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FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Humanities

**Place, identity and memory: a study of American ante-bellum
autobiographical slave narratives, and Holocaust survivor accounts by
Jews living in Bialystok, Poland, after 1918 and up to 1943.**

by

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis is an interdisciplinary study of the interaction between the construction of place and personal identity. Using theories and ideas from the fields of autobiography, memory and social geography, it offers a comparative analysis of ante-bellum, mainly autobiographical, American slave narratives, and accounts by Holocaust survivors from Bialystok, Poland. The principal aims are to provide a new perspective on some famous slave texts which have already been researched in detail in other ways, and to bring more to the fore accounts by 'ordinary' people who survived the Holocaust.

Due consideration is given to the literary and social pressures and influences on the authors. Key questions such as what caused writers' sense of particular places to develop, how this affected their personal identities, and why this sense endured or changed over time are examined. For the slave writers, the significance of gender, feelings of rootedness and the phenomenon of places in imagination is demonstrated by reference to a number of narratives. In addition, the texts and supporting papers of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass are given extra attention. In the case of Holocaust survivors, the importance of Bialystok as a Jewish centre is discussed. Five main texts are examined to consider the effects of interwar Polonization and subsequent Russification, the cause and effect of the meanings of a place, and the diverse nature of personal Jewishness. The separate analysis of Samuel Pizar's autobiography allows for consideration of the changeability and contradictoriness of the meaning of a particular place and how more than one place could be simultaneously meaningful.

Finally, the comparative element of the thesis, which considers the implications of the similarities of and differences in slaves' and Jews' attachment to their home places, is constructed around the themes of place meanings, as well as individuals' need for roots.

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I also want to thank friends who have showed interest in this project, particularly Chris and Neil Arnold, Janice Young, and Liz Billings, whom I hope will feel able to complete her own study.

Finally in acknowledgement, I dedicate this thesis to two people. First, to the memory of Gerry Mould, a friend who followed my career as a mature student and who died suddenly just as this work was about to get underway. I continue to miss his wit, intelligence and friendship. The second dedication is to my husband, Graham, who has never wavered in his support and belief, and to whom I owe an unrepayable debt. I know he feels the same relief as I that the end has been reached.

Part 1: Introduction.

This thesis is a study of mainly autobiographical ante-bellum American slave narratives and accounts by Jews of Bialystok in Poland who survived the Holocaust. I shall examine these texts to learn more about the interaction between the construction of personal and place identity by focusing on the writers' thoughts and feelings about their places, and on the way these were recorded. I shall then make a comparison of my findings. Places and their identities are widely recognized by social geographers as complex constructs, with profound implications for their effects on the way individuals, and groups, think and feel about and remember particular locations. By looking at texts by slaves and survivors to see how individuals reacted to certain places, I intend to develop a perspective which recognizes that, however great was their suffering through slavery or the Holocaust, slaves' and survivors' lives were about more than that suffering and victimhood. I also want to bring more to the fore some accounts which have enjoyed less attention than those, for example, by Primo Levi, the renowned Auschwitz survivor and Frederick Douglass, the most famous of fugitive slaves.

As far as American slaves are concerned, their narratives were long regarded as unreliable by historians and were rejected as valid sources.¹ John Blassingame's book, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, which exemplified the value of the written narratives, did not appear until 1972. Blassingame made extensive use of the narratives to emphasize the slaves' 'African heritage, culture, family, acculturation, religion and personality'.² Over the years since Blassingame's work, writing about slavery from the slave's perspective has become increasingly popular with a variety of topics providing the focus of historians' attention. Lawrence Levine, also writing in the 1970s, was concerned with black culture, while others such as Ira Berlin, John Hope Franklin, Loren Schwenginer, and Deborah Gray White have since written on matters as specific and diverse as what slaves thought about freed labour, runaway slaves and female slave life.³ Although none of these writers has sought to explore the significance of particular places to slaves, there has been a recognition of that significance. Leon

¹ This refusal to use the narratives and his argument in their favour is discussed by John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* 2nd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 370-374.

² *Ibid.*, p. xi.

³ See Ira Berlin et al, 'The terrain of freedom: the struggle over the meaning of freed labor in the U.S. South', *History Workshop Journal*, 22 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 108-130; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schwenginer, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lawrence Levine *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1985).

Litwack, in his 1980 book, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, referring to a North Carolina freedwoman who had returned to her home region, noted that she ‘typified the attachment which numerous ex-slaves felt not so much to the old master or mistress but to the region they knew most intimately, the familiar surroundings in which they had been raised’.⁴ Elsewhere, Ira Berlin observed that the freed people of the Sea Islands felt an attachment to specific land which they and they forebears had worked, and that ‘plantation slaves became provincial, linked to place, land and kin’.⁵ Apart from historians, at least one other academic has commented on the attachment that slaves articulated about their home places. Frances Smith Foster, a literary scholar, in analyzing the slave narratives, pointed out that many writers express an affection for the South’s natural beauties as well as a desire to remain in the areas of their birth.⁶ Clearly, then, scholars recognize that slaves did have an attachment to their home places, and although it must be said that this is not remarkable or even unusual, it does have the potential for fruitful examination. Focusing here on this attachment makes it explicit, and is another way of showing that slaves’ lives were far from one-dimensional existences as the property of another, by considering how the slaves saw themselves and their lives in relation to their places of enslavement.

Turning now to Holocaust survivors, the literature on their experiences, as recounted by them, is varied, generated by scholars from a number of disciplines.⁷ With regard to historians, there is a reluctance to use survivor accounts which is similar in its cause to academics’ dismissal of the slave narratives - they are often seen as unreliable or not useful.⁸ This rejection of survivor accounts obviously explains the imbalance between work produced by historians and literary scholars. Most of the literature I have considered here, and which draws upon accounts by survivors, comes from academics other than historians. The focus of that literature ranges from Terrence Des Pres’ concern with how people survived the death and concentration camps, to Sara R. Horowitz’s interest in how women, specifically, dealt with the complexities of survival, memory and testimony, to the concerns of

⁴ Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 307.

⁵ Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003), p. 270 and p. 202, respectively.

⁶ Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of the Ante-bellum Slave Narratives* 2nd edition (Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin, 1994), pp. 16 and 128.

⁷ For example, work by historians such as Donald Bloxham, Tony Kushner and Saul Friedländer sits alongside books by those involved in literary studies such as Lawrence Langer, Mary Lagerwey and James Young, by playwright and psychologist Henry Greenspan, and by psychoanalyst Dori Laub.

⁸ See Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust: Critical Historical Approaches* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 17.

Barbara Foley and Andrea Reiter with the form of and influences on the survivors' accounts.⁹ This work is part of what must be an evolving process given that survivors' accounts are still appearing (the most recent text I examined was published in 2000), that some have yet to be translated into English, and that scholars continue to seek different ways of utilizing both the more recent and older material. In view of this it is not surprising that gaps and flaws in the academic literature have been identified. For example, Horowitz, in 1994, pointed out that historians' treatment of women survivors had either tended to occlude their particular experience or to present it in terms of sexuality, and Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner have highlighted the elitist academic approach which has downplayed the value of the testimony of 'ordinary' people while admitting into the canon that by the likes of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel.¹⁰

There are also shortcomings with respect to the material on the place - Bialystok - from which the survivors examined here originated; there is, simply, little published in English, whether academic texts or otherwise. The scholarly book by Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews*, published in 1997, tells the story of Bransk, not far from Bialystok, concentrating on the multiple layers of Holocaust memory in Poland, while Tomasz Wisniewski has published two guide books to 'Jewish' Bialystok.¹¹ It goes without saying, then, that there is a shortage of work which analyzes the effect of Bialystok, an important place in European Jewish history, on Jews who subsequently survived and wrote about the Holocaust. My study attempts to address in some measure this absence, and the neglect of the testimony of 'ordinary' survivors. I make concentrated use of six survivor texts, most of which have not been the subject of academic publications, and I analyze the writers' lives and memories not predominantly in terms of their Holocaust years, but in terms of their occupation of Bialystok and how this, and their displacement from it, affected their identities, their sense of who they were and are.

⁹ See Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976); Sara R. Horowitz, 'Memory and testimony of women survivors of Nazi genocide', in *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing* ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), pp. 258-282; Barbara Foley, 'Fact, fiction, fascism: testimony and mimesis in Holocaust narratives', *Comparative Literature*, 34 (Fall 1982), pp. 330-360; Andrea Reiter, *Narrating the Holocaust* translated by Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Continuum, 2000).

¹⁰ Horowitz, 'Memory and testimony of women survivors of Nazi genocide', p. 264, and Bloxham and Kushner, *The Holocaust*, p. 42.

¹¹ Tomasz Wisniewski, *Synagogues and Jewish Communities in the Bialystok Region: Jewish Life in Eastern Europe before 1939* (Bialystok: David Publishing House, 1992), and *Jewish Bialystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland* (Ipswich, Mass.: Ipswich Press, 1998).

Sources.

The study draws on the slave narratives which were produced between about 1820 and 1865, a period chosen for the simple reason that the writings of that time have a relevance here which those either side of it do not.¹² The accounts published before 1820 were characterized by their preoccupation with projecting their writers' lives as spiritual journeys, while those coming between 1820 and 1865 have a different quality. These later narratives were written by authors who had either escaped or somehow been released from slavery, and who, whether they were free or merely fugitives, were part of the abolitionist movement. Their texts were, to quote Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates, 'explicitly and implicitly, polemical, discursive acts against human bondage'.¹³ This change in the character of slave narratives is significant in allowing a view on the institution of slavery from the slave's, or perhaps more correctly ex-slave's, perspective, vital in considering the construction and interaction of personal and place identity. The autobiographical narratives which came after the abolition of slavery in 1865 marked a further change both in the expectations of the genre, and the black autobiographical form itself. There was a loss of urgency in that the anger evident in the earlier body of work was diminished and the story concluded with the writer adjusting to freedom rather than calling for it from exile. Furthermore, the purpose of the narrative had changed. Writers were trying, not to convince their readers of slavery's evils, but to present a balanced picture of their lives.¹⁴ In short, referring to Davis and Gates again: 'Essentially, the slave narrative proper could no longer exist after slavery was abolished.'¹⁵

Of the separately published autobiographical texts that appeared between 1820 and 1865, many are now easily available either in modern collections or online. The twenty-text anthology compiled by Yuval Taylor was a good introduction to some of the less well-known narratives by men such as William Grimes, Jacob Green and William Parker as well as the famous accounts by, for example, Henry Bibb, Lewis and Milton Clarke, William and Ellen Craft, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. I supplemented this reading by referring to the online collection made available by the University of North Carolina as part of its Documenting the

¹² Yuval Taylor, ed., *I Was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives* (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1999), pp. xv-xvi, provides a brief description of the distinguishing characteristics of each of the three periods of slave narratives.

¹³ 'Introduction: the language of slavery', in *The Slave's Narrative* eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr., (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. xxii.

¹⁴ Taylor, ed., *I Was Born a Slave*, p. xvi.

¹⁵ Davis and Gates, 'Introduction: the language of slavery', p. xxii.

American South project.¹⁶ Having read a total of fifty ‘slave narratives proper’, it is appropriate to comment briefly on some of their features, acknowledging first that even the most obscure or least literarily impressive text has been produced by a man or woman exceptional in several ways. Yuval Taylor has pointed out that only 1% or 2% of slaves escaped in the United States’ history of the institution, and the fugitive writers examined here all exhibit the qualities which contributed to their ability and determination to escape - they were physically strong, brave, resourceful and imaginative. These men and women were also often literate in a time when it was illegal for slaves to possess that advantage. Another unusual characteristic of the narrators is their skin colour; nearly all were mulattoes, although this group as a whole was no more than 10.5% of the general slave population in the ante-bellum years.¹⁷ The significance of this particular feature will become clear later. Finally, it is apparent that these writers, fugitive and otherwise, were unusual in the mix of their slavery experience. Most of them were plantation-born, but went on to acquire in some shape or form firsthand knowledge of urban life, something that was relatively uncommon given that fewer than 10% of slaves were recorded as town dwellers.¹⁸ It hardly requires saying that having

¹⁶ The chronological bibliography compiled by the University of North Carolina (UNC), online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibliographychron.html> consulted in December 2002, shows eighty-six texts produced by slaves or former slaves published between 1820 and 1865. These include a number of texts which are either not narratives or were written by those who were not enslaved in the United States, and foreign translations and multiple editions of classic narratives, none of which were relevant to my project. The number of texts listed in this bibliography and pertinent to this study, is fifty-two. Included in that figure are the same twenty narratives which form Taylor’s anthology. Having consulted Taylor’s collection first, I use those versions in footnotes here. It is only in referring to the other narratives that I provide the UNC online reference in footnotes.

¹⁷ Taylor, ed., p. xvi, comments that the ‘narrators by no means represented a cross section of the slave population’ and notes their distinctive qualities. See also Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, p. 130, who cites John Hope Franklin: “By 1850 there were 246,000 [7.7 per cent] mulatto slaves out of a total slave population of 3.2 million. By 1860 there were 411,000 [10.5 per cent] mulatto slaves out of a total slave population of 3.9 million.”

¹⁸ In using the word plantation here, I am aware that there is some debate over the definition of that term, as outlined by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 32. However, for this study, I see no requirement to discuss the finer points of what may be a plantation, a farm, or a yeomanry activity. Instead, I follow the slave writers, using the word they chose to describe their immediate environment.

I make reference to the urban and rural distribution of slaves following Virginia Meacham Gould, “If I can’t have my rights, I can have my pleasures, and if they won’t give me wages, I can take them”, in *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past* ed. Patricia Morton (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 184, who refers to the 1860 census which shows that only 7.1% of the South’s entire population was urban. Elsewhere, Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) p. 14, notes that 95% of slaves were rural.

experience of rural and town enslavement was highly relevant to a study concerned with the interaction of places and people.

In terms of substance, the narratives are a very variable collection, ranging in length from about the 7,000 words by William Green, to the 150,000 words that comprise Frederick Douglass' second narrative. Probably the most straightforward thing that can be said about them as a body is that they conform to the abolitionist agenda and, largely, to the audience expectations of nineteenth-century Americans. Many of the ante-bellum narratives were published through the efforts of abolitionists whose movement had begun to enjoy a resurgence in the 1830s. As a part of this, campaigners had instigated a change in the literary style they favoured, moving away from the practice of using the eighteenth-century poetry of Phillis Wheatley to exemplify black potential, and endorsing a more straightforward literary form. The worth of the slave narratives lies in them being primary accounts of the slave's experience, something often revealed immediately by their titles. Several of the examined narratives contain either the words 'written by himself' (or herself), 'dictated by themselves', 'narrated by himself', 'taken from his own lips' or 'written from a statement of facts made by himself'.¹⁹ These phrases, in making such an explicit reference to the writer, are significant in being assertions of authenticity, and in offering the audience access to real rather than invented experience, as well as having a personal resonance for the author in serving as a declaration of existence as a person rather than as something to be accorded only chattel status. The narratives also had a propagandistic value in stressing the cruelty of slavery with graphic descriptions of beatings and veiled references to sexual assaults on women and girls. While the description of slave beatings may be noted for their effectiveness in eliciting sympathy for the slave's plight and support for the abolitionist movement, references to the sexual abuse suffered by female slaves are notable in reflecting the narrators' preoccupation with the mulatto.

Depictions of rape and sexual abuse were more often than not made through the figure of the mulatto or "mulatta", and the extent of the whiteness of a slave, male or female, with mixed ancestry is also a prominent and recurrent theme in more general terms. This preoccupation with the mulatto has been examined by Foster who points out both that he or she was given disproportionate emphasis by writers who themselves were often of mixed race, and that he or she received excessive interest from those who read the narratives.²⁰ In short, there was a two-way

¹⁹ Writers who used these phrases in their titles are: Thomas Anderson, Solomon Bayley, Henry Bibb, Leonard Black, Henry Box Brown, William Wells Brown, Lewis and Milton Clarke, Frederick Douglass, William Green, William Grimes, William Hayden, Josiah Henson, Andrew Jackson, Harriet Jacobs, James Mars, Thomas Smallwood and John Thompson.

²⁰ Foster, pp. 127-141.

fascination with the pale slave which is helpful here in contextualizing the accounts. The writers and their sponsors and publishers recognized that forbidden sex between white men and slave women was a powerful selling point. The intended audience for the narratives was eager for sensationalism and providing this in the form of the abused slave woman, though having the drawback of showing her as little other than a victim, also stressed the anti-slavery message and added to the narrator's criticism of the slaveholder class.²¹ Description of the mulatto's fate at the hands of white men was one way of drawing attention to the brutalizing effect of slavery on those touched by it, be they black or white.²² Jacob Green, for example, a Maryland plantation slave in the 1830s, was keen to show the predatory nature that could develop from slave ownership. Mary, whose 'colour was very fair, approaching almost to white', and who 'had already had a child to her master in Mobile' narrowly escaped rape by her owner's son, William Tillotson, after she refused to have sex with him. Green described the incident noting not only Tillotson's 'lustful passion' and intent, but also highlighting the fact that he was married. Green tells how Mary tried to avoid the inevitable by reminding Tillotson of his wife, 'but William was not to be put off, nor his base passion to go unsatisfied'. Mary was spared only by the intervention of another slave who killed Tillotson with a pitchfork. Green continues with the mulatto figure and the theme of white misbehaviour when he reveals that his wife, Jane, gave birth five months after they were married to a 'nearly white' baby with 'blue eyes and veins', fathered by their master.²³

The mulatto was also useful to the slave narrator for showing the cruel reach of slavery - enslavement was not confined to those who had black skin. Many

²¹ Foster, p. 63, comments on the growth of literacy in nineteenth-century America and how this new audience had more vulgar taste.

²² Narrators did not restrict themselves to the predatory man to illustrate the deleterious effects of slavery on whites. For example, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 551, drew attention to his owner's wife, Sophia Auld. Auld had 'never had a slave under her control previously to myself' and 'she had been in a good degree preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery'. However, Auld soon succumbed to the effects of 'irresponsible power': 'That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon.' Narrators were also keen to stress the cheating nature of slaveholders, often by telling how they had agreed to buy themselves and had parted with the funds only to find that their owners subsequently reneged on the deal. Moses Grandy, for instance, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy; Late a Slave in the United States of America* (London: C. Gilpin, 1843), pp. 17-18; online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/grandy/grandy.html>, paid \$600 for himself, was then denied free papers and was sold on to a third party. Grandy described his owner as 'a very wicked young man'.

²³ Jacob D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave, from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 695-700.

narratives feature a slave, man or woman, who was pale enough to pass as white but whose known mixed parentage was enough to condemn him or her to a life of slavery. William and Ellen Craft, whose joint narrative was published in 1860, refer at some length to the fate of Ellen's white cousins, Frank and Mary, whose co-habiting parents were a white man and a slave concubine. On the death of their father, Frank and Mary's mother attempted to buy them, but was thwarted by another family member, Mr. Slator, who claimed them as his property. In the end, the fact of their whiteness allowed Frank and Mary to effect their escape north, but not before a court had awarded ownership of them to Slator.²⁴

Ultimately, although the figure of the mulatto served to support the argument against slavery, that was not its only function. The writers' use of him or her also undermined the possibility of a positive black image and in this, there is an indication of the difficult circumstances in which the narrator was working. The narratives were produced at a time when even those advocating abolition were often convinced of inherent black inferiority, and the very particular prominence of the mulatto did little to help dispel that myth. As Foster has said, the mulatto slave, male or female, was evidence of the sexual exploitation of slave women and thus represented 'the absence of a viable black family structure', while their mothers were associated with the idea of illicit sex; neither was conducive to a good black representation.²⁵

In another way, too, the narrators were affected by their circumstances. The pressure on slave writers to comply with the requirements of the abolitionists adds to the quality of sameness which marks the narratives, and which has led James Olney, a theorist of autobiography, to claim that 'one can imagine a sort of master outline drawn from the greatest narratives and guiding the lesser ones'.²⁶ This sameness was not always confined to the outline of the narratives, but can be seen occasionally in the content. For example, the famous passage in Frederick Douglass' 1845 narrative, where he describes the fight with his abusive master, Mr. Covey, is introduced by Douglass to demonstrate his physical courage and his determination 'not to be used as a brute any longer'. Douglass considered that, 'after puffing and blowing at a great rate' Covey received 'entirely the worst end of the bargain; for he had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him'. The episode concludes with Douglass claiming that he 'did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in

²⁴ William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 493-497.

²⁵ Foster, p. 131.

²⁶ James Olney, "'I was born": slave narratives, their status as autobiography and as literature', in Davis and Gates eds., pp. 148-175 (especially p. 152).

killing me'. William Green's much shorter and less famous narrative was published in 1853 and resonates with a virtually identical scenario. Green describes a fight with his master in which they 'fought until almost out of breath' and from which Green emerged victorious: 'When I had wallowed him in the dirt to my heart's content I let him go.' Green ends the account: 'I had long before made up my mind that he nor no other one man should whip me; and I boldly told him so. I told him often that day that if he whipped me, or had me whipped, I would never do another day's work for him or any other man in the place'.²⁷ The point about this particular similarity of content, is that it draws attention to the intertextuality of the slave narratives, which then prompts consideration of the role of the abolitionists in the production of such accounts. In fact, Green's text does not contain any authenticating or explanatory documents which could be used in this consideration, but many accounts do include documents written by editors and amanuenses, people whose role I examine more fully later. For now, I want to comment briefly on the matter of narratives' sameness for its direct bearing on my intention to maximize the use of less famous texts.

Obviously to a certain extent, similarity of content and form reflects a similarity of experience and circumstance, and in reading the narratives it quickly becomes clear that many were produced from a position that may have inhibited the achievement of a more individualistic, genuinely self-reflective account. The need to generate income added to the pressure to produce a text that would meet abolitionist and audience expectations. William Grimes, for example, who wrote and published his narrative in 1825, ten years after his escape, was quite open about his financial predicament: 'I hope some will buy my books from charity [...] I am now entirely destitute of property; where and how I shall live I don't know'.²⁸ Even if profitability was not the writer's first priority, he or she would be caught in the dilemma that has always persisted for African-American writers. As a member of 'an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members', any attempt at public analysis of one's self and life was always going to be compromised by loyalty to a group which needed as much positive representation as possible.²⁹ In view of the foregoing, it is perhaps unsurprising that some

²⁷ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, pp. 569-570; William Green, *Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green, (Formerly a Slave.) Written by Himself* (Springfield: L. M. Guernsey, 1853), pp. 12-13.

Online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/greenw/greenw.html>

²⁸ William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself*, in Taylor ed., vol. one, p. 232.

²⁹ The quoted phrase is from Stephen Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), p. 3. Jennifer Fleischner, *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives* (New York and London: New York University

narratives proved to be more useful than others in considering both how the writers felt about their places of enslavement and the interaction of place and personal identity. One result of the general tendency of slave writers not to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings about their home places was to highlight the particular texts where more emphasis was given to that topic. In this regard, two of the writers who warranted more lengthy and detailed analysis are Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, authors whose texts are already well to the fore in the field of slave narrative; indeed, they are required reading in any such study.

Douglass' and Jacobs's accounts proved to be the most useful here for a number of reasons. Douglass wrote two of his three autobiographies in the ante-bellum period, in 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, and in 1855, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and they provide a rare opportunity to consider whether and why a slave's sense of a particular place of enslavement endured or changed. In addition, Douglass' published papers are easily available and these supplemented the two narratives, offering further insights into Douglass' attitude to the sites where he was enslaved. Jacobs's pseudonymous 1861 account, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*, is a compelling choice because it is the only self-penned text by a female slave in the ante-bellum years, and as a result of her life being the focus of attention by Jean Fagan Yellin, other sources are accessible to shed more light on Jacobs's place experience. Letters Jacobs wrote in 1867 are included in Yellin's edited version of her narrative, and Yellin's biography, published in 2004, was revealing in what it told of Jacobs's later life. Jacobs's narrative was crucial to this study for another reason. As a result of their providing plenty of violence, and assaults on women, most of the male-written accounts portray female slaves one-dimensionally as victims, which was why I sought as many female-authored accounts as possible - to see how they presented their lives in their places of enslavement. Jacobs's text was useful for counterbalancing the woman-as-passive-victim tendency in that she presents herself and other women as exercising agency in their lives despite enslavement. The narrative was also helpful in thinking about the role of particular places in a slave's imagination, the role of gender in place experience, and the effects of places on an individual's gender identity. So, although Douglass and Jacobs's accounts are already well-known and researched, they were both too valuable vis-a-vis the phenomenon of place and personal identity to relegate to a minor role in this study.

Press, 1996) p. 31, also makes this point about autobiographers from outside the dominant group. It is probably their fate to represent their own people since this is their culturally sanctioned role.

As far as narratives of other women are concerned, only two ante-bellum accounts are available and both are slightly problematic. *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon*, is actually the publication of a question and answer exchange Picquet had with a church minister in 1860. This short 'narrative' does not yield much concerning Picquet's feelings about her places of enslavement, though it does confirm how slave women's gender identity could be adversely affected by their location. The second narrative, the life of Sally Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams, of Detroit, Michigan*, is not autobiographical. As the title suggests, the narrative was written by Williams's son and was aimed at a young readership. Despite the fact that the book is a biography and was rejected by Blassingame as revealing little of slave life, it does provide some insights into Williams's sense of a particular place and why this developed.³⁰ Having explained why I have chosen to concentrate on certain texts, it does have to be said that even the writers who are less voluble and specific about their places indicate that their place experiences were always complex, so these, too, were useful.

In the process of selecting the slave narratives and survivor accounts which were to become the focus of my study, one thing was immediately noticeable - the difference in the number of texts available within each group. According to the University of North Carolina's bibliography, between 1820 and 1865, only fifty or so new (rather than second edition) narratives describing slavery in the United States were published. Since 1945, the number of testimonies by Holocaust survivors is over 100,000, in written, oral and video form.³¹ While it was easily possible to read all the relevant ante-bellum slave narratives, clearly it was impossible to consider all survivor testimony. Instead, I decided to use published accounts, which meant that the two groups were represented by the same medium, and read two dozen or so survivor texts, including some considered as required reading such as those by Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel and the fictionalised account by Tadeusz Borowski, and to concentrate on six writers who all lived in Bialystok, in north-eastern Poland, during the interwar years. Although the rationale for selecting the texts in each group is dissimilar - in the slaves' case it was one of chronology, in the survivors' one of geography - that has not been a hindrance so

³⁰ John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. xxviii, viewed Williams's narrative as one of several texts so like Indian escape literature that few details of slave life are revealed.

³¹ I have taken this figure from Tony Kushner, 'Oral history at the extremes of human experience: Holocaust testimony in a museum setting', *Oral History* 29 (2), (Autumn 2001), pp. 83-94 (especially p. 84).

much as an addition to the complex nature of the project. To have widened the geographical spread of survivors would have meant losing the chance to consider the effects of a place which has huge importance in Jewish and Holocaust history; an importance which is easily and usefully demonstrated.

There were Jews living in what was the village of Bialystok as early as 1658, and an obvious sign of their historical presence remained until as late as 1941 when one of the two brick synagogues, which had been built by 1765 at the latest, was destroyed. In addition to the long tradition of a Jewish presence, Jews were numerically well represented in the area. By 1936, out of the city's total population of 99,722, Jews numbered 42,880. By November 1939, when many Jews had fled east following the German invasion of Poland, the number had swollen to about 250,000 (in a total population of between 330,000 and 400,000). By 1945, Jews' devastation was nearly total: fewer than 1,100 survived the war and Bialystok as a Jewish place was irreversibly changed.³² Using accounts by those who had known the city in the interwar period was a way of seeing and recording how this once great centre had affected a number of 'ordinary' Jews living in it.

Given the small number of survivors, it is not surprising that there are few autobiographical accounts, particularly in English, by Bialystoker Jews. Nevertheless, the six texts which are studied here are substantial and diverse. They were published variously in America, Canada, Israel, Poland and the United Kingdom from as early as 1947, up to as recently as 2000, and vary in the expressed purpose of their being written, and in their length which ranges from about 43,000 to 200,000 words, itself a reflection of the texts' different nature as autobiographical writings and of the different concerns of their authors. Unlike the slave narrators, exceptionality is not something that marks most of the writers, and that is not surprising; after all, as Kushner has pointed out: 'Holocaust survivors are simply ordinary people to whom something extraordinary happened.'³³ The survivors are also unlike the slave narrators in exhibiting an intra-group variation in their texts. For instance, there are differences of tone between Michel Mielnicki's angry and bitter book and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's generally more understated account. Such differences are attributable to any of a number of reasons. Mielnicki's book was published in Canada in 2000, Nomberg-Przytyk's in Poland

³² Population figures are taken from Wisniewski, *Jewish Bialystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland*, appendix III. He also notes that in 1945 'about 1,085 Jews came to Bialystok,' (p. 38). According to Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. one (New York and London: MacMillan, 1990), p. 214, some two hundred Bialystok Jews survived in the camps, several dozen hid on the Aryan side of the city and were saved, as were sixty fighters who had escaped to the forests. The Jewish population confined to the ghetto in August 1941 was fifty thousand, including some from outside the city.

³³ Kushner, 'Oral history at the extremes of human experience', p. 86.

in 1966. The different times and places of writing reflect the different climate in which these and other accounts were produced; the writers all felt different effects and showed different responses to the common experience of war and genocide. They wrote differing kinds of text, because they wrote for different audiences, they were different personalities, and they wrote at different points in their lives which also influenced the autobiographical act. These points are examined more closely later.

The shortest of the survivor texts is the Hebrew-written diary of Shmuel Soltz. Self-published in Israel in 1988 and, it appears, simultaneously translated into English, the diary covers the days in August and September 1939 when Soltz served in the Polish army, and then the time up to February 1942 when he arrived in Palestine following an epic journey of escape. He left Bialystok in January 1941 making his way across Russia and Asia. The book ends abruptly with that arrival, and therefore it is not known how Soltz's memory of his childhood and early adulthood spent in Bialystok relates to the rest of his life. Even so, it is easily possible to learn something of what Bialystok meant to Soltz as the diary was written, and how he consciously used his memory to ensure that his departure from the city would not mean that the place became lost to him.

In contrast to Soltz's text, the book written by Samuel Pizar, published in 1980, is lengthy at about 110,000 words and is unusual here in two respects. First, it goes well beyond the time he spent in the death and concentration camps, in fact, right up to the time of publication when Pizar was about fifty: of the total text no more than approximately one third is given to relating the camp experience itself. Second, it is a sophisticated work, entirely in keeping with the profile of a Harvard- and Sorbonne-educated international lawyer and author, written not only as an autobiography but with the express intention of serving as a warning. What is also evident from Pizar's book, as he reflects on his life and how he became the man he is, is his concern with his memories, not just of his camp experiences, but also of his pre-war place experience. This characteristic, combined with other textual evidence that he is overtly interested in particular places, recognizing their effect on individuals, makes Pizar's work especially compelling for this study.

Unlike Pizar, Chaika Grossman avoided deportation to a concentration or death camp. She is a well-known figure in the history of Jewish resistance in wartime Poland, having been a member of the socialist Zionist youth movement group, *Ha-shomer ha-tsair* (The Young Guard), before and during the war. Grossman's book, first published in Hebrew in 1949 and then in English in 1987, is the longest among those studied. It is a record of her activities in the movement in Bialystok, Warsaw and Vilna in the period up to the liberation of Bialystok in

August 1944, and may be seen as a corrective to the postwar idea that there was no resistance by Jews to what was happening to them. Grossman's account was most useful in my consideration of the interaction between a place and individuals with regard to the matter of ethnicity.

Michel Mielnicki was born in Wasilkow near Bialystok and deported to Auschwitz at the age of fourteen in 1941. His account was published jointly by Ronsdale Press and Vancouver Holocaust Education Trust in 2000 and boasts an introduction by the British historian Sir Martin Gilbert. Having been written to keep Mielnicki's promise 'to bear full witness' it is not surprising that, like most of the other texts, Mielnicki's does not go meaningfully beyond the war's end, although an epilogue by John Munro provides some further biographical details of Mielnicki's postwar life.³⁴ Mielnicki writes at some length about his childhood experiences in Wasilkow and Bialystok and from this it has been possible to identify at an individual level the effects of interwar Polonization of the city and its Russification between 1939 and 1941, and to note how more mundane place characteristics such as its built topography may add to the meaning attributed to a particular location.

Charles Zabuski's text is about 70,000 words, published, it appears, privately, in English in 1996. Although he moved to France after the war and continued to live there, Zabuski was persuaded to recount his story by his American cousin, June Sutz Brott, an 'editor, writer and teacher of work-place writing'.³⁵ The cousins shared Bialystoker grandparents but were separated by distance and the absence of a common language, although eventually a book materialized from their collaborative effort. Again, details of postwar life are sparse in Zabuski's text, possibly because as an obviously reluctant author he preferred to keep his later life private, but from the epilogue it can be seen that Bialystok continued to resonate with him, decades after he left it, and therefore it is possible to consider whether and why Zabuski's feelings about Bialystok changed.

Finally, among the full-length texts, Sara Nomberg-Przytyk wrote two books detailing her experiences in Bialystok's ghetto from 1941, and those in Auschwitz between 1944 and 1945. Her books have an interesting history, which is outlined

³⁴ The quoted phrase is from Michel Mielnicki, *Bialystok to Birkenau: The Holocaust Journey of Michel Mielnicki as told to John Munro* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press and Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, 2000), p. 18.

³⁵ The publisher of Zabuski's book is Popincourt Press of Oakland, California. My reason for thinking this is a private publication is simply because it seems likely given Brott's profession, and the fact that she lives in Oakland, while Zabuski himself lived in 'a second-floor apartment on Popincourt Street' in Paris, which suggests his address inspired the name of the publishing body. The quoted description of Brott's profession is from an unattributed comment on the book's back cover.

later, and take a very particular and unusual form in comprising a series of vignettes. Nomberg-Przytyk's translator, David H. Hirsch, has described her account of life in the ghetto as 'neither a memoir, nor a history of the Bialystok Ghetto' though this has not prevented the gleaning of insights into what made Bialystok, which was not Nomberg-Przytyk's birthplace (as it was for the other authors), 'home' between 1939 and 1943 when the ghetto was razed.³⁶

The other source on which I have drawn and which requires some immediate commentary (with expansion in the chapter on survivors) is *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*. Memorial books have been described as 'devoted to the lives and deaths of entire Jewish communities in Eastern Europe'.³⁷ They range in size and format from slim volumes produced in Displaced Person camps just after World War Two, to large glossy volumes which came many years later. *Yizker-bikher* is one of three varieties of such books, whose main function is to preserve the names and records of acts of martyrdom. The *pinkes* books are a community chronicle with an emphasis on outstanding events and persons, while the *sefers* are religious texts bearing rabbinical approval. The *Bialystoker Memorial Book* falls into the first category, although it is concerned with much more than acts of martyrdom and draws on works which first appeared in *Pinkas Bialystok*, *Sefer Bialystok* and *Bialystok Photo Album* in the 1950s and 1960s. In short, *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* is a fascinating and eclectic collection. Although the problematic nature of using memorial books has been noted by Kugelmass and Boyarin - '[they are] neither primary sources historiographically nor proper secondary sources' - it is entirely appropriate to make use of *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*. As Kugelmass and Boyarin subsequently point out, such books 'are not inadequate academic histories but the often eloquent voices of simple people determined to preserve a glimpse of a world they knew, loved and lost'.³⁸

In reading the slave and survivor accounts, it is impossible to remain unaware of others' role in their writing and publication. As far as the slave narratives are concerned, it was no surprise to learn that many were written by an amanuensis and/or had clear editorial hallmarks. It was rather less expected that this would feature in the selection of survivor texts, but among the six selected here, two are 'as told to' accounts. For both groups of writers, this draws attention to something

³⁶ Introduction to *The Pillars of Samson* translated by Roslyn Hirsch and David H. Hirsch (London: Vallentine Mitchell, forthcoming), p. 1.

³⁷ Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, eds. and translators, *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 1.

³⁸ Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, 'Yizker bikher and the problem of historical veracity: an anthropological approach', in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars* eds. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 519-536 (especially pp. 519 and 521, respectively).

that must be pertinent in their close reading - the part played by the editor or perhaps others in the publication process. It is unquestionable that some slave narratives contain more or less editorial embellishment or bias, a feature which has been extensively considered by Blassingame who concludes that editors were generally men of integrity and professionalism.³⁹ No doubt they were also sympathetic to the writer's plight, a man or woman in need of help to produce a narrative. In requiring such assistance, the slave has proved to be far from unique. Among the six survivor texts, those by Mielnicki and Zabuski confirm that the assistance of an intermediary could make the difference between the production, or not, of an account. Mielnicki, whose text is a collaborative effort, evidently wanted someone he found *simpatico* in order to proceed with it, fifty years after his release from Belsen. He refused various offers of help to write his book or to buy the rights to his story until 'the right person came along' in 1995 in the form of John Munro, an 'independent scholar' and 'one of Canada's more accomplished [...] writers and historians'.⁴⁰ Similarly, Charles Zabuski's account only materialized as a result of the persistence of his cousin and co-writer. I make these observations of others' involvement with the texts under examination here, neither as a criticism nor endorsement of it, but as an acknowledgement that manuscripts do not simply metamorphosize into books on the market. Manuscripts are subject to a process more or less intrusive with implications for what reaches the public domain, and if Mielnicki and Zabuski illustrate how supportive intervention could positively affect the publication of a text, then the history of Nomberg-Przytyk's manuscripts shows how the converse could do the same.

Nomberg-Przytyk wrote a trilogy while living in Poland in the 1960s. The first two volumes, *Wiezienie Bylo Moim Domen (Prison Was My Home)* and *Kolumny Samsona (The Pillars of Samson)* were published in Poland in 1964 and 1966, respectively. The third book, *Zydzie Oswiencimiu (The Jews of Auschwitz)* dated 1966, was due to go to press in June 1967, again in Poland, when Nomberg-Przytyk was told by her editor, that in view of the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states, publication would not proceed unless she removed all references to Jews. Not surprisingly this was a requirement Nomberg-Przytyk felt unable to meet. She withdrew the manuscript, eventually depositing it in the Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, when she was forced to leave Poland in 1968, where it was discovered by Eli Pfefferkorn who brought it to publication as *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grottesque Land* in 1985, through an American publisher. The

³⁹ Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, pp. xviii - xxxvi.

⁴⁰ The quoted phrases are from Mielnicki, *Bialystok to Birkenau*, p. 17, and from unattributed comments on the book's cover, respectively.

translator of *Zydzie Oswiencimiu* was aware of the existence of *Kolumny Samsona* and as far back as 1985 was working on an English translation. However, this version is not yet published, one of the reasons for its delay being the difficulty of finding an American publisher because the text 'was thought to be too left wing for the US market'.⁴¹ The history of Nomberg-Przytyk's manuscripts, and the clearly important and sometimes prominent role of collaborators, editors and amanuenses in the writing of various other accounts, are instructive here inasmuch as they highlight an important point - what is to be created as memory and who owns that memory. This is a matter to which I shall return as part of my explanation of the interdisciplinarity that is necessarily involved in this project.

Theories.

The very idea of looking at place and personal identities as represented in the autobiographical texts of slaves and survivors, has demanded deployment of approaches and theories from various disciplines as a method of looking at those accounts other than as merely historical documents. Some of the most notable borrowings, in addition to fields involved in the workings of memory, come from autobiographical theory and social geography. Before discussing these areas, I want to briefly comment on this study as a comparative project and identify the views and ideas upon which I have drawn.

The first point is to note what my comparison is not. It hardly requires saying that oppression, albeit of very different types, is the most obvious experience shared by slaves and survivors, but my purpose is not to compare the organizations and institutions which inflicted it upon them. In the past, it has been claimed by C. E. Black that 'states, nations, polities - offer a much more satisfactory basis of comparison than the more vaguely defined "civilizations" and "cultures"'.⁴² But Black's opinion expressed in 1966 seems dated and unappealing today, when it is apparent that an examination of individuals' experiences can also result in a worthwhile comparison, increasing historical knowledge and understanding, a stance supported by the more recent and enlightened outlook of George Fredrickson, a historian who has compared racism in America and South Africa. So, my intention is to consider and compare the various individual place experiences of slaves and Jews and how this affected their thoughts and feelings about those places. The exercise is a justifiable endeavour in that these two groups

⁴¹ Andrew Charlesworth, at the University of Gloucester (who has been instrumental in arranging for the forthcoming publication of *The Pillars of Samson* by Vallentine Mitchell in England), in a letter to me on 18 January 2002.

⁴² C. E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 41-42.

of people satisfy a requirement articulated by Fredrickson - that any historical comparison must be based on substantive rather than incidental or superficial similarities.⁴³ Certainly the duress which slaves and Holocaust victims suffered seems a similar enough experience to encourage an immediate comparison, and the existence of a relationship between place and personal identity, a universal phenomenon, is sufficient to warrant individual inspection and closer comparison of those experiences. Furthermore, as a subject of comparative study, slaves' and Jews' experiences also avoid the potential shortcoming noted by another comparative historian, John Breuilly. As Breuilly points out, while there is no purpose served in studying events with nothing in common, neither is there any value in examining those which do not differ significantly.⁴⁴ Slaves and Holocaust victims, though, are sufficiently distanced geographically, temporally, culturally and experientially to provide an appropriately diverse subject.

My particular focus here on identity also happens to fit with another of Fredrickson's ideas. Fredrickson maintains that establishing and keeping in mind a common international context is helpful in doing comparative history. Awareness of the larger international struggle against racism allowed Fredrickson to treat black resistance in the United States and South Africa as case studies of a more general phenomenon.⁴⁵ Here, the general phenomenon of the relationship between places and individuals, and the resultant effect on the identity of both, is the context for the two disparate groups. Places and their identities are and have always been highly relevant, obviously for the places themselves, and also for individuals - there can be a great significance attaching to places in people's imaginations and in their daily lives, as events in the former Yugoslavia in the recent past testify.⁴⁶ The conflict that erupted in Yugoslavia is a strong example of how the significance of a place to people can be directly related to the role of race/skin colour/ethnicity in their experience of that place. This factor was of major importance for both slaves and Jews, as is shown by the qualitative difference in the nature of their occupation of and departure from their home places. Slaves were where they were as a direct result of their enslavement; the Bialystoker Jews studied here were all in their place, if not by individual choice (most of the authors were born there), then

⁴³ George M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 2.

⁴⁴ John Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Doreen Massey, 'Places and their pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (1995), pp. 182-192 (especially p. 182), cites Serbs' attitude to parts of what used to be Yugoslavia making the point that they were 'calling upon a particular way of conceptualising "place"'.

certainly not because they were enslaved. Most slaves voluntarily fled their places for freedom, or, to put it more accurately, felt compelled to leave them, while Jews were either uprooted from theirs and taken to ghettos and concentration and death camps, or went into hiding, or passed as Aryan. But the differing facts of slaves' and Jews' occupation of and departure from their home places had the same cause - race/skin colour/ethnicity. Very obviously for slaves, race was a defining characteristic of their place experience and although being Jewish in interwar Bialystok was vastly different from being enslaved, ethnicity was an emotive issue in a city where, despite its heterogeneous population, the size of the Jewish community there made its members highly visible. Most writers refer to the antisemitism they encountered in those years and ultimately, of course, it was their Jewishness that resulted in Jews' expulsion from the city between 1941 and 1943.

The suitability of slaves and Jews as a subject for comparative study is emphasized by virtue of the fact that both groups experienced trauma, although my comparative effort is not one of focusing on this dimension. However, the work of one scholar, Marcus Wood, who has focussed on slaves' and Jews' trauma, is doubly instructive here. Wood, whose principal interest is indicated in the sub-title of his book, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780 - 1865*, has confirmed, while advocating care, that the events of slavery and the Holocaust may be compared. He wrote: 'Comparisons between the history of Atlantic slavery and the Nazi Holocaust are precarious and frequently wrong but not always impossible or improper.'⁴⁷ This warning about the need for caution in any comparison between slaves and Holocaust victims is matched by Wood's concern that any attempt at memorializing either slavery or the Holocaust requires particularly sensitive treatment in dealing with the horrors of their lives. Thus, he notes the limitations of the display in Liverpool's slavery museum and comments on the problematic nature of some Holocaust exhibitions.⁴⁸ Wood also makes a comparison between the sentiments expressed in the catalogue produced to mark the opening of the Liverpool museum and a particular approach to Holocaust memory. Wood is critical of Liverpool's statement that: 'We can come

⁴⁷ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780 - 1865* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 11.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 297-300, for Wood's critique of the display in the Transatlantic Slavery gallery on Merseyside. He lists a number of unsettling features: the precise location within the museum of the slavery exhibition which is separated from the main narrative of Liverpool's development as a port; the absence of slave figures on the slave decks, who, instead, are represented by voiceless images from projectors which themselves possess a 'confusing presence'; the contrast with the presentation of Irish people on coffin ships which includes a sound-track of human groans. See also p. 219 where Wood cites and agrees with James Young who expresses serious reservations about the use of objects at the Holocaust displays in Majdanek and Auschwitz.

to terms with our past only by accepting it, and in order to be able to accept it we need knowledge of what really happened', questioning the appropriateness of assuming that that knowledge is even available. Instead, Wood prefers the efforts of some intellectuals who believe 'that the Holocaust is something the West must work very hard never to "come to terms with"'.⁴⁹ Any comparative study involving slavery and the Holocaust, then, need not mean that the subjects are uneasy bedfellows, but it does mean they demand a thoughtful approach.

To enhance the viability of any comparative study, Frederickson maintains that the work should be presented in such a way as to avoid merely compiling parallel histories.⁵⁰ Nancy Green also suggests a particular method which may improve the comparative exercise. Using the example of a study of immigrants, Green recommends applying a 'constant' like the economic sector to provoke different questions and conclusions to arrive at an understanding of their work and lives.⁵¹ For slaves and survivors, the concept of place, specifically, individuals' sense of places, is a good constant to set. In looking at the different constituents of place identity, it soon becomes clear that it is possible to use these as an ordering framework within which the experiences of the individuals in each group, and their resultant sense of places, can be examined. However, the particular nature of the components of place identity, and the fact that the two groups of writers do not share a unifying characteristic such as departure from or arrival in the same place, means that these experiences cannot easily and clearly be dealt with interactively. As I will show later, the identity of places and individuals are intimately and inextricably linked, and this quality, combined with the fact that the slave narrators came from a variety of towns and cities across the American South (whereas the Jewish writers are all from the city of Bialystok), dictates that the texts are best dealt with and presented in separate parts, followed by another in which the differences and similarities between the two groups are identified and considered.

In an initial comparison of accounts by slaves and survivors, one thing is immediately noticeable - both groups of writers tend not to offer anything, or very little, about their lives following escape or release, or the end of their time in camps, or in hiding, or spent in passing as non-Jewish. In some cases this is not unexpected. An account produced shortly after escape or liberation means, of

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 297.

⁵⁰ Frederickson, pp. 12-13.

⁵¹ Nancy L. Green, 'The comparative method and poststructural structuralism - new perspectives for migration studies', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13 (1994), pp. 3-22 (especially p. 16). This approach is also endorsed by Amitai Etzioni and Frederic L. Dubow, *Comparative Perspectives, Theories and Methods* (New York: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 9: 'work with a general model or theory and compare each unit under study to the model'.

course, the writer had lived less of his or her life after, rather than before and during the event which caused him or her to write. Such truncation does, however, prompt the question: what kind of texts are these two collections? The first thing that ought to be said about both of them is that they function in more than one way. The books by Jewish writers are tales of Holocaust survival, and the slave narratives, often with exciting descriptions of natural hazards overcome en route to freedom, seem like adventure yarns as well as abolitionist polemics; but the texts also function in identity formation and the obvious starting point to give this closer attention is the field of autobiography. Knowing something about that genre leads to better understanding of the complex nature of the experience and purpose of writing a slave narrative or a survivor's account, and also provides insights into the processes which inform the reading and interpretation of them. In other words, the texts can be more fully explored and evaluated with an awareness of how and why they are constructed as they are and, equally important, with an awareness of what forces affect their reception. With this in mind, there are some aspects of autobiography I want to briefly consider for their general application, and for their particular application to slave and survivor writings.

The first and one of the most complex of these aspects is definition. Olney has commented on the difficulty of fitting out autobiography 'with the necessary rules, laws, contracts and pacts; it refuses to be a literary genre like any other'.⁵² Nevertheless, this fluidity has not precluded the emergence of a canon of 'good' autobiography. This has been dominated by a Eurocentrist, masculinist tradition which, in excluding women and minority groups, has compounded the notion that a good autobiography is one scoring highly in the elitist test that measures the extent and influence of the writer on his time.⁵³ It is a form of elitism further strengthened by the requirement that works should be of a 'literary' standard. Essentially, the theory has been that autobiography is the preserve of 'great men' and that somehow its ('well written') presentations are of a transparent 'self'. I make the point about this narrow definition of autobiography, not because I want to argue that particular slave and survivor texts should or should not be regarded as autobiography, but because the ideas of some progressive, mainly feminist theorists who are challenging the traditional definition are highly relevant to this study.

The work of theorists who embrace a wider definition of autobiography, a definition that does not seek to discount the ordinary individual, is useful because

⁵² James Olney, 'Autobiography and the cultural moment: a thematic, historical and bibliographical introduction', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. James Olney (Princeton and Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 3-27 (especially, p. 25).

⁵³ See Laura Marcus, *Autobiographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), particularly pp. 1 and 153.

some of the other principles they espouse encourage a different way of understanding texts which focus on the writer's life. Susan Stanford Friedman, for example, in observing the drawback of individualistic paradigms as not considering the role collective consciousness plays in the lives of women and minorities, makes a particularly valid point for a project of this kind.⁵⁴ An approach encouraging the consideration of the role of others in the writer's life is a positive thing in looking at slave and survivor texts in relation to place identity. The social relations in places, and the people who help generate them are a crucial element of that identity. And other people are also important in the writers' lives for the part they play in the sense of self which individuals develop and in the personal identities which are constructed - as demonstrated by Blassingame's work on the slave narratives, where he argues for the value of the slave community in promoting self-esteem for its individuals and allowing for the development of different, non-stereotypical personality types.⁵⁵

Acknowledging that, with notable exceptions, slave narratives and survivor accounts may not generally fit the tradition of autobiography, not least because in representing his or her social group, the writer is compromised in his or her attempt to achieve one of autobiography's goals, that is, an understanding of one's self and life, may prompt the question of which category it is into which they do fall. There is a clear and broadly accepted distinction between autobiography and memoir, the former being distinguished as a text in which the life of the author is central to the written work, in contrast with a memoir which portrays the writer as someone merely observing the events of which he or she writes.⁵⁶ Although it may be possible to categorize the examined texts accordingly, there would be little if any point in doing that for the purpose of this thesis. As Liz Stanley, the feminist theorist, has argued, although there are differences between different forms of life writing, 'the same analytic apparatus is required [...] for the same questions and problematics demand critical enquiry'.⁵⁷ Furthermore, as Jerome Bruner has said,

⁵⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's autobiographical selves: theory and practice', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* ed. Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 34-62 (especially p. 56).

⁵⁵ See Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, p. 285, where he noted that: 'From the outset, the most important component of personality is self-esteem.' See also Jonathan Glover, *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity* (London: Penguin Group, 1988) pp. 176-177, where he refers to the effect of other people on an individual's self-awareness.

⁵⁶ Georg Misch, a theorist of autobiography, made a distinction between autobiography and memoir which is broadly accepted among both traditional and more radical theorists. A discussion of his contribution is to be found in Marcus, *Autobiographical Discourses*, pp. 148-153.

⁵⁷ Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 3.

it is true that any text can be read as revelatory of the author, so long as it satisfies certain conditions regarding his or her memories and ‘perspicuousness in communications about a private domain’.⁵⁸ So, it is enough here to know that I am dealing with autobiographical writings (a convenient catch-all phrase), and to be aware of something else regarding the reception of such texts. To paraphrase Stanley, the writer’s life and self is understood through the reader’s own lived life and other written lives. This reader phenomenon is a result of the ideological effect of the *Bildungsroman*, the literary device whereby the writer conveys his or her triumph over adversity, and is a reminder that, in the audience of any autobiographical writing, there will be an expectation of what a life should look like, an expectation which itself may help dictate what the writer chooses to include and exclude.⁵⁹ The point about audience expectation is further interesting and significant because it leads to consideration of how closely slave narrators and survivors, or more accurately their texts, conform to or breach those expectations, and it heightens awareness of the pressures on the writers and the boundaries against which they were sometimes straining.

As far as autobiographical slave narratives are concerned, their authors were easily able to comply with the audience requirement for the presentation of a linear and progressive life. Virtually all the narrators were escapees, and their stories focus on and then move from the writer’s recognition of his or her condition of enslavement, to his or her determination to flee slavery and achievement of that goal. Of course, as it was lived, a slave narrator’s previous life would have been quite different from that of his or her reader, and any criticism of the narrative’s quality as autobiography must be tempered by the knowledge that the reader was not interested in becoming familiar with the individual slave, but in getting a firsthand look at slavery, and the narrative reflected this to some degree.⁶⁰ But despite the difference in the writer’s and reader’s lives, and the latter’s relative lack of interest in the slave himself, as he recounted it, the male writer was able to show his audience that he possessed some of the attributes that a nineteenth-century American man would be expected to exhibit. For example, the desirability of physical courage and strength is repeatedly acknowledged in the narratives - Douglass’ and William Green’s determination to resist a beating has already been

⁵⁸ Jerome Bruner, ‘The autobiographical process’, in *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* ed. Robert Folkenflik (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 38-56. The quote is from endnote number 7, p. 242.

⁵⁹ Stanley, *The Autobiographical I*, pp. 12-14.

⁶⁰ Beth Maclay Doriani, ‘Black womanhood in nineteenth-century America: subversion and self-construction in two women’s autobiographies’, *American Quarterly*, 43 (2) 1991, pp. 199-222, especially p. 206, made the point about where the readers’ interest lay.

mentioned here. Also important were qualities such as resourcefulness and intelligence, which could enhance the image of the protagonist as a self-made man, a notion of manhood which had gained prominence in ante-bellum America.⁶¹ Demonstration of this particular brand of masculinity was often through the writer's recognition of the importance of literacy and his pursuit of that quality. It was much more difficult for the narrators to deal positively with the reality of the slave woman's life. Unable to show her truthfully as having the qualities of the feminine ideal - innocent and aspiring to motherhood through marriage - because she was vulnerable to sexual assault, slave writers were also faced with the pervasive perception that slave women were black Jezebels, an image bolstered by their rate of reproduction and by their clothing which often left their bodies more exposed than those of Southern white women.⁶² As a result of these limiting factors, male narrators depicted the slave woman as a victim.⁶³ This victimhood often combined the elements of sex and violence in a single episode, catering for the reader's expectations of sensationalism, but if this is seen as an indication of the significance of the reader's role in the production of slave narratives, then it must also be acknowledged that the writers were able to use black women's victimhood to further their cause. Because the representations of the female slave were at odds with the ideal of womanhood, there was the possibility that they would at least elicit sympathy for the female slave. What a male-written portrayal of slave women did not do was undermine readers' ideas about womanhood. But in contrast to the men's narratives, Harriet Jacobs's pseudonymous account did amount to a challenge to readers' expectations of what a woman's life and characteristics might look like.

Although Jacobs complied with generic convention to some extent in that like many men narrators she recorded the moment she became aware of her condition of enslavement, and her narrative ultimately revealed a successful escape to the North, her account is less conformist by other literary standards.

⁶¹ Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), pp. 3-5, refers to the three different phases of the concept of manhood in nineteenth-century America. The notion of what he calls the 'communal manhood' of the early decades was eclipsed by the idea of the self-made man which was in turn supplanted, in the late nineteenth century, by the idea of 'passionate manhood'.

⁶² White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, pp. 29-30, notes the popular image of the black woman as a Jezebel whose life was governed by her libido. White goes on to consider the development of the other popular image of the slave woman as Mammy, claiming this came in the thirty years before the Civil War because it was in keeping with the maternal or Victorian ideal of womanhood that was then prevalent in nineteenth-century America.

⁶³ Foster, pp. 63-65, discusses the social and literary effects on slave narratives 'which were highly influenced by contemporary racial attitudes and literary expectations', pointing out that the black writer was 'perhaps more than any other nineteenth-century writer restricted and inhibited by the attitudes and limitations of those for whom he wrote'.

Nineteenth-century literature reinforced the myth that women should be without independence and agency, should experience only higher feelings of the heart rather than physical lust, and become mothers only after marriage.⁶⁴ Jacobs's text has been described as 'subverting readers' expectations' in beginning to revise the understanding of black personhood and as showing that 'the world of the black woman demanded a revised definition of true womanhood'.⁶⁵ The breach with convention lies in Jacobs's portrayal of herself as a woman who exercised control over her sexuality by taking a white lover and giving birth to his two children. It is the story of a slave woman who, despite persistent harassment by her master, refuses to show her slave life as one of victimhood only. The challenge to contemporary thinking about womanhood that was posed by this picture of a strong woman exercising agency is compounded by Jacobs's references to the actions of other women, black and white, who featured in her life. Jacobs's maternal grandmother, who, among other things, remonstrated with Jacobs's owner for his treatment of her, and the white wife of a slaveholder who agreed to help Jacobs hide, are two examples of women who could hardly be described as fitting the submissive ideal.⁶⁶

If the slave writers were able to satisfy audience expectations of a linear and progressive life, then that is where they diverge most noticeably from the survivor accounts examined here. As Barbara Foley has pointed out, the survivor is faced with the task of communicating an experience which is beyond that of his or her audience, as, indeed, was the slave. But the reader of survivors' autobiographical writing will find that expectations of a text which will ultimately reveal its writer to have overcome the effects of that experience are thwarted.⁶⁷ The survivors' accounts I have examined match the profile Foley has identified in their refusal to conform to the familiar pattern of traditional autobiography. Survivors' writings tend to show a reversal of the usual model of growth; instead, the characteristic movement is from life to death, followed by a silence.⁶⁸ Among the six texts

⁶⁴ Doriani, 'Black womanhood in nineteenth-century America', especially pp. 203-205, comments on the role of the seduction and domestic novels in promoting the ideal of American womanhood as pious, pure, domestic, and submissive. Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 279-280, noted that, although women had always symbolized in bourgeois fiction 'the heart' and 'feeling', the latter was carefully distinguished from mere lust.

⁶⁵ Doriani, pp. 200 and 207, respectively.

⁶⁶ Two examples of Jacobs's references to her grandmother's spirit may be found in Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 560 and pp. 596-597. The reference to Jacobs's white benefactress is on pp. 608-609.

⁶⁷ Foley, 'Fact, fiction, fascism: testimony and mimesis in Holocaust narratives', especially pp. 332 and 340.

⁶⁸ Foley, pp. 338 and 339, has said that the movement from life to death is a common characteristic of Holocaust memoirs. They show a four-part development: life before deportation; shock and despair at the death of relatives; adaptation and survival in the camps; and departure

studied here, four were written between twenty and fifty-five years after World War Two, yet only one of those - Samuel Pizar's 1980 autobiography - goes meaningfully beyond 1945, the other three provide only brief outlines of life after the Holocaust. Nomberg-Przytyk's account of Auschwitz ends abruptly with her return to Lublin after liberation in 1945, and Zabuski closes his story with a short description of his fifty postwar years, while Mielnicki's life after 1945 is summarized by his co-writer in a cursory epilogue. This silence or truncation adds to the unsettling effect of the texts' content by encouraging the assumption, right or wrong, that the writer's life has been dominated by the Holocaust experience.

The survivors' writings are further unconventional by traditional autobiographical standards in that they tend towards a lack of individual perspective.⁶⁹ That particular characteristic is not evident in the book by Pizar, but it is certainly the case that some of the other texts, for example, Nomberg-Przytyk's and Soltz's, do place considerable emphasis on people other than the writer. In this regard, the point to bear in mind is not that the reader is denied greater access to the life of the author, although, of course, that may be true, but that these writers were also constrained by one of the very things that compelled them to write, that is the need to bear witness to those who died. Their writings are not an exercise in self-indulgence.

Having considered some of the aspects of autobiography and their implications in the examination of slave and survivor writings, I turn now to the role of memory in the construction of personal and place identity. Although the complexity of memory can be a daunting prospect, the relatively recent research it has generated offers great scope in the examination of slave and Holocaust survivor texts, and I want to consider some general points about social and individual memory for its implications in the production of those accounts. My concern is not with the hard scientific workings of memory, its neurology, but with the findings and theories of those who explore memory for its psychological significance. Of course, memory is always a basic requirement of autobiographical writing - all accounts come after the moment they describe. In the case of books written by survivors, those in which I am principally interested are not, to my knowledge, supported by contemporaneous diaries or notes, that is, no writer has indicated that he or she has 'written up' from a previous record. The same applies to the slave narratives, some of whose writers simply did not possess the tool of writing, even after their

from the camp to a life that could only parody normality. And after the description of escape there is silence.

⁶⁹ Foley, p. 338, attributes this lack of individuality to the writers' priority with showing the Nazi process of dehumanization. The authors' 'revulsion against the negation of their identities tends to be couched in very universalistic terms'.

escape.⁷⁰ Frequently, even those slaves who were literate, opted, like some survivors, to defer writing their accounts until years after the events to which they refer.⁷¹ Essentially, the texts being examined here were written by people relying exclusively on memory to write their lives.

Awareness of this dependency upon memory inevitably prompts the question of its reliability, especially if the writer was aged. Some cognitive psychologists, like Alan Baddeley, acknowledge that older people have poorer recall, but also recognize the compensatory value of practising memory, that ‘working at it’, hones it.⁷² This tendency to practise, which may mitigate inaccuracy, is clearly not confined to the elderly and is something which, with the matter of accuracy generally, I shall address later. For now, I want to highlight a number of points arising from something related to the habit of practising individual memory, relevant to slave and survivor writers alike, whatever their age. Social memory has been succinctly defined by James Fentress and Chris Wickham as coming into being when individual memory is talked about.⁷³ Obviously, such discussion need not involve a great number of participants - as few as two will suffice - but regardless of scale, social memory as a concept is very important in this project because it is instrumental in the formation of personal and place identity, in that memories are not only an individual’s own, but are learned, borrowed and inherited from his or her family, community and culture.⁷⁴ In short, the memory of the writers under review has a significance which does not necessarily wholly lie or originate in the private domain of the rememberer. Furthermore, any milieu where memory is practised and includes others constitutes an intercourse that must be recognized as being part of a construction process which always has the potential for two-way

⁷⁰ Literacy and illiteracy are recurring themes in slave narratives. Charles Stearns who was the amanuensis and editor of Henry “Box” Brown was candid about Brown’s ignorance. In his preface to *Narrative of Henry Box Brown who Escaped from Slavery, Enclosed in a Box Three Feet Long, Two Wide, and Two and a Half High. Written from a Statement of Facts Made by Himself. With Remarks upon the Remedy for Slavery by Charles Stearns* (Boston: Brown and Stearns, 1849); online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/boxbrown/boxbrown.html>, p. vi, Stearns wrote: ‘The narrator is freshly from a land where books and schools are forbidden under severe penalties, to all in his former condition, and of course knoweth not letters, having never learned them’.

⁷¹ Slaves who delayed writing their accounts include Harriet Jacobs, who wrote twenty years after her escape, and Lewis Clarke and William Grimes who waited five and ten years respectively before publishing their stories. Survivors often waited even longer. Samuel Pizar did not write his book until 1980, while Michel Mielnicki’s account was not published until 2000.

⁷² Alan Baddeley, ‘The psychology of remembering and forgetting’, in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 33-60 (especially p. 48).

⁷³ James Fentress and Chris Wickham eds. *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. x.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. viii, where the point is made about the construction, sustenance and transmission of a common stock of memory.

traffic: social memory is created or augmented by individuals' memories, but, in turn, it has the capacity to supplement those private recollections. Reminiscing can be a private and unshared activity which may not involve verbal discussion or even articulation of the memory; but even in a totally private scenario, there must always be the possibility of the rememberer being influenced by social memory if he or she has knowledge of it, whenever the particular event is under personal review. This may be increasingly so with the passage of time, as Zofia Kubar, a Jew living in Warsaw from 1940, openly admits. It was decades before Kubar's text was published, in 1989, and in it she tells of the reactions to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943, drawing attention to the vulnerability of her memory:

I have gone back to those days so often that I can hardly distinguish among the sources of my knowledge of the events - what I witnessed myself, what I have been told by other people, what I have read in books. But my memory and my own experience have probably faded, given the total catastrophe.⁷⁵

The constructed and therefore changeable nature of memory, social and individual, is another issue to which I shall return, but it is already clear that social memory is potentially powerful in its effects. Another point to note is that its ownership and consumption can be problematic. Slave narratives, as well as functioning as abolitionist propaganda, played a more subtle role in creating and preserving a social memory of their writers and those of whom they wrote, as do survivor accounts. As a manifestation of a personal memory, such texts add to, or may create, a pool of social memory, the ownership and consumption of which it is important to be aware because of their relation to the production of those accounts.

Slave narratives were not written for a slave audience, but for the white middle-class whose expectations had to be accommodated, as had the agenda of the abolitionists who often sponsored the accounts. So, in addition to their violence, the narratives usually feature a protagonist who strives for the ideal of nineteenth-century American masculinity - the self-made man with heroic tendencies, as exemplified by the narratives of Frederick Douglass, who, as well as describing his physical prowess, also made much of the fact that he taught himself to be literate, and Henry Bibb, who, despite the danger, made repeated attempts to rescue his wife and daughter from slavery. Slave narrators had a ready audience, so it is unsurprising that the social memory of slavery was constructed principally to suit the demands of its sponsor and contemporary consumer rather than those of its

⁷⁵ Zofia Kubar, *Double Identity: A Memoir* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 33.

victims. As Nellie McKay has pointed out, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that these texts became the sites of history and memory that could be excavated to give to African-Americans a history of slavery as experienced by their ancestors.⁷⁶

Obviously for survivors, too, the construction of a social memory through the creation of a text is no less susceptible to the demands and constraints of its time. Unlike the slave narrator, the survivor did not have a willing audience, particularly in the immediate postwar years. The reluctance to hear survivors' stories may have begun to lessen following the Eichmann trial in 1961, but that did not mean either that their accounts became less agonizing to recall or that they could easily proliferate everywhere.⁷⁷ Mielnicki delayed accepting help in the production of his account partly, at least, because, for many years he found his memories private and painful to a degree that rendered them beyond public articulation: 'John Munro probed my memory as I never thought possible, and I have shared with him, as with no other person, all the secrets of my life'. If the process of telling his story was a personal relief for Mielnicki, that was evidently increased by being able to keep a promise made during the war. Writing in 2000, Mielnicki continued as follows:

I am further grateful that at last I have been able to keep a promise made more than half a century ago that I would bear full witness to the unspeakable horrors inflicted upon the Jewish people by the Hitlerian hordes.⁷⁸

Mielnicki waited a long time, but presumably he did eventually receive strong and influential support in the form of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Trust and the eminent historian, Martin Gilbert. Other writers in other places who felt able to 'go public' earlier did not find the experience of shaping social memory easy. And nowhere was this more true than in Poland.

Among the writers examined here, Nomberg-Przytyk is unique in having experienced great difficulty in bringing two manuscripts to publication (once in Poland, and once in America), and both episodes demonstrate the sensitivity about what it is that is allowed to form social memory. Nomberg-Przytyk was denied the opportunity to make a contribution to Holocaust memory in her own country, with *Zydzie Oswiencimiu* (*The Jews of Auschwitz*), because of its references to Jews.

⁷⁶ Nellie Y. McKay, 'The journals of Charlotte L. Forten-Grimké: *les lieux de memoire* in African-American women's autobiography', in *History and Memory in African-American Culture* eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 261-271 (especially p. 262).

⁷⁷ Robert Rozett, 'The scribes of memory', *Yad Vashem Magazine*, 10 (Summer 1998), pp. 6-7, notes how the Eichmann trial was seen as a watershed regarding public discussion of the Holocaust.

⁷⁸ Mielnicki, pp. 17-18.

When the requirement of her editor that these should be removed is considered against the background of 1960s' Poland, it is easy to see that Nomberg-Przytyk had fallen foul of Poland's 'memory keepers'. By the time she was writing, a process that had started in Poland in the early 1960s was underway though not yet complete. The Holocaust would become something that was 'no longer a Jewish property', in that the three million Polish Jews who died would simply be added to the same number of Poles to become six million Polish victims.⁷⁹

Nomberg-Przytyk's book *Kolumny Samsona (The Pillars of Samson)* was published in 1966, containing numerous references to Jewish suffering in Bialystok's ghetto. By 1967, with the Arab-Israeli war, the climate had worsened to the extent that *Zydzie Oswiencimiu* was unacceptable to those who helped decide what should reach the public domain. For refusing to withdraw the references to Jews, Nomberg-Przytyk was doomed to wait almost twenty years before her story of Auschwitz was published (in America). Now, the earlier book, *Kolumny Samsona*, is considered too left wing for an American publication of the English translation; so, forty years after it was written and published in Poland, and twenty years after work began on its translation, it is only today (and in the United Kingdom) that that book is about to be brought to an Anglophone readership.⁸⁰

Having highlighted the fraught nature of social memory, I now want to consider the role of individual memory, specifically, with regard to its effects on the rememberer's personal identity and his or her sense of place. Individual memory has only relatively recently been the subject of research, the reason for its neglect probably being the complexity of the topic.⁸¹ Certainly, it is clear that among theorists there are contentious areas, and others which are only incompletely understood. However, there is some agreement about important points that have a general application and which are of particular relevance in providing a sound basis for the project of looking at memory and identity. Memory's role in personal identity construction is paramount, and as already noted, memory itself is constructed. Craig Barclay, a psychologist, has written: 'Autobiographical

⁷⁹ See Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989). On pp. 35-36, Irwin-Zarecka discusses the need to understand what happened to the memory of Polish Jews in Poland through, among other things, consideration of the attitude of Poland's memory keepers. Her comments regarding the policy of official historiography in the 1960s are on p. 62. Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 82-83, also refers to the appropriation of the Holocaust, noting, for example, a Polish encyclopaedic handbook in which Jewish victims in every category of the Nazi camps are 'subsumed under Polish victims'.

⁸⁰ See p. 17 and footnote number 41.

⁸¹ Baddeley, 'The psychology of remembering and forgetting', p. 48.

remembering is an improvisational activity that forms emergent selves which give us a sense of needed comfort and a culturally valued sense of personal coherence over time.⁸² It is important to note this improvisational quality because it helps to relieve the concern mentioned earlier about the accuracy of individual memory. According to another psychologist, David Rubin: 'Autobiographical memories are constructed. This does not mean that they are accurate or inaccurate, but that they are not encoded, stored and retrieved as wholes but rather are created at retrieval.'⁸³ It follows that because it is constructed, autobiographical memory is changeable, and is never over and done with. This capacity for change, though, need not be a problem - it just means there is a need to recognize and allow for the character of individual memory, as some slave and survivor writers have done. Among the more famous Holocaust survivor-writers, Primo Levi drew attention to the unstable nature of memory, but less prominent authors also see memory as the subject even while they are subject to it.⁸⁴ To refer again briefly to Kubar, she not only acknowledged the vulnerability of individual memory to the social, but also its imperfection in retaining the personal detail of even a momentous occasion. She tried to telephone her cousin on 19 April 1943, the start of the Warsaw uprising:

I dialed the number. I can't remember whether the [']phone just kept ringing or a man's voice finally said there was no Rachel there.

⁸² Craig Barclay, 'Autobiographical remembering: narrative constraints on objectified selves' in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 94-125 (especially p. 95). Practitioners of other disciplines have also noted the primacy of memory's role in identity. In philosophy, Glover, *I*, p. 141, wrote: 'If all my memories were obliterated, this would obviously have a disastrous effect on my sense of who I am'; while the anthropologist, Gavin Lucas, 'Forgetting the past', *Anthropology Today* 13 (1) (1997), pp. 8-14, has commented upon the significance of memory for both personal and collective identity.

The phrase 'autobiographical memory' is used to refer to episodic (context-bound) memory defined by Martin Conway, *Autobiographical Memory: An Introduction* (Milton Keynes and Bristol, Pennsylvania: Open University Press, 1990), p. 3, as occurring when a 'person remembers an experienced event containing spatio-temporal knowledge' and is distinct from semantic (context-free) memory which is the remembrance of information about states of the world; for example, 'canaries have wings'.

⁸³ 'Introduction', in *Remembering Our Past* ed. David C. Rubin, p. 4. Rubin's view, however, is not the only one. For a slightly different perspective see William F. Brewer's essay: 'What is autobiographical memory?' in *Autobiographical Memory* ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 25-49, where he argued for what he called the 'partially reconstructed position'. In view of the relatively recent research into autobiographical memory and the fact that Rubin's and Brewer's views are not wholly opposed, it seems unnecessary and inappropriate to be overly concerned with any ongoing debate in this study.

⁸⁴ Gillian Banner, *Holocaust Literature: Schulz, Levi, Spiegelman and the Memory of the Offence* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), pp. 87-130 discusses how Levi reflected upon memory. See especially pp. 115-116 which refer to his recognition of how memory changes.

The treachery of my memory upsets me, though this detail is no longer important.⁸⁵

The fallibility of memory was also acknowledged by the ex-slave writer who, while seeking to assure the reader of the reliability of the slave's memory, also realised it would be foolish to pretend his recall was total. William Grimes's narrative came in 1825, about ten years after his escape, and makes several specific references to his enduring memory of cruelty, yet at the end of his account even he acknowledges the shortcomings of memory, albeit to emphasize that he had understated the extent of his suffering: 'I may sometimes be a little mistaken, as I have to write from memory, and there is a great deal I have omitted from want of recollection at the time of writing.'⁸⁶

For this study, the important thing about the fragility of memory is that accuracy is not the only or overriding issue. Instead, it is the fact of the relationship between memory and meaning that is paramount. This is so even though that relationship is dynamic: the attribution of meaning comes only over time, it may be represented at the expense of accuracy and the meaning may change as the rememberer's needs change.⁸⁷ This quality of changeability is a reminder that memory is not merely an unbidden indulgence, nor is it totally innocent. It performs a function, and demands are made of it all the time. As a broad demonstration of this, it is only necessary to point to an experience common to many Holocaust survivor-writers. The memory of places from which they were deported had a meaning which was not necessarily constant throughout their lives. Even though the place may not have been actually revisited, it could acquire a different meaning, through memory, at a later stage. As well as this fluidity, autobiographical memory has a further feature that is especially relevant here. Such memory is always egocentric, a characteristic that is welcome in an exercise looking at how the individual is affected by places.⁸⁸ Even so, welcome though that quality is, it is as well to bear in mind its downside when trying to identify and assess the role of other people in the writer's life. The slave writer, particularly, is reluctant to introduce others as 'main players' in his story (apart, that is, from his usually villainous master), but, as already mentioned, other people are vitally important for

⁸⁵ Kubar, *Double Identity*, p. 32.

⁸⁶ See Grimes, *Life of William Grimes*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 232. Examples of his insistence that his memory was sound may be found in phrases such as: 'I can never forget' (p. 194); and 'I can remember her cruelty with emotions of indignation' (p. 189).

⁸⁷ John A. Robinson, 'Perspective, meaning and remembering' in *Remembering Our Past* ed. David C. Rubin, pp. 199-217 (especially pp. 201-203), is useful in his discussion of the dynamism of meaning.

⁸⁸ Those who comment on egocentricity in autobiographical memory are Baddeley, p. 52; Conway, *Autobiographical Memory*, p. 97; Robinson, *ibid.*, p. 210.

their contribution to any individual's sense of self and to the identity he or she constructs. There is one final aspect of autobiographical memory to note here, and that is its connection with place and space. In his essay, 'Domains of memory', Ulric Neisser addressed the question of the relation between autobiographical memory and space and place, and though he was concerned with the neural system of memory, his hypothesis that spatial and autobiographical memory are linked in some fundamental way is relevant to this thesis.⁸⁹ Neisser's view may be seen as one that privileges the status of place in individuals' lives, as is that of the anthropologist Katherine Platt, who has written that the human race has a 'creative genius for making and a desperation to make the world meaningful [...] [and] the meanings of place are one of our special passions'.⁹⁰

These two qualities of place, its link with memory and its emotional significance, encapsulate the profundity of an individual's sense of particular places, the main focus of this study. Before moving on to discuss what is meant by a sense of place, I want first to stress a point about personal identity which is very relevant for a study concerned with place identity, and then to outline a theory of what comprises place identity. Personal identity is a highly complex and multifaceted quality defying easy definition, yet a fundamental requirement for the psychological well-being of individuals. This intensely personal and variable quality adds to the elusiveness of place identity as an object of scrutiny simply because personal identity and place identity are interdependent. As David Ley has argued, 'place is a negotiated reality, a social construction by a purposeful set of actors. But the relationship is mutual, for places in turn develop and reinforce the identity of the social group that claims them'.⁹¹ This mutuality is of a changeable nature, guaranteeing that place, like personal identity, is a dynamic and not easily understood phenomenon. Some social geographers, though, have provided a working theory of place identity which allows for the consideration of how two disparate groups like nineteenth-century American slaves and twentieth-century east European Jews experienced their home places, and what effect those locales had on them and vice versa. For the slaves particularly, who are much less explicit about certain aspects of the places of enslavement, a theory of place identity is a way of mining the more subtle references of their texts.

⁸⁹ Ulric Neisser, 'Domains of memory' in *Memory: Interdisciplinary Approaches* eds. Paul R. Solomon et al (New York, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1988), pp. 67-83.

⁹⁰ Katherine Platt, 'Places of experience and the experience of place', in *The Longing for Home* ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1996), pp. 112-127 (especially p. 116).

⁹¹ Cited by John Eyles, *Senses of Place* (Warrington, Cheshire: Silverbrook Press, 1985), p. 4.

Despite its complexity, place identity may be conveniently dissected into its basic constituent parts. For this study, it is appropriate to give more attention to some components than to others, though the importance of all and their inseparability cannot be overlooked.⁹² The first, most striking and relatively straightforward element of place identity is that of physical setting. Physical, geographical properties of a place and the built or created landscape both form part of the environment which has the potential to be experienced by individuals. These may not always be the object of residents' attention, and certainly not of those who write accounts of their lives. For slave writers, one of the most notable absences in their narratives is that of references to slave quarters. But it is inconceivable that the lack of detail on slaves' homesteads was either because they had no effect on their occupants, or because the quarters did not matter to the physical appearance of the places where they were sited. Rather, it was the case that what went on inside their quarters was of greater significance to slaves. That geographical or created physical characteristics acquire a kind of taken-for-granted quality, undeserving of particular mention, is not an indication they are irrelevant.

Closely linked to the physical setting of a place is the social relations which occur there. These are varied and variable; they include work, social life and political activity and thus may be individual or communal. These relations will not always be confined to a particular locale and the combination of local and wider social activities over a period of time is what makes places distinctive, but in performing these activities, either locally or more widely, people, too, may be deeply affected by them.⁹³ William Wells Brown, a slave living in St. Louis, Missouri in the 1820s and 1830s, was caught up in the city's commercial activities which went well beyond the local, when he was compelled to ply the Mississippi between St. Louis and New Orleans, assisting in the business of slave trading for a year. 'It was', wrote Brown, 'the longest year I ever lived.'⁹⁴ Without giving closer thought to the effect on him personally, this experience of Brown's makes another significant point about social relations. Because they are characterized by inequality, there is always an element of power, and encounters with the social and economic manifestations of that power shape and affect all lives.⁹⁵

⁹² I have taken the three basic elements of place identity from Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), pp. 47-48.

⁹³ See Richard Meegan, 'Local worlds', in *Geographical Worlds* eds. J. Allen and Doreen Massey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 53-104 (especially p. 55).

⁹⁴ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*, in Taylor ed., vol. one, p. 700.

⁹⁵ Eyles, *Senses of Place*, p. 2, in his critique of the traditions which have pertained in social geographers' interest in people's response to places, wrote: 'Further, place and the experience of place seem to be regarded as unrelated to the forces of which we are only dimly aware but which

People's everyday experiences are further crucial. Their experiences of a locale, in terms of its physical environment and its social relations, generate meanings and thus contribute to its identity. Meanings or significance are a subtle and abstract element of place identity and, importantly, cannot be separated out from people's intentions for a place. In recognizing the human factor in all this, it follows, first, that meaning is not an inherent quality of a place, though it may be linked to or originate in its physicality, and second, that neither meaning nor intention are unalterable states. The Nazi intention to ghettoize Bialystok, and the implementation of that decision in August 1941, illustrates the point. The physical change to the city, the erection of fences and gates and the relocation of fifty thousand Jews into a non-Jewish neighbourhood cannot have been without significance for all Bialystokers, be they Jewish or not (or, indeed, for the occupying Germans there). The concept of meanings and intentions is complex not only because they have the capacity for change, but also because these will not necessarily be the same thing to all interested people at any particular time. Again, to take Bialystok as an example, it is clearly the case that for the Nazis who arrived as occupiers in June 1941, the city did not hold the same meaning as it did for contemporary Bialystokers. The incomers may, perhaps, have felt indifference to the city as they arrived, but even those whose subsequent experience of the place did not leave them feeling neutral about it, would have found it meaningful in a way quite different from the locals for whom Bialystok was the place of their families, home, and employment.

There is another thing about the meaning of places which is very important for this study. Although it is clear that the meaning of a place may be different to different groups or individuals at the same time, that is not to say that the place will necessarily have only one meaning for an individual or group at that time, as is shown by the slave experience. Places occupied by slaves may have been more or less physically and psychologically painful for and demanding of them, but such locales also had a positive meaning for their slaves. Slave writers may provide frequent and emotionally charged descriptions of enforced family separations, but to repeat the reference to Blassingame, a slave's quarters were vital in being a place where through his relationships with people other than his owner, he could benefit from a developing self-esteem. So, although the place of enslavement meant exactly that - a slave had to endure slavery there - it also meant a place where he

significantly shape our lives (eg work, power, domination).' Gillian Rose, 'Place and identity: a sense of place', in *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, eds. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 87-132 (especially p. 89), following Eyles, also refers to the fact that 'feelings about place are caught up in the power relations that structure all our lives'.

could reap the rewards of family or other emotional ties to positive effect. In short, places just do not consist in a simplistic, fixed quality - different people, individuals and groups, inevitably assign different meanings to places, which may change. This diversity of meaning indicates the complicated nature and effect of experiencing places, and this experience itself is closely related to, and an important part of, what may be described as a sense of place.

The phrase 'a sense of place', frequently used by social geographers, is a versatile term which requires clarification. Edward Relph has used it to refer to the character or spirit of a place, while Gillian Rose's use of it is to indicate that people have the faculty of thinking and feeling about places.⁹⁶ In this study, I use the phrase in the same way as Rose, and I also use the term 'sense of a particular place' to make clear that I am referring to the way a writer remembered, felt or thought about a specific locale. I should add that I am treating this very personal phenomenon, of thinking and feeling about particular places, as the final component of place identity because of its close relation to the other such components - social relations, which give rise to experience, which in turn generates meaning.

It hardly requires saying that a sense of a particular place has the potential for limitless fluidity. Any individual's range and complexity of thoughts and feelings may alter as his or her contemporary experience of a place changes, or as his or her memory of that experience changes. The highly personal and dynamic nature of a sense of a place, or sometimes places, is the key feature in my examination of slave and survivor texts. These are considered in one, or both, of two ways. First, for what they may reveal of the writer's sense of a place as he or she experienced that place, by thinking about what his or her recorded actions and attitudes may indicate, and second, depending upon when they were written, by thinking about how that sense may have endured or changed. This necessarily involves looking at possible causes of that sense and here I want to outline the argument I have deployed. The cultural influences theory advocated by Rose - that a sense of place develops as a result of meaning people give to their lives - is more convincing than the view that a sense of place is somehow innate.⁹⁷ The former theory seems more persuasive because it allows for consideration of the variation in the thoughts and feelings, to be found in people in close proximity, about the same location, and of what effect external variable factors may have on their sense of a particular place. As a straightforward example, it is easy to see how slaves and slave owners would

⁹⁶ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, p. 48. Rose, 'Place and identity', especially p. 88.

⁹⁷ See Rose, 'Place and identity', p. 98-105, where she discusses the various explanations for the cause of a sense of place.

think and feel quite differently about the particular locale which was their mutual place given their polarised encounters with the social and economic expressions of power. In this way, senses of a place can be seen as not only varied, but as an intrinsic part of the social relations which always pertain. Moreover, in recognizing a sense of a place is a result of cultural influences, it follows that culture interacts with place and identity. Through access to fundamental practices in a culture, like language, itself one of the systems of meaning in it, individuals have a position within the system. They acquire a sense of belonging and of knowing who they are which adds to the quality of being a specified person; in other words, personal identity is enhanced.⁹⁸ A corollary of this effect on identity is the stimulation of thoughts and feelings about the locale - a sense of a place, which in turn also contributes to the place's identity. Place, culture and identity, then, are qualities which cannot be disentangled. 'Place' is as much socially constructed - through meanings and intentions, social relations and individuals' sense of it - and as fluid as is, say, language. People will be affected by and affect places just by being there and, as will be shown in this study, people can be affected by places in which they are not, and perhaps never have been.

Still referring to the phenomenon of a sense of place, another geographer whose work has relevance here is John Eyles. Eyles carried out a study of people living in Towcester, Northamptonshire, to examine how they felt about living in the town, and why. Although his investigation was of individuals currently residing in the location, Eyles's classification of their various sense of the place has been both useful - for providing examples of what causes such a sense to emerge - and fascinating - in that he identified no fewer than sixty-eight forms of a sense of place which he then whittled down to a broad group of ten.⁹⁹ Three of these have proved to resonate strongly among the slave and survivor writers. The most common sense Eyles found was a 'social' sense of place, described as one dominated by the importance attributed to social ties and interaction. The second form that is of interest here, is a 'nostalgic' sense of place where feelings about a place are based on the past. For the slaves who escaped from their places of enslavement and the Jews who were uprooted from theirs, the potential relevance of this category goes without saying. The third form of a sense of place, 'based on "roots"', is described as one where rootedness takes the form of family ties in the district and where a feeling of belonging is added to the familiarity which comes from basing much of one's life in a specific place. This sense of belonging, or

⁹⁸ See Stuart Hall, 'New cultures for old', in *A Place in the World?* eds. Massey and Jess, pp. 175-213 (especially p. 176).

⁹⁹ Eyles, pp. 122-123, refers to the information from 162 respondents.

rootedness, is a condition recognized as being of overwhelming importance, if difficult to explain. Relph cites Simone Weil, who wrote in 1955:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of the community, which preserves in living shape certain particular expectations for the future. This participation is a natural one in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, condition of birth, profession and social surroundings.¹⁰⁰

And Relph himself notes the profound effect of feeling rooted. The individual benefits from a 'firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things'.¹⁰¹ There are myriad ways of encouraging the condition of rootedness; the nature of social relations in any place which may facilitate that development has already been noted as varied and variable and the slave and survivor accounts studied here show, more fundamentally, that merely being among people perceived to share similar characteristics or attributes, can also encourage a feeling of rootedness.

Clearly, the various forms of a sense of a place are not mutually exclusive, something which in itself confirms how complex a sense of place may be. This complexity is compounded by the relation of a sense of place to another quality relevant to an individual's experience of a place. The condition of what Relph has described as 'insideness' of a place is a useful one of which to be aware. According to Relph, there are varying degrees of insideness, and, indeed, 'outsideness', which indicate the extent to which a person identifies with or against a place. In examining slave and survivor texts, it is identifying the existence or absence of the writer's identification with a place that allows for consideration of how that individual is affected by it. I do not make extensive references to the various levels of insideness discussed by Relph, and I provide a brief summary of some of his categories here, only because to do so draws attention to a particular quality of the slave place experience.

For Relph, insideness is something which may be felt at several levels. Behavioural insideness is that of merely physical presence in a place, seeing it as a set of objects and views and activities arranged in certain ways and having certain objective qualities. There are two greater levels of insideness, which Relph names as empathetic and existentialist. Empathetic insideness is defined as an emotional and empathetic involvement with a place, while the existentialist variety 'characterises belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place

¹⁰⁰ Cited in Relph, p. 38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

that is the very foundation of the place concept'. It is the experience of a place 'without deliberate and selfconscious reflection'.¹⁰² All the writers studied here experienced places as what may be loosely termed 'home' which would suggest that their type of insideness would fall within either of Relph's latter two categories. But the point vis-a-vis the slave narratives is that their writers do not fit comfortably within either category because the actions they took shows that they did not feel the complete and unself-conscious commitment to a place that Relph sees as a consequence of those types of insideness. The slave narrators were highly self-conscious in the philosophical sense. They were also reflective on their places of enslavement, rather than innocently accepting of them; the mere fact of their escape clearly points to the thoughts and feelings about those places, and their effects, that were necessary to cause the writers to undertake the most hazardous of journeys.

Obviously, a sense of a place is a profound occurrence and exploration of its cause and effects among slaves and Holocaust survivors, as expressed in their autobiographical writings, is a way of recognizing that these people had lives that were more than their experiences of trauma. Nevertheless, for scholars of slavery and the Holocaust alike, trauma has become an important interpretive tool, and although trauma is not the overarching theme of this study - that precedence lies with the phenomenon of a sense of a place - it is not possible to ignore certain traumatic incidents suffered by slaves or Jews. As part of my approach, I intend to consider these incidents in relation to the individual's sense of a particular place and this necessarily calls for acknowledgement of a basic difference in slaves' and survivors' experiences. For slaves, trauma originated in their home places and was an intrinsic part of their experience and sense of those locations. For Jews, their trauma originated in their displacement from Bialystok and in the city's ghettoization, and was compounded by experience in the camps, so consideration here of their trauma is essentially limited to thinking about how they represent this as relating to the sense of Bialystok which followed their departure from the city. The aim of my approach is to show that slave writers had a response to the places of enslavement which was more complex than merely a rejection of or a rebellion against their condition and the sometimes terrible events that befell them; and to show that the Jewish writers had lives that were not just about having survived a period of years in ghettoized Bialystok and/or Nazi camps.

Another point to be made about trauma, or more accurately traumatic experience, is that it has to be acknowledged as a part of the identity of the place in

¹⁰² See Relph, pp. 49-55, for his categorization of insideness and outsideness.

which it occurred. The reason for this is simple - social relations in any place are one of the components of its identity. As far as the places of enslavement were concerned, their social relations, and thus contemporary identity, were affected by, among other things, the slave labour which sustained their economy. The nature of this labour and the fact of the ownership of individuals must have ensured that the places of enslavement, from the slave's perspective, meant trauma. Given that meaning is another component of place identity and, importantly, is always an attributed rather than inherent quality, it follows that place identity and trauma are indissociable. Having acknowledged this, my concern here, because of the varied origins of the narrators, cannot be with the historical identity of a single particular location, so the relationship between trauma and the identity of any specific place of enslavement will remain unexplored. With regard to Bialystok, although the identity of the city is considered, this is not to examine in any detail the trauma of its ghettoization. As outlined above, the focus on this aspect of Jews' place experience is confined to the effects on the individual rather than the city.

In order to give best attention to the texts, I considered them in a particular way which has resulted in this study being presented in two further main parts. Part two is a straightforward examination of slave narratives. These texts are famous for their hackneyed opening line: 'I was born a slave', or something very similar, but what is less frequently commented upon is that this is often followed by details of where the writer was born. John Brown's first paragraph is not unique in the kind of information it contains:

I do not know how old I am but think I may be any age between thirty-five and forty. I fancy I must be about thirty-seven or eight; as nearly as I can guess. I was raised on Betty Moore's estate in Southampton County, Virginia, about three miles from Jerusalem Court house and the little Nottoway river.¹⁰³

Slaves may have been ignorant of their birthdates and were often uncertain of their paternity, but their places of birth or upbringing assumed a significance which may have gone some way to filling that void.¹⁰⁴ Slaves' geographical locations became, to quote Lindon Barrett, 'the most ineradicable marker of self and identity'.¹⁰⁵ Slavery did not render slaves indifferent either to their immediate locations or to more distant places; the writers' place experiences were as complex for them as

¹⁰³ John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings and Escape of John Brown*, in Taylor ed., vol. two, p. 324.

¹⁰⁴ It seems likely that providing the level of detail exemplified by John Brown's account was also useful as a way of adding weight to claims that the narratives were authentic.

¹⁰⁵ Lindon Barrett, 'African American slave narratives: literacy, the body, authority', *American Literary History*, 7 (3) (1995), pp. 415-442 (especially p. 422).

they would be for any other individual. This section outlines the evidence for and causes of this complexity, considering the effects on the writers' sense of particular places by looking at how their gender identities were affected; showing how imagined places were originally brought to the slave's attention by the mere fact of his or her enslavement and by his or her inevitable involvement in the social relations of the place of that enslavement. I also consider the close relation between the meaningfulness of a place, whether positive or negative, and the individual's sense of that place, and how that meaning, which may be highly fluid, is enhanced by the role of other people. The section concludes by concentrating exclusively on the experiences of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass whose narratives are complemented by papers allowing for closer examination of the themes previously identified.

Part three, focusing on Bialystok Jews, does not have the same shape as the previous part. The advantage of concentrating on Jews all from a place which is so significant in Jewish history, is that it allows for identification of some of the factors which were very pertinent to the Jews whose interwar years were spent there. For this reason, I start with a history of Bialystok highlighting the great and rapid changes between 1920 and 1943 which affected all the writers, influencing how they felt about the locale and, sometimes, the new state of Poland. Inevitably, it is the meaningfulness of particular places to individuals which is a common factor in the slave and survivor experience. Attribution and changeability of meaningfulness, and the degree to which meaning derived from the role of other people is considered. The final part is given to the study of the text by Samuel Pizar because, like Frederick Douglass, Pizar had a keen interest in places which he made explicit and his book prompts consideration of the themes identified among the other writings.

In the final and much briefer section, I make the comparison between the two groups of writers. The comparison is presented separately because the writers' experiences are collectively very wide-ranging and individually complex, and as mentioned previously, using a theory of place identity to examine these experiences precludes a coherent presentation of the material interactively. However, it is the application of a theory of place identity and associated ideas from social geography which justify undertaking the examination of these particular autobiographical writings. Applying such theory allows for both a new perspective on exhaustively researched texts like those of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, and for some insights to be obtained from less famous or applauded narratives. This method also provides a way of looking at accounts by 'ordinary' Holocaust survivors without

focusing wholly or mainly on that one episode of their lives, even when that event is what motivated them to produce their accounts.

Part 2: An examination of place experience and the causes and durability of a sense of a place for ante-bellum slave narrators.

Although slaves' attachment to their home places has long been recognized, one of the most underrated qualities of their narratives is that which reveals the writers had a highly developed and lasting sense of place.¹ All the texts concentrate on presenting the writers' determination to escape slavery as the main theme, but that does not obscure the evidence, sometimes explicit sometimes not, that his or her sense of places emerged from other than a merely negative experience of the places of enslavement. A characteristic common to many of the narratives is a silence surrounding any antipathy their writers may have felt for the places from which they had escaped, a feature that is very significant for this study. It is a silence from which it is reasonable to infer that, to some extent, slaves identified with rather than against their places. In leaving what happened in those places - slavery - as the main focus of their references, ex-slave writers' silence on other matters suggests that those places also had a positive meaning which was not always considered necessary or appropriate to articulate or explain. After all, some narrators may have preferred to keep certain matters private, besides maintaining a degree of silence which minimized the risk of undermining the abolitionist message by implying that slaves could be happy with their lot at home. The purpose of this section is to consider the effect of places on slaves and, specifically, to examine the cause of their sense of particular locations, but before doing that, I want to make some more general comments.

In reading the slaves' narratives, it became apparent that places, both the sites of enslavement and of freedom, were very important to them; the personal condition of slavery did not render places merely incidental to the author. It is also clear that a positive sense of a particular place could emerge for a number or combination of reasons. A feeling of attachment or of rootedness could be the result of family ties, of familiarity which had developed sometimes over a period of many years, or it could develop from affirmative effects of the place on particular aspects of the writer's identity. Some narrators are more voluble and specific than others with regard to expressing their sense of a particular

¹ Melvin Dixon, *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), has examined the use of images of physical landscapes by black American writers to assist them in 'the search, discovery and achievement of self' (pp. 4-5). His chapter on slave narratives and songs (pp. 11-27), concerned with 'how they communicate the slave's view of the world in images of place identity and survival', is useful for its consideration of the effect of the natural topography on slaves. It does not, though, consider the significance of the slave's sense of particular places.

place or places, but even for those who are more reticent, it is obvious that their place experiences were always complex. This complexity was born out of a slave's interaction with two components of the identity of a place, namely its social relations and topography. These elements are crucial to the always attributed meanings of a place, themselves important in being essential to the development of a sense of a particular place.

In any consideration of what and why his or her place meant to the slave, it is fundamental to acknowledge its type - urban or rural - and this, because the narratives make it overwhelmingly clear that urban slavery was preferable to the rural variety. There are two main reasons for this preference. First, urban slavery was less harsh in its physical cruelty. As Frederick Douglass commented on his transfer from plantation to Baltimore: 'There is a vestige of decency, a sense of shame that does much to curb and check those outbreaks of atrocious cruelty so commonly enacted upon the plantation.'² Second, enslavement in a town could offer significant opportunities not available in the rural system, most notably affecting living and working conditions. The different requirements of a non-plantation economy could result in 'hiring out', a practice which could take two forms, one of which often proved very attractive to the writers examined here. A slave owner could rent his slave to a third party, resulting in a change of master which may or may not have met with the slave's approval. Or, the owner could allow the slave to hire him or herself, an alternative that was usually very well received.³ As will become clear, this method allowed a degree of independence that could hugely influence the way a slave felt about the place of enslavement.

There is also another prominent feature of the slave narratives which requires mention because it is relevant to place identity. Almost all the narratives make reference to escape attempts, sometimes in a very dramatic way. To give added effect to these episodes, it is often the case that the author will make use of his knowledge of the landscape. The narrative of Solomon Northup, for example, is

² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, in *I Was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives* ed. Yuval Taylor, (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1999), vol. one, p. 552.

³ Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820 - 1860* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 38-48, explains the versions of 'hiring out' and the development of slaves hiring their own time. More recently, Midori Takagi, "*Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction*": *Slavery in Richmond, Virginia, 1782 -1865* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1999), has written on the effects industrialization and slavery had on each other in Richmond considering, among other things, the practice and benefits of 'hiring out'.

not untypical in the style of its reference to the Cocodrie Swamp in Louisiana which was:

filled with immense trees, the sycamore, the gum, the cotton wood and cypress [...] without inhabitants save wild beasts - the bear, the wild-cat, the tiger, and great slimy reptiles [...] I saw hundreds of mocassin snakes [...] I saw also many alligators, great and small⁴

In the main, this device helps the texts function, at one level, as adventure stories adding to their appeal to a contemporary readership. There is, however, one outstanding exception to this practice. The autobiographies by Frederick Douglass show his genuine interest in the physical properties of his places of enslavement and their effect on him. This concern with topography is one thing that prompts my separate examination of his narratives. Another is the fact that Douglass' narratives are required reading in any study of primary slave narratives - they have a widely recognized and singular autobiographical quality. This very singularity, however, which raises the matter of their representativeness does not diminish their value to this project. Douglass' texts contain explicit indications of his interest in places which make them particularly relevant here. The text by Harriet Jacobs is also required reading and an analysis both of her narrative and Douglass' will follow the first part of this section which is given over, essentially, to consideration of what it was that made certain writers' sense of their places and the effects of that on their identity. This necessarily involves acknowledging the inherently complex nature of place experience, which I shall now do by looking at a number of contributory and linked factors.

The complexity of slaves' place experiences: comparisons, contradictions, participation in social relations.

For the slaves examined here, the complexity of place experience is indicated in a number of ways. One is the fact that slaves were interested to compare places of enslavement, a capacity that was always likely to be enhanced by the very nature of the slave's chattel status. Mobility, whether unwelcome, as it often was when enforced by sales, or willingly embraced as a consequence of being hired out, brought with it the opportunity to make comparisons. Sally Williams

⁴ Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River in Louisiana*, in *I Was Born a Slave*, Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 226-227.

had lived for twenty years in the town of Fayetteville, North Carolina, before she was sold to Alabama at the age of nearly forty in about 1833. Home was now a plantation on the Alabama River, two hundred miles north of Mobile, and Williams found the contrast striking:

slavery there was, in some respects, a different thing from what even her experience had made it in Carolina. The ties of affection and mutual dependence which at home so often bound master and slaves together, seemed there no where to exist.⁵

Williams's comparison requires two points to be made. First, the distinction between Alabama ('slavery there') and Carolina - the absence of affection in the master/slave relationship - typifies the common belief among slaves that slavery in the Deep South was even more horrific than enslavement further north. This perception is a dominant and recurrent theme of the narratives and one whose significance is addressed later. The second point is that Williams's comparison also distinguishes between rural and urban slavery, albeit that here the two versions were experienced in two widely separated states - rural in Alabama and urban in Carolina. And Williams's comparison of places was not confined only to the difference between regions and between town and country slavery. She could see her new place offered less opportunity, even to those not enslaved, important for Williams because she was married to a free black who intended to follow her south. Williams 'noticed that free negroes were always spoken of and treated with contempt', something that made her send 'word to her husband to remain in Fayetteville, where he was known, and where he would at least earn a comfortable and independent living'.⁶ And the physical characteristics of Fayetteville compared well with Alabama. When Williams suffered a 'dreadful home-sickness', it was made worse by the contrast between her previous urban environment and the wilder countryside of Dallas county which was her new place:

The leaf-buds were swelling, the woods were full of singing birds, and the winds were soft and balmy; but as she looked out in the moonlight upon the log-cabins, and the newly-cleared fields, and the broad forests beyond them, she sighed for the

⁵ *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams, of Detroit, Michigan* (Cincinnati: Western Tract and Book Society, 1858); online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/sally/sally.html>, p. 132.

⁶ *Ibid.*

comely streets of Fayetteville, and was only oppressed by the untamed loveliness of Alabama.⁷

Although Williams's move provoked comparisons of the places she knew, the non-autobiographical nature of her account does not allow for consideration of another complicating factor in the experience of places of enslavement - the effect of mobility on identity. But itinerancy could be very powerful in this regard, as shown in the narrative of Lewis Clarke.

Clarke, born near Richmond in Madison county, Kentucky, in 1815, was in his early twenties by the time he was owned by a man who permitted Clarke to hire himself. For a period of between three and five years, Clarke was allowed to 'go over the state' which brought the advantage of an autonomy which contributed both to his personal identity and to his positive sense of his place. By the summer of 1840, Clarke's owner had died and eventually Clarke was offered for sale, unsuccessfully: 'No *bid* could be obtained for me'. One reason for this was that Clarke had become 'unslavelike'; he continues:

I had had too many privileges, had been permitted to trade for myself and go over the state; in short, to use their [the bidders'] phrase, I was a "spoilt nigger".⁸

The qualities that marked Clarke as a 'spoilt nigger', meaning, presumably, that he would be considered resistant and difficult to handle, must have been those of independence and resourcefulness. During the time he was allowed to hire himself, Clarke paid his owner \$12 monthly, and fed, clothed and sheltered himself; all in all, a considerable outlay funded by Clarke turning his hand to a variety of back-breaking jobs. But Clarke's reward was more than one of financial independence. In an acknowledgement of the positive associations which exist between mobility and masculinity, Clarke had an enhanced view of himself as a man.⁹ His reflection on the 'spoilt nigger' comment says it all: 'And

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸ Lewis and Milton Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke, Sons of a Soldier of the Revolution, During a Captivity of More than Twenty Years Among the Slaveholders of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of North America. Dictated by Themselves*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 618, emphasis in the original.

⁹ The point about the link between mobility and masculinity follows from my reading of Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 34. In looking at how men's narratives represent life in slavery, Smith pointed out that: 'By mythologizing rugged individual, physical strength and geographical mobility, the narrator enshrined cultural definitions of masculinity.' Elsewhere, a social geographer, Doreen Massey, among others, has written on the matter of gender in the experience of places and the significance of 'differentiated mobility' to men and women. See *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, Polity Press: 1994), especially pp. 147, 149, 179.

sure enough I was, for all their purposes.’¹⁰ The enhancement of Clarke’s identity as a man was the result of his particular form of engagement with the social relations of his home place or area, and at this point it is useful to be reminded of the ubiquity and importance of those relations in individuals’ lives as outlined in the introduction.

Social relations are potentially complex because of their variability and they are inevitably significant. They affect the identity of all places and, importantly, the people who practise them may also be affected, obviously in their experience of particular places and in their attitude to that place or places, and to their own selves. The reason for this is that the element of power always evident in social relations, and the social and economic manifestations of that power have an effect on people’s sense of places. This point about power has an obvious relevance as far as slaves are concerned, but it is crucial to remember that in each individual’s participation in the social relations of a place, and in encounters with its power manifestations, these may not have been straightforward in their effects. Referring again now to Clarke’s narrative, his encounter with the power in his place, or perhaps places, was not of a kind that automatically precipitated his escape. In the three to five years when he hired himself, Clarke had not attempted to flee; it was only the thought of his imminent sale that finally made him take the plunge. Clarke wrote: ‘I had long thought and dreamed of LIBERTY; I was now determined to make an effort, to gain it.’¹¹ Clarke’s delay in making his escape brings to mind a point made by the geographer, Edward Relph, which has a special resonance in thinking about how slaves coped with the home experience. Relph observed that: ‘Our experience of place, and especially of home is a dialectical one - balancing a need to stay with a desire to escape.’¹² It follows that the ‘need to stay’ must surely only be felt as a result of also feeling a sense of belonging. Clarke clearly felt a need to stay in his area because he voiced a nervousness about leaving, which he believed affected all potential fugitive slaves: ‘And then, if he gets away, *who, what* will he find?’¹³ So, it may be seen that Clarke had an attachment to home, a positive sense of that place. His participation in the social relations of his place of enslavement had caused deferment of, or had to some extent mitigated, the need to escape.

¹⁰ Lewis Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 618.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 618-619.

¹² Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p. 42.

¹³ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 619, emphasis in the original.

In noting the significance of social relations in slaves' reactions to their places, it is important to remember that their individual encounters would vary from place to place. Moses Roper, another itinerant, demonstrates the point while also confirming that slaves compared places and could quite quickly develop an attachment to new places of enslavement. Roper was born in Caswell county, North Carolina, in 1816. In November 1835 he sailed for Liverpool from New York, having had a career of escaping and being recaptured that finally ended successfully when he fled from Marianna in western Florida. Roper's narrative was published in London in 1837, and although he was still only a teenager when he left America and had spent the previous five years living in a number of different places mounting his escape attempts, Roper had developed a fondness for Pendleton and Greenville in South Carolina which he made explicit, something that makes more noticeable his relative silence on how his time was spent in this particular area. Sometime in 1832 he was bought as a domestic slave to wait upon his new owner, Marvel Louis, who lived in Greenville, but whose business Roper does not specify. When Louis left for Pendleton, about twenty or thirty miles away, he fell ill, subsequently leaving Roper in Columbus, Georgia. When, later, Roper learned of Louis's death, he was still away from what had become home: 'I was very much attached to the neighbourhood of Pendleton and Greenville, and feared, from Mr. Louis's death, I should not get back there.'¹⁴

Roper does not elaborate on this attachment, which had come within a year or two of his arrival there, but it did not stem from family ties - by then aged seventeen, Roper had been separated from his mother, stepfather and siblings for more than ten years. Thinking about why Roper was so attached to his new place does then prompt acknowledgement of the fact that slaves' inevitable comparison of and reaction to different places of enslavement would reflect their individual participation in the social relations of those places. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to at least guess at what contributed to Roper's affection for Pendleton. Prior to slaving for Louis, Roper had been in the ownership of a slave drover, spending a year travelling around preparing slaves for sale. Again, Roper introduces neither detail nor much emotion in his account of this time, but it must have been a doubly offensive experience. Witnessing the trade in people was bad enough, but to be complicit in it by being forced to oil slaves' faces before their sale must have compounded the depressing effect of the whole

¹⁴ Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery; with a preface by the Rev. T. Price, D. D.*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one p. 509.

business.¹⁵ It seems that whatever Louis's trade was in Pendleton and/or Greenville, Roper's part in it would have been less troubling than assisting a drover. Although, ultimately, it is not possible to know from Roper's sketchy account what made him identify with Pendleton and Greenville, he does not refer to any of the other places he knew in the same tone, and it is clear that the area was more acceptable to Roper because his own personal experience of slavery there was less terrible than it had been elsewhere. Certainly, Greenville had its share of atrocities against slaves, but if, as seems to be the case, Roper was treated reasonably by Louis and he was no longer involved in the practice of preparing slaves for sale, his routine encounters of that particular place may have been more positive than those hitherto.¹⁶

Between them, Roper, Williams and Clarke represent both the extremes of slave mobility - the portability of property and the autonomy of the itinerant - and also demonstrate the complexity of place experience and its potential to affect personal identity. And even those writers whose experience was less extreme in terms of their transfer, reveal that although a move could be welcome, and the new location compared well, the slave's place experience could be complicated by its changeable nature. Henry Watson, for example, whose account also confirms the eagerness of slaves to become urbanized, was slaving in his owner's farmhouse about a hundred miles from Vicksburg, Mississippi, when he was presented with the opportunity to move in the 1830s. Watson leapt at the chance to find himself a new master and was delighted to achieve an urban placement in an unnamed town approximately thirty miles from Vicksburg:

I entered the duties of my new situation with pleasure; not that I saw anything more pleasing in my new master than I did in Mr. McNeill, but the thought of having left the farm, as I hoped, forever, was a source of great consolation to me. [...] I learned

¹⁵ See *ibid.* p. 508, for Roper's reference to his period of ownership by Marcus Rowland, the drover who required Roper to 'look over the slaves, and see that they were dressed well, had plenty of food, and to oil their faces'.

¹⁶ With regard to the point about atrocities against slaves, it is interesting that in the Philadelphia edition of Roper's narrative (which is the one in Taylor's anthology), published in 1838, he does not make any mention of the execution of a slave who was burned alive in Greenville, presumably in the early 1830s, though his account does give graphic details of other torture, in other places. In June 1836 while in London, Roper wrote to Thomas Price who, in addition to editing Roper's narrative, was also editor of a British journal, *Slavery in America*. In his letter, published in the journal in August 1836, Roper provides full details of the execution, though he does not claim to have witnessed it. His letter is reproduced in John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 23-26.

that he [the new master] was training us for a hotel, which he intended opening in a neighboring city. This information pleased me much; for I thought the larger the city I was in, the smaller the chance would be of my getting on a farm.¹⁷

Watson's enthusiasm for town life, though, did not cause him to be undiscerning about a particular place and, importantly, its effects. In what amounts to an acknowledgement of the interaction between a place and the individuals who have experience of it, Watson believed that the 'neighboring city' adversely affected him. While working in the hotel as a waiter, Watson 'soon learned to gamble' and in 'this wicked business' became 'very expert'. He had also become something of a drinker and brawler and having spent four years in the city, Watson was as pleased to leave as he had been to arrive at his first urban destination: 'To my great joy and satisfaction, I soon left this town; for I had made up my mind that it was one of the most wicked places that I had ever been in.'¹⁸ The specific experiences of Watson, Williams, Clarke and Roper are enlightening about the potential for slaves' varied and profound participation in their places of enslavement. Because of his or her variable encounters with the power in particular locations, a slave could feel differently about different places; itinerance or transferability did not necessarily inhibit an attachment to a new place, which could form quickly in the right conditions, and a slave was not necessarily inclined to be hidebound in his view of a particular place - disaffection could set in however much the incoming slave had welcomed a particular kind of place. In short, slaves' experiences of places were no less complex for them than they would be for anyone else and at this stage I want to continue considering this complexity in the context of the point made by Relph and highlighted earlier - the experience of balancing a need to stay with a desire to escape.

Relph's observation is an explicit acknowledgement of the potentially contradictory nature of the home place experience. As far as slaves were concerned, if the places of enslavement were also the place of his or her family, then at the very least there was always the possibility of conflicting feelings, the emotional ties could easily be at odds with the need to escape. Henry Bibb was twenty-two and married with a young daughter, slaving on a plantation in Oldham county, Kentucky, when he decided to mount an escape attempt in 1837. Bibb remembered feeling before he left, how 'strong attachments to

¹⁷ Henry Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1848); online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/watson/watson.html>, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

friends and relatives, with all the love of home and birth-place which is so natural among the human family, twined about my heart and were hard to break away from'.¹⁹ Bibb was by no means the only slave who referred to the emotional conflict felt living in these places of enslavement and for slaves who were single, or who had suffered the anguish of family separation, it is not remarkable that they would derive comfort and solidarity from friendships. Lewis Clarke eventually escaped to Canada in 1841, but five years later as he wrote his narrative, he recalled how much he had missed, indeed perhaps had continued to miss, his home place, and this was directly related to the way he felt about old friends:

And could I make that country ever seem like *home*? Some people are very much afraid that all the slaves will run up north, if they are ever free. But I can assure them that they will run *back* again, if they do. If I could have been assured of my freedom in Kentucky, then, I would have given any thing in the world for the prospect of spending my life among my old acquaintances, where I first saw the sky, and the sun rise and go down. It was a long time before I could make the sun work right at all. It would rise in the wrong place, and go down wrong; and, finally, it behaved so bad, I thought it could not be the same sun.

There was a little something added to this feeling of strangeness. I could not forget all the horrid stories slaveholders tell about Canada.²⁰

In seeing slaves' friendships as a natural development of their place experience, it would be easy to overlook the fact that they, too, are part of the broader social relations which occur in any place. Slavery was never a sufficiently closed institution to limit slaves' sources of self-esteem, a key component of personality and identity, to their relationships with their owner or master, a feature that has a special relevance in the context of the slave's sense of particular places.²¹ Slaves' relationships with others in the community always had the potential to exert a considerable and positive influence. As the social geographer John Eyles has said: 'Interacting with[,] or simply living close to,

¹⁹ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 28.

²⁰ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 623, emphasis in the original.

²¹ John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* 2nd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 284-322, has argued for the value of the slave community in promoting self-esteem for its individuals and allowing for the development of different, non-stereotypical personality types.

people perceived to possess similar attributes provides a sense of belonging; it symbolises a sense of identity with people and place [...] this sense of belonging can be an important dimension of [personal] identity'.²² Slaves may have had little choice about where they lived and the interaction that goes with working alongside others, but Bibb and Clarke show that that did not necessarily preclude the forging of valued friendships; indeed, those very enforced conditions may have encouraged their development.

It was also the case that the slave's engagement with the more practical social relations of his place could be contradictory. Lunsford Lane was a slave in Raleigh, North Carolina, who eventually purchased himself, his wife and their seven children before being compelled to leave the state. Lane was very reluctant to depart from Raleigh, and it is clear from reading his narrative that his experience there over a period of nearly forty years, from his birth in 1803 until he left in 1842, was something of a paradoxical nature, both in terms of what happened and in its effect on how Lane felt about the place. The point is best illustrated by first briefly outlining the events that led to his reluctant departure from the city, and then considering his actions and what they indicated about his sense of Raleigh.

By 1835, when he arranged to buy himself through a third party, Lane was married with six or seven children. In North Carolina, self-purchase and manumission was illegal, except for 'meritorious service', and Lane, recognizing the vulnerability of his position, travelled to New York in 1836 where he was formally made free and the appropriate record made.²³ Though it was illegal for him to do it, Lane then returned to his wife and family in Raleigh where he continued trading as a tobacconist and timber merchant. By 1838, he was secure enough financially to enter into an agreement whereby he would buy his wife and children over a period of five years. In September 1840, however, Lane was served with a notice to leave the state and though he petitioned against the order he departed in May 1841, for New York and then Boston. Still determined to achieve the freedom of his family, Lane returned to do this in April 1842, when he was arrested on the charge of delivering abolitionist lectures in Massachusetts. Shortly after the court hearing of these charges, Lane and his family were obliged to leave Raleigh.

²² John Eyles, *Senses of Place* (Warrington, Cheshire: Silverbook Press, 1985), p. 133.

²³ Barnett Hollander, *Slavery in America: Its Legal History* (London: Putnam, 1962) p. 83, lists the states where manumission was not permitted: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Lane's actions, twice leaving and then returning, illegally, to Raleigh are easily explained as the natural and brave, if foolhardy, behaviour of a man determined to secure the freedom and safety of his family. Clearly such ties contributed to Lane's positive sense of that particular place, a sense he explicitly revealed in the account of his court appearance on the charges of advocating abolition, when he affirmed that he had wanted to stay in Raleigh and that his departure from it had hardly been by choice:

The circumstances under which I left Raleigh [in 1836], said I are perfectly familiar to you. It is known that I had no disposition to remove from this city, but resorted to every lawful means to remain. [...] But being driven away, no longer permitted to live in this city, [...] my last resort was to call upon the friends of humanity in other places, to assist me.²⁴

Understandable though these ties were in consolidating Lane's attachment to Raleigh, other factors also contributed. Lane had not been an itinerant slave, but had remained in Raleigh, as had his parents, and he lived and worked in the city until he was thirty-three, when he left to register his manumission in New York. In other words, Lane was strongly rooted in a place with which he was very familiar. It was a rootedness that could only have been consolidated by Lane's experience of Raleigh's attitude to particular aspects of slavery and to freed slaves.

Raleigh's was an attitude in contradiction to the effective implementation of state laws, and as such it rendered the city more than tolerable to Lane. So, although it was illegal for him to return to the state after registering his freedom, Lane was probably aware that he could flout the system. Despite the illegality of his return, in about September 1836, Lane was able to secure employment as early as January 1837 as a clerk to the State Governor's private secretary. It took until September 1840, fully four years after his homecoming, before he was served with the notice ordering him to leave the state. Lane does not comment on why it took so long for the order to materialize, but presumably it was because the authorities were dilatory and/or ignorant of his presence.²⁵ Whatever the reason for the delay, Lane had been the beneficiary. During this

²⁴ Lunsford Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C. Embracing an Account of His Early Life, the Redemption by Purchase of Himself and Family from Slavery, and His Banishment from the Place of Birth for the Crime of Wearing a Colored Skin* 2nd edition (Boston: published by himself, 1842), pp. 38-39; online <http://docsouth.unc.edu/lanelunsford/lane.html>

²⁵ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (London, New York, Victoria: Penguin, 1995) p. 128, is helpful here, pointing out that much of the restrictive legislation was haphazard and inconsistently applied.

time, he had continued with his business activities (while also employed in the Governor's office) and in January 1839 had moved with his wife and family into a house he purchased previously. And this was not the first instance of Lane being able to take advantage of Raleigh's apparently inefficient bureaucracy.

In about 1830, due to a change in his owner's circumstances, Lane was able to hire himself. Strictly, this, too, was illegal in North Carolina, but Lane knew how to make the most of 'a privilege which comparatively few slaves at the South enjoy' and for which he considered himself 'truly blessed'.²⁶ Lane, knowing that 'in Raleigh it is sometimes winked at [the practice of self-hire]', also knew that 'generally [...] if the slave is *orderly* and appears to be *making nothing*, neither he nor the master is interfered with'.²⁷ Bearing this in mind, Lane 'found it politic to go shabbily dressed, and to appear to be very poor'.²⁸ Lane was able to make his experience in Raleigh one which encouraged him to feel that it was a place to which he felt he belonged and with which he could identify, despite the fact of its slavery and racism. No wonder he felt reluctant to leave:

And why must I be banished? [...] I had endeavored so to conduct myself as not to become obnoxious to the white inhabitants, knowing as I did their power, and their hostility to the colored people.²⁹

Lane was also mindful that as a free black he had no legal right of abode in Raleigh, but it appears that he did think he had a natural right, as indicated by his tone in describing how he received the warrant that summoned him to court, in November 1840. Lane was called 'to answer for the sin of having remained in the place of my birth'.³⁰ Lane was neither oversentimental in expressing his affection for Raleigh, nor eager to show the place in a poor light; instead, he evenhandedly acknowledged that his experience there had been contradictory. In March 1842, Lane received an assurance that he could safely return to Raleigh for a period of twenty days to settle his affairs, that is, to complete the purchase of his family. As he recalled setting out for Raleigh in April, Lane knew the visit was to be a 'farewell one'. He 'did not dream that my old cradle,

²⁶ Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane*, p. 15. Self-hire was indeed a relatively uncommon experience among the general population of slaves. The scarcity of urban centres in the ante-bellum South and, as noted in the introduction to this study (p. 5, note 18), the fact that the overwhelming majority of slaves were rural, emphasize this.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

hard as it had once jostled me, would refuse to rock me a pleasant or even an affectionate good bye. I thought, too, [...] that I might visit the home of my boyhood, of my youth, of my manhood, in peace'.³¹ It was this visit that led to Lane's court appearance on the charge of advocating abolitionism and to his final departure from Raleigh. Ultimately, Lane proved not to suit Raleigh but, initially as the place of his enslavement and then as his free, albeit illegal, home Raleigh had suited Lane. His experiences there are further revealing in that they highlight a feature of slaves' lives in all their communities, and that is their gender oppression. This was a major challenge that inevitably complicated the slave's place experience and with it, of course, his or her sense of the place.

Gender.

The point about gender oppression is an important one. A slave's basic but crucial sense of identity as a man or woman could be greatly affected by the oppression which resulted from the intrusion of white masters and mistresses into the slaves' gender roles and relations. The very ease with which such intrusion could be made shows how powerful it was in its capacity to undermine identity, as Harriet Jacobs showed in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*. On one occasion, Harriet's brother, John, was called by his father and his mistress at the same time. John responded to his mistress, causing his father to chide him: 'You are *my* child and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water.'³² The white mistress had been able to undermine both slaves simultaneously, one in his role of responsive child, and the other as an authoritative father. The Jacobs family were town dwellers and clearly felt the effects of gender oppression, but urban places were more likely than rural locations to offer some alleviation of the adverse effects of that oppression. This was especially true for male slaves.

Enslavement in a town could mean the chance for a slave to live away from his master, something that could allow the married slave to exhibit at least one quality of masculinity in being able to be a provider for his family. In Lunsford Lane's case, it is very easy to see how living in Raleigh allowed him to assert his masculinity in this way. Lane certainly resented the injustice of the responsibility foisted upon him by his wife's owner withholding 'both from her and her children, the needful food and clothing', but that did not encourage Lane to

³¹ Ibid., p. 37.

³² Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 547, emphasis in the original.

shrug off that responsibility. Having exhausted his funds at one stage 'by the expense of providing for my wife and children', Lane was in despair: 'I discovered myself, as though I had never known it before, a husband, the father of two children, a family looking up to me for bread'. It was at this point that Lane was able to start hiring himself which enabled him to render 'such support as necessary to my family'. Finally, of course, Lane proved to be the supreme provider when he made arrangements to buy his entire family, and although his return to them in 1836 must primarily have been driven by natural affection, he also saw it as the correct, manly thing to do: 'I returned to my family in Raleigh, and endeavored to do by them as a freeman should.' With such clearly positive aspects to his place experience, it is really not surprising that Lane was able to develop and sustain an affirmative sense of Raleigh. In his own words: 'we were getting along very well, until September 1840'.³³ For Lane, being able to overcome the challenge to his masculinity consolidated his positive sense of Raleigh.

For the female slave, however, the attainment of conventional womanhood, which in nineteenth-century America was a middle-class, patriarchal concept that prized innocence, helplessness and physical purity, was always a difficult if not impossible goal, whether she was urban or rural.³⁴ Yet, among the three accounts of women's lives studied here, two are very explicit about the threat to their gender identities. Louisa Picquet's story has little to offer in terms of what she felt about her place of enslavement, but it does neatly pinpoint the twofold threat to slave women's femininity. First, work on a farm or plantation was of a nature always likely to undermine ideals of femininity. Picquet observed that: 'The women there [farm workers in Texas] tend mills and drive ox wagons, and plough, just like men.'³⁵ Second, even if a slave woman or girl was not a field worker, she was at risk of sexual abuse that would deny her conventional womanhood. Picquet was a concubine in 1840s' New Orleans from the age of thirteen, gave birth to four children, and was miserable in the knowledge that she could not live either as a pious woman or as a married mother, two qualities

³³ Lane, pp. 12, 14, 17, and 24, respectively.

³⁴ Beth Maclay Doriani, 'Black womanhood in nineteenth-century America: subversion and self-construction in two women's autobiographies', *American Quarterly*, 43 (2) (1991), pp. 199-222 (especially pp. 203-204), refers to a womanhood valued by white middle-class nineteenth-century Americans.

³⁵ Louisa Picquet, *the Octoroon: or Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life*, in *Collected Black Women's Narratives* ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 17.

strongly associated with womanhood: 'I wished he would sell me [...] because I had no peace at all. I [would] rather die than live in that way.'³⁶

Picquet's sentiments echo the discomfiture famously expressed by Harriet Jacobs in her narrative, a revealing account in the context of gender identity and place experience. Jacobs's text is revelatory not because Jacobs had a great deal to say specifically about her particular location, Edenton, in North Carolina, but because she says very little. Jacobs's narrative is famed for two related reasons which have a bearing on the way she felt about Edenton. First, Jacobs's account contains a relatively frank discussion about the agency she exercised in choosing a white lover to father her two children, a successful move to avoid the sexual overtures of her master. Second, Jacobs's book is a highly gendered account in emphasizing the strength and support offered by the women, black and white, in her life, and in considering the behaviour and roles of the men in her community. It is this preoccupation with gender that sheds some light on Jacobs's apparently understated sense of Edenton.

Jacobs makes only two meaningful and virtually identical comments about Edenton. In referring to the worry caused to her as a girl of fourteen being subjected to sexual harassment by her master, Jacobs was grateful for the fact of living in a town:

It was lucky for me that I did not live on a distant plantation, but in a town not so large that the inhabitants were ignorant of each other's affairs. Bad as are the laws and customs in a slaveholding community, the doctor [her master], as a professional man, deemed it prudent to keep up some outward show of decency.

It was a sentiment reiterated when Jacobs referred to her avoidance of a whipping by her mistress:

How often did I rejoice that I lived in a town where all the inhabitants knew each other! If I had been on a remote plantation, or lost among the multitude of a crowded city, I should not be a living woman at this day.³⁷

In short, Jacobs's sense of her home place amounted to little more than gratitude that it enabled her to escape the more frightening aspects of slavery. Of course, because Jacobs's account is pseudonymous, it is possible that she preferred not to reveal too much about her home town in case it and the main characters in her narrative could be identified. Certainly, the fact that the text

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 560 and 564, respectively.

opens without any kind of details of her place of birth is unusual in the genre; almost all narratives, famous and obscure, begin with a reference to the writer's birthplace. Or, the absence of detail regarding Jacobs's home may be because her experience of Edenton rendered the place little more than incidental to her, for a time, at least.

When she escaped from Edenton in 1842, at the age of twenty-nine, Jacobs had spent the previous seven years hiding in the attic of her free grandmother's house. It was a claustrophobic existence that exacted a heavy price from Jacobs. She was separated from her two young children, by what was virtually imprisonment, and her full and open engagement with the town was curtailed for more than half of what had been her adult life. It is quite possible Jacobs refrained from further comment about her home place because as she wrote her account while living in the North she felt no particularly strong affection for, or, it has to be said, antipathy to it. In other words, she may not have remembered Edenton as being positively meaningful to her when she experienced it, and/or the place may have become even less meaningful with the passage of time - her account was not published until 1861. This point about meaningfulness is important, because it is the single most significant element in any individual's sense of a particular place, whether that sense is positive or otherwise. Without doubt, Edenton was somewhere that had been a difficult place for Jacobs, not only in the obvious fact of being the site of her enslavement and self-incarceration, but also, more subtly, because her experience there did not encourage the gender identity to which she aspired. Edenton had caused Jacobs to be a strong, resourceful and bold woman, but not a feminine one. For Jacobs, preoccupied with gender, this experience was always going to have the potential to inhibit rather than stimulate a lasting attachment to Edenton. However, although it may be claimed that Jacobs's sense of Edenton was not pronounced, as she wrote her narrative, that is not an unqualified assertion that her place experience was uncomplicated, or that it was 'over and done with' even as long as two decades later. I shall return to her narrative to consider other aspects of her place experience, and also refer to other sources which indicate that it would be a mistake to argue that Jacobs felt an ongoing indifference about Edenton.

Rootedness.

Of course, although a positive experience of a location in terms of its conferring or enhancing gender identity could go some considerable way towards encouraging a slave's affirmative sense of the place, that was not the only factor

in development of that sense. The need for rootedness is basic, and their condition of enslavement did not necessarily prevent slaves from feeling rooted, despite being aware of their chattel status. As a quality or result of an experience of a particular place, rootedness emerges very strongly among the narratives examined here, confirming, yet again, how complex that experience was. Rootedness could be strong enough to induce a slave to return home even after he made good his escape or had bought himself. Moses Grandy, for example, who was slaving in Dismal Swamp, Virginia, bought himself in about 1830 with the assistance of a third party who then sent him to Providence, Rhode Island, to stay for a year and a day to establish the residence which would legally secure his freedom. However, although the prize was great, Grandy did not stay away. He makes much of his gratitude to the couple, Captain and Mrs. Minner, who facilitated his purchase, but this must have been something that only added to his desire to go back to the place that remained home, rather than the feeling that initiated it:

But I stayed only two months [in Providence]. [...]. I longed much to see my master and mistress for the kindness they had done me, so went home in the schooner. On my arrival, I did not stop at my own house, except to ask my wife at the door how she and the children were in health, but went up to the town to see Captain and Mrs. Minner.³⁸

In Grandy's case, the power of the feeling of rootedness is emphasized by the fact that he was well aware of the risk he ran in returning to Virginia prematurely. He had lost a court case there (or in North Carolina) some time previously during which the legal requirement of establishing residence in a northern state was made clear to him. Even Henry Bibb, who eventually became a successful escapee, continued to feel attached to his home in Kentucky. Bibb's narrative was published in 1849 and includes a letter written in March 1844 to his and his wife's owner, William Gatewood. Bibb wrote: 'But you had it in your power to have kept me there much longer than you did. I think it is very probable that I should have been a toiling slave on your plantation to-day, if you had treated me differently.'³⁹

In noting the complexity and contradictoriness of place experience and its effects on personal identity, and the importance of rootedness or a sense of

³⁸ Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy; Late a Slave in the United States of America* (London: C. Gilpin, 1843); online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/grandy/grandy.html>, pp. 40-41.

³⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life of and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 87.

belonging for slaves, it is crucial to remember that even for slaves their involvement in the social relations of their places was not wholly confined to work. Slaves had access to other practices which helped develop or increase their sense of belonging and which had implications for both personal and place identity. One such practice is referred to by Harriet Jacobs who provides an uncommon description of the colourful and exotic performance by slaves enjoying the Christmas celebration:

Every child rises early on Christmas morning to see the Johnkannaus. Without them, Christmas would be shorn of its greatest attraction. They consist of companies of slaves from the plantations, generally of the lower class. Two athletic men, in calico wrappers, have a net thrown over them, covered with all manner of bright-colored stripes. Cows' tails are fastened to their backs, and their heads are decorated with horns. A box, covered with sheepskin, is called the gumbo box. A dozen beat on this, while others strike triangles and jawbones, to which bands of dancers keep time. For a month previous they are composing songs which are sung on this occasion. These companies, of a hundred each, turn out early in the morning and are allowed to go round till twelve o'clock, begging for contributions.⁴⁰

Clearly, Jacobs enjoyed this slave custom - 'Without them, Christmas would be shorn of its greatest attraction' - and while this may be partly explained by its being a pleasurable activity for child and adult slaves alike, it is likely that Jacobs also felt a more profound effect. The anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff has written on the importance of rituals, ceremonies and celebrations, pointing out that it goes beyond the superficial, that performance has a purpose and value, not least in 'providing opportunities for self and collective proclamations of being'.⁴¹ The particular tradition of Johnkannaus, which originated in Africa, was one of the cultural practices that allowed slaves through passive or active participation to feel they belonged to the community, that they identified with it, and its place.⁴² Jacobs, and the other slaves in her community, had been able to

⁴⁰ Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 621.

⁴¹ Barbara Myerhoff, *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling and Growing Older* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 233-235.

⁴² The significance of African ceremonies to slaves is widely recognized. Sterling Stuckey, for example, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 68-69, draws attention to the importance of Johnkannaus which went beyond that of merely being entertainment for children. Slaves were taking advantage of Christmas as a religious period and occasion for exchanging gifts to revive African cultural expression along similar lines and to identify with

participate in something that surely reiterated their existence as more than only another's property, very relevant given the timing of this celebration. The new year was the occasion of fresh hiring arrangements and sales and, as Jacobs commented, 'many families are fearfully looking forward to the probability of separation in a few days'.⁴³ Christmas and the Johnkannaus ceremony were enjoyable, it was a time for displaying and reinforcing slaves' commitment to kith and kin, it was an expression of personal and group identity, and in this it was also shaping the identity of the place in which it occurred.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to consider in detail the identity of any one particular place of enslavement, Jacobs's reference to Christmas in Edenton does prompt a brief and justifiable digression to make a further observation on one of the components of place identity. The significance of a locale's social relations for individuals has already been emphasized, and the consequence of such activities, over time making a place distinctive, was mentioned in the introduction. Thus, as slaves joined in the Johnkannaus celebration, consolidating their sense of belonging, they were also affecting the identity of the place in which they practised it. Johnkannaus was an 'outside' tradition tailored to fit an American religious holiday. Jacobs's description of it as a spectacle does not go so far as to refer to its Africanness, but Sterling Stuckey has said that the 'overall effect of the ceremony could scarcely have been more African to the slaves, nor could the means of achieving it[,] in musical instruments, dance and mode of singing, and attire [...] the general effect and purpose were African'.⁴⁴ The Johnkannaus ceremony exemplifies the symbiotic relationship of place and personal identity for slaves, very positive in the sense that it was a contribution to place identity of much more than only (a black) physical presence and enforced labour. Cultural difference encourages a sense of place and establishes a difference between groups who occupy that place, which in turn means that the place has a different identity for each of them.⁴⁵ In other words, Edenton, as but one example of a place of enslavement,

ancestral figures. Lawrence W. Levine, too, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford, London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 11, referred to the unifying force of the celebration, noting how slaves collectively used the subtleties of their song to comment on whites around them. Stuckey, p. 65, also refers to the frequent harvest festivals, especially the singing and dancing, which allowed slaves 'to give full expression to their Africanity'. Stuckey notes the positive effects of one such dance, the 'cake-walk', performed on the plantation. This was a 'means of distancing slaves from the purely exploitative reality of work [...] which helped slaves affirm their dignity through labor'.

⁴³ Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 620-621.

⁴⁴ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, p. 67.

⁴⁵ Gillian Rose, 'Place and identity: a sense of place', in *A Place in the World?: Places*,

had identities assigned to it by its occupants which were the result of factors other than that of only the difference between being an owner of persons, and being a person who was owned.

The annual Johnkannaus ceremony both reflected and encouraged slaves' sense of belonging to a place and in this it was an obvious display of community, but there were also activities in slaves' daily lives that show they had access to distinctive slave practices that consistently confirmed them in their membership of that community. Henry Bibb, for example, when seeking the affection of a local slave girl, and when trying to avoid punishment for a misdemeanour, and in wanting to prevent his master abusing him, called on a local conjuror for a supply of appropriate tricks. As a middle-aged married man, Bibb, 'taught by the old superstitious slaves to believe in conjuration' may have been embarrassed at what he saw as his earlier gullibility, but in admitting that their teachings had worked - 'I had then great faith in conjuration and witchcraft' - Bibb also shows he had been very much part of a particular community.⁴⁶ Perhaps mindful of his white readership, Bibb with his dismissive tone may have been seeking to distance his older, more 'American' self from activities so obviously foreign (he had been advised to scratch the slave girl with the bone of a bullfrog to win her over), while at the same time emphasizing, through a firsthand account, that slaves were in need of proper education to avoid slipping into these superstitious habits. Whatever the motive for the nature of his comments, Bibb's more than brief description of the easy availability of the conjurer's services and their popularity, shows how cultural difference generates a sense of belonging to a distinct community.⁴⁷ And the

Cultures and Globalization eds. Doreen Massey and P. Jess (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 87-132 (especially p. 98), makes the point that cultural difference may encourage a sense of place to develop and that this difference may take the form of rituals. As an example, Rose cites the Eisteddfod as an assertion of Welsh identity.

⁴⁶ Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 18-20.

⁴⁷ Bibb's reference to the significance of superstition and conjuration in the slave narratives is not uncommon. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 569, reveals that he was persuaded by a fellow slave in his community to carry a 'certain root' to protect himself from a beating. William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*, in Taylor ed., vol. one, pp. 709-710, refers to his visit in St. Louis, Missouri, to a slave 'very distinguished as a fortune-teller'. Brown does not dwell overlong on the incident, but interestingly, in his book published in 1880, *My Southern Home: or, The South and its People* (Boston: A. G. Brown, 1880); online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brown80/menu.html>, pp. 68-80, he writes at greater length. Brown reveals how commonplace were these people and their elevated status: 'Nearly every large plantation with any number of negroes, had at least one who laid claim to be a fortune-teller, and who was regarded with more than common respect by his fellow slaves.' William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself*, in Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 200, also visited a fortune-teller, a woman, in Savannah, Georgia, and was

narrative of Jacob Green provides another example of a social practice which promoted that feeling.

Green tells of an amusing episode involving himself as a sixteen-year-old at a dance, but what is more significant here is what is indicated by the mundane details of the story.⁴⁸ Green was obviously part of a large slave community that organized its own entertainment. He 'was invited privately to a negro shindy or dance' evidently arranged without white sanction or interference. The venue was 'an old house in the woods, which had many years before been a negro meeting-house' and the dance attracted a 'large crowd', many of whom must have thought the entertainment very worthwhile because they attended without their owners' permission but with their owners' transport: there were 'about one hundred horses tied around the fence - for some of them were far from home, and, like myself, they were all runaways'.⁴⁹ Green recalled how 'everything was alive and happy inside the room' and this pleasure, coupled with the elements of secrecy and autonomy which had gone into its generation, must have amounted to one of the occasions which Blassingame described as leading to 'cooperation, social cohesion, tighter communal bonds, and [which] brought all classes of slaves together in common pursuits'.⁵⁰

Places in imagination.

From the foregoing it is already apparent that any single place could be a complex experience for slaves. As well as being changeable and contradictory, a place of enslavement could variously, and sometimes simultaneously, undermine gender identities and relations to differing degrees, cause feelings of rootedness, and provoke a need to escape. In view of this, it is not surprising, among the narratives examined here, that slaves' thoughts and feelings were rarely confined

convinced that another slave, a woman named Frankee, owned by his master, was a witch. Solomon Bayley, *A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley, Formerly a Slave in the State of Delaware, North America; Written by Himself, and Published for His Benefit; to Which Are Prefixed, a Few Remarks by Robert Hurnard* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1825); online: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bayley/bayley.html>, p. 11, also must have been aware of conjurors while he was enslaved in Delaware or Virginia, because in referring to an incident while sleeping in the open in Delaware, he described being awakened by 'an old conjuror, for so I called him'.

⁴⁸ Jacob Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave, from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 693. Green tells how he filled his trouser pockets with brass buttons hoping to convince people he was carrying plenty of money, only to become a laughing stock when his trousers were torn at the dance and his money was revealed to be no more than twenty-four cents and fifty buttons.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 692-693.

⁵⁰ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, p. 106.

to the particular location in which they found themselves at any point. Time and again it is made clear that other places, too, were significant. The phenomenon of what can be described as a place or places in imagination is valuable in further showing how complex, and sometimes interrelated, could be the experience of both lived-in and imagined places.

One of the recurrent and most strongly voiced themes of the ante-bellum narratives is the fear in which the slaves held the Deep South, and it is often expressed in a way that conveys the abolitionist message. Thus, Sally Williams's biographer (and son), stressing the cruel nature of slavery through the description of the anguish caused by the separation of his family, when his mother was sold from Fayetteville, to Alabama in 1833, records verbatim her response on learning she had been sold: "'Oh, then,' said Sally, 'I couldn't cry. 'Peared like I was stunned, an' the life died out o' me.'"⁵¹ Yet recognizing and allowing for the use of anti-slavery devices in the narratives should not obscure the fact that a move further south could be a very real and powerful force for slaves, particularly for those in areas feeling the effects of the Second Middle Passage. Between 1810 and 1861, more than one million men and women were uprooted in a forced deportation and the possibility of sale or transfer to a place greatly distant did not go unrecognized by the slave population.⁵² Certainly, for Lewis Clarke, who was slaving in Kentucky in the 1830s, by which time the state had already become an exporter of slaves, the Deep South in his imagination had a profound effect in motivating him.⁵³ Clarke was galvanized into making his escape once he learned he was to be sold further south. Although he had long thought and dreamed of escape, Clarke had not, for whatever reason, attempted this until 'the report was started that I was to be sold to Louisiana. Then I thought it was time to act. My mind was made up.'⁵⁴ Clarke's reaction is not only an example of the power of places in imagination, it is both further confirmation that slavery was not perceived by slaves to be the

⁵¹ *Aunt Sally*, p. 98.

⁵² Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2003) pp. 161-162, writes: 'The Second Middle Passage was the central event in the lives of African-American people between the American Revolution and slavery's final demise in December 1865. Whether slaves were themselves marched across the continent or were afraid that they, their families, or their friends would be, the massive deportation traumatized black people, both slave and free.'

⁵³ According to Berlin, *ibid.*, p. 162, some portions of the Upper South - Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland and Missouri - were so affected by the transfers that they changed from being slave societies to societies with slaves. By the 1820s, Kentucky, previously an importer of slaves, was one of those moving slaves west (p. 213).

⁵⁴ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 619.

same in all locations, and an indication of the extent to which Clarke identified with and was inside his home place.

Not all other places of enslavement in the slave's imagination were so frightening, sometimes their experience of lived-in places granted them an insight into other locations which provoked a positive view. Williams spent the first eighteen or nineteen years of her life on a rice plantation near the small town of Fayetteville, North Carolina where she was born and raised. Following a beating, she took her children and with her husband's help walked the several miles into the town where she remained as a truant for two or three months. The significant thing about this episode was that Williams evidently believed Fayetteville offered the real prospect of a better slave life, even before she had lived there. She knew she could stay with another slave woman who was allowed to hire herself, and Fayetteville, the place in Williams's imagination, clearly lived up to expectations because she subsequently went to some lengths to legitimize her presence in the town. She out-manoeuvred her owner and arranged to be sold to a Fayetteville man, who allowed Williams to hire herself. Williams had managed to convert the place of enslavement in her imagination into lived-in reality to very good effect and, as already noted, went on to develop a deep attachment to Fayetteville before being sold on to Alabama.

For other slaves, the obvious value of imagined places lay in their role of inspiring escape. Henry Bibb made his first escape attempt at the age of ten in what would have been 1825 or 1826. By the time he was eighteen, Bibb 'had heard that Canada was a land of liberty, somewhere in the North' and as an escape destination it became something of a fixation for him. Bibb wanted to be free from the condition of slavery, a desire heightened by the proximity of Kentucky to free states:

Sometimes, standing on the Ohio River bluff, looking over on a free State, and as far north as my eyes could see, I have eagerly gazed upon the blue sky of the free North, which at times constrained me to cry out from the depths of my soul, Oh! Canada, sweet land of rest - Oh! when shall I get there?⁵⁵

This passage has more than a passing resemblance to the style of Frederick Douglass' narrative, as will become clear later, but this literary influence on Bibb does not disguise what was clearly a real determination to reach Canada. The sheer persistence Bibb showed confirms the power of that place in his imagination, and it was not only because it was a destination of freedom. Bibb

⁵⁵ Taylor, ed., vol. two, pp. 19-20.

imagined not only Canada, he imagined the man he could become there. When Bibb married Malinda, the couple agreed they would ‘embrace the earliest opportunity of running away to Canada for our liberty’.⁵⁶ In fact, the couple became separated in December 1840, but Bibb’s need to assert his masculinity, to be a good husband, and protector of his wife, was something he knew he could do in Canada. Bibb’s letter to William Gatewood makes clear his belief, while still a slave, that Canada would allow him to achieve one of the markers of manhood:

To be compelled to stand by and see you whip and slash my wife without mercy, when I could afford her no protection, not even by offering myself to suffer the lash in her place, was more than I felt it to be the duty of a slave husband to endure, while the way was open to Canada.⁵⁷

For Bibb, the value of the particular place in his imagination lay in its inspirational quality, an effect of Canada that emerges frequently in the slave narratives. For Harriet Jacobs, New York in her imagination was similarly important, though more directly related to her place of enslavement. Jacobs stayed where she was, hiding in her grandmother’s attic, rather than attempt escape, partly through concern about her children and her grandmother, and a lack of good opportunity for flight. Alongside these very substantial reasons for staying, is evidence that the idea of New York was a positive distraction, alleviating the effects of virtual imprisonment. Jacobs’s owner, Dr. Norcom, travelled to New York believing that to be where Jacobs had escaped and to encourage him in this, Jacobs devised a successful ruse whereby that city became, by proxy, of real practical use to her. By engaging the help of a friend who knew of a trustworthy sailor who sailed to New York, and by using an old copy of the *New York Herald* for information on streets and numbers, Jacobs arranged for letters to be posted to her owner from the city. Consequently, Norcom approached Jacobs’s grandmother and attempted to deceive her regarding Jacobs’s desire to have her children sent to New York or Philadelphia. Jacobs was able to listen to the encounter and found Norcom’s antics ‘as good as a comedy’. More seriously, Jacobs knew Norcom believed her letters, in which she claimed to be living in Boston, to be from New York. For Jacobs this was crucial to her peace of mind, and to keeping alive her hopes of successful escape, while she hid in the attic:

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

It was a great object to me to keep up this delusion, for it made me and my friends feel less anxious, and it would be very convenient whenever there was a chance to escape. I resolved, therefore, to continue to write letters from the north from time to time.⁵⁸

New York must have resonated with Jacobs for some while. Her home town of Edenton was a small coastal port, a feature which would have naturally increased the slave community's knowledge and curiosity about other locations. Jacobs does not say how she first became aware of New York, but she was a girl of only fourteen when her uncle escaped, heading there by boat. Another enslaved uncle had also visited the city. While she was waiting to make her own escape, Jacobs became aware that her brother, John, had fled while in New York, and she also had friends who had escaped there.⁵⁹ All in all, New York was a famous location within Jacobs's family and circle of friends. Like Bibb, Jacobs saw the particular place in her imagination both as an escape haven and somewhere that would enable her to become the person she aspired to be. Jacobs's hopes of New York are frequently articulated through her desire, once there, to be a good, and conventional mother. She told her son before leaving Edenton:

I was now really going to the Free States, and if he was a good, honest boy [...] the Lord would bless him, and bring him to me, and we and Ellen [Jacobs's pseudonym for her daughter] would live together.⁶⁰

Jacobs wrote a remarkable narrative which has been seen as challenging the dominant contemporary views of how female slaves should be judged as women.⁶¹ Yet twenty years after escaping from North Carolina, Jacobs remained disappointed that she had not achieved conventional motherhood in being able to provide a home for her children. Her narrative closes with the oft-quoted words that show her frustration: 'Reader, my story ends with

⁵⁸ Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 629.

⁵⁹ John Jacobs was bought by the man who fathered Harriet's children, Mr. Sawyer. Sawyer subsequently became a congressman and took John Jacobs with him to Washington, Canada, Chicago and New York, where Jacobs seized his opportunity and fled to New Bedford.

⁶⁰ Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 645.

⁶¹ Jean Fagan Yellin ed., *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself by Harriet A. Jacobs* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. xxxi, refers to the following passage in Jacobs's text: 'Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others', and comments as follows: 'Located within the larger context of a narrative that affirms her value, this quiet comment resonates with the ringing interrogatives with which Sojourner Truth redefined womanhood.'

freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. [...] The dream of my life is not yet realized, I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble.⁶² New York as a place that had gone from imagination to become Jacobs's lived-in reality had evidently not provided the one thing, apart from freedom, that she most desired.

The different nature of the imagined places of Jacobs, Clarke, Williams and Bibb - free and unfree, known and unknown - does not obscure the wider point that the narrators have in common, that is, simply, that places were important to them. The condition of their being sites of enslavement did not necessarily render them meaningless or only incidental to slaves. Furthermore, the lived-in place was always more or less instrumental in bringing the imagined locations into the writers' minds. Sally Williams's knowledge of Fayetteville as a nearby town came well before she headed for it as a young woman. Similarly, Bibb and Jacobs seem 'always' to have been aware of Canada and New York. Clarke, growing up in 1820s' Kentucky, must have been aware of the slave transfers being effected well before his own sale was mooted. All places, including remote plantations, had social relations which could never be wholly confined to the immediate vicinity. Indeed, as an important part of these relations, slaves, with their chattel status, were in a condition that can only have ensured heightened awareness of other places, near and distant. The arrival and departure of slaves added to the slave community's knowledge of various locations, and sometimes to their interest in them.

Noting the prominence of the phenomenon of places in imagination for slaves does lead to consideration of the extent to which Africa may have featured in this way. The Africanness of Johnkannaus and magic tricks was not made explicit by Jacobs or Bibb, and there is little in the narratives generally to indicate that the slaves were interested in that place, but there are two for whom Africa did register to some degree. Frederick Douglass, in the context of describing how he learned about the call for Irish Catholic emancipation, wrote:

The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and had gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men.⁶³

⁶² Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 675.

⁶³ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 555.

Douglass' change from writing in the first person singular to the plural may be no more than an acknowledgement that he personally was not stolen from Africa (although it also demonstrates that Douglass recognized the need for all black autobiographers to acknowledge the group they represented, and not just their individual selves), and it is the only account examined here that refers to Africa in terms of a black homeland and to a collective uprooting from it. As a powerful piece of rhetoric, the reference reflects Douglass' sophistication, as an abolitionist and public speaker, acquired over the seven years after his escape and before his narrative was published. But it also draws further attention to the significance of colour or race to Douglass, a point to be considered later. In contrast to Douglass, William Grimes, a Virginian-born slave, did not see Africa as 'home'. Grimes seems to have seen America both as home and as superior to Africa in some way. Grimes's 1825 narrative is rather unconventional in that he is not concerned to demonstrate that he was a slave with unquestionable character, perhaps as a result of the absence of abolitionist influence or aid in the publication of his account, and reveals that Grimes was accused of thievery, pimping and rape, and that he was also not averse to fighting.⁶⁴ It is the description of a fight which shows how Grimes saw some Africans as inferior. Grimes recalled telling his master his version of the events leading to the brawl with the black slave driver on a Savannah plantation:

but, sir, if you had been there you would not have used me in the way the driver did: he is an iggorant [sic] old African, or Guinea negro, and has not judgment to superintend any one in my present situation.⁶⁵

It is clear that the idea of Africa had different meanings for Douglass and Grimes which, although in themselves might be interesting to explore, I mention here only because their attitudes lead to the more immediately relevant question of how and why slaves felt about America as a place, and how this may relate to their sense of the particular places of enslavement.⁶⁶

The geographer Gillian Rose makes the point that a sense of place can combine different geographical scales, that it is possible to identify with the local, regional and national, and this question of scale or multiplicity is of interest in considering the slave narratives, especially with regard to the

⁶⁴ Taylor, ed., in his introduction to *Life of William Grimes*, vol. one, p. 182, discusses the unusual nature of Grimes's narrative.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶⁶ For instance, Relph's identification of the phenomenon of what he calls vicarious insiderness, *Place and Placelessness*, pp. 52-53, might be useful in considering Douglass' ideas about Africa.

national.⁶⁷ Among the narrators examined here, Moses Roper is far from unusual in expressing alongside the usual message about practices in the South, affection for the country of his birth. His mother and siblings remained in bondage as Roper arrived in England, but his anti-slavery peroration makes a declaration of loyalty to America:

Whatever I may have experienced in America, at the hands of cruel taskmasters, yet I am unwilling to speak in any but respectful terms of the land of my birth. It is far from my wish to attempt to degrade America in the eyes of Britons. I love her institutions in the free states, her zeal for Christ [...] may America soon be indeed the land of the free.⁶⁸

Although this kind of sentiment is an indication that fugitive slaves and their abolitionist supporters did not want to be perceived as un-American in their campaign, that fact itself says something about the writers' need to identify with their country. If Roper's declaration is a sign of this, then so, too, are remarks made by Harriet Jacobs.

Jacobs is strident in her comments as she remembered the time when she was at risk of recapture having fled to New York and how weary she was of the chase. Jacobs's angry tone is unmistakable, yet she saw herself as American: 'but there I sat, an oppressed American, not daring to show my face'.⁶⁹ What Jacobs's comment underlines is that slaves' sense of particular places could be highly fluid. Unable and unwilling to return to their home places, fugitives often found they encountered racism in the North. It was hardly an easy transition, and in not feeling a sense of belonging in their new place, it is quite possible that two things could happen. First, positive feelings about places of enslavement could be strengthened; but with the impossibility of return there, the second thing that might emerge could be an increased need to identify with the national place rather than the local. This second phenomenon cannot be properly assessed here given that many narratives do no more than provide a cursory outline of life after escape. Even with regard to the places of enslavement it is not possible in most cases to establish their ongoing significance to the authors. Indeed, some accounts were published so shortly after the writers left their homes, that not much new life had been lived. Lunsford Lane, for example, left Raleigh in April or May 1842 and published his narrative the following August. At the other extreme, Harriet Jacobs started writing her manuscript in 1853,

⁶⁷ Rose, 'Place and identity', especially p. 92.

⁶⁸ Taylor, ed., vol. one, pp. 519-520.

⁶⁹ Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 673.

more than a decade after her escape, and it was 1861 before its publication. This length of time may well have diminished Jacobs's sense of her home place and, to some extent, account for the paucity of references in her text. But in Jacobs's case there are other sources which allow for further consideration of whether her feelings about her place of enslavement became more positive than her narrative alone suggests.

Harriet Jacobs.

In the spring of 1867 Jacobs returned to Edenton where on 25 April she wrote a letter to an acquaintance, Ednah Dow Cheney, a Boston abolitionist.⁷⁰ The letter principally addresses Jacobs's concern for Edenton's postwar black community - she refers to her attempts 'to teach the women to make Yankee gardens' and observes that the freedmen were being cheated out of their cotton crops, while some plantation children were being denied education through being too distant from a school. But of particular interest here is what the opening paragraphs of the letter reveal about Jacobs's thoughts and feelings about the place of her enslavement.

According to her biographer, Jean Fagan Yellin, Jacobs went back to Edenton 'to see whether she could still live in her old home'.⁷¹ Leaving aside the practical considerations of establishing the position regarding property left by her deceased grandmother, which may also have been a factor in Jacobs's visit, this suggests at least an element of desire to return to Edenton, itself evidence that Jacobs had some positive sense of that place, particularly as this was not her first return visit.⁷² As already mentioned, Jacobs's sense of Edenton is muted in her narrative, possibly for either of the reasons mentioned earlier, and perhaps because, in writing publicly, Jacobs was concerned to concentrate the reader's attention on the specific aspect of slavery that was potentially one of the most worrying for its enslaved women - sexual assault or harassment. But in the private letter to Cheney which followed years later, Jacobs gave freer rein to her reflections on Edenton, revealing how complex in its ambivalence was her memory of the place. Jacobs recalled the unequivocal and unsurprising misery of her enslavement as follows:

⁷⁰ The text of the letter is reproduced in Yellin, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, pp. 249-250.

⁷¹ Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), p. 211.

⁷² According to Yellin's chronology, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, p. 225, Jacobs returned to Edenton carrying relief supplies in October 1865. This visit is not covered in any detail in Yellin's subsequent biography, *Harriet Jacobs*, where, on p. 245, referring to the straitened circumstances of the Norcoms, the family who had owned Jacobs, Yellin writes: 'Yet when Jacobs visited Edenton just after the war ended, his fortunes had again reversed.'

I felt I would like to write you a line from my old home. I am sitting under the old roof twelve feet from the spot where I suffered all the crushing weight of slavery. thank God the bitter cup is drained of its last dreg. there is no more need of hiding places to conceal slave Mothers.⁷³

Yet she also refers to something she seems to have found unexpected - an affection for the place. Jacobs continued: 'I had long thought I had no attachment to my old home.' Edenton remained meaningful in Jacobs's memory in the negative sense of being the site of her enslavement, but she was also able to attribute a positive meaning which originated from her feelings about some of the people who had shared that place. Jacobs explained her attachment thus:

as I often sit here and think of those I loved of their hard struggle in life - their unflinching love and devotion to myself and Children. I love to sit here and think of them. they have made the few sunny spots in that dark life sacred to me.

Natural and strong though these positive associations were, they remained overshadowed by Jacobs's unhappy memory of slavery in Edenton, even as postwar changes in the town may have given cause for optimism. Jacobs told Cheney:

I cannot tell you how I feel in this place. the change is so great I can hardly take it all in[.] I was born here, and amid all these new born blessings, the old dark cloud comes over me, and I find it hard to have faith in rebels.

If Jacobs's memory of her previous experience in Edenton was ambivalent, so too was the experience occasioned by her visit. Ultimately, Jacobs did not want to stay in the town, and the assumption must be that this was at least partly because it was too painful a place for her - her adverse memory of it not only remained unmitigated by her new experience, it must have been reinforced by it. Towards the end of 1867 Jacobs visited Julia Wilbur, a fellow activist living in Washington, who wrote: 'This evening Mrs. Jacobs came to stay all night, good visit with her. Her Georgia experiences interesting. Also her visit to her old home in Edenton. Has possession [sic] of her Grandmother's property, has no desire to make her home there.'⁷⁴ In fact, Jacobs did not own her grandmother's property. In February 1867 ownership had been awarded to the

⁷³ Yellin, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, p. 249. Jacobs capitalized important words but not the opening word of a sentence.

⁷⁴ Cited in Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, p. 211.

surviving beneficiary named in Jacobs's grandmother's will, Dr. William Warren, a local white man.⁷⁵ Even as a purely practical development, this surely would have compromised any intention Jacobs may have had of returning permanently to Edenton, but the particular circumstances giving rise to the legacy can only have strengthened her negative memory of the place. Jacobs's grandmother, Molly Horniblow, had named white beneficiaries when she made her will in 1840, because she knew that neither her enslaved son, Mark Ramsay, owned by Horniblow herself, nor Jacobs, could inherit. Horniblow hoped that by naming non-family members as legatees, they would somehow arrange for Ramsay's freedom. Ramsay was free by 1843 when he married, and after his mother's death in September 1853, he continued living in her house. Ramsay himself died in 1858, leaving a widow, Ann, who remained in the property, until she was evicted once it was awarded to Warren.⁷⁶ Jacobs had returned to Edenton as a free woman, but the ramifications of her family's enslavement in the town years previously had continued to make themselves felt in the most unobvious of ways.

However, it was true that Jacobs's visit to Edenton was not without its more uplifting moments; Jacobs also told Cheney that she had:

hunted up all the old people, done what I could for them. I love to work for these old people. many of them I have known from Childhood.

Yet the positive aspects of Jacobs's trip to Edenton were not enough to make her want to stay, although that is not to say that Jacobs had no further interest in the place. She did make further visits to Edenton, if for no other reason perhaps than because she wanted to see her uncle's widow. And it seems that almost half a century after she had escaped from the town, Edenton remained predominantly a negative place for Jacobs. In February 1889, Jacobs, then in her mid-seventies, travelled with her daughter to Edenton. By this time, Jacobs, according to her biographer, was: 'Long a city woman [...] [and] was feeling

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 254-255. Yellin does not provide comprehensive details of the will of Jacobs's grandmother, Molly Horniblow. However, according to Jacobs, in Taylor, ed., *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, p. 641, Horniblow had also owned the property next to her own home: 'She [a slave named Aggie] lived in a small tenement belonging to my grandmother, and built on the same lot with her own house.' Apparently it was this property in which Ann Ramsay was living and where Jacobs stayed during her visit in 1867; Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, p. 255, notes: 'Harriet was staying next door [to her grandmother's home] with her uncle's widow, the evicted Ann Ramsay.' Ann Ramsay had bought that property in November 1859 (Yellin, notes, p. 364). Perhaps Julia Wilbur, in 1867, was referring not to Molly Horniblow's own home, but to the property next door.

⁷⁶ Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, pp. 253-254.

isolated in her old hometown'.⁷⁷ It may well be that Jacobs's preference for city life accounted in some part for her disappointment with Edenton, and it is clear that her sense of the place, inevitably still affected by memories of her enslavement there, was actually dominated by them. Jacobs wrote to her friend Julia Wilbur, who in turn made a diary entry: 'Says Edenton is a forlorn place....She had seen the place of her suffering for years.'⁷⁸ From the foregoing, it is obvious that Jacobs's visits to Edenton were a source of ambivalence, and this attitude is significant because it illustrates very specifically two important things about places.

First, the fact that place meanings are an attributed rather than inherent quality means that they are always susceptible to change and to multiplicity. To Jacobs, Edenton undoubtedly meant slavery, but certainly her indicated sense of the place in the 1860s, was also informed by a more positive element - her affection for the people in it, and this leads to the second point about places. To paraphrase the geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, things and places will be drained of meaning in the absence of the right people.⁷⁹ Jacobs could not purge slavery from the meaning that Edenton held for her, but the fact that the right people - the beloved old people she was so pleased to help - were in the town did counter its weight. And there is another point which emerges from this association of places and people for Jacobs.

According to Yellin, Jacobs 'had led a rootless life' since she escaped slavery and it may well have been this lack of contemporary rootedness that encouraged Jacobs to consider whether she could return permanently to Edenton in 1867.⁸⁰ The need to feel rooted is basic and powerful and the disappointment and dissatisfaction Jacobs felt with the North probably increased the feeling that despite everything, Edenton was where she belonged - among the people who gave the place its added meaning. It also has to be acknowledged that Jacobs's particular circumstances in 1867 would have caused or contributed to her ongoing feelings about Edenton. As the geographer, John Eyles, has pointed out, an individual's sense of a place is always likely to change as his or her life changes, and by the end of the Civil War Jacobs's life was, of course, rather

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 252.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 140.

⁸⁰ Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, p. 255, describes the result of Jacobs selling, in 1892, the property she owned in Edenton as 'severing her last ties with Edenton'. She continues: 'Since that rainy night she had fled the Norcoms, she had led a rootless life. Her inability to plant roots is emblematic of the condition of her people.'

different from what it had been twenty-five years earlier.⁸¹ In 1867 Jacobs was well into middle-age and without the youthful expectation that relocation would provide what she had hoped for in addition to freedom - a stable family life in her own home - and she was rootless and disaffected with the North. All in all, it was a combination of factors likely to encourage both feelings of insecurity in Jacobs, and the hope or belief that postwar Edenton would be a better place for her.

It is not surprising that, ultimately, Jacobs's response to Edenton remained ambivalent, but it does throw into relief the difference between her reaction and that of Frederick Douglass, a contemporary who also returned to his places of enslavement. One possible reason for this difference, of course, is that Jacobs and Douglass were enslaved in different places, but it is also the case that another fundamental factor - gender - was significant. A point about places generally is that women and men experience them differently.⁸² For Jacobs, gender was the defining characteristic of the whole of her adult life in Edenton. From the age of fourteen until her escape at twenty-nine, she had experienced the place through her physical vulnerability to the sexual harassment of her master, and through the resultant compulsion to assert control of her sexuality in a very public manner. Then, having given birth to two children, she was unable to mother them much past early childhood because she had to resort to hiding to avoid her owner's advances and threats. Gender could not help but have the most profound effect on Jacobs's sense of her home place. Postwar, she had both emotional and more tangible ties to Edenton which ensured that until virtually the end of her life, she remained in contact with the town, her final visit coming in early 1889.⁸³ But positive though these ties were, they had not overcome the negative associations.

⁸¹ Eyles, *Senses of Place*, p. 27, succinctly summarizes the dynamic nature of the close association between a place and individuals' personal identity. Writing about his own feelings on living in Towcester, Eyles observed: 'My sense of place, much wrapped up with my identity and material well-being, evolves not necessarily in a constant or continuous fashion, but as life itself changes.' Elsewhere, pp. 129 and 131, in his analysis of the data from Towcester people who contributed to his research, Eyles 'moved from the specificity of Towcester to the general forms that sense of place may take' and wrote: 'Thus the form which an individual sense of place takes certainly changes in relation to changing life-events and aspirations.'

⁸² I make this comment following Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 12, who wrote that the purpose of her work was to 'examine the extent to which women and men experience spaces and places differently'. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 179, has also made the point, arguing that 'spaces and places are not only themselves gendered, but in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood'.

⁸³ Jacobs sold the property she owned in Edenton in August 1892. In noting this, Yellin,

Frederick Douglass.

In contrast to Jacobs, Frederick Douglass had a lifelong, positive sense of one of the places of his enslavement, Baltimore, something which emerges clearly from his two ante-bellum narratives, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and *My Bondage and My Freedom*. This difference justifies the brief comparison of those two authors' place experiences. Additionally, there are two other reasons for dealing with Douglass' texts separately from the other narrators. First, his narratives were published ten years apart, in 1845 and 1855, so they are useful for thinking about whether and why a sense of a particular place may persist, as it most definitely did for Douglass. Second, the texts show that Douglass was consciously interested in places. If only one thing were to be said, here, about Douglass and that interest, it would be that he openly acknowledged the role of places in making people. I shall examine his two narratives to consider his strong identification with the place of Baltimore and his attitude to the other places of his enslavement. This necessarily involves considering the role of a particular place in Douglass' imagination, his place experiences and the resultant interaction of place identity with Douglass' identity, and how these things affected his sense of places over time.

As will become evident, Douglass had a lifelong and positive sense of Baltimore, from its genesis in his imagination, to development as the place became a lived-in reality for him, and then as it became a memory. From the beginning, Baltimore as an imagined place was uplifting - the very idea of it made plantation life more bearable in providing excitement for Douglass as a child. In his early years, during the 1820s, Douglass was based on an Eastern Shore plantation, twelve miles north of Easton in Maryland, which was sufficiently productive to allow his master to run a laden sloop regularly to Baltimore, about thirty or forty miles away. The boat was manned by slaves whom Douglass described as 'esteemed very highly by the other slaves, and looked upon as the privileged ones of the plantation'. The reason for the status of the slaves and for the envy they caused was simple: 'it was no small affair, in the eyes of the slaves, to be allowed to see Baltimore'.⁸⁴ Knowledge about or maybe even merely awareness of Baltimore, in making slave life more tolerable,

Harriet Jacobs, pp. 255 and 364, does not say whether Jacobs returned to the town to effect the sale.

⁸⁴ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 540.

encouraged Douglass, once he learned he was to be transferred there, to hope it would offer him much:

I had the strongest desire to see Baltimore. My cousin Tom [...] had been there, and [...] inspired me with that desire, by his eloquent description of the place. Tom was, sometimes, Capt. Auld's cabin boy; and when he came from Baltimore, he was always a sort of hero amongst us, at least till his Baltimore trip was forgotten. I could never tell him of anything, or point out anything that struck me as beautiful or powerful, but that he had seen something in Baltimore far surpassing it. [...] he spoke of the bells ringing; and of many other things which roused my curiosity very much; and, indeed, which heightened my hopes of happiness in my new home.⁸⁵

Douglass was not disappointed. He arrived in the city, in 1826, as a child of eight, old enough to make the inevitable comparison between his two known places, and Baltimore fared very well. He had not been there long, before he 'observed a marked difference in the treatment of slaves, from that which I had witnessed in the country. A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation.'⁸⁶ It is no surprise, then, that speedy recognition of its advantages would cause Douglass, like the other slave narrators, to welcome his urban lifestyle. The sense of the place in his imagination gave way to a powerful attachment that developed from lived reality.

Between the age of eight and fifteen and again from the age of eighteen to twenty when he escaped from Baltimore in 1838, Douglass benefited from a positive place experience - Baltimore was very much a place that suited Douglass, in several ways. In the 1820s it was what Christopher Phillips has described as a 'notorious entrepôt' for fugitive slaves between slave and free states.⁸⁷ The city's population in 1830 and 1840 was 80,620 and 102,513, respectively, of whom 18,945 and 21,322 were black. Of this population, only 4,111 and 3,177 were enslaved.⁸⁸ In other words, Baltimore had a thriving black community with a preponderance of them being free. It is unthinkable, in this environment, that Douglass would have been unaware that the city's name

⁸⁵ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), pp. 210-211.

⁸⁶ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 552.

⁸⁷ Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁸⁸ I have calculated these figures of the enslaved using data in *ibid.*, p. 27. Table 2 shows the white, slave and free black population in percentage terms. In 1830, these were 76.5%, 5.1% and 18.3%, respectively; in 1840, 79.2%, 3.1% and 17.5%, respectively.

was synonymous with freedom. Baltimore also had a fluid population of immigrants, a result of the fact that it did not depend heavily on the slavery system. Indeed, it was two Irish dockers who ‘both advised [...] [Douglass] to run away to the north’. It was a message Douglass took to heart: he ‘remembered their advice, and from that time I resolved to run away’.⁸⁹ But before he actually did that, Douglass’ participation in the social relations that helped make Baltimore the place it was, allowed him to become aware of abolitionism, to become literate and, finally, to learn a trade. Right from the outset, Douglass was being shaped by his location, and his existing positive sense of the place consolidated.

Douglass already felt a deep attachment to Baltimore, when he left the city, temporarily as it transpired, in 1827, to return to the Eastern Shore to be valued and allocated as part of his deceased owner’s estate. He recalled leaving ‘with a young heart overborne with sadness, and a soul full of apprehension’, to return after ‘just about one month, [...] [that] seemed to have been six’.⁹⁰ By the time he was transferred again to St. Michael’s in 1833, in what was intended to be a long-term move, Baltimore was well and truly a place with which Douglass could identify, because it had offered opportunities that had allowed him to thrive. His mistress there had provided some basic teaching that was curtailed when her husband forbade her to continue, but Douglass exploited his surroundings in Baltimore to overcome his illiteracy showing a resourcefulness that would stand him in good stead:

The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, [...] getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. [...] I soon learned the names of these letters [...] I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named.⁹¹

In addition, Douglass occasionally attended a sabbath school in the city where he became ‘more of a teacher than a pupil’, a skill he was pleased to employ in St. Michael’s. When in St. Michael’s, Douglass was hired to William Freeland, who allowed Douglass to run a slaves’ sabbath school from ‘the house of a free colored man’. This reference to colour in the context of Douglass’ interaction

⁸⁹ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 556.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 557 and p. 558, respectively.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

with other slaves is an important one, and not only for Douglass' expression of 'job satisfaction':

I succeeded in creating in them [Freeland's other slaves] a strong desire to learn how to read [...] nothing would do but that I must keep a Sabbath school [...]

I look back to those Sundays with an amount of pleasure not to be expressed. They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves was the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed. We loved each other and to leave them at the close of the Sabbath was a severe cross indeed. [...] I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race.⁹²

This activity exemplifies the point made by the geographer, Eyles, and noted earlier: it generated for Douglass, and it seems for his pupils, a sense of belonging attributable to the qualities they shared, not least of which was skin colour or race. The right kind of people, fellow blacks, had provided the means to create or enhance this sense for Douglass, the significance of which is indicated by its recurrence as a theme. Before this particular scholarly episode, Douglass had been offered the chance to assist with teaching in a white-run school, also in St. Michael's, a chance he accepted with alacrity. Douglass' description reveals the value of the right kind of people in particular places in adding meaning to those locations:

Wilson, asked me, one day, if I would like to assist him in teaching a little Sabbath school, [...] Here, thought I, is something worth living for; here is an excellent chance for usefulness; and I shall soon have a company of young friends, lovers of knowledge, like some of my Baltimore friends, from whom I now felt parted forever.

[...] I could not go to Baltimore, but I could make a little Baltimore here.⁹³

The passage shows the extent, and for what reason, Douglass felt he had belonged to Baltimore. And the phrase 'I could not go to Baltimore, but I could make a little Baltimore here' is also an acknowledgement that the place had given him purpose and made him useful. It is an indication that Douglass knew places made people. This view is confirmed by Douglass' converse, negative,

⁹² Ibid., pp. 573-574.

⁹³ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 254.

sense of another place of enslavement, Tuckahoe, ‘the dull, flat, and unthrifty district’ where ‘without any fault of mine’ Douglass was born. The place was: remarkable for nothing that I know of more than the worn-out, sandy, desert-like appearance of its soil, the general dilapidation of its farms and fences, the indigent and spiritless character of its inhabitants, and the prevalence of ague and fever.

[...] The reader will pardon so much about the place of my birth, on the score that it is always a fact of some importance to know where a man is born, if indeed it be important to know anything about him.⁹⁴

Yet Douglass believed people could raise themselves above their places, as he indicated in a passage about his mother which also reiterates the uninspiring nature of his birthplace. Douglass’ mother:

was the *only* one of all the slaves and colored people in Tuckahoe who enjoyed that advantage [of being able to read]. How she acquired this knowledge, I know not, for Tuckahoe is the last place in the world where she would be apt to find facilities for learning. [...] the achievement of my mother, considering the place, was very extraordinary.⁹⁵

Douglass may not have been able to explain his mother’s achievement, but in his own case, he believed it was Baltimore that helped him to raise himself above the place of his birth. Indeed, elsewhere, Douglass is explicit about this. When he wrote that: ‘Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity’, it was not that he was remembering and referring only to his material success.⁹⁶ It was also an acknowledgement that Baltimore helped shape Douglass the slave boy into Douglass the man. As it was for Jacobs, so was Douglass’ place experience defined by gender, with the advantage that as he grew older, that experience consolidated rather than undermined his gender identity. From his arrival there as a young boy until his departure at twenty, the city of Baltimore offered Douglass all the ingredients of that most desired American condition: the self-made man. Douglass’ autobiographies are renowned for their deliberate gendered quality - the story of the heroic orphaned slave boy, and their relative silence on the women in his life, especially in the first account - and his affection for the city was, at least in part, a result of the fact that his place experience enhanced his masculinity.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 139-140.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 155-156, emphasis in the original.

⁹⁶ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 550.

Douglass became literate in Baltimore, and while intelligence in itself was a much valued manly quality, the manner in which he achieved literacy - using the boatyard environment as a way of completing his introduction to it - allowed him to refine and display another masculine trait, that of resourcefulness. Another manly characteristic was independence, something for which Douglass strove. He acquired the trade of caulking on boats, and embraced the independence that accompanied the practice of self-hire when he persuaded his owner to allow him to do this in 1838. Although a hard bargain was driven in permitting this, for Douglass the deal was welcome: 'I thought it better than the old mode of getting along. It was a step towards freedom to be allowed to bear the responsibilities of a freeman'.⁹⁷ Of course, the transition from slave boy to man was so successful, Douglass could not stay in the city, but felt compelled to escape - the ultimate and common contradiction of the slave's positive place experience. As he would later say: 'Since I came to manhood, slavery and I could not live in peace in the same state.'⁹⁸ Nearly thirty years later, Douglass was eager to return to Baltimore and, unlike Jacobs's experience of visiting her place of enslavement, Douglass' return would be a great pleasure to him. That occasion is something I shall examine later; for now, it is enough to note that his departure in 1838 did not diminish Douglass' attachment to or his sense of identifying with Baltimore.

Douglass' willingness to acknowledge the influence of Baltimore was one example of a lifelong, deep and sometimes analytical interest in the places of his enslavement and their effects on him. When his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, was published in 1855, Douglass was keen to explain why Baltimore had been able to exert such a hold, and the explanation he offered is revealing in two regards. First, in referring to his temporary absence from the place in 1827, it makes explicit Douglass' need to feel rooted:

The people of the north, and free people generally, I think, have less attachment to the places where they are born and brought up, than have the slaves. Their freedom to go and come, to be here and there, as they list, prevents any extravagant attachment to any one particular place, in their case. On the other hand the slave is a fixture; he has no choice, no goal, no destination; but is pegged down to a single spot, and must take root here, or

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 584.

⁹⁸ John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates and Interviews vol. 4: 1864-80* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 42, contains a transcript of these words spoken by Douglass as part of his address in Baltimore on 17 November 1864.

nowhere. The idea of removal elsewhere, comes generally, in the shape of a threat, and in punishment of crime. It is therefore, attended with fear and dread. A slave seldom thinks of bettering his condition by being sold, and hence he looks upon separation from his native place, with none of the enthusiasm which animates the bosoms of young freemen, when they contemplate a life in the far west, or in some distant country where they intend to rise to wealth and distinction.⁹⁹

This was a need Douglass had made public some years earlier, albeit as a secondary point, in an open letter to his old master, Thomas Auld, written in 1848, ten years after his escape. The letter was subsequently included in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and though it has to be considered in the context of Douglass' abolitionist activity at that time, that does not suggest that the strength of that need was feigned, nor detract from his affection for Maryland:

I am, however, by no means prejudiced against the state as such. Its geography, climate, fertility, and products, are such as to make it a *very desirable abode for any man; and but for the existence of slavery there, it is not impossible that I might again take up my abode in that state. It is not that I love Maryland less, but freedom more.* You will be surprised to learn that people at the north labor under the strange delusion that if the slaves were emancipated at the south, they would flock to the north. So far from this being the case, in that event, you would see many old and familiar faces back again to the south. The fact is, there are *few here who would not return to the south* in the event of emancipation. *We want to live in the land of our birth, and to lay our bones by the side of our fathers;* and nothing short of an intense love of personal freedom keeps us from the south.¹⁰⁰

The expression of this need for rootedness is indicative of something that has been recognized about Douglass elsewhere. David Blight has said that throughout his adult life Douglass yearned for a sense of belonging.¹⁰¹ In this, Baltimore had been a very successful place for Douglass. He had become literate, acquired a trade, and made friends there. In short, Douglass had 'taken

⁹⁹ Douglass, p. 238.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 414-415, emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst and Boston, 2002), p. 24.

root' in Baltimore, so it is no surprise that the place should remain dear in his affections, even after he had voluntarily left it.

The second point of interest of both the quoted passages, is their relevance to the question of slavery and the experience of place at a more general level rather than as it pertained to Douglass particularly. Douglass was expressing his own attachment to Baltimore, and a need for rootedness, but as he presented himself as far from unique in his identification with his place of enslavement, he was, in effect, saying that slavery imposed on slaves a greater attachment to their places than might otherwise have been the case: 'free people generally, I think, have less attachment to the places where they are born and brought up, than have the slaves'. The tenability of this view is not the issue here; what is more immediately germane is the significance of such slave attachment. Douglass was neither alone nor mistaken in the belief that 'there are few who would not return to the south'. Lewis Clarke also made the point when he wrote: 'Some people are very much afraid that all the slaves will run up north, if they are ever free. But I can assure them that they will run *back* again, if they do.'¹⁰² The postwar phenomenon of freed slaves leaving and then returning to their places of enslavement has long been recognized and raises the question of why this should have been the case.¹⁰³

Without doubt, one factor in the slaves' return was hostility in the north or in the newly emancipated southern states. Another was the matter of dislocation; slaves who had been subject to the wartime practice of what was termed 'refugeeing' wanted, not unreasonably, to return to their home places when they were able. But it was also true that many slaves were emancipated while still at their home plantations and these, too, often left and then decided to return. Of course, some left simply because they were able to - there was a strong association of mobility with freedom. In the case of these slaves, although the act of return was less symbolic than the act of departure, it was no less revealing. The suggestion must be that their experience in the site of enslavement had offered them something positive: that 'they knew their place', in both senses of the phrase. For the slaves to 'know their place' in terms of knowing their geographical territory was no less likely an occurrence for them than for any other individual, and the consequences would be no less significant.

¹⁰² Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 623, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰³ Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 292-335, and Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 161-270, both refer to the slaves' practice of departing from and returning to their home places.

Knowing one's place in this geographical sense is straightforward in itself, but that quality does not dilute the power of such familiarity. Douglass' sentiment that he and other slaves wanted to 'live in the land our birth, and lay our bones by the side of our fathers' is one repeated elsewhere, and is evidence of a strong and positive association with places of enslavement.¹⁰⁴ The significance of such an association, according to the geographer, Edward Relph, is that it constitutes a source of individual identity and security, it is a 'point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world'.¹⁰⁵ For slaves, knowing one's geographical place resulted in also knowing one's place in the other sense - being aware of one's position. It may seem perverse to claim that as a positive feature in the context of slavery, but what it boils down to is that the deep association that Relph says virtually everyone feels with the places where they were born and grew up, was no more denied to slaves than it would be to anyone else.¹⁰⁶ In short, slaves' places were as good a source of identity development for them as freemen's places were for their inhabitants.

Returning now to the particular significance of Baltimore to Douglass, to properly understand this, it is necessary only to be aware of the continuation and growth of that significance once the place became nothing but a memory. This is easily shown in two examples, one from his narratives and one from the edited collection of his papers. The first example requires a repeat of the reference to the episode of Douglass being invited to teach at the sabbath school in St. Michael's. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass told the story in a concise paragraph in the context of discussing the hypocrisy of certain slaveholders who were also practising Christians. His low opinion of the place and its people are clearly conveyed:

there was a white young man, a Mr. Wilson, who proposed to keep a Sabbath school for the instruction of such slaves as might be disposed to learn to read the New Testament. We met but three times, when Mr. West and Mr. Fairbanks, both class-leaders, with many others, came upon us with sticks and

¹⁰⁴ In October 1865, a group of freed slaves on Edisto Island, South Carolina, wrote to the Freedmen's Bureau commissioner and to President Johnson expressing their distress at the decision to deny them ownership of land upon which they had slaved. They complained of being 'at the mercy of those who are combined to prevent us from getting land enough to lay our fathers['] bones upon' and claimed: 'This is our home, we have made These lands what they are.' The letters are reproduced by Ira Berlin et al, 'The terrain of freedom: the struggle over the meaning of free labor in the U. S. South', *History Workshop Journal* 22 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 108-130 (especially pp. 128-129).

¹⁰⁵ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

other missiles, drove us off, and forbade us to meet again. Thus ended our little Sabbath school in the pious town of St.

Michael's.¹⁰⁷

By the time the narrative was published in 1845, both St. Michael's and Baltimore were only a memory - Douglass had escaped north in 1838. In his 1855 narrative, the same episode is recounted with a quite different emphasis, remembered and used now, not only to convey the message as in the first narrative, but also to highlight Douglass' great attachment to Baltimore:

Wilson, asked me, one day, if I would like to assist him in teaching a little Sabbath school, [...] Here, thought I, is something worth living for; here is an excellent chance for usefulness; and I shall soon have a company of young friends, lovers of knowledge, like some of my Baltimore friends, from whom I now felt parted forever.

[...] I could not go to Baltimore, but I could make a little Baltimore here. At our second meeting, [...] in rushed a mob, headed by Mr. Wright Fairbanks and Mr. Garrison West [...] Thus ended the infant Sabbath school, in the town of St. Michael's. [...] The cloud over my St. Michael's home grew heavier and blacker than ever.¹⁰⁸

This new emphasis is an indication, more than twenty years after Douglass had left Baltimore, in 1833, that the city remained significant to him in a way that went beyond nostalgia. Baltimore had made Douglass who he was and therefore had remained positively meaningful to him. And it is the meaning an individual attributes to a particular location that is the essence of the individual's sense of that place.

The second example of the persistence of Douglass' sense of Baltimore came almost a decade after *My Bondage and My Freedom* appeared, and nearly thirty years after escaping slavery. Douglass returned to Baltimore at what must have been the first sensible opportunity. On 1 November 1864, slavery in Maryland was abolished, and on 17 November Douglass went back to Baltimore where he made an address at the Bethal African Methodist Episcopal Church. As an active abolitionist and public figure, Douglass' return to Maryland must have had a considerable symbolism for him. It was also a very personal experience, being the first time he had seen his sister, who had remained there, since

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 562.

¹⁰⁸ Douglass, p. 254.

1836.¹⁰⁹ The action itself speaks volumes about Douglass' attachment to the city, but when he addressed the Baltimore audience, he chose words which explicitly revealed his identification with his home state:

now I return to greet with an affectionate kiss, the humblest pebble from the shores of your glorious Chesapeake. I did not leave because I loved Maryland less, but freedom more.¹¹⁰

Douglass' visit to Baltimore had great personal and professional implications for him which serve to draw attention to the difference between his return to his home place and Jacobs to hers. Douglass had not forgotten the horrors of slavery, but in contrast to Jacobs, the pleasure at returning to the site of his enslavement was not marred, or at least was not overwhelmed, by either his unpleasant memories or his new experience of the place. Whereas Jacobs found herself depressed by her return, 'under the old dark cloud', Douglass saw his homecoming as one of the most positively significant events of his life.¹¹¹ This was partly because his return was facilitated by the abolition of slavery, which was made clear to his audience when he made his address in November 1864: 'My life has been distinguished by two important events, dated about twenty-six years apart. One was my running away from Maryland, and the other is my returning to Maryland to-night.' But it was also because Douglass continued to see Baltimore as the place which had shaped him from his earliest days there: 'here in this city where I abandoned all these evil courses [fighting locals], and became a thoughtful boy'.¹¹²

Well before Douglass articulated his memories of Baltimore in 1864, he had shown a more pronounced concern with his places of enslavement, as is shown in *My Bondage and My Freedom* where he introduced entirely new memories. The fact of this greater detail on particular locations is important, here, because it emphasizes Douglass' engagement with and interest in places in their totality. People are always affected by the components of places, most obviously their social relations, but also, often in a taken-for-granted way, by their topography. This can be a very significant factor in the identity of any place and in its effects on individuals, but among the slave narrators Douglass is outstanding for his

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps it was because of the family reasons for Douglass' return, which must have accounted at least in part for the speed of his visit, that he excluded details from *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, his final autobiography published in 1882 - his autobiographies are famous for their projection of the public rather than the private Douglass.

¹¹⁰ Blassingame and McKivigan, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, p. 43.

¹¹¹ The quote is from Jacobs's letter to Edna Cheney, in Yellin, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, p. 249.

¹¹² Blassingame and McKivigan, eds., pp. 41 and 40, respectively.

acknowledgement of these. For example, a windmill on the Eastern Shore when Douglass was there as a child, was as fascinating itself as was its vista:

The windmill was to me a source of infinite interest and pleasure. The old man always seemed pleased when he saw a troop of darkey little urchins [...] approaching to view the whirling wings of his wondrous machine. From the mill we could see other objects of deep interest. [...] It was a source of much amusement to view the flowing sails and complicated rigging, as the little crafts dashed by, and to speculate upon Baltimore, as to the kind and quality of the place.¹¹³

This topographical interest was not confined to the built landscape and is important to note, because a more complete understanding of Douglass' sense of his places demands acknowledgement that in one way this was fed by a real feeling for the natural landscape of his places, not least because it influenced and inspired him. Thus, when he left Baltimore for the Eastern Shore in 1833, and sailed 'down the Chesapeake Bay, our sloop - the Amanda - was passed by the steamers plying between that city and Philadelphia, and I watched the course of those steamers, and while going to St. Michael's, I formed a plan to escape from slavery'.¹¹⁴ Similarly, once in his new place, Douglass was heartened by its proximity to the coast; and in the passage which seems to have influenced Henry Bibb, he wrote:

Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. [...] The sight of these always affected me powerfully.

[...] Only think of it; one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! Try it? Yes! God helping me, I will. It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom.¹¹⁵

Douglass' almost elemental affection for the topography of Chesapeake Bay, confirmed in his delight at returning to the 'glorious Chesapeake' in 1864, is in contrast to the way he depicted the 'worn-out, sandy, desert-like appearance' of Tuckahoe.¹¹⁶ Douglass wrote in his letter to Thomas Auld, and spoke of his 'love for Maryland', but Tuckahoe and St. Michael's just did not fall within that

¹¹³ Douglass, p. 166.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 243.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 566.

¹¹⁶ Douglass, p. 254.

ambit.¹¹⁷ When Douglass returned to St. Michael's in 1833, its change in economy from shipbuilding to oyster-fishing adversely affected its appearance as far as Douglass was concerned; it had become a 'very *unsaintly*, as well as an unsightly' place.¹¹⁸ This less positive attitude, though, is itself worth briefly considering, because Douglass' negative sense of those places was not, or did not remain, entirely straightforward and provides further insight into his ongoing memories of his places of enslavement.

For Douglass, a positive sense of a place undoubtedly meant the feeling he had about Baltimore. His sense of belonging there, despite it being the place of enslavement, is indicated by his reaction when he arrived in New York. Once the euphoria of safe arrival had subsided, Douglass was 'seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness [...] without home and without friends'.¹¹⁹ Of course, this nervousness of his new place did not last, Douglass went on to have a hugely successful life in the north, though that never lessened his affection for Baltimore. But if this affection persisted because Douglass felt that Baltimore had helped him feel rooted, he was also concerned about roots in the more historical and mundane sense of referring to the place of his origin. In his third autobiography, published in 1882, Douglass referred to his three visits to the Eastern Shore, made between 1877 and 1881, which he discussed at some length, but with an interesting omission of a very particular and somewhat ironic incident. On the second visit, in November 1878, to the town of Easton, Douglass took the opportunity of locating the site of the slave cabin (no longer standing) where he was born and took a handful of the very soil he had previously deprecated to keep at the landed, twenty-room property in Washington into which he had moved two months earlier.¹²⁰ However, Douglass made no reference to this, although in his explanation of what prompted him to make his third visit to the Eastern Shore, there is more than a hint of the continuing importance of roots to him:

When one has advanced far in the journey of life, [...] it is natural that his thoughts should return to the place of his beginning, and that he should be seized with a strong desire to revisit the scenes of his early recollection, and live over in memory the incidents of his childhood.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 414-415.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 245, emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 586.

¹²⁰ This detail about Douglass collecting a handful of soil is provided by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in his chronology included in Douglass, p. 1070.

¹²¹ Douglass, p. 879.

Obviously it is not possible to do more than speculate as to why Douglass did not refer to the slave cabin site. It may be just another example of his preference to keep some private matters private, but though a very minor act, the symbolism of collecting the soil resounds, and it is related to the fact that Douglass knew that where he came from, where his roots were, was fundamental to explaining his life.

According to David Blight, Douglass knew he could only explain both sides of his life on both sides of Chesapeake Bay, that even into old age he apparently needed to ask: how did I get from there to here? For an autobiographer who had not travelled anywhere outside of his birthplace, the metaphorical question would be pertinent, but for Douglass the question was a literal one which confirmed that 'there', although left behind, was still with him. Importantly, Douglass' sense of 'there' became increasingly positive. In his second autobiography, Douglass introduced his arrival in Baltimore as a young boy with more detail than he provided in his first narrative, including a reference to the mildly hostile reception he received from Baltimorean boys. Douglass was made conscious of the inferior status accorded to his birthplace, as the city boys 'chased me and called me "*Eastern Shore man*", till really I almost wished myself back on the Eastern Shore'.¹²² Douglass was in a place whose people recognized and flaunted their urban-born status, yet although this was obviously upsetting initially, it did not prevent him undergoing 'a sort of moral acclimation' and 'doing much better' there.¹²³ Douglass had been only too keen to consign the Eastern Shore to his history, as made evident by the distress caused when he was forced to return there as a young man. Yet by the end of his life, when the time he had spent on the Eastern Shore had dwindled to a fraction of his years, Douglass had come to view the place of his origin rather differently.

On the first of the three visits to the Eastern Shore mentioned above, in June 1877, which was widely publicized, Douglass made a public declaration. According to contemporary newspaper reports of his visit, Douglass gave as a reason for it the fact 'that he loved Maryland and the Eastern Shore. Eastern Shore corn and Eastern Shore pork had given him his muscle. He claimed to be an Eastern Shoreman, with all that that name implies.'¹²⁴ There may have been

¹²² Douglass, p. 214.

¹²³ Ibid.

Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, p. 147, says that black Baltimoreans looked down upon rural-born immigrants, whether free or enslaved and to illustrate his point, he, too, quotes the taunt levelled at Douglass.

¹²⁴ Blassingame and McKivigan, eds., p. 479.

an element of rhetoric in Douglass' speech, but when it is coupled with the soil-collecting incident of the following year, the suggestion, nevertheless, is that Douglass now wanted to keep alive his memory of the place of his early childhood and young manhood - he knew that where he had come from, and where he had been, made him who he was no less than did his current location. In fact, Douglass had long recognized that a man's birthplace was a significant detail of his life (to reiterate: the opening of his second autobiography contains the words 'it is of some importance to know where a man is born'), and cultivating his memory of the Eastern Shore maintained his association with it.¹²⁵ In short, the Eastern Shore had become a positively meaningful place; decades after Douglass had left the site, the place remained a part of him. Douglass' change of heart about the Eastern Shore is, like Harriet Jacobs's about Edenton, an illustration of Eyles's point that a sense of a particular place will evolve with the individual's life. One of the things that was probably a factor in Douglass' change was that by the time he was articulating it, he was prominent, acclaimed as the black leader of his generation. Secure in his contemporary identity as a successful self-made American man, Douglass eventually felt positively about the Eastern Shore because originating from there as a slave had not been an insurmountable handicap.

Douglass' feelings about his old places were able to endure partly because he was concerned to remember them. Blight has written on the importance of the memory of slavery to Douglass, his determination after the Civil War, to guard against the 'politics of forgetting'.¹²⁶ There can be no doubt that this determination owes much to Douglass' efforts as an abolitionist, but equally it can be claimed that its roots lie in Douglass' personal memories of enslavement, and of its places.

Conclusion.

Frederick Douglass' interest in his places, though explicit and easily identified, does not indicate that his experience and memory of those sites was wholly straightforward, quite the contrary, and in this, at least, he has much in common with the other narrators examined here. What emerges from the slave narratives are three main points. First, the slaves' experiences of their home places were no less complex than they would be for any other individual. The condition of

¹²⁵ Douglass, p. 139-140.

¹²⁶ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London: 2001), especially p. 105 and pp. 300-319.

slavery did not reduce the place experience to one merely of just 'being there'. Rather, it is plain that slaves were very engaged with their places. Even the most basic characteristic of a place, its topography, could have an effect. From Sally Williams who preferred the urban streets and buildings of Fayetteville over the countryside of Alabama, to Frederick Douglass who was inspired by the waterways of Maryland but who deplored the tired landscape of Tuckahoe, the physical properties of the sites of enslavement contributed to how the slave felt about his or her place. The topography of a place, especially when linked with the more complex component of place identity, its social relations, often had an impact in sparking an interest in other locations. The phenomenon of places in imagination was known by nearly all the writers to some degree, and could be powerful in its capacity to motivate and sustain, as well as, in Lewis Clarke's case with the Deep South, to cause dread. Henry Bibb was desperate to get to Canada not least because he believed that there he could become the kind of husband and father he could not be on the plantation. For Harriet Jacobs, New York as a place in her imagination was a positive force in several ways. It served a practical purpose in helping to fool her owner, it relieved the anxiety generated while she was in hiding, and it was the location on which she rested her hopes for the future. But imagined places did not have to be distant, or free, to generate something positive in the slave. Sally Williams believed Fayetteville would offer her a better kind of slave life, as did Frederick Douglass of Baltimore, and they were both proved right.

The second point about the narrators' experience of their home sites of enslavement, is the strength of the sense of place it encouraged. Strength in terms of durability has been most easily observed in the narratives and papers of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, where it is clear that, whether they felt positively or not about their home places they continued to remember and be affected by them long after their departure. The strength of a positive sense of a particular place can also be measured by its preterite persistence. Lunsford Lane felt sufficiently positive about Raleigh, even while acutely aware of its racism, to see the city as the place of his free future. The reason why slaves' sense of a place should be so strong is in no small part attributable to the basic human need to feel rooted, and this was in no way undermined by the fact of an individual's enslavement - according to Douglass, quite the reverse was true. The importance of rootedness, here, is that it indicates identification with a place, crucial to the development of an individual's own identity. Lane lived in Raleigh for many years and had undoubtedly acquired a rootedness that came from familiarity. This was complemented by feeling comfortable in and with a city

that, though the place of his enslavement, allowed Lane to feel and exhibit the characteristics of masculinity.

The final point to make about slaves' sense of their places is the most obvious and that is, that it is the meaning they attributed to their places which is the key element. In connection with the attribution of meaning, for many narrators it is impossible to overlook the role of other people. Henry Bibb, Lewis Clarke, Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass all found that the right people in Kentucky, Edenton, Baltimore or the Eastern Shore, rendered those places positively significant. The meanings of places could also be not only simultaneously contradictory, but highly labile either as the place was experienced or as it was remembered. For Henry Bibb, the contradiction was that the plantation, as the place of his home and family, was 'hard to break away from' even while it was also the place from which he was desperate to escape because it prevented him being a proper husband and father. For Henry Watson, the town in Mississippi that originally meant the opportunity to escape rural slavery, changed to something less positive as he perceived its adverse effects on him. For Douglass, although Baltimore was always a positively meaningful place, the Eastern Shore on the other side of the Chesapeake, was not. Yet as Douglass grew old, and many years after he had left it, his birthplace was less somewhere he wanted to leave dormant in his past and more somewhere he was concerned to actively remember. In the ultimate example of how the meaning of a place could change, Douglass went from feeling indifference or even antipathy about the Eastern Shore to an affection he articulated publicly. No other slave was as vociferous as Douglass about the places of enslavement, the home places they left behind, but it is clear that all were greatly affected by them. What I address in the next section is the nature and extent of the effect of one particular city on Jews who, like the slave narrators, left their home place behind them.

Part 3: A consideration of interwar Bialystok and its effects on Jews' sense of that place.

The Jewish writers studied in this section were all either born and raised in or near Bialystok in north-eastern Poland, or moved there prior to World War Two, and all subsequently left the city. It will already be clear from the introduction that a sense of a particular locale and the construction of place and personal identity are not easily disentangled, and it is this inextricability which, here, though it can be a difficult thing to grapple with, pushes to the fore a crucial point for examination, that is, the dynamism and multiplicity of identity, both place and personal.

To achieve the best understanding of the survivors' texts and the importance of Bialystok in their lives, it is necessary to be aware of the city's origins and growth and the role of Jews within these, and to consider aspects of its interwar identity, giving attention to those factors which especially affected Jews and their sense of the place. This will then allow for further exploration of the chosen books with regard to the issues of what the writers remember and why, and the implications of their remembering. Referring to these texts, it is important to be aware that even those most straightforward in their composition are likely to be more complex than they may first appear; all of the accounts require a close reading to maximize the reader's involvement with the work, particularly in trying to gauge the role that memory may play in the construction of identity. Although a commentary on the various sources has been provided in the introduction, it is helpful to elaborate here on one particular text, *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*.

Kugelmass and Boyarin's observation that memorial books 'are not inadequate academic histories but the often eloquent voices of simple people determined to preserve a glimpse of a world they knew, loved and lost', reveals the relevance of *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* here given my focus on Bialystoker Jews' sense of their home place.¹ The subsequent qualification by Kugelmass and Boyarin, that memorial books are 'best used for the study of *topics* not *towns*', is however, one that cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged.² Kugelmass and Boyarin go on to say that certain matters such as weddings and market days receive considerable attention in these books and that 'those who come together to create a *yizker bukh*

¹ Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, 'Yizker bikher and the problem of historical veracity: an anthropological approach', in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars* eds. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn and Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 519-536 (especially p. 521).

² *Ibid.*, p. 533, emphasis in the original. More positively, Israel Gutman, 'Remarks on the literature of the Holocaust', in *The Dispersion: Surveys and Monographs on the Jewish World* 7 (1967), pp. 119-134, especially p. 121, while noting: 'Quite a few defects in these [memorial books]', saw them as useful in learning about Jewish towns, they 'have contributed to what is known about small remote towns. They have uncovered a world hitherto unknown.'

[memorial book] collectively evoke fragments of several towns bearing the same name'.³ For this study, in which I follow the social geographers who recognize the constructed and fluid nature of the identity of a place, those very points made by Kugelmass and Boyarin are crucial in such recognition. Weddings and market days, as just two of the innumerable things comprising the social relations of a place, were important both for the identity of the place in which they were held, and to the individuals who participated. And the fact that a group of contributors to a particular *yizker bukh* would evoke several versions of the same place is confirmation, if any were needed, of the point made in the introduction to this study, namely, that a single place will be experienced and remembered differently by all who know or knew it. There is certainly scope with *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* to learn something about the city's identity through the way its Jews wrote of it. The study of such writing leads, ultimately, to the matter of how place identity might be shaped by the sources under examination here, but before considering that, it is helpful to be aware of the nature of *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* because that has a direct relation to the matter of Bialystok's identity.

The Bialystoker Memorial Book was published as a bilingual volume in Yiddish and English in New York in 1982, more than a decade after it was first proposed to produce such a book at the Bialystoker world convention in Israel in 1970. It is probable that the convention was a meeting of the various groups of Bialystoker Jews which exist around the world, although the Book Committee says nothing more than: 'At the 1970 Bialystoker world convention in Israel, it was decided to issue a memorial book as soon as possible.'⁴ In any event, the book's production appears to have been a labour of love and the result of a religious commitment. The Committee, in New York, refers to the failed negotiations with the Bialystoker Centre in Israel to prepare and issue the book jointly, and to its own decision which eventually led to publication, as follows:

our Center in New York carried on negotiations with our counterparts in Israel to prepare and issue the book jointly. Regrettably, this attempt at collaboration failed.

Nevertheless, we were not discouraged and took it upon ourselves - as a sacred task - to publish the volume. We knew in

³ Ibid., p. 533-536

⁴ From the entry, 'To our Bialystoker landsleit and friends', in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* eds. Israel Shmulewitz, Izaak Rybal and Lowell S. Kronick (New York: Empire Press, 1982), pp. V and VI (especially p. V).

advance the difficulties that lay ahead, and that did, in fact, materialize.

[...] this volume has gathered scattered articles and documents into one anthology. It wasn't easy to organize them into a coherent unit.⁵

It may not have been easy to organize the contents of *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, but for any reader examining some of these articles it is very easy to see that, collectively, they amount to nothing less than an outright claim to the history and identity of Bialystok as Jewish. Editorial comments like: 'May Bialystok remain a shining example of Eastern European Jewish life for generations to come' and: 'We invested much time and effort to enable you [Anglophone Jews] to read about the heritage of our beloved birthplace in your own language' are unambiguous declarations which are supported by equally positive articles confirming the Jewish contribution to Bialystok.⁶ One writer for example, I. Shmulewitz, declares that 'the very emergence of Bialystok from a barren, uncultivated swampland in the forests of Eastern Poland into a flourishing, sprawling center of human life was a tribute to the creativity, industriousness and hard work of its Jews'.⁷ These and similar remarks are clearly expressions of great pride in the Jewish role in Bialystok, but they are also more than that when they are considered in the context of the construction of place identity. The purpose of this study is not to try to portray the identity of Bialystok at any time in its interwar history or at any other point, but nonetheless, it is useful to briefly explore an aspect of place identity in order to try to understand its fluidity and, later, how this interacts with personal identity, and vice versa, which is my aim.

The separate components of place identity have already been discussed but it is important, now, to note an additional point, and in this regard the work of a social geographer is very helpful. Doreen Massey has argued that the past is always present in places in a variety of ways, one of them being in the memories of people in their conscious and unconscious construction of the history of a particular place.⁸ The relevance of this argument here, follows from the fact that identity is a dynamic quality and from another of Massey's claims: 'The identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them'.⁹ In adopting this view, it becomes clear that one function of *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, indeed

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See *ibid.*, p. VI, and the foreword by Max Ratner, p. X.

⁷ I. Shmulewitz, 'Bialystok - a historical survey' in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, p. 3.

⁸ Doreen Massey, 'Places and their pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (1995), pp. 182-192 (especially pp. 187-188).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

of all the texts under examination here, is to construct a specific history for Bialystok. But it is important to be aware that a contemporary identity of a place is also affected by a history told of it, and to illustrate this point I shall refer to an article presented in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*. First though, it is helpful to note yet another of Massey's points. She maintains that the past is 'present in resonance', whether actually from the past or as a self-conscious building-in.¹⁰ The past may resonate in an actual manner - the existence of old buildings or landmarks - or it may be constructed through, for instance, the use of certain words, names or language. By referring briefly to *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* it is possible to see how the past may resonate in a different geographical location from the original and how that resonance can continue to affect the contemporary identity of the original location.

In August 1949, at the Bialystoker world convention held in New York, a decision was made to 'establish *Kiryat* [town or village] Bialystok in the Jewish State in tribute to Bialystoker Jewry'. It was to be constructed 'as an eternal, living monument to our destroyed hometown and to the 60,000 Jews who perished in the liquidated ghetto'. *Kiryat* Bialystok was to be a mixture of residential and industrial sites with streets named after Bialystoker Jews and generous benefactors, the creation of a place, from space acquired in Yehuda.¹¹ Today, *Kiryat* Bialystok stretches over fourteen streets and alleys with names such as Bialystok Ghetto Warriors.¹² Bialystok's past clearly, and as a deliberate construction, resonates well and truly in *Kiryat* Bialystok's present and as it does so, its own contemporary identity is enhanced, made more Jewish, even if only because people today have attributed a particular meaning to the Polish city, and because its social relations are touched by those of *Kiryat* Bialystok. In reporting the decision to establish *Kiryat* Bialystok and in telling something, however brief, of the history of both places, *The Bialystoker Memorial Book* plays a part in shaping these place identities.

A brief history of Bialystok; an outline of interwar Polonization; consideration of a sense of belonging to the local and/or the national places.

Having noted the heterogeneous nature of the sources informing this study and recognizing that their very existence is instrumental in the construction of place identity, historical and contemporary, I want now to offer a synopsis of Bialystok's

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹¹ *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, p. 188.

¹² This information is taken from: *From Bialystok to Kiriat Bialystok, Yahud Israel: We Remember Bialystok, a Town and a Mother of Israel!* ed. Gera Ben-Anat. Online: http://www.zchor.org/bialystok/kiriat_bialystok2.htm

history so that the authors' place experiences may be better contextualized. Bialystok, today the largest city in north-east Poland, was founded as a village in 1320 with a Jewish presence from as early as 1658. By the eighteenth century, Jews were invited by the Polish count Jan Klements Bronicki to settle in what had become the city of Bialystok. These Jews were provided with land and materials, they were granted equal rights in 1745, and by 1807, with their numbers standing at 2,116, the Jewish community represented 51% of the total population of 4,115.¹³ They were a majority presence in a city of some standing. In 1807, Bialystok formed part of Russia's territorial acquisitions, remaining so until 1918 (with the exception of the period 1812 to 1815 when it fell under French hegemony), and was declared the capital of the voivodship of Podlasie in 1808. Throughout the nineteenth century Bialystok's population grew, increasing more than fifteen-fold by 1897 to 66,032, of whom 41,905 (63.46%) were Jewish. (The foregoing statistics are taken from a table compiled by Tomasz Wisniewski who does not explain why the number of Jews increased disproportionately, but this must be partly attributable to the forced displacement of Jews from other towns and cities in the Russian Pale of Settlement during the nineteenth century, as well as natural demographic growth of eastern European Jewry in this period.) The demographic prominence of Jews in Bialystok was matched by their presence in the city's economy which consisted mainly of commerce and the manufacture of textiles. At the end of the nineteenth century, Bialystok was Russia's third largest industrial city behind only Moscow and Lodz, and, in 1912, 90% of its factories were Jewish-owned.¹⁴ By 1918, when Poland declared independence and sought to bring Bialystok within its borders, the high proportion of Jews in the city had peaked, not to be reached again until the war years with the arrival of thousands of Jews from further west.

Between 1918 and 1939, Bialystok underwent great change culminating in its assignment to the Soviet Union on 22 September 1939. The further periods up to June 1941 and then to August 1943, were also an era of massive upheaval. From

¹³ Tomasz Wisniewski, *Jewish Bialystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland: A Guide for Yesterday and Today* (Ipswich, Mass.: Ipswich Press, 1998), appendix III.

¹⁴ The claim that Bialystok held this third position is made by Elijezer Fejgin in 'Bialystok - the beginning' in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, pp. 5-6 and by Max Ratner in the foreword, p. IX, neither of whom cite their source. Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland Volume II: 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 174, however, confirms Bialystok's pre-eminence: 'By the second half of the nineteenth century, the main textile manufactories of Russian Poland had outstripped the production of the Prussian and Austrian Partitions combined. Neither Leignitz (Legnica) and Neustadt (Prudnik) in Prussian Silesia, nor Bielitz (Bielsko) in Austrian Silesia, or adjacent Biala in Galicia, could compete with Lodz, Bialystok, or Zyrardow [near Warsaw].'

September 1939 until June 1941, a twenty-one month concentrated process of Sovietization, which Russians themselves had taken twenty years to undergo, was forced upon Bialystok citizens. Between June 1941 and August 1943, with the German occupation, Bialystok was a physically divided place as areas were ghettoized. In August 1943, the ghetto was razed, although it took until November of that year for the Nazis to capture and imprison those Jews who had resisted the order to attend for deportation three months earlier. It was not until August 1944 that the city was liberated by the Soviet army.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the five-year period up to 1944 had been unprecedented in terms of its effect on the components of Bialystok's identity which was changed dramatically, significantly and irreversibly. Bialystok's Jewish population was virtually obliterated, and with it the essential and overt Jewishness which had been the city's defining quality. That is not to say, however, that the interwar years were uneventful for Bialystok's Jews. This, too, was a very particular moment in Bialystok's history, so much so, that to ensure greater knowledge of the place experience and its effects on those who wrote their lives, it is necessary to know more about what was happening to the city's identity at that time. Despite the downturn in numbers which was evident by 1918, it is important for this study to recognize something about Bialystok in independent Poland. The proportion of Jews in its population did not suffer a sudden and catastrophic reduction in the interwar years, rather, the diminution was gradual. The writers whose texts are examined here were born into, or joined, a still large Jewish community who could claim a presence that was almost three hundred years old. In other words, at the start of the interwar period, Bialystok remained very much a place that was Jewish in appearance and, as a result of its Jewish population, in its social relations. It is an examination of these two elements of the city's identity which will facilitate an understanding of how and why the writers, here, felt as they did about the place.

In addition to their strong representation in the economy of Bialystok, the Jewish community had left its mark topographically, not least of all in the synagogues and other places of worship which flourished. In terms of numbers, Bialystok boasted no fewer than one hundred such establishments in 1939, a statistic whose significance may be measured by the fact that Bialystok had Poland's greatest number of synagogues per capita.¹⁵ Warsaw, though fifteen

¹⁵ Tomasz Wisniewski, *Synagogues and Jewish Communities in the Bialystok Region: Jewish Life in Eastern Europe before 1939* (Bialystok: David Publishing House, 1992), p. 134. Elsewhere, Wisniewski reiterates the number of religious establishments, but also notes that '59 synagogues and houses of prayer [...] were in use in 1939' - see Wisniewski, *Jewish Bialystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland*, pp. 34 and 18 respectively. In *Synagogues and Jewish*

times the size of Bialystok, had only double its number of such buildings at two hundred.¹⁶ This proliferation in Bialystok was a direct result of the increased Jewish population. Since 1855 regulations had been in force to the effect that where there were fewer than thirty Jewish houses only one synagogue was allowed. As the population had expanded, the distinct location of Jewish quarters had become less common and as a consequence the synagogues appeared in various places to serve Jews now living in these different parts of the city. What is interesting about this expansion is what it must have meant as an ongoing statement and assertion of Jewish influence and presence. One synagogue, the Szmuel Beth Midrash, was built in 1902 on an apparently choice site very close to the Branicki palace and gardens, but in the face of bureaucratic resistance. Authorities were concerned at the construction of a synagogue in close proximity to an elite school for Christian girls in the palace. These officials also wanted to build an Orthodox church on the site, plans which ought to have dictated that the synagogue would not materialize since such construction was forbidden on a street where an Orthodox church existed or was planned. Yet the synagogue did appear. Similarly, in what appears to have been a flurry of synagogue building in early twentieth-century Bialystok, the famous Great Synagogue was constructed between 1909 and 1913. Its neo-Byzantine architectural style was one deliberately designed to dissociate the synagogue from the neo-Gothic appearance that was closely identified with Christianity, and it sported a distinct dome and ten-metre spire that helped ensure its visibility on, if not dominance of, Bialystok's skyline.¹⁷ Bearing in mind that a number of churches were also being constructed at this time, it is easy to see this as a Jewish community busy in consolidating and raising its profile and, by the very function of its religious buildings, ensuring that a certain quality or atmosphere would be present in the city. This last point is important because it leads to a matter mentioned only briefly at the start of this study, but which is vital in the examination of the identity of any place and its effect on people, and that is what is best termed, to paraphrase Edward Relph, the spirit or genius of a place.¹⁸ This, too, is a component of identity and although it is neither tangible nor easily analyzed, that does not make it any the less real or significant a characteristic in an individual's place experience as I will show later. Before that,

Communities in the Bialystok Region, p. 134, Wisniewski expressed his intention to publish a separate volume on Bialystok's synagogues 'because they deserve a separate study', but unfortunately this has not yet materialized, or at least, not in an English translation.

¹⁶ Wisniewski, *Jewish Bialystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland*, p. 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁸ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p. 48.

though, it is helpful to have an idea of how other features of Białystok's interwar identity affected Jews who lived there.

Two years after the declaration of Poland's independence in 1918, Białystok was eventually absorbed back into the new state's territory, with one notable consequence of reintegration playing a crucial role in place identity: the state's intention to Polonize the new country. Polonization meant, for example, ensuring the pre-eminence of the Polish language. In this, the Jewish population was under pressure to learn Polish not least through the introduction of state schools which made it difficult for the Jewish private school network, where Yiddish and Hebrew dominated, to compete.¹⁹ Polonization also involved strengthening the economic position of Poles at the expense of Jews.²⁰ The mere existence of such intentions towards Białystok, as a component of its identity, is sufficient to claim that that identity, and by extension those of all its citizens, were altered. Intentions may not always manifest themselves in action or developments, but when they do materialize they consolidate the change through another component of place identity, namely its social relations, with concomitant effects on the individuals or groups of that place. As already shown, by the time of Poland's independence, Białystok had long been famous as a Jewish centre, in its population and built topography. Białystok's population in 1921 was 76,792 of whom 39,603 (51.5%) were Jews.²¹ Even in 1931, when their number remained virtually static at 39,165, in the total population of 91,355, Jews were a substantial minority at 42.8%.²²

¹⁹ See Ezra Mendelsohn, 'A note on Jewish assimilation in the Polish lands', in *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times* ed. Bela Vago (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 141-149 (especially p. 145).

²⁰ See Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915-1926* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 14.

²¹ I have shown the figures indicating that Jews were a majority even though, among the secondary sources consulted, there is some inconsistency regarding their number in Białystok in 1921. Wisniewski, *Jewish Białystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland*, appendix III, shows that Jews numbered 37,186 (48.4%). In 'A historical calendar' in *The Białystoker Memorial Book*, p. 45, their number is given as 39,603 (51.5%). Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, p. 5, does not quote numbers in reference to the 1921 census, but writes: 'Białystok actually possessed a Jewish majority.' Because of Mendelsohn's academic credentials, I follow him in saying the Jews did constitute an actual majority.

²² References to the 1931 census do not vary greatly enough to be of consequence. Wisniewski shows, for 1931, a total population of 91,355 with 39,165 (42.9%) as Jews. *The Białystoker Memorial Book* refers to the second census on 19 December 1932, giving rounded figures of 91,000 and 39,000 (42.8%) for the total population and for Jews, respectively. According to Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919-1939* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton, 1983), table 24 on p. 172, the second Polish census was held on 9 December 1931. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, pp. 5-6, cites work by Refael Mahler, *Yehude polin ben shte milhamot olam*, pp. 18-36 and Szyja Bronsztejn, *Ludnosc zydzowska w Polsce w okresie miedzywojennym* as sources for his comments on the 1921 and 1931 census, but I am unable to consult these for clarification of the statistical position.

However, these Jewish characteristics of Bialystok did not render the city wholly resistant to the effects of Polonization. The political determination of the new Poland to secure the dominance of Polish and economic advantage for Poles had far-reaching effects in Bialystok where inevitably its social relations were affected by this policy, which in turn affected individuals' experiences of the place. It is these issues I now want to briefly consider in order to then look at their implications for people's sense of the place and for their identity.

Polonization was obvious in its effects on Bialystok's Jewish workers. Michel Mielnicki remembers how one of the Jews' traditional avenues of employment in his home town on the outskirts of Bialystok was undermined: 'Polonization was the order of the day [...]. In Wasilkow, even the firemen had to be Polish Christians - whereas in the past they'd all been Polish Jews.'²³ Mielnicki does not claim to have had family members who were firemen, but his awareness of how Polonization was changing Bialystok was reinforced by knowledge of his father's experience before Michel was born. In 1924 or 1925, Chaim Mielnicki was caught by legislation designed to make it difficult for Jews to run certain businesses. Having started a bus service running between Wasilkow and Bialystok, within a year he was compelled to take a gentile partner in order to avoid new discriminatory licensing laws.²⁴ Mielnicki's view of the changing nature of life in Bialystok and its environs and its effects on its people is supported by an example of what was happening simultaneously on the employment front in Bialystok proper. In 1922, the privately-owned tobacco industry employed a total of about three thousand Jews in four major cities including Bialystok. By 1931, having been nationalized, there were virtually no Jewish employees.²⁵

However, the state-inspired Polonization, with its capacity to affect the city's identity and that of its citizens, was not the only change in Bialystok's social

²³ Michel Mielnicki, *Bialystok to Birkenau: The Holocaust Journey of Michel Mielnicki as told to John Munro* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2000), p. 32. Charles "Shleimeh" Zabuski, *Needle and Thread: A Tale of Survival from Bialystok to Paris* (Oakland, California: Popincourt Press, 1996), p. 5, also makes reference to the strong Jewish representation in Bialystok's fire brigade: 'My father was a member of the Volunteer Firemen's League (which was 90 per cent Jewish)'.

²⁴ Mielnicki, *Bialystok to Birkenau* p. 32. Bernard K. Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility: The General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland, 1917-1943* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 210, refers to the difficulty Jewish artisans faced in trying to obtain a licence. They had to be proficient in Polish language, history and geography and have proof of literacy in the dominant language of the state. Most grown Jewish men at this time had received a schooling in Yiddish and Hebrew when Polish history was a forbidden subject in the tsarist period. The result of the licensing order was that there was near elimination of Jewish artisans.

²⁵ Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, p. 209.

I am aware that the term nationalization is strictly incorrect in this particular context and that some of what was happening in Poland would be more accurately described as etatism, but it seems unnecessary, here, to elaborate on the distinction between the two terms.

relations. While official Polonization changed Bialystok and could intrude into and disrupt many Jewish lives uninvited, less formal versions also played their part. Some Jews chose to welcome an alteration in their way of life which could amount to a voluntary form of Polonization. The spread of voluntary integration/assimilation/acclturation among Poland's interwar Jewish community is a complex subject, with significant geographical variations, and even definition of the terms being less than straightforward.²⁶ For my purpose it is sufficient merely to note that the gradual process of modernization tended to be in the larger cities, of which Bialystok was one.²⁷ Certainly Michel Mielnicki's father embraced the idea of closer contact with the host population. In 1933 he sent his son to a Polish elementary school with very few Jewish pupils because doing so suited his 'integrationist philosophy'.²⁸ At about the same time, Charles "Shleimeh" Zabuski, a tailor's son born in Bialystok in 1921, could see for himself that the future was Polish and believed that this could not be achieved through a traditional Yiddish education:

School was very important to me. At twelve I had decided that I wanted to "be somebody" when I grew up, and that meant I would need a better Polish education. Since the age of six, I had attended Yiddish schools where we had only one hour of Polish each day. I kept thinking about how much I wanted to learn Polish, but since I already knew what it was like to want something but not get it, I wasn't surprised when I was sent to a Yiddish *Folkshul* instead of a Polish gymnasium.²⁹

The desirability of a Polish education to Zabuski is emphasized through the effect on him of its elusiveness. Though finally Zabuski's mother and his maternal grandfather agreed to Polish schooling, it ended before it began. Zabuski's mother

²⁶ Mendelsohn, 'A note on Jewish assimilation in the Polish lands', p. 141, says that there was not one pattern of assimilation because the 'lands' were greatly different from each other. Elsewhere, he has pointed out the 'grave difficulties' in the definition of, among other terms, assimilation. See 'Interwar Poland: good for the Jews or bad for the Jews?', in *The Jews in Poland* eds. Chimen Abramsky, Majiej Jachimczyk and Antony Polonsky (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 130-139 (especially p. 133). Sergio DellaPergola, 'Quantitative aspects of Jewish assimilation', in *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times* ed. Vago, pp. 185-206, also comments that different writers attach different shades of meaning to a number of listed terms including integration, assimilation and acculturation (p. 185).

²⁷ Ben-Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 14, describes the two dominant characteristics of the interwar Jewish community as acculturation and secularization, and points out that it was the richer workers, the younger generation and dwellers in larger cities that tended to move away from tradition and religious observance.

²⁸ Mielnicki, p. 65.

²⁹ Zabuski, *Needle and Thread*, p. 19.

accompanied him to the Polish gymnasium on his very first day there and witnessed the antisemitic reception offered by his classmates. Although Zabuski was frightened, he wanted to stay, but his mother was insistent on withdrawing him from the school leaving him 'utterly crushed, realizing then that I would never learn how to read or write Polish well, that my dreams of a bright future were shattered'.³⁰ The point, here, about Mielnicki's and Zabuski's experiences of the different forms of Polonization, is not only that they were symptomatic of the change that was affecting interwar Bialystok, but that such change is something that can be crucial in its effects on individuals' sense of places; not only the local, but also on a wider scale. What I want to consider next is the interaction between, and the implications of, the sense of a local and of a wider place.

In essence, the change being effected in Bialystok's interwar identity was nothing more than a result of the fluidity which is inherent in the identity of all places. However, although the fluidity of place identity may not be recognized by people of, or interested in, a particular locale, this is less likely to be the case when the scale and nature of the change is great, rapid or turbulent, or all of those things. The significance of this is that such perception may have a profound effect on the emergence of an individual's sense of place. As Yi-Fu Tuan has said, 'if we see the world as process, constantly changing, we should not be able to develop any sense of place'.³¹ In extending this principle here, to include a sense of a particular place or places, it follows that people in interwar Bialystok faced a challenge to their sense of the city itself and the new state of Poland. As the new identity of these places was being forged, it was inevitable that each would affect the other, and both would affect the people living there. For people experiencing interwar Bialystok, an atmosphere of flux must surely have prevailed for much of the time. The city had been something of a geopolitical football before the assignment of its geographical status to Poland which came only after the turmoil of the years from the declaration of independence in 1918 up to the end of 1920, during which time Russia claimed Bialystok. Furthermore, in being a contested place, and key in determining the physical eastern boundary of Poland, Bialystok was a part of change in the new country's identity overall, and itself underwent change even as it was instrumental in the change on a greater scale; Russian and Polish intentions for the city simply could not have been the same. Although Polish 'ownership' of the city was established, that of itself did not make it or its people 'Polish', nor did the highly visible Polonization programme which came after 1920. Bialystok was a

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 179.

place not only of Jews and Poles, but also of Russians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Belorussians and Germans, a diverse population which suggests it was always going to be difficult for a coherent 'Polish' society to emerge.³² In this climate, it is easy to see how, for some people (perhaps for many, including non-Jews), a positive sense of a particular place, any feeling of belonging to the new nation, could be inhibited. What is interesting in this connection, is how the presence or absence of a feeling of belonging to a greater place, the new nation, related to the intensity of Jews' feeling about a smaller place, their locality, even though that smaller place, too, was undergoing change. In order to assess this, it is necessary to identify some of the factors, external and internal, tangible and intangible that could encourage or discourage feelings of belonging.

One of the outside features that played a role in the way Jews related to the new country was the behaviour of other ethnic groups. According to Ben-Cion Pinchuk, in Poland's eastern provinces generally, there was an intense struggle for cultural and political supremacy between Polish, Ukrainian and Belorussian nationalisms, an effort which affected Jewish behaviour. In avoiding entanglement in that three-way struggle, Jewish separateness and exclusiveness became particularly acute although, as already seen, there were individuals in Bialystok who preferred less separateness.³³ As part of this tendency, one obvious quality could potentially inhibit Jews' development of some kind of rapport with the new Poland. Their language did not conform with expectations of what being 'Polish' would mean. Right from the start there was a general failure by Jews to identify with the new state's dominant nationality. In 1921, over seventy per cent of Poland's Jews declared themselves as belonging to the Jewish nationality. Even ten years later, their continuing absence of identification with the nation was indicated by that more precise measure of separatism, language. Hebrew was largely confined to religious affairs, but Yiddish, widespread in commerce, culture and some politics, was declared by almost eighty per cent of the country's Jewish population of over three million, as its native language.³⁴ The association between language and a sense of belonging is strong and some of the writers studied here are very clear on how this impinged on their place experience. Zabuski's eagerness to learn Polish is absolutely explicit and even the way he chooses to relate the

³² Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 410, refers to the 'formidable' task of 'reintegrating Polish society into a coherent whole' which the Second Republic faced as soon as it was created.

³³ Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule*, p. 13.

³⁴ The census information and interpretation of it is taken from Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*. He cites the number of Jews (defined by religious affiliation) in Poland in 1921 as 2,853,318 (p. 5). In 1931 the Jewish population was 3,113,933 (p. 6), of whom 2,489,084 listed Yiddish as their native language.

incident which led to his withdrawal from the Polish gymnasium, emphasizing his mother's old-world Jewishness, shows how he saw language as something separating Jews from Poles:

As soon as I entered [the classroom], a boy in the first row started yelling *jeszcz jeden zydek* (another Jew!).

My mother was scared. "Shleimeh," she whispered in Yiddish, "Let's get out! They'll kill you here!"³⁵

Mielnicki, too, saw the role of language as crucial. His Russian-born father decided to settle in Bialystok in 1918, because the city 'was as close as he could come to returning to Russia without actually doing so', and as he 'had yet to master the Polish language, there was an obvious advantage in the fact that the majority of Bialystokers, whether Jews or gentiles, were Russian-speaking'.³⁶ The Mielnickis also spoke Yiddish, which remained the *lingua franca* of the Jewish community as the young Mielnickis were growing up in the 1920s and 1930s. In mentioning this, Mielnicki's text draws attention to the fact that continued dependence on Yiddish, in the face of Polonization, could be a detrimental factor in the extent to which Jews might otherwise have had any nascent feeling of belonging to the new Polish nation. Indeed, it could also be used to undermine any feeling of belonging to the local area, to Bialystok itself. Certainly, one other Bialystoker Jew recalls how official insistence on the primacy of the Polish language on one occasion resulted in the alienating experience of the effective disenfranchisement of many of the city's Jews, doing little to encourage unity between them and Poles.

According to Y. H. Kancypolski writing in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, voting materials for the gerrymandered election of the city's administrators in the 1920s were published only in Polish, which the majority of Jews did not understand. The Jews boycotted the elections with the result that the new administration consisted entirely of Poles. Ironically, though, Bialystok's election fiasco developed into something which had positive implications for its Jews, and for their sense of belonging there, even if they did not feel the same about Poland. The gerrymandering and language issues in Bialystok, emanating as they did from the national Polonization policy, clearly were potentially alienating, divisive and antipathetic to any Jewish feeling of being a Pole. However, Jews were able to continue to make their presence both felt and, importantly, to count as shown by one particular episode which affected Bialystok's identity through its social relations. This incident also went some way to counteracting negative

³⁵ Zabuski, p. 20.

³⁶ Mielnicki, pp. 24-25.

developments for Jews in being positive activity within the community which, in turn, encouraged affirmative thoughts about the city. Jews' active involvement in Bialystok's identity continued through their role in its politics. Eventually new elections were called and, with what was presumably a show of solidarity, Jews participated fully, while this time Poles refused to vote. The result was that Jews, although in a minority in the gerrymandered districts, became a majority in city government. To avoid Poles' alienation, Jews pragmatically voted for a Polish city president, but what is more relevant here is that they were able to ensure the ongoing Jewishness of Bialystok, which must have been significant in offering some consolation to Jews in the face of blatant attempts to make Bialystok 'Polish', and for 'Poles'. Kancypolski seems proud to record the Jews' achievements and their contribution to the physical appearance of the city. In 1927 they gained control of Bialystok's economy, restructured the tax system and ensured that many Jewish institutions received large subsidies, and constructed wider streets and large new homes.³⁷ Yet it would be misleading in relating Kancypolski's story of Bialystok's politics to imply that Jews there in the 1920s and 1930s felt they could be of only Jewish identity. Among the writers here there is evidence that Jews also experienced at least a modicum of feeling Polish.

Mielnicki suggests that Jewishness was not an exclusive identity, although it is not clear whether his source is anecdotal or based on firsthand observation, when he refers to Jews who must have felt themselves to be Poles even though they were not recognized as such:

Jews (even when they cut their hair, shaved their beards, dressed in Western clothing, and swore allegiance to the Polish motherland) were not considered true Poles.³⁸

The diary by Shmuel Soltz, *Eight Hundred and Fifty Days from Border to Border During the Second World War*, also describes an incident which suggests that being Jewish did not wholly preclude the possibility of being Polish too - even though Soltz was a staunch Zionist. Soltz's diary entries consistently confirm him as a young man strongly embracing his Jewish identity, not only in the time after he left Bialystok for Palestine in 1941, but for the short period in September 1939 when he served in the Polish cavalry forces, presumably as a conscript. Yet in reading his entry for 24 September when Poland fell, it is clear that Soltz obviously felt something about Poland that was not entirely negative. A parade was held which ended with the singing of the Polish anthem and which provoked an

³⁷ Y. H. Kancypolski, 'Under Polish jurisdiction 1919-1939', in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, p. 37.

³⁸ Mielnicki, p. 32.

emotional response from Soltz who recorded: ‘The first words of the song - “Poland will not die as long as we are alive” - were sung by all of us, officers and men, in tearful, choked voices.’ Soltz goes on to say that: ‘Like the others, I wept during the singing of the anthem.’ He also comments that he experienced this wave of emotion ‘even though I had never had any special sentiment about Poland’.³⁹ Soltz does not attempt to explain why he felt emotional, an omission which is quite understandable. A diary entry, made in war conditions and perhaps hurriedly, is unlikely to be the best place for careful self-reflection and analysis of one’s actions and feelings. In this, Soltz’s diary serves as a reminder that survivor accounts, even the most apparently straightforward, require the reader’s close attention to ensure critical interpretation of the text. But the entry and omission do suggest, even while seeming paradoxical, that he did in fact feel a certain degree of identification with Poland even if perhaps the feeling had been largely latent. With this particular diary entry, it would be foolish to be categorical about how Soltz saw his identity and how this related to his place experience, but I shall return to his writings later in connection with more definite evidence about the effects of his time in Bialystok. In the meantime, I want to briefly mention another factor which had the potential to affect whether Jews felt they did or did not belong to Poland and/or to Bialystok, and that is their religion.

Practising Jews who wanted to feel a sense of belonging to Poland faced a significant obstacle in their path. After Poland became independent, the Catholic church maintained its antisemitism which Ezra Mendelsohn has summarized as an insistence ‘that non-Christians could not possibly be accepted into the Polish nation or be regarded as equal to Poles’.⁴⁰ In thinking about Jews’ religion and how it affected their ability to identify with their place, an obvious point comes to mind. The effect of Bialystok’s numerous synagogues on the town has already been mentioned and their ongoing presence was assured when, in 1927, a Preservation Bureau was established and almost all synagogues in the region were classified as historical monuments, requiring permission for reconstruction or architectural changes.⁴¹ So, while one of the most noticeable features of Jewishness, that is, religion, put its adherents beyond the range of what was considered Polish, it continued to define an identity for the city, maintaining its quality of Jewishness. The importance of this is that it encouraged among Jews a continuing feeling of identification with the local place, despite the upheaval it was undergoing, and

³⁹ Shmuel Soltz, *Eight Hundred and Fifty Days From Border to Border During the Second World War* (Givayatom, Israel: Soltz, 1988), p. 25.

⁴⁰ Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Wisniewski, *Synagogues and Jewish Communities in the Bialystok Region*, pp. 77 and 134.

despite the difficulty they may have encountered in trying to feel they belonged to the new nation. This was true even for Jews like Mielnicki's father who did not keep strict religious observance. According to Mielnicki, his father 'probably sometimes questioned the very existence of God' and 'certainly ate non-*kosher* meals outside the house and might well have preferred life in a secular society had this been possible', but he did maintain the family's membership of the Beth Amidrash Synagogue.⁴² For the young Mielnicki, this membership was something that facilitated identification with his local place, and having noted this, I want to continue to explore the theme of local and national belonging, using Mielnicki's text to complete this particular section.

Mielnicki expresses no antipathy to or criticism of Bialystok, or more precisely Wasilkow, as a locale; his home town is discussed mainly in terms of his family and school-life up to 1941, but his sense of the place was much more than one of neutrality. To Mielnicki, Wasilkow, although itself no stranger to change in its key role in the creation of the independent state, remained a Jewish place. Although the pre-war Jewish ghetto in Wasilkow was an area which confirmed the outsider status of its 1,500-strong community, and represented overall social division of the town, its existence also offered a unifying force to its dwellers. So, while Mielnicki believes 'that the local Polish Christians would never have tolerated the physical integration of our communities', Wasilkow, partly because of its division, was a place reinforcing Jewish group identity and a sense of belonging to that group:

Like everyone else in our community, we went on Saturdays to the synagogue [...] and to the Great Shul on high holidays. [...]

The fact is, however, that the social/religious aspects of life in the ghetto were self-regulating to such a high degree that going astray was difficult. We lived cheek by jowl with our neighbours. In consequence everybody knew a great deal about everybody else's business, to the extent that no one could escape unnoticed if they broke the fundamental taboos and requirements that bound us as a people. [...]

To me the steam bath was its own occasion: a communal rite of individual purification before we went to our synagogues that further served to bind us.⁴³

It may not be surprising that Mielnicki would feel positively about Wasilkow - it was where he was born in 1927 and where he lived with his family until 1941 - and in this, his sentiments make a basic point. The persistence of a feeling of belonging

⁴² Mielnicki, p. 52.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 53, 55-56.

to a locale in the face of ongoing and not necessarily welcome change, both locally and nationally, is, simply, a reminder of the need to belong. Mielnicki's experience suggests that this need can be strong enough to overcome the factor (of ongoing change) which can otherwise inhibit the development of a positive sense of place. In other words, even though Bialystok and the new Poland were changing, it was still possible to feel positive about the local, even if not about the national, place. For Mielnicki, the sense of belonging to Bialystok may well have been heightened by his perception of the inevitable difficulty Jews faced in belonging to a nation. In analyzing why his parents did not allow recreation to have some priority over schoolwork, it was because:

most Jewish parents thought differently from their Polish Christian counterparts about education.

History had taught Jewish people that they couldn't afford to become attached to any country, in the sense of believing that they were going to be there forever. [...] Consequently, Jews tended to regard education as a form of easily transportable wealth like diamonds, or gold, or rare stamps.⁴⁴

Certainly in voicing his anger and resentment at various unhappy incidents in Wasilkow or Bialystok, Mielnicki is quick to attribute blame to the new Poland, revealing an absence of any feeling of affinity with the country, which came from the state's antisemitism and dereliction of duty to its Jewish citizens. According to Mielnicki, the punishment of a 'drunken gentile' who killed a Jew and who was subsequently sentenced to only a 'few years' in jail, was because 'to murder a so-called Christ-killer was never that much of a big deal in the land of the Black Madonna'.⁴⁵ Yet Mielnicki's experience of Bialystok was more complex in its effect merely than in causing him to identify with the local and, unchangingly, against the national and I want to briefly consider this complexity in the context of personal memory.

Mielnicki himself is clearly aware of the significant role that memory could play in the ultimate survival of those who experienced death or concentration camps. Writing as an old man, Mielnicki believes that the act of remembering one's previous life while being held as a camp prisoner could be nothing short of a survival mechanism. As he describes being in Auschwitz, where he arrived at the age of fifteen in December 1942, Mielnicki recalls how he:

just listened, fascinated. [...] I was never with anyone substantially older than myself in the camps who ever admitted to being a failure.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

They'd all been successful and rich, and had screwed themselves silly every night of their lives. Bullshit to be certain, but something more than that, I think. When they stopped talking about these things, they stopped talking about life. They gave up hope and died.⁴⁶

Personal memory, as noted in the introduction, is a difficult subject, but one thing at least is straightforward and clear in its relation to places. The impossibility of later separating experience from the place in which it occurs - because as an autobiographical memory it must be episodic and therefore context-bound - is the essence of what sustains individuals' sense of particular places. In other words, remembered experiences will inform the individual's sense of a place, even when he or she is no longer in it. Mielnicki's acknowledgement of the significance of remembering one's pre-camp self is interesting enough, but what is also relevant is what is revealed by the meaning he attributes to his memory of things that happened to him in Bialystok and to the city itself. Mielnicki's book is certainly an attempt to bear witness to the Holocaust, but it is also an autobiographical act in his effort to understand and impose meaning on certain aspects of his life. In this, Mielnicki sees the time between 1939 and 1941 as something that encouraged him to identify not only with his local place but also with the state - Russia - charged with its administration in that period. Mielnicki's experience in Bialystok between 1939 and 1941 was in contrast to his time there under Polish jurisdiction, and the important thing about this is that Mielnicki believes his own Russianness played a vital part in his subsequent wartime survival.

The occasion of the Russian arrival in Bialystok in 1939 heralded another swift and major change to the city's identity. Becoming part of a different country/state/nation is about as great a non-topographical change as any place can undergo, crucial to all its inhabitants, affecting their sense, and potentially their insideness of it and therefore their individual identity, even as its own is geopolitically reassigned. The Mielnicki family's response was largely one of embracing the ensuing Russification of the region. Chaim Mielnicki became involved with the NKVD, the forerunner of the KGB, despite the concern and misgivings of his wife, Esther. Both voted 'yes' in the plebiscite of October and November 1939 asking Bialystokers whether they wanted the region to form part of West Byelorussia. Michel's brother, Aleksei, began engineering courses at a

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 162. The point about the potentially beneficial effect of remembering is supported by Andrea Reiter, *Narrating the Holocaust* translated by Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 58, where, in looking at how survivor-writers came to terms with the camp experience, she concludes: 'coping always has something to do with remembering'.

school in Minsk, an opportunity that delighted his mother, and Lenka, his sister, met and became engaged to a Russian army officer who visited the Mielnicki home weekly for over a year until 1941.⁴⁷ For Michel, by 1939 six years in a mainstream Polish school as a result of his father's integrationist philosophy, where he had encountered antisemitism ranging from exclusion from the Polish Army Cadet Corps to schoolboy bullying and name-calling, the arrival of the Russians was good news: 'life', he remembers, 'as it began under the Soviets, was bliss'.⁴⁸ As the Bialystok area was made ostensibly Russian, the Mielnickis' encounters with the new regime were an improvement on those they had had with Polish Bialystok. It is true that Mielnicki's father was keen for the family not to be overtly religious in their Jewishness, and his involvement with the NKVD made it difficult to deny Michel's wish for membership of the Pioneers, the Communist party youth organization. Yet the consolidation of Michel's Jewishness was not compromised; he had a bar mitzvah, albeit low-key, in 1940. While this no doubt confirmed his sense of belonging to the Jewish community, Michel's Pioneer activities also generated feelings of attachment to a wider society:

The Soviets provided me with everything the Polish régime had denied me. Most importantly, they welcomed me into the mainstream of their society, and gave me a red, boy-scout-type scarf, which I wore proudly to show that I *belonged*.⁴⁹

Clearly, the Jewishness that prevented Mielnicki feeling he could be Polish did not prevent him feeling Russian. Elsewhere, Mielnicki recalls that 'being part of the Soviet Union gave the overwhelming majority of those in our community the security of belonging to a civil society [...] For the first time in my young life, I could wander the streets of Wasilkow without anyone calling me *'Jude zyd'* or 'Christ Killer,' or throwing rocks at my head.'⁵⁰ Mielnicki's experience of events of international significance at the local level encouraged a greater sense of identification with his home city and with its new state. The personal everyday experiences of Bialystok's Russification, the issue of Soviet passports to the family following the 'yes' vote in the plebiscite, the awareness of his father's Russian background, all these things added to Mielnicki's emergent identity as a Russian, something he continues to believe helped in his survival of the camps.

Mielnicki's parents both died at Auschwitz and his later separation from his older brother rendered Michel a vulnerable singleton, a condition that no doubt

⁴⁷ Mielnicki, pp. 79 and 87-88.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

played a part when, some time after January or February 1944 and not yet seventeen, he fell in with a group of Russian prisoners of war at the Auschwitz Mona-Bunowitz camp. Mielnicki developed a friendship with these men which lasted until liberation from Bergen-Belsen in April 1945 and was something which he regarded as a life-saver: 'I could not even begin to talk in terms of ultimate survival had it not been for my gradual change of identity from Polish Jew to Russian gentile. From Mendel to Misha.'⁵¹ What is revealing about Mielnicki's view of this vital friendship is the factor he sees as important in its facilitation - certain qualities of Russianness - which cannot be dissociated from his experience of Bialystok. This Russianness was obvious in two positive ways:

I think largely because I spoke perfect Russian, but also because I was [...] the son of St. Petersburg Lancer hero Chaim Mielnicki, about whom I boasted, they began to include me in their society. As an equal.⁵²

Mielnicki's experience of Bialystok had been complex. For him, the interwar Polonization that rejected Jews was countered by the two-year period of Russification perceived by Mielnicki as far more inclusive, and as something which resulted in an enduring feeling of belonging. The experience of Russified Bialystok had not only strengthened Mielnicki's sense of belonging there, though, it had also led him to identify himself as a Russian with the consequence of later helping him forge a vital friendship in the camps. It also has to be noted that Mielnicki's experiences of Bialystok highlight the significance of the meaning of a place, something very important both for the individual and for the place itself. This point is considered in the next section.

The importance and source of meanings of a place.

As previously discussed, the meanings attributed to a place are one of the components of its identity and for the individual who attributes them they are what elevates the place from its condition of neutrality. In this, meanings will be crucial in determining whether that individual feels an identification with the place. Clearly, Mielnicki attributed a meaning to the physical structures of his place, the roles of the synagogue and the bath-house strengthened feelings of being Jewish and of belonging to the community, and the symbolism of these buildings ought not to be underestimated for its capacity to lend a particular meaning to Mielnicki's home

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 187. Mielnicki's given forename was Mendl (the spelling of which is not consistent in the text), which was changed to Menachem Mendl at the age of four or five. Following his arrival in France after the war, Mielnicki adopted the name Michel when he became a fashion designer.

⁵² Ibid.

place. But nor should the importance of the right people who support that meaning. To paraphrase Tuan, things and places would be drained of that meaning in the absence of the right people.⁵³ This point is illustrated here by looking at the contrasting attitudes to the idea of returning to postwar Bialystok of Mielnicki and of Samuel Pisar, one of his contemporaries.

In 1943, Mielnicki and his brother, Aleksei, had vowed to meet at Wasilkow if they survived the war. In 1945, after his liberation from Bergen-Belsen aged eighteen, Mielnicki believed he could rectify his allocated status: 'A Displaced Person [...] with yet another number: something I didn't intend to be for long. I was headed *home*.'⁵⁴ However, on arriving in Bialystok, he discovered that Aleksei and their sister, Lenka, were not there. Mielnicki, though he recognized a few on the list of visitors' names, found none who were related to him, something that was 'terribly depressing'.⁵⁵ Without the people who gave added meaning to it, Mielnicki's home place offered him little. Their absence, and his growing awareness of the strength of antisemitism in the city, led Mielnicki to conclude that he 'had to get out of Bialystok, and as quickly as possible'.⁵⁶ Samuel Pisar, who was born in Bialystok in 1928 or 1929, came from a propertied family who were moved into the ghetto in the summer of 1941. Pisar, his mother and sister remained there until the ghetto was razed in August 1943; his father, though, was murdered by the Gestapo some time before that. At the end of the war, Pisar's attitude to the very idea of returning home was quite different from Mielnicki's. Pisar's parents and sister were known by him to be dead before he and two friends, one of whom, Ben, was a fellow Bialystoker, were found by an American GI near Dachau in 1945. Ben wanted to go back to his home city to look for his mother and sisters. The sixteen-year-old Pisar, though, found the prospect anathema:

My mind flinched at the thought of a journey back to Bialystok. For what - to search in the bloodstained sand for the blown-away traces of the dead - those nightmarish visions which repeatedly invaded my sleep?⁵⁷

As proved to be the case for Mielnicki, Bialystok could not be positively meaningful or home for Pisar without the right people in it. It is plain that the meaning, affirmative or otherwise, of a place will always be important for the individual who attributes it, but, here, there is a further very particular importance to be recognized: when it was meaningful in significant and positive ways - the

⁵³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 140.

⁵⁴ Mielnicki, p. 210, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁵⁷ Samuel Pisar, *Of Blood and Hope* (London: Cassell, 1980), p. 98.

location of family, the source of enhancement of group and personal identity - it was possible to feel a sense of belonging to Bialystok, even if it was not possible to feel the same way about the country in which it was located. However, the meanings of a place are neither unfailingly positive, nor unchangeable, but they will always be complex in their source and in their effects, and they will always dictate the individual's sense of a particular place. These are the matters which are considered next.

The first point to make is that although the meanings of a place are a property of the individual's intentions for and experiences of it, and although, self-evidently, these are hugely variable and complex, that should not obscure the fact that such meanings may also be rooted in the more mundane. The physical setting of the place cannot be seen as insignificant. The writers studied here often convey their memory of Bialystok and what it meant to them by references to the city's built topography or landmarks, and there is at least one example where the most simple and clear reference reveals the profound association between the individual and his place. Israel Beker, an actor, director and artist, was born in Suraska Street in the heart of Jewish Bialystok in 1917. He moved to Palestine in 1947 and in 1979 his art book, *The Stage of My Life*, appeared with an introduction that is reproduced in part in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*. In it, Beker tells what Bialystok meant to him: 'The street and neighborhood where I lived, the things and happenings etched in my memory, have great significance for me.' Indeed, Bialystok and its streets and buildings were a part of Beker in a way that seems almost visceral. Beker returned to the city in 1945 and found in the rubble that had been his home the family's salt cellar:

A moment before, I thought that no one had existed, no father, no mother, brothers and sisters, neighborhood, Bialystok. Everything had disappeared and if that was true, then so had I.⁵⁸

It is not possible in thinking about Beker's attachment to Bialystok's streets and buildings to know for certain whether he had felt its strength prior to his return there in 1945, but there is no such doubt regarding one of the other writers here. Shmuel Soltz, the diarist, returned to Bialystok after Poland fell in September 1939. In common with many other Jews at that time, Soltz, whose widowed mother had died in 1935, decided to leave Poland. His final visit to Bialystok was in January 1941 to say goodbye to his extended family. At this point, Soltz's diary entries are more lengthy, and it is clear that one of the things he was doing was

⁵⁸ Israel Beker, 'My beloved home', in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, pp. 146-147 (especially p. 147).

quite deliberately consigning topographical details and their associations to memory. As he left ‘the house at Polna 47’, his aunt walking with him, Soltz: passed the synagogue of the family Citron [...] This magnificent synagogue was built by Chaim Citron in memory of his father and my uncle, Mair Cinowitz, taught a page of ‘Talmud’ every night there. [...]

Slowly we walked and came to Bialystozneska Street, house number 13. This was ‘The House of Learning’ of my grandfather and named after him [...] I have many childhood memories of this ‘House of Learning’. [...]

Opposite the courtyard of our ‘Beit Hamidrash’, I passed by two large textile houses belonging to the Merrin and Zilberblatt families, in which 1,000 workers had been employed.

Slowly, we pass by the houses, the courtyards. I look on both sides [...] My heart is as if ordering me to ‘walk slowly and look hard. You may be among the last who will remember this.’⁵⁹

For Beker and Soltz the meaning of Bialystok was positive and for Beker, at least, it remained so. More than thirty years later he wrote in the introduction to his book: ‘No, I don’t come from Bialystok: I am a Bialystoker, and that is something more.’⁶⁰ Noting the constancy of meaning for Beker, though, leads to consideration of how this is not always the experience of all the authors here, as the texts by Charles Zabuski and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk both confirm, albeit in different ways.

Sara Nomberg-Przytyk was born in Lublin in 1915, and moved to Bialystok at some point after October 1939 following her release as a political prisoner from Fordonia, about one hundred and fifty miles west of Bialystok. Two of her texts have been studied in this project, *The Pillars of Samson* and *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land*, both written in Poland in the mid-1960s and both very clearly delineated. Thus, *Pillars* deals with the period from the German arrival in Bialystok in June 1941 up to November 1943 when Nomberg-Przytyk was discovered hiding in the razed ghetto, and *Auschwitz* continues her story from deportation to Stutthof, en route to Auschwitz, in January 1944 until liberation in 1945. Obviously with such chronologically confined writing, it is impossible to know what Nomberg-Przytyk’s perspective was on her Bialystok experiences between 1939 and 1943 in terms of how they fitted or ranked in her life overall, but her narrative in *Pillars* makes very clear the dramatic effect that could follow when

⁵⁹ Soltz, *Eight Hundred and Fifty Days From Border to Border*, pp. 82-84.

⁶⁰ Beker, ‘My beloved home’, p. 146.

the meaning attributed to a place was threatened by external assault, and it can also be seen from that text and from *Auschwitz* that the place remained meaningful to her.⁶¹

As a result of German intentions for the city, Bialystok underwent major hostile changes - in its built landscape, with the symbolic destruction of the synagogue and the construction of barriers, and in the accompanying alteration to the city's administration system - all geared to undermine Jews' physical and psychological well-being in the drive to make Bialystok *judenrein* (free of Jews). For reasons which are discussed later, Nomberg-Przytyk actually chose to move into Bialystok's ghetto and on the eve of doing so she found the city had quickly taken on a kind of alien nature. Recalling how she stayed with a friend in a property that would be outside the ghetto, Nomberg-Przytyk felt that: 'What existed outside the window was no longer our street, no longer our world.' The next day, as she considered her predicament, Nomberg-Przytyk was clearly in a state of shock: 'My mind was a complete blank. I had no idea where to start. [...] My will was completely paralyzed'.⁶² Yet in the trauma and chaos of the ghetto, some positive meaning was restored to Nomberg-Przytyk when she was reunited with people who shared her political inclinations, and this helped imbue the place with a more friendly quality. Nomberg-Przytyk attended a gathering of the anti-Fascist supporters in November 1941:

I was sitting on the sofa, watching the goings on in the room through a fog. I couldn't control the emotions that welled up within me. I looked at all the celebrants and repeated to myself: 'My loneliness is ended. Now we'll look for an answer to the questions that have been tormenting us. My dear friends, how fortunate it is that I have found you.'⁶³

In confirming the changeability of meaning which Bialystok had for Nomberg-Przytyk, her sentiments also reiterate the point made earlier about the importance of the right people to an individual's perception of a place. And

⁶¹ Biographical details on Nomberg-Przytyk are sketchy. According to the translator's forward in Nomberg-Przytyk's text, *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land* translated by Roslyn Hirsch, eds. Eli Pfefferkorn and David H. Hirsch (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. xi, she left Poland in 1968 for Israel before joining her son in Canada in 1975. From Mary D. Lagerwey's book, *Reading Auschwitz* (Walnut Creek, London, New Delhi: AltaMira Press, 1998), p. 32, it appears that Nomberg-Przytyk died in 1990. A copy of the manuscript for *Auschwitz* was deposited in Yad Vashem in 1968, but according to an e-mail sent on 30 January 2002 by Robert Rozett at that institution, it has no additional information on Nomberg-Przytyk, nor does it hold an oral testimony by her.

⁶² Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *The Pillars of Samson* translated by Roslyn Hirsch and David H. Hirsch (London: Vallentine Mitchell, forthcoming), pp. 25 and 27.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

although Nomberg-Przytyk does not express a nostalgia or hankering for Bialystok (perhaps because she alone among the writers studied here chose to remain in Poland after the war), it can be shown from the way that she portrays herself as living through Auschwitz that she had positive memories of the city. From arriving at the camp in January 1944, as a lethargic and apathetic victim - 'I imagined that thousands of fingers were pointing at me and saying, "Here is a victim you can hit; you can pour your anger out on her and she will not protest, not even if you perform unusual acts of torture on her"' - Nomberg-Przytyk moved from planning suicide to actively endeavouring to survive.⁶⁴ This transformation in attitude, and her ultimate survival came from a combination of four contributory factors. First, there was a crucial element of sheer chance in surviving a death camp, something that Nomberg-Przytyk, in common with a number of authors examined here, acknowledges. Second, the intervention of a colleague from Bialystok who was already in Auschwitz when Nomberg-Przytyk arrived there, ensured that she survived her first 'selection', the process that decided those who were to be murdered immediately. Third, Nomberg-Przytyk was one of those able to draw on her previous experience of having served two terms as a political prisoner, something which is recognized as having created a greater survival potential.⁶⁵ Fourth, and this element is the most relevant for my purpose, Nomberg-Przytyk was able to sustain the individual identity that was so vulnerable to the Nazi determination to dehumanize and diminish those in the camps. Nomberg-Przytyk achieved this by acting in accordance with the person she perceived herself to have been prior to her deportation, and this was directly related to her participation in Bialystok's social relations between 1939 and 1943.

Nomberg-Przytyk makes very few references in *Pillars* to her time in Bialystok prior to 1941, but the rekindling of her political interest and activity over the following two years in the ghetto became something she could later draw upon in Auschwitz. When she was approached by the same woman, Sonia Rozawska, who had reunited Nomberg-Przytyk with the ghetto activists in 1941, the encounter marked Nomberg-Przytyk's turning point. She was assigned to work in the camp infirmary and knowing she was part of a political network determined to resist and to survive, was in some measure restorative to Nomberg-Przytyk. While waiting her turn in the queue at the infirmary, in 'this cold, terrible, brutal world, my heart was singing a happy song about brotherhood and friendship'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Reiter, *Narrating the Holocaust*, pp. 20-21, cites Bruno Bettelheim in noting that ex-political prisoners had a greater capacity to survive the camps.

⁶⁶ Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz*, p. 37.

For Nomberg-Przytyk the change in the meaning of Bialystok and its subsequent restoration and durability is relatively easy to identify, but for Charles Zabuski the change in the meaning he attributed to the city is less obvious and is evident only much later in his life. Zabuski's disaffection with Bialystok has already been highlighted and the reasons behind his poor impression are obvious. His father was a man of modest means so Charles sometimes went hungry, and his experience of Bialystok often involved antisemitism of a more frightening nature than that which he encountered at the gymnasium. The family's Polish landlord used to call to collect the rent wielding a large knife to encourage payment, trips to Ignatki forest were frequently marred by antisemitic hooligans assaulting Jewish visitors, while to escape political persecution, one of Zabuski's uncles, Zundel, fled the country after he was arrested for communist activities in the early 1930s.⁶⁷ All in all, Zabuski's memories of Bialystok are not fond ones. As a child his lived-in place experience included being hungry, physical and verbal antisemitism, and denial of the schooling he wanted, and as a young man the place was the scene of even more severe trauma.

Still aged only eighteen, Zabuski married in 1940, when Bialystok was back under Russian occupation. By the time his first child, a boy named Yehiel, was born in 1941, Bialystok had been ghettoized following the Germans' arrival in the summer. The poor conditions resulted in Zabuski's wife, Henia, being so malnourished she was unable to breast-feed the baby and he died when a week old. When their second son was born in July 1943, the ghetto was only a month from liquidation, and as Zabuski and Henia faced deportation in August, they decided to place the baby with a midwife at the ghetto hospital for safe keeping. Subsequently, the child was removed from the hospital by the Germans and buried alive. Zabuski last saw Henia in the camp at Majdanek near Lublin before they were separated. It comes as no surprise when reading Zabuski's account to learn that at the end of the war he chose not to return home. Zabuski was liberated near Veterfeld in Germany and as he witnessed Poles, French and Russians 'all anxious to go home', he felt he 'had no home to go to. I had already lost all my family. Why return to Bialystok? It had been destroyed - both the houses and the people.'⁶⁸ Zabuski eventually moved to Paris having remarried in Fromberg, Germany in 1946. His wife's brother and his family, also Polish Jews, who were in France after the war, decided to return to Poland which left Zabuski and his wife, Adela, with their young son in Paris feeling 'very much alone'.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Zabuski, pp. 9-10, 32-33 and 13-14 respectively.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

This isolation was not enough, apparently, to make Zabuski want to go back to Poland. In closing his account with the briefest of summaries of his post-war life, there is no expression of any desire to visit the place of his birth, but that is exactly what he did do in August 1993 for the fiftieth anniversary of the Bialystok ghetto uprising.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, Zabuski does not say anything at all about his visit, it is only in the epilogue written by his cousin that the trip is mentioned. It is a silence that has to be considered in context. The idea of producing an account of Zabuski's experiences was not his and, certainly initially, he was unwilling to offer his memories for examination. In the book's preface, Zabuski's cousin, June Sutz Brott, describing how she wanted to learn of her Polish family, writes:

but Charles - who for forty years had been silent about his wartime experiences - staunchly resisted all my questions. Finally, I convinced him that if he, the sole survivor and eye-witness, refused to speak, then the saga of our Bialystok ancestors would be lost forever - to me, my father, my four brothers, all our children, and even to Charles' own son.⁷¹

It is clear that with the majority of the book concentrating on the German occupation of Bialystok and Zabuski's camp experiences and liberation, Zabuski's main reason for writing was to please or satisfy his cousin and to provide a testimony to his family, rather than to reflect openly and extensively on how his time as a child and young adult in Bialystok and, indeed, in the death and concentration camps related to the rest of his life. Therefore, it is possible only to speculate on what motivated Zabuski's return to the city in 1993, but a number of things can be said.

At the very least, Zabuski's visit in 1993 suggests Bialystok had now acquired a different, more positive meaning for him. He had arranged to meet his American cousin in the city and as he showed her certain topographical landmarks and sites, it seems he had pleasant as well as terrifying memories of them. Brott writes that Zabuski: 'directed our driver, leading us on a tour of the city.' He pointed out the site of a prominent and Jewish-owned landmark: 'See that corner? That's where the Hotel Ritz used to be. Uncle Benny - your father - stayed there in 1929.'⁷² Zabuski showed Brott 'a modern apartment building, the site of the former fish

⁷⁰ Similarly, there is no reference by Zabuski to a visit he made to Poland in 1992. His cousin and co-writer has made a footnote of Zabuski's trip to Majdanek on *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 172. According to Wiesniewski, *Jewish Bialystok*, pp. 52-53, the Ritz Hotel, a large and impressive establishment was owned by the Jewish company Rabmil. The occasion of Zabuski's American uncle's visit to Bialystok in 1929 and the great excitement he felt is recalled by Zabuski, in his book, pp. 15-17.

market area, near where our grandparents lived' as well as the ghetto cemetery where his two baby sons were buried, and the site of the Great Synagogue on Suraska Street which was burned down with Jews inside when the Germans arrived in June 1941.⁷³ Perhaps Zabuski returned to Bialystok because he saw and, now, as an old man, welcomed it as a source of his Jewishness. Certainly, it is clear that Zabuski does not attempt to disregard his ethnicity or to distance himself from his home city. He is described on the cover of his book as: 'Active in the French Jewish community, he arranges yearly *Yizkor* (memorial) ceremonies for Bialystoker Jews.' In any event, his return to Bialystok in 1993 was an occasion which helped him to participate as a single Jew among a group of more than one hundred, who had met after a fifty-year absence from their home place, and which says something about place and personal and group identity. The public commemoration of the ghetto's uprising was a claim to the Jewishness of Bialystok's past. And as an act in Bialystok's social relations which brought the past into the present, it continued to affect Bialystok's identity, which in turn contributed to the ongoing identity of those who participated. Jewishness, in all its various guises, may not always have been what Zabuski wanted in and from Bialystok, but clearly with the passage of time, that had changed.

The possibility that Zabuski's eventual attribution of a positive meaning to Bialystok was related to his Jewishness cannot be surprising. The matter of ethnicity, and feelings of rootedness, are two possible causes for the assignment of an affirmative meaning which surface among some of the other texts. It is also very clear that survivors' personal quality of Jewishness cannot be dissociated from Bialystok's identity - the symbiosis of place and individual conferred Jewishness on each. What is further explicit in the accounts is that the writers attach varying degrees and types of importance to it. Zabuski, with his childhood desire to 'be somebody', couched in terms which suggest this might have been a person rather less traditionally Jewish than he was encouraged to be, was not the only one who found his ethnicity difficult. Nomberg-Przytyk, too, evidently found her Jewishness complex.

Both of her books reveal the ambivalence Nomberg-Przytyk felt about being Jewish. As an active communist, Nomberg-Przytyk felt an element of self-hatred or at least ambiguity for the ethnicity she saw as undermining her role in the political cause, as is indicated in *Auschwitz* by the description of her arrival at the concentration camp in Stutthof:

⁷³ Zabuski, p. 172.

We were the first Jewish transport to arrive in Stutthof, a motley crew who shared nothing in common but the tragedy of having been born Jewish. No wonder we met with little sympathy from the other prisoners. [...] We felt that no one wanted us here. It was the isolation of the prisoners in the Jewish cell that had hurt me most of all in the Bialystok prison. The whole world was involved in a battle, but the prisoners in our cell were not a part of it.⁷⁴

The climate in which Nomberg-Przytyk's books were written has already been described in the introduction, and it seems likely to have been one that encouraged her to promote her written persona as a communist at the expense of her Jewishness. Certainly, *Auschwitz* is replete with references that amount to Nomberg-Przytyk de-Judaizing herself, or at least downplaying her ethnicity, as she stresses the importance of communism both prior to her arrival in the camp at Stutthof and then subsequently as a member of the underground movement that operated in Auschwitz. Yet, from *Pillars* it is clear that Nomberg-Przytyk also felt a pride in being Jewish. She chose to return to Bialystok in late July 1941, having fled to Slonim, one hundred and thirty miles to the east, when the Germans arrived in June 1941. Nomberg-Przytyk recalled that when she alighted from the train at Bialystok, she 'was tempted to tell them [the German soldiers who were fellow passengers] that throughout the whole trip they had been flirting with three Jewesses who did not run away and hide in holes'.⁷⁵ The theme of resistance by Jews is a strong one in Nomberg-Przytyk's account, one which emphasizes her identification with that group, and what I want to consider is how her ethnicity, her experience of Bialystok and her resultant sense of the place interacted.

The significance of Nomberg-Przytyk's return to Bialystok in July 1941 lies in the fact that she had previously decided to move to Warsaw, with two other Jewish women she names only as Karola and Celka who were already passing as Aryans, where there was the chance she, too, could live using false papers. En route to the capital, the three women journeyed to Bialystok, where Nomberg-Przytyk changed her mind and decided to stay, in the full knowledge that the city was about to be ghettoized, and had already been the site of mass murder in the synagogue there. Nomberg-Przytyk does not explain why she returned to Bialystok nor does she indicate that she even considered going to Lublin to join her parents, brother and sister-in-law, who were still alive at this stage.⁷⁶ This may have been because

⁷⁴ Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz*, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁵ Nomberg-Przytyk, *Pillars*, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Though Nomberg-Przytyk had not seen her family since October 1939, it does not appear that she was estranged from them. She received letters in 1940, before losing touch when the Russo-German war broke out. In early 1942, some months after returning to Bialystok,

Lublin, already ghettoized, was an unrealistic proposition, but Warsaw, too, had been sealed. Of course, in practical terms, Nomberg-Przytyk may not have had much of a choice about returning to Bialystok - choosing not to try her luck in Warsaw, Bialystok was the only remaining option. As Nomberg-Przytyk remembered returning to the city, she did not explain her change of mind, but her words reveal the compulsion she felt:

In Slonim, the plan [to go to Warsaw and obtain false papers] had seemed completely realistic to me. Now I knew I would be going to the ghetto in Bialystok, that I would not be able to smile when really I wanted to cry. I couldn't help it. Perhaps I was putting myself in a position where I would have to accept a horrible death, but I could not act differently. I was surprised that I had chosen of my own free will to go to the place that the occupier had prescribed for me. But I couldn't do it any other way.⁷⁷

This lack of rationale for Nomberg-Przytyk's return to Bialystok and instead this more emotional reflection on it, indicates her identification with the city. Her decision shows that Nomberg-Przytyk felt an attachment to Bialystok which, although it may have been latent - 'I was surprised that I had chosen of my own free will to go to the place' - was strong enough to transcend the grim prospect offered by the city under German occupation. This then raises the question of what may have caused or contributed to that attachment.

Among the writers examined here, Nomberg-Przytyk is alone in not having been born in Bialystok, which makes her identification with it more notable by virtue of having developed during the relatively brief period from October 1939 to June 1941. Without doubt, this speedy development stemmed largely from Nomberg-Przytyk's political activities in Bialystok. Indeed, the fact that she was there at all was due at least in part to knowing that Bialystok when under Russian rule was where 'political prisoners congregated after they had been released from prison'.⁷⁸ But the passage quoted above indicates that Nomberg-Przytyk also felt a certain solidarity with Bialystok Jews, that was almost instinctive - 'I knew I would be going to the ghetto'; 'I couldn't help it'; 'I could not act differently'. To better gauge and understand the significance of this solidarity, it is helpful to be aware of Nomberg-Przytyk's reaction to the time she spent with other Jews in Slonim. While in that city in July 1941, Nomberg-Przytyk sought safety in the synagogue

Nomberg-Przytyk was sent hand-delivered letters from her parents and brother asking her to return to Lublin, which she hoped to do in April 1942. Before this could be arranged, however, she learned that all her family had been killed in the death camp of Belzec.

⁷⁷ Nomberg-Przytyk, *Pillars*, p. 20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

together with hundreds of others. Yet despite sharing a common danger and refuge, Nomberg-Przytyk felt isolated from her fellow Jews. She refers to the ‘operators’ willing and able to benefit from the misfortune of others, the woman driven to madness by the death of her young daughter, and a family whose patriarch, being eager to work with the Germans, Nomberg-Przytyk saw as being base and stupid.⁷⁹ While it would not be wholly accurate to say that Nomberg-Przytyk felt nothing positive towards the Slonim Jews - elsewhere in her text she recounts their suffering through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl, Niunka, who subsequently came to share the same ghetto accommodation as Nomberg-Przytyk in Bialystok - it is clear that, at this point, Nomberg-Przytyk did not identify strongly enough with Slonim or its Jews to want to stay.⁸⁰ A chance encounter there with the two Jewish women, Karola and Celka, one of whom she knew from Bialystok, was enough to convince her to try to get to Warsaw.

The reason, or one of them, that Nomberg-Przytyk changed her mind about Warsaw, deciding to remain in Bialystok, was that that place had become home. Her action in returning to the city suggests that Nomberg-Przytyk felt what Relph has defined as an existential insideness - ‘part of knowing implicitly that *this* place is where you belong’. The result of this attitude of existential insideness is that a person ‘is part of that place and it is part of him [...] there exists between place and person a strong and profound bond’.⁸¹ It is a suggestion made stronger by the words Nomberg-Przytyk chose to describe her reflection on the decision not to deny her Jewish identity in an attempt to pass as Aryan. Nomberg-Przytyk implies a sense of well-being and reiterates the strength and source of her attachment to Bialystok as she walked away from the station: ‘The day was sunny and cheerful, and it made me feel good, like someone recovering from a serious illness. I had renounced what would have been a very difficult path for me to pursue, and I was happy that I had done so.’⁸² That Nomberg-Przytyk identified with Bialystok after a short time, to the extent that she was prepared to surrender the chance of relative safety elsewhere, is less surprising in view of the fact that she was one of many thousands of Jews who had arrived in the city in 1939. As a refuge for those trying to escape Nazism, Bialystok had become more Jewish in population terms than it had been at any measured point in the previous twenty years. In 1936, the city’s population was 99,722 of which 42,880 (43%) were Jews. By October 1939, the total population had doubled to 200,000 of which 140,000 (70%), more than treble

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-13.

⁸⁰ The reference to Niunka is on *ibid.*, pp. 62-64.

⁸¹ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, p. 55, emphasis in the original.

⁸² Nomberg-Przytyk, *Pillars*, p. 21.

the 1936 number, were Jews.⁸³ Nomberg-Przytyk was one of the 97,000 Jews who accounted for virtually the whole of that overall increase and this ethnic preponderance must have added to the appeal Bialystok already had as a centre for attracting political prisoners, an appeal worth further examination to see what may be learned about Nomberg-Przytyk's identification with her fellow Jews.

In truth, it is not possible, given the particular nature of Nomberg-Przytyk's texts - the use of vignettes in which other people are often the main focus - to point to something and to claim that it categorically reveals the source of her identification with Jews. But it is possible to eliminate two particular forms of Jewishness with which Nomberg-Przytyk clearly did not identify.

Nomberg-Przytyk did not identify with Jews religiously. Although she came from a religious background, with several rabbis in the family, Nomberg-Przytyk had little time for Judaism.⁸⁴ In *Auschwitz*, she referred to two 'very religious' Slovak Orthodox Jews whose 'fanaticism irritated' her. These Jews, despite the horrors that confronted them, 'continued to believe in the glory of the Chosen People' and in 'God's special affection for the Jews', something incomprehensible to Nomberg-Przytyk: 'It was difficult for me to understand how they could maintain this belief in the face of the facts.'⁸⁵ Similarly, Nomberg-Przytyk could not have been drawn to Bialystok through the Jewish political cause of Zionism. Her commitment to communism has already been mentioned and remaining in Poland for more than twenty years after the war suggests that she did not switch allegiance to Zionism. Of course, Nomberg-Przytyk must have considered herself Jewish by race, but without minimizing the significance of that, there were other elements which provided her with a link to fellow Jews. There is no doubt that Nomberg-Przytyk identified with Jews because she felt their suffering - that is evident from her thoughts on going to the ghetto. This, though, is a form of identification that would have become more evident with the passage of time, given that in 1941 Nomberg-Przytyk could not have been aware of the nature and scale of Polish Jews' devastation. By the 1960s, when she was remembering, and writing her story, Nomberg-Przytyk would have been able to relate her wartime experiences in the ghetto and camps to the collective Jewish disaster. In other words, Nomberg-Przytyk's identity as a Jew in the 1960s may have had a different source or emphasis from that of twenty-five years earlier. As a young woman in Bialystok, Nomberg-Przytyk's interests were not only political. In 1940 and 1941,

⁸³ Wiesnicki, *Jewish Bialystok and Surroundings in Eastern Poland*, appendix III.

⁸⁴ The translator's forward in Nomberg-Przytyk's *Auschwitz*, p. x, reveals that Nomberg-Przytyk was 'brought up in a hasidic atmosphere' and that her grandfather and 'many other relatives' were rabbis.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

she 'used to give history lectures to working people several evenings a week' in a large building on Sienkiewicz Street housing a number of Jewish schools.⁸⁶ She makes no more than this passing reference to such activities, but the suggestion is that Nomberg-Przytyk, who had rejected Jewish orthodoxy, was attracted to secular Jewish culture, and that that both offered pleasure or satisfaction, and was something with which she could identify.⁸⁷ And clearly, despite the upheaval of the times, perhaps even because of it, Nomberg-Przytyk would have benefited from the positive effects of simply being among those who shared the characteristics of Jewishness - be they racial or cultural; to repeat the quote from the geographer, John Eyles: 'Interacting with or simply living close to people perceived to possess similar attributes provides a sense of belonging'.⁸⁸ Notwithstanding her attachment to the most Jewish of cities, Jewishness for Nomberg-Przytyk was not unproblematic, but for others it was a more straightforwardly positive characteristic.

Unlike Nomberg-Przytyk or Zabuski, for Chaika Grossman, Jewishness as an affirmative quality was never in doubt. Her text, *The Underground Army: Fighters of the Bialystok Ghetto*, makes abundantly clear that it was a personal and place quality of prime importance. Grossman's background was rather different from that of either Nomberg-Przytyk, Zabuski or Mielnicki. She was the daughter of a factory owner and raised in a home where not only Yiddish but Hebrew was spoken, and she had paternal grandparents living in Jerusalem.⁸⁹ In short, it was a Zionist background that could only have been enhanced by living in Bialystok, its long association with Zionism ensuring the attraction of Palestine in Grossman's imagination, something to be examined later. Grossman's experience was also different from the other writers in that she was not captured and sent to a camp, but continued to live in Bialystok after its ghettoization in 1941, moving from the

⁸⁶ Nomberg-Przytyk, *Pillars*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ I make this point about Nomberg-Przytyk and secular Jewishness having read the essay by the Polish-born Jew, Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1981), p. 41, whose reflections on 'who is a Jew' reveal similarities with what I know of Nomberg-Przytyk's experiences. Born in 1907, Deutscher, too, rebelled against Jewish orthodoxy and addressed large meetings of workers in Yiddish, enjoying the secular Yiddish culture of literature and theatre. Deutscher is also helpful in further illustrating my previous point about Nomberg-Przytyk feeling Jewish by later relating her wartime experiences to the collective Jewish disaster. Writing when well into his seventies, Deutscher explained that he saw himself as a Jew because he felt 'the Jewish tragedy [the Holocaust] as his own tragedy' and because he felt 'the pulse of Jewish history' (p. 51).

⁸⁸ John Eyles, *Senses of Place* (Warrington, Cheshire: Silverbrook Press, 1985), p. 133.

⁸⁹ None of these details are supplied by Grossman in her book, but have been taken from Ada Holtzman ed. *Chajka Grossman - Life Story: An Article from a Memorial Booklet published by the family and Kibbutz Evron after Chajka's Death*.

Online: <http://www.zchor.org/bialystok/grossman.htm>

ghetto to the ‘Aryan side’ and travelling outside the city. That Grossman was in Bialystok at all at the outbreak of World War Two is a matter of some significance. Born in Bialystok in 1919, Grossman graduated from its Hebrew Gymnasium in 1938 and received an immigration certificate which would have enabled her to go to Jerusalem to study at the Hebrew University. However, the certificate was received at the same time as Grossman was ordered by *Ha-shomer ha-tsair*, the Zionist youth movement group of which she was a member, to Brisk-Pinsk in eastern Poland to organize activities there. This particular episode pre-dates the point at which Grossman’s book opens and she only describes her decision to stay as she reflected on it in June 1941 at the start of the German-Russian war. One thing that is plain is the importance of her Jewishness to her:

The debate was over. Pinhas [a member of the six-member underground leadership, who was leaving to go east in 1941] was tense, and as a person of conscience was certainly asking himself: Is this an order? Is this why we gave up aliya, gave up our certificates? What does our organizational conscience say? Our organizational conscience tells us to accompany the Jewish masses in their troubles and to guide them.

At the time of parting you acted bravely, didn’t you? What has happened to you now? [...] Is it so hard to be alone? The war has taken them all away ... Comrades had gone to Palestine and now they are building “your homeland ...” [...] And you are alone in a brutal world. Two days ago, on the last day of peace you received a letter from a comrade in Palestine. He misses you, is still waiting for you to come [...] From this day on I am in the underground, underground to everything, to the German beast of prey, the far-away homeland. List me as dead ... Tomorrow once again the hobnailed boots of the blonde [sic] soldiers will trample your Jewishness, your freedom, your youthful dream to go to Palestine

...⁹⁰

The organizational responsibility she felt to stay and help the ‘Jewish masses’ is the only reason Grossman offers for remaining, and this solidarity with fellow Jews, clear from Grossman’s actions during the war, is something she made explicit in her account.⁹¹ While still in Vilna in 1941, her immediate response to the

⁹⁰ Chaika Grossman, *The Underground Army: Fighters of the Bialystok Ghetto* (Washington: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1987), pp. 7-8.

⁹¹ In *Chajka Grossman - Life Story* it is revealed that Grossman was pressured into staying in Poland in 1939 by *Ha-shomer ha-tsair* under threat of expulsion from the movement having decided to emigrate to Israel just before war broke out.

suggestion that she should use a false, non-Jewish identification card and Catholic papers was one of great reluctance: 'I refused to accept them. [Telling her Polish colleague:] "I don't want to hide my Jewishness; I don't want to enjoy a fate different from that of the rest of the Jews"'.⁹² The undoubtable importance of Jewishness to Grossman at a very personal level was something that was consolidated in knowing that her home place, which she held in great affection, was itself rich in a Jewishness which came from its people and what they did in Bialystok. When she returned to Bialystok in January 1942 after two years away from the city on underground business, the public absence, destruction and alteration of its Jewishness left her bereft. Grossman writes:

This time I would look in vain for the Jews who used to crowd the ticket booth [of the railway station] and waiting room [...] Now, I was a stranger here. [...]

There were streets here winding, narrow and littered, the homes of impoverished and oppressed Jews. It was from these streets that the Jewish revolt originated, and the Jewish self-defense, in 1905. [...] When the socialist Zionist movement developed, it too spilled over into these streets. [...] Some distance away there was a street called 'Shmuel Schmidt's Gessel' that I always unthinkingly identified with Reb Sender, who owned a shop there. [...]

Where were the houses, the shops, the draftsmen? Where were the peddlers and the wagoners? Where was the Great Synagogue? A community razed, crushed into the ghetto. [...] They had shortened the road. The streets no more. Only the rusty iron skeleton of the Great Synagogue remained, lying on its side like an uprooted giant tree. The remains had dwindled, and the iron columns, the tiny frame of lives that had once been were all twisted.⁹³

Yet the obvious and major changes in Bialystok which must have altered its meaning for Grossman - 'Now, I was a stranger here' - did not undermine the commitment to it which had resulted from the previous meaning it held for her. Despite the devastation, perhaps even because of it, Grossman remained in the ghetto, determined to motivate its youth - 'I would come with demands and encouragement, a militant consciousness and a warm heart' - and she was there at its uprising and to witness its liquidation.

⁹² Grossman, *The Underground Army*, p. 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 52 and pp. 56-58.

Like Grossman, Shmuel Soltz was a Zionist, and again like Grossman, Soltz found the loss of Jewishness in Bialystok, in his case when he returned there after the handover to Russia in September 1939, profoundly upsetting. Unlike Grossman, though, Soltz decided to leave Bialystok; he found the assault on the city's Jewishness eroded this aspect of his own identity. By the time Soltz returned from the war Bialystok was in the hands of the Soviets, badly overcrowded and suffering from food and medicine shortages. Although Soltz could have worked in one of the factories, the newly introduced ruling that Saturday and Sunday were working days for everyone meant that in being unable to maintain religious observance, he could not be the kind of Jew to which he aspired and it was this assault on Jewish practice that was the deciding factor for him. Soltz wrote that he 'couldn't make my peace with the idea of Saturday's [sic] being like any other day in the week, so I decided that I must leave and realize my ambition to get to Israel'.⁹⁴ In addition, Soltz had witnessed the damage being wreaked, albeit in a different form, in several Jewish communities he visited before he finally left Bialystok for good in January 1941. He saw relatives in Augustow, north of Bialystok, in October 1939 and was shocked at what the Russian occupation had already done there: 'the people here had greatly changed. [...] everything that had happened a few weeks earlier had lost its value'. And in Bialystok itself, the intangible 'spirit of the place', so dependent upon one of the other components of place identity, social relations, was perceived by Soltz as adversely affected. The change to the working week that made Soltz decide to leave Poland, had also diminished the city's atmosphere, which owed much to the preponderance of Jewish businesses and their practices: 'In this way the holiday spirit of these two days was done away with.'⁹⁵ Jewishness, then, whether as a personal characteristic or as a quality of Bialystok was an important part of living there. It is also the case, for almost all the writers studied here, that living in Bialystok heightened awareness of the potential of other places to embrace their Jewishness. Places in their imaginations were a powerful part of the authors' lived-in reality of Bialystok and it is this topic to which I now turn.

Places in imagination.

From the previous discussions here, it will be obvious that Bialystok was (indeed, will still be) a multi-layered place, both in its history and its ongoing identity. As a result of these things, the experiences of the Bialystok Jews examined here were

⁹⁴ Soltz, p. 39.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42 and 39, respectively.

also diverse and complex, but it is possible to briefly consider the role of places in their imaginations in noting three points relevant to all of them.

The first of these points is that Bialystok's history and contemporary social relations combined to actively encourage engagement with the idea of other places. All places have the potential to stimulate in the imaginations of their inhabitants an interest in other places. By their very nature, the social relations of any location will not be wholly confined to that place alone, but will 'stretch' in any of a variety of ways to other sites - one straightforward example of this would be through trade links which might involve the movement of goods between places, thereby creating at least awareness of other locations. Bialystok probably had such links or something similar, but there were also other factors which contributed to a tradition of foreign locations being of interest. Bialystok had a strong association with Zionism, with the obvious connotation of the relevance of another place.⁹⁶ The city had also long been a place from which Jews departed not only to Palestine, but to South America, the United States and western Europe. This history and tradition, when combined with the element of racial and political intolerance can be seen to have had an impact on the imaginations of the authors. Recognizing the significance of this dynamic leads to the second point, namely that the phenomenon of places in imagination could be powerful in a number of different ways.

One way in which the idea of other places was powerful was in its capacity to offer excitement and a diversion from everyday routine, particularly when the idea was planted at an early age. Zabuski, for example, remembered learning about Argentina from his father's story while still a young child. Zabuski senior, as a young man, had made an abortive trip to Argentina in 1918 before returning in 1920 to marry, and his son found the adventure endlessly exciting and a welcome distraction from the lived-in reality of Bialystok: 'Stories about the enchanted land of Argentina mesmerized me, so I never tired of hearing how it all began. [...] Compared to colorful Argentina, Bialystok seemed hopelessly gray, old world, poor and superstitious.'⁹⁷ For others who were older, the notion of living in a different country was hugely motivating. Soltz, living in Bialystok as a boy and young man, had a place in his imagination which had been almost a way of life. His 'one objective, for which he had been educated since childhood, was to reach Israel', which he did in February 1942 after an epic journey.⁹⁸ The importance of

⁹⁶ According to the historical calendar in *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, p. 44, the *Chouevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) party, precursor to the Zionist movement, was formed in Bialystok in 1882.

⁹⁷ Zabuski, p. 1-3.

⁹⁸ The quote is from an unattributed commentary on the dust-jacket of Soltz's published diary.

this particular type of place-in-the-imagination experience for Soltz is emphasized by his reaction when he saw it was under threat. Soltz's distress at the effect of the Russian arrival in Augustow in 1939 was compounded by the effect on the ideal closest to his heart: 'The youth movement and the Zionist movement was as if erased in one stroke in this place.'⁹⁹ Chaika Grossman was also a Zionist and her text reveals the power of a place in the imagination to sustain. Like Soltz, Grossman intended to leave Bialystok for Palestine when she became a young woman. However, she twice decided to remain in the city, just before and then during the war years, and, not surprisingly, staying was not without a price, and nor did it banish Palestine from her imagination. In remembering the danger and loneliness of her situation in June 1941, when she was in Vilna, Lithuania, on underground business, Grossman reveals how great her sacrifice had been as she reflected on her earlier decision when she had surrendered the chance to convert the place in her imagination into lived-in reality:

But... perhaps we shall still meet...Perhaps it is better thus...Perhaps the iron will be better forged this way? It is good that you are there, good that you are all there. You, in my place, would act like me, wouldn't you?¹⁰⁰

Perhaps these thoughts of a possible reunion consoled Grossman in her disappointment, certainly there is evidence that the idea of Palestine continued to sustain her. The power which that particular imagined place exerted over Grossman is revealed in her reaction when she felt that any future chance of moving there might be jeopardized by the events of 1942:

Hitler's armies were nearing the gates of Palestine. Those were the days of el-Alamein. We suddenly seemed petrified. Hitler's armies were approaching the borders of Palestine! The days were gloomy and sad. [...] We asked ourselves whether Rommel would succeed in crushing our last hope. For hours and days our hearts beat wildly. We read the newspapers nervously, and listened to the radio, our chests tight with pain and fear.¹⁰¹

Places in the imaginations of the writers, then, had taken root for different reasons and had different effects, yet, and this is the third point, for all the authors the phenomenon was directly related to the matter of how accommodating other places would be of Jews and Jewishness.

⁹⁹ Soltz, p. 42.

¹⁰⁰ Grossman, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

For Soltz and Grossman, Palestine was the land that would offer something with which they could religiously and politically identify as Jews. Zabuski was more attracted by the idea of safety and opportunity in other countries. He could see why his father had wanted to move to South America: 'I understood the attraction of Argentina: wonderful opportunities and freedom from antisemitism'.¹⁰² Zabuski's belief was confirmed by the knowledge that other family members had achieved successful moves. Zabuski's uncle Zundel had relocated to Uruguay following his flight from political persecution in Poland, and Zabuski 'liked the idea that he was in the same faraway South America, where my father had once attempted to settle'.¹⁰³ Zabuski also had another uncle who, like Zundel, had left Bialystok. Uncle Benny had been sent to Chicago aged twelve in 1907 or 1908, as a result of his parents' fears for him following the pogroms in Bialystok in 1905 and 1906. In 1929, when Benny visited, Zabuski, who was 'so proud to have an American uncle', must have believed him to have become affluent in America. Benny stayed at the 'fancy Hotel Ritz' and gave Zabuski a dollar, a 'vast new sum of money'.¹⁰⁴ For a poor Jew, Argentina and America in his imagination were exciting places offering safety and opportunity, things Zabuski perceived as sorely absent for old-world Jews in Bialystok. And as far as Benny was concerned, his move had not meant the elimination of one of the strongest markers of Jewishness. According to Zabuski, on his return to Bialystok, Benny avoided speaking to someone he thought was Polish because he 'didn't want to waste time trying to speak to someone who certainly didn't know Yiddish'.¹⁰⁵ Zabuski does not comment on Benny's ability still to speak Yiddish despite having lived in America for over twenty years - the incident is included in his account because the 'Pole' whom Benny chose to ignore was his own father - but to Zabuski, Benny must have seemed living proof that it was possible to prosper, to be safe, and to be Jewish in America.

The phenomenon of place in the imagination is one manifestation of the importance of places to individuals and has been shown as explicit in a number of texts, but there is one other writer studied here, so far mentioned only briefly, whose interest in the significance of places is overt and illuminating. Samuel Pissar's book, *Of Blood and Hope*, published in 1980, is the focus of the remainder of this section.

¹⁰² Zabuski, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 14, 16 and 17, respectively.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

Samuel Pisar.

As a text published when he was well into middle-age, Pisar's long-term reflections openly acknowledge the effect of places on individuals and is an excellent example for reiterating how and why the meaning of a place may change over time, for showing how meanings could be contradictory, and how more than one place could be simultaneously meaningful. In one sense, it may even be claimed that 'place', albeit on a very large scale, has dominated a fair proportion of Pisar's professional life, bringing together his east European background and his subsequent life in the West. His doctoral dissertation was an exploration of the legal aspects of trade between communist and capitalist countries and Pisar later concerned himself with East-West tensions, offering ideas for a new approach on relations and producing a report for Congress in the early 1960s. Pisar's reluctance to return to Bialystok after his liberation in April 1945 has been noted earlier, but the reason he gave for not returning - he already knew his immediate family were dead - is matched by the recognition that Bialystok had been more than the place where he and his family lived; it had helped define Pisar's identity, and now the changed meaning of the city, 'the burned-out cauldron of my private hell', both undermined his sense of who he was and rendered him rootless:

Then what? What should I do? Who was I? I felt lost. Peace had come to Europe; I could go where I pleased. But where could I find a place called home? Where?¹⁰⁶

For this study, the question of rootedness has an obvious relevance in the consideration of any individual's experience and sense of a particular place, but it is especially pertinent in looking at Pisar's text, because it emerges as an intimate part of the relationship between particular places and his own identity and is something he comments upon very explicitly. Pisar's concern with identity is reiterated throughout his account in his expressions of the immense gratitude he feels to America, the place to which he moved in the summer of 1954, taking up a scholarship at Harvard. America not only provided shelter and education, but allowed Pisar to consolidate his own identity through identifying with the place: 'this generous, open country, which, like no other ever could, has given me the opportunity to find my place and play my part'.¹⁰⁷ The acknowledgement by Pisar that place plays a role in shaping people is repeated in later comments which themselves demonstrate that his sense of places was complex in that, despite his identification with America, he continued to feel, or at least remember, the effects of his original place. When Pisar explains in the book's epilogue his reason for

¹⁰⁶ Pisar, *Of Blood and Hope*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

writing, he goes on to write a revealing paragraph. On reflection, Pizar was not entirely happy with the effects of different places on him, indeed, to such an extent that he had become regretful of his neglect of the person he had been many years previously, a person who in essence had been formed from his home place experience:

I had to find my own voice, not just the voice of the scholar from Melbourne and Harvard and the Sorbonne, [...] but the voice Ben feared I had lost when I sank *new roots in social environments where nothing is ever straightforward*, [...] where the dialogue is usually far from the innermost currents of one's emotional life. For even if *the diverse identities that had been foisted upon me* as I touched the depths and the heights of human experience did not divide my soul, I realized that *I had blended far too well, from too many origins*, into the cultivated worlds of refined British gentlemen, witty French aristocrats, and dynamic American businessmen and politicians. *I had left the subhuman of Bialystok and Maidanek way too far behind.*¹⁰⁸

The phrases: 'new roots in social environments where nothing is ever straightforward'; 'identities that had been foisted upon me'; 'I had blended far too well, from too many origins'; 'I had left the subhuman of Bialystok and Maidanek way too far behind', all speak of Pizar's obvious unease - with the person he had become and with the loss of old roots. In doing this, such comments confirm the link between rootedness in a place and Pizar's identity, specifically his ethnicity. The use of Nazi terminology in the final sentence is a reminder of why virtually the whole of Jewish Bialystok was wiped out, but as a poignant expression of regret at the loss of who he had been, in the linking of himself as a Jew with his home city, Pizar also makes the connection between personal, including ethnic, identity and place. It is not necessarily the case that rootedness in a particular place will inevitably be associated with an individual's ethnicity, but it is simply too significant a characteristic of the Bialystokers examined here, to be disregarded in looking at any one of their texts. In Pizar's account, generally, Jewishness, for what it meant to him, is not an especially prominent theme, but when it does surface it does so in a way that is striking, particularly a certain episode in his camp experiences to which he makes two independent references.

In early 1945, Pizar was in a camp in Leonberg near Stuttgart when, on learning he was to be 'evacuated ahead of the "enemy advance"' he decided in the ensuing

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 309, emphasis added.

mêlée to pass as an Aryan, calling himself Gerhardt. He arrived at another camp in Kaufering west of Munich, where he had previously been held and where his Jewish friends, Ben and Nico had remained. Now passing himself off as an Aryan convict, Pisar took the opportunity of joining the column of non-Jews which had been formed alongside one of Jews as both groups were marched out of the camp. At this point, Pisar was seized by ‘an irresistible impulse’. He left his self-assigned group and ‘darted back into the column - the column of Jews’.¹⁰⁹ It is difficult to know if this was an act of Jewish solidarity, fear, bravery or folly, or any combination of those things; Pisar himself offers no explanation or comment on his action, but from the subsequent reference, it seems that solidarity was probably a good proportion of it:

Today, were the Jewish people again threatened with genocide, I would be no less ready to fight and die for Israel than for America. Come what may, the uncontrollable impulse that pushed me, after I had renamed myself Gerhardt, to abandon the “safe” Aryan column and join Nico and Ben on the way to Dachau will remain with me forever.¹¹⁰

Pisar’s Jewishness, then, was a positively significant characteristic, something which is to be borne in mind in looking more closely at why his sense of Bialystok continued long after his departure from the place.

It was more than fifteen years after the war’s end before Pisar returned to Poland. In 1961, serving as an adviser to the Joint Economic Committee of the United States Congress, Pisar travelled to Warsaw and while there decided on a spontaneous visit to Bialystok. His reason for the trip was because: ‘I wanted most of all to find my father’s grave.’¹¹¹ In fact, all Pisar found was a monument - a stone cross - to the men murdered by the Gestapo. Pisar returned briefly and emotionally to his childhood home and then went back to Warsaw. What is interesting here about this visit is not so much the search for a grave, but Pisar’s insistence that the trip was quite definitely nothing to do with feelings of rootedness:

My purpose was not to search for roots; there were none left where I was going. My roots, my branches, my blossoms were now, and forever, on the other side of the Atlantic.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 282. Pisar wrote “safe” because that group of non-Jews were, in fact, not safe. They were executed by the SS shortly after leaving Kaufering.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹² Ibid.

This emphatic statement of attachment to America is consistent with other comments throughout Pizar's account, such as: 'I, in fact, was quietly beginning to feel American' and: 'I felt an important part of me wedded to the United States', and there is no reason to doubt its veracity.¹¹³ But if nothing else, the sentiment does have to be considered alongside others for their implications about his sense of particular places, because they indicate that simultaneous feelings about and memories of different places can conflict.

Later in his text, Pizar recounts another trip to eastern Europe that makes clear his ongoing interest in Bialystok. In 1974, following a conference in the Soviet state of Georgia, Pizar flew home with his 'eyes glued to the window of the small Gulfstream jet. Somewhere below, west of Minsk, lay the remains of my native city.' Of course, as the place of his birth and childhood and the site of his father's murder, it is entirely understandable that Pizar's interest would be born of much more than mild curiosity about geography, but this particular incident was part of a larger experience which unsettled Pizar and which, from his recounting of it, strengthened feelings about eastern Europe generated by his family background. He continued:

I thought about how Russian officialdom had just treated David Rockefeller [...] [at the Georgia conference] and I remembered how David's family had been presented in the schoolbooks I was required to read during the Soviet occupation of the town almost directly below us. [...] the Rockefellers were caricatured as the ultimate symbols of bloodthirsty capitalism [...]. During our week-long stay in the Soviet Union, the only image of the Chase Manhattan Bank's chairman which *Pravda* and *Izvestia* chose to convey to its readers was one of a peace-loving partner in economic cooperation. How strange and how sad that 'peaceful coexistence' was a Russian, not an American, phrase.

Everything seemed upside down. [...] It was time for a respite from my frenetic activities, time to stand back, time to reflect.¹¹⁴

Pizar could not admit to feeling rooted in Bialystok, but in affecting him so strongly, it clearly remained positively meaningful, notwithstanding the fact that he was 'wedded to the United States'. This raises two points: the question of why this sense of Bialystok persisted, and its implications in considering multiplicity as characteristic of personal identity. It was not nostalgia at work here, or, at least it

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 150 and 172, respectively.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 247.

was not only nostalgia; Pizar did not see 'then' as being happier than 'now'. It seems likely that this ongoing sense of Bialystok continued for two related reasons.

The first reason is that, in the historical sense at least, Bialystok *was* where Pizar's roots were. Pizar's father had refused to leave Bialystok in the late 1930s, against his wife's wishes, 'because the prospect of becoming a refugee in some foreign land went against his grain. Bialystok had been his family's home for generations'.¹¹⁵ And thirty years later, Pizar had not shaken off the effects of such ineradicable roots. In recalling the various concerns in his life in the 1960s, he admits as much in a single sentence:

I was also preoccupied with my love-hate relationship with the culture of Eastern Europe, where my ancestors had sunk their roots centuries ago when they moved to that part of the world - a culture that had now risen to challenge America's.¹¹⁶

Second, Bialystok was the place that reinforced Pizar's Jewishness, that quality indissociable from the city itself, as Pizar readily acknowledges when writing that it had been 'one of the glories of European Jewry'.¹¹⁷ The question to consider now is that of how the importance of personal Jewishness with regard specifically to Bialystok is manifested in Pizar's text. To do this, it is helpful to look a little more closely at his 'love-hate relationship'.

What Pizar hated about eastern Europe is easily and quickly dispensed with: it was the communist system. He goes on to say that he 'had cast out the poisonous seeds of Stalinist indoctrination planted in my mind at a very tender age'. Establishing what Pizar loved about the culture of eastern Europe is key to the claim that it was his embrace of his Jewish identity that made Bialystok remain important to him. In this connection, two episodes are particularly illuminating. In yet another declaration of his feeling of belonging to America, Pizar confirms not just the simple human need to belong, but also the desirability of official recognition and endorsement of that intensely personal feeling. The following is Pizar's description of how he felt about being part of the Kennedy administration in 1960:

But I was increasingly uncomfortable with what seemed to me to be a glaring anomaly: privy to the processes of American decision-making and cleared to read some of the secret information [...] I was, nonetheless, a citizen of a foreign country. [...] the ambiguity in my personal status bothered me more and more.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[...] I was, it seemed, American at heart, but not in the eyes of the law.¹¹⁸

Pisar was granted American citizenship through an act of Congress in June 1961, a development which delighted him, and which makes paradoxical his choice of words in his description of the ensuing celebration. He used words which bring to the fore the Jewishness that had originated, for him, in Europe and which confirm his attachment to that heritage: 'I moved among them [his guests] flushed like a boy at his bar mitzvah.' This choice, in this particular context, cannot be accidental and their positive Jewish connotation is an echo of an earlier reference to Pisar's own bar mitzvah ceremony which consolidated his Jewish identity. The celebration was held, in what must have been 1941 or 1942, 'in a shabby little synagogue, just inside the barbed wire', hardly the most auspicious of surroundings. But the occasion cannot be divorced from its location and it was here, in ghettoized, suffering Bialystok, that although 'not animated by any great religious fervor' Pisar 'felt privileged, perhaps because the persecution was now at its highest point, to belong to that people for better or for worse'.¹¹⁹ This association of Pisar's Jewishness with his birthplace, may well have been in his mind in the summer of 1961. Certainly, as he wrote his book almost twenty years later, he described other occasions when he remembered, contemporaneously, that association, and it is one such episode that provides the second example of Pisar's attachment to the culture of eastern Europe.

It was a very specific element of European Jewish culture, the Yiddish language and its effect on its speakers, that continued to resonate with Pisar long after he had left the continent, and which also reveals just how keenly aware he was of the connection between personal identity and place. Pisar provides a description of a visit by his fellow Bialystoker, Ben, in 1970 to France where Pisar was working and living. It is clear throughout his book that Pisar felt great affection for the friend who not only came from the same place, but who had been imprisoned in the same camps during the war and who had journeyed to Pisar's relatives in Australia afterwards. But when Pisar describes Ben's visit to France it is in words that make clear that Pisar also welcomed both the reminder of his original place and the form of that reminder: 'His plain Bialystok manner, his abrupt gestures, his Yiddish accent, with a touch of Cockney mixed in, provided a lively contrast to the somewhat stuffy atmosphere of chateau life in the Loire Valley.'¹²⁰ This particular episode, and its strong association with Bialystok for Pisar, stayed with him.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

Following a professional lecture he gave in Stockholm in 1974, with scientists, scholars and policymakers from around the world, Pizar was dissatisfied with his performance. He had ‘adopted their language, this in-house idiom, careful to anticipate some academic objection, mindful of the latest fashion of mainstream thought’ and he felt distanced from the person he had been in the Bialystok of his childhood. Pizar recalled Ben’s visit, using words that convey the interaction for Pizar between place and language, and the effect of both on him, and a tone that is openly wistful:

I thought of Ben, of how his Bialystok directness of speech had sent a little pleasurable shiver across the mannered dinner table of the French aristocrats at Authon, and I wondered just when it was that I had lost this same ability.¹²¹

It is this acknowledgement by Pizar that his earlier place had helped make him who he was that leads me now to the second point about the persistence, or re-emergence, of a positive sense of Bialystok. That multiplicity is characteristic of personal identity has already been noted in this essay - the Bialystoker Jews, described by Mielnicki, who felt Polish enough to acquire the appropriate cultural markers, or Soltz who felt moved when singing the Polish anthem - and as Pizar’s book speaks volumes about his becoming American, so, too, does it confirm this was not a wholly exclusive condition, even though ultimately, Pizar saw America as his place and felt himself to be American. Returning now to his reflection on being part of the Kennedy administration, Pizar also wrote:

Who was I? [...] Was I a European? Yes: for that continent had marked me indelibly in my flesh since birth. Was I an Australian? Yes, again: for that continent had picked me up and reshaped me [...] And yet I had to admit that however adaptable I had proved to be, I had always felt somewhat on the edge of things, a kind of marginal man - in Europe, and in Australia as well. Somehow, it seemed to me that only in the United States was I completely accepted and completely at home, completely sure that I would be permitted, even encouraged, to develop my aspirations to the full.¹²²

The difference between the indications of the existence of multiplicity by Mielnicki and Soltz, and the unequivocal admission of it by Pizar, is that Pizar experienced it long after he had left Bialystok, whereas the other two are referring to events during the time they lived there. The point about this, here, is that in retaining these

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 289.

¹²² Ibid., p. 175.

memories of the place when he was absent from it, in continuing to identify himself as European as well as American (not to mention Australian), Pizar was aware of a certain tension or conflict. His comment about 'blending far too well with the worlds of refined British, witty French and dynamic Americans' has already been noted, as has the double tension generated by his 'love-hate relationship' with the culture of eastern Europe, which also challenged that of America's - his new place. Elsewhere, Pizar was almost despairing of Europe even though he knew it would always be very much a part of him. Recalling trips to Greece made in the 1970s, Pizar wrote:

Europe, land of my birth, that has branded my flesh and my soul for life, blessed land of enlightenment and culture, accursed land of fire and darkness, must you always excite the highest hopes and counter them with the bleakest disappointments? Are you always to suffer the deepest wounds in the eternal contest between the best and the worst? Are you to be blighted again now, when you are at the point of achieving your most noble ambition?¹²³

Clearly, Pizar continued to harbour strong feelings about his original home place (and the extended area) even while he expressed great attachment and affection for his new place. For a demonstration of the complexity and contradiction of feeling that may continue to be provoked long after leaving a place, it is not possible to find a starker, more explicit example than that provided by Pizar's account. That text, in offering a longer, more complete perspective on how Bialystok continued to affect its writer is unusual among those examined here. However, despite the relative brevity and lack of sophistication of some of the accounts, a number of things can be claimed about their writers and their home place.

Conclusion.

Bialystok as a place, was and remains, like people are, multi-layered. Its interwar Jewishness was not eliminated by the strenuous attempts to Polonize the economic and political strands of the city's social relations. Bialystok remained a place with which Jews could identify, not least through the more mundane quality of its topography. The sense of belonging to Bialystok and to its Jewish community, encouraged for Michel Mielnicki by the function of the synagogues and bath-house, was echoed by Israel Beker who remembered the Jewish neighbourhood and streets as nothing less than crucial to who he was. Of course, Bialystok was not exclusively Jewish and even without reading texts by ethnic

¹²³ Ibid., p. 226.

Poles, it is possible to see how perceptions that the city was Polish and for Poles manifested themselves. Zabuski's frightening experience as a young schoolboy, and the murder of a Jew recounted by Mielnicki were, it seems, generated by feelings that Bialystoker Jews were not Poles and ought not to be in Bialystok. It would be ridiculous to argue that Bialystok today is anything like the Jewish place it was before the war, but it is clear that its past is present in individuals' memories and these contribute to the history and historical identity that is being constructed. And in making this construction there is an ongoing effect on Bialystok's contemporary identity which continues to have an element of Jewishness attributed in a variety of ways by a variety of people. I want to illustrate this point by looking at some examples, because it leads to an important part of this conclusion.

For Jews in Israel, the 'living monument' that is *Kiryat Bialystok*, is topographical evidence of the historical meaning of the Polish city which is kept alive or rendered contemporary.¹²⁴ In this connection and applying Massey's argument that the identity of places is highly fluid, always in formation, and affected by connections which may go well beyond the local, Polish Bialystok's contemporary identity must be influenced by its link with Israel which was initiated, forged and consolidated by Jews there.¹²⁵ Furthermore, because the identity of a particular place is not a single, fixed quality discernible by all as precisely the same thing, but comes partly from meanings which people attribute, it follows that Polish Bialystok could easily have an identity attributed by individuals in Israel who may not necessarily have been to the city. This is because it is possible for a person to find a place meaningful even without visiting it - a point already demonstrated in my references to the place-in-the-imagination phenomenon.

In Poland itself, Bialystok's historical Jewishness has been commemorated by returning Jews like Zabuski who attended the ceremony for the fiftieth anniversary of the ghetto uprising. Such acts of remembrance are part of the social relations which contribute to Bialystok's contemporary identity, and to quote Barbara Myerhoff again, as a 'proclamation of being', they also enhance the individual's Jewish identity.¹²⁶ But in Bialystok today it is not only visiting Jews who wish to attribute Jewishness to the city. Ruth Ellen Gruber in her book, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (2002), examines the current fascination with 'Things Jewish' in parts of Europe, especially Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and Italy. 'Things Jewish' range from klezmer music (traditional

¹²⁴ The quote is from *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, p. 188.

¹²⁵ Massey, p. 187.

¹²⁶ See Barbara Myerhoff, *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling and Growing Older* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 233-235.

eastern European Jewish music) to academic study programmes, to festivals, to synagogue restoration, to Jewish-style restaurants and to a host of things in between, and are becoming more and more evident, even in places which have a negligible or perhaps non-existent Jewish population.¹²⁷ Bialystok has not been excluded from this phenomenon. The work of a non-Jew, Tomasz Wisniewski, whose books on Bialystok and its synagogues were utilized in this thesis, is part of something which is, sometimes literally, changing the Jewish landscape. In addition to Wisniewski's publications and those of others which are constructing Bialystok's historical Jewishness, derelict Jewish cemeteries in the area are being tidied, plaques are being put in place and restoration work is underway - all physical manifestations of the attempt to restore the Jewish history of Bialystok, and bolstered by an increasing local awareness of the significance of Jewish monuments.¹²⁸ Bialystok's contemporary identity itself is not the main point of this project, but as the foregoing confirms, places both make and are made by people who attribute, sometimes very actively and conspicuously, meaning to them. The relevance here of Bialystok's identity lies in the fact that it cannot be extricated from the personal identity of those who continue to attach meaning, and therefore identity to that place.

It is this quality of intimacy, which comes from the sheer meaningfulness of places to individuals, that is so significant in this study. The identity of people and places are bound together through the meanings of places. Meanings are at once a key component of place identity and indispensable to an individual's positive sense of a particular place, which, in turn, is a factor in the enhancement of personal identity. Two further points may be made about meanings. First, they may originate for any of a number or a combination of reasons. For Michel Mielnicki, Wasilkow and Bialystok was meaningful because it was the place he could identify with as a Jew. Living in the pre-war ghetto confirmed his membership of the Jewish community. But more important than this, Bialystok was the place of his family. It was returning home in 1945, and realizing the absence of his siblings, that made the also evident antisemitism of Bialystok something Mielnicki could not tolerate. For Shmuel Soltz, too, Bialystok was meaningful because it allowed him to develop a crucial aspect of his Jewishness - religious observance was so important to him that when the Russian occupation undermined his capacity to maintain this, it expedited his departure for Palestine. Mielnicki and Soltz show that identifying with

¹²⁷ Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2002), pp. 5-8.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-98, tells of Wisniewski's efforts since 1982 and how these were prompted by reading on Bialystok's history which he did while serving a prison sentence for anti-communist activity.

Bialystok as Jews was a more or less significant phenomenon, and this is an important point here. Those two, in common with the other four main writers, have shown in their texts that Jewishness to Bialystok's interwar Jewry was not one single identifiable characteristic that applied to all; rather, it was a complex, varied and divided quality. For Soltz, his Jewish identity was bound up with Zionism and religious observance. Grossman, too, derived her Jewishness from Zionism, in her case through active involvement with the left-wing political group, *Ha-shomer ha-tsair*. In contrast to Soltz and Grossman, Mielnicki's Jewishness came from neither Zionism nor strict religiosity; it was more of a secular quality - simply being among fellow Jews and enjoying a bond that was strengthened through communal practices - as it was for Pisar, who continued to take pleasure in the Yiddish language many years after he had left Poland. Among the authors studied here, it is also clear that, although interwar Bialystok was a European city, that did not mean that their Jewish identity was perceived by them as being exclusively European. Obviously, for Soltz and Grossman, as Zionists, Jewish identity was linked to Palestine. For his part, Mielnicki found that being Jewish, which prevented his being Polish, was more compatible with being Russian. With regard to Nomberg-Przytyk, however, it is reasonable to assume, from the fact that she remained in postwar Poland, that she at least wanted and hoped for an accommodation of her Jewishness there.

The second point about the meaning of places is that they can be changed by or buried beneath those attributed by other people. In other words, although the meanings of places are an intensely personal quality, dependent on what it is that gives rise to them, they may not be able to withstand an external assault. As these external changes are imposed, individual responses will be variable. As a young soldier back from the war, Soltz saw the Russians' arrival in 1939 as a negative development and decided to leave. In contrast, Mielnicki welcomed the Russian occupation; it had the effect of increasing his sense of belonging. The difference in meaning that Bialystok had for the Nazis and their intentions for the city, made evident by the erection of fences and the demolition of Jewishness in certain areas of it, was in hideous contrast to Bialystok's meaning for Chaika Grossman and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk. Yet both women felt compelled to stay. It is also clear from the texts that the meaning of a place to an individual may change, internally and over time. For Samuel Pisar and Charles Zabuski, Bialystok in 1945 was no longer meaningful in a positive way; both men knew their families were murdered. However, over the years Bialystok clearly became positively meaningful for Pisar, and the suggestion is that it seemed to for Zabuski, too. It is not possible to do more than speculate as to why this was the case for Zabuski, but he and Pisar both

confirm a very important point about a change in the meaning of places, and that is, that absence does not preclude the re-emergence (or persistence) of positive meaning. An individual's experience of a particular place may result in his or her memory of it acquiring different significance or emphasis with the passage of time.

Comparison and conclusion.

Having examined something of the nature of Jews' and slaves' experience of their particular locations and the resultant sense of those places, I turn now to the comparison of those things between the two groups, although before attempting this exercise it is helpful to be reminded of a number of points relevant to it. As explained in the introduction, it would not have been easy to attempt such a comparison by dealing with the material in a way that avoided its separate presentation - the preferred method of George Fredrickson - although it has been possible to follow Nancy L. Green to a certain extent in applying a constant - the phenomenon of a sense of a particular place or places.¹ That constant, however, though it may be closely defined, is of such a fluid nature, and interacts so closely with the qualities of place identity, that it would render unwieldy a 'unified' comparison of the place experience, and its effects, of two disparate groups. Nor is it possible to neatly categorize the comparison, or to impose a particular model upon it as Amitai Etzioni and Frederic L. Dubow would recommend: 'work with a general model or theory and compare each unit under study to the model'.² It is not, for example, the Jewish and slave writers as groups nor, obviously, their experiences in a single common place that is to be compared, but their individual experiences.

In analyzing these individual cases, their highly textured nature has come to the fore, making each group 'untidy' and unsuitable as collective subject material on its own and even more so when considered on an inter-group basis. That said, however, there is something which clearly unites these groups of distinct writers and which provides the specific focus for comparison. What emerges consistently from the texts is evidence of a similar condition of attachment to home places despite the different nature - chosen rather than involuntary - of slaves' and Jews' occupation of and departure from those places. This condition was not necessarily straightforward and could be a sign of the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of people's relationships with places. For example, attachment to a place was not always confined to individuals' birthplaces. Moses Roper, who quickly became 'very much attached to the neighborhood of Pendleton and Greenville' following his move there, and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, whose decision to return to

¹ George M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 12-13; and Nancy L. Green, 'The comparative method and poststructural structuralism - new perspectives for migration studies', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 13 (1994), pp. 3-22 (especially p. 16).

² Amitai Etzioni and Frederic L. Dubow, eds., *Comparative Perspectives: Theories and Methods* (New York: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 9.

Bialystok in 1941, made her 'happy', both show how affection for a location other than one's birthplace could develop quickly.³ And the capacity to feel such attachment was not necessarily restricted to one particular place. Like Roper and Nomberg-Przytyk, Pizar took up residence in a new place - America - but despite the powerful and positive feelings this engendered, it did not prevent him continuing to feel he was also something else: 'Was I a European? Yes: for that continent had marked me indelibly in my flesh since birth. Was I an Australian? Yes, again'.⁴ The attachment to home places could also be a very durable quality in one or more ways, often withstanding the trauma of enslavement or extreme antisemitism, absence and the passage of time, for several writers from both groups.

The aim of the comparative exercise is simple: to consider the implications of the similarities and differences that underlie slaves' and Jews' common affection for their home places. With this in mind, the comparison will be constructed around the two themes which have proved the most prominent in this study, the significance of place meanings, and individuals' need for roots. First, however, for the sake of completeness, I ought to briefly comment on slavery and the Holocaust as events which have drawn comparison.

There are significant differences between slavery and the Holocaust which emphasize the difficulty of comparing the two episodes. Seymour Drescher, in his comparative essay, discussed their different contexts and justification.⁵ The Holocaust involved only one continent over relatively few years and was dominated by one political entity with the aim of eliminating Jews. In contrast, modern slavery was practised for centuries, involved the movement of people across the world, was not dominated by any 'single collectivity', and was justified on economic grounds.⁶ Despite these major differences, the two events do, of course, have in common the role of race in their development, though that, too, varied. Drescher saw racism as an effect rather than a cause of slavery - the enslavement of Africans in the Americas was not the result of racial selection before the start of the slave trade, whereas racism in the Holocaust was perpetrated

³ Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery; With a Preface by the Rev. T. Price, D.D.*, in *I Was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives* ed. Yuval Taylor (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1999), vol. one, p. 509. Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *The Pillars of Samson* translated by Roslyn Hirsch and David H. Hirsch (London: Vallentine Mitchell, forthcoming), p. 21.

⁴ Samuel Pizar, *Of Blood and Hope* (London: Cassell, 1980), p. 93.

⁵ Seymour Drescher, 'The Atlantic slave trade and the Holocaust: a comparative analysis', in *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* ed. Alan S. Rosenbaum (Boulder, Colorado, and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 65-85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-69.

with the intention of annihilating a designated group.⁷ Yet this difference between the racism of slavery and that of the Holocaust is not unbridgeable. The fact that race and racism were prominent in both events prevents their dismissal as being incomparable and in making this claim, Paul Gilroy's thoughts on raciology are helpful. For Gilroy, raciology is 'the lore that brings the virtual realities of "race" to dismal and destructive life' and he devotes considerable space to expounding his views on its effects and its present condition.⁸ Gilroy's thoughts are complex, but expressed among them is one of his more straightforward ideas, namely, that raciology was responsible for both slavery and 'genocidal activities'. Gilroy's point is that insights 'can be acquired by systematically returning to the history of struggles over the limits of humanity in which the idea of "race" has been especially prominent'.⁹ It is also true, of course, that though divergent, the Holocaust and slavery are similar in being traumatic episodes when they are considered through autobiographical writings. So, while acknowledging the undoubted differences between slavery and the Holocaust, a productive comparison is not precluded despite the fact that the place experiences of slaves and Jews were not identical in regard to the prejudices they suffered.

The comparison.

A convenient point to start the comparison is to claim that some writers, Jews and slaves alike, were concerned to actively remember their places, by which I mean they deliberately brought them back into their thoughts. Although it cannot be shown that the writers universally did this after their departure, either because of the time of the texts' publication, or because of their chronological limitations, or their particular focus, the accounts by Frederick Douglass (supported by his other papers), and by Samuel Pissar, show that they remembered their particular places, long after they left them, in such a way that it may be said that they had 'taken their places with them'. Similarly, one other author made a conscious,

⁷ Ibid., pp. 78-79. In making this reference to Drescher's view that racism was an effect rather than a cause of slavery, I am aware that at least one other historian holds a different view. Winthrop D. Jordan, in his essay, 'Enslavement of negroes in America', in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development* ed. Stanley N. Katz 2nd edition (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1976), pp. 229-268, especially p. 256, considered enslavement in Virginia and Maryland and concluded that: 'Rather than slavery causing "prejudice," or vice versa, they seem to have generated each other. [...] Slavery and "prejudice" may have been equally cause and effect'. Jordan's view is not wholly opposed to Drescher's, and I see no requirement to do any more here than to acknowledge that the role of race in slavery is not regarded unanimously.

⁸ The quote is from Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London, New York, Victoria: Penguin, 2000), p. 11, which opens the chapter titled 'The crisis of "race" and raciology'.

⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

contemporaneous, effort to try to take his place with him. Shmuel Soltz's diary entry, detailing his neighbourhood in Bialystok, in particular the description of his departure for Palestine in 1941, bears repetition for confirming his clear and firm intention: 'Slowly, we pass by the houses, the courtyards. I look on both sides [...]. My heart is as if ordering me to "walk slowly and look hard. You may be among the last who will remember this."' ¹⁰ While it might be expected that Jews would want to remember home places because there had not been the same element of compulsion in their occupation of them, clearly that cannot be said of slaves. This difference in the two groups' experience of home places - slaves' enforced and Jews' chosen presence - leads to two related comments. First, the fact of Jews being in Bialystok by choice does not mean that the experience was without its tensions and drawbacks, any more than the fact of enslavement meant that slaves' places were unremittingly negative for them. Second, individuals' experiences of places, which were the sites of more or less physical and psychological strain, could transcend the potential of those places to suffocate any feeling of attachment to them. This is not surprising given that the main factor in explaining the phenomenon of attachment, for any person regarding any place, may be summarized in reiterating that places themselves have no inherent meaning. It is the meaning attributed by individuals (or groups) that must come from his or her part in the social relations of a place that make it what it is - to that person.

Crucially, such attribution of meaning is not necessarily singular or immutable and the qualities of multiplicity and fluidity are two of the most pronounced to emerge in this study. Indeed, it would not be overstating the case to claim that the ongoing effect of home places could be maintained precisely because of this condition of variability. In other words, an individual's memory of a place could change, perhaps acquiring a different meaning, as his or her personal or psychological needs changed. This claim applies particularly with regard to the memory of birthplaces and holds good for writers from either group. Frederick Douglass' attachment to Baltimore may have been constant from the time of his transfer there in 1826 until well beyond the time when he wrote his second autobiography in 1855, but his sense of his birthplace was more changeable. From being the 'dull, flat, and unthrifty district' that Douglass initially did not identify with, the Eastern Shore became the place he was pleased to publicly own, when he declared himself an Eastern Shoreman. ¹¹ For the Bialystoker Jew, Samuel Pisar,

¹⁰ Shmuel Soltz, *Eight Hundred and Fifty Days From Border to Border During the Second World War* (Givaytim, Israel: Soltz, 1988), pp. 82-84.

¹¹ The quote is from Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom in Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York, Library of America, 1994), p. 140.

his sense of his birthplace changed much more quickly and dramatically. Bialystok was no longer home once he was free in 1945, when he simply could not countenance the idea of returning to the place that, for him, had become a graveyard of 'bloodstained sand'.¹² Later, however, Bialystok resurfaced more positively for Pizar, very significantly in its association with his Jewishness, as expressed, for example, in his regret that he had left 'the subhuman of Bialystok and Maidanek way too far behind'.¹³ Douglass and Pizar were not the only ones similar in experiencing a change in the meaning of particular places to them. Harriet Jacobs, on returning to Edenton in 1867, found that the place of her enslavement had acquired a positive meaning for her and if this did not actually transcend the town's adverse connotations, then the two meanings at least coexisted. Jacobs felt an unexpected affection for her home town - 'I had long thought I had no attachment to my old home' - even while she could not shake off 'the old dark cloud'.¹⁴ Charles Zabuski was much less voluble about his latter feelings for Bialystok than he was about his negative memories of it as a child and young man, but it is reasonable to infer from his action of returning to the city in 1993 for the ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the ghetto's uprising, that he had become able to attribute a more positive meaning to it.

Douglass, Pizar, Zabuski and Jacobs shared an experience of change in the meaning, and therefore sense, of their birthplaces as they came to identify with them, despite absences of many years. This was connected to the basic yet complex and powerful need to feel rooted. To achieve a more complete understanding of the significance of an attachment to these places, it is necessary to be aware that the need for rootedness may involve either one or both of two things. It is easily possible to feel contemporaneously rooted in a place in that it may be where one's home and/or loved ones are presently located. Equally, it may be that there is a need to be able to identify with one's birthplace, even while feeling rooted elsewhere. Frederick Douglass and Samuel Pizar both left their birthplaces and 'put down roots' in their new locations. Pizar could not have been more explicit: 'My roots [...] were now, and forever, on the other side of the Atlantic [in America]'.¹⁵ Douglass was no less ensconced in the North where, after leaving the Eastern Shore and then Baltimore, he married, raised a family and created a prominent and

¹² Pizar, *Of Blood and Hope*, p. 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹⁴ From a letter reproduced in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself by Harriet A. Jacobs* ed., Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 249-250.

¹⁵ Pizar, p. 43.

successful public role for himself. Yet in their later years, both men acknowledged the ongoing importance of their birthplaces to them.

In contrast to Douglass and Pizar, Harriet Jacobs did not have a successful move, in one way at least. The rootlessness of her life after Jacobs escaped from Edenton must have been something that encouraged her to consider whether she could return permanently to the town in 1867.¹⁶ The place of her birth and growing up was the scene of much trauma for Jacobs, but in her absence from Edenton, she could feel positively enough about it to want to try to re-establish roots there. That she found she could not stay is less significant here than the fact that she wanted to. For Zabuski, the belated need to embrace his Jewish roots, shown by his return to Bialystok, is further confirmed by his choosing to arrange annual *Yizkor* (memorial) ceremonies for Bialystoker Jews in France, where he now lives, something that must surely both reflect and strengthen his new, positive attitude to his birthplace. What Zabuski and the other writers found was a capacity to attribute changed meanings to their birthplaces which ensured they were able to satisfy a need, in later life, to embrace the place of their roots. This matter of roots/rootedness is something to explore a little further, but before doing that it is necessary to highlight a point about the role of other people in an individual's attribution of meaning and to do this within the context of the displacement experienced by both groups.

The fact of slaves' and Jews' displacement, and its opposing nature - most slave authors choosing to leave their places, Jews being forcibly removed from Bialystok - are themselves less relevant here than the implications of that displacement: specifically, how the writers' attitudes to their home places compare in the light of their relocations and the different form of the respective displacements. Given the 'voluntary' nature of fugitive slaves' departure from their home places (meaning now not only their birthplaces), it might be reasonably expected that their reaction to their new place would be one that was predominantly positive. In fact, the individual responses varied, but it was not uncommon for slaves to feel an acute sense of not belonging. Obviously, this is not surprising as an initial reaction to a strange place. The comparative experience, inevitable on arrival in a new location, must have thrown into stark relief the nature and extent of home comforts. Fugitives, in choosing to escape enslavement were often also forgoing the emotional and psychological security that came from the sense of belonging to a place, and being familiar with it. When Douglass arrived in New York from Baltimore, he experienced the immediate feeling of 'great insecurity and loneliness

¹⁶ Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), p. 255, refers to Jacobs's rootlessness.

without home and friends'.¹⁷ Lewis Clarke, on arriving in Canada, missed his friends, felt disorientated - 'It was a long time before I could make the sun work right at all' - and knew a 'feeling of strangeness'.¹⁸ Clearly, even when a slave's departure from home was voluntary, perhaps even eagerly anticipated, it could be a deeply unsettling experience and the evidence of this is a reminder that, however keen he or she was to escape, the slave was leaving because he or she felt compelled to do so.

In this regard, it hardly requires saying that Jews, too, found their departure from Bialystok profoundly distressing. But there is a difference between Jews and slaves, with reference to their absence from their home locations. The difference is that slaves knew their home places were still there, not only in the material sense of still standing, but in the sense of retaining their meaning for slaves, despite their absence. Clarke, for example, recalled that he 'would have given any thing in the world for the prospect of spending my life among my old acquaintances [in Kentucky]'.¹⁹ Conversely, Jews knew, sometimes without returning, that their place, Bialystok, was at some level irrecoverable, that, at that particular point, it meant nothing positive to them. In 1945, Pisar and Zabuski simply could not see Bialystok as home. Pisar's feelings of not belonging anywhere and futility at the idea of returning ('But where could I find a place called home? Where?') are echoed by Zabuski ('Why return to Bialystok? It had been destroyed - both the houses and the people.').²⁰ In contrast to Pisar and Zabuski, initially Michel Mielnicki very much wanted to return to Bialystok ('I was headed *home*'), because it retained a positive meaning for him: he was hoping to be reunited with his siblings there.²¹ What emerges from observing the different effects of slaves' and Jews' absence from home, is not only the obvious and expected confirmation that meaning was the critical element in both groups' sense of particular places, but also that, again for both groups, this meaning was often either rooted in or enhanced by the significance of certain people in that place to the writers. Mielnicki, returning to postwar Bialystok, found that it offered him little without the people who had lent

¹⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, in *I Was Born a Slave*, Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 586.

¹⁸ Lewis Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke, Sons of a Soldier of the Revolution, During a Captivity of More than Twenty Years Among the Slaveholders of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of North America. Dictated by Themselves*, in Taylor ed., vol. one, p. 623.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Pisar, p. 98; Charles "Shleimeh" Zabuski, *Needle and Thread: A Tale of Survival from Bialystok to Paris* (Oakland, California: Popincourt Press, 1996), p.145.

²¹ Michel Mielnicki, *Bialystok to Birkenau: The Holocaust Journey of Michel Mielnicki as told to John Munro* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2000), p. 210, emphasis in the original.

it added meaning, which combined with antisemitism resulted in him feeling he ‘had to get out of Bialystok’.²² Harriet Jacobs’s somewhat unexpected attachment to Edenton was in no small part linked to the memory of her affection for some of the people there: ‘I love to sit here and think of them.’²³ Of course, fondness for family and friends is a natural development causing and consolidating feelings of rootedness for the writers in their places. These feelings, though, subsisted in more than familial and friendly affection. In some part they were attributable to the role of ethnicity in individual place experience, a feature from which it is possible to identify further differences and similarities between slaves and Jews.

The first difference between the two groups is superficial - each accorded different weight to the significance of race/ethnicity/colour. Though it varied in nature and extent, the Jewish writers, without exception, have a preoccupation with their Jewishness which has been shown to be a very variable characteristic, ranging from the religious observance kept by Shmuel Soltz to the left-wing Zionism of Chaika Grossman, to the practices of communal bathing that for Mielnicki had a social as well as a religious quality, to the identification that Pizar and Nomberg-Przytyk felt with the Yiddish language and secular culture. Given the diversity of Jewishness and how it permeated many aspects of daily life, and the fact that the survivors’ accounts are often written either principally to bear witness to what happened to Jews during the war, and/or to show that there was Jewish resistance, and/or to reflect upon what being Jewish had meant in their lives, such preoccupation is not surprising. Jews from Bialystok thus possessed multi-layered religio-ethnic identities beyond the racial categorizations of antisemites. The slave writers are also less concerned with expressing a racial identity despite the fact that skin colour is a recurrent and prominent theme among them. There are, however, subtle differences between the groups: the nature of slaves’ and Jews’ respective accommodation by their superordinates was fundamental to the part played by ethnicity in promoting feelings of rootedness. Bialystok Jews had an autonomy, their own institutions, their own language and, if desired, a particular quality and degree of separateness that was not available to slaves. Bialystok was meaningful to Mielnicki, for example, not only as the place of his family members, but also because as part of its Jewish community, whose social and religious practices ‘served to bind us’, Mielnicki’s ethnicity added to his rootedness there.²⁴

In contrast to Bialystok’s Jews, slaves could not experience the institutional separateness that consolidated Jews’ ethnicity and rootedness. Yet despite the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²³ Yellin, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, p. 249.

²⁴ Mielnicki, *Bialystok to Birkenau*, p. 56.

difference, of the respective presence and absence of institutional autonomy, between the groups, slaves were similar to Jews in being able to enjoy certain cultural practices which reflected and encouraged a sense of belonging. Harriet Jacobs's enjoyment of the Johnkannaus ceremony, Henry Bibb's juvenile belief in conjuration and Jacob Green's eagerness to attend the 'negro shindy' show how slave culture resulted in a feeling of belonging to a particular community itself rooted in a particular place. Furthermore, in noting this attachment to a slave community, it is impossible to minimize the role of race or skin colour, simply because it was that which resulted in the condition of enslavement. In this way it may be said that slaves felt rooted partly through reasons related to their race/skin colour, in the same way that Jews felt their ethnicity rooted them. To repeat John Eyles's point: 'Interacting with or simply living close to people perceived to possess similar attributes provides a sense of belonging'.²⁵ Jacobs was away from Edenton for a quarter of a century before returning. In that time, she had encountered racism that, while it must have compounded her rootlessness in the North, strengthened her feelings of belonging to the southern town, even if these remained largely dormant until her return there in 1867.²⁶ Then, Jacobs's visit was ultimately dominated by the negative associations the town held for her, but the positive meaning she was able to assign at that stage came from her affinity with the people there - people with whom she shared the characteristics of (past) enslavement and skin colour. Similarly, it has been seen that Nomberg-Przytyk returned to Bialystok in 1941, deciding not to pass as Aryan, partly, at least, because she preferred to remain among its Jewish community.

A feeling of rootedness, then, was often a consequence of ethnicity/race/skin colour, but whatever it was that encouraged that feeling, it did not preclude the phenomenon of 'place in the imagination' which often involved the writer's desire to be somewhere else. The causes and effects of that occurrence were not identical among slaves and Jews and an added complication is that it is not always easy to know which was cause and which was effect. For example, Zabuski's fascination with Argentina may have been sustained because life in interwar Bialystok was hard, or life there may have seemed particularly grim in the knowledge that Argentina was a land of plenty. Two things that can be said with certainty, are that place in imagination was a common occurrence, and that it was powerful. Virtually all slave narrators reveal its strength in its capacity to induce dread when they refer

²⁵ John Eyles, *Senses of Place* (Warrington, Cheshire: Silverbrook Press, 1985), p. 133.

²⁶ Jacobs knew racism right from the time she left Edenton in 1842. Travelling by train from Philadelphia she was told that as 'colored' she could not travel first-class. It was an encounter that triggered the 'first chill to my enthusiasm about the Free States'. See Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*, in Taylor, ed., vol. two, p. 651.

to the Deep South. Lewis Clarke's imaginings were so awful that when he learned he was to be sold there it was enough to spur him to 'make an effort, to gain [liberty]'.²⁷ Other narrators, like Douglass, Bibb, Jacobs and Williams show that imagined places could be positive in sustaining or distracting them. Like Zabuski with Argentina, Douglass, when a young boy, immensely enjoyed hearing about Baltimore. Among the very much smaller sample of Jews, half of the writers indicated that place in the imagination was a prominent and positive feature for them. The idea of Palestine was enough to make Soltz undertake a difficult wartime journey, while for Grossman, the prospect of eventually making *aliya* sustained her through the dangerous years spent moving between Bialystok's ghetto and Vilna. The final thing to say about place in imagination, as it appears in both groups of examined texts, is that it could cause or add to the tension which Relph has argued is a universal feature of the home experience.²⁸ Thus, Henry Bibb desperately wanted to escape to Canada, the place that captured his imagination, but that did not make it easy for him to leave his beloved home and birthplace in Kentucky. And Chaika Grossman's 'dream to go to Palestine' ultimately conflicted with the compulsion she felt to remain in wartime Bialystok.²⁹

Conclusion.

Comparing the accounts by slaves and Jews to identify what is common and what is distinctive about their experience and sense of particular places, it is clear that the similarities are more striking and significant than the condition that distinguishes the groups. The difference in the nature of slaves' and Jews' occupation of and departure from their home places is much less the issue than their similarities. That is not to say that either transfer into or displacement from a place was inconsequential, but to emphasize that it is in the context of the total place experience that the writers' accounts can be most usefully compared. In other words, the consideration of slaves' and Jews' experiences, their concerns and attitudes and the reasons for them, has shown them to be more meaningful than the different circumstances of their respective presence and departure. An examination of slaves' and Jews' accounts of their experiences in particular places, has consistently proved those experiences to be profound: as they were lived, as they

²⁷ Taylor, ed., vol. one, p. 619.

²⁸ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p. 42: 'Drudgery is always a part of profound commitment to a place, and any commitment must also involve an acceptance of the restrictions that place imposes and the miseries it may offer. Our experience of place, and especially of home, is a dialectical one - balancing a need to stay with a desire to escape.'

²⁹ Chaika Grossman, *The Underground Army: Fighters of the Bialystok Ghetto* (Washington: U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1987), p. 8.

were remembered and, sometimes, as they were anticipated. Furthermore, the individual's experience, the effect on his or her identity, and the role of the various components of place identity were all inextricable in the resultant sense of those places.

The physical settings of the places - natural landscapes and created environments - combined with the social relations that they facilitated, resulted in the assignment of meaning by individuals. Such meaning was critical not only as the single key element in an individual's sense of a particular place, but also in two further ways. Meaning reflected the effect of the place on that individual's identity, and it also added to the construction of the identity of that place. For Michel Mielnicki and Samuel Pizar the synagogues and bath-house of Bialystok (and nearby Wasilkow), which themselves in their physicality contributed to the city's Jewishness, were also crucial in the meaning that the writers attributed. Both men later remembered that their ethnic identity was strengthened as they felt a sense of belonging to and identification with Bialystok's Jews, a feeling in part generated by the role of those buildings in their lives. For the slave writers, the effects of their places were often keenly felt in the impact on their gender identity. Frederick Douglass and Lunsford Lane found that Baltimore and Raleigh, respectively, allowed them to feel that their masculinity was enhanced by their place experience. Conversely, Harriet Jacobs's time in Edenton, defined as it was through gender, left her frustrated and resentful that enslavement there had forced her to behave in a way that denied her conventional femininity.

For slaves and Jews alike, the effects of their places for their ethnic or gender identity was but one aspect of their experience. What also emerged strongly from both sets of texts was the meaning of home places in terms of roots and rootedness. In this context, the changeability of attributed meaning was most evident as home places became important in being the place of one's origin, even when that place had not been held constantly in positive regard by the writer, and even when he or she may have subsequently felt rooted in a new location. Several authors such as Douglass, Jacobs, Pizar, Mielnicki and Zabuski, felt at some point a certain lack of affection for their birthplaces which was overcome as they felt a need to identify with them. The reasons for this renewed need were not always the same. Douglass, for example, eventually came to value his birthplace as significant in measuring his progress through life and how he came to be who he was. Similarly, Pizar, who in turn had felt positively and negatively about Bialystok found it restored to him as a positive place, many years after leaving it, as a result of needing to 'find himself' as it were, to get back to the person he had been. Jacobs felt drawn back to the place of her enslavement possibly because, rootless

ever since she had left it, she could hope to feel rooted in Edenton. What these writers demonstrate is that the meaning of a place could change, either as it was experienced or as it was remembered, as the individuals' need for roots changed and as they grew older and felt more or less secure in or satisfied with their present identity. By the time she was middle-aged, in the post-Civil War era, Jacobs's experiences in the North suggest a growing insecurity, in contrast to Douglass who was secure in his identity as a self-made man. Yet the effect on their respective sense of their home places was similar in encouraging positive feelings. Jacobs sought to establish herself back in Edenton, while Douglass publicly stated his pride in his Eastern Shore origins. For Pizar, his need to 'find himself', a reflection of his concern with the person he had become, was also evidence of how a sense of a particular past place evolves as one's life and present needs change. In this respect alone, the authors' sense of particular places has proved to be a complex affair, yet ultimately that phenomenon may be very simply and succinctly expressed. The saying about being able to 'take the girl out of the place, but not the place out of the girl' may be clichéd, but it does have a certain resonance here, although it may be more appropriate to quote again from Relph:

There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world.³⁰

The texts of slaves and Jews, whether men or women, show that despite what happened to them in terms of enslavement or expulsion, they, no less than anyone else would be, were shaped by their home places. Being points of actual departure, whether by 'voluntary' flight as for slaves and some Jews, or by expulsion, these places continued to resound with the writers examined in this study, to affect how they saw themselves, sometimes many years after they had been left behind.

³⁰ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, p. 43.

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