



Yizkor Books, Yiddish, and Israel

Yizkor Book Authors, Languages, and Publication Patterns, 1943–2008

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ABSTRACT • Yizkor books are memorial books commemorating Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust, which are also the result of communal activity. The books have been published since 1943, mostly in Israel. Based on a qualitative and quantitative survey of 613 books, the largest survey of Yizkor books done to date, this article repositions the books linguistically and geographically. It demonstrates that contrary to previous research, Yizkor books are a significantly more heterogeneous phenomenon that began in the Yiddish-speaking world but quickly changed into an Israeli- and Hebrew-based phenomenon, which also included Jews from non-Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi, and even Sephardic, communities. Especially since the 1980s, the phenomenon further evolved to include more English-language books, published in the USA. Against this geographical and linguistic backdrop, I also show that the producers of the books were a diverse array of groups and individuals from varying backgrounds. The publishers were not only Yiddish-speaking *landsmanshaftn* (Jewish mutual-aid societies consisting of individuals originating from a particular place and their descendants) but a variety of organizations of different kinds, individuals, and even schoolchildren. Finally, I present examples of Yizkor books that were presented in previous research as *landsmanschaft* literature produced by Holocaust survivors and show that these assumptions regarding the authors are partially or wholly erroneous and that those books were, in fact, produced by a different set of actors.

Introduction

Yizkor books (Yiddish: *yizker bikher*) are communal memorial books published since 1943 to commemorate Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust. ‘Communal’ has a dual meaning in this context: all Yizkor books formally commemorate one or more communities and have resulted from a communal effort. These two characteristics differentiate Yizkor books from other types of Holocaust literature, such as survivor memoirs, and genealogical and historical publications. Scholars have often employed a narrower set of definitions, focusing on the book as the product of a particular type

of organization (the so-called *landsmanshaft*), the Yiddish cultural world, and its publication networks. I show here that those definitions were often inaccurate or partial and did not account for the Yizkor book phenomenon and that Yizkor books should be re-contextualized chiefly within the context of Israeli history and Holocaust memory, with the Yiddish world constituting the books’ origins and roots.

This article seeks to answer these questions: 1. In what countries were Yizkor books published? 2. What are their languages of publication? 3. Where were the commemorated communities located? 4. What types of publisher produced the books? Through these

questions, this article will demonstrate that contrary to claims in the scholarly literature, *Yizkor* books are significantly more diverse and nuanced when it comes to their places and languages of publication, as well as to their publication patterns throughout the years, as well as that the people involved in the production of the books, the publishers and editors, were significantly more heterogeneous than previously claimed, and that there was a wide range of organizations and individuals that produced *Yizkor* books. Lastly, while *Yizkor* books were firmly rooted in the Yiddish world and the Ashkenazi Jewish traditions of prayer and commemoration, the books quickly evolved into an Israeli-centred, Hebrew-language phenomenon of its own, with its own identity and self-perception, viewing the Yiddish-speaking European world primarily as its (all-important) past, while emphasizing the Hebrew-speaking Israeli world (and later also the English-speaking, Jewish American world) as its present and future.

Yizkor books are named after the Jewish *Yizkor* prayer (pronounced *Yizker* in Yiddish). The *Yizkor* has traditionally held a significant place in Jewish Ashkenazi commemoration, even by secular Jews, as the publishers and editors of *Yizkor* books commonly were. The *Yizkor* memorial prayer has traditionally been recited four times a year since ancient times, commemorating one's deceased family members. It has also been a part of the Hebrew commemorative traditions in Palestine and later in Israel. It was first adapted into its more secular and nationalistic version by Berl Katzenelson, a prominent figure in Labor (Socialist) Zionism,¹ following the Tel-Hay

1 Who incidentally was also born in Babruisk in the Russian Empire, and had both contributed to the *Yizkor* book of that community (published 1967), and has a whole section especially devoted to him in the book.

battle of 1919. This battle has since become a significant moment in Israeli national history and ethos, partly as a result of Katzenelson's adaptation of the *Yizkor* prayer. In post-1948 Israel, the *Yizkor* is recited twice a year, in two different versions, on the national memorial days for the Holocaust victims and fighters and for fallen soldiers and victims of terror.²

The results presented in this article are based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of 613 *Yizkor* books, as well as, among other sources, 1,746 pages of editorials from 565 books, comprising forewords, letters sent out to the community, and other texts. This selection represents the entire *Yizkor* book collection of the New York Public Library, as well as additional books from the Yad Vashem collection in Israel, added during several research trips. The books were selected on the basis of the definition presented here to provide as exhaustive as possible a picture of the field. Translations were not included in the research as separate books.

The people behind the books

Many people participated in the production of each *Yizkor* book. They fall into three categories: publishers, editors and contributors.

The publishers were the initiators and main functionaries of the production process and could be single persons, groups or large organizations. They often sent letters to descendants of the community worldwide, requesting texts, photographs, details on Holocaust victims from the community and financial contributions. They usually hired an external editor

2 Set in 1951 at six days after Passover for the Holocaust memorial day and seven days later for the soldiers (and later also victims of terror) memorial day (celebrated right before Independence Day). This generally means somewhere in late April to early May. The exact date is celebrated according to the Hebrew calendar, and under several more religious restrictions.

or appointed one or more from within their ranks to fill that role. This category included *landsmanshaftn* and various other organizations, individuals and classes of schoolchildren (Becker 2022, 114–21).

The editors were the primary decision-makers and driving forces behind the publication process of a particular book. Some editors were professionals who had previously edited other Yizkor books; others were professionals from other areas, commonly professional literary editors or historians. Some editors were professional Yizkor book editors and edited multiple books. Many editors were not Holocaust survivors. (Becker 2022, 127–31)

The contributors sent in texts, photographs and drawings to be included in the book. This highly heterogeneous group included men and women from all socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The publishers or the editors sometimes interviewed contributors. Some books included a few contributors' entries, while others included texts and other contributions from dozens of participants, such as maps, photographs and obituaries.

Landsmanshaftn and other organizations

Landsmanshaftn are generally defined as mutual-aid organizations based around a shared hometown, away from their homeland. This type of immigrant organization was not unique to Jews and can be found among other immigrant groups. Yizkor book authors often invoked this definition, sometimes noting that they formed a memorial organization because they had no *landsmanshaft*, demonstrating that they perceived their Israeli-based organizations as a different type from the *landsmanshaftn*. The latter were often established well before the Holocaust, in the central immigration destinations of European Jews, such as the USA, Canada and Australia. While every *landsmanshaft* is an organization of *landslayt*

(descendants of the same town), not every *landslayt* organization is a *landsmanshaft*. Yizkor books are often mentioned as a part of *landsmanshaft* literature, while some widely accepted Yizkor books (i.e., accepted as such by most or all scholars in the field, as well as their authors) are, in fact, not the product of a *landsmanshaft* or, in many cases, of any formal organization, but instead were produced by individuals or school classes.

While there were, and in some cases still are, organizations in Israel that are based around a common hometown, they have largely been created after the Holocaust around the need for the commemoration of lost communities – their primary functions were activities such as holding a yearly memorial and, later on, erecting memorials, installing plaques and, of course, publishing Yizkor books. This is often noted in the introductions to Yizkor books themselves. These organizations differed from those outside Israel – they had no significant mutual-aid, financial or social functions. Communities in the diaspora had many social, cultural, economic, religious and political functions, while in Israel these became the responsibility of the state. Moreover, in pre-Second World War Palestine, the 'new' Israeli identity was much more significant than the 'old' diaspora identity. After all, according to Zionist thinking, as well as other currents of Judaism, Israel was the homeland, and the diaspora was *ha-galut* (in Hebrew: the exile / the diaspora).

Additionally, it is clear from the books that authors often shared this position regarding the *Landsmanshaftn*. Many books published by Israel-based organizations mention that they did not have a *landsmanshaft* or that 'our *landsmanshaft*' in a specific country helped or donated money. Members of Israel-based organizations did not see themselves as members of a *landsmanshaft*, and according to their own definition, this kind of organization

existed only outside Israel, the significant function of those being monetary aid.

To demonstrate the latter point, we can examine the memorial book of Wadowice, Andrychow, Kalwarja, Myslenice and Sucha (Jakubowicz 1967), former German-speaking Jewish communities in Poland, published in 1967. It was published by the organization of descendants of these communities in Israel. In his introduction, the editor, David Jakubowicz, writes that collecting the funds was difficult 'because, unlike other communities, because of community members not emigrating overseas before the war, there is nowhere in the world a *landsmanshaft* organization of our own' (Jakubowicz 1967, 10–11). Here, Jakubowicz distinguishes clearly between the *landsmanshaftn* outside Israel and the Israeli-based descendant organizations. This is an example of a distinction that is often missed in the literature on Yizkor books, confusing the specific kind of descendant organization that is the *landsmanshaft* with the larger category of descendant organizations (In Hebrew: *Irgun Yots'ey* ווגריא ויאצוי). The latter, which still exist and are to a degree active in Israel, have always been based around the common place of origin and were often founded for commemoration purposes, not mutual aid. It is telling that these organizations were not significant in Israel (Palestine) in any way before the Second World War, as the focus was on Zionism and the new identity in the holy land, not on old diaspora lineages. These are just some examples of how many Yizkor books are the products of several distinct types of publishers.

Thus, using the definition of *landsmanshaft* presented above, and knowing that most books were published in Israel, where according to both scholars and Yizkor book authors, *landsmanshaftn* rarely existed as such, we can conclude that the majority of Yizkor books are, in fact, not *landsmanshaft* literature.

Previous research

Despite the large volume of publications, Yizkor books have received limited attention from scholars, and only a fraction of this scholarly attention has been from historians. In the first two decades following the Holocaust, some publications by leading historians in Jewish and Yiddish history were published (Friedman 1951–2; Schulman 1967–8; Shatzky 1953, 1955). For obvious reasons, they appeared before most Yizkor books were published and, therefore, covered only a minuscule portion of the overall phenomenon.

In the following two decades, only one publication appeared, by the Holocaust historian Abraham Wein (1973). In 1983,³ alongside a rise in Yizkor book publications in English and an increase in popular attention to the books, especially in the United States, a highly influential work appeared: *From a Ruined Garden*, a book by two anthropologists, Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin (1983). This is widely regarded as the seminal text in the field of Yizkor book research, and many libraries also use it to define Yizkor books for cataloguing (Burnette & Horowitz 2011, 269–74). The book was based on an analysis of only around sixty books (less than 5 per cent of the estimated number of published books) and included two main arguments regarding Yizkor books: first, that the books were published mainly in Yiddish and through Yiddish publication networks; second, the books were the result of the work of young Zionist Holocaust survivors who survived the Holocaust primarily because of their age and physical condition (Kugelmass et al. 1998, 15–17). Overall, this publication established an image of Yizkor books as a highly homogeneous phenomenon. Current scholarship

3 The book was published in a second edition in 1998.

on Yizkor books has echoed those ideas (Amir 2011, 32–4; Cimet 2011, 123). I will show that Yizkor books were significantly more heterogeneous than Kugelmass and Boyarin argued and that the first idea is largely incorrect, while the second was always erroneous with regards to the broader phenomenon of Holocaust survival and the identity of Yizkor book authors.

Current research on Yizkor books is primarily done by scholars of cultural and literary studies. It has mainly analysed literary and library-related aspects, as well as different themes that appear in the books (Amir & Horowitz 2008; Amir 2011; Cimet 2011; Horowitz 2011; Horvath 2011; Parciak 2011). One publication has looked at Yizkor book producers and the Yizkor book phenomenon at large (Becker 2022). It is also the only analysis connecting Yizkor books to collective memory. Previous scholarship has been based on small sample sizes, usually between thirty and sixty books for qualitative research and 348 books at the most for quantitative analyses. Given that the overall number of Yizkor books published is over 1,500, these numbers do not suffice. In their survey of 348 books, Rosemary Horowitz and Michlean Amir found that 216 (62 per cent) were primarily in Hebrew, while eighty-two (23.5 per cent) were primarily in Yiddish. The rest were mainly in English, Hungarian and other languages. Out of 350 books (the two additional books were not accounted for), 264 (75.4 per cent) were published in Israel, fifty-one (14.6 per cent) in the USA, and seventeen (4.9 per cent) in Argentina. Other places of publication were Germany, France and South Africa (Amir & Horowitz 2008, 45–6).

Yehudit Baumel (1995) has shown that the books had not merely a memorial but also a ceremonial function. The books were used during memorial ceremonies and gatherings of survivor organizations, especially on their

own commemorative day.⁴ Excerpts from the community's Yizkor book were read aloud, like reading from the Bible or a *siddur* (a Jewish prayer book). Baumel places the books in a tradition of commemoration associated with religious relics, such as the ashes of death-camp victims that were brought to Israel for burial. The survivors perceived these as being the remains of martyrs, i.e., the dead, who were sanctified by the circumstances of their deaths.

Other works on Yizkor books include Jan Schwartz's studies (2011, 2015, 2016) regarding the relation between Yiddish Yizkor books and the Yiddish literary world. Roni-Kochavi-Nehab (2011) has written about sanctification as one of the purposes of the books (alongside mourning, chronicling and memorialization). Faith Jones and Gretta Siegel (2006, 52–3) have connected Yizkor books to earlier traditions, going back to the Middle Ages. Yale Strom (2011) and Daniel Magilow (2011) used books as primary sources for research on Jewish culture.

Despite their publication in large numbers, Yizkor books have generally been mentioned in passing in some publications, if at all, mainly in the context of remembrance and commemoration (Jockusch 2012; Roskies 2012; Roskies & Diamant 2012; Stone 2004; Waxman 2004) or community building (Heuman 2014).

In qualitative studies, discussions of publication patterns or the producers of the books largely echo the ideas of Kugelmass and Boyarin (1983) regarding the books and their authors. Based on a more extensive sample and in-depth analysis than previously undertaken, this article shows that these ideas are largely incorrect: Yizkor books are in fact a Hebrew-based phenomenon more than a Yiddish one, and the types of authors were significantly more varied than is often stated in the literature.

4 This is usually the day of the ghetto liquidation. Another option is, for example, the day the Nazi occupation of the town began.

Results from the quantitative analysis

In this section, I show that Yizkor books were predominately Israeli-based and that Hebrew was significantly more prominent than previously thought. The vast majority of the European Jewish world perished in the Holocaust. The countries that, prior to the Holocaust, were home to the largest Jewish communities were in ruins. The surviving remnants of European Jewry from these countries emigrated from Europe following the Holocaust. The survivors often moved to the Jewish centres that existed before the Holocaust outside Europe, such as the USA, Argentina and Canada. These were naturally far less affected by the Holocaust and had in place the social and financial resources and infrastructure needed to produce the books. Once Israel was established in 1948, the majority of Jewish immigration from Europe was diverted towards it. However, Israel was a relatively poor country in its early years, lacking material resources. Producing a Yizkor book was an expensive and time-consuming process, and organizations in Israel often needed aid from their Jewish brethren abroad.

Places and languages of publication

When looking at the overall numbers based on the geographical place of publication, we can see that the publication of Yizkor books was based mainly around the post-Holocaust centres of Jewish life. The table shows that Israel has been the most significant place of publication overall; a distant yet substantial second is the USA, which was the main arena of Jewish life in the world during the immediate post-Holocaust period. The third notable location is Argentina, another country that was an important Jewish centre in the early years following the Holocaust. Only six of the 613 books, less than one per cent, were published in Europe.

Table 1. Yizkor books by place of publication

PLACE OF PUBLICATION	#	%
Argentina	24	3.92%
Australia	3	0.49%
Canada	4	0.65%
France	3	0.49%
Israel	507	82.71%
Israel and USA	4	0.65%
South Africa	3	0.49%
USA	62	10.11%
Other	3	0.49%
Total	613	100%

Other items include one book each from Germany, Poland, Serbia. Source: Yizkor Books Database (Becker 2022, 139-45).

We can observe significant trends and findings when we look at change over time together with the place of publication (Appendix 1). Until 1951, the USA was the most prominent place of publication, with fifty-six per cent (nineteen of thirty-four) of the total number of publications by that point. Until 1948, Israel and Argentina have the same number of publications (five each). However, from 1952, the number of publications in Israel increased significantly, while the USA and Argentina stayed at the same place relatively. Israel became the central place of publication as early as 1952, and this trend intensified with time. From 1970 to 1972, amid the peak period of Yizkor book publication, sixty-six books were published in Israel compared to three in the rest of the world, all in the USA. In 1973-5, sixty books were published in Israel, compared to six in the rest of the world and four in Argentina. No Yizkor books were published in Argentina after 1975. The jump in the Israeli numbers can probably be attributed to the state's stabilization after its 1948-9 War of Independence and the settlement of the enormous waves of immigrants that entered the country from 1948. Israel also received reparations from Germany between 1953 and

1965. Some Israelis received reparations from Germany, while others received financial aid from relatives abroad. This enormous growth in Yizkor book publication numbers is in line with the overall expansion of grassroots and state-initiated Holocaust commemoration in Israel during the same period. This commemoration included, for example, the erection of gravestones for destroyed communities, the setting of memorial plaques, and the establishment in 1953 of Yad Vashem, the state authority for Holocaust commemoration (Baumel 1995). The numbers demonstrate how Israel increasingly became the focal point of Yizkor book publication as the years passed.

Languages of publication

It is difficult to determine the exact ratio of Hebrew to Yiddish in Yizkor books that include both languages. Hebrew and Yiddish are by far the most common languages. Of 246 single-language books examined, 225 (91.4 per cent) are in Hebrew or Yiddish. Of 291 dual-language books, 232 (nearly 80 per cent) are in Hebrew and Yiddish, with a substantial number of pages for both. However, Hebrew is more common than Yiddish in dual-language books. In triple-language books, English joins Hebrew and Yiddish (with all three having a substantial number of pages), making up over 84 per cent of the triple-language publications examined.

The problem mentioned above is determining exactly how many pages Yiddish and Hebrew each have in a specific dual-language Hebrew/Yiddish book. Hebrew and Yiddish share an alphabet written from right to left. This allowed the publishers to include pages that contained both languages in the books. Moreover, since these two are the prevalent languages among Ashkenazi Jews during the Yizkor book publication period (with some notable exceptions, such as German and Hungarian), contributions received in either language were often left in their original

language and not translated. Many books thus go back and forth between the two languages.

Yiddish includes many Hebrew words, commonly known as ‘the Hebrew component’, primarily from the religious and familial spheres. These words are spelled the same way as in Hebrew, disregarding Yiddish spelling rules, but pronounced in the Yiddish way. Furthermore, many Jews continued to use the Yiddish spelling for names when using Hebrew. This was still quite common until the late 1960s. As a result, some commemorative and memorial pages in multi-language Hebrew/Yiddish books cannot be assuredly assigned to one or other of the languages, as the same words, with the same spelling, could be used in either language. Moreover, it is clear from examining the sources that the vernacular used by many who contributed to the books comprised a mix of Yiddish and Hebrew words, often seen by the authors as a single dialect or language (Bartal 2013; Weinreich & Yivo Institute 1971).

Two examples shown in Appendix 3 demonstrate this issue. The first, from the book of Babruisk, Belarus (Slutsky 1967), displays two commemorative plaques, the first in Hebrew, the second in Yiddish. The first includes a list of villages around the town, described as ‘her daughters’, in which the names of the villages appear in Yiddish spelling, even though the plaque is in Hebrew. The second example is from the book of Berezhany, Ukraine (Katz 1978). It is a page meant for the reader to write down details of their own family for future generations. It has the same title – ‘My Family’ – twice, once in Hebrew and once in Yiddish. A widespread commemorative abbreviation (ז"ל – י"ב) is in the middle. It is used only once as it is spelled the same in both languages. The text around the page is a mix of different prayers. Jewish prayers would be written in Hebrew, even in a Yiddish prayer book. Both pages are examples of standard pages appearing in many books. In both cases,

assigning exclusively Hebrew or Yiddish to the page is impossible. Some books included tens or hundreds of similar pages to these. Thus, even after close examination, it is only possible to roughly estimate the overall prevalence of Hebrew and Yiddish within a specific book, based on the rest of its pages.

Table 2. Single-language books

LANGUAGE	#	%
Hebrew	137	55.7%
Yiddish	88	35.9%
English	13	5.3%
Other	8	3.1%
Total	246	100%

Other incl. German, Hungarian, Polish. Source: Yizkor Books Database (Becker 2022, 140-6)

Table 3. Dual-language books

LANGUAGES	#	%
Hebrew & Yiddish	232	79.7%
Yiddish & English	16	5.5%
Hebrew & English	16	5.5%
Hebrew & Hungarian	20	6.9%
Other	7	2.4%
Total	291	100%

Other incl. Hebrew with German, Romanian, Spanish. Yiddish with Spanish Source: Yizkor Books Database.

Table 4. Triple-language books

LANGUAGES	#	%
Hebrew, Yiddish, English	64	84.2%
Other	12	15.8%
Total	76	100%

Total incl. mostly Hebrew and Yiddish with Polish, English, Czech; also Hebrew and English with Hungarian, German. Source: Yizkor Books Database.

The designation of the Yizkor book phenomenon as Yiddish-based instead of wholly Yiddish is made more robust if we consider that some Yizkor books commemorate Ashkenazi communities from the non-Yiddish-speaking

world (such as large parts of Hungarian Jewry), as well as non-Ashkenazi communities (for example, from Greece and Bulgaria). These publications cannot be included as *landsmanshaft* or Yiddish literature, and were not published and distributed through Yiddish publishing and cultural networks.

This association with language is not only a semantic exercise – it holds significant cultural, political and linguistic meanings. These differences appear, among other things, in editorial linguistic and content choices, ideas expressed regarding the *Yishuv* and the *Gola*,⁵ as well as the place given to pre-war history in publications. This is also the reason I use the term ‘Yizkor books’ instead of ‘Yizker books’ or *yizker bikher*. The latter two are commonly seen as related to the Yiddish cultural and literary world, while the former represents the significance of Hebrew in the publications.

Patterns of publication

Publication numbers by decade

As we can see in Table 5 and Appendix 2, the peak period of publication was the late 1960s and early 1970s, specifically, the second half of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Possible explanations for these developments are the improvement of material conditions in Israel and the delayed effect of the Eichmann trial, which affected the willingness of people to share their experiences, and of others to donate money and support commemoration projects (Baumel 1995). Even with sufficient funds, the effect was delayed due to the long publication periods. These processes could take years, so their effects would become visible around the end of the 1960s. These are reasonable arguments, albeit difficult to verify on a case-by-case basis.

5 The Hebrew terms for the Jews living in Palestine and outside it (the diaspora), respectively.

Table 5- Yizkor books publication numbers by decade

DECADE OF PUBLICATION	#	%
1943–1950	31	5.06%
1951–1960	102	16.64%
1961–1970	206	33.61%
1971–1980	158	25.77%
1981–1990	68	11.09%
1991–2000	34	5.55%
2001–2010	14	2.28%
Total	613	100.00%

Source: Yizkor Books Database

I would add another explanation based on the analysis of the editorials: the more time passed, the more books were being published, and the bigger the urgency and need for those who had not yet published to do so. Many sources mention that the idea of publishing a Yizkor book came up during a meeting commemorating their community’s memorial day. More often than not, it is noted that many other communities had already published such books and that it was a sin or disrespect to the martyrs that such a project had not yet been undertaken. Moreover, groups such as *Irgun Yots’ey Polin* (the organization of descendants of Poland) and schoolchildren intentionally chose communities that had not been commemorated at the time, and where it had become evident that this would not happen, mainly because there were too few survivors to take on this task. This kind of reasoning is, of course, predicated on the passing of sufficient time.

Where were the original communities commemorated in the books?

In this section, I will present the distribution of the 613 by the country the community is in today. Using the community’s current location is a way to counter the problem that the borders of Eastern Europe have repeatedly and significantly changed over the last couple of centuries, including around the Second

World War. In particular, Poland, home to the largest Jewish population before the Holocaust, saw its borders repeatedly moved, including during Second World War. This affected the Jewish population as much as any other group. Many books commemorate a long period during which some communities changed two or more countries several times. These political changes did not affect the view the Jews had of themselves. For example, the Novo Selica community (today Novoselytsia in Ukraine) was part of Romanian Jewry. That town changed hands several times between Romania, Russia and later the USSR, ending up in Ukraine after the fall of the USSR. The descendants of this Jewish community continued to define themselves as Romanian Jews throughout that period. In another example, the Jews of another current Ukrainian town, Rava-Ruska (Rawa Ruska in Polish), saw themselves as Polish Jews throughout the same period, regardless of which country the town was part of during a given time. Thus, the communities were assigned to their current country for simplicity and consistency.

Table 6- Yizkor books by location of the community today

COMMUNITY IN	#	%
Belarus	82	13.37%
Bulgaria(s)	3	0.48%
Greece(s)	4	0.65%
Hungary	14	2.28%
Lithuania	24	3.92%
Moldova	17	2.77%
Poland	270	44.04%
Romania	34	5.54%
Slovakia	14	2.28%
Ukraine	140	22.83%
Other	11	1.79%
Total	613	100%

Other includes: Austria 1, Czech Republic 1, Germany 2, Latvia 2, Serbia 2, Croatia 1, North Macedonia(s) 1. Sephardic communities are marked (S). Source: Yizkor Books Database.

Considering that book-form commemoration has a long and rich history in Ashkenazi Jewish culture, it is not surprising that most Yizkor books commemorate communities belonging to the core of the Ashkenazi world – Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, the main areas of Polish Jewry. Almost all of the communities commemorated in Ukraine and Belarus were in the western regions of those countries – areas where Jews traditionally resided (the Pale of Settlement). Next are the areas of Romanian Jewry – in present-day Romania, Moldova and small parts of Ukraine, such as the aforementioned Novo Selica. Lithuanian and Romanian Jews were traditionally Yiddish-speaking, much like Polish Jews (although they spoke different dialects). Some Lithuanian Yizkor books commemorate an exceptionally high number of communities, up to 200, and the overall population size before the Holocaust was relatively small: around 320,000, compared, for example, to more than three million Polish Jews.

What stands out from this table is the four Sephardic communities that had Yizkor books, entirely in Hebrew. These were all in Europe, but adopting an Ashkenazi commemorative tradition, historically written in Yiddish – a language not spoken in Sephardic communities – is a fascinating development worthy of future scholarly examination.

Another interesting detail is that all five books published for German-speaking communities – in Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany – were produced by a single person, the Austro-Hungarian-born historian Hugo Gold, who initiated, collected material for and published all five books (in Israel). Gold took it upon himself to bring the tradition to German Jewry (for example: Gold 1958, 1962, 1966).

Typology of publishers and editors

I will review here a typology of Yizkor book publishers, based on my analysis. Through this

typology, I demonstrate that Yizkor books were the product of a significantly more varied group of publishers than previously claimed.

1. *Landsmanshaftn* – these organizations did, in fact, publish some Yizkor books, mainly in the 1940s and 1950s, but they were not the majority publisher even during that period. This type of book was more common in the first decade after the Holocaust, when the centres of publication were in the USA and Argentina, but its dominance wanes as Israel becomes the foremost centre of publication.

2. Other organizations – many books were published by completely different kinds of organizations from *landsmanshaftn*. This is not only a typological difference; it relates to a vastly different set of backgrounds, interests, content and linguistic choices. This group includes organizations of townsfolk that were established after the Holocaust for commemoration purposes, or that were not *landslayt* organizations at all, for example, *Irgun Yots'ey Polin* in Israel, the umbrella organization of all Polish Jewry descendant organizations in Israel, which in the 1960s published a series of Yizkor books for communities which at the time did not have any (*Sidrat Polin* – The Poland Series).

3. Private individuals and groups – This type of publisher has existed since the start of the Yizkor book phenomenon. It includes private individuals who, in very small groups, sometimes alone, decided to publish Yizkor books many times because there was no organization of any kind in existence, and others because they felt a personal need to commemorate the town. For example, the book of Glubokie is often mentioned as part of *landsmanshaft* literature (Horowitz 2011, 8) while it is, in fact, the product of the work of two brothers, Michael and Zvi Rajak, who collected material and published the books by themselves, with the help of an editor, but without any formal organization behind them.

Another notable mention in this category is the aforementioned Austro-Hungarian Jewish historian Hugo Gold.

4. Schoolchildren – some books were produced by schoolchildren, aged 7–16, from different schools all over Israel. These were mainly published in the 1970s, and often mention their initiative as based on a call made by Gideon Hausner, then member of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and former chief prosecutor in the Eichmann trial, for schools to take up the commemoration efforts for communities which had not yet received memorial books.

Some communities have had more than one book published, often by different publishers, of different or similar kinds.

It is very important to remember that in the case of the first two groups (and sometimes also of the third), a formally designated editor, often a professional, was in charge of the publishing process. Some editors, most notably David Sztokfisz, were involved in more than one book (in Sztokfisz's case, at least twenty-two different books). This means that in many cases, the person in charge of the majority of the process, and always the one selecting which pieces would be published, making translation choices and so forth, had little or no personal connection to the community in question, and certainly was not a descendant of that particular town, even area.

The identity of the writers

As mentioned earlier, Yizkor book contributors have often been described in the scholarly literature as being young Zionist Holocaust survivors who survived thanks to their physical condition and youthful vigour (Kugelmass et al. 1998; M. Amir 2011). This characterization of the authors is largely erroneous; Holocaust survival was not generally due to physical condition or prowess. While these were helpful, survival was largely the result of circumstances beyond the survivor's control, or even awareness. Examples

include living close to the USSR, receiving help from friends and partisans, possessing skills useful to the Germans (from engineering to sports and anything in between), and even sheer luck. A person's physical condition or ideology made no difference if that person was sent to a death camp and murdered upon arrival. Some survivors were children at liberation, and some were in their 40s or older. They were certainly not all Zionists. The memoirs of survivors (for example: Klüger 2001; Kertész 1997), as well as collected testimonies (such as the Black Book, World Jewish 1946), are filled with such accounts, stressing factors other than physical prowess, such as pity from camp staff or other prisoners, as keys to their survival. This connects us to the second erroneous claim, namely that the books were written mainly by Holocaust survivors. Some books were entirely produced and written by descendants of the community who either left the town before 1939 to move, for example to Palestine or the USA, or by the children of survivors ('second-generation survivors'). As I will demonstrate through the typology of Yizkor books in the following section, Yizkor books cannot exclusively be described as the 'Zionist Holocaust survivor literature'; far from it.

Examples of Yizkor book typologies

I present here several examples of Yizkor books. Each one of these books has been widely mentioned by previous scholarship as a recognized 'Yizkor book'. However, as we shall see here, even those books that are commonly mentioned as Yizkor books, and hence as Yiddish-centric *landsmanshaft* literature according to the definitions of these scholars, are in fact of different types, and demonstrate that the overall phenomenon of Yizkor books is highly heterogeneous. Every book listed below appears in the list of Yizkor books included in *From a Ruined Garden*, and they are mentioned as 'classic' Yizkor books (that is, as

examples of *landsmanshaft* Yiddish literature) in other publications as well.

The Lodzer Yizker-bukh (Łódź, Poland)

This book (Lodz 1943) is widely considered the first Yizkor book. Published in 1943, it is a classic example of a Yizkor book that is also *landsmanshaft* literature. It was published in Yiddish by the United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Łódź, a New-York based organization of former immigrants from Łódź, living in the USA, to aid their townsfolk back in Poland. In this sense it fits very well into the view of Kugelmass and Boyrain and other scholars about Yizkor books. However, the book was published in early-mid 1943, while the Lodz Ghetto was liquidated in May 1944. The full scope of the *khurbn* was far from fully known at that point. The book is then focused on the history of Jewish Łódź, the ongoing catastrophe under Nazi occupation and the relief committee's efforts. The book does not contain a necrology (as most later books do), which is acknowledged in the book, as there was no complete information about who exactly had died at that point. Nonetheless, it is already called 'Yizkor Buch', meaning that the catastrophe was already understood to be significant enough to require commemoration for the many victims and the community itself, alongside the then still-ongoing relief efforts for those who were still alive. Another significant difference between this book and later ones is that Holocaust survivors were, of course, also not a part of the group of contributors. Thus, while this book is commonly seen as the archetype of Yizkor books, it differs substantially from later publications as it relates to its publishers and contributors.

Khurbn Glubok (Hlybokaye, Belarus)

Another book (Rajak & Rajak 1956) is referenced in the literature and given as an example of a *landsmanshaft* publication (most notably

in Kugelmass et al. 1998). The book is entirely in Yiddish. It was published by two brothers – Michael and Zvi Rajak, alongside the editor, Shlomo Suskevitch, with no organization behind them. The two collected pieces and took part in editing the book. Thus, it cannot be categorized as *landsmanshaft* literature, as there was no formal organization of any kind significantly involved in the book production.

Ir u-shemah Monastir (A City Called Monastir)

This book (Oren 1972) was the initiative of a single person – Louis Russo, an American-based businessman who immigrated to the USA before the Holocaust from Bitola, Macedonia. Macedonian Jews are Sephardic, and so the tradition of book-form commemoration was foreign to them. They did not speak Yiddish nor have any strong connection to the Yiddish-speaking world. To publish the book, he hired the professional editor Uri Oren, who, by his own account, given in the introduction to the book, was hired because no *landsmanshaft* existed anywhere in the world for the town. The book was published wholly in Hebrew and is an example of Yizkor books for Sephardic communities, which were all published by individuals, often wealthy businessmen (for example, Recanati 1972, 1986) who adopted the Ashkenazi book-form commemorative tradition in order to commemorate their own communities.

Ostra (Ostroh, Ukraine)

This book (Levin 1966) is an example of *sidrat kehilot Israel* (the Communities of Israel series), published in Israel from 1965 by *Yad Yehadut Polin*, a worldwide Jewish organization founded in Israel that year with the explicit goal of commemorating the destroyed Jewish communities of Poland and Lithuania. The books of this series were all published in Israel and in Hebrew. *Yad Yehadut Polin* is an organization that is not community-specific, and so had

published a book for communities with which members did not necessarily have a direct relation. In fact, the communities commemorated in the series' books were intentionally chosen as communities that had not received book-form commemoration previously.

Koloz'var-Klozenburg (Cluj, Romania)

This book (Zimroni and Schwartz 1968) is an example of Yizkor books that were published by schoolchildren, in Israel and in Hebrew, mainly during the 1960s (for example: Amarant 1974; Schwartz 1969). This particular Yizkor book was published by seventh- and eighth-graders (ages twelve to fourteen) from the city of Hadera in Israel, in collaboration with survivors from the town who lived in the city. The children who wrote in the book were born after the Holocaust, and some of the students, as well as some of the school staff, had no family that had been in the Holocaust or relation to the Ashkenazi world. This book is nonetheless defined by its authors and by scholars as a Yizkor book.

Conclusions

This article has sought to demonstrate several points regarding Yizkor books. 1. That in contrast to previous research, Hebrew was the primary Yizkor book publication language. This fact, combined with the overwhelming majority of the books being published in Israel, demonstrates that as scholars we should analyse Yizkor books largely through the lens of Israeli and Hebrew-speaking Holocaust commemoration, with Yiddish as the books' highly important background and roots. 2. That the publishers and editors were a heterogeneous group, in which *landsmanshaftn* were only one of several different types of publishers, and overall a minority among the publishers. Yizkor books were based on pre-existing Ashkenazi commemorative traditions. In the early period following the Second World War,

the books were indeed commonly published by *landsmanshaftn*, usually in Yiddish, in the main Jewish post-Holocaust centres, such as the USA and Argentina. However, the phenomenon quickly shifted to Israel, and Hebrew became the primary language. This is particularly noticeable during the 1960s and 1970s, the peak periods of publication.

Among the publishers, we find organizations of different types, most of which developed around commemorative needs of descendants and not mutual aid. These were mostly founded after the Holocaust by survivors and other descendants, most commonly in Israel, with small numbers in the USA as well. Many Yizkor books were published by individuals who were not backed by any formal organization. Lastly, I have discussed a unique type of publisher: school classes, usually between twelve and fourteen years old. These operated exclusively in Israel, mainly during the 1960s, and published, in collaboration with survivors, Yizkor books for communities to which the children had no familial or cultural ties. Moreover, the children were, of course, not Holocaust survivors themselves, and many did not have a familial connection with the Holocaust either.

Another notable group of Yizkor books are those published by non-Yiddish-speaking Jews. Most notable among these are books commemorating Hungarian-speaking communities in present-day Hungary and northern Romania. Those books were published in Hebrew and Hungarian. Books for communities in German-speaking areas (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic) were published in German. Historically, those were also Ashkenazi Jews who spoke Yiddish and German. Finally, we have also seen books that were published to commemorate Sephardic communities. These communities neither spoke Yiddish nor shared in the Ashkenazi tradition of book-form commemoration, and

their adoption of the tradition is thus particularly interesting.

Yizkor books are indeed firmly rooted in the Yiddish world from the publishing and the historical perspectives. However, they very quickly transformed from a Yiddish cultural phenomenon, based mainly in the USA and Argentina, into an Israeli-centred, and thus Hebrew-speaking, phenomenon. This change was already taking place in the early 1960s. With the passage of time, the shift in language was significant from a readership

perspective as well – the explicit target audience of the books became increasingly the younger, Hebrew-speaking generation instead of the older, Yiddish-speaking one. There is no doubt, however, that the *shtetl* – the Jewish town – the hometown of so many of those who published the books and contributed pieces to them, always remained at the centre of the publication. The memory and resurrection of the lost communities remained strongly at the centre of the genre, regardless of language. ■

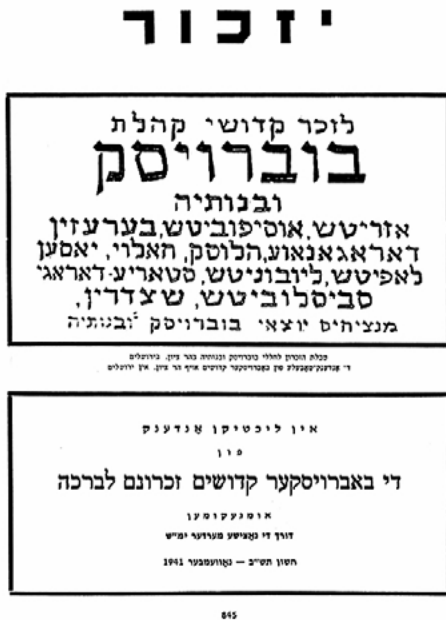
Appendix 1. Book publication: location over time

Place / Period	43-45	46-48	49-51	52-54	55-57	58-60	61-63	64-66	67-69	70-72	73-75	76-78	79-81	82-84	85-87	88-90	91-93	94-96	97-99	00-02	03-05	06-08	09+	Total	
Argentina	2	1	4	3	3	1	3	2	1		4														24
Australia								1			1					1									3
Canada					1			2							1										4
France		1		1								1													3
Israel	1	3	4	16	30	35	40	48	63	66	60	30	18	16	13	23	18	10	2	3	4	3	1		507
Israel and USA						1	1			1			1												4
South Africa				2																1					3
USA	1	6	12		3	5	7	4	6	2	1	2	1	3		5	2								62
Other		1	1																				1		3
Total	4	12	21	22	37	42	51	57	70	69	66	33	20	19	14	29	20	10	2	4	4	6	1		613

Appendix 2. Language of publication over time

Period / Language	43-45	46-48	49-51	52-54	55-57	58-60	61-63	64-66	67-69	70-72	73-75	76-78	79-81	82-84	85-87	88-90	91-93	94-96	97-99	00-02	03-05	06-08	09+	Total	
Hebrew	1	2	2	7	7	7	2	10	9	14	6	3	2	4	4	13	9	4	1	2	3	3	1	116	
Yiddish	2	6	11	7	11	8	7	6	5	1	3	1	2	1											71
English								1	4					1		1	1			1		3		12	
Hebrew and Yiddish		1	2	6	13	23	25	28	40	35	35	11	4	4	1	1	2	1							232
Hebrew and English									1	1		3	2	2		1	2			1	1				14
Yiddish and English					1		1		1		2		1	1		2									9
Hebrew and Yiddish and English						1	9	5	3	8	10	9	3	4	5	4	1	2							64
Hebrew main					1	1	1		5		1	2	1	1	2	3	3	1							22
Yiddish main		1	2	6	2	3	1	4	3		2														24
English main																									0
Other			1			1	1	2	4	2	10	7	4	5	1	2	4	2	2	1					49
Total	4	12	21	22	37	42	51	57	70	69	66	33	20	19	14	29	20	10	2	4	4	6	1		613

Appendix 3. Two examples of dual-language pages from Yizkor books



Source: Yizkor book of Babruisk, vol. 1 (Slutsky 1967)



Source: Yizkor book of Berez hany (Katz 1978)

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