Holocaust lists and the Memorial Museum

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Abstract

The article looks at Holocaust related death lists in the permanent exhibition of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum. The museum opened to the general public in October of 2007. I argue that Holocaust lists are best understood as memorial objects which project a particular kind of aura. This aura also surrounds the sacral and criminal landscape of Bergen-Belsen, which the lists have come to represent and mediate. It is the relationship of list to landscape that structures their shared auratic resonances, in the interplay between presence (what is documented in the list) and absence (names that have been destroyed, never to be retrieved). In the case of the lists of Bergen-Belsen this is even more nuanced, in that there were two landscapes where the detritus of the genocide unfolded: the iconic mass graves of Belsen and the displaced persons camp, several kilometers down the road from the concentration camp, where the sick and dying were transported after the liberation. Given that there is no original list of the dead in the mass graves of the concentration camp, the death lists in the displaced persons camp take on a more complex memorial meaning. In conclusion, I make the argument that the memorial experience of Bergen-Belsen is a useful template from which to view other transnational sites of destruction and crimes against humanity.

Key words: Holocaust lists, landscape, aura, archive, Chevra Kadisha, amnesia

Prefatory remarks

The aim of this article is to develop a framework from which to analyze Holocaust lists as museum artefacts with particular kinds of interiors. Because of the dire circumstances from which they have been issued, these artefacts conceal a tense internal opposition between what they contain historiographically and what they reveal as ghostly presences of an irretrievable past. We will be looking at Holocaust lists associated with the Permanent Exhibition of the new Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum in Germany, one of which is currently on display. The Museum opened in October of 2007, to critical acclaim, for both its architectural and documentary achievements, covering an involved and intricate decade long period from 1940 to 1950, incorporating the early Soviet Prisoner of War (POW) Camp, the infamous concentration camp and finally the displaced persons camp. The museum is surrounded by the iconic and still largely anonymous mass graves of Belsen. The mass graves as landscape are a funereal reminder of the incompleteness of the information contained in the lists. There is no original list of names documenting the full human tragedy of Bergen-Belsen. It was destroyed, just prior to the liberation. The available lists of names, written immediately after the liberation and referring to deaths in the nearby displaced persons camp, are points of mediation for an auratic amalgam of signs which bind them, the permanent exhibition, the surrounding sacral and criminal landscape of the former camp and the displaced persons camp into a corporeal entity.

The lists remain unfinished artefacts from both historical and memorial standpoints. Historically, they are missing the majority of the names of the dead for the calamitous and criminal events they have come to empirically document and visually mediate. The names of the dead frequently repeat themselves, within the multiple lists we will be examining. These

repetitions, as we will see, are profoundly inter-textual. None of the lists are autonomous entities, nor can they stand as such. Their memorial value is that they function through forms of internal recognition, names which strike the reader as leaping back and forth amongst the lists themselves, broadening our understanding of the synchronicity between absence and presence, and of course the specter of lost names. Indeed, one list is the absent frame for the other lists *and* itself. Through the absence of names, so associated with the general barrenness of the Bergen-Belsen site, the lists summon a putative and uncertain knowledge of the mass graves in the concentration camp, as they document the continuing catastrophe that ended with burials in the individual and mass-row graves of the Zelttheater cemetery in the displaced persons camp, in the weeks following the liberation. In this figurative and alluring sense, the lists of names of the perished of Bergen-Belsen are object-like extensions emanating from the landscape itself, and deeply inscribed with what Jacques Derrida (1994) has called the presence of a specter.

Fig. 1. Mass grave in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. (Photo, Bergen-Belsen Gedenkstatte Archives)

A further aim of this article is to explore the social and cultural biographies of these essentially differentiated, yet largely empirically similar lists, through the intersectional intentions of their separate writers. The four lists we are looking at were written within weeks and months of each other, after the liberation of the camp in mid April of 1945. They contain, if we look at the early British death list and the Glyn Hughes Hospital list (the sources for the other two lists examined in this article), 3,310 names. Though similar, each list contains differentiated memorial values because of the political, cultural and subjective iterations present within the actions of actors who initially compiled the lists. Each actor had a particular claim to historicity, thereby filling-out our understanding of the times. As we will see later, these points underpin my larger interest in bringing to the foreground the challenge of exhibiting objects at the physical site of destruction, mediating a viscerally felt absence within the landscape, as a question of justice and memory. These are points to be taken up in the conclusion of this article.

Fig. 2. Zelttheater Cemetery in the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp (Photo, Bergen-Belsen Gedenkstatte Archives)

Lists as objects

Give them names, for memory's sake.
Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins*

One of the first records in the genealogy of writing was the antediluvian harvest list. The list was, and remains, a material record of what is witnessed, recorded, remembered and - given the history of the list as a memorial object - sometimes forgotten to be later reclaimed. And, as the harvest period was at the very root of early forms of observance, marking the passage of season and time, the list was there to record the presence - and if read differently - the absence of things. The Holocaust list deepens these basic recording functions, as we grapple with its perplexing memorial value.

The Holocaust list has a place within the meticulously constructed archive, and yet dwells beyond it, through a more distantly expressed language of events around the labyrinthine construction of absence, i.e. what is missing; under what circumstances or event did 'the missing' take place; who are the actors responsible for the loss, who did the recording. These questions must be asked of the Holocaust list to better imagine its interiority and imaginary, its thin and thick description of historical context. To wit: how do we speak about a purposefully inadequate object such as a Holocaust list within a memorial context? The list has the hard job of narrating evidentiary and substantiated 'fact' while in the same instance gesturing to an inevitable absence within 'the memorial' that is beyond numerical validation. As an historical document, the list's self-referential quality defines it parameters. Thought otherwise, the Holocaust list recounts - were we to divine its memorial trajectory - a series of actions around human relations and events: for example, what happened to the list after it was completed; which cultural, political and social contexts enabled it to be read in a particular way, if read at all.

As Arjun Appadurai (1986) has argued, objects/commodities have social lives much like persons, and circulate in different regimes of value, emulating exchange relationships. Unlike, however, the commodities Appadurai seeks to explain, which are defined by their 'situations of exchangeability (past, present, future) for some other thing that is its socially relevant feature' (Appadurai 1986: 4), the Holocaust list relies less on the classically commodified social relationship inscribed within the object (if we forgo the museum's objective interest in acquiring such artefacts and processes of object reification therein) and more so on its position as a sign within a signing system that is defined by its lack, that which it does not contain and can never really retrieve. The memorial is invoked at this juncture of mediating absence. In a manner of speaking, the lists' memorial relationship is with a phantom that is hidden within it, the other lists *and* the referenced landscape. The Holocaust list, in this regard, must be read intertextually (Julia Kristeva 1980). As mentioned earlier, these intertextual sources are other lists, the aura of the surrounding landscape of mass graves, but also information gleaned from relevant moments within survivor testimony and non-institutionalized acts of memorialization (visitations to memorial sites and date specific commemorations from the 1950s onwards) by survivors themselves. In short, the twisting shadow-dance of individual and collective experiences, filtered through institutional diktat, 'reads' the lists for us in the face of a profound absence that the lists have now come to signify, and however inadequately, memorialize.

A Holocaust list from a curatorial standpoint is an occasion to understand social, cultural and political motives and their subjective meanings, as a backstage within a process of memorialization. The lists present us with plausible new knowledge when viewed through the conditions under which they were written, the materials used in its production, the script, the paper, its narrative of re-appearance on the stage of history and memory, the circumstances of its disappearance, origins, and very importantly, the ways in which it was culturally inscribed within the archive. Narrating even minor shifts and turns in the cultural biographies of the Holocaust list gives us a glimpse into the multiple worlds it occupied - institutionally contingent, ritually-based and socially fragmented by multiple subjectivities at the cross-roads of crisis and re-constitution - a penciled portrait of very troubled times.

The haunted archive of Bergen-Belsen

The Holocaust list has a relationship to lost data (barring the discovery of new information) which no longer exists nor will likely be easily recovered. While the list as an enumerative document points to an evidence-based archive, the list as a memorial object points to an abstract deficit as an epiphenomenon of the material list that remains. The list, in this sense, is much larger than its historical content and literally cascades into 'the memorial', where there is greater and cumulative value associated with irretrievable loss. For as many names that appear on the specific lists that we examine in this article, thousands more have been lost and have in a sense escaped historical narration.

The history and memory of the Bergen-Belsen concentration and displaced persons camps are defined by such an absence. In the last days of the War, Josef Kramer, the commander of Bergen-Belsen ordered the destruction of all the existing records of camp inmates. Lists and documents were burning as the British liberators entered the camp. This not only included the lists of Jewish inmates, but all European nationalities and ethnicities who either perished or survived the camp from 1943 to1945. The moment that Josef Kramer burnt the full lists of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, an invisible supplement to his destruction was created. As the literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1995) reminds us in her close reading of Derrida, the supplement we speak of is dangerous 'because it opens us up to the incalculable' (Chakravorty Spivak 1995: 117). The idea of 'the incalculable' suggests a rupture from the sort of constitutive logic we would expect of a more or less cohesive civil society in relation to a state. In the context of post-war Occupied Germany, and the functional bureaucratic remnants of the perpetrator state (sequestered within the continuing institutional memory of the German postwar civil service) incalculability manifested itself through historical amneses. The history of the perpetrator state was itself a phantom and supplement that was framed within the actions of post-war reconstruction. It is difficult to begin a discussion of the lost names of the deceased of Bergen-Belsen, the *inconnu* within the mass graves in the concentration camp,

without referring to the ghostly supplement created by Kramer's last criminal act: the vanishment of tens of thousands of names, instantiated as an invisible and haunted appendage to any list that came after it.

In the context of survivor testimony which recollects a carnal appearance (a survivor recalling, 'yes, I last saw her alive at Bergen-Belsen') and its onomastic disappearance - not knowing where the body is buried or the name inscribed - the Holocaust list and its supplement address a basic memorial question: how do we remember when the name as a signifier of the individual has been lost: where to begin? As mentioned above, the lists we will be examining, empirically refer to the individual and mass-row graves of the Zelttheater cemetery in the displaced persons camp, but symbolically address the mass graves of Bergen-Belsen. The lists are symbolically linked to two landscapes and sites of loss. Over and above their historical importance, as a source of documented names, this symbolic linkage creates a particular kind of aura. This auratic quality defines their memorial imaginary. Walter Benjamin understood aura as an emanation expressing a distance 'as close as one can be' (Benjamin 1989: 236). For Benjamin, aura – is entangled in a strange web that carries its own measure of incalculability. Whilst aura refers to authenticity, and the tensions and oscillations around multiple representations which arrive thereafter, *authenticity itself can only be understood as aura through its destruction*. For our purposes, the auratic moment is signalled by the elimination of names (the crime of the mass graves of Bergen-Belsen which has no documentation) and their disjointed and symbolic re-appearance (names associated with the individual and mass row graves of the nearby displaced persons camp in the Zelttheater cemetery).

This symbolically rich intersection marks an instance wherein both landscapes (the mass graves of the concentration camp and the Zelttheater cemetery in the displaced persons camp) are positioned side-by-side within the memorial imaginary. The differential purposes of history and memory are temporarily suspended only to re-combine in a haunting encounter. The lists we will be examining are indeed ghost-like fixtures, as in Jacques Derrida's elucidation of what constitutes a haunting. In relation to the dual landscapes of genocide, the lists re-appear as 'a prosthetic body, a ghost of spirit one might say, the ghost of the ghost' (Derrida 1994: 10).

Landscape and amnesia

It estimated that 80,000 concentration camp inmates either passed through and/or perished at Bergen-Belsen. As of 2006, the former prisoners registry at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum, had gathered 45,000 names, largely through recourse to registries in Yad Vashem in Israel, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen[1], Germany. Information has also come from survivors themselves, who inscribe their names or the names of relatives in the survivors registry when visiting Bergen-Belsen. However, the forces of forgetting are the more common denominators for Bergen-Belsen as a contemporary memorial site. From the day of the liberation on April 15th 1945, the camp was engaged in a struggle against the forces of historical amnesia. The camp's former grounds - the prisoner barracks, the division between the internal camps, the notorious roll call plazas (the appel platz) - are recognizable only through aerial photographs, taken during the war by British reconnaissance flights. Because of the typhus epidemic, at the time of the liberation, the British Army burned all existing buildings in the camp on May 16th, 1945. This left a wasted and barren landscape, a cold uniformity bracketed by the anonymity of mass graves, making a background ripe for concealment.

In the 1950s, one of the last acts of the British Army was to initiate a memorial design for the camp, one that was ironically inspired by plans from a former Nazi landscape architect, Wilhelm Huebotter (Wolschke-Bulmahn 1977).. Huebotter was well known as Hitler's landscape architect and the designer for Himmler's Grove of the Saxons memorial, an SS cult site. He also had to his credit the landscaping of the Autobahn and other SS cult sites throughout Lower Saxony. The physical appearance of the Bergen-Belsen memorial camp today, as in the early fifties, remains the unspoiled vision of Huebotter: a nature aesthetic in sync with German national and cultural forest myths, bordered by trees and covered with fields of purple heather, amidst Teutonic-like raised knolls which now characterize the infamous mass graves.

The forces of forgetting did not begin, however, with Huebotter's memorial design: first

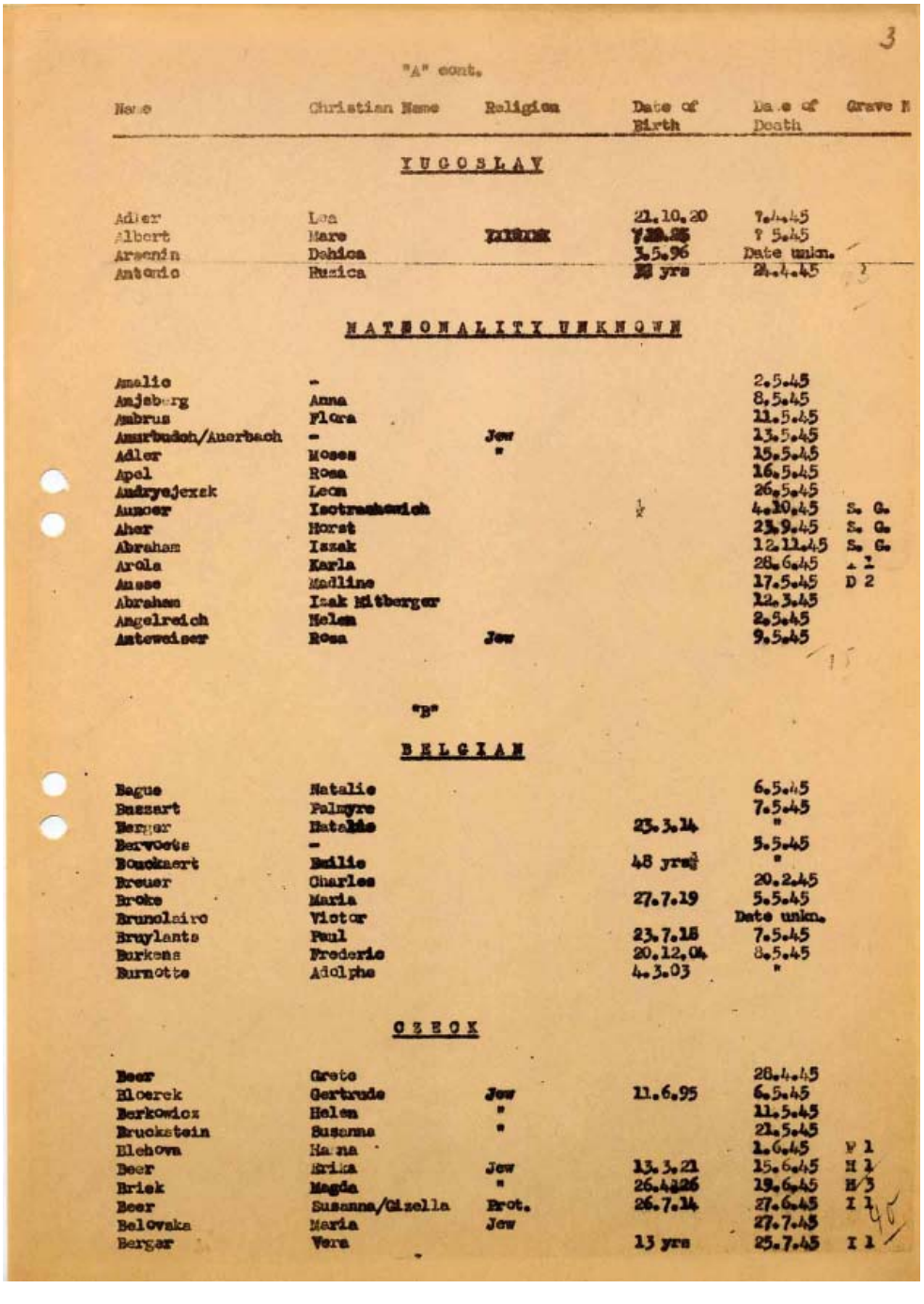
commissioned, rejected as too controversial and finally, hastily implemented by the British before their departure. The choice of Huebotter's design was contiguous with efforts to blur the history and memory of Bergen-Belsen, from the moment of liberation in 1945. This fits a perverse pattern of events which began with the destruction of the original list of inmates by Josef Kramer; the memorially consequential, although necessary, burning of the camp by the British Army; and finally the complete re-configuration of the camp's onerous topography by Wilhelm Huebotter's memorial design. In such an intentionally constructed environment, the haunted archive of Bergen-Belsen underscores the full criminal achievement of National Socialism. The Nazis created the referent that all the lists must acknowledge from a memorial standpoint. Nazi record keeping had as its aim, in the first instance to destroy the holder of the name, the name itself and finally the geography of genocide that defined the site. The amnesic history of Bergen-Belsen is a product of these cavernous intents, as we can still view today mass graves entangled in billows of Huebotter's original purple heather floral designs, that have now spread web-like over the entire memorial grounds and visible from the windows of the memorial museum.

The Lists

I now turn to the four lists which date from the period of the immediate liberation and the displaced persons camp. These were the first known lists of inmates at Bergen-Belsen. The 1st list is the British Army record, the general death list in the Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons camp, immediately following the liberation; the 2nd is the death list from the Glyn-Hughes Hospital, the military infirmary in the Displaced Persons camp. These two lists, combined, are often referred to as the 'British Army Administration list'. The information for these two lists come from death cards issued at the Glyn-Hughes hospital and the various triage centers in the displaced persons camp, totaling 3,310 names. The 3rd is the Felix Hohl list. This list represents a memorial act by a local German citizen. The 4th list is the Bergen-Belsen Chevra Kadisha list, or the Bergen-Belsen Holy Society of the Dead list. We will be examining this last list in some detail.

The central list of names in the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons period are the death records compiled by the British Army in April and May of 1945. Record keeping of the deceased did not take place in the early days of the liberation and none refer to the thousands buried in the mass graves of the concentration camp. The sheer number of deaths; small mountains of bodies piled outside barracks or in open fields, disease and the mayhem, and the general confusion of the liberation, were overwhelming for the British military. These deaths were recorded in the triage center in the Round House - a large meeting hall that served as a ballroom for the activities of SS Officers during the war, and later a makeshift hospital in the immediate aftermath of the war, and soon thereafter a social and political gathering place for the Jewish displaced persons. The language of the British list is English. It is typed, arranged alphabetically and by country of origin. The list captures the ad hoc accounting of names. The social, political and cultural contexts of the British list are evident in the way in which it was written. The immediate post war struggle of the displaced persons to be defined as Jews, as opposed to nationalities, was the first of many open conflicts between the British army and the former inmates. The British list does not recognize this cultural and political demand. The names of the former inmates are organized and categorized by nationality. From very early on, the displaced persons camp contained a broadly representative spectrum of Zionist sympathies. The British feared it as a potential centre for Zionist activity within the occupied zone (Lavsky 2002), compounded by their own presence in what was then Mandate Palestine. The concerns of the British were well grounded. And, the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp was an important organizing centre in the Exodus attempt and other, then illegal, migration efforts to reach British Mandate Palestine.

Repatriation to their European countries of origin, many of which were now behind the Iron Curtain, was not a viable option for the Jewish displaced persons. From the British perspective, defining Jews as European nationals kept open a possibility of repatriation. British documents from the period suggest that the military command was sensitive to mounting pressure on their Mandate in Palestine to accept Jewish refugees from the displaced persons



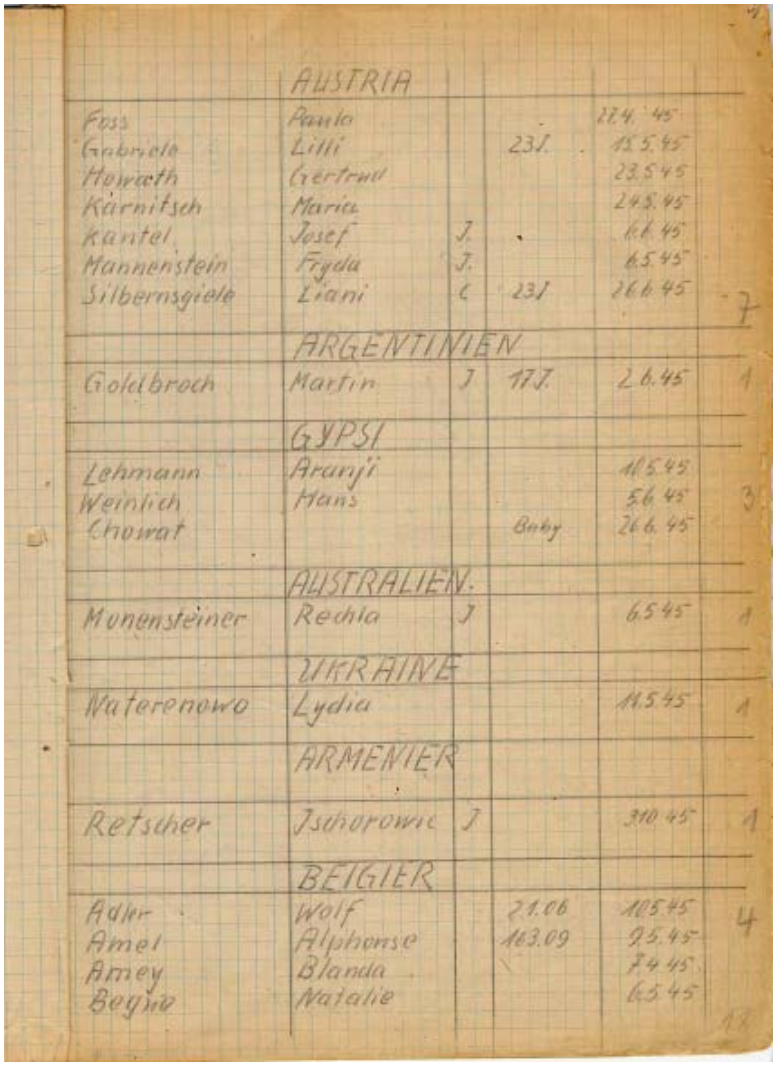
3

"A" cont.

Name	Christian Name	Religion	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Grave No
YUGOSLAV					
Adler	Lea		21.10.20	7.4.45	
Albert	Mare	[illegible]	[illegible]	? 5.45	
Arsenin	Dobica		3.5.96	Date unkn.	
Antonio	Ruzica		[illegible] yrs	21.4.45	
NATIONALITY UNKNOWN					
Amalie	-			2.5.45	
Amjaberg	Anna			8.5.45	
Ambrus	Flora			11.5.45	
Amrbudoh/Auerbach	-	Jew		13.5.45	
Adler	Moses	"		15.5.45	
Apel	Rosa			16.5.45	
Andrzejczak	Leon			26.5.45	
Aunoer	Isotrashevich			4.10.45	S. G.
Aher	Horst			23.9.45	S. G.
Abraham	Iszak			12.11.45	S. G.
Arola	Karla			28.6.45	A 2
Anese	Madline			17.5.45	D 2
Abraham	Isak Mitberger			12.3.45	
Angelreich	Helen			2.5.45	
Antewelser	Rosa	Jew		9.5.45	
"B"					
BELGIAN					
Bague	Natalie			6.5.45	
Bazzart	Palmyre			7.5.45	
Berger	Natalie		23.3.14	"	
Berveets	-			5.5.45	
Bouckaert	Emilie		48 yrs	"	
Breuer	Charles			20.2.45	
Broke	Maria		27.7.19	5.5.45	
Brunolaire	Victor			Date unkn.	
Bruylants	Paul		23.7.15	7.5.45	
Burkens	Frederic		20.12.04	8.5.45	
Burnotte	Adolphe		4.3.03	"	
CZECH					
Beer	Grete			28.4.45	
Blocrek	Gertrude	Jew	11.6.95	6.5.45	
Berkowicz	Helen	"		11.5.45	
Bruckstein	Susanna	"		21.5.45	
Blehova	Hanna			1.6.45	F 1
Beer	Erika	Jew	13.3.21	15.6.45	H 1
Brick	Magda	"	26.4.26	19.6.45	H 3
Beer	Susanna/Gizella	Prot.	26.7.14	27.6.45	I 1
Belovska	Maria	Jew		27.7.45	
Berger	Vera		13 yrs	25.7.45	I 1

Fig. 3. List 1, British Army record, the general death list in the Bergen-Belsen Displaced Persons camp[2]

Fig. 4. List 2, The Glyn Hughes list[3]



	AUSTRIA				
Foss	Paula			22.4.45	
Gabriele	Lilli		23.1.	15.5.45	
Howath	Gertrud			23.5.45	
Kärnitsch	Maria			24.5.45	
Kantel	Josef	J.		6.6.45	
Mannenstein	Fryda	J.		6.5.45	
Silbernsgiele	Liani	C	23.1	26.6.45	7
	ARGENTINIEN				
Goldbroch	Martin	J	17.7.	26.6.45	1
	GYPSI				
Lehmann	Aranji			11.5.45	
Weinlich	Hans			5.6.45	3
Chowrat			Baby	26.6.45	
	AUSTRALIEN.				
Monensteiner	Rechla	J		6.5.45	1
	UKRAINE				
Waterenowo	Lydia			11.5.45	1
	ARMENIER				
Retscher	Tschorowic	J		3.10.45	1
	BELGIER				
Adler	Wolf		21.06	10.5.45	4
Amel	Alphonse		16.3.09	9.5.45	
Amey	Blanda			7.4.45	
Beyne	Natalie			6.5.45	

Fig. 5. List 3, The Felix Hohl list[4]

camps. The British death list unfolded within these early days of mounting political and cultural struggle. The deceased inmates are therefore listed as nationalities, with some designation conferred to religious identity. The list is written on unbound sheets of paper. The loose sheets suggest a hurried form of recording in the context of thousands dying, within the first weeks of the liberation. At the top of the list, the British military refers to the displaced persons camp as Camp Hohne, as opposed to the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp. The British military insisted on maintaining the Camp Hohne moniker, a designation used when Nazi battalions occupied the camp until April of 1945. The Camp Hohne name was rejected by the former inmates, represented by the *Central Committee of Liberated Jews of Bergen-Belsen*, under the leadership of Josef Rosensaft. Maintaining the Bergen-Belsen name for the displaced persons camp and its association with the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, was a symbolic battle that the survivors won. The British list captures this cultural and memorial struggle at its mid-point.

Inmates, who died in the military clinic in the displaced persons camp, appear on the Glyn Hughes list. The Glyn-Hughes Hospital, named after Brigadier Glyn Hughes, a physician and liberator of Bergen-Belsen, is also known as the birthplace of over 2,000 Jewish displaced children, in the post-War period. In the days immediately following the liberation, it was a treatment centre, overwhelmed by the medical needs of the former inmates. The hospital was a site of conflict between patient and doctor, as German physicians still stayed on as clinical staff, after the liberation, and former inmates refused treatment from them. Today, the hospital lies in ruins, in a NATO training field still occupied by the British Military, and outside of the control of the Bergen-Belsen memorial properties.

The Glyn-Hughes hospital list is not arranged in national categories, but does record nationality, next to the name, which is indexed alphabetically. For the most part, there is no indicator for religion. Hence, Estera Grinsberg is a Polish national; Emma Glabstein is a Hungarian national, when these are most likely Jewish names, given the large Polish and Hungarian Jewish populations in the concentration and displaced persons camp. The Glyn-Hughes Hospital list is hand written in what appears to be a military address book, worn edges confirming its precipitous use by the original record keeper.

The two British lists served as important resources for Felix Hohl. The Felix Hohl list is hand written in German and contains 3,104 names. It follows the basic structure of the British list: arranging the dead according to national groupings, randomly noting their religion. Understandably, religious designation would be difficult at times to discern, since the British did not record it as a matter of practice, and consequentially Felix Hohl's list is a reflection of this purposeful omission.

Felix Hohl's motivation to record the deaths at the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp was replete with subjective meaning. During the 1930s, Felix Hohl was imprisoned in a concentration camp for political prisoners. Remarkably he survived. Released, in the early 1940s, he found himself living near the Camp Hohne German Military base outside the town of Celle. Felix Hohl worked as a minor chauffeur, transporting SS officers to entertainment centers in the nearby Celle and the City of Hanover, approximately 90 kilometers from the camp. Immediately after the liberation, he visited the row-like mass graves in the displaced persons cemetery where the dead from the Glyn Hughes Hospital and the triage center in the Round House were newly buried. The dead, having perished in the displaced persons camp, were the former inmates of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. At the time, the names of the dead were inscribed on thin wooden plaques, attached to sticks and arranged in front of the mass row graves. Sensing the imminent erosion of the plaques and the disappearance of the names, Felix Hohl recorded all the information, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, in an accountant's ledger. In some cases obviously Jewish names become Germanic.

He kept this list in his possession, quietly without notice, for twenty years. The silence surrounding Felix Hohl's list can be understood as a general cultural indicator of the times, throughout the 1950s and 1960s in Germany, which made little investment in the commemoration of Holocaust victims. There were youth movements in the 1950s, that did engage in commemorative acts, such as the 'Flowers for Anne Frank' movement that attracted thousands of young people who marched from Hamburg and Hanover to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp as a generational statement, publicly distancing themselves from the wartime actions of parents, grandparents and the perpetrator state[5]. These movements coalesced around the heroic and victimized image of Anne Frank, spurred forward by the publication of her diary. But, these forms of generational based collective action albeit important were the exception to the rule. Felix Hohl's list lacked an empathetic institutional memorial context for its emergence.
Felix Hohl was, however, right to worry about the short durability of those thin wooden plaques and the names inscribed on them. They eroded over a short period of time. The British occupying forces eventually left, and placed their two lists in the archives of the Imperial War Museum in London. Felix Hohl's list was the only record of the dead of Bergen-Belsen to remain, unbeknown to anyone, in the immediate region. Felix Hohl's list, as an action of recording, documents an intention: the dissident post-war witness, a German, the political subject and citizen of a perpetrator state. Felix Hohl died in the late 1950s. He left a single letter explaining his act of recording. His widow donated the letter and his list to the local authorities in 1965. Both the list and the letter from Felix Hohl are now in the collections of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum.

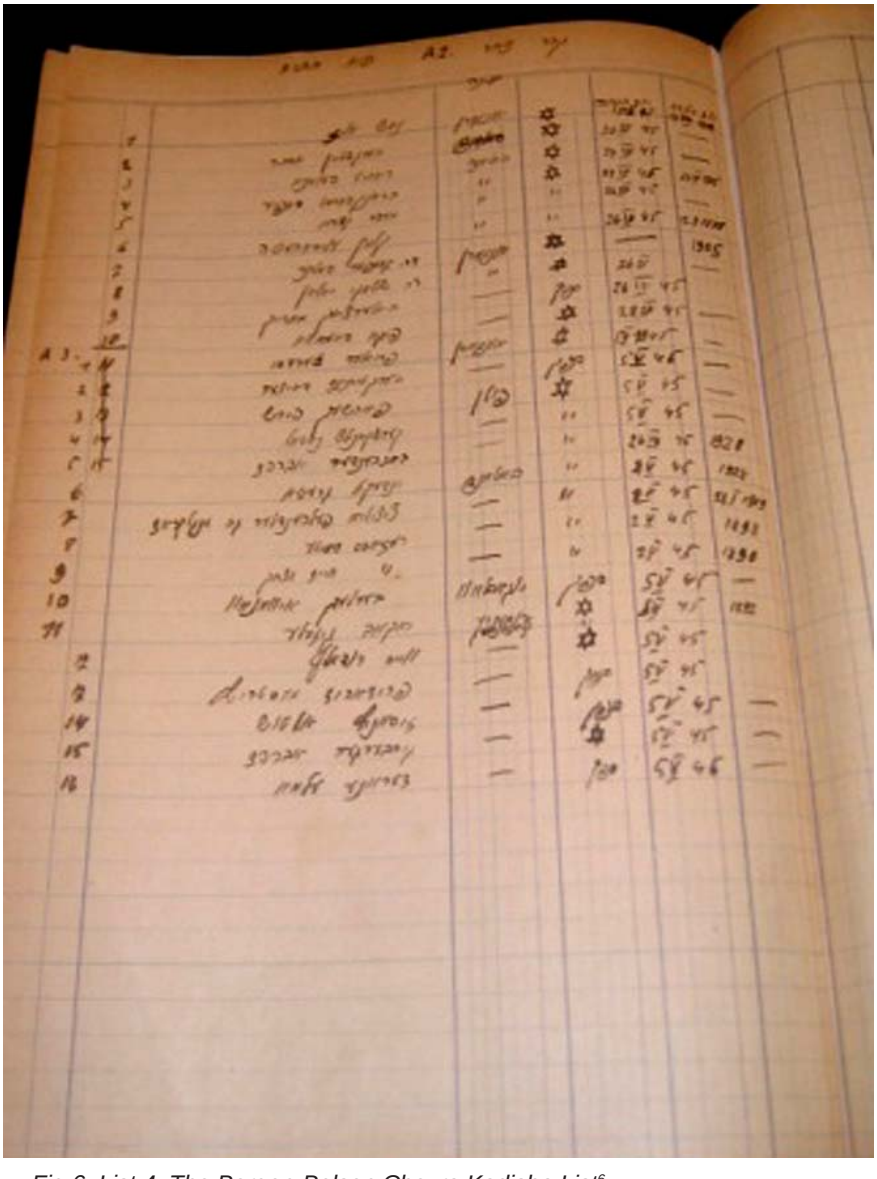


Fig 6. List 4, The Bergen-Belsen Chevra Kadisha List[6]

The Bergen-Belsen Chevra Kadisha is an ultra orthodox religious record of names, noting deaths, and written in Yiddish. The term Chevra Kadisha translates as *Holy Society of the Dead*. It has a practical and liturgical function, in that it straddles the border between an enacted burial testament and a recording book. It also is the only list that has available living witnesses that can attest to its provenance, historical and reflexive meanings. As a religious record, it thereby had a comparative relationship to the then (and some would argue contemporary as well) ultra orthodox rabbinic interpretation(s) of the Holocaust, which were categorically metahistorical. The meta-historical view held that the Holocaust was in some way a function of God's will. As Gershon Greenberg (2007), the noted Biblical scholar of ultra orthodox Holocaust writings points out, the rabbinic *responsa* to the Holocaust, during and immediately after the War was

founded in a co-mingling of God's covenantal relationship with Israel and the ontological interplay between catastrophe, penitent return and redemption. Within this broader context of God's hand in history, as Greenberg explains, rabbinic interpretations were often complex, circuitous and searching for explanations of seemingly unexplainable and disastrous events and 'divine intervention was interpreted as a response to Jewish assimilation in the modern era in measure-to-measure fashion, for example Nazi strictures against Jews entering public places were seen as a punishment for Jews having attended theatres. Or, the onset of the historical tragedy represented by Nazism was interpreted as a consequence of the decline in Torah observance' (Greenberg 2007:12).

The *responsa* references to the Holocaust by the rabbis were largely indirect, symbolic, and cloaked in allusions to mass suffering rather than the events of the war (Greenberg 2007: 12). The ultra orthodox metahistorical explanation of these calamitous events, of a biblical scale and character, were however filled with a difficult logic of tautologies. Again, as Gershon Greenberg explains, if a decline in the study of the Torah was the reason for the Nazi onslaught, how can it be justified that the pious suffered most and died. These issues are too complex, from a religious and eschatological perspective, to treat here in any satisfactory manner and the interested reader is urged to refer to Greenberg's excellent discussion of these matters in the *responsa* literature. Ultimately however, as the Biblical scholar Eliezer Schwied notes (Schwied 2007: 229) the ultra orthodox interpretation of the Holocaust drew on traditional and trans-traditional sources in an effort to repair damaged faith and re-establish a commitment to God. The ambiguities and difficulties of the above positions, noted by Greenberg and Schwied, were followed by a period of relative silence by the rabbis (a similar 'silence' occurred in the secular and mainstream branches of Judaism) to last well into the mid 1950s, in the face of persistent challenges to a seemingly damaged covenant.

The Chevra Kadisha, list, given its middle-range standing (not having the reflexive status of considered *responsa* as a sort of rabbinic high theory) had as its mission to record and be manifestly historical/religious as well as memorial in reference to a site of destruction. The Chevra Kadisha, with all its integrated comments, is clearly a multifaceted list in that it also criticizes the times and gives us a sense of order, disorder in the everyday life of a displaced persons camp, in the early weeks and months of the liberation. It is also a multi-layered ultra orthodox historical object that permits a closer reading of what we might tentatively refer to as a 'Hasidic civil society' response to unfolding events of unimaginable calamity several degrees below rabbinic interpretation. At the very least, the Chevra Kadisha list allows us to view a landscape of ultra orthodox ritual and practices outside a metahistorical perspective and doctrinal narrative, although clearly the religious content is omnipresent. The German perpetrators, and the actions of the British military are denounced within the list, suggesting that things should have occurred otherwise and contrary actors should be held accountable. It is also important to situate the writing of a list such as the Chevra Kadisha in a time of great questioning, within and outside the ultra-orthodox Jewish population in the displaced persons camps of the immediate post war period. The recent and important work of Esther Farbstein (2007) illumines these difficult moments of steadfastness to faith, as well as loss of faith within the displaced persons population in the camps.

The Holy Burial Society of Bergen-Belsen: the Chevra Kadisha

The institutional history of the Chevra Kadisha begins with the arrival of Rabbi Schlomo Baumgarten after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. An orthodox British army chaplain by profession, Schlomo Baumgarten gathered 10 men to form The Holy Burial Society of Bergen-Belsen, thus beginning the task of ritual Jewish burial in the displaced persons camp. Rabbi Baumgarten appointed a young Hasid, Chanina Walzer as 1st Secretary of the Holy Society.

Chanina Walzer was born in Eastern Galicia, in Moshchiska, 325 kilometers west of Kiev. He left as a youngster to study Torah in Bobowa, Poland under the auspices of the Grand Bobowa Rebbe, Ben Zion Halberstam. He also married in Bobowa, and worked as a book binder for religious manuscripts. With the start of the war, and before the liquidation of the ghetto, he was a member of the town's Chevra Kadisha. After internment in several work camps, at War's end he was liberated at Bergen-Belsen. He soon moved to what became the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp, (several kilometres from the concentration camp)

Fig. 7. Chanina Walzer. Photo, Walzer Family Collection, currently on loan to the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum. [7]

within days of the arrival of the British Army. Following the liberation, there was a shortage of everyday objects required for ritual practices within the ultra orthodox community in the displaced persons camp. Supplies were furnished by the Vaad Hatzalah, an American rabbinic organization that marshalled an intense support network for the remnants of the ultra orthodox communities in Europe. The Vaad Hatzalah sent *tfillen* (leather straps that are ritually wrapped around the arms and head of an observant Jew while praying) to the Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp. They eventually ended up on Chanina Walzer's desk. The *tfillen* needed to be checked and authorized for ritual use before distribution in the camp. Chanina Walzer had studied the laws governing *tfillen*. and did this work as a charitable deed to the religious displaced persons community. He became so proficient in this practice that he was soon ordained a certified scribe, a distinction he received at Bergen-Belsen displaced persons camp Yeshiva. He eventually made his own *tfillen* and it became his stock in trade in the displaced persons camp.

Rabbi Baumgarten also invited five women into the Chevra Kadisha - Sima Rochel, Leah Weiss, Beila Freund, Sarah Freund and Chaya Gelbman. They were charged with purifying, dressing and prepararing the shrouds for women amongst the deceased.

At the beginning of the list, the Chevra Kadisha list states its ritual purpose.

> First, to deal with, at any time, when there will be a death, Gd forbid, up to the last detail: Second, if there is none of the deceased's relations to say Kaddish, the society is obligated to appoint someone to say Kaddish, Thirdly: To supervise the building of monuments and that it should be in the presence of 10 people, a minyan.

The first recording of a death in the Chevra Kadisha list took place on April 23th, eight days after the liberation of the concentration camp. The list is prefaced with these remarks:

> In the month of Menachem Av, 5705, with the assistance of the Rebbe Schlomo Baumgarten, shlit'a was founded a Holy Society, True kindness, to stand on watch for the Holy work.

It is important to note that Chanina Walzer's first recording of a death in the Chevra Kadisha takes place eight days after the liberation, April 23, 1945. His personal memoirs indicate that his fingers were numb from cold as he inscribed the first death, read from the same wooden name plaques that Felix Hohl availed himself to for his list. Yet, the establishment of the Chevra Kadisha, as inscribed above, is in the Hebrew month and year of Menachem Av, 5705, which translates in the Latin calendar as commencing July 11th and ending August 9th, 1945. The Chevra Kadisha was therefore formed three months after the liberation of the concentration camp. Chanina Walzer's work began well before the institutional establishment of the Chevra Kadisha by Rabbi Baumgarten. Chanina Walzer recorded the religion, country of origin, birth date, date of death, age and the mass grave number in the displaced persons camp cemetery for each of the deceased. When he was satisfied that the deceased person was Jewish, he

would draw a small Star of David next to the name. When he was less confident, he left a sign indicating his uncertainty. The Chevra Kadisha list offers a veritable template of the mass row-graves in the displaced persons camp cemetery. It is the only list of the four that shows the actual location of the individual in the mass row-graves in the camp:

> In the 10th row there is one Jewish grave and it is the 3rd grave in the east north, after two gentiles, on the side of the Celt Theater and the first to the road (meaning the 10th row). And she is a Romanian women and her name is Magda Geler, In the 9th row, second from the side of the road, on the side of the Zelttheater, are all Jews. 1) On the day of the Sabbath 9th of Elul (18.8.45) was discovered in the camp Hab'Zvi Binyomin Propinater, whom Polish murderers killed on account of money and schnapps, and he was buried on Monday, 12, 11, Elul or 20.8.45.

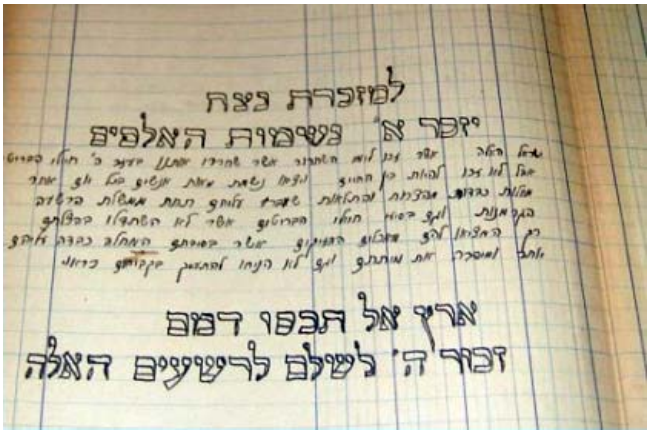


Fig. 8. The Chevra Kadisha Memorial Page [8]

The Chevra Kadisha list contains a poignant political critique of the times. Starvation was rampant at the very end of the war and the immediate liberation period. Mayhem ruled. Former inmates took over the SS officer's canteen and distributed food, whilst the guards, who still manned the lookout towers immediately after the liberation, fired upon them, killing many inmates. The British also brought foodstuffs to the emaciated survivors. Rumour soon spread that the last barbarous act of the Nazi command, before surrender to the British, was to poison the bread. There is no historical evidence for this assertion, but its timing coincides with the eating of ordinary foodstuffs, provided by the British military, which alone proved deadly for hundreds of former inmates. These events are remarked upon in survivor memoirs and testimony as abject failings of the British liberators. Accusations against the British, during this tumultuous time were however muted, as the British military was after all the long awaited liberator, but also the direct source of further and avoidable suffering. The Chevra Kadisha captures these difficult and tragic moments of the liberation and the ultra orthodox perception of the British actions.

> For an everlasting memory. May Gd remember the souls of these thousands of Jews that merited the days of liberty. The British Forces liberated us with Gd's help. However, these Jews did not remain among the living and the souls of hundreds of people expired every day after serious illnesses, from the misfortunes and sufferings that transpired over them under the evil German government. And also with the actions of the British forces, who did not concern themselves with their rescue, and made to the prisoners available harmful food, and that because of them, their sickness got worse and hastened their death. And also the British soldiers did not deal with their burial as should be. Earth do not conceal their blood. Remember Oh Gd to pay these evil doers.

The critical assessment of the British military (rarely captured in documents, but often discussed in survivor testimony) is that they too were evil doers, in clearly relative and measured terms, because of ill-preparedness for the disaster they came upon in the concentration camp, witnessed in the distribution of inappropriate food stuffs and an ignorance of the centrality of Jewish burial rites and rituals.

Fig. 9. The Bergen-Belsen Rabbinical College & Trade School, Sherith Israel (Jakob Kempler Coll. Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum) [9]

The Bergen-Belsen Rabbinical College and Trade School, Sherith Israel: The Yeshiva

The organization of the Chevra Kadisha was part of the sacral mission of the Bergen-Belsen Yeshiva, established in Bloc 52 of the displaced persons camp. It was through the Yeshiva that Rabbi Baumgarten, sought volunteers for the Holy Society of the Dead. Living members of the Chevra Kadisha recall the initial enticement, which Rabbi Baumgarten offered to them all: the promise of a clean ritual suit from England, an object of some discernable value in the immediate post war times. The Bergen-Belsen Yeshiva was led by Rabbi Hersh Zvi Meisels, and was comprised of a group of dedicated orthodox teachers and their students. They spent their days studying and largely apart from the other displaced persons, as the young men learned traditional Jewish trades. The Yeshiva was able to fund this activity through its own international fund-raising outreach initiatives and internal economy, a portion of it based on black market activities. The black market was *de facto* the only economy that functioned in the region on a basic supply-and-demand model, and a good number of the local German population, displaced persons as well as the British military participated in it in one manner or another.

Chevra Kadisha members recall seeing the daily unloading of sacks of coffee from British military trucks in the back of Bloc 52, which housed the Yeshiva. The Yeshiva had a direct political and economic link to Britain through the chaplain offices of Rabbi Baumgarten. This also allowed the Yeshiva to act independently of the Jewish Central Committee in Bergen-Belsen, in the promotion of religious activities in the displaced persons camp and in the larger British Occupied zone. Their relationship with the Jewish Central Committee of Bergen-Belsen was a source of friction. Accounts in ultra orthodox survivor testimonies speak of enthusiastic political debates, within the Yeshiva, regarding the creation of an Ultra Orthodox Central

Committee of Bergen-Belsen, an idea that was quickly abandoned as impractical. The image of the Yeshiva members above was part of such a fund-raising campaign and first appeared as a fund-raising postcard for distribution in the United States and the United Kingdom in 1946. The day-to-day practices of the Chevra Kadisha unfolded under the aegis of the Yeshiva. As mentioned earlier, although the Chevra Kadisha was formed almost three months after the liberation, it was still within the framework of mass row grave burials, occurring at the Zelttheater cemetery in the displaced persons camp, the last of which took place on July 28th, 1945. The British military would bring the bodies of the deceased from the hospital, or the residential blocs, to the mass row-graves of the displaced persons cemetery. The young men of the Yeshiva took the bodies off the trucks. Great care was taken that the bodies could be arranged in rows, not one on top of the other, as was the case in the mass graves of non-Jews in the displaced persons camp, and as was generally the case for both Jew and Gentile in the mass graves in the concentration camp. The deceased in the mass row-graves were rarely covered in ritual shrouds, as Jewish tradition demands. Shrouds were in short supply. Again, the names of the dead were derived from the general British army death list and the Glyn Hughes Hospital list, supplemented by the inquiries of the Yeshiva students as to the background of the deceased gleaned from family, friends and acquaintances still in the displaced persons camp.
At burial, the death was recorded, and a minyan (10 men required for reciting the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead) was formed. The men who performed the actual burial, and recited the Kaddish, were often the younger members of the Yeshiva, and not the original members of the Chevra Kadisha, named at the beginning of the list. The original members, like the rest of the displaced persons population, were anxious to emigrate, and many did just that, as soon as they were able. The Chevra Kadisha list contains 1,651 names.

Fig. 10. Students of the Bergen-Belsen Yeshiva (Photo, Vaad Haatzla Publications, New York, 1946).[10]

Chanina Walzer the 1st Secretary of the Chevra Kadisha left the displaced persons camp for the United States with his family in 1947. The list remained in Brooklyn, New York till late 2006. Chanina Walzer died in Boro Park, Brooklyn in 2007. During this period of over 60 years, Chanina Walzer was sought-out by families looking for the last resting place of relatives and friends who were known to have been inmates of the Bergen-Belsen concentration and displaced persons camp. Throughout these many years, the Chevra Kadisha list served a movable memorial with a religious and practical recording purpose, as was its original intent.

An analysis of the Chevra Kadisha list indicates that the study of other everyday 'recording artefacts' such as, for example, Bet Dhins (the proceedings of rabbinical courts authored in displaced persons camps) which deal with orthodox family law regarding marriage, divorce and death after the calamitous effects of the Holocaust on the institution of the family; survivor memoirs (of which there is a growing cottage industry from religious presses); and survivor testimonies (particularly the archives of the Kiddush HaShem collections in Bnai Brac, Israel, which exclusively records ultra orthodox speakers and their Holocaust experiences) offers information about and insight into the experiences of this community. These sources run both along and outside the *responsa* literature as such, indeed one illuminating the other. The analysis of such documents and objects would greatly balance out our understanding of the grounded social and cultural experiences of the ultra orthodox, during and after the Holocaust and particularly in the critical period of the displaced persons camps. This is a narrative that in many ways still stands outside the privileged themes of contemporary Holocaust culture as represented in museums and the scholarship of the period.

Names, lists and landscape: two repetitions

I alluded at the beginning of this article to the auratic quality of the lists and the repetitions which take place between them. Auratic repetition is at the core of the pendulum-like conundrum of presence and absence, and it is an integral internal dynamic of the lists in their relationship to the surrounding landscape of genocide. First,, there is the repetition of names between the four lists. The lists repeat similar names of the dead. Yet, in each unique list they are configured differently. In the British lists, even in death, the inmates were presented as emigrants, disposed to repatriation; a strategic political construct and representation of excluded subjects. In the Felix Hohl list, the disabused chauffer becomes a witnessing subject and addresses his witnessing to a German audience, citizens of the perpetrator state. His moment of witness is the recounting of the other's trauma. Felix Hohl's list, in this sense, is an object that actualizes and recalls the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's discussion of 'the state of exception' - the excluded as annulment - in the relation between sovereign and citizen. Hohl's list recounts the pariah that has been expelled, a human life that becomes politicized at the moment of its death: in a memorial reading of Agamben's point, the 'living dead' of the perpetrator state that is constantly referenced. Felix Hohl as witness inserted himself into the experience of the trauma, as he documented the names. His list is a necessary part of the already embedded auratic repetition that was contained in the information on the small wooden plaques, which he copied into his accountant's book. The Chevra Kadisha list is the first emphatic memorial repetition of the names to the perished of Bergen-Belsen. It begins as an individual and subjective act by Chanina Walzer and is then incorporated within the collective memory of the Burial Society. It, however, repeats differently in that it anchors the name in a sacral practice of burial, as it explains the circumstances under which the deaths occurred. The internal tensions surrounding the auratic repetitions between the four lists note an irony in that they expose the inability of the witness/writer to control the interpretation of the larger text, which is the culmination of the four intersecting lists, each one's purpose both conflicting and mediating the other. Each writer's intention co-habits the other's through a process of repeating the names differently, a logic of interiority they all share.

There is also an auratic repetition between the sacral and criminal landscape of Bergen-Belsen and the lists, in that they gesture to each other. The intersection of the lists and the mass graves of the concentration camp and the mass-row graves of the Zelttheater cemetery in the displaced persons camp transports us to what Emmanuel Levinas has called the 'open wounded space' as a further metaphor for memorialization and finally exhibition. The displacement of the geography of genocide, from the concentration camp, several kilometers down the road, to the displaced persons camp represents a further moment of the complex intersectional experience of landscape and recording. What is lost in one site re-appears in another, what is too early in one environment becomes too late in another; the essence of the auratic condition (Benjamin 1989). The deaths in the displaced persons camp were occurring not long after the already long dead of Bergen-Belsen were being randomly pushed by earth moving tractors into the mass graves of the concentration camp.[11]

The Memorial imaginary, the transnational and human rights

The Bergen-Belsen death lists speak of shifting meanings in the aftermath of genocide. Lists as exhibited objects, within the labyrinthine memorial context we are describing above, beg broader questions regarding the transnational import of memorial museums in the face of other historical and currently unfolding human rights travesties, where presence and absence co-mingle. Question: How can we bring the memorial significanceof these lists into yet another difficult but necessary theatre of memory, that of the transnational other. In the passages that remain, I would like to suggest that this is a task for an expanded memorial imaginary - understood as a way to articulate how object biographies can help mediate the relationship between multiple forms of subjectivity and institutionalized representations of absence in site specific contexts. This represents a platform from which to contemplate the transnational commonalities of memory work, as well as the common risks of historical amnesia.

A transnational perspective opens the door to Wittgensteinian 'family resemblances' around collective trauma, and thereby strategically expanding the parochial and nationalized nature of memorialization. By examining auratic repetitions, the similarities and dissimilarities of embedded subjectivities within text (written records), voice (testimony) and object, we de-author a politics of memory through investitures in meaning that are beyond it. For example, the Holocaust lists discussed in this article contain the residue of subjective actions which have resonances for transnational theatres of difficult memory, resonances that address international human rights concerns. Josef Kramer's purposeful destruction of the original camp lists, Huebotter's post-war concealment of the landscape of Bergen-Belsen, and the resulting historical amnesia (which lasted decades in the case of Bergen-Belsen) is concomitant with the actions of perpetrators and collective abuses throughout the twentieth and now twenty-first century. Memorials and memorial museums documenting genocides, as in the case of Bergen-Belsen, or memorials to the disappeared in Argentina during Videla's murderous regime, where a full accounting of names is available, but not the bodies, share a filial connection in the shared problematic of absence and its mediations. The Memoria Abierta (Open Memory)[12] project in Argentina operates by definition beyond a singular geographic landscape. It has documented hundreds of dispersed detention and torture sites as part of public education program in Buenos Aires. The project has itself become a memorial act for the disappeared. As a memorialization process this represents an ongoing re-coupling of names and absent bodies – in the case of Bergen-Belsen absent names and anonymously buried bodies - addressing the haunting at the centre of Argentinean and German society in its relation to a fascist past, a condition that Jacques Derrida has so finely described, as a history of 'ghosts chained to ghosts'. The perpetrators understand this all too well, but of course on their own terms, as a necessary dramaturgical stage for unleashing the forces of forgetting (Lustiger Thaler 1996). In 1933, when asked about how history will respond to his final solution for the Jews of Europe, Adolf Hitler darkly responded: 'who remembers the Armenian genocide?' This response is one that resonates - as in Derrida's metaphor of ghostly chains - in the field of transnational human rights concerns and initiatives. The use of memory in this regard, has a proscriptive value for the advancement of democratic culture.

The historical and memorial experience of sites such as Bergen-Belsen (in the concentration and displaced persons phases) carry within them deeply inscribed lessons which beg larger questions of justice and human rights within the present and future, particularly as regards memorial museums at a site of destruction. Upgraded to an international level, difficulties no doubt persist around the proprietary uniqueness of calamitous events, particularly in Holocaust related sites, competing forms of victimization and similarly political concerns about remembering too much in transitional justice phases within post-conflict societies. But, institutional paralysis around the ownership of cultural struggles and identities, and recourse to the niches of selective memory are not an option, in an effort to avoid being drawn into a static representation of the past which inevitably carries with it the loss of memory. Contrary to this, the optimal role of the memorial museum, should be to act as a facilitator, by setting the commitment to memorialization as something beyond the purely political, and towards a memorial imaginary that acknowledges the experience of the individual as the other, and before all restoring the name.

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Notes

[1] Bad Arolsen is the site of the International Tracing Service (ITS) archive, a venue for millions of documents related to the Nazi-attempted extermination of the Jewish people and others. Information kept hidden from the public for the past fifty years is now available by the ITS, an organization that is part of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

[2] Stiftung niedersächsische Gedenkstätten/Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen: Friedhof DP-Camp Bergen-Belsen, British Death list.

[3] Glyn-Hughes Hospital: USHMM, Washington, CEGES/SOMA, RG 65.001M, Microfilm Roll 68, Akte 4899, 'S.O. Book 129 Indexed' Death Registry Glyn Hughes Hospital.

[4] Felix Hohl list: Stiftung niedersächsische Gedenkstätten/Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen: Friedhof DP-Camp Bergen-Belsen, Felix Hohl Death List

[5] A full discussion of the Flowers for Anne Frank Movement in post-war Germany is found in 'Hauntings of Ann Frank' by Henri Lustiger Thaler and Wilfried Wiedemann in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Schandler (eds.) *Mediations of Ann Frank*, Indiana University Press, forthcoming, Winter, 2009

[6] Abraham Walzer Family Collection, Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum.

[7] Walzer Family Collection, currently on loan to the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum.

[9] Jakob Kempler Collection. Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum

[10] Vaad Haatzla Publications, New York, 1946.

[11] In the overall representation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, the mass-row graves of the displaced persons camp are less known and not easily accessible as they are presently in a functioning NATO base, with all the security concerns that surround such a compound.

[12] See *The Urge to Remember: the Role of Memorials in Social Reconstruction and Transitional Justice*, by Judy Barsalou and Victoria Baxter, United States Institute of Peace.

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