

Democracy and Human Rights

# COMMEMORATIVE CULTURE AND APPROACHES TO REMEMBRANCE

In Israeli Museums and Memorials of  
the Shoah

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This study presents the history and educational approaches as well as the context of Israeli commemorative culture based on the example of four museums/institutions.



At the same time, the question of ways to convey history in connection with commemoration is raised and the political importance of the Shoah in Israeli society is reviewed.



Changes in the Israeli culture of commemoration can be readily observed at the museums, providing insight into the development of Israeli society in the past decades.



# Contents

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION AND SOCIETAL MEANING</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 THE MUSEUMS AND THEIR APPROACHES TO REMEMBRANCE</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 YAD MORDECHAI MUSEUM	6
3.2 MASSUAH INSTITUTE FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES	8
3.3 BEIT LOHAMEI HAGHETAOT - GHETTO FIGHTERS' HOUSE (ITZHAK KATZENELSON HOLOCAUST AND JEWISH RESISTANCE HERITAGE MUSEUM, DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY CENTER)	11
3.4 YAD VASHEM (THE WORLD HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE CENTER – HISTORICAL HOLOCAUST MUSEUM)	15
<b>4 ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>24</b>

## PREFACE

Special thanks go to Guy Tiomkin (former CEO, Institute for Holocaust Studies Yad Mordechai), Yael Stauber (CEO, Institute for Holocaust Studies Yad Mordechai), Dr. Noa McKayton (Deputy Director European Department, International School for Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem), Aya Ben-Naftaly (Director General, The Massuah International Institute for Holocaust Studies), Dr. Mali Eisenberg (Academic Director, The Massuah International Institute for Holocaust Studies) and Yaron Tzur (Pedagogical Director, Ghetto Fighters' Museum / Beit Lohamei Haghetat), as well as Dr. Natan Sznajder from the Academic College of Tel-Aviv-Yaffo, without whose knowledge and comprehensive help this study would not have come to be. Special thanks also go to the head of the Israeli office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and staff members, Dr. Paul Pasch, Judith Stelmach and Micky Drill, for their support and helpful assistance in the production of the study.

## 1

## INTRODUCTION

The remembrance of a historical trauma and its reappraisal and reassessment in a society is not a uniform process – this can be observed in particularly salient terms in how Israeli society is re-examining the Shoah, the systematic genocide of the Jewish population in Europe by the German National Socialists and their collaborators. Museums and, in a broader sense, memorial sites, play a special role as places of education, reflection and memory. Since the early 1950s, several museums and institutions in Israel have set themselves the task of analyzing the history of the Shoah and creating a space for remembrance in order to inform and educate Israeli society about the history of the genocide of the Jewish people. This society has experienced numerous changes in attitude towards the Holocaust and its survivors through half a century. This development has taken place in the historical context of a state, which, through several changes in generation, immigration from all over the world and through regional military and political power conflicts has developed new perspectives on the legacy of the past. The different Holocaust museums in Israel reflect this influence of the changing society in their structure, the changes they have made as well as their approaches to remembrance. Thus, there are parallel challenges being faced today in the context of a diverse society, as well as the discourse over the meaning of being a place for historical education and Holocaust remembrance.

The following study presents the history, educational approaches, and the context of Israeli remembrance culture as exemplified in

four museums/institutions. At the same time, the question of the ways to educate people about history in connection with remembrance is examined, as well as the political meaning of the Shoah in Israeli society. What is the historical context in which the Holocaust is explained and how are the actors presented? What values and concepts of remembering are conveyed to visitors, especially to the younger generation like students and youth groups or young people performing military service?

To obtain a specific view of the work carried out by these institutions, several representatives of the museums were asked about their work, their approaches, their educational concepts and the structure of the museum or research institution.

At the same time, the following report offers a historic analysis of the development of the Israeli culture of remembrance in the form of these institutions. Secondary literature and interviews with representatives and employees of the respective museums and educational institutions, as well as sites and documents provided by them have served as sources.

## 2

## HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION AND SOCIETAL MEANING

The systematic genocide of the Jewish people in Europe, referred to by the terms Holocaust or Shoah, is at the center of historical debates dealing with its placement in history, the question of unprecedentedness as well as its legacy for following generations. Consequently, the formation of commemorative culture is also a topic in these debates. The latter is to be afforded special consideration in the context of the founding of the state of Israel. Since the beginning of Israel as a state, the millions of victims of the Holocaust have had a presence which has acted as a connecting element between the ghastly destiny of Jews during the Holocaust and the formation of the state.<sup>1</sup> This presence has been reflected in the societal discourse, in politics, as well as in the commemorative culture of the country down to the present. In this context, one also needs to take into account the meaning of commemoration in connection with formative catastrophic events in Judaism itself.

The beginning of commemorative culture in Israel is set in the immediate shadow of the Shoah. In 1948, the year of the formation of the state, about half of the (Jewish) population in the country were survivors of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps.<sup>2</sup> The process of state formation thus took place between oblivion and memory. The Holocaust and the emergence of the state of Israel stood

in a complex relation to one another. Thus, the founders of the state emphasized the need for a state and of Zionism by citing the horrors of the Shoah. At the same time, the Shoah was also seen as the catastrophic end of the Jewish diaspora by some.<sup>3</sup> Where this diaspora ended, there was a new beginning (in their opinion) in the guise of the “New Jews”.<sup>4</sup> This differentiation between diaspora and the Israeli state as a new beginning had an effect on how the Shoah was commemorated in the 1950s: the focus was put on the figures of heroes and the Jewish resistance, with a contrast being drawn to the “defenseless” Jews of the diaspora.<sup>5</sup> This was done with the notion of the “New Jews” in mind, as well as of the image of the “David-against-Goliath”, which came about through the War of 1948 against neighboring Arab states. This forged a social cohesion within Jewish society during the formation of the state. The partisans of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and their armed resistance against the National Socialist perpetrators and their collaborators stood at the center of many memorial sites.

At the same time, the first generation of survivors, who did not seem to fit into the image of the resistance fighter, was confronted with questions asked by the second generation, who were trying to understand the behavior of their parents’ generation. One of the many questions asked was: “Why didn’t you put up any resistance?” For the survivors, it was difficult to talk about the topic, hence the 1950s were

<sup>1</sup> Zertal, Idith. *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory – Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 214/215.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 211/212.

<sup>4</sup> Quote: *Ibid.*: p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 212.

a decade of silence, in which the topic was not openly dealt with in the educational system or in any other parts of society.<sup>6</sup> The "Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day" was institutionalized by a Knesset law passed in 1959, placing a focus on remembrance of the Jewish armed revolt against the National Socialists.

The moment in the history of the state which broke this silence was the Eichmann Trial in 1961.<sup>7</sup> This spectacular event all of a sudden created a space for eyewitness reports by survivors, among other things because it was a media event<sup>8</sup> that received considerable attention from the Israeli and world public. The testimony by witnesses given at the trial against Adolf Eichmann about their traumatic experiences, decisions and their survival shed light on the complexity of the circumstances, which had not been taken into account in the questions posed by the second generation, thereby creating a new discourse within society.<sup>9</sup> The image of armed resistance as the only narrative in commemorative culture began to change. The question about courage and decisions taken in daily life during the Shoah, as well as humanity within the frame of reference of the Holocaust were emphasized, as was the meaning of the Shoah in the *raison d'être* of Israel.

At the same time, the War of 1967 as well as the Yom Kippur War in 1973<sup>10</sup> and the societal changes triggered by additional immigration moved the questions of the importance of

<sup>6</sup> Ehrlich, Ernst Ludwig (Hrsg.). *Der Umgang mit der Shoah – Wie leben Juden der zweiten Generation mit dem Schicksal der Eltern?* Verlag Gambert Schneider, 1993, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory – Holocaust Memorials and Meaning.* Yale University Press, 1993, p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> Sznajder, Natan, Levy, Daniel: *Erinnerung im Globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust.* Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2001, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Ben-Rafael, Eliezer: „Die Shoah in der kollektiven Identität und politischen Kultur Israels“, in: Freilich, Miri (ed.): *Der Dornbusch, der nicht verbrannte – Überlebende der Shoah in Israel.* Deutsche Ausgabe, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Israel, 2012, p. 23

<sup>10</sup> Resnik, Julia. "Sites of memory' of the Holocaust: shaping national memory in the education system in Israel". In: *Nations and Nationalism* 9 (2), 2003, p. 310.

this legacy and the image of Israeli society into public awareness. The Holocaust was increasingly addressed in movies, literature, art, and theatre plays, primarily by children of Shoah survivors, initiating a search for their own identities and their roots. The role played by the second generation and their handling of the trauma experienced by the generation before them runs through commemorative culture like a scarlet thread and is reflected in several layers of the societal discourse. Finally, in the 1970s, the Holocaust was introduced into school lessons, where it has remained, being dealt with from different angles depending on the part of the Israeli educational system. In 1983, educational trips to Poland began for secondary school pupils in public schools. This has remained a controversial issue down to the present day, as quite often the question is posed as to how education about the Holocaust can be structured as a historical and explainable event from which universal values can be derived, and at the same time the question of national remembrance for Israel as a state with a Jewish identity. The presentation of the Holocaust as such in the Israeli educational system, in museums as well as in society hence also has a political component.<sup>11</sup>

By the same token, the term "civil religion" in the contemporary debate over the Shoah warrants mention. "Civil religion" describes myths, ceremonies, stories, and convictions which determine social rules and order as well as moral concepts and which guide the political discourse.<sup>12</sup> The position of this "civil religion" is quite important in relation to the educational conveyance of history and the role of the Shoah in forging an identity in contemporary Israeli society, above all for the younger generations, whose personal connection to the Shoah has strongly changed or even faded.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> Liebman, Charles S., Don-Yehiya, Eliezer. *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State.* University of California Press, 1983, ix, p. 9, 7. Quoted in: Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation.* Rutgers University Press, 2014, p. 21.

# 3

## THE MUSEUMS AND THEIR APPROACHES TO REMEMBRANCE

According to Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, author of the book "Holocaust Memory Reframed",<sup>13</sup> there are several challenges confronting Holocaust museums: to present contemporary witness testimonies, to create memory in an accessible way and to educate visitors, as well as a fourth difficulty: To present the Shoah as a unique ("sacred") event in history, so that visitors to the museum perceive it as such.<sup>14</sup> Institutions and museums in Israel also address the question of how the Holocaust can be viewed as an "unprecedented"<sup>15</sup> event, and at the same time placed in a broader, more universal context, which may put the approach to educational conveyance and the connection to the present day in a different light. This question is therefore to be examined in the following study.

To obtain deeper insight into the work of the four institutions chosen and best known in Israel, these were asked to answer some questions. The questions are broken down into: the founding of the institutions, their history, composition and structure, and the institution's approach to education of, and interaction with, visitors. Representatives of the institutions were asked about their work and were posed the following questions about their museums:

1. When and under which conditions was the

<sup>13</sup> Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*. Rutgers University Press, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*: pp. 18 - 20.

<sup>15</sup> Term coined by Yehuda Bauer, for additional literature see: Bauer, Yehuda. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. Yale University Press, 2001.

1. museum/institution founded?
2. How do the architecture and the place stand in connection with the museum?
3. How did the museum change over the course of time?
4. How are the exhibitions structured?
5. Which are the largest and most common visitor groups?
6. Which messages/ approaches to remembrance are being transmitted to the visitors?
7. Which perspectives of the actors are being presented?
8. Through which means are the history of the Shoah and its remembrance represented/ connected?

### 3.1 YAD MORDECHAI MUSEUM

1. History

In 1936, the Kibbutz Mitzpe Hayam was founded near Netanya. Several years later, in 1943, it was renamed Yad Mordechai in memory of Mordechai Anielewicz, a partisan and leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which had taken place in the same year. Simultaneously, the founders of the Kibbutz, the youth movement "HaShomer HaTzair" ("The Young Guardian") decided to relocate it to the south, near the coast. During the War of 1948, Yad Mordechai was occupied by Egyptian troops, which they only left five months later. The symbolism of the attack and of resistance against the Egyptian Army, as well as of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 have played a significant role in the



identity of the Kibbutz down to the present day. In 1965, a replication of the battlefield between Egyptian and Israeli soldiers was constructed and in 1968, the "Yad Mordechai Museum" with the caption "From Holocaust to Revival" was opened to the public. It is located next to the cemetery for soldiers and those killed during the War of 1948.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, there is a statue of Mordechai Anielewicz, who is strongly connected to the historical identity of the site. It is located next to the old water tower, which was heavily damaged during the assault by the Egyptian army. The statue was designed by Natan Rappaport, who is known for his many early designs of memorials and sculptures commemorating the Shoah.

## 2. Structure and composition

The Yad Mordechai Museum was designed by the architect Arie Sharon and is built out of several concrete blocks, resembling trapezes. The several phases of the Shoah, the Second World War, Jewish Life in Eastern Europe and in Israel shortly after the founding of the state are shown and explained on the three floors of the museum.

To begin the tour, the visitor descends a narrow staircase with concrete walls, leading into a living room in Warsaw during the 1930s. Next to replicated furniture of the epoch, one can look "outside" and see pictures of the streets of Warsaw, as well as the day-to-day life of the Jewish community: There are group pictures of youth movements, scenes from a street, families, Torah scriptures and Judaica. During the tour, the diversity of the Jewish community in Warsaw is presented, as is the childhood of the resistance fighter and leader of the HaShomer HaTzair youth movement, Mordechai Anielewicz. He grew up in Powiśle, a quarter in Warsaw. Then there is another ascending staircase, bringing the visitor outside the living room onto the street, where they witness the changes wrought by the invasion of Poland by the Wehrmacht in

1939. The walls of the staircase are covered with archive photographs showing the harassment of the Jewish population and the forced relocation to the Warsaw Ghetto. The narrow walls and cold atmosphere reinforce the feeling of brutality and humiliation that the Jewish community had to endure. The Jewish councils as well as the Jewish police in the Ghetto are also shown with photographs. In the following exposition rooms, which are accessed through an open cattle truck,<sup>17</sup> visitors are led over a wooden bridge symbolizing the bridge in the Warsaw Ghetto spanning the tramway tracks. Under the wooden construction, one can see the lighted replica model of 150 miniature houses in the Ghetto before its liquidation. There are plans to redesign this exposition room and to project archive film material upon the walls, to show the inhuman, horrifying conditions characterizing life in the Ghetto. In the exposition, it is explained how the forced resettlement of the Jewish population meant that the plans for liquidation of the Ghetto and deportation of the Jewish population who had survived until 1943 to the extermination camps in occupied Poland had already been drawn up.

Further on, visitors are led into a room of great significance for the museum. It is a replication of the shelter in 18 Mila Street in the Ghetto. During the armed struggle of Jewish resistance groups against the Waffen-SS, the OB (the Jewish Battle Organization) had its headquarters there, with Anielewicz as their leader. In furnishing the room, a lot of attention was devoted to details and it communicates a feeling as if the resistance fighters had left it just a few moments before. In the design of the exposition room, survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising were asked for advice, and one survivor also assisted in the process.

At the end of the exhibition, one is led through a long and broad hallway called the "Corridor of Revival", which describes the period of 1944-1947, the illegal immigration of Shoah survivors

<sup>16</sup> Information taken from the Yad Mordechai Museum's "Identity Card" flyer.

<sup>17</sup> According to Guy Tiomkin, it is planned to remove the wagon from the exhibition.

during the British Mandate, the founding of the state of Israel, irrigation and agricultural projects in the desert and finally, the War of 1948. One level higher, visitors are invited to view temporary exhibitions, such as for example about the saving of Jews during the war and the Holocaust by non-Jewish persons, among them Jan Karski, whom this part of the exhibition is dedicated to. In the wide and open staircase, one can see a portrait of Mordechai Anielewicz that is several meters high.

One then returns to the monumental entry hall, in which a model of the Kibbutz showing the lines of attack by the Egyptian army in the War of 1948 is displayed. Different types of weapons used by the British, Egyptian, and Israeli forces during the battle are hung on the walls. Some of them are simply provided as examples, while others were actually used in battle. Visitors can watch a movie on a screen about the history of the Kibbutz' founding, as well as about its occupation by the Egyptian army, which lasted several months, and the flight and return of the inhabitants after the war along with eyewitnesses' testimonies and archive material.

At the same time, there are plans that involve using the rooftop of the museum and integrating it into the exhibitions in order to further strengthen the feeling of "Revival", as explains Guy Tiomkin, (former) CEO of the Yad Mordechai Museum. From the top of the building, visitors can view the Kibbutz and the statue of Mordechai Anielewicz next to the water tower.

### 3. Approaches to Remembrance and Conveyance of Knowledge

The mission of the Yad Mordechai Museum is to explain the Second World War, the Holocaust and above all the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the context of the systematic genocide of European Jews. The historical context and the circumstances surrounding the Shoah which led to armed resistance are illuminated using an explicit example. At the same time, the

Shoah and the founding of the state of Israel are depicted almost on a straight line one after the other by virtue of the structure of the museum. This is also underscored by the strong focus on heroism and resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto 1943 and in the Kibbutz Yad Mordechai during the War of 1948. The statue of Mordechai Anielewicz, which is placed next to the destroyed water tower, hence acts as a connecting point to the past.

Furthermore, the closeness of the museum to the cemetery where those killed in action in the War of 1948 lay symbolizes this direct connection. Inside the museum, "descending" into the past (into the Warsaw living room) and "ascending" into the exhibition room about the founding of the Israeli state and the battle for the Kibbutz in 1948 shows how the idea of "Revival" is symbolized in the architecture. "Revival" also means rebirth: From the catastrophe of the Jewish Diaspora, the Shoah, to a new beginning with the rise of the state of Israel.

The museum can only be visited following pre-registration. Mostly by groups of students, soldiers, as well as by persons of third age, reports Guy Tiomkin. There are also plans to make some changes to the museum and redesign several aspects. This also applies to the dilemma of the stringent line in the problematic historical narrative that is laid down through the name of the museum, "From Holocaust to Revival".

## 3.2 MASSUAH INSTITUTE FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES

### 1. History

The Massuah International Institute for Holocaust Studies in the Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak was established in 1965, during a period in which the societal discourse surrounding the Shoah began to change. The youth movements "HaNoar HaZioni" ("The Zionist Youth") and "Bnei Akiva" ("Children of Akiva") initiated the establishment of the institute, which was completed in 1972. From

the very beginning, it was intended to function as a politically independent educational institution, creating a space for dialogue, research, and study. The original thought behind it was to have an institution complementary to the Yad Vashem Museum, which at that juncture in history was mainly a place of commemoration.

Simultaneously, the archiving of documents of the Shoah played an important role, as this had been performed by Jewish organizations since the early 1940s. This was one of the first tasks carried out by the Massuah Institute.

Then, at the beginning of the 1970s, the first youth visitors and school groups were received. In seminars lasting several days, they wrestled with the topic of the Shoah. This idea underlying the approach is to be understood in terms of its impact over the long term. As a result, the historical investigation of the Shoah was put in the hands of the second generation, thereby finding its way into school education. Through seminars that last several days, groups of visitors are invited to obtain deeper-going insight into the topic and at the same time be supported in their personal reflection through interaction with the group. The Massuah Institute down to the present has functioned primarily as a center for education and place of encounter for people from all age groups, societal background, and countries. A special focus in the activities of the Institute is on the preparation of school classes for their 'trip to Poland' to visit the former concentration and extermination camps, as well as the further education of those accompanying the trips.

## 2. Structure and composition

On the wide-ranging grounds of the Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak, Massuah Campus comprises museum buildings, a multimedia center, archives, conference and seminar rooms, a library, office buildings, dormitories for 160 students, and an amphitheater. In 1969, Kuba Gaver and Roda Reilinger designed the hexagonal structure of the institute, which is meant to emphasize the

importance and "centrality"<sup>18</sup> of remembrance of the Holocaust in Israeli society.

The exhibitions are spread out among several buildings and address a wide range of topics. The focus is by the same token on interaction within the visitor groups. The museum does not structure its exhibitions in chronological historical order, but rather solely based on the respective context.

The exhibitions are designed in the form of study centers based on the idea of structuring knowledge.<sup>19</sup> This is said to be highly effective when groups visit the museum. Furthermore, it is important to give the visitors a "spectrum of interpretations"<sup>20</sup> so that they can reflect and take a step back from cognitive patterns that are familiar to them. In this way, "new contexts"<sup>21</sup> can be created.

There are specific exhibitions that are used to explain a broader historical context, like about the Eichmann Trail ("Six Million Accusers - the State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann"), in which the focus is placed on contemporary witness testimonies. At the same time, it is through these that historical processes of the Shoah are explained. The so-called "choiceless choices"<sup>22</sup> describes the moral dilemmas of persecuted persons and Holocaust survivors against the underlying conditions of the Shoah. In the main exhibition "Six Million Accusers", the visitor learns about the chronology of the Holocaust with the help of witness testimonies given during the court hearings in Jerusalem in 1961-1962, as well as the decisions they had to take in order to survive. Adolf Eichmann himself is not at the heart of the exhibition and is only mentioned in the context of his capture, as well as his role in the systematic genocide,

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.massuah.org.il/eng/Exhibitions> (14 December 2019).

<sup>19</sup> The concept is explained by Dr. Aya Ben Naftaly.

<sup>20</sup> Quote: Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Quote: Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Langer, Lawrence L. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*. Oxford University Press. 1995, p. 46.

which is shown in a smaller frame of the exhibition. The exhibition combines an audio-visual documentary presentation with a digital interactive multimedia system. A visit to the exhibition combines an experiential dimension and a cognitive dimension: personal or group research work using an interactive multimedia system. This has a cognitive dimension as well as one based on experience: Visitors can view some 150 video clips of testimony by witnesses organized around thirty special topics, accompanied by historical photographs and documents.<sup>23</sup> In addition to these approaches, groups of visitors also encounter universal topics that have a direct relevance to the present-day world and, more specifically, to Israeli society.

Another exhibition named "The Hate Industry" seeks to explain different antisemitic stereotypes which were found in newspapers and publications in different European countries and put out by the National Socialist regime in occupied territories like Poland, Serbia and parts of the Soviet Union and how these contributed to the culture of hatred and led to the extermination of Jewish communities in Europe. Visitor groups are then led into connecting exhibition rooms which address current forms of antisemitism (among left- and right-wing groups, as well as in the Islamic world) and radicalization at the outset of the twenty-first century, racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia as a syndrome of "group-focused enmity"<sup>24</sup> as well as in Israel the discrimination against Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, Jewish New Immigrants from Ethiopia and other minorities. Throughout all the exhibition, interaction within the group is seen as crucial to developing an instructive educational museum dynamic during the visit.

An additional aspect worth noting is

<sup>23</sup> Information and description of the exhibition provided by the Director General, Dr. Aya Ben Naftaly.

<sup>24</sup> For additional information see: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229738213\\_The\\_Syndrome\\_of\\_Group-Focused\\_Enmity\\_The\\_In-terrelation\\_of\\_Prejudices\\_Testing\\_with\\_Multiple\\_Cross-Sectional\\_and\\_Panel\\_Data](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229738213_The_Syndrome_of_Group-Focused_Enmity_The_In-terrelation_of_Prejudices_Testing_with_Multiple_Cross-Sectional_and_Panel_Data)

the considerable use of digital media in the exhibitions. Monitors equipped with touchscreens are found in almost every exhibition room. Visitors can examine the different types of antisemitic stereotypes in the form of caricatures with comments and explanations or in another program look at questions often posed by the second generation to the generation of Holocaust survivors, as well as "their answers". This topic is further addressed in the exhibition "What was that word 'Shoah'? - The Memory of the Holocaust in Israeli Cultural Discourse". The discussion of the Shoah in theatre, literature, film, and art is addressed as well as developments over several decades. This demonstrates to visitors the changing discussion of remembrance, as does a head-high wall poster, which shows how the production of movies, plays, novels or art works dealing with aspects of the Shoah grew between 1945 and 2005. Here, the dichotomy between "victims" and "heroes" prevailing among the surviving generation in the first two decades of existence of the state of Israel is explained in terms of the "defenseless Jews of the diaspora" and the "new Judaism". The changing discourse within Israeli society during the 1970s and 1980s is hence underscored in the exhibition.

There are furthermore changing exhibitions which address current topics relating to Israeli society or specific aspects of the Shoah, such as for example the role of letters and postal services during the Second World War ("Addressee has left' - destination unknown, mail from occupied Europe").

### 3. Approaches to Remembrance and Conveyance of Knowledge

Even though the questions posed by the Massuah Institute to its visitors often relate to contemporary issues, the main starting point is always historic. The Massuah Institute has the objective of commemorating, asking questions, researching and educating. Hence, there are numerous programs for wide-ranging groups. These range from upper secondary school

pupils preparing for their trip to Poland, middle school pupils, religious schools (in which case boys and girls are led separately through the exhibitions), teacher training groups, student teachers, soldiers, as well as groups of visitors from abroad (in the frame of programs like Taglit, Birthright, as well as journalists, politicians, diplomats, etc.). Depending on the group, there is a specific program with a particular focus (e.g., a guided tour concentrating on leadership and the dangers of propaganda for groups of soldiers).

It is emphasized that many visitor groups (no longer) have any biographical connection to the Shoah: Therefore, one challenge for the Institute is in connecting events from the past with the present. This is effectively achieved through the emphasis placed on “everyday life” during the Shoah, i.e., a focus on individuals in history as a whole. By placing visitors in the shoes of people who are confronted with a moral dilemma and through interaction with other individuals in the visitor group, visitors encounter the topic at a very personal level. By the same token, the focus is placed not on heroism, but on the power of a decision taken by one person.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the museum encourages an analysis of the perpetrators who committed the crimes of the Shoah, as well as of the society which created the underlying conditions for hatred and persecution. The concepts of pure “good” and “bad” are questioned, and an effort is made to help visitors understand the power of decisions within the reference framework of the Shoah. As a result, different perspectives and actors are illuminated. The idea behind it all is not to impart a perfectly well-established basis of detailed historical knowledge to visitors, but to give them (and above all younger groups) the “moral tools” to take with them as they become involved in contemporary debates (both Israeli and International). The fight against racism and discrimination is a central part in the commemoration concept of the Massuah

Institute. The foundations of this are on the exhibition “Industry of Hate” and the interactive educational programs offered to groups of visitors. The complexity and diversity of Israeli society is moreover taken into account in the design of the programs.

The Massuah Institute therefore differs from Yad Vashem and the Yad Mordechai Museum, as it attaches considerable importance to the educational approach and relevance to contemporary society as well as contemporary conflicts - similar to the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum.

### **3.3 BEIT LOHAMEI HAGHETAOT - GHETTO FIGHTERS' HOUSE (ITZHAK KATZENELSON HOLOCAUST AND JEWISH RESISTANCE HERITAGE MUSEUM, DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY CENTER)**

#### 1. History

The foundation of the Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot (“Fighters of the Ghetto”) was initiated among other persons by survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In April 1949, the Ghetto Fighters’ House was opened, as the first Holocaust Museum in Israel and in the world. Several Zionist youth organizations also played a role in its establishment, like “Habonim Dror” (“the Builders of Freedom”) and “HaShomer HaTzair” (“The Young Guardians”), as 20%<sup>26</sup> of the Kibbutz founders had participated and fought in the uprising and were a member of one of the movements. Furthermore, it was their goal to transmit the ideals taught to them when they were leaders and members of the youth movements (such as, for example, a “humanistic consciousness”<sup>27</sup>). The historical

<sup>26</sup> This number was confirmed by Educational Director Yaron Tzur during the guided tour.

<sup>27</sup> Visitor’s guide Ghetto Fighters’ Museum (status: November 2019).

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.massuah.org.il/eng/Educational-Approach> (30.12.19)



conveyance and teaching about the Shoah were intended to take place on this basis.

Set in the Western Galilee region, the museum itself was designed by Shmuel Bikeles.<sup>28</sup> The main building, finished in 1959, was built in the style of a Polish synagogue. In 1995, Yad Leyeled ("Monument for the Child") was added to the complex. It is a special museum designed for children starting at the age of 10, with the objective of transmitting the subject of the Shoah, of survival, and of the trauma in an educational way. The Center for Humanistic Education was also added in 1995. It is aimed at conveying the topic in a new and universal way to different parts of society, like Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze, mainly from all parts of (Northern) Israel.<sup>29</sup> This is done through seminars with school classes and other groups. The museum also accommodates an archive with approximately 2 million objects, documents, letters, personal memories, movies, photographs and art works, which were collected by the members of the Kibbutz, documenting the vanished Jewish communities and the Holocaust.

## 2. Structure and composition

The museum complex of the Ghetto Fighters' House consists of the main building, the children's museum and the Center for Humanistic Education. Overall, there are 10 exhibitions in the entire complex at present, some of them permanent and others temporary focusing on specific topics.

The structure of the exhibitions at the Ghetto Fighters' House is broken down into three concepts: "Memory", "Warning" and "Inspiration". On several floors, visitors are led through exhibitions which are designed along the lines of these three concepts, beginning with historical memory, moving from Polish-Jewish

History (Jewish life in Warsaw and during the war), and continuing with the broader historical contextualization of the Holocaust (outbreak of the Second World War, invasion of Poland by the Wehrmacht, occupation of Warsaw, forced resettlement of the Jewish population in the Ghetto), and leading up to the trial and indictment of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and, finally, with seminars addressing contemporary societal issues. One should note that the exhibitions are only partially structured one after another in chronologic order. In the beginning, one is led into the "Yizkor" hall, the Hall of Memory. The names of 4000 cities and places in all of Europe in which there once lived Jewish communities are projected on a dark screen. The letters begin moving towards each other and creating a name for 90 seconds. But they only linger together for a second before dissipating. This symbolizes the long historic existence of these communities in contrast to the shortness of time in which they were destroyed through the Holocaust. The hall is of central educational importance for the groups guided through the museum. Among other things, visitors are asked to activate the "light of memory" in the glass boxes in another part of the hall. These contain objects which relate to the Shoah, mostly personal objects of memory, showing daily life, horror, family, tradition, and survival in the camps. Groups are able to peruse information relating to the objects. They are asked to select one and explain why they decided to focus on that particular object. Furthermore, art works like drawings and watercolors created by the artists and Holocaust survivor Esther Lurie are also displayed in the glass boxes (status of the exhibition: December 2019).

It is also striking that in almost every exhibition room groups are provided the space to sit in a circle and observe something from different angles. This may be a displayed object or a situation which visitors can put their themselves in. Interaction with the group is an essential aspect of the visit.

When leaving the Hall of Memory and

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ghetto-fighters-house>

<sup>29</sup> [www.gfh.org.il/eng/Center\\_for\\_Humanistic\\_Education](http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/Center_for_Humanistic_Education) (21 December 2019).

descending the stairs ("into the past"), one enters an exhibition on the concentration and extermination camps (formerly named the "Hall of Camps"). There, a model replication of the Treblinka extermination camp accurate in every detail is displayed (created by the survivor Yaakov Wiernik<sup>30</sup>, who built the replication of the camp in 1959 based on his own memory). The hall also features a map of Europe and Northern Africa during occupation by the National Socialists, with small light bulbs showing the numerous concentration and extermination camps, as well as archive photographs and survivor witness testimonies used to shed light on the mass shootings in Eastern Europe. The room itself is kept dark and the entrance area is covered in wood paneling. Visitors may sit around the model of Treblinka and listen to information and explanations on an audio guide about the industrial nature, the extermination process itself, daily life and details on the Shoah as exemplified by Treblinka. The information on the exposition is in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

Going upstairs again, one enters the exhibition rooms for temporary exhibitions, where at present (November 2019) there is an exhibition on the deportation of Jewish communities in the Netherlands during the occupation. Through information boxes, archive photographs, models, as well as a life-size replica of a person waiting with all her belongings at a train platform, the exhibition seeks to show the specific history and fate of Dutch Jews during the Shoah.

On the first floor of the main building, one notices how the interior architecture is inspired by the structure of an old Polish synagogue, through the arched ceilings and the light coming through small inlets in the ceiling, resembling stars, and adjoining it a smaller hall, inspired by a room for prayer. This floor, which is dedicated to the concept of "Memory", contains an exhibition on Jewish life in Warsaw before the Second World War ("Jewish Warsaw – The Story of Human Spirit"), depicting daily life

and street scenes projected on screens several meters high. The atmosphere is enhanced through background noises of people and the daily hustle and bustle. The exhibition is bathed in light and reflects the diversity and breadth of Jewish society of the period in the city. It evokes a feeling of the approaching destruction of this diversity through forced resettlement to the Ghetto and systematic murder on an industrial scale.

A hall to the side presents the exhibition "Home of Testimony", which is mostly based on testimonies by time witnesses and stories of the first Kibbutz members, describing their survival of the Shoah, their memories and arrival in Israel.

The last exhibition on the floor describes the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising 1943 in a detailed chronology ("The Warsaw Ghetto Fights Back"). With the help of models, accurate in every detail, and original objects, the fight is revisited. The chronology ends with a memorial to the resistance fighters of the 1943 Uprising. With an audio guide, visitors can receive historical background information and hear testimonies by time witnesses.

The second floor of the Ghetto Fighters' House contains additional exhibitions. Under the rubric of "Warning" there are among other things exhibitions dealing with the ideology of "Race in National Socialism", as well as the "termination of life not worth living", i.e., the murder of people with disabilities and hereditary diseases by the Nazi regime. Another exhibition touches upon the topic of 3,000 deported Jewish as well as Roma and Sinti children from the Netherlands. Portraits and snapshots of the children, as well as information about their place and date of birth, next to the place and time when they were murdered.

An additional exhibition is "Facing the Glass Booth: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem", an exhibition in which the original glass box in which Eichmann was held during his trial in

<sup>30</sup> Ghetto Fighters' House informational brochure (status: November 2019)

1961 is the center-piece. The room is separated through metal bars, with space for a group to sit on the right, simulating “the audience” at the trial, facing the glass box. Along the bars, small screens are installed and one is able to listen to testimony given by survivors during the trial, while in the background one hears the opening speech at the trial, held by the Attorney General and main prosecutor, Gideon Hausner. The walls are lined with quotes and reprints of documents showing the complicity of Eichmann in the systematic murder of European Jews and his knowledge and organization of the entire process.

The transition into the exhibition rooms modelled according to the concept of “Inspiration” is facilitated through photographs showing several extermination camps today, after this proceeding into the “Room of the Righteous”. Its walls are covered in small symmetric photographs showing only the backs of many different persons. Only a few are facing the camera. This exhibition symbolizes the great number of people who saved Jewish persons during the Holocaust, but for whom no information or memory has made its way to the present. Finally, one can go out onto the rooftop of the museum, with a view of the Galilee landscape.

The Yad Layeled Museum (“Memorial for the Child”), dealing with education on topics relating to the Holocaust for children, is in another separate building in the shape of a white spiral. It is open to children starting at the age of 10 and designed from the perspective of a child growing up in Europe (probably Eastern Europe), experiencing the invasion of the Wehrmacht, the war, forced relocation, day-to-day life in the Ghetto, as well as the deportation to a concentration camp and finally, depending on the interpretation, liberation of the camp. The spiral form of the museum leads young visitors in a descent, during which they are confronted with simulated situations, having an oppressing effect, with testimonies of time witnesses accompanying them on small

monitors, retelling their accounts of a specific moment in their survival of the Shoah. The fate of the pediatrician Janusz Korczak and the children at the Jewish orphanage he ran is emphasized throughout the exhibition. He, the children, and the personnel of the orphanage were murdered in Treblinka. At the same time, the theme of “childhood” is addressed, as well as the arrival of the child survivors in Israel after the war. Theatre plays and concerts touching upon the topic of childhood during the Shoah as well as exhibitions with art works by survivors are staged on a regular basis.

#### 1. Approaches to the conveyance of knowledge and remembrance

As mentioned above, the Ghetto Fighters’ House is broken down into three areas: The main museum, the children’s museum, and the Center for Humanistic Education. Within the main museum, the three concepts “Memory”, “Warning” and “Inspiration” structure the exhibitions. This structure presents the procedure for tours by groups of visitors, predominantly schoolchildren. Young visitors are offered a picture of young people under life-threatening and almost hopeless conditions from the beginning of the tour onwards, starting with the foundation’s history and the background of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Those young members of the youth organizations were active and committed, before, during and in the wake of the Shoah. This so-called “proactive approach”<sup>31</sup> is itself reflected in educational material about Jewish life before the war and during the Shoah (“Memory”), a description of the societal context in which the Shoah was able to place (“Warning”) and a presentation of decisions which individuals made to preserve their humanity (“Inspiration”). This latter concept also creates a link to the present, in the shape of exhibitions and seminars dealing with current political issues, such as for example the question of African refugees in Israel. The objective is to create a dialogue between the past and the present while simultaneously emphasizing the

<sup>31</sup> This description was provided in a discussion with Yaron Tzur.



unprecedentedness of the Shoah. Concepts like independent thinking, the power of decisions and the complexity of situations which can force one to take these decisions are conveyed. Most of the information is available in three languages: Hebrew, Arabic and English.

The Ghetto Fighters' House begins with an introduction to the topic with a very specific starting point: The Polish-Jewish perspective on life before and during the Holocaust, as well as the theme of heroism and martyrdom in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In the course of the visit to the museum, however, this starting point fans out, creating new angles to examine the Shoah, racial ideology, the Second World War and the persecution of minorities by the National Socialists, such as, for example, Sinti and Roma. Toward the end, the subject of decisions is touched upon in the form of the "Righteous among the Nations". The mixture of older permanent exhibitions like the "Hall of the Camps" and the gallery with the detailed chronology of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising with new exhibitions like the one about the trial of Eichmann and Jewish life in Warsaw before the war imply an interaction between new and previous styles of educational transmission of history, as well as a direct relevance to the present through the contemporary exhibitions. The Center of Humanistic Education, the third section of the GFH, aspires to carry on the universality of the values conveyed during the tour through the exhibitions. About 95% of visitors to the Ghetto Fighters' House are Jewish, most of them members of student or soldier groups. But it is quite often the case that young visitors have hardly any personal association with the Shoah. As a consequence, the museum and especially the Center for Humanistic Education see it as their task to make the meaning and memory of the Shoah tangible and something that can be readily grasped by all visitors by underscoring universal values like empathy, moral consciousness, especially with regard to the protection of minorities, democratic values, social engagement and civic duties. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the Holocaust is "not

simply" an educational metaphor<sup>32</sup>, but is also conveyed as an unprecedented event in human history.

### **3.4 YAD VASHEM (THE WORLD HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE CENTER – HISTORICAL HOLOCAUST MUSEUM)**

#### 1. History

When the national Holocaust Memorial site Yad Vashem ("A Memorial and a Name") was opened in 1953, it had been planned as the official place of remembrance by the Knesset Law from the same year. The "Mount of Remembrance" in the West of Jerusalem was chosen as its site, next to the Mount of Herzl. Shortly before, the remains of Theodor Herzl had been buried there, and the last resting place for the soldiers of Jerusalem who fell in the War of 1948 is located at a slope of the hill.

The documentation of the Holocaust had already started during the Holocaust, through the help of Jewish organizations which had begun collecting documents and evidence of the genocide. Hence, Yad Vashem was established with the idea of formalizing this commemorative work and enabling grief. In 1961, the first memorial site was opened, the "Hall of Remembrance", in which the ashes of the murdered were laid to rest and hence, a virtual grave. Finally, in 1973, a building for the museum was added.<sup>33</sup> Through its architecture, Yad Vashem represents the changing Israeli culture of remembrance. As such, the War of 1967 has had an influence on the form of commemorative culture in Israeli society.

In the 1990s, there was a movement to reflect on societal change in the way of remembering and a new design for the museum and the

<sup>32</sup> Quote by Yaron Tzur.

<sup>33</sup> Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*. Rutgers University Press, 2014, p. 64.

memorial site was initiated, which was then completed in 2005. An area of 45 hectares<sup>34</sup> contains the Holocaust Historical Museum, an art museum for works which primarily were created during the Holocaust, a synagogue as well as academic research institutions like the International Institute for Holocaust Research, a library and the International School/Institute for Holocaust Studies, several archives with inter alia 217 million pages of documents<sup>35</sup>, two libraries (one of them for film documents) and the International School for Holocaust Studies. Furthermore, several memorials can be found on the site, commemorating the victims of the genocide, as well as the “Righteous among the Nations” – here especially through the Avenue of the Righteous (for the rescuers of the persecuted) and the Valley of Communities, in memory of the destroyed Jewish communities. The building of the Holocaust Historical Museum, which opened in 2005, was designed by Moshe Safdie. The architecture was designed in accordance with the meaning of Jerusalem, which is emphasized through its nearness to one of the most important Israeli soldier cemeteries, additional graves of Zionist thinkers, the graves of significant prime ministers and of Theodor Herzl (for more on this, see “Approaches to the conveyance of knowledge and remembrance). Visitors from all over the world come each year to the memorial. In 2019, there were more than one million<sup>36</sup>, among them school classes, groups of soldiers, but also groups of young people, teachers, trainees and high-ranking representatives of foreign countries who were able to take part in guided tours. Ceremonies and international conferences are held on a regular basis, such as, for example, the “International World Holocaust Forum”.

Furthermore, the 1990s were also a time when the meaning of Yad Vashem was defined as a national and international educational center. As such, in 1993, the International School/

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/pressroom/highlights/2019.html>

<sup>36</sup> Taken from the Yad Vashem annual report 2019: <https://view.publitas.com/yad-vashem/annual-report-2019/page/8-9>

Institute for Holocaust Studies was founded, with the aspiration to shape a new approach to how the Shoah was taught in school education. In 2005, the European Department was added, which through seminars conveys to European educators, instructors, and teachers ways of teaching about the Holocaust. There is now a broader framework of cooperation with more than 40 countries and about 60 seminars per year (in the European department). Their work also includes seminars to prepare school and youth groups to go to Poland as well as additional seminars on the topic of the Shoah for Israeli and international youth groups.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. Structure and composition

The site of Yad Vashem is located on the Har HaZikaron, the “Mount of Remembrance”. For visitors, the central starting point is generally the Historical Holocaust Museum, which is accessed over a narrow suspension bridge. The inner structure of the museum is shaped in serpentine, and divided into galleries, which chronologically recapture the life of Jewish communities before the Holocaust (gallery: “The World that Was”), and show how antisemitism spanning a thousand years created the breeding ground for the rise of the Nazi regime and the persecution and murder of the Jews. Furthermore, the exhibition shows in detail the process of systematic mass murder of European Jews in the context of the Second World War and addresses the meaning of Israel as a Jewish state for the survivors. Thus, visitors start off with a film collage, “I Still See Their Eyes - The Vanished Jewish World”<sup>38</sup> by Michal Rovner, which demonstrates the diversity of Jewish life in Europe before the Shoah. The passage into the next gallery is accompanied by a presentation on the book burnings of 10 May 1933 shown on a monitor screen, surrounded by copies of literary works of authors who were Jewish, oppositional, communist or pacifist and whose

<sup>37</sup> Taken from the Yad Vashem annual report 2019 (<https://www.yadvashem.org/pressroom/highlights/2019.html>)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/the-world-that-was.html>

books were burned by the National Socialists and their sympathizers.

The first gallery addresses developments in Germany before National Socialism and ultimately with the seizure of power by Hitler and the National Socialist regime. Here, the perspective and the process of marginalization of German-Jewish citizens is shown (the name of the gallery is: "From Equals to Outcasts"), through events like the boycott of Jewish businesses, banning Jews from public spaces, the Nuremberg racial laws and, eventually, the November pogroms of 1938 ("Kristallnacht"). The gallery also has a replication of a living room of a Jewish family in a Germanophone part of Europe.<sup>39</sup> Time witness testimonies can be seen on monitors, in which survivors recount their daily lives before the Shoah and the beginning of the persecution. The history of antisemitism in Europe is shown at the beginning of the gallery, presented chronologically and illustrated with antisemitic caricatures, objects, and documents. Over the course of the exhibition, the visitor becomes conscious about the feeling of hopelessness that overcame many German Jews through the mounting persecution and the first internments in concentration camps. Moreover, there were scarcely any countries to which they could have fled.

Finally, one proceeds through the passage to the next gallery, entitled "The Awful Beginning", which shows the relationship between the outbreak of the Second World War and the persecution of Polish and Eastern European Jews. Here, a focus is placed on showing chicanes and harassment by the National Socialists, the formation of "Judenräte", forced resettlement into ghettos and isolation of the Jewish population, illustrated by means of archive photographs, geographic maps, objects, items from the communities and houses of Jewish-Polish families, which underscore the desperation and adaptation to the worsening circumstances for the Jewish communities through personal accounts. It is

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/from-equals-to-outcasts.html>.

emphasized that the path to systematic murder began with targeted isolation of the Jewish population in ghettos and preparation for their deportation.<sup>40</sup>

The following gallery, "Between Fences and Walls", sheds light on the ghettos in Eastern European cities, set up by the National Socialists in a more detailed way, exemplified inter alia by Warsaw and Kovno. This exhibition seeks to show the severity of life under imposed circumstances. Art works created in the ghetto in Theresienstadt are accompanied by descriptions and personal accounts. Within the gallery, there is a replica of Leszno Street in the Warsaw Ghetto, with tramway tracks and artefacts offering some insight into what life was like in the Ghetto. At the same time, the preservation of Jewish life under impossible living conditions of crowding, hunger, forced labor, death and hopelessness is emphasized in the shape of letters, diaries, photographs and drawings which could be saved.

The invasion of the Soviet Union by German Wehrmacht troops paved the way for the first mass shootings of the Jewish population, such as for example in Ukraine. This is exemplified through the murder of the Jews of Kiev in Babi Yar by the "Einsatzgruppen". Contemporary witness testimonies by survivors of the massacres can be seen on a screen. An abyss cast in concrete is set beneath the screen, representing the ditches before the shootings. The gallery is specifically designed from the point of view of the victims and furthermore also examines the calls to armed Jewish resistance against the National Socialists and the imminent deportations. Continuing through the gallery, the background and participants of the 1942 Wannsee Conference as well as the decision to plan the murder of all European Jews – the "Final Solution for the Jewish Question" – are themes in the gallery.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/the-awful-beginning.html>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/mass-murder.html>

The next gallery following this is devoted to the "Final Solution". At the beginning of the gallery, train tracks lead into the ground. The deportation of Polish Jews to the concentration and extermination camps, as well as armed and spiritual resistance are themes. The gallery thus commences with a depiction of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which stands as a symbol for active armed resistance of Jews against ongoing extermination despite the hopelessness of their situation. Thereby, the conditions prevailing in the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943 are illustrated with the aid of testimonies by surviving resistance fighters, archive photographs and a replication of the paving stones on the streets of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Deportation and the accounts of the survivors of the Auschwitz extermination camp are at the heart of this gallery. Next to a depiction of the railroad network providing an idea of the extent of deportation within Europe, part of a cattle wagon hints at the transition into the thematic exposition of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the gallery, the arrival and selection process of those deported to Auschwitz are explained by means of time witness testimonies, photographs of the ramp and a replicated model of the gas chambers (in white) and the crematoriums at the extermination camp, showing how humans were killed in the gas chambers and burned on an industrial scale. Next to the model, under a Perspex sheet, are a large number of shoes that belonged to the victims which were found in the clothes chambers at the extermination camp.

The following gallery is dedicated to resistance by, and rescue of, Jews. Next to the question as to why the Allied did not bomb Auschwitz, partisan resistance in the woods is explored, as well as Jewish underground organizations like in France, which tried to save as many people as possible from deportation. This is visualized

by means of archive photographs, exhibited weaponry and objects which were used by Jewish partisans, as well as personal stories of time witnesses displayed on a screen. The transition into the part of gallery which addresses the Righteous among the Nations follows. Different forms of rescue are examined, for example through collective efforts like in Denmark (illustrated by a rowing boat which was actually used to rescue Jews by taking them to Sweden) and Bulgaria, or through single individuals from a great number of countries.<sup>43</sup> Visitors can open drawers in a shelf to inform themselves about details on the rescue of Jews through one of the persons or groups portrayed. The rescuers were of different origins, from Portuguese diplomats to Eastern European peasant families, and they helped Jews survive in widely different ways. In addition, parts of the original duplicate of Schindler's list are exhibited there.

The next gallery, "The Last Jews", deals with the horrors of daily life in the concentration camps, while a focus is set on the individual stories of the inmates. This is done by means of personal objects which function as symbols of spiritual resistance in moments of humiliation, hunger, exhaustion, and suffering in the camps, as Yad Vashem stresses in its description of the gallery.<sup>44</sup> Different inmates' clothes are exhibited, as well as replicas of the camp barracks, accompanied by contemporary witness testimonies on a screen addressing the religious question of suffering and continuation of life after the Shoah as a practicing Jew. Furthermore, two of the death marches are also illuminated in the form of archive photographs, a head-high painting showing prisoners during the march as well as contemporary witness testimonies and objects (like a decayed shoe worn and lost during a death march).

The gallery ends with the liberation of the camps. Photographs made by the Allies during

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/the-final-solution.html>.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/resistance-and-rescue.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/the-last-jews.html>

the liberation of the camps are used as illustrative material. Survivors tell their personal experience of the liberation, the ending of their time in the camp, their search for relatives, their grief, as well as their physical and psychological exhaustion at that moment.<sup>45</sup>

"Return to Life", one of the last galleries, presents to visitors the moment of finding, of reorientation and of a new beginning for many survivors in the wake of the camps, who were simultaneously confronted with trauma and rootlessness. At the same time, reports of antisemitic attacks in Poland after the war are shown, as well as how the survivors dealt with their new "freedom". This is done in the form of videoclips of time witness conversations, in which daily life in the camps for "displaced persons" is described. The monitor screen is framed by the roof of a replicated camp barrack. The conflict between new beginnings, hope, trauma, and memory is depicted in this gallery.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, there is a transition to emigration to Israel before 1948. Here the focus is placed on what was at the time attempts at illegal immigration from British internment camps on Cyprus, as well as on the importance of a Jewish state for the survivors of the Shoah. The gallery ends with a video collage made from archive material, showing emigration to and arrival in Israel, highlighted by a children's choir singing "HaTikva" ("The Hope"), which would later become Israel's national anthem.

The room of the "Epilogue" marks the end of the galleries. Letters, diary entries and further writings are illustrated in a video installation by the artist Uri Tzaig<sup>47</sup>, serving as symbols of the human condition, showing individual aspects of suffering, hope and life. They were written by members of communities that were almost all destroyed in the Shoah.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/return-to-life.html>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.yadvashem.org/museum/holocaust-history-museum/galleries/epilogue.html> (28 December 2019)

The "Hall of Names" is the next gallery. Roofed by a dome-like structure, the middle of the room opens into an abyss, whose ground is covered with water. The circular-shaped dome hangs above. Its inner side is covered with 600 pictures of persons murdered in the Holocaust as well as "Pages of Testimony", which can be submitted to Yad Vashem by relatives or others for a murdered person.

The main exhibition ends with a slight ascent to an opening of the hill out onto a balcony. Here one has a view of the western forest landscape of Jerusalem. The opening functions as a natural source of light at the end of the long gallery corridor. At this point, one looks back on the galleries and the beginning of the exhibition and the video installation about Jewish life before the Shoah can be seen in the distance, situated at a slightly lower level.

### 3. Approaches to conveyance of knowledge and remembrance

Over the course of time, the remembrance approaches in Yad Vashem have changed parallel to the way that Holocaust survivors and the Holocaust are seen in Israeli society as such. The terms "Martyrs and Heroes" is no longer strictly associated with armed resistance or partisans, but includes any form of spiritual resistance, like the term "Amidah",<sup>48</sup> defined by Yehuda Bauer, which means "standing up against". Yad Vashem places a strong emphasis on accompanying visitors through personal accounts or objects which belonged to the survivors. As a consequence, Jewish persons during the Shoah are portrayed as individuals who had to take decisions in a frame of reference imposed on them by the National Socialists and their collaborators which put their own moral values in question. To illustrate those so-called "choiceless choices" is a task which directly dovetails with the questions posed by the second and third generations

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, Yehuda. *The Death of the Shtetl*. Yale University Press. 2009, p. 73.



(“Why didn't you resist?”). The individuality of the persons depicted, further emphasized through art works by concentration camp survivors as a part of the permanent exhibition, is therefore used as evidence to the contrary of dehumanization at the hands of the National Socialists. The approach adopted by Yad Vashem involves redefining heroism through illustration of the human condition and the humanity which communities tried to maintain despite catastrophic circumstances. Contemporary issues are not to be found in the permanent exhibition, as it is mostly about the conveyance of a historical narrative.

As the biggest Holocaust Museum in Israel, it uses its capacities to examine the system and the special nature of the Shoah in all its broadness and transnationality (in 20 European countries), as well as the actors in their diversity in the context of the Second World War and in connection with a thousand years of antisemitism. The latter created the breeding grounds for the genocide of European Jews. The unprecedentedness of the Shoah – set in a historical context – is emphasized.

The architecture of the Historical Holocaust Museum plays a significant role. The beginning and the end of the building, as well as the small ascent are connected with the so-called “architectural return to life<sup>49</sup>” in the hills and nature of Jerusalem. The beginning is dark, and the past is illustrated through archive film scenes from a world that has been annihilated. The only connection to the present occurs through the “Return to Life”, the “Light at the End of the Tunnel”. This structure allows room for interpretation. On the one hand side, one can link the commemorative approach to the present and make a connection to Israel as the state of the Jewish people. The return to life, hope as such, can be seen in an abstract manner or in the emigration of the survivors to Israel, symbolizing the new beginning that is associated with it. As such, the light at the end of the tunnel can be interpreted as the

<sup>49</sup> Quote: conversation with Dr. Noa McKayton

special meaning that Israel has for the survivors. The other perspective views the importance of Zionism in the world. One may see a connection with the present, especially with antisemitism and discrimination against Jewish persons in contemporary societies.

The role of Yad Vashem and especially the museum with regard to the history of the Holocaust hence does not involve direct conveyance of knowledge to contemporary society, but rather the memory and the explanation of a historical narrative, placing the focus on the details and individual accounts of the victims.

In a wider context, the location of Yad Vashem can also be seen as an indirect approach to remembrance. Through its nearness to the Mount of Herzl and the soldier's cemeteries, as well as other memorials, Yad Vashem stands in relation to the history of the state of Israel.<sup>50</sup> The soldiers killed in different wars have been seen in the similar light as (amongst others) the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising over the course of time.<sup>51</sup> The notion of civil religion also becomes relevant, as the commemorative ceremonies for fallen Israeli soldiers are held in the constant presence of Yad Vashem. At the same time, it should be noted that Yad Vashem does not take part in any organization or performance of these ceremonies and that this only relates to the conscious geographic closeness of the two locations in connection with civil religion.

The task of conveyance of knowledge and further education in the educational system is performed by the International School of Holocaust Studies. Through partnerships with state and non-state organizations, it is possible for teachers and educationalists from all over the world to encounter new perspectives and

<sup>50</sup> Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*. Rutgers University Press, 2014, pp. 63/ 64.

<sup>51</sup> Padan, Yael. “Re-placing Memory.” In *Constructing a Sense of Place: Architecture and the Zionist Discourse*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2004, p. 250. Quoted in: Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*, Rutgers University Press, 2014. p. 65

methods in teaching the Holocaust in school classes. A strong focus thereby is placed on the perspective, in this case on that of the persecuted Jewish persons. It is also attempted to counter the tendency to categorize other actors into groups (“savior”, “follower” and “perpetrator”) and shed light on the complexity of underlying conditions (for example: a follower can become a perpetrator, a perpetrator can save or spare lives, be it through bribery or for other motives). In this sense, another focus is on education about “perpetration of crimes” and explaining how people become perpetrators.

## 4

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

From the detailed examination of the different museums and institutions, several conclusions can be drawn. Concerning the commonalities, one can observe that all the museums have a similar starting point, a historical one. At the same time, the unprecedentedness of the Shoah in historical education is emphasized. Furthermore, one can readily observe the changes that occurred in the Israeli culture of remembrance within the museums, precisely because these are addressed in special exhibitions. The Yad Mordechai Museum, the Ghetto Fighters' House and Yad Vashem have their beginnings in the representation of heroism and the memory of armed resistance during the Shoah. All the museums except Yad Vashem were influenced by the philosophy of different Zionist youth movements. These were the beginnings. But by the same token, a change in the attitude towards the generation of survivors can be observed in the names of two museums (Yad Mordechai and Yad Vashem) and in the redesign of all the museums over the last 70 years. The depiction of "Heroes and Martyrs" was the starting point for three of the museums (except the Massuah Institute), for instance, before they settled on different approaches toward conveyance of knowledge and remembrance.

The Massuah Institute and the Ghetto Fighters' House have a special focus on youth and group work. Both museums/institutions act against the background of a heterogeneous Israeli society, as can be noticed in their approaches and methods. Even though both have different foundational pasts, their remembrance work

branches out into a conveyance of universal values, while they create a tangible connection between the past and the present. Furthermore, the exhibitions do not follow a strict chronologic line, and are instead organized along the lines of themes and topics. Through this broader view on changing issues and problems (especially at Massuah), a bridge between the past and a personal connection to the present is created for visitors. The Ghetto Fighters' House uses its history and image as a Socialist-Zionist youth movement as the starting point and through the exploration of topical areas which stand in context with the Shoah (such as for example "Race" Ideology and doctrine and the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities) creates a broader picture of events. The figures of the youth movements are ready examples with which to establish a connection to younger visitors and explain decisions as well as moral consciousness. Hence, their approach to remembrance is a universal one, which at the same time underscores the special nature of the genocide in the Shoah and sheds a light on the problems of today's society. The goal is to provoke self-reflection on the part of visitors through the "tools" provided by the museums and to stimulate independent thinking.

The Yad Mordechai Museum is oriented towards a different approach. Through its defining roots in the HaShomer HaTzair youth movement and its geographical location, one can readily observe Israel's early culture of remembrance through this example. Thus, an indirect, almost associative connection is made between the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the



soldiers of the Israeli army in the War of 1948 against the Egyptian army. At the same time, a change in conception has taken place and it is planned to give the museum a new structure. But the geographical location as well as the legacy of the Kibbutz are strongly connected to this form of remembrance culture, which has armed resistance at its core.

The Remembrance Center Yad Vashem aims at transmitting historical remembrance of the Shoah through its size, its international reputation and its possibilities for research and further education there. At the same time, it has become part of a political culture and of Israeli civil religion<sup>52</sup> through its proximity to the Mount of Herzl and important memorials.

Furthermore, as a scientific institution, the memorial plays a decisive role in the field of Holocaust research, offering an extensive range of further education programs for young people as well as for Israeli and international educators and teachers on the complex teaching of the Shoah in classrooms.

Here as in the exhibitions, the focus is on the individuality of the persecuted, moral dilemmas, spiritual resistance and, in a broader sense, the fight against antisemitism. At the same time, the Yad Vashem memorial serves as a forum for international conferences and ceremonies with high-ranking state guests, and its additional research facilities and extensive archives make it an important pillar in the documentation of the Shoah. In addition, Yad Vashem's mix of previous and new monuments, including the 1970 memorial to members of the armed Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, as well as the new museum, demonstrates the change in commemoration through reflection over what came before. Thus, it shows the Jewish perspective emanating from the Second World

War and presents the Diaspora from the point of view of Jews from different countries. Israel as a Jewish state plays a subliminal role in the architecture, the location (Jerusalem) and, at the end of the exhibition, where it leaves space for visitors to interpret the balcony and the light at the end, the "return to life", as a special meaning of Israel for the survivors.

The museums at the same time mirror the conflict within society regarding in what depth and which aspects of the Shoah should be represented. Thus, it is a balancing act for them not to cross the lines between politics, history, and the choice between one or several narratives. Yet, the museums have different histories leading to their establishment, tasks and commemorative approaches, which in a certain way stand in a contradictory as well as complementary relationship to one another.

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<sup>52</sup> Liebman, Charles S., Don-Yehiya, Eliezer. *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*. University of California Press, 1983, ix. Quoted in: Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*. Rutgers University Press, 2014, p. 65.

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## COMMEMORATIVE CULTURE AND APPROACHES TO REMEMBRANCE in Israeli Museums and Memorials of the Shoah



Even more than 70 years after the end of the Second World War, the Shoah is still a traumatic and formative event for Jews all over the world as well as for Jewish Israelis. In Israel, this is evidenced by the large number of Shoah memorials and the intensive exploration of the topic in the Israeli educational system. This study presents the history, educational approaches and context of the Israeli culture of remembrance on the basis of four museums/institutions: the Yad Mordechai Museum in the south of the country, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in northern Israel, the Massuah Institute, located in Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.



The changing Israeli culture of remembrance can be readily observed at these museums, thereby also providing insight into the development of Israeli society over the past decades. The Yad Mordechai Museum, the Ghetto Fighters' House and Yad Vashem initially focused on a depiction of heroism and the memory of armed resistance in the Shoah. The change in attitudes toward the generation of survivors can therefore be observed primarily at the Yad Mordechai Museum and Yad Vashem. All the museums except Yad Vashem are partly influenced by the philosophy of various Zionist youth movements. This explains their beginnings.



The museums represent the dilemma within society as to what depth and which aspects of the Shoah should be depicted. Thus, these museums have to perform a balancing act to avoid crossing the lines between politics, history, and the selection of one or more narratives. At the same time, the museums have different histories, missions, and approaches to commemoration that are to a certain extent both contradictory and complementary.

You will find additional information on the topic here:  
<http://www.fes.org.il/de/israeli-germaneuropean-relations>