbo, but what if it is outdated? Further salt to the wound, I was asked to review the subsequent published volume; I declined. What could I say that would not be compromised by bitterness? Sometimes I regret this decision.

Beyond my vulnerability as an academic, I am haunted by my obligations to the communities I have studied,

**Beyond my vulnerability as an academic,  
I am haunted by my obligations to  
the communities I have studied...**

particularly Holocaust survivors, who entrusted me with their testimonies. What are my responsibilities to get their stories into the light?

A few years ago, I was invited to join a research workshop of scholars writing about absence in postwar Holocaust memory. During a week in Italy, we shared insights and feedback on papers in process. However, when final drafts were due for a special edited journal, I could not meet the deadline, hampered by other work obligations. I could see the story I wanted to tell, feel the presence of the survivor Arkady P. walking beside me through his childhood home in Shpikov, driving together to the site of the transit camp in Rogozna, where we could no longer find the mass grave, and then on to the Pechora camp, former Romanian camp of starvation and death, now restored to a sanatorium on the idyllic grounds of the Bug River. We followed the very route he and his family took, except that they were driven on foot, in winter. Walking on the grounds, Arkady told me how he survived the camp with his mother; they were some of the few prisoners who remained in the camp until liberation in March 1944—others fled to nearby ghettos in those last months of occupation. The absence of physical remnants of memory, except in the stories of Arkady P., invoked a Holocaust narrative unfinished, meant to find shelter on the pages of my essay in the volume.

Other stories haunt me—hovering between ethnography and autobiography—unwritten except in my mind. How can I capture in words the nauseating anguish I felt on September 12, 2001, as I stood before the mass graves in the woods of Pechora, accompanied by two Holocaust survivors, trying to fathom the horrors of the past while wracked by the horrific images of the day before? The strong associations in my mind's eye still seem inappropriate when committed to paper, but the two moments for me are forever intertwined.

In this period of quarantine, I thought maybe I could return to the unfinished tasks. I turned to my journal to write reflections, but the time needed for academic writing has been absorbed by new tasks—virtual

programs, Zoom meetings, grant proposals, strategic planning in the context of new uncertainties. Articles sit unread; papers remain unedited. Who am I kidding? In our home, we have also been cooking and baking—perfecting challah, meringue, ice cream, meatballs, hummus—small creative challenges that bring a sense of completion and accomplishment. In contrast, a colleague responsible for a series on anthropology and Judaism asked me recently about my dissertation on Ukrainian Jewish identity. Shame and embarrassment mixed with hope and possibility: Is my work worthy of reconsideration? How would I go about the daunting task of revision?

I think again of Ernst Valfer, who strives to be a better father, husband, and friend, still struggling to overcome his childhood trauma, even at the age of ninety-five. So it must be for me, as I grapple with the dilemma of

unfinished work and the feelings of vulnerability it imparts. Unfinished work has taken on new meaning in these weeks of protest—our collective work of reckoning with the underbelly of racism girding American society and its institutions. We are all vulnerable here. I am reminded by a Holocaust survivor that we are always unfinished, even as we strive to finish our stories. Yet, we must keep struggling to be good, to be accountable—to our families, to ourselves, to the communities we study, and to the societies in which we live and work.

Finishing this essay is but a small start.

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**REBECCA GOLBERT** is the executive director of the Berkeley Institute for Jewish Law and Israel Studies at UC Berkeley, where she oversees the activities of the institute's academic programs as well as its work supporting students and faculty.



Mira Sucharov. "Unfinished wall of doughnuts, with apologies to Wayne Thiebaud," Cambridge, England



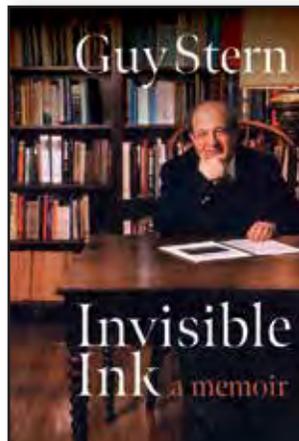
Mira Sucharov. "Coffee break," Montreal



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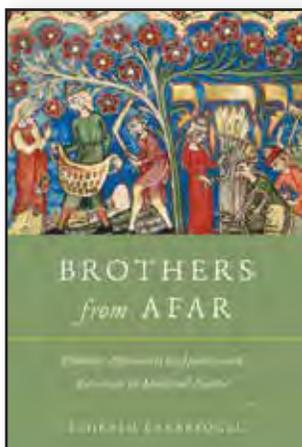


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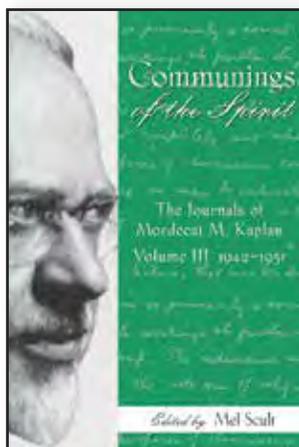
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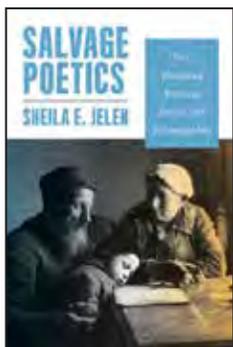
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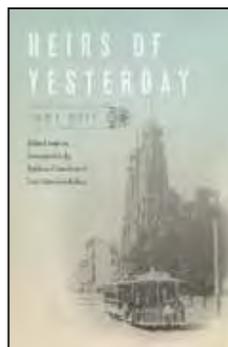


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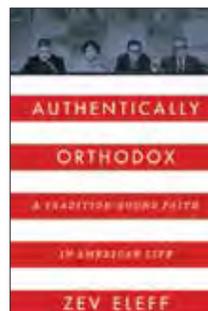
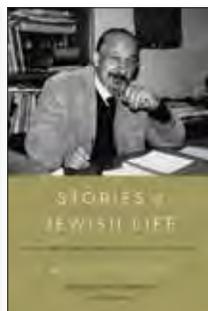
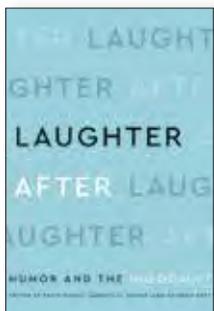
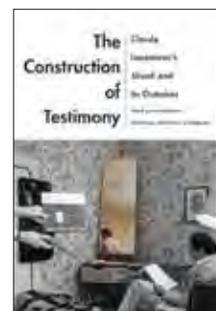
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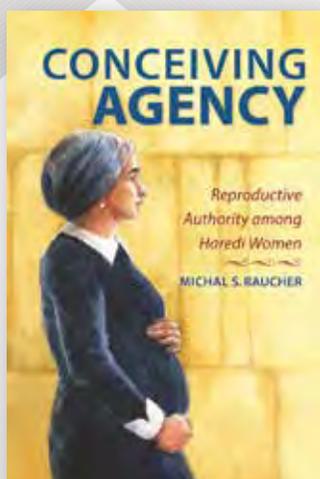
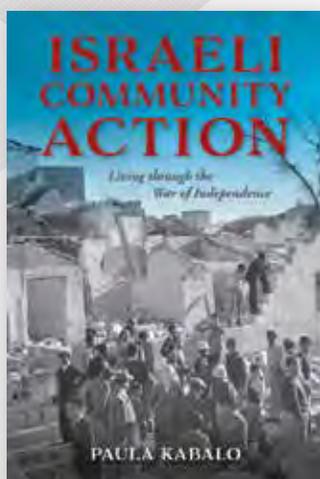
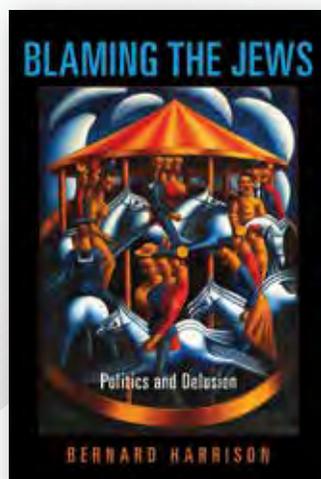
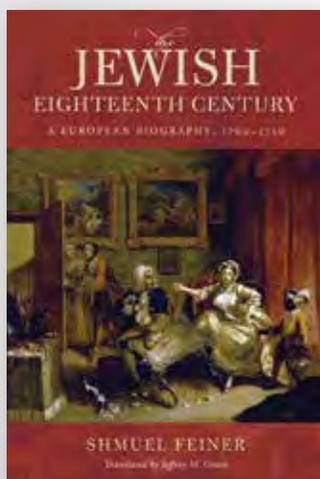
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# Pedagogy

## The Unfinished Study Abroad Experience

Ronnie Olesker

The Hebrew Bible begins with the story of Genesis, a story of God completing the creation of the world in six days. “And on the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work” (Genesis 2:1-2). Yet here in London, where I moved to direct St. Lawrence University’s abroad program, time seems to have lost its meaning. I have been restless ever since we made the call to send students home, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread. A director, orphaned of her program, away from her home, trying to bring a deserted city into the life of her students.

While moving to online teaching was challenging for most faculty and students, it presented a unique challenge to our abroad programs that use their location’s architecture, museums, foods, smells, and people, to teach about globalization and multiculturalism. How do you translate a smell, a vibe, an emotion, to an online interaction when the subject of your teaching is no longer accessible to you? How do you lead an abroad program with no students or city with which to interact? For directors, the sense of insecurity is amplified by the need to self-isolate in a foreign land, in a space that is not your own, with the prospects of returning home delayed indefinitely. Alternatively, it may have meant evacuating quickly, not knowing when, or if, you might return.

For my students, travel abroad was an important goal in their academic careers. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) just over 10 percent of all undergraduates in US programs travel abroad during their studies.<sup>i</sup> At St. Lawrence University, over 50 percent of our students study abroad for a semester, and 70 percent have some off-campus experience as part of their studies. This is largely due to the intense involvement of faculty with off-campus studies. The university offers many opportunities for faculty to direct off-campus programs, to offer short-term travel components as part of our courses, to do research with students abroad, to offer summer courses abroad, and to coordinate each one of our thirty off-campus semester programs. Faculty members also serve fixed terms as associate deans of our Center for Intercultural and International Studies, enhancing faculty commitment to study abroad. So when the pandemic erupted, its ripple effects on study abroad were felt across the campus.

Studies show that living abroad is associated with the development of a clearer sense of self.<sup>ii</sup> Even short-term study abroad experiences significantly improve students’ job prospects and cross-cultural competency, and can transform their world view and sense of self. Still, what is left of this experience for teacher and students when their abroad experience comes to an abrupt end? What long-term implications might this have on their personal development?

As a final assignment for my course, I asked my students to reflect on the meaning of an “unfinished” semester. Although this was not an official study, at least some of the responses indicate that despite the sadness, anxiety,



*Photo by James Norminton*

and anger at having to leave London and finish their semester online, students were able to grow as a person and develop their resilience. One student expressed the need to first grieve, “Crying really helps. Before I even got back to the States, I began the process of grieving what I had lost.” The inability to “finish” the semester was another repeated theme. One student noted that “this unfinished semester has been hard on me because I have felt stuck and unable to finish assignments.” Coming to terms with having to leave was also difficult. “I had a hard time accepting that I was going home and was not returning to London. For days I didn’t unpack, change my calendar of events, or even change the time zone on my computer,” another student wrote.

Students missed the catharsis of the end of the semester, when their knowledge and experiences would “come full circle”; one expressed, “I feel as though the biggest thing that is lost from not making it to the end of the textbook, is the sense of fulfillment.” Yet, despite these missed opportunities, students demonstrated a degree of strength and maturity that we would expect from a study abroad experience. “From having to leave London, I realized how calm I can remain in stressful situations

**Coming to terms with having to leave was also difficult. “I had a hard time accepting that I was going home and was not returning to London...”**

when others need my support.” Gaining an understanding of the limits of self-control was also a recurring theme. “I have learned that some things are out of my reach and what is important is how I react to things.”

But what of the director? I, too, fixated on the need to “finish” the semester. Continuing to teach an abroad program under these conditions highlights our dislocation: we are removed from each other and the place we are studying. It’s unnerving; it undermines the sense of self. What I gained in administrative experience, shepherding a program through perhaps the most challenging times for study abroad in half a century, was mitigated by the loss of learning and travel opportunities for my students. I, too, grieved as I gave up on the notion that I could bring the city into their homes.

In adapting my course to an online experience, reflection was the default pedagogy; trusting that my students had experienced enough to engage in deep introspection on

## Pedagogy

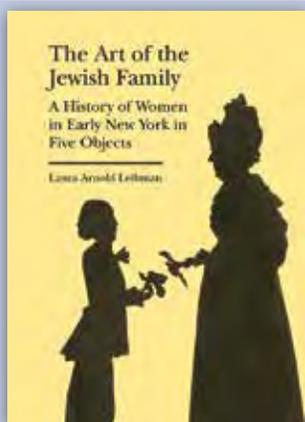
how their current social and physical (isolated) location juxtaposed with their experiences in London.

Yet the need to “finish” and make the experience “come full circle” persists. Over the past few months, I have come to realize the importance of redefining our relationship with and meaning of completion. I am learning to let my mind rest, knowing that although my students and I did not complete the work we set out to do, we arrived at a destination worth experiencing. Letting go of the need to arrive where you first started is one of the first lessons I taught my students when they arrived in London; it is now time I learn that lesson myself.

**RONNIE OLESKER** is an associate professor of government at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY. During the 2019–2020 academic year she directed the university’s London program.

- i <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/11/18/open-doors-data-show-continued-increase-numbers-americans-studying-abroad>
- ii <https://hbr.org/2018/05/how-living-abroad-helps-you-develop-a-clearer-sense-of-self>

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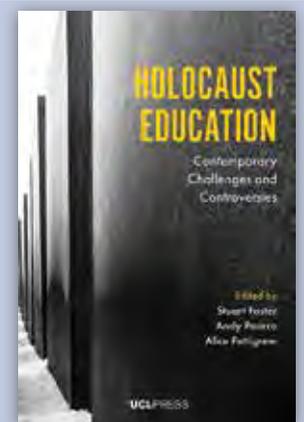
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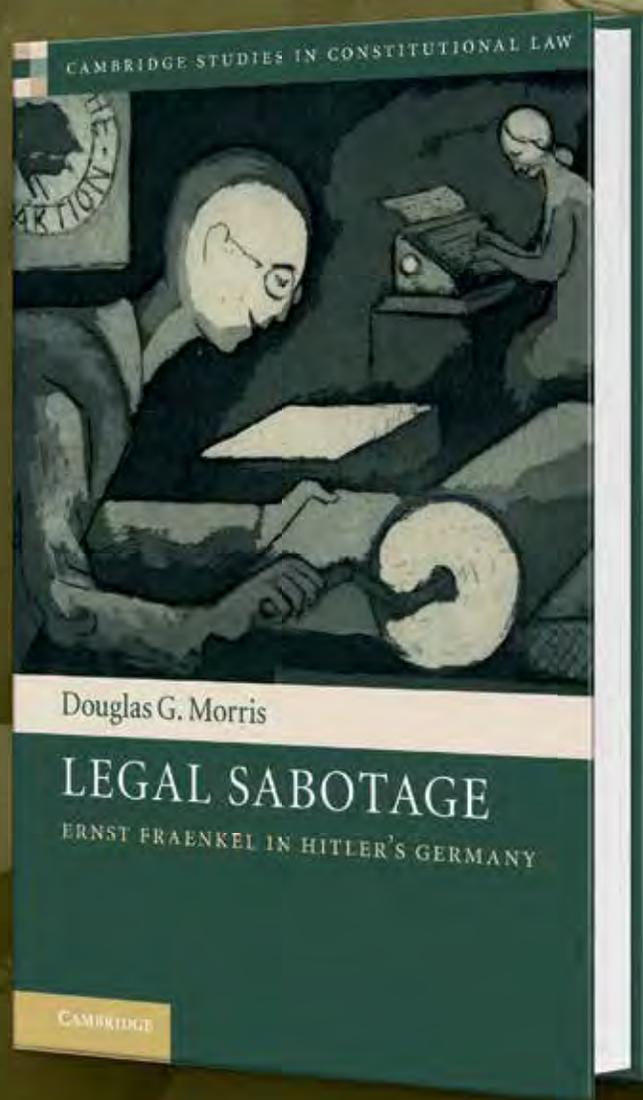
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# Class Disrupted: Teaching Canadian Jewish Literature during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ruth Panofsky

On March 13, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of Toronto's Ryerson University, where I am a professor of English. Faculty were given one week to transition to emergency remote teaching. We were permitted to recalibrate the value of certain assignments, but obliged to cover all remaining course material. In my upper-level course on Canadian Jewish Literature, that meant one novel, one short story collection, and three poems.

In the midst of confusion and chaos, I felt fortunate in several respects. First, I had had eight weeks to reinforce the historical/theoretical lens through which I analyzed the rise and development of Jewish writing in Canada, with an emphasis on the urban centres of Montreal, Winnipeg, and Toronto, as well as the experimental farming communities of the West. Second, I had already covered significant ground, including well-known works such as Ted Allan's short story "Lies My Father Told Me" and Leonard Cohen's poem "The Genius," Adele Wiseman's novel *Crackpot* and Isa Milman's full-length poetry collection *Prairie Kaddish*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I had developed a solid rapport with my students, most of whom were new to the religious traditions, practices, and beliefs referenced in the course materials.

Soon after the campus shutdown, however, it became clear that the very "remoteness" of online instruction would intensify the pedagogical challenges I had encountered in teaching Canadian Jewish Literature. How, for example, might I continue to offer nuanced interpretation of literary texts that referenced historical



*Lies My Father Told Me*, movie poster art, 1975.  
Everett Collection, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

**I sought to offset the lack of live discussion with an alternative mode of "classroom participation."**

events and complex political ideas that were unfamiliar to most of my students? How would I address sensitive subject matter without personal engagement? (Zoom was brand new to Ryerson and had yet to be tested as a tool for teaching.) And how could I compensate for the lack of clarifying in-class discussion? Amended expectations helped mitigate potential difficulties, while a number of adaptations provided students with intermediary guidance via electronic means.

Immediately, I conceded that without our weekly contact students could not be expected to engage fully with the five works remaining on the syllabus. They were practiced, however, in our classroom approach to textual analysis informed by cultural context, and so I trusted that they had acquired the analytical skills and necessary background to successfully interpret the texts in question.

I then proceeded pragmatically to redesign the last two assignments in the course. Transforming the comprehensive final examination into a take-home exam that covered only those texts we had taken up in class was relatively straightforward. Less so was the replacement of the final analytical essay (focused on a single work) with a series of reading responses, which I envisaged as a means of encouraging and facilitating student engagement with new literary works.

I sought to offset the lack of live discussion with an alternative mode of “classroom participation.” To that end, I developed guided reading responses, each of which provided notes on the text, accompanied by links to elucidating primary and secondary materials. My notes attended to the more challenging aspects of a work. Each reading response also included a list of questions formulated to enrich students’ understanding. Students were invited to answer any number of these questions in their 300-word reading responses.

They were asked, for example, to interpret the stark ending of Henry Kreisel’s 1948 novel, *The Rich Man*, which is set in the spring of 1935, soon after Hitler became chancellor of Germany. In *The Rich Man*, Jacob Grossman returns to his native Vienna to visit the family he has not seen for thirty-three years, having immigrated to Toronto as a young man. The crisis of the novel hinges on the fact that Jacob—a poor man himself—cannot come to the aid of his impoverished and increasingly vulnerable family members, all of whom are in the grip of heightened restrictions against Jews and virulent antisemitism. For the students to grasp the full import of Kreisel’s work, it was essential that I explain the political atmosphere that dominates the novel and the contrasting positions of Jacob, who returns freely to Canada, and his family members, who remain trapped in Europe and whose eventual deaths loom over the action, as does the Holocaust itself.

David Bezmozgis’s 2004 collection, *Natasha and Other Stories*, addresses the matter of contemporary Jewish identity head on and I was particularly interested in learning how students understood the volume’s presentation of “Jewishness.” As a coming-of-age chronicle, narrated in the first-person by protagonist Mark Berman,

**For the students to grasp the full import of Kreisel’s work, it was essential that I explain the political atmosphere that dominates the novel...**

*Natasha* was accessible to students. For useful background information, however, I directed them to an extensive online HIAS interview with Bezmozgis, in which he recalls his own experience as a Latvian-born child who at age six immigrated with his family to Toronto. To aid students’ grasp of Mark’s developing Jewish sensibility, it was also vital to explicate his Soviet background, clarify his references to refuseniks, and probe the troubling nature of the bullying he experienced at the hands of fellow Jewish boys and—most traumatizing—the principal of his Hebrew school.

Finally, the course concluded with three elegies, two of which blend English and Yiddish, while a third takes place during the holiday of Sukkot. The significance of Yiddish as both a language and cultural marker had often entered our class discussions, so I spurred students to consider the role of Yiddish in poems by Karen Shenfeld and Kenneth Sherman that memorialize father figures who cleave to Old World ways and values. The third poem by Adam Sol laments a wife’s miscarriage that occurs during Sukkot. To help students grasp the poem’s sad irony, it was necessary for me to describe the celebratory aspect of Sukkot, with its week-long tradition of eating meals in a sukkah. My remarks were linked to supplementary author interviews and book reviews. To offer students further assistance, I held virtual office hours and communicated with them individually over email and telephone.

I sensed a new kind of actively engaged learning emerging among my students. They were more independent, capable of synthesizing knowledge and applying the critical skills they had honed during the semester. They also seemed more confident. And judging by their reading responses, the majority were not only absorbed by the works they read in isolation, they were changed by their reading.

Students’ own comments corroborated my belief that they had connected thoughtfully and profoundly with the material on the course. Many emailed affirming messages. This was “an interesting and enlightening

**I admit to being especially gratified when students were moved to read beyond the offerings on the course.**

class” wrote one; another was “grateful for all it has taught me.” Others addressed the course content and their newly acquired insight: “I had never ... read any literature focusing on Jewish Canadians. I have learned so much from this course and it has exposed me to so many beautiful stories.” “I loved all of the readings ... it was really interesting for me to learn more about Jewish culture and writing here in Canada.”

I admit to being especially gratified when students were moved to read beyond the offerings on the course. One was “already trying to figure out a way to safely get a hold of Henry Kreisel’s other novel [*The Betrayal*] to read over the summer, as I absolutely loved *The Rich Man*.” Yet another had secured a copy of Mordecai Richler’s *Barney’s Version*—a novel I had mentioned in class—and was “waiting for the chance to begin reading it. Thanks for the influence!”

For an English professor, is there any greater satisfaction than inspiring students to read further afield? In fact, the redesigned course may have steered me closer to my goal of enlivening students and rousing their curiosity about Canadian Jewish Literature. While the interrupted semester felt somewhat “unfinished,” it closed in an unforeseen but surprisingly positive way.

**RUTH PANOFSKY**, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, is professor of English at Ryerson University in Toronto, where she teaches courses on Canadian Jewish writing and Holocaust literature. Most recently, she is the editor of *The New Spice Box: Contemporary Jewish Writing* (University of Toronto Press, 2020) and author of *Radiant Shards: Hoda’s North End Poems* (Inanna Publications, 2020).

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# Filling in the Blanks: Tackling the Wikipedia Gender Gap

Melissa Weininger

There are few things more disappointing (and infuriating) to professors than finding a student has cited a Wikipedia article as evidence in a formal written assignment. Many of us explicitly ban Wikipedia as a source for research papers. And yet, who among us has not casually Googled something while preparing a class or talking with a colleague and found themselves searching through a Wikipedia entry for the answer to a question?

Even if it's not a reliable scholarly source, we all know that Wikipedia is a fact of contemporary life and often a very useful resource for background information or statistics we need for a lecture or just to find out the age of a beloved actor in the movie we're watching. Wikipedia has its place, and whether a person or a topic appears in the database is often an indicator of their cultural significance.

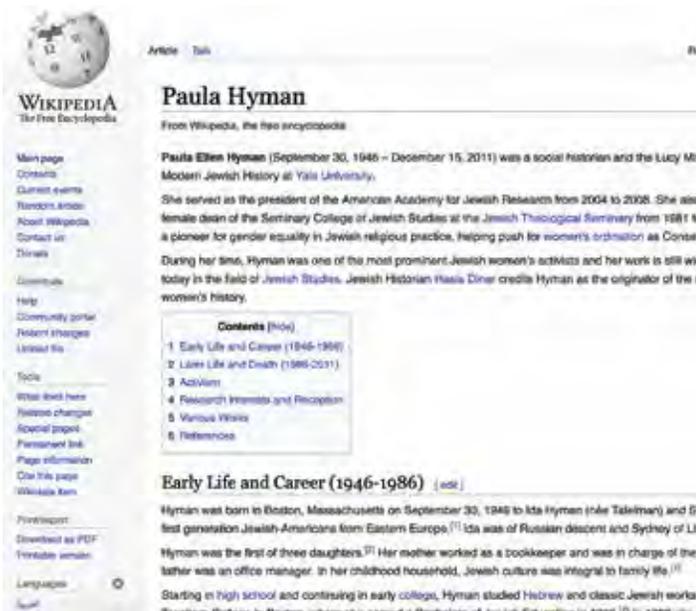
That's why it's so disturbing that statistics show that only 34.2 percent of biographies on English-language Wikipedia are of women.<sup>1</sup> Not only that, but the people writing those entries are overwhelmingly men. A variety of surveys indicate that only between 6-16 percent of Wikipedia editors are women. Not only is Wikipedia's content skewed by gender, but the people shaping Wikipedia's narrative of cultural authority are mostly men. A number of editing groups within Wikipedia have been established specifically to begin to right this imbalance, including WikiProject women, WikiProject feminism, WikiProject gender studies, and Wikiproject LGBT.

**A healthy polity also relies on informed readers, ones who know how to differentiate reliable and unreliable sources.**

In the last several years, I have been rethinking many of my class assignments, trying to teach writing and argumentation skills through projects that have more benefit to students and to the world than standard academic research papers. Even at the elite private university where I teach, most students will not go on to graduate school in the humanities, so there is little value in giving them the skills to write scholarly articles. However, I can safely assume that many of them will be involved citizens, and in the present political climate it has become increasingly clear that giving students the tools to make arguments in the public sphere using evidentiary techniques and argumentation drawn from academia but adapted to the larger public is a crucial skill. A healthy polity also relies on informed readers, ones who know how to differentiate reliable and unreliable sources.

In fall 2019 I taught a course titled "Sex and Gender in Modern Jewish Culture." It's not a new course; I've taught it several times before, to classes of largely women students. When I heard from a colleague about another professor who regularly asks students to write and edit Wikipedia entries as part of a course, I thought that it might be an ideal way to have students learn hands-on

One student found that another, anonymous editor was changing her entry as she edited and improved it, sometimes adding specious or unsourced information.



Screenshot of Paula Hyman Wikipedia entry

how this kind of open-source information database is created, as well as allow them to do research connected to our class. In addition, the Wikipedia project had political value: it would be part of the movement to correct gender imbalance in Wikipedia. I structured all the assignments for this class around the idea of writing as politics: students had to do one narrative writing assignment that explored the idea of the personal as political, a feminist standard; write one op-ed; and the Wikipedia project.

To execute the project, I relied on the help of WikiEdu, an organization that works to bring the expertise of scholars and students to Wikipedia by encouraging their participation as writers and editors. Through the Wikipedia Student Program run through their website, I was able to offer the students training in the particular requirements and processes of Wikipedia and structure my own assignments throughout the semester. Each week, students would learn and practice a new aspect of Wikipedia: editing, talk pages, citations, and more. They gave each other feedback on their drafts and made improvements accordingly. And by the end of the semester, they had produced their own entries, improvements of "stub" articles that have been deemed important topics by Wikipedia users but are underdeveloped. Paula Hyman's Wikipedia entry, a paragraph made up of a few sentences, was turned into a brief but comprehensive biography and survey of her work and its importance to the field of Jewish and gender studies. The entry on *tkhines*, Yiddish devotional prayers written by and for women, became a

scholarly summary of their history, literary and religious significance, and sources for further reading.

Involving students in the creation of informational resources available on the Internet pulled the curtain back for them on where the things they are reading and influenced by come from. They learned—sometimes the hard way—that unlike final papers for their courses, Wikipedia entries are never really finished. One student found that another, anonymous editor was changing her entry as she edited and improved it, sometimes adding specious or unsourced information. Wikipedia's fairly stringent citation rules helped my students learn a lot about sourcing and evidence, and become more critical about how other entries had been cited. They each also became an expert in one small topic area, which they got to "own," and the last day of class each student presented their topic to everyone as the expert. And finally, they got to publish their own writing! This was really exciting for them; during our last class, just after they had posted their articles to Wikipedia, many of them were Googling their own topics just so they could see their very own article pop up first in a Google search.

Now these students know how to research and edit Wikipedia articles, a skill that they can take beyond the classroom. Although we used WikiEdu as an introduction, anyone can become a Wikipedia editor by simply creating an account on the site and learning some basic expectations and skills. There is almost no barrier to entry, which is both Wikipedia's blessing and its curse. But now there are another handful of women who know the importance and the rewards of Wikipedia editing.

**MELISSA WEININGER** is associate director of the Program in Jewish Studies and Anna Smith Fine Senior Lecturer in Jewish Studies at Rice University. Her article "Another Israel: Alternative Homelands in Contemporary Hebrew Literature" appears in the recent volume *Since 1948: Israeli Literature in the Making* (SUNY Press, 2020).

<sup>i</sup> Wikidata Human Gender Indicators: <http://whgi.wmflabs.org/gender-by-language.html>



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Judaic Studies Program  
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New Haven, CT 06520-8282

[renee.reed@yale.edu](mailto:renee.reed@yale.edu)

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