Learning in the ‘Land of Ashes:’ ‘Poland’ through the Windows of a Bus on the Toronto March of the Living

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to determine how learning in situ in Poland during the March of the Living (a trip which takes young Jews to Poland and Israel) shapes the curricular experience of Holocaust education. It examines the trip’s purpose of constructing Jewish self and communal identities through the history, and what impact that may have on the participants’ understanding of history, their Jewish identity and the Polish-Jewish relationship. This qualitative research study revolves around three questions: What pre-existing beliefs and attitudes regarding Poland do students bring into the trip? How do pedagogical choices employed in Poland change the narrative of the Holocaust from static to active? And, how does this act of experiential Holocaust education shape the participants’ beliefs, actions, and relationships with the Jewish community over time? It determines that many participants have a tendency to ‘inherit’ negative memory and myth about Poland from previous participants and family members, and the March’s creation of a ‘Poland’ that exists entirely as a Jewish construct certainly reinforces those pre-trip attitudes. Once there, the conflict between experiential and formal education that the
program tries to negotiate results in the prioritization of emotional understandings of history over intellectual ones. The common use of ‘embodiment’ within the trip encourages students to “enter history” on the side of Nazi victims, and in the absence of Nazis, local Poles surrounding the students become placeholders for the perpetrators and bystanders as a counterpoint to the students’ embodied ‘victim.’ The highly emotional, identity-building pedagogy on the trip feeds into various types of ‘modeled’ types of Jewishness presented to students throughout the trip, and the most pervasive form students exit with is one that is both under threat and empowered (represented by Holocaust and Israel respectively). This research indicates that the March attempts to bridge both educational and identity-building agendas, but is at present unable to successfully negotiate that tension, resulting in students lacking considerable knowledge about the Holocaust. Their Jewish identity building measures also seem to work to change attitudes, but not behaviours. This would indicate mixed levels of success for the March of the Living’s key goals.
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Introduction

Primo Levi once wrote than an unbridgeable abyss yawns between one who was there and one who wasn’t. Astoundingly, it seems today that this gap is narrowing. Many of us feel as though we might have been there; to a certain extent, it’s as if we were there. Our young people, second and third generation offspring of native-born Israelis, gravitate towards Auschwitz. They want their own feet to treat that cursed earth, as to assure themselves that the sun which rises there is the same one which rises in our world. I’ve watched them there, clinging to each other, clutching the flag of Israel, weeping … we shouldn’t suppose that we differ from our grandfathers and grandmothers who went to the gas chambers. What separates us from them is not that we are some sort of new Jew. The main difference is external: we have a state, and a flag and an army: caught in their tragedy, they lacked all three." - Limor Livnat, “Of Holocaust and Heroism,” Ha’Aretz, April 19, 2001.

In the summer of 2011, I was awarded an Auschwitz Jewish Centre Research Fellowship to study in Poland for four weeks. During that time, I attended the 70th anniversary commemorative ceremony of the Jedwabne massacre. The Jedwabne massacre is a particularly challenging part of history from a Polish self-conception perspective. The story was publicized in Jan Gross’ 2001 text Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, a book which details the 1941 murder of the entire Jewish community by local Poles, albeit with Nazi incitement. Acknowledgement of these types of wartime and post-war pogroms were largely repressed under the Soviets – all types of ethnic conflict were suppressed, and the official party line behind the Iron Curtain was that they were the helpless victims of the Nazis (Gebert, 2008). Furthermore, after the experience under the Nazis and then the Soviets, the already latent concept that intertwined Polish national identity with the idea of being the innocent, eternally victimized sacrificial nation became a dominant part of the national narrative (Steinlauf, 1997, pp. 9-11). This book – which identified a group of Poles as being responsible for the murder of an entire community – clearly places people and actions in history outside the Polish narrative of victimization during the Second World War.

1 Emphasis mine.
Upon our arrival in the small town in Eastern Poland, the tension of the upcoming memorial was pervasive. Among the people who had recently arrived to participate in the commemoration were a number of resentful (and often inebriated) locals. One man came up to our translator and began yelling in rapid Polish, which was later translated to us as a plea, not to hold him responsible for what happened 70 years ago; evidently it was perpetrated by people who are no longer alive, and he did not understand why we held him accountable for the past. Our translator quickly explained that we were students of history, and we did not hold contemporary Poles responsible for the history of the Shoah, just the memory of it. During the ceremony, which was held on the former site of the barn in which a few hundred Jews were burned alive, not a single local attended; two teenagers were spotted at a fair distance, observing the action from afar.

My fellow researcher and I talked at length about how we felt deeply uncomfortable that day, for we were clearly an unwelcome reminder of a past that has been the source of both Polish resentment and Jewish confirmation of Polish crimes. This experience is what, more than anything, drew me to this research project today. When I went to Poland for the first time, it was as a member of a quasi-Jewish educational trip (The March of Remembrance and Hope) in 2007. I did not yet have the depth and breadth of learning about the Holocaust that I attained in graduate school, and came out with a very dark perception of Polish complicity in the Shoah. Four years later, I had (I hope) the benefit of distance, age and a graduate school level education. I was more able to understand the complexities in history and society that were causing this visceral reaction – even if I did not particularly enjoy witnessing it.

In the intervening years, I began my Doctoral program and took on a full-time teaching position in Jewish history at a high school in Toronto. During my years there, I became painfully aware

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2 The number is still uncertain. Jan Gross stated 1600, but recent estimates have put it around 340 (after a partial excavation of the mass grave).

3 By resentment, I am speaking of the resentment of what many feel is a Jewish “willful misinterpretation” of the past. See Polonsky & Michlic (2004), Bikont (2004) for erudite analyses of this phenomenon.

4 A trip which was run at the time by the Canadian Centre for Diversity, and which falls under the umbrella of the March of the Living (including some of the same staff) but which is not explicitly for Jews, and does not go to Israel.
of the fact that my students who go to Poland on the March of the Living \(^5\) – the program I am choosing to study – en masse every year were even less well equipped than I was the first time I went. The Toronto March of the Living does not explicitly espouse anti-Polish sentiment, and yet many students come back with both concerning misunderstandings of history and misattributions of responsibility (particularly regarding Poles), and even more problematically, believing that the March is responsible for inculcating them. Thus, I began to consider how sixteen-year-old eyes would view the same scene as I had in Jedwabne. How would they understand Poland, the country, when the sole interaction they had with the society is through the death camps and destroyed remnants of Jewish life? How do they, as Jewish students on a trip that is as much about Jewish identity formation as Holocaust education, understand the Polish people whose narrative is made simplistic? Furthermore, how does this narrative, shaped through a performance of history that necessarily avoids contact with Poles while simultaneously requiring limited exposure, help change the Holocaust narrative from one relegated to history to a lived modern-day experience? Put simply, how do these trips which are focused on reinforcing (as Jackie Feldman puts it) the “boundaries of the enclave” (2008, p. 89) shape not only the participants’ understanding of the history of the Holocaust but also their relationship with it and those who exist outside the “enclave’s” borders?

At its core, this dissertation revolves around three questions:

- What attitudes or beliefs do participants bring with them on the trip, and in what ways do those preconceptions inform the way in which they understand the narratives presented to them?
- What pedagogical choices are being employed on the trip, and how does the ‘tourist gaze’ and positioning that takes place while in Poland shift the narrative of the Holocaust and Israel from static and historical to active and contemporary?
- How does this act of experiential and immersive Holocaust education shape their beliefs, actions, choices, and relationships with the Jewish community over time?

Through my research, I seek to determine how learning \textit{in situ} in Poland during the March of the Living shapes the curricular experience of Holocaust education for the purpose of helping to construct Jewish self and communal identities, and what impact that may have on the

\(^5\) In this case, the trip to Poland and Israel designed for 16-year-old high school students.
participants’ understanding of their Jewish identity, the Polish-Jewish relationship and the Polish locals who are simultaneously present and excluded.

**Dissertation Organization**

This dissertation takes a case embedded within a larger society – the March of the Living as it manifests itself in Toronto – and examines the concentric circles of influence and attitudes that surround it in order to explore the roots of students’ interpretations and understandings of the education presented to them. I seek to understand i) how the competing historical and national narratives of both Jews and Poles come into play during this seven-day interaction in Poland, ii) how has the globalization of the modern period shifted tourism from a medium of enjoyment and consumption to one that facilitates communal socialization and iii) how the act of being in Poland, the so-called ‘land of Jewish death’, helps facilitate modern day connectivity to the past.

With the following chapters I demonstrate my own analysis of the program as an increasingly popular experience for Jewish teenagers in the GTA, but continually draw on the competing narratives at play, as well as the educational choices implemented, and the way in which the participants’ understandings of the Holocaust, the Jewish community, Polish history and responsibility shape the way in which they understand the pedagogical and ideological choices made by the March of the Living during their week-long visit to Poland. In order to effectively analyze the complex and layered issues surrounding the program, I broke down the dissertation into smaller chapters dictated by the three secondary research questions, consolidating the relevant literature and data analysis for each.

Chapters 1-3 set up necessary context. Chapter one will introduce and situate the study, and examine the competing historical narratives of both Poles and Jews, which come into conflict on the trip. Chapter two, as a traditional methodology chapter, deals with overarching research philosophies, and I position myself, the researcher. Chapter three allows the readers to see the experience of the March of the Living through the eyes of its participants, with four case studies of different students representing different backgrounds in pre-existing Jewish education.

Chapters 4-6 are data chapters divided along the three core question lines. Chapter four deals with pre-trip assumptions and education about the Holocaust that informs students’
understandings of the events and people involved long before they even make the decision to apply to the trip. It will also include an analysis of the pre-trip educational programming. Chapter five will focus on the experience of the trip itself. Its primary focus is on the way in which the act of learning *in situ* transforms the history of the Holocaust into a contemporaneous event and what the implications of that are for the students. Chapter six examines the aftermath of the trip, and how the program encourages students to connect with their own Jewish identities, and will assess their success in doing so. It includes some longitudinal assessments based on students who are a year out, five years out, and upwards of ten years out (the latter two groups did not have pre-trip interviews, and instead are just being asked to reflect on the role of the March of the Living in their identities).

Lastly, chapter 7 offers the traditional discussion and conclusions, as well as providing the program with a series of recommendations as to how they can implement different educational programming and pedagogies in order to bring the outcomes more in line with their stated goals.

### Organization of literature review

In researching this dissertation, there was a wide range of literature that can contribute to the understanding of the March of the Living for the Toronto Jewish community, but little that focuses directly on it. Given the vast number of books that this research necessitated, it is impossible to do a comprehensive synthesis within the page limits. As a result, I will explore certain seminal works more in depth, while giving only cursory acknowledgement of other texts I read during my research. For a comprehensive list of all texts read, please see the bibliography at the end of the paper.

My research also offers some important distinctions from the literature cited over the following chapters. First of all, much of the research focused on North American Jewish educational travel is focused on Taglit Birthright Israel\(^6\) – a much more normative and widely attended trip (as it is free) than the March of the Living. Secondly, this research focuses not only on the Jewish

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\(^6\) A free 10-day trip to Israel, the technical right of all North American Jews, ages 18-26.
experience of the trip, but also how these short-term and relatively segregated interactions impact the Polish-Jewish relationship. While there has been research done on how Poles and Jews interact in the post-Holocaust age, there is still little research that regards the role of pilgrimage travel in that interaction. I am also specifically looking at the Toronto Jewish community, and assessing the ways in which the demographics and communal identities help shape the students’ experience, outside of the objectives of the program. Last but certainly not least, my research, while critical, in no way denotes these educational experiences as being a pre-cursor to so-called “Israeli Apartheid”, ethnic cleansing, or misplaced engendering of perpetual victimhood (as some people have argued) – in fact, I would refute those claims very strongly.

Definitions

March of the Living (sometimes written in its short-form, MOL or the March) – A Jewish educational trip caters to Grade 11 students. It includes one week in Poland and one week in Israel. It has a pre-trip curricular component. Started in 1988 after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Poland, it has become an increasingly normative part of the Jewish educational experience (at least within the engaged Jewish population). At the largest Jewish high school in Toronto, roughly two-thirds of the Grade 11 class goes every year. The March of the Living brings approximately 10,000 Jews from North America to Poland and Israel every year. There are also additional Young Adult and Adult contingents that run simultaneously. The trip is expensive, therefore making participants relatively self-selecting. From a socio-economic perspective, those who choose to go on the trip are largely from wealthy families that are already strongly committed to the Jewish community.\(^7\) In 2016, the cost was $6,299.00 USD per person for the Toronto contingent.

The March of the Living has two sets of leadership: although it is implemented in Canada by “Canada Israel Experience,” a branch of the Jewish Federation, there is an umbrella “March of

\(^7\) From research.
the Living International” which guides the overall vision and mission of the program. It is this international body that oversees the itineraries and “mega” events, governs the broad strokes curriculum, and sets the cost. To a certain extent the March of the Living Toronto is bound by the decisions made by the international body.

**Taglit Birthright Israel** – An organization that sponsors a free 10-day trip to Israel for any Jew between the ages of 18-26. Those who went on the March of the Living are permitted to register for Birthright after the age of 22. The trips began in 1999, and have brought more than 350,000 Jews to Israel. The idea was created (and funded by philanthropists Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt among others) as a way of reinforcing Jewish identity and Diaspora connection with Israel. Findings have shown how effective the trip is in terms of encouraging participants to make more “Jewish choices” including endogamy, Jewish education, and further trips to Israel.

**Toronto Jewish Preparatory School (TJPS, not its real name)** - One of the largest Jewish day schools in North America, located in Toronto.

**Judaism and/ or Jewishness** – The technical definition of Judaism is a faith-based system and its people who adhere to its religious tenets. The secondary definition of Judaism is a feeling of Jewishness, a cultural or ethnic affiliation, a feeling of peoplehood and connectedness. It is this secondary definition that this dissertation concerns itself with, less its faith-based iterations. Thus, when I speak of Judaism, I am in some ways speaking more of Jewishness.
The 12 Goals of the March of the Living

1. To remember those who perished and to be a witness, thus denying Hitler a “posthumous victory.”

2. To pay tribute to the courage of those who survived the Holocaust – who rebuilt their lives despite the haunting memories of the past – to be the bearers of their memories, the witnesses for the witnesses.

3. To recognize and learn from the altruistic actions of the “righteous among the nations”, who teach us to never be a bystander in the face of oppression.

4. To honor [sic] the heroic veterans of WWII who fought to liberate Europe from the hands of Nazi tyranny.

5. To never again allow for the unchecked rise of the menace of antisemitism.

6. To never again allow any kind of discrimination directed by any individual or group against another to gain strength. Given the Jewish people’s historic experience of persecution, our tradition teaches that the Jewish people have a special responsibility to oppose intolerance (Love the stranger because you were once strangers – Deut 10:19), and to teach the world that all human beings are created btselem elohim [sic] (in the image of G-d – Gen. 1:27), and deserve equal dignity and respect.

7. To inspire participants to commit to building a world free of oppression and intolerance, a world of freedom, democracy and justice, for all members of the human family.

8. To bolster the Jewish identity of the next generation by acquainting them with the rich Jewish heritage that existed in pre-war Eastern Europe. Included in this goal is a commitment to living our Jewish lives today in a way that reflects the diverse values and traditions of pre-war European Jewry.

9. To understand the importance of the existence of Israel: • as the spiritual center [sic] and homeland of the Jewish people. • through the lesson that Jews will never again allow themselves to be defenseless [sic]. • by developing a love for the people of Israel and an appreciation of the hardships and sacrifice endured by her citizens on behalf of Israel. • through the understanding of the concept of Meshoah Le’tkumah (from destruction to rebirth). Despite the devastation of the Holocaust, the Jewish people never gave up their belief in building a better tomorrow. Rather they rose up, against all odds and established the State of Israel—the hope and future of the Jewish people.

10. Jewish Unity – To instill [sic] in students a love for Am Yisrael, an appreciation for and connection to, the Jewish people in every land, throughout the ages and in contemporary times.

11. Tikkun Olam – To remind the students of the Jewish peoples’ responsibility to be a Maor Lagoyim [sic], a light unto the nations, by reaching to people of other faiths and cultures, and by mending our too often shattered world, through providing our help and assistance to those most in need.

12. The final goal is not so much to learn from or about history – but to enter into history. By visiting Eastern Europe, young Jewish students are taking part in a commemorative act, which demonstrates to the world that the death of six million of our people has been marked and will never be forgotten by the Jewish people.

(Source: http://marchoftheliving.org/goals-of-the-march-of-the-living/)
1 Chapter One: A House Divided

Loneliness is the key word that evokes the Jewish experience in Poland. Why didn’t the Polish population protect them – or at least help them? We tried, Polish officials tell us. They quote facts and figures. The fact remains that today there are six thousand Jews in Poland. Before the war, there were 3,500,000. It is only natural, therefore, that a Jew feels out of place in today’s Poland. He looks for his brothers and he fails to find them; even among the dead. A sentence here, a line of verse there, an allusion: not enough to recall their memory to future generations.

Our hosts [the Poles] refer to victims in general; we speak of Jews. They mention all the victims, of every nationality, of every religion, and they refer to them en masse. We object: of course, they must be remembered, but why mix them together? Both Poles and Jews must be remembered, but as Poles and as Jews. The Jews were murdered because they were Jews, not because they were Poles. True, they both faced the same enemy; both were victims of the Nazis. But the Jews were victims of the victims as well. They, and they alone were destined for total extermination, not because of what they had said or done or possessed, but because of what they were; to ignore this distinction, this essential fact about them, is to deny them. And so we told our Polish hosts, “if you forget the Jews, you will eventually forget the others.” - Elie Wiesel, From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences. P. 108, 1979.

In considering the causes for the anti-Semitic feeling that has brought about the manifestations described above, it must be remembered that ever since the partition of 1795 the Poles have striven to be reunited as a nation and to regain their freedom. This continual effort to keep alive their national aspirations has caused them to look with hatred upon anything which might interfere with their aims. This has led to a conflict with the nationalist declarations of some of the Jewish organizations with desire to establish cultural autonomy financially supported by the state. In addition, the position taken by the Jews on favour of Article 93 of the Treaty of Versailles, guaranteeing protection to racial, linguistic and religious minorities in Poland has created a further resentment against them. Moreover, Polish national feeling is irritated by what is regarded as the “alien” character of the great mass of the Jewish population. This is constantly brought home to the Poles by the fact that the majority of the Jews affect a distinctive dress, observe the Sabbath on Saturday, conduct business on Sunday, have separate dietary laws, wear long beards, and speak a language of their own. The basis of this language is a German dialect, and the fact that Germany was, and still is, looked upon by the Poles as an enemy country renders this vernacular especially unpopular. - Report of the Mission of the United States to Poland, 3 October 1919. Henry Morgenthau, Brig. Gen. Edgar Jadwin, and Homer H. Johnson.

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8 Emphasis mine.
The March of the Living is a trip of many reputations and contradictions. Its supporters argue that it is an invaluable experience for students to travel to the sites of the Holocaust with survivors, that seeing the places in question cause the history to come alive for them in a way it wouldn’t in a classroom, and that its emphases on both the Holocaust and Israel are of critical significance to the modern Jewish community. Its detractors believe that the trip is not pedagogically sound, that the students are too immature at the age of sixteen, that the trip tries to create a contemporary Jewish identity with the Holocaust as its strongest (and sometimes, only) base, and that they actively encourage a willful mistrust of contemporary Poles. The trip organizers take umbrage with the last two points in particular, arguing that they not only do not encourage those ideas, but that they address those untruths head-on. Yet, student after student returns from the trip citing the Holocaust and Israel as a fundamental rationale for why they have to make Jewish choices, arguing that the Poles bear eternal responsibility for the actions of their forebears during the war, and that contemporary Poland is the ultimate example of a failed diaspora and a contemporary antisemitic society. The aforementioned messages they internalize often manifest first and foremost in a tendency towards enclave-ism and a bizarre understanding of isolationism (in that Jews are part of a broader Diaspora society, but must first and foremost take care of themselves).\(^9\)

This chapter sets up the context necessary to understand not only the pre-trip assumptions that shape students’ understandings of the pedagogy and the sites they witness, but also the competing nationalist narratives at play that inform the students’ understanding of Poland, its people, and the attributions of moral and legal responsibility that the students make during their week-long trip to the country. The operative word above, it bears repeating, is students. While the trip may attempt to combat certain ideas they do not endorse head-on, those efforts (as well as the pedagogical efforts of the program in general) work best when they assume the participants are passive receptacles for the messages they are attempting to impart. Far from that ‘ideal,’ many participants enter the program with agendas of their own, seeking certain experiences that become the lens through which they view every program, every site, and every 

\(^9\) Data collection and analysis.
interaction. This tendency to come in with pre-existing attitudes and beliefs about the Holocaust is rooted in a perspective on the Polish-Jewish conflict that appears to be stronger with greater levels of pre-existing Jewish education, a theme that repeats frequently throughout this dissertation.

The March of the Living is a trip composed of two parts – seven days in Poland and six days in Israel. The itinerary changes a bit every year, but never in essentials. The Poland section of the trip usually begins in Kraków as a result of spending Yom HaShoah\(^\text{10}\) in Auschwitz. Over the first few days the students explore the former sites of the Kraków ghetto and the Plaszow labour camp before turning to Auschwitz I and II.

The main ‘event’ of the Poland section is the actual ‘March of the Living’ where the participants march from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz II (theoretically in complete silence) – a roughly 2 kilometer walk intended to allow participants to embody the experience of the many who did not survive. This act of performative history symbolizes Jewish people walking the

\(^{10}\) Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorated annually on the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. On the Hebrew calendar, it falls on the 27\textsuperscript{th} of Nisan (usually sometime in April).
same ground as their fallen brethren. The participants are often draped in Israeli flags (brought by the participants themselves, not provided by the trip organizers, although certainly not discouraged by them), adding an additional level of significance – perhaps even drawing a parallel between support for the state of Israel and the memory of the Holocaust. This tension as ethnic identification, commemoration and nationalism juxtapose on the train tracks is one that plays out both in Poland and Israel. Each country is seen in the shadow of the other, and the carrying of Israeli flags on the tracks of Auschwitz is only one small example of the trappings of Jewish nationalism at play. At each of the camps or sites a very similar ceremony takes place – the choir sings (Eli, Eli\footnote{Poem written by Chana Senesh – a partisan during the Second World War – transformed into a song.} or Ani Ma’amín\footnote{One of Rambam’s 13 articles of faith, transformed into a song about belief in the Messiah. Evidently sung by Orthodox Jews in many of the camps prior to death.} are popular examples), a Holocaust survivor speaks, there is a reading of a poem or another form of testimony, the group says Kaddish (the prayer for the dead) at a site and then it concludes with HaTikvah, the Israeli national anthem. The conclusion of each ceremony with HaTikvah reinforces the connection between the occurrence of the Holocaust and the need for the State of Israel.

After leaving the Kraków area (or before, depending on the year and when Yom HaShoah falls in the itinerary) students visit Warsaw (usually over Shabbat, as the Novotel Centrum hotel where the students stay is downtown, cutting down on the need for transportation forbidden on the day of rest). One of the recent additions to the trip is a visit to Polin, the new Warsaw museum of Polish Jewry. An important facet of Shabbat on the March is a trip to the Nożyk synagogue in Warsaw for tefillot (prayer) – sometimes for Friday evening and
sometimes for Shabbat morning. While prayer there is not mandatory (although each student has
to attend a service of some kind) it is often the one that is encouraged, with the message of
‘returning Jewish life to Warsaw.’

From Warsaw, the students visit Treblinka, where the majority of the Warsaw-and-environs Jews
were killed. Before Treblinka, however, students go to a nearby former shtetl\(^\text{13}\) (Tykocin), dance
and celebrate with the Holocaust survivors who have accompanied them on the trip, before
heading to the Lopuchowo forest nearby where the entire Jewish population of the town was
killed in 1941. Some years the trip goes to Belżec death camp, but only occasionally as it is so
far east. Lastly, the students often visit the city of Lublin and Majdanek (one of the death camps,
located on the outskirts) on the final day. As the first still-functioning death camp that was
liberated from the Nazis (by the Soviets in 1944), the liberators found a wealth of evidence of
Nazi crimes, including a massive pile of ash, now entombed in an open-air memorial. That is
often where the last ceremony of the program takes place, in between the ashes and the
crematoria that remain standing. From there, the students fly overnight to Israel.

The Israel leg of the trip is more varied, depending on the itinerary of the other groups as well as
the security situation at the time. Often they begin at the Dead Sea and Masada. The Masada
climb is also significant symbolically, as the ‘Masada myth’ is often considered representative of
much of the ethos of the contemporary state of Israel, although less so in the modern political
climate. Masada was the lone hold out after the Great Revolt of 70 CE, and in said myth the
inhabitants of the mountaintop killed themselves in 73 CE rather than be taken as slaves by the
Romans. One of the main themes oft-repeated in modern Israel is the idea of Masada never
falling again (indicating the need for a strong military and national security apparatus), making it
a fitting beginning to the Israel leg of the March of the Living. It also harkens back to the crucial
idea that the Jews lost their independence and state to the Romans back in 70 CE, and since then
have suffered almost two millennia of abject persecution (the pinnacle of which was the
Holocaust) which would have been mitigated or avoided completely if the Jewish state had
existed.

\(^{13}\) Yiddish: Rural village; usually comprised of a large Jewish population.
Afterwards, the trip either makes its way to the Jerusalem area for a few days or to the North to relax on a Kibbutz and tour the Golan Heights. In Jerusalem, students tour the Old City, explore the environs, and go to a number of ceremonies in the area, an example of which would be an evening at ‘Mini Israel’. These ceremonies are often designed to connect the legacy of the Holocaust with the modern-day State of Israel. They also address topical issues. At an event I attended in 2009, the ceremony at Latrun devoted a large portion of the evening to the story of Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier who had been living in Hamas captivity for (at that time) three years. The key difference between these ceremonies and the ones in Poland is the fact that they always end in celebration, dancing and music.

The ‘main event’ of the Jerusalem section of the trip is a second March, this time from city hall to the Kotel (Western Wall). Contrary to the silent March in Poland, this is one full of dancing and singing. While it is certainly a fun event meant to inspire positive feelings for Jerusalem and Israel, it is simultaneously intended as a counterpoint to the one in Auschwitz, continuing to reinforce the dichotomy of Poland as the land of Jewish death versus Israel as the land of Jewish life. From there, the trip moves north to a Kibbutz where Shabbat is always spent. This Shabbat is much more ‘relaxed’, and often highlights survivor narratives of liberation and their connection to the State of Israel. A typical tiyul\(^4\) in the North is into the Golan Heights to a military overlook out over Syria, reinforcing the threat that still exists today. Depending on the timing of flights, the trip may spend the last day in Tel Aviv, going to Independence Hall (where the State of Israel

\(^{14}\) Hebrew: Hike, trip in nature.
was formally declared in 1948) or other sites of political and historical significance. Many educators and participants have described to me in interviews that the Israeli section of the trip is far weaker than the Poland one educationally. Students fly home from Tel Aviv, and the trip is finished with the exception of occasional post-trip social programming.

1.1 A House Divided: The Question of Nationalism

*All citizens of Poland should realize that they must live together. ... The Polish national must see that its worst enemies are those who encourage this internal strife. A house divided against itself cannot stand.* – Morgenthau Report, 1919

At the heart of the tension of the trip is the question of nationalism, the historical desire and fight for independence both Jews and Poles experienced in the 20th century. Nationalism was a driving force in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The concept that a group with its own distinct language, customs and history should have a separate and defined state for themselves found fertile ground in the context of European imperialism, namely the Germanic, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires (Polonsky, 2013).

For the Poles, this was a desire to be a republic separate from domination by foreign powers that consistently overran their land. After the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth was dismantled and subsumed into Russia, Prussia and Austria in the 18th century, Poland’s independence was a long-fought battle – including two costly failed revolts against the Tsarist government. The country resurfaced briefly as an independent state in 1918 under Józef Piłsudski, but that lasted only until the breakout of the Second World War in 1939. After the war, they were forced under Soviet control, only re-achieving independence in 1989.

The Jewish community in Europe was also influenced by the rampant nationalism of the period, and a group of Jews began to seek the re-establishment of the historical State of Israel. Although throughout the preceding two millennia this was a consistent hope (as an example, the Passover *Haggadah* ends with *L’Shana Haba b’Yerushalayim* – Next Year in Jerusalem), this latent desire transformed into a political movement in the late 19th century. Many of these Zionist leaders, such as Theodore Herzl and Ze’ev Jabotinsky, fought for this Jewish state as a result of
their belief that antisemitism was systemic in Europe and thus the community would never truly be safe there.

The two histories of these groups, who shared the same land for centuries before their communities were ripped down two divergent paths in the 20th century, play a decisive role not only in their own national narratives but also in their modern-day interactions. The experience on the ground in Poland on the March of the Living is often quite contentious for both Jews and Poles: many students report feeling resentment and anger towards local Poles while visiting, and many Poles I interviewed reported feeling similar feelings towards Jewish students in their midst. To break it down further, a repetitive theme among students were feelings that these Poles were by definition antisemitic, responsible for deaths of the Jews during and after the war, and were inherently threatening to Jewish safety and security even in the modern period. Themes I uncovered through interaction with Poles revealed that many felt that these Jewish school trips were i) holding the Poles responsible for the history of the Holocaust, ii) generally disrespectful towards the Polish countryside and people, and iii) monopolizing the history of the Holocaust and suffering under the Nazis.15 Bikont (2004), a Polish-Jewish journalist, summed it up by saying that “unfortunately, when you ask Poles who suffered more during the war, the Jews or the Poles, most Poles would say the Poles” (p. 11).

This tension, I believe, is largely the result of these competing national narratives that to a certain extent both base modern-day legitimacy, independence and the need for their own state on a history of suffering but which often cannot seem to include the other’s history. I argue that this competing sense of nationalism is something that exists prior to the trip and outside of it but is certainly reinforced and augmented by the experience. For many of the Poles who live in the areas adjacent to the former camps and ghettos, their understandings of the Jewish community’s so-called monopolization of the history of suffering under the Nazis are reinforced by their external perception of Jewish students draped in Israeli flags and surrounded by security forces. On the other side, many Jewish students come to Poland with a set of expectations and pre-conceptions about what they will find, largely as a result of pre-conditioning (through Jewish education and community/familial experiences) regarding Polish involvement in the Holocaust.

15 Interviews and meetings, Summer 2011
As a result, in this chapter I will explore the World War II experience and nationalistic ambitions of each group to help understand the way in which these narratives come into conflict during the trip, deeply impacting the way in which the trip becomes a ‘lived experience’ for many of its Jewish participants.

1.1.1 Polska Chrystusem Narodów (Poland, the Christ of Nations)

*To be born after the war into a nation that was invaded by the Germans was to be born on the side of angels.* - Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt*, p. 9

The history of modern Poland has been one of more-or-less consistent subjugation. As discussed above, Poles were under foreign control from the 18th century onwards, with the exception of a brief interwar period of independence. This fed into one of the most popular Polish national narratives was of Poland as the ‘Jesus Christ of Nations’ (as coined by the famous Polish romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz). As the constant victim of greater and more powerful nations, Poland was the eternal innocent – the Poles free of any persecution or wrongdoing themselves, free of guilt, and destined to be returned to glory. Throughout the modern history of annexation, the latent nationalism of the period coalesced into a tendency towards xenophobia regarding non-Polish minorities, particularly Ukrainians and Jews. The Jewish-Polish relationship, while certainly complicated historically, deteriorated significantly in the interwar years. There were a few motivating factors for this, such as growing nationalistic tensions, the economic lassitude of the new state, and the growing fear of communism from the East. I believe that the most significant of these factors was the heightened Polish nationalism of the Polish republic. Interwar Poland, Steinlauf (1997) states, was “only two-thirds ethnically Polish” – in Eastern Poland (the *Kresy*) Poles were themselves a minority (p. 8). This potentially led to feelings of increased insularity and populism in the face of what could be perceived as an existential threat by non-Polish minorities. National consciousness was certainly cultivated in and by the Roman Catholic Church in this period (1997, p. 7) and during the interwar period it festered into an “exclusivist, ethnically based notion of Polishness that proved increasingly influential and led to rising hostility to non-Poles” (1997, p. 15).

The majority of Poles in this period did not see Poland as a multinational state (comprised of Poles, Ukrainians, Belorussians and Jews) but instead sought an “ethnic Polish nation-state”
under which any minorities were unlikely to attain anything beyond second-class citizenship (Mendelssohn, 1987, p. 13). In this era of intense nationalism, internal foreign minorities often presented a major problem. The perception of Jews as an alien other, irreconcilably different from the Poles despite living among them, kept them firmly outside of this nationalistic ambition. This is not to say that they were the only group who triggered xenophobic backlashes; the Ukrainian-Polish relationship also declined significantly in the interwar period when an independent Poland re-emerged and the Ukrainians remained spread out between Poland and Russia. The increase in tensions between these two groups ultimately led to ethnic flare-ups and massacres well into the Second World War period (Polonsky, 2013, p. 183). That said, the Jewish ‘question’ often elicited a much more emotional and vitriolic response, perhaps as a result of the influence of the Catholic Church as a dominant institution in Polish society.

To complicate matters, at the Paris Peace Conference the Jewish community lobbied the European powers for minority protection (mainly regarding religious observance). Many in the Polish government reportedly felt “bitterly resentful” about this, not only because the Jews had (in popular perception) forced the hands of the Poles, but also because it could been seen as an incursion into Polish national sovereignty by external forces – the same nations, perhaps, that the Poles had been struggling to achieve independence from (Mendelssohn, 1987, p. 35; Polonsky, 2013, p. 208). In the 1930s, perhaps tied to this political climate, there was also an increase in native fascist movements throughout Eastern Europe as a whole (Polonsky, 2013, p. 257). Poland was not immune to this, with such organizations as the National Radical Camp (ONR), Association of Polish Fascists and Falanga springing up (although they remained relatively marginal). The popular National Democratic party (in its many variations), a group that many in North Eastern Poland were affiliated with – pejoratively known as ‘Endek’ – also rejected cooperation with non-Polish minorities and was deeply antisemitic (Polonsky, 2013, p. 228). These movements were often ‘obsessed’ with the so-called Jewish question, and were the source of antisemitic violence. As Mendelssohn (1987) says, in this polarized political climate, minorities (not exclusively but often Jews) were “regarded as threats to the status quo and as disloyal elements interested in redrawing the frontiers in order to accommodate their own national interests” (p. 5).

Another key factor of the decrease of Jewish social status in Poland in the interwar period was the economic depression. Aside from the worldwide economic issues of the era, Poland was a
poor, only partly-modernized state (Morgenthau Report, 1919) that was attempting to build a modern economy from scratch. Over 60% of the economy was agrarian based (and unfortunately often inefficiently run) (Mendelssohn, 1987, p.15), little industrialization had happened, and the Christian peasant majority often had a remarkably low standard of living. In many of the agrarian areas of the country, the literacy rate barely exceeded 50% (Polonsky, 2013, p. 218). After centuries of dependence on foreign powers, the fledgling attempt at nation-building had varying degrees of success (Morgenthau Report, 1919; Polonsky, 2013). Bilewicz et al. (2011) also demonstrated that it is times of economic anxiety that causes a heightened belief in Jewish conspiracy, a common iteration of antisemitism in Poland (p. 825), worsening the relationship between Jews and Poles before the war.

Despite the fact that much of the Polish Jewish community was similarly impoverished, many elements within Poland evidently felt that the Jews were faring inordinately well and were doing ‘better’ than their Christian counterparts. This may be a result of the fact that Jews were a particularly visible minority economically, as they held a disproportionately large percentage of commercial positions (Polonsky, 2013, p. 211). These economic troubles also led to a growing wave of proletarian-ism within certain Jewish ranks, which contributed to the external perception that Jews were actively interested in communism (illegal and very much feared in the Polish republic – perhaps a legacy of the attempted Soviet invasion in 1920). By the outbreak of the war, there were numerous Jewish groups (such as the Bundists) who sought out Socialism as the answer to their increasingly difficult existence.

All of these factors coalesced when the Jewish community in Poland too began to develop nationalistic ambitions (explored more fully later); the growing nationalist conflict, combined with the alleged economic dominance of the Jewish community, led to the specter of “a ‘Judaeo-Polonia’, a latter day ‘Paradise of the Jews’” that was supposedly the Zionists’ true aim (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 12). This deep-set fear, that the Jews’ real goal was the establishment of a Jewish state on Polish soil, increased the Polish hostility towards the Jews in the interwar period, as it pitted the two against each other as two nationalities competing for dominance of the same land. This is, of course, illogical. The Jews were a minority that was increasingly disliked and marginalized, and there was no actual nationalistic competition. That said, demography also came into play here, for although the Jewish birthrate was statistically lower than that of Roman Catholics in Poland, they also had significantly lower rates of infant and childhood mortality
They also had a lower death rate (17.2 versus 21.9) and in many areas were more financially stable (Hundert, 2014, p. 24). All of these different factors led to a Jewish community that was expanding more rapidly than the Christian one, one that exacerbated Polish nationalistic fears.

In 1939, the complicated interwar period came to an end with the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion. The Poles suffered greatly under the Nazis (whose racial dictates held them to be fit for no more than slavery and exploitation). According to Steinlauf (1997), they “were not to be bargained with or cajoled; they were to be broken, reduced to the common denominator of helots for their Nazi lords” (p. 25). Reinhard Heydrich, within a week of the invasion of Poland, stated that all Polish nobility and Jews were to be killed (intelligentsia was added to this list shortly thereafter) (1939, found in Arad et al., 1999, p. 173). In sum, the Nazis policy towards the Poles was a “prototype” for the German occupation of “Slav helots” (Polonsky, 2013, p. 310). To further codify Nazi policy, Himmler stated in 1940 that “all Polish specialists will be exploited in our military-industrial complex. Later, all Poles will disappear from this world. It is imperative that the great German nation considers the elimination of all Polish people as its chief task” (1940, found in Arad et al., 1999, p. 275). Policies towards the Poles were extremely brutal, and Poles found themselves the victims of forced expulsions, labour, Germanization and ultimately mass murder. Punishment for Poles who aided Jews was high, with the discovered paying with their lives as well as the lives of their families and, at times, neighbours. It is important to note that despite this, Poland had the highest number of ‘Righteous among the Nations.’ Of course, this could potentially just be a reflection of the high density of Jews in Poland. Additionally, as Grabowski (2013) points out, there are numerous people that swell the Righteous list that did so when they hid Jews for extortionate financial gain (p. 149).

In face of attempted national and cultural extinction, there arose the most effective anti-German resistance in wartime Europe. Interestingly, however, Polish resistance often manifested itself in cultural ways, first and foremost seeking to maintain the social, religious and cultural ties that defined the Polish identity the Nazis were trying to obliterate (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 26). This resistance often did not extend to resisting the Nazi anti-Jewish policies.

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16 Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews in the Holocaust.
How these ethnic Poles reacted to the mass murder of their co-territorialists was varied. It fell across the entire spectrum from active involvement in saving members of the Jewish community (as mentioned before, at great personal risk), through to indifference or helplessness, and all the way to active involvement in the persecution of another victimized society (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 30).

There are also a number of uncomfortable truths that complicate the narrative. Firstly, the reality of Polish antisemitism in the prewar and wartime period, which “while hardly identical to mass murder” certainly played a large role in Polish reactions to the genocide happening in their midst (Steinlauf, 1997, p. x). Another is reality of economic benefit the near-elimination of the Jewish community had for their neighbours. During a period of such catastrophe, rationing and starvation, the ability to expropriate the financial resources – be it a house, money or other property – that could be used on the Black Market that comprised roughly 80% of the wartime economy (Mendelssohn, 1987, p. 198) was too valuable an opportunity to pass up. There is also the question of denunciations and murder of fleeing Jews seeking help on behalf of some local Poles, explored more later. Finally, there was also the rise of anti-Jewish Polish blackmailers (nicknamed szmalcownicy), and the legacy of those people who played an active role in German persecution of the Jews for economic or social gain is still an active part of Jewish memory today (Lehrer, 2013, p. 4).

On the other side of the coin, there were also groups like Żegota (Council of Aid for the Jews), founded in 1942, which was a part of the Polish underground, determined to help Jews survive on the so-called ‘Aryan side.’ It’s important to note that although Żegota is frequently cherry-picked as an example of Polish bravery by modern-day nationalists, it was an organization co-founded and largely funded by Jewish money from the West. That said, it was founded in response to a leaflet published by a Catholic Polish nationalist, Zofia Kossak-Szcucka, which displays the deeply conflicted feelings towards the Jews during this period. She wrote in 1942 (after a report leaked about Treblinka) that:

17 Polish for ‘grease’ or ‘money.’
[This] is why we, Polish Catholics, are speaking out, our feelings about the Jews have not changed. We have not ceased to regard them as political, economic and ideological enemies of Poland. Furthermore, we recognize that they hate us more than the Germans, that they hold us responsible for their misfortunes. Why, for what reason – that remains a secret of the Jewish soul, nonetheless it is a fact that is continually confirmed. Our awareness of these feelings, however, does not free us from the responsibility of denouncing the crime (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 40).

This quote is ripe with opportunity for analysis of the psyche at the time, but to put simply I would say that it represents the typical Polish Catholic antipathy to the Jewish community during the period, combined with a strong ethical impulse, perhaps augmented by religious conviction, to save the lives of those who are suffering in their midst – regardless of how one feels about them.

Both populations suffered greatly regardless of religious or ethnic identification; the death toll of ethnic Poles reached roughly 1.5 million by the war’s end (in addition to the 3 million Jewish Poles also dead by 1945). It should be noted, however, that the numbers when representing a percentage of the populations as a whole show a great disparity, with close to 90% of the pre-war Polish-Jewish population dead, as opposed to 10% of the ethnic Polish one. The numbers alone demonstrate the differences in wartime experience between the groups.

In the aftermath of World War II, when Western countries that had been subsumed by the Third Reich had their autonomy returned, those who had been ‘liberated’ by the Soviets found themselves now under Stalinist rule. Soviet rule brought a separate set of challenges, although no less problematic. During the war, Soviet policy towards the Poles in the Eastern sphere was hardly less brutal than the Nazi one. Determined to enforce communism, the Soviets systematically murdered or deported the majority of Polish officers and intelligentsia – most notably in the 1940 Katyn Forest massacre (which while not an isolated incident, is often the most potent symbol). Many of the social and religious institutions were purposely dismantled. For the often deeply religious population, communist dictates regarding religion were often particularly hard to handle, both during and after the war.
The outcome of the failed Warsaw uprising of 1944 also exemplified Soviet policy towards the Poles. During the 63-day revolt, the Soviet forces watched from across the Vistula River as the Polish Home Army attempted to overthrow Nazi forces. By failing to support the Warsaw Uprising and permitting the Germans to suppress it, the Red Army allowed the military organization that supported the non-Communist Polish government-in-exile in London to more or less destroy itself (Davies, 1990; Polonsky, 2013). Kemp-Welch (2008) suggests that this history may not be as black and white as suggested, and that the Soviets were sustaining heavy losses across the river from Warsaw, but does acknowledge that this provided a suitable cover for non-intervention (p. 5).

At the 1945 Yalta conference, Stalin effectively presented the Polish future as a fait accompli – his forces were in the country, and it would remain under his control. The massive restructuring and fluctuation of people in and out of the country in the three years post-war further hindered anti-Soviet resistance (Kemp-Welch, 2008, p. 23). Despite these weakened social structures that would have allowed for more effective resistance, there is substantial primary source evidence that shows the majority of Polish peoples’ disenchantment with the new Soviet regime. Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish communist party for almost 15 years of the pre-Solidarity period, recorded that many Poles viewed the USSR through the lens of the seizure of Polish territory, and the raping and pillaging by the Red Army in the immediate end of war and post-war period, and Stalinist terror. Despite the fact that the majority of Poles regarded the Soviets as harbingers of violence and repression (Kemp-Welch, 2008, p. 21) through various tactics the USSR was able to consolidate power in Poland bring the country behind the iron curtain in the post-war period.

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19 This is evidenced in Kemp-Welch 2008, p. 19. Questions asked by Polish peasants to party leadership also remain, regarding i) their feelings that the Soviets were not knowledgeable about planting, which might lead to widespread famine, ii) the fact that Red Army soldiers had evidently bemoaned the state of collective farms in Russia, and iii) whether or not they would be able to borrow a horse to go to church and how the traditional practice of parents granting children land when they married to buy a house would continue. These questions indicate that there seems to be a fair amount of trepidation about how the Soviet rule would disrupt the social/cultural fabric of Polish life, as well as showing the unintended consequences of exposure to the Red Army in the post-war period.
After the war, the Polish People’s Republic (1945-1989) was a Soviet satellite state. Many Poles clung to the hope that a return to sovereignty and a freedom from Soviet rule would be possible in the future. In 1980 the Polish solidarity movement came to prominence (it was eventually forced underground). It was this movement that first re-introduced a non-Communist narrative of the Second World War and Holocaust (Wróbel, 1997, p. 566). With the slow implosion of the USSR, Poland was one of the countries that toppled their Communist governments in 1989. When Poland had its elections in 1989, it was their first semi-free election in almost eight decades.

This legacy of oppression would have deep ramifications on the Polish narrative of the 20th century. On the one hand, it potentially contributed to a tendency within Polish society towards xenophobia, nationalism and populism as an outcome of the perspective of “Poland for the Poles.” Under the Soviets, there was very little acknowledgment in the educational system of the divergent experiences of different ethnic and religious groups during the war. The Soviet educational policy’s central aim was the “alleged historical inevitability of the communist system” (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 6) that thus reframed curriculum and history itself to prove that everything that came before was merely a ‘prehistory’ to the communist dominance of Europe. Within this framework the Holocaust became a symbol of the barbarity of a non-communist past. The education that Poles received about the Holocaust in the aftermath of the war was thus highly politicized by the Soviets, for the joint purpose of emphasizing the communist “superiority” and of creating a new Polish nationalist identity that could more comfortably coalesce within the Soviet system. The Holocaust thus became a very pressing and complicated symbol within the new Polish landscape.

During the 1960s, there was a concerted and two-pronged effort in Polish society to “recast the memory of the Holocaust” (Polonsky, 2013, p. 409). This effort was led, for the most part, by wartime Partisans, still organized under PUWP\textsuperscript{20}-hardliner Mieczysław Moczar\textsuperscript{21} who was making a bid for power over Polish communist leader Gomułka. The effort, which emerged around the same time as some of the first publish Jewish accounts of some deplorable actions of

\textsuperscript{20} Polish United Workers Party.

\textsuperscript{21} Nom de Guerre.
the Poles during the war, was a response to a perceived Jewish ‘dominance’ of the wartime narrative that downplayed or overshadowed the ‘correct’ one of Polish martyrdom. The first attempt was to create a concept of “parallel” experiences of both Poles and Jews under the Nazis, which led to the “equating” of said experiences (Polonsky, 2013, p. 409). One such example was the official Soviet ‘textbook’ of the Second World War (written between 1962 and 1965) (Polonsky, 2013, p. p. 400) in which neither the terms ‘antisemitism’ or ‘Holocaust’ appear. Further, during a political crisis in the 1960s, a large swathe of staff at the Polish Scientific Publishers was fired after the release of some of the volumes of the Great Universal Encyclopedia. This was led by Moczar in response to the fact that the encyclopedia allegedly emphasized the uniquely Jewish rate of death camp losses and did not sufficiently address Polish resistance and martyrdom. Also erected in the 1960s, the original monument at Treblinka commemorated the death of “800,000 citizens of Europe” (Polonsky, 2013, p. 409) despite the fact that the vast majority were Polish Jews. These stories perfectly encapsulate the Polish-Jewish tension over the ‘ownership’ of the World War II experience and suffering. These are only a few small events in a great many, in which the Holocaust memory was reshaped to exclude any ethnic identification. Further, the Partisans who were leaders in this careful reshaping not only promoted a “sanitized” version of Polish action during the war, but also recast the Jews as being ungrateful and dangerous for their good Polish hosts, therefore negating any historical explorations into Polish actions (investigations which were, of course, ‘anti-Polish’ anyway).  

The continued oppression under the Soviets even after the toppling of the Nazis reinforced the idea that Poland was a constant victim of oppression – potentially even in a way in which the Jews were not, considering the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and immigrant success in

\[22\] An interesting example of the way that this remains a part of the Polish narrative was a dinner I had in Warsaw during my third year of research, in which I sat with three Polish people who proceeded to yell at me in the middle of a Warsaw pizzeria over the fact that the Poles had no responsibility to aid the Jews (although Poles were all heroes who tried to do so regardless) because Jews were a minority and were apparently the reason that Hitler had invaded Poland in the first place. Further, the Poles suffered just as much as the Jews if not more, and that “5 million ethnic Poles” also died in the Holocaust. It then somehow segued into an accusation that the Jews deserved it all as they were responsible for the death of Jesus anyway, and were therefore met with eternal damnation. This was in 2017.
North America. This different post-WWII experience is one of the factors that plays into the perception of many Poles that the Jews who come on these programs are ‘monopolizing’ the suffering and the history of the Holocaust, considering many would argue that they were also – even equal or greater – victims of the Nazis and that their occupation lasted far longer than the six years of the Holocaust in Poland.

Within this political climate, these yearly incursions by the March of the Living onto Polish soil and into the arena of narrative and politically charged history could potentially contribute to the very negative feelings that some Poles have towards the tourists – particularly because the issue of who has the claim to the history is such a thorny point.

1.1.2 The Future of the Jewish Past

The roots of the Jewish diaspora experience reaches back to 588 BCE, when the ancient kingdom of Judea was taken over by Babylon. Throughout the next five hundred years, they were ruled by a series of foreign empires with the exception of a short period of self-rule between the Greek and Roman eras, the last of which began in 63 BCE. The Jews fought two devastating revolts against the Romans in 66-73 CE and 132-135 CE, both of which ended in the destruction of the country, loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, and the dispersal of the Jewish community into the Arabian peninsula, Northern Africa and Europe. Throughout the next two millennia, the Jewish community faced an almost unending series of debasements, expulsions, and pogroms. Despite a tenuous grasp on physical and religious safety, the largest community of Jews by the outbreak of World War II in 1939 was in Eastern Europe – primarily Poland and Russia, where almost 60% of the worldwide population lived. The Polish-Jewish relationship had its high and low points over the centuries, but as elaborated on above, went into severe decline in the interwar period.

Against this changing political backdrop, the Jews of Poland were going through an interesting period of cultural and religious development in this interwar period. Despite the oft-repeated myth of pre-war Jews as being largely innocent shtetl-bound insular communities (in the vein of Fiddler on the Roof’s Anatevka) the picture is a bit more complicated. While the community retained a high birth rate and a low rate of intermarriage, (Morgenthau Report, 1919; Polonsky, 2013; Mendelssohn, 1987) there was a wave of urbanization that brought much of the Jewish community to urban centers in the inter-war period. These urbanized Jews certainly went through
a period of secularization and acculturation, (Polonsky, 2013, p. 214) but against the backdrop of the aforementioned economic issues and hyper-nationalism of the Polish republic, the Jewish community in Poland was divided down four major lines of affiliation: Orthodoxy, assimilation, Zionism and socialism (2013, p. 214). All likely contributed to the ever-larger chasm between the Jewish and Christian Polish populations leading up to the invasion of Poland in 1939. In the words of Yehuda Bauer (2011), “it would be too much to say that there was a Holocaust before there was a Holocaust, but the Holocaust in Poland was possibly easier for the Germans to implement because the Jews were an oppressed and increasingly vulnerable population, often intensely disliked by their Polish neighbours, before the first German soldier ever crossed the border” (p. 8). This chasm is significant as it contributed to the oft-invoked post-war Jewish perception of the Poles as a deeply antisemitic population who were either passive bystanders or active perpetrators in the genocide of an increasingly disliked and marginalized community. Many participants of the March of the Living reported this idea as an objective truth to me before they themselves ever stepped foot in the country.

At the outbreak of the war, the Jewish community in postwar Poland found themselves under either the Nazis or Soviets. For the community under the Nazis, anti-Jewish persecution began in 1939. For those under the Soviets, they were subject to many of the same restrictions as the Poles faced, but a small number of collaborators and the perception that the Jews ‘benefited’ from Communism caused many Poles in the Eastern sphere to feel that the Jews as a whole collaborated with the Soviets. In 1941, the status quo changed drastically with the Nazi invasion of Russia in Operation Barbarossa. The first attempt at implementing the so-called ‘Final Solution’ resulted in the death of millions of Jews, communists and other political or social ‘unwanted’ behind the lines of the Wehrmacht advance. When this plan became un-implementable (at least with the ease and success that leadership had hoped for), the extermination camps were created. Within the final three years of the war, millions of Jews perished primarily in the camps system. Aside from the massive death toll, those who went through the camp system were also the victims of dehumanization, cruelty, medical experimentation and other brutalities.

Often those who sought help from their Polish neighbours were rejected or denounced (a phenomenon explored more extensively in Chapter four) (Grabowski, 2013; Engelking, 2011). This is an additional matter that complicates the question of Jewish and Polish narratives of the
wartime years. Because Germans were the clear-cut enemy as opposed to the Poles who were former neighbours, there was a different expectation placed upon Polish behavior (Engelking, 2011, p. 439). Perhaps this expectation of a common bond in the face of the Nazi enemy was naïve, as certainly the Jewish-Polish relationship had become increasingly contentious and embittered in the years before the war, but the memories of those who managed to survive hiding in the countryside – even if they themselves found Polish aid eventually – greatly informs the Jewish narrative of Polish complicity in the Holocaust.

Upon liberation, the small number of Jews who survived often struggled to find their families, friends, or simply a safe place to stay. Recent estimates posit somewhere between 100,000-400,000 Polish Jews were also deported by the Soviets into the Russian interior, and although they suffered in their own way they survived. In mid-1946, roughly 250,000 Jews resided in Poland (Wróbel, 1997, p. 565). Those who remained were faced with a Poland that was both familiar and foreign, home and hostile. Most of the Jews who were returned from the Soviet hinterland almost immediately left the country for the West. Some survivors who returned to their towns found others living in their houses. This appropriation of property became a major sticking point in the Jewish-Polish relationship in the post-war period. While the majority of these encounters ended in little other than sour words, there were incidents of violence intended to keep Jewish persons from reclaiming their family homes (a popular motif in Jewish narratives of this period). Steinlauf (1997) notes that this reality also likely contributed to Polish feelings as well, because “to dislike one’s neighbour, to wish him gone; then to observe his unprecedented total annihilation; finally to inherit what had once been his: such a sequence of events can only add immeasurably to the guilt occasioned by the trauma itself” (p. 60).

Another factor that contributed to the deteriorating Jewish-Polish relationship was post-war pogroms. While there were a number (hundreds were murdered between 1944-1947), the Kielce pogrom in 1946 is often regarded as a watershed moment for the post-war Jewish Poles (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 51). A year after the war, 42 Jews were killed in an act of spontaneous violence with little to no intervention of Communist forces. These pogroms happened in response to a variety of forces, such as local Polish desire to keep appropriated property,
medieval anti-Jewish beliefs like the Blood Libel,\(^23\) or the fear that the Jews were in control of various Soviet government forces like the UB security force (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 52). Ultimately there seems to be a popular perception of Jewish involvement with the new forces of control, and perhaps, as a result, the violence that could not be meted out to the Soviet rulers was directed at a considerably more vulnerable Jewish population. The Kielce pogrom and others like it were a significant catalyst for widespread emigration of Holocaust survivors who had attempted to re-settle in Poland (Gross, 2006, p. 89).

The magnitude of suffering fed the Jewish drive for statehood, and the pre-war Jewish population in Palestine – helped by an influx of Jewish immigrants – started fighting the British (who were then in control of Mandatory Palestine) for the promised creation of a Jewish state there.\(^24\) In 1947, after an escalating series of violent exchanges between the British and both the Jews and Arabs, the British handed the problem of what to do with Palestine over to the newly formed UN. The UN voted to partition the land into Jewish and Arab areas. The Jewish readiness to accept partition was doubtless influenced by the wartime destruction of the Jewish community in Europe, validating the Zionist argument that the Jews were not safe without statehood. Under threat of an Arab invasion in 1948, Ben-Gurion declared the Jewish state.

The small post-war Jewish community in Poland too fell behind the Iron Curtain, and were thus subject to capricious Soviet rule, exemplified by the 1968 political crisis: in the midst of an intellectual rebellion against the PUWP,\(^25\) and in reaction to Israel’s success in the 1967 war, an anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist campaign began in Poland. Generated from the top-down, it was hardly as simple as a rash of popular antisemitism. Politically, it was potentially a reaction to the Soviet perception of Israel ‘straying’ from the socialist path. However, in many ways it was a way of shoring up internal support for the faltering communist regime and supplying a common enemy to hold responsible for the political crisis in the country at the time. Presenting the Jews

\(^23\) Medieval antisemitic trope in which Jews were accused of killing Christian babies in order to bake their blood into Matzo.

\(^24\) Promised in the 1917 Balfour Declaration as well as the 1920 Establishment of the British Mandate document.

\(^25\) Polish Communist Party.
as a dangerous fifth column within the country, as those who were inherently loyal to a country other than Poland and a cause other than Communism, Gomułka tried (and failed) to strengthen his party’s position, channel the workers’ frustrations towards one group – potentially keeping said workers from joining with the intellectual popular uprising. The demonization of the Jews that followed the Six Day War was also reflective of the eternal European ‘other’ being ‘othered’ yet again. Regardless of rationale, upwards of 13,000 Jews living in Poland emigrated in the aftermath.

This fractured history of antisemitic violence and policies in Poland – regardless of whether it was a function of popular hatred or a top-down purposeful ‘othering’ – created a deeply embittered legacy of Poland for many Jews who either personally experienced it or for their families. The idea that not only did Poles actively participate in the Holocaust (not so historically accurate, although there were certainly examples), but that they also benefited from it economically become a dominant Jewish perception. This is made worse by the fact of the presence of antisemitic actions in Poland in the years following the war and the lack of a substantial modern-day Jewish population in a country that used to hold the world’s largest Jewish community. When juxtaposed, these beliefs form a great bulk of the Jewish narrative of the Polish-Jewish relationship in the post-war period.

The central question is, of course, why does Poland engender significant vitriol and anger from the Jewish community, at times even more so than Germany, the clear perpetrators? Perhaps it stems from the above-stated expectation of aid from Poles, refuge that was often refused. There are also significant disputes over anti-Jewish violence in Poland before, during and after the war, particularly related to phenomenon of Polish peasantry denouncing Jews during the Judenjagd in return for minor financial or material incentives (Grabowski, 2013, p. 7; Lehrer, 2013, p. 68). The way in which certain post-war memorials have been constructed (such as the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz) is also a source of anger. The post-war issues of restitution and reclamation of Jewish property remains a significant sticking point. Add in a healthy dose of

26 Although they were treated as Jews and subject to the same persecutions, many were not aware previously of their Jewish identity or considering their Judaism irrelevant.

27 German, hunt for the Jews. Refers to the combing of the countryside for Jews who had managed to flee liquidation and deportation from local ghettos.
myth, hyperbole, and the presence of all Nazi death camps on Polish soil, and Poland casts a long shadow in the Jewish world. I would most mark this as the result of a feeling that Poles should have offered the fleeing and imperiled Jews safe harbor, and when that help was often refused, the disappointment and humiliation often felt was carried by survivors and passed down into the collective historical memory.

This anti-Polish perspective may be stronger in Toronto, which has a largely Polish-origin Jewish community. Further, it is one of the cities with the largest proportion of Holocaust survivors. An excellent example of the tension and perception may be found in an acquaintance of mine (a deeply logical and rational man) who, when he went to Poland in 2010, advised me that he would not buy me a trinket that I had asked for as he “refused to augment their economy.” Considering the presence of Holocaust survivors from Poland in his family, perhaps I should have expected this response. That said, he has no issue owning a German car, which would certainly indicate to me that the vitriolic feelings towards wartime groups are a bit skewed. However, this knee-jerk reaction of deeply emotional anti-Polish sentiment is one that I found time and time again throughout the research for this dissertation. This preconditioning and pre-existing expectations that participants have of Poland and Polish society plays a significant role in the way in which they view the country and internalize the educational programming, regardless of what the program intends. This is, of course, the crux of this dissertation, explored more fully in later chapters.

1.2 Competing Narratives

“We were taught as children” – I was told by a seventy-year-old Pole – “that we Poles never harmed anyone. A partial abandonment of this morally comfortable position is very, very difficult for me.” – Helga Hirsch, Polityka, 24 February 2001

History by definition is almost always a narrative. It is not rote memorization of anemic facts, and to regard it as such removes the human element that is fundamental to the way in which we shape and select the facts to commemorate and pass on. Ultimately, for good or ill, often history

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presented is a story that is summoned to explain and substantiate the present. For both the Polish and Jewish people, their proximate histories and the facts that both choose to acknowledge, teach, and emphasize tell a story about the values and objectives of their contemporary populations. This is never more relevant for either people than in the study of the Second World War.

The Nazi takeover of Poland was an event that irrevocably altered the trajectories of both the Jewish and Christian populations of the country. The experiences of both groups under the German occupation are textbook examples of “cultural trauma” as defined by Jeffrey C. Alexander, which he describes as the experience of “a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander et al., 2004, p. 1). Both groups, traumatized in the face of attempted cultural and physical extinction, are defined by this experience in the 72 years postwar. It should be stated, however, that while both groups claim a unique sense of victimhood in the war years, in scope and scale there isn’t room for parallels. While Poles were certainly victims of the Nazis, they were not destined for mass murder the way the entire Jewish population was. Further, 90% of the Jewish population of Poland perished in the war, as opposed to 10% of the ethnic Polish one. Thus, they are far from equal experiences, despite both feeling that their nationalistic narrative is underpinned by wartime suffering.

Jeffery C. Alexander’s paradigm of cultural trauma is a critical lens for understanding the continued interactions of these two groups in this post-war period. He describes the assumption of cultural trauma by populations by acknowledging that “social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others’ trauma, and because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. By denying the reality of others’ suffering, people not only diffuse their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for their own suffering on these others” (Alexander et al., 2004, p. 1). I argue that this paradigm is particularly useful in helping us to frame nationalistic Polish reactions to the mass murder of their co-territorialists, as much of the popular Polish narrative is hinged around the idea that the Jews were responsible for the suffering of Poles before, during and after the war. Thus, it is a useful lens through which to view the Polish-Jewish relationship in the 21st century. Both groups’ national narratives are informed by their experience of trauma [with the natural outcome of establishing victimhood, attributing responsibility, and distribution of consequences, (Alexander et. al, 2004, p. 22)] and
in both claiming the so-called ‘superiority’ of victimization by the same enemy, both inherently deny the other party’s suffering and claim victimization at their hands as well. Again, this is rewritten history at least from a nationalist Polish understanding of their so-called victimization by Jews. This is at the heart of the competing narratives that so deeply inform the participants’ reaction to the Holocaust education juxtaposed against the landscape of Poland, the Polish response to Jewish claiming of sites of mass murder, and the inherent tension that reinforces participants’ ingrained beliefs. In the words of Piotr Wróbel (1997), the “double memory” of Jews and Poles is understandable because of the “different experiences [they] had during this periods – experiences that deeply affected them and limited their mutual understanding” (p. 568). Indeed, the entire understanding of the war is different, with the Poles perceiving it as a “war between Poland and Germany, and the Jews merely hovered around its margins” as opposed to a Jewish understanding which divided Poland into three actors: “The Germans, the Jews and the Poles” (Wróbel, 1997, p. 568).

In some ways, the narrative of “Poland, Jesus Christ of Nations” connects Polish autonomy to this history of victimization: Poles deserve their own state, run in a manner in which they choose, as a result of almost two centuries of oppression. This need to emphasize the narrative of victimization has lead to a distorted view of Polish history during the twentieth century – particularly regarding the Nazi and immediate post-war period. As Steinlauf concisely notes, in the Soviet period, without a real chance to grapple with the shared and divergent histories of the two groups, “the stage was set for a future ‘victimization competition’ expressed in the ritualized Polish insistence that they had suffered during the war as much as the Jews. … For Poles, in a world comprehended through the myth of their own eternal victimization, the Holocaust would begin to feel like their ultimate victimization by Jews” (1997, p. 61).

Attacking the history of Poles as strictly victims could theoretically be regarded as an existential attack on the Polish right to self-determination. Furthermore, the reality of the murder of millions of Jews on Polish soil was a potential stumbling block in the Polish reclamation of the past as a history of simultaneous victimhood and glorious martyrdom. This idea was brewing as early as 1947, when the Council for Protection of Memorials to Struggle and Martyrdom (a Polish governmental organization) ratified Auschwitz (in which over a million Jews and roughly 73,000 Poles – plus thousands of homosexuals, Roma, Sinti, Soviet POWs etc. – died) as a site to memorialize the execution of Poles and others (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 69). Within this equation, the
Jewish deaths were nothing but a footnote to the Polish one, part of the secondary ‘other’ groups. When most Jews and Poles look at this history, the word and concept of ‘other’ comes up again and again, mentality and terminology used in the same way by both groups; that othering is almost always meant to reflect a less equal status than the group passing the judgment.

Significantly, this idea has become heavily politicized in the current period. Recently, the newly elected Polish populist Law and Justice party (commonly known by its acronym, PiS) introduced legislation focused on “defend[ing] the good name of the Polish nation.” In short, it threatens to jail people “who publicly and against the facts, accuse the Polish nation, or the Polish state, [of being] responsible or complicit in Nazi crimes committed by the German [Third] Reich” (Grabowski, 2016). One of the first historians to come under attack was Polish-born Jan Tomasz Gross, author of Neighbors (the book about the Jedwabne pogrom) as well as other books such as Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz. While he had long been a polarizing figure in Poland (given the narrative-shaking contents of Neighbors), he was awarded the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland in 1996. His historical analysis is an anathema in PiS’ current political climate, and Gross is now undergoing a series of troubling challenges to his historical discourse. In fact, the Polish minister of Education, Anna Zalewska, said during a July 2016 interview that Gross’ Neighbors was “full of lies” and that she was unable to name the perpetrators of the Jedwabne pogrom – despite the numerous historical sources that acknowledge the Polish towns peoples’ responsibility and the 2011 public apology made by former Polish President Bronisław Komorowski (Porter, 2016). Going one step further, the current President Andrzej Duda during an election debate declared that “the Lord knows that the Polish people did not take part in the Holocaust” (Porter, 2016). The problem, of course, is that by challenging Gross’ historical findings, the government is potentially arguing for their right to determine what their history should be. This deeply Orwellian mentality is extremely concerning.

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29 I am including in this section a number of articles (ie. Porter, 2016) from newspapers as sources because they indicate the way in which this contentious history and relationship is publicized in the mass media for the consumption of the Toronto Jewish community. Many community members have pointed to these articles and the sentiments they contain as evidence of the fact that the Polish people “inherently hate” the Jews.
Grabowski (2013) roots this careful shaping of history in the post-1968 period, when the Communist party, “eager to deflect the worldwide condemnation that followed the expulsion from Poland of the last Jews survivors and their families, encouraged studies that painted a rosy picture of wartime Polish-Jewish relations and stressed the universality of the “helping phenomenon” in Polish society” (p. 149). This has since become a phenomenon that has left strictly academic circles and taken on a life of its own in the media.

Another complication is that recent data suggests that antisemitism, in various iterations, also remains alive and well in Poland, despite the negligible Jewish community there. Bilewicz et. al (2013) differentiates between three forms of antisemitism commonly seen in the country: traditional antisemitism (seen most often in rural areas and among older people) (p. 822), the belief in Jewish conspiracy, and secondary antisemitism focused on Holocaust commemoration (p. 822). This last form of antisemitism is particularly relevant to the discussion here, as it is a form of post-Holocaust prejudice that holds Jews both “responsible for the antisemitism that targets them” and abusive of “other nations’ feelings of guilt” (Imhoff & Banse, 2009). This form of antisemitism, based on national narratives of victimhood (Bergmann, 2009; Brzeminski, 2002) is become relatively common, with 52.9% of the population surveyed locating themselves above the “midpoint of the secondary antisemitism scale” (Biłwicz, et. al, p. 825). This data would indicate that the way in which certain elements of Polish society feverishly deny Jewish losses in the war while simultaneously resentfully reminding others of their own is becoming such a widespread form of anti-Jewish sentiment that it can be classified as a new and virulent form of antisemitism. Interestingly, data from Bilewicz et. al (2013) indicates that the group who most commonly espoused these beliefs are the younger and less educated. It is this group in Poland that overwhelmingly has such a perception of “in-group victimhood” (p. 835) that it cannot acknowledge other history. The above complications in modern Poland serves as a reminder that the careful shaping of history for the purposes of substantiating national narrative is alive and well in today’s world, and far from only in Poland.

Similar to the Polish schema of oppression to independence, the Jewish understanding of the Holocaust is often inherently connected to the creation of the State of Israel. Despite the fact that many early (and definitively pre-war) Zionist thinkers and workers would shudder at the concept that the Holocaust played such a large role in the creation of the Jewish state (because, glib as this comment may seem, it makes Hitler one of Israel’s founders), one cannot truly separate the
end of the Holocaust from the creation of the state of Israel three years later. That said, this national narrative merely places the Holocaust as the pinnacle event in two millennia of subjugation, expulsions, physical attacks and attempts at cultural extinction. The drive for Jewish statehood, therefore, is often entrenched within this history of victimization – the state of Israel has the right to exist as a result of the fact that the Jews are not safe elsewhere. In fact, the Declaration of the State of Israel states that “the catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe – was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz Yisrael the Jewish state.”

This idea is one of the central components of the March of the Living’s narrative. The devastation of the Holocaust, in which two-thirds of the European Jews perished, is highly significant as an important event in and of itself but also as one of the only events around which an increasingly divided Jewish community can rally. In fact, in the 2013 PEW Jewish population survey, 73% of American Jews said that remembering the Holocaust was an “essential” part of what being Jewish means to them. This is significant because it was not only statistically the biggest factor for the American Jewish community, it also considerably outstripped other traditional markers of Jewish identity, such as observing Jewish law (19%), being part of the Jewish community (28%) and caring about Israel (43%). This last statistic may show another crucial

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<tr>
<th>% saying ___ is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them</th>
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<tr>
<td>Remembering Holocaust</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading ethical/moral life</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for justice/equality</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being intellectually curious</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring about Israel</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having good sense of humor</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being part of a Jewish community</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>Observing Jewish law</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eating traditional Jewish foods</td>
<td>14%</td>
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Source: Pew Research Center; non-partisan statistical population survey group.

The PEW Study is a regular report, similar to a census, which assesses population trends and beliefs among the American Jewish community.

aspect of the March of the Living narrative – using the Holocaust to shore up wavering Jewish connectivity with, and support for, Israel.

In many of my interactions with students and educators on the March, the underlying – and sometimes explicitly stated – tension was enmeshed in the clash between a universalist and a particularist interpretation of the Shoah. Many Jewish students felt that the Holocaust was first and foremost a Jewish tragedy, and that any attempt to view it through a universal lens was detracting from that. The particularist narrative of the significance and uniqueness of the Holocaust is in some ways threatened by the Polish narrative of being equal victims under the Nazis – and potentially continued victims afterwards in a way that the Jews were not. These two competing narratives, which identify the other as a source of their historical pain, often come into conflict during the March of the Living. Jewish students arrive in Poland to bear witness to their lost heritage and come together as the living in these places of Jewish death, sites that many Poles regard as equally representative of Polish loss. And whether it’s reflective of reality or not, many Poles feel that the Jewish trips monopolize the history of suffering that these places represent.\(^{35}\) Furthermore, when they come draped in Israeli flags and march through Poland surrounded by security, it also encourages many Poles in the belief that they are being treated as an enemy (a history most don’t recognize as legitimate).\(^{36}\) In many ways, this touring of Poland exclusively from a Holocaust-history perspective, far from being an opportunity for a renewed relationship and greater understanding between the groups, often results in an increasingly embittered relationship played out on the landscape of Poland.

\(^{35}\) Interviews undertaken by researcher from 2011-2017.

\(^{36}\) Interviews undertaken by researcher from 2011-2017.
1.3 Significance of the Study

As the March of the Living becomes increasingly more popular in the Canadian Jewish community, and normative within a subsection of that group, the study of how these trips impact both the Jewish and Polish communities is correspondingly more important. For the Jewish community, the Holocaust is one of the two most defining events of the modern age (the other being the foundation of the State of Israel). Its importance and impact on the way the community has developed in the past seventy years cannot be overstated. It is summoned as both a curative for the widespread assimilation of American Jewry and justification for the shift to the right of American Orthodoxy (Soloveitchik, 1994, p. 1). It is used by many organizations in the Jewish community as a tool to combat assimilation, intermarriage and disengagement – with varied success. Rhetorically, it is both the catalyst for the formation of the State of Israel, and the ultimate validation for Israeli political and military action (Novick, 2000). Continually, it is summoned in the fight for Jewish continuity. This is seen most clearly within the context of these trips. With the dual objectives of encouraging students to make ‘Jewish choices’ at the university level (particularly regarding dating and marriage) and ‘shoring up’ connection with, and support for Israel, trips like the March of the Living implicitly construct modern teenage Jewish identity around the narrative of the Holocaust and Israel.

In 2017, it has also become important to understand that inherent to these trips is also the insistence that students must learn about the Holocaust in situ in order to prevent another recurrence. This message may be becoming increasingly significant. We are now facing the reality of the explosion of populist movements in Europe and America, particularly with the election of nationalist parties in Europe, the so-called “Brexit” vote in England, the sudden rise

37 The ‘engaged’ Toronto Jewish community member, whose family plays an active role in the community, who can afford these trips and regard Jewish education as worth the money.

38 Jewish continuity is often defined as the progression of Jewish marriage and Jewish-born children who make Jewish choices as young adults and while raising their own children.

39 Namely in Poland and Hungary.
of “Alternative for Germany,” which ended the 2017 election in a strong third-place finish and the election of Donald Trump in the United States (Judis, 2017), all of which cannot be ignored by the stakeholders of the March of the Living. To many Jews, these trends are eerily reminiscent of the 1930s, both in extremist politicians and a tendency towards isolationism and rejection of immigrants and refugees. While Jews are no longer the singular ‘out group’ given the prevalence of Islamaphobia, many in the Jewish community feel that they have simultaneously a moral responsibility to respond to these crises as a result of their past and, at times, shaky footing themselves. Particularly in Europe, one cannot escape the growing public acceptance of antisemitism – which can perhaps undermine that moral responsibility, as antisemitism has found fertile ground in the poor and disenfranchised Muslim populations in Europe, particularly in France. For Canadian Jewish students, this is particularly significant considering the fear many feel regarding leaving for universities. Although I am loathe to cry antisemitism (and nor do I feel it is that simple), many universities which are otherwise continually focused on dialogue, safe-space, and anti-racist rhetoric, are seen by many in the Jewish community as condoning anti-Zionist perspectives, even in their most extreme iterations. Despite the fact that I believe much of the fear is overstated and that students do not need to be afraid, I cannot deny that there seems to be something acceptable about anti-Zionism (which does at time border on or overlap with traditional antisemitic tropes) in the world today that is at odds with other values in Canadian society. Additionally, despite the fact that the Jews are not necessarily singled out as the prime ‘out’ minority, statistical evidence indicates that the Jews remain a major target of hate-crimes (Griffiths, 2016). Another political situation the program has to face concerns the growing political isolation of Israel, which has also played a significant role in the trajectory of Holocaust education. When I started this dissertation process in 2014, these factors were not a dominant element to take into consideration – however, once I started writing in 2016, it became clear that I would need to include an analysis of the educational processes vis-à-vis a growing assault on Israel’s right to exist.

The timing is also significant for another reason. The March of the Living’s system has long been predicated on survivor attendance, and the act of ‘hearing a witness’ shifting the students

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40 The first time since 1945 that a nationalist party received any seats in the Bundstag, the AfD achieved 94 seats.
into the role of witness themselves. Before long, the basis of the program will need to be fundamentally different. In addition to the fact of aging survivors, the world that the students live in now is one that is very different from the inception of the program. The March, self-admittedly, is poised for a re-evaluation, re-branding, and re-creation with an eye to achieving its programmatic goals in a different way. I hope to be able to provide a helpful perspective on this, a prospective written by someone who is both an insider and an outsider. I am an insider in so far as I am a Jewish educator, have been on the trip in a number of capacities, not to mention that I am one who was fundamentally shaped by my own experience on a Jewish trip to Poland. As a result of all of those things, I have to admit to feeling a certain level of connectivity with, or protectiveness of, the program. That said, I don’t work for the program, and I am not a Toronto Jewish Federation employee (the governing body of the March of the Living in Toronto). I am an academic with a determined critical distance through which I can analyze the program in both its successes and its limitations. I would argue that this particular vantage point allows me a unique perspective and insight, at the time that the program needs to be both evaluating and evaluated.

My primary hope with this work is the creation of a broader understanding of the ways in which historical narratives are utilized by minority communities to substantiate their identity within a multicultural milieu, and how ethnic tourism can bring these historical experiences from a flat ‘textbook’ experience to one that they internalize as part of a personal journey. As the March of the Living has become a ‘right of passage’ for many of the students I interact with on a daily basis, I believe that a thorough analysis of the implicit and explicit narratives promoted by the program as well as an understanding of the way in which the stakeholders are internalizing said narratives is of critical importance. Furthermore, if the participants are receiving different messages than what the program intends, then assessing the disparity and seeking to redress that imbalance is imperative.
Chapter Two: Methodology, Philosophies, and Research Design

2.1 The Story of the Question

I was born into an upper middle class, educated, liberal, (technically) Protestant family. My fascination with Jewish history began in my early years and was created and inculcated by my grandfather, Edward Fanjoy, who remains the most intelligent person I have ever met. When I was eight years old (needless to say, far too young to understand anything that these books contained) he handed me three books that became fused into the bedrock of my life: *The 100* (an analysis of the 100 most influential men in history), *Mein Kampf* (Hitler’s autobiography) and *Night* (memoir by Elie Wiesel). That was the beginning of my ‘obsession’ with Jewish history (as my parents used to call it). In 2007, I participated in a quasi-Jewish trip to Poland and Germany (the March of Remembrance and Hope), and came back deciding to convert. Since then, I have been a passionate, active member of the Toronto Jewish community. I tell this story because it’s of paramount importance to understand that I occupy what is, at times, an uncomfortable seat on the fence of insider and outsider on this research, at the intersection of anthropologist and sociologist.

During this research I struggled with how to position myself in relation to the program and community I’m analyzing. I am assessing the way in which a trip that was a catalyst for my own Jewish identity shapes others’. I am analyzing a program that is attempting to straddle the gap between formal and informal Jewish education as someone who has historically occupied both worlds myself. I have access to the questions this dissertation raises, as well as the ability and agency to seek the answers, only because I am a member of a community that is, at times, very

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41 In that it is run by members of the Jewish community and is certainly focused on Jewish aspects of the Holocaust history, but is open to non-Jews, doesn’t go to Israel, and embraces a more universalist narrative of the Second World War.
insular (and a trip that’s even more so), and access to the people I need only because of the fact that we know each other on personal and professional levels.

But that isn’t to say that this quasi-insider status has made it easy. It’s made it possible, but the trip organizers remain very skittish about outside involvement or analysis. As I am a doctoral student at OISE in particular, this sensitivity is likely even more keenly felt as a result of the 2011 acceptance of a particularly vitriolic MA thesis by Jenny Peto. This thesis played a great role in some of the difficulties I had in my research, as it was not a paper that was written and then relegated to the backwaters of the Internet. Instead, it became front-page news in Toronto, and forced the March of the Living into a position where they had to go on the public defensive about their objectives and methods. When, a few short years later, I, at the same university and in the same department, commenced my own research, the way in which criticism of the program was splashed all over the newspapers made access for me difficult at times. In the words of my father-in-law, I was Jenny Peto until proven innocent.

In order to deal with the above issues, I created an adaptable research plan. This methodology chapter, which concerns said research plan, seeks to address the following questions:

- How does my position at the intersection of insider-outsider shape my research?
- Why a qualitative case study was the best approach,
- And, taking the above factors into consideration, how I designed and implemented a research plan that had to be, first and foremost, adaptable.

2.2 The Case for Qualitative Research

Many of the studies that have been done on the impacts of Holocaust tourism and Jewish identity have been largely quantitative. While there were those studies which did extensive interviews (such as Jeffery Podoshen et al., 2014 and 2015) many others were primarily survey based (before, during and after trips). In approaching this research, I felt that qualitative research offered the most effective way to analyze the impact of Jewish educational travel to Poland,

42 Explained more fully in Chapter Six, but in essentials ascribes acceptance of ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Palestinians as part of the curricular outcomes of the March of the Living.

43 See Nager, Pham and Gold (2013) as one example.
particularly as I am choosing to focus on the ways in which students internalize and interpret the messaging of the March of the Living, less so on what the program believes itself to be doing. Qualitative research thus allows me to narrativize the thoughts and perceptions of the students participating in the program, before during and after their experience. While at the beginning of the research I utilized both a survey and an interview, I quickly realized that the survey was basically ineffectual – it caused students to be too quick to categorize their perspective, and once they were forced to actually process their thoughts, their ideas were often subtly but significantly different from the ones expressed in the survey. In order to get an in-depth analytical assessment of the way in which students were traditionally educated, how they responded to the pedagogical choices made on the March of the Living, and how they felt about their experience afterwards cannot necessarily be expressed in a survey, because doing so doesn’t force the participants to reckon with their own journey.

Many students enter the trip with clear-cut understandings of the history. All Nazis were inherently evil; all Jews were innocent victims; all Poles and other Europeans (although by and large, as a result of the trip, they only bystander group they really identified were the Poles) who were bystanders were despicable. There is little to no complexity, the Holocaust was a cautionary tale and the greatest exemplar of evil. The lessons to be learned are clear – and while many didn’t necessarily say it explicitly, the two lessons most commonly taken away seemed to be that the Jews couldn’t count on anyone else to take care of them, and therefore in this threatening world they must take care of themselves, and that the State of Israel needs to be supported in order to prevent the occurrence of any future genocide. Lessons about humankind, about choiceless choices, about the way in which people rationalize evil, about economic, political and social factors that allowed for the rise of fascism – those didn’t seem to be as significant.

This dissertation is about the way in which students understand material, less about the material itself. In a way, the historical truth is ultimately almost immaterial to them and to the study at hand. The students act upon what they believe, and they see their own history through a framework that often reinforces those core beliefs. Furthermore, it showed to me how significant conversation in and of itself was in order to get them to consolidate and synthesize their own ideas. When forced to articulate ideas, they were able to demonstrate the attitudes and ideas they superimpose on to the history they learn, and how that knowledge shades and colours the way they view the world around them. The interview-based research thus allowed students to
contemplate and complicate the binary, strict dichotomous perspectives that many initially expressed.

It was clear that for the majority of students, viewing this history through a different lens was deeply uncomfortable. Qualitative research allowed me to investigate these contradictions. Through interviewing and discussing their understandings before, during and after the trip, I was able to bring to light some of the deep-set preconceptions and prejudices with which they approached the history of the Holocaust, and assess the way their experiences on the March of the Living influenced their understanding of history. I was also able to explore the way in which their trip either reinforced those beliefs or challenged them, and the way in which the trip impacted their worldview after. I was able to see which students had different reactions, and whether to some extent their parents, education level, or community involvement informed those ideas. In sum, by engaging with the participants on a human level, I was able to witness them process and synthesize their own ideas, gain insight into the way in which they internalized the messages of the trip, and help them begin to grapple with the ways they connected the study of their past with the trajectory of their future.

I come at this research through a personal connection with the trip and its goals. I attended Queen’s University for my BA, where I focused on modern Jewish history. After Queen’s, I attended Brandeis University in the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program, achieving a dual Masters in Jewish Studies and History. During the intervening period, I was also a staff member on a March of the Living trip – one of a number of times I travelled to Poland. At Brandeis, I began to work with Antony Polonsky. His influence on my research, particularly centered on Poland, cannot be understated. When I arrived at Brandeis, one of my beliefs was that the Polish people were as responsible for the Holocaust as the Nazis were. I had come to this conclusion through previous research as well as my many experiences in Poland. Over my two years studying with Antony, he exposed me to a considerably more complex narrative – one that in no way negated actions of complicity among some Polish people, but one that was not nearly as black and white as I had assumed. As a teacher, I went again on the March of the Living with some of my Grade 11 students, a trip that I found very illuminating given the

44 Primarily term papers at Queen’s University.
totality of my experience with them, as their teacher for (at that point) three years, through the pre-trip programming, on the trip, and afterwards. The holistic understanding I had of these students allowed me to see the program through a different lens and different eyes.

My academic life has been largely centered on how the Holocaust (and its narrative) has been used as a tool for Jewish identity formation. I approach this work from a position within the Jewish community. As with many Jewish educators, my focus is on Jewish continuity; as a researcher, I am focused on how this particular history is used to shape Jewish youth in the name of said continuity. My continual academic focus on analysis of Jewish education has, however, given me the critical distance necessary for effective research. My being an ‘insider’ has invariably benefited my research as I have access to people and to studies that I may not have had quite as easily. Furthermore, I am able to get to the questions I’m asking directly as a result of the fact that I have been involved in the past. That access led me to my dissertation topic, and given the insularity of the program it’s unlikely I would have gotten it otherwise.

As stated above, because such things do matter here, I have been a part of the trip in various roles over the years. Additionally, given the fact that my own Jewish identity was in many ways formed around the history of the Holocaust, I have to be careful not to read my own experiences into others’. This has been one of the critical complications in approaching this dissertation. I’m at an interesting intersection between an insider and an outsider, but regarding the trip itself, I very much support its continuity and I think it offers an invaluable opportunity for Jewish youth. This has afforded me a type of “epistemic privilege” (Campano and Damico, 2007), granting me insight and access that I likely would not have had otherwise.

45 The preservation of a distinct Jewish community.

46 Defined by Moya (2009) the term “epistemic privilege” usually refers to an understanding that those who are oppressed have, making them the best positioned to understand what the implications of those oppressive actions are. Although not directly relevant here, per se, I use the term as it demonstrates the ability of an “insider” to understand the inner workings and structures far better than those who exist outside of the community.
2.2.1 Philosophical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

There are a number of philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks that influenced my research question and impacted my data collection and analysis. My research focused on the ways in which students interpret and internalize explicit and implicit curricula while studying the Holocaust in Poland. As someone whose Jewish identity was, in many ways, created and strengthened through my experience on a similar trip, I certainly have deeply-held personal assumptions. Through this section, I explore two philosophical assumptions that have informed the creation and implementation of my research study, as well as two theoretical frameworks that will shape my policies towards data collection and analysis.

Creswell, in his 2013 edition of *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, questions whether or not multiple philosophical assumptions can play a role in the same study. For my part, I argue that axiological and epistemological assumptions both play a prominent role in this dissertation.

**Axiological assumptions.** My research question(s) focus heavily on assessing the ways in which programs teach values as a method of self and communal identity creation. As a Jewish educator, this is a reality in my day-to-day work. I am a history teacher, but a part of my objective being a teacher at a communal Jewish school is to connect students to those events or elements in their history that will connect them to their Jewish heritage and therefore substantiate their own identity. As a result, one of my key assumptions is that a key element of Jewish history education is value-laden curriculum. Inevitably this influenced my research, data collection and analysis. Furthermore, I as a researcher cannot completely disassociate myself from my own values in relation to my research problem. One of the important things I have done in this dissertation is position myself in relation to the research participants and educational program, while simultaneously including my own interpretation along side those of my participants’ – a key implication of said philosophical framework in practice.

**Epistemological assumptions.** Tying in with the axiological argument about the significance of my value-based framework, as a member of the Jewish community, as a researcher who is studying a program with which I have been involved, and as a teacher in the same school as many of my research participants, I cannot hope for distance. That said, this is a strength of my research. While ethnographers (and my data analysis will certainly reflect elements of ethnography) in many ways seek to eliminate some distance between themselves and those they
are researching so that they can better understand their perspectives and world-views, that is a closeness that’s already present. My challenge was the opposite: how to weave in my personal experiences, background and convictions while not allowing them to inform my analysis to the point of drawing simplistic or biased conclusions from the available data. Furthermore, my research question is ultimately predicated on allowing participants – most of whom are teenagers – to share with me the way in which they created or gave meaning to experiences, therefore creating *their own version of truth*. There are also key elements of an epistemological framework as I relied heavily on direct quotes and subjective analysis of my participants.

While philosophical assumptions are not always stated at the outset of research, conceptual frameworks often reflect the assumptions that the researcher possesses. The primary conceptual framework – *Social Constructivism* – which I use as a lens through which to view my research question, corresponds well with the above philosophical assumptions. Social constructivism, or the study of how individuals interact with and study the world that they live in (Creswell, 2013, p. 24) is a theory that played a crucial role in my research question and data collection. Social constructivism concerns the ways in which individuals ascribe subjective meanings to their experiences, and the way in which those meanings are formed through interactions with others (Creswell 2013, p. 25). As the ways in which students understand history and their connection with it is often a result of socially constructed identities and pre-conceived understandings of events, this is a crucial lens. In keeping with this theoretical framework, my interview questions were more general and unstructured, allowing participants to elaborate on their views and understandings of the March of the Living and their experiences in Poland throughout the process. This framework also falls in line with the above philosophical assumptions, particularly regarding the way in which I, as the researcher, had to be careful to position myself in relation to my research participants and their values. Perhaps most importantly, this framework not only allowed for but also encouraged the inclusion of complex and multiple viewpoints, many of which do not intersect but are all equally legitimate.

Another theory that has played a critical role in understanding the March of the Living would be the *study of tourism*, and the way in which Diaspora communities, of which North American

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47 See Appendix A
Judaism is only one, have summoned it as a form of ‘ethnic pilgrimage’. In the age of globalization, tourism as a form of mass consumption of experience as opposed to material has been channeled by groups into a medium for what Shaul Kelner (2010) describes as “political socialization” (p. 12). Group trips to a site that have assigned some sort of emotional or historical significance to them has allowed these communities to reposition themselves in relation to the place, time, and the rest of the group they travelled with. Some examples include descendants of slaves who return to some of the ‘points of no return’ in Africa from whence slaves left the continent of their birth as a way of reclaiming their place in this history, the progeny of people who fell on either side of the Civil Rights battle in the American south returning to places of conflict to engage with their histories and with each other, or Jewish teenagers visiting Holocaust sites in Europe as a way of attempting to position themselves in relation to a history which many describe to me as feeling distant or unrelated to them. As Kelner (2010) describes, “tourism, in this conception, is a particular way of using space, a specific mode of experience, a particular set of knowledge practices – more aesthetic than instrumental, explicitly semiotic, and always experienced in an embodied context” (p. 37). The goal of this pilgrimage tourism is, of course, to have the participants engage with a history that they did not necessarily live through but nevertheless informs their lives today. The March of the Living falls at an interesting intersection of Diaspora and Homeland tourism, and the tension between the two sites being visited plays out across the trip, and forms a crucial part of Chapter Five.

The last theory that informs my research is that of identity as a socially constructed concept, particularly in terms of how history is used to shape identity. Identity theory concerns itself with how identity is a socially and historically constructed concept, informed by interactions with family, peers, institutions, education and communities. This research focuses extensively on the way in which a specific educational program taps history in order to inform and shape the identities of high school students. Identity is constantly evolving. Each new interaction, peer group or experience leaves impressions, and often identity is shaped and formed in relation or reaction to said impressions. I was interested in to what extent the ways in which specific messages are internalized and if that influences students’ self and communal identities. I was also particularly interested in the outcomes of these identity shapers – how they inform participants’ ideologies, values and future interactions with their world. Theorists such as Linda Alcoff (2006) have argued that history and historical experiences leave an indelible mark on
contemporary identities, and I draw on these perspectives on identity here. Particular for the population I’m studying, one of the most relevant identity theories is Shaul Magid’s (2013) concept of millennial Jewish identity, which is considered less monolithic and focused than previous generations, with a greater focus on intersectionality and multiple identities.

2.3 Research Design

Within the broader framework of qualitative research, I utilized two separate methodologies. As a member of the Jewish community whose Jewish identity was in many ways created and substantiated by an experience in Poland, I clearly have an invested interest in an analysis of the March of the Living. As a teacher at a Jewish high school moreover, I certainly used those experiences to help me assess the ways in which students internalized the messages presented on the March in their lives upon return. Given my position in relation to and my place within the community I’m studying, my research involves a certain amount of reflexive exploration.

That said, the primary methodology I adopted was a case study approach. This methodology was the most appropriate as I sought to address a particular phenomenon within a broader cultural society. This approach is designed to accomplish the type of in-depth analysis of a certain facet of a broader community, like the role of the Holocaust and the trip of the March of the Living plays within the Toronto Jewish community.

Robert K. Yin, in his 2009 book Case Study Research: Design and Methods defines case studies as “empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a ‘case’), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Furthermore, he goes on to state that the case study approach is best when the research addresses a descriptive or explanatory question, and when it is being asked for the purposes of evaluation. My research assesses a specific case within the broader Toronto Jewish community. The case study approach is appropriate here for two primary reasons: i) the research question is an exploratory one, asked to determine the impact of a particular trip (a bounded case) within the broader field of Jewish education, and ii) the case is not able to be assessed without a broader analysis of the context of Jewish communal values and education.
To revisit my research question, I seek to determine how learning *in situ* in Poland during the March of the Living shapes the curricular experience of Holocaust education for the purpose of helping to construct Jewish self and communal identities, and what impact that may have on the participants’ understanding of their Jewish identity, the Polish-Jewish relationship and the Polish locals who are simultaneously present and excluded.

In order to understand the above, I looked to three core research questions:

i. What attitudes or beliefs do participants bring with them on the March of the Living, and in what ways do those preconceptions inform the way in which they understand the history and narratives presented to them?

ii. What pedagogical choices are being employed on the trip, and how does the ‘tourist gaze’ and positioning that takes place while in Poland shift the narrative of the Holocaust and Israel from static and historical to active and contemporary?

iii. How does this act of experiential and immersive Holocaust education shape the participants’ beliefs, actions, choices, and relationships with the Jewish community over time?

These secondary questions illustrate the importance of the case study approach, encompassing the context, content and analysis of the phenomenon. These three core questions also form the structure of the dissertation itself, with each data chapters addressing one question.

### 2.3.1 Participants

In accordance with the three secondary research questions, a number of potential different ‘Research groups’ were identified in order to be able to analyze the full scope of the experience. The research participants can, therefore, be divided into three general categories: i) high-school age participants (age 16-17), ii) young adults (undergraduate and professional students, a few years out from their trip) and iii) adults with families (10-20 years out from their experience on the March of the Living). The first group is the most significant as I am only looking at the teen experience on the trip (not the young adult or adult contingents). However, the two other groups come into play when assessing the longitudinal impact of the March of the Living.

As an active member of the Jewish community in Toronto, the bulk of my participants were selected as a result of personal or peer connections. I reached out to students who I knew were
going on the trip, but also advertised my research within the school. I also asked the students to connect me to friends of theirs who were not part of the Jewish day school system who I may not necessarily have been able to reach otherwise. Through my participation as a direct and participant observer on the trip, I also became sufficiently embedded within the program in order to reach out to different participants through doing so. In short, I used my status as an insider to gain access to people.

I ‘invited’ them to participate via email or social media, and I was upfront about what my subject matter was. While I didn’t share what specifically about the March of the Living I was seeking to understand, I told them that I was looking to “understand the participant experience and outcomes” on the trip. I advised that it would require an interview before the trip as well as one afterwards. The only specific criteria I had for the participants was that they represent a wide range of Jewish educational backgrounds.

Section I, the high-school age participants, formed the bulk of my interview subjects as they were the primary stakeholders of the trip. Through interviewing them before they participated on the trip that I was able to assess pre-trip perspectives and ingrained attitudes; through observing them on the trip I saw their immediate reactions and responses to the explicit and implicit educational choices. Upon interviewing them afterwards I was able to determine their immediate reactions and understandings. In order to be able to show the range of diverse opinions, and to see what impact previous Jewish day school education may have on pre-trip attitudes, I identified students across a range of previous experiences.

48 See Appendix B
### Table 1: Outline of the Four Research Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Jewish Education:</strong></td>
<td>11 years of Jewish education at the time of the program.</td>
<td>3 years at the time of the programs (Grades 9-11).</td>
<td>Left Jewish education during or at end of elementary school.</td>
<td>No formal Jewish education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics:</strong></td>
<td>- Forms the largest demographic of participants on the March of the Living (roughly 60% combined with Group B – but only in recent years. Even 3-4 years ago, it was about 75%).</td>
<td>- Along with the Group A participants, forms the large TJPS contingent on the March of the Living</td>
<td>- C and D form smaller demographics (currently about 40% combined – up from around 25%).</td>
<td>- C and D form smaller demographics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I identified at least 2-3 students from each group (so I was able to determine a few different viewpoints) per year over the course of two and a half years, allowing me to get both a range of differing opinions and to see the ways in which their experiences impacted them in their last year of high school and/or first year of university. Given my access to Groups A and B, I ended up having a wider range of students from those two groups. As they also compromise a greater percentage of the students on the trip itself, the demographics of my research pool accurately reflects the same that exists on the program. One note of significance is that the 2015 participants fell in an awkward period between the completion of my comprehensive examinations and the approval of my ethics review board application and as a result only have follow-up interviews.
where they were asked to reflect upon their experiences and thought processes from before the trip. They also have my observations of them as a participant-observer that year, but lack a pre-trip interview because at that time I had not yet submitted my ethics protocols. In total, I had 33 teenagers that I followed over the course of three years.

Section II, young adults, is comprised of participants who are now nearing the end of their undergraduate career or are at the beginning of graduate school. Here, I drew from two separate pools: those who went through the Jewish educational system before university, and those who did not. As I was a staff member on the March of the Living in 2009, I had access to a pool of students. The main goal of reaching out to participants of this age is that I want to have a better understanding of to what extent they made Jewish choices at the university level, and what extent the objectives of the program played out during this crucial developmental period.

Section III, adults with families, is comprised of a few participants who went in the early years of the March of the Living (1985 – 1990), most of whom are now married with children. I used this group to determine whether or not they stayed active in the community, if they are involved with Jewish causes at all and in what ways, whether they married a Jewish spouse, and in what way the trip impacted their life. Additionally, their reflections on their programs allowed me to assess the trajectory of the changing trip over the years, and the way in which students’ reactions changed with it. In total, I had 14 young adult and adult participants over three years.

### 2.3.2 Data Collection

I used four different types of data collection typical for the case study approach:

**Direct and Participant Observation.** Chapter Five is primarily based on direct and participant observations from different experiences on the March of the Living from 2015-2017. Through these various experiences, I was able to gain access to participants and to glean the explicit curriculum of the program. I saw first-hand how these students related to Poland, related to its people, and reframed their connection to the Jewish community while there. I went both as a direct observer (outside of the program, staying in different hotels, but with the participants during the day) and a participant observer (as a chaperone, accompanying as a member of staff at my school). While the bulk of the research in this dissertation is interview based, data collected
to answer this particular research question was considerably less interview-based and more based on my own personal observations of the educational and identity-based programming taking place in Poland.

**Direct observations.** I went as a direct observer on the Poland section of the 2017 March of the Living. This involved extensive field notes from the day as well as interviews with survivors and educators. I did not spend significant time interacting with the students who I had conducted pre-interviews with, but instead observed them at a distance to understand the way in which they reacted to the pedagogy and curriculum “on the ground.” In order to understand this, I floated between different buses throughout the week in Poland, going back and forth between different buses as they guided specific “sites” in order to see the difference of how the educators engaged the participants under their charge.

**Participant-observation.** I went as a participant-observer in 2015 as a chaperone. Given the insularity of the program, it was important as it also gave me access to pre-trip chaperone training, programming and education as well as the experience on the trip with the participants. The key difference between participant and direct observation is that as a participant observer I was only privy to my particular bus.

Being both a participant observer and a direct observer provided vastly different perspectives. The March of the Living sends students in buses, and each bus creates its own microcosm with roughly 40 students, three chaperones, one Israeli educator and one survivor. As a result, each bus has its own culture and experience. While the buses technically travel in two contingents (each of either 3 or 4 buses, that stay at different hotels and follow a slightly different schedule) the connection to the bus is greater than the one to the contingent. As a participant observer, thus, you really take on an understanding first and foremost of your microcosm. While this is of course the reality of any research – as it’s always only one part of a broader story – going as a direct observer that had me on a different bus each day allowed for a broader (albeit more surface) understanding of a wider range of experiences. Each bus’ culture was different, and not only the participant culture (whether they were more day school or non-day school kids, from the Southern or Northern Toronto Jewish communities etc.), but also in terms of the agendas and beliefs of their chaperone team and educators. Thus, being a participant versus direct observer offered a significantly different perspective on the trip.
The data collection as a direct observer ended up involving extensive field notes, photographs, and journaling. I had occasional video footage where appropriate. At the end of each day, I transcribed all field notes on my computer and read across them to analyze overall themes from the day. My week there spent time assessing two primary things: i) How the educators strike the balance between non-curricular, emotion-laden processes (particularly embodiment) and historical facts and academic interpretations of the events in question (what I call “cognitive processes” in Chapter Five), and ii) How the different educators’ understanding of the balance between emotive and cognitive processes shaped their bus’ knowledge of the history and their attributions of responsibility for the Holocaust.

As a participant observer, the data collection involved more of a general reflection at the end of each day. In this role, I was most able to create connections with students for the purposes of research in the months after the trip. The other value was the immersion into the culture of the program, from the chaperone training to the pre-trip education, access I would not have had otherwise.

Attending the trip as a direct observer was an experience rife with challenges. Despite the fact that I was someone who has worked with members of the program leadership in many capacities over many years, there was a strong resistance to my coming as a direct (not participant) observer. This was ostensibly a result of the fear that I would ‘take away from the mood of the program and the experience of the participants’ - to paraphrase the many conversations I had. This unfortunately meant that there were some things that I didn’t ultimately have access to as a direct observer, just a participant one, because requests were met with resistance and I did not see it in my own best interest to push the issue. The most important (and for my research, detrimental) issue was that despite the fact that I had permission from small groups to join in debriefing at the end of the day, it was a problem for trip leadership. Thus, any reflections the students had about events or sites in question, for the cohort in 2017, are gleaned entirely from their time at the event/ site itself (without ample time for processing) or in the weeks or months after the trip (in the forms of interviews or focus groups).

The issues presented here are part-and-parcel of the fact that there is a culture of ‘untouchability’ regarding the March of the Living, given its subject matter. In fact, a number of people who work at the Toronto branch of the Jewish Federation described the March as having a “cult-like
“status” in terms of it being a program resistant to constructive criticism or change. One person described it as a program that was so focused on the way things had always been done that they were resistant to ideas of changing the way things should be done in the future. Perhaps rooted in that perspective, the tremendous resistance I ultimately encountered in attempting to observe the program shaded my perspective. I can only hope that given my previous relationship with the program and involvement in the community, my perspectives and observations will be received.

**Interviews and Document Analysis.** The data collection for chapters four and six were based on interviews with teens and adults. The participants for this were recruited largely through my insider status as a teacher at a Jewish day school and an observer (both participant and direct) on the March of the Living. They were for the most part teenagers, Jewish students interviewed after their application and acceptance to the program but before the trip began. The students involved were participants who went on the 2015, 2016 and 2017 Toronto contingents of the March of the Living.

In total, over three years, I interviewed 33 students, 27 of whom were from Research Groups A, B and C (*some* experience in formal Jewish education of any capacity) and 6 of whom were group Research Group D (no experience in formal Jewish education in any capacity). The information was collected through both focus groups (of which all members had the same level of Jewish education, or lack thereof) and individual interviews.

For Chapter Four, which describes pre-trip attitudes, I drew only on the focus groups and interviews that took place in between the students’ acceptance to the program and their departure on it. These unstructured interviews focused on their relationship with Judaism, the Holocaust and Israel, their understanding of Poland, the Polish people and what they are expecting to find upon the trip. The interviews were largely discussed-based, and were framed in a way to understand what factors going into shaping their attitudes: did they have grandparents or great-grandparents from Poland, how is the country or the events of the Holocaust discussed in their home by their parents (if at all), and to what extent has their Jewish education (or lack thereof) impacted their understanding of the Polish culpability for the Shoah. All specific questions can be found in Appendix A.

In order to understand the ways in which the demographics of the Toronto Jewish community impacted not only the structure and goals of the trip but also the preconceptions that influenced
the students’ understanding of the trip, I had a few interviews with leaders from the Montreal community (more heavily Sephardi, comprised of Jews of non-European descent). Additionally, I focused on whether non-TJPS participants (as upwards of half the program each year are TJPS students) handle non-Jews and the non-Jewish narratives of the Holocaust in a different way than those with 10+ years of Jewish education.

For Chapter Six, which explores the identity-building outcomes, I expanded the interview pool to include two more groups who have graduated university or started families themselves. This was done with the intention of being able to assess the longevity of the identity-building outcomes seen in the teenagers. While I drew on the experiences of the 33 students I interviewed and observed from 2015-2017, to this total I added 14 participants who participated on the trip between 2006 and 2014 (11 of which went as teens, three of whom went as young adults) and four who went between 1988-1992. While the latter category is much smaller – so as potentially to be seen as negligible – I felt including them was of interest for two reasons. Firstly, they can speak to the different ways in which the trip has changed from its inception to now, and secondly, they demonstrate the way the March still resonates in the lives of adults many years after the conclusion of the trip.

These latter two categories did not have pre-trip interviews, and instead were interviewed in a free-form manner years after their trip. These focused less on specifics, but on the way in which the students themselves feel the trip helped shape their commitment to the Jewish community. Questions can be found in Appendix A.

All names in this dissertation, with the exception of March of the Living professionals, are pseudonyms.

**Other data sources.** Additionally, I interviewed the Toronto program leadership from both Canadian Israel Experience (as the umbrella organization) and March of the Living Toronto, to determine more fully what the organization is hoping to achieve. The participants included Eli Rubenstein, the National chair of the March of the Living, the Toronto chairs of the March of the Living over the time I was researching, and with two March of the Living professionals, Sherri Rotstein and Alana Saxe. I also did a few interviews with a subsection of parents who chose to send their children. In interviewing them, I hope to gain a better picture of what specific rationales and decision-making went into considering the March of the Living as an important
Jewish experience. I also interviewed seven different chaperones and six educators to assess why they chose to go with their participants, the educational and historical perspectives they brought to the program, and the way in which they felt the trip influenced them.

Lastly, I conducted document analysis on the March of the Living Curriculum program and Chaperone guides. These were given to me when I was a chaperone in 2015. Through these, I assessed the explicit objectives of the program and stated goals. Going into the research process I hypothesized that there was a second set of so-called ‘implicit’ goals that are not necessarily stated but certainly play out over the course of the program. This documentary analysis was an important part of establishing the divide that may exist between the two. Additionally, I analyzed the March of the Living Toronto website, for both the “12 Goals of the March of the Living” as well as their promotional literature, particularly the “student survey responses” that they use to advertise the program. As the outcomes the students report in these responses are used to encourage program participation, I concluded that they speak to the program leadership’s program goals.

2.4 Analysis

Firstly, I transcribed all interviews, creating a brief précis of the interview as a whole at the end. Particularly during the summary, I broke down the data into themes. As I kept my interview questions more general, I didn’t have any a priori categorization planned. Once categorized, I identified salient patterns across the codes. Falling in line with Huberman and Miles’ (1994) data analysis strategy, I counted the frequency of different patterns seen across the categories. At this time I also identified relationships between the patterns.

Having identified existing relationships between the patterns, I then extrapolated said relationship by analyzing not only themes seen across the board, but also controlling for Jewish education. I drew on Madison’s (2009) suggestion that all coding should be seen through the lens of my interpretative framework. As a result, I broke down all data collected down by broader themes of similar experiences and perspectives on the same event. My analysis was guided by the following questions: To what extent did similar educational backgrounds draw similar responses and meanings? Are there relationships between where participants’ families came from and their responses to Poland and any pedagogical choices implemented on the March of the Living? To what extent does the family’s connectivity with the Jewish community –
religiously or culturally – dictate the way they understood their relationship to both Holocaust and Israel?

I then took any conclusions drawn from the patterns and variables across the data and contextualized it within the available literature. Moving into data analysis, I broke it down into a number of chapters, divided by theme. The analysis became the basis for the three data chapters of my dissertation, with each “core question” forming its own chapter. In order to contextualize the data findings, I also wrote a chapter of four case studies highlighting participant experience, with each “case” representing themes seen across those with a similar pre-existing level of Jewish education. Ultimately, the role of pre-existing Jewish education became the controlling analytical factor throughout which all pre-trip attitudes, reactions to pedagogy, and long-term impacts were determined.
3 Chapter Three: ‘Poland’ Through Students’ Eyes

In this chapter, I present brief case studies of four students who chose to participate on the March of the Living, going into their backgrounds, interests, reactions and “take-aways” from the trip. While I have done my best to include students who exhibit a wide-range of opinions and reactions, and have chosen one student from each of the four research groups to show the diversity of the Jewish educational and communal background of the trip, at the end of the day it remains only a small window into a much larger program.

None of these students was interviewed initially with the purposes of becoming a featured case study. They were just part of the larger cohort, but I found that they demonstrated ideas and stories that were very compelling. The students below demonstrate Shaul Magid’s (2013) idea of ‘millennial’ Judaism, where multiple Jewish identities are sought and internalized in “the search for meaning and the creation of affiliations of shared meaning” (p. 184). Magid views this as different from previous forms of North American Judaism focused on “community and continuity,” with now younger Jews being more likely to search for various intersections of connectivity and identity for themselves. All of the students highlighted here demonstrate the way in which young Jews in Toronto seize upon Jewish educational opportunities as a way of creating a Jewish identity and community that works for them. Through their various experiences and backgrounds, crystallized on the March of the Living, each student has created their own sense of Jewish identity, which isn’t necessarily in line with more traditional markers of religious identity, but certainly one that is relevant for them at their stage of life.

Further, these students, and the many others like them, demonstrate the different assumptions and attitudes that the students bring with them on the trip. It also displays the ways in which the individual picks up on events and ascribes their own meaning to it, and what they, a year out from their trip, have chosen to remember and share. Ultimately, the four narratives below are small, but significant, examples of the ways in which students understand information and create their own educational experiences as a result of who are they are, what their relationship is with the history at hand, and the way they entered the trip with certain expectations of both experiences and feelings.
3.1 The cheeky contradiction-in-terms

I met Robert in Grade 9, when I was taking his phone away in class. It wasn’t exactly an auspicious beginning. Robert took it with a rueful grin and pressed on, going to succeed over two years in my class, getting very high marks despite the fact that he flirted with the line between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour on a regular basis. This same mentality exhibited itself again and again during the research phase, of which I asked him to be a part because I was aware he had very strong opinions and wasn’t afraid to express them.

Robert is one of three boys, two of whom I have taught, and all of whom are very similar. They are cheeky, they are intelligent, and they are challenging in the best way. Robert was educated in a particularly Zionist-oriented day school before continuing on at Toronto Jewish Preparatory School (TJPS) for high school. He is a STEM\(^{49}\)-oriented student, hoping to study engineering at the university level. He is a highly analytical person, and perhaps that is behind his primary rationale for why he wanted to go on the March of the Living. He was seeking, first and foremost, an emotional connection with the history of the Holocaust. He comes from a Polish background, and he also has Holocaust survivors in his family. This background he uses as the justification for his very strong feelings about Israeli security, favouring Naftali Bennet (and the ultra-right Jewish Home party) and Bennet’s position on settling the West Bank as a measure of safeguarding the Israeli state.

Robert also has a visceral hatred of Poland that long pre-dated his application or acceptance to the program, which he attributed to the presence of Holocaust survivors in his family (all from Poland). In pre-trip interviews he showed both inherited prejudices and a more dispassionate, analytical awareness of them. In the same breath he would say that “the March donates tons to the Polish economy, which is kind of hypocritical – why are we helping the Polish economy? The Poles are still antisemitic” and remind other students that “we can’t be critical of Poland for not helping the Jews, to play devil’s advocate, because they were also subject to genocide.” Despite his ability to think critically about himself and his own opinions, Robert demonstrated a great amount of vitriol regarding the Poles in the pre-trip focus group, specifying that the government in Poland today isn’t antisemitic, but the people still are. Despite the fact that he had

\(^{49}\) Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.
spent some time in France that year, he stated that he didn’t ever want to go to Europe because of mass antisemitism that exists there. That said, when Eli Rubenstein gave his talk on understanding both Jewish and Polish narratives of the war in the pre-trip seminars, Robert spent the time to go up to him afterwards and thank him for such an insightful talk, and emailed me to comment on how much he had learned.

To me, Robert’s pre-trip understandings indicated one of the strongest tendencies towards ‘inherited memory’ that I saw throughout my research,^{50} in part why I have chosen to highlight him here. In the pre-trip focus group he brought up the “little white house near the fence in Majdanek.” This infamous house is someone’s home right near the fence outside of the death camp, and one that is frequently seized upon by students as an example of Polish acceptance or tactic approval of the Holocaust. He discussed how Poland is “more green” than you think it is (without having been there). He spoke about how Polish people “stand and watch you when you’re there” without saying or doing anything. He spoke objectively about how the Polish people were deeply and intrinsically antisemitic, without exception or nuance, before he had ever had personal experiences with any. This could be from two sources: first, his older brother Noah participated on the 2015 trip, so he may have been drawing from Noah’s experiences. Secondly, his grandparents were all Holocaust survivors from Poland. After the trip, he remarked: “my Zeide is Polish, and he hates them so much. I hate everything about them, I hate Poland. It’s just a shitty country. Poland is the armpit of Europe, it’s just gross.” The beginning of the statement is, I believe, the most significant qualifier – his hatred, his mistrust, his vitriolic feelings about Poland come first and foremost from a pre-trip familial attitude that has permeated, at the very least, from grandfather to grandson(s).

On the trip, his brashness continued. He was at times a bit of a disciplinary problem. However, his tour guide also pulled me aside to tell me that he was “exceptionally intelligent” and “above and beyond the other students” in terms of knowledge. He not only had answers to all of the questions, he had questions that were “miles ahead of where anyone else was at,” in the direct words of his tour guide. He remained a cheeky contradiction in terms.

^{50} A trend explored more in Chapter Four, where the participant repeats beliefs about Poland and the Holocaust, without personal knowledge or experience, summoning the experiences of family members or friends as objective truth.
This contradictory attitude is one that is often attributed to the many TJPS students who swell the ranks of the March of the Living, with many chaperones over the years reporting to me that they felt that they were “disrespectful,” “arrogant,” “troublemakers” and the ones who negatively impacted the atmosphere of their buses. Although this was hardly true across the board, the attitude among many chaperones, particularly in 2017, was that those who were problems almost exclusively came from the Jewish day school ranks. This may have been a reflection on the fact that many felt as if they knew much of what was being discussed, or the fact that they represented more tight-knit social groups that existed before and outside of the program. Robert was certainly one of those. He came in with a tight group of friends, all of whom were put on the same bus. They were there simultaneously for the experience of going to Poland and “for the chill.” They had no compunction in discussing this. On the trip, I was regaled with numerous tales of playoff-watching in the Novotel at night, and “bus chills,” so much so that it was clear in large part they had all come to get the chance to be away with each other.

Despite his, at times, troublemaker personality, Robert was profoundly affected by the trip and seemed to take on a great deal that the trip was looking for him to understand. On the trip he spoke to me about his most meaningful moment, which was after the actual “March” from Auschwitz I to Birkenau, when at the conclusion of the ceremony the Shofar was blown. This reclamation of a Jewish tradition in the site of Jewish death for him, was the highlight of the trip. “To be there with my friends, and to just hear the shofar blown as the sun was setting over Auschwitz-Birkenau, it was a feeling I couldn’t describe.”

For him, the greatest outcome was a heightened support for the State of Israel, which he discussed was one of the goals of the trip. He described the amazing time he had with the food, with the sun, with the innovation museum, with Masada and the Dead Sea. He argued that the March “leverages the Holocaust for Zionism,” saying that he “like[s] that they use the March to amplify everyone’s sense of Zionism. The reason people should be Zionist is because of the Holocaust, and the March makes them aware of that.” He came back with an even stronger love for the State of Israel than he had going in, and respect for its military and its role as security

51 Social time.

52 Ceremonial blowing of a ram’s horn, done around the high holidays.
guarantor in a threatening world. When speaking about Israel after the trip, his tangents quickly led into discussions of campus (“you’re not safe anywhere you go”) and general issues that Jews face at home and abroad (“you know, you see Swastikas everywhere, even right by my house at UCC.”)53

With regard to the March of the Living, he felt his home and day school education prepared him better than some of the other participants. He said that he had “such a big advantage” because he “knew all the stuff.” When compared to the other people on his bus, and on his contingent, he felt that he was “so much better prepared.” In watching him on the trip, it’s clear that he played a dominant role in his bus dynamic. Not only was he personally and socially a major player, he also academically set the tone for the bus, for the questions that were asked, for the direction that the group steered their guide down. This is important because of his aforementioned strong opinions about Poland and about Israel.

After the trip, Robert struggled with how what he learned and experienced on the trip would change him or his behaviour patterns. He ended up with a vague notion of “being involved at university” and “going to Western, because of the Jewish community there,” something that he had already been planning to do. No doubt he expected to engage with the Jewish community at the university, presumably at Hillel, Chabad, or one of the other Jewish organizations on campus. To him, the March validated and amplified decisions he already made, ideas that he already had, and reinforced relationships to the peers in his cohort, more than it actually fundamentally changed anything. Although he, like many of his peers, came back and asserted that the “trip changed his life” it would be hard to determine exactly where the change happened. Perhaps, like others, the impact of the trip will percolate under the surface and change will manifest itself in years to come, but for right now, Robert hates Poland and loves Israel and for him that seems to be enough.

53 Private school in Toronto.
3.2 “I watched Jersey Shore, they watched Warsaw Shore.”

Lily and her sister (two years apart) both came to TJPS in Grade 9 after floating around a number of different private elementary schools. Lily was never the most academically-inclined student, although she was more than intelligent enough. She had long been straddling the line between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Toronto, affiliating with organizations in which large groups of Jews congregated (such as the so-called “TW”54 camps like White Pine, Timberlane and Walden, which were not explicitly Jewish camps but drew large numbers of Jewish campers) but never quite formalizing her own identity in one metaphorical ‘camp’ or the other.

Lily and I met for coffee at the end of her second year of university, when she had returned to Toronto for the summer. Three years out she still had very strong memories of her trip, and she brought her trip diary with her to show how they haven’t changed much since she wrote them originally. She applied for the March because close to 80% of her class applied, but also because her dad was going as a chaperone the same year. She felt that it was an experience you “couldn’t learn about from books, or even in a Canadian classroom in 2017.”

Lily came to the March with extremely negative attitudes about the Poles, although she acknowledged that this was not a reflection of her having any personal experience or connection with the country, or even a great deal of education about the Holocaust as it played itself out in Poland. Instead, she attributed this to a “general attitude” that was held by her class in her Jewish high school. She said that she felt, even at the time, that her pre-trip programming did little to dissuade the students from their pre-conceived anti-Polish views. She discussed how one of the male educators was very disparaging toward the Poles, but she argued that this was understandable, as “he was being protective of the survivors who were also there.” This idea of presenting the Poles within certain morally absolute terms as a form of “protecting” the survivors who play such a large role in the program is a theme that I heard again and again throughout this research, and I think has an amount of validity to it. What’s important, however, that many of the students (Lily included) don’t necessarily understand is that the survivors themselves don’t always agree. In fact, among a number of the survivors who come regularly, there is little accord,

54 A number of Toronto-area camps whose names begin either with a “T” or a “W,” which are not Jewish per se, but include a large portion of Toronto-area Jews.
and the question of the Jewish-Polish relationship is a constant matter of debate between them. Some survivors feel more charitably towards the Polish people and nation, while others view the Poles as a people and a country with whom there should be limited (if any) interaction. Thus, there is hardly consensus that needs protecting.

After the trip, Lily described to me that the same anti-Polish sentiment was expressed regularly on her bus, which she attributed to the influence of her survivor, who was hidden in a farm throughout the war. What Lily really struggled with in this respect though, was that the survivor was extremely bitter and angry, and spent a great deal of time sharing that, yet she had in fact been saved by Poles. Lily couldn’t then, and still can’t, reconcile that contradiction.

Lily still remembers her first few days in Poland:

We were there the year that it snowed. There was literally snow everywhere, and none of us had really prepared for that. We were so, so cold. And somehow, it just seemed appropriate. In the first few days, we spent time in the Kraków area. Our guide was crazy. She was just insane. I couldn’t stand her. That’s really what I remember. I also really strongly remember the March of the Living, because it felt so satisfying. Everywhere we looked, it was just death. And here we were, a living reminder of what was almost lost. But we didn’t lose – we won. Things really changed for me when we got to Warsaw, though. We were staying at the Novotel and I looked out and I saw a billboard for Warsaw Shore [the Polish equivalent of the popular MTV show Jersey Shore]. And all of a sudden it just hit me: we weren’t that different. We weren’t different at all. I watched Jersey Shore. They watched Warsaw Shore.

This image stuck with her the entire time she was on the rest of the trip. Although many of her peers reported in their debriefing sessions and afterwards that they felt a certain amount of ‘revulsion’ towards the Poles in terms of their proximity to sites of former labour and death camps, she kept feeling torn between two different beliefs. To her, the fact that Poles lived among former death camps and other Holocaust sites did the greatest damage to the March participants’ perception of Poles. She also said that on the March of the Living, she was cognizant that “[they] never see a good side of Poland.” She attributed this to the fact that Poland at present is an inherently “negative place for Jews” and the March “doesn’t want you to see otherwise.” The entire time they were there, she said that she and her bus “never felt safe, never felt comfortable.” Apparently, her survivor told the bus that “everyone here hates you,” a
comment followed by a long silence throughout the entire bus. Years later, she questioned why her educator didn’t contradict the survivor (even when she wasn’t there) and felt that it was out of respect or potentially out of agreement. While she said that no one else ever said it, the way in which the educators and chaperones “circled the facts and created the impression” did a lot of “damage” to both her and the rest of the group. Furthermore, she felt that the trip itself created an environment where “discussions and disagreements with any challenge of [that moral absolutism] were not allowed.” While the March leadership would certainly not advocate for or agree with this, her statement speaks to the way in which the group mentality plays a role on the busses while there (explored more in Chapter six).

For Lily, the biggest takeaway from the trip was fear. She was scared to stay in Poland. She was scared to return to Canada. She was afraid to leave the tight-knit community of people who understood what she meant by that. While she acknowledges that it was likely the entire experience that played into this, she attributed the certain testimony of a survivor for really reinforcing her sense of fear. This survivor spent her entire testimony talking about how she mistrusted everyone, and how her experiences made her fearful and afraid of the world around her. Lily, three years out, looked back on that and acknowledged that “[her] fear came onto us.”

She loved her time in Israel, however. She can’t wait to go back on Birthright, and spent a good deal of time in reflection of being at the Dead Sea with her friends, and the way in which they all got “muddled up” and took tons of photos. She also said that she came back to university prepared to be a better advocate for Israel on campus (although she feels less concerned about Holocaust education).

Today Lily reflects a Jewish identity that many would regard as tangential at best, but one that works for her and for the majority of her social group. Three years out from her trip, after four years of Jewish education at the high school level, she counts the March of the Living as the “most formative” Jewish experience of her life. Having just completed second year university, her primary friend group remains people from her bus all of whom went to the same school. Even though she is cognizant that the story she has of Poland and the war is hardly the whole one, she asserted that she’s “never going back.” But in fairness, said the same thing about Germany. To her, the biggest takeaway was the way in which the Holocaust is almost a “bubble-ized [sic]” event which is part and parcel of the Jewish bubble. In first year of university, much
to her surprise she met numerous people (largely from rural areas of Ontario) who knew almost nothing about the Holocaust, nor did they care to. To her, that was scary.

While she said that she would never forget her time on the March, and recognizes how significant a role it plays in her life, activities and social group, she admitted that she would be unlikely to send her own children. This was because “30-something” years from now, when her kids are looking at going, “there won’t be any survivors – and then, what’s the point?”

### 3.3 A belief in God, rediscovered

The first time I met Mark, he was listening to music with one ear-bud in, only half-paying attention to everything around him. He had not been interacting with those around him, and I wasn’t to know this yet, but this was his classic ‘defense posture.’ Mark was less than thrilled to be on the March. Five days before, the March of the Living came up at a family Shabbat dinner, and his mother decided to push for him to go. Mark fought it, saying it was a waste of money. But, his mother pushed so hard he decided to cave and two days before the first seminar he was accepted. So here he was, at yet another Jewish event that he didn’t want to be at, surrounded by people he actively disliked, and a community he felt little to no affinity with. Thus, the ear-bud would stay in, and he would stay half tuned-out.

Mark came from a family who were actively engaged in the Toronto Jewish community. He was the youngest of three children in the family, all of whom remained involved. His family wanted him to stay engaged Jewishly, but Mark was turned off by the Jewish community. When he was at Jewish day school at elementary level he experienced such bullying that he not only left the school, he refused to have a Bar Mitzvah. His choice to leave the private school system was personally motivated, as he strongly hated his peers and found them both obnoxious and toxic. He also resented the Jewish studies dual curriculum – he was interested in history, but “when something was forced [on him] he did the opposite.” He described day school as having a “profoundly negative effect” on his Jewish identity, because he found his peers to be difficult to get along with. For financial reasons, his parents eventually supported the decision to leave the school.
By the time he got to Grade 11, he was dating a non-Jewish girl, completely disinterested in the Jewish community, and was not part of any Jewish social networks. Mark’s mother forced the March of the Living issue on him that year because she was hoping that it would help create a positive connection with his Jewish identity and with the broader Jewish community. Her father was a survivor, and she felt it was of critical importance that Mark develop some sort of connection with the Jewish community before he left for university. So, after a few turns, Mark found himself stuck on a trip, back with the people he “hated” and struggled to get away from in the first place.

When we arrived in Poland, Mark slowly seemed to get more and more engaged with the group. While on the bus (the usual socializing place) he was often to be found staring out the window with his headphones in, I did see him start to move towards the back of the bus and actively participate in a group of kids who didn’t come from the day school world. His expectations for Poland were generally what he found – his grandfather was a survivor, had been through Poland, and he expected to see a very dark, dangerous, depressing country. After the trip, this is largely what he described, but with a few more descriptors now – the main thing he focused on was what he felt was a high rate of alcoholism among the population. Indeed, his strongest memory of Poland wasn’t any of the sites or ceremonies, it was when the participants were leaving a synagogue in Kraków and a local woman (clearly high on something) was putting on a strip-tease for the students and throwing her clothing at them from her window. To him, this became representative of a culture in which it was so dysfunctional that “substance abuse was a normal part of life.” Things started to turn around a little bit for him during the actual “March of the Living” when he and a number of other boys were running behind, and as a small group we walked together to find the rest of our bus. During that time, we had a more personal in-depth discussion of about 15-20 minutes, and I saw, for the first time, a spark in his eye and an interest in the subject at hand.

Mark really came alive in Israel. It was his first time going, and he fell in love with the country. He was so impressed with it, particularly after the experience in Poland. A year later he was still talking about the food – how at the first lunch after arrival, he had fresh oven-baked pizza that he still described as the best he had ever had. He remembered the sunshine, the swimming in the Dead Sea, the hike up Masada, and the food – first and foremost, always the food.
When he returned, he admitted that he found it difficult to return to life as normal. His best friend commented on the change, saying that he felt that Mark had “way more self-confidence” now – and Mark agreed. He did. But that wasn’t the only thing that had changed. For the first time, Mark had a positive association with the Jewish community. He had created a Jewish social network of peers, and – most shockingly to him – he had rediscovered a faith in God.

In the middle of Grade eight, I just stopped believing in God, but I do again now. Part of it was the March. When we were there, I don’t know what triggered it, but I felt that there had to be a reason for this – for the Holocaust, for Israel. When I came home, I came to the conclusion that God had set things in motion. I don’t know, it was a bit funny – Jewish day school had a profoundly negative effect on my Jewish identity, but the March was the exact opposite. Mostly because of the people. It reconnected me to the Jewish community, and made me realize that being Jewish wasn’t so bad. But it wasn’t just the fact of the social networks. I connected with the history of Judaism – it was very appealing – it generated a sense that ‘I come from here,’ allowed me to root myself in terms of ‘this is who I was before, now, who will I be?’

He is still dating the same non-Jewish girl, but says that he “thinks marriage is different” and that he’d “likely make a different choice for that.” Mark is now studying engineering at an Ontario university and has loose affiliations with the Jewish community there, attending Shabbat dinner and other Jewish cultural programming (but not strictly religious events such as synagogue services). He evidently remains grateful that all those kids he disliked went to different universities. Two years after his trip, when asked to reflect on the March of the Living, he points to it as a ‘turning point’ in his life. Despite his self-admitted tendency towards contrarianism, he says that he’s glad he went and that “[his] mom got what she wanted.” When I asked him to elaborate on that statement, he acknowledged that he has a positive connection with the Jewish community now (enough to engage on his own terms) and he has created a circle of Jewish friends from the trip that he remains in touch with. He also spent a great deal of time when he got back from the trip speaking to his survivor grandfather and pressing him for all of the details of his story, so that he can memorialize his Zeide’s experience throughout his own life. Mark believed he saw similar growth in the people on the bus he spent time talking to – primarily those who were not attending Jewish high school. He hopes to go on Birthright and return to Israel soon.
I find Mark’s story very compelling, because when I met him he was a person who was deeply alienated from the Jewish community and had no interest in any involvement with it, and came away from the March feeling very differently. Is he someone who is now attending synagogue regularly, eating kosher food, or celebrating Jewish holidays – some of the traditional markers of Jewish identity? No. That said, he feels Jewish now, which he did not feel earlier. He has a positive relationship with the community, and feels a sense of belonging and Jewish peoplehood he certainly lacked before. While his Jewish identity may not be all encompassing, one cannot say that it is nonexistent. And it’s an identity that was formed for him through the Jewish microcosm of a bus in two very different landscapes. He also believes that the trip was “more meaningful” for him because of the fact that he was not being educated in the Jewish day school system. It exposed him to the narrative of the Holocaust and Israel that he “wasn’t numb to” or “disinterested in” – things he said many of the people on his bus admitted to feeling. Because he had not been regularly “brainwashed about how important both events were,” he was able to create his own relationship to them on his own terms, when he was mature enough to understand them.

3.4 On fire with the ‘light’ of the Holocaust

Rachel’s parents were from the former Soviet Union. Once in Canada, they created a nice life for themselves, and they wanted her to have all of the things that they never had: first and foremost, a Jewish education. Rachel was less interested in that. She wanted to attend a non-Jewish private girls day school, and ultimately got her way, although she was still raised with a solid sense of Jewish history and identity. The background of oppression that her parents had lived through informed her own identity to such an extent that she admitted to viewing Jewishness as an identity of oppression and struggle (her ideas, not her words). To that end, very early on she linked her own Jewish identity with the peoples’ struggles and trying times, and as an avid student of history, latched on to the narrative of the Holocaust.

As Rachel went to a non-Jewish private school, this close affiliation and self-admitted “tendency to lecture others” led her into some interesting arguments with fellow students. One of her strongest examples she turns to again and again about what it meant to be an identified Jew in an Anglican, international school was when the class learned about the Holocaust in Grade 10
Canadian history. Within this context, the Holocaust was a mere “footnote” to the broader story of intolerance during the 1930s and 40s. Weeks were spent on the war in general, and a “paragraph in the textbook” and “half a class” were devoted to the Holocaust. Her teacher spoke about the event in terms of the “eleven million who died” and then moved on quickly. Rachel, never known to be a wallflower, immediately spoke up. She asked her teacher why they weren’t spending more time on the tragedy, why she had “minimized the role of the Jews,” and why it didn’t constitute a broader part of the curriculum. Another student also spoke up, asking why the teacher mentioned the Holocaust at all. After all, there were other genocides, and other issues. In fact, she argued, as an Armenian, she was deeply offended that the Armenian genocide at the hand of the Turks wasn’t covered at all. Rachel, in 2016, ruefully looked back at this interaction with a laugh and said that her intelligent teacher quickly moved on before the two could really get at each other’s throats. But, then she assigned class work on the broader history of genocide. Clearly, she was responding to the conflict in the class.

Rachel’s parents dictated to her that participating in the March of the Living in Grade 11 was not negotiable, not only because the private school she attended had a large Jewish population and they were thus not only aware of the trip but accommodating of the students who chose to go, but also because they wanted her to have that strong connection to Jewish history, Israel and community they sought when they tried to put her into Jewish education in the first place. Ever the committed history student, she was excited. Aside from the social opportunity and travel that the trip offered, her main interest was the chance to learn and engage with the history of the Holocaust in a Jewish setting and with a Jewish group, because “[she] would be with people who understood, and for whom [her] avid interest in the Holocaust wouldn’t create any kind of backlash.” Her excitement for intellectual and ideological homogeneity I found interesting.

Rachel approached the trip with the eyes of a student who had learned about the Holocaust in universalist terms. Not only was it taught her as a mere side-show to the broader story of the Second World War, when it finally was discussed in more depth, it was done so within the terms of other genocides. It was taught as one of many genocides, rather than as a ‘unique’ or ‘exceptional’ event. When she prepared to go to Poland, she felt a great deal of empathy for the Polish people. She described that they had been living under Nazi and Communist rule for much of the last seventy years, and that they were a people who could perhaps also understand exactly what it meant to have a history blighted by tragedy and oppression. She idealized them to a
certain extent, expressing that she thought that they would be polite, empathetic, kind, and most of all, excited to have an annual injection of the Jewish community with the March of the Living. This notion ended when she arrived in Warsaw.

Near the Novotel Centrum (the popular Warsaw hotel where many teen groups stay), there is an underpass for pedestrians to avoid the busy intersection above. When the students were being herded through there one day on the way to the old Warsaw Ghetto, she and her friends were left slack-jawed at the presence of not only a swastika spray-painted onto the brick wall of the underpass, but also a Magen David with a line through it. Her first reaction was one of hostility and fear, but also confusion – were people there not aware that the swastika, and the white-power “Aryan” message it represented, was actually anti-Pole as well? Why would anyone Polish have co-opted that message for themselves? That was the beginning of the end for Rachel’s positive understanding of the Polish people, for now she felt there to be a strong undercurrent of ignorance and antisemitism. But what she felt most, more than distrust from them, was apathy. She felt that they didn’t care about those who had come to their country to learn about its history (the Jewish population), and that they would have been happy to have been left well enough alone. As the week progressed, she began to feel extremely “uncomfortable” and “threatened” at every turn. She described the way the security guards with their jackets and bluetooth ear sets made her even more nervous, as though they were vulnerable to threats all around. She found herself viscerally hating the people, hating the country, hating the food, thinking Poland was just one of the most depressing places she had ever had cause to go to.

When in Majdanek, she and I were walking up through the camp and she told me about a story she had heard one of the other guides telling their group - that the SS were among the most evil people in the world, so much so that they were sexually aroused as a result of the pain and death that they inflicted upon their prisoners. She and I walked a little faster and eavesdropped as that same guide said that SS officers reportedly pleasured themselves in the aftermath of murder and torture. Rachel was shocked and horrified, but also, completely believed it. She and I spoke at great length about it; I tried to cast some historical doubt on the assertion. When she asked why any tour guide would say it if it wasn’t true, I told her that I felt that there were likely incidents of sadism and barbarism, but to say that it was a universal or wide-spread was untrue; however, perhaps in the attempt to emphasize the point that the SS were the epitome of evil, the tour guide had misspoken and exaggerated.
With my group that night, I brought it up and we debated the question of what was more terrifying: a large army unit universally sexually excited by violence, who were therefore driven to commit terrible acts, or the same army unit who committed evil and violent acts for a wide range of banal reasons and poor choices. That night Rachel shared with me that she just wanted to leave Poland already (which was a good thing for her, as we were) but also that she felt that the Poland section of the trip should be minimized to only two to three days. When I asked why, she said that it was better for the March to condense as much of the learning as possible during the pre-trip seminars, and spend only a few days in Poland seeing all the major sites and then “getting on the plane and getting out of there as quickly as possible.” She said that the country was too dangerous, too threatening, that she felt miserable and unsafe the entire time she was there, and moreover, she felt uncomfortable contributing to their economy for so long. “It’s not right. We should only stay for a few days, make as little of a mark as possible, and then go to Israel and spend more time there.” When the plane finally took off out of Warsaw, years later, she still remembers the sigh of relief that she breathed.

For Rachel, her first time in Israel she described as “like coming home.” She was full. She was happy. Moreover, she felt safe. When she speaks about her time in Israel two years later, she is primarily focused on the social experience that the time there engendered. She had a wonderful time with her friends, ate wonderful food, attended social events with hundreds of others her age, and got to float in the Dead Sea. When pressed, she acknowledged that the Israel trip was lacking on the educational front, but felt that it was a nice way to “unwind” after a week in Poland. She came to feel very strongly about Israel, marking it as the sole bulwark against the recurrence of another Holocaust. She plans to go back on Birthright when she can.

When Rachel returned home, she described herself as being “on fire with the light of the Holocaust,” which is certainly a unique descriptor. She apparently took up the Jewish mantel and the Holocaust one so much so that she developed a reputation for it at her school. She acknowledged that she thought that Jewish history generally and the Holocaust specifically were the “most important thing to study.” She ran a Holocaust Education Week event at her school, and ended up writing numerous term papers on the subject.

In first year of university now, she has apparently “mellowed” and is once again cognizant of the “Holocaust as being one event in many.” That said, she has a renewed and strong connection
with the Toronto Jewish community. She chose Western University for her postsecondary studies largely as a result of the fact that it has one of the largest Jewish communities. She was recently elected to a leadership position at the campus Hillel (Jewish organization). This campus Jewish organization is one a vast number of communities and groups that are offered to students at different points of engagement. She is minoring in Jewish history, expressly against the wishes of her parents. She came back from the March wishing to study Jewish history exclusively, but her financially-oriented family wished her to get a business degree – so, she is. But, history has remained a priority for her, and in her post-March world, she is still almost exclusively focused on the Jewish narrative of the past. She also firmly believes in only dating Jews and being an active member of the Jewish community - both things that she attributes to her experience. Most of all, however, she created a social network of engaged Jewish friends, and they collectively go to Chabad and Hillel dinners together (followed by nights out at the bar). Rachel, like Mark, has a non-traditional Jewish identity, but it is one that is increasingly common among Jewish youth.

3.5 Discussion

These four students were chosen because their stories and their experiences, before, during and after the trip, highlighted themes that are exhibited throughout this dissertation, particularly when controlled for pre-existing Jewish education.

Robert Hart, who had been educated in the Jewish day school system his entire life, entered the program with substantially “more” than those in other research groups: more education about the topics at hand, more pre-existing social networks, more ingrained perceptions and attitudes about Poland and Israel, more of a defined Jewish identity for himself. His exhibited tendency towards “inherited memory” from other participants and family members was one of the strongest I saw, a phenomenon seen much more strongly in those in Research Groups A and B, who for the most part usually have a stronger social and cultural connection with the Toronto Jewish community. He also left with less. Perhaps because of this inherited memory, of these pre-trip opinions, of his experiences in Israel prior to the trip, the March served more to reinforce his attitudes and behaviours as opposed to fundamentally impact them.

Lily Cole, who entered Jewish education in high school (Group B), was influenced by many of her Group A friends. She came in with a certain set of pre-existing negative attitudes. But, like
many with less Jewish education, whose pre-trip perspectives were less entrenched than those commonly seen across Group A, she developed a more nuanced perspective. Further, after the trip, both she and Mark Himmel developed a similar form of Jewish identity – one that is entirely based on social relationships, and a cultural understanding of Jewish practice, in part utilizing the social networks created on the trip. Mark and Rachel’s stories both indicated the way in which the less Jewish education the student has before the trip left room for substantially more changes in attitudes or practice. Mark entered the program with a very negative connection with the Toronto Jewish community, and came out with a Jewish social network, a changed attitude, and a renewed belief in God. Rachel picked up the banner of the Holocaust in her non-Jewish private school, going on to take important leadership positions at that school and at Western afterwards, becoming a representative of the Jewish community. In this though, Rachel bucked the trend common among groups B, C and D, who have a tendency to support the Jewish community “in spirit” on campus and after the trip as opposed to taking on active involvement. She too indicates the way in which even those with a nuanced and broader understanding of the Holocaust are influenced both by the pedagogy on the trip and the attitudes of those who were educated solely in the Jewish system, leaving with a far stronger particularist attitude about the Holocaust and negative understanding of Polish people than the more universal and sympathetic views she had coming in.

The four students displayed here serve to reflect trends in the different pre-trip attitudes and post-trip outcomes particular to their research groups, and thus serve as an apt introduction to the following three data chapters.
We were sitting in a room at Queen’s University in 2015 for that year’s March of the Living chaperone training weekend. Two of the heads of the program were up at the front discussing the tendency towards anti-Polish sentiment that exists in the Jewish community, and trying to present the group with the realities of history. They reminded the chaperones that the Poles had the greatest number of Righteous among the Nations (non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews) despite the fact that the conditions and Nazi penalties were far graver. They explained that the Polish had no semblance of government structure and that they too were victims of the Nazis. That it was fundamentally inappropriate to hold the Poles responsible for what happened during the war. They argued that there is a fundamental difference between perpetrator and bystander; yes, they said, we want to teach our participants to be “upstanders” instead, but you cannot paint the entire Polish population with the brush of perpetrators themselves. They went on to talk about the Polish country’s political support of Israel, and how that was also a significant fact in contemporary Polish-Jewish relations. In short, the message was clear: if you are going as chaperones on a trip that’s set in Poland, you need to be prepared to remind your students that the Poles were not the ones who built the camps or put the Jewish population to death there.

I was satisfied with that position. Many of those around me were not. I watched a number of the survivors on the other side of the room grow steadily more frustrated and angry. As we left the room for the night, we moved into the hallway and started socializing in small groups. The first words I heard from the group I joined was how ‘inappropriate’ the previous session had been. When I asked why, many said that it had to do with the fact that it had made a number of the survivors angry and therefore it shouldn’t have been said – or at least it shouldn’t have been said in front of them. People discussed how you could see at least one of them, a woman by the name

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55 To a certain extent, an emic term which describes those who focus on defending the downtrodden or bullied; created in response to the traditional categorization of peoples in Europe into perpetrator/ victim/ and bystander (upstander is the last’s antonym).
of Eleanor, getting extremely angry. As we discussed further, however, it became clear that at least two of group, Yoni and Ilene, also fundamentally disagreed with what the heads of the program had said. They talked about how their families had come from Poland, and how they knew all about how the Poles had treated the Jews during the war, and to frame it as any other way was whitewashing that history. As I listened, I struggled (but succeeded) in keeping quiet, but I kept returning internally to that useful adage I frequently employ in my classroom: you are entitled to your own opinion, but not your own facts.

That being said, I can’t pretend that there isn’t truth in what these chaperones said. Their parents were from Poland. Those parents likely did experience a great deal of antisemitism before, during and after the war. I would never presume to question their memories or their feelings. But, nothing in history is black and white. And, human nature being what it is, it is more comfortable for some to view this history through morally absolute, black and white terms, and when presented with a different lens through which to view the same history, the automatic reaction tended to be a ‘digging in of heels.’

There we were in a room, being educated in preparation for our responsibility as facilitators for teenagers on their trip to Poland and Israel, ostensibly to learn about the history of the Holocaust. We were also there as adults positioned to help participants shape their Jewish identities in relation to the Holocaust and the creation of a Jewish state in Israel. The operative word here was facilitator – we were not the educators, we were there to help them understand the information and experiences that they were being presented with while there. But in this role, clearly we would have a lot of influence. And already, it was clear that with at least a number of us were rejecting this information we had received on Poles and the Holocaust almost out of hand. I spent a lot of that weekend with my mouth firmly shut. If those in charge couldn’t convince some of the people there to treat the history with the complex and nuanced eye that was needed, I certainly wasn’t going to try.

This tension is one of the fundamental issues inherent in the trip that this chapter seeks to address. The program leadership, at least on an official level, does not endorse the monolithic narrative of the Holocaust in which the Poles as a whole were willing participants or contented bystanders. The leaders ostensibly do not endorse anti-Polish sentiment, particularly towards modern-day Poles. They went out of their way to address the chaperones, charged with
supervision and engagement with the participants on a personal level, about how complex this history really is. The National Chair also gave a lecture directly refuting the notion of Polish complicity in the Holocaust in one of the pre-trip seminars. Despite that, it largely fell on deaf ears from what I could tell from conversations then – and now.

There exists a certain strongly held set of attitudes and understandings about Poland by many in the Toronto Jewish community that pre-existed the trip. These ideas are not only found among the survivors, their children or their grandchildren; they are present in books and the media (as elaborated upon below) that inform the attitudes of their teachers and their chaperones. They are reinforced by uncomfortable truths about the historic Polish-Jewish relationship. Thus, when the participants learn about the history of the Jewish community in Poland, before, during and after the war, often it is through a lens of pre-conditioned sentiment.

The implications of this are clear. The value of informal education is found in students’ understandings of the history and the meanings that they ascribe to it. The question about pre-ingrained attitudes was of critical importance to this dissertation as, I believe, it is at the crux of the issues present on the trip. According to Ellsworth (2005), what counts as educational exists “only in our responses to it” (p. 23). The students are intrinsically shaping their own educational experiences and their own understanding of the pedagogical choices employed by the program based on attitudes they carry coming into the program. Those attitudes are reinforced by a pre-trip educational programming that, while ostensibly focused on the history of the Holocaust and Israel, is more grounded in personalizing the Holocaust as an integral part of both Jewish history and modern Jewish identity, and providing an emotional framework through which to interpret the event.

If we take Malcolm Forbes’ assertion that the goal of education is to enable the shift from an ‘empty’ mind to an open one, the March of the Living, as an educational program, often does not have the benefit of the latter. These students attend the program with an empty mind – in so far as many do not have a real historical understanding of the Holocaust beyond basic details – but certainly not with an open one. The educational implications of this are of critical importance to understanding the way in which students internalize the messaging of the trip. This chapter, thus, will focus on these pre-trip assumptions and education about the Holocaust that inform the students’ understandings of the events (and the way in which different educational and
demographic backgrounds shape participant attitudes) and people involved long before they even make the decision to apply to the trip.

4.1 Literature Review: Jewish-Polish Relations

“He who controls the past controls the future, he who controls the present controls the past.” - George Orwell

There is a wealth of books written about the concurrent and divergent histories of the Jewish and Polish peoples, as well as each group’s relationship with their own past. In order to understanding the pedagogical choices being made on the trip, the students’ reaction to their surroundings, the messages they internalized, and the way in which they felt about the Poles and Polish history in the aftermath – and vice versa – it was critical to develop a deeper understanding of each group’s understanding of their relationship with their own history and that of the other. As a result, the first set of literature I approached was analyses of both the histories and narratives of both groups. Except where otherwise noted, all of the books below have an underlying common theme that is critical to this dissertation: all indicate the ways in which both the Polish and Jewish narratives have become politicized in the modern period. Furthermore, they’re representative of books that have been released to the general public (as many are mass paperback release books, instead of strictly academic publications), many of which greatly inform the ‘history as political battleground’ idea among non-academic members of the Toronto Jewish community. Many in the Jewish community (particularly the parents, chaperones and educators of the participants, less so the participants themselves, in part because of age) have read these books (and others), many of which present the Polish-Jewish relationship in a very negative light. This isn’t just true necessarily of the texts written by Jews or Jewish-sympathetic historians who are presenting an analysis of Polish complicity or apathy in the face of the Nazis; some of the ways in which Polish historians assert their common suffering, equal victimhood, and grudging assessment that the Jews and the West collectively decry Poland to be inherently antisemitic are also summoned to prove this perspective. The modern-day political situation in Poland has also underpinned the latent belief in the deep-seated antisemitism that is held by many in the Toronto Jewish community. With the recent election of the right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), the dichotomy of Poland as innocent victim versus Poland as active
participants/beneficiaries of the Nazi Holocaust has become extremely political. These unfortunate truths have only served to reinforce the North American Jewish anger usually directed at Poland. Thus, the books contribute to the preconceptions many of the stakeholders of the March of the Living bring into the program with them, including chaperones, educators and survivors. Within the microcosm of the bus, these ideas all coalesce, and when juxtaposed against the backdrop of Poland, turn elements of this unfortunate history into a lived experience that students then contemporaneously respond to.

Undoubtedly the most significant book I read for this research was *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* by Michael Steinlauf (1997). This seminal text explores the changing nature of Polish interpretation of the World War II period over the remainder of the twentieth century, as well as the political rationale behind the changed understandings. Initially going into their relationship prior to and during the Second World War, the book is divided into five periods – 1944-1948 (memory’s wounds), 1948-1968 (memory repressed), 1968-1970 (memory expelled), 1970-1989 (memory reconstructed) and 1989-1995 (memory regained?). Steinlauf is a professor at Gratz College in Pennsylvania, with most of his research focuses on Jewish culture in Poland. He’s been a historical adviser to both the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington and POLIN in Warsaw. Its most important relevance to my research was its assessment of the way in which the past remains alive and political in Poland, given how much both Polish and Jewish narratives of the war inform their modern day perspectives. For the Polish people, according to Steinlauf, the careful curating of this history began in the immediate postwar period by the Soviet-controlled government. As this book demonstrated, understanding the Polish perspective of the Holocaust and their role in it is impossible without viewing it through the lens of Soviet manipulation. As Steinlauf notes, getting the Poles on side would have been impossible for the Gomulka regime (and successive governments) without tapping into the pre-Soviet Polish priority of looking to the past to legitimate the present.

The development of modern Polish national identity had been rooted in claims to the past in the name of the present; no government professing to represent the Polish people could

56 The museum of Polish-Jewish heritage and history.
avoid this task, and especially in relation to the war years. To discover meaning in the unprecedented suffering of that period would have weighed on the imagination of any nation, all the more so one that had chosen to define itself through a narrative of exemplary self-sacrifice. The many-sided development, in a host of contexts and mediums, of an acceptable narrative of the war years, was a process crucial to the efforts of postwar Polish governments to legitimate themselves to their subjects (Steinlauf 1997, p. 68).

This history is so significant to this research because many in the Jewish community repeat the maxim that Germany was responsible for the Holocaust but has lived up to its past and therefore, can be approached. However, because the Poles have continually refused to acknowledge their role during the war years, active distrust or hostility towards them is permissible. However, it would appear that immediately in the postwar period, the complexities of the wartime experience – considering that Polish actions towards the Jews ran the gamut from active persecution to righteous aid, with the vast majority somewhere in the middle – was carefully curated by the government and educational system. The Soviet governments may have adopted this policy for political expediency, but this shaping also fed into a latent tendency towards national victimization and self-aggrandizing that existed in Poland long before the Nazis crossed the border. The Polish romantic poets, as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, often looked to the motif of Poland as the Jesus Christ of nations, the constantly subjugated and eternally innocent country – an idea which found fertile soil in a deeply nationalist and religious Poland. Thus, while the Soviets were responsible for the abdication of responsibility for the vanished millions, many of the Polish people who lived through the war were certainly ready and willing to buy into that narrative.

It should be mentioned that the depth of knowledge presented in Bondage to the Dead was necessarily complemented with a comprehensive overview of Poland under Soviet rule: Anthony Kemp-Welch’s Poland under Communism: A Cold War History. This text provided me with a broad perspective of Poland under Communist rule, not merely its history in relation to the Jews. It traces Polish history from the Second World War to the collapse of the USSR, going in-depth into such periods as Stalinization, de-Stalinization, and the 1968 political crisis, as well as Polish responses to the way in which top-down Soviet policy was enacted on Polish soil. Through reading it, Bondage to the Dead’s important messages were given more clarity.
The Steinlauf book also provided me with an overview of the non-political aspects that went into systemic forgetting. He notes that the Polish response to Jewish claims to the Holocaust is three-fold. “First, there is the conviction that ‘we did our best to help them’; then the retort ‘didn’t we suffer as well?’; and finally the bitter lesson, recalling Zofia Kossak: ‘no matter what we do, they hate us” (1997, p. 135). The book seeks to address the reasons behind these successive reactions. The fear of reprisals, retribution, or reclamation of property plays a deep role in shaping the psyche of the modern Pole wrestling with history. Adding to this is the reality of economic benefit the average Pole received as a result of the vanished Jewish population. Last is the uncomfortable truth of deep antisemitism that existed in the country prior to and during the war, as well as the strange reality of continued antisemitism in a country almost devoid of a Jewish population.

Another author provided me with an important framework within which to understand the Polish-Jewish relationship in the twentieth century: Jan T. Gross. Two of his important works, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland (2001) and Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz (2004) are seminal texts necessary to understanding the competing narratives and histories. Interestingly, they are important not only on the basis of the scholarship they provide, but also the way in which he and his academic work have become a lightning rod for criticism in modern-day Poland.

Gross, born to a Jewish father and Christian mother in post-war Poland, was an intellectual dissident at the University of Warsaw who was expelled and jailed in the 1968 political crisis. As a result of this, he and his parents emigrated from Poland in 1969. His works are certainly provocative (perhaps intentionally so) and thus have attracted a great deal of press. Neighbors was arguably the most so, as it challenged the held-fast narrative of Poles as victims (and solely that) during the war.

Gross assessed the story of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland (northeast, taken over by the Soviets from 1939-1941 and the Nazis as of 1941), a story that was known in select circles but certainly not on a wide scale. In 2001, when the book was released, a memorial stood in the town marking the “site of the suffering of the Jewish population; the Gestapo and the Nazi gendarmerie burned 1600 people alive 10 July 1941.”
Gross challenged this willful misreading of history by revealing that it was not in fact the Germans who were the primary perpetrators of this massacre; it was an act of Polish-led violence that enabled the seizure of Jewish property. He contended that the locals needed little encouragement from the Nazis. They were already pre-programmed by traditional Catholic antisemitism, the perception that the Jews were lackeys of the Soviets and had participated in the Soviet subjugation of the ethnic Poles in the preceding two years. The acceptance of anti-Jewish violence afforded an opportunity for economic gain in a poverty-stricken period. The attackers, according to Gross, acted not under duress by the Nazis, but willfully seized their opportunity in the vacuum of power created by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. While certainly influenced by the Germans and by a similar pogrom in a nearby town, the horrific brutality and actual murder of local Jews was the providence of the Poles.

Immediately there was a systematic cover-up, and the imposition of silence enforced in the post-war period. Nevertheless, the story did come out and some of the participants were tried and jailed by the Communist government – although it should be said that many were jailed as a result of coerced confessions. After the prosecution, this incident faded from memory outside of the area, but certainly lived on in Jedwabne itself. One woman, Antonina Wyrzykowski, provided shelter for seven Jews from the area for over two years, and was ostracized by her townsfolk so much that she was forced to leave the area after liberation. She remained demonized by Polish compatriots in the United States (Polonsky and Michlic, 2004, p. 183). In fact, more recently there was an effort to rename the school in Jedwabne after her, which caused a great deal of controversy and was eventually shot down (p. 183).

The release of Neighbors created an acrimonious debate in Poland about issues in the monolithic narrative of the war and the history of the Jewish-Polish relationship. As previously the dominant culture did not allow for a public reckoning of less-favourable aspects of history, the contents were a shocking revelation for many of its readers. While many in the Jewish community accuse the Poles of a refusal to acknowledge responsibility for the past – considering the debate didn’t truly start until the end of the twentieth century – it likely wasn’t possible before the collapse of Soviet power remade the political climate. Neighbors, with both its positives and negatives, has been regarded as the ‘bombshell’ needed to begin a necessary reckoning with, and reclamation of, a challenging period of history.
The publication was also the catalyst for the creation of a forensic investigation of the Jedwabne massacre by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). It concluded that Gross’ report of Polish complicity was accurate, although his number of 1,600 murdered was not. They concluded that roughly 300 Jews perished in the barn that was torched by Jedwabne residents, although other authors have put the number closer to 900. The exact number remains unknown today.

After Neighbors, Gross published a second book, Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz (2004) which accused Poles of continued violence towards a dwindling Jewish population. Once again, arguably written to provoke, it met with much criticism in Poland. Its basic argument was that the Poles, for various complex reasons, are inherently antisemitic and fundamentally approved of the German Final Solution – as it rid them of a problematic and increasingly distained population. Its primary example of this was the 1946 Kielce pogrom. The book also goes into considerable detail regarding economic appropriation as motivation for anti-Jewish violence.

The image of Polish people found in both of these books plays further into the perception amongst many in the Jewish community that the Poles bear equal responsibility with the Nazis for the calamity that befell European Judaism during the war. The impact of these books in even non-academic circles has propagated this understanding through many in the Toronto Jewish community. In the interviews with many of the adult chaperones on the trip, they cited the Gross texts that they had read as evidence of a basis/ justification of their hostility towards the Polish people. However, it’s not just Gross’ work that reinforces this – it’s also the reaction to his work in Poland that has been causing headlines on internet-based news sources that propagate social media, and even in Toronto newspapers and magazines.57 This, an example of the so-called

‘bubble-effect’\footnote{Where social media filters news so that it mostly presents you with news you would want to see; additionally the reality of self-selection of social networks who usually believe in similar things.} that is the reality of people who get the majority of their news from social media sources, is another example of confirmation bias embraced by many of the participants – teenage and adult – who go on the trip.

Under the contemporary nationalist Polish government, Gross’ combined works have met with intense criticism. In fact, in many ways he has become a symbol of the so-called ‘Western’ or ‘Jewish’ attack on Polish moral absolutism that the PiS party seems quite intent on glorifying. Therefore, attacking Gross is seen as a method of reclaiming the previously acceptable and morally comfortable Polish narrative of the war. In recent years, Gross has come under a severe level of criticism in Poland, his findings being degraded and ignored for political expediency. A recent comment he made, that “Poles killed more Jews than Germans”\footnote{Welche Schuld könnte die Polen treffen? Die Welt, 14 September 2015.} prompted another firestorm. The grammatical difficulties of this statement led some to believe that he was asserting that Poles were more responsible for the Holocaust than the Nazis; however, he was actually arguing that the Poles killed more Jewish civilians during the war years than they did German military. The math of this appears to be correct, as somewhere between 20-30,000 Germans were killed by Poles in various actions, versus roughly 150,000 Jews who we can conclude were killed in the same period.\footnote{Germans: roughly 13,000 were killed in the 1939 invasion, another 4,000 during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, and 6,000 in ‘other’ actions, likely by partisans. For the Jews, in 1942/1943 roughly 200,000 Jews had escaped the various German aktions and were hiding in the countryside or in Polish houses – by liberation there were only about 50,000. Given the very light presence of the German army in Poland during this period, the conclusion can be logically drawn that Poles were primarily responsible for the death of the remaining 150,000 people. Piotr Wróbel, meeting, 25 October 2016.} In response to this, on 15 October 2015, the Polish government initiated a libel suit against Gross for the offence of “publicly insulting the Polish nation” – conviction for which carries a three-year sentence in jail. While this was elaborated on extensively in Chapter One, it should be further noted that the publicity surrounding the libel suit is indicative of the very raw wounds that still fester in contemporary Poland.
There are two more books that were written in response to Gross that need to be examined – *The Neighbors Respond*, edited by Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (2004) and *The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne* by Anna Bikont (2004). Both offer significantly more context than *Neighbors*, as well as primary sources documenting not only the initial reporting of the events but also the moral and religious debates that take place in Poland today. The way in which both books assessed the Polish responses to the release of *Neighbors* was fundamental to my dissertation, as it allowed me an inside look into the social ripples left in the book’s aftermath. The primary difference between them was that *The Neighbors Respond* charted in academic - as opposed to journalistic - tones the context and outcomes of the Jedwabne massacre, including far more primary sources and historical grounding.

There were significant findings that both books detailed. First and foremost, the ‘poor’ reactions of locals of Jedwabne and its environs who were all of a sudden thrust into the limelight and made a national example of anti-Jewish violence that happened in varying degrees and locales throughout the war. Immediately many people, particularly the Luadanski family, came forward to defend their reputations. The Catholic Church, a dominant force in Polish society, was loathe to sit on the sidelines of the national debate. Some of its adherents – like the Bishop of Lomza, Stanislaw Stefanek and the chief Primate, Cardinal Glemp – were responsible for some inflammatory comments. Stefanek in March of 2011 asserted at a public speech in Jedwabne that the story of the pogrom was just another example of Jewish economic exploitation of the Poles. According to Stefanek:

> over a year ago my friends in Warsaw, in discreet conversation, with lowered voices, told me: there will be a great attack on Jedwabne, it is about money … [there] is also a new way of profiting from war, from harm. There is an expression now in the United States: Shoah business. … the best business is made now on the blood of the innocently murdered Jews (Gebert, 2008, p. 116).

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61 Named by both books (and the historical record) as being some of the biggest ringleaders of the massacre.
The hideousness of this statement hardly needs unpacking. Cardinal Glemp was also quite vicious. He claimed that to acknowledge the suffering of the Jews at the hand of the Poles, one must also acknowledge that Jews were instrumental in the Soviet government and the UB\textsuperscript{62} which inflicted so much suffering on the Poles. He also described Jews as clever people who “knew how to take advantage of Poles” (Polonsky and Michlic, 2004, p. 167). By invoking both the popular motifs of equating Judaism and Communism and the Jewish economic superiority and manipulation of the Poles, Stefanek and Glemp publicly represented antisemitic tropes. Furthermore, the immediate reaction of Catholic representatives of the area was to deflect any blame by projecting guilt back onto the Jewish community in question – which effectively amounts to them justifying mass murder. Another priest, Father Henryk Jankowski reacted in a similarly inflammatory way around Easter in 2001, when his church created a replica of the charred barn in Jedwabne that included slogans of “Jews killed Jesus, the prophets, and persecuted us” as well as “Poles save Poland” (Polonsky and Michlic, 2004, p. 116, footnote).

What was very effective about the Polonsky & Michlic and Bikont texts were the sheer level of research and documentation, which I would imagine would have quelled those who said that Neighbors was inadequately researched (likely as they disagreed with his findings). This knee-jerk reaction by some of the significant members of the Church are so significant to acknowledge because they made headlines and books – the same media attention that many in the Jewish community point to in order to prove systemic antisemitism and hatred that existed during the war and remains today. Both books, in very different styles, showed the way in which the reverberations of the book’s release were felt during the period of the following few years.

Conversely, there are a number of significant texts that explore the Polish-Jewish relationship from a primarily Jewish perspective. The four that I drew from most often are Ezra Mendelsohn’s Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars, Antony Polonsky’s The Jews in Poland and Russia: A Short Story, and Emanuel Ringelblum’s Polish Jewish Relations during the Second World War, and Konstanty Gebert’s Living in the Land of Ashes.

\textsuperscript{62} Postwar secret police.
Together, the Polonsky, Mendelssohn and Ringelblum texts provided me with a firm basis from which to understand the Jewish community of the interwar and wartime period, important in light of the fact that the pre-war Jewish status is something that is frequently invoked (in a negative light) by many participants on the trip. Mendelssohn was a well-researched source that provided demographic data of the different cultural and religious communities in the interwar period juxtaposed against the changing Polish politics. More important was Ringelblum’s primary-source work, *Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War*. Ringelblum was an important prewar Jewish historian from Warsaw, and during was the ringleader of the *Oneg Shabbos* archival collection on life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Although he was murdered in the last year of the war, his work provides one of the fundamental portraits of the Jewish-Polish experience.

Ringelblum approaches the question of Polish (in)action towards the calamity that befell the Jewish community with an impressively nuanced understanding of the Polish position. He goes to great length to categorize the wide range of various Polish reactions, all the way from active participation in the crimes to courageous defense of those being persecuted. In fact, although throughout much of the book he is critical of the deep-seated antisemitism of the Polish community in the interwar and wartime periods, he begins the book by writing of his indebtedness to Poles who saved his life twice over, once in 1940 and again in 1944 (Ringelblum, 1944, p. 1). There is also a famous quote from the book that is oft-repeated in secondary source books on the Holocaust, including in the March of the Living and TJPS curricula on the Holocaust. He writes that:

The Polish people and the Government of the Republic of Poland were incapable of deflecting the Nazi steam-roller from its anti-Jewish course. But the question is permissible whether the attitude of the Polish people befitted the enormity of the calamities that befell the country’s citizens. Was it inevitable that the Jews, looking there last on this world as they rode in the death trains speeding from different parts of the country to Treblinka or other places of slaughter, should have had to witness indifference or even joy on the faces of their neighbors? In the summer of 1942, when carts packed with captive Jewish men, women and children moved through the streets of the capital, did there really need to be laughter from the wild mobs resounding from the other side of the ghetto walls, did there really have to prevail
such blank indifference in the face of the greatest tragedy of all time? (Ringelblum, 1944, p. 7-8)

The frequency with which this quote is repeated is highly significant because it paints a very nuanced and yet condemning picture of what he perceived as the normative Polish reaction in the face of the Holocaust. It is a quote that the participants on the trip are exposed to not only in the pre-trip curriculum, but also likely at school (for those who attend a Jewish day school). Within the TJPS curriculum, it is certainly used in many of the Holocaust classes. The image that this passage invokes: that far from bystanders, the Polish population was pleased that the Nazis were ridding them of troublesome and disliked Jews, is one that almost all of the participants and chaperones I interviewed on the trip espoused.

There are an additional two texts that deal with a matter that complicates the question at hand: the actions of some Poles who denounced and murdered Jews in German-occupied Poland. The first is Jan Grabowski’s 2013 book Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland. The second is Barbara Engelking’s text “Murdering and Denouncing Jews in the Polish countryside, 1942-1945.” Grabowski uses the geographical area of Dąbrowa Tarnowska to tell the story of the Judenjagd, and the concerted effort of the Germans gendarme to track down and murder Jews in hiding in rural areas (with occasional help from local Poles). This work extensively covers the area and tells the story of the Holocaust from a very different angle, using extensive archival work from post-war trials and testimonies. Here he differentiates between the two geographical situations of Jews in Poland, and how that shaped their fate. He argues that the urban Jew was cut off early in the war from Polish sight and universe of responsibility, and when they were inevitably rounded up and deported, they had so long been apart from Polish life that it mattered little (2013, p. 5). Despite this, it was in many ways easier to survive in hiding on the Aryan side of a city, because of the anonymity of city life. Rural Jews, on the other hand, often lived in areas where German restrictions were not as

63 Which used to be in Grade 12 - and therefore after the trip - but were recently moved to Grade 11, the year the students participate.

64 German: Hunt for the Jews.
enforced (2013, p. 5) and maintained stronger ties to ethnic Poles throughout the early years of the war. Despite these pre- and early-war connections, Grabowski demonstrates that “many peasants, seduced by modest prizes and inducements offered by the Germans, became actively involved in hunting down the Jews” (2013, p. 7). Grabowski also discusses the Polish “blue” police and the way in which they were a fundamental part of the chain, often participating in the *Judenjagd*, with deadly ramifications. The tight-knit bonds of country life may have worked against them in the end, because they were known to their neighbours and it was harder to hide.

Engelking (2011) also analyzes the phenomenon of Jews in the Polish countryside seeking refuge and aid, requests that were usually refused. While she acknowledges that this refusal was often the result of fear (completely justifiable to feel in the face of Nazi retribution), there are incidents of Polish denunciations to the Nazis or outright murder of those who had sought help. She argued that fear was not the primary motivator of these actions, but instead that greed (for financial incentive, personal ingrati ation or for Jewish property) played the biggest role (p. 444). These occurrences play a large role in why Poland particularly engenders so much anger and vitriol on behalf of the Jewish community. Engelking argues that the act of refusing help or denunci ating the seekers had significant psychological impact on the Jews wandering in the countryside looking for aid.

Did the Jews care about those who denounced them? Since they were going to die anyway, did it really matter if they had been captured by the Germans, or if Poles took them to the Germans? I am convinced it made a great difference. For it does matter if it is a neighbor, somebody familiar, who denounces – and all the Poles were “familiar” to the Jews – in contrast to a person who kills but is somebody alien, distant and unfamiliar, as were the Germans. Being denounced by a “familiar” person increases disappointment with people, intensifies loneliness [and humiliation] and makes death more difficult (p. 439).

Grabowski includes testimony of a man that accurately sums up the complications and ways Jews regard Poland and Poles as a result of this phenomenon:

My survival was dependent on the absence of hostile behavior of Poles who hated Jews. Poland is my motherland, Polish is my native language. Poles helped me to survive the Holocaust. I remember gratefully the few who were my protectors. I resent the many that
harmed countless Jews, and the millions who were eager to do so. The trouble was not lack of friends, but the multitude of enemies. The denunciations of the Jews who were hiding or were on false papers were not a sporadic activity, but an endemic problem. Virtually all Poles resisted, actively or passively, the German occupation. However, the majority of the Polish population assisted the Germans in their efforts to annihilate the Jews. We should not expect ordinary, decent people to take heroic action. There is no moral obligation to be a hero, but it is a criminal offense to be an accessory to murder. Whoever denounced a Jew on false papers was a cowardly killer. The death of my cousin Miriam was a joint project of Poles and Germans."

Although, as he acknowledges, this is hardly a scientific analysis that can be applied to the Holocaust as a whole, it sums up the ways in which many Jews feel about Poland. This perspective of Poles as people whom aided the Germans, when the expectation of them had been far different, greatly informs modern Jewish understandings of the country.

From a survey about Polish-Jewish history perspective, an important book I read was Polonsky’s ironically-titled ‘short’ history of the Jews in Poland and Russia (although it was certainly a condensed and amalgamated version of previous texts). Regardless, as it is over 600 pages, short doesn’t exactly seem the apt term. This book covers the span of the Jewish-Polish experience, providing a comprehensive overview of Jewish life within the Polish (and Russian, although for my purposes I do not reference that here) social, religious, political and economic milieu. The context Polonsky provides is significant in explaining the violence of the World War Two period and after, indicating that in many ways the beginning of the end of Polish Jewry began long before Hitler invaded in 1939.

The final book that provides fundamental context is Konstanty Gebert’s Living in the Land of Ashes, which is a modern-day reflection on the life of a Jew in a land almost devoid of a Jewish population but full of evidence of a vibrant Jewish past. The Gebert text was important not only because it provided an interesting and different perspective on the modern-day Jewish-Polish relationship, but also because it was a window into a different form of Diaspora-Israeli relations.
The book begins with Gebert’s meeting with some kibbutzniks\textsuperscript{65} who stare at him with rank disbelief that he “lived in a graveyard” (Gebert 2008, p. 1). This is a motif that I hear constantly not only from Israelis but also from participants on the program: they can’t understand why anyone would choose to live in Poland, let alone Jews. They see Poland almost exclusively through the lens of the Second World War and the vanished Jewish population. For Israelis, for whom the binary of Diaspora v. Israel is a part of the national ethos, this is potentially even more antithetical. For the small Jewish community that has chosen to stay in Poland, the challenges are many – not least of all because of the reactions of other Jews. This book goes into considerable detail about continued Jewish-Polish relations and the peculiar dynamics of life there in the modern period – the poor numbers of people who report self-identification as Jewish on national censuses and in Jewish organizations, a reflection of a post-war apprehension of attaching oneself to the community on the public record; the continued fights over ownership of the wartime experience; the way in which the Jewish community outside of Poland regards the land as representative of Jewish death and therefore often fails to understand those who have chosen to lead a Jewish life there. Gebert’s reflections of the particular complications of Jewish life in modern-day Poland are significant considering that the March of the Living devotes time to exploring both the vibrancy of pre-war Jewish life and the postwar Polish political support for Israel, positive elements of the relationship that bookend the Holocaust, and yet few students report internalizing this message in any way.

Considering that this dissertation is focused on an educational experience, it is perhaps odd that such a thorough explanation of the histories of both communities consumes so much time and paper. However, the fact that it does is indicative of how important history is to both Jews and Poles. The March of the Living is a trip that brings Jewish students to Poland to walk the same land where their forebears lived and died (emphasis usually on the latter), where they can listen to survivors and become living embodiments of the Jewish past, claiming a narrative and an experience as their own. In doing so, they return to a country that has a thorny history of its own vis-à-vis its formerly large Jewish population, and that has a complicated popular narrative that necessitates history being shaped to focus on acts of Polish heroism in the face of the Nazis and negating historical incidents that contradict that image. For both groups, history forms such a

\textsuperscript{65} Those who lived on a Kibbutz, a socialist communal farm in Israel.
significant part of their modern-day identity and the tension on this trip that the historical background proved to be imperative context to explain how students internalize the messages – intended and unintended – of the March of the Living.

4.2 Participant attitudes – before they became participants

We are all a product of the environment in which we grow up, indelibly influenced by our parents, our schools, our social groups. The Toronto Jewish community is certainly no different. For those who are actively engaged in the community, there are even wider circles of influence. Members can be shaped by their religious clergy, by fellow members of their synagogue, by their social groups at school or at summer camp, by the many political and social commitments that mark the Toronto Jewish calendar – from the Walk with Israel, to Holocaust Education Week; from the Passover food drive, to fundraisers for the Toronto Jewish community in the form of everything from gala dinners and the annual phone campaign. Being an involved member of the Toronto Jewish community means that you are part of a group that simultaneously is enmeshed with the wider Toronto city and looking to consolidate an identity as a separate and distinct group in their own right. The March of the Living primarily (but not exclusively) draws its participants from the ranks of the engaged community members – even if the teenager doesn’t necessarily self-identify that way, the parents agreeing to send them almost certainly do. In choosing to go or send, one is committing to two weeks of missed school and a substantial financial cost (even though the March of the Living has started to offer bursaries and assistance with Jewish Free Loan). Unlike the other Jewish educational travel counterpart, Birthright, the March of the Living is neither free nor organized around school holidays. Thus, parents or participants are making considerable sacrifice of one kind or another in order to participate.

4.2.1 “Don’t you mean Six Million?”

Jordana Goldberg and I sat over coffee at Starbucks one morning in late July of 2016, discussing the environment in which she grew up. She was a member of the Thornhill Jewish community, descended from Polish Jews, and now teaches English at a Jewish day school. After completing teacher’s college, she participated in a program that brought educators from the Canadian Jewish community, Germany and Poland together for a two-week educational trip in Poland and
Germany. This was, for her, a life-altering experience. She had been raised in a household in which antipathy towards both Poles and Germans was assumed, although Poles certainly engendered more vitriol. Most of her and her now husband’s family are Holocaust survivors or those who came from Poland but left before the war. In her childhood and adolescence, there was no purchasing of German or Polish products. She describes her pre-fixed response to Poland as “hatred and mistrust” – the same feelings that she recognizes in many of the students she teaches today. When she returned from the trip, she asked the high school where she teaches at to bring some German and Polish students (when they came to Canada for another part of the trip) in to speak to some of her Jewish teenagers. In describing how this was received, you can still sense her underlying anger. Her program was co-opted by an Orthodox Rabbi who also taught at the school. The Rabbi framed the program and led the discussion – and still, in the aftermath, she was warned by another member of staff that a group of the Orthodox men also on staff were upset with her because she had framed a Holocaust event in other than explicitly Jewish terms. Over our coffee, she described how, all these years later, she still found this a deeply troubling experience. She felt that for many where she taught, the Holocaust remained an entirely Jewish event. Aside from just the fact that the Holocaust was the ultimate example of Jewish suffering, it seemed to be being held up as a way of preserving Jewish identity, and therefore needed to remain an event framed entirely as a Jewish experience. Any attempt to deviate from that position, particularly within a Jewish environment, was met with open hostility and an attempt to shift the conversation back into an appropriate and singularly Jewish arena.

Chloe White also shared a similar story of her experience on the March in 2011. When one goes as a participant, one is asked to select someone who you are ‘Marching’ for. She selected the “Eleven Million who died in the Holocaust.” At the very first debriefing, when the participants were asked to share who they were marching for and why, she said she was choosing to participate in memory of all eleven million who died. A fellow participant immediately interrupted her with “don’t you mean six million?” This immediate reaction of Jewish particularism versus universalism is one that I found again and again in interviews with participants. The Holocaust was a Jewish event, first and foremost, and to acknowledge the suffering of others was to detract from that experience. Thus, those others were often ignored. This was particularly true when it came to any discussion of the three million Poles who also died under the Nazis.
The dual tendencies towards ethnocentrism and Holocaust-as-standard seemed to be present in all of the groups that I interviewed for this. It was absolutely there in the community at large, in parents/ chaperones, and in many teachers, all of whom inform the mindset of the participants. Now this is not to say that it is a universal experience – for example, Eli Rubenstein, the national chair of the March of the Living in Canada, hosted an event at his synagogue (Congregation Habonim) about Polish-Jewish relationships and dialogues in the 2016 Holocaust Education Week. That said, his commitment to greater understanding between the two groups seems, at times, like more of an outlier perspective than a normative one. I gave a talk on the Jewish-Polish relationship in modern Poland in 2015’s Holocaust Education Week, and the entire lecture was punctuated by an angry attack from a member of the audience, who was hell-bent on correcting everything I said when it came to trying to understand the Polish wartime experience and (in)action. In 2011, when I gave a talk encouraging the inclusion of perpetrator and bystander narratives in Holocaust education in Boston, an Israeli man angrily interrupted my talk saying that I was validating and giving voices to people who should have none, and how inappropriate it was given modern-day antisemitism in Poland.

These reactions are found across the board, and are indicative of many of the communal and familial factors that they have been exposed to in the lead-up to their trip. Through interviewing community members, parents, chaperones, teachers and finally students, I discovered that the microcosm that many in the Jewish community have grown up with (their levels of Jewish education obviously being a big differentiation factor here) in Toronto has a direct influence on the way in which students engage with the Holocaust narrative, Israel, their ideas about responsibility for Jewish suffering and tragedy, and even why they choose to go on the trip. The following section will take extracts from these various interviews and focus groups to assess the environment of the Toronto Jewish community, as well as analyzing to what extent the pre-trip programming also influences or reinforces these ideas before they arrive in Poland (and to a lesser extent, Israel).
Table 2: Outline of Participants controlling for pre-existing Jewish education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Jewish Education:</strong></td>
<td>11 years of Jewish education at the time of the program.</td>
<td>At least 3 years at the time of the programs (Grades 9-11). Some went in early elementary as well.</td>
<td>Left Jewish education during or at end of elementary school.</td>
<td>No formal Jewish education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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4.3 Analysis results

I was sitting in a classroom with nine students, all of whom were in Grade 11 and would be participating in the 2017 March of the Living. All were students who had been through day school for their entire young lives. I began with one exercise. I gave each student a sheet of paper and a pen and I asked them to reflect on two societies – Germany and Poland. I asked them for five adjectives or associations that they attribute to each. Almost all of the responses about Germany were positive: good beer (although as they were all 16 I’m not sure whether they acquired that knowledge first- or second-hand), good chocolate, fantastic cars, beautiful country – a litany of similar responses. One response out of the roughly 45 associations was Nazis. In the focus group’s explanation the student in question did go on to couch his response with the fact that Germany has done a lot for Israel and much to apologize. Poland was a remarkably different story. All of the adjectives and associations were negative, to say the least: Auschwitz, grey,
rainy, cold, Holocaust, antisemitism, hatred were all ones that were offered repeatedly. The stark contrast of the two was, while not shocking, was telling. These are educated, bright, curious, lovely young people. They are intellectual, interested and interesting, and I consider myself fortunate to be their educator. And yet, their responses indicated a somewhat skewed knowledge of history; or if not necessarily a lack of knowledge, the emotional component present in their narrative outweighed objective attributions of responsibility. These were 16 year olds, the vast majority of whom had never been to Europe, many who admit to not being ‘up’ on current events, and none of whom are particularly interested in history. The vast majority in fact are STEM- heavy students. Despite all of these factors, they all felt extremely grounded in their opinions, and the objective truth contained within them. So how did this group of intelligent sixteen year olds with little experience with Poland come to such strong opinions? The following section demonstrates the way in which not only the heavily-Polish background of Toronto Jewry has shaped the students’ perceptions of the Polish-Jewish relationship long before they apply, but also how within certain circles of participants, those who go on the March inherit and internalize the experiences of siblings or friends who have gone before them and therefore treat the program with a set of ‘expected’ or ‘desired’ experiences (many of which are emotional and vitriolic) that they are looking to have themselves. When juxtaposed, many of the students enter the application for the program already possessing a fixed set of ideas about Poland, the Polish people, the Jewish-Polish relationship, and the way in which the event shaped the lives those in of both communities which is reinforced by their bus-oriented social networks and pre-trip educational program - which the program is unwilling, or unable, to acknowledge, let alone change.

4.3.1 Why participate? Differences pertaining to level of Jewish education

When discussing why participants chose to go on the March, three main motifs came up time and again. For those who were Jewish day school students, the idea of ‘expectation’ was a

66 Science, technology, engineering, math.
67 Although this section deals with different experiences of those with different levels of Jewish education, statistics regarding how many members of the Toronto Jewish community are enrolled in day schools are presently unavailable as the Jewish Federation of Canada does not
dominant theme. This remained true for both research groups A and B – so even if students only commenced Jewish education in Grade 9, it was already sufficiently ingrained by the time they reached Grade 11. TJPS students in particular kept commenting that it was “what was done” in Grade 11. One student commented that when she arrived in Grade 9, after Passover most of the Grade 11s weren’t there, and it made such a difference in the school dynamic that it was impossible to miss – and right from then, she felt that attending the March was a normative part of the Grade 11 experience. Another student described her 11 years of Jewish education, and that it was something that she felt was the “culminating point” of her Jewish experience. Parents of TJPS students I met also reinforced this idea to me, saying that for most it wasn’t even a decision or a choice – it was just something that their kids were expected to do.

Another common motif among students with a Jewish day school background was that they wanted to go in order to cement an emotional connection with and a better understanding of the Holocaust. Of the 21 day-school students interviewed, 19 reported that first and foremost they wanted to be able to “understand” and “personalize” the Holocaust in a way that they couldn’t in the classroom. One student noted that through all of her years of Jewish education as it pertained to the Holocaust (first introduced in Grade 4) she felt “numb” to the history and wanted the chance to “feel something” about it. One student, Matthew Schwartz, shared the story of how his father went to Germany on a trip and saw a concentration camp, and upon returning to Berlin was so horrified and disgusted that he had to immediately leave the country. Matthew finished his story, saying “I want that feeling!”

Interestingly, almost all the day-school students interviewed (20 out of 21) reported feeling a sense of disconnection or unreality when it came to learning about the Holocaust. As well, they reported that by the time they reached Grade 11, all of their teachers expected that they already knew more information about the Holocaust than was actually the case. Jessica Davis told the story of her Grade 11 history teacher introducing Kristallnacht with a caveat about how they ‘obviously’ knew all about it so therefore he wasn’t going to go into depth, to which the students document that. However, Jewish day school enrollment is on the decline, largely as a result of its (often) prohibitive cost.
responded that they knew almost nothing. Across different classes and academic streams, almost all described an ingrained perception in the community that the Holocaust was so central an event to Jewish history and so important to Jewish identity, by Grade 11 participants would be fully aware of Holocaust history and its importance. But this was not so. Many reported feeling that they don’t understand the Holocaust – they understand the historical outline but they can’t “wrap their heads around” how it happened and why, and they are looking to visit Poland in order to gain a broader understanding of the scope and scale of the event. They also appreciated the fact that the March of the Living mandated an interview with a survivor before the trip, because, in the words of Noah Berman “if you learn about the overarching theme of the Holocaust, the six million is just a statistic, and interviewing a survivor allows you to personalize it and it becomes more meaningful.” The desire to return to the ‘scene of the crime,’ to feel an emotional connection with the history, to walk in the footsteps of fallen ancestors and family, and to take a history that they feel is often presented to them dispassionately and understand it through a viscerally emotional framework was the most often-repeated rationale (although said in different ways by different people) that day-school students reported.

With non-day school students and parents, a very different reason was presented by most (10 out of 12). For them, the March of the Living was seen as “the” Jewish experience that the parents wanted their children to have before they go off to university. Mark Himmel shared the fact that his mother particularly was desperate to create a positive association with the Jewish community, and thus “scraped the money together” for him to go. Rachel Bloom wanted to go to a non-Jewish private school in Forest Hill instead of a Jewish day school, and was told that she would be permitted to do so “as long as” she went on the March of the Living. In 2015, when I was a chaperone, almost half of my bus was from non-Jewish day schools. The rationale repeated over and over again was the desire by parents to create/ reinforce Jewish social networks and create a deeper commitment with the Jewish community. This was echoed by many of the participants who did not attend Jewish day school. Their parents, they said, were pushing for them to go in the hopes that that they would create Jewish social networks and a greater understanding of the community’s history. I heard this motif so frequently that I began to wonder if the March of the Living was seen as a substitute to Jewish education in these parents’ minds – they had decided not to send their children to Jewish day school for whatever reason (be it philosophical, financial or otherwise) and were looking to the March of the Living to fill in the Jewish gaps and create
the Jewish networks they weren’t getting in public or non-Jewish private schools. 7 out of the 12 non-day school participants interviewed stated their parents also wanted their children to marry within the Jewish fold. The March, their parents hoped, would help their children to a) understand why that was an important value, and also b) to help them form the necessary Jewish social network before university, where many romantic attachments form.

It is clear that no matter what the educational or familial background, or whether the student was going of their own choice or their parents’, the idea of the March of the Living in Toronto as a ‘rite of passage’ or a fundamental element to underpin Jewish identity in the modern world was an underlying common theme. The point of the ‘rite of passage’ is of particular significance because there were a number of students who clearly admitted that they were going for the social element. Students from both research groups A and B stated repeatedly that they wanted to go because they were “able to go with your peers,” or “for the social scene.” The idea of a two-week trip with your friends (and not your parents!) was a critical draw for many. This of course creates a whole host of other problems – this is a trip that was originally conceived as one for teen leadership, a highly coveted place with a difficult application. Now the goal (largely as a result of influence from the Toronto Jewish community donor pool) is that anyone who wants to go should go, and the practice has become not to turn anyone away. This underscores the extent to which the organized Toronto Jewish community considers the Holocaust a fundamental part of the Jewish experience, and the way in which community leadership sees the ‘Holocaust-as-standard’ as a tool of inculcating Jewish continuity.

The problem with this expectation is that there are a whole host of students who should never have been admitted because they are neither emotionally or educationally mature. These students form a subsection of students with disciplinary problems on the trip, known for (among other things) taking ‘selfies’ in Auschwitz, bringing alcohol on the trip, seeking out sex, bullying other students, and causing disciplinary difficulties for their chaperones. The inclusion of a number of students who are not there for any personal growth or to learn about the history of the Holocaust changes the tone of the trip and proved a disrespectful force for others. One of the truly engaging students I taught in 2016 chose not to go on the March for this reason – she wanted to go with a more serious and focused group of people, and didn’t think she’d get an appropriate experience. Although the March leadership readily acknowledges this problem, it doesn’t appear to be one with an easy solution, given that as a Federation program that casts a wide net and Jewish
outreach through pilgrimage travel to Poland and Israel is, at present, something that is regarded as a necessary part of Toronto Jewish life.

4.3.2 The March of the Living and the Power of Myth Making

Throughout the three cohorts of interviews, the vast majority, before and after the trip, pointed to a deeply hostile and antagonistic attitude towards Poland and modern-day Poles. In order to understand these deep-set (and subsequently reinforced) convictions, I would point to two equally important phenomena: the first being the way in which the Polish-Jewish relationship tends to be presented within the Toronto Jewish community, and the second is the power of myth-making on the March of the Living. Sherri Rotstein, the National Director of the March of the Living Canada told me that she felt sometimes that students could write their essays about what they experienced on the March before they even went, as there are such strongly held beliefs about what one does and experiences in Poland and Israel while a participant. These two perspectives, taken together, have led to a tendency among participants to take an already ingrained anti-Polish sentiment and extrapolate that onto their understandings of the March of the Living and its pedagogy, well before they board the plane.

4.3.2.1 “Inherent” antisemitism

The first theme heard repeatedly across the interviews of those in Jewish day school is about the ‘natural/ inherent’ antisemitism of the Polish people. Robert Hart said he believed that it was actually “hypocritical” that the March of the Living goes to Poland, as “tourism is a huge thing for Poland and the March is a big part of that, so [we’re] donating tonnes to their economy, which is kind of hypocritical – why are we helping the Polish economy? The Poles are still antisemitic.” He went on to describe it as a necessary evil, but believed that the March should limit its time and economic impact on Poland as much as possible. Rebecca Cole said that “she heard really awful things about the people, [that they were] just as bad as the Germans, [that they] have a visceral hate towards the Jews and that still permeates the country.” Matthew Schwartz told the group about how a friend of the family went (who is African American) and how he was “spit on” by “skinheads in Poland just for being black.”

This negative perception of Poland also played into their pre-trip attributions of responsibility, with Rebecca Cole saying she would be far more like to travel to Germany than Poland, as
Germans are “less antisemitic” and “deeply apologetic” and that it was the “fault of the German government but not the German people.” The same seemed to be true in reverse for the Poles according to these students, as “the Polish government couldn’t have done anything” but the average Polish citizens “were the ones who were actually bad towards the Jews – yelling, screaming, happy about what the Nazis were doing.” In fact, the majority of day-school students (17 out of 21) discussed how the Poles remained antisemitic today in a way that the Germans did not, and that they were “happy” about the Nazi invasion and Holocaust. Robert Hart argued that Poland “even without the war was antisemitic, and the war just fuelled their antisemitism, [they] thought [the Holocaust] was great, and even the next generation thinks it was a good thing.”

Another common manifestation of the perception of eternal Polish antisemitism that I heard from a number of different students is that the reason that the Death Camps were located in Poland was because the Polish people were more naturally antisemitic and therefore Hitler and the SS could “get away with it” more so than they could if they were in Germany. Many students pointed to the “Aktion T4” failure in Germany (discussed in one of the pre-trip sessions) as evidence of this. The pre-trip session did not say this, it merely used Aktion T4 as an example of wider Nazi persecution and world view. Many of the students had extrapolated this ‘fact’ and applied it to their understanding of Poland that existed previously – in the words of Annabelle Shapiro, “well, it must have proven to the Germans that they couldn’t commit mass murder in Germany itself without people getting upset about it, so they moved all the camps to Poland where no one would care.” I would also like to note the use of ‘moved’ in the above sentence, which certainly implied pre-existing death camps in Germany that were then presumably demolished and rebuilt in the country to the East.

To bolster the myth of natural antisemitism, many also discussed the presence of houses around the grounds of various camps (note: this is, once again, before they’ve gone) that point to the fact that the Polish people saw the destruction of the Jewish community as a positive. This is not to say that there is not some truth in their perceptions. Antisemitism, in many forms, is a regular

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68 Nazi-sponsored attempt to kill all mentally and physically handicapped people by lethal injection, as they were considered to be a ‘burden on the state’. Once it was publicized, an unprecedented wave of religious-led pushback and mass demonstrations ultimately resulted in the program being closed in the early 1940s.
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theme in Polish discourse and society (Bilewicz et al., 2013). However, there is exception and nuance in this history that is entirely lacking from students’ perceptions.

4.3.2.2 Inherited memory

This last point is of critical importance, as there seems to be a trend of ‘inherited’ memory through the experiences of siblings, family friends, or the siblings of friends who participated on the March of the Living. These experiences had by other people had almost been internalized as the students’ own. The students were able to describe things such as the “white house by the fence at Majdanek” and point to clear indications of neo-Nazism and neo-fascism in Poland (such as the “little Jewish figurines with the money” or the “Magen Davids with an X through them”) before they’ve ever even been there. And they are able to point to many of the uncomfortable truths about the modern Jewish-Polish dynamic as evidence of this eternal and unyielding antisemitism and hatred that Poles have for the Jews, long before any of them have ever experienced it themselves. One student, Jessica Davis, who was participating in the 2017 March of the Living, shared with me the experience of her older brother who went as part of the 2015 contingent. She described how her brother witnessed a shouting match between Polish people and the Jewish participants, and how it was an example of the fact that “the Poles hate us.” When she was telling me this, I think she didn’t remember that I was there on that trip, and it was actually a drunken shouting match as a result of flat-out inebriation. I speak just enough Polish to understand that none of the ‘trigger’ words I was listening for during it as the students were being separated – having to do with Jews, particularly – were not uttered. While I can hardly point to this as a positive interaction, nor could I ascribe antisemitic undertones to it. When I pointed this out to her after the interview was finished, she responded with the fact that it was only one example of many that proved her point.

This phenomenon is more commonly found in those who have had more Jewish education. There was a significant difference between Research Groups A and B (in Jewish high school at the time of the trip) in terms of negative feelings towards the Poles in advance of the trip, and this anti-Polish sentiment is seen even less among Research Groups C and D (in public or non-Jewish private school at the time of the trip). The level of Jewish education previously had played a fundamental role in the level of anti-Polish sentiment in the participants. Research Group A (all schooling had been completed in formal Jewish educational system) showed a clear antagonism,
whereas B and C (some education in Jewish institutions) showed considerably less anti-Polish hostility than their counterparts. Across the board those with no Jewish education at all showed little pre-trip expectations about either Poland or Israel. Those with some formal Jewish education showed less vitriol and more apathy, however – few seemed to have really engaged with the narrative or really internalized it in any way before the trip. This isn’t to say that they necessarily had positive associations towards Poland particularly, it was just that most of them stated that they “had never thought about it.” Five out of six students interviewed from Group D stated that they actually expected to feel a warm welcome or sense of commonality with the Poles (once there, it should be noted, none did) – perhaps as a result of learning about the Holocaust through a more universal lens in their schooling. They were more prepared to understand the ways in which Poland also suffered, and hadn’t necessarily learned about the Holocaust through an ethnocentric lens. Rachel Bloom, a student who has been educated in the non-Jewish private school system, described how she actually felt that the Poles would be really “welcoming” and “excited to see the March of the Living.” Her feelings of hostility towards the Poles didn’t actually start until she arrived in Poland and was confronted by a mass of people she felt “didn’t care and didn’t want [them] there.” While it is important to note that she did eventually develop some feelings of hostility towards the local population, that evolution will be covered more fully in Chapter Five. Mark Himmel indicated that he had never thought much of anything about the Poles before he had left. Sophie Marks, a student who was avidly interested in the Second World War, felt a great deal of sympathy towards the Poles, and discussed at length the impact of Poland being both under the Nazis and the Soviets. This last student would be an example to me of the differential treatment that the Holocaust receives in non-Jewish public/private schools. Rachel Bloom shared that at her non-Jewish private school, the Holocaust was a “mere footnote” to the broader story of the Second World War (it’s worth noting that she and Sophie attended the same school, two years apart). She said that in Grade 10 Canadian history and other advanced history courses, the broader concepts of the Second World War were what was focused on. Hitler’s genocide was a small part of a broader story of the intolerance, hatred and brutality of the 1930s and 1940s.

This is different from the Jewish day school model, in which the Holocaust is often the main story. Within the Jewish day school framework, the Holocaust is ultimately a Jewish tragedy, with almost exclusively the only other groups that are discussed are the Roma/Sinti and the
homosexuals. Indeed, one of the first pages of the TJPS Holocaust course textbook is a single Elie Wiesel quote: “the Holocaust was a uniquely Jewish event albeit with universal implications.”

The tendency towards inherited memory was seen more strongly in those with Holocaust survivors in their family. This was an interesting development considering the way in which the transmission and impacts of memory has become a subject of study in recent years, particularly regarding Holocaust survivors. Regarding theories that could help unpack this trend among the participants, one of them that I kept returning to was that of inherited trauma seen consistently among survivors and their children. Scientist Rachel Yehuda at Mount Sinai hospital in New York recently completed a study that showed genetic changes in Holocaust survivors (what she describes as “traumatic markers”) that also showed up in the children of survivors, confirming her opinion in the idea of “epigenetic inheritance” (Yehuda, 2015). Tamar Fox (1999) focused on a similar trend among the children of survivors in Israel. She found that their children have inherited many of the same markers of trauma and PTSD that their parents had, despite the fact that they themselves were born after the Holocaust. This is not only seen in the children of Holocaust survivors, but also the children of survivors of other genocides (Danieli, 2016).

Letzter-Pouw et al. (2014) showed that there are higher rates of post-traumatic stress found in the children of two survivors, demonstrably greater than the offspring of those from a marriage with one survivor and one not. Further, the Letzer-Pouw et al. study also demonstrated that the extent of post-traumatic symptoms increased with the greater “transmission of burden.” What exactly this “transmission of burden” is can be hard to quantify. Although the study at hand does not reflect on the transmission of trauma per se, the way in which memory is passed on to the next generations does play a role here. What this study indicated is that the grandchildren of survivors inherited a strong and palpable sense of fear and distrust of the Poles (although it’s bizarre that this often does not seem to extend to Germans in the same way, despite the fact that Germans were the persecutors). In Robert Hart’s case study his qualifier (albeit I believe a subconscious one) is that his grandfather was a Polish Holocaust survivor who has a deep and abiding hatred of Poles. In this way, although grandchildren may not have inherited the same trauma as their

69 From his 1985 speech upon receiving the Congressional Gold Medal.
70 See page 59.
parents, it would seem that some sense of low-level trauma and memory of hatred has been passed on, which manifests itself primarily in a sense of distrust and hatred.

4.3.2.3 The March of the Living “hates” Poland

Another myth that was often repeated among March participants (almost exclusively from groups A and B) was that the trip did not allow you to shop in Poland, brought terrible food in themselves, and hired Israeli security guards “so as to not augment the economy of antisemitic Poland.” Although I believe that there is an ideological underpinning at play here where the March certainly does not wish for students to spend time in Poland in a manner not related to Holocaust study, for the most part the refusal to allow students personal time in Poland is a product of lack of time. And yet, time and again, I heard from participants that they were not allowed to shop there because Poland was antisemitic. In one pre-trip focus group (Group A) there was a lively argument between a number of students about it, with one, Sophie Barnes, finally concluding with “but why would you want to buy anything there anyway!? It’s the most depressing country ever.” At least Robert Hart was analytical enough to understand that the March of the Living itself was a huge boon to the Polish economy in and of itself, although he considered that less than desirable. Food was another myth oft-repeated – instead of ascribing the food that was not as tasty or was quite repetitive to the realities of trying to find kosher caterer in a country without a substantial Jewish population, five students in one focus group of eight all asserted that the food was “going to be terrible in Poland” because “the trip wants you to be miserable and hungry there.” Apparently a very strong pre-trip myth is that the trip doesn’t let you sleep, feeds you terrible food, and won’t let you purchase anything that might taste better, all for the express purpose of making the students ‘identify with’ those who suffered in Poland 70-plus years ago.

This tendency towards inherited memory – passed on through siblings, parents, grandparents, friends or even just the status that the March of the Living has – is also potentially an organic reaction bred from the tendency towards ritualization of history in the Jewish community. At the Pesach Seder, it is said that the history is repeated every year so that each Jew may himself “feel as if he has personally walked out of Egypt.” It would seem that this ritualization of history may actually be unconsciously extrapolated to the teaching of the Holocaust in Poland – many day school students (particularly those who are the grandchildren of survivors) before they go
already feel as if they personally walked on the accursed earth of Auschwitz and lived to tell the tale. They have taken the experiences of those who came before them and it informed their opinions to such an extent that they can (and do) repeat inherited memory as justification for ‘objective truths’ of the Polish-Jewish relationship.

4.3.3 Demographics as influence

In addition to the levels of exposure to the Jewish community and formal Jewish education, familial demographics also served as a differentiation factor in the ways students internalize the story of the Holocaust and the messaging of the March.

In one focus group of ten students (Group A) alone, nine had survivors in their family background. Of those nine, eight were descended from Polish Jews. The demographics of the Toronto Jewish community is heavily descended from Poland, and that was unexpectedly displayed within the students asked to participate in the Focus Groups. In a focus group of students from Research Group B, four out of the six were descended from Poland, with 1 having a Holocaust survivor grandparent (who was going on the trip with her). Out of the 12 students from groups C and D, seven were descended from Poland, and five were from Russia. As noted by Shira Gelkopf (2014), who wrote her Masters cognate paper on the March of the Living, when asked why the March only goes to Poland and not Germany as well (considering that was where Nazism began) Dani Fine indicated that it was because of the high proportion (c. 75%) of students descended from Polish Jewry – meaning that this was the part of the story that they could most identify with (Gelkopf, 2014).

Those descended from Polish Jewry (whether they left pre- or post-war) displayed a much higher tendency towards anti-Polish perspectives, and also more often repeated those beliefs as if they were facts and not opinions. For those with Holocaust survivors in their families, that attitude was even more so. Many discussed how their Holocaust survivor grandparents did not want them to return to Poland at all. Corinne Styles (Group A) said that the number one reason she wanted to go on the March was to go see where her grandmother had survived, despite the fact that her grandmother actively opposed her going. “She doesn’t understand why I want to go back. She said to me that she went to Poland for free in the 40s, she doesn’t understand why anyone would pay to go there.” Julia Feldman said the same thing – that her grandmother, who survived Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald is returning for the first time with her this year – but
only at her insistence. Joseph Hart (who had a grandfather who survived by being deported to Siberia from his hometown in Eastern Poland by the NKVD) said that he would only go back to Poland to go to the camps, but needed to leave as quickly as possible, and that even if given the opportunity he would refuse to spend money. “I can understand those who couldn’t do anything” [he said], “but there were so many Poles that actively participated in the Holocaust and continue to be antisemitic today, and that can’t be forgiven.” Even those with less Jewish education who were descended from Polish Jewry tended to have a greater antagonism towards the Poles pre-trip, leading me to conclude that the presence of someone in your family who was originally from Poland (even if one was not a Holocaust survivor) led to a greater anti-Polish sentiment that had become an ingrained part of the family dynamic and history.

4.3.4 Israel

Similar to the way that students are pre-programmed for certain feelings and desired experiences in Poland, the same is true about Israel. Although it is not the primary focus of this dissertation, it should be noted that many participants have a pre-conditioned understanding of Israel that influences their thoughts on Poland and the Holocaust. This is, once again, more commonly seen in those in a Jewish educational milieu at the time of the trip. Many students reported an extensive knowledge on Israeli society and (non politically-charged or contentious) history that greatly outweighed their knowledge of the Holocaust, giving them both an academic and emotional connection to the latter half of the trip. It should be noted that their knowledge of the Arab-Israeli conflict was lacking. Interestingly, among them, many students reported the idea of Israel as a “unifying” force for modern Jews – somewhat out of step with the reality beyond their sheltered and narrow perspective. Gabby Shapiro (Group A) commented that “the Holocaust is more distant, and Israel is more current. It also unites the Jews more than the Holocaust, and we need that unity now.” Israel is also understood as the place where the crying stops. Similar to expectations of tears and grief in Poland, Israel is framed in the context of happiness, relaxation, and floating in the Dead Sea. The students have internalized the schema of the program, the trip from destruction from redemption, and pre-trip are prepped to see the two sites of the trip in direct opposition to each other.
4.3.5 Narratives presented, narratives internalized: MOL’s pre-trip programming

The Toronto pre-trip educational program consists of seven educational pre-trip seminars. The curriculum was originally written by Sarah Atkins and Sherri Rotstein, but has been revised and updated by Alana Saxe. The intentions of the pre-trip seminars are to ensure that students have a thorough grounding in “the Holocaust, Israel, Jewish identity, and current global social conditions” (Atkins and Rotstein, 2009, p. 1). Similar to the schema presented on the trip, the pre-trip curriculum treats the Holocaust and Israel as a narrative in and of itself, each reinforcing the other – the Holocaust was an event that “caused” the creation of the State of Israel, and Israel’s security is necessary as a bulwark against future genocides. It should be noted that nowhere in the curriculum is this stated as a fact, but the way in which the pre-trip programming is laid out and the discussions are framed, this is certainly the message that students internalize.

The seminars are arranged in the following order:

i. Introduction to larger themes (genocide in general, who/what and where etc.)
ii. Antisemitism and Hitler’s rise to power
iii. The War Years
iv. Destruction and resistance
v. Liberation
vi. Israel and me
vii. Here and now

Effective presentation of information to participants is thwarted by the problems in chaperone selection. Few are chosen for any educational abilities they bring to the program. Instead, selection has most to do with ability to pay and demographics. But the March is by definition an educational program. If there is a pre-trip curricular component then the staff (including chaperones) needs to be able to provide that for their charges. One chaperone I spoke with brought this home for me, when she admitted that she knew “next to nothing” about the Holocaust or Israel. She shared her experience with these pre-trip seminars, saying that she “told [her] students that she didn’t know anything, [she] was very clear about that, and [she] gave them the readings to present to the group as they knew more.” She framed it as the students taking greater responsibility for their education and playing an active role in their own earning, which is actually a valid point and certainly consistent with modern pedagogical practices. That said, if this is an educational program about history – and in fact, some students from non-Jewish day schools actually receive a course credit for participating – then having chaperones there who
admittedly “know nothing” is beyond counterintuitive, it’s fundamentally problematic. How can one expect students to gain historical understanding of the Holocaust if their leader can offer little to nothing in that regard?

The pre-trip seminars do attempt to address some of the historical complexity of the World War Two period. Eli Rubenstein provided an excellent lecture in 2017 on the Jewish-Polish relationship, similar to the one presented to the Chaperones as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Robert Hart\textsuperscript{71} indicated to me, after hearing it, that it had really challenged much of his pre-conceived notions, which he appreciated. Contrary to what many of the March of the Living’s detractors would say the program espouses, Rubenstein argued that a) while Holocaust commemoration is important, in no way should it be a central aspect of Jewish identity, and b) Poland was the land of choice for Jewish settlement for 1000 years, and that challenging the stereotyping of Poles today that exists within the Toronto Jewish community is imperative, particularly as Jews themselves have historically been victims of stereotyping. As he argued, the students “have an obligation to open a fresh page on Jewish-Polish relations, and to a pursuer of the truth, not of stereotypes.” The only problem is, in order for students to take on this task, they both have to a) be willing, and b) be listening. Listening is the crucial pedagogical issue of these pre-trip seminars. The students are brought together every two weeks to a seminar that lasts for a couple of hours on a weeknight, after they have had a long day of school. Aside from the exhaustion, the simple act of putting 100+ students in one room and lecturing them frontally for over an hour creates a situation in which many students chat amongst themselves during much of the lecture, or listen to music through their earbuds with hoods pulled up - largely because in a sea of kids, it’s harder to police for such things. While the chaperones do spread themselves out, with that large a group, you are always running the risk of behavioural problems. During Rubenstein’s lecture, many of the students in my line of sight spent the majority of the talk shmoozing among themselves. I can’t really blame them; if I had been in class for eight hours that day, had been out for two hours, and then brought back for a frontal lecture, I might be doing the same thing.

\textsuperscript{71} See 3.1
Regarding Poland specifically, the students are intellectually short-changed because the last reference to Poland was 1945. The communist rule of Poland, and its legacy, is completely overlooked – which is necessary to understand the Poland of today. When the students learn in situ, they are surrounded by the regular legacy of the Communist period – from the architecture of many Polish cities, to the construction of the monuments at the Death Camps, almost all of which were created by Communist authorities. Aside from this neglect being a missed historical opportunity, the Communist legacy plays strongly into students’ pre-trip attributions and understandings of the Polish people, as the oft-repeated trope is that the Polish government and Polish people have done little to acknowledge their own history or responsibility (unlike Germany). How can students really engage with the Poland they visit without an understanding of the Communist period? The Polish people of today were educated largely under a Soviet-led system that didn’t allow for a reckoning with the past. This overlooked reality is absolutely essential to understanding not only the Polish-Jewish relationship, but also the relationship of the Poles to their own 20th century history. It’s concerning that the entire post-war restructuring and reckoning (or lack thereof) is ignored on a trip that is ostensibly about history, and it’s particularly challenging given the fact that this plays into the stereotypes that many students have, and could arguably encourage them in their perceptions of Poland within strictly World War Two terms.

Another key element of the pre-trip seminars is one-on-one time with Holocaust survivors. On the one hand, this is done through the pre-trip “manuscript project” in which every student is required to meet with a Holocaust survivor and listen to their story, writing it down and preserving it for the future. This project is crucial to the “hear a witness, become a witness” goal of the March of the Living, and seeks to personalize the experience for the students. It’s worth noting that many of the day-school educated students particularly speak highly of this project, as they feel it gave them a unique opportunity to understand the Holocaust in a different and more meaningful way. During pre-trip seminars there is designated time for interaction in small group while the survivor tells the participants their wartime experience. Time is left afterwards for discussion, but the small-group chaperone leader comes with prepared questions if the discussion were to fall flat, including:

- Seeing the rise in antisemitism, and the destruction it can cause, how can we learn from the past and improve the situation today?
• How do you feel about life today as a Jewish person, compared to what you think it was like 60 years ago?
• Where is Judaism heading, and where are we heading as a people?

This intergenerational bonding of survivor to participant, especially when framed within these terms, is certainly linking the history of the Holocaust to the drive for Jewish continuity. Another example of the continuity thrust is the “Jewish values” game in which students (along with survivors) in small groups consider and rank the values necessary for Jewish continuity and survival. The options include (but are not limited to) Jewish social networks, Shabbat, Jewish marriage, God, Torah, Israel, Traditions, Synagogue, Charity (Tzedakah) etc. (Gelkopf, 2014, p. 15). The underlying messaging of juxtaposing discussions about Jewish values and Jewish continuity along with the history of the Holocaust inevitably positions the two as welded one to the other – Jewish survival (culturally and religiously) being the logical and necessary outcome of Jewish (physical) survival during the war.

Lastly, a major concern with the pre-trip education program is the lack of verifiable and accurate historical sources used throughout the seminars themselves. While, yes, the leaders and educators certainly have a background grounded in the history of the Holocaust and Israel, the information presented to the students is primarily to stir emotion as opposed to an awareness of historical complexity. As this trip is ostensibly designed for Holocaust education, this is troubling. An example would be the seminar on liberation – instead of a discussion of the different aspects of liberation – depending on whether one was liberated by the Western Allies or by the Soviets for example – what is shown is the Band of Brothers clip of the liberation of the camp in Germany. Instead of being able to place liberation within the context of the greater World War Two narrative, the seminar focuses on the emotional fallout of liberation and how hard it was for people to rebuild and reconstruct their lives. There are, of course, discussions about the post-war pogroms in Poland. There is nothing wrong with any of this in and of itself – but I argue it would be more appropriate to ground the students in the history of the period first and then connect them to it on a personal level, as opposed to only the latter. This, however, is ultimately the crux of the program – the creation of an emotional bond to a historical place and

72 Episode 9 of the series.
event, as opposed to an understanding of the complexities of history. By focusing almost exclusively on the emotive and personal aspects of the Holocaust, when the students land in Poland they are psychologically prepared to embark on the pilgrimage program within the appropriate mindset. The message one could take away from the seminar series is that the history of the Holocaust is offered up as a compelling reason to stay Jewish, and as rationale for why the State of Israel is necessary.

Although the pre-trip programming is technically different from pre-trip attitudes, I include it in this section because it is part of the attitude and knowledge creation process that takes place before the actual trip. Further, it speaks to the notion that for the most part the pre-trip perspectives that students enter the program with are not effectively addressed or changed. The set of seminars created by the March of the Living to provide students with a base of knowledge before the trip in many ways need to be rethought if the March wishes to address the attitudes many participants enter the trip with.
### Table 3: Assessing trends in pre-trip attitudes, controlling for pre-existing Jewish Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Jewish Education:</strong></td>
<td>11 years of Jewish education at the time of the program.</td>
<td>At least 3 years at the time of the programs (Grades 9-11). Some went in early elementary as well.</td>
<td>Left Jewish education during or at end of elementary school.</td>
<td>No formal Jewish education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trends:</strong></td>
<td>Greatest tendency to ‘inherit memory’</td>
<td>- Most akin to Group C in attitudes</td>
<td>- Most akin to Group B in attitudes</td>
<td>- Unlike all other groups with regard to pre-trip attitudes (less of a tendency towards inherited memory or pre-trip perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Overall strongest pre-trip attitudes regarding the Poles</td>
<td>- Tendency towards a more nuanced understanding of both Jewish and Polish narratives</td>
<td>- Tendency towards a more nuanced understanding of both Jewish and Polish narratives</td>
<td>- See the Holocaust more so as a broader part of a larger story of the 20th century (likely because of TDSB curriculum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- See Poland and Israel within strict binary</td>
<td>- Influenced by attitudes from Group A students as they are (mostly) at the same school at the time of the trip</td>
<td>- Similar to Group D, see the Holocaust as a broader story (likely because of TDSB curriculum)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Discussion

When the students arrive in Poland a few days after Passover, they enter the country with an understanding of the Holocaust that is less historical than emotional, less academic than personal, and often with a mindset that expects to encounter antisemitism and hatred. Many in the Toronto Jewish community, teachers, professionals and parents alike, assume the proverbial baton of Holocaust education has been passed effectively to the next generation. Despite the fact that many educators believe that by the time these students reach Grade 11 they are relatively well-versed in the history of the Holocaust, overwhelmingly participants say that they are not. They are lacking a substantial or detailed understanding of the event, having only a superficial account that is often presented to them through various programming such as Holocaust Education Week or Remembrance Day. Despite the fact that they do participate in March-organized pre-trip education sessions, the fully-frontal pedagogy and hiring of chaperones who are usually unable to lead educational sessions in small groups often results in students either i) not engaging with the history that they are being taught or ii) having their pre-trip beliefs reinforced by adults who often know little about the Holocaust or are unable or unwilling to push students on their beliefs. Thus, the participants begin the trip with less of a historical background to the events they’re there to learn about than an emotional, Jewish-identity substantiating one.

These attitudes are not monolithic. Those with a greater pre-trip formal Jewish education have a tendency to see the Holocaust more through a highly emotional and exclusively Jewish lens. They also have a tendency to ‘inherit memory’ from previous participants. This leads them to have the strongest ‘knowledge base’ before they apply to the trip, which I put in quotation marks because their level of knowledge is suspect. That said, many of the beliefs that they hold pre-trip they interpret as truth and fact, and repeat those within programming as thus. Those who have either started Jewish education in high school or left before it, unsurprisingly, exhibit similar attitudes – understandable considering they have both have footings within the Jewish community and without. However, those who are in the Jewish educational milieu at the time of the trip are more influenced by those who have been there throughout their entire education. Both groups (C and D) that are outside of the Jewish educational context at the time of the trip have more nuanced understandings and perspectives of both the Holocaust and Israel, but that nuance is largely a product of a lack of heavy communal influence less than a greater educational level and understanding of context. Given that all Ontario students study the Holocaust in Grade
10 Canadian History (within the unit about the Second World War) all have a baseline understanding, but those from Jewish schools seem to have been taught that unit with the emphasis on the Holocaust (with the broader story of the Second World War as context), as opposed to those in the public or non-Jewish private school focusing more on the Second World War with the Holocaust as a less important detail of that event. This is a critical difference, as those in Jewish high school educational contexts have a greater tendency to see the Holocaust as one of the “defining Jewish events” but have less knowledge of the larger story of the war. What is interesting, and troubling, is that despite this, many students report little more than a cursory understanding of the Holocaust.

Further, the schema of destruction (Holocaust) → redemption (Israel) in which Poland carries the guilt of the Holocaust (regardless of historical inaccuracy) underpins the participants’ pre-trip attitudes. This foundational framework that the students inherit through social, communal and familial communications, which is enforced through their education and reinforced by their experiences on the March of the Living. This undergirding is exacerbated by i) the sense of inherited trauma that is transmitted through the families of Holocaust survivors, particularly when confronted with the semiotic site of memory (Danieli, 2016), and ii) Poland as it becomes a site of inquiry for the students without resolution (LaCapra, 2001). The program forces the participants to respond contemporaneously to a landscape which they expect to feel threatening, and thus that’s what it is to them. The fact that the trip is happening entirely on Polish soil, when combined with a negative foundational frameworks and a deficit of knowledge about the post-war Polish experience, results in many students having a skewed understanding of history and flawed attributions of responsibility for the event itself. As explored in Chapter Five, this is perhaps a natural reaction to any landscape of trauma, but this is particularly reinforced by a tendency towards believing in the historical fact (without nuance or much exception) of Polish complicity with the Nazis. Many truly feel that in returning to Poland, they are entering a proverbial lion’s den, and that they face an existential threat at every turn, akin to Polish Jews in wartime. For many of the participants of the March of the Living, Poland becomes a site representative of Jewish death, of failed Diaspora, and as the line between past and present blurs the participants perceive the landscape through the same myths of fear and hatred that they internalized long before they touched down in Warsaw.
Chapter Five: Learning in the ‘Land of Ashes’

“Tourism is, after all, a medium through which people who do not live in a place can come to know it, and, through a variety of practices, can actively position themselves in relation to it. The result of this recognition has been a proliferation of state- and NGO-supported international tours that represent countries as “homelands” to diaspora ethnics who are specifically brought to visit them. For governments, these homeland tours offer a means of developing ties to potential investors, political advocates and migrants. For diaspora groups, they offer a means of strengthening collective identity and ethnic community around the world. Recognizing their mutual interest, the two sides have begun working in partnership to systemically develop tourism as a form of political socialization that fosters identification with a nation-state and a sense of belonging in a transnational ethnic community.” (Kelner, 2010, vxi)

The above quote, taken from Kelner’s seminal text *The Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage and Israeli Birthright Tourism* highlights the relatively recent realization of pilgrimage tourism as a form of political and communal socialization, as well as an enterprise through which both sides of the equation benefit. Of course, in speaking of “mutual interest” in fostering identification with a land and a community, he is discussing Jewish pilgrimage specifically to Israel. Within this context, there absolutely exists a relationship of mutual need – for the leaders of pilgrimage tourism in North America that seeks to inculcate in its participants a greater responsibility towards Israel and by extension to each other as members of the Jewish people, but also for Israel to secure greater support from outside, and a potential influx of immigrants. Birthright, the program Kelner refers to, has a relatively simple and successful model, as its sole focus is on bringing Jewish North American youth to Israel with the hope of creating a greater sense of connectivity with the Jewish state but also with the Jewish people once back at home. The program, as analyzed by the Cohen Center for Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, has shown remarkable success in doing so.73

The March of the Living, however, deals with a slightly more complex narrative while still being rooted in many of the paradigms reflected on above. In bringing students to Poland and Israel, the program does seek to have the students come to know the land and to position themselves in relation to it, as Kelner says, but they seek to create two different situations and relationships. In terms of their relationship with Israel, the March of the Living seeks much of the same things

that Birthright does, although Israel’s framing as the proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes of the Holocaust positions the students in relation to the state differently.

If we take Kelner’s approach, it raises a number of interesting questions about the experience of the March in Poland specifically. The weeklong experience in Poland is an act of political and communal socialization, but in no way is it presented as a Diaspora → Homeland experience. Instead, it is the stopover and segment that exists somewhere in the middle of that equation, taking a successful Diaspora group to a place that’s indicative of a different – and markedly less successful – Diaspora experience, all while being framed as a stop on the way to its homeland. It in no way seeks to strengthen a collective or ethnic affiliation to the land of Poland, but it certainly seeks to strengthen those identities among the group in question while in Poland. And while Israel stands to benefit economically, socially and politically from birthright tourism of all kinds, and it ends up being a relatively harmonious experience, Poland only stands to benefit economically, finding little ‘bridge-building’ or ‘identity-consolidating’ edification from a group that enters to claim ownership over a history or tragedy that many in Poland would claim as, first and foremost, their own. Thus, we have a weeklong experience rife with tensions and contradictions, as the trip seeks socialization against two very separate backdrops – the first, as representative of ‘Jewish death’ and the failed Diaspora, and the other of ‘Jewish life’ in the strong state of Israel.

This chapter focuses on the choices made primarily during the trip’s time in Poland, and how the educational program of the trip deals with the above tensions. It seeks to understand the pedagogical choices made on the trip, what processes are happening in the experience of the students (both as a result of the pre-trip conditioning discussed in Chapter Four, but also as a result of schemas presented on the trip), and what the impact of those processes are in how students understand their time in Poland and internalize those messages. I occasionally reference the second week of the trip in Israel, but exclusively in terms of how Israel is framed within the context of the Holocaust and the week in Poland.
5.1 Pedagogical Choices: an Introduction

Informal education (or, as many Jewish organizations call it, experiential education) is an umbrella term encompassing all non-formal or classroom and curriculum based educational spheres, usually created and implemented often with the intention of the socialization and character/morality building of its participants (Reimer and Bryfman, 2008; Wertheimer, 2008). Informal education, particularly when summoned by religious or cultural groups, also serves to aid students in the acquisition of specific cultural literacy (Maynard, 2002). It is a type of education that was formalized and summoned to fill a gap (Bekerman, et al., 2006, p. 3) where traditional education fell short – namely in the cultivation of the person as opposed to just the student. Mark K. Smith (2006) characterizes the differentiation between formal and informal education as a dichotomy of “monitoring and bureaucracy” versus “learning about sensitive issues … and the uniqueness of [the students]” (p. 3). Jewish informal education specifically is rooted in Jews “doing Jewish” with other Jews, which can encompass the wide range of Jewish exposure and practice, but basically involves everyday life being oriented around Jewish life, values and practice. Informal educators seek to create positive associations with Judaism and a deeper knowledge of Jewish life and practice, all within a fun environment.

Both formal and informal Jewish education got a boost in the early 1990s after the release of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS). This study indicated that the rate of Jewish marriage to non-Jews was climbing steadily, at that time up to 28% in America. This aggregate, however, encompassed all marriages – but that number for marriages in the past five years was well over 50% (up from 9% before 1965). As the study says:

The choice of marriage partners has changed dramatically over the past few decades. In recent years, just over half of Born Jews who married, at any age, whether for the first time or not, chose a spouse who was born a Gentile and has remained so, while less than 5 percent of these marriages include a non-Jewish partner who became a Jew by choice.

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74 Highlights to be found here: http://www.jewishdatabank.org/studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=3129
As a result, since 1985, twice as many mixed couples have been created as Jewish couples (Highlights, p. 14, Chart 14).

For Jewish communal leadership, the so-called “continuity crisis” over the future of the Jewish community that this spurred (given the decline of children being born into Jewish households), resulted in both formal and informal educational Jewish spheres having a substantial growth in enrolment and championing within most North American Jewish communities (Wertheimer, 2008, p. 13). The subsequent 2000-2001 NJPS showed that since 1996, the number of Jewish marriages to non-Jews remained on the rise, with 47% marrying non-Jewish spouses. Issues of continuity remained, with the 2000-2001 NJPS highlighting that those who married non-Jews showed significantly less engagement with the Jewish community over time (using the markers of synagogue membership and attendance, membership with Jewish communal organizations, donations to federation campaigns, Jewish education, and religious practices such as lighting of Shabbat candles and observing kosher laws) (NJPS, 2001, p. 18).

These dramatic demographic shifts in American Jews around the turn of the millennium caused a shift in the way Jewish education was conceived and delivered. Beyond texts and religious instruction, a greater emphasis on Jewish social networks, on positive associations with Jewishness, on “doing Jewish” with other Jews became a part of the vernacular. In short, a greater emphasis on varieties of Jewish learning gave a plethora of choice to parents and children (Wertheimer, 2008, p. 15). Informal education particularly received a great deal of attention and funds, based on the “underlying assumption … that exposure to informal Jewish education during the teen years was particularly beneficial for nurturing long-term Jewish commitments” (Wertheimer, 2008, p. 15) – an assertion substantiated by a study proving Jewish social networks were key to long-term Jewish engagement (Philipps, 1998, p. 35-40).

The March of the Living, founded at the time of this massive change in emphasis in Jewish education, was certainly influenced by new trends in experiential education. The March, and other informal Jewish educational trips to Poland and Israel put a great deal of emphasis on socialization and identity-building, of learning through experience, and these concepts infuse

75 Highlights to be found here: http://www.jewishdatabank.org/studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=1490
every element of the trip. Its focus on *teen* engagement, with the intention of creation of Jewish social networks (for those inside and outside the Jewish day school system) is created in line with the above ideas. Further, a former national chair of the Toronto March of the Living, James Fishman, argued that the reason why students go in high school is to “get them” before they leave for university, when many lifelong Jewish choices are made (or not made).  

Interestingly, this mission statement positions the March within the arena of Jewish *Kiruv* organizations, such as Chabad, which operate on campus to both provide Jewish students with resources but also to bring more non-religious Jews into the religious fold. The implications of this are unpacked in Chapter Six.

Despite a clear grounding in Jewish experiential education, the March also borrows from formal educational spheres, with a curriculum and traditional authority structures (in terms of its educators). In fact, the International March of the Living also promotes itself as an “annual educational program” … “which brings individuals from all over the world to Poland and Israel in order to study the history of the Holocaust and to examine the roots of prejudice, intolerance and hate.” It goes to clarify that it is universal goal is “to help inspire our participants to fight indifference, racism and injustice by witnessing the atrocities of the Holocaust. Our hope is that the program will help strengthen Jewish identity, connections to Israel, and build a community of future Jewish leaders.”

One can assume, thus, that the intended outcome of the program is *identity building* (which falls in line with informal education), but the process is to be rooted in a *historical, educational experience* (formal education). If the March of the Living markets itself thus, that it is an educational trip, then it theoretically should be beholden to its participants to teach them both the Holocaust and Israel from a historical perspective as well as from an emotional one.

One of the fundamental tensions that exist on the March of the Living, particularly regarding the way in which its educators educate, is the dissonance between the cognitive (facts, dispassionate information) and the emotive (emotion-laden, identity-forming) pedagogies in place on the trip.

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76 Interview, 2014  
77 Hebrew: to make close or to bring closer, usually relating to making Jews more religious.  
78 March of the Living website.
This is, in some ways, a reflection of an attempt to straddle the formal and informal educational divide. In a sense, both the cognitive and emotive elements have a place in Jewish education. If the ultimate goal of informal Jewish education is the knowledge of Jewish past and present for the preservation of the Jewish future (Reimer and Bryfman, 2008, p. 342), then the emotive piece is significant. Informal education predicates itself on “spontaneous” (Livingstone, 2006, p. 204) learning – in terms of a “teachable moment to impress participants with his/her deep Jewish commitments” (Reimer and Bryfman, 2008, p. 344), and of education through experience with all five senses as opposed to students sitting in a classroom being a passive receptacle for information. The March of the Living thus fits far more within the realm of experiential education than formal. That said, March leadership markets the program as an opportunity to learn about the Holocaust in situ, with an emphasis on its curriculum and education. As it struggles to negotiate the divide between informal and formal education, however, its emphasis on emotive processes is educationally problematic as it is only utilized effectively with appropriate outcomes when the cognitive elements are also in place.

The March of the Living leadership attempts to do both, but for various reasons (explained throughout this section), it largely fails to do so. Thus, the emotive element is often the only form of education that the students receive on the trip, which has serious implications.

An important element to understand at the outset is that there is a complete lack of uniformity among the experiences of various participants, not only from year to year, but also from contingent to contingent, bus to bus, small group to small group. The following charts illustrate the strict divisions that break up the trip into small microcosms:
Figure 7: Contingent One Breakdown, Toronto March of the Living

Figure 8: Contingent Two Breakdown, Toronto March of the Living
Figure 9: Typical bus, divided into microcosms

The above division is likely the most important factor needed to understand the following data section. Each ‘microcosm’ that is created by the March of the Living functions of its own accord, and the success or failure of the March of the Living’s goals, as well as to what extent the above processes are at play on the program is almost entirely dependent on the educator the students are assigned to. In other words, as is true in most educational settings, it’s the luck of the draw.

During the years in which I have observed the program, the way in which the educator chooses their “most appropriate and/or most effective” method of teaching students about the Holocaust in situ has the greatest bearing on how participants understand the curriculum. I will draw attention to this issue repeatedly throughout this chapter, by addressing specific ways in which different educators chose to present material. Thus, the students’ experiences on one bus may be drastically different from the learning that happened on another.
5.2 Frameworks and Literature

Barry Chazan, in his landmark analysis of Israel experience trips (1994), argued that ideology and partisanship is part and parcel of any proper informal educational trip: “the good trip is rooted in a ‘curriculum’ which reflects an underlying philosophy or ideology … [It] Is not simply an ‘itinerary’ or schedule of events. It is a carefully-woven scenario which reflects a world-view” (p. 28). Like the Israel experience trips that Chazan (1994) and Kelner (2002, 2008, 2010) reference, the March of the Living is far from ideologically neutral, but in doing so is keeping with the Deweyan version of pedagogy common to informal education. This chapter explores the pedagogy of the March of the Living “on the ground” in Poland and the way in which the ideological underpinnings of the commissioned Israeli educators directs the tourist gaze of the participants, and the influence that this has on the participants when juxtaposed against the backdrop of Nazi ghettos and death camps in Poland. As a necessary frame of reference, I begin with two useful frameworks (grounded in relevant literature) through which the data findings of this chapter were analyzed.

1. John Dewey’s (1939) framework of education and experience, wherein students are encouraged to participate with the curriculum and to shape their connection with the presented facts using their own personal background and experiences. This cornerstone of experiential or informal education is a useful tool to understand the goals of the umbrella term ‘experiential education’ as a whole, and the March of the Living’s pedagogy in particular.

2. Using the above Deweyan framework, the dichotomy of emotive versus cognitive experiences, and the use (and misuse) of emotion as a vital part of the informal educational experience. I pay particular attention to the concept of “embodiment” and its use on the trip, within the context of the reconceptualization of curriculum.

5.2.1 Education and Experience

John Dewey’s perception of education as having the ability to convey social norms and be used for the purposes of student socialization is one of the bases of the informal educational model. His idea of “moral education” (1938) and “education by experience” (1939) infuses all Jewish informal education (Reimer and Bryfman, 2008, p. 301), particularly the March of the Living.
His argument that students learn best when actively engaged in an event or idea rather than passively learning about it is the bedrock of experiential education. Chazan (1994) references this idea in his assertion that informal Jewish education is “rooted in a belief that the experience is central to the individual’s Jewish development” (p. 38). In this case, he refers to learning through “participation in events” and the way in which said involvement “results in a pedagogy that attempts to create settings which enable values to be experienced personally and events to be experienced in real time and in genuine venues” (p. 21). The March also implements the three “characteristics” common to all Jewish experiential education: Recreation, Socialization, and Challenge (Reimer and Bryfman, 2008, p. 344). Recreation is the desire for students to have a sense of enjoyment and fun within a Jewish context. Socialization is best described by Reimer as the goal of encouraging “participants to identify with a Jewish group and to internalize those behaviours, attitudes and feelings that characterize members of that group” (2008, p. 345). Last, experiential educators seek to challenge their charges to seek out different Jewish communities, milieus, and a more complex identity; to deepen their “Jewish journey.”

Despite the formal curriculum, the primary goals of the March of the Living, such as “entering history” as well as “hearing a witness to become a witness” (thereby denying Hitler any posthumous victories) are directly reflective of informal educational practices, and certain pedagogical theories such as constructivist and reconceptualist educational theory. Some of the important reconceptualists, such as Pinar (1988) and Grumet (1989), discuss how in traditional curriculum theory, content was often seen as static or eternal (p. 15) and reinforced a traditional top-down power dynamic. This type of education is often teacher-centric or material-centric, and the experiences and values of students and how those impact their understanding of material was frequently not considered. In this relationship, the teacher was the dispenser of knowledge and information and the student was the repository. As reconceptualist theory was created during the social protests of the 1960s, in many ways its values directly reflect the anti-authoritarian ideas of the time period. Furthermore, reconceptualists, in the words of William Pinar (1988), “acknowledge the value-laden perspective” (p. 210). The theory in many ways encourages understanding where both the teacher and student stand in relation to the phenomena they are studying (Grumet, 1989, p. 17).

This decentralization of education is part-and-parcel of the Toronto March of the Living, in terms of how students approach the material. One such way is the hiring of chaperones (who lead
and facilitate the pre-trip educational program) who aren’t necessarily well-versed in education or history in general, and certainly not the history of the Holocaust specifically. The program, thus, often transitions into group discussion, with the group examining content and making decisions together. Within this context, students certainly have far more agency and involvement in their own learning, but this pedagogical choice is arguably only appropriate when steered by a hand with experience in education and the material. This tendency carries over onto the trip, and although during the day the students are for the most part taught by an educator (Israeli tour guide) during the evening debriefing sessions, the group is once again led by the chaperones and group discussion settings. These debriefing sessions are critical from a pedagogical perspective, because it is during these meetings that most often attributions of intentions and responsibility are shaped and formed by the students in conjunction with each other. This phenomenon is discussed more at length later.

The emphasis on educational experience as a form of socialization is also reflective of “constructivist” pedagogy. As Richardson (2003) says, constructivism is “often associated with pedagogic approaches that promote active learning, or learning by doing” (p. 1632) a key decision with Jewish educational travel. The decision to move away from traditional classroom education on the March of the Living allows students to learn by experience – to develop emotional and intellectual connections with an event that may seem like ‘ancient history.’ A fundamental belief of constructivist pedagogy, additionally, is the acknowledgement and inclusion of pre-existing worldviews (Richardson, 2003, p. 1630).

Within this pedagogic milieu, the pre-existing Jewish communal attitudes towards history, towards Poland, about the Holocaust, all come into play as students explore the landscape of the Shoah. As an example, this is particularly true regarding pre-trip attitudes about Poland. Richardson (2003, p. 1630) acknowledges that within the constructivist mentality, the inclusion of pre-existing attitudes and values encourages students to come to their own understanding of

79  Explore critical pedagogy or literacy

80  While this research is particular to Holocaust trips to Poland, there is a wide range of travel programs to Israel. Taglit Birthright, the free ten-day trip, is most common. However, there are dozens of trips that range from ten days to a year sponsored by the North American Jewish community. For more information, see the MASA website.
the ‘truth.’ The students, daily in Poland, construct their own truth about the history of the Holocaust and the burden of history. In many ways, the students see what they expect to see. There is often the communal perception that Poland is the land of Jewish death, and that the Poles were just as responsible for the Holocaust as the Nazis. As Erica Lehrer (2013) notes, Poland has become an easy symbol for the Jewish community in many ways, often as a “touchpoint for antisemitism.” (p. 57) As a result, that pre-trip attitude shapes their interactions with the landscape, although some of the pedagogical choices (such as only seeing the death and concentration camps while in Poland and the tight security that makes the country seem inherently threatening) on the program certainly contribute.

Ultimately, the March of the Living intends students to “experience” Poland and Israel within an explicitly Jewish construct. With the key goals of value-based education, and of students “doing Jewish” with other Jews, they enter the landscape of Poland seeking to experience the country but within a strict set of parameters. They are “experiencing” ‘Poland’ (and ‘Israel’) within a microcosm in which the goal is more socialization and identity building than learning history. Thus the way in which the countries and narratives are presented to the students is inevitably shaded by this agenda, and history is relegated to a position in which it is used first and foremost as an emotive touchstone for which the students to engage on their way to a more crystallized and relevant understanding of Jewish ‘uniqueness.’

5.2.2 Emotion and Education

The role of values and emotion is a (if not the) key difference between formal and informal education. For the most part, there is an attempt in the classroom to strip narratives and emotion in order, as Kelner (2002) puts it, “to allow their dispassionate consideration” (p. 64). Informal education, on the other hand, uses emotion as both “a means and an end” (p. 65) in which an emotive understanding of the event, country and site in question is constructed for the express purpose of being emotionally meaningful. This paradigm is fundamental to the March of the Living. Kelner (2008) offers an interesting synthesis of the goals that must exist within this

81 Generalization, based on many factors including but not limited to the issues covered in Chapter Four.
paradigm, when he argued all Jewish educational travel is predicated on two questions: “who are we?” and “what lessons can we take from history?” (p. 425).

These guiding questions are an excellent framework through which to analyze the March of the Living and the role of emotion and intellect. When the educational component of the trip is framed within these two questions, the primary value is not being placed on the history itself, but the way in which the history is used (by being framed within emotive processes and through an identity-building lens) in order to substantiate a modern Jewish relationship to a Jewish past. The question is not what happened in history, but how the ‘lessons’ from it inform our decision-making today. It is about who “we” are in relation to that history. Joseph Reimer and David Bryfman (2008) acknowledge that the March of the Living is hardly alone in this tension, saying that “informal education is often identified with feeling rather than cognition” although Chazan (2004) also argues that a binary dichotomy between informal and formal education, between feeling and cognition, is hardly as black and white as suggested (p. 344).

The emphasis on emotion and identity is a fundamental component of the March of the Living program, in which instead of “bland” or “textbook” facts, the educators employ more value-laden methods in which to teach about the Holocaust. Some examples include: the use of music, silence, poetry, singing, and dancing in order to encourage students to develop an emotional connection with the history and with each other. It also overlaps with identity- self- and community- building ideologies in which students are encouraged to understand the event in terms of the way it shapes their present. In one way, emotion also plays a significant role before the trip even begins, with the highly “gut-based” perspectives on Poland and the Polish people that many students entered the program with. In this case, emotion is a stumbling block, because it can be very hard for people to re-think or re-assess their pre-conceptions, misconceptions and prejudices. Those emotive undertones can ultimately cloud their judgment or ability to see historical facts beyond or in conjunction with the emotional framework they enter the program with. Emotive processes and understandings infuse every element of the March of the Living, from the application, to the pre-trip programming, from the pedagogy to the post-trip programming.

82 Student interviews, 2015-2017
The most common way in which the March of the Living utilizes the “emotive” element of education during their week in Poland is through the practice of embodiment. Embodiment within curriculum is best defined by Ellsworth (2005) as a pedagogical shift wherein the teacher chooses to immerse students in an environment where they “experience” the history they are learning about. The concept of embodiment is a crucial element of the March of the Living. Discussed in more detail in its many iterations later, what’s important to understand is that embodiment is the key pedagogic shift at play in the March of the Living, and I argue that it is the primary source of inaccurate and damaging attributions of responsibility for the Holocaust.

Jeffrey C. Podoshen (2015 and 2016) describes the significant emotional processes at work on Jewish pilgrimage to Poland that tie in with Ellsworth’s concept of embodiment. Podoshen et al. (2016) lays out four critical theories:

i. Tourists close to the history of the Holocaust feel more ‘negative emotions’ while at the sites, which more accurately predict long-term behaviour changes than positive ones (Nawjin, Isaac, Girdnevskiy and van Lempt, 2015).

ii. The processes at work on the trips have long-term ramifications on the emotional state of participants (Liyanage, Coca-Stefaniak, and Powell, 2015).

iii. Co-presence at the sites (of both survivors and participants as well as parents and participants, for those who go with their parents/children) engenders greater identification with – and embodiment of – those who experienced the atrocity (Kidron, 2013).

iv. Many Jews desire to return to these sites as a way of seeking “emotion and stimulation” in order to provide “structure and context for identity” (Kidron, 2013) (p. 3).

The above processes form an excellent paradigm through which to understand not only the communal significance that the March of the Living has taken on in Toronto, but also the ways in which cultural and pedagogical choices on the program are interpreted and internalized by the various stakeholders. In Podoshen et al. (2016), the authors assess the ways in which “identity-based” conflict frequently breaks out on these trips, as a result of misunderstandings of even “mundane behaviours.” Many students interviewed described their daily assessment of Poles visible outside of the exclusively Jewish ecosystem of the trip, and almost all were negative. The students assumed anti-Jewish sentiment in even the most banal behaviours, and interestingly, according to Podoshen et al. (2016) this may have been a self-fulfilling prophecy, as these negative and tense interactions have caused a growth of native antisemitism among people who live near Holocaust sites. Where this research falls short, in my opinion, is that it relied solely on post-trip interviews and documentary films, which was the only visual of the interactions they
were studying. I believe that direct observation/participant observation is essential to understand the processes at work on the trip. Additionally, while Podoshen et al. (2016) describe the impacts on the local-tourist relationship, it was evidently outside of the scope to assess the specific elements on the trip that influenced the relationship on both sides. Despite that, I find their categorization of the responses – particularly about the influence of context (ie. learning in situ) that causes a shift in student’s interpretation of benign interactions – provide a useful framework.

Erica Lehrer (2013) also describes the emotional processes at work on the March of the Living, through her experience of being an educational guide one year. She acquired this job at the last minute after another guide fell through, despite her self-admitted experience in experiential education, because “[she] would be in Poland, [she] was Jewish, and that seemed to suffice” (p. 64). She extrapolates her experiences onto the March of the Living as a programmatic whole, assessing the value and implications of mission travel to Poland. She describes the emotional underpinning of mission travel as a “single-minded pursuit of a particular experience; an exalted moral purpose and expectation of personal transformation” (p. 59). Her analysis of the phenomenon of the way in which Jewish students view Poland (and view Poles viewing them) is excellent and I use it to help illustrate the creation of Poland within an explicitly Jewish construct. However, one concern I had with her chapter on the March of the Living is that her experience is relatively limited (having had one experience as a guide). Further, her description of the March entirely as a mission describes the trip from some cities; however, other cities (Toronto being one of them) utilize a formal curriculum and offer credit, making the story more complex than what is being presented here. That said, the way in which she assess the trip as a Jewish person who lived in Poland for many years offered a level of depth and complexity to an understanding of the way in which Jewish pilgrimage travel to Poland impacts the Jewish-Polish relationship and understanding.

83 Nager, Pham and Gold’s 2013 quantitative study entitled March of the Living, a Holocaust Educational Tour: Effect on Adolescent Jewish Identity is also an interesting article to assess in regards to my dissertation, namely as it finds that Jewish identity “did not substantially increase overall or from one period to the next” – contrary to the stated goals of the March. Through my research, I drew some different conclusions. In Chapter Six, I will assess some of my theories as to why our research had such different findings.
The March of the Living ultimately sacrifices the academic components of the program on the altar of the identity-building objectives. The concern with this is that one of education’s most important roles is that it causes the learner to examine themselves in relation to an event, a people, a series of choices. Education should encourage learners to think critically - not only about the facts and information that they are being presented, but also about their own understanding and the way in which they relate to it and themselves. Within the context of the March of the Living, when the emotive is prioritized and the cognitive is considered less significant, it creates an environment where students aren’t really encouraged to examine themselves or understand patterns of human behaviour. One Holocaust education agency, Facing History and Ourselves, argues that by studying human behaviour, it enables students’ to “[understand the] complexities of history, and make connections to current events, [to] reflect on the choices they confront today and consider how they can make a difference.” When the study of human behaviour is absent in Holocaust education, particularly when juxtaposed against ‘Poland’ (the inherently threatening landscape constructed on the March of the Living) the internalization of victimhood many students take on can be traumatizing, and yet in a way psychologically comfortable as it asks nothing of them from a self-examination perspective. The implications of teaching victimhood are many, and are addressed more in Chapters Six and Seven.

5.3 Poland, Holocaust, and the creation of a “usable” past

5.3.1 March of the Living, narrative, and “usable” history

Eisen (1999) argues that nostalgia, the “form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one’s home or country; severe homesickness” (p. 157) brought about by utilizing the “old [Jewish] home[land]” is a modern secular Jewish mitzvah. In visiting these former sites of Jewish life and death, the students engage in a ritual act of secular Judaism, fulfilling the mitzvah in question. Feldman (1995) seconds this, arguing that the collective Jewish experience of this

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84 Facing History And Ourselves Website, www.facinghistory.org
85 He discusses France, Germany and Israel, but this could be equally true about Poland in this context.
dark form of tourism became more central to secular Jewish identity than beliefs. Although he is speaking of Israelis here, the experience can be extrapolated to the secular Jewish populations of the Diaspora. The educators, thus, face a serious dilemma brought forward by Kelner (2008) of how they make the students feel a sense of nostalgia for a home that was never theirs, for a culture they don’t necessarily recognize as their own (p. 486). This method of attempting to generate a connection, to make the students feel something for the people and life that was lost, to make them feel that they themselves would also be caught in the tightening Nazi noose if they had been born into this time period instead of their highly privileged one, plays a significant role in the way in which educators present the sites in question.

In attempting to create an emotional, nostalgic connection for a way of life and a people that was lost, the educators seek to create a usable history within the boundaries of a collective memory set against the backdrop of Poland. Fitting in with the Halbwachs (1992) definition, the educators seek to transform the individual memory to a collective one for the purposes of identity substantiation. Within the March of the Living’s educational constructs, the Holocaust is summoned as a method of creating a “usable” collective understanding most directly in relation to Israel but as well to create a collective understanding that exists among the group about their Jewish identity and community. This context of “usable” history is one that is important to understand in terms of the way in which the educators use emotive elements first and foremost, as facts that exist outside the narrative presented are often obfuscated, relegated to the background, or not mentioned at all. As the history of the Holocaust becomes increasingly important in the modern Jewish identity (Bialystock, 2000; Novick, 2000; Kugelmass, 2006; Kelner, 2008; Schweber, 2008) ritualized trips to the “old home” of Poland have transformed into an imperative, as there’s “no other way to really know” the recent history (Kugelmass, 2006, p. 201). Although the students are already primed to see the sites as symbols beyond historical evidence, the way in which the educators guide the sites for the most part reinforces and augments this perspective.

Many of the guides during the years I’ve been observing them use Poland as a touch-point less for the understanding of history than for the cultivation of feeling and emotion in their charges.

86 Posthumously collected and published.
This is not to say that this is true across the board. However, many guides demonstrated a tendency towards the use of emotion-laden pedagogic tools over explanations of historical facts and significance of the sites in question. This may be for a number of reasons, but I would point strongly to the fact that the educators hired are Israeli tour guides who are educated within the sphere of Israel first and foremost. They are excellent, knowledgeable guides for the Israel section of the trip, but they are significantly less effective while in Poland. While they do have training, I discovered that most did not have a formal educational background in much pertaining to Poland or the Holocaust, and many cite their background through “reading and personal study” or the “years of doing it.” Erica Lehrer’s (2013) story of how she became a guide one year on the back of her being both Jewish and in Poland, despite no experience in guiding or teen-education indicates some of the deep issues at work here. The problems exhibited by the guides are also idiosyncratic because they’re not necessarily reflective of trends in Israeli Holocaust education. The state in the last decade particularly has moved towards depoliticization and a greater understanding of nuance and complexity. The monolithic narratives presented by many of the guides (as well as their politicized and nationalistic overtones) would indicate, therefore, one of two things: either, these are guides who have been doing the program for a long time and have not updated or altered their delivery at all, or, they are getting direction from the program leadership to present the Holocaust in more simplistic and emotional tones.

Aside from the fact that there is something fundamentally problematic in bringing those with a cursory training in the Holocaust to Poland to teach the students about the Holocaust, the fact that they are Israeli frequently influences the way in which they direct the students and their tourist gaze while at the sites. They are, in the words of an experiential education professor at Hebrew University, “the embodied answer to the problem Poland presents.” Many of them also utilize that position to reinforce the strict dichotomization of Poland v. Israel, the underlying focus of said usable history.

5.3.2 Itinerary as necessity, not pedagogy

“I feel so badly for our guide, she seems really nice, but like, no one is listening to her!” - Student, 2017 March of the Living, in POLIN: the Jewish Museum in Warsaw
Chazan (1994), discussed the importance of the itinerary as key to creating an educational experience, a framework necessary to allow the guides to create a narrative and construct knowledge in specific ways. Tourism in general, and pilgrimage and educational trips specifically, is a semiotic experience in which places and sites take on constructed meanings and symbolism (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 2004). To harness the power of these symbols and create the desired educational experience, the “journey” that students take, as set out by the itinerary, is key. When the March of the Living arrives in Poland, however, there is an immediate influx of thousands of teens and adults, all with an interest in seeing the same basic sites, utilizing the same general itinerary, and all in competition with each other for access to the places in question. Thus, the itinerary often becomes rooted in necessity as opposed to designed with pedagogy in mind.

This is true right from the beginning of the trip, when “overnight” flights are utilized (where the students presumably sleep) followed by a full day on the ground in Poland, because of limited timing. In my many years on the trip, I have never known a plane entirely full of teenagers, most of whom are friends or acquaintances, to be anything but raucous. Thus, the plane arrives in Warsaw or Kraków, sometime between 2:00 and 5:00 a.m. Canadian time, most of the students having little to no sleep, and they are immediately thrown into the lion’s den of Holocaust education.

The pedagogic element is a concern when simultaneously attempting to construct a trip and a program. In 2017, the first day was focused on pre-war Jewish life in Poland at large, but mostly in Warsaw, with a Polish-guide led visit to POLIN: The Jewish Museum in Warsaw. The students, unfortunately, could not appreciate the accuracy and significance of beginning the trip with pre-war Jewish life, because they were for all intents and purposes dead on their feet. As I self-admittedly eavesdropped on the participants, most of the comments I heard were variations on a theme: “I’m so tired; I can not listen to this; this is a really nice museum, I wish I could actually appreciate it but I’m honestly just too tired; they haven’t told me anything I don’t already know.”

Presumably, the next logical step would be to focus on ghettoization, the first stage of Nazi rule for the Warsaw Jews, before moving on to Treblinka, where the majority of Jews from that city and its environs perished. Unfortunately, given the nature of Shabbat observance on the program,
it ends up being in reverse. The participants move from “pre-war Jewish life” (although most students understand very little about the subject), to Treblinka, to a walking tour of the Warsaw ghetto. Thus, everything they learn on the Shabbat walking tour of Warsaw is coloured by their outcome. Now, one could make an argument that the same could be said of the entire trip to Poland. The students experience Poland and pre-war Jewish life entirely through the lens of where and how Jews died. The reality is, however, is that the Holocaust progressed in a series of steps, and the process of ghettoization was distinct from the process of eventual murder. The haphazard framing could also encourage the students in the perception that the Nazis had planned to execute the Holocaust from the beginning, ignoring the functionalist debate in favour of the intentionalist one.87

This is a logistical concern somewhat beyond the staff’s control, but there are implications. First of all, for the most part the first day attempts to construct and re-introduce pre-war Jewish life, whether in Kraków or Warsaw. There is a concerted effort to demonstrate where the pre-war Jewish neighbourhoods were, what life was like, to see it in situ. Unfortunately, this day is also effectively a write-off as a result of students’ being incapable of paying attention due to jetlag and exhaustion. And what’s concerning about that is that for the most part, the staff is aware of that. Thus, the only attempt to address pre-war Jewish life in Poland is lost in a haze of exhaustion. Most seem to think (rightly so) that you cannot take the teenagers straight to a death camp. But in relegating pre-war Jewish life to the one day where students are incapable of taking anything in, that means that for all intents and purposes, the only experience of Poland that the students have is one framed within the four walls of death camps, ghettos, and killing fields, something that the program has been struggling against.

The itinerary is also frenetic, with the students being driven around the country to see what one chaperone earnestly described as “Poland’s highlights:” the death camps. The students often wake between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m. and don’t go to bed until close to midnight. As Kelner (2002)

87 This too is historically problematic, as it is considered by many that the “true” accounting of the Holocaust lies neither in the functionalist nor internationalist field, with there being subtleties and nuances missed by both (LaCapra, 2014, p. 11) but despite that lack of nuance, many of the educators solely present the Holocaust within the intentionalist context. This, of course, falls in line with the general tendency towards a politicization of history that takes place on the program.
describes, “the rapid pace and frequent juxtaposition of unrelated or marginally related sites creates a cumulative experience where recollections of individual places and lessons blur” (p. 245), and as they are driven from death camp to death camp, from city to city, with little connectivity or thought as to the bigger historical picture, many students describe an almost robotic feeling the trip takes on. At each site is the same basic ceremony, same basic experience, with a four-to-five hour bus ride tacked on to each side. Far from being educationally effective, the trip in many ways becomes a series of lengthy bus rides, replete with emotional movies, as the students are shuttled around the country to try and jam as much as possible into their week-long experience.

5.3.3 ‘Poland’ as Jewish construct

*Everywhere, we will be surrounded by local Polish people, and our feelings toward them will be ambivalent. We will hate them for their involvement in the atrocities, but we will pity them for their miserable life in the present.* – Original March of the Living handbook (removed in the mid-1990s).

Although the participants return to Toronto with a passport stamp identifying themselves as having travelled to the country, the ‘Poland’ that they have visited exists solely within relation to the Holocaust. Within this context, Poland is a Jewish construct, in which only sites related to Jewish history are visited, and the country is viewed solely through the ideology of the program and through the windows (physical and metaphorical) of the bus. Thus, the experiences students have in ‘Poland’ are almost completely decontextualized from the country itself.

Despite myriad attempts by Toronto March of the Living to humanize the face of Poland and the Polish people (discussed more at length later) the students for the most part view the country as it exists outside of the enclave the trip creates for them. Much of this is a function of rules proscribed by the International March of the Living as well as the reality of travelling with hundreds of teenagers. Unfortunately, largely because of pre-trip expectations and ideas about Poland, as well as the power of the myths that exist about the trip’s time in the country, the students interpret these rules as a response to a lack of safety.
Upon arriving in the country, ostensibly because of time constraints, the students do not engage with the country in any real capacity. Although they are staying in Polish hotels, their movement is restricted even within the hotels themselves. They do not leave the hotel, and when they do, it is part of a tightly controlled program, surrounded by security, and focused exclusively on Poland as site of the Holocaust. They are not permitted to buy any souvenirs, snacks at any rest stops, or any food (despite the presence of kosher restaurants in Warsaw and Kraków). Other Canadian groups, such as the contingent from Montreal, are permitted to do so. The Toronto contingents don’t visit the Old Town historic tourist sites of either Warsaw or Kraków, instead only visiting the old Jewish areas and sites of the former Ghettos. Despite official protestations otherwise, I find it hard to believe that this is not an intentional choice to not engage with contemporary Polish businesses or people, particularly considering the time restraints and number of people are the same in Israel, and yet spending is allowed there.

Being there in April, the weather is usually unpleasant, which is interpreted by students as being “fitting” or “appropriate.” More than once I heard the maxim of discomfiture at the fact that Poland appears in colour, not in “black and white” like how it was pictured. The weather reinforces the students’ preconceptions about Poland that exist, and I heard repeatedly the idea of the country being “grey, cold and miserable.”

Food is also an interesting example of the March of the Living’s choices. The food is something that is of grave concern to the participants; to say it is unappetizing is an understatement. It is also almost the same thing every day. This is ostensibly because of the problems of importing food from Israeli producers. Once again, this is done for Kashrut reasons, despite the fact that there are kosher restaurants and catering companies in Poland. This

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88 Kosher laws
again feeds into the pre-trip conception of Poland as dull, miserable place where people eat horrible food and “live in a graveyard.”

When in ‘Poland’ the students are tightly surrounded by security men, which are in front of and behind the group, and these typically burly security men further reinforce the feeling of threat. The Auschwitz Jewish Centre in Oświęcim remarked that the constant presence of security is also a thorny point for locals, who believe that the students are purposely made to feel unsafe and threatened, and do not feel that they (locals) are perceived fairly as a result. Further, Lehrer (2013) argues that the inconvenience and burdens placed upon locals when tour groups arrive does little to ameliorate the relationship, and that Jewish students often look at Poles standing on the street or at stations (who are held up and unable to move) as evidence of Polish dislike. The participants also stand out to the locals, a tightly controlled and protected sea of youth in bright blue jackets emblazoned with a *Magen David* and Hebrew writing. According to interviews undertaken with locals, this is interpreted by many Poles who live in the environs of the camps and ghettos as a hostile ‘invasion’ of sorts, by people who hold them (the Poles) responsible.

On the buses in which the students travel, the emotional elements of the program are kept up by both the non-stop Holocaust movies (Escape from Sobibór, Fiddler on the Roof [idealizing the innocent shtetl life that was lost], Schindler’s List, Uprising, etc.) and survivor testimonies.

When they do get off the bus, it is entirely within a Jewishly-constructed bubble. They are in a constructed “Warsaw” and “Kraków,” or they are in Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, or Bełżec. They do not, for the most part, interact with Poland at all; not its country, its people, its economy.

Lehrer (2013) was advised as a guide on her trip that she should “draw all window curtains so that the room can not be surveilled from the outside;” “do not wander into stores and do not reveal information pertaining to the delegation’s plans or timetable;” “avoid joining strange people, particularly at their invitation” (p. 183). These instructions, given without context or explanation, would certainly impact the bus leadership’s understanding of Poland as a place of threat, a perspective that is often felt and appropriated by the teens under their control.89

89 See 3.2 as an example.
This interaction with Poland solely through the lens of the Holocaust leads to even the most banal and normal things in Poland taking on a frightening tint. For example, Matthew Schwartz, the participant who “wanted [the] feeling”\textsuperscript{90} of hating a country and its people so much that you had to get on a plane and leave, described in significant detail how afraid of the “trees” he was while standing in Treblinka. On the bus, he said, he “could not help but stare at the trees” and how the beauty of the forests was off putting because “the trees represented the forests in which Jews died.” Two girls on his same bus were focused on the houses - the mere presence of houses, even 30, 40 km away from the camp, were representative of the Polish knowledge of, and complicity with, the crimes of the Holocaust. Furthermore, in discussions among the bus, many students decried houses and people in Poland in general, failing to understand “how they could live here” and how they were “living in a graveyard.” Even things such as a modern office building in the former site of the Warsaw Ghetto were horrifying to a group of female students, because they existed outside of the context of the World War Two site they had come to engage with and imagine. Lehrer (2013) confirms this, arguing that in her experience, “Poles are blamed for living in proximity to Nazi sites” (p 123). Tamara Klein, a student who participated in 2015 after eleven years of Jewish education, said that when she was in Poland,

All we could think about and see was the energy of Jews who suffered during this time; I could only picture Poland in World War Two and I could not see it in its modern time. In Kraków, it was so beautiful, but I could not think about its beauty, I could see - you know, in that apartment, someone was probably killed. We could not see the beauty, just would think about the hardships.

Jordana Greenbaum, who was on the same bus as Tamara, echoed her thoughts, saying that:

Every morning in Poland I was sick to my stomach. I could not do it again. It was emotionally and physically exhausting. I would want to cry on the bus because I just could not go to another place, and it was the same feeling evoked every time. But weirdly, I did not actually cry on the trip. Nothing there seemed real to me, so I could not cry. I just knew I did not want to be there anymore. I hated it, I was tired, and it made me hurt. … I was so hungry all the time. I felt bad because I was in a camp, and worse things had happened

\textsuperscript{90} Chapter Four, page 100.
there. I don’t want to compare miseries, but I both felt how they felt and also felt an appreciation for the lightness of my complaints.

Two other students from the 2016 contingent (both whom came from pre-existing Jewish educational backgrounds) remarked on how jarring it was to see Poland as a real country where people lived, worked, had families, and socialized, similar to the way in which the participants did at home. Max Piller said that he:

did not expect Poland to be like that. The weirdest thing was coming to Poland and realizing it was a place. There were people there, who dressed the same as me, it was not World War Two, it was not black and white, people were walking around with Nikes, and I just kept looking at them and being like ‘where am I?’ It was shocking to see that Poland was a real country.

Ariella Bialystock also echoed this, saying that:

I don’t see the people who live there as evil, but I don’t understand how they could just forget what’s happened. People’s lives had to go on, I guess, but I would not want to live in a place where people got killed. It would be like living in a town full of ghosts that no one can see.

The students with more Jewish education, as indicated above, tended to have a stronger sense of antipathy towards the Poles. Their comments also speak to the way in which the program in Poland is curated to create certain emotional and physical responses. If you consider Jordana’s comments, that she was “physically sick,” both “emotionally and physically exhausted,” “hungry” and that she extrapolated those perspectives as a way of identifying with the victims, one has to consider whether or not this might be considered a desirable outcome by March of the Living leadership, who seeks first and foremost to have students “become witnesses” themselves.

Although it was more common to see undercurrents of hostility through those with more Jewish education in the months and years after the trip, there remained a similar sense of antipathy in those with less Jewish education, although it was usually accompanied by a more nuanced or differentiated understanding. Alicia Swirzky, who entered TJPS in Grade 9, after her experience on 2017 said that: “now [she] [understood] what it was like for them, to be there, to see it. I was
so cold and miserable and hungry all the time, just like they were.” Another male student, Adam Green, from her bus and from the same educational background said that:

It is amazing to see how well they kept up the concentration camps, the sites like Treblinka, all the memorials, considering that there was so much antisemitism in the country. It is cool how well kept up and preserved they are.

What I find interesting is the dual mentalities that exist in Adam’s statement, where he is simultaneously impressed by Polish upkeep of Holocaust-related sites and an assertion of a society with antisemitic beliefs. Similarly to Adam, a group B student named Simon remarked that he:

Found the museum at Auschwitz to be the most disturbing. It is so cold, and clerical. I expected to feel so much when I was there and it was just a museum, like anywhere else in the world. Why come to Poland, just to see a museum?

Simon’s last sentence there sums up much of the students’ understanding of Poland: that it is the place you come to in order to visit the Death Camps and other sites of Jewish history. Their understanding of Poland as a country where people live, work, eat, go to school and go to museums is negligible. Mark Himmel’s most distinct memory about Poland and its people was that they were “interesting.”

Remember when we went to the synagogue and the stripper threw her underwear at us? That was fun.[Chuckles] No but seriously, they seemed indifferent, not to care. They knew what happened to us, but aside from people who set up memorials, no one in Poland really cares about it that much.

Jennifer Green, who attended a public school for her entire educational career, remarked that:

In general, Poland, for a Eastern European country, they have a lot going on. I thought it would be like going up North of Barrie, you know, where there’s nothing going on. But when we stayed downtown Warsaw, you feel like you’re in the middle of a big population like Cleveland or Detroit or something.
I find these comments interesting as there is a greater variety and complexity of response and feelings represented by them, as opposed to those with an exclusively Jewish-education background which seemed to be more monolithic. They had the same experience of Poland, but there seemed to be less of a pre-ingrained emotional response to the country.

The yearly pilgrimage to Poland in and of itself transforms the sites in the eyes of the students in line with what Kelner (2002) describes as the “ritualized affirmation of connection to place” (p. 23). In the very genetic makeup of the trip, the camps, former ghettos and even cities themselves, particularly when seen through the windows of a bus, become “detached cognitively … [and decontextualized], transforming them into exhibits of themselves” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 18). The places take on a value that goes far beyond historic interest of relevance, but instead by the very nature of representation and display, become powerful symbols to be utilized by those visiting (p. 18). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002) argues, travel education engenders a type of knowledge that is “felt rather than understood through acts of reflection on the relationship between site and self” (p. 119). When at the sites in Poland, be it at a death camp (usually memorialized by the Soviets), or in the site of former ghettos (usually subsumed back into the landscape of the city with only small monuments) the representation and memorialization is for the most part not in line with the way in which Jewish leaders of the trip may want (Kelner, 2002, p. 367). This contrary representation (from a Jewish perspective) also plays into the symbolism that the sites take on, almost as if they are continued representations of hostility towards the Jewish people. The strongest example of this is the location of the monastery close to Auschwitz, always a topic thoroughly covered by the guides. Further, particularly when at locations in cities, the act of every day life continuing around sites of Jewish historical suffering, this symbolism becomes even stronger.

The Toronto March of the Living has gone to great pains for the students to see Poland and the Polish people, not just a heavily constructed version glimpsed as a threatening landscape through the windows of the bus. Over the years I’ve been studying the program for this dissertation, they have created Jewish-Polish youth mifgash\(^{91}\) programs, brought in Polish “Righteous among the

\(^{91}\) Hebrew: Meeting.
Nations”\textsuperscript{92} to address the students, brought in Jewish-Polish youth to tour Poland and Israel with them. Unfortunately, these attempts often don’t reach the students at the level they’re intended, both as a result of confirmation bias in the students’ perceptions of the country as an alien other as well as the foundational framework of the program which keeps the students in an entirely Jewishly-constructed country.

For the most part, the week in ‘Poland’ reinforces the students’ pre-trip perceptions regarding the country. That it is grey and miserable (weather). That it is antisemitic and threatening (tight controls, security). That they hate us, and therefore we don’t spend any money there (lack of financial engagement). That it is a country representative of Jewish death, of failed Diaspora (the only sites they engage with are the killing fields, death camps, sites of the former ghetto). This is a textbook example of confirmation bias, defined as a cognitive phenomenon in which people subconsciously “seek out and assign more weight to evidence that confirms their hypothesis, and/ or ignore or underweigh evidence that could disprove their hypothesis.”\textsuperscript{93} This cognitive process demonstrates that humans often receive and process data presented to them as a way of proving what they already believe.

That said, this confirmation bias is certainly aided (it is unclear whether this is purposeful or not) by certain pedagogical choices that the program implements. When you also consider what appears to be a purposeful decision to keep the students within an explicitly Jewish bubble in which ‘Poland’ is only engaged with as a site of Jewish death, one could draw the conclusion that although confirmation bias plays a role, the trip may seek to confirm these preconceptions. The participants on the young adult and adult trips, who are permitted to engage with Poland beyond ‘Poland’-as-Holocaust report far less hatred and mistrust towards the Polish people.

Whether or not the trip intentionally seeks to create in its teen participants a sense of Poland as threat, confirmation bias certainly does play a role. The students overwhelmingly come in with attitudes about the Holocaust that include, but are not limited to: a particularist perspective of the Holocaust as an exclusively (or almost completely) Jewish event, that the Polish people of the

\textsuperscript{92} Non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

\textsuperscript{93} Psychology Today, 2015.
1940s were at worst just as responsible for the Holocaust as the Germans were, and at best profited from Jewish death, and that the people of modern Poland remain rabidly antisemitic and were happy to have had their Jewish neighbours murdered. What is significant, however, is that much of these ideas are transmitted from previous participants who have been kept in that strict Jewishly constructed, fear-inducing country. This is the framework which many students (dependent on how much exposure they have to anti-Polish sentiment or formal Jewish education) enter the March of the Living. They expect the program to hold anti-Polish beliefs, and so that is what they find. They believe Poland to be “grey and depressing” and the Polish people to be “inherently, wholly antisemitic” – and so, that’s what they see. They approach this trip with a certain set of pre-trip expectations, and thus it should not be surprising that they arrive home from the trip having ascribed antisemitic undertones to even the most banal interactions with the Poles, and having only seen the landscape through World War Two terms.

5.3.4 The faulty assumption of previous knowledge

“Guide (Alex): ... On the way to Treblinka, we’re going to watch the film ‘Escape from Sobibór’...
Participant (Jesse): Sobibór?
Alex: Sobibór.
Jesse: What is Sobibór?
Alex: One of the Operation Reinhard camps.
Jesse: Operation what?

We were on our way to Treblinka, and the guide had introduced the film that we were going to watch: *Escape from Sobibór*. Within the bus dynamic, it immediately became clear that many of the students were unable to contextualize Treblinka within the broader story of the Operation Reinhard camps, the above student just being the first to admit to it. Despite the fact that it was clear that the contextualized understanding of the creation of the Death Camps was lacking, the guide soldiered on and put on the movie *Escape from Sobibór*, which played until just before we arrived. It was almost as if the movie (a tangentially-related movie played before every site on the bus ride) was supposed to fill all of the students’ knowledge gaps.

This small interaction highlights a complication present among Holocaust educators in certain spheres of the Toronto Jewish community: the underlying (and at times very faulty) assumption
that students have a baseline grounding in the history of the Holocaust. The same inaccurate assumption is made once the students arrive in Poland, where the Israeli educators commissioned by the March of the Living to guide Poland believe that there is a sufficient cognitive baseline in the Holocaust.

This belief is demonstrated in the way in which the guides convey historical fact to their charges. Much of the pre-site information that the educators disseminate to students is done on the bus in the 30-45 minutes before arrival. Before that, a movie (usually tangentially related to the site of the day, such as Escape from Sobibór before Treblinka or Schindler’s List before Auschwitz) is shown. To a certain extent, there is an understanding that the students will “get” something out of the movie, educationally, in advance of the trip. Given the hectic nature of the trip, however, most of the students end up sleeping throughout. Once the students are roused in the immediate period before arrival, the educator usually takes the microphone to give them historical information about the place they are going to. Unfortunately, the way that the bus is usually structured (20+ rows, with the rowdier kids usually gravitating towards the back and all chaperones, survivors and the educator sitting at the front) means that many students continue to chat amongst themselves instead of paying attention, with little to no adult intervention.

One guide, Alex, shared with me that this type of education is imperative in the context, and that “[they] have to assume that they know everything they need to by the time that they get here, because we don’t have time to teach them all over again as well as do everything we want to do in Poland.” A different guide, David, argued that the students did not actually need as much of the cognitive, fact-based “stuff” on the trip because “they could get all of that from a book, here, they come to feel.”

5.3.5 Cognitive processes (or lack thereof) and “facts-lite” guiding

“Look with your hearts, listen with your souls.” - Advice from an educator upon entering Treblinka, March of the Living, 2017
5.3.5.1 Polish monuments and narrative

The March of the Living is a program formed both for the purposes of ritualization of history and which employs the ritualization of memory and commemoration in situ. Thus all the history presented and activities on the trip are framed through the lens of commemoration and emotion. The educators, perhaps out of a misunderstanding of the grounding the students have regarding the Holocaust, or because they are operating first and foremost with an identity-building agenda as opposed to a historical one, implement certain pedagogical choices with two major impacts. The first is that many students not only don’t gain a significant understanding of the history and context of the event in question, and the second is that the participants exit the program with striking misunderstandings of the roles of the various people in wartime Europe, particularly with regard to attributions of responsibility foisted upon the Poles. These outcomes are achieved through the juxtaposition of a type of guiding that is “facts-lite” with emphases on songs, music and prayer, on an empowered Jewish identity (namely as represented through Israel), on modern antisemitism and threat, and finally, on encouraging the students to make Jewish choices in young adult and adult life.

The guides each create a narrative of the war and its significance, for the most part based on their own backgrounds and belief sets. Once their group arrives at the “site” of the day (be it a ghetto, concentration or death camp), the historical facts are often conveyed to students for the purposes of creating a usable history, with that use being determined by the guide. There are those who are facts-heavy and education based; those who are extremely religious and therefore everything is shaded by connectivity to Jewish religious life; those who are deeply Zionist and frame everything within Poland as antithetical to the Jewish state. Regardless, the narrative often utilizes certain facts and histories that work for them, and ignore facts that are less convenient, with the end goal of creating a usable past. For example, one group was touring around Warsaw, and the guide was making a number of disparaging comments about Poles. This suffused his tour, with odd comments like he “knew where to go for alcohol or hypodermic needles” when showing an apartment block. Likely this was meant as a joke, particularly about a decrepit building, but in listening to the students it was clear that within the context of the site they took it as a direct attack on the Polish people as a whole. Aspersions of rampant alcoholism and depression came from all student corners, near verbatim repetitions of comments made by adults before and during the trip.
One way this guiding within the context of emotion as opposed to intellect is the way in which many of the guides present the memorials to the Holocaust that litter Poland. Within Germany, the *mea culpa* element of memorialization is everywhere; in Poland, that same memorialization is common-place, and yet it is much more complicated. Most of the memorials, understandably, focus on the ethnic Polish experience under both the Nazis. Many memorials at the camps were also created by the Soviets. They are, thus, stripped of ethnic and religious qualifications, and the implications of that are discussed. Many students view that as Polish-led (as the historical background of the program has not given them sufficient basis to understand who the Soviets really were or what the implications were of Soviet control of Poland) despite the fact that they are acknowledged to be a product of the Communist period. The one Polish-built memorial that seems to come up within the March of the Living (in that it is acknowledged as Polish-built) is the infamous cross/monastery at Auschwitz. Thus, the implication is clear: the Soviets built these, those that the Poles built are claiming our history as theirs.

Unfortunately, many of the physical memorials that the students see are misunderstood by participants as being the providence of non-Polish groups, particularly the *Umschlagplatz* memorial in the former site of the Warsaw Ghetto. Entirely devoted to the hundreds of thousands of Jews deported from there to their deaths in Treblinka, it was built by Poles in 1988. Because the providence of this is *not* mentioned, whereas the Soviet creation of the camp memorials and the Auschwitz cross *are*, its absence is notable. When discussed afterwards, many students assumed that it was created by Jews. This is significant because physical memorials play into the mentality of claiming history as the providence of one particular group. When one chooses to mention that there was a disputed physical memorial (the cross) in which history did become a political battleground between Jews and Poles, it is equally important to mention the counterweight of Poles taking on the responsibility to memorialize an explicitly Jewish event. Further, seeing local Poles involved in historical memorialization may go a long way towards changing the attitude of Poles as perpetrators/hostile bystanders during the war, and angrily hostile regarding the shaping of their own history now.

### 5.3.5.2 Perpetrators and the “usable” past

This tendency towards the shaping of facts for the purpose of a usable history is most seen in the way in which perpetrator narratives are presented to the students. This is hardly uncommon in
many Jewish-led arenas for Holocaust education, wherein an explanation of why, in a serious, critical and thoughtful way, is ignored in favour of keeping the perpetrators within a cloudy veil of purely evil intentions. Perhaps this may be a fear that the organic outcome of explaining perpetrators is explaining them away. Perhaps it is done out of respect for Holocaust survivors, of keeping their experiences as the sole focus of Holocaust memorialization. Regardless of rationale, the fact that perpetrator narratives are often seem as less significant within traditional Jewish education about the Holocaust leads to a critical gap in knowledge, removing important context and understanding. The pervasive view of European peoples in the war acting like Goldhagen’s (1996) “Hitler’s Willing Executioners” runs rampant in the program, although within the context of the historical background students have, both Germans and Poles seem to take on this “willing” position. The March of the Living is far from the only Jewish educational institution to play into this, but a particular interview I had shed light on this in some alarming ways.

Alicia Bitton, an employee at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Israel, who works on Holocaust education content for international groups, shared with me the outcomes of a meeting with international March of the Living. Within this meeting, a division of the museum which is responsible for creating programming for international tour groups pitched a program in which the students would be responsible for assessing the reports of two people involved in the same interaction: one, an SS officer, merely a small cog in the Nazi bureaucratic machinery, discussing the deportation of Jews to Riga, Latvia. The second is the testimony of a survivor who was a part of that same deportation.

Yad Vashem runs the program, entitled “How is it Humanly Possible?” for many international groups. In the program, the students read sections of both memories and critically assess the events, with an emphasis on humanizing the perpetrator - who was he to make these choices? What had led him to this point? He was a “loyal” government member for the Weimar Republic, the Nazis, and the post-war West German government. How much of a role did ideology play in his decisions, or was he “just following orders”? If so, what does that mean for our

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See Writing History, Writing Trauma by Dominick LaCapra for an erudite analysis of this phenomenon.
understanding of human nature? Of patterns of human behaviour? Of preventing yourself and others from becoming complicit, becoming perpetrators yourselves? When reading the survivor testimony, they sought to understand the source: when she discussed the fact that an officer murdered someone, why wasn’t that in the officer’s story? Was he the murderer? Does he view himself like that? Ultimately, the program presents the Holocaust within a cognitive framework, not an emotional one; through a universalist lens and not a particularist one. For both of those reasons, the program was shot down. Just like David, the tour guide said:\(^9\) here, they came to feel.

The member of the March of the Living international who declined that this program be used proceeded to ask for less “historical content” and more of a focus on “modern antisemitism,” seemingly arguing that this was of more relevance to the teens participating on the trip. In a way, this interview and the competing tension between intellect and emotion, between universalism and particularism, sums up the complications and difficulties present in the March of the Living.

If the program is about Holocaust education, first and foremost, what’s wrong with an activity which focuses on cognitive versus emotive processes? If the program is less about Holocaust historical facts, and it is about using history as a base from which to enact the slogan of “never again” then arguably, assessing patterns of human behaviour that led to participation in mass murder is also very important. In fact, if one truly wants to utilize the history of the Holocaust as a call to arms to prevent any future repetitions (despite the fact that the knowledge of the Holocaust has done little to prevent subsequent genocidal acts) then understanding the mentality of the perpetrator and the rationale behind why ordinary people participated in genocidal acts is far more important than understanding the victims.

However, within the framework of the March of the Living, the international leadership seems to be far more focused on the students’ feeling connected to the story of the victims than understanding the mentality of those who either were involved or who stood by and let it happen. This is even more significant given the makeup of the program, which encourages students to “enter” history and become living embodiments; in this case, that means those who lived and

died in the hostile world of World War Two Europe. Through this embodiment, the threat becomes real, present, and contemporary.

5.3.5.3 History-“lite”

Beyond just a tendency towards “facts-lite” history, there occurs, with alarming frequency, the utterance of complete inaccuracies presented as fact, which, for the most part, go uncontested. As a general rule, it is smaller facts that are confused. When in Treblinka, a guide said that the camp “stopped operating at the end of the war.” It stopped in 1943, a full two years earlier. Another said that “it was turned over to the Ukrainians by the Soviets.” This is, of course, illogical. In the Warsaw Ghetto tour, someone argued that the Polish caloric allotment during the war was just as high as the Nazi one, (c. 2500/ day) as opposed to the Jewish one of 164/ day. The Polish were being asked to subsist around 600/ day. Another guide said that the war ended in 1946. These are a few of examples of many, and speak to a general tendency among the guides to not be focused on strict facts. At times, however, guides present some truly shocking inaccuracies, such as on the 2017 trip in which one guide shared with his bus in Majdanek that Zyklon B was provided to Nazi Germany by Canada. When pressed on that by a chaperone, he said that they provided them the reserves before they entered the war in 1941. After about 30 minutes, when the chaperone pulled out his cell to check on that answer, he ‘retracted’ in that he said he had read about that somewhere and would pull the source out for the students to double check. The participants on the bus were lucky to have a chaperone in that case who knew that to be inaccurate and was confident enough to challenge the educator on it.

I do not seek to fault the educators for every small error. I know first hand how mistakes happen while teaching. The greater concern is how so many guides don’t put an emphasis on the academic study of the Holocaust, and the flippant way in which the history is, at times, treated. This may be a result of natural error (although they occur with too great a frequency to be acceptable in an educational setting) or the result of the fact that the guides, for the most part, are trained first and foremost in Israel and not Poland. Regardless, it speaks to a need for greater training and emphasis on historical accuracy when it comes to presentations about the Holocaust.

The way in which emotive processes are used would also indicate the organization’s perception that the histories of the Holocaust and Israel don’t stand alone. The Holocaust in its facts, its testimonies, its history is not enough, apparently, without the heavy-handed emotional overtones
and manipulation. It would indicate that it is the Holocaust-as-symbol as opposed to Holocaust-as-fact is seen as the only way of connecting participants to the past. The story of Israel is also insufficient without the undertones of antisemitism and threat, and when presented thus is only “justifiable” (in the words of a professor at Hebrew University) when shown in relief against the story of the Shoah. In short, the program’s schema and presentation styles indicates a fundamental lack of faith in the history and fact of both Holocaust and Israel as being enough for students to understand their significance.

5.3.6 Music as emotional process

This tendency towards “facts-lite” education is augmented by the heavy reliance on music as a form of emotive expression and reinforcement. The music employed regularly by the March runs the gamut from Hebrew sayings set to music to English songs written about the Holocaust. They form the core of the ritual of memorialization, with the same basic formula at each site. The use of music as a way of affecting emotion is well documented (Swaminathan and Glenn Schellenberg, 2015; Lonsdale and North, 2011), and a recent study (Sleigh and McElroy, 2014) found that the “type” of music utilized is “more effective than alternate manipulations at changing a mood from positive to negative” (Swaminathan and Glenn Schellenberg, 2015, p. 190). Further, it has also been indicated (Molnar-Szakacs and Overy, 2006) that in hearing that same music in an ex situ situation has the power to return those same emotional responses. In short: the music that the March of the Living selects, and its implementation, has the power to induce the participants into a desired emotional state, and to recall that emotional state at a later time.

Music is intended to underpin the emotional connectivity to the program and heightened the mood at specific locales. Some songs employed regularly, and these are taught to the participants before they go, during the Shabbaton weekend away and the lyrics are provided for them in a little booklet that they carry around, and they form a part of the narrative presented on the trip. One of the commonly utilized songs “Legacy” exemplifies the goals of the March of the Living, as it exhorts its listeners to embody and pass on the message of the Holocaust in an extremely personal (and graphic) manner.
“Listen you’ll hear all the tears that I’ve cried/ I am the soul of millions who died/ before you were given your birth/ Part of your being, a piece of the past/ the women and children so brutally gassed/ this is my legacy, please make it last/ go tell all the people on earth.

Memories, as they grow older, tend to grow colder, and then disappear/ the burden is now on your shoulder/ you have a message, you must make them hear/ please never forget me, I am a spirit, that must live on/ Though you’ve never met me, you just remember me/ now that I’m gone.

Nothing has changed, I can still feel the hate/ suffering in silence, you’re tempting your fate/ you must speak out now, before it is too late/ You can not close your eyes and pretend/ Think of the grandfather you never kissed/ all of the relatives that you have missed/ raise up your voice and then raise your fist/ and tell the world ‘never again!’” ...

Ceremonies always finish with the survivors saying Kaddish and then Ha ‘Tikvah the Israeli national anthem. In this way the progression of selected music mimics the ritualization of grief that takes place on the March of the Living: the students move, in every site and at every ceremony (as well as in the overall schema of the trip) from a reclamation of Jewish life (as indicated by the Hebrew songs and prayer), the reflection on a lack of Jewish safety in the past and present (often framed within the context of modern antisemitism and a fear that the participants take upon themselves) and lastly with HaTikvah, cementing Israel as the sole guarantor of the promise of ‘Never Again.’ One way that music has a demonstrable effect is on a number of TJPS students who remarked that upon their return, the morning Israeli anthem has taken upon a new and emotional meaning to them. Samantha Eisen remarked that the words of the chorus, “L’hiot am chofshi ba’aratzenu” just means so much more to me now that I’ve been to Poland.” Jessica Davis, who has gone to the same schools as Samantha their entire lives, echoed this idea, saying that “Ha ‘Tikvah is our hope, it shows us that

Figure 11: Ceremony in Lupochowa Forest, MOL 2015

96 Lyrics from HaTikvah, Hebrew, “to be a free people in our own land.”
Another girl on the same trip in 2017, Gabby Rosen, commented that the daily singing now made her emotional, and that “it’s no longer robotic for [her] now.” This underlying dichotomy reported by students was interesting – it was less being in Israel that inspired a heightened connection with the Israeli national anthem and the ideas it represented, it was the act of being in Poland that reinforced the emotional tie with Israeli nationalism.

Outside the ceremonies, there are individual educators who relied upon the use of music as a way of affecting emotive responses to specific sites. As an example, in the Umschlagplatz (deportation place) in Tarnów, the guide used the song *Vehi Sheamda*, a song that the students may or may not be familiar with from the Passover seder, in order to set the mood and start a discussion. After he introduced what the site was, the students were asked to listen in silence to the song, a prayer set to music, which argues that “for not only one arose and tried to destroy us/ rather in every generation they try to destroy us/ and [God] saves us from their hands.” This song, which he translated after, was utilized to spark a conversation with the students about the way in which the Jewish community remains a hated, marginalized group, and whether or not they thought another Holocaust was likely. They decided it was. After that, he encouraged them to be quiet and listen to the song again.

5.3.7 Family ties, family modeling and engendered emotion

The March of the Living uses the presence and co-presence of family members (grandparents - parents - grandchildren) as well as the mimicking and modeling of family units in bus units in order to create an additional emotional component within the construction of the program. Carol Kidron (2013) argues that familial co-presence is a method of “searching for one’s inherited ‘centre out there’” and “the meaningful discovery of connectedness and continuities beyond the self” is an organic response to heritage tourism which by definition seeks the “cultural, familial and/ or collective legacy” (p. 176). Kidron (2009), who studied the phenomenon of Israeli Holocaust survivors returning to Poland with their children and/ or grandchildren found that the role of “co-presence” with the family members increased “engendered intense emotions” (p. 175).
Nuclear and extended family units are a common occurrence on the March of the Living, because many families regard it as a “bonding experience” to go with their family members. Further, the survivors often bring a plethora of children and grandchildren who populate chaperone and participant pools. Aside from ‘true’ family circles, the March of the Living also focuses on the creation of its ‘microcosms’ resembling *de facto* family units. In this context, survivors become representative and collective grandparents, with selected chaperones on each bus usually representing the ‘mom,’ ‘dad’ and ‘brother/ sister/ cousin’ roles respectively. In this way, both with the modeled and true families presented on the trip, the survivor testimonies take on an additional emotional component. In the above photo, you see a survivor dancing with students and his grandson in Tykocin in 2015, surrounded by celebrating on-lookers one of frequent times when the pre-trip familial models were celebrated and displayed. This act of families dancing together in sites of “spontaneous” celebrations is commonplace.

This evokes Bell’s (1997) description of “ghosts of place,” as the sharing of memories *in situ* allow the descendents (real or *de facto*) to “get an empathetic ‘feeling’ of what the Holocaust experience ‘was like’” (Kidron, 2013, p. 183). This performance of history is predicated upon two ideas: the first is a reclamation of victimhood on behalf of the survivor as well as the participants (children, grandchildren and others), in which the listeners are encouraged to seek for and find a sense of continuity - not only with the idealized pre-war life or the European Jewish community, but also with the survivors themselves. The second is the performative act of victory, in which the survivors return to the site of their communal and familial destruction with hundreds of real and *de facto* family members, to assert their triumph over the Nazis.
This connectivity with survivors and the family unit modeling is one of the most important ways in which the March of the Living imparts its messaging, and the heightened emotional state aids in the underpinning of creating an atmosphere which dictates how participants are to feel. Kidron (2013) also argues that it serves a therapeutic sense for both all real and de facto family members, as it allows the “narrativization, catharsis, liberation and closure” (p. 184) for the survivor, as well as the ability of the family members to truly engage with and “understand” the pain of those who came before them.

The reality is, of course, that one can never truly understand the experience if one was not there. However, the family modeling makes many participants “feel” as if they were there themselves, as if they “truly understand” the experiences of their real or de facto grandparents. In this, they feel as if they are able to truly act as witnesses, to pass on the torch of Holocaust remembrance once there are no longer survivors that walk among them. This family modeling is both fundamental part of, and augmented by, the March of the Living practice of embodiment.

5.3.8 Embodiment on the March of the Living

Last night I was transported from 1987 to earlier times: before the war and even back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In that way I have become part of Polish hasidic life, and I also enter the world of my grandparents Dora and Josef. Today we go to Auschwitz. By the time we enter, I have changed from being a “surviving grandson” to being equal, arriving at the gates from the past in the past. Only now can I finally die with Josef, Dora, and my father Hans. Later I walk back through the camp entrance at Birkenau, I am reborn, in my present life. As witness, not as a survivor.

- (Dekro, 1988, p. 11)

I glance at my own shoe, expecting it to be far different than those in this ocean of death, and my breath catches in my throat as I see my shoe, though lighter in colour, is almost the same style as one, no, two, three of the shoes I see: it seems as though every shoe here is my shoe. I wish I could throw my shoes into this pile, to grasp and feel each shoe, to jump into this sea, to become part of it, to take it with me.

- (Horn, 1992, p. 16)

The educators on the March of the Living seek first and foremost to disseminate the information in a way that will “get through” to the students, and make the event and the trip relevant to them. This many find difficult, as the participants under their charge are, for the most part, privileged North American Jewish students whom have little experience with real social or religious
persecution. Although this may not be a conscious decision, most end up framing everything within the goal of creating a usable past. In order to get the students to understand who they are in relation to the history of the Holocaust, and to make them feel a connection, the most commonly employed method is that of embodiment, in which the students are encouraged to “enter history” as a European Jew caught in the crosshairs of the Nazis. This is a goal of the International March of the Living, and is certainly reinforced by the experience of travelling with Holocaust survivors. The frenetic nature of the trip further complicates this by adding heightened emotion, sleeplessness, hunger and the accompanying emotional fraying and distress. Importantly, this emphasis on embodiment on the trip has a tendency to inculcate in its participants a sense of Poland as a landscape which is inherently threatening, and creates, reinforces and augments students’ perception of Poland as the ultimate land of Jewish death and its people as responsible for the deaths of ancestors they have come to embody. In the attempt to combat Holocaust fatigue, ultimately the educators seek for the students to understand that, but for time and location (and the State of Israel), this could happen to them too.

Students arrive in Poland searching for the “authentic” experience of the Holocaust. They are searching for meaning, searching for connection. There are constant questions to the educators about whether something is “real” or “constructed.” They come searching for as close an experience to those who emerged from the camps as possible. Eli Honig, hidden child, a professor at the University of Toronto and a former teacher at a TJPS, wrote an article in 2017 for the Canadian Jewish News concerning the implications of how students understand (and misunderstand) immersive Holocaust education. During his years of teaching, he saw many examples of students returning from their experiences on the March with what he considered problematic understandings of what it meant to be a participant on the program. In his article, he shared two in particular: one about a student who shared that she climbed into one of the crematoria so she could “feel” what it was like, and another who said she was hot on the actual

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97 Although some students reported negative interactions with non-Jews, this was far from normative among the participant pool.

98 Meaning that he was hidden by his family members in a non-Jewish setting (typically taken in by a family or by a convent) and survived the war that way.

‘March’ but that it was appropriate and she kept her jacket on so she could “suffer” like the Jews of old did. This self-aggrandizement and bizarre idealization of suffering has become one of the “expected authentic experiences” on the trip that many students seek. It is also very in line with how students understand the pedagogy of embodiment on the ground in Poland.

This idea of embodiment is studied in depth in Ellsworth (2005), when she assessed its role in pedagogy. Her ideas also far in line with Witold Rybczynski’s (2003) description of how historical sites are often guided “in the form of an experiential path that is critical to understand the [place] as [part] of an ongoing event” (p. 1). With embodiment employed as a “pedagogic hinge” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 35) the past “interfuses with the present … not through heavy-handed lecturing or prescriptive lessons but felt via a lived encounter …” with the intention of learning through the past “through its material impact on our inhabitations of the present.” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 19) Students are brought out of the classroom and to Poland to interact directly with the Polish landscape (in this case, largely restricted to the death camps and former ghettos). Within the context of the trip, embodiment is a process used regularly, where students are encouraged to “enter history” by “commemorating” the victims and survivors. Instead of using a general emotive process to frame the events, embodiment encourages the student to actively identify with a person or peoples involved in the history event itself. The boundaries of past and present become hazy, and students often understand the landscape as inherently threatening. This act of learning in situ often forces the shift from dissociative understanding of a historical event to an “interfusing of past and present” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 19) that encourages students to embody simultaneously the survivors (who they travel with) and liberators (as North Americans). When embedded in the landscape of the Poland, both as a result of many participants’ desires to walk the earth of Auschwitz and feel as if they too inhabited this place and lived to tell the tale as well as the educators’ consistent framing of the history in that way, students engage with the Holocaust as “an event that has not yet ended.” As Ellsworth describes, these pedagogical choices shift the history from being understood as a static event in the past to being one that they themselves are living through, forcing the learners to “contemporaneously respond to it” (2005, p. 19).

The goal of embodiment is interwoven in every historical tour, ceremony and even in the makeup of the program. The students are physically exhausted as a result of overnight flights, early wake ups, 10-12 hour days, and programming that runs at night. They are hungry because
so many don’t want to eat the food they’re offered in Poland. They are emotionally drained by consistent tours and ceremonies and the very nature of immersion in a trip focused on death.\textsuperscript{100}

The students, as a way of creating their authentic Poland experience, always appropriate the weather (regardless of what it is). The 2016 cohort reported feeling very strange towards Auschwitz as it was bright, sunny and warm on the day they went. One group told their guide that it felt wrong, and she retorted with a “you don’t think that they had hot days in Auschwitz?” Later, a number of girls in the same group said that it was fitting that it was so warm on the physical March of the Living because she was hot and uncomfortable and that was “appropriate” as it helped her understand her grandparents’ experiences better. In 2017, it was freezing and hailing, and the students consistently commented on the appropriateness - once again, because they were “suffering like they did,” echoing the Honig article.

5.3.8.1 The search for meaning in a gas chamber

“Everything around here is threatening. The trees. The houses. The people. You can really feel how scared people would have been to arrive here seventy years ago, I’m scared now.” Matthew Schwartz and I sat chatting outside of Treblinka (a sentence that represents complexities and tensions on the trip) as everyone was being caroled into order for our tour of the camp. It was the first real day of the trip, the students having spent the day previously travelling and at POLIN: the Jewish museum. He, and many of his friends, were “excited and ready” for the trip to really begin, as they hadn’t really “seen Poland yet” (despite having spent the day before in Warsaw). As the group made its way into the camp, the forest opened up into concrete “tracks” built by the Soviets to commemorate the former site of the tracks that led the people to their deaths.

\textsuperscript{100} For the most part, many (29/33) students interpreted these realities of the tour (before they left) as the March’s way of making them “identify” with those who lived and died in the Poland of over seventy years ago. Everything is interpreted through this lens.
Each group occupied a different section of the tracks, and the educator led them through an introduction to the camp. One group studied the history of the camp in terms of its relation to the other events of the Holocaust. Most others read testimony of people who were deported to concentration camps (only sometimes related to Treblinka, as there were only 70 survivors). The stories, for the most part, all had to do with women and children. One group did the entire “pre-camp” on one story of a woman who suffocated her child en route to the camp so that he would have a “holy death.” Another group, led by a guide named Daniel, listened to Hebrew music while sitting on the tracks, and punctuated the music with random interjections: “picture yourself on the train. … You arrive. … You see a signboard. … It says Treblinka station. … But it is not like a real train station. … Nobody’s waiting for you. … You cannot get a return ticket. … You’re here to die.” This theme followed this bus throughout the entire trip. In Treblinka at the stone of Janus Korczak he played a song for them that is a recorded post-war version of a song the orphans sung as they were marched onto the trains to the camp.

In Majdanek: one group sat in the grass and discussed their own shoes. Each was asked to pick their favourite pair of shoes and describe it to the group. Is it blue? Is it a sneaker? How about a heel? What is your most positive memory about the shoes? Why are they your favourite? If you only had one pair of shoes to pick up, which one would it be and why? If you knew you could only wear one pair of shoes for the rest of your life, which ones would you take? After the students had finished discussing their shoes, they went into the Majdanek barracks full of shoes, and the students broke down weeping.

Majdanek, again: the students are there at the same time as an Israeli group, who all carry signs with a yellow star and Jude written across them. The students are bowled over with emotion. Many report later that this encounter “connected a lot of dots.”

Majdanek, again: Year after year, students are told the same thing: “this place could be up and running in 48 hours. All they would have to do is flip a switch.” (Who is ‘they’? That is never spelled out. Just left at that: they.)
In Kraków: As the students left Kazimierz, the old Jewish section of Kraków, they were brought down through the city across a bridge towards the old Jewish ghetto area. The guide urges them to “think about what it would have been like.” She tells them to think about how they were leaving their house, maybe for the last time (but they don’t know that). “Think about how it would feel. You don’t know if you’ll ever see your friends again. Your house again. What are your neighbours doing? Are they throwing rocks at you as you leave?”

In Auschwitz: When the girls complained about the cold and how they don’t want to be outside anymore. “Can you imagine what it would be like here in January? Being outside for Appel for hours in thin layers? Look at what you’re wearing now – they did not have Canada Goose¹⁰¹ then.”

Auschwitz, again: A search for meaning in the gas chamber. A survivor on a bus refuses to go in, saying that her family died in there and begs her granddaughter not to go. The granddaughter insists that she has to, so she can “understand what it was like for them at the end.”

During the “March”: embodiment is the whole point. Students come to represent those who died, standing with those who survived, to march from Auschwitz I to Birkenau in holy commemoration of a lost people.

In Tarnów: Students gather in front of a broken synagogue in an open plaza, and an educator gives a speech about how she hopes that this place “encourages [them] to consciously make the choice to be Jewish.” And then a Rabbi comes to the front and says that the trip has the opportunity to return Jewish life to Poland, to “imbue sanctity in this very spot” because “Jewish life here is not lost, when we here

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¹⁰¹ A popular parka brand.

**Figure 15: MOL Arrives in Birkenau, 2017**
have the opportunity to continue.” And then a ‘spontaneous’ flash mob breaks out, with dancing, singing, with the students continuing to shout out “Am Yisrael Chai” – The Jewish people lives.

In the forest near a small town: a student reads an impassioned poem in front of a mass grave to the group about how everyone who died in this place were “children just like me.” It goes into some troubling detail, including those who were murdered, gassed, shot, were all children just like him.

In Poland: constant security. “Stay close together.” The shadowy world of Poland beyond the bus is seen entirely past the stance of the security guard.

5.4 Discussion

5.4.1 Attributions (and misattributions) of responsibility

While the tendency to emphasize the emotive understanding of the Holocaust on the March of the Living over an intellectual, fact-based one plays a role in the significant education gaps that students have about the event, it is the continual employment of “embodiment” that plays such a strong role in the creation of wildly inaccurate attributions of responsibility for the Holocaust itself.

5.4.1.1 Participants’ perspectives on Polish complicity and responsibility

In pre-trip interviews, many students reported a perception that although the German government was responsible for the Holocaust, the Polish people supported it on the ground and that it would have been “impossible” for the Nazis to enact without the tacit support of local Poles. The pre-trip perceptions are not helped by the experience on the ground. As one of the key emotive processes, the heavy-handed emphasis on embodiment often results in students both simultaneously looking for authentic experiences and also viewing everything around them as real and original. In the search to make things “real” for the students, the participants at times lose the division between past and present. As the students “enter history” in Poland, they begin to see everything in the terms of the Second World War and Poland becomes representative of the place where the Holocaust was enacted. Although this is true in terms of the Operation Reinhard camps, many students misunderstand this as being a perspective on Polish complicity
with or tacit approval of the Nazi regime and their plans. It also constructs Poles within the context entirely of this perceived complicity, and any attempts (although most if not all entirely come before the program) to tell students that Poles were often caught up in the camp system themselves pales in the face of the seeing the camps on Polish soil. The death camps come to be seen as “Polish camps” despite the fact that they are German camps constructed on Polish soil. Participants (33/33) consistently describe Poland as “grey” and “miserable,” that they were “surprised to see that anyone actually lived there” and even more surprised to learn “that it wasn’t in black and white like [they] pictured, but in fact looked like everything else.” The process of embodiment of the victim organically leads to the perception of the “other” as the perpetrator/bystander, a strict dichotomization that will be assessed later. These perceptions are reinforced by pre-trip beliefs that many students have regarding Polish support for the Holocaust.

These attitudes and perceptions that are obviously ahistorical and could theoretically be easily remedied by regular reminders of fact are often seemingly reinforced within the environment of the bus. Those who are in the microcosms, the chaperones, participants, and educators alike, often do not challenge these views or also believe them. The survivors, as described earlier, often also present a deeply anti-Polish attitude towards their bus. One survivor on the 2017 trip kept asking the leadership, educators and students why they were here, arguing that “Poland is a miserable place” and “why do we come here at all?” She kept advocating that they needed to leave Poland immediately, and that there was nothing to be gained from spending time there.

Further, by taking them in adolescence, they are catering to an audience of young people who developmentally have a tendency towards classification (Piaget, 1936). This mental preconditioning towards classification and striation is part of the problem of taking adolescents on this type of trip, as they are not necessarily mature enough to understand the complexities (or to be able to take what they’ve learned and apply it meaningfully). Developmentally, they are thus primed to seek to classify the wartime Europeans within the stringent ‘perpetrator, bystander, victim’ schema. It is more difficult for them to see the shades of grey that exist, and the desire for classification is certainly reinforced by the nature of the trip.
5.4.1.2 Homogeneity of anti-Polish opinion

Although there is an attempt to move away from Poland-as-perpetrator, the way the trip is structured seems to lend credence to this pre-trip perspective. Further, the program ‘leaves’ Poland in 1945, explaining next to nothing about the Communist period and how that impacted Polish history or contemporary society. Although the March leadership made a few attempts to address this there is not enough reinforcement within the microcosms, when all of these ideas and attitudes coalesce. The final “blow” to any attempt at nuanced attributions of responsibility is that the Holocaust itself is in many ways a traumatic event without explanation or resolution. Poland becomes a site which is indicative of that lack of resolution, an attitude that is given more weight by the use of emotion and embodiment on the trip.

A TJPS student who went in 2015, Sydney Kohl, discussed the fact that none of the adults on her bus pushed back on students’ ahistorical or problematic beliefs. “It was the job of the educators and the chaperones to challenge people’s perspectives – is that not the point of education? It is not just to confirm everything you already think. But they did not. In that way, I think that they failed us.”

Sydney’s experience could be explained by two factors: first, she described her educator as “less focused on the history, and more about the relationship between the Holocaust and Israel,” with a tendency towards “over-dramatizing and trying to make everyone sad.” Further to that, while she liked her chaperones a great deal, she found that the ones on her bus weren’t really able to have the conversations with her and the other students that she was looking for. Frequently, those with the most influence on the bus dynamic are usually of one mind, and to a certain extent they all reinforce each other. Roughly half of the participants are not from formal Jewish educational backgrounds, and did not espouse much in the way of anti-Polish perspective before the trip, but many came out feeling those ways. When students come in with some of the skewed historical perspectives outlined above, the chaperones (the adults who far and away spend the most time with the participants) are often incapable (or at least unwilling) to engage with the students and push back in a meaningful way. One 2015 chaperone, Sarah Maddox, said that she “was uncomfortable with grey areas” and preferred to stay in “morally comfortable positions.” She felt that she did not have enough of a background to challenge students, but furthermore, many of the anti-Polish perspectives were ones that she was familiar with.
This was also seen frequently while in Poland. In bus discussions, chaperones talking among themselves, to me, to the survivors, and to the educators, repeatedly discussed variations on a theme: “You know, that’s why all the concentration camps are here – because Hitler knew he could get away with it here”; “Germany has done so much to deal with their past, but Poland hasn’t at all”; “we are so lucky to be here to return Jewish life to a place where they hate the Jews”; “this whole trip is just like [sic] a giant f—k you to the Germans and the Poles and it is great.” These snippets were heard on four separate buses on the 2017 trip. When those responsible for facilitating the ‘debrief’ sessions in which the students process, contextualize, and seek to understand their experiences are firm believers themselves in said inaccurate pre-trip attitudes, one would have to assume that they are not challenging the students on those understandings. In fact, you could imagine that they are encouraging these misattributions of responsibility.

The way in which the adults on the bus presented the material and its impacts was seen in a post-trip focus group. There were twelve students in the group, whom represented four different buses. Three female students had learned from a guide whom, at every site, focused a great deal on context and fact-based history. These three participants showed a drastically more nuanced understanding of the Holocaust and wartime Europe than the other students from different buses. While the 9 other students indicated beliefs that indicated outright hatred and distrust of the Poles (many of which were particularly vitriolic), the three female students from that one particular bus discussed how they did not know enough to make firm opinions (not that that stopped the others), and that there were numerous incidences of Polish aid and support. They also spoke about how the Polish situation was different under the Nazis than it was anywhere else. In short, their outcomes seemed directly related to an educator who attempted to balance cognitive and emotive processes on the trip.

5.4.1.3 Internalization of victimhood and its attendant complications

By creating nebulous, ill-defined and thus inherently threatening constructions of ‘bystander’ and ‘perpetrator’ through their interactions with contemporary Poland, often students come to understand themselves, first and foremost, as ‘victims.’ This is achieved through the pedagogical choices of constant interaction with the architecture of the Holocaust, the inherent lack of sleep
that furthers heightened emotions, and the presence of survivors who are there to share their stories. When the immersive Holocaust education experience encourages students to embody the victim, the landscape takes on a new and fearful edge. The trees, the houses, the churches, and especially the people, all become representative of those who were involved in, or stood by the side and watched, the Nazi Holocaust. If they are the victim, then everyone around them is the bystander or the perpetrator. There becomes a basic mistrust, a very “us” versus “them” mentality in which the students search for the authentic, but in the absence of real Nazis for them to view, mistrust, and return to claim victory over, local Poles often become the placeholders for tyrants that the participants seek.

This internalization is reinforced and augmented through the schema of the program, which travels from exile (Poland) to redemption (Israel). Throughout the trip, and upon return, the participants come to see themselves as both victims and witnesses, bearers of a tradition and a world that was lost. Thus, they are encouraged to make Jewish choices – namely marrying Jewish spouses and raising Jewish children – as authentic embodiments of the destruction of the Jewish past and hope for the Jewish future. These returned students are also encouraged to identify with the ‘culmination’ of the Holocaust as presented in these trips: simultaneously both Israel and the North American liberators. The juxtaposition of two ‘end points’ of the Holocaust – liberation and Israel – create an interesting tension on the program, but also another opportunity for socialization and citizenship building. As both narratives are presented, it encourages fostering participants’ connectivity to both North American society – represented by the liberators – and Israeli, as the ultimate guarantor of Jewish safety in the modern age. That said, as the trip ultimately ends in Israel, inextricably linking the Holocaust to the creation of the State, that narrative is more dominant. This narrative is given even more weight by the presence of Israeli guides, who are themselves living embodiments of the solution to Poland: Israel.

5.4.2 Outcomes of emotive v. cognitive processes, and its impact on the March of the Living’s goals

At the beginning of the dissertation, I outlined the two primary goals that the March of the Living has: both the creation of Jewish roots for the participants, as well as the creation of a
cohort of students who would commit to an agenda of *tikkun olam* and broader anti-racist perspectives. As it currently stands, however, the program is thus far only meeting the first goal and failing in the second. Their educational program in Poland takes the students *in situ* but does so in a way that is entirely constructed by the Jewish community. The goal of creating a usable, emotion-laden history is prioritized over the students acquiring a nuanced and contextualized understanding of that same history. Unfortunately, students often return with serious knowledge gaps that the program not only did not close, but are also exacerbated in favour of the identity-building agenda. Students report little to no understanding of context, they don’t know the broader story of the Second World War beyond the story of the Holocaust, and they are unable to contextualize the history of the Holocaust within that of genocide as a whole. Instead, the Holocaust is not an event in which a historical understanding is had or encouraged, but only seen as an event emblematic of the tragedy of the Jewish people.

As they learn *in situ* the students both search for authenticity and assume authenticity in every site, every interaction. As they engage in an educational program that creates the highest of highs and the lowest of lows emotionally, their understanding of the history as well as their relationship to each other and the broader Jewish community, Poland takes on a threatening tinge against which they create their own collective. The students ultimately search for Poland as symbol, and the trip to a certain extent encourages that. As the trip is so decentralized, the leadership has scant control over (and sometimes, even knowledge of) what happens in each bus microcosm. Thus, you have educators who infuse their own narratives and agendas into their own buses, leaving the students’ experiences as largely a matter of luck.

At its base, the outcome of learning about the Holocaust through this type of experience is inherent distrust. For both Israelis and North American Jews on the March, who reach Jerusalem through Auschwitz, that symbolism encourages the dichotomy of Israel as the only guarantor of Jewish safety in a world of indifferent and hostile people. Thus, the second goal of broader anti-racism and being a broader part of a global world is eroded in the face of Jewish need. Consider the argument made by a member of the international March of the Living, that the issue “most

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*102 Hebrew: heal the world, usually refers to social justice.*
relevant” to the students is of modern antisemitism, as opposed to the “history” that the trip markets itself as providing for its participants. Logically, one can assume that the students are supposed to understand that the threat of the Holocaust, the horrific outgrowth of accepted European antisemitism, is still a threat that is relevant today. If that is to be accepted, then that internalizing of “Judaism under threat” could be extrapolated into students leaving the trip with the very outcomes that the program itself argues that they don’t want: the Holocaust as base of Jewish identity, a sense of victimization and threat, and a strong fear of the failed Diaspora “other” (in this case, almost exclusively Poles). Troublingly, it would seem that the emotion present in Holocaust education is being summoned expressly for students to feel all of the above, that is it merely a means to an end, and that despite all protestations otherwise, perhaps the ultimate objectives of the trip are more than what are explicitly written in its twelve goals.

5.4.3 De-contextualization and semiotics

The March of the Living is predicated on the concept of the value of learning in situ, that there is a different level of knowledge that the students take away when actually embedded in the sites under discussion. The way in which the trip manifests itself, however, particularly with regard to the educational program, means that despite the goal is to learn in situ everything is in fact ultimately decontextualized. With the emphasis on the emotive over the cognitive processes, and the goal of summoning the Holocaust within explicitly Jewish terms, the history of the Holocaust is decontextualized from the wider history of the war. The way in which the trip interacts with Poland is cherry picking sites that are decontextualized from the country itself, seen only through the appropriate lens of those who seek to remember. The narrative of Poland and its people that the majority of participants enter with is one that lacks both the context of the pre-Holocaust years and of Poland (for both Jewish and ethnic Poles) after the war. The things that the participants pick up (literally and metaphorically) are all out of context and seen through a very narrow lens.

When tourism is broadly considered as a semiotic exercise, one must also consider that when the only interaction with a country is in terms of its killing fields in which countless ancestors died, seen at a distance through the windows of a bus, what would that encourage other than fear and hostility? In some ways, the experience in Poland is reflective of the idea of Poland as a
particularly potent symbol that encompasses many useful ideas and narratives for the function of Jewish identity building: Jewish death and suffering, indifference of the broader world to the Jewish plight, the pinnacle of attempts to eradicate ‘our’ people, a site where Jewish absence is keenly felt in the buildings and streets where ‘our’ people once roamed, numerous shtetls and synagogues remaining as evidence of an innocent and shtetl-bound Orthodox Jewish communities who represent an ‘authentic’ form of religious Judaism, a place upon which students can return and claim ‘victory’ against an enemy that no longer exists, the counter point of hopelessness and helplessness that serves to validate and make relevant a strong and empowered Jewish state of Israel.

It is simultaneously a symbol that serves to draw out nationalism and spirituality, a sense of threat and a feeling of empowerment. Far from the only country where the Holocaust was enacted (in fact, in some ways it was worse off for the population of Lithuania and other Baltic countries), Poland remains a significant and potent symbol for the North American Jewish community, one that represents the bookends of Jewish life that surround the Holocaust and usually only seen in its shadow. Yes there was a great history of Jewish life here, but look at how the Holocaust destroyed it. Yes, there is a revival of Jewish life here, but look at how pale it is in comparison to what was once.

It is against this Poland-as-semiotic backdrop that the Jewish participants on the March of the Living are positioned in relation to. Poland is held up as a symbol against which the participants are intended to crystallize a group identity that exists separate and apart from the country. In Israel, this changes; students are encouraged to position themselves in relation to Israel and the Jewish state, and that is seen in every element of the trip from the lessened security and control, to the better food, from the more ‘upbeat’ nature to the active themes of Israel as sole protector. This socialization form thus seeks first and foremost to create and substantiate a group identity that exists outside of the context it finds itself in, a particularly unpleasant interaction en route to the Jewish home. The Holocaust itself is to a certain extent symbolized, and the Holocaust and Poland as both symbol and site serve to bond the group together against this semiotic backdrop, as opposed to in the group’s interactions with either the history or country.
6 Chapter Six: Identity-building strategies on the March of the Living and their impacts

Despite the devastation of the Holocaust, the Jewish people never gave up their belief in building a better tomorrow. Rather, they rose up, against all odds, and established the State of Israel - the hope and future of the Jewish people. - 12 goals of the March of the Living

The March of the Living sits at the intersection of pilgrimage and educational experience, straddling both worlds and constantly trying to negotiate the tension between the two. Despite the fact that it is marketed as an educational trip rooted in a formal curriculum, its intended goals reveal that the primary desired outcome is the utilization of the Jewish past to substantiate a Jewish present, by cultivating national, political, cultural or religious identities in and affiliations among the participants.\(^{103}\) In Poland, learning the history of the Holocaust and Israel is not the goal in and of itself, but merely a vehicle utilized for its emotive power to underpin and reinforce an identity-building agenda. During the two-week trip, Poland and Israel become emotion-laden and symbolic contexts in which the students create and shape their identities vis-a-vis each other, their families, and both the Diaspora and Israeli Jewish communities. The emotive processes outweighing the cognitive ones on the ground indicates the way in which the history presented is a means to an end: a sense of Jewish uniqueness; reinforcing a stronger Jewish identity that is shaped by an experience with peers instead of parents in the years before the students leave their parental homes for university; a greater commitment to Israel; the creation of a cohort which will return to contribute to the Toronto Jewish community in a variety of capacities. When thus framed, these Jewish choices are held up as a symbol of all that was lost in the Holocaust. Within this framework, the March of the Living models a number of forms of Jewishness, explicitly or implicitly, which are offered to the participants as different varieties for them to connect with.

\(^{103}\) This is, of course, slightly ironic considering the way in which the Jewish present in Poland is mostly ignored by the trip. The idea of Jewish “present” seems to only be framed within Israel or North America.
The trip itself offers a unique opportunity to connect with and alter Jewish beliefs and practice, as tourism by definition offers the opportunity for people to re-view and re-define themselves when in juxtaposition with home (Kelner, 2002, p. 97). As this is a trip in which the students are being asked to both understand and perform the difference between Diaspora and Homeland, in a way the students are encouraged to understand how they themselves are also different in these environments. This shift is intended to have the students spark new connections and engagements, set against the semiotic backdrop of Poland and Israel.

The previous two chapters outlined data pertaining to pre-trip attitudes and the way in which learning in situ while in Poland impacts the formal and informal curricula of the March; this chapter seeks to complete the picture by analyzing the identity-building strategies employed on the trip. Shaul Kelner’s (2010) Tours that Bind offered an interesting typography of the different ‘types’ of Jewishness both modeled and internalized on Birthright Israel. Here I employ a model loosely based on that typography to categorize different varieties of Jewish identity presented on the trip, both explicitly and implicitly. It is important to note that I am using different terminology and nomenclature than the trip organizers themselves would employ. Using this framework, I examine the way in which the trip has shaped the identities of the students in the months and years after the trip, primarily as Jewish citizens, but to a lesser extent as global citizens as well.

6.1 Literature Review: The Holocaust in (North) American Life

In 2014, a Polish Holocaust film – Ida – was nominated in major categories in that year’s Academy Awards. Splattered all over the internet in response were a number of articles and ‘tweets’ about how it is an unfair competition in some ways, because regardless of other people’s films, if it features the Holocaust, it wins. In the words of some of the Lomża area priests, there’s no business like Shoah business. And the Academy has certainly rewarded many – from Schindler’s List to Life is Beautiful, from The Pianist to Sophie’s Choice. The list goes on and on. This profusion of Holocaust films indicates the role the event plays in today’s North American society, one that is part of the daily vernacular for both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.
Haym Soloveitchik, in his 1994 article assessing the “shift to the right” of American modern Orthodoxy, also denoted the Holocaust as the primary reason that religious rigour keeps increasing within the Jewish community. His rationale was that the Holocaust destroyed an entire generation of Jews, rupturing the mimetic tradition, and turning it into a text-based one, which by nature took a more stringent approach. His article, “From Rupture to Regeneration,” highlights one of the myriad ways the Holocaust has impacted the lives, traditions, objectives and identities of North American Jewish communities.

The heightened centrality of the Holocaust in the Jewish community as well as the popularity (for lack of a better word) of the Holocaust in today’s world has led to a number of enduring myths about the trajectory of Holocaust memory in North America. One of the most popular is the idea of a collective moratorium on discussing the history of the Holocaust and personal experiences until after the Eichmann Trial in 1961 or the Six Day War in 1967, in which ‘finally’ the subject was released from Pandora’s box. Within this myth, the Jewish community ignored the Holocaust for the purposes of communal growth, out of fear, or as a result of a desire to integrate with the general public. This myth is given strength by the historical context, as the community was working in the face of the twin specters of a lack of a strong civil rights bill (leaving many American Jews to be legally discriminated against), and the strong anti-Communist sentiment brought about by the Cold War, when for decades, ‘Judaism’ and ‘Communism’ were synonymous in some circles. I bring this myth up particularly as the notion of a ‘Holocaust narrative’ that was shaped and utilized during different periods of the North American Jewish experience is significant to this study, because within that dichotomy, one could read that one of the reasons that the March of the Living was founded in the late 1980s was in response to the growing assimilation and secularization that resulted in the wake of the success of the Jewish American experience in the late 20th century. There is an interesting argument to be made; that a community looking to consolidate its members around a common cause seized the Holocaust in the later part of the 20th century when other modes of traditional connectivity began to degrade. Some of the books that I elaborate on below that are critical – to put it lightly – of the role of the Holocaust in the North American Jewish community cling to this argument, using it to validate the idea that the trip is poised to inculcate this oppositional identity in its participants.
In this section, I grapple with a few of the ways the Holocaust is not only summoned and utilized by North American people but also the ways in which the ever-present nature of the past has shaped the Diaspora Jewish community, the idea of the Holocaust as a cultural trauma that irrevocably shaped modern Jewish identity, the ways in which it has been summoned by both American and Canadian Jewish communities, and those who are critical of the use of the Holocaust narrative in North American life. I include this section because to truly understand the role that the March of the Living plays in the Jewish community of the modern period, one must understand the way in which the broader Holocaust plays in the role of the Jewish North American experience.

There are many popular and controversial pieces on the Holocaust narrative in North American Jewry, and their authors take their critiques to an extent that is – to me – fundamentally problematic. While this hypercriticism is not isolated to these, the three works I will be discussing here are Peter Novick’s *The Holocaust in American Life*, Norman Finkelstein’s *The Holocaust Industry* and a minor academic piece by Jennifer Peto. As I do not draw on either of the two books in a meaningful way, I just want to briefly observe that there are significant issues with them – and yet, they have reached a mass audience.

*The Holocaust in American Life* (Novick, 2000) takes aim at the role of Holocaust memory not only among Jews but also the wider American population. Novick’s basic argument is that there are no useful lessons to be drawn from remembering the Holocaust, and its prevalence is tied to, among other things, the Jewish community looking to affirm continued American support for Israel. He also argued that the Holocaust was an issue that had more ‘moral clarity’ than the increasingly divisive Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and thus was a more appropriate symbol around which the Jewish community could rally. The major issue with this book is twofold: one, Novick fails to argue what the place of the Holocaust should be in American life – he merely argues that its current iteration is inappropriate. Failing to provide meaningful conclusions makes his work (which, as mentioned before, went out to a mass audience) seem contrarian merely as a point. Secondly, he has a tendency towards being flippant and glib towards the Holocaust as a whole – including the experience of survivors. His assertions that the Jews have claimed the “gold medal” in the “victimization Olympics,” for example, do little to advance academic understanding of the subject.
Interestingly, Peter Novick himself commented on the other book I must mention, Norman Finkelstein’s *The Holocaust Industry*, (1999) by saying that it contained “false accusations, absurd claims, and egregious misrepresentations” (Jewish Chronicle, 28 July 2000). Finkelstein’s book’s basic premise is that there are two versions of the Holocaust – the historical event, and the “ideological reconstruction” of it that American Jews have latched onto. This text presents the rise of Holocaust memory in the 70s and 80s as a Zionist conspiracy to encourage support for Israel, saying that it “legitimizes one of the world’s most formidable military powers, Israel, [to] cast itself as a victim state and [because it provides] the most successful ethnic group in the United States with immunity to criticism” (Finkelstein, 1999, p. 68). The book is vague and convoluted, and ignores much that would negate his arguments, including the fact that there are many non-Jews who have been at the forefront of Holocaust memorialization and restitution. To frame the Holocaust as some sort of Judeo-Zionist conspiracy borders on the antisemitic and plays into fringe movements of Holocaust denial. It also is deeply unsatisfactory as the tendency towards vague hyperbole and conspiracy theories, a careless disregard of facts, and the inflection of his own political agenda means that Finkelstein in some ways is representative of what he is decrying.

What is of vital importance to understanding the presence of the two above books is that they were written by Jews – therefore, seemingly, to those who have a tendency towards anti-Israel and anti-Jewish perspectives as having extra legitimacy. In a review of *The Holocaust in American Life*, Greg Raven (IHR) says that “the book is not important because it reveals new details about Holocaust claims, or because it cites heretofore unknown arguments, or because it breaks ground in interpreting contemporaneous evidence. It is important because a Jewish historian has stated truths about the Holocaust and its use by Jews … revisionists have long since gone more than halfway in bridging the gap between what we know about the Holocaust and what we have been told. It is nice to see someone on the other side, make an effort, no matter how small, to arrive at a more complete understanding. Whenever Jewish academics criticize

104 Emphasis mine.

105 http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v20/v20n1p36_novick.html
the role of the Holocaust or Israel in the Jewish community, it is given even more weight by fringe movements and is seized upon, playing into the dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’

The vaguely conspiracy-laden books, which ignore much political and historical fact, have also played a role in some minor academic pieces that have posited Jewish educational travel as an educational tool facilitating so-called Israeli Apartheid. One text in particular needs to be addressed in this regard is *The Victim of the Powerful: White Jews, Zionism and the Racism of Hegemonic Holocaust Education* by Jennifer Peto, an OISE MA thesis accepted in 2011. This is not a stand-alone essay, as there is another piece that drew on similar themes was Griffin Epstein’s *Extension: Towards a Genealogical Accountability: (The Critical [E]Race[ing] of Mad Jewish Identity).* While I disagree with the author’s conclusions (that Holocaust education promotes a victim-identity which in turn encourages ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Palestinian people), that in and of itself is immaterial. The primary concern with Peto’s research project is the complete lack of primary research. Despite the fact that in an interview afterwards she claimed that Masters Students are not expected to do higher-level comprehensive research – such as interviewing people – I can not imagine that any serious academic would agree with that assertion. Her thesis references none of the relevant Holocaust-education literature, and does not actually interview anyone on the trip – although the text focuses on how the experience of the trip shapes participants’ identities vis-à-vis the Palestinians. The thesis uses primarily the March of Remembrance and Hope/ March of the Living handbook and juxtaposes the inferred “goals” of the trip against the author’s beliefs about Israeli Apartheid.

I do not deny that there is often a continually reinforced connection between the study of the Holocaust and the importance of the Jewish state. In a famous Ha’aretz article, the author described the significance of the longing of Israelis to travel to Poland, stating ultimately that the Israelis and those who died in the Holocaust are not that different, and all that separated them were three external factors – a state, a flag and an army – and that in the Holocaust the European

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106 This Master’s assignment had a similar general viewpoint towards the Ashkenazi Jewish community, race and violence. However, the inclusion of this work exhibits more of a tendency towards anti-Israel literature as opposed to texts specific to trips to Poland. The issue with this thesis is, again, the lack of research.

107 Israeli newspaper.
Jews lacked all three (Livnat, 2001). Comments like this underpin the consistent mentality of Israel being the guarantor of Jewish safety in the modern-day world, the only thing preventing the recurrence of another Holocaust. That said, the attempted creation of a direct causal link between the attempt to ‘shore up’ connection with Israel and alleged ‘support’ of so-called Israeli apartheid fails for lack of actual substantive research. Having completed only one of the typical elements of qualitative research (document analysis), and no others – such as direct observations, interviews, or participant-observation – her data collection was negligible or non-existent.

It is another point worth mentioning that as a Jewish historian and educator, my religious and cultural choices seem to be significant in this regard. As Jenny Peto said in a talk at Western University in the 2011/2012 Israeli Apartheid Week, she “was educated in their\textsuperscript{108} system” and therefore was able to provide an insider’s understanding of victim-aggrandiztion and racism. As a self-identified and involved Jew, perhaps I can claim that same inside understanding. That said, while I am critical of certain elements of the March of the Living and do believe that a critical analysis of its messaging for the Toronto Jewish community is imperative, the above texts to me are little more than ideological rants masquerading as scholarship.

To move on to books that were fundamental to this research, I begin with a book that allows a more over-arching analytical approach to the significance of the Holocaust in general, for all those who were affected by the Hitler years: \textit{Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity} (Alexander et al.,1994). Including articles by various authors on different theories and manifestations of cultural trauma and it is impact on identity, this book provided a vital framework to understand the social and psychological effects of a traumatic event has on the population it affects. Both the Jewish and Polish communities have a modern-day narrative in which the Holocaust plays a fundamental role. According to Farbstein (2007), “general Jewish society has lost part of its Jewish identity, so it needs the Holocaust. And I believe the Holocaust has become too much a part of that identity. This is very problematic – harmful in my opinion” (p. 18). While I do not necessarily agree with this statement in its entirety, the question arises as to how much this cultural trauma is summoned to substantiate the continued connectivity in both Jews and Poles.

\textsuperscript{108} Jewish.
For both Poles and Jews, the event has been summoned to substantiate modern identities, and this preoccupation is at play in both group’s understanding of the other during the March of the Living. Is there a fear that particularist cultures or identities might be being ‘watered down’ or ‘slipping away’ that causes both groups to look to this trauma as a reminder that said cultures were nearly eradicated and therefore need to be continued? Within Jewish communal leadership in North America there is a fear that the high rate of intermarriage and secularism will cause an eventual dissolution of the Jewish religion – and increasingly, the Holocaust is held up as a standard bearer, as the ultimate rationale why you must stay Jewish. This trend is less prescient in Canada than in the United States, perhaps as the rate of intermarriage is not as high as it is in the U.S. This idea of course is invoked by the famous assertion by philosopher Emil Fackenheim (1994) that the 614th mitzvah\(^\text{109}\) was to reject assimilation, thus “denying Hitler a posthumous victory” (p. 213).

This book made me grapple with the question of whether or not the use of cultural trauma within both groups’ narratives was an organic reaction to such a harmful event, or whether it was being summoned purposely to keep people within the pale. Of course, it could be both. Wróbel (1997) argues that the World War Two experience of both Jews and Poles resulted in the creation of a ‘civic religion’ in which stories of the war were summoned as proof of exceptionality (p. 572). The juxtaposition of the Holocaust narrative and maintenance of Jewish traditions in the modern era is certainly alive and well in the Toronto Jewish community, and as a result the Alexander et al. book provided an interesting philosophical approach to understand that more deeply.

One must also mention Diner (2010), a fascinating in-depth analysis that confronts the myth of a communal silence on the Holocaust in the years after the war. While it is true that many survivors report a general communal disinterest in their experiences – in Israel, America and Canada – Diner reports that right from the very beginning, there was an attempt at memorializing and remembering. In spite of the above concerns, particularly in the McCarthy years, she showed that the American Jewish community founded themselves in the shadow of the Holocaust. This book evidences that far from being entirely a narrative that was manipulated for various communal purposes in later decades (after being conveniently ignored for some time) right from

\(^{109}\) There are 613 mitzvot (deeds) that Jews are supposed to adhere to.
the beginning of a post-Holocaust Jewish presence in North America, the Holocaust was a quiet but significant element in Jewish identity. This certainly dispels the idea that the pivot towards the Holocaust had an entirely politically-based motive that came about when the need arose, as some academics claim in the works examined above.

The Holocaust in Canadian life has, of course, taken a different trajectory than its American counterpart. It is important to note that all of the texts I’ve discussed in the various literature reviews thus far really only focus on the American Jewish experience. As I am solely looking at the Toronto March of the Living it bears emphasizing that the Canadian Jewish community is different from its American counterpart in some fundamental ways. Furthermore, not all Canadian Jewish communities are created equally – Montreal and Toronto are very different, as an example, not only in terms of demographics, but also general practice, identities, and ethnic backgrounds. In order to provide this context, there were three books that provided me a basis of understanding of the Jewish (and survivor) communities of Canada in general and Toronto specifically, through which I was then able to extrapolate to my own research: *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955* by Adara Goldberg (2015), and *Delayed Impact: the Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* by Franklin Bialystok (2000) and Harold Troper’s *The Defining Decade: Identity, Politics, and the Canadian Jewish Community in the 1960s* (2010). These three books help trace the history of the Jewish community in Canada, and the way in which the communities have changed over the 20th and 21st centuries. The Goldberg book focused on the differing communities from more of a social perspective, as opposed to the Bialystock book, which examined the communities through a more political lens. The Troper text looked solely at the 1960s and the way in which the Canadian Jewish communities, largely in Montreal and Toronto, established themselves into the communities they are today. While all three books focused on Canadian-wide experience, I only really drew on the sections that focused on Toronto. The research of Toronto communities was invaluable, as the demographics play a large role in the identities that inform participants’ interpretations of the education they are receiving on the trip.

Similar to the American Jewish community, the Canadian Jewish community towards the beginning did not loudly emphasize the Holocaust as part of its identity. Bialystock’s rationale, and one that I ‘buy into’ is that both the survivors and their Canadian counterparts were unable to truly comprehend the scope of the event and the experience of the survivors. (Bialystock, 2000,
However, the Holocaust grew to increased prominence in the 1970s in response to the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the rise of neo-fascist movements at home and abroad, as well as the famous trials of neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers (most notably Ernst Zundel and James Keegstra) in Canada. Interestingly, it was partly the rise of people such as these two that necessitated the creation of the March of the Living, done so in the 1980s to combat a wave of Holocaust denial. Furthermore, similar to the American Jewish community, the increased political vulnerability of Israel and its Jewish population in the late 1960s and early 1970s (as a result of the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars) galvanized many Canadian Jews and survivors to begin publicly asserting Holocaust memory. In the 1980s this grew stronger, with the release of Troper and Abella’s *None is Too Many*, which demonstrated the Canadian government’s unwillingness to help the Jewish refugees trying to flee Nazi-occupied Europe. Later, the Holocaust became a part of mainstream culture with the release of the documentaries *Holocaust* and *Shoah*, as well as the landmark success of *Schindler’s List*. Considering the sheer number of Holocaust films in today’s Hollywood, it is a bit surprising to realize that this is a relatively modern phenomenon.

The Toronto Jewish community was also, according to Troper (2010), a unique one. This uniqueness stemmed from being “geographically close and organizationally active” in which it was possible to both live a “narrowly sheltered Jewish life” or “access the mainstream and to do so as Jews” (p. 86). Although he qualifies this within the parameters of a muted, less ostentatious form of Judaism, that same uniqueness continues to this day. It remains a community clustered along the Bathurst Street corridor, and one that Ray Breton’s (1964) thesis of “ethnic institutional completeness” certainly applies to. Despite that, it is a community in which Jews are an active part of mainstream Canadian life. Franklin Bialystock (2000) observed that at the turn of the millennium, although four-fifths of the Canadian Jewish community was not directly affected by the Holocaust, the majority had appropriated the tragedy as a fundamental part of their identity. One possible motivation for this is the understanding that this is relatively normative within the Jewish tradition – in fact, almost all of the Jewish holidays commemorate a

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110 Eli Rubenstein, meeting, 2016.
111 In that they had family members who were victims of the Nazis.
historical tragedy and the narrow Jewish escape.\textsuperscript{112} Therefore, to turn to the history of tragedy is a organic Jewish response bred by the calendar. That said, one could also make the argument that as the Jewish community in Canada became increasingly more fractious (divided over critical issues of religious denomination, practice, intermarriage, politics at home, Israel, differing feelings of responsibility for groups like the Syrian refugees, etc.) the Holocaust is increasingly held up as a standard for everyone to rally around. This may be even more so in Toronto, as the Toronto Jewish community had a large proportion of Polish Jews pre-war, which grew after the war (for many reasons such as relative ease for survivors to get visas to Canada than the US, or the presence of an ‘expat’ Polish-Jewish community that pre-existed their emigration). This distinctly Polish character has had a demonstrated influence on the Toronto Jewish community and the March of the Living by extension. Many of the participants I interviewed are of Polish heritage – an estimated 75% self-identified as being from Poland in a pre-trip program in 2015 - many with grandparent survivors whose experience in Poland either before or during the war was formative in their opinion. This lineage led to an increased anti-Polish attitude that pre-existed their participation on the program (and even their application to it). These pre-conceived ideas demonstrably impact the way in which students understand and internalize their experiences, and have led to some significant misunderstandings/myths about the March of the Living’s intentions or objectives in Poland.

In a recent survey\textsuperscript{113} of millennial Jewish Canadians (ages 18-40) undertaken by United Israel Appeal (UIA) and Canadian Israel Jewish Agency (CIJA) this trend was maintained, with 79% of surveyed Jews arguing that “remembering the Holocaust” was important to their Jewish identity – outstripping the other markers of identity, inclusive of “attending

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{CIJA & UIA findings, 2017}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{112} Passover, the Jewish escape from slavery in Egypt. Purim, the survival after the attempted genocide under Haman. Chanukah, the narrow defeat of the Seleucid empire, etc.

\textsuperscript{113} June 2017
synagogue” (16%), “observing Jewish religious traditions” (33%) and “supporting Israel” (61%). This is an interestingly high marker considering the presence of Holocaust fatigue that is demonstrated among many participants I interviewed for this research.

Something that further complicates the role of the Holocaust in the identity of all North American Jews – both American and Canadian alike – is the advent of “second and third generation survivors.” This concept is predicated on the assumption of ‘inherited trauma’ from the Holocaust that is visited upon the children and grandchildren of survivors. This is likely stronger in Canada than in the U.S. given the higher proportion of Holocaust survivors; considering Toronto has one of the highest proportions of survivors worldwide,¹¹⁴ this is likely a trend further reinforced here.

The psychological impacts of the trauma on the children of survivors is well documented¹¹⁵ but increasingly groups are popping up that are focused on the so-called ‘third generation survivors.’ Some of these are groups that are focused on the responsibilities of these people to honour the memory of the Shoah and take over from their grandparents as witnesses to the event in an age of historical revisionism. Others, however, argue that the cultural trauma of the Holocaust has directly impacted the psychological and emotional wellbeing of those three generations out. A study that took place at Haifa University in 2012 concluded that there were two “experiential patterns of distress that are liable to be passed down from generation to generation”: i) reality seeming threatening, and seeing threats to safety of family members on a regular basis, and ii) an inability to develop a warm, nurturing relationship between parent and child – something evidently found in both the relationship between survivors and their children, as well as the second and third generation groups.

Groups that focus on the responsibility of third-generation survivors often focus on the ways in which they are newly responsible for the continuation of memory. As one of the major American groups, 3GNY, says:

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¹¹⁴ The other being Sydney, Australia. (Meeting, Harold Troper, 8 August 2017).
¹¹⁵ See page 102.
Living in a world of equal opportunity and religious freedom seems to present us with a choice: how “Jewish” do we really want to be? How much should we allow our family’s Jewish history to be part of who we are today? To what extent should we share our grandparents’ Holocaust stories with those around us? Despite being unaffected by it personally, some third generation Holocaust survivors choose to make the Holocaust part of their identities while others choose to completely separate from it. If history is to not be forgotten and repeated, we need more individuals to select the former path and to truly take an interest in the Holocaust.

The idea of embodying the survivors to ensure their story lives on is crucial to the study at hand, for two reasons. One, in ten years, the March of the Living will have to change drastically as the trip is predicated upon bringing survivors back to Poland, allowing the students to “hear a witness [and thus] become a witness.” This idea of creating “witnessing for the witnesses” is seen in the works of poet Paul Celan (1967) who argues that “nobody bears witness for the witnesser” and as an undercurrent theme in Elie Wiesel’s writings (1970, 1998, 2002). Wiesel’s statement that when one “hears a witness, [they] become a witness” (2000) has become the *de facto* slogan for the March of the Living and appears prominently in their advertising, demonstrating the key role that the idea of embodiment of survivors plays on the trip. When that is no longer possible, whom will they turn to in place? The obvious answer is usually the family members of survivors – although this has its own host of problems, to be discussed in Chapter Seven. Nevertheless, if the future of the March of the Living is going to be dependent on the ‘second and third generation survivors,’ an understanding of the implication of that is significant. Additionally, the presence of these groups in North American society in general is indicative of the way in which the appropriation of the Holocaust narrative has become fundamental to modern Jewish identity. It also indicates that the concept of embodiment of survivors as a way in which to internalize the message is not a choice that is only made on the March of the Living – it is something that is present in the community before participants even make the decision to apply. This embodiment, particularly when transferred to Poland and experienced there, has an organic outcome of distrust and perception of threat (as indicated in the study about inherited trauma), arguably reinforced when juxtaposed against the landscape of death and loneliness on a visit to extermination camps.
6.2 Modeled Judaism and Jewishness

6.2.1 Collective Jewishness

Judaism is, at its core, about community, Jewish peoplehood and connectivity to each other. Even within religious practice this is true – a minyan\(^{116}\) of ten people is required in order to pray; at its most basic tenets, Jewishness is being part of a religious community that is important. This tendency towards collectivism arose out of a historical sense of peoplehood and religious precepts, but was ultimately reinforced by necessity, and even within the modern world has inculcated a tendency towards enclave-ism. The Jewish people spent most of the last two millennia dispersed and at the mercy of its various foreign rulers whom imposed a gamut of restrictions that ranged from the tolerably unpleasant to outright looting and murder. Within this context, even in the modern, relatively safe period of Jewish life, there still exists that same tendency towards inward-looking and communal support. The prescription that “each Jew is responsible for every other Jew” has been reinforced by an equally relevant perspective that “no one else will look after us and therefore we need to take care of ourselves” (explored in its more recent, nationalist and militaristic variations later) and those both remain a subtle but present undercurrent to Jewish life. The Toronto Jewish community is particularly organized, having achieved what Breton (1964) identified as near “ethnic institutional completion” with an extensive interconnected system of “religious, educational, political, recreational [and] professional” structures (p. 194). The March of the Living in Toronto reflects much of those values, being run by the Toronto Jewish Federation, the organizational ‘glue’ that holds a complex and disparate community together. This type of communal organization is increasingly important in a community beset by issues between denominations and political leanings. Thus, the community that the March of the Living is both rooted in and attempts to model is one that is in flux and constant negotiation. In attempting to model a Jewish community, first and foremost the March models values of ethnic institutional organization typified by Federation.

The March of the Living sometimes speaks to the importance of this communal life explicitly. In 2017, the participants all visited a former World War Two-era Jewish apartment block. Each

\(^{116}\) Hebrew: quorum, the ten people (traditionally men) required in order to be able to pray.
guide and group entered the courtyard area and said variations on the same theme to each of their
groups: here was a modeled Jewish community. There was a \textit{Va’ad}\textsuperscript{117} that came together to take
care of the entire communal needs. One guide noted: “if one child really wanted a bicycle, and
the family could not afford it, the \textit{Va’ad} would raise money to buy the child a bicycle.” They
also all went on to emphasize the modern-day value of community in the Jewish people, and how
the idea of taking care of one another was an important part of being Jewish. In this way, the
guides are assuming an element of Jewish communal leadership and are encouraging the
participants to caring for the collective as a form of secular mitzvah which may be more
palatable for the less religious youth.

The trip also mimics the importance of community building with a key facet being the creation
of many \textit{“kehilloth,”}\textsuperscript{118} drawn primarily along bus lines. Within each, students are encouraged to
become subsumed within the identity of the \textit{“kehilla,”} which takes on a life of its own. There are
specific group dynamics, and those dynamics are carefully curated by the March of the Living
staff. Consider chaperone selection and organization: each bus is intended to have a “mommy”
and a “daddy” figure,\textsuperscript{119} as well as a third (often younger) staff rounding out the circle. At the
core, the bus leadership is organized around a mother/father/sibling dynamic, with the Holocaust
survivor often representing a \textit{de facto} “bubbie or zeide.”\textsuperscript{120} The only adult who falls outside of
this dynamic is the Israeli educator, who often has a separate role to play depending on their
personality, age and level of engagement. Within this finely honed system, each bus takes on its
own culture, with certain songs, inside jokes, personalities, rivalries with the other buses, and
interpersonal relationships. In 2015, as a participant observer, I was a chaperone on the “fun” bus
of my contingent, self-described that way by many of the students, in so far as they liked to
dance and party and have a laugh. Other buses that year self-described as “leftovers” (a self-
decrating analysis of the fact that many felt that they were extraneous to the more core buses
which represented certain friend groups, school groups, camp groups etc.) or “the nice ones.”

\textsuperscript{117} Hebrew: council.

\textsuperscript{118} Hebrew: communities.

\textsuperscript{119} Interview, Carrie Gelkopf, July 2016.

\textsuperscript{120} Yiddish: grandmother or grandfather.
The group culture is of particular significance to the way in which the students engage with the material and with each other, as well as their “take-aways.” The way in which the ‘individual’ on the bus is subsumed within the ‘tour group’ community that shapes the experience of all, is evidently a normal part of the Jewish educational travel experience. (Kelner, 2001, xviii). For example, returning to 2015: my self-described “fun” bus was just that. They were also curiously unemotional in some respects. There are certain expected normative experiences on the March of the Living, many of which are those that employ emotive responses to events. Students pre-trip spoke about many of these emotional experiences that they are seeking during their trip. These expectations were frequent: “when you first see the train station at Auschwitz;” “being in the forest with the survivors;” “seeing the pile of ash at Majdanek” – crying all the while – were discussed in hushed and fervent tones of expectation. Crying was an important pastime where the March of the Living was concerned. That said, my bus did not really do that. I came in expecting to have to be there as an emotional support for many of my students during what was almost certainly a traumatic experience, but I ended up largely irrelevant in that respect. The participants approached it from a very sober but analytical perspective, and expressed their emotions by becoming even more hyper and happier when they returned to the bus. A year after the trip, meeting with a group D student named Rachel Abrams, she, unprompted, shared that the most difficult part of the bus for her was that she felt that she could not be “authentic” about how she felt. When pressed, she admitted that since no one else was being emotional, she did not feel that she could be either. By the end of her time in Poland, she said she also felt that same somber, but slightly detached, perspective.

This group mentality also very strongly shaped the way students assigned importance and meaning to various sites and interactions while in Poland. When watching interactions between teens from the outside, it became clear that when it came to understandings of Jewish history and attributions of responsibility for what befell the European Jews, those with a stronger Jewish educational background usually ended up playing a more significant role in the bus dynamic. This is significant because those were the same group with a greater tendency towards seeing the Holocaust as an exclusively Jewish event, and instilled with a greater sense of pre-existing hostility regarding the Poles particularly. Rachel Bloom, a student who came into the trip with a relatively positive outlook on the Polish community – feeling that they would find common kinship in the history of victimization and hatred – came out feeling little more than apathy and
mistrust towards that same group. Part of that has to do with the implications of *in situ* education as discussed in chapter five. But one cannot and should not overlook the element of the fact that her entire friend group on the trip was largely from Jewish day school. Many of those students at the sites and in debriefing afterwards spent considerable time discussing, at length, their revulsion for the Polish people and their wartime actions. By the end of seven days in Poland, Rachel had done a 180-degree flip on her attitudes, and the collective identity of the bus and the way in which it has the power to infuse and shape the experiences of the individuals contained within is an important factor in that change.

This same tendency was seen on a smaller scale on a daily basis. Take Matthew Schwartz, who decried how he found the “trees” threatening around Treblinka. Within this conversation, two students who came from no Jewish education who had expressed attitudes towards Poles to me the previous day that were ambivalent at worst also began to mimic this, arguing that every house, every farm, every person “showed how they knew and chose to do nothing.” Matthew’s bus was 3/4 TJPS students, and as they were considered by the chaperones and non-TJPS students as “more knowledgeable” they were both more vocal and had more of an influence on the bus dynamic.

An example of the way in which this collective form of Jewishness becomes so significant is the role the group assumes in the aftermath of the trip. I remember when I returned from the March of Remembrance and Hope in 2007, which was my first trip to Poland, the only people I could speak to any more (it felt like) were those who shared in the same experience. My parents watched with frustration, reminding me that I had known these people a mere 10 days, and they could not understand why they had become so important, so quickly. It passed within a month or two, but for that immediate post-trip period the heightened emotional experience that the group had shared translated into a more tightly-knit emotional bond in the weeks and months after the experience came to an end.

For many of the participants of the March of the Living (assuming that they had a positive experience within their own bus – which is, of course, not true for everyone) the song remains the same. Social media is filled with bus-specific memories and events in which the same group of students who travelled together continue to be tied to bus-specific circles. Lily Cole’s primary friend group at Western University, three years after her March of the Living, remains a number
of girls from her bus. Together, they go to Shabbat dinner at Chabad (usually followed by drinking and clubbing – perhaps not what the rabbi had in mind) every week, they live together, they attend classes together, and the group forms her primary social and Jewish network on campus. When asked why, she cited the fact that they had a bond shared by common experience that, years later, still existed – in a way that even those who have been on the same trip in another year do not necessarily understand. The bus reigned supreme.

This may be a product of the fact that the majority of the participants on the March of the Living are part of a bus and/or community with other people are at the same age and place in life. The Young Adult trip, which often brings students from a wide range of ages, interests and life places, this is less so the case. Jacob Lawson, who participated on a Young Adult contingent, enjoyed the experience but did not feel the same kind of heightened emotional bond – and two others I interviewed who were part of the same trip reported the same. Perhaps this is a reflection of the fact that many were in professional programs by then, the age range spanned almost 18 years between the youngest and oldest participant, and many came for an individual experience first and foremost. This individuality was also likely reinforced by relative freedom the program allowed them in terms of social experiences and leaving the group in the evenings - something that is not true of the trip for the teens.

Another facet of the collective Jewishness presented is the one embodied by the Federation model of North American Judaism. Jewish federations are community leadership establishments that exist all across North America, who fundraise, create and fund Jewish programs in their communities. In a way, the March of the Living serves the Federation goals in creating a cohesive unit that “models an idealized Jewish community” (Gelkopf, 2014, p. 15). The March of the Living is a UJA Federation program, and in fact the only baseline standard for chaperones is that they be in good financial standing with the Federation campaign. Further, the program is run by Federation employees, who are primed to support Federation values, seemingly prioritized over those who have an academic background in Holocaust history or educational best practices.

In many areas and facets, the March seeks to model Jewishness as a collective or community, and they are successful in doing so. It was more difficult to quantify this exactly, but the thread of community and importance can be seen throughout the remainder of this section. In a way,
you could argue that every element of Jewish community that the trip tries to demonstrate to its participants boils down to communal structures. If a desired outcome is endogamy, statistically Jewish social networks and access to community has proven to be a large factor. Religious and cultural life and identities are community-oriented. It also underpins the sense of collective responsibility the trip urges, not only for the Toronto Jewish community at home (in which the participants are encouraged to become either donors or active members) but also for Israel - which the students should support from their home bases or as part of the Jewish people.

6.2.2 Cultural Jewishness

The vast majority of the students who participate on the March of the Living are from engaged, although largely secularized, backgrounds. Given that the majority of the students come from TJPS, whose ranks swell with primarily Reform and Conservative Jews, this sets the tone of the trip. The remaining participants are drawn from families whom are more secular (often those who are not in formal Jewish schooling), not usually from more Orthodox educational institutions. Many Jewish scholars have argued that this lack of feeling of Jewish particularism or exceptionalism leads to a greater “danger” of assimilation and marriage to non-Jews. One of the primary goals of the March of the Living is to bolster a sense of Jewish commitment, but the trip leaders are forced to do so to a wide range of students from diverse religious and educational backgrounds. Within this context, a cultural basis of Judaism is the most palatable form of Judaism that is easily modeled to the students as a yardstick to measure and consolidate their own identities around.

This ‘cultural’ Judaism employs Jewish traditions (such as family dinners, symbolic foods, music, art, language, literature, education, and humour) that are largely family and community oriented. In many circles it is seen as a form of “lowest common denominator” Judaism, one that requires little of its adherents. The March of the Living promotes this version of Jewishness by employing many elements of traditional Judaism within the programming, “decontextualized”

121 As demographic studies like the PEW study indicate that intermarriage usually leads to the children of intermarriage not affiliating themselves with the Jewish community, this is considered the greatest threat to so-called Jewish continuity.
(Gelkopf, 2014, p. 7) from their religious ritual, and thus interpreted by the students as an example of culture or tradition, instead of religion. This is significant as many students self-report a “wariness” regarding religion, particularly in terms of “Kiruv” – a modern Jewish concept focused on making secular Jews religious by exposing them to enticing elements of Orthodox life. Although there are certain elements which try to reinforce a more religious understanding of the Jewish community (explored later), for the most part the March of the Living is underpinned by the collective cultural identity that it promotes.

On the trip, there are many ways in which a primarily ‘cultural’ model of Judaism is employed. While there are religious undertones, in that all of the food is strictly kosher, and all programming on Friday/ Saturday is Shabbat observant, the way in which the program presents these religious precepts are through a more cultural lens. There are optional prayer services every morning, but the students only need to participate on Friday night/ Saturday morning. Even within this necessitated prayer service, there are many iterations presented to the students, the most popular of which is the informal ‘storytelling’ one. Second to that was a trip to the Nożyk synagogue in Warsaw. That said, both are representative of primarily cultural affiliations - the majority of the students who attend the informal/ song-based service do so out of a lack of interest in formal tefillot; most of the students who attend the traditional service do not actually pray in Nożyk but go “for the scene.” They want to enjoy the beauty of the synagogue, which was used by the Germans as stables during the war and has been extensively restored. They want to participate in the ‘act’ of a Shabbat morning at Nożyk, but the majority spend the entire time chatting amongst themselves or taking the “vibe” in. As a female, I was relegated to the female section of the synagogue, and spent much of my time watching the participants: i) hanging over the edge of the balcony to watch the action below, ii) sitting on benches chatting among themselves, iii) occasionally chatting with me about the history of the synagogue, all the while being regularly hushed by the presiding Rabbi – who, despite all purported happiness at the number of people in his synagogue, has never failed to end up very frustrated by the students’ lack of involvement.

122 Hebrew: prayer.
The mixed messaging regarding religious observance is also felt in other places during Shabbat programming. Despite the official policy of “no devices,”\textsuperscript{123} in any number of years I’ve yet to see any student who takes out their phone be penalized or reprimanded in any way. The program seems to prefer to cater to its population by holding up a version of Shabbat that is “in the Shabbat spirit” as opposed to rigidly by the laws. As it is not a Yeshiva\textsuperscript{124} program, this is doubtless the most effective model. The significance is that, once again, it is catering to a population that defines its Jewishness as one that is more cultural as opposed to religious. Were it to attempt a more religious outlook, parents and students alike may not respond well. This is something seen frequently at TJPS, where parental reaction against the imposition of religious ruling are often strong. Like TJPS, the March finds itself at an uncomfortable intersection where its more secular participants are sometimes turned off by the “religious” nature of the program, which they feel is too strict for them, whereas members of the Orthodox community feel that the program is far too secular. Trying to negotiate this tension is an undercurrent that faces many Toronto Jewish communal programs and institutions.

Some of the programmatic choices are also reflective of the emphasis of the effort to be a cultural beacon around which the participants can congregate. An example would be the trip to the Genscha cemetery in Warsaw, which survived the war, and is a place where many famous Jewish cultural figures of the past are buried. A regular visit includes stops at the memorial for Janus Korczak (Polish-Jewish educator/author who died in Treblinka along with his orphanages’ charges), Adam Czerniakow (former head of the Warsaw Judenrat) and Marek Edelman (one of the lone survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising), IL Peretz (Yiddish language writer) and Ludwik Zamenhof (investor of Esperanto). All of these point to an illustrious cultural past of Jews in Poland, any of which the students can empathize and connect with.

This tendency towards cultural Judaism was a fundamental problem for a former NCSY\textsuperscript{125} employee who participated as a chaperone four times.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{123} Shabbat observance includes no electronic devices being used.
\textsuperscript{124} Religious school.
\textsuperscript{125} Modern orthodox youth organization.
\end{flushleft}
I went when I was a student at Ulpanah\textsuperscript{126} on the March and I do not even remember Israel as a participant. The March can work miracles, though, I’ve seen it. Taking them as teens is an ideal time. They have the capacity to think and analyze, be passionate, they have a tendency towards idealism … but they do not have burdens. They have time and resources to participate. The problem is, the trip could do so much more than it actually does. Poland draws out their spirituality, and they could capitalize on that in Israel, but they do not. And it is a missed opportunity! This is a great opportunity for them to connect to Shabbat, Israel, the Chagim, to mitzvot. Instead, it sometimes seems to be more about fun and social networking among Jews. And do not get me wrong, you can not do one without the other. Regardless of politics, it is okay to party. But still. It is a missed opportunity.

As Gelkopf (2014) notes, the March often employs a Canadian iteration of Wocher’s “civil religion” – which is “similarly respectful of Jewish tradition, but places little emphasis on extensive knowledge or observance of that tradition” (p. 7). It however, perfectly symbolizes Herbert Gans’ theory of “symbolic religiosity” in which the participants consume religious symbols without participation in the religious culture they derived from. One such example would be the yearly excursion to Tsfat, the Kabbalistic city in Northern Israel, where students are often given a certain amount of free time to explore the market area. Students en masse (particularly female) return sporting red threads around their wrists,\textsuperscript{127} with hamsa necklaces,\textsuperscript{128} and/ or with beautiful Tsfat shabbat candles or Chanukiyot.\textsuperscript{129} All of these are traditional religious symbols, steeped in Jewish mysticism, representing religious rites and Jewish religious commitment. Within the context of the trip, however, they become symbols of material consumption and trinkets that they can wear upon return to showcase their travels. They are not viewed within their religious context, and in de-contextualizing them, they take on a new and different meaning, representative of a Jewish, peer, cultural experience for the participants.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{126} Religious girls school in Toronto.
\textsuperscript{127} A cabalistic symbol intended to “avert the evil eye.”
\textsuperscript{128} Again: to avert the evil eye.
\textsuperscript{129} The “menorah” used at Chanukah with the 9 branches.
\end{flushleft}
Jacob Lawson’s accounting of Shabbat on the Young Adult iteration of the trip also reinforces an emphasis on culture as opposed to religion (something which is different on the teen trip) - when staying at a Kibbutz hotel up north, there was no allotted time for the students to join *Kabbalat Shabbat* services before Shabbat dinner, but he wanted to. Unfortunately, by the time the Kibbutz-led services were over, Shabbat dinner with his peers had almost drawn to a close as well. The heightened importance placed on Shabbat dinner, a cultural and social experience, over services (a religious one) indicates where the programmatic emphases lay for that particular group.

This cultural emphasis can be used to explain Lily Cole’s \(^{130}\) cultural and social form of Jewish connection, which she points to the March of the Living as having the greatest influence. Consider her Friday night: she goes to Shabbat dinner at Chabad (with her March of the Living bus friend group), and then to one of the many London, ON student-oriented clubs. She feels a cultural affiliation with the Jewish community, and views the Chabad Shabbat dinner as reflective of that. She admittedly never goes to the pre-dinner services, but she and her friends every week go to the dinner. When pressed why, her reasons revolved around the social scene: her friends were there, it was an expectation within the Western Jewish community, it was a “scene,” free alcohol was provided. Within her milieu, the Shabbat dinner has been stripped of its religious meaning and has taken on importance for its social and cultural elements.

When presenting a cultural identification with Judaism, the March of the Living is both hitting the students where they’re at (so to speak) as well as providing the most realistic Jewish future for them. In doing so, March leadership is remarkably successful. This identification is one of the two common form of Judaism that students take up and keep (the other being an ‘empowered’ Judaism vis-a-vis Israel). Although the question of Jewish marriage often falls on the fence between a cultural and a religious Jewish expression, in the 5-10 year range out (namely when they started actually thinking about marriage and children) all of the young adults that I interviewed in their years after the trip marked the March of the Living as having crystallized their intent for Jewish marriage. The trip, however, has more success in creating an identifiable and relevant Jewishness for those with less Jewish education (Groups B, C and D). For many of

\(^{130}\) See Case Study for Research Group B, Chapter Three, p. 63.
the students with this background, they expressed an interest in a cultural affinity (relating to Shabbat dinners, Jewish social networks, Jewish community events, etc.) that did not necessarily require a lot from them. Although none used this terminology, the students as a whole seemed to prefer a sense of cultural Judaism because it did not require a great deal of sacrifice or behavioural changes. In claiming “cultural Judaism” they seemed to allow themselves a more “cherry-picked” Jewish commitment.

6.2.3 Religious Judaism

In 2015, sitting outside of Auschwitz I, a guide pointed to the camp entrance and said to the entire group that “this was the reason to stay Jewish.” Two years later, in Tarnów, the same guide told the group that they must, in whatever way that made sense to them, “consciously make the choice to stay Jewish.” Poland and Israel are consistently used as the backdrop against which students are encouraged to make Jewish choices. The ways in which the emotive and identity-building processes are implemented on the ground encourage students to create and strengthen Jewish identity and practice, as bearers of the lost tradition and peoples of Europe. Despite the tendency towards modeling cultural Judaism as a viable option for the participants, there are elements of the trip that are infused with religious tendencies and traditions. Many of these overlap with the cultural elements, including the ultimate desire to have Jewish teenagers make Jewish choices at university, particularly relating to marriage. This is one of the fundamental beliefs of religious Jewish organizations that are led both by a religious understanding of Jewish status (in that the mother must be halachically Jewish in order for the child to be) and data which indicates that those who are born into intermarried families tend to identify less as Jews.

The concept of religious or moral education is one that is fundamental to many areas and contexts of Jewish education, with the intention of “socializing the child into the mores of the Jewish community” (Ingall and Kress, 2008, p. 291). Within congregational or denominational contexts, such as day-schools or summer camps, there are both attempts to contextualize Jewish

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131 Hebrew: in accordance with Jewish law.
religious content into every-day life and specifically blocked times for intentionalized education. The March of the Living attempts to do both, in terms of the fact that it offers some aspect of religious learning (in Shabbat prayer services, and in religious mourning rituals at each site) and in an infusing of religious practice as modeled by adults on the trip.

The program is technically Shabbat and Kashrut observant, with services offered every morning and mandatory religious services on Shabbat. In 2015, an entire bus joined in Mincha (afternoon services) with a contingent from a religious school in Israel, with a number of the boys on the bus marking it as the most significant experience of their trip in the years after. At every site, Mourner’s Kaddish and El Malei Rachamim are said.\(^{133}\) A major Orthodox youth group has at least two staff members on each trip, and these members play a greater role in the ceremonies and other public gatherings than the other chaperones. In this, religious practice and modeling infuses many aspects of the trip, despite the fact that the majority of participants are secular. Although one can assume that the March of the Living seeks to have participants deepen their Jewish beliefs and practices, the most important is the question of Jewish marriage according to trip leadership. In 2017, there were two interesting examples of this religious modeling, demonstrated by one of the NCSY\(^{134}\) Rabbis on the trip.

The first was during the Yom HaShoah ceremony in Kraków, when the participants gathered in a beautiful reform synagogue in the former Jewish area. There, they spoke about the coming Holocaust remembrance day, a survivor gave a particularly raw testimony (in which she described Poland as a “miserable place” that she “doesn’t understand why people still come to”) and then the Rabbi came up to conclude the service within the terms of religious life. He drew on

\(^{133}\) Traditional Jewish mourning liturgy.

\(^{134}\) National Conference of Synagogue Youth, an Orthodox youth group.
the liturgy of the Jewish megillah *Eicha*, said on Tisha B’Av in commemoration on the
destruction of the Temple. In using a quote “for these things I do weep, my eyes flow with tears/
how can we find comfort?” he argued that the only thing that could give comfort to both them
and to those who died [in the Holocaust] is that the “next generation would remain committed
and continuing in the path of Jewish tradition, values and identity.” He compared Auschwitz to
the psalmic “valley of the Shadow of Death,” concluding that “connecting with God” is the way
that they “can find comfort for this tragedy.”

Two days later, the same Rabbi stood on the grounds of the destroyed synagogue in Tarnów, a
small town in Eastern Poland, and said to the assembled participants that:

> Shuls [synagogues] have sanctity even when they are destroyed. The building itself isn’t
what’s holy, it is the people that used it. Actions, their actions, imbued this place. We
have the opportunity now to imbue sanctity in this very spot, to continue to build sanctity.
Jewish life here isn’t lost, we have the opportunity to continue. Let’s add holiness to this
site, right here, right now.

They did so by singing and dancing on the site of the destroyed synagogue.

Religion, religious liturgy, and the presence and belief in God are presented as antidotes to the
history of the Holocaust, a somewhat ironic interpretation given how frequently belief in God
and the occurrence of the Holocaust are pitted against each other in Jewish circles. The way
religion is modeled here is also as a form of continuity, a pledge one makes to the people who
died who were naive, innocent and deeply religious as a whole, in the common (but faulty)
perception often presented on the trip. In this search for continuity with the Jewish dead, a
foundational element to the trip, religious practice and connectivity is seen as yet another mode.

The March’s promotion of religious leadership and their promoted goals indicate a strong
undercurrent of religious Judaism on the trip. The idea of Jewish exceptionalism, within the
context of religious terms, is modeled throughout the trip but in the hands of certain educators
was clearer. One of the “regular” guides is personally religious, and perhaps unconsciously, the
information he disseminates is seen almost exclusively through this lens. When guiding in the
Warsaw Ghetto in 2017, even the way in which he presented the Jewish hospital in Warsaw was
a matter of Jewish (religious) survival: “We have separate institutions then and now; remember,
we survive because we’re separate.” These religious tendencies, perhaps born out of the Fackenheim (1982, p. 213) pledge to “deny Hitler any posthumous victories,” one of the twelve goals of the March, infuse many elements of the trip beyond ceremonies and speeches.

The fact that the majority of participants in the program are secular means that sometimes these religious overtures fall on deaf ears. But many were moved. In the case of Mark Himmel, there is an example of renewed commitment to a belief in God if not religious practice, and for the most part that seems to fall in line with most peoples reported experiences after the trip. In this, there was no great difference between participants when controlling for pre-existing education. There are some who reported differently in the longitudinal studies. Chloe Goldberg, 10 years after her experience, reflected that the March of the Living was the catalyst for her to keep kosher as well as to work in a Jewish day school. Another, 29 years after her trip in 1988, said that it was a trip that forced her to “re-evaluate her religious practice.” Neither would identify as Orthodox, which the Rabbis on the trip may have considered the most desirable outcome, but they both certainly maintain some form of religious identification.

Three other participants who participated in longitudinal studies reported that in the years after the March, they became more religious (all three identify now as Orthodox) but it is uncertain to what extent that pre-dated the March. All three went to Jewish day school, and spent the year in Israel after the trip in religious schools. While some commitment to religious life may have predated the March, it was their experiences on the trip that seemed to have sparked or confirmed their desire to spend a year in Israel prior to entering university, and it was in Israel that religious practice and identity was deepened. In this, one can thus interpret the March as having an important role in their religious growth, doubtless a desired outcome for the trip’s more traditionally-minded leadership. For the most part, however, many students remain in the more cultural spheres of the Jewish community that the March was more successful in marketing to them, I would assume because that was the default position that many entered the program with.

135 See Chapter Three, p. 67.
6.2.4 Social Judaism

Leonard Saxe, the head of the Cohen Centre at Brandeis University, posed a question to our class in 2011, one that he had grappled with in his research: Is Birthright so successful in terms of fostering Jewish engagement with Israel because of its program, or because of the “Birthright effect,” where young adults had a fun experience drinking, partying on the beach and mingling with Israeli soldiers? This question is one which can certainly be applied to all Jewish informal educational experiences. To what extent is the way in which Jewish students create social networks and positive associations with the Jewish community a factor in the program’s success?

With the March of the Living, the social element plays a significant role in why students want to participate and also in the program’s outcomes. Students across the board, although most particularly those in Jewish education contexts, wanted to participate on the March of the Living “for the scene.” The idea of being able to go with their friends, to get away for two weeks and go without their parents, was seen by some as “camp with your school friends.” To that end, the way in which the buses and contingents were organized played a great deal into how students prepared for the trip. Those that did not get on a bus with their friends, or who were on the smaller contingent, often complained bitterly; to the trip leadership and to their friends.

Many educators and community leaders look at this as an unfortunate byproduct of the way that the March of the Living has changed since its inception. At the beginning, as a leadership trip, it wasn’t considered a social scene. Once the March’s policy became to not turn anyone away, the tone of the trip changed. While sometimes this change in tone is seen as a negative outcome of that decision, it could also be considered an advantage given the identity-building agenda the trip has. As the participants are at the end of Grade 11 by the time the trip departs, they are roughly one year from leaving the parental home and entering university. In this, I believe that the March attempts to model the creation of a Jewish social network that exists outside of parents for students to understand and adopt within the university sphere. The March of the Living exists to help combat what one interviewee earnestly referred to as “the A word,” assimilation, and some researchers believe that Jewish social networks at university136 and in young adulthood are a

defining factor in endogamy. In this, the creation of a social Judaism, in which students create a bond not only with each other but also with the Jewish community, is seen as a key factor to keep young Jews as part of the tribe.

In Poland, despite the somber tone of the trip, students describe their experience as being an odd mixture of depression off the bus and a corresponding emotional high on the bus and at the hotel. It seemed as if participants were so emotionally ‘shot’ by the end of the ceremonies that the reaction was to become even more rambunctious and determined to have fun. This was seen especially when in Warsaw, as it was the only time that both contingents were at the same hotel for the entire trip. One Group A student, Jillian, said in 2015 that: “the March was a really big social experience. In Poland, you felt kind of bad about having fun, but when you got back to the hotel and all of your friends were there, it just so nice to have a release from the emotion of the day.” When interacting with the Poland-as-symbol, the depression that ‘Poland’ of the outside world achieved its counterpoint in the microcosm of the bus and small group, and when students were released into their exclusively Jewish bubble, the threat and fear they felt in ‘Poland’ was finally gone.

In Israel this was even more common. Here, the trip’s pretense of education was abandoned and it became a week of fun. Israel in this way is also symbolized in the same way that Poland is. While Poland is offered as a symbol of Jewish death and destruction, Israel is symbolized as a landscape of fun, sun, beach and security. Participants remember Israel in two ways: first, the weather, the food, the fun; second: as a counterpoint to Poland, its opposite in every way.

Set against the Poland and Israel as symbol and site, the relationship to each other (particularly in the participants’ microcosms, to a lesser extent with the entire program) is crystallized and heightened. As described in the collective Judaism section earlier, the heightened emotion creates a group bond that carries into the months and years after the trip. The reality of lack of personal space or privacy also serves to heighten these bonds, as the individual becomes almost inseparable from the collective.

The way in which this is internalized by students did not differ significantly throughout the research groups. Each group showed a strong affiliation to their Jewish friends. What was interesting was the way in which the social networks both created and reinforced by the trip played a role in their post-high school choices. Across the board, students in first and second
year university discussed how their March social groups were still a part of their circles at school. What was tough to discern was to what extent those networks existed prior to the program and how many would have existed without it. Group A, and to a lesser extent Group B, showed a tendency to want to stay within those Jewish social networks at the university level. Not only was the presence of a Jewish community at their university selection important to a great number, it was also a decision to go where their friends were also going. In fact, of all of the Group A participants interviewed, only one chose to leave the “bubble” - a deliberate choice she made, searching for “a clean slate.” This is less so for groups C and D, perhaps because at the time of the choice of university, they existed in a non-Jewish milieu. For those from Group D, five out of six interviewed students indicated little to no thought about the Jewish community at university.

In sum, the March of the Living attempts to model and create a social form of Judaism, but external networks seem to have a greater impact on the participants than the ones created on the trip itself. Education levels and the extent to which participants had regular interactions with Jewish peers played a far greater role in both the creation and continuity of social networks. That said, the relationships sparked and reinforced on the March of the Living do play a significant role for all students at university, with similar trends towards a continuity of said relationships at the university level shown among all groups. If we can assume that it is true that the presence of Jewish social networks does indeed shape choices of Jewish dating and marriage, then the March of the Living’s modeling of a social form of Judaism has some success in an area is very important to March’s organizers.

6.2.5 Canadian, North American, and Global identities

It is clear that the March of the Living, in both positing that the Holocaust led to the creation of the State of Israel, and Israel as the sole protector of the Jews, is encouraging a stronger ethnic and national affiliation with the State of Israel. For the most part, however, the trip does not attempt to inculcate in its participants a desire to make aliya\textsuperscript{137}, although it is an undercurrent

\textsuperscript{137} Move to Israel, take on Israeli citizenship.
that some students pick up on. As the trip participants are diaspora Jews, despite the focus on Israeli nationalism, one of the major goals and outcomes is the creation of a group that models a successful Jewish community back in Toronto. In this way, the trip does try to shape a Diaspora Jewish identity.

At the beginning of the trip, many students are asked a question in their small groups: are they Jewish Canadians or Canadian Jews? In other words, which part of their identity is the dominant and which the qualifier. Interestingly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, those in Jewish day school for the most part said that they were Jewish Canadians (17/21), and those in Groups B, C and D said that they were Canadian Jews (10/12). This identification potentially plays a role in the outcome that the different research groups have in the months and years after the trip, when those with extensive Jewish education show a greater tendency towards the collective (Jewish community, Israel) whereas those who were educated partly or completely outside of the Jewish milieu continue in the prioritization of being outside the “Jewish bubble.” This trend is explored more later in terms of the way in which students engage with Israel on campus and as young adults. There are examples of students from groups B, C and D discussing their prioritization of a Canadian identity, but not one participant from Jewish educational settings reported feeling the same. Simon, a student who began Jewish day school in Grade 9 said that he wouldn’t involve himself in Israel on campus groups because “involving myself … would involve me saying that my Jewish identity is first and foremost, and it’s not. I’m Canadian.” Carly, a student who went to a private girls high school said that she is “more Canadian than Jewish, so as much as I care about Judaism, I would choose to identify as a Canadian on campus.” Adam, a student who was on the 2015 March and came from a private boys’ school said that he was “more passionate about Canada than about Israel.” The responses from all of these students indicate that they feel that their Jewish and Canadian identities do not comfortably gel together, and that they have to “choose” between the two – and to involve themselves in a form of nationalism that was not Canadian was a form of particularism which they could not accept.

The trip also does little to model or create a Jewish identity rooted in North America specifically, focusing more on creating a collective identity in and of itself, theoretically transferrable to any Diaspora center. Indeed, it also mentions little about the modern world beyond the dangers facing the Jewish community (modern antisemitism, anti-Zionist sentiment on campus, Iran’s nuclear program, Hamas), for the most part ignoring world events that have a bearing on the
subject at hand. When considering the goal of creating a cohort of ‘empowered Jews’ in North American society, with the ability and courage to speak out both against antisemitism and other forms of prejudice, there are many opportunities for engagement that the March missed.

These opportunities include, but are not limited to: the rise of populist, nativist movements all over the world, the Syrian war and the resulting refugee crisis, the sudden outburst of antisemitic rhetoric in Europe and in North America, the tacit acceptance of white nationalism in the United States and examples such as the outburst of violence in Charlottesville, VA. There are many opportunities to model the ‘upstander,’ one of the March’s core values. For the most part though the trip only focuses on issues with which the collective is directly impacted, thus lessening the ability for students to create a broader, contextualized understanding of their place relative to the rest of the world, their transnational, global identities.

Despite the fact that there are particularist and universalist goals claimed by the March of the Living, the other Judaisms (ones that are clearly defined within Feldman’s (2008) “borders of the enclave”) are prioritized over modeling a Judaism that exists in a global world. For the most part, however, only those educated solely in the Jewish day school system seem to internalize this in a way that lasts beyond the initial ‘high’ of the trip, elaborated upon more later. Those from groups with less Jewish education tend to continue seeing themselves as acculturated members of the Canadian community first and foremost. This may also be a product of the religious makeup of the trip, which is largely drawn from secular circles.

### 6.2.6 Threatened Judaism

The March of the Living is a trip that is divided into two sections, sections that are always seen in opposition to the other. Participants, in Poland, are directed to see Poland as the necessary precursor to Israel. When in Israel, it is seen in opposition to Poland. In a way, the last two forms of Jewishness modeled, threatened (Poland and, to a certain extent, Israel) versus empowered (Israel) Jewishness, can at times overlap so much that it is hard to differentiate between the two. At it is root, these two ideas are the most significant outcomes of the trip, with the threat that is engendered in Poland extrapolating itself into heightened support for Israel, the protector against any “enemies that come up.” Within this context, the creation of a ‘new Jew’
(discussed in the Empowered Judaism section) was seen clearly: that of a people which would no longer be willing to submit to foreign rule, domination and murder. Within the schema of the trip, Israel is positioned as the ultimate rejection of Jewish powerlessness, which Poland most comes to represent.

In the years after the trip, participants continually referred to Poland as the prime example of a world that hated the Jews, and also indicated inaccurate understandings of history where Poland was concerned. Interestingly, the way in which the students remember Poland is less about the Holocaust, and more about Israel. This is in all likelihood a result of the way in which the Poland-Israel dichotomy is created and reinforced while in Poland. Guides continually reference the State of Israel (as they are all Israeli) as guarantor of Jewish safety, a safety that would have prevented the Holocaust in retrospect.

Interestingly, one common method is the attribution of Zionism to the people who died. When walking in Tarnów in 2017, one guide elaborated upon how “all of the people who died, they longed to go to Israel. And you actually get to leave here and go to the Holy Land, just like they wanted to.” In Bełżec, a different guide discussed how the people went into the gas chambers praying for the Messiah and singing HaTikvah. In the Warsaw Ghetto, another guide pointed out the site of a former synagogue and said how people there had been praying for the same opportunity that the students were being afforded: the chance to go to Israel. In Treblinka, the same guide from Tarnów used Israeli music to underpin his message, and argued that the “people died here longing for Eretz Yisrael.”

This tendency of attributing Zionism to people who lived and died in Poland is inherently problematic. As discussed in Chapter One, the Polish (and European at large) Jewish population was split largely into three factions, with some (although insubstantial) overlap: those who adhered to Orthodoxy, Socialism and Zionism. Zionism was only a part of the pie, and to ascribe those beliefs to everyone is not only historically inaccurate, it is inseparable from political or nationalistic motivations.

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138 See page 205.
While in Tarnów, one guide also used the State of Israel and the Holocaust as a method of engendering fear of a second Holocaust. Using the song *Vehi Sheamda*, he began the conversation about how God protected the Jews from people who sought to kill them in every generation. He went on to expand about how “being chased, being martyred, is the natural state of the Jews.” The students did not initially respond. He then went on to tell the story of a Polish “*pilat*” (one of the Polish guides who is responsible for directing the drivers around Poland on behalf of the March of the Living) who said that “you must admit that the Holocaust and antisemitism would not happen if the Jews did not have it coming.” Upon hearing this, the students began to react more. One student argued that a future Holocaust is an impossibility, because “affairs have turned away from the Jewish people. People are now more concerned about Muslims.” Another student retorted that “we are still hated, always attacked.” Another chimed in that “everyone hates us.” Another said the fact that Islamophobia is more problematized than antisemitism “and just takes away attention from it.” The student who argued that Islam is more feared and threatened than Judaism reversed his position, drew attention to the fact that he had misspoken, and said that “of course the Jews are the most hated group in society, I did not mean to say that they weren’t, I just meant that Muslims get more attention.” This whole exchange not only indicates the heavy-handed approach to threat that some educators employ, it also speaks to the power of the collective mentality as indicated earlier in this chapter.

Another point of interest regarding this exchange was how the discussion ended was entirely within the construction of Israel as military guarantor. When the students had spent around 20 minutes discussing the likelihood of another Holocaust, the survivor on the bus piped up with: “but we have the State of Israel now! And an army! They would never allow anything to happen to us!” The educator seized upon this “Jewish teachable moment” to impress upon the students that the State of Israel “was the only thing that stood between the Jews and their enemies who sought to kill them.”

The above interaction demonstrates the tendency of presenting Poland and the Holocaust entirely through the lens of Israel and Jewish survival. The emotional touch points in Poland naturally become part-and-parcel within the narrative of how Israel is framed as a proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes of the Holocaust, and as the only bulwark protecting modern day Jews from the occurrence of another genocide. Instead of viewing Israel from a more holistic perspective, of its contributions in art, culture and technology, it becomes representative of a Judaism that is
constantly under threat, and encourages students to view it within those highly politicized, nationalist overtones. Furthermore, it invalidates the rich history of Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael, as well as pre-war Zionist struggle, and frames the establishment of Israel entirely within the parameters of World War Two – being founded in response to the Shoah, and necessary to prevent a reiteration.

When in Israel, the same sense of threat that imbued every element of the trip in Poland, is seen again in the face of a different enemy: the combined Arab states who have attempted more than one invasion. This is seen most clearly during the trip to the Golan Heights, in which the students are taken to an overlook where they can see Syria. In 2017, this was particularly alarming for some, as they came back reporting that they could see smoke rising over the cities. As Syria in 2017 has gained considerable international attention with the rise of ISIS, the failed uprising against dictator Bashir Assad, and, relevant for the students, his purported use of crematoria to cover up mass murder, this was brought all the more home to the students who participated that year. The embattled, threatened sense that students internalized in Poland was manifested here, on the overlook. The same external and at times nebulous perpetrators, who were to be felt but not necessarily seen, came to threaten them here too.

One participant, Emily Freeman, reflected on this five years after he trip. She expressed discomfiture at the way that Israel was framed on the March, after a year spent living in Jerusalem and actively engaging in Israel advocacy at university.

The tie between the Holocaust and the State of Israel is how the whole trip is structured. When we went to Israel, we did not go to Tel Aviv, when we went to Jerusalem we only went to the hotel and nothing else, and for the most part we spent a bunch of time near the border with Syria. We went to the Dead Sea and to Masada, where we talked about the Holocaust. Aren’t we supposed to come to Israel to feel better? Well, we did not. For sure we had parties on Yom Ha’atzmaut, and sometimes I had a lot of fun. That breakfast in the Bedouin tent was delicious. But it was just so tiresome. I found myself rolling my eyes sometimes. You can talk about Israel without mentioning the Holocaust, but they never did. We never spoke about regular problems that Israel has that are outside of the security

139 http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/15/politics/assad-syria-crematorium/index.html
situation. It was all about security. We went to the border with Syria to look at it, and it was all: “look over there, there are people who want to kill you a few feet from here.”

Well, what the hell are we doing here? The point of being in Israel is to show us Israel, and living by the border with Israel isn’t the common Israel experience, if there even is one.

Emily’s comments here illustrate an important point: that Israel is often presented on the trip entirely within the construct of threat and in the shadow of the Holocaust. With its emphasis on the military and its bordering countries, that same sense of threat felt in Poland is intentionally re-inculcated in its participants. She went on:

I could not tell you what we learned there, which is a real shame. We learned about the wars, we saw some tanks, but we really only learned about the military. The emphasis is “oh there are kids a few years older than you who have to go and defend the country. So now, what are you going to do?” Who is it to say I have to do something? It was never a part of the conversation. It was always just expected. Because you were persecuted, and now we have this state that protects you, what are you going to do for it?

This last idea is significant, because it indicates the weighty expectations placed upon the shoulders of the participants and the way in which Diaspora and diaspora living is problematized. I also find it interesting that she reported a sense of disconnect or dissatisfaction with the isolationist narrative presented to her on the trip. What was less clear to me she would have been able to express these ideas at the time, or if they have been clarified after a year of living and studying in Israel (in which she was able to engage with the country outside of the highly nationalized experience on the March of the Living). The way in which she phrases the above also indicates the way in which the students internalize and personalize the history presented to them, certainly one of the goals of the March of the Living.

Although the North American Jewish community is often not touched on explicitly by the Israeli guides, the fear and threat that pervades the March of the Living at its core, and the way in which Israel v. Diaspora (represented by Poland) is dichotomized often subtly implies that North American Jewish communities need not be so complacent. Although the leadership seeks to consolidate support for Israel without necessarily encouraging aliyah (immigration) the presence of both the schema of the trip, particularly in the hands of Zionist educators whose only frame of
reference from which to discuss the Holocaust and modern Judaism is through the State of Israel, the undertone of aliyah is present.

Ultimately, the trip, wherein students reach Jerusalem by way of Auschwitz seems to engender distrust. This sense of distrust and fear is typically manifested in the fear of the university campus. In the interviews that took place in their Grade 12 year, 21/33 students indicated that they were nervous for heading to university, because of the way in which students understand what life on campus is going to be like. As Israel has become an increasingly polarizing issue on many university campuses\(^{140}\) this has become an “issue” of the Toronto Jewish community. Funding and support for Israel groups on campus is prevalent. While to a certain extent the only people on most campuses who care about the Arab-Israeli conflict are small but vocal majorities on either side of the problem, it is certainly conflated in the Jewish media and in popular opinion.

Note, however, that this proportion is highest by a significant margin (14 out of the 21 are from group A, the remaining seven are spread out among Groups B and C) among those who have been in Jewish school their entire life. There are two other potentially explanatory or correlated issues here - first, a fear of many in leaving the Jewish “bubble” that they’ve lived in their entire lives, which concerns some students on many levels\(^{141}\) in the same way it excites them. Secondly, in Grade 12, all students at TJPS participate in a “university life” seminar for the day, and professionals are brought in from on-campus Jewish groups – the activity (which I have participated in every year since 2009) most often used is a ‘Jewish situational “what would you do?”’ led by different campus professionals. Almost every year these issues pertain to anti-Israel or anti-Jewish sentiment on campus, and does little to mitigate the students’ fears about Jewish life on campus. Many students report feeling a need to choose a university with a Jewish community, and when pressed on why, 13/14 Group A students’ responses indicated a latent fear of security on campus. Melissa Greenbaum, who just finished first year university, said that:

140 See Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movements at Ryerson, University of Toronto, and other schools; incidents of physical violence between Jews and Muslims over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at York University, the infamous letter from the rector of Queen’s University, all as examples.

141 Being away for Jewish holidays, concerns over exams during Passover, and finding kosher food on campus are all issues that many Grade 12s discuss outside of the Israel on Campus context.
After going on the trip, I made a point of asking about Jewish/Israeli involvement on campus at McGill which I would never have asked before. I did not apply to universities that are outspoken against Israel. My family is secular, we support Israel, but passively - but now I feel I would not be comfortable in a place that wasn’t Israel-friendly. This stemmed from the trip, from seeing how much Israel is needed.

Her choice to only select universities who were Israel-friendly is an interesting outcome from the March of the Living – and I say interesting because her emphasis was not on there being a robust or diverse Jewish community, but whether there was a large anti-Israel voice on campus. The two don’t necessarily go hand-in-hand, and her outcome was more nationalistic as opposed to religious or communal. This mentality when choosing a university was statistically less pronounced among those who had less Jewish education, perhaps as a result of both i) living outside of the Jewish bubble already, ii) less of a focus on Israel in general and Israel on campus specifically in the months and years leading up to their high school graduation.

Other ways in which this distrust manifested itself is harder to quantify although undercurrents of distrust and fear showed up frequently in post-trip interviews, albeit more strongly in those with more Jewish education. In fact, in the 2017 follow ups alone there was a significant differentiation between the Group A and Group B focus groups. One way this distrust exhibited itself was in continuing dichotomization of Poland versus Israel, and the symbolic interpretations of both. Group A spent considerable time following up on pre-trip themes of Polish antisemitism and apathy towards the Jewish community, as well as a residual feeling of Polish approval of Nazi policy, whereas Group B students showed a relatively positive attitude towards the Polish community as crystallized by the Polish-Jewish mifgash program. Fewer of the Group A students went to it (one third went to the traditional service at the Nozyk synagogue in Warsaw that morning, therefore missing out on the mifgash) so that may play a role in the anomaly. The fact that they counter-program the encounter with the Polish students would indicate a general lack of importance placed on the experience by leadership. One Group B student, Simon Lowell, discussed that he “had added a number of the Polish students on Facebook” after a discussion that “did not involve any of the questions the March gave us to answer.” Instead, they just “chilled” and discussed movies and TV shows and things that they had in common. He did refer back to a question he still remembered, which was about how the communities can create bridges, saying that “this is how – by sitting, talking, getting to know each other as people. This
is how you can build a bridge.” While those students with less Jewish education showed less active mistrust of the Poles, they did still feel a sense of distrust about the Diaspora in general. This distrust was indicated by their emphasis on Israel as necessary for the purpose of preventing another Holocaust. This was a trend seen across all groups. Erin Condren, who started at TJPS in Grade 9, said that she “never understood the importance of Israel until this trip. People used to say that it was the important to prevent another Holocaust, and that never made sense to me. But now, now I see.” Ethan Solar, who went in 2015 from a public school background echoed this idea, saying:

Poland was obviously very, very, very sad, and we study how the Holocaust happened, but we’re left with the question of how knowing this helps us moving forward. And then we go to Israel, and Israel’s unbelievable, and it just brings it all together: that we need a Jewish state because of what happened in Poland.

Annabelle Shapiro, from Group A, said:

I became very Zionist individually. It had always been my family who was, and I was kind of just there. But it was my first time in Israel this time, and it was really cool to be there, but it was mostly meaningful to be there having been in Poland before.

All three of these students, from different backgrounds and connections, report a similar outcome: Israel is seen as a solution to the problem of Poland, and a nation requiring their continued support because of the Holocaust. This black and white mentality is one that is rooted in the very schema of their experience.

This emphasis on threat ties into the way in which Jewishness is presented, where the Holocaust in some ways is seen as a “quick fix” by Jewish professionals as a way to get students to connect with the Jewish community. As the national chair of the March of the Living said to me in an interview in 2016,

Many teens do not have an appreciation for how easy their Jewish life is today. Studying the Holocaust, forcing them to live in the past, is a way to keep Jewish connected. The Holocaust is the biggest event in modern Jewish history, and people do not identify with Israel the same way that they do with the Holocaust. The Holocaust is more personal, and therefore it is the right tool.” The right tool for what? “To make them marry Jewish.
The Holocaust, as an emotive event in the hands of the educators, is summoned as the ultimate rationale for Jewish choices, namely Jewish marriage. Take the educator standing outside of Auschwitz II, advising the participants in 2015 that “this was the reason to stay Jewish.” Emily Freeman, a participant in 2011, spoke to this when she said that she felt that the educators used the Holocaust in an almost patronizing way.

I think that they feel like so lowly of us. That we cannot possibly be interested in Jewish heritage or culture. That why they just think: “you know, the way that we’re going to keep these kids interested in their Judaism is for them to feel that everyone hates them and that they died together as Jews, and that you are failing all of the people that did die if you stop being Jewish.”

That is quite a responsibility being placed upon the participants.

The Holocaust continues to have such power in the modern Jewish community because it is (relatively) recent, and its survivors still walk among us. It is a reachable and tangible part of history. This also may be reflective of the fact that many Jewish educators do not necessarily look to cultural Judaism as a viable or sufficient basis for Jewish engagement in and of itself. Perhaps the Holocaust is seen as an appropriate tie in, an additional emotional component that helps to solidify cultural Judaism. It is a secular event, its remembrance a secular mitzvah, which potentially can be utilized in lieu of religious symbolism for an increasingly polarized community. What happens, however, when these teens are young adults, and the event no longer necessarily carries such weight? Or even in the more distant future, when they are parents and grandparents themselves? When the pervasiveness of the Holocaust becomes less potent, when its use as a symbol less personal, when people are no longer able to trace direct familial connections to their losses, what happens then to the people who tied their Judaism to it? Will this structuring of Jewish identity with the Holocaust as its emotional base prove to be a short term and shortsighted solution, creating a communal identity that waxes and wanes along with the significance of an event that each day becomes more historical?
6.2.7 Empowered Judaism

The State of Israel has a historically complicated relationship with the narrative of the Holocaust. In particular, this complication centers on the question of Jewish response to the Nazis. The wartime image of the Jew as passive, controlled, and without agency or self determination was directly opposed to the image of the Sabra rooted in the Jewish homeland. The Zionist ideology centred around the creation of the ‘new Jew’ – one who had broken free of Diasporic shackles, who was active and pioneering, and who exercised the Jewish right to autonomy (Segev, 2000, pp. 14-18). This concept of ‘new Jew,’ although it has somewhat fallen out of fashion in contemporary Israeli politics, is still often utilized by the Israeli educators on the trip as a way of counterbalancing and repositioning the participants in relation to both Poland and Israel. There is a consistent emphasis on the trip on a rejection of powerlessness, imbued with a sense of modern threat, as indicated in the previous section.

Aside from a sense of cultural affinity with Judaism, the most substantial impact that the March of the Living has over time is in its creation of a sense of both a threatened and empowered Judaism in regard to the State of Israel. Although the March employs the Holocaust as the base of its educational program, the biggest benefactor (so to speak) is a heightened sense of Zionism and support for the State of Israel. This support is primarily expressed in security-based or militaristic terms. Although this is tied in many ways to the sense of ‘threatened Jewishness’, how this differentiates itself is in a sense of Jewish pride vis-a-vis the State of Israel and its military. This is most commonly extrapolated in discussions about the security situation in Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

One of the great ironies of the time in Israel is that students are encouraged to see Israel both as a place of safety (compared to Poland) and as one of threat (from external foes). Students are constantly presented with two “truths” – one of Israel as being a place of safety and relaxation, where they are finally allowed to explore beyond the boundaries of their buses, and where all 33 reported feeling “safe” and “relaxed” and “happy” for the first time during the trip. This feeling of safety and relief is particularly fierce when juxtaposed against the perceived danger of Poland. The second truth however is equally powerful, which is that the trip has brought them to a country where threat of terror attacks and war is far more extreme than it is in their home contexts. This tension is a constant negotiation, and the students are in many ways encouraged to
identify with those from within (Israelis) and fear those without (Arabs), which is an extension of the same binary in Poland – although on a much larger scale.

In a way, this underlying threat also serves to demonstrate the differentiation the program seeks to build between Israelis and Diaspora Jews. While it wants the Jews to identify with Israel, it doesn’t necessary seek to encourage mass *aliyah*, more looking for the creation of a strong Diaspora support network. Within this tension is the underlying message presented by the educators that “we [Israelis] are in danger” and “you [Diaspora Jews] are safe” (Kelner, 2002, p. 99). As the students have just left Poland, in which the Jews were an embattled, threatened people who were ultimately wiped out, the idea of a “two-way” relationship of need is presented: that the State of Israel is there to protect the Diaspora Jews, and that the Diaspora Jews are there to protect Israel, even just as a guarantor of its own safety. 6 out of the 14 longitudinal case studies reported an active connection with the Jewish community and Israel, although all had made the choice to marry a Jewish spouse and were in some way affiliated communally, so their self-reporting here is a bit suspect. Those who reported an “active” connection tended to be those who were working within the communal structure. One, for example, had a self-described tertiary connection, and yet she is a major fundraiser and organizer for a Jewish children services network in Toronto.

Although it is technically a different objective and point, another important way that this ‘empowered’ mentality exhibits itself is through a heightened public discourse on antisemitism that the participants feel comfortable engaging in. In many ways, however, the two points overlap as many students interpret anti-Zionist sentiment on campus and elsewhere as antisemitism in sheep’s clothing.

This goal of the March of the Living is certainly successful, as many students accept as their moral duty to fight against those who take anti-Israel/anti-Jewish positions. This, however, has an interesting caveat: although many expressed an interest in “speaking out” or “discussing” antisemitism and anti-Zionism, many showed a distinct apathy with regards to actually taking an active role on campus or in the community. Jessica Davis, from group A, argued that: “It makes me uncomfortable that antisemitism still exists, but for right now, I think that’s a personal thing for me only.” She had felt a personal belief change, but it was not enough to inspire her to get
involved to combat rising antisemitism. Matthew Schwartz had a different perspective, saying that:

The March of the Living totally changed my perspective. Before, I did not shout out that I was Jewish, but now I realize that there’s a worse things than being Jewish. It is important that I speak up. It is happened to me, it is happened to everyone here, and I need to stand up for myself.\textsuperscript{142}

In interviews with the teens from 2015-2017, 29/33 said that they were most likely to support Israeli on campus groups when they went to university. When asked about Holocaust education on campus, only 21/33 said that they would support programming on campus. Of the 14 participants I interviewed after completing their undergraduate degrees, 12 of them had been highly involved in Israel groups on campus, with only seven being involved in Holocaust-related events. That said, when asked if the students would actively \textit{join} or participate, as opposed to just support, the number dropped off dramatically outside of those Jewish educational contexts. A recurrent theme in those from Research Groups B, C and D is that for the most part they would support Israel groups on campus, and should anything major occur (such as a Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions vote or act of overt antisemitism) they would be involve themselves. However, when it came to membership and involvement on a regular basis, by far those who attended Jewish day school their whole lives were vastly more inclined to do so. (12/14 from Research Group A, 3/19 from Groups B, C and D) This seemed to stem out of a belief among the students that Israel was important, but in actively involving themselves in Israel advocacy on campus, they were prioritizing their Jewish identity over their Canadian one, and they did not feel that this was strictly necessary. Jaime Greerson from Group B illustrated this, saying:

I do not know if I’d join a club, but, I’m kind of loud and opinionated, and so if someone said something [bad about Israel] I’d go up to them and say something about it. But I do

\textsuperscript{142} Two notes: 1. “It” is antisemitic and ant-Zionist comments and attacks on him personally. 2. His generalized statement, when said to the rest of the focus group, turned out to be inaccurate for every other member of the group except him. He was the only one who had ever experienced some sort of antisemitic comment directed at him.
not think I’m Jewish enough, that I know enough about my religion, to actually get involved.

What I found interesting about this trend was the fact that having Canadian and Jewish identities are not mutually exclusive, and in fact Canadian identity is often predicated upon the idea of multiculturalism. As seen throughout the data in this chapter, however, many of the students who came from less Jewish education demonstrated a continual sense of disconnect between their “Canadian” and “Jewish” identities and struggled in how to prioritize them. This may be a product of feeling pressure to choose between “Canadian” social experiences in their school settings and more traditionally Jewish ones (such as being home on Friday night for Shabbat dinner as opposed to going out with friends.)

However, it should be noted that when it came to Holocaust education, while many expressed an interest in supporting (ie. going to an event), when it came to active involvement, that number dropped to 5/33, with no significant difference across any of the groups. This is an intriguing outcome, considering that so many students and people qualify Holocaust memory as being fundamental to their Jewish identity. Indeed, the CIJA/UIA study undertaken in 2017 also showed that for young Canadian Jews, by far the highest marker of Jewish identity (at 79%) was Holocaust memory. I believe that this may be a reflection of the fact that remembering the Holocaust is a passive expression of Jewish identity, one which requires very little of the those in question. Thus, when participants are merely asked to remember, that passive expression of Jewish commitment is far from difficult, but when asked to actually participate in the active transmission of memory, statistically far fewer are inclined to do so.

This outcome also seemed to result out of a belief (not expressed by many outright, but an undercurrent theme) that the Holocaust was past, whereas the State of Israel and its attendant issues are a problem of the present and the future and therefore needed their attention. That said, the State of Israel was seen almost exclusively for all interviewees within the construction of the Holocaust. When asked why Israel advocacy specifically, all reported (whether expressed explicitly or not) a belief that the State of Israel was necessary as a guarantor against future

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143 See Figure 16.
Jewish tragedy. They were seen as the greatest (and sometimes only) defense for the Jewish people, the only thing stopping the recurrence of another mass genocide. Tamara Klein (group A) argued that: “Israel is evolving, whereas the Holocaust is static. It’s Israel that needs us now.” Erin Condren (group B) echoed this, saying that she would “maybe get involved in an Israel on campus group, but definitely not Holocaust education. I’m going to have such little time, I need to choose where to spend it.” Robert Hart said that Holocaust education was simply less important, because “a fraction of what you can do with the Holocaust is what you can do if you care about Israel. Supporting their economy, supporting the military … everything.”

Adam Lichtenstein, from group C, was succinct and firm:

I have to be honest, the Holocaust doesn’t rivet me. I think that it is an important part of our history and I’m glad I studied it in my education, but it doesn’t interest me in terms of educating others about it.

Thus, in a way, across almost all students educated outside of Jewish day school, the March is largely unsuccessful in its mission to create an empowered Jewish youth cohort. Although the students report across the board that they’ve internalized the ‘Judaism under threat’ mentality into a strong feeling of support for the State of Israel and a desire to speak out against antisemitism, few students report actively engaging in groups or institutions that set out to do so. In fact, many believe that doing so would be prioritizing their Jewish identities over their other Canadian, youth and social identities, which they express discomfort with. Further, despite the fact that it is a trip about the Holocaust first and foremost, many students come out with a sense of apathy about the event, seeing it only in its relation to Israel. This, however, may not be problematic for the March of the Living, for whom support for the State of Israel may be more important (indicated to me by the presence of Israeli educators in Poland, and the way in which the two sites are dichotomized throughout the trip). There are exceptions to the rule, however, in addition to the teens who acknowledged that they weren’t interested in taking an active role, of the 14 longitudinal interviews, the subjects who involved themselves (9) were all from Jewish educational backgrounds, and cite a combination of Jewish education and the March of the Living for inspiring said action.
Table 4: Charts assessing outcomes controlling for Jewish Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Jewish Education:</strong></td>
<td>11 years of Jewish education at the time of the program.</td>
<td>At least 3 years at the time of the program (Grades 9-11).</td>
<td>Left Jewish education during or at end of elementary school.</td>
<td>No formal Jewish education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trends:</strong></td>
<td>- Most willing to participate in and take leadership positions in Jewish life after the trip</td>
<td>- Most akin to Group C in attitudes, both pre- and post-trip</td>
<td>- Most akin to Group B in attitudes, both pre- and post-trip</td>
<td>- Holocaust and Jewish identities less significant than other groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- More anger exhibited towards Poles, which the trip does not change</td>
<td>- Tendency towards a more nuanced understanding of both Jewish and Polish narratives</td>
<td>- Tendency towards a more nuanced understanding of both Jewish and Polish narratives</td>
<td>- Tendency towards a more nuanced understanding of both Jewish and Polish narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- For the most part the trip served to reinforce previous identities and perceptions: about Poland, Israel, Zionism; social groups; religious and cultural beliefs</td>
<td>- Similar love of Israel to all other groups</td>
<td>- Similar outcome of love of Israel to all other groups</td>
<td>- Similar outcome of love of Israel to all other groups</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- did not really change behaviours substantially across the board</td>
<td>- Inclined to passively rather than actively support Israel and Jewish groups on campus</td>
<td>- Inclined to passively rather than actively support Israel and Jewish groups on campus</td>
<td>- Inclined to passively rather than actively support Israel and Jewish groups on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Played the greatest role in the collective</td>
<td>- See more of an identity based in social/ cultural Judaism</td>
<td>- See more of an identity based in social/ cultural Judaism</td>
<td>- See more of an identity based in social/ cultural Judaism</td>
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6.3 Discussion

The March of the Living seeks first and foremost to further an identity-building agenda, and in doing so they model a number of opportunities for the students to construct different Jewish identities. In controlling for previous levels of Jewish education, a picture of to what extent the trip helps shape those identities, reinforce previous trends, or has little to no impact emerges.

There are four types of Judaism which are the most significant to the trip leadership: collective, cultural, threatened and empowered. It is within those four that we see most what the March of the Living seeks to create. Most of all the March seeks to create a stronger cohort of committed Jews. For the trip leaders, this sense of commitment can manifest itself in a number of ways, but they are all interrelated. First, they seek to create a sense of Jewish exceptionalism and uniqueness, and this is done through presenting the students of the history of the Holocaust as an important case study in that regard. This idea of the Jews as occupying a fundamentally different space politically and nationally is certainly an intended outcome. The collective as being responsible for one another is certainly modeled by the program, and this collective is presented as the tie to all other forms of Judaism. The community is the foundation of the religious, cultural and social identities, it is transposed onto Israel as a country and in terms of the students’ relationships with Israel.

The proliferation of Jewish identities presented also indicate the March of the Living’s understanding of ‘Millennial’ Judaism (Magid, 2013). Magid (2013) discusses how for many young American Jews, multiple Jewish identities are sought and internalized in “the search for meaning and the creation of affiliations of shared meaning” (p. 184). In this, the March of the Living does not intend to create a monolithic Jewish community or identity (although it would certainly encourage participants, without fail, to support both the Toronto Jewish Federation and the State of Israel) but rather to indicate to students that there is place for them in the Jewish people, however they choose to connect. All they have to do is make a choice to consciously be, and stay, Jewish.

Despite this, it also bears acknowledging that the March’s focused priorities indicate a traditional and somewhat narrow idea of Jewish identity. Trip leadership seeks certain participant “take aways”: a belief in Jewish marriage, the importance of Jewish religious practice, engaging with Israel in traditionally prescribed ways. All the research I did indicates that the greatest desired
outcome regarding these Jewish attitude and practices is that of endogamy. The Jewish population surveys discussed earlier have shown over the years both a steep rise in intermarriage and a strong decline in traditional markers of Jewish identity.\(^{144}\) As intermarriage statistics have indicated that children raised in mixed-marriage homes have a greater tendency not to be involved in the Jewish religion or community, the desire to encourage endogamy has become an even more important focus for the Jewish communities in North America.

In doing a broad analysis of the identity-building agenda on the March of the Living, it can be summed up in two goals: endogamy, and support for Israel. The Holocaust and its history is used as a vehicle through which to substantiate the participants’ understanding of the necessity of both. In this, longitudinal studies would indicate that they are relatively successful. However, where they have the most success in these goals (particularly regarding active engagement as opposed to passive support) is with those students who already have a strong background in Jewish education. For those with less, the identity-building outcomes tend to pertain more towards beliefs and feelings as opposed to a change in behaviour.

\(^{144}\) See pages 115-116.
7 Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusions

I sought in beginning research for this dissertation to understand the way in which history is used to substantiate a distinct Jewish identity within a multicultural Toronto milieu. While I focused on one specific program and how Jewish students understand the messaging not only of that program but also the schema (Poland/ Holocaust → Israel) presented within it, there are broadly applicable themes that are relevant to many educators, educational contexts, and learners. In this final chapter, I read across my data and analysis and to suggest implications for these various groups, and conclude with opportunities for further research.

7.1 Knowledge, Implications, Opportunities

7.1.1 Informal Education Best Practices

This research contributes to the knowledge of how informal education might benefit from greater standardization and benchmarks, as my findings indicated the great variety of experiences and “takeaways” had by participants, almost all of which were directly related to their specific educators. As the educators are not subject to a great deal of standardization or centralization, the environment is created in which its participants have little to no standard experiences or outcomes.

There are vast implications for informal educators, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The field of informal education as a whole suffers from a lack of definition and standardization. The lack of formality has both its upsides and downsides, but a substantive negative outcome is that informal education often suffers from a vague definition of goals and lack of standards and benchmarks. The March of the Living certainly evidences these concerns, with different goals both explicitly stated and implicitly enacted, and with very little program assessment and analysis. As it falls under the banner of informal education, it appears to be “kosher” that it doesn’t effectively enact its formal curriculum, which is a way the program is advertised to key stakeholders. As Bryfman and Reimer (2008) and Wertheimer (2008) both discuss, the field as a
whole would benefit from firmer parameters and measurements for which to assess its outcomes. This idea of standards and benchmarks is not in and of itself without complications. Some of the efforts to standardize formal education in North America have met with limited success. But, the March of the Living and other informal educational programs like it should have a baseline requirement to elucidate its goals and set minimal standards to assess whether or not its participants are leaving the March with the outcomes the leadership desires.

Further, informal education could benefit from stricter standards for the educators it hires. Especially trips that are predicated on the use of history for the substantiation of modern-day connectivity require educators and leadership knowledgeable of that history and who can effectively communicate that history. The March of the Living has two problem areas when it comes to pedagogy, which are ironically opposite. First, they employ direct instruction practices during the pre-trip sessions because they are unable or unwilling to decentralize the education to their chaperones. Thus, instead of more easily-controlled small groups with an emphasis on discussion and engagement, students are asked to sit and listen to lectures in a group of more than 100 participants at a time. Oddly, however, when the students reach Poland, the leadership relinquishes all educational and ideological control to assorted educators, with a troubling level of decentralization. The educators are given free rein on their own buses with a seeming lack of control or leadership, leaving all educators to press their own personal agendas, beliefs and biases to on their group. More to the point, the educators, rather than being historically knowledgeable, often have significant knowledge gaps regarding Poland and the Holocaust, and due to the decentralized nature of the program, these often go unnoticed or unaddressed.

Some final questions for further research: To what degree are the issues regarding baseline standards and benchmarks also reflected in other Jewish educational trips to Poland and Israel (of which there are a number)? Is it also seen in other forms of informal educational environments? To what extent is this a product of a religious/ national group and their specific concerns, or is this something endemic to a greater variety of informal educational contexts?
7.1.2 Educational Travel as Semiotic Practice

This dissertation contributes to the field of Jewish educational travel by offering greater insight onto Jewish pilgrimage to Poland as opposed to Israel. The research indicates that the way in which Poland is transformed from a country in the community of nations into a semiotic representation of itself changes the students’ understandings of the history of the Holocaust, their relationship with the Polish people, and results in a heightened sense of the importance of the Jewish community in a dangerous world. It has also spoken to the power of semiotics in general on these educational travel trips, one that can be applied to a wide variety of pilgrimage trips enacted by various Diaspora communities. These are becoming increasingly more common in the age of globalization (Kelner, 2010, p. 13) be it African-American trips to former plantations or to the site of slave routes, Chinese diaspora trips back to villages on the mainland, or other Jewish trips to various global sites. The study of how the tourist gaze shapes representation and understanding is significant as for so long tourism was though of as merely a form of enjoyment or fun, although now its power to socialize is starting to be realized (Kelner, 2010, p. 3).

Taking members of a Diaspora community back to a “homeland” on some form of pilgrimage involves the group positioning themselves in relation to the land. In doing so, the land automatically becomes less place than symbol. This schema automatically creates the land in question into a semiotic representation which participants are encouraged to view as some form of “homeland” despite the fact that they may not have any personal connections with it. If someone was a descendant of a French Jew, who was brought to Auschwitz, before emigrating to North America, constructing either Poland or Israel as a “homeland” for them is problematic. Within the construction of the trip the sites become almost idealized, in terms of the ideal locations from an identity building constructive, the site as the situation for the creation of a usable history. With the goal of creating and reinforcing youth support for Israel, this idealized construction of Israel-as-homeland is natural. The March of the Living and its creation of isolated, bubbled communities within the milieu of both Poland and Israel shape the countries into mere representations of themselves, created for the purposes of period engagement and withdrawal. It is within those momentary engagements that the country is turned into a symbol created for the use of the community doing the viewing, participating in the remembering. This semiotic practice has a great deal of power to create or substantiate transnational and global
identities, but it once again needs more study to understand its implications across a variety of communities.

This is another further opportunity for research: how do different communities use their histories and/ or different countries as semiotic backdrops to substantiate a collective memory? How do non-European Jewish groups, or non-Polish dominant Jewish groups, understand Poland-as-symbol differently? Does going on a Jewish trip to Poland not under the umbrella of the March of the Living (like Ramah Seminar, Tichon Ramah Yerushalayim, or Biliuim Israel, to name a few other travel experiences that operate for Toronto Jews alone) also change the way in which the semiotic representations of Poland and Israel are created?

7.1.3 Minority Identities in a Multicultural Milieu

This research has also contributed to understandings of how different minority groups utilize history to substantiate collective identities within a multicultural milieu like Canada. Given the vast number of ethnic groups in the city of Toronto, and no lack of ethnic- or religious group-specific cultural programs, findings from this research could doubtless be applied to understand a great number of communities. Within these communities, one could argue that many focus on the creation of a history that is far from anemic facts stripped of emotive power - in fact, one of the strongest uses of history within ethnic and religious communities is one that is to summon historical events to create a “usable past.” This idea of collective memory, particularly where trauma is concerned, has been studied by many scholars (see Halbwachs, 1994; Alexander et al., 2004) and is generally considered a powerful way of creating the boundaries of a group within a broader milieu.

There are two particular areas in which this research sheds light on the creation of the “usable past:” first is the question of whether or not this constructed oppositional identity, when summoned as a response to some sort of collective trauma, has the power for longevity. Although findings from this research suggest that the March of the Living is somewhat successful in supporting participants to develop a Jewish identity that encourages both endogamy and nationalistic fervour, it is less clear the degree to which those identities are the results of participants’ prior Jewish education. Also, students who have a strong Jewish education usually come out of homes where Jewish identity is highly regarded. Further, it remains to be seen whether a cohort of youth whose identities are shaped around the twin narratives of the
Holocaust and Israel remain identifiably Jewish (in the way in which the March of the Living would wish them to), particularly when Holocaust survivors will no longer be present to make the event personal for the participants. Secondly, this research specifically speaks to the desire to shape teenage choices and understandings of Jewish identity, and the theoretical power of reaching adolescents at the cusp of making independent life choices. This is another interesting opportunity for research - a more encompassing longitudinal study tracking involvement, attitudes, beliefs and practices of participants, ideally up to 10 years out. It was beyond the scope of this research, but could be a valuable area of study.

7.1.4 Embodiment In Situ

Embodiment comes in many forms and in many contexts across the educational field (Ellsworth, 2005). This research speaks to some of the power of embodiment, particularly in the creation of negative associations and emotions, which according to Kidron (2009) are more associated with greater outcomes of behaviour and attitude changes. My research focuses particularly on the use of embodiment in terms of “entering history,” in asking all students to embody Jews of the 1930s and 1940s who lived through or died in the Holocaust.

The findings from my research indicated that it is the use of embodiment in situ that heavily influences students’ misunderstandings of history and incorrect attributions of responsibility for the Holocaust. When embodying victims in Poland, Poland and its people become symbolic representations of the perpetrators the participants seek, transforming the country and its population into those who tacitly complied with or approved of Nazi genocide. It is because of this embodiment in Poland as opposed to Germany that many participants report a feeling that Poland and the Polish people are considered more culpable for the Holocaust than the Germans.

The implications for a wide variety of educators who utilize embodiment, particularly when it relates to traumatic historical events, should be further studied. Although my findings relate to Jewish students in Poland specifically, the implications of embodiment may have implications for non-Jewish groups. What are the implications of teaching victimhood, for example? If everyone is a victim, no one is a bystander, no one is a perpetrator, and no one has any agency for their actions, for history, for the present. In Holocaust education as a whole, the March of the
Living is far from the only context to utilize this. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC famously gives each visitor a card with a person who perished in the Holocaust at the beginning of his or her tour. This is to give each visitor a victim to identify with. The problem is, teaching victimhood almost always involves an abdication of any responsibility. Although it may be expedient in the moment, as it is often seen in the March of the Living (as a way of creating a connection, even if it’s through a negative understanding, with the Jewish community) there are potential ramifications that educators should consider.

The problem, of course, is that victimhood is associated with helplessness, and once a victim, that is the entire allotted role. This teaching of victimhood and its implications can clearly be seen in both Polish and Jewish societies, and its ramifications are clearly reflected in the competing national narratives of these groups. From a longitudinal perspective, the example in Polish society speaks clearly to this. It was in the teaching of victimhood – in which you can only be a victim, and nothing else – that the negative reaction to Jan Gross’ (2001) Neighbors was born. When this book was released at the turn of the millennium, the quintessential Polish narrative of the war was one of glorious martyrdom and resistance. This narrative, bred through years of subjugation and victimization, came into conflict with Gross’ discussion of a community in which Poles acted in a self-servingly brutal manner towards their Jewish neighbors in 1941. When it was released, the effect caused a massive re-evaluation of said narrative, although many corners of Polish society made hideous accusations against the Jews, arguing that they were seeking financial gain, that they were the source of Polish misery before, during and after the war, and that the Poles were being victimized by Jews at one with the communists again by talking about Jedwabne (Polonsky and Michlic, 2004; Bikont, 2004).

When one is only encouraged in a self-reflective perception of victimhood, the acknowledgement of being anything else is next to impossible. How is a people to react to historical agency being foisted upon them, when the abdication of any responsibility had long been assumed? If you have always been a victim, which is what many in the Polish historical narrative at the end of the 20th century held true, you are by definition incapable of being a bystander or a perpetrator. You are helpless, without agency, without control. This, while traumatizing to a certain extent, is also a morally comfortable position. If you consider some of the horrific reactions to the release of Neighbors, to the questioning of the long-held narrative of victimhood (as described in Chapters One and Four), you can clearly see the long-term
ramifications of teaching victimization. It was easier to search for mitigating factors, to reject the title of perpetrator, to create the new narrative of re-victimization at the hands of the Jews.

Hand in hand with the narrative of victimization is the impact of teaching distrust. In the era of globalization, when one comes in contact with other peoples, religious and ethnic groups (and in Toronto, lives with them) what are the implications of teaching a certain fear of the “other” that this form of embodiment-of-trauma organically engenders? This is another question that this research sheds light on, though it certainly creates just as many questions as it answers. This would be another interesting long-term study question: does this teaching of distrust quantifiably change the participants’ relationship with the Diaspora “other” over time?

7.1.5 Emotion and Education

This research also underscores the role of emotion in education. While some educational theorists (Richardson, 2003; Grumet, 1989; Pinar, 1988) have described the role of pre-existing beliefs, I have applied those theoretical understandings to Holocaust education specifically.

My research demonstrates the impact of education in a few crucial ways. First, is the way in which emotionally-based perceptions of Poles abide in many students, and these pre-trip assumptions play a significant role in how they view the material presented to them. Secondly, it discusses the way in which the creation of a “usable history” results in the prioritization of emotional processes designed to encourage students to “feel” history more than to understand it.

Informal and formal educators, particularly when focused on historical events that are relatively recent, need to be more aware of the amount of emotion-laden perspectives that stakeholders enter with. It can be extremely difficult to change prejudicial thinking and emotionally-bound ideas. But these beliefs can form a strong default position through which the students understand material presented to them. In general, a greater understanding of how these emotional positions cause students to interact differently in the learning process needs to be better understood by educators on pilgrimage and educational travel.

Further, it must be remembered that many beliefs are ‘created’ by those who have ‘inherited memory’ from those who came before. This concept of inherited memory, while explored here within the context of the March of the Living participant experience, can also be applied to many
Holocaust survivors and their families. The demarcation of “second-” and “third-generation” survivors indicates a tendency among North American Jews to assume some sort of inherited trauma and memory from those who survived the Holocaust (Danieli, 2016; Fox, 2016). The March of the Living’s current program for how to keep the survivor experience of the trip alive when they have aged beyond the ability to participate is to bring the children of survivors to share their story instead. This raises many issues, but also indicates an assumption made by many communal members that there is some extra validity to the memory of those who weren’t there, because they were related to people who were. This isn’t to say that there isn’t something “different” about the experiences and stories of those who were impacted by the Holocaust. They offer not only the experiences of their family members, but also an emotional awareness and understanding of how the parents’ experiences impacted them while growing up. As many studies indicate (see references above) children of survivors may carry genetic and psychological markers of trauma felt by their parents. This alone gives children of survivors a perspective on discussing trauma that others don’t have. That said, the program needs to seriously consider the implications of having children stand in place of their parents.

Lastly, I also shed more light on the role of emotive processes in Holocaust education. This again can speak to a wide range of educational contexts and learners. The most important implications of this is that there needs to be a better balance between emotive and cognitive practices. When either is explicitly prioritized, the event can potentially either become too symbolic in its nebulous definitions and lack of historical context, or the significance and power of the event is lost in its anemic facts. Particularly for educators of history, this need for balance resonates in many contexts and capacities. Further, when it comes to Holocaust education specifically, educational contexts should be careful not to get too overwrought, because the basic facts, testimonies and stories from the event itself can stand alone in their significance.

7.1.6 Holocaust in Toronto (and North American) Life

The way in which students understand the messaging of the trip indicates many issues related to.

In 2008, Simone Schweber designed a chapter of the survey book *What We Now Know About Jewish Education* with a qualifier that in fact, not much is known about Holocaust education in its many derivations. This would be an apt title for this dissertation as well.
While Jewish educators are regularly combatting “Holocaust fatigue” in the community, particularly among youth, the Holocaust still reigns supreme as a communal symbol across a great variety of Jewish communities. This dissertation has added to the field of Holocaust studies in a number of ways.

Firstly, this research speaks to the need for educators to understand local mores and perceptions that may be fiercely rooted in the city or communities the educators are in. In Toronto, where many members of the Jewish community are of Polish descent (which accounts for roughly 75% of participants of the March of the Living), the idea of Poland certainly carries a different emotive and pre-trip symbolic value for participants. This understanding of Poland-as-symbol of hatred and death, I imagine, is different in other communities with different ethnic backgrounds (certainly an interesting opportunity for further research). These emotional and value-laden perspectives of Poland and the Polish people as responsible for the death and suffering of Jews play a role in how the learners understand and interpret the information given to them, as well as the importance and meaning that they choose to assign to the material presented to them on the trip. Educators need to better account for the local perspectives and understandings when they are teaching, in order to address these ideas head-on.

Secondly, findings from this research suggest the need for a greater balance between emotive and cognitive processes in Holocaust education. For a great many Jewish students in Toronto, their only basis and understanding of the Holocaust is one that exists largely in the emotive realm. This I found particularly shocking, considering the importance awarded the Holocaust in the Grade 10 Canadian history curriculum. However, according to student reports, many were taught about the Holocaust in less than one class, leaving it as a footnote in the broader story of the Second World War. Their cognitive and intellectual understanding of the event is often surprisingly inadequate. This may also speak to some of the Holocaust fatigue that educators face, as the same tropes are presented to students year after year, usually within the context of Holocaust-as-symbol as opposed to Holocaust-as-opportunity for learning and engagement. This will also help to address the needed balance in particularist versus universal understandings of the event. The Holocaust carries a lot of weight in a particularist narrative, but it can

145 My basis for saying this is my own research. See Chapters Four and Five for examples.
simultaneously be a context for connection with Jewish heritage and an opportunity for students to assess broader patterns of behaviour and the history of intolerance and genocide.

Specifically within this idea of the Holocaust as a learning opportunity, this research also sheds light on one small example of how perpetrator narratives are presented within many Holocaust education contexts. If one wants to understand the Holocaust for the purposes of “never again,” (the common Jewish trope to discuss how the history of the Holocaust should be studied to prevent another repetition) then ultimately a greater inclusion of perpetrator narratives is necessary. Further, if one wants to take meaningful lessons away from the event, then it is an understanding of human behaviour and how not a whole country of genocidal maniacs, but perfectly ordinary people systematically murdered eleven million. It is in understanding how and why those people made those decisions and the historical context that catapulted demagogues into power, especially across Eastern Europe.

Lastly, it addresses the apparently ineffective use of the Holocaust as a “quick fix” for dealing with various communal problems. This research demonstrates that the Holocaust can be effective for inspiring action, at least in the short term, and particularly with regards to the State of Israel. However, Holocaust fatigue apparently still wins out at the end of the day, with many participants in the months and years after the trip freely admitting that they “aren’t moved” by the history of the Holocaust – at least not enough to actually participate in Holocaust education. While it can inspire participants into a greater belief of the significance of the State of Israel, it does little to impact behaviour in terms of Israel advocacy. When controlling for Jewish education, it would appear that the Holocaust narrative inspires said behavioural changes considerably more when the student already had completed the vast majority of their schooling in the Jewish educational context.

A final opportunity for research here would be a greater study on the use of the Holocaust narrative during the March of the Living in Israel. It was beyond the scope of this dissertation, but could be a very interesting way to see how the two events are juxtaposed. Beyond just the March of the Living, how Jewish students taken on pilgrimage trips to both Poland and Israel understand the role and importance of the Holocaust when in Israel and engaged in Israeli society could be valuable to the field.
7.1.7 On the impacts of formal Jewish education

Although this dissertation seeks to understand the impacts of an informal Jewish educational experience, an unintended outcome was a study of the impacts of formal Jewish education. Although the trip engages Jewish students from a wide-range of backgrounds, and has impacts for participants from each of those contexts, it was clear at the end of the research that the trip in some ways had the most lasting impact on those who existed within a primarily Jewish milieu. Although it may have had less direct impact in terms of changes in attitudes or behaviours, in terms of the goals of creating an empowered Jewish cohort regarding support for Israel and endogamy, the March of the Living was most successful in inculcating or reinforcing those beliefs with students who had already been in formal Jewish education for eleven years. Thus, one can interpret these findings to indicate that it is the formal Jewish educational setting (perhaps apart, and perhaps in conjunction with the trip) that creates these attitudes and behaviours. This is particularly relevant in 2017, with the closure of three Jewish day schools (TJPS’ north campus, as well as the north campuses of two other Jewish elementary schools). Many parents question the rising costs of Jewish education and are forced to calculate its worth, particularly given the plethora of other educational options presented to Jewish parents. As the debate over the value of Jewish education rages in the Toronto Jewish community, this dissertation (perhaps unintentionally) certainly contributes to the knowledge regarding formal Jewish educational outcomes.

7.1.8 For the March of the Living

For the Toronto March of the Living, there are a number of specific policy implications and recommendations that this research provides.

First, there is a need for a greater understanding of how guides relate to educational outcomes. The chance of which guide each participant receives is the single most important determining factor in how much and what the student learns on the trip. When guides provide knowledgeable and contextualized information, the participants seem to be much more likely to have a nuanced understanding of the Holocaust and all of the various players in wartime Europe. However, many of the guides demonstrate a lack of confidence not only in the Holocaust-as-history, but also in the ability of historical facts to stand alone as compelling in and of themselves. Whether that is because of the guides’ lack of education on Poland and the Holocaust, or because of the direction
they are receiving from the leadership, it’s tough to tell. Regardless, the often heavy-handed emotional manipulation frequently employed by the guides is educationally and morally problematic and needs to be addressed. Further, considering that this is ostensibly an educational trip, the grounding in facts as opposed to usable or more palatable history and narrative needs to be markedly stronger.

This also speaks to need for different parameters for chaperone selection. If this trip is offered as an educational experience, then it is important to hire people who are able to shoulder the burden of education. Although cost is seen as the greatest barrier, surely the experience of the participants is paramount. As it stands now, chaperone selection is flawed by poor selection parameters, poor preparation and poor oversight. These improperly trained chaperones play a substantial role in promoting misunderstandings of history and inaccurate attributions of responsibility that the participants too often take away.

If the March of the Living also seeks to overcome the complacency and inattentiveness of a number of its participants who are there for the “social scene” and create numerous disciplinary issues, reducing numbers and making the application process more selective is a relatively easy solution. Despite the fact that the Toronto Jewish community donor pool evidently seeks to have the trip be open to anyone who wants to go, the vast majority of disciplinary problems and students who take little away from the March are a direct result of a number of participants who are there for social scene or because it is considered a right of passage – not because they are interested or intent on learning. Given the sense of entitlement that exists among many participants on the trip, asking students to shoulder responsibility before and after the trip could help that and also aid them in the “actualization” that the trip so sorely lacks.

One way the above dearth of “takeaways” exhibits itself is in a lack of effective programming designed to assist students in taking their experiences and implementing them in their various communities after the trip. In fact, one of the only real expectations in the post-trip program is that the participants go to a synagogue and speak about their experiences on the March, which is effectively just preaching to the already converted.

To understand why and how, we can look to Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle, which provides an excellent framework to understand informal educational goals (from a lofty perspective) but also effectively demonstrates where the student experience on the March of the
Living succeeds and falls short. Kolb’s cycle emphasizes reflection and conceptualization and finally implementation of an idea or action that indicates how the experience has changed the learner. The March of the Living, however, only manages to capture the participants during the first two stages (experience and reflection), with no accountability for participants regarding the second two stages (although effort is exerted by staff).

Figure 17: Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle

One of the problems is that students have little effective processing time given the magnitude of the experience. On an average day on the March, the students are “experiencing” Poland for upwards of 12 hours a day. When the day is finished, formal reflection time is built in - but unfortunately, this reflection is often put into the hands of people who are unable to facilitate effective reflection (particularly with the end point of conceptualization → actualization). There is very little actual processing time built in to how the students will take what they’ve learned and apply to their lives back home. Despite the fact that many students come back repeating the

146 Graphic sourced from: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/kolb-learning-styles-john-dsouza
maxim that “the trip changed their life,” it’s very hard to determine for the most part if or where that change exhibits itself.

One example of how to create greater engagement before and during the trip would be take up Montreal March of the Living’s mandate that each participant independently meet a community fundraising threshold of $500. I would highly encourage the Toronto March of the Living to take on a similar program. When participants feel ownership and responsibility, they are far more likely to engage with the program on a different (and deeper) level. This fundraising also ties in with the “collective” Judaism that the program wishes to model. In attempting to create a cohort of participants who are more involved, and who take this on as a leadership opportunity, the program could also once again attract a caliber of educator that the National Chair indicated they now struggle to find. While many of the educators on the trip are good, evidently many Israeli educators don’t want to take on the job, as it is harder work and longer hours but especially as they are dealing with students who are not interested. Also, for the most part Israeli educators have no experience of working with North American youth and need greater training in doing so.

Further, considering the original creation of the program as a leadership trip, a return to their leadership program roots could be very beneficial from a teen-leadership-development perspective. Creating a cohort of students who can return to the Toronto Jewish community as effective leaders would doubtless be in line with the goals of the program organization, and at present, the model doesn’t support that outcome.

Given the timing of the trip, participants return and are immediately thrown into the end of school and exams, and therefore any thought of actualization or taking the lessons they’ve learned to heart are shifted aside in the interest of academics. Although the March is structured around having the students in Poland for Yom HaShoah and Israel for Yom Ha’Atzmaut, from a longitudinal perspective it would actually be better for them to run the trip at the beginning of summer before teens go to camp or engage in some other summer activity.

There should also be a serious consideration as to whether or not the Toronto trip to Poland and Israel should continue to operate under the March of the Living umbrella. The cost of the trip is now perilously high, and is also illogical. After making my trip to Poland and Israel numerous times, given the quality of food and hotels and flights, it’s hard not to see artificial inflation. Recent Israeli journalists also uncovered the fact that Israeli tour groups have been artificially
inflating the costs of trips to Poland, so clearly there’s precedent for overly-inflated costs.\textsuperscript{147} In going outside of the March of the Living “times” (with \textit{Yom HaShoah} in Auschwitz and \textit{Yom Ha’atzmaut} in Jerusalem) they are potentially losing the rhythm of the Jewish calendar that they seek. However, in losing that they also stand to gain a great deal. First, in being allowed to create and price the trip themselves, they stand to drastically reduce the cost, making the trip less self-selecting of privileged youth. Secondly, they can partner with other Canadian cities or Israeli groups if they wish to still create the ‘international’ feel to the trip. As Canadian Jewish communities often ‘twin’ with Israeli cities and community groups, they can certainly play up that connection (for example, Toronto is ‘twinned’ with Eilat in southern Israel) to create a cross-cultural group. Lastly, the trip could also operate outside of school time, allowing students to actually reflect and process their time, and return more capable of actualization at home.

From an educational program perspective, greater centralization and enforcement of educational parameters is also important. As the Israeli guides have relatively free reign when in Poland, there are many instances of “facts-lite” guiding and an often careless disregard for historical truth. Greater training and oversight of training for both chaperones and educators could greatly enhance the educational program of the trip. When in Poland, assuming that the program sees the way students understand Poland and Polish people as responsible for the Holocaust as undesirable and something that they want to change, greater engagement with the country outside of the Jewish enclave is important. In conversation with the national director of the March, he suggested that perhaps they could give students supervised free time in the main square in Kraków or Warsaw, for example, an idea which I think would do a great deal to encourage students to see Poland beyond their veil of fear. There are also many instances of Polish memorialization that the program could tap into, which would not only boost the educational robustness of the program, but also give them a glimpse of how the Holocaust and World War Two impacted those beyond the borders of their enclave. One excellent example is the recently opened Warsaw Uprising Museum. The Museum, as the name indicates, focuses on the 1944 Warsaw uprising from a Polish perspective. It has concurrent exhibits in Polish and English, includes a great deal of archival material, and attempts to personalize the experience of

\textsuperscript{147} See: http://www.timesofisrael.com/travel-agents-face-prosecution-for-march-of-the-living-scam/
the War and the Uprising. Moving through the museum, the exhibit layouts and emphases reminded me of many of the ways in which the Jewish narrative of the Holocaust is presented on the March of the Living. It begins with an emphasis on victimization under, and ordinances of, the Nazis. It continues through the “glorious” revolution, focuses on individuals and their sacrifices, ends with the failure and aftermath, and ultimately concludes with an exhibit on the modern Polish army (complete with current armaments). The narrative is clear: the 1944 revolution may have been a military failure, but it is an ultimate example of the bravery of the Poles under continual occupation, and our present army is an integral part of prevent further takeover and death.148

Interestingly, the museum itself has a parallel identity-building agenda to that within Jewish spheres, seemingly oriented towards the youth. Many videos and exhibits point to the fact that it was so exciting as it was primarily a youth movement. One speaker (on video) has an oblique reference, marking that “if you were young and in Warsaw then, then you would have also been involved.” Furthermore, in many exhibits there is a tendency towards juxtaposition of marching Nazis, dying Poles, and the crucifix. Sometimes all together in one video, others spread out through the exhibit. Towards the end, there’s a chapel where mass is said. One cannot escape the similar motifs between the Jewish and Polish representations of the same history. In both, there’s the attempt to personalize both by the focus on the youth as well as the inclusion of many personal stories and backgrounds of the fighters. Similar to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s layout where visitors receive an “identity card,” there are cards with dates and stories throughout the museum that students pick up and read about - and the story continues throughout.149

148 The history of the Jews is presented in a smaller way, mostly focused on the ways in which the Poles aided Jews. As an example, in one of the main videos in the exhibit, there is a mention of how a priority of the Home Army (AK) during the revolt was to “rescue the 300 Jews working in the labour camps in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto.” There is occasional mention of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Beyond that, the museum is primarily about the ethnic Poles and their own failed revolution.

149 Additionally, the idea of the event as a substation for modern ethnic and national identity - be it cultural or religious - is certainly present throughout both. Religious motifs are a common connection, although the juxtaposition of dying Poles and the crucifix was far more explicit than anything I’ve ever seen in a Jewish museum. Lastly, both have an emphasis on the modern
Given that it is outside the parameters of the Jewish war, why should the March send the participants?

First of all, the Museum provides an excellent video called the “City of Ruins” which is a 3D overview of Warsaw at the end of the war. One of the most impactful museum exhibits I have ever experienced, it gives an interesting context to understand just how destroyed the city of Warsaw was, both the Jewish and gentile sections. It is a testament to not only the Nazi/Soviet power to destroy, but also of the human capacity to rebuild and renew. Aside from that small experience, however, it is important from the broader perspective of both universalizing the Holocaust and giving the students necessary historical context. Many students have the perception that the Poles were active perpetrators - and this does an excellent job of representing the diversity of the World War Two experience. Furthermore, information is always a positive, and the more informed the students’ experiences, the greater educational outcome that they will have.

It could also be an interesting exercise in critical analysis. Even if the students don’t agree with everything presented to them within the museum, it is an opportunity for them to understand the way in which the history is politicized. It also gives them an opportunity to compare and contrast narratives. As I went through it, I kept imagining the questions that my students would ask, ranging from why there were only sparse acknowledgements of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, to why there seemed to be an understanding throughout of the death of 6 million Poles as just that - deaths, Jewish and ethnic Polish alike. I can easily see my students grappling with some of the ideas presented to them within the exhibits, and it is an interesting introduction to critically analyzing presented narratives and not taking everything at face value.

Lastly, to actually see Poles involved in elements of memorialization, and to get a non-Jewish experience within Poland may be to their benefit. Their understanding of Poland is entirely military. Yad Vashem is slightly more implicit, with the ending of the museum opening onto modern Jerusalem (a more nationalist than military perspective), although many visitors are encouraged to go to Har Herzl, the military cemetery, after. Furthermore, in the physical path between Yad Vashem and Har Herzl, there is an exhibit tying the two events together.
through a Jewish construction of the country, and to be able to engage with it on non-Jewish terms may help in their misunderstandings of history and responsibility.

Another opportunity to engage with Poland beyond the borders of the bus would be to engage with Jewish revival in the country. There are three elements to an understanding of the Polish Jewish community – prewar, Holocaust, and revival. The latter is usually considered ephemera. However, as students enter Poland and are encouraged to see it entirely as an open-air Jewish graveyard, to have a greater understanding of the living Polish-Jewish community could broaden their understandings of Diaspora Judaism and modern day European Jewish life. The adult and young adult contingents of the March of the Living do touch on this, visiting the JCC in Kraków for example, but it is something that has yet to make its way down to the teen trip. It could, however, be a beneficial exercise.

That said, the above recommendations are only viable if considered within a perspective that the March of the Living seeks first and foremost historical understanding. The above recommendations would help in demonstrating to students the overall context of the Second World War, give them an understanding of the Polish perspective (which is sorely needed), and would hopefully cause them to understand Poland better, instead of just ‘Poland’ as a Jewish construction.

There also needs to be a re-haul of the educational program before the trip, which in this case is less about the curriculum and more about the staffing and pedagogy. In choosing to only utilize Federation employees as opposed to those well versed in teaching practices, they are stripping the pre-trip program of educational robustness. There are many local educators who have indicated to me throughout this research that they would happily volunteer their time, and the program would very much benefit from utilizing those community resources.
Further, when the program assesses their future in the face of aging survivors, they must consider carefully how to proceed. First, their digital archives of survivor testimony are an excellent resource and should continue to be used. Using the Shoah Foundation video archives would probably also be to their benefit. While they plan to use the children of survivors on the future trips, that is an interesting idea but not one without significant issues that need to be addressed. One interesting way of contextualizing the program further within the broader story of genocide would be to also tap into the Rwandan genocide survivor community in Toronto. On the March of Remembrance and Hope, the program I participated in in 2007, two Rwandan genocide survivors came with us and it gave us an interesting point through which to crystallize our understanding of how to take what we’ve learned and turn it into social action upon our return. Considering that this is one of the ways in which the program struggles, this could be an interesting addition to the program (even if it was only done in the pre-trip programming).

Lastly, although this dissertation only touches briefly on the Israel leg of the trip, once again, considering its purported educational mission, the trip lacks any true educational substance during the week there. Take the first day of the 2017 trip: the students flew overnight from Poland, went to a Bedouin tent in the Negev, floated in the Dead Sea for 6 hours, and then bussed all the way up to the border with Lebanon. They have traversed the entire country in a day, with little to no justification or substance for doing so. In an attempt to both “unwind” and “create a positive sense of Israel” the week in Israel is predicated more on relaxation and fun – but, it bears repeating, this is ostensibly an educational program. There are a variety of things that they could do to increase the educational content of the week, such as visiting Save a Child’s Heart (showcasing Israel in the medical world, giving an opportunity for students to volunteer or visit), spending substantial time in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem doing any of the myriad historical or cultural tours that exist there, engaging in dialogue with non-military Israelis. The 2017 program offered the participants the chance to go to the Innovation Museum, and it is actions like this that there need to be vastly more of in order for the students to really experience Israel and everything it has to offer – beyond just the ironic understanding of Israel as site of both threat and empowerment.
I came to this research out of a desire to understand how students comprehend, internalize, and take away the messaging presented to them on the March of the Living. At the end of three years of research, I have ultimately determined that the March is attempting to straddle both educational and identity-building agendas, and is presently struggling to do both effectively. Part of the difficulty with the educational program is that many participants have a tendency to ‘inherit’ memory and myth about the trip from previous participants, but certainly the March’s creation of a ‘Poland’ that exists entirely as a Jewish construct reinforces those pre-trip attitudes. Once in Poland, the conflict between experiential and formal education that the trip tries to negotiate itself through and the prioritization of emotional understandings over intellectual ones regarding the history, particularly in terms of the way in which the Israeli guides present the narrative of the war, encourages students within the construction of the Holocaust as an event that happened almost exclusively to the Jewish community with passive or active Polish participation and leadership - a situation not aided by the selection of chaperones who often have little to no academic grounding in the history. The common use of ‘embodiment’ within the trip encourages students to “enter history” on the side of those caught in the tightening Nazi noose, shifting the Holocaust from a static historical event to one that is ongoing and requiring active response. In the absence of Nazis, local Poles surrounding the students become placeholders for the perpetrators and bystanders as a counterpoint to the students’ embodied ‘victim’, and the landscape of Poland itself often becomes threatening, seen exclusively within Second World War terms. In being encouraged to “enter history” - particularly within the immersive experience of the trip - many come to view Poland and the Polish people as historically responsible for what befell the Jewish people - a hatred, many feel, that continues to this day. And the educators do not disabuse them of this notion. Just the opposite. The highly emotional, identity-building pedagogy on the trip feeds into the various types of ‘modeled’ forms of Jewishness that are presented to students as options throughout the trip, and I followed number of students in the months and years after the event to determine to what extent the program shaped and substantiated their Jewish identities. Ultimately the research suggests that the March of the Living struggles to incorporate an effective educational program for a number of reasons, resulting in students lacking knowledge about the Holocaust the trip seeks to study. In terms of
its identity-building agenda, it is relatively successful, particularly with students who already have a strong Jewish educational background. What they are primarily capable of doing is modeling a form of Judaism that is rooted in threat, which is one that is extrapolated to community support (“we all have to take care of each other, because no one else will”), Jewish marriage (“deny Hitler posthumous victories”) and Israel (“guarantor of Jewish safety in a threatening world.”) What is less certain is to what extent this has lasting power. This research follows people only a few years into their university careers, and at that time the March seems to have impacted their beliefs and attitudes more than their behaviour. The participants, more so with less formal Jewish education, report that they feel a great deal of support for Israel and for the Jewish community, but less of a need to turn that attitude into action and support. This would indicate a mixed level of success, but perhaps the change in attitude will manifest itself into behavioural changes as these participants turn into adults. Only time will tell.
References


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Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Interview Questions

Note: All questions are general. I would like to offer a more informal environment as I believe that will allow for participant-directed reflection.

Interview Group 1: High School Students Participants

Pre-trip

• What it means for them to identify as Jewish?
• What beliefs and practices inform their sense of Jewish identity?
• Do they have other identifications (national, racial, ethnic, communal, etc.)?
• What choices, interests and expectations brought them to the March of the Living?
• What are they hoping to get out of their experience?
• What understandings of Israel (politically, religiously, personally) do they bring to the program?
• What do they believe to be the goals or purpose of Holocaust education? Do those goals or purposes change when it’s abroad, in Poland, versus in the classroom?

Post-trip

• What does it mean for them to identify as Jewish?
• What beliefs and practices inform current sense of Jewish identity?
• What are any connections they have with the Jewish community, on campus or at home?
• What are their connections with Israel (politically, religiously, personally?)
• What Holocaust programming do they currently participate in on a yearly basis?
• Do they have any lingering reactions to the March of the Living program?
• What specific recollections of Poland do they have?
• Since returning from the trip, have your perceptions of the Holocaust and its history changed at all?
• How about Israel?
• Do you feel that the Holocaust narrative is used by the Jewish community? If so, how?
• How willing would you be to go an event like Holocaust education week on your university campus? More or less willing than one about Israel?
• Would you take a university course on the Holocaust?

Interview group two: Young Adult Participants

• What are they currently doing/ studying?
• What does it mean for them to identify as Jewish?
• What beliefs and practices inform current sense of Jewish identity?
• What are any connections they have with the Jewish community, on campus or at home?
• What are their connections with Israel (politically, religiously, personally?)
• What Holocaust programming do they currently participate in on a yearly basis?
• Do they have any lingering reactions to the March of the Living program?
• What specific recollections of Poland do they have?
• Would they go again on a young adult version of the trip, if offered?
• How many years were you in formal Jewish education?
• Since leaving High School, have your perceptions of the Holocaust and its history changed at all?
• How about Israel?
• Do you feel that the Holocaust narrative is used by the Jewish community? If so, how?
• How willing would you be to go an event like Holocaust education week on your university campus? More or less willing than one about Israel?
• Would you take a university course on the Holocaust?

**Interview Group Three: Adult Participants**

• To what extent are you involved in the Jewish community now?
• What are specific connections with today’s Jewish community do you have?
• What are your connections with Israel (politically, religiously, personally)?
• Do you have any specific recollections of Poland?
• Do they have any specific recollections of the March of the Living?
• What was Poland like when you went there?
• To what extent did you interact with Poland outside of the Holocaust?
• Do you have any adult reflections on the impact of communism on Poland?
• Are you involved in any specific Jewish causes?
• Are you married? If so, is your spouse Jewish?
• Do you have children?
• Do you send your children to Jewish day school? If so, where? What went into that decision making process?
• Do you feel that the MOL trip has had any impacts on your life now? If so, in which ways?

**Interview Group Four: Parents (non-participant)**

• What were some of the key decisions that went into sending your child on the March of the Living?
• What did you hope that they would get out of it?
• How did your child respond to pre-trip programming?
• How did your child respond to the actual trip itself?
• Did you notice any discernable differences (specifically regarding interest in the Holocaust or Israel) upon their return?
8.2 Appendix B: Email Recruitment

Hello,

For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Alexandria Fanjoy Silver. I am currently a teacher at TanenbaumCHAT (Jewish History) and a Doctoral Student at the University of Toronto.

For my dissertation, I am focusing on the curricular implications of Holocaust Education in Poland.

I was given your name as a participant on the March of the Living. If you would be willing to sit down and have an informal discussion on your experiences on the March and connections with the Jewish community now, I would be very grateful, and would be happy to buy you a coffee during our discussion.

Please follow up with me if you would either a) be willing to participate, or b) would like more information on the study.

Best,

Alexandria Fanjoy Silver