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# Memory of the Holocaust and the Shaping of Jewish Identity in Israel

This paper examines general trends and turning points in the construction of Jewish memory and identity in Israel as influenced by and based on the events of the Holocaust. The chapter will show the importance, as a factor in identity formation, of the slow and gradual evolution from the often rejected traumatic post-Holocaust memory, through the process of the social internalization and integration of this memory, to the current institutionalized memory. This process in Israel is connected with generation change from the first generation of eyewitnesses of the Holocaust, through the second generation of new Zionist citizens, to the third and fourth generations looking for their identity in the globalized world.

This paper is rooted in political science and will try to determine (a) how memory of past events is represented by and influences the contemporary political and social life of a democratic country; (b) what role remembrance plays in achieving social and political goals; and (c) who is responsible for the shape of memory in the society. These are particularly important questions at a time when historical relativism and revisionism are used as tools in international relations, and when gradual globalization provokes confrontation with memories. This topic is important for Poland as a country which, only beginning in the last decade of the twentieth century, entered onto a path of social dialogue and bilateral relations with Israel. Those relations are still strongly emotional because of the historical and stereotypical burden involved. Understanding each partner's collective memory and identity and confronting it with our own mental images seems to be the only path of future dialogue. The study of memory and identity building in Israel can also help Poland to deal with its own past and images.

Memory and identity are integral to how modern democracies influence state politics and social life. Of course, we can easily claim and

prove the opposite, namely that state politics and social life are integral parts of memory and identity. These notions, regardless their broader or narrower meaning, are always inseparably connected, each of them the necessary condition and function of the other. Their internal relation is so strong that in many cases it is hard to decide which of them is primary and which is secondary. Only in relation to individual political and social facts can we say that memory "comes" later, so is therefore secondary. On more general grounds, however, we notice that political decision making and social life are influenced by memory of past decisions and events. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this article, we need to stress the basic difference between memory and identity versus state politics and social life. Memory and identity are intangible and imagined notions, created and shared by some larger group of population, while state politics and social life are very tangible because they are built on social and political facts. The intangibility of memory and identity does not make those two abstract. On the contrary – they always tend to be inseparable from time, place, factual events and people, who provide specific meanings. By this means we can see in state history two parallel realities, one factual and the other imagined, developed in parallel and influencing one another (Halbwachs 1992, Le Goff 1992, Anderson 1983).

One must also distinguish between memory and identity, but at the same time understand how they interact. Memory takes different forms, depending on who is influencing and who is sharing it. It can be personal, private, or family, but can also belong to larger cultural groups, tribes, or whole societies. There is always some anthropological, political, or social context in which memory is created and shared. Private or group preferences allow, and sometimes enforce, changes, omissions and interpretations which serve some current purpose or need, but alterations are sometimes implemented without visible aim (Thelen 1989).

Maurice Halbwachs uses the term "collective memory," a very useful construct for the purposes of this article. For Halbwachs, collective memory has nothing in common with historical facts shared by some community; rather, it stands in opposition to history. In order to have a proper historical understanding, one needs to recognize the whole complexity, take different perspectives and accept ambiguities. This does not happen with collective memory, which tends to simplify events, takes one biased perspective and does not tolerate ambiguities. Collective

memory does not recognize chronology and time; it interpolates events, and is created to justify the foundations of group or social status. According to Halbwachs (1992), collective memory is the reconstruction of the past with the data and facts from the present time; it is based on stories and documents provided by eyewitnesses, as processed later by historians. Halbwachs makes a distinction between social memory and historical memory. Social memory is the memory of personally witnessed events, it is a form of group experience which is remembered. In terms of the Holocaust, social memory is reserved for the generation of survivors only. On the other hand, historical memory is the processed and shared historical creation presented in secondary descriptions, books, films and the educational system. Historical memory refers to and is shared by the majority of Jews in Israel because they were born after the Holocaust.

In this process of combining past and present and looking for some continuity of events, historiography casts elements of national identity. But social and historical memory represent only part of the phenomenon of national identity. National identity is an amalgam of collective memories, symbols, myths and prejudices connected with the past, present and future of a nation. It contains the nation's characteristics, including its genealogy, past, tradition, victories and defeats, heroes, and even current and future plans. Identity, a deeply emotional notion, can easily generate patriotic or even nationalistic feelings. Identity and its elements are rarely criticized and revised because this could shake the foundations of the social and political system (Anderson 1983, Sztompka 2002).

## STATE FOUNDATIONS

Before I focus on Holocaust memory, I would like to briefly discuss other elements of Israeli identity. In relatively new societies based on immigrants, it is hard to extract, especially in the beginning, one dominating cultural pattern which may become a common denominator for all members of society. In the case of Israel, however, it is worthwhile to identify the factors that were common to many of the immigrants, starting from the time before the founding of the Israeli state: a common religion, common genealogy, memory of the biblical Israel, a new

Hebrew language, Zionism, memory of European anti-Semitism, and memory of the Holocaust (Segev 1989). In the course of Israeli history we can observe a gradual replacement of the ancient, genealogical, Zionist and religious factors by the images and memories of more current events. This process was an outgrowth of modern Israeli experience. Heroism, a militaristic society, and the Middle East conflict are the new identity factors that have emerged. The only exceptions to this process are memories of the Holocaust and European anti-Semitism, which are both part of the foundation of the state. Their role in collective memory and identity remains vivid, growing continuously by gaining new forms and representations. This is explainable in case of anti-Semitism, which cannot be treated as a strictly historical phenomenon because it is still present in modern societies. We cannot talk about the Holocaust as a current phenomenon, but only as a revived memory. The importance of this memory, as evidenced by Israel's attempt to stress its unique Jewish character, is shown in the change in terminology from "Holocaust" to "Shoa." In recent years many research institutions and museum responsible for the presentation of history and memory, such as Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, have broadened the definition of the Holocaust. Thus, the Holocaust is no longer perceived as a uniquely Jewish experience. More and more projects are presenting the reality of the Holocaust in modern times. These projects focus on exposing common patterns of perpetrators and victims, not only of the Nazi Holocaust, but also of other societies, such as Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur, where genocide and other crimes against humanity have also occurred.

The majority of prime factors crucial to Israeli identity can be found in the "Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel," later repeated in the basic legal code. In the Declaration of May 14, 1948, we read:

> The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe – was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations.

> Survivors of the Nazi holocaust in Europe, as well as Jews from other parts of the world, continued to migrate to Eretz-Israel, undaunted by difficulties, restrictions and dangers, and never ceased to assert their right to a life of dignity, freedom and honest toil in their national homeland.
> In the Second World War, the Jewish community of this country contributed its full share to the struggle of the freedom- and peace-loving nations against the forces of Nazi wickedness and, by the blood of its soldiers and its war effort, gained the right to be reckoned among the peoples who founded the United Nations.

The document clearly indicates that the establishment of a state was a consequence of the Holocaust and that the state grew out of the necessity to protect world Jewry and to counteract any future genocide. The Holocaust, by provoking strong moral trauma for all of humanity, stimulated world leaders to establish the State of Israel (Segev 2002).

Theories concerning collective memory and identity can be easily applied to the case of Israel's memory of the Holocaust. Holocaust memory in the almost 60 years of the country's history never remained constant, especially because it was transformed from collective memory of the first generation to the historical, or cultural, memory of the *sabras* born in Israel.

## FIRST GENERATION

In the second half of 1945 around 90 000 Jewish refugees arrived in Palestine from Europe. All of them had survived under Nazi or Soviet occupation, and the majority had been in concentration camps. Over the next three years, another 60 000 survivors would follow, and in the first years of statehood an additional 200 000 European survivors would emigrate to Israel. At the end of 1949 there were around 350 000 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust living in Israel, representing one third of the population (Sikron 1957).

Those survivors were not warmly welcomed in their new state and nation. In the 1940's and 1950's in Israel, on the wave of constructing a new identity, there was no space in public discourse for non-heroic elements. Those who, according to general opinion, had been led like "sheep to slaughter" did not get recognition in the eyes of battle hard-

ened Israelis. Moreover, their histories and memories were treated as a social, collective taboo. During this period Israelis were unwilling to confront the traumatic memory of the Holocaust; they were reluctant to ask questions and unable to listen. This attitude toward memory is very typical when, in the period just after a traumatic event, society attempts to recover through forgetting, often through destruction of material evidence like monuments and prisons, but also by rejecting the witness or survivors. This was especially true in the newly-created State of Israel, which was going through its own internal and external problems and wars and trying to forge a new strong identity, built out of immigrants. Some role in this rejection process was also played by the sense of responsibility and overwhelming feeling of helplessness when the Holocaust was happening in Europe and information about it was reaching Palestine (Dobkin 1946).

The survivors, on the other hand, had to face the psychological problem of starting a new life, often with a feeling of guilt for being a survivor in the first place. If any interest was shown in their stories it was always aimed at making the survivors justify their survival. An additional burden was the lack of language to describe the cruelties of war and genocide, a lack not only of a means of expression, but also a lack of commonly shared language in Israel at that time. This situation left the survivors trapped in their own memories, which could only be shared, at best, with the closest members of their families. Parents sometimes forced their children to acknowledge the burden of memory by giving them the names of family members murdered in Europe (Elon 1983). New immigrants often broke ties with those family members who decided to stay in Europe after the Holocaust.

The emerging Israeli collective memory and identity were based on faith in the possibilities of a new man, created and shaped by Zionist ideology. The memory of Holocaust survivors was in some way dehumanized by referring to this generation as to "sheep led to slaughter" or "human dust." In that period it was necessary for society to forget about the old world order and roots remaining in Europe. Everybody was to be focused on the construction of a new heroic and strong society, which will never again allow itself to be oppressed.

Some survivors were able to find relief through fierce belief in and construction of the new Israeli Zionist identity, at the same time sus-

pending their traumatic experiences indefinitely. They were trying to deal with the nightmares on their own, depriving their children of answers to questions which were often formulated among the younger generation, but rarely asked. It was also common for survivors to falsify their past in order to be perceived as heroic fighters who had been born in Israel (Palestine) (Dasberg 2000).

The majority of survivors were sent to *kibbutzim*, where they had to take Hebrew names and learn to operate within the frames of a totally new Zionist identity. Those first years only intensified Holocaust trauma for many survivors, deprived of professional help and left alone to deal with this chapter of their lives. In the official political discourse, the survivors were referred to as people who needed to be "re-educated"; they had to learn to love their new country and incorporate the moral values of Israeli society. Memory of the Holocaust was socially frozen (Segev 2000).

At the same time, political and social life in Israel began to face the problem of the Holocaust and its definition. There were three major events in the 1950's and the beginning of the 1960's which dealt directly or indirectly with social and political dimensions of the Holocaust and affected the shaping by Israelis of memory and identity. These were passage of the "Law of Return," The creation of Yad Vashem and the establishment of relations with Germany and negotiation of war reparations.

The creation of the Law of Return was the first, basic legal act in the new country. From the very beginning, the founders of Israel wanted to make the new country safe and always accessible to all Jews in the world in need of shelter. This was a lesson learned from memory of past persecutions and particularly from the Holocaust. Most Israelis remembered the British immigration quota, which had blocked access of European Jews to Palestine.

The second milestone in the Israeli approach to the Holocaust in the 1950's was the legal establishment of Yad Vashem. Initial attempts to commemorate the Holocaust had been made in 1942, while a majority of the victims were still alive. The name *Yad Vashem* was suggested at that time for a place that would commemorate the war victims and heroes of Israel. Even during the war, politicians in Palestine referred to the Holocaust as some distant event from the past, quite often link-

ing commemoration with the need for reparations (Dobkin 1946). Mass emigration from Europe and the Independence War in Israel put the commemoration plans on hold. The Yad Vashem plan was revitalized by Mordechai Shenhabi in 1950, who officially requested the institutions of the new country to continue the registration of Holocaust victims and to grant posthumous Israeli citizenship to all victims. However, the lawyers who were to give opinions on honorary citizenship for victims could not reach agreement, so the government established the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, postponing consideration of the citizenship problem. In 1951 the Knesset designated 27 Nisan as Yom Ha-Shoa, a day of Holocaust Remembrance in Israel. On the May 18, 1953, the Knesset unanimously approved the Yad Vashem Establishment Bill, which established the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. The juxtaposition of destruction with the heroism of the resistance fighters had been present in Israel from the very beginning, and it became an integral part of memory and identity building. At that time it was the only possible way to reconcile the painful history of the Holocaust with heroic Zionism. In its first years of existence, Yad Vashem limited itself to collecting data about victims. The first exhibition opened in 1958 in the administration building. Due to the social climate during this period, Yad Vashem had very limited impact on collective memory and identity. However, this would change very soon.

The third event in the 1950's that was crucial to revitalization of Holocaust memory was the establishment of bilateral economic relations with Germany, including intensive debate about reparations for Israel. David Ben-Gurion, ever the pragmatic politician, would have made a variety of concessions if they could have led to development of the Israeli state. The Israeli boycott of Germany had to be eased when trade possibilities favorable for Israel emerged and the prospects for reparations and compensation grew. In the emotional political battles of that time we can see the conflict between religion, culture and memory of the Holocaust on one side and, on the other, new elements of Israeli identity focusing on national development and the needs of future generations. At this point of its development, Israel was becoming much more directed toward the future. This is why negotiations with Germany were successful, leading to the establishment of bilateral relations and payment of reparations. On this occasion different political parties in

Israel noticed the potential of memory of the Holocaust. Menahem Begin and his Herut party pictured themselves as defenders of the national dignity and Holocaust memory by strongly opposing Ben-Gurion's negotiations. However, most Israelis were not ready to defend memory yet, because it was still shared only by the survivors, and therefore had limited impact on Israeli society as a whole.

## THE EICHMANN TRIAL

The beginning of the 1960's saw the Eichmann trial, and with it a fundamental change in the approach to memory of the Holocaust could be observed. In the late 1950's, the Mossad received information on where Eichmann was hiding. In May 1959 he was kidnapped in Buenos Aires and transported to Israel. His trial in Jerusalem did not start until April 1961. The interim between his capture and trial witnessed an intense debate among Israelis about how to deal with memory of the Holocaust, a debate that would prove decisive for the future shape of historical memory. It was the first time that Israeli society had a chance to acknowledge the survivors' history, to live through them and internalize their experience, thereby creating a common historical memory of the Holocaust. The trial was broadcast on national TV and widely covered in the newspapers.

Eichmann was tried on the basis of the Israeli "Nazis and Nazi Collaborators Punishment Law," which was introduced by the Knesset in 1950. This Law precisely categorized Nazi crimes and provided punishments under Israeli law. From the memory perspective it is interesting that crimes committed on European territory against Jews, who had been citizens of many different countries, were in this case understood as crimes committed on Israeli territory and judged in the light of Israeli law. (A similar situation had occurred a few years earlier, when Israel claimed to be the sole representative of Holocaust victims in negotiating German reparations.) The idea of judging perpetrators in light of Israeli Law was socially understood as a posthumous moral victory.

From a logistical point of view, it would have been much easier to kill Eichmann in Argentina, but in this case it was not Eichmann that was important, it was the trial itself, taking place in Jerusalem, conducted

by the society that was gradually becoming a society of survivors. The trial was used as a kind of group therapy for the whole nation. Dating from this event we can observe a gradual transition of Holocaust memory from painful and hard to encompassing trauma into institutionalized, nationally shared historical memory. Until that moment, images of the Holocaust were haunting many of the survivors, imprisoning them in years of silence. The Eichmann trail forced them to confront their traumatic memories and pass them on, often for the first time, to their children and then to succeeding generations.

Political interest was also apparent. Throughout the Eichmann trial, Ben-Gurion sought to project a positive image for his Mapai party, sidestepping allegations of passivity during the Holocaust and directing attention away from the recent Kastner trial, thereby guaranteeing future control of the Holocaust legacy and its memory for his Mapai party. The leading Mapai party also had a few social aims to be achieved through the Eichmann trial. The first was to integrate the Holocaust experience into the next generations of Israelis, who were brought up in the atmosphere of silence about Shoa. Of course, this education had to be carefully prepared; facts had to be chosen and presented for the needs of Israeli society in a way that would not threaten or destroy the image of heroism promoted from the beginning of the state's creation. Memory of the Holocaust had to be reconciled with Zionist ideology, still strong in society, in order to achieve the desired effect of national unification around the commonly shared memory of the Holocaust.

In the early 1960's, the ethos of Jewish pioneers developing the land of their forefathers was fading away. First, tensions between Moroccan Jews and the Ashkenazi establishment were endangering the status quo. Ben-Gurion decided to include these "oriental" Jews in the process of Holocaust education, so that every member of society could treat this event as a reference point and means of social integration. There was a need to find an idea that could unite the society again, an idea that would be purifying and patriotic and that would lead to national catharsis.

But the Eichmann trail also had its international ramifications and aims in the minds of the Mapai leaders. Their first objective was to make world leaders interested in Holocaust history again, at the same time stressing that it was an Israeli historical experience. The second objective was to show the connection between past endangerment of the Jews

in Europe and the present endangerment of Israel by the neighboring, hostile Arab states surrounding it. This process equated anti-Semitism with anti–Zionism. The Eichmann trial established a new memory pattern for future generations of Israelis, in which Holocaust memory was gradually integrated with Zionist heroism.


## THE SECOND GENERATION

After the Eichmann trial, Israeli society was never again the same in its approach to Holocaust memory. The succeeding years, which saw an escalation of the Middle East conflict and increasing militarization, would also be affected by memory of the Holocaust. The former juxtaposition of Holocaust with heroism had to be replaced by reconciliation of these two Jewish and Israeli experiences. Unfortunately, this often led to use of Holocaust memory for political aims.

Holocaust survivors fought in all the Israeli wars. The first immigrants had to fight in the Independence War, yet this did not integrate them into the new society. Even after the war was won, the division of the Israeli army into heroic sabras and passive European Jews was preserved (Yablonka 2000). The second war was fought in 1956. At that moment, the first attempts were made to link the current fear of destruction of Israel with the fear known from the period of the Holocaust. It was still too early, however, because social awareness of the Holocaust was relatively low. On the other hand, in this war Israeli society had to face the problem of becoming an occupier and even taking responsibility for massacres in Kfar Kassem and Dajr Jasin. During this period, the cooperation of the survivors with the *sabras* was based on four basic foundations: The Holocaust was a major factor in the establishment of Israel; the world was hostile and did nothing to save the Jews; there is a linkage between the Holocaust and heroism; and the less talk about Holocaust the better (Smith 2001).

The war of 1967 was fought in the context of new Holocaust memory realities, memory which had been gradually internalized and become a part of identity. Just before the war, when Nasser was spreading propaganda about American ships evacuating Jews from Israel and promising total destruction of the country, the mental connection to the Holocaust

was inescapable. The Religious Council of Tel Aviv surveyed the city's parks, sport fields and empty plots and sanctified them as cemeteries (Segev 2000). One of the young soldiers in a later interview for *The Seventh Day* said:

> People believed we would be exterminated if we lost the war. We got this idea – or inherited it – from the concentration camps. It's a concrete idea for anyone who has grown up in Israel, even if he personally didn't experience Hitler's persecution. Genocide – it is a real possibility. There are the means to do it. That's the lesson of the gas chambers. The fact of Jewish existence in Israel isn't yet unquestionable.                    (Deutsch 1971, p. 160)

The politics of Nasser were continually compared to those of Hitler, but at the same time heroic acts in Jewish and Israeli history were also recalled. The fear of destruction led the Israeli Defense Forces to attack all three neighboring countries on June 5, 1967. The war was soon over, with a spectacular victory and seizure of new territories: Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Society was gradually becoming aware of the enormous victory and the meaning of Israel returning to the Old City in Jerusalem and to the Western Wall. The spirit of battle and the final victory were attributed to the Holocaust memory as well. Uri Ramon, a young officer, said in this regard:

> Two days before, when we felt that we were at the decisive moment and I was in uniform, armed and grimy for a night patrol, I came to the Ghetto Fighters Museum at Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot. I wanted to pay my respects to the memory of the fighters, only some of whom had reached this day when the nation was rising up to defend itself. I felt clearly that our war began there, in the crematoriums, in the camps, in the ghettos and in the forests. I have left this museum pure and clear and strong for this war.    (Ramon 1969, p. 57)

The social feeling was that the time had finally come when others were suffering loss, and the problem of constant fear and endangerment had been solved once and forever. The Israelis proved to themselves and others that they were no longer "sheep led to slaughter." Now, they had a country and nation able to face any enemy. This was also the moment when Israeli militarism was mythologized, because the society felt itself closer to the heroic defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto than to the victims of the death camps. With this victory a new question arose: whether the

Israeli army, cherishing the legacy of the Holocaust, could now serve as an occupation force in the new territories.

The euphoria did not last long, because the Yom Kippur War of 1973 once again brought the phantom of the Holocaust before everyone's eyes. This time the element of surprise was used by the Arab armies. In the Sinai Campaign in 1956, the fear of destruction came just before victory and led to the Israeli Army withdrawal. During the Six-Day War, fear was present before the war and provided the stimulus that led to victory. In 1973 fear came in the middle of the campaign, and it shook the very foundations of the country. The war was finally won, but at the cost of 2 500 victims, representing one victim per thousand Israeli citizens. The war was a serious blow to the sense of security gained in 1967. Once again, everyone realized that destruction was possible. The Israeli ideas of self-sufficiency and heroism promoted in the education system faded away in the wake of the Yom Kippur War. Israel needed financial support not only from the Diaspora, but also from the international community.

After 1973, Menachem Begin was elected prime minister. From the very beginning of his political career, he was promoted as a fighter for Holocaust memory and its representation in society. Indeed, he often presented himself as a survivor of the Holocaust. During his tenure, he was successful in integrating the Holocaust into the cultural memory of his own constituency, who were mainly Sephardic Jews. This was important, because for this group the Holocaust was not a personal experience, so they often accused the Ashkenazi establishment of misusing the Holocaust and its memory for political purposes.

The next military conflict, the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, once again inspired political and social comparisons to the Holocaust. Before the invasion, Begin addressed the members of his cabinet:

> You know what I have done and what we have all done to prevent war and loss of life. But such is our fate in Israel. There is no way other then to fight selflessly. Believe me, the alternative is Treblinka, and we have decided that there will be no more Treblinkas.                          (Noar 1986, p. 47)

When Israel was criticized in international circles, especially for massacres which were carried out with the knowledge of Israeli Defense Forces in two Palestinian refugee camps, Sabra and Shatila, Begin kept

repeating that after the Holocaust nobody in the world had the right to teach moral lessons to Israel.

Such misuse of Holocaust memory by the government evoked almost immediate social discussion, led mainly by the left-wing supporters. In the beginning of the 1980's, the journalist Boaz Evron wrote an article, "The Holocaust: A Danger to the Nation," in which he predicted a turning point in the way that Holocaust memory would be shaped. First, he attacked the view of the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish experience by presenting the Nazi plan to exterminate the Gypsies, the mentally and physically handicapped, and other groups. He accused the Zionist leaders and their ideology of using memory of a Jewish-only Holocaust in order to promote the moral superiority of Israel while at the same time creating an isolated society (Segev 2000). He also condemned the constant comparison of Arab countries with the Third Reich. Such an approach by its leaders was portrayed as a real threat to Israel and its people. From this moment onward we can observe researchers and politicians presenting more general and global conclusions drawn from the Holocaust experience. Memory of the Holocaust gradually became not just an Israeli domain, but a more global phenomenon (2001).

War and conflict in different forms, from World War II to the occupation of Lebanon and the Intifada, would become integral elements of Israeli identity. Each generation of Israelis identified itself with the particular war or wars that had the greatest impact on them, as a result of personal participation in war, loss of family members, or memory of splendid victory. The gradual internalization of Holocaust memory led to the point that World War II and the Holocaust became common experiences, shared by all of Israeli society.

## MEMORY TODAY: REFLECTIONS

Andreas Huyssen writes that "remembrance as a vital human activity shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present. As individuals and societies, we need the past to construct and to anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future" (71). This view is prominent in the current Israeli approach to Holocaust memory. The key role in the process of shaping and preserving this memory is

played by specialized museum institutions and monuments, created to conduct research, to educate and to promote memory. This role grows when members of society commemorate events of the past, creating objective, collective memory, to be shared by everyone.

Those institutions play a crucial role in inter-generational memory transmission. To understand this process it is crucial to make a distinction between primary and secondary witnesses of the Holocaust. Primary narratives are based on experienced events and are remembered as social memory. Secondary narratives are versions of the primary ones, reproduced in the processes of conducting research, searching for generalizations, drawing conclusions and offering commentaries. All this is a part of the historical memory of society. Hirsch defines historical memory and its images as "postmemory":

> Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through imaginative investment and creation.                                    (22)

The task of forging and preserving postmemory of the Holocaust in Israel was given mainly to Yad Vashem, but also to other commemoration institutions like *kibbutzim*, Yad Mordecai, Lohamei Hagetaot, and numerous museums and monuments all over the country. These institutions, with their various political affiliations, have always aimed to forge social identity in the country. Very direct political influence is visible during numerous commemoration days.

In order to observe how Israeli identity continues to be shaped today, we should have a closer look at the different commemoration days and state festivals introduced and shaped by politicians in Israel. In 1951 the Knesset passed a bill creating a day of commemoration of "The Holocaust and the Ghetto Uprising" (*Yom Ha-Shoa Ve'Hagvura*). Only in 1959 was a second bill passed, mandating how this day should be observed. The name was changed to "The Commemoration Day of the Holocaust and Heroism." This included a day of national mourning, with official political ceremonies at Yad Vashem and sirens at noon. The next bill, passed in 1961 in response to the demands of the leftist

lobby for Uprising commemoration and the religious lobby for a more religious character to the day, remains in force. The day is now named "The Commemoration Day of Holocaust Uprising and Heroism," and starts, according to the religious calendar, on the evening preceding the 27th day of Nissan.

By following the name changes we can observe the political importance of this day. In the final version from 1961, the single word "Holocaust" was replaced by two words: "Uprising" and "Heroism." A week after this day is another day of commemoration day: *Yom Ha-Zikaron*, in memory of the Jewish soldiers who fell during all of Israel's wars. The sirens sound once again, and the week between *Yom Ha-Shoa* and *Yom Ha-Zikaron* is designated a period of mourning and remembrance of Holocaust and heroism.

After this time of mourning is a catharsis in the form of two joyful state festivals. The first of these is *Yom Ha-Acmaut* (Independence Day), celebrated on 4 Iyar, just one day after *Yom Ha-Zikaron*. Independence Day is the anniversary of British withdrawal from Palestine and proclamation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. It is a festival in which elements of Zionist ideas are still visible. At the end of the month, 28 Iyar, is the celebration of *Yom Jerushalaim* (Day of Jerusalem). This holiday commemorates the re-unification of Jerusalem under Israeli administration after the Six-Day War of 1967.

There is no doubt that shaping social memory in Israel and forging a common Israeli identity have been an important internal policy tasks of successive governments. The current aims in the country's social and internal policy can be achieved by skillful and conscious collective memory building and bringing to public attention only chosen historical events. This defines and helps to achieve the aims of social integrity, feelings of independence, and historical awareness and constant morale building, crucial for a country in a continuous state of emergency (Levy 2000, Perlmutter 2000).

In recent decades there has been a noticeable weakening of Zionist ideology in Israel in the wake of gradual globalization and Americanization of Israeli society. At the same time the rise of individual and collective Holocaust consciousness and remembrance is becoming more central to Israeli identity.

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