Part II: **Digital Practices**

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Technological Heterotopianism: How a Case Study of a Holocaust Digital Mapping Project of Łomża, Poland Served as a Guide for Reconciliation in Polish-Jewish Relations

When I first arrived in Łomża in 2019 with the descendants of Łomża Holocaust survivor Nachman Podróżnik – having been effectively living in Podróżnik's Łomża as described in his Holocaust memoir for the past year as I digitally mapped his city – I was shocked to not recognize any of it. The Talmud Torah where he taught was a tennis court. The family home on Stary-Rynek was an ice-cream shop, several doors down from which stood Lech Kołakowski's offices, a *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS; or Law and Justice, the right-wing political party) member with a seat on the SEJM. Podróżnik's in-law's movie theatre had been demolished and its bricks used to build a communist party house turned teacher's training college. The Jewish cemetery on Boczna street was in disarray, headstones damaged, graffitied, and displaced. For the Podróżnik family this "homecoming" trip, from the outset, seemed to reaffirm that they had no place in modern-day Łomża. The city did not remember them, and they did not recognize it.

In this chapter, I explore how the digital Holocaust memorial map I created of Łomża in collaboration with Łomża history teacher Marcin Mikołajczyk and his history club students, as well as with the council of local Łomża public historians, ultimately, after much back-and-forth negotiation, served as a tool for Polish-Jewish reconciliation. The digital world played the mediator between the two groups, leading in November 2022 to today's citizens of Łomża collectively gathering to remember its lost Jews and the Podróżnik family finding their place and recognition in today's Łomża. In this piece, I ask why the virtual setting was so effective in guiding the reconciliation process. What was the virtual terrain able to offer us that the physical terrain could not? What, in turn, could the virtual map teach us about memorial practices and heritage production in the aftermath of mass atrocities?

The Podróżnik family first approached me about a project on Jewish Łomża in 2018. They had recently published Podróżnik's Holocaust survival memoir, *The Counterfeit Poles*. Throughout the memoir, Podróżnik meticulously notes the names of everyone he remembered from Łomża, citing addresses where they lived and worked. For a number of these people, I discovered that Podróżnik's

account was the only remaining testament of their lives. The family asked me to research and identify these individuals. Reading the memoir, I was struck by Podróżnik's keen attention to urban space and apparent drive to anchor as many murdered Jews as possible to sites they occupied in Łomża. It was as if he was trying to return them home, re-establish their sense of belonging in the spaces from which they had been removed. Thanks to his detailed testimony, I created a digital, interactive map of Łomża that cartographically represents Podróżnik's city.[1]

The map is in English and Polish. It includes color-coded markers that correspond to sites of Jewish life and destruction, as well as sites of local resistance and collaboration in the Holocaust. The points on the map were derived predominantly from Podróżnik's memoir, but also from Podróżnik family letters, visual history testimonies, Yad Vashem pages of testimony, International Tracing Service files, the Łomża Yizkor book, and interwar telephone directories. Map users can click on the markers to explore Łomża and meet its former inhabitants. At some markers, visitors can hear directly from these inhabitants through video testimonies. At other markers, they can read passages from post-war memoirs detailing the events that occurred there (See Fig. 1). The virtual Łomża is represented on three maps: a present-day map, a 1942 Nazi map, and a 1940 Soviet map. I geo-rectified the two historic maps onto the present-day map and made the layers transparent, so that all three can be viewed simultaneously.

After I completed a first version of the map, we travelled to Łomża. In spite of the map, on arrival, we could not have felt more lost. Fortunately, we soon met Mikołajczyk who gave us a tour of his Łomża. I reached out to Mikołajczyk having heard about his work for the Forum for Dialogue, a program whose aim is to foster dialogue on Polish-Jewish relations by providing monetary and community-based support for teachers and activists across Poland to conduct projects in their communities. Mikołajczyk founded a history club at his school that wrote a tour guide to Jewish Łomża and used the Forum's funding to publish their findings in a booklet entitled *Śladami Żydów Łomżyńskich* (In the Footsteps of the Jews of Łomża). The first edition was published in 2012 with the goal of building "tolerant attitudes based on expertise knowledge in the area of multiculturalism and an understanding of human rights".[2]

Mikołajczyk's goal was, in no small part, a response to the fact that Łomża is a largely homogeneous town with ultra-conservative voting tendencies driven by

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1 To view the map visit: https://counterfeitpoles.com/neatline/show/lomza-map.

2 III Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Żołnierzy Obwodu Łomżyńskiego AK, *Śladami Żydów Łomżyń-skich* (2012). Thereafter, SZL (2012) or SZL (2019) for the 2019 edition.
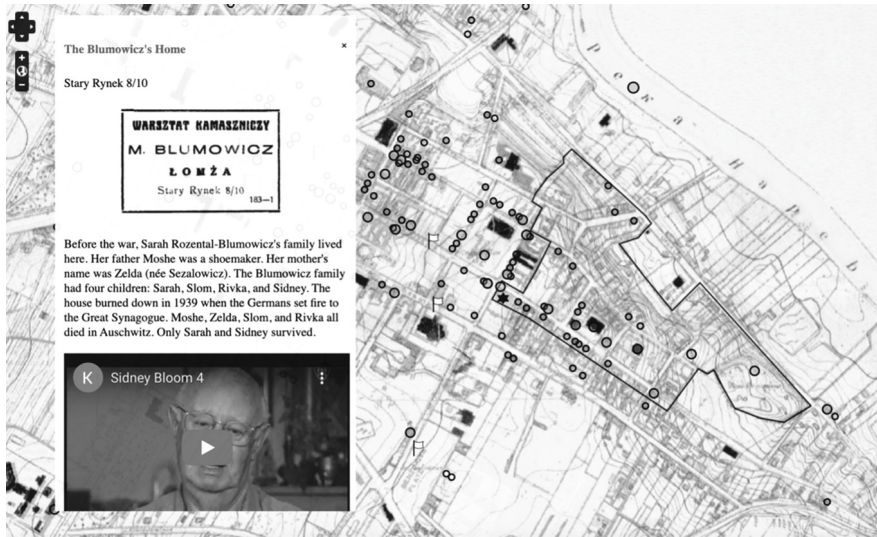
Fig. 1: A screen shot of the Łomża map opened to the Blumowicz family home at 8/10 Stary-Rynek.

a desire to keep it that way. This was made clear in 2010 when local PiS politician Kołakowski closed an asylum center for Chechen refugees.[3] When we met with Mikołajczyk, he explained that he wanted to expand the project and write an updated guide with his students in an afterschool history club but was struggling to find local support. This was not altogether surprising given the then recent proposal by PiS for a "Holocaust Law" that would effectively make it illegal to discuss the question of Polish collaboration. The proposed law, now voided, was a response to the publication of Jan Gross's *Neighbors* where Gross recounts how Catholic Poles murdered 1,600 of their Jewish neighbors in July 1941. This pogrom occurred in Jedwabne, a town only 20 kilometers from Łomża, in turn, casting a shadow over the region, which for many became synonymous with the collaboration scandal. After meeting with Mikołajczyk, the Podróżniks wanted to help him, seeing this as an opportunity to advance Holocaust education in the region. They offered to fund a new publication. In return, they asked that Mikołajczyk and his

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3 Szalanska et al., "Public policy towards immigrants in Poland's shrinking cities", *International Migration* 61/1 (2023). The authors note how Ukrainian refugees have been more openly welcomed as they do "not differ from Poles in terms of external appearance and culture, so for the Łomża community, it is easier to accept their presence than the presence of Chechens".

students pay homage to Podróżnik and his family in it, and work with me to incorporate my digital maps and website as pedagogical tools for future students and, by extension, the Łomża community at large. Mikołajczyk agreed.

However, when we began working together to combine our research and knowledge on the digital map, we struggled to find common ground. Our difficulties were fueled by our different motivations driving our involvement in the project. The Podróżniks, whom I represented, wanted the project to serve as a tool to remember Łomża's murdered Jews and the spaces they called home, as well as to prevent the repetition of genocidal mistakes in the future. They also hoped the project would help them to re-establish a connection with their ancestral home. Mikołajczyk wanted the project to serve as a means to build a more tolerant and accepting Łomża in the present based on a lost multicultural Łomżian past. He wanted to do so without stirring conflict. The two groups disagreed as to who should be the primary recipients of the project. The Podróżniks prioritized Łomża's murdered Jews and their descendants. Mikołajczyk prioritized Łomża's present-day citizens. For the project to work, we had to find a way to negotiate our simultaneous, and sometimes contradictory, care of the living and the dead, Jews and Poles, Jewish and Łomżian heritage.

In my article for *Contemporary Jewry*, I focused on the points of contention that arose over the course of our collaboration.[4] These points emerged, as I concluded, because both sides were originally thinking in zero-sum game terms. We diverged on which map to use as the base on which to plot our points for the project. We disagreed on the "Jedwabne question": whether the map should include an arrow pointing to the site of the pogrom in the neighboring town, and the narrative facts of the massacre. Lastly, we favored adding points of different natures to the map: religious or secular sites and still existing or destroyed ones. While we initially found ourselves fighting over virtual space on the digital map, in what sometimes felt like a pseudo-technological dystopia, to claim ownership of sites in pixelated form, we soon discovered that a digital topography could provide opportunities to settle our differences and work towards a common goal of mutual respect and understanding – in short, reconciliation. Contestation and reconciliation should be understood in this chapter as two sides of the same coin. Our reconciliation was built on the scaffolding of our contests for space. Contestation served as the building block for reconciliation. Put differently, the contestations over space we discovered in our collaboration worked themselves out on

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4 Kyra Schulman, "Memory Space: A Case Study of a Holocaust Digital Mapping Project of Łomża, Poland", *Contemporary Jewry* 44 (2024): pp. 261–80.

the screen and reflected a model of reconciliation we could imitate off screen: one that could never have been realized on a non-virtual platform.

Contributions to the Literature and Theoretical Framing

Drawing from my experience as a researcher, and often intermediary – particularly as the primary mapmaker – between Nachman's descendants and Mikołajczyk, his students, public historians, and the broader Łomża community, this chapter seeks to add to the current literature on digital memory studies and its intersection with the future of Polish-Jewish relations. It intends to do so by introducing a concept of technological heterotopianism to the conversation. Proponents of technological utopianism contend that with the addition of new technologies society will move closer to a utopian existence, a more perfect world. Digital public history scholars have argued projects, like ours, provide opportunities that, at the very least, ark towards a more utopian existence, as academic and non-academic actors can collectively engage "in a process of co-creation through digital means, a form of citizen's digital history for the public and with the public".[5] This is not what we experienced in creating the map. The process for us often better resembled a land scramble than a project of "co-creation" particularly as we fought over who should be included within "citizen" and "public". Conversely, we also did not find ourselves trapped in a technological dystopia of the kind scholars like Andrew Hoskins have warned.[6] We were somewhere in the middle in line with interpretations scholars like Antony Rowland and Matthew Boswell have proposed whereby technology is understood as a tool that can provide opportunities for memory production, even if the results are far from perfect.[7] Foucault defined heterotopias as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted".[8] The virtual topography, like a heterotopia, is an unreal space, but one that provides an oppor-

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5 Serge Noiret, Mark Tebeau, and Gerben Zaagsma, *Handbook of Digital Public History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), p. 15.

6 Andrew Hoskins, *Digital Memory Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

7 Antony Rowland and Matthew Boswell, *Virtual Holocaust Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

8 Michel Foucault, "Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias", *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (1984): 3.

tunity to imagine a place of progress and a path towards improved Polish-Jewish relations.

It can do so, as I hope to demonstrate, by placing Polish and Jewish actors in conversation with each other on more equal terms in heritage production. Ruth Ellen Gruber and Erica Lehrer represent two lines of thought in this production. Gruber studies a phenomenon in many post-communist, Eastern European countries whereby non-Jews, increasingly interested in Jewish culture, developed Jewish-themed restaurants, festivals, exhibitions, and educational programs. She describes the influx of Jewish heritage production as a "parallel universe" where non-Jews "study, teach, perform, produce, and consume in a virtual Jewish world of their own creation [. . .] creating the sort of 'museum Judaism' where Jews themselves need have no place, except perhaps as artifacts".[9] Writing over a decade later, Lehrer understands the phenomenon to be the product of greater Polish-Jewish collaboration than Gruber credits. In a case study of Kaźmierz, she traces how non-Jewish "heritage brokers" in post-communist Poland "have played essential roles in cultivating 'Jewish space,' where both Jews and non-Jewish Poles could begin to reimagine themselves in plural, interconnected ways".[10] Today's Jewish Kaźmierz is a "result of two overlapping subaltern memory projects – a local Polish one and a foreign Jewish one imported by tourism".[11] Under both interpretations, the production of Jewish memory is unequally shared. This is in part because Jews and Poles, by and large, do not live on these sites today as neighbors. The digital verse, by contrast, places Poles and Jews on the same (web) page and, accordingly, as Gruber highlights, "have changed the game, moving the goalposts and blurring the boundaries".[12]

Currently in Poland, Jewish and Catholic Poles do not even attend the same memorial ceremonies. In her contribution to this volume, Diana Pinto discusses how two ceremonies commemorating the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Insurrection were held in Warsaw: the official government ceremony led by President Duda in front of the POLIN Museum, and the unofficial ceremony organized by vocal Polish Jews in opposition to the government, its understanding of history, and its failure to learn from that history as it committed

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9 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 50.

10 Erica Lehrer, "Jewish Heritage, Pluralism, and Milieux de Mémoire: The Case of Kraków's Kazmierz", in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 172.

11 Ibid., p. 171.

12 See Ruth Ellen Gruber's chapter, "Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 Years after *Virtually Jewish*", p. 15, in this current volume.

rights abuses in the present.[13] In a "glass half full" reading of the day's events, Pinto marks a turning point in official Polish treatment of Jewish history, which had traditionally taken a zero-sum game approach subsuming Jewish suffering in the Holocaust under the banner of Polish wartime suffering without addressing the genocidal particularities of the former. At the 2023 official ceremony, diverging from the government-sponsored monolithic telling of history many have come to expect, President Duda appeared to "transcend the zero-sum game approach" by including Jews in the Polish national narrative "without denying their Judaism". In his speech, he described how Jews and Poles "lived on the same soil for almost one thousand years, one could say: under one roof. Throughout different epochs in history but staying together".[14] He praised the Jewish Ghetto fighters for having learned their resistance lessons from Jewish history in the form of the Maccabees and Polish history in the example of Konstanty Julian Ordon. While this was certainly progress, in terms of Duda's more inclusive historical lens, for many, Duda's failure to extend that more universalist, and humanistic, lens to the present day – particularly regarding his treatment of Syrian and Afghani migrants trapped at the Belorussian border – suggested a need for an alternative ceremony. This ceremony began 300 meters away at the ghetto fighters' bunker at Miła 18 and ended another 250 meters further at the Umschlagplatz monument. As in our project, different motivations, politics, and audiences guided these two ceremonies. However, thanks to the digital topography we built, in our case, we managed to create a single memorial in a shared virtual space that could hold our often-conflicting aims and politics at once. The mapping project suggests hope for Pinto's "glass half full" interpretation thanks to the boundary blurring, Gruber highlights, that the virtual world provides.

In what follows, I interrogate to what extent virtual space can provide a solution to problems of contested memory in physical space and, in turn, serve as a tool for reconciliation between effected communities in the aftermath of mass atrocities. I do so by adopting Foucault's definition of a heterotopia – as a counter-site that is simultaneously "represented, contested, and inverted" – as a theoretical framework.[15] In section one, I interrogate how the materiality of the virtual world can expand our representational possibilities. In section two, I explore how virtual memorials can help to contest a monolithic telling of history that dominates physical memorials. Finally, in section three, I show how digital

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13 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", in this current volume.

14 Andrzej Duda, "Nigdy nie zgodzę się na oczernianie Polski", *Oficjalna strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, January 29, 2018, https://www.president.pl/news/president-says-poles-did-not-take-part-in-holocaust-condemns-hatred,36626.

15 Foucault, "Of other spaces", p. 3.

topographies can invert the rules of space and spatial ownership in ways that enable us to find common ground. The mirror, for Foucault, represented the heterotopia par excellence. He described the experience of standing in front of a mirror where the mirror:

> [M]akes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[16]

The Łomża digital map serves as a mirror of its own kind. On a literal level, the map reflects Łomża from its past to its present. It represents real space while simultaneously providing a terrain on which to counter harmful and divisive politics. For the Podróżnik family, the map of Łomża reflects on the memory of the murdered Jews. It also allows them to reflect their sense of attachment to Łomża onto the modern-day city. For Mikołajczyk, it reflects the possibility of creating a more tolerant, multi-cultural society in the present. For all the project collaborators, the digital space transformed over the course of the project to provide a terrain on which to imagine possible futures in Polish-Jewish relations beyond conflict and competition.

Representing Infinite Memory Spaces

The first quality of a heterotopia is that it represents real spaces. In physical space there is a limit to how much can be remembered and thus represented. Scarcity, in turn, becomes the mediator in a real-estate battle for memory space where parties curate spaces to fit their agendas. This is not the case in virtual space, where there is virtually no memory limit. That is to say that a virtual topography can provide endless representational possibilities that ensure all parties can shape their own image in accordance with their agendas without occluding another's. Scarcity ceases to be the mediator. Virtual plenitude replaces it. It was for this reason that the virtual world was so appealing to us in the first place. In writing his memoir, Podróżnik aimed to represent the "six million who could not tell their own stories".[17] We could do that in virtual space.

There were complications when we began our collaboration. These complications resulted from the fact that we were all thinking in terms of physical space where the rules of scarcity apply. In turn, we each favored including different

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16 Ibid, p. 4.
17 Nathan Drew, *The Counterfeit Poles* (Minneapolis, MN: Wise Ink, 2018), dedication.

sites that we felt best represented our intentions for the project. We diverged in our curatorial approaches, particularly in how to deal with the question of materiality – what sites were lost and what sites remained – and the rhetorical consequences of representing one over the other on the shared memorial map. We understood sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, as Pierre Nora defined them, to mean "complex things. At once natural and artificial, simple and ambiguous, concrete and abstract".[18] The Podróżniks favored the natural, simple, and concrete in order to demonstrate a continuity between today's Łomża and Podróżnik's lost Łomża. Mikołajczyk favored the artificial, ambiguous, and abstract in order to avoid unnecessary conflict that could arise from even insinuating the existence of Polish opportunism or collaboration in the Holocaust on the ground. We discovered these divergences as we observed the physical walking tours we created of Jewish Łomża that we planned to combine to create the shared virtual memorial map. Our problems, we would soon diagnose, extended from our decision to begin our memorial planning in the physical and convert it to the virtual.

On the walking tour Mikołajczyk and his students created, they favored memory sites of absence.[19] Mikołajczyk, for his part, wanted to demonstrate that Łomża had once been a multicultural city where people with very different customs and religious practices lived but, importantly, without stirring unproductive divisions at home. The sites included the ghetto, the synagogue, the marketplace on Stary-Rynek, the Beit Midrash, the Talmud Torah, the Yeshiva, the two Jewish cemeteries, the Jewish orphanage, and the Jewish hospital. Most of these sites either no longer existed or, in the case of the cemeteries, were heavily damaged. Only the Jewish orphanage and the Jewish hospital remained. The orphanage is now private housing, the only private dwelling included. The hospital is Mikołajczyk's school. As the beginning and ending point of the tour, it serves as the "bridge between the past and the need to commemorate Jewish inhabitants of Łomża".[20]

By contrast, the Podróżniks' walking tour was almost entirely composed of "bridges". The family wanted to demonstrate a continuity between Podróżnik's and present-day Łomża; one that would allow them to anchor his survival story in the present-day city, and, accordingly, stress the familial connection and attachment. We went to the river Narew where Podróżnik swam. We walked to Jakub Waga Park where Podróżnik and his wife walked. We visited the family's cinema, or at least the bricks that once made up its exterior. We walked by the

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18 Pierre Nora, *The Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 14.

19 See SZL (2012).

20 Forum for Leaders of Dialogue, "Marcin Mikołajczyk": http://dialog.org.pl/liderzy-dialogu/en/lider/marcin-mikolajczyk-2/.

former homes of many of the people Podróżnik listed in his memoir, such as the Młotek family home at 20 Długa Street, which remains a residential site. A number of other present-day residential sites made the tour route including Tobiasz's fur shop, the Lasko family home, and the Bengelsdorf factory, all on Długa Street.

Given that the tours of key *lieux de mémoire* were set in real space and drawn on printed maps, the representational possibilities were limited. This, in turn, encouraged us to curate sites of memory that best represented our agendas and allowed us to use scarcity as an excuse for excluding sites that did not. The solution to our problem was to lean into the virtual medium and allow it to play the mediator in a way only a virtual topography can. Eyal Weizman introduced the concept of the "threshold of detectability" whereby both that which is physically there and that which is absent carry a material weight. That material weight, whether absent or present, serves as proof that something existed. Weizman demonstrates this concept using the example of an aerial photograph taken of an Auschwitz gas chamber. In the photograph, the holes on the roof of Crematorium II hover "between being identifiable and not", materially present and absent.[21] David Irving used this "absence of evidence" in the English High Court of Justice to deny the Holocaust. However, as Weizman, drawing on the case's expert witness Robert Jan van Pelt's work, argued "the absence of evidence was certainly not evidence of an absence".[22] In a court of law it could be, as the material and immaterial are both afforded weight in argument. While the case of our map was quite different, and by no means was anybody in our collaboration suggesting any form of Holocaust denial, we, nonetheless, had to contend with the fact that the absence of certain kinds of material evidence could, if left unexplained or mediated, shape the narrative to serve external negationist agendas.

Once we plotted the places visited on our physical tours onto our shared virtual space, we, furthermore, could see that our sites collectively hovered between a similar presence-absence dichotomy to the one Weizman describes in the Auschwitz photograph. On the screen, however, all the sites just looked like pixels. We used this to our advantage. The virtual map would serve as a materiality mediator creating an equality between our preferred sites of memory in pixelated form. In turn, the still existing sites from the Podróżniks' tour served as bridges, not only between Podróżnik's Łomża and present-day Łomża, but also between the virtual and physical world. Conversely, the immaterial sites found materiality again on the digital sphere. This changed the nature and the stakes of our memo-

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21 Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), p. 20.
22 Eyal Weizman, "Introduction", in Ibid, p. 364.

rial practices challenging us to rethink our priorities. Concerns from the physical world continued to carry over in the virtual. For instance, we still had to consider the consequences of including residential homes. Locals might see their homes represented on the map, which could raise questions about its provenance. However, the fact that the still existing residential homes appeared in the same materiality as the no longer existing sites changed the way we digested the material. The Podróżniks could still feel as if they had a bridge into modern-day Łomża, while Mikołajczyk's very real concerns about raising conflict on the ground could be relieved, precisely by the fact that the virtual topography was not on the ground. It represented the ground, but it did not occupy it. This distinction was important. The map itself could only cast a shadow memory over the physical realm. In turn, we could place an infinite number of Łomża's murdered Jews on the map, marking the no longer standing Golabek family home on Senatorska Street alongside the still standing Ostrov family home on Dworna Street. In this way, the digital topography succeeded in reconciling Polish-Jewish memory practices and the anxieties that drove them in one memorial while representing an infinite number of Łomża's Jews.

Contesting Concrete Memory

The second quality of a heterotopia, for Foucault, is that it contests real space. Our virtual memorial space did this by contesting nationalist motivated historical narratives on the ground while simultaneously providing us a space to work on reconciling our points of contention. Perhaps our greatest point of conflict in the project was over the inclusion of Jedwabne on our virtual map and, particularly, the narrative attached to it. In his memoir, Podróżnik recalled the aftermath of the pogrom:

> Refugees from other towns began to arrive in the ghetto. These were the remaining few who somehow managed to escape the massacres and slaughters in their own towns and make it to our city. We found out from them that in Jedwabne 1,500 people were burned alive in a stable.[23]

Mikołajczyk had his concerns. The subject of Jedwabne was divisive, as the event that instigated the proposal of the 2018 "Holocaust Law". Mikołajczyk, responding to pressures on the ground, favored using the Polish *Instytut Pamieci Narodowej* (IPN; the Institute of National Remembrances) report's account of the total

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23 Drew, *Counterfeit Poles*, p. 21.

murdered, 340 Jews, while the Podróżniks favored using Jan Gross's estimated 1,600 murdered. The idea of citing an IPN report for the Podróżniks was out of the question. The IPN, or "ministry of memory" as it has been mockingly called, with its pro-PiS leanings, has a stated mission of protecting "the reputation of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Nation".[24] It seemed we were at a dead-end. However, the virtual topography, given its quality to contest all that exists in the real, provided a means for reconciliation that would allow us to continue to share a memorial space without having to share a narrative.

In finding a solution, we were guided by the work of post-colonial scholars who have attempted to reread Nora's *lieux de mémoire* project in a way that expands the national narrative. In *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, the editors compiled a collection of essays to discover and interrogate *lieux de mémoire* "around which cohere traces of colonial memory".[25] The project was a direct response to Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–92) and the fact that, blinded by a methodological nationalism, he failed to account for colonial realms of memory. As the collection's editors explain in their introduction, Nora's seminal work has "become emblematic of a certain French incapacity and/or unwillingness to engage with the inherent and increasingly undeniable imbrication of the colonial in the *roman national*".[26] By adding new points of memory to the national narrative, the scholars worked to expand and contest it. We tried to do the same for Poland by similarly expanding the kinds of *lieux de mémoire* included on the map and thus contesting the history on the ground.

In physical space, there can of course be multiple viewpoints, multiple readings of history, and multiple interpretations thereof. However, they are not all afforded equal influence and rarely appear in the same place, particularly in memorial form. It is, in no small part, for this reason that two memorials took place in Warsaw for the ghetto uprising's 80th anniversary and not one. At first, it seemed as if in the case of Jedwabne we were going to have to settle for a two-memorial solution as well.

We had always planned to have both a Polish and English language map in order to broaden the audience of the memorial. We decided to use this to our advantage. Recognizing that different communities would be visiting the respective maps – Poles, and mainly Łomżians, the Polish map, and an international community largely composed of Jews, the English map – we worked, as public history scholar Sheila Brennan advises for such projects, to "place [the likely]
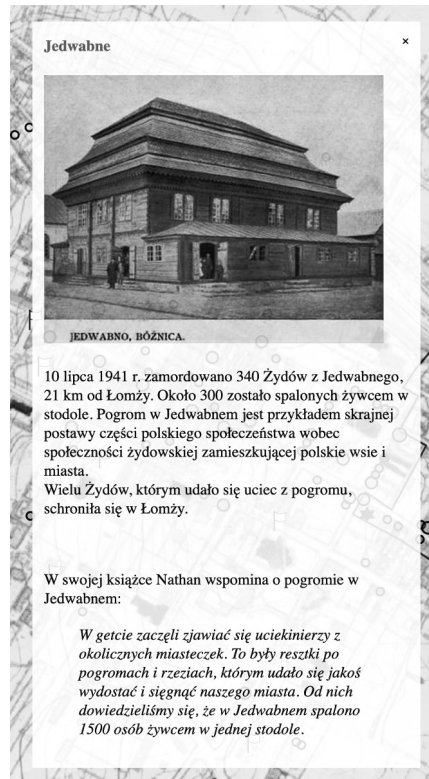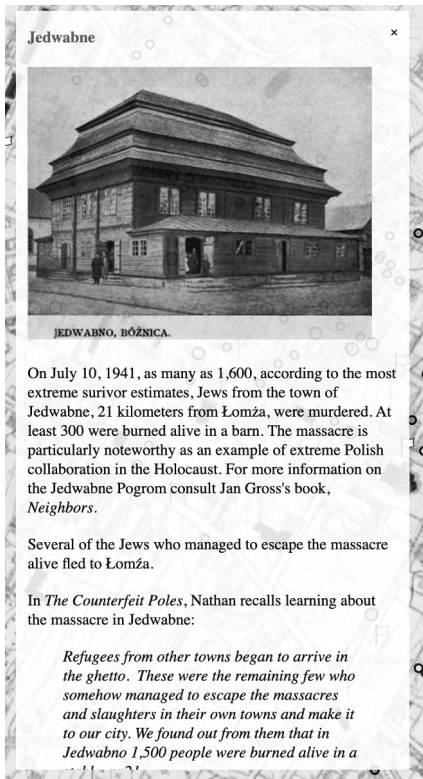
24 See Polish Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1575.
25 Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno (eds.), *Postcolonial Realms of Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), p. 2.
26 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

communities [. . .] at their core".[27] That is to say that we prioritized the needs, and concerns, of our two publics (See Figs. 2-3 for our solution). On the Polish language map, we provided the IPN's conservative estimate of 340 murdered Jews. Next to this, however, we agreed to include the quote from Podróżnik's memoir where he cited that 1,500 Jews were murdered. There would be no mention of Gross's *Neighbors*. These decisions were made so as not to create excessive and unnecessary divisions, particularly ones that might harm those living in Łomża today. We then used the English language map to contest the historical under-

Figs. 2–3: The Polish (https://counterfeitpoles.com/neatline/fullscreen/lomza-map-326#records/600) and English (https://counterfeitpoles.com/neatline/fullscreen/lomza-map#records/235) language maps for the Jedwabne marker.

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27 Shiela Brennan, "Public, First", in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 354–67.

standing in Poland. Here, we cited Gross's estimate of 1,600 murdered. We urged viewers to read *Neighbors* and learn about the controversy behind it. We also provided passages from two English language survivor accounts from Łomża who remembered the pogrom in their neighboring town.

The two-map solution was a concession in so far as we were separating what would likely be Jewish and Polish audiences onto different maps. However, we chose to view it as a steppingstone towards reconciliation rather than a step back. The virtual space gave us the opportunity to come together in spite of our divergences, thanks in part, to its malleable nature whereby points on the map and accompanying descriptions can be altered with ease. The fact that points could be added or removed with a single click, by contrast to if we were building the memorial in stone, relieved some of the anxiety and sense of permanence. In this way, virtual memory appeared less daunting, even as it maintained a connection to the real world and the associated stakes. Our narratives could diverge, but they would do so on the same webpage, on virtually identical maps. They would simultaneously contest each other and, to different degrees, an accepted nationalist telling of the Jedwabne pogrom. This would enable us to maintain continued dialogue with the goal to one day combine the two maps into one. The virtual topography came to resemble a space apart where we could contest the logics of the physical world that would push us towards two memorials and two groups.

Inverting the Rules of Space and Space Ownership

The final quality of a heterotopia for Foucault was that it inverts real spaces. Our digital topography inverts the rules of space and spatial ownership in ways that enabled our groups to find common ground and reconciliation. In *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg uses a spatial lexicon to describe processes of memory. He does so by employing terms to describe it such as "borders", "directionality", "occupations", and "real estate". Space becomes a semantic network that threads through his analysis. Rothberg asks his readers to understand memory as a "malleable discursive space", shaped by the dynamics of multidirectional memory. The digital world, it seemed, could serve as a different kind of "malleable discursive space" as it does not necessarily have to rely on tactics of "negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" that Rothberg argues create multidirec-

tional memory.[28] Such tactics may be necessary in the physical world where there is inherently limited space, but not on a virtual topography where it is *virtually* limitless. That is to say that ownership is not necessarily a binary in virtual space as it is in physical space where one owns a space, and another does not. On the virtual map, two people could claim full ownership of the same site, or city, on equal terms and work side by side to shape the memory it reflects without occluding the other's work.

In the case of Polish-Jewish relations, Lehrer observed that "Polish-Jewish reconciliation has not been necessary, as the two groups no longer inhabit the same geographical space".[29] Even if reconciliation efforts were to take place, particularly through heritage production on the ground, the collaboration would necessarily be on unequal terms from the start, as one group would occupy, and possibly even own, the space and the other would not. This was the case in our project. Mikołajczyk and his students lived in Łomża. The Podróżniks lived in America. Seen through the lens of Gruber's and Lehrer's analyses of Jewish memory production in Poland, the best-case scenario would be a shared heritage production, most comparable to a short-term lease where the Podróżniks would visit Łomża once a year to offer home improvement suggestions based on inherited knowledge and Mikołajczyk and his students would decide what to keep. For instance, we had an early discussion about installing a plaque on the tennis court for Mikołajczyk's school, the former site of the Talmud Torah, in honor of Podróżnik, who had been a physical education instructor there. The Podróżniks raised the idea. Mikołajczyk heard it. The Podróżniks returned to America. The idea was forgotten.

On the virtual topography, however, we built a space where the rules of ownership and spatial occupation were inverted. We did this by creating an anachronic memorial. We were guided here by historian Charles Romney, who has encouraged public historians to embrace "multiple chronologies, unstable chronologies, or contested chronologies", as a means to "enhance the interpretation of our urban past".[30] Instead of choosing a single map background we picked three representing three historical periods. By layering them on top of each other and altering the visibility settings to make each transparent, it became impossible to temporally locate the represented Łomża. While for much of the project it had seemed as if the Podróżniks owned a lost Łomża of the past and Mikołajczyk and

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28 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 5.

29 Lehrer, "Jewish Heritage", p. 178.

30 Charles Romney, "New City Guides and Anachronic Public History", *The Public Historian* 37/4 (2015): 29.

his students owned the city in the present, on the virtual ground, neither party had a clear home court advantage. Everyone had to find their bearings on entering the anachronic board. Both parties' claims to ownership of Łomża were represented without denying the others. It followed that when we fought over the memory plotted on the virtual space, we did so as neighbors with equal rights to the map. In turn, we could negotiate the finer points of our contestations in a shared Łomża.

Back through the Looking Glass

Until this point, I have focused on the ways in which the mapping project enabled our two parties to find a kind of reconciliation in the virtual world. I discussed the reflection in the mirror of Foucault's heterotopia. But how did this reflect onto the material world, the object in the mirror? In what remains, I interrogate the effect of our virtual reconciliation on the involved communities and how it guided reconciliation in real space. These effects became particularly clear as we prepared for, and ultimately participated in, the 80th anniversary of the liquidation of the Łomża ghetto in November 2022. For the occasion, we stepped out of our collective virtual Łomża and onto its material streets. What followed was open exchange. It did not always go smoothly. There were certainly uncomfortable moments. However, the shared world we had projected onto the virtual map seemed to be making its way back through the looking glass in positive ways.

The first glimpse of the reflection in reverse came almost a year into our collaboration. Mikołajczyk asked me to write a piece for the physical tour guide that would be distributed around Łomża and officially launched at the 80th anniversary events. I wrote a piece entitled "A Walk with Nathan and Helen" where I guided readers through Podróżnik's Łomża. The sites were chosen because they remained, in both Nachman's Łomża and today's Łomża, places associated with a shared humanity. Whether Jewish or Catholic, these sites served, or continue to serve, for all Łomża's citizens as places of home, learning, socializing, and communal fun. For instance, the tour took visitors to 5 Stary-Rynek where Podróżnik and his wife married in 1938. Today, the building is an ice-cream shop. The point was to highlight how despite the passage of time, today's Łomżians and Podróżnik likely shared happy associations with the space. In turn, these sites served as bridges not only between the past and the present, but also between people. Mikołajczyk also made room for me to introduce questions of collaboration that lightly pushed the boundaries of PiS-sponsored narrative gatekeeping. Next to the sites of shared humanity, I included sites of inhumanity, like Swinsky-Rynek,

"where Nazis and their collaborators rounded-up Jews to be murdered".[31] I simultaneously worked to center today's citizens of Łomża in an image Mikołajczyk would appreciate of multiculturalism. At the 80th anniversary activities, Mikołajczyk shared with a crowd that the addition of my article was "particularly important to [him]" because it provided "a new look . . . let's say, not Polish, so to speak . . . [but a] completely new dimension".[32]

The second sign the reflection was affording opportunities for reconciliation in the physical world came on October 28, 2022, when Mikołajczyk with the help of the Muzeum Północno-Mazowieckie organized a public event on Podróżnik's memoir. Attendees included students from Mikołajczyk's school familiar with the map, as well as interested locals who could take an extended Friday lunch break. The auditorium was full. The program included talks from Mikołajczyk on his guidebook, Podróżnik's son on his parents' survival, historian Adam Sokołowski on Łomża Jewry, and me on the map. The community was engaged. Mikołajczyk's students asked thoughtful questions to Podróżnik's son about how it felt to return to Łomża, his connections to Judaism and Poland. There also were more uncomfortable, or confusing, encounters. One man came from Jedwabne to ask Podróżnik's son if he knew a certain Jewish family. Another man asked him if he knew about the Poles who risked their lives to save Jews. After several moments of discomfort, however, the man switched his tone to explain that he knew some Poles had "reported on" Jews in hiding. He wanted to hear Podróżnik's son's feelings on the matter. The son replied simply. There was collaboration and aid. His father experienced both and was lucky enough to have survived, in no small part, thanks to the aid. The questions continued. The hard work we had done on the virtual map seemed to have opened the door for respectful dialogue in the Łomża town center.

On the last day of the anniversary events, we attended a concert at the Łomża Philharmonic in memory of the ghetto's liquidation. The concert demonstrated not only that we had achieved a level of respect and dialogue through our collaboration, but also that we could share culture and joy, even if at times tinged with discomfort. The program for the evening starred Dariusz Stanisław Wójcik, an opera singer, who goes by the stage name Davidek. Davidek is not Jewish but describes himself as fascinated by Jewish culture. On stage, he plays a Jew often dressed in a tallit and kippah. That evening, the concert hall was packed. The program included songs in Yiddish and Hebrew – *Tumbalalaika* and *Hatikvah* were

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31 See SZL (2019).

32 "Pozorowana tożsamość", Muzeum Północno-Mazowieckie, Instytucja kultury Miasta Łomża oraz III Liceum Ogólnokształcące w Łomży, Hala Kultury, October 28, 2022.

crowd favorites – as well as music from the *Schindler's List* soundtrack performed by the Łomża Philharmonic. Interspersed between the musical numbers, members of the Łomża community read poetry and excerpts from Holocaust testimonies. The performance had its moments of discomfort. All the men wore kippahs, but few succeeded in keeping them balanced on their heads for long; bows at the end of each number proved a hurdle. Davidek made exaggerated gesticulations, leaning into the Jewish caricature. Nonetheless, there was something special going on here. The Łomża community had assembled to listen, learn, and have fun. When we first arrived in Łomża in 2019, we never could have imagined this.

As an effectively enacted heterotopia, the digital memorial map provides a terrain on which to imagine possible futures beyond conflict and competition by representing, contesting, and inverting our realities. This technological heterotopianism can guide our heritage production and memorialization efforts in more productive and inclusive ways. Our project is only a micro example and one that was conducted between an open-minded Jewish family and a sympathetic Polish educator with his intellectually curious and compassionate students – conditions that were certainly not in place for the 80th anniversary events Pinto discusses nor in the majority of cases Gruber and Lehrer confront. Yet, the fact that we could make this project work in a town 20 kilometers from the epicenter of the collaboration scandal, I contend, should give us hope for building common ground. The map, ultimately, can only serve as reconciliation mediator if we are willing to engage on it. Importantly, in doing so, it seems, many of our anxieties around heritage production and memorialization could be addressed and relieved.

After Davidek's concert, the Podróżniks, Mikołajczyk, local friends, and I went to dinner. We ate pulled pork sandwiches on challah. The sandwich seemed to sum up our project representing two worlds coming together: Polish and Jewish. It was not perfect, and in the case of the sandwich certainly not kosher, but it was progress. As we left the restaurant, a friend of Mikołajczyk's wanted to take photographs of the group. "Now all the Polish men", she called. She ushered Podróżnik's son and grandson into the frame.

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