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TEORIE

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Shimon Samet and the Gap in the Story

Summary

This article offers a close reading of personal memoirs about coming of age in Żółkiew in Eastern Galicia and about transitions on the way to immigration to Mandatory Palestine before WWII. It focuses on gaps in the fragmentary autobiographical texts written by Shimon Samet, a native of the town, who became an accomplished professional journalist in Israel, and reconstructs missing pieces of narrative about Samet's brother and about the Zionist micro universe of transition and training sites in Galicia of the early 1920's. It points to significant explanatory possibilities gained by identifying such gaps in personal and commemorative narratives.

Keywords

Shimon Samet, Żółkiew, Galicia, Mandatory Palestine, Israel, Sygniówka, Chlebowice, Zionist movement, memorial book, small scale analysis, sites of transition, omissions

Collecting biographical material about a particular town in a particular period offers many opportunities to compare overlapping accounts and different perspectives for the same events. This kind of project, which can take many different forms and shapes, also highlights the different levels of data availability and personal documentation within the population under consideration. Working on the annotated edition of Gerszon Taffet's 1946 book on

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the destruction of the Jews of Żółkiew, and putting together biographical material pertaining to interwar Żółkiew, thus brought into sharp relief differing approaches to writing and presenting memoirs, autobiographical and biographical accounts, within the contexts of local history, commemoration, and post-catastrophe writing.¹

Reconstructing these individual biographies involved a process of extracting information mostly from life-stories and government records and creating life-histories.² One of the most important and multifaceted sources for the project has been *The Book of Żółkiew*, the memorial (*yizkor*) book, edited by a committee of former residents of Żółkiew and published in Israel in 1969.³ The editors of *The Book of Żółkiew* faced similar challenges in reconstructing local realities, events and personages, and grappled in their own way with Taffet's text, which appeared in the memorial book in a slightly truncated Hebrew translation, juxtaposing it with other texts, omitting certain passages, explaining a few, but avoiding any significant additions, clarifications or explanatory footnotes, even though the author was still alive and active, and apparently could have been consulted. Working with Taffet's text has therefore made *The Book of Żółkiew* the focus of multiple queries and textual explorations, and brought into question the editorial choices and considerations.

Approaching a memorial book from the angle of a historical aid underscored how much was missing, and suggested how much more information could have been collected or included. This unavoidable form of hindsight makes assumptions and demands on an already labor-intensive text. It does however raise the question of editorial and personal choices in deciding what to include and what to leave out, what content to write down and what to avoid. This is most pertinent to the work of the editors of *The Book of Żółkiew* as they faced the indifference of many former residents whom they had approached in vain. Likewise, they also exhibited their own choices in the texts they themselves wrote for the book.

Of the dozen or so individuals involved in the preparation of the book, two stand out as key organizers and enablers. Zutra (Aleksander Zygmunt, Zygo) Rappaport (1909–1989) and

¹ I thank the two anonymous readers and the editors for their valuable input and useful suggestions. Natalia Aleksion, Shuki Ecker, "Biogramy Żydów żółkiewskich," in: Gerszon Taffet, *Zagłada Żydów żółkiewskich*, 2nd edition, ed. Natalia Aleksion, Shuki Ecker (Warszawa: ŻIH, 2019). The town of Żółkiew near Lwów in Eastern Galicia, currently Zhovkva (Жовква) in Lviv oblast, Ukraine, had a population reaching 11,000 before WWII, almost half of them Jews, the rest almost equally divided between Roman Catholic Poles and Greek Catholic Ukrainians.

² The distinction between life-stories and life-histories follows Rosenthal (see below).

³ The organization of former residents of Żółkiew in Israel and abroad, in the participation of the late Dr. Nathan Michael Gelber, Dr. Israel Ben-Shem, *Sefer Żółkiew (Kirya-Nisgava)* [*The Book of Żółkiew (Exalted City)*], English title: *Żółkiew (Kirya Nizgava)*, (Jerusalem: The Encyclopedia of the Diaspora and the Society of Żółkiew in Israel and the Diaspora, 1969) [henceforth *The Book of Żółkiew*].

Shimon (Szymon) Samet (1904–1998). Though coming from different backgrounds, both were professional investigators and regularly wrote reports. Rappaport had been a police officer, and Samet a journalist. As the initial organizers of the association of former local residents, and of the memorial book's publication, Rappaport and Samet were the ones who recruited the other participants. However, they approached their mission differently. As it appears from the memorial book itself, Rappaport collected materials and dealt with organizing the project, whereas Samet has disseminated information among the Żółkiew diaspora for much longer, and was more mobile, more connected, publicly visible, and accessible. He differed from Rappaport also in what he chose to write about and the form he chose for his texts.

Shimon Samet was a professional writer, a journalist for many decades, and a keen observer and an accomplished reporter. He wrote for leading Jewish newspapers in pre-war Poland and Hebrew newspapers in British Mandate Palestine and the State of Israel, and for a wide readership in Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish. He wrote about Tel Aviv and other newly created Jewish localities, he wrote about sports, the movies, street life, people and events. He wrote travel reports from his many visits to Europe and the United States and also published a number of books based on his reports. Though Samet has not published an autobiography, he has left a rich written legacy. This extensive written corpus allows to explore and compare his general approach beyond *The Book of Żółkiew* and thus to evaluate one of the main figures involved in its creation.

In this paper, I therefore focus on Samet's texts and editorial choices, in the memorial book and in other venues, particularly on his approach to writing narratives about his own past, the past of his town and its former residents, and the ideological path that led him as a young man, to settle in what was then Mandatory Palestine. As in the example of the memorial book above, I look at omissions and gaps, and the processes of identifying and investigating them, at what Samet chose to leave outside of his narratives, and at ways to reconstruct segments of his life-history. At the same time, I look for the trajectories and conventions his texts follow, as additional explanatory mechanisms. The texts that are available for this analysis were all written in the post-immigration period, after Samet's arrival in Mandatory Palestine. The paper therefore necessarily relies on texts from a particular period in Samet's life, and can only relate to what Samet reported in texts written after his emigration from Poland, about his life before emigration.

Throughout these scattered texts, the prospect of emigration and resettlement in the Land of Israel looms large – even in descriptions of early childhood, either as an ideal, a planned course of action, or in making practical preparations. The ideological Zionist trajectory is central to Samet's way of telling his past, as it was in his journalistic work. He was a strong

and committed supporter of the Zionist project, and in one of his later interviews, noted that journalistic writing was seen as serving that ideal.⁴

Samet has had his share in shaping the face of Zionist and Israeli journalism. He witnessed and recorded historical turning points, shaping the way later writers and historians would view these events, writing the texts they would quote, choosing the topics they would be able to read about. He was not the only reporter working in that period, but his influence lasted for many decades.

It is therefore also beneficial to explore the forming of Samet's ideological commitment, and his path to emigration, through his childhood and early education in Habsburg Galicia, his coming of age during its war-time period and its incorporation in the restored Polish state, and his transitions and relocations as a young adult, through the lens of his own telling. Samet's narratives of his past stand for the majority of his contemporaries, who came of age in similar circumstances in Galicia, and who experienced migration from Poland to Mandatory Palestine, but left no narratives at all.

Samet's extensive and continuous narration throughout a long and professionally active life stands in the place of a single autobiographical text, and supplies a wide range of narratives and lacunae for exploration. Samet had ample opportunities to write and publish. That which he has chosen not to write about is as significant as that which he did. Gaps in the stories Samet told about his past, are part of his narrative as well, and will be a primary point of inquiry into the past. In not telling about certain aspects of his life, Samet joins his contemporaries who wrote only about certain topics or nothing about their personal past. In reviewing the limited number of recollections of those who did write about the same places at the same time, the gaps in Samet's narrated life can be compared and contrasted with segments of his experienced life, the only way to glimpse at what was left outside the narrative. Reading these narratives together raises questions about the reasons and circumstances for inclusion and omissions in Samet's corpus of writing.

This approach is derived from two prescriptive discussions of life narratives: a general theoretical and methodological one developed by Gabriele Rosenthal, and a practical one propagated by practitioners of biographical writing, such as Steve Weinberg. Both address the familiar issue of gaps, omissions, discrepancies and silences in self narrated lives, one from the point of view of sociological research, and its concepts of the generalized life, often anonymized in the published research, the other from the point of view of the biographer,

⁴ Nili Aryeh-Sapir, *The Formation of Urban Culture and Education: Stories of and about Ceremonies and Celebrations in Tel Aviv in its First Years* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 132: "it was the responsibility of the press, to plant hopes, that an [independent Jewish] state would be eventually established" (based on her 1997 Ph.D. dissertation).

who focuses on a specific, well identified, individual life story. Rosenthal points to the gaps between what she defines as the narrated life story and the experienced life history, and suggests segmentation for better comparison.⁵ Weinberg suggests to actively search for the gaps, as they are more telling, and point to the most important aspects of the image constructed by the author. Following the view of writing not only as revealing but also as an act of concealment, and underlying this aspect as its most telling part, he sees the search for the missing parts as a routine methodological path to both working with autobiographical materials and producing biographical studies.⁶

Biographical Narrative

The place and function Samet gave his early life in his self-narrated life-story is best gleaned from a complete telling that covers his experience from the beginning to the point of writing. Such an overview of Samet's life in summary form can be found in various biographical dictionaries. One of the earliest and most detailed products of this kind was David Tidhar's *Encyclopedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel*. Tidhar and his small team relied mostly on detailed questionnaires sent out to individuals and families, and published the replies in the form of biographical essays, sometimes several pages long. This was not only a biographical project but also a practical attempt at telling a story of nation-building and state-building from biographical and genealogical lenses. Samet's biography, half a page long, was published in one of the first volumes of the project, and reflected the detailed account provided by Samet himself. A carefully curated autobiographical text, turned into a published encyclopedia style biography, it retains Samet's choices, highlights and omissions in presenting his life for public consumption. Comparison to other biographies in the encyclopedia clarifies that these choices were not editorial policies.

Samet provides the routine information about birth and parents, adding very particular details. Żółkiew in Eastern Galicia, where he was born on 13 March 1904, to Jacob-Joseph Samet and Lea nee Spritzer, was "the town in which Nachman Krochmal lived and worked," tying his hometown to its most venerated link to Jewish Enlightenment of the 19th century. Rather than stating his father's profession, Samet discusses his brief intellectual and ideological biography and Zionist credentials: "an educated man, who as a young man studied in the Chassidic Belzer tradition, and later became an ardent Zionist and a representative of

⁵ Gabriele Rosenthal, *Interpretive Social Research. An Introduction* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2018), 167–168.

⁶ Steve Weinberg, *Telling the Untold Story: How Investigative Reporters Are Changing the Craft of Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1992).

the Zionists in various institutions.” His parents, Samet underscores, “followed their ideological convictions,” they “eventually sent their two sons and daughter to Palestine (Israel) and then followed them there.”

Samet recalls receiving education “in the spirit of Jewish tradition” in his early childhood, and when he reached school age, being sent to a Polish school which also taught in German, and later to high school. “In spite of the Polish atmosphere in these institutions,” he joined early on the Zionist youth organizations *Hashomer Hatzair* and *HeChalutz*. After undergoing training, he became an “educator and guide to Jewish assimilated youth, encouraging them to adopt the Zionist outlook and convictions.” From 1920–1922 he trained himself in agricultural farms towards immigration to the Land of Israel, as was the expected ideal in his youth movement. Afterwards he was invited to be a youth educator in Łódź, from there he moved to self-training in pioneer work groups in Lwów.

Samet also notes that starting already in his youth he took part in youth publications and even served as the editor of a student journal. He published occasional reportages and educational reviews in the youth press. He immigrated to the Land of Israel in 1926 and after a certain period in which he was a member of the “*Hachshara*” Kibbutz in Petach Tikva (together with Meir Grabowski⁷), he embraced his chosen profession – journalism. He was hired as a reporter in *Davar*, and then moved to the editorial board of *Haaretz* in 1931.⁸

In his biographical article, which evidently closely follows the questionnaire Samet filled in, neither the agricultural farms or work groups in which he received his training are identified by names. Given Samet’s attention to detail and propensity for precision as a journalist, these omissions seem significant. Samet chose not to dwell on these details and seems to have mostly avoided them in other texts in his published corpus. While not naming his primary or secondary schools seems to follow the trend of focusing on all things Zionist, this absence, especially when specific attention to locations of Zionist activity is to be expected and relates to the topic, seems conspicuous. On the other hand, the discernible pattern in Samet’s life-story as it emerges from this text is a life divided into two parts, before and after emigration. Life before emigration lacks clear details, such as names, locations, social

⁷ Samet used names of prominent figures as identifiers and a way to reference in shorthand the topic he discusses with events that are well-known or can be easily looked up in other publications. Meir Grabowski (later Meir Argov, 1905–1963) became an eminent political figure at the time of writing and served as a member of the Israeli parliament until his death.

⁸ David Tidhar, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel* [Heb.], vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Rishonim, 1949), 1370–1371. All the quotes in this section are from this biographical article. For less reverent and less curated accounts of Samet’s early years in the press see for example *Haolam Haze* 762 (1952): 6–7, reprinted in: 2075 (1977): 4; Anita Shapira, Esther Raizen, eds., *Berl Katznelson’s letters* [Heb.], vol. 6: 1930–1937 (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1984), 32–33.

contacts, and the descriptions are generalized and condensed, mentioning but not naming or clearly dating “school,” “newspapers,” “farms.” Life after emigration is much more detailed, with people, journals, farms, and institutions, clearly named, identified and dated. Anonymous farms fall well within this pattern, naming some locations while not naming others also seems significant.

The focal point of Tidhar’s encyclopedia is highly relevant to the general pattern of Samet’s self-fashioned narrative. As a collector and initiator of biographical and autobiographical material, Tidhar enabled and supervised the creation of an important biographical dictionary that focused on a commonly shared experience of working for and contributing to the creation of the state of Israel. This at the time was a common focal point for such scholarly as well as popular efforts. It brought together a collection of biographies that shared that element and privileged them as worthy of recording, reading and remembering. The general theme also shaped the content of the biographies themselves, as they were submitted by the individuals themselves, by their relatives or by writers that prepared them, and it would have influenced the way Samet chose to present his. The clear division between life outside of Israel and within Israel, or the service to the ideal and then active participation in projects of building the Jewish community in Israel, marked the date of immigration to Israel as a critical turning point. It also privileged the path leading to that moment, over other life segments.

Samet’s narrative follows this pattern as well. The Zionist trajectory and the transitions it entailed are at the core of his narrative and form the organizing element of his self-fashioning. The location of this transition is Eastern Galicia and the time period is the first 22 years of Samet’s life, which culminated in his leaving his hometown towards the actual emigration in 1926. However, Samet’s narrative also contains its own divergent pattern of “before” and “after” emigration, a general pattern that continues also in other texts he authored. Even when writing about Żółkiew before emigration, Samet constructed what can be termed a “Zionist biography,” a narrative that focuses on the path to emigration. This emphasis is clear when the inquiry focuses on the pre-emigration period. This general pattern is discernible also in Samet’s written contributions to the Żółkiew memorial book.

Commemorative Narratives

While Samet’s life in Palestine (after 1948 Israel), his travels within its borders and his visits to foreign countries, including his excursions in Poland, are well documented, mostly in his own published reports, his life in pre-immigration Poland is significantly less documented. He published his most extensive writing on that period in the Żółkiew commemorative volume



(*yizkor* book) – the communal chronicle of memory and mourning, of which he was one of the organizers. *The Book of Żółkiew* had been long in the making, and Samet enabled its publication as a dedicated organizer and as an active member of the editorial team. Already before the war, his residence in Tel Aviv became a meeting place for new and old immigrants from Żółkiew. Even before the end of the war, still under British Mandate, Samet was one of the first organizers of the group of former residents of Żółkiew, and primary distributor of information concerning the fate of Żółkiew Jews, using his home and the offices of *Haaretz* and making use of his ability to publish in *Haaretz*, *Davar* and other newspapers. Samet contributed to yearly ceremonies of commemoration, and in collecting, translating and very likely extensive editing of material for the memorial book, which was finally published in 1969. Traces of his activity can be found in the book itself, as well as in the daily press of the time.

While deeply involved in commemorative work, Samet's autobiographical material included in the published book seems limited. The persistence of the same gaps already noted above is striking: Samet condensed his personal information, giving few identifying elements, names, localities, and specific groups. While the other leading organizer, Rappaport, included the expected personal piece about his family and early years, and contributed multiple texts covering different local aspects he deemed necessary, Samet did not produce a similar personal account. His input to the book can be described in several layers: the most visible one is the main text he wrote for the book.

Written in Hebrew and titled *A tour of Żółkiew*, Samet's main text in the memorial book uses the layout and topography of Żółkiew as the backdrop for recalling his experiences growing up and coming of age. The "travel writing" genre that he used in his essay was a common feature and long-standing staple of his journalistic writing.⁹ Samet opens his essay in a theatric call to his fellow natives of Żółkiew – those who could read his Hebrew essay – to join him on a virtual tour, on the "wings of our memory," through its streets, alleys and most beautiful spots. Of course, his audience would not necessarily be in immediate need of walking down Samet's memory lane. They would have their own memories of Żółkiew. Still, this performative call evokes a guided tour in town, with Samet as the tour guide, talking along the way and stopping in chosen spots to share relevant information. While staging his text in this form, Samet most likely imagined a wider readership, with those not familiar with Żółkiew standing to benefit the most from his introductory excursion, in which he would go on to name the streets, the landmarks, the river, and many figures of local importance. It

⁹ Shimon Samet, "Siyur al pnei-Żółkiew" [A tour of Żółkiew], in: *The Book of Żółkiew*, 303–314 [henceforth: Samet, "A tour"]. Samet's statement at the beginning of his complex narrative that it was written 37 years after he had left, may refer to 1920 or 1926, depending on how it is interpreted, which point to its being written between 1957 and 1963. All the following quotes in this section are from this article.

is a highly evocative tour, that recalls the landscape with sound, smell and emotions. Samet wrote a virtual, memory-powered tour, because not he, nor anyone else of his intended readers, could make an actual tour to Żółkiew. It was meant as a commemorative exposition to a beloved lost place and community. While not presented as a personal journey through town, unavoidably it presents a very personal view and parallels an autobiographical memoir, arranged spatially instead of chronologically or thematically.

Samet plots a path through his memories, subjugating them to the physical layout of the town, mapping his recollections of places, people, organizations and events, onto the outlines of the town's streets, passages, parks and building. He excavates multiple layers of local realities, and draws a detailed geography of his private life, the life of his family and the locations of social interactions. For the reader it forms a thick description by a local informant, who was familiar with the places, the people, the events and other aspects of local reality for decades.

As an ardent Zionist, Samet's analysis of the town's Jewish community, and its divisions relies heavily on a set of convictions that put the Zionist cause at the center. He recalls Żółkiew as a Zionist stronghold and does not fail to elaborate on that. Central to his life-story is the place Zionism took in his life and the life of his family. However, the Zionist activity connected to specific location is only briefly noted.

In the limited scope of this paper, I will point out only his tales of the train station and its environs, a meeting place for many, where they courted, hatched plans for the future, and dreamed of escaping into the big world, where he clarifies that "as far as we were concerned" – future plans of escaping into the big world meant "to the land of Israel." The Polish station master is noted, as he encouraged Samet's plans to emigrate, seeing a better future to Jewish youth outside of Poland.

Likewise, Samet makes reference to seemingly trivial but personally important meeting places of the Zionist social milieux, young and old. He mentions the Lichter family kiosk, across from the main synagogue, which sold few items, but served as a meeting place for the Jewish youth, and where also the *Hashomer Hatzair* members were gathering and discussing their plans. Also recalled is the *Kadettenschule* Synagogue, a Zionist "hot spot," where during prayers discussions of "Zionist politics" took place, in which Samet's father also took part. Last but not least, Samet lists a local coffeeshop, and a local stationary store, where other snippets of meetings, conversations and condensed descriptions of repeated interactions, point to the high level of minute detail weaved together into the general outline of the town.

Samet's street narrative is complemented by Rappaport's own street narrative, describing the same streets, but taking a different path and producing a very different text. In its own way Rappaport's text is a masterpiece of descriptive presentation of urban space, complete

with elevation and building patterns, with attention given to other aspects of the town's built area and its inhabitants. Rappaport's highlights, perhaps not surprisingly, are usually different than those of Samet.

Samet's second narrative, which forms an additional layer of Samet's input, written after a visit to Żółkiew in May 1965, reads as a much more personal experience, summing up two days of walking among the physical remains of the town of his youth, noting as much the missing parts as those which were still standing. It is in this narrative that Samet gives detailed descriptions of his family's apartment, talks about his old school and a visit to his old classroom. This was an addition to an already completed book, added to its last section. In contrast to the older narrative, it is much less elaborate in style and content. It mostly mirrors the earlier text, guided by the memory of the previous life, adding the current condition of the physical environment, and more directions as it is a description of two actual walking tours in the town rather than a composite constructed condensed one. This text ends with a realization that he has nothing to look for in this town and nothing to find, and that he will not see it again.¹⁰

Analyzing these narratives in full, with their multiple layers of memory, is well beyond the scope of this essay and requires a great deal of background information. Here I continue to focus on one aspect in Samet's narratives – the gaps in the stories he tells, about his town and about himself.

The personal geography of Samet's main descriptive text is appended by a social topography in which he describes some of the people that did not fit the spatial format or had a significant influence on life in the town and on his own path, without going into much detail. These are mostly noteworthy Zionists, with some tales about their opponents as well. This is another signature genre of his writing – reports about personal encounters. Among the towering individuals in Samet's Żółkiew is David Taube (later Tuviyahu). Taube was the son of a timber merchant whose house and timber yard served Samet to mark the point where Żółkiew ended and the road to Lwów began. Taube the father was an important personality in Żółkiew of the "older generation" in Samet's words. The young Taube was a guiding light to the younger generation – Samet's generation: "path-breaking... a living example and role model... inspiring and persuasive." A man of strong will, who years later ran the city of Beer Sheva with an iron hand and decisive resolution, he serves in Samet's story as the local incarnation of Theodor Herzl – the founding father of the Zionist movement and his personal guide:

¹⁰ Shimon Samet, "Pnei-Żółkiew kayom (rishmei-siyur ba-ir, May 1965)" [The face of Żółkiew today (impressions from a tour in the town, May 1965)], in: *The Book of Żółkiew*, 809–818.

I met him amongst the piles of timber in his father's yard on Lwowska Street. I came to consult with him about private training in his father's depot. He recommended taking up agricultural training, to strengthen my body towards my future as a working man in the land of Israel. I asked him innocently: How will I be able to immigrate to Israel? His reply was short: There's a book written by the prophet of our generation, Theodor Herzl, which states: "If you will it, it is not a dream." I joined a pioneers agricultural training group in a farm near Żółkiew, led by Anda Pinkerfeld.¹¹

Even after describing in great detail those moments of encounter, Samet gives no detailed account of the actual agricultural training, the name of the training groups, their exact locations, or the experience of the actual immigration. The name of Anda Pinkerfeld (later Amir, 1902–1981) is the only piece of information he included in the essay. Even in a text dedicated to his experience in his hometown, Samet omits these sites and individuals, which arguably had great importance in his ideological and physical journey out of Żółkiew.

Many of the photos incorporated in *The Book of Żółkiew* clearly came from the collection of the Samet family and form another layer of Samet's contribution to local commemoration. The photos tell stories that Samet does not. The typical sending-away photos, with the prospective emigrants surrounded by members of the local branch of their Zionist movement of choice, show Shimon Samet and his younger sister Yehudit (Jetti, born 1906) seated amidst members of *Hechalutz*. Shimon in 1926, the year of his emigration, surrounded by 17 members, Yehudit in another year, possibly 1927, among 20 members. Ten members appear in both photos. Both photos are taken in the same location, the seating arrangement is almost identical, possibly taken in the same studio by the same photographer.¹² Samet does not elaborate in his texts about Yehudit's part in the movement or the dates of her activity, nor does he elaborate about most other members of the group.

An earlier photo, from 1924, depicts the 7 members of the group of *Hechalutz* in Żółkiew, called "*hamedura*" (the "bonfire"), Shimon Samet is one of them. Six appear also in the 1926 photo, five appear also in Yehudit's photo. The name of the group is indicative. A group by that name from Żółkiew reportedly participated in active training in Turynka in the early months of 1924.¹³ This could be one of the places of training Samet attended. Nevertheless, Samet does not mention this group nor the location in his text. Beyond these speculations,

¹¹ Samet, "A tour," 312. Tuviyahu (1898–1975) emigrated to Palestine in 1920 after studying in Vienna (see D. Dyokanai [David Lazar], "David Tuviyahu," *Maariv*, 15.08.1952, 3–5).

¹² *The Book of Żółkiew*, 305–306, 313–314, 337–338.

¹³ Levi Arie Sarid, *The Pioneers – "Hechalutz" and the Youth Movements in Poland, 1917–1939* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1979), 316. About the farm in Turynka see below.

the names identified in the photos illuminate Samet's social contacts and some of the names he does reference.

The most pervasive and least visible layer of commemorative involvement is Samet's almost invisible role as editor, which left few traces but can be deduced. Presumably, this would allow Samet to influence the inclusion of specific texts in the book, and potentially the editing policies employed. He would presumably have been in a position to solicit texts for the book, review them, approve and edit them. Though there is no indication to the actual level of his editing input, some function of gatekeeping can be assumed. Samet certainly knew which texts and authors would be included in the published book and could limit his own contributions to what was missing in that material, hence, possibly, creating omissions by avoiding repetition. This leaves the question of how much omission would be reasonable to expect in such a case.

Overlapping Narratives

Only comparison to other texts in the memorial book, to interviews Samet conducted on other occasions, and to narratives derived from other sources, reveal some of the gaps and omissions in Samet's own descriptions. Indeed, the most significant component missing in his Zionist autobiographical narratives is his own brother Avraham. He is not even mentioned by name in Shimon's detailed and carefully crafted recollections of their hometown. Avraham Samet who came to Palestine two years before Shimon did not even write any piece for the Żółkiew memorial volume. However, other contributors mention him in the same memorial book, whereas they fail to mention Shimon by name. The contrast between some of these descriptions leads to additional confusion concerning Shimon Samet's patterns in personal omissions.

Adding Abraham (Avraham in Hebrew) Samet to the picture, based on other memoirs, clarifies some of the local realities and events, but leaves more questions concerning the relationship between the two brothers. Born on 6 April 1902, Abraham was the oldest brother. He joined the Zionist movement at a young age and immigrated to Palestine in 1924.¹⁴ He was one of the leaders and organizers of the Zionist movement in Żółkiew immediately after WWI. The memoir written by Pnina Netzer (nee Katz, 1902–1985) points to the first conference of *Hashomer Hatzair* leadership in Tarnawa Wyżna which took place in July 1918 in

¹⁴ Miri Feinstein, *Avraham Yitzhak Tzemed (Samet), 06/04/1902–05/10/1982* (as told by his daughter Zohar Lekach, 27.01.2014), supplemented with additional texts and memoirs, Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, memorial webpage for deceased members, <https://kry-zikaron.org/person>, last accessed 18.01.2020 [henceforth kry-zikaron.org].

which Abraham Samet served as the Żółkiew representative. It was upon his return from the meeting that *Hashomer Hatzair* was secretly organized amongst the graduating class of the local gymnasium, under the leadership of Meir Melman. After Melman and others left and pursued higher education, Abraham Samet took over the leadership and recruited younger members from all the age groups of the Jewish youth and all social backgrounds, and Żółkiew youth began to go out to training groups of *Hashomer Hatzair*.¹⁵

In the same memorial book, Shoshana Salah (nee Herbster, 1902–1977) outlines the local development of the movement and Abraham Samet’s activities into the 1930’s. The organization expanded to all the age groups from age 12. Extensive activities took place in the local park and the Haraj forest. She details the yearly training carried out by the local organization. The first training took place in Żółkiew itself, in Apfelschnitt’s field in the outskirts of the town, where a group of gymnasium students took over the harvest. A second training took place during the summer vacation, Abraham Samet was then head of the *Hashomer Hatzair* troop, and he supervised also the training of the local group of *Hechalutz*. The trainees traveled about 10 kilometers north-east of Żółkiew, to the village of Turynka, to the estate of Lorenz and Schreiber (possibly the lease holders and not the owners). Herbster names only eight participants, perhaps only the ones from Żółkiew, including Abraham Samet (but no other member of the Samet family). During the following year Abraham Samet went to the training center in Chlebowice, a village near Bóbrka.¹⁶ Herbster uses the *Hashomer Hatzair* group leaders’ meetings (*menahalim* in the Hebrew term, a translation of *kierowników szomrowych*), for the periodization, hence these are relevant for her perception and division of time.

She recalls that after that same conference Abraham Samet reviewed the membership of *Hashomer Hatzair* in Żółkiew and allowed only the active members who – he believed – truly intended to immigrate to Eretz Israel to stay. He then immigrated himself, which caused the troop to lapse after many members left it. Few remained and reorganized the local group, among them Yehudit Samet (Shimon’s sister), until that group also immigrated.¹⁷ In her account, Herbster reconstructs an entire geography of organizational transition, as Jewish youth movements at the time seek to transform in various location into makeshift and stable training centers – among them agricultural training centers, and connecting willing

¹⁵ Pnina Netzer (Katz), “The beginning of ‘*Hashomer Hatzair*’ in Zolkiew” [Heb.], in: *The Book of Żółkiew*, 333–336.

¹⁶ The trainees there included “Anda Pinkerfeld, her sister and brother, her future husband, her future sister in law Cilka Keller, the Minczer brothers, Klara Reich, the Mieses brothers, and others.” The incident occurred in 1922–1923, before the third *Hashomer Hatzair* summer conference (*hishtalmut*) – in Strzyłki-Topolnica near Sambor (22–24 August 1921).

¹⁷ Shoshana Salah (Herbster), “‘*Hashomer Hatzair*’ Troop” [Heb.], in: *The Book of Żółkiew*, 335–342.

administrators of sites such as estates, sawmills and factories with would be workers. The new networks that emerged, which located possible sites, assigned trainees, directed them to their designated places, and eventually arranged their immigration. Dealing with a constant departure of leading members due to immigration, the turn-over in these groups was also relatively fast, with vacancies opening unexpectedly. Several centers – hubs applied themselves to try and regulate these flows and shifts. Many of them centered in Lwów, the local metropolitan center, and Żółkiew’s close neighbor.

For Herbster, the sites she describes entailed life changing experiences, the pinnacles of her life prior to emigration. Samet in his various narrations does not linger on those. While Herbster gives a detailed account of the ups and downs in the local chapter of her youth movement, Samet plays down the new world that was plotted. Samet seems to attempt to avoid most of this complex reality and only concentrates on a limited line of events that was his path through this web. Even from his brief treatment, the complexity, the multiple sites and responsibilities and the short terms of engagement are evident. What Samet chose to omit and gloss over, others marveled at. Why Samet chose to focus on other topics can have many reasons, intended and circumstantial.

Sygniówka and Chlebowice – possible additions to historical narrative

Following other memoir overlaps, leads further into the changing world of the early 1920’s, as young people from small towns arrived in Lwów seeking guidance and training, and various organizational affiliations. Abraham Samet and the farm in Sygniówka played then a significant transformative role in the life of young Yaakov Meller and took up a disproportionate space in his short recollections, which were recorded in a four-hundred-page memorial book dedicated specifically to the Klosova training center. Meller, still in his Hassidic attire, left his native Belz without his parents’ consent at seventeen. He went to the headquarters of *Hechalutz* and met with one of its leaders, Berale Stock (later Dov Sadan, 1902–1989, *Davar* literary editor and Jerusalem University professor), who sent him to a suburb of Lwów called Sygniówka, where a training group for future “pioneers” was located. The head of the group was Abraham Samet, who oversaw Meller’s personal transition. Under Abraham’s influence he also became a strict vegetarian. Sometime later, the group declared a strike against the farm owner, in protest of his negative attitude to their members, and it was subsequently disbanded and Meller began wandering unhappily between other training locations, most of which he does not identify, until he moved to Klosova near Sarny in the beginning of 1927.¹⁸

¹⁸ Yaakov Meller, recollections written in Givat-Hashlosha, September 1975, reproduced in: Hayim Dan, ed., *The Book of Klosova* [Klesów, Klesiv], [Heb.] (Kibbutz Lohamei Hagettaot and Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters

These training centers varied in size, process and impact. None was the same, and most evolved over time. They were “change factories,” the locations in which transformation and transition were intended to take place. The change could be liberating, or traumatic.¹⁹ Their meaning was supposed to be understood by the initiated readers. There is an immense literature about the conceptual transformation and practical processes that evoked the creation of these facilities, and temporary assemblies of individuals and groups. The underlying concepts used are no less than the creation of a “new” man or woman, a “new Jew,” fully committed to the “cause.” The changes were to be in language, appearance, behaviour, profession, skills, knowledge, outlook, beliefs, religion, and more, and they were envisioned or imagined as total and irreversible. They can be summed up in a poem that appeared on the front page of one of their many publications – “I am holding the light, I am going and will never return, I do not look back.”²⁰ These factories of change were envisioned both in the country of origin and in the land of destination. Of course, how much of this transformation actually took place and in what direction, depended on the specific circumstances and the specific people in each location. As some of their occupants were quite young, some of these group activities took the form of a summer camp.

Shimon’s training pattern likely resembled that of his older brother, he may have even followed in Abraham’s footsteps to one of the training locations he attended. Or perhaps he preferred to steer away from his brother’s influence and follow his own path. It is difficult to conclude either way. And Shimon’s not making any mention of the brother’s involvement in his own training path only makes it even more difficult to figure out. The names and places Shimon does mention are useful clues only if the map and timeline of training locations was fairly clear from other sources. This is far from being the case. Shimon Samet was not the only one who kept some details unmentioned. It is just as challenging to reconstruct

House–Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1978), 59–61. Abraham had been a strict vegetarian who wouldn’t even wear leather shoes, but would later give up the vegetarian lifestyle. Meller remained a vegetarian throughout his life. Meller notes that he was 17 years old when he arrived in Lwów, which must have been before Sadan’s emigration in 1925, and Samet’s emigration in 1924. Yaakov (Janek) Meller died in 1982.

¹⁹ *Hanoar Hacijoni* 2–3 (1934): 7–10, 49–51. The term *hachszara* meant preparation, training, or education, or more generally any adjustment needed to prepare the prospective future immigrant, as well as the place, the facility, the group, or, generally, the circumstances, in which this training took place. The terms I am using here are a mere convention for translation purposes. The original terms are difficult to translate, even in Polish publications discussing the Zionist project, its movements and their activities, the terms were kept in the original Hebrew. *Hanoar Hacijoni* in 1934 uses the words: *Haszomer Hacair, Erec, snif, kibuc, hachszara, chaluc* in Polish spelling, as well as the forms: „kwestia hachszar chalucowych”, „hachszary miastowe”, „hachszary rolne”, „chalucowe wychowanie”.

²⁰ Sh. Shalom [Shalom Shapira, 1904–1990], “Voices in the Night” [Heb.], *Diwrej Akiba: Pismo Ruchu Agudat Hanoar Haiwri “Akiba”* 15 (1938): 1.

Pinkerfeld's whereabouts with any precision based solely on published memoirs. Even the results of academic research, which had given some attention to that period, fall short of complete reconstruction. The two brothers were associated with Anda Pinkerfeld, but it is not clear whether they shared the same place and time of making her acquaintance.

Similarly, Shimon Samet himself makes a reference to Sygniówka, without at all tying it to his brother. Instead of referring to his brother, he introduces yet one more character to the story. "One cold winter evening, a stranger, dressed in Polish army uniform, entered my father's house and asked to speak with him in private." As the two were whispering, the rest of the family feared arrest for some trumped-up accusation. Then the father swore them to secrecy and explained that this was a Jewish soldier, a Zionist from Łódź, whose name was Michael Osowski. He changed to civilian clothes and stayed in the house until the father with the help of others enabled him to continue on his way to the land of Israel. This stranger later became one of Samet's close associates, the Middle East expert, head of the Journalists association in Tel Aviv, and member of the editorial board of *Davar*, Michael Assaf.²¹

Many years later, after Samet and Assaf became colleagues and collaborated in the Israeli press and the Journalists Association,²² when Samet came to interview Assaf for a commemorative project of Israeli journalists, he repeated the story of their first encounter. Samet's approach to interviews was similar to his reporting style. He would sum them up in the form of an essay, in which he had the leading voice, and plant the dialogue lines in the best place to illustrate his assertions. The many interviews he conducted are thus more of a report and a personal report at that, in which he visits and meets the interviewee. He does not avoid interjecting himself into the text.

Reporting about his meeting with 75-year-old Michael Assaf at his home in Tel Aviv, Samet gives a slightly different summary of the story:

I looked at the wall and saw a picture of a young man, Michael Assaf of the past, and a wave of memories flooded me (...) in 1920 a Polish soldier entered my parents' house (which was a meeting place for Zionists and Zionist youth movements) (...) and secretly revealed to my father (who was an elected member of the city council and the local Zionist federation) that his name was Michael Osowski, a native of Łódź, head of *Hashomer Hatzair* federation, who decided to leave the Polish army and undergo pioneer training. He was one of the founders of the training farm near Lwów, Sygniówka. In July 1920 Assaf arrived

²¹ Samet, "A Tour," 312–313.

²² See for example *The Palestine Post*, 10.12.1947, 2: "The new committee of the Association of Palestine Journalists yesterday re-elected Mr. Joseph Heftman of the 'Haboker' as president; Mr. Michael Assaf, 'Davar,' Vice-President; Mr. Shimon Samet, 'Haaretz', Secretary."

in the Land of Israel. 51 years passed since then. Osowski is Assaf, who had a successful career in writing, a journalist and author, orientalist and researcher.²³

Sygniówka was a trope in Assaf's story. When he submitted his own biography to Tidhar's encyclopedia, this was one of the leading details:

Born in Lodz, Poland, 5656 (3 May 1896), son of Menachem and Chana. (...) Studied in *Heders*, in School, and attended pedagogical classes, and later became a teacher and headmaster in the Shalom Aleichem Hebrew school in Łódź. *Hashomer Hatzair* activist, one of the founders of the pioneers' farm Sygniówka near Lwów. Made *aliya* on 4 Av 5680 (19 July 1920), worked in road construction, in agriculture in Gan Shmuel settlement, and afterwards appointed secretary of the culture committee for the General Organization of Workers.²⁴

Shimon Samet was obviously familiar with the story of Sygniówka and had access to first-hand information about it. Yet he did not elucidate how Assaf came to be involved in the farm, or how his own brother came to be the one in charge of the training there, and what exactly were the circumstances of Assaf's leaving. It is also clear that his version of Assaf's visit to his home might be missing some of the most essential parts of the story. Michael Assaf's version of how he came to Lwów is recorded elsewhere:

I served in the Polish army and I happened to be in Galicia. I was working in the military recruitment office (*komisja poborowa*) and I wandered with the army from town to town. One day we arrived in Przemyśl. The battalion deployed in the field before the swearing-in ceremony. Suddenly I heard an announcement: – people of the Jewish faith (*stározakonny*) – get out of the lines! The “glorious” Polish army hence refused to accept the oath from the Jewish soldiers. (...) So I told myself – since the liberated Poland refuses to accept an oath of allegiance from me, I am not bound to it – I am free. Immediately after that I deserted from the army, and to disguise myself, I grew a beard. I went to the local group of *Hashomer Hatzair* and there they provided me with a place to hide, and with the help of the Zionist center I went to the *Hachshara* in Sygniówka (near Lwów), together with the late Arie Alweil, Anda Pinkerfeld, and other students from the Zionist association (headed by Dr. Lauterbach). A few friends deserted from the Polish army like me. Most of us – members of *Hashomer Hatzair*. It was this running away that led us to immigrate.

²³ *Sefer ha-shanah shel ha-itonaim* [The Journalists' Yearbook], vol. 31 (Tel Aviv: Agudat ha-itonaim, 1971), 310–312.

²⁴ David Tidhar, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel* [Heb.], vol. 4 (1950), 1865–1866.

We went out to the *Hachshara* training, because we thought that without “preparation” immigration to the Land of Israel is impossible. With great enthusiasm we set out to work. We learned then to dip our hands in urine and break down piles of refuse. In the evenings we studied Hebrew, Zionism, the geography and history of the land of Israel, new songs. Seven months passed between the establishment of Sygniówka and our immigration, we felt that the ground is burning under our feet – we had to immigrate!²⁵

Assaf also framed the place Sygniówka played in his life, using religious terms to describe his experience:

Sygniówka was for me the temple of my youth, the spirit of divine youth was then hovering over everything. Amazement and enthusiasm, faith and innocence. The first day of work in the farm was an exhilarating experience. The Polish agronomist taught us to knead the manure between our fingers and we did this as if it was sacred work. The more exhausting or dirty the work was, our pride rose higher, and during breaks the eyes were fixed on the blue sky; the joy that spread throughout the body, and when the first pair of mules was purchased, the enthusiasm rose to greater heights. Personally I found it disturbing that the participants spoke Polish among themselves, and in the evenings I would fight like a lion for the sake of the Hebrew, but nevertheless I see them in front of my eyes: the university and high school students, tired with their eyes almost closed, learning Hebrew, literature and Zionism, and fighting off sleep, because the Sygniówka training place already possessed part of the holiness of the land of Israel.²⁶

Assaf chose to highlight Sygniówka above other locations he would shortly after move to. He identified it as location of his transition, his transformative experience. Appropriately, he gives a relatively detailed check list of what were the highlights of Sygniówka for him, as well as who were the most prominent figures in that group, both later known figures. His elaborate details, emotional presentation and extreme praise stands in contrast to Samet’s approach in referring to his own training experience. Clearly a landmark in Assaf’s life, a moment, place, and collection of people that would be told and retold in his life story. Apparently, this was not exactly the same case for Samet.

Assaf would continue to be identified as a Sygniówka man even after he arrived at his destination. When he joined the Um-Maalek settlement with the group of immigrants arriving

²⁵ For Assaf’s memoirs see: Sarid, *The Pioneers*, 98–99, 127 n. 22; Aharon Efrat, *Hashomer Hatzair on the Path to Immigration* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim–Givat Haviva, 1991), 34, 42 n. 41.

²⁶ Sarid, *The Pioneers*, 148–149.

from Lwów, he and his peers were known as the Sygniówka group or the Assaf group. And they retained that identity after they proceeded to the Bitaniya settlement, and to the work on the road to Haifa, until they dissolved into individuals and merged with other groups. Other training collectives would similarly retain their training location identity even longer, indicating the formative as well as transformative effects of some of these facilities. While these were evidently sites where social networks would be formed for decades to come, the process of creation, and many of the individuals involved were not routinely or publicly recorded.²⁷ While Sygniówka was an important station in Assaf's life and Assaf asserted his own importance in the development of this training farm, the point of view of local activists broadens the view. David Horowitz, who operated in the Lwów group before Assaf's arrival, still placed Assaf in a significant place in his Sygniówka story:

In Lwów and around it there were then also Polish troops, most of them recruited in "Congress Poland." Among them were several members of *Hashomer* [*Hatzair*], who found their way to our group's meeting place and spent there their free time. One of those was Yaakov Hazzan from the Warsaw group, who used to spend many evenings in our place. (...) Another soldier who showed up one day in our group's meeting place was Michael Osowski-Assaf (...), with whom we developed strong ties. One day we decided together with him to get him out of the Polish army. We got him the proper documents and he joined the group that was undergoing pioneer training (preparation for immigration) in a suburb of Lwów – Sygniówka. In this training farm were then a number of young men and women, members of *Hashomer Hatzair*, who had issues with their legal status from the point of view of the Polish authorities.²⁸

Menahem Gelehrter (1900–1985), had organized the Stanisławów group and together with Assaf was elected to the leadership council in a general conference that took place in Lwów in spring 1920, shortly before several of its members immigrated.²⁹ In his memoir, he

²⁷ Partial limitations for the full reconstruction and preservation of memoirs is the young age of most participants and organizers. Most were 18 to 20 years old, the older ones were in their early twenties, the younger ones in their teens. Few were the "responsible grown-ups" that were personally involved.

²⁸ David Horowitz, *My Yesterday* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1970), 79–80. Assaf, when writing about Horowitz's books, did not mention Sygniówka but rather later stations in their early lives as new immigrants (*Davar*, 21.03.1952, 26.08.1970, 29.05.1975). Horowitz (b. 1899 Drohobycz, d. 1979) was younger than Assaf (see: Tidhar, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, 1521–1522).

²⁹ Matityahu Mintz, *Pangs of youth: Hashomer Hatzair 1911–1921* [Heb.] (Jerusalem: Publishing House of the World Zionist Organization, 1995), 190. The council members were: Arie Allweil, Michael Assaf, Emanuel Blatt, Arie Riesser, Benjamin Freifogel (Dror), Menahem Gelehrter, Shmuel Goldscheim.

links Assaf to Sygniówka, but adds a figure of authority missing from all previous descriptions, Dr. Henryk Sterner:

I met Michael Assaf (in Poland Osowski) in the big training location for new immigrants, Sygniówka near Lwów, which was under the management of Dr. Zvi (Henryk) Sterner. Assaf had been head of the *Hashomer Hatzair* group in Łódź and director of the first Hebrew primary school in Poland, which was established in Łódź and named after Shalom Aleichem. He made aliya in the beginning of Av 5680 [July 1920].⁵⁰

In a short essay on the beginnings of the *Hechalutz* in Lwów, Yaakov (Jakub) Bickels, gives an even wider perspective. Born in 1895, he completed his medical studies in 1920. He was one of the founders of the organization in April 1919 together with Eliezer Furman (Karari) and played a leadership role until he left for Tel Aviv in 1926. His recollections are written in the form of a historical report, as objective as possible, referring to himself in the third person. Bickels too chooses particular training locations and individuals to mention, especially the prominent figures who led the organizations, meetings and conferences as they were official milestones, and permanent locations. He gives attention to dates, to organizational initiatives, and to general historical explanations. He stresses the role of the experienced and efficient organizer Dr. Henryk Sterner, leader of the Jewish scouting organization in Galicia, which he founded in 1912, who joined *Hechalutz* Center of Eastern Galicia. He recalls having penned a call to Jewish youth in Galicia to train for agricultural work in the Land of Israel and to be the pioneers in a future immigration wave. Printed in Lwów in May 1919, it was distributed in thousands of copies in the city and throughout the region. Soon, many young aspiring pioneers began arriving to the new center, or sent in letters, asking for directions on training for immigration. The *Hechalutz* in Eastern Galicia appealed to Jewish owners of farming estates for assistance in the training initiatives and employment in their estates:

In order to increase the number of locations for agricultural training and, especially, to learn the ways of independent management of an agricultural farm, the Center established teaching farms: one in Chlebowice near Stanisławów and one in Sygniówka near Lwów, and installed in them groups of pioneers/immigrants. The adjustment of the buildings was planned and carried out voluntarily by engineer Boris Czaczkes; and the first farm manager in the first year was a Christian farmer, however after a while the management was given to the pioneers themselves, who in the meantime acquired experience in this

⁵⁰ Menahem Gelehrter, *A Life-long Zionist* [Heb.] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1982), 74–75.

capacity. These two farms were under the direct supervision of the *Chalutz Center*, however besides them there were also many farms in other small towns, under the supervision of the local committees. These farms as well as the working-placements with the local land-owners were standing-centers for agricultural training.³¹

The role played by Henryk Sterner in the founding of the farming centers near Lwów is highlighted by other memoirs, which focus on his personal contributions and present him personally as a founding figure. Other publications that focus on Sterner, place him squarely in the center as the founder and visionary responsible for a series of such farming-training endeavors. Sterner himself wrote a long article about Chlebowice, published in installments in the daily *Chwila*. He also casually mentioned a sort of collective diary kept by the group, which has evidently been lost.³² This gallery of memoirs amply locates Sygniówka and other similar locations in their organizational and personal context. It also clarifies which farms operated in 1920–1922 near Lwów, were potentially referred by Shimon Samet, and would be associated with the two organizational affiliations he indicated – *Hashomer Hatzair* and *Hechalutz*.

The memoirs plot trajectories that span certain time periods, locations, organizations, figures, groups, activities and events. Their overlaps are the loci that allow aligning them together and using them as a corpus. Therefore, Samet's writing of his past, like other autobiographical and memoiristic products, cannot be read alone. Where Samet leaves blank spots, others fill in with extensive detail, drawing much deserved attention to his omissions. Reading other personal narratives concerning the training period, location and contents, makes Samet's scant details shine even brighter. While each memoir represents its creator's mental world and its unique landmarks, the absence in Samet's case is also telling and conspicuous. Why would he erase any mention to the very places and events that shaped his path, to the brother that clearly had a significant impact on his upbringing and convictions.

³¹ Yaakov Bickels, "Beginnings of *Hechalutz* Movement in Eastern Galicia," in: *Galicia Chapters: Memorial Book to Dr. Abraham Silberschein*, eds. Israel Cohen, Dov Sadan [Heb.] (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1957), 266–269 (quote from page 267). Bickels presentation indicates that all of this organizing effort took place before the first formal initial conference of the Chalutz Center, that took place on 5–6 December 1919.

³² Dr. Henryk Sterner, „Ferma chalucowa w Chlebowicach w roku 1921. Eksperyment wychowawczy,” *Chwila*, 24.05.1922, 3–4; 25.05.1922, 3 [with author's name]; 26.05.1922, 4; 27.05.1922, 3–4; 31.05.1922, 6; 1.06.1922, 6 (Dokończenie), translated to Hebrew and published in: Mendel Scherl, ed., *The Loving Uncle, Wujko, Dr. Zvi Henryk Sterner: His activities in the historic perspective, a collection of essays in his memory* [Heb.] (Givat Haviva, 1983), 41–46. Sterner is identified as the author on the second installment and in Scherl. See also: Yad Yaari Archives, Mendel Scherl papers, 30.109-95 (4), folder 1. I would like to thank Dudu Amitai director of Yad Yaari, and Michal Schreiber of the Givat Haviva Archives for making it possible to use the archives in times of pandemic.

Abraham Samet himself published under the pen name Avizohar or A. Avizohar. His poems for his daughter Zohar appeared in *Davar* and *Davar Liyladim*. He also wrote and edited *Barama*, the local newspaper of kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, and occasionally published in other venues, but usually less prestigious and less widely read than Shimon's. In 1938, after Sterner died in Poland, he published a eulogy in *Davar* signed A. Avizohar. Years later, when Mendel Scherl was collecting material for a book about Sterner, he received a letter Abraham sent to Yehuda Karni, who was then interviewing early settlers, with a copy of the eulogy and additional recollections, which were both published in the book after some minor editing. In 1938, Samet wrote about Sterner:

17 years ago, he established, with many efforts, a pioneers' farm in Chlebowice. (...) Amongst the Zionist youth in Galicia he was nicknamed "uncle." With much affection and a trace of mockery. We pondered much about him (...), he surrounded himself often with rebellious youth, honest to the extreme. (...) They rebelled against him, and did not abstain from sharp criticism, from personal insults, he accepted the bitter ingratitude and never relented. (...) During the three days of the "weekend" he lived with the youth. During the half year in which I was fortunate to prepare myself for immigration in Chlebowice, he hardly ever missed a Saturday in that place of care of his. He called it "Merkaz Chaim" [Center of Life]. When he came, he behaved as one of us. He ate the same food, he slept in the same beds, he took part in our work and stood guard at night. He never burdened us; he knew well the sensitivity of youth to outside interference. Took care of all our needs, not just the material ones, watchful for anything that was needed.³³

In 1977, he added a personal note:

At the end of 1920, delegates from all *Hashomer Hatzair* troops in Galicia convened in Lwów for a general discussion and to elect the leadership, and at the same time there was a meeting of *HeChalutz*. Dr. Sterner listened to the speakers, talked with those he approved of and offered them to go to Chlebowice. (...) Life in Chlebowice, at least in the 6 months I spent there were very intensive. (...) The dreams, the hopes, the thoughts and the arguments of the members were partially written down, I don't know if these bound booklets were preserved. To me Chlebowice gave one of the most beautiful and rewarding periods

³³ A. Avizohar, "In memory of a dear man," *Davar*, 26.05.1938; reprinted in: Scherl, *The Loving*, 129–130.

in my life. There, I learned manual labor – ploughing, seeding (...) and many more, which were very useful in my Kibbutz years in Israel, to this day.³⁴

Although Abraham Samet clearly considered his time in Chlebowice to be formative, and useful throughout his life, he wrote about it in very specific circumstances – the death of the main organizer of the project, and when he was requested to write about it. If he wrote about the other locations of training he attended – it wasn't widely published. Then again, Abraham settled in a kibutz and lived the ideal of the training farms. Samet had not.

Conclusion

In 1982, Shimon Samet eulogized his brother. Even then, while fully recognizing Avraham's achievements, he still alluded to the brother's impact on himself only in a circumvent way, as a part of the youth of Żółkiew:

My brother Avraham was the awe-inspiring jewel in the crown of the Samet household among the youth in our native town of Żółkiew, many of whom he trained to actively fulfil the Zionist ideals, to dream and to sustain the group ideals of the Kibbutz. He was the "intelligent" one, with the wide capacity to listen. He was also very handsome, and in his studies, in which he excelled, philosophy took the lead. To philosophy he also dedicated most of his studies at the University of Vienna, except that in 1924 he decided to actively fulfil his aspirations, to end his studies, and return to his parents' home. He emigrated to the Land of Israel, and as a student and leader of *Hashomer Hatzair* went directly to settle in Beit Alfa, and when he felt after a while, that the "ideological doctrine" and the social approach there was foreign to him, he joined a similarly minded group of members and together organized a new pioneering collective group in Ramat Yohanan, where he found the desired place and appropriate atmosphere and possibilities.³⁵

There is no doubt that Shimon Samet valued his Zionist upbringing and training. Nor is there any doubt that he held his older brother in the greatest respect as an important influence and educator. Yet, his choices in telling his own story reveal additional considerations, not fully explicable.

³⁴ Yad Yaari Archives, Mendel Scherl papers, 30.109-95 (4), folder 1; printed in: Scherl, *The Loving*, 51.

³⁵ Shimon Samet, *My brother Avraham* (text of a letter sent to Yaakov Yaniv of Ramat Yohanan, with the eulogy he read at the memorial ceremony 30 days after his death [Heb.]), kry-zikaron.org.

Samet's writing, while powerfully personal and emotional was also regularly conceived as serving higher causes, while portraying a place, a community, prominent figures, important realities, with close attention to details. Even in his most personal texts, Samet retained the stance of a reporter who explored his own history. Yet there were limits to this exploration that included not a small number of gaps.

There were never more than several thousand Jews in Żółkiew before WWII. Most perished in the Holocaust, without leaving behind a personal account. What memoirs can be used were generated by a small minority. In spite of the expectation for at least the close family and social milieu of the memoirist to be represented, that cannot be taken for granted. Any memoir calls for a systematic comparison with other relevant memoirs, seeking overlaps and identifying gaps in order to begin to evaluate what is omitted from the personal account. It is always recommended to investigate the story and compare it to the reconstructed life history, preferably in small segments. But how to choose the segments? It appears a useful strategy to carry out a comparison with other life stories – overlapping in time and place and social milieu – and identify and follow where they split ways, especially when the documentation is scarce and personal accounts are the leading source of evidence.

Samet's story may not have been a "typical" one and his path did not end in an agricultural settlement, but it stands for many "atypical" life-histories that require individual research. The many gaps that cannot be filled in a simple manner indicate that although much has been studied and published about this period and movements, much is left untouched, especially the experiences of individuals, and locations used for training and short term preparations before arrival in Palestine, and also that the weight of organizational and ideological history still comes at the expense of specific groups and events. It points to the need to analyze not only available texts, but also the "experienced life history," with microanalysis of segments of texts and reconstructed histories, even broken down to the basic ingredients of individuals, localities, and so forth. Names of individuals, of groups, localities, organizations, sometimes omitted for different reasons, sometimes mentioned briefly, serve some writers as coded references to their life stories, to chunky pieces of evidence that are keys to analysis and identification. In Samet's narratives, the absent and the unnamed are special categories that pose the most difficult hurdles in the face of historical reconstruction of a continuous life history. Gaps in his story contain a significant explanatory power, they are indeed primary segments to be investigated. The editorial board that put together *The Book of Żółkiew* included several professional writers and investigators. Samet was one of this professional group. This has not necessarily made the book a better source for reconstructing the life histories of its former residents. It has certainly added a layer of professional writing approaches, standards, habits and filters, and may have brought in additional bias generated

by professional experienced writers and their dealings with texts. These additional layers are discoverable through comparing the texts to these authors wider written corpus and its contexts. Samet as a writer avoided central topics in his biography, certain people, places, events. He had the space, opportunity and available witnesses to expand his narratives, and yet, he effectively removed them from his narratives, even when they were pertinent to the story, to his core theme, and to the social context he was describing. Like most editors and authors of the book, Samet was a pre-war ideological immigrant, and not a survivor. The book is not only the product of survivors writing primarily about those who died in the war, but also of pre-war immigrants writing or not writing about fellow townspeople who also emigrated and were still alive and active. Part of the commemoration was of local realities and events, not necessarily of the dead. The decisions made were potentially even more complex than just commemoration considerations, and are closer to the autobiographical considerations of other authors in other contexts and venues.

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Szymon Samet i luki w historii

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje teksty pamiętnikarskie o życiu młodych Żydów w Żółkwi we wschodniej Galicji przed II wojną światową, ich dojrzewaniu oraz przemianach osobistych i politycznych, prowadzących ich do imigracji do Palestyny. Skupia uwagę przede wszystkim na lukach w często fragmentarycznych tekstach autobiograficznych napisanych przez Szymona Sameta, pochodzącego z tego miasta, który został uznanym zawodowym dziennikarzem w Izraelu. Rekonstruuje brakujące elementy rodzinnej narracji o bracie Sameta i specyfice ośrodków, w których młodzi ludzie przygotowywali się do wyjazdu na początku lat 20. XX wieku. Artykuł pokazuje, jak ważne dla interpretacji autobiografii i tekstów pamiętkowych może być wskazanie takich luk.

Słowa kluczowe

Szymon Samet, Żółkiew, Galicja, Palestyna, Sygniówka, Chlebowice, ruch syjonistyczny, księga pamięci, mikroanaliza, miejsca transformacji, pominięcie

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