

# New Europe College Yearbook 2016-2017



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# MOVING IMAGES, STATIC LIVES: INTERWAR POLISH JEWISH DOCUMENTARY FILMS

## Abstract

This article examines two sets of films—those produced by amateur home movie-makers, Polish Jewish immigrants to the United States, on return visits home as well as the *Six Cities* series produced professionally by Sektor Films—in the context of the larger project of the creation of an image of Polish Jewish life in the interwar period. It uses the concepts of nostalgia delineated by Svetlana Boym to argue that even more than fundraising, the filmmakers intended their documentation to create a nostalgic souvenir for Americanized Jews and their children, a pre-facto memorialization of Polish Jewish life.

**Keywords:** Jews, Judaism, interwar Poland, emigration, American Jews, diaspora, film, documentary, nostalgia, Svetlana Boym

The establishment of the Second Polish Republic in November 1918 changed the lives of the new state's 27 million residents in multiple, profound ways. Among those residents, the country's nearly three million Jews (who formed the largest Jewish community of any country in Europe and the second largest in the world, after the United States) were faced with the challenge of finding a place for themselves in a state that increasingly defined itself as a creation of the ethnic Polish nation, to which Jews, by most accounts, did not belong.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, the Minorities Treaties (the so-called "Little Treaty of Versailles") gave Jews, as all minorities within the newly-formed Second Polish Republic, a measure of official recognition unprecedented under the rule of the three partitioning powers, Russia, Prussia, and Austro-Hungary. At least on paper, Jewish organizations were free to open schools in Yiddish and Hebrew; a strong Jewish cultural scene grew in the 1920s. On the other hand, Jews' *de facto*

equality with other Poles was by no means assured. During the war itself, Jews faced violence at the hands of their Polish (Catholic) neighbors, and after it, their safety was hardly guaranteed.<sup>2</sup>

The interwar period, it should not surprise us then, was a ripe time for Jewish self-depiction, as various Jewish groups vied to create the image of the Polish Jew. The ways in which Polish Jews took up this task were varied. Among the ways in which many Jews took up this new challenge was a concentrated effort to collect and display those aspects of their past that could demonstrate that they, too, belonged in and were a vital part of the new Polish state. During the twenty years of the Second Republic's existence, between 1919 and 1939, multiple Jewish museums opened their doors to the public. Hundreds of amateur collectors (*zamlers*, in Yiddish) mobilized to document their towns' Jewish history, artistic legacy, and folkways. Professional scholars, some of them trained in ethnography, also played a central role in this collection boom. Their aims were varied; some collectors used their work to paint a picture of a Polonizing (and Polonizable) Jewry, while others sought to "define the Yiddish nation," in the words of one scholar, distinguishing a language-based Jewish nation separate from the Polish one.<sup>3</sup>

By and large, all of these depictions of Polish Jews were created for audiences within Poland, Jewish and gentile. But there was yet another set of images of the Polish Jew which emerged from the interwar period: those created for American immigrant audiences. Two sets of films from the interwar period, created by Polish and Polish-American immigrant Jews and aimed at an immigrant Jewish audience, demonstrate yet another facet to the contested image of the Polish Jew: that of the already-disappeared relic.

The first set of films falls into the category of "home movies," which were made for private consumption with family and friends and in some cases to be shown to larger audiences as part of a fundraising event. These films were all made by Jews who had emigrated from Poland to the United States, mainly before the Great War or in the first years of the 1920s. The second set of films was made professionally in Warsaw in 1938 and 1939, and sent to the United States for showing shortly thereafter. The two sets of films speak directly to each other, but also must be contextualized within the broader project of forming and depicting the Polish Jew.

The dominant image of Jewish life in interwar Poland—truly, the image, the visual document—was the creation of Alter Kacyzne, an immigrant photographer himself. Born in Vilna (Polish Wilno, today Lithuanian

Vilnius) in 1885, Kacyzne moved to Warsaw in 1910 with a large wave of so-called “Litvaks” (Lithuanian Jews). He worked as a translator and photographer, and was deeply involved with the modernist literary scene in both Russian and Yiddish.

Kacyzne, because he was working for various American organizations, was the photographer whose images would have been most familiar to contemporary American Jews. In 1921 he was commissioned by the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, or HIAS, to document immigrants arriving in the United States, at Ellis Island. Then, in 1923, Ab Cahan, the editor-in-chief of the daily Yiddish newspaper *Forverts*, hired Kacyzne to photograph East European Jewish Life. Kacyzne held this job for seven years, until 1930. Cahan and Kacyzne argued quite a bit over artistic direction. Cahan did not appreciate Kacyzne’s photographs of his own artistic milieu in Warsaw, preferring instead one type of image: the poor *shtetl* (market town) Jew. Kacyzne’s photographs would have been widely recognized by the creators of the first set of films under discussion, the home movies of Jewish returnees.

Kacyzne was not the only Jewish photographer who emphasized poverty alongside close family life. The ethnographic expedition photographs of S. An-sky and his team, taken in 1912-1914 in the Pale of Settlement (the Russian partition of Poland), also emphasize these characteristics of the “old world”—which was already “old,” that is to say outmoded, for An-sky as well as for Kacyzne, and for most Jews who had moved from *shtetl* to city in the previous decades.<sup>4</sup> Kacyzne and An-sky were friends and intellectual compatriots, and An-sky’s influence can be detected in Kacyzne’s photographs. An-sky’s work served partly to memorialize *in situ* living communities “as they disappeared.” Even before he witnessed the Great War, An-sky felt a sense of urgency in the face of impending disaster:

The systematic collection of folk art and the comprehensive investigation of economic life have for the Jewish people, over and above general artistic and scientific significance, a further topical interest. If anti-Semitic theories are based on a slanderous portrayal of the Jewish character, and such a slanderous definition of the economic role of Jewry as harmful, we must be armed...with materials that clearly depict the spiritual aspect of the Jewish people, its attitudes, beliefs, hopes, and despairs, which folk art offers to us directly.<sup>5</sup>

An-sky hoped to rescue the Jews from persecution and from the false beliefs of others, and to build up a Jewish cultural bulwark against both prejudice and assimilation. This goal became even more important for him during wartime.

The films presented here can be seen as source material documenting the *shtetlekh* of Poland, and as a part of American Jewish relief efforts. I argue, on the basis of Svetlana Boym's theories of "restorative" nostalgia, that they can also be seen as a vehicle for a type of nostalgia, albeit with an unconventional definition: as a way to establish a break with the past, not to bridge it.<sup>6</sup> I posit that the desire to fix the past, in this case in film, as a method of maintaining "restorative nostalgia," the vision of the past "as it was," and unblemished (though again—not to restore as salvage ethnography aimed to restore, but rather to keep at some distance from the actor). This nostalgic action (or actions: filming and viewing) occurred before the rupture of the Holocaust; it can also be considered pre-commemorative nostalgia, something to which the filmmaker and viewers might return to in the unknown future, within the limited framework of the screen.

Jewish ethnography and collection practices have been discussed primarily as responses to catastrophic circumstances, as attempts to capture a vanished, or vanishing, way of life. It is in this manner that David Roskies has written about Jewish literature that attempted to describe Jewish life.<sup>7</sup> This description works from an idea of "salvage" ethnography, that is, ethnography that is intended to preserve, albeit in a fossilized form, a remnant of a life that is about to slip away. (The attempt to salvage might be considered the opposite of the type of nostalgia described here, which also aimed to preserve, but not to restore to the present.) And indeed, the tendency of Jewish ethnographic and literary writing to memorialize destruction as it is happening stretches back before An-sky, to Natan of Hanover's *Yeven metsulah*, the abyss of despair, which memorialized the Jews killed in the Khmel'nyts'kyi Uprising of 1648.<sup>8</sup> But as we see from later works, An-sky's and Kacyzne's among them, memorialization need not be for the dead, it could also be for a way of life, even as it was still being lived.

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As Polish Jews in the United States, some of them new American citizens, looked at the effects of the Great War overseas, and at their



own increasing financial resources, some bought one of the increasingly-affordable home movie cameras available on the market, along with a package tour to Poland, as an extension of a more traditional European vacation.<sup>9</sup> This paper discusses just four of the films available in digital format. Many of the extant films are difficult to watch, not due to subject matter but due to the poor quality of the camerawork and the dizzying effects it produced.<sup>10</sup>

1924 marks the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act, also known as the Immigration Act of 1924 or the National Origins Act. An act of Congress, it limited immigration to the United States to a quota based on country of origin, 2% of the 1890 immigration totals by nationality (meaning, in the American sense, country of origin, not citizenship or ethnicity). (The Johnson-Reed Act also completely excluded immigration from Asia.) In effect, aside from Asian immigration, the Act was designed to limit immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Put another way, the Act limited the immigration of Jews, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox families and communities.<sup>11</sup> The Johnson-Reed Act was the last step in increasingly strict immigration quotas based on racialized thinking and fears of communism as well as anti-Jewish and also anti-Catholic sentiment. Whereas other prior acts limited immigration, this Act effectively shut out whole populations, as in 1890, most immigrants to the U.S. were from north-west Europe—parts of Germany, England, and Scandinavia.

Jews from Eastern Europe had started to come *en masse* to the U.S. beginning right around 1880, in response to a wave of pogroms across the territory of today's Ukraine. Jews also emigrated as well for reasons common to most immigrants—economic crisis in smaller towns and villages, desire for a less strict way of life religiously, and a sense that America offered more opportunities in general. In contrast to many other immigrant groups, Jews had much lower rates of return to their place of origin. It was quite common for, say, a Sicilian immigrant to come to the U.S., make money, and return to Sicily either to stay or at least to marry. East European Jews really did not go back in very high numbers. From 1908 to 1925, 1,018,878 Jews immigrated into the U.S., while 52,585 departed, 5.2%. The rate for Italians was 55.8% and for Germans 15.3%.<sup>12</sup> In effect, after 1924, it was quite likely that an East European Jewish immigrant still had family in Eastern Europe who had intended to come to the United States, but were cut off from doing so, first by the Great War and subsequently by the Johnson-Reed Act. The passage of the Act solidified what was already a trend: the act of immigration as a

complete rupture with the past, both the individual past and the Polish Jewish past broadly.

Arriving in the cities and towns they had left as much as a decade or more prior, their reasons for their trips were diverse. Some went to visit family, who could not join them in the States after the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act. (We must imagine that some of the people in the films are family members.) Others wanted to show their Americanized children life in their former homes. We can consider these films to be, in a sense, the opposite of the “*papirene kinder*,” the photographs of children who left for America that are visible in family portraits of East European Jews.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that regardless of the reason for traveling, there was no option for a full and unadulterated “return,” for the country they were visiting had changed, in multiple ways. In all cases, they were visiting a country, the Second Polish Republic, which did not exist when they left. More than national borders had changed since these returnees’ departures. The Great War had devastated the towns and villages along the Eastern Front, and roughly half of Galicia’s Jewish population alone migrated away from their hometowns.<sup>14</sup> Reports on the losses of life and poverty, along with photographs, had been published in immigrant newspapers, as well as in national news, however, none of these home movie makers had seen the extent of the destruction firsthand.

Additionally, we must imagine that home movie makers had seen Kacyzne’s images of the poor Jews of Eastern Europe, living in squalid circumstances, unable to make a materially comfortable life for themselves. They may also have been familiar with the photographs of Jacob Riis, for example, whose (often staged) photographs of New York’s Lower East Side depicted crippling poverty in a bid to raise awareness of (and aid money for) “the other half.”<sup>15</sup> Many of the returnees had likely lived on the Lower East Side themselves. It is also quite possible that some of the movie-makers drew some inspiration from the social documentary programs of the Works Progress Administration, which was established during the Great Depression to provide jobs and to document daily life. Some of the documentary projects of the WPA included films and travel writing.

Apart from individual travelers’ own initiative to document, *landsmanshaftn*, fraternal societies comprised of Jews from the same hometown in Europe, also sent individuals to document their hometown’s present conditions. The filmmakers would then bring these films back, and screen them with the goal of helping to raise funds for relief efforts within the United States. The scenes that filmmakers brought back to the

states attempted to make various impressions on their viewers. In some films, destitution and decrepitude are emphasized; others paint a more sentimental portrait of life back in “the old country.”

The film “A Pictorial Review of Kolbishev,” made by Peysakh Zukerman in 1929, falls into the category of a nostalgic, “trip down memory lane” type of film.<sup>16</sup> Zuckerman, who was 30 when he shot the footage, was a native of Kolbuszowa (Kolbishev in Yiddish), in the Subcarpathian region of Poland, and had immigrated to the United States as a teenager. The film opens with introductory words that underscore the idea of the successful immigration story, and the “American dream,” while nonetheless paying homage to an idealized home town:

Although we have made this glorious country as our second home, living under far better conditions and enjoying more freedom under the American flag, we still feel and consider in the depths of our hearts our native towns with all its [sic] shadows and faults as the sunny spot of the first happy years. Looking up-on all the school, synagogues, and all the other unique features prevalent in our idealic [sic] towns, we feel as a shock of pride would touch us and many a tear relieves our sensitive hearts while looking at these pictures and recalling the first episodes of our early lives.

Zuckerman, like most of the home-movie makers, used the film to raise money for Jews in Kolbuszowa, showing at a 1930 ball for the United Kobesevher Relief, which netted \$4,500 in donations.<sup>17</sup>

Zukerman told his cameraman, “I want the life of a week ... the way children go to *kheyder* and the...market-day...pictures for a whole week with the exception of the Sabbath.” The scenes focus on aspects of the everyday, showing mundane scenes in a positive light. The literal light in the film comes from the sunny skies under which the film was shot; the summertime trees and natural light of the outdoor shots (home movie-makers typically did not have the equipment to shoot indoors) give Kolbuszowa an aura of a summer colony rather than a typical town.<sup>18</sup> The cameraman showed stacked loaves of bread in the market square, which stand in for a life of satisfaction without hunger. Scenes of bustling trade similarly depict a Kolbuszowa where people get along with their daily business, working hard but not without reward.

Around minute 20 of the film, the cameraman turns to the graveyard. There is no ominous or portentous meaning in the scene; images of stones are merely reminders of loved ones who have passed on, and the cemetery

is a part of the town, where life included living and dying amongst ones family. The graveyard shots are followed by a scene of a marching band, underscoring the absolute normality of death in the circle of life.

Considering the purpose of the film, that is to raise relief money, the choice of images may seem odd: Kolbuszowa does not appear, in the film, to be a town in need. There is bread, the town is orderly. There are no scenes of overt poverty, and while Kolbuszowa is clearly not a rich city, nor do its residents seem destitute or unhappy. We may view this partially as a function of the season in which the film was shot, as well as Zuckerman's success in the "goldene medine," the "golden land." Finding success in America, he remembered a happy childhood in the "old country." While he could never return for good—at least, he certainly would not be able to maintain his financial success if he had returned—he looked on his former life with nostalgia, a longing for simpler times. What Zuckerman did in America is unknown, however, his profession and location certainly would not have allowed him the time to do what he (via his cameraman) did in the film: wander through a town, taking in its sights, delighted by all he passed. We must also consider the impact of the film on the audience. While perhaps scenes of destitution might have encouraged the Kobishever *Landsmanshaft* member to open their purses wider, at the same time, the nostalgia *produced* by the film, and the happy memories it likely triggered, must have had a similar effect to images of poverty and want.

This film also belongs to what I suggest was a prevalent mode of depicting Polish Jewish life before the Holocaust: the pre-commemorative. Postwar viewers of these films, familiar with other filmic and photographic depictions of pre-Holocaust Jewish life in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, will recognize certain elements: the beautiful scenery, the implications of close family ties, the everyday humor and serendipities. The romanticized notions of *shtetl* life are only possible with its destruction. And while it is in fact the case that *shtetl* life was disappearing by force (mainly the Great War) and by choice (through migration to cities) well before the Holocaust, World War Two and the Holocaust are remembered in the popular communal imagination as the major event of destruction of the East European Jewish way of life, which is troped as *shtetl*-dwelling. The nostalgia of post-Holocaust commemoration is necessarily complete, final: there can be no return to that past, whether idealized or not. This finality is always necessarily sad. But pre-Holocaust commemoration leaves open the possibility for happiness; memories of happy life are

broken by emigration, but not by destruction. The memory of happiness, transferred to film and projected to people who may well have also had similar happy childhood memories from the exact same place, may leave the audience with a collective sigh, but it need not be tragic, sad, to be effective as a vehicle for nostalgia.

In contrast to Zuckerman's portrayal, Sydney Herbst's 1935 film made for the *Ershte Shendishever Galtzianer Chevra* (First Sędziszów Galician Fraternal Organization) depicts Herbst's hometown, Sędziszów, in the midst of terrible decline.<sup>19</sup> Herbst had traveled to Sędziszów to disburse funds collected for charity. His aim was similar to Zuckerman's: to capture his town on film, while providing some financial relief. However, the image he was met with did not match that which his imagination and memory had produced.

He wrote in his diary that on the way to the town from Warsaw, "The last two hours on the train [I was] very nervous like before going to a party." But when he arrived, he was disappointed and miserable: "Terribly homesick. Horrific sight awaited me on arrival. On mainstreet like a graveyard, not a light in any of the stores, not a store open....Mother wailed, cried for hours, fainted at first and never stopped crying all night.... It's very cold here. Can't wait till I leave. Counting the days like in prison."<sup>20</sup> Herbst's impressions of his former town were certainly not inaccurate. The economic and political situation of Jews in 1935, contrasted with 1929, were far worse. Herbst wrote about the "unspeakable poverty" and the "misery all over town" in his travel diary. In addition to the worsened economic conditions, Herbst traveled in winter, which certainly cut a harsher impression than did Kolbuszowa in summer. While Hebrst's interlocutors, like Zuckerman's, still smile and pose for the camera, street scenes show emptied streets, and muddied roads, a poverty of dress (where women wear shawls instead of coats) and infrastructure.

Boym wrote that "Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future....[N]ostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory." Zuckerman's film of Kolbuszowa conforms to this vision; it is a way of commemorating and fixing the idealized image of the past, in order to bring it into the present, especially in the changed world of the immigrants. By contrast, Herbst's film can be seen as an attempt to capture a useful image for the present and future; instead, it underscored the absolute

inaccessibility of the past, and the misery that attempting to bridge the gap between present and past can create. "Restorative nostalgia," as opposed to "reflective nostalgia," "stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home....Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition."<sup>21</sup> Zuckerman's film fulfilled the goal of reconstructing the lost home; Herbst's disturbed the image of the past.

Certainly, we may attribute the difference in the two films' scenes and narration to the very real differences between the towns, and temporalities, they depict. Six years and a full season made for a very different image of the "home country." Would Zuckerman still have portrayed his hometown in such a rosy light in the winter of 1935? It seems unlikely that he could have. But we can also view Herbst's disappointment not as a byproduct of a worsening situation, but additionally as a result of a crushed expectation, the expectation for a redemptive nostalgia, one that put the filmmaker back in his childhood home, with his family, a part of the seemingly (from the perspective of an older, urbanized new American) snug and orderly town. Herbst's film is above all a reminder that "you can't go back again." It is the filmic representation of the breach of the open-ended nature of pre-commemorative nostalgia. Because Herbst had not intended to make the film in a commemorative vein, he was shocked and saddened to find that commemoration, and attendant mourning, was exactly his task.

For viewers, the films are a vehicle for memory, or, in the phrasing of Richard Terdiman, "the past made present."<sup>22</sup> The films bring the viewers' own pasts, or similar pasts, into the present moment. However, the films also capture the present; this is the problem presented by Herbst's film. For while he intended to capture the past, in order to seal it away, he inadvertently filmed the present.

Gerold and Lillian Frank's film of Kamionka and Skidel (Skidl in Yiddish), made in 1934, similarly to other films made in the 1930s, also depict poverty.<sup>23</sup> Large families, though smiling, had clearly fallen on hard times. The Franks aimed the camera at the siding of houses, with peeling paint. People hardly appeared at all, save for the first few minutes of the almost 20-minute film and a few shows in the middle. A horse-drawn cart kicked up dust on the road, and scrawny trees looked like they might snap in the breeze. Similarly, the cemetery was presented without visitors, and appeared desolate, the graves tilted left and right. Rather than the marketplace, the Franks showed market carts without goods in them. Almost no building indicating life appeared in the film.

Ethel Zim's film of Libowne (Luboml in Yiddish) and Oliwne depicts scenes of poverty, as well, but conversely to the Franks' film, it shows almost solely people, often wearing shawls instead of proper coats.<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that the film's subjects are not happy; certainly, they are smiling and show affection towards one another. A sense of the broader landscape is given as Zim took the camera on a train, and filmed the passing scenery through the window, but it is literally a blur, and the film ended with a sense that the houses could all be the same. There were limitations imposed on the filmmakers, of course, primarily technological. Indoor lighting technology had not advanced as quickly as had portable film cameras, most of the films are shot entirely outdoors.

These four films, only part of the corpus available of "home movies" intended to raise money for Jews in Eastern Europe from the mid-1920s through the late 1930s, were edited to present a certain picture of life in Eastern Europe to those who had departed. At once journalistic and personal, showing scenes of people who may well be family members, and places familiar to the filmmakers from childhood, they also were intended to be shown to a larger audience, albeit one with roots in the very same town. One can imagine that during such a showing, audience members would gasp, point, and whisper to each other in recognition of places and people. These moments of recognition might trigger nostalgia, in the case of seeing a favorite childhood spot projected, or sadness and horror, if the *landsmen* saw ruins or despair. In both cases, the *landslays* were viewing their childhoods and young adulthoods, a world that had gone on by and large without them.

None of these observations are intended to obfuscate the very real, and dire, economic and sociopolitical circumstances facing Polish Jewry through the 1930s. Nor are they intended to belittle the filmmakers' impressions; we know from Herbst's diary that he was truly shocked and upset by the state of his hometown, and that he wished to leave at once. It is simply to point out two things: 1) that there were attempts at a pre-commemorative, healing, nostalgia before the absolute destruction not only of the towns and their people but also of the possibility for such a nostalgia, which we also might term "closure," and 2) that the images presented relied not only on the objective lens of reality, but on the filmmaker's own desires, projected, as it were, onto the screen.

It is instructive to contrast these films with the historical records of the towns, with what we know about the economic and cultural life of these towns. None of the filmmakers, nor other filmmakers, depicted what

we tend to think of as progressive changes: the opening of new schools, building of new buildings, modernization of industry and infrastructure. Although we know from the historical record that modernizing efforts, including new train stations, modernization of homes and schools (to say nothing of teaching methods), and the development of economic cooperatives, were widespread.<sup>25</sup> We can attribute these lacunae to a few factors, beyond the time constraints of film. For one thing, the filmmakers needed to show either economic ruin or simple natural beauty in order to raise funds. As much as Zuckerman's idyllic images are hard to imagine sparking the writing of a cheque, the nostalgia they produce certainly did. Scenes wholly unfamiliar to the audience, however, scenes of progress and development, could not spark nostalgia, and might instead have the opposite effect of encouraging dissociation with the hometown. Secondly, the filmmakers were *re-visiting* the towns, looking for their own pasts, and not for a complete picture of Kolbuszowa or Sędziszów or any of the other towns filmed for similar purposes. Additionally, after having lived mainly in much larger cities like New York for their adult lives, the small measures of modernization taking places in the Polish *shtetl* may not have even struck the filmmakers as progress, may not have crossed their minds at all.

As a parallel to the lack of scenes of modernization, modern viewers may also notice the lack of non-Jews in the films. Of course, filmmakers shot their family and friends; most of the latter would have been Jewish as well. And the films were intended for *Jewish* relief efforts. The monoethnic portrayal, unrealistic as it is (Kolbuszowa, for example, was about half Jewish, half Catholic in the interwar period), tells us something about the construction of an idealized past, as a way of coping with (or, perhaps, avoiding coping with) a violent past and a present indelibly marked by that violence. I would suggest, however, that these pre-war home movies present a similar image—of Jews, by Jews, for Jews—for much the same purpose, to idealize the past, whether the present is portrayed as similar to, or different from, that past. The films' Americanized audience, too, surely played a role in this construction. Removed from their towns' histories, they may have stopped caring about the Catholic populations of those towns, preferring to think of them instead as a Jewish homeland. Similarly to the Jews of Białystok, who one scholar argues formed a second diaspora, with Białystok as the homeland, the immigrant Jewish audiences for these films may also have constructed a mythical homeland out of their towns.<sup>26</sup> The films then serve as part of the founding narratives of these mini-nations,



with all the historical obfuscation that implies. Finally, as filmmaker and memoirist of Polish Jews film Natan Gross has put it, “in an atmosphere of struggling against anti-Semitism, a Jewish environment was formed.”<sup>27</sup> That is to say, the anti-Jewish actions within Poland, surely known to the diasporic filmmakers, influenced the way in which the Jewish environment was portrayed: mono-ethnic and mono-religious.<sup>28</sup>

Nostalgia, Boym wrote, can be dangerous in that it “tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one.”<sup>29</sup> Given the circumstances of the films’ creation, as vehicles for fundraising to lift the towns out of dire conditions, there would seem to be little danger in the pre-commemorative nostalgia, designed to fix a certain image of the past to be accessed on demand. Rather, the amateur filmmakers and their audiences could never be confused by the real and the imaginary; their nostalgia appears to work on a meta level, easily passing between documentation and creation of a keepsake for the future.

### **Six Cities: A Portrait of Urban Polish Jewish Life for American Audiences**

The second corpus of films, Sektor Films’ *Six Cities* series, was made under vastly different circumstances to the home movies. These films, six films of roughly ten minutes’ duration each, were created by professional filmmakers in Poland. Sektor also produced films for an American Jewish audience, however, the overall impression *Six Cities* gives is vastly different from those films made by immigrant Jewish amateur filmmakers. Although the films depict urban environments, and were not intended to be viewed by former residents of the specific cities (unlike the home movies), *Six Cities* also trades in nostalgia, the pre-commemorative type of nostalgia before “something” happens to make that sort of open-ended emotion, full of pathos but also of possibility, an absolute impossibility.

Sektor Films was a company comprised of the brothers Shaul and Yitzkhok Goskind. Shaul Goskind, the driving force behind the enterprise, was born in Warsaw in 1907, though the family moved to Nieszwiez (present-day Belarus), where Shaul attended elementary school. He then attended a Russian-language school in Warsaw, and received his *matura* (high school diploma) in Gdansk. After high school, Shaul had planned to attend agricultural school in Prague. However, a chance happening changed the course of his life. Goskind entered, and won, a contest

sponsored by the periodical *Nasz Przegląd* (Our Review), essentially for having a photogenic face. The prize was two years' tuition at a film school focusing on advertising.

Goskind was a member of Hashomer Hatzair (The Young Guard) in Warsaw, a youth organization similar to a scouting club which was affiliated with Poalei Zion (The Workers of Zion), a leftist, socialist-oriented Zionist movement in Europe. The club organized excursions, holiday celebrations, and political activities. Goskind's first films as a student were of Hashomer Hatzair's celebrations for Lag B'Omer, a summer minor festival, but one that is celebrated by scouting organizations worldwide, as part of the celebration involved creating a large bonfire.

After graduating from film school, Goskind opened Sektor films in 1930. The first two years, until 1932, the studio operated as a laboratory. Starting in 1932, Sektor opened Kinor ("Harp," as in David's harp), a subsidiary focused on production. Sektor itself was involved in distribution, and also owned Neo Vox, the sound firm. Neo Vox used portable sound equipment, and was the only one of its kind in Poland.<sup>30</sup>

The first film produced by Sektor was *Al chet/Za Grzechy* ("For Our Sin"), in 1936, a Yiddish-language melodrama "talkie." Most of the film's crew came from Germany, driven out of the country by the repressive measures against Jews. It received positive reviews in Poland as well as abroad, from Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, though it also received criticism for not dealing with contemporary Jewish problems.

1936 proved to be a banner year for Sektor. Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, the Revisionist Zionist leader and orator, visited Poland in that year, on a speaking tour.<sup>31</sup> According to the memoirs of Natan Gross, Jabotinsky, who had a lifelong interest in film, had personally spoken with the Goskind brothers. In Jabotinsky's mind, after Jews had left Poland (for Palestine), almost nothing would remain of them, demonstrating their presence. Jabotinsky told the Goskind brothers, "And after that [after the Jews leave], what will be left? Films, if you make them."<sup>32</sup> This is the birth story of Six Cities.<sup>33</sup>

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, the Revisionist Zionist leader with desires for Jews to leave Poland within the next fifteen years, had some role in the project that produced the films. He met with the Goskinds in 1936 and this meeting furthered Jabotinsky's conviction that there was no viable future for Jews in Poland. The Goskinds, for their part, heard Jabotinsky's speeches from his tour of Poland, in which Jabotinsky preached his message of the need for emigration from Poland, to Palestine. Jabotinsky,

perhaps best known for his role in the formation of Betar, the Revisionist Zionist youth organization, and his mixed record in favor of militancy in Palestine, had lectured throughout Poland and Russia on the need for Jewish self-defense. From 1935 onwards, at the New Zionist Organization (NZO) in Vienna, Jabotinsky had publicly espoused the concept of *shlilat ha-golah*, negation of the diaspora, a tenant of Zionist thought that held that Jews must give up their diasporic identities (language, names, and other associated cultural practices) in order to become new, liberated Jews in Zion. The factors of this strand of Zionist thought, combined with the very real physical dangers that Jabotinsky perceived to Jewish life and liberty in Poland, combined to form a telos based on the absolute absence of Jews from the future of Eastern Europe. For some time, Jabotinsky had had a “premonition of doom lying in wait for the Jews of Europe unless they left it in time.”<sup>34</sup> Jabotinsky, of course (and in contrast to some accounts), was not “prescient” or “ahead of his time;” he did, however, travel widely and observe (perhaps through the colored lens of his political sentiments) that Jews were threatened everywhere.

Initially, Sektor had no investor for the films, and it took two years to even begin production. Someone then had the idea that money might come from *landsmanshaftn* in the United States. However, without an opportunity to travel to the U.S., Goskind decided to make the films in Poland and send them to the U.S. to recoup the expenses.

The titular six cities were Łódź, Białystok, Krakow, Lwów, Wilno, and Warsaw. The Łódź film is presumed lost, but the other five are still extant. Filmmaker Natan Gross wondered in his memoirs whether the film depicting Łódź was not, in fact, kept within the archives of the Jewish community in that city, but to date, the film has not been recovered. The Goskinds had intended the films to be distributed in the United States, and had sent one copy in a package to the U.S., as well as additional copies to Palestine and to the official Jewish communal offices of the cities depicted. They shipped the packages only a few days before the Nazi German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. For unknown reasons, the United States-bound package was left in the dead letter office until 1943; the intended recipient never arrived. Somewhere between arrival in the United States and 1943, the Łódź film disappeared. We may also assume, as Gross did, that the Goskinds intended to produce films on other major cities with smaller Jewish populations.

Jabotinsky and the Goskind brothers hoped that the films would be of interest to *landsmanshaftn*, who might buy them and *post facto* finance

the project. Due to the late date of their arrival in the United States, they were not used for the relief effort. If we might imagine a counterfactual history, though, what if the films had been used the way that the home movies were? What might reception have looked like? The voice of Asher Lerner providing factual information and punchy anecdotes is quite different from the “voice” of the intertitles providing sad commentary. And yet, most of the home movies date from the years before many of the anti-Jewish acts were in effect in Poland. By the time of *Six Cities* production, Jews faced *numerus clausus* enrollment caps in universities, and so-called “ghetto benches,” physically separate seating for Jewish students, within the university. Kosher slaughter bans, boycotts, and prohibitions on Sunday trade attempted to (and to an extent succeeded in) crippling Jewish economic life.<sup>35</sup>

However, none of the scenes in *Six Cities* even hints at these local developments. There are two broadly negative categories of shots, and narration, that the film depicts. The first is economic: it is hard for Jews to make a living. A viewer with a knowledge of the area would know that it was hard for non-Jews to make a living as well, though of course Jews also faced the above-mentioned sanctions on economic activity that Catholic Poles did not face. The comments on economic difficulty take up no more than two sentences within each of the films, and are presented as almost neutral facts, without cause—making a living is simply difficult. . A klezmer and classical soundtrack, from the in-house firm Neo-Vox, accompanies the narration. The original narration was provided by Asher Lerner, in Yiddish.

The second negative element in most of the films is introduced visually with the image of Jews reading the newspaper. Within the photographs of Alter Kacyzne, by and large, reading is a sign of traditional Jewish life: boys read in *kheder* (Jewish religious primary school for boys), and older Jews read as part of their continuing religious studies and practice. There are no reading characters in the home movies. Within *Six Cities*, however, reading is an outlet to the broader world. The stack of newspapers from all different viewpoints, from socialist–leftist to Zionist to socialist-Zionist to religious, demonstrates the breadth of news available to Jewish readers (and those are just the Yiddish papers), as well as the political divisions amongst Jews. Inevitably, with these images of news comes a piece of narration about the troubles of the world. These “troubles,” however, are never specified (although viewers would at the very least understand the implied threat from Nazi Germany, reported on daily by every Jewish

paper in Poland). Like a general economic distress, a general political distress is but one element of a vibrant society.

It is tempting to read these films back through the lens of the Holocaust, particularly images of children who, in all likelihood, never reached their teenage years let alone adulthood. Indeed, English- and Hebrew-language narration of the films, along with a new soundtrack, was added in the 1980s; this narration does mention Jewish university quotas, a pogrom, and similar hardships. The new narration also emphasized the idea that the youth were learning Hebrew and dreaming of a better world somewhere else. The future is already present in these versions of the films. In the originals, however, no mention is made of a worsening situation in Poland. Given Jabotinsky's and Goskind's shared negativity about the future of Jewish life in Poland, the overall positive portrayal in *Six Cities* might be surprising. However, Jabotinsky placed some of the blame for Jews' worsening circumstances on the Jews themselves, for not taking the reins into their own hands.<sup>36</sup> If this were the case, and Poland did not stand for a monolithic force against the Jews, then composing an elegy to Jewish life in Poland, as an integrated part of Poland, became less of a problem.

Despite the need to not read the Holocaust backwards, it is also important to realize that the films were already providing a pre-Holocaust elegy to Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Since World War One, Jews had been composing memorials to Jewish life in Poland and the region, and these films fit within a longer tradition of Jewish memorialization that did not begin, nor end, with the Holocaust. As a pre-event memorial, however, the films are of an entirely different character. After the promises and high hopes of the 1920s (in particular) in Poland, the films construct a memorial elegy to the good times, emphasizing not dashed hopes but rather a peaceful and happy present, "before" whatever event Jabotinsky, and the Goskind brothers, imagined.

The five films have great value as historical sources, as visual documentation of a bygone world. There is precious little moving footage of Polish Jewish life before the Holocaust, and the films thus serve as rare resource for scholars and students alike. Gross, too, wrote of the films as documentation, as scenes of a time which is no longer assessable, not even in the archive. However, the films also need to be read as documents, and not treated as neutral conveyors of information. As much as they captured images, they also shaped an image of Jewish urban life in Poland for an American audience—an audience that might be encouraged to send money and aid. They accomplish this (or rather, hoped to accomplish this)

by creating a ready-made memorial for the happy times in Poland, times that future Polish Jewish *olim*, immigrants to Israel, might look back on fondly. That is, the films served as agents for a future nostalgia. They did this through their imagery and their narration, depicting happy times and local color, with only a hint of the economic and political circumstances facing Polish Jews.

The five extant films have numerous commonalities, even as the narration stresses the particular local elements of the Jewish communities. All five show monuments, civic buildings, buildings housing Jewish religious and cultural institutions, and parks. All show scenes of youth and the elderly, boys and girls, the seemingly well-to-do and the poor. The camera pans from neighborhood to neighborhood, focusing on scenes of commercial activity, schools, and monuments of the city that were built by Jews.

In all the films, Jewish life is shown as an element of a larger civic life. "Jewish Life in Białystok," for example, begins not with reference to Jews, but rather to the city generally: "Białystok tock is a relatively young city," Lerner explains. "Jewish Life in Krakow" and "Jewish Life in Lwów" begin similarly, with an overview of the towns, their monuments, and their general contours. "Jewish Life in Krakow" began with a brief overview of major buildings and statues, such as Wawel (the former royal fortifications and burial site for Polish kings), the Mariacki Church, and the monuments to the leader of the 1794 Polish uprising Tadeusz Kościuszko and to poet Adam Mickiewicz. It is only when the focus moved to trade that Jews were specifically mentioned; Lerner points out that the main square (Rynek Główny) was once, in an unspecified past that is not, apparently, an object of mourning, known as the "Jewish Square." In a cinematic framing directly the reverse of the Krakow home movie, the film moved from Krakow's center to the Jewish quarter, zooming in on the Jews rather than moving from particular to general. The music modulated from a classical tune for strings and piano to an arrangement of klezmer tunes for the same instrumentation.

Scenes of cultural institutions showcase Jewish historical figures of the town as local heroes. In Białystok, Luwdik Zamenhoff, creator of Esperanto, features (though a shot of his former home), as well as do Zionist leaders. In all the cities, the sheer variety of Jewish cultural activity stands out. Libraries named for the author Sholem-Aleichem (in Białystok) or the Tarbut ("culture," a school emphasizing Hebrew literature), newspapers

of all political orientations, and other literary societies take up a large portion of the visual tour of the cities.

Innovation in industry and culture play a much larger role in *Six Cities* than in the home movies. To be sure, there was simply more industry, and a greater array of new organizations, within larger cities. But *Six Cities* specifically focus on the new. In Białystok this included long shots of factories (with Jewish workers) and clips of the industrial workings. Beyond industry, the films make note of some of the new, interwar-era social programs available in cities. In Białystok, this includes a center for children run by TOZ, the Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej (Society for Protecting the Health of the Jewish Population), an organization established in Warsaw in 1921. Scenes of children at this center (naturally, eating bialys, a bit of local taste) cause Lerner to remark on their beauty, and on how the children will be the future of the city.

In Warsaw, too, the focus was on the new. "A Day in Warsaw" focuses on the city's urban landscape, with the second-tallest skyscraper. Viewers experience the buzz of the city, and the contrast of the old city with the new. The narration underscores this. In the Old Town, for example, one can still hear about the history of the city: "today if you'd like to chat with an old Jew, who is familiar with Old Warsaw, about the lovely Warsaw Jews of old, Hassidim and *maskilim* [opponents of the Hassidim], you can in the streets of the old city." In the old town as well, Lerner mentions trials and tribulations of old. Hundreds of years ago, Jews were banished from Warsaw, but were eventually allowed back. Lerner does not connect this history to the present crisis, but rather locates it physically in the Old Town, far from both the skyscrapers and from the busy market life of today's Jews.

Each of the five extant films shows only one negative aspect of Jewish life in Poland: the difficulty of earning a living. This difficulty is mentioned one time in each of the films, generally in connection with the market day activities. In Białystok, Asher Lerner intones, "Jews try to eke out a living." In Krakow, "Jews run to and fro, trying to make a living." In Wilno as well, "How, how does one eke out a living!" The narration's light touch on economic distress warrants mention, when so many of the images of Polish Jews made for American consumption, Kacyzne's among them, depict Jews as universally poor and destitute. The economic downturn of the thirties was felt particularly hard by Jewish merchants, as boycotts and other specifically anti-Jewish measures took a toll. (There is some evidence that by the very late 1930s, economic life had started to look

up for Jews in Poland, though there are no good statistics through which we might follow this potential trend.)

However, the narration of *Six Cities* paints economic worries as an everyday affair, not something over which to become particularly distraught. In contrast to, for example, Herbst's scenes of empty marketplaces, the Jews buying and selling in *Six Cities* have enough wares, and the markets are busy and lively. To this end, the difficulties in earning a living might seem to the viewer to be no different than in years gone by, or, indeed, no different to life in the United States, where making a living was also not guaranteed for immigrant laborers. So while the narration does not gloss over the circumstances, the overall picture of a vibrant, happy Jewish life is untainted. Even Jewish underworld activity fits into this picture of average people just trying to get by: Lerner notes that in Warsaw, many Jewish traders operate without a permit.

This overall happy picture is carried throughout the films, down to their last moments. In Białystok, viewers hear that the young women strolling through a city park are "dreaming of wealthy American husbands." Over a violin and piano duet and scenes of flowers, the last line Lerner uttered was "Come visit Białystok—you won't regret it." Scenes of Krakow ended with a vision of Jews walking through the parks, then of Hassidim walking to synagogue for the Sabbath, accompanied by an upbeat klezmer tune, set in an orchestral arrangement, perhaps a metaphor for the city itself, traditionally Jewish in some ways while modern, high cultured, and Polonized in others. In Krakow's parks, like everywhere, Jews talked politics, and played games. In an ode to the city's strong religious life, Lerner reminds viewers that the Sabbath in Krakow was a "real Sabbath," complete with *shtreymlekh*, large circular fur hats typically worn by married Hassidic men. Lerner added a note of humor: And "if *shtreymlekh* aren't enough, here's a man in a *kolpik* [a different type of hat, also typical of Hassidim]. Good Sabbath!" In Wilno, as men discuss politics in the park, Asher ends his narration in English: "Goodbye, Vilne, goodbye!"

In Warsaw, too, we see just a hint of the current political crisis. In the park, as well, older people read the newspapers. We see a stack of newspapers, indicating the diversity of the press in Warsaw (and in Poland more generally), and the array of political opinions that Jews held. Like the economic situation, Lerner's narration briefly mentions the contents of those papers, while diminishing their importance. "There is enough to read about—war and troubles abound. But let's not dwell on the sad affairs of the Sabbath. The Sabbath meal awaits: fish, cholent, and kugel."



On this note, the film ended with “Quiet and serene on the Sabbath.” This is also one of the only nods to religious life in the film, beyond the old Jewish man in the Old Town. Perhaps these brief mentions of hard times indicate that the filmmakers assumed that Jews who had emigrated due to hard times would already know quite enough about this aspect of life, and remember it quite harshly; it would be more important to focus on happy moments that got lost in immigration.

It is only in Wilno that religious life was a true focus of the film. Indeed, before the interwar period, Wilno was most well-known in the Jewish world for its circles of Torah scholars, especially for its *misnagdic* learning, the opposite of Hassidic learning, focusing on strenuous and sober text study. “Jewish Life in Wilno” begins immediately with the historical record of Wilno’s Jewish settlement, its fame for Torah scholars, and its reputation as the “spiritual center of Eastern European Jewry.” Only after this introduction was a nod given to the castle and Adam Mickiewicz. More so than the Lwów and Krakow films, religious life remained the focus, especially the *shulhoyf*, the famed synagogue courtyard, and the institutions, such as the Strashun Library, that were located there, and the “Jewish ghetto,” or quarter.

Scenes of the “ghetto” (the Jewish district in Wilno was called the ghetto long before the Nazis established the two ghettos there) were accompanied by an elegiac and mournful tune, but the rest of the scenes, even of streets with Yiddish signs, had upbeat music. Jews in Wilno, Lerner mentioned during the tour through the ghetto, spoke a “tasty Lithuanian dialect, with a sharp *sin* [a letter of the Yiddish alphabet]. Housewives shop for *fis* and tongue for *sabes*” (“standard” pronunciation being *fish* and *shabes*).

The portrayals of Jewish life in the five (and one can assume six) cities are upbeat, showing a vibrant and diverse Jewish community. The shots of children in most of the films shows viewers not just the cultural achievements of the Jewish community, but also the future of those communities. To be sure, each film mentions economic problems as an issue for Jews, but discussion of economic problems merits far less attention and time than mentions of newspapers, programs, dialects, and jokes. The narration further urges the viewers, American Jews, to visit the cities in question. In contrast to the home movies, however, the push to engage with East European Jewish communities was not a strictly commercial one. The filmmakers did hope that money from American Jewish immigrant groups might make up for the financial loss the films incurred for Sektor. However, the films themselves were not an appeal

for resources. Indeed, well-off Jews were depicted alongside poor ones, and the competency of social welfare organizations is far more evident than their financial struggles.

Even an ardent Zionist as Jabotinsky, convinced of the futility of Jewish life in Poland, could not help but wish to preserve an image of dynamism, of local color, of *home*, for posterity. These images from *Six Cities* show a Polish Jewry that was integrated into the broader Polish society. Of course, Jewish life in cities was a more integrated one, with younger Jews especially speaking Polish more comfortably than Yiddish. However, the diasporic of the filmmakers must also be taken into account. Immigrant Polish Jews, returning home to their places of origin, were looking specifically for *Jewish* life specifically. They had little interest in Jews as a broader part of the town, taking part in its general features.

The image of Polish Jewish life was shaped by a number of factors: concerns about the future, both economic and political, and the desire to ameliorate difficult economic circumstances. However, it was also shaped by a desire to elegize, if not to eulogize, a past that was increasingly irrecoverable, as well as, in a sense, a present that seemed to be disappearing. We may conclude that the process of memorialization Polish Jewish life began before the *start* of the Second World War, when the physical destruction of East European Jewry could not even be imagined. For Sektor Films, this was a pre-hoc enterprise, though for the immigrant filmmakers, what they saw as terrible tragedy had already come to pass. The lens, whether Kacyzne's still large-format camera, Polish Jewish immigrants' Kodachromes, or the studio-grade equipment of Sektor Films, was trained on Jews in Poland, but directed towards American(ized) Jews—to their hearts and to their wallets.

Both sets of films are nostalgic. The filmmakers' intent was to produce a reflective nostalgic portrait, "before;" though in the case of some of the home moviemakers, what they ended up producing is a film of disappointment, not nostalgia. The films were also intended as loci for nostalgia, some time in the not-to-distant future. The movies' existence confines and desired act of salvage or recreation to the film canister, to be taken out in specific moments only. The images of pre-World War Two Jewish life in Poland, moving across the screen, are nevertheless frozen in an almost-ideal state, to be taken as souvenirs into Jews' new lives.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For an account of forms Polish nationalism took throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially in relation to violence, see Brian Porter-Szűcs, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> On the wartime violence, see Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, and Israel Bartal, eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010), especially the first section. For one well-known example, pertinent to this paper: the Lwów Pogrom of 1918, in which almost 100 Jews were murdered.
- <sup>3</sup> See Itzik Nakhmen Gottesman, *Defining the Yiddish Nation: The Jewish Folklorists of Poland* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003). For non-nationalist ways in which ethnography was used by Jews in interwar Poland, see Sarah Ellen Zarrow, "Object Lessons: Art Collection and Display as Historical Practice in Interwar Lwów." *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 29: Writing Jewish History in Eastern Europe (December 2016), 157-176, and Sarah Ellen Zarrow, "Collecting Themselves: Jewish Documentation and Display in Interwar Poland" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> See Eugene M. Avrutin, et al, eds., *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-sky's Ethnographic Expeditions* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis UP, 2009).
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in Benjamin Lukin, "An Academy Where Folklore Will be Studied': An-Sky and the Jewish Museum," in *The Worlds of S. An-Sky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Gabriella Safran and Steven Zipperstein (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2006), 290.
- <sup>6</sup> See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), esp. ch. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1984), especially chapter five, "The Rape of the Shtetl."
- <sup>8</sup> See Shaul Stampfer, "Gzeyres Tat Vetat," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008).
- <sup>9</sup> On the Jewish travel agents who arranged these tours from the American side, see Daniel Soyer, "The Travel Agent as Broker between Old World and New: The Case of Gustave Eisner," in *YIVO Annual*, 21: Going Home (1993), 345-368.
- <sup>10</sup> The total collection of films at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research comprises films from 22 cities and towns, some on the same reel (some travelers visited more than one town on their trips). Not include in this figure are the few films made outside of interwar Poland; there is at least one extant film from Kiev, one from Birobidzhan, the "Jewish Autonomous Oblast" of the Soviet Union, and a few from Czechoslovakia.

- 11 See Table 2 in Mark Tolts, "Population and Migration," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008).
- 12 Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914," *American Jewish History* LXXI.2, (1981), 256.
- 13 Anca Ciuciu, "Papirene kinder... 'Shadows of the Departed,'" *Studia Hebraica* 9-10 (2009-2010), 212-222.
- 14 For statistics on displacement and losses in the Great War, see David Engel, "World War I," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008).
- 15 Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890).
- 16 "A Pictorial Review of Kolbishev," YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (hereafter YIVO) RG 105.
- 17 In Roberta Newman, "Home Movies of the *Alte Heym* (Old Home): American Jewish Travel Films in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s," in *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 15.1 (1993), 23.
- 18 In Roberta Newman, "Home Movies of the *Alte Heym* (Old Home): American Jewish Travel Films in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s," 25.
- 19 "Sedziszow," YIVO RG 105.
- 20 In Newman, "Home Movies of the *Alte Heym* (Old Home): American Jewish Travel Films in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s," 23.
- 21 Boym, xviii.
- 22 In Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.
- 23 "Kamionka and Skidl, Poland," YIVO RG 105.
- 24 "Libowne (Luboml) and Oliwne," YIVO RG 105.
- 25 See Jeffrey Shandler, *Shtetl: A Vernacular History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2013), and Steven T. Katz, ed., *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), especially Samuel Kassow's chapter on the *shtetl* in interwar Poland.
- 26 See Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and its Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010).
- 27 Natan Gross, *Film żydowski w Polsce* (Krakow: The Center for Research on the History and Culture of Polish Jews, 2002) 62.
- 28 For details on anti-Jewish measures taken in Poland during this time, see Szymon Rudnicki, "Anti-Jewish Legislation in Interwar Poland," in Robert Blobaum, ed. *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 2005), 148-170.
- 29 Boym, xvi.
- 30 Gross, 62. Gross noted that "this equipment served as a bulwark against antisemitic firms," in that firms were incapable of boycotting Sektor, as it was the sole owner of such equipment in Poland.

<sup>31</sup> On Jabotinsky, see Hillel Halkin, *Jabotinsky: A Life* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2014), and Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin-de-Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Gross, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, there is little source material on these films. Natan Gross's recollections serve as the only documentation, and were written well after the films were made. Nevertheless, because of the paucity of information, I have decided to include Gross's memories here as fact. Readers should be aware of this.

<sup>34</sup> Halkin, 18.

<sup>35</sup> See Rudnicki, "Anti-Jewish Legislation in Interwar Poland."

<sup>36</sup> Halkin, 214-215.

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