School of Social and Political Sciences/ University of Glasgow

"Holocaust Memory and Jewish Identity in Poland and México: The Role of Museums and the Current Impact of October 7th"

CEERES Master's Thesis

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August, 2025
Kraków, Poland

Field of Studies:

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of:

Magister (mgr) of European Studies (specialty: Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies), Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland

International Master's (IntM) in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies: University of Glasgow, UK

Master of Arts in Social Sciences (MA) in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies: University of Tartu, Estonia

Word count of the thesis: 23,106

Authorship Declaration: I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Łucja Piekarska-Duraj and Professor David Smith, for their constant support, time, and valuable knowledge. I also want to give special thanks to Dr. Katarzyna Suszkiewicz, not only for offering me the opportunity to do my professional internship at the Galicia Jewish Museum, but also for her kindness and for being a source of inspiration. To my family and friends, I am forever grateful for your unconditional love and encouragement throughout these years; it was difficult to be without you. But above all, I thank God for making this dream come true, as none of this would have been possible without Him.

Abstract

In the mournful atmosphere of Auschwitz and the halls of the Museum of Memory and Tolerance (which I will refer to throughout this paper by its original Spanish name: *Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia*) in México City, the Holocaust is articulated, exhibited, and negotiated. However, beyond the display cases, dates, and photographs, an essential question is posed: how should the irreparable be remembered? This work explores the landscapes of memory in two markedly different countries – Poland, the site of the genocide, and México, the post-Shoah homeland for some who managed to escape– to examine how museums and institutions construct narratives about the Holocaust, and how these narratives influence Jewish identity today.

The Holocaust, one of the most significant and profoundly impactful events in recent history, continues to influence global consciousness through how it is remembered and commemorated. Over the decades, Holocaust memory has evolved, transitioning from immediate survivor testimonies to institutionalized remembrance through museums, literature, and public discourse. Nations such as Poland, which was a direct site of Nazi atrocities, have developed extensive memorialization practices. In contrast, countries like México have integrated Holocaust memory into human rights education and cultural narratives. The most outstanding features of Holocaust memory include its role in shaping historical justice, the preservation of survivor testimonies, the establishment of museums and commemorative sites, and its influence on global discussions about genocide prevention. Therefore, today, the memory of the Holocaust serves not only as a historical record but also as an urgent warning against intolerance and contemporary antisemitism, which threaten to fracture our society once again.

Keywords: Holocaust Memory, Museums, Collective Memory, Functional Memory, Collective Trauma, Multidirectional Memory, Post-Memory, Antisemitism.

Contents

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Introduction

I vividly remember the day I visited the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem in 2017. I had the opportunity to visit with a friend's mother, who is a descendant of Holocaust survivors. The huge, modern complex, situated on a high hill in the city, stood in stark contrast to what its walls housed: the memory of lives that were extinguished, voices that were silenced, and experiences that no human being should ever be subjected to.

What would the world be without places where memory is preserved, such as museums? While history books are crucial for knowing and understanding the past, museums facilitate a unique experience of those events in a certain way. They bring us closer to the reality that the people of that time lived through. On my visit to the Yad Vashem Museum, I was immediately struck by the thousands of pairs of shoes that once belonged to people who had families, dreams, and above all, names that were reduced to a number tattooed on their forearms.

One of the inscriptions on the wall, a verse from the Old Testament, had a profound effect on me. The inscription read as follows: "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off"[1] This passage encapsulates the fundamental purpose of memory, which is to restore dignity, to preserve the name, and to defy oblivion. But perhaps the most important of all: the imperative need to remember so as not to repeat.

Years later, this verse has even more force in the face of the resurgence of global antisemitism and following the attack perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023. For the Jewish community, and for the Jewish community in Israel, that day represented not only a contemporary tragedy but also a reactivation of historical trauma. The memory of the *Shoah* was reactivated with greater force, evoking ancestral fears that had been erroneously assumed to have been buried. The images saturating various media platforms and the hate speeches replicated in multiple countries confront us with a

[1] Isaiah 56:5 (King James Version)

painful but stark truth: the Holocaust is not a closed chapter in history, nor a historical account that lies in history books or memories preserved in museum exhibits. It is an event whose memory remains necessary, uncomfortable, and above all, urgent.

The subject of the Holocaust has always caught my attention for several reasons. What intrigued me most, and I still find difficult to understand, is how someone can feel hatred towards a group or community simply because they belong to a certain ethnic group and practise a certain religion. And after visiting this museum, I was comforted to know that there are organisations dedicated to preserving this memory, thus ensuring that such events are not erased from the collective consciousness.

Objective

This research seeks to analyse how the memory of the Holocaust is articulated in two very different national contexts: Poland, a country deeply marked by the tragedy and the tensions of its remembrance, and México, where memory is constructed from exile, diaspora, and pedagogical commitment. In both cases, the role of museums, cultural institutions, and public discourse is central to understanding how Holocaust awareness is forged or fragmented in the 21st century. The paper also examines how recent events, especially the 7 October attack, re-signify this memory, straining it between commemoration and actuality, between the past and its potential repetition. Remembering, in this context, is not an act of nostalgia or a ritual gesture, but a critical tool for resisting violence and defending humanity.

The Reason for Studying the Subject (Justification)

Despite the passage of more than seventy years, the memory of the Holocaust remains a contentious issue, undergoing active re-signification and transmission in multiple cultural contexts. The Holocaust is not an issue that is confined to the European context; rather, it represents an ethical and political legacy that transcends national borders, as Michael Rothberg has proposed in his concept of multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2019). This research is based on the conviction that memory is not a given fact, but a social and historical construction.

In the current context, marked by the erosion of historical memory, the trivialisation of suffering, and the resurgence of hate speech, the study of institutions that preserve and

transmit the memory of traumatic events such as the Holocaust acquires an inescapable ethical, political, and pedagogical relevance. By focusing the analysis on the cases of Poland and México, the thesis proposes a comparative approach that allows us to observe how two profoundly different contexts – one a direct scene of catastrophe, the other a place of refuge and identity reconstruction – face the challenge of keeping alive a memory that tends to fragment and is in danger of being diminished over time. The selection of these two countries facilitates the identification of the divergent narratives surrounding the Holocaust and the diverse interpretations it acquires in each context. In Poland, the discourse surrounding the subject is characterised by an oscillation between victimhood, complicity, and heroism. Conversely, in México, the remembrance of the Holocaust is predominantly sustained by community initiatives and museums, which strive to combat both oblivion and indifference.

In both cases, the role of museums, memory centres, and educational institutions is fundamental to understanding how a public narrative of genocide is constructed and how it impacts contemporary Jewish identity. However, for the purposes of this research, the analysis focuses on two institutions in particular: the *Galicia Jewish Museum* in Poland and the *Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia*[2] in México.

The memory of the Holocaust and the construction of Jewish identity have undergone constant evolution over time. Since the end of the Second World War, numerous events have influenced this process, although they will not be addressed in detail in this paper. Nevertheless, one date merits special attention: October 7, 2023. Why is this date significant? Because it holds great importance for the Jewish community, representing the second most devastating tragedy they have faced after the Holocaust. This date will undoubtedly be remembered for its profound impact on both the Jewish community and the Palestinian people, as it has led to a resurgence of fear, shock, and a need to remember, triggering parallels with the trauma of the *Shoah*[3] that should not be overlooked.

[2] For this research, I will refer to this institution in its original name in Spanish which in English is translated into *Museum of Memory and Tolerance*.
[3] In Hebrew, the term *Shoah(שׁוֹאָה)* means "catastrophe", but it has become the common term to refer to the Jewish Holocaust.

For all these reasons, this paper is justified in that it seeks to contribute to the field of memory studies with a specific analysis of how the Galicia Jewish Museum, in a region marked by genocide and post-memory, keeps the legacy of the Holocaust alive. The research addresses not only a historical dimension, but also a profoundly topical question: how can we continue to remember when the witnesses have disappeared? Moreover, what forms of memory are capable of transforming consciousness and responsibility in the present?

Main Hypothesis

The memory of the Holocaust is not a static or consensual remembrance, but rather a field of tension where collective identities, historical responsibilities, and narratives of belonging are negotiated. In Poland, the territorial proximity to the genocide has generated disputes around the role of local society, national victimisation, and recognition of Jewish suffering, while in México, geographical distance has favoured a more universalist appropriation of the Holocaust, linked to the defence of human rights and the rejection of intolerance.

The construction, transmission, and resignification of Holocaust memory in Poland and México reflect the historical and cultural particularities of each country, as well as contemporary tensions surrounding Jewish identity. This is particularly relevant in light of the resurgence of antisemitism following the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. In this context, museums and memory institutions play a pivotal role in preserving the past and actively denouncing new forms of hatred. They demonstrate that the trivialisation, obliteration, or even denial of historical events such as the Holocaust can contribute to the normalisation of antisemitism in the present day.

Methodology

This research project aims to analyse how certain Holocaust memorial museums have responded to the attacks in Israel on 7 October 2023, and how these responses can be interpreted as contemporary forms of cultural memory reactivation. To this end, a qualitative methodological strategy has been developed, focusing on the content analysis of institutional statements and publications on digital media and social platforms. The study focuses on two representative cases: the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków and the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia in México City.

These two institutions were selected for their central role in publicly transmitting Holocaust memories in two different geographical, political, and cultural contexts: Eastern Europe and Latin America. Explicit or implicit positioning linking the historical legacy of the Holocaust to contemporary violence was sought in their official websites, institutional Instagram accounts, and public statements issued after the 7 October attacks. A review of works by authors specialising in memory studies was also carried out, with the aim of understanding, based on the concepts they propose, the mechanisms by which memory is transmitted, preserved, and legitimised. At the same time, digital press articles from both countries were considered, which allowed for the contextualisation of institutional reactions within broader public debates on historical memory, trauma, and the resurgence of antisemitism.

The approach adopted from a qualitative analysis allows us to observe not only the declarative contents of the institutions but also how these discourses are integrated into a broader media and emotional ecosystem, where the memory of the Holocaust functions as an ethical, narrative, and political resource. In this sense, the methodology is not limited to descriptive data collection but incorporates tools from critical discourse analysis and memory theory with concepts that I consider key to interpreting how the traumatic past is re-signified in a context of present-day violence.

The study specifically examines the symbolic and emotional impact of the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack in Israel and how it has reactivated memories of the Holocaust. These memories are now being reinterpreted within a new narrative of existential threat. This work seeks to add to the ongoing discussion about the politics of memory, the role of museums as agents of narrative, and the challenges and dangers faced by the worldwide Jewish community in both historical and contemporary contexts.

In this sense, museums serve not only as spaces for transmitting historical knowledge but also as active agents in shaping collective memory. Their ability to inform, inspire, and influence social perceptions makes them sites where narratives are negotiated, which can either reinforce or, alternatively, fragment our understanding of the past. This ambivalence is central to the current study, as it shows that the memory of the Holocaust, as presented and reinterpreted in various national contexts, is not a neutral legacy but rather a contested space whose representations directly impact contemporary debates on identity, how the past is remembered, and historical reconciliation.

Limitations of the research

Throughout this research, several limitations have emerged that need to be acknowledged to properly contextualize the scope of the analysis. Firstly, a lack of fluency in Polish has restricted direct access to certain primary sources and institutional materials issued by museums or local media in Poland, particularly regarding untranslated official reactions to the October 7, 2023, attacks. This language barrier may have limited the ability to examine institutional statements, museum programs, or public debates in greater depth within the Polish context. Although official translations, English content, and computer-assisted translation tools were used, some cultural or semantic nuances may have been lost in the process. Secondly, the current work faces an unavoidable temporal contingency: the war between Israel and Hamas that began in October 2023 continues at the time of concluding this thesis, making it impossible to provide a definitive conclusion on how Holocaust memory frameworks have been reconfigured in light of this new episode of violence. In this sense, the processes of constructing and re-signifying collective memory remain in development, which gives this analysis a necessarily provisional character, open to future updates and reinterpretations as new institutional, cultural, and social responses unfold in the coming months and years. Nevertheless, the information collected provides a comprehensive overview, enabling us to examine the intersection between memory, violence, and institutional representation during a period of significant historical tension.

Furthermore, this thesis focuses on the contemporary reactivation and re-signification of Holocaust memory, particularly in the museum field and its public discourse as cultural institutions. This delimitation in no way seeks to deny, obscure, or minimise the suffering of the Palestinian people, whose experiences of violence, displacement, and

loss are also part of the collective memories of the present. However, in order to maintain analytical and theoretical coherence, the study focuses on the legacy of the Holocaust as a foundational trauma of the twentieth century, and how it is mobilised or updated by museum institutions and the main actors who frame the narrative.

Acknowledging this choice does not imply an exclusionary stance, but rather an ethical commitment to the precision of the object of study and the need to contribute to debates on memory, without instrumentalising the suffering of any people. Nevertheless, it is essential to address the issue of antisemitism not only as the historical origin of the Holocaust, but also as an element that permeates and conditions the very construction of its memory, revealing the tensions between forgetting, denial, and intergenerational transmission.

Research Question(s)

How is the cultural memory of the Holocaust articulated and balanced in two contrasting contexts - Poland, a direct witness, and México, a recipient country - and what transformations has this memory undergone in the wake of current events such as Hamas's attack on Israel and the rise of antisemitism?

Sub-questions:

1. How have the attacks of 7 October 2023 reactivated, re-signified, or strained the memory of the Holocaust within the institutional discourse of memory museums?

2. What institutional discourses have museums such as the Galicia Jewish Museum and the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia produced in the wake of the 7 October attacks, and how do these link to the memory of the Holocaust?

3. How does the geographical and historical context of each museum (Central Europe and Latin America) influence how the relationship between past and present is articulated?

Chapter 1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This paper is part of the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. It addresses how certain cultural institutions, such as museums, actively participate in configuring, transmitting, and politicising collective memories of traumatic events. The memory of the Holocaust is used as the main example. The research focuses on how the memory of the Holocaust is conveyed at the Galicia Jewish Museum in Poland and the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia in México, and how it is used and/or abused. Additionally, it explores whether this memory has evolved, or if the narrative(s) have been reconfigured, since Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October, and how this memory has been evoked or reappropriated concerning these events.

1. Collective Memory and Cultural Memory

The concept of memory is not only an individual exercise of remembering but rather a social, shared, and contested construction. Jan Assmann observes: "Memory enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (Assmann, 2008, p.109).

However, Maurice Halbwachs was among the first to articulate the notion of a shared memory within a community, proposing the concept of collective memory[4] as a form of remembering that is anchored in social frameworks. According to Halbwachs, the memory of individuals is always structured by the groups to which they belong, such as family, religion, or nation (Halbwachs, 1950). Memory is not only individual, it is also produced within social frameworks that determine what is remembered and how. This collective memory is shaped by rituals, stories, places, and institutions, and it helps to create a sense of group identity.

In this sense, museums can be understood as spaces where specific collective memories are articulated - in this case, those of the Jewish community of Galicia and Museo de

[4] In his original work, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), Maurice Halbwachs defined collective memory as the shared pool of knowledge and information held by a group of people that is significantly shaped by social frameworks. In his view, memory is not purely individual but is constructed and sustained within social contexts—particularly through the frameworks of family, religion, class, and other social groups.

Memoria y Tolerancia, which portray the trauma of the Holocaust - that transcend the individual to become shared narratives.

Building on this foundation, Jan Assmann further developed the concept of collective memory by introducing the notion of *communicative memory* and *cultural memory* (Assmann, 2008). While communicative memory refers to memories transmitted orally on a daily basis by direct witnesses, and has an ephemeral and intergenerational character, cultural memory is institutionalised and transmitted in a more lasting way through texts, objects, monuments, and museums. Assmann (2011) contends that cultural memory aims to preserve the past beyond the lifetime of witnesses, thereby transforming memory into an archive, symbol, and a pedagogical tool. In Jan Assmann's words: "In order to be able to be reembodied in the sequence of generations, cultural memory, unlike communicative memory, exists also in disembodied form and requires institutions of preservation and reembodiment" (Assmann, 2008, p.111). In this sense, museums function as key institutions for keeping cultural memory alive, particularly in instances where direct testimonies from living witnesses are no longer available.

This is where it becomes relevant to mention the concept of mnemonic memory[5], which can be understood as a set of cultural and social strategies that function as collective mnemonics designed to encode, preserve, and update, in this case, the memory of the Holocaust. Thus, the mnemonic memory of the Holocaust can be understood as a network of practices and devices (museums, commemorative plaques, official ceremonies, educational narratives) that not only preserve the past but also structure and control it.

Within this theoretical framework, museums are conceptualized as pivotal agents of cultural memory, serving as spaces where the past is preserved, interpreted, and narrated. The influence of museums extends beyond the exhibition space, encompassing the construction of identities, the legitimization of narratives, and the suppression of others. Museums, meanwhile, are agents of information and mediators of historical

[5] In studies of cultural memory, authors cited for this work, such as Halbwachs, Nora, Jan, and Aleida Assmann, do not specifically refer to the term mnemonic memory. However, they analyse cultural mechanisms that function just as collective mnemonic techniques.

memory, as they play a fundamental role in how societies remember and reinterpret past events. Through resources such as graphic representations, written testimonies, and period objects, they manage to establish a deep connection with their audience, transmitting knowledge and arousing emotions that influence the construction of collective perceptions. However, this process can be biased: the memory they project can lead to selective memories, distorted interpretations, or even narratives that fuel social polarisation. Consequently, museums not only preserve and disseminate the past, but also actively participate in its reinterpretation, shaping both the possibilities for historical reconciliation and the risks of fragmentation by legitimising and/or delegitimising narratives.

2. Memory, Post Memory, and the Transmission of Trauma

To understand how the memory of the Holocaust is constructed and re-signified in different contexts, such as Poland and México, it is essential to begin with a fundamental distinction between memory and post-memory. Pierre Nora (1989) proposed the concept of 'places of memory' (*lieux de mémoire*) to refer to the spaces—physical, symbolic, and narrative—in which a community anchors its memory of the past when it has lost direct contact with lived experiences. In the context of the Holocaust, these places are embodied in museums, monuments, archives, and testimonies.

Considering that the role of museums focuses on transmitting history and preserving memory, it is pertinent to note Nora's distinction between the two disciplines: “Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.” (Nora, 1989, p.8).

In this context, it is also necessary to introduce the concept of places of memory that Nora proposes (1989), understanding them as symbolic spaces that arise precisely when

there is no longer a 'lived memory'. These places seek to preserve or reactivate certain elements of the past through their materialisation. The museum, as a place of memory, does not merely refer to a disappeared past, but it also reactivates and reinterprets that past through its museographic and pedagogical presentation, functioning as an interface between historical trauma and contemporary consciousness. And why is it relevant to create a bridge between historical trauma and contemporary consciousness? The establishment of a connection between a historical trauma, such as the Holocaust, and contemporary consciousness signifies more than a mere act of commemoration; it represents a profoundly structural process that facilitates the comprehension of the past within the present, while enabling the projection of an ethical horizon into the future.

Historical trauma does not disappear over time; it persists in the social tissue, in intergenerational narratives and institutional silences. As Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) argues, cultural trauma lies not only in the traumatic event itself, but in the way a society interprets it, symbolizes it, and incorporates it into its collective identity. In this sense, if a conscious memory of trauma cannot be articulated, the risk is repetition, denialism, or indifference.

The connection between trauma and consciousness serves as a form of historical responsibility. As Paul Ricoeur[6] (2004) has pointed out, memory is not only an exercise in remembrance but a form of justice: by remembering, one acknowledges *the othe*r (the victims, the silenced, the absent) and assumes an ethical position in the face of the violence suffered. This link to the past signifies that the present is not oblivious to what occurred, and that new generations are not mere spectators, but critical heirs of a history that challenges them. Moreover, building this bridge has a fundamental pedagogical and democratic value. Through active and contextualised remembrance of historical trauma, societies can develop tools to identify and resist discourses of hatred, exclusion, or supremacism. The transmission of traumatic memory, especially through cultural institutions such as museums, makes it possible to generate what the philosopher Avishai Margalit (1996) calls *decent societies*: communities that actively engage with the dignity of all their members, including those already absent.

[6] Original title in French: Ricœur, Paul. *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. L'ordre philosophique. Seuil, 2000.

Within Assmann's theoretical framework regarding cultural memory, the connection between trauma and contemporary consciousness acts as a mechanism for maintaining the social and political relevance of the past. The goal is not only to recall and store information but also to nurture forms of memory that engage in dialogue with current tensions, such as the resurgence of antisemitism and historical misinformation, thereby promoting critical and empathetic thinking. In short, the link between historical trauma and contemporary consciousness serves a transformative purpose: it converts memory into action, memory into learning, and the past into an essential tool for addressing the challenges of the present. Without this link, history becomes a ruin, a mute archive; with it, it transforms into a conscience, a warning.

Within this theoretical framework, the concept of postmemory is particularly relevant to understanding the ways in which the Holocaust continues to resonate with generations who did not experience it directly. Marianne Hirsch (2012) introduces the concept of postmemory to refer to how later generations relate to the traumas experienced by their ancestors. Although these generations did not directly experience the traumatic events, as in the case of the Holocaust, they inherit the memories in an affective and visual way, laden with silences, narrative fragments, photographs, and emotions that profoundly shape their collective and individual identity. This transmission occurs not only through family narrative but also through cultural practices, commemorative rituals, and institutional spaces of memory. In the context of Jewish communities in México, the notion of post-memory acquires particular relevance, as it allows us to understand how the Holocaust experience is reconstructed from a double perspective: geographical and temporal remoteness. Despite not having been direct witnesses or immediate descendants of victims, many members of these communities maintain an intense emotional and identitarian connection. Thus, postmemory functions as a symbolic bridge that re-signifies the traumatic past and articulates it with the challenges of the present, thereby ensuring the preservation of memory and the continuation of its transmission to future generations.

The concept of cultural trauma, formulated by sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander, extends the understanding of trauma beyond the individual or psychological experience to situate it within the field of the collective construction of meaning. According to Alexander (2004), cultural trauma is not defined solely by the suffering of a group, but

by how this suffering is narrated, recognised, and symbolically codified in the public space, generating new forms of collective identity. In this sense, traumas are not inherent to the events themselves but are discursively constructed through social and institutional processes (including the media, art, education, and museums) that attribute meaning to these events and engrave them in collective memory. This perspective is particularly relevant for analysing how the Holocaust has been incorporated into public memory in both Poland and México, in contexts that are profoundly different but interconnected by processes of globalisation of memory.

3. Museums as Producers of Memory

Museums not only display objects, but they also produce meaning. In her book *Museums and Their Shaping of Knowledge,* Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) proposed to conceive them as 'discursive spaces' where knowledge is negotiated and where curatorial selection operates as a form of symbolic power. This is particularly relevant in the case of museums that aim to preserve the Holocaust memory, where the objective is not only to show a historical crime but to position it as a moral and pedagogical reference.

In his analysis of sites of traumatic memory, Paul Williams (2007) argues that Holocaust museums face the challenge of representing the unrepresentable: how to show the horror without embellishing it? How to narrate the genocide without falling into trivialization or sensationalism? Furthermore, how to convey a message without hurting or altering that group's identity? These tensions are central to the work of every institution dealing with the Holocaust memory. Yet behind institutional frameworks lie agents who are actively involved in shaping the narrative. Their interpretive choices—shaped by ethical commitments, political sensibilities, values, and dynamics of collective memory—profoundly influence how the trauma of a historical past is mediated and remembered, continuing to shape this narrative in the aftermath of October 7.

4. Jewish Identity After the Holocaust

The Holocaust is widely considered not only to have marked an unprecedented historical rupture but also to have redefined what it means to be Jewish in the

contemporary world. For numerous communities, the Shoah (the term they use to refer to it) has become a pivotal component of collective identity. It serves as a shared experience of trauma, a transmitted memory, and a cautionary historical lesson. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, trauma "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander, 2004, p.1). In this sense, it is evident that the identity of the Jews who survived the concentration camps, as well as that of the generations that followed, would be irrevocably altered forever. The Holocaust will forever mark a before and after in terms of identity. It went through a process of transformation, which can be divided as follows:

Historical break

Before the Holocaust, Jewish identity had evolved over millennia through religious, cultural, and geographical influences. During the Holocaust, the systematic extermination of millions of Jews led to a historical rupture: a moment after which the collective memory of the Jewish people was irrevocably altered. This event redefined what it meant to be Jewish, intertwining identity with the trauma, loss, and resilience experienced during and after the Second World War.

The establishment of the state of Israel[7] and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine have been deeply connected to the post-Holocaust redefinition of Jewish identity, especially in institutionalized spaces that aim to preserve the Holocaust memory, such as Museums. Within this redefined narrative, the existence of the state of Israel is frequently depicted as a response to the vulnerability that the Jewish community around the world has experienced and continues to experience to the present

[7] In the face of systematic and prolonged violence over the centuries, the idea that the Jewish people needed a homeland of their own as a minimum condition for their security and historical continuity grew stronger. During the 19th century, thinkers such as Theodor Herzl argued that the 'Jewish question' could not be solved by integration, but only by the foundation of a modern Jewish state (Herzl, 1896). In this manner, Jewish identity underwent a transition from a focus on faith and ancestral cultural traditions to a focus on sovereignty, self-governance and existential protection.

day. The Holocaust highlighted the need for a Jewish homeland where Jews could be free from persecution and racist ideologies.

Some Museums, particularly those located in the United States and Israel itself, frequently portray the foundation of the Jewish state not only as a political achievement, but also as a manifestation of historical justice and a protective measure against potential genocidal threats. This ideological framing serves to reinforce a narrative of resilience and survival, where the trauma of the Holocaust justifies the necessity of a homeland for the Jewish people. However, this narrative may simplify the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In various museums, such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the conflict is presented in a way that legitimises the actions of the Jewish state in relation to its Palestinian neighbours.

This selective framing has been a primary contributing factor to the exacerbation of polarisation. Some groups advocate for Israel's right to exist by acknowledging the historical suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Conversely, others contend that this framing silences the voices of the Palestinian people who have endured suffering since the establishment of the modern Jewish state.

In the context of the events of 7 October 2023, about Hamas's terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and the subsequent war in Gaza, these older narratives have shaped public and institutional responses. For many, 7 October revived historical memories of existential threat, reinforcing the Holocaust-Israel continuity; for others, it further exposed the limitations of a narrative that excludes Palestinian history and suffering.

The Legacy and Memory of the Holocaust Survivors

For survivors and their descendants, the trauma of the Holocaust has shaped their sense of self. Their stories have become a moral imperative for remembrance, leading to the establishment of memorials, museums, and educational initiatives. These efforts to preserve memory are not only about honouring the victims but also about ensuring that the brutal consequences of hatred and intolerance shape identity in a way that protects against forgetting or repeating such events.

Nonetheless, the Holocaust not only redefined the Jewish Collective Identity but also caused an impact on European and global consciousness. The Holocaust is not merely a

Jewish tragedy; it is a defining moment in world history. In numerous European nations, the Holocaust compelled a profound introspection concerning past complicity and a comprehensive re-evaluation of national values. This "before and after" boundary has influenced how nations define their collective identities, emphasizing remembrance, justice, and the prevention of threats against collectivities.

Authors such as Alvin H. Rosenfeld have addressed how the Shoah has shaped identity discourses in diverse national contexts. Rosenfeld (2011) warns us against the 'political use' of the Holocaust in the formation of a *defensive memory*. In his book *The End of the Holocaust,* the author introduces the idea of defensive memory to describe a form of Holocaust remembrance that focuses on the protection of national or collective self-image in the face of historical responsibility. This mechanism serves as a form of protection, primarily by accentuating the experience of victimisation and, secondly, by minimising or attempting to cover up complicity in the crimes committed. In his work, Rosenfeld places particular emphasis on the selective appropriation of Holocaust memory in the context of post-war Europe. Here, commemorative practices may appear to honour Jewish suffering yet simultaneously avoid acknowledging the role of local populations in enabling or perpetrating the violence. Therefore, Rosenfeld warns of the dangers of a memory that fosters a comfortable narrative and that prioritises the defence of identities over the search for historical truth, evading an ethical confrontation with the past.

In countries such as Poland and México, the formation of Jewish identity after the Holocaust reflects a complex interaction between the memory of genocide and local contexts. In Poland, this identity is constructed within a historical framework marked by the suppression of memory and the country's ambiguous role as both victim and, in certain cases, perpetrator. México, meanwhile, became a refuge, offering a new home to Polish Jews seeking to escape the war, which influenced the configuration of their memory and identity in an environment different from that of Europe.

Memory, Trauma, and the Present: Resignifications in Times of Crisis

Holocaust memory is not static. As Michael Rothberg (2009) proposes, memories can coexist, intertwine, and conflict, a phenomenon that he refers to as multidirectional

memory[8]. Rothberg challenges the notion that collective memories compete for limited space in the public realm, highlighting the capacity for diverse memories to coexist and interweave with other forms of violence across diverse cultural and historical contexts. This dynamic interplay fosters the emergence of a multidirectional memory that nurtures solidarity and historical justice. In this manner, the commemoration of the Holocaust should serve as a unifying catalyst that awakens a worldwide ethical conscience concerning numerous modes of violence, including but not limited to slavery and colonialism. In this logic, contemporary events can reactivate or re-signify memories of the past. Hamas' attacks on Israel in October 2023 have sparked a renewed interest in reinterpreting the memory of the Holocaust, highlighting how contemporary events can reshape perceptions of the past. For many Jewish communities and international observers, these attacks evoke historical parallels with previous persecutions, reactivating fears about the existential vulnerability of Israel and the Jewish people. Likewise, media and political discourse resorts to references to the Holocaust to articulate narratives of victimisation, security and justice, generating new tensions between historical memory and current conflicts. This phenomenon also reflects the competitive and contextual nature of collective memory, as theorists such as Michael Rothberg have argued, to the extent that contemporary events can influence how a traumatic past is remembered and interpreted.

The relationship between past and present is fundamental to understanding how Jewish identity is reconfigured through institutions of memory. Memory is not merely preserved; rather, it is reactivated, politicized, and transformed into a domain of symbolic contestation. In her book *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann (2011) proposes two concepts: storage memory and functional memory, which form an integral part of his theory of cultural memory. The former is defined as the accumulation of information, historical data, and archives (to mention a few) that are accessible to all, but as the name suggests, remain stored. In contrast, the concept of functional memory is defined as the cognitive process that facilitates the reinterpretation

[8] In Michael Rothberg's definition: "I have proposed the concept of multidirectional memory, which is meant to draw attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance. Thinking in terms of multidirectional memory helps explain the spiraling interactions that characterize the politics of memory" Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 13.

of past experiences to construct a meaningful present, particularly in contexts characterised by crisis. Functional memory is selective and dynamic: it does not embrace the entire past, but only those elements that a society considers significant and useful for its self-image, its values, or its orientation towards the future. These elements are kept active in public discourses, celebrations, monuments, rituals, or institutions (such as museums). Therefore, this memory not only remembers but also actively organizes the past in relation to the needs of the present.

In the context of the Holocaust, functional memory is manifested in the way in which the Holocaust memory has become a central ethical referent of collective memory in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Assmann argues that the Holocaust represents a turning point in Western cultural memory, in that it has been constituted as an exemplary memory that redefines the frames of collective remembrance beyond the directly affected group. In this sense, museums, commemorations, and educational practices act as means of functional activation of this traumatic past. Following this idea, memories of a traumatic past are triggered when a crisis occurs, and a community's integrity and identity are threatened. This concept is central to comprehending the resignification of the Holocaust memory in crises such as the 7th of October.

Assmann distinguishes three fundamental tasks of functional memory: legitimization, delegitimization, and distinction (Assmann, p.128). The author defines "legitimization" as "… the immediate concern of official or political memory. The typical alliance between power and memory finds expression in the elaboration of detailed historical knowledge, preferably in the form of genealogy, because power needs origins" (Assmann, 2011, p.128). When narratives are challenged, a process that Assmann defines as "delegitimization" occurs. This activates critical memory, denouncing past crimes, violence, and regimes while questioning official narratives and introducing an ethical, self-critical dimension. Finally, "distinction" refers to the use of memory to establish symbolic differences with other groups or communities, emphasising one's own characteristics as signs of belonging or cultural superiority. These functions are not mutually exclusive and may coexist or conflict in the public space.

In the case of the Holocaust, its inscription in European functional memory has operated simultaneously as a mechanism for delegitimising totalitarian regimes, legitimising

democratic values, and distinguishing it from negationist memories. In this context, memory institutions such as the Galicia Jewish Museum play a central role in these processes, offering a narrative of the past that seeks not only to preserve but also to intervene in the present from an ethic of memory.

Chapter 2: Poland, Memory of the Holocaust, and Jewish Identity

In recent decades, the Holocaust has become increasingly central to public debates about historical memory, education, and human rights in various national contexts. However, this centrality has not meant a universalisation of its meaning, but rather a pluralisation of its uses, narratives, and meanings. Before addressing one of the most controversial cases of Holocaust remembrance in contemporary Poland, an ethical and methodological clarification is necessary. The following section in no way seeks to minimise the pain and suffering of the Polish people during this tragic period in their history, much less to damage their collective memory. Acknowledging the complexity of historical events also requires confronting the many sides of the same story, however uncomfortable they may be. From this perspective, some fundamental findings will be presented from the book *Neighbours*, by sociologist Jan T. Gross, whose reading has been decisive in understanding how certain episodes of anti-Jewish violence were perpetrated not only by occupying forces, but also by sectors of the local population. This critical look does not seek to point out collective guilt, but rather to reflect on the silences, omissions, and disputes surrounding the memory of the Holocaust in the Polish public space.

Victims and Accomplices: A Blurred Line

As it has been extensively documented, the experience of the Second World War has had a profound impact on the political nature and destiny of all European societies in the second half of the twentieth century. However, it is important to note that Poland has been affected by this historical event in a unique manner. Most notably, the country experienced a significant change in ethnic and religious minorities. The Jewish people, who were the main victims of the Holocaust, and the Ukrainian and German populations, who were displaced as a result of changes in border lines and population movements after the war.

Poland's history during the Holocaust is complex and nuanced. The country's dual identity as both a victim of Nazi occupation and a witness to (or participant in) the atrocities committed against its Jewish population has shaped its history ever since. The Holocaust led to the decimation of Poland's Jewish community and left a legacy of enduring questions about the role of Polish society during this turbulent period. At the

outbreak of the Second World War, Poland was home to the largest Jewish population in Europe[9] and the second largest in the world, surpassed only by the United States. Holocaust remembrance in Poland has been, from the beginning, the subject of political and moral tensions.

While millions of Poles endured the consequences of Nazi rule, many of them collaborated, driven by several factors, including antisemitism, fear, self-preservation, and even the opportunity to climb the social ladder. However, it would be completely inaccurate and wrong to deny the fact that many of them risked their lives and those of their families for the sake of saving their fellow Jews. These competing narratives of complicity and victimhood are still controversial today and exert influence on how the memory of the Holocaust is preserved and portrayed.

The Holocaust on Polish Soil: Between Trauma and Responsibility

Caught between two relentless totalitarian regimes, Poland in the 20th century experienced invasions and silencing, with its geographical position making it both a battleground and a testing ground for extermination. This dual occupation led to the country's fragmentation, both physically and symbolically, resulting in years of systematic violence. The period from 1939 to 1945 was marked by mass deportations, cultural destruction, and political, cultural, and national repression. The streets of Warsaw, the forests of Katyn, and the Auschwitz barracks serve as witnesses to a shared landscape of suffering, where the Polish people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, endured unmatched violence at the hands of these brutal regimes.

For a significant proportion of the Polish population, the Second World War was not merely a competition between foreign powers. Rather, it was a protracted tragedy in which the nation's very existence was on the brink of collapse. This status as a victim of two totalitarian regimes has had a profound effect on the Polish national narrative of the Second World War, while simultaneously giving rise to tensions with Holocaust

[9] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum «Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country». Accessed April 16, 2025, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-population-of-europe-in-1933-population-data-by-country.

remembrance, particularly when demands for historical recognition are made and accusations of complicity in Nazi crimes are voiced.

Nonetheless, as the author Jan T. Gross observes in his book *Neighbours*[10], "… The reality of the existence of an independent dynamic in Polish-Jewish relations within the restrictions imposed by the occupation forces cannot be denied. There were things that people could have done at the time and did not do; and there were things that they should not have done, and yet they did."[11] (Gross, 2002, p.12).

This observation is made in the context of the pogroms that took place in the villages of Radziłów and Jedwabne, which had a large number of Jewish inhabitants. The Polish residents of the area decided to kill their Jewish neighbours in the most heinous ways possible[12], and they did so even before the Germans issued the order to murder them. The methodology employed in the commission of these crimes, as the author describes, which included the murder of children and the elderly, was such that it defies comprehension by any rational individual.

As previously mentioned, Poland found itself in a position of vulnerability between the two totalitarian regimes that were emerging in Europe: The ideological underpinnings of Nazism and Stalinism. Following the ratification of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a non-aggression agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union, the country found itself subject to the incursions of its invaders along its eastern and western frontiers. During the early years of the war, Polish Jews were perceived as Soviet sympathisers, generating a feeling of aversion among their non-Jewish compatriots. There may be some veracity in this claim, as Hitler's animosity towards the Jewish people and his intentions to eliminate them had already gained notoriety. Therefore, knowing their fate

[10] This title was originally read in its Spanish translation 'Vecinos' by Jan T. Gross, 2002 as a bibliographic source for this research. All the future references of this author are taken from the Spanish version and translated into English by me.

[11] The text in its Spanish version reads: "...la realidad de la existencia de una dinámica independiente en las relaciones entre polacos y judíos dentro de las restricciones impuestas por las fuerzas de ocupación. Había cosas que la gente podría haber hecho en su momento y que no hizo; y había cosas que no habría debido hacer, y que sin embargo hizo." Gross, Jan Tomasz. *Vecinos: el exterminio de la comunidad judía de Jedwabne (Polonia)*. Memoria crítica. Crítica, 2002.(p.12)

[12] Szmul Wasersztajn provided testimony detailing the violent acts committed against the Jewish population in Jedwabne during the pogrom. His statement, as referenced in Gross's 2002 publication *Vecinos* (Gross, 2002, pp. 31–35), offers a first-hand account of the violence perpetrated by Polish citizens against their fellow Jews.

at the hands of the Nazis, it is a reasonable assumption that the Jews preferred to be under the Soviet rule that, while not supporting them, did not explicitly manifest a desire to annihilate them.

Nevertheless, Hitler did not merely harbour an aversion and deep hatred for those ethnic groups that did not conform to his mental construct of the Aryan stereotype. Therefore, while the Jewish people constituted the primary object of his hatred, he also considered individuals of Slavic origin as beings of lesser value[13]. Despite not being regarded as ideologically threatening to the same extent as Jews or Communists, they were nevertheless deemed biologically unfit to govern themselves or establish advanced civilisations. This inferiority was a justifiable basis for the Nazis to engage in the exploitation, displacement, and elimination of these groups.

During the time the territories remained under Soviet occupation, the people experienced significant hardships. They underwent a profound transformation that affected all ethnic minorities and social classes, creating deep resentment, particularly among the Polish population. Such was the discontent that many Poles welcomed the Nazi army with open arms when it advanced into the territories occupied by the Red Army after Hitler broke the non-aggression pact in July 1941, as he had always intended to invade the Soviet Union to carry out his plans to 'Germanise' Europe.

As the Nazis advanced into the eastern territories of Poland in the summer of 1941, a series of brutal pogroms unfolded in the wake of their arrival. In the village of Radziłów, residents, emboldened by the presence and tacit approval of the Germans, organized and perpetrated the systematic massacre of their Jewish neighbours, burning many alive in a barn[14]. These acts were not isolated incidents. The prevailing sentiment of antisemitism, and under the consent of the Nazis, led to a growing segment of the local population expressing a desire to eliminate the Jewish population of Poland. In

[13] In his book entitled *My Struggle*, Hitler planned a strategy on how to deal with the Slavic peoples of the East. In his vision a part of them would constitute the working class that would serve the Third Reich. See Kiernan, Ben, Wendy Lower, Norman Naimark, y Scott Straus, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Genocide*. 1.ª ed. Cambridge University Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108767118. Pp. 358-359

[14] GROSS, JAN T. "WHO MURDERED THE JEWS OF JEDWABNE?" In *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, NED-New edition., 79–89. Princeton University Press, 2022. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv20rsjrf.12.

Radziłów, as in other towns such as Jedwabne, few (if any) dared to intervene. The Jews found themselves socially isolated and politically unprotected, lacking any form of weaponry or protection, and forsaken by those with whom they had previously shared a communal existence[15]. The brutality of these attacks can be partially traced to deeply rooted religious myths, such as the accusation that Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus[16], a belief passed down across generations, which during this period was weaponised under the cover of war and occupation.

Nazi Exploitation of Antisemitism in Occupied Poland

Sławomir Kapralski emphasises that one of the main reasons that paved the way for the flourishing of antisemitism[17], particularly in the years leading up to the Second World War, was the fact that, although Jews and their Polish compatriots lived in the same country, their relations were limited merely to economic transactions. This community's cultural and religious practices led to a certain social isolation, as they rarely established meaningful relationships with their non-Jewish neighbours. As he describes, "both groups formed separate worlds that existed in physical proximity, but were separated by the barrier of custom, endogamy and prejudice, and their members largely ignored each other" (Kapralski, 2017, p.176).

The social divide between the two groups intensified with the arrival of the Nazis and the subsequent creation of ghettos, where Jews were confined. Little could be done to help them, largely because they were regarded as 'them' rather than as part of 'us'. The propaganda spread by Hitler and the Nazis soon extended beyond Germany's borders to

[15] Jan T. Gross states that prior to the outbreak of the war, the village priest, Aleksander Dolegowski, served as the intermediary between the Jews and non Jews villagers. However, when approached for intervention, he and his fellow compatriots, with whom the Jews previously enjoyed cordial relations, refused to do so. (Gross, Jan T., p.70-71)

[16] Throughout history, various authors have interpreted biblical texts as proof that the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion and death of Jesus. These include Martin Luther who observes the Jews in his work '*On the Jews and Their Lies'* as enemies of Christianity, murderers of Jesus, and a cursed race. Despite being a central figure in Protestant Christianity, his rhetoric was used to fuel antisemitic ideologies, including the Nazi regime.

[17] The Holocaust Encyclopedia defines antisemitism as "Antisemitism is the prejudice against or hatred of Jewish people. This hatred was at the foundation of the Holocaust. But, antisemitism did not begin or end with the Holocaust. Antisemitism has existed for thousands of years. It has often taken the form of systemic discrimination against and persecution of Jews. Antisemitism has repeatedly led to serious and deadly violence against Jewish people". United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Antisemitism." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Accessed April 14, 2025. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism

other countries, including Poland. The myth and the prevailing narrative that the Jews were to blame for all the misfortunes of the nations soon took root in the minds of the people, contributing to the rise of antisemitism across Europe. Contradictory notions concerning the Jewish community, which were concurrently depicted as both filthy and impoverished, whilst concurrently accused of conspiring to dominate the world, became entrenched within the collective thinking[18] of numerous non- Jews individuals seeking to rationalise their irrational hatred. During WW2, the prevailing sentiment among a significant segment of the Polish population towards the Jews became increasingly hostile and indifferent. This marked increase in antisemitism, coupled with the desire to seize Jewish property and assets, motivated many Polish citizens to denounce the Jews who remained hiding or those who tried to escape from the Nazis.

The Nazis quickly recognized these prior antisemitic attitudes in occupied Poland and took advantage of them to weaponize them and include them in their systematic murder agenda. They relied not only on their own bureaucratic and military machinery but also on the cooperation, whether active or passive, of the local population. As historian Christopher Browning refers to in his book *Ordinary Men*, the participation or complicity of local populations and their lack of resistance towards their invader accelerated the scope and speed of the Holocaust (Browning,1992). This does not mean, of course, that Polish antisemitism caused the Holocaust, but it certainly paved the way for its acceleration.

However, in the post-war period, the issue of local complicity was frequently eclipsed by the prevailing discourse of Polish national victimhood. During the communist regime, the remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland was marginalised in favour of more comprehensive narratives of anti-fascist resistance and Polish martyrdom, leaving limited acknowledgement of the specificity of Jewish suffering or the examination of

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[18] In his work *La Psychologie des foules* (1895), Gustave Le Bon observed that, when a crowd is formed, individual personalities are erased and replaced by common ideas and feelings. According to Le Bon, the *psychollogy of crowds* phenomenon occurs when individuals brought together in large assemblies may experience a loss of their capacity for rational thought. This could result in their mental conjoining with the crowd, leading to the rapid dissemination of a "crowd mind" throughout the group via "suggestion or contagion". Moreover, in the absence of the individual's rationality and sense of self, the crowd grows vulnerable to the influence of a charismatic speaker. This speaker is able to manipulate the crowd's will and actions.

Polish involvement in that process. Museums, public monuments, and school curricula emphasised the heroism of the Polish nation and framed the Holocaust as part of a larger tragedy inflicted on all Poles. The participation of some Poles in the persecution or denunciation of Jews was either omitted or actively denied. Despite the dissolution of the communist regime, endeavours to address this facet of history, exemplified by the publication of Jan T. Gross's work in 2001, have encountered profound public disapproval and political contention.

Victims of Horror: The Polish People and the Nazi Repression

During the Second World War, Poland was one of the countries that suffered the most under Nazi occupation. This was for two main reasons. Firstly, there was systematic destruction of its political, social, and cultural infrastructure. Secondly, there was extreme repression and violence directed at its civilian population. As asserted by the historian Timothy Snyder, the Polish nation endured unparalleled levels of institutional collapse, with its territory being the main battleground for the death policies of both countries (Snyder, 2011).

Therefore, it is erroneous and unjust to assert that all Poles were complicit in the systematic killing of their Jewish compatriots. While a significant number of individuals did indeed collaborate with the Nazi regime, it is equally true that many others assisted Jews in escaping capture, despite the risk of detention by the Nazis and the threat of severe consequences. In the context of absolute terror and uncertainty, solidarity emerged as a key factor, leading to the formation of underground resistance groups. These groups not only organized resistance against the Nazis but also helped non-Jews, demonstrating a profound commitment to human dignity. The heroism displayed by a considerable number of Polish citizens must be emphasized, as approximately 7,000[19] of them have been recognized by Yad Vashem as *Righteous Among the Nations*, representing the highest number among all European countries. The number in question

[19] Yad Vashem, "Names of Righteous by Country," *The Righteous Among the Nations*, accessed April 17, 2025, https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics.html (The official website displays the number of individuals per country who have been awarded this title until the beginning of 2023.)

corresponds to Polish citizens for whom information is available. However, it is worth noting that the actual number may be higher.

This dual status, as both victims of Nazi terror and protagonists of acts of solidarity, highlights the complex position Poland has held since the Second World War and largely defines the intricate experience of the Polish people during the war.

The Construction of Memory after World War II

Since the end of the Second World War, Poland's relationship to Holocaust remembrance has been a complex and conflictual process, marked by various factors that, in general terms, include the silencing of the issue, political transformation, nationalist re-appropriation, and international disputes. Nevertheless, I would like to elaborate on the proposed detailed period about how memory developed in Poland once the war had come to an end, as referenced by Michael Steinlauf.[20] He develops five distinct phases from 1944 to the mid-1990s: wounded memory (1944-1948), repressed memory (1948-1968), expelled memory (1969-1970), restructured memory (1970-1989), and finally regained memory (1989-1995)[21].

Wounded Memory (1944-1948)

The phase of Wounded Memory (1944-1948), Steinlauf (1997) highlights that in the aftermath of the war, a significant proportion of the remaining Jewish population[22] returned to a Poland that had been profoundly impacted by the war, with visible signs of destruction and devastation in all aspects of society. This was exacerbated by the prevailing social tension and anxiety in Polish society in anticipation of Stalin's imminent communist repression. In this emotional climate, violent anti-Jewish pogroms, such as the one in Kielce in 1946, confirmed the fragility of coexistence and

[20] The five stages of memory mentioned were developed by author Michael Steinlauf and were taken from Chapter 8, titled *Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia*, from the book entitled *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception* (2017).
[21] See Michael C. Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead. Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).
[22] According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia, by 1950, Poland's Jewish population had declined to approximately 45,000. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Remaining Jewish Population of Europe in 1945," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed April 29, 2025. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/remaining-jewish-population-of-europe-in-1945

the persistence of antisemitism. Steinlauf (1997) examines the contradictory nature of the repressive communist system, highlighting the apparent contradiction between the support given to Jews and the participation in events commemorating the Holocaust. These events were strategically employed to legitimise the newly established state authority and to shape the political interpretation of the past. This course of action was, however, met with disapproval by non-Jewish citizens. This situation serves to illustrate how memory can be institutionalized by power to legitimize its existence.

In the *Repressed Memory* (1948-1968) phase, Steinlauf (1997) emphasises the need of the communist regime to adapt historical memory to its needs. The events that took place in Poland during the war were reduced to a class struggle, with the tragedy of the Holocaust experienced by the Jewish people omitted from the communist narrative. The Auschwitz camp, for example, was presented as a symbol of Polish martyrdom rather than the epicentre of the Jewish genocide because the official narrative avoided reference to antisemitism or systematic extermination. This stage can also be examined in terms of the concept of 'stored memory' (Assmann, 2011): the information was present in archives and part of historical knowledge but was not actively integrated into public or cultural discourse.

The efforts of the communist regime, which still exhibited Stalinist trends, were directed towards the exaltation of national traditions to recapture the essence of the first Polish state. By 1960, the nationalist wing, characterized by persistent antisemitic rhetoric, had gained popularity. This development led to the implementation of an antisemitic campaign that was government-sponsored in 1968, which resulted in a significant number of Jews fleeing to Israel (Steinlauf, 1997).

According to Steinlauf (1997), the *Expelled Memory* phase (1969-1970), marked the emigration of Jews from Poland to other countries was for various reasons, but most notably due to the presence of antisemitism. The historical, cultural, and social contributions of the Jewish people have been largely overlooked in public discourse. This ideological purge effectively excluded the Holocaust from the official collective memory of Poland, thereby consolidating the structural oblivion of the country's Jewish past.

In the phase of *Reconstructed Memory* (1970-1989), despite the communist regime's efforts to maintain its control over official history, Steinlauf (1997) stresses how new forms of Holocaust remembrance emerged primarily from the dissident, intellectual, and religious sectors due to the apparent emergence of liberal ideas and a rising democratisation process. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, many symbols and testimonies were recovered, and publications and representations that served to restore the Jewish voice began to circulate. Perhaps one of the most notable illustrations of this phenomenon was the visit of Pope John Paul II to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1979. During his speech at the concentration camp, the Pope placed special emphasis on the suffering of the Jewish people: "In particular I pause with you, dear participants in this encounter, before the inscription in Hebrew. This inscription awakens the memory of the People whose sons and daughters were intended for total extermination. This People draws its origin from Abraham, our father in faith, as was expressed by Paul of Tarsus. The very people that received from God the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', itself experienced in a special measure what is meant by killing. It is not permissible for anyone to pass by this inscription with indifference."[23] Through Pope John Paul II's symbolic visit to Auschwitz in 1979, the Polish Church expressed explicit and public recognition of the Jewish genocide. This gesture was experienced by a significant part of the Polish people as an act of penance and historical awareness, with a profound emotional and spiritual impact.

Regained Memory (1989- 1995)

Finally, during the period of *Regained Memory* from 1989 to 1995 (Steinlauf, 1997), the landscape of Poland is characterized by the collapse of communism and its aftermath. The transition to a more democratic regime fostered an openness to a more critical and ethical review of the memory of the Holocaust and its representation in various areas, including education, culture (particularly in museums), and commemoration. A significant development was the establishment of new spaces for dialogue between Polish society and Jewish communities. In these spaces, a more critical examination of the past came about, and the collaboration or indifference of the Polish people toward the genocide began to be discussed more openly. However, this period of dialogue was

[23] This quote was taken directly from Pope John Paul II's speech at Auschwitz. John Paul Meenan, "John Paul II at Auschwitz: Lessons of Kolbe," *Catholic Insight*, August 14, 2025, https://catholicinsight.com/2024/08/14/john-paul-ii-at-auschwitz-lessons-of-kolbe/

not wholly embraced, as the revelation of historical truth collided with entrenched nationalist narratives. Within this paradigm, the notion of multidirectional memory, as proposed by Michael Rothberg (2019), provides a valuable framework for contemplating the commemoration of the Holocaust in a way that does not compete with existing collective memories, such as those associated with Polish suffering under Nazism and Communism. Instead, it advocates for a relational and ethical approach to the shared past.

Contested Memory: The Past that Haunts the Present

Building on the dynamics of postwar memory outlined above, subsequent scholarship has further intensified the debate on Polish responsibility during the Holocaust. In this regard, Jan T. Gross's book *Neighbours* has sparked a broad debate in contemporary Polish collective memory by challenging deeply entrenched historical narratives. Through a documentary and testimonial approach, the book exposes events during World War II that confront the traditional image of Poland as an exclusive victim of the conflict. The revelations contained in the text, particularly concerning the Jedwabne massacre, generated a profound national shock by exposing the active participation of some Polish citizens in crimes perpetrated against the Jewish population. This interpretative twist provoked an identity crisis in the country's historical discourse by partially shifting the figure of the Pole as a victim to the position of a perpetrator.

Thus, within the framework of historical memory and post-conflict studies, books such as *Neighbours* become paradigmatic examples of how certain discourses can destabilise a nation's narrative consensus and force a critical revision of the past, as author Aleida Assman[24] proposes. They also raise fundamental questions about the construction of collective identities, the selection of public memories, and the role of recognition in historical justice and reconciliation processes.

Diverse authors, including Aleida Assmann, argue that collective memories can conflict when different groups within a society recall the same historical event in varying ways. She speaks of ‘divided memory’ when different narratives, typically one official and one marginal or silenced, compete for legitimacy. This type of contested memory can

[24] See Assmann, Aleida, y Aleida Assmann. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. 1. English ed. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011

emerge in contexts of transition, post-conflict, or following the opening of repressed archives and testimonies (Assmann, 2011). In the same line, author John R. Gillis (1996) argues that memory can be a battleground because collective memory is inherently conflictive, as there is no single version of the past, but rather multiple competing narratives. These constructions reflect struggles for power and identity, and how different collectives seek legitimacy for their own versions of the past. Therefore, these memories are constructed according to social, political, and cultural interests and are often confronted in public spaces such as monuments, political discourses, and museums[25].

In the case of Poland, an analysis of the tensions that emerge in the realm of historical memory can be viewed through the lens of Michael Rothberg (2009) and his concept of multidirectional memory. This is especially significant in situations where multiple traumas converge or clash. Rothberg introduces the idea of 'competitive memory,' suggesting that collective memories do not necessarily compete for attention and legitimacy within a finite space. Instead, he argues that memories of different groups can coexist and even enhance each other. This view is particularly pertinent for examining the Polish case, where the national memory of suffering during Nazi occupation—focused on the victimization of the Polish people—has been challenged by narratives highlighting local complicity in crimes against the Jewish community. The defensive reactions from some sectors of Polish society to the accounts presented by Jan T. Gross reflect the persistence of a national memory that resists this multidirectional approach to some extent. In this context, recognizing other victims—in particular, the Jewish community—is seen as a potential threat to Polish collective identity.

Despite its innovative nature and potential to catalyse healing historical tensions and foster an ethical memory and dialogue, the concept has not been universally embraced in Eastern European countries. Several former communist states, including Poland, have implemented memory policies predicated on the reaffirmation of a victimizing national identity, a tendency that often results in a rejection of analytical frameworks that question the role of local populations. These resistances are represented in different

[25] See Gillis, John R., ed. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. 2. print., 1. paperback print. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996.

dimensions, ranging from the political sphere to legislation aimed at safeguarding historical memory. One such example is the controversial 2018 law that prohibits attributing responsibility for the Holocaust to the Polish people. Initially, the law sought to criminalise anyone who damaged Poland's name by referring to its involvement in the Holocaust.

Author Kornelia Kończal proposes the concept of *mnemonic populism*[26] to analyse how Polish legislation on the Holocaust articulates a moralizing and exclusionary interpretation of the past, mediated by political concerns and perceptions of public opinion. She argues that although the law was amended after international pressure, its existence highlights how populism instrumentalizes historical memory to consolidate nationalist and victimizing narratives, limiting the possibility of a critical reflection on the episodes of collaboration and complicity during the Nazi occupation (Kończal, 2021).

In this sense, we can understand the concept of mnemonic populism as the strategic use of historical memory by political actors to consolidate a nationalist project, configure the narrative, and shape the collective identity. Unlike collective memory, which emerges from shared experience and memory, mnemonic populism instrumentalizes the past for political ends, selecting and reinterpreting transcendent historical events according to criteria of ideological convenience.

Between Heroism and Censorship: Disputes Over Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Poland

Holocaust remembrance in Poland is a complex and debated subject, where official accounts often favour a heroic and victim-focused view of the Polish people, while instances of local collaboration or antisemitism are frequently ignored or minimized. The state, particularly the PiS political party (in Polish *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*), is one of the primary actors in shaping and representing the Holocaust memory. When the Law and Justice party (hereafter PiS) came to power in 2015, the Polish government adopted a nationalist approach to history that, in terms of memory, has emphasized protecting

[26] "I understand mnemonic populism as poll-driven, manifestly moralistic and above all anti-pluralist imaginings of the past." (Kończal, 2021, p.458)

the country's dignity and good name during World War II, with particular emphasis on the role of Poles during the Holocaust. In the context of articulating the Holocaust memory, other actors must also be considered. One such example is the state-controlled Institute of National Remembrance, an entity tasked with preserving the national narrative of Polish heroism. A key element in this preservation is the suppression of any reference to Polish complicity in the Holocaust.

During its time in power, the PiS party oversaw a significant reorganization of public memory in Poland. The goal of this reorganization was to strengthen a heroic narrative of the national past and to symbolically protect Polish society from any form of historical accountability for the crimes committed during World War II. This politics of memory has turned the Holocaust, and particularly the period of Nazi occupation, into an ideological battleground, with the state acting as the judge and censor of the historical narrative. As is already known, one of the most emblematic measures of this policy was the 2018 amendment to the Act on the IPN, which penalized—initially with criminal sanctions—any public statement suggesting the involvement of the Polish state or people in the crimes of the Holocaust.

And although the criminal sanction, as previously said, was subsequently removed following international pressure, the Law continues to exert a restraining effect on public and academic debate, limiting the teaching of the Holocaust and promoting a simplified and one-size-fits-all interpretation of the past. As Kończal would argue, it is interesting to see the foundations that gave rise to this Law: "…the rationale behind the Law was not of legal but of political nature. More specifically, the Law is part of a political strategy that is boosted by and contributes to imaginings of the past that are poll-driven, manifestly moralistic and above all anti-pluralist, i.e.mnemonic populism. At its core, the mnemonic populism pursued in contemporary Poland regarding the Holocaust suggests that Poles helped Jews on a mass scale and those who did not were not Poles." (Kończal, 2021, p.461).

From this perspective, the role of Poles is reduced to two categories: victims of Nazism and/or heroes of resistance. Under this logic, the names of Poles who risked their lives to save Jews are honoured, whilst at the same time, scholars or historians who seek to

critically revise established historical narratives and promote an honest historical memory are censured[27].

These actions collectively constitute a functional memory strategy (Assmann, 2011) in the sense that the political utilisation of the past serves to reinforce a nationalist narrative, reducing the areas of ambiguity and portraying Poland as a heroic martyr. The PiS party has defined the parameters of acceptable discourse, promoting a uniform official memory that evades uncomfortable or critical nuances, and transforming museums and academic institutions into instruments of state power. The result has been an increasingly homogenised civilian memory with limited critical awareness.

Today, although the PiS party continues to have influence in the educational system[28] and some museum institutions in Poland, this does not apply to the Galicia Jewish Museum, as it is an independent entity that seeks to preserve Jewish memory. As the museum receives no direct funding or control from the state, it is not bound to follow a particular agenda concerning Holocaust remembrance. In this sense, the museum positions itself as a space of active counter-memory, where Polish-Jewish history can be remembered in its complexity and plurality, outside of official campaigns but with an educational approach.

Another significant actor in shaping Holocaust remembrance in Poland is the Jewish community[29], which has advocated for a more inclusive, critical, and pluralistic approach to remembrance. The community is led by Rabbi Michael Schudrich (Chief Rabbi of Poland), and even though his interventions are not legally binding, they carry significant moral weight. In doing so, they act not only as the bearer of a post-memory – in the sense proposed by Marianne Hirsch (2012), as an affective inheritance of trauma

[27] Jan Tomasz Gross, Barbara Engelking, and Jan Grabowski are examples of historians who have been subjected to smear campaigns and prosecutions by pro-government sectors in an attempt to delegitimise their scholarly contributions and thus restrict the space for the expression of critical memory.

[28] For a deeper reflection on how the PiS party has influenced the narrative around the Holocaust and the role of Poles in the education field, see: Stec, Katarzyna, Sylwia Sadlik, and Marek Kucia. «Representations of Holocaust Protagonists in History Education in Polish Primary Schools under the Rule of the Law and Justice Party». *Holocaust Studies* 30, no.1 (January 2, 2024): 132-56. https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2023.2245284.

[29] Jewish Policy Research, "How Many Jews Live in Poland?" *Jewish Policy Research*, accessed May 3, 2025, https://www.jpr.org.uk/countries/how-many-jews-in-poland (According to the website of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, the number of inhabitants in Poland who identify themselves as Jews is 9,600).

transmitted by later generations – but also as an agent of a multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), capable of connecting the past with contemporary struggles against forgetting, racism, and censorship.

Chapter 3. Refuge and diplomacy: México's response to forced displacement during World War II (1943–1947).

México’s Stance On Jewish Refugees

The Holocaust influenced Latin America by creating an urgent need for refugees to find safety, along with the varied responses from the region's nations to this need. The refusal of many countries to ease their immigration quotas in response to appeals from Jews persecuted during the Holocaust—whether through restrictive policies, diplomatic indifference, or outright negativity—shows a conscious decision to prioritize national interests over the suffering of the victims. This attitude emphasizes the dominance of national agendas over humanitarian concerns and illustrates a willingness to dismiss any sense of shared responsibility. As a result, these stories are often presented as separate narratives—the plight of the persecuted and the actions of the observing countries—rather than as a connected story that recognizes global responsibility for genocide.

Although officially recognized Jewish migration mainly occurred at the end of the 19th century and during the early decades of the 20th century, the presence of Jews in México has deeper roots dating back to the colonial period, when many arrived forcibly or secretly amidst the Sephardic diaspora and Inquisition persecution. Exploring this historical aspect would help provide a broader understanding of the diversity and complexity of Jewish experiences in the country. While México was not a primary destination for the large Jewish migration from the Russian Empire starting in the 1890s, it received a small but meaningful number of Ashkenazi Jews fleeing persecution and seeking better living conditions. Although their numbers were small compared to countries like Argentina and Brazil, on the continent, these migrants laid the groundwork for strong communities that actively participated in México’s social and economic life. This early settlement not only created a lasting community fabric but also established symbolic ground in which, decades later, the experiences of Holocaust survivors would be integrated. Therefore, the history of Jewish migration in México cannot be separated from the processes of collective memory and identity that would be strongly rekindled after the war.

During the 1930s and the years of World War II, the Mexican government's stance towards Jewish refugees trying to escape the Nazi regime was ambiguous and deeply

conditioned by ideological and structural factors. Although México, under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, publicly expressed its condemnation of fascism and took in thousands of Spanish Republican exiles, its migration policy towards European Jews was considerably more restrictive. Population laws, in force since 1926, favoured the arrival of immigrants considered "assimilable" according to the nationalist logic of *mestizaje*[30] - that is, people culturally or racially close to the groups that made up the Mexican national identity. In this context, Jews were labelled as "undesirable"[31] or "unassimilable", which made it difficult for them to enter the country. Among the actors and social sectors that labelled Jews and other ethnic groups (such as those of Asian or African origin) as "undesirable" were various state agencies, in particular the Directorate General of Migration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexican officials in Europe who warned about the dangers of letting them into the country, local businessmen (who feared economic competitionas) as well as conservative groups, most notably the Catholic Church, which frequently reinforced antisemitic stereotypes.

Despite these institutional and social barriers, figures such as Consul Gilberto Bosques made remarkable efforts from Marseilles and Lisbon to issue humanitarian visas, which allowed hundreds of Jews and other politically persecuted people to find refuge in México. Thanks to these efforts, hundreds of Jewish refugees arrived in México[32], mainly through the port of Veracruz and, to a lesser extent, Tampico. Thus, we can infer that the year 1926 marks an important milestone in Jewish immigration in the country, although still modest in comparison with other countries on the continent. However, this community was beginning to gain greater visibility and consolidation. That year, approximately 662 Jews entered the country, according to records from the National

[30] Since the 1920s, Mexican migration policy was based on the idea of building a homogenous nation around *mestizaje* (the fusion of indigenous and Spanish). Under this logic, immigration of "similar races" - southern Europeans, Catholics, Iberians - was favoured, and those perceived as racially, culturally or religiously different were excluded. Jews did not fit into this narrative and were seen as a culturally differentiated group, difficult to "assimilate".

[31] The categorisation of Jews as 'undesirables' in México in the 1930s and 1940s was not exclusively the result of a formal antisemitic policy (as in Europe), but rather of a combination of nationalist discourses, exclusionary migratory criteria and racial and cultural prejudices disseminated by state actors, diplomats, and social sectors.

[32]Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "More Jewish Refugees Come to Mexico," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 2, 1926, https://www.jta.org/archive/more-jewish-refugees-come-to-mexico (According to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, around 1926, within a week, approximately 275 Jews from Syria and Poland arrived in México, mainly through the port of Veracruz).

Registry of Foreigners, reflecting a gradual growth of the community in the decades following the Mexican Revolution.

Among these groups were communities that would form colonies known as “Little Poland”, which I will discuss later. These isolated cases, however, did not succeed in reversing a migration policy that, in general terms, prioritised internal stability and national interests over humanitarian commitment, also reflecting the ambiguities of the Mexican state in the face of the European Jewish situation during this time.

The anti-immigration rhetoric in México intensified in 1942, when the country joined the Allies. At that time, only citizens from Spain and the USA were exempt from this. However, only those refugees who had relatives in México were able to enter the country legally, as the 1936 Population Law allowed family immigration; this explains why most of the Jewish refugees who managed to reach México were Poles who were relatives of Polish Jews who had immigrated to México in the 1920s. Thus, the number of Jews who entered the country as political refugees was very limited.

In short, the Mexican government's stance towards Jewish exiles was improvised throughout this period. There were moments of relative flexibility when the government was willing to allow more refugees to enter, often in response to external pressures. Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging that the government was incapable of designing a concrete plan to aid the Jews who tried to escape from Europe.

First Traces: The Formation of the Jewish Community in México

The construction of the Jewish community in México cannot be understood only as a migratory or demographic process, but also as an identity narrative elaborated from collective memory, as its origins have been the subject of reconstructions that seek to articulate belonging, continuity, and historical legitimacy. This memory has been shaped by experiences of exile, persecution, and reconstruction. As well as the efforts of later generations to preserve a Jewish identity in dialogue with the Mexican national context. The intergenerational transmission of these memories, whether through family testimonies, community archives, commemorations, or ritual practices, plays a fundamental role in shaping a collective identity characterised by the tension between assimilation and difference in the Mexican context. Therefore, the origins of the Jewish community in México must be analysed not only as events of the past, but also as a field

of symbolic dispute in the present, where there is a constant negotiation of what it means to be Jewish in a country with a cultural tradition deeply influenced by Catholicism and a dominant narrative of national unity.

The Jewish presence in México dates back to the early colonial period, when individuals of Jewish descent arrived in the viceroyalty, fleeing religious persecution in the Iberian Peninsula. However, their presence remained hidden for centuries due to inquisitorial control, which made it difficult to openly consolidate a Jewish identity. It was not until the end of the 19th century and, with greater intensity, during the first half of the 20th century, that organised Jewish communities were established in the country, made up of migrants from Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and, later, Germany and Poland[33] who sought refuge from the rising tide of antisemitism and violence in their countries of origin.

The first community established in México with the specific aim of helping Jewish immigrants was *Alianza Monte Sinaí*, which was founded in 1912. Various communities were formed in the years that followed, including the *Ashkenazi*, *Magen David*, and *Sephardic* communities. In 1938, in light of the intense persecution of Jews in Europe under the threat of Nazism, and due to changes in the General Population Law that limited the possibility of Jewish immigration to México, the Central Committee was established as a pro-refugee institution. Nonetheless, the development of the Jewish community in Mexican soil was marked by a constant tension between integration into the societal and cultural environment and the preservation of a unique ethno-religious identity. Since the early 20th century, the Mexican state promoted a strict separation between church and state, restricting religious visibility in the public sphere. In response, the Jewish community chose to operate in private spaces and, above all, to maintain a low profile, prioritising internal life as the mechanism for developing and preserving their identity. In the educational sphere, the creation of institutions was aligned with the formal requirements of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), but at the same time transmitted Jewish culture and preserved Jewish identity. Therefore, schools became a key element in combining formal integration into Mexican society

[33] Although there is no precise figure, author Alicia Gojman's research suggests that around 3,879 Polish Jews arrived in México at the beginning of the 20th century. (Gojman, 1993, p.323)

with the preservation and reinforcement of Jewish ethnic and religious identity in a completely foreign context. A further key strategy employed by the community was the practice of endogamous marriage, a measure implemented with a view to safeguarding cultural continuity. In this way, the community sought to balance the force of integration with social and economic participation in the Mexican society, as well as the force of preservation through educational, cultural, and religious institutions that reinforced their collective identity.

In response to the need to coordinate, represent, and consolidate a growing but diverse Jewish community (including Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Syrian, Polish, and German ethnic groups), the Central Committee was created in 1938. This entity became the representative body of the entire Jewish community in México. It has become one of the key actors in mediating relations with the authorities, as well as with the country's political and social forces. As an active member of the national agenda, it participates in various fields, including security, human rights, fighting antisemitism, and preserving Jewish identity in a predominantly Catholic environment, such as México continues to be. The Committee's organ responsible for establishing connections with the media, academic, and religious groups is the Tribuna Israelita. In this way, the Central Committee not only consolidated the institutionalisation of Jewish life in México but also became a key forum for negotiating the terms of integration and national belonging, preserving their memory, culture, and community continuity.

A "Little Poland" in México

The solidarity shown by México under the presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho remains little known, particularly its reception of approximately 1,500 Polish refugees[34] who fled the war following Germany's invasion of Poland. It is important to note that during the 1930s, México intensified its strict migration policies. Therefore, it is surprising that the Mexican government agreed to grant 20,000 visas for the entry of refugees and opened its doors to this significant number. One of the terms that was imposed upon the admission of those seeking refuge was that they would be expected to

[34] Celia Zack de Zukerman and Gloria Celia Carreño A., "La Pequeña Polonia en México: Historia de refugio y hospitalidad (1943–1947)," *Embajada de México en Polonia*, accessed July 24, 2025, https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/polonia/index.php/es/la-historia-de-los-ninos-de-santa-rosa/16-sin-categoria/45-la-pequena-polonia-en-mexico

return to their country of origin upon the end of the war. Intervention by the USA was deemed necessary to cover the costs of this arduous journey, as war-torn Poland was unable to finance the refugees' travel.

Consequently, following deliberations between Polish representative Wladyslaw Neuman, US Ambassador George S. Messersmith, British Ambassador Charles Harold Bateman, and Mexican Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Jaime Torres Bodet, a consensus was reached that the ideal location for the transfer of refugees would be the *Hacienda de Santa Rosa*, in the state of Guanajuato. This refugee colony that accepted Polish refugees exemplifies forced displacement during World War II, where tensions among collective memory, national identity, and cultural adaptation converge. Although most were Polish Catholics, the settlement may have included a small number of Jewish refugees[35] who, like their fellow countrymen, shared the trauma of exile, war, dispossession, and the disbanding of their communities to adapt to a new environment.

The experience in this Mexican enclave served as a space for subjective reconstruction in which refugees attempted to preserve a national identity rooted in traditional Polish culture, while facing a profoundly different environment, both geographically and symbolically. Refugees in this community were restricted to living within the Hacienda, as they were not allowed to join the Mexican workforce. However, this did not prevent life from continuing as normally as possible, and the younger members of the community from receiving an education, as schools were opened where the Polish educational programme was taught. After World War II, the community had disintegrated by late 1947. Those women who married Mexicans settled permanently in the country, whereas the majority of men and women later emigrated to the United States. Only a small group of 87 people returned to Poland.[36]

This settlement on Mexican soil not only reveals an episode of international solidarity but also reflects an operation of identity homogenisation that marginalised dissenting

[35] Although there were likely a small number of Polish Jews among the refugees in Santa Rosa, there are no official figures or detailed lists that would allow us to establish how many there were. The lack of formal recognition, coupled with pressure to assimilate into a Catholic and homogeneous community, contributed to the silencing of these identities within the dominant historical narrative.
[36] Celia Zack de Zukerman and Gloria Celia Carreño A., "La Pequeña Polonia en México: Historia de refugio y hospitalidad (1943–1947)," *Embajada de México en Polonia*, accessed July 24, 2025, https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/polonia/index.php/es/la-historia-de-los-ninos-de-santa-rosa/16-sin-categoria/45-la-pequena-polonia-en-mexico

voices and experiences, particularly those of Jewish origin, as there are no formal records of their presence in this settlement in particular. This could be understood from two perspectives: on the one hand, the representation of the Polish refugee as a Catholic, traditionalist, and culturally homogeneous subject responds to the logic of Polish nationalism in exile, which erased or minimised internal differences in the name of a unified collective identity in the face of the trauma of occupation. On the other hand, mid-20th-century México, forged on the myth of integrative and Catholic *mestizaje*, did not offer fertile ground for public recognition of multiple or minority identities, such as Jewish, especially if they did not fit into the dominant categories of what was regarded as "Mexican". This intersectionality of exclusions reinforces the idea that collective memory is not inherently inclusive but rather is shaped by disputes over symbolic power, where certain subjects are remembered and others are relegated to the margins of the archive and social imagination. Recovering these missing memories would not only allow us to problematise how exile and integration are narrated, but also to expand our understanding of México as a multicultural, welcoming space, marked by ethnic, religious, and political tensions that are more complex than its official narrative admits.

Chapter 4. Museums as Key Institutions in the Construction of Memory

1. Voices Resisting Oblivion: The Galicia Jewish Museum and its Commitment to Holocaust Remembrance

The memory of the Holocaust constitutes one of the fundamental pillars in the construction of contemporary historical consciousness, especially in contexts marked by violence, collective trauma, and the systematic attempt at cultural annihilation. In this context, museums of memory are not only spaces of preservation, but also active scenarios of education, dialogue, and resistance in the face of oblivion and indifference.

The Galicia Jewish Museum[37], located in the Polish city of Kraków - a region deeply marked by the history of Nazi extermination - represents a unique example of this multidimensional function of memory. Collective memory, particularly in contexts of historical trauma such as the Holocaust, cannot be understood as a simple accumulation of data about the past, but as an active, complex, and necessarily multidimensional process. According to Maurice Halbwachs (1992), *collective memory* is socially configured through institutions, narratives, and shared practices, and it is precisely in this field that museums of memory, such as the Galicia Jewish Museum, acquire a fundamental role as active agents in the production and transmission of memory.

The museum expresses its vision on its official website: "The Galicia Jewish Museum exists to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and celebrate the Jewish culture of Polish Galicia, presenting Jewish history from a new perspective… The objectives of the Museum are to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions typically associated with the Jewish past in Poland and to educate both Poles and Jews about their own histories, whilst encouraging them to think about the future."[38]

Thus, collective memory cannot be understood as an accumulation of data from the past, but as a dynamic process in constant construction. This memory includes historical, pedagogical, ethical, political, and affective dimensions, all of which are

[37] Galicia Jewish Museum, "Museum," *Galicia Jewish Museum*, accessed June 27, 2025, https://galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/museum/
[38] Galicia Jewish Museum. "History." Accessed June 27, 2025. https://galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/museum/history/

indispensable for understanding the role played by institutions such as the Galicia Jewish Museum in contemporary society, which I believe is necessary to analyze in order to understand how the Holocaust memory is preserved and portrayed.

Firstly, from a historical perspective, the museum serves as an agent of recovery and documentation of the Jewish legacy in Galicia, a region that was home to a vibrant Jewish community that was almost annihilated during the Second World War. The museum is part of what Jan Assmann (1995) calls *cultural memory*, i.e., an institutionalized form of remembering that exceeds individual experience and is grounded in durable media, such as archives, objects, and, in this case, museographic narratives. The museum's photographic archive, ethnographic research, and permanent exhibitions facilitate the reconstruction of fragments of a silenced history. Through the recovery of testimonies, photographs, and documents, the museum retraces the Jewish history of Galicia, defying the silence imposed by the machinery of genocide and the subsequent oblivion promoted in Poland under the communist regime. In this way, it lends new meaning to a past that had been relegated to the margins, reinserting it into the country's historical framework.

Secondly, from the educational perspective, the museum assumes an important educational function. It becomes a space for what Michael Rothberg (2009) calls *multidirectional memory*: a way of remembering that does not compete for suffering, but connects it with other experiences of violence and exclusion, promoting intercultural dialogue. Although it is a space dedicated to preserving the memory of the Jewish community in the context of WW2, it also creates a space that promotes critical thinking by connecting the suffering of this community with current issues of violence and hatred, encouraging not only young Poles but also international visitors. Through workshops, lectures, guided tours, and academic collaborations, it contributes to a *pedagogy of memory* that not only conveys facts but also challenges participants emotionally and intellectually, encouraging reflection on moral responsibility for human suffering and the need to preserve historical memory.

In the field of memory-building processes, a significant educational potential is evident. However, it is imperative to point out the uses and abuses of the past, which, according

to Tzvetan Todorov (1995)[39], occur when memory fails to achieve an exemplary character, but is limited to mere literalness. This phenomenon, according to the author, can foster, for example, the spirit of revenge. By projecting the effects of an initial trauma and the extension of its consequences of victimisation to other generations, through the imposition of meanings associated with the past. This phenomenon is transformed into a manifestation of time trapped in time, into something insurmountable, into a perception subjected to the present. Consequently, literal memory is trapped in a static and rigid past.

From an ethical and political perspective, the museum positions itself as a space of resistance against denialism, the latent threats from those who trivialize or even deny genocide, and the resurgence of antisemitic discourses.[40] From this perspective, the museum embodies what Pierre Nora (1989) calls a *place of memory* (lieu de mémoire), a physical and symbolic site where the memory of an almost disappeared community is condensed and updated, directly addressing today's societies. In this context, the museum actively contributes to the fight against negationism and contemporary antisemitism, and is part of a militant memory framework, in which remembering becomes an act of resistance against disinformation, hatred, and the banalisation of suffering. It works not only to commemorate the victims but also to dignify their lives by incorporating them into a narrative that defies forgetting and reinforces the principles of human rights as well as the recognition of diversity.

In the field of heritage preservation, cultural institutions such as museums play a crucial role. These bodies, in their struggle to safeguard cultural heritage, often resort to the use of militant memory. However, the need emerges to clearly articulate what militant memory is. I would like to refer to the concept that author José Pablo Feinmann[41]

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[39] The original title of his book *Les Abus de la Mémoire* was first published in French in 1995. The Spanish translation *Los Abusos de la Memoria* (2000) was consulted for this research.

[40] Through its permanent and temporary exhibitions, its collection of books on the history of Jews in Galicia, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, and educational materials on the dangers of racism, as well as through its travelling exhibitions in different countries, the Jewish Museum of Galicia offers its visitors a meaningful opportunity for education and critical reflection on memory and human rights. See the 2023 Annual Report, the most recent available on its official website: https://galiciajewishmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Galicia-Jewish-Museum-%E2%80%93-Annual-Report-2023.pdf

[41] Quote translated from its Spanish original: *"Hay dos formas de la memoria. Una memoria pasiva, que se agota en el hecho que recuerda, que anula el presente en la exaltación de un pasado irrecuperable. Y una memoria activa, creadora y militante, que busca la esencia movilizadora del*

proposes. He captures its essence in the following words: ‘There are two forms of memory. A passive memory, which exhausts itself in the fact that it remembers, which annuls the present in the exaltation of an unrecoverable past. And an active, creative and militant memory, which seeks the mobilising essence of the past, which commits itself to the present as the only way of not drowning that past in sacralisation and idolatry. One is militant memory. The other is called nostalgia...’ (Feinmann, 1986, p.139).

Finally, in its affective and symbolic dimension, the museum provides a space for mourning, intergenerational connection, and the reconstruction of fragmented identities as it operates as a space of *post-traumatic memory*, offering the possibility to process and empathise with a past marked by pain and absence. In Pierre Nora's (1989) terms, it acts as a *place of memory* where the personal and the collective are intertwined in narratives that allow the past to be re-signified in the present. All these reasons justify why the Jewish Museum of Galicia cannot be understood simply as a traditional museum institution but as a vital junction in the network of transmission of the memory of the Holocaust. Its multidimensional function addresses the contemporary challenges of educating, remembering, and resisting in a world where the echoes of antisemitism and intolerance still linger.

From the perspective of author Alison Landsberg (2004), the Galicia Jewish Museum can be analysed as a generator of *prosthetic memory*, which she defines as a form of memory that is not derived from direct lived experience, but is acquired through technologies of representation, such as cinema, museums, television or virtual reality. These memories are ‘grafted’ onto the individual as a type of emotional and cognitive prosthesis to enable individuals to connect with these (in this case, traumatic) experiences by establishing an ethical relationship with others.

During my third academic semester in Krakow, Poland, as part of the CEERES program, I had the opportunity to intern at the Jewish Museum of Galicia from September 27, 2024, to January 31, 2025. During a guided tour led by Dr. Katarzyna Suszkiewicz, a fundamental question arose: Who will take responsibility for safeguarding this memory and ensuring the continuity of this legacy, thereby preventing

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pasado, que se compromete con el presente como única forma de no ahogar ese pasado en la sacralización y la idolatría. Una es la memoria militante. A la otra la llaman nostalgia...” José Pablo Feinmann, *‘La creación de lo posible’,* Legasa, (Buenos Aires, 1986), p.139.

the events of the past from being forgotten in the years to come? One of the points that requires critical reflection is that, although the museum has managed to sustain itself thanks to the commitment of various actors, including organisations and individuals dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust, this work depends largely on institutional will and support that are not guaranteed in the long term. The Jewish Museum of Galicia is funded through a combination of public and private resources, including support from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Municipality of Krakow, as well as international organisations such as the Claims Conference, the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, and private donations from Europe, Israel, and the United States.[42] This structure, although effective, highlights the fragility of memory projects, which, lacking structural mechanisms for autonomous sustainability, run the risk of fading away if political or philanthropic interest wanes. This raises an urgent question: who will assume responsibility for preserving this memory in the future when contexts, priorities, or governments change? Similarly, how can this memory be kept alive in the face of contemporary challenges such as intolerance, resurgence of hatred, and the trivialisation of the past?

This question resonates even more strongly with the resurgence of antisemitism globally, and despite the deeply symbolic character that the attacks of 7 October 2023 acquired in the contemporary Jewish imaginary - as an evocation of historical traumas and existential threats - the Galicia Jewish Museum, an institution dedicated precisely to the preservation and transmission of the memory of the Holocaust, did not issue an official statement on its institutional platforms. After a thorough review of its communication channels, including its website, social media accounts, and press releases, no evidence was found of any public stance or statement alluding to such events[43]. This absence does not necessarily imply a lack of ideological positioning. Still, it could be explained by various factors, such as its educational-historical focus on the Jewish experience in Galicia, or an institutional strategy of neutrality in the face of

[42] Galicia Jewish Museum, "Sponsors," accessed August 24, 2025, https://galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/museum/sponsors/

[43] The verification was carried out through direct consultation of the official website of the Jewish Museum of Galicia (https://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/), its Instagram account (@galiciajewishmuseum), and a review of relevant news items through search engines between April and June 2025. No institutional statements, publications, or interviews were found regarding the attacks of 7 October 2023.

contemporary geopolitical conflicts. However, the silent omission contrasts with the activation of discourses of memory by other similar institutions such as Yad Vashem[44] in Israel, and the Allied Museum[45] in Germany, opening up relevant questions about the limits, tensions, and responsibilities faced by memory museums in positioning themselves - or not - in the face of current events that reactivate historical sensitivities linked to the Holocaust.

It is noteworthy that, despite the absence of an official statement from the museum, the display of a poster bearing the hashtag *#bringthemhome,* which refers to the Israeli citizens held hostage in Gaza, at the main entrance is of considerable significance. This symbolic gesture, although discreet, demonstrates how even in the apparent institutional neutrality, an ethical stance based on empathy and the continuity of an active memory permeates. This representation is intrinsically linked to the functions of cultural memory, as asserted by Aleida Assmann, which not only preserves but also mobilises identitarian meanings in response to contemporary events.

Architectures of Remembrance: The Memory of the Holocaust at the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia

In the Mexican context, the preservation and transmission of Holocaust memory has taken a complex course, tied to the initiatives of local Jewish communities as well as educational and cultural institutions. Yet, this work has been primarily led by the organized Jewish community. This community has played a crucial role in promoting Holocaust awareness in a national environment where this event is not an integral part of the official historical narrative. The actions undertaken are not only limited to commemorative practices, but also extend to the promotion of tools for identity

[44] Following the attacks, during the UN Security Council session on 25 October 2023, Yad Vashem Chairman Dani Dayan stated: "The slaughter of Jews by Hamas on October 7th was genocidal in its intents and immeasurably brutal in its form… Those who seek to *understand,* look for a justifying context, do not categorically condemn the perpetrators, and do not call for the unconditional and immediate release of the abducted – fail the test. UN Secretary General António Guterres failed the test." Yad Vashem, "Yad Vashem's Response to UN Secretary General António Guterres's Statements in the UN Security Council about the Israel-Gaza War," October 25, 2023, https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/25-october-2023-08-28.html

[45] AlliiertenMuseum, "Statement by the Allied Museum concerning the Hamas attacks on Israel," *AlliiertenMuseum*, accessed August 24, 2025, https://www.alliiertenmuseum.de/en/stellungnahme-des-alliiertenmuseums-zum-angriff-der-hamas-auf-israel/

formation and the fostering of education on the subject in a country whose national history is not directly linked to the Holocaust.

In the Mexican context, the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia has established itself as the leading institution in preserving and transmitting the memory of the Holocaust, playing a central role in shaping discourses on human rights and historical memory. Established in 2010 in the Historic Centre of México City, its main objective is to convey a message of tolerance through the historical memory of genocides and other crimes.[46] The museum's founding story exemplifies the transformative power of personal experience, showing how it can become a strong force for building collective memory.

During an interview on February 7, 2022, conducted by Oso Trava on his YouTube channel[47], Sharon Zaga Mograbi, the founder, co-creator, and current director of the museum, discussed how her early encounters with Holocaust memory—shaped by family stories and a formative visit to Auschwitz during her youth—inspired her to create a museum dedicated to human dignity. From her perspective as a Mexican Jew, Zaga recognized that suffering does not need to be experienced firsthand to serve as an ethical and educational tool, stating, "pain makes you grow, but it doesn't have to be yours."[48] This idea is connected to the concept of prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004), which emphasizes the ability to empathetically adopt others' memories through cultural means like museums. The museum's origins were marked by institutional independence and a clear vision: not only to preserve the memory of the Holocaust but also to relate it to other genocides and hate crimes worldwide.

In this context, I would like to highlight the concept of post-memory, since Zaga's experiences and the motivations that led her to create the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia are a paradigmatic example of the impact this form of memory can have on those who did not directly experience a traumatic event. Marianne Hirsch approaches the postmemory[49] concept (2012) as a form of second-generation memory, in which the

[46] As stated in the mission/vision section of its official website: https://www.myt.org.mx/myt
[47] Sharon Zaga Mograbi, interview by Oso Trava. Sharon Zaga | Fundadora del Museo Memoria y Tolerancia #160, posted 7 February 2022, YouTube video 1:31:37, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olkGKZX8bTc&t=2709s
[48] This sentence was taken from the original Spanish version of the aforementioned interview with Sharon Zaga. The Spanish version mentions: "El dolor te hace crecer, pero no tiene que ser tuyo".
[49] Marianne Hirsch proposes the following idea that embodies what *postmemory* is: "...postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms

descendants of survivors inherit traumatic memories that they did not experience directly, but which are so deeply transmitted that they shape their identity and their relationship to the past. Thus, both prosthetic memory and postmemory allow us to understand how the experience of pain, trauma, and memory can be appropriated, transmitted, and re-signified beyond those who experienced it in their own flesh, becoming a universal ethical and educational resource.

Zaga's decision to create a cultural space for memory safeguarding was reinforced following her involvement in a university course at a prestigious institution in México City entitled 'Other Genocides', where she delved into the common dimensions of these crimes, including the systematic eradication of individuals based on ethnic, religious, or national factors. The museum's cross-cutting approach has been met with political resistance, as evidenced by pressures exerted by governments, including those of China and Turkey, to exclude specific genocides from its narrative.[50] For Mexican society, these genocides are part of a historical narrative that is 'distant' in both geographical and cultural terms. This phenomenon can result in the perception of these events as tragedies that do not directly impact México, given that the country has not formally experienced genocide in the narrow sense defined by the 1948 Convention. However, massacres have occurred on Mexican soil, such as the massacre of people of Chinese origin in the city of Torreón in 1911, fuelled by racial prejudice and xenophobia, or the discrimination that persists today towards indigenous peoples.

Nevertheless, the museum has persisted in its aim to present a functional memory (Assmann, 2011), which legitimises an ethic of otherness and a pedagogy of

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of mediation. Family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broader transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance." (Hirsch, 2012, p.35)

[50] Sharon Zaga Mograbi, interview by Oso Trava. Sharon Zaga | Fundadora del Museo Memoria y Tolerancia #160, posted 7 February 2022, YouTube video 1:31:37, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olkGKZX8bTc&t=2709s (While there are no official sources expressing the opinions of the Chinese and Turkish governments exerting pressure on the museum regarding the exhibitions on the Tibetan and Armenian genocides, respectively, Zaga mentions during the interview with Oso Trava that she received subtle warnings from the embassies of these countries in México to remove the exhibitions).

coexistence, even when the term "tolerance"[51], as Zaga herself acknowledges, still carries ambivalent connotations in México.

Mission and Values

Since its foundation, the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia has been committed to a deeply ethical and educational mission: to foster a culture of peace by promoting tolerance and respect. These values, explicitly stated on its official website, guide each of its exhibitions, educational programmes, and public initiatives. The museum seeks not only to inform, but also to provoke critical reflection on the consequences of hatred, discrimination, and indifference, with special emphasis on the memory of victims of genocide and historically marginalised groups. In this sense, its commitment is not limited to the past, but is projected into the present and the future, raising awareness of the situation of the most vulnerable and encouraging active participation and solidarity among citizens in the face of contemporary injustices.

The Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia is widely regarded as one of the most prominent institutions in México dedicated to the exhibition of the memory of the Holocaust. The museum's narrative positions the events of the Holocaust within a broader discourse on the defence of human rights. This discourse is characterised by a particular emphasis on the struggle against racial intolerance, the dangers that extremist ideologies represent, or the simple danger posed by indifference to the most vulnerable segments in the population by their own community. Inaugurated in 2010 in México City, the Museum's museographic proposal incorporates multimedia technology to narrate the genocide from a pedagogical, ethical, and human rights perspective[52]. Through permanent exhibitions, specialized diploma courses such as *Nunca Jamás* ('Never Again'), and collaborations with Holocaust survivors who found refuge in the country,

[51] Although etymologically the term *tolerance* implies acceptance of the other, in México's everyday language it is often associated with a passive or condescending attitude towards what is perceived as annoying, uncomfortable, or foreign. To *tolerate* someone is often understood as "put up with", rather than establishing an active recognition of what makes the other different in a sense of unique.

[52] Carlos Paul, "El Museo Memoria y Tolerancia incorpora realidad aumentada," *La Jornada*, 9 de mayo de 2023, https://www.jornada.com.mx/2023/05/09/cultura/a05n2cul

such as Luis Stillmann and Ruth D. Lechuga, the museum has established itself as a space of reference for the work of memory.

It is essential to note that the institution does not intend to portray a hierarchical structure of evil, the suffering of a specific population, or the gravity of crimes committed throughout history. Nevertheless, the memory of the Holocaust has been instrumentalised in institutions such as this one, allowing the European Jewish experience to engage in discourse with other manifestations of structural violence that prevail in Latin America. However, we cannot overlook the tension persists between the universalisation of the Holocaust as a moral lesson for humanity and the preservation of its singular character as a Jewish trauma, which poses interpretative challenges in contexts such as México, where other memories of violence (criminal, racial, or political, to cite a few examples) that are problems that persist in the country to this day also struggle for visibility and resolution.

The Museum's mission is not merely to educate the public, but rather to generate empathy and awareness about the importance of educating, in particular, the younger generations about the threat posed by racial hatred, its implications, and most importantly, that such chapters of violence throughout history should not be repeated. However, the existence of academic, artistic, and testimonial initiatives that address the Holocaust, memory in México has been constructed mainly from the museum and community sphere, leaving gaps in the national collective consciousness. This shows that Holocaust memory in México is not a homogeneous narrative, but a field in constant dispute and full of gaps in the collective memory, influenced by the tensions between cultural, political, and transnational memory and the current challenges regarding the subject of the conflict between Gaza and Israel.

Between Past and Present: The utilisation of the Holocaust as an Interpretative Framework for the Contemporary Conflict (Post 7 October)

Vasily Grossman once wrote: "It is the writer's duty to tell the terrible truth, and it is a reader's civic duty to learn this truth. To turn away, to close one's eyes and walk past is to insult the memory of those who have perished."[53]

[53] Vasily Grossman, *The Road: Stories, Journalism, and Essays*, citado en Goodreads, "It is the writer's duty to tell the terrible truth, and it is a reader's civic duty to learn this truth. To turn away, to

This statement forms part of his testimony regarding the Treblinka extermination camp. In addition to emphasizing the ethical necessity of remembrance, it establishes a link between the act of narration and the responsibility of the listener, reader, or witness. In societies where the Holocaust did not form part of the national historical narrative, such as México, the risk of ignoring the past is said to lead to its trivialisation or indifference. Conversely, in countries such as Poland, where the crimes occurred domestically, the challenge lies in confronting the grey areas of complicity and passivity, rather than adhering solely to heroic or victimising narratives.

Grossman's quote challenges both the creator and the receptor of memory, reminding us that the transmission of the Holocaust memory or legacy is not a passive exercise, but a political, ethical, and cultural act that obliges us to confront the horror without shortcuts or symbolic anaesthesia. In this sense, the work of institutions such as the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia in México or the Galicia Jewish Museum in Poland acquires a crucial relevance: they are spaces that not only preserve historical facts, but also call for a form of conscious citizenship, and the willingness to confront the horrors and the repercussions of the past is instrumental in preventing their replication in the present.

The official position of the Polish government following the attacks carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023 was one of explicit support for Israel, expressed by President Andrzej Duda, who condemned the attacks by Hamas and expressed Israel's right to protect its citizens.[54] Although no official statement was found from the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, I consider it worth mentioning that the POLIN Museum did publish one on the matter, condemning the terrorist attacks and defending Israel's right to exist[55]. The statement begins with a stark characterisation, drawing a clear line between perpetrators and victims. Although empathy for Palestinian victims is subsequently expressed, the structure of the text prioritises the pro-Israeli narrative and

close one's eyes and walk past is to insult the memory of those who have perished," https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/10253760-chteniya#:~:text=It%20is%20the%20writer's%20duty,of%20those%20who%20have%20perished (This quote was taken from Vasily Grossman's essay *The Hell of Treblinka*, which was later incorporated into his book *The Road: Short Fiction and Essays, 2010*).

[54] Polska Agencja Prasowa (PAP), "Duda assures Herzog of Poland's solidarity with Israel," *PAP*, 10 October 2023, https://www.pap.pl/en/news/duda-assures-herzog-polands-solidarity-israel

[55] Zygmunt Stępiński, "POLIN Museum Director's Statement Regarding Israel-Hamas War (Update)," *POLIN Museum*, August 11, 2025, https://polin.pl/en/polin-museum-directors-statement-regarding-israel-hamas-war-update

only then considers Palestinian suffering. And although the statement condemns questioning Israel's right to exist and labels it as antisemitism, it also emphasises its commitment against all forms of hatred, thus seeking to strike a balance in its message and preserve an image of ethical impartiality, although it does not necessarily extend to a political impartiality.

The museum also warned against the resurgence of antisemitism disguised as political criticism towards the state of Israel. Although the text does not explicitly refer to the Holocaust or its memory, the statement is part of a framework of memory in which contemporary attacks against Jews are interpreted in light of the historical experience of persecution and extermination. In this way, although the past is not mentioned, we can see how it continues to operate as a latent reference point. From the notion of 'memory frameworks' proposed by Maurice Halbwachs (1992), it can be understood that the condemnation of violence against Jews is articulated against a historical context of persecution and extermination, which, even without being named, legitimises the defence of Israel as the guarantor of Jewish survival. This dimension is reinforced if the Holocaust is viewed as a 'cultural trauma' (Alexander, 2004), whose memory serves as a moral warning against the repetition of atrocities.

Nevertheless, the public response to the POLIN Museum's statement after the attacks highlighted that memory institutions operate in a space of symbolic conflict where the past and present are connected. While the Polish government initially supported Israel, some parts of civil society criticized this stance by protesting in support of Palestine. In Polish academia, particularly at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, there were pro-Palestinian student demonstrations and demands for the institution to condemn Israeli military actions in Gaza.[56] There was even pressure to sever ties with Israeli academic institutions. However, the most disturbing aspect was that these protests were tainted by antisemitic acts, including the presence of banners bearing the slogan 'Jews to the gas chambers', which led to official condemnation and the opening of a police

[56] Jakub Tyszkowski, "Students Demand Response on Israel's Action in Gaza: Patience Wears Thin," *MyImpact*, May 16, 2024, https://my-impact.org/social-engagement/students-demand-response-on-israels-action-in-gaza-patience-wears-thin-7028451721706048a

investigation, highlighting the resurgence of tensions and hostilities in university settings.[57]

In early 2025, protests were held in Warsaw and Kraków, condemning Israel's actions and comparing the Gaza situation to Nazi ghettos.[58] In this way, we can see how Halbwachs's concept of memory frameworks is reshaped, creating a form of competitive memory (Rothberg,2009) in the public sphere. The POLIN Museum became a key site of this controversy, receiving both messages of solidarity and digital harassment[59] (after issuing its statement in support of Israel), which reflects a broader trend of hostility toward institutions that support the Jewish state and the release of hostages still held in Gaza. This situation highlights the urgent need to address online harassment and information management, especially on digital platforms, to protect freedom of expression and the integrity of cultural and educational institutions such as museums.

From the Holocaust to 7 October: Tensions and Echoes of Memory in México

Although it is presented as an ethical duty to remember in order not to repeat, in practice, the Holocaust memory operates under the devices of institutional legitimation, which entails ethical and political dilemmas. In México, the discourse surrounding the Holocaust is shaped by a variety of actors—including governmental, institutional, academic, and community-based entities—who play an active role in its construction, circulation, and legitimization. In the community-based entities under consideration, the most prevalent are the organised Jewish communities[60] (e.g., the Central Committee of the Jewish Community of México) and some government bodies (e.g., the Ministry of

[57] Jerusalem Post Staff, "'Jews to the Gas Chambers': Pro-Palestinian Poster at Polish University Draws Condemnations," *The Jerusalem Post*, October 18, 2024, https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-825168

[58] Swissinfo, "Manifestaciones contra Israel en víspera de aniversario de liberación de Auschwitz," *Swissinfo*, January 26, 2025, https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/manifestaciones-contra-israel-en-v%C3%ADspera-de-aniversario-de-liberaci%C3%B3n-de-auschwitz/88783185

[59] Zygmunt Stępiński and Piotr Wiślicki, "An Open Letter to the Friends of POLIN Museum," *POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, accessed August 15, 2025, https://polin.pl/en/open-letter-friends-polin-museum

[60] World Population Review, "Jewish Population by Country 2025," accessed August 24, 2025, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/jewish-population-by-country (According to the World Population Review website, the number of Jewish people living in México in 2023 was 40,000).

Foreign Affairs[61]). However, these discourses often omit pre-existing historical tensions, such as the Mexican state's resistance to receiving Jewish refugees during Nazism, or the way in which a universalist view of the Holocaust is prioritised, diluting its historical specificity in the name of generalised causes such as tolerance or peace. As Aleida Assmann observes, this universalisation can have a dual effect; while it enables the Holocaust to be recognised as part of a global human rights framework, it also threatens to decontextualise and depoliticise the specific historical circumstances of the genocide.[62]

Each of these actors has a specific role in representing victims and perpetrators, operating within discursive frameworks that respond to particular historical, ideological, and pedagogical contexts. Among these instances, the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia, directed by Sharon Zaga and Milly Cohen (both of Jewish descent), has positioned itself as the most prominent reference for the public dissemination of the Holocaust memory in the Mexican context. The museographic and educational proposal is not limited to the commemoration of the Nazi genocide; rather, it translates this into an ethical narrative with a focus on the present, articulating what Aleida Assmann (2011) refers to as a functional memory: that part of the past that remains active because it fulfils identity, educational, or political functions in the present. In this case, the museum selects significant historical events, such as the Holocaust, other genocides, and serious human rights violations, to highlight their contemporary relevance and use them as tools for prevention and civic education. This approach draws parallels between historical tragedies and contemporary issues, thereby reinforcing an ethical message. However, like all functional memory, this practice also involves omissions and hierarchies that could pose a risk by turning memory into a political resource in the public sphere.

[61] A day after the attacks, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement in which it 'unequivocally condemns the unproductive attacks by Hamas against the people of Israel on 7 October' and reaffirms that 'any act of terrorism constitutes a threat to international peace and security... no cause justifies the use of terrorism'. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, "Gobierno de México expresa su máxima preocupación por conflicto entre Israel y Palestina y condena todo acto en contra de civiles," [*Mexican Government Expresses Its Deepest Concern over the Conflict Between Israel and Palestine and Condemns Any Acts Against Civilians*] *Gobierno de México*, last modified October 27, 2023, https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/el-gobierno-de-mexico-expresa-su-maxima-preocupacion-por-conflicto-entre-israel-y-palestina-y-condena-todo-acto-en-contra-de-civiles?idiom=es

[62] See Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

In a country marked by structural violence[63], impunity and the normalisation of cruelty, as is the case in contemporary México, the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia re-signifies the Holocaust not as a distant and closed event, but as a paradigm of radical evil that has the potential to manifest itself again in other forms if it is not recognised, studied and denounced. This transposition transforms the museum into a space for critical pedagogy and citizen education, where memory is not confined to the past, but interpellates the present and its fractures.

In response to the outbreak of violence on 7 October 2023, when the Islamist group Hamas launched a massive attack on Israeli civilians, the Museum issued a public statement that sought to position itself based on a humanist and pedagogical ethic. Two days after the terrorist attacks, the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia published a post on its official Instagram account, noting:

"From the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia we observe with pain and condemn the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas against the civilian population of the State of Israel. In this conflict nobody wins and the use of force particularly harms the civilian populations involved. We consider that both peoples, Palestinian and Israeli, have a legitimate right to live in peace and to exist, and not to die violently. We hope that peace and reason will prosper."[64]

This position reflects a carefully balanced institutional stance that seeks to sustain its role as an ethical mediator between the memory of the past and contemporary crises. By declaring: 'From the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia we observe with sorrow and condemn the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas against the civilian population of the State of Israel...', the institution reaffirms its commitment to human rights and its rejection of violence directed at civilians. This statement aligns with the museum's core values, such as dignity, peace, and tolerance, as well as its pedagogical function of preventing hatred through historical awareness. While explicitly condemning the

[63] In México, structural violence is one of the most acute phenomena in the country, impacting individuals and communities in profound ways. This violence takes various forms, including the significant impact of organised crime across the country, femicides, and disappearances. These problems are exacerbated by poverty, inequality, and the weakness of the rule of law.
[64] @museomyt, Instagram post, October 9, 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CyMbzbUOGtg/

terrorist attacks, it also appealed to the legitimacy of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to coexist in peace.

From an ethical perspective, this institutional response not only reveals the museum's commitment to denouncing violence against civilians but also expresses its effort to maintain a balanced narrative, even in a polarised context. The tone of the statement evidences a clear will to frame the event not from a partisan or nationalist logic, but from an ethical and memorial horizon that promotes empathy, respect, and recognition of the other as a basis for coexistence.

However, from a critical perspective, the statement raises several tensions in the field of memory. By introducing the phrase ‘in this conflict no one wins’ and equating the suffering of ‘both peoples’ without making a clear distinction between victim and perpetrator in the immediate context, the discourse engages in an ethical symmetrization that may dilute the gravity of the concrete event. This form of rhetorical balancing, while humanistic, may conflict with the specific function of Holocaust remembrance, which, as Paul Ricoeur (2004) warns, demands a narrative vigilance that neither conceals responsibility nor obscures the moral hierarchies of events.

Furthermore, the statement omits any explicit reference to the memory of the Holocaust as an interpretative framework for Jewish suffering, which is significant for an institution whose foundation is articulated around this historical event. In a context of increasing use of references to the Holocaust to explain or denounce contemporary events - both by Jewish and non-Jewish actors - this omission can be interpreted as a strategy of discursive containment to avoid controversy or accusations of instrumentalisation of the Holocaust.

Following the publication on Instagram by the Museum, various responses were observed in the Mexican public sphere, both in support and reproach. However, the most visible rejection came from pro-Palestinian groups who continue to question the museum's institutional neutrality[65]. Cultural and artistic initiatives in public spaces, such

[65] In addition to the Holocaust, the Museum's official website covers other internationally recognised genocides, such as the Armenian (1915), Cambodian (1975), Guatemalan (1981), Rwandan (1994) and Darfur, which began in 2003 and is still ongoing. However, there is currently no specific section dedicated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or to the controversies surrounding its legal characterisation as a possible case of genocide or systematic displacement.

as murals in front of the museum and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and marches demanding a ceasefire in the streets of the Mexican capital, mainly warned of a biased narrative, accusing the museum of 'covering up for murderers' and 'opposing the truth'[66]. This scenario shows how citizens responded with active criticism, rather than passive silence or approval, to the museum's call. A significant tension arises here between an institutional memory that seeks discursive equity and the demands of a population that claims the inclusion of other memories of suffering as a condition for authentic peace.

The reactivation of the memory of the Holocaust after the attacks generated a discursive space in México where different historical memories began to intersect in public debate. In this context, the conceptual framework proposed by Michael Rothberg (2009) - multidirectional memory - offers a critical tool to analyse how memories of the Holocaust are not situated in isolation, but are configured in dialogue (and sometimes in conflict) with other collective memories present in Mexican society, such as those of the victims of the conflict in Gaza, the structural violence in the country or forced displacement. Rothberg (2009) argues that the memory of one suffering does not necessarily erase another, but can act as a catalyst for empathy and solidarity if it is articulated in an inclusive and ethical way. In the Mexican case, this possibility is manifested in some academic, museum, and citizen voices that have sought to avoid the hierarchisation of pain. However, a discourse has also emerged that reactivates the memory of the Holocaust as the only paradigm of absolute evil, which can close the space for the recognition of Palestinian suffering or depoliticise the analysis of the conflict. This phenomenon of selective memory recall is driven by a logic of competition, where the acknowledgement of one victim appears to invalidate the recognition of another.

From this perspective, the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia in its statement after the attacks, evidences precisely this tension: on the one hand, it invokes the universal ethical values of coexistence, condemning all forms of violence; on the other, it avoids explicitly activating the memory of the Holocaust as a lens of interpretation, possibly in an attempt to avoid reinforcing a competitive memory. Hence, México emerges as a

[66] United Nations, "Daily Press Briefing (20 January 2025)," YouTube video, January 20, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Om2Fhpzg-6M

paradigmatic case to examine the limits and potentialities of the multidirectional model. In a society marked by multiple forms of violence and fragmented memories, how Holocaust remembrance is articulated can serve as a bridge or a symbolic border.

In sum, the Mexican Museum's statement operates in the realm of moderate functional memory, seeking to maintain its ethical authority as a space for dialogue and human rights education, but at the cost of renouncing a more confrontational or specific stance from within the framework of the foundational genocide that structures its institutional narrative. This tension between diplomatic neutrality and ethical commitment is evidence of the difficulties inherent to memory museums in contemporary contexts of high geopolitical polarisation.

Historical Memory and the Reactivation of Trauma: From the *Shoah* to 7 October in the Jewish Community Discourse

In the case of the organised Jewish community in México, October 7th marked a moment of strong identity reactivation where the memory of the Holocaust was evoked as a historical reference to denounce the resurgence of antisemitism and violence directed against Jewish civilians. To cite an example, during the annual ceremony to remember the victims of the Holocaust that took place on 27 January 2025 in the Mexican capital, survivor Luis Opatowsky Goldberg, expressed:

> "Hoy, en pleno 2025, el antisemitismo está disfrazado de antisionismo que es un odio encubierto contra el único país judío en el mundo, Israel… este odio contra el pueblo judío trajo el nuevo Holocausto el día 7 de octubre del 2023… siendo ésta la mayor masacre de judíos desde el Holocausto… México debe despertar del extremismo radical que nos afecta a todos y a este gran país… no me duelen los actos de la gente mala, me duele la indiferencia de la gente buena…"[67] [*"Today, in 2025, antisemitism is disguised as anti-Zionism, which is a hidden hatred against the only Jewish country in the world, Israel… this hatred against the Jewish people brought a new Holocaust on October 7,*

[67] Luis Opatowsky Goldberg, speech delivered at the "Reflexiones" ceremony, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, January 27, 2025, cited in Elena Bialostocky, "Comunidad evangélica PAAZ cumple 20 años de conmemorar el Holocausto con 'Reflexiones'" [*Evangelical PAAZ Community Celebrates 20 Years of Holocaust Commemoration with 'Reflections'*], *Enlace Judío*, January 30, 2025,, https://www.enlacejudio.com/2025/01/30/comunidad-evangelica-paaz-cumple-20-anos-de-conmemorar-el-holocausto-con-reflexiones/

2023… this being the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust… Mexico must awaken from the radical extremism that affects us all and this great country… I am not pained by the acts of bad people, I am pained by the indifference of good people…"]

Considering this, the community narrative privileged a memory oriented towards protecting the group and strengthening solidarity with the state of Israel, situating Hamas attacks as an existential threat comparable, in some discourses, to the antecedents of the Nazi genocide. This position, while valid insofar as it addresses a collective trauma, can also hinder the development of a more nuanced and relational understanding of the conflict. This can make it challenging to acknowledge the suffering of other parties, particularly the Palestinian people.

Taken together, these events show that the modern tragedy triggered not only fear and community action but also revived a shared memory of the Holocaust, which is used to condemn hatred and raise civic awareness. Thus, the Jewish community in México finds itself at a discursive crossroads: on the one hand, it has the possibility of articulating an ethical memory that, without diluting the trauma of the Holocaust, projects it towards a universal commitment to human rights; on the other, it runs the risk of enclosing this memory in a defensive logic that prevents empathy and recognition of other victims. In this sense, Rothberg's multidirectional model remains a powerful tool for thinking about the future of public and community memory in scenarios marked by polarisation.

Gaza in the Collective Memory: A Memory Under Construction

Since 7 October, events in Gaza have been etched into the collective memory of both peoples, each crafting its own narrative of what happened. I will not dwell on the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as that is beyond the scope of this work. However, I will use that date—which has become a turning point for both communities—as a reference point to analyse how recent events have not only shaped different competing memories, but also narratives laden with pain, meaning, and historical significance for each party.

The developments in Gaza have become part of the collective memory, although in a fragmented and contested manner, depending on the narrative framework. In the

Palestinian case, Gaza is seen as a symbol of the historical continuity of the *Nakba*[68], occupation, and dispossession, becoming a focal point of identity that articulates the collective experience of victimisation and resistance. Younger generations have inherited from their ancestors images of destruction, displacement, and suffering as part of an identity narrative (Hirsch, 2012) that connects them to the memories of 1948 and reinforces the perception of a prolonged struggle for survival and justice. In this setting, violence and terrorist acts against Israel are seen and justified through an ideology that views Palestinians as victims of colonialism and genocide by the Jewish state.

For the international community, which has not directly experienced these events, these memories of injustice can be understood through what Alison Landsberg (2004) describes as prosthetic memory. Although the suffering and pain experienced are not part of the direct experience of those observing from outside, these events are internalized through empathy, symbolically appropriated, and 'borrowed' to articulate denunciations of injustice. This shared memory aims to create a framework of moral identification that allows external communities to adopt these foreign memories as their own, thereby inscribing them into the collective memory and reinforcing human rights discourses.

The situation in Gaza has prompted widespread support and sympathy worldwide, shown through numerous solidarity events. These include marches supporting the Palestinian people and extensive media coverage condemning the actions of the Israeli government. However, this prevailing narrative often overshadows the reality of those still in captivity, hiding a key part of the conflict's complexity.

By contrast, in the collective memory of Israelis and large sectors of the global Jewish community, the events in Gaza are interpreted through the prism of an existential threat. Gaza, under the leadership of Hamas, is perceived as a place that generates violence against Jews and, by extension, as a permanent threat to Israel's national security. This perception is intertwined with a broader historical experience of persecution, reinforced by contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism in different parts of the world, where

[68] This Arabic term means 'catastrophe' and is particularly associated with the displacement of Palestinian Arabs during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. United Nations. "About the Nakba." *UNISPAL – Question of Palestine*. Accessed August 24, 2025. https://www.un.org/unispal/about-the-nakba/

Jews are blamed either for the policies of the State of Israel or, indiscriminately, for their collective identity.

These events, especially those related to the murder and kidnapping of civilians[69] on 7 October, inevitably evoke memories of the pogroms and the Holocaust, reinforcing the view that antisemitism remains a constant threat. This interpretation bolsters the Jewish collective memory and awareness of historical vulnerability, while also showing that the Holocaust cannot be reduced to a tragic and closed chapter, but is a living reference that shapes the understanding of the present. However, this same connection raises questions about the limits of memory: although it serves as a valid warning against the repetition of persecution, it runs the risk of being used as a political framework that outsizes the threat and shapes the way in which contemporary narratives of the conflict are constructed.

This duality of narratives illustrates a competitive memory (Rothberg, 2009), where the same events generate different interpretations depending on the cultural, historical, and political background. Museums operate as spaces that reinforce these narratives by selecting which memories to emphasise and how to link the past to the present. In both institutions, the Galicia Jewish Museum and Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia, 7 October has not yet been incorporated into their institutional narratives. This is partly due to the immediacy of the events, which requires broader contextualisation to ensure accurate presentation and avoid bias. Nevertheless, this absence raises the question of how and when these events will be incorporated into official memory narratives.

[69] According to the Human Rights Watch article titled 'I Can't Erase All the Blood from My Mind,' on 7 October, an estimated 1,195 people were killed during the Nova music festival and in communities south of Israel. In addition, around 251 civilians were taken hostage in Gaza.
Human Rights Watch, "'I Can't Erase All the Blood from My Mind': Palestinian Armed Groups' October 7 Assault on Israel," July 17, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/17/i-cant-erase-all-blood-my-mind/palestinian-armed-groups-october-7-assault-israel

Chapter 5. From Remembrance to Warning: Holocaust Remembrance in the Face of the Resurgence of Hate

“Antisemitism is always a means rather than an end; it is a measure of the contradictions yet to be resolved. It is a mirror for the failings of individuals, social structures, and State systems. Tell me what you accuse Jews of—I’ll tell you what you’re guilty of.” (Grossmann, 2006, p.484).

Grossman's statement invites us to understand antisemitism not only as a prejudice that has always been present in societies throughout history or as an isolated ideology, but as a projective mechanism through which entire societies displace their crises, fears, and internal conflicts onto a historically stigmatised ‘other’. In this sense, antisemitism functions as a moral and political thermometer: where it flourishes, it reveals deeper structural fractures - economic, identity, cultural - that states and societies have failed to resolve.

This final chapter proposes a critical reading of the memory of the Holocaust as a tool for analysis and prevention in the face of the resurgence of antisemitism. Based on the dialogue between memory, history, and politics, this will address the current tensions surrounding the instrumentalization of the past, the normalization of discriminatory discourse, and the urgency of sustaining an ethical memory capable of generating collective responsibility and resistance in the face of repetition.

The Holocaust memory serves as a crucial axis in shaping contemporary memory politics and analyzing current forms of antisemitism. It involves not just the preservation of historical facts but also a vital exercise that enables us to identify how hate speech functions, evolves, and re-emerges in social and political contexts. Far from being overcome, antisemitism endures in new forms, adapted to the languages of today: from denialism and historical relativism to its spread on social media, social networks, populist rhetoric, and institutional venues.

Within this framework, Holocaust remembrance cannot be viewed as a concluded event, a subject for history books, a series of tragedies to be displayed in museums, or diminished as a mere commemorative act. It is imperative to conceptualise this as an active social practice that challenges the present, both in its forms of transmission and in its capacity to generate critical consciousness and awareness. Remembering the

Holocaust implies recognising that the mechanisms that made it possible - dehumanisation, the normalisation of hatred and collective indifference - are not phenomena of the past, but latent threats in contemporary societies.

Post-7 October Antisemitism: Between Discourse and Action

The 7th of October 2023 marked a turning point in the global resurgence of antisemitism. Hamas's violent attack on Israeli civilians not only triggered a regional crisis of war, but also precipitated a wave of antisemitic reactions in multiple societies. This phenomenon manifests itself in physical acts as well as in symbolic and discursive expressions, demonstrating that this deep hatred remains an active, mutating, and deeply rooted threat. Historian Deborah Lipstadt has expressed concerns about this phenomenon from a critical perspective, stating that antisemitism is not a relic of the past, but rather an adaptable ideology capable of reinvention in response to contemporary needs (Lipstadt, 2019).

A particularly relevant issue that has gained visibility since the 7 October 2023 attacks is the scant critical attention paid in some sectors of Western public opinion to the overtly antisemitic nature of Hamas's discourse, as expressed in its founding charter[70] and numerous subsequent statements by its leaders. This ideological component, which denies the right of the State of Israel to exist and associates Jews as a collective with absolute evil, rather than being widely denounced, has, in many cases, been downplayed, ignored, or subsumed within a political narrative about the conflict. As a result, in countries such as France, the UK, and the Netherlands, mass demonstrations in support of the Palestinian people have been held, sometimes tolerating slogans or symbols that reproduce anti-Jewish stereotypes or trivialise the memory of the Holocaust, under the guise of legitimate criticism of the Israeli government. This phenomenon raises urgent questions about the boundaries between political solidarity and the indirect legitimisation of hate speech, as well as about the ethical responsibility of social and media actors in highly polarised contexts.

[70] Anti-Defamation League, "Anti-Semitism & Hamas Charter: Selected Excerpts," *ADL*, accessed August 24, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/news/anti-semitism-hamas-charter-selected-excerpts

A report published by the Anti-Defamation League in early May 2025[71] has indicated a notable increase in violent antisemitic incidents within the seven countries with the largest Jewish communities outside Israel, collectively known as the J7: Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia, and Argentina. The report states that attacks against Jewish schools, synagogues, and businesses, as well as individuals, have increased significantly, in some cases more than doubling in 2023 compared to the previous year[72]. It also points out that these violent acts cannot be attributed to extreme left-wing or right-wing groups, but rather to a more alarming phenomenon: the normalization of antisemitism in societies. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the mechanisms that permit the normalization of this hatred in societies characterized by democratic values.

Expressions of antisemitism were also observed in Poland and México. Just a few weeks after the outbreak of the conflict, on 21 October, during a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Warsaw, a student was photographed carrying a placard showing the Israeli flag inside a rubbish bin, accompanied by the caption 'keep the world clean'.[73] Beyond its apparent visual simplicity, the image condensed a message of exclusion and dehumanisation, associating a Jewish national symbol with waste that must be eliminated, reproducing historical narratives of ethnic cleansing and implicitly legitimising the eradication of a people. A year later, in October, banners appeared at Jagiellonian University with messages such as 'Jews to the gas chambers,'[74] bringing openly genocidal rhetoric into the academic space. Such expressions, displayed in a place that should theoretically be a bastion of critical thinking and resistance to all

[71] Anti-Defamation League, "80 años después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial: las siete comunidades judías" [*80 Years After World War II: The Seven Jewish Communities*], *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed August 18, 2025, https://www.adl.org/es/resources/press-release/80-anos-despues-de-la-segunda-guerra-mundial-las-siete-comunidades-judias
[72] Anti-Defamation League, "Top 5 Global Antisemitic Trends: October 7 One-Year Impact Report," *ADL*, accessed August 18, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/report/top-5-global-antisemitic-trends-october-7-one-year-impact-report
[73] American Jewish Committee, "Reports and Emblematic Examples of Antisemitic Hate Speech and Violence Since October 7," *AJC*, accessed August 18, 2025, https://www.ajc.org/reports-and-emblematic-examples-of-antisemitic-hate-speech-and-violence-since-october-7
[74] TVP World, "Police Probe 'Jews to the Gas Chambers' Message Left at Poland's Oldest University," *TVP World*, accessed August 18, 2025, https://www.tvp.pl/tvp-world/kategorie/society/police-probe-jews-to-the-gas-chambers-message-left-at-polands-oldest-university/

forms of intolerance, highlight the fragility of these principles when hate speech manages to infiltrate the university sphere.

In México, in May 2024, the Israeli Embassy became the target of acts of vandalism. What began as a peaceful demonstration in support of Palestine turned into an episode of violence when some participants threw Molotov cocktails at the diplomatic compound.[75] Beyond the material damage, the attack can be interpreted as having strong symbolic significance, as attacking a diplomatic headquarters not only violates a space protected by international law, but also sends a message of direct hostility towards the state it represents.

The rise of this type of attack worldwide indicates not only an emotional reaction to the conflict but also a structural basis that Lipstadt had previously identified and warned about: "Antisemitism flourishes in a society that is intolerant of others, be they immigrants or racial and religious minorities. When expressions of contempt for one group become normative, it is virtually inevitable that similar hatred will be directed at other groups. Like a fire set by an arsonist, passionate hatred and conspiratorial worldviews reach well beyond their intended target. They are not rationally contained. But even if the antisemites were to confine their venom to Jews, the existence of Jew-hatred within a society is an indication that something about the entire society is amiss. No healthy society harbors extensive antisemitism—or any other form of hatred" (Lipstadt, 2019, p.11).

Antisemitism as Conspiracy and Displacement

Another central aspect of contemporary antisemitism is its deeply conspiratorial character. Throughout history, in different cultural and political contexts, narratives have proliferated that attribute to the Jewish community an alleged hidden and disproportionate power over world events. These conspiracy theories include accusations of financial control, government manipulation, or global media influence. After the 7 October attacks, this conspiratorial imaginary has resurfaced with force, especially in digital spaces where the circulation of disinformation, decontextualised

[75] AFP, "Manifestantes y policías se enfrentan cerca de la embajada de Israel en México" [*Protesters and Police Clash Near the Israeli Embassy in Mexico*], *El Economista*, May 28, 2024, https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/internacionales/Manifestantes-y-policias-se-enfrentan-cerca-de-la-embajada-de-Israel-en-Mexico-20240528-0124.htm

images, and polarising discourses has created a fertile breeding ground for its dissemination. In this scenario, it is worth problematising the logical inconsistencies underpinning such discourses: if there is a control of the media by the Jewish people, as some sectors insist on claiming, how then can we explain the persistence - and, in many cases, the amplification - of antisemitic narratives in global media platforms?

This dissonance highlights not only the empirical falsity of such claims, that, far from describing an objective reality, antisemitic conspiracy theories act as mirrors of collective fears and as tools of simplification in the face of complex problems. Their strength lies not in the truth they contain, but in their ability to offer a totalising explanation in times of uncertainty. Understanding antisemitism in its contemporary complexity requires an intersectional, historical, and critical approach that distinguishes between legitimate criticism of a state's policies and collective hatred of a people. In doing so, it contributes to a pedagogy of memory that does not trivialise the past or instrumentalise the suffering of others for ideological purposes, but rather brings it into dialogue with the ethical demands of the present.

The Holocaust as a Mirror: Uses, Abuses and Disputes of Memory in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict after October 7

The memory of the Holocaust has been employed in several highly controversial and polarised ways in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly in discourses on the suffering of the Palestinian people and accusations of genocide in Gaza. This instrumentalisation has generated a range of significant academic, political, and ethical reactions and has been a source of concern among Holocaust historians, Jewish intellectuals, and human rights advocates. In some of these spaces, slogans such as ‘from the river to the sea’ or explicitly equating Israel with the Nazi regime have resulted in a competing memory (Rothberg, 2009), where Palestinian suffering is articulated not to enter into dialogue with the memory of the Holocaust, but to displace or invalidate it. This collision of memorial frameworks can be interpreted through the notion of multidirectional memory, as it shows how memories of violence can come into tension when instrumentalised by divergent political interests. The risk, as Deborah Lipstadt (2019) warns, lies in the fact that these narratives, by taking up just causes, end up reactivating classic and new forms of antisemitism that naturalise symbolic and physical violence against Jews.

This resurgence cannot be separated from the emotional, political, and media context that followed the attacks. On the one hand, global outrage at the civilian deaths in Gaza generated a wave of solidarity with the Palestinian people. However, this solidarity was, in some cases, channelled through symbolic forms that included antisemitic elements, such as the denial of the Holocaust, the trivialisation of its victims, or the collective attribution of crimes to all Jews worldwide. From the perspective of multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), this phenomenon can be understood as a symbolic competition between narratives of suffering. The evocation of the Holocaust by Jewish communities to denounce the attacks, and the response of pro-Palestinian sectors that compare the situation in Gaza to the Nazi genocide, is evidence of a tension between frames of reference that collide rather than dialogue. This conflict of memories, when not approached from an ethic of complexity, can lead to polarised forms of identification and hatred.

In the aftermath of the attacks of 7 October 2023, the Holocaust memorial museums that I have discussed in this research have faced new challenges in coping with the resurgence of antisemitism in their respective social and political contexts. Although their responses have varied according to their national realities, both spaces have reaffirmed their role as active institutions of pedagogy, guardians of memory, and defenders of human rights. The Galicia Jewish Museum has adopted a careful but committed stance in the face of the resurgence of antisemitism, opting for an educational rather than confrontational response. Through its programming focused on the Holocaust and its consequences, the museum promotes an empathetic and critical memory, insisting on the need to remember not only as an act of commemoration but also as a tool for ethical resistance to hatred. Its permanent exhibitions, such as *Traces of Memory*[76], and its regular commemorative activities, not only preserve Jewish cultural heritage in Poland but also provide spaces for collective reflection. In a context where the political instrumentalisation of the past has become commonplace, the museum claims the value of a complex and non-manipulative memory, capable of generating dialogue rather than polarisation.

[76] Galicia Jewish Museum, "Traces of Memory: A Contemporary Look at the Jewish Past in Poland," accessed August 19, 2025, https://galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/wystawy/traces-of-memory-a-contemporary-look-at-the-jewish-past-in-poland/

In México, where antisemitic incidents have been more isolated but equally significant[77], the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia has reinforced its mission to promote respect for diversity. Although it has avoided taking an explicit stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it has emphasised the need to distinguish between legitimate political criticism and hate speech, warning about how antisemitism can be camouflaged under forms of political activism that collectively dehumanise the community.

Today, more than ever, Vasily Grossman's words resonate as an urgent warning that antisemitism is not an isolated or outdated phenomenon, but rather a persistent symptom of the structural flaws that remain unresolved in our societies. His reflection: "Antisemitism… is a mirror for the failings of individuals, social structures, and state systems" challenges us to critically examine the mechanisms of projection, exclusion, and symbolic violence that continue to operate beneath supposedly civilised narratives. The Holocaust did not happen overnight; it was the result of an accumulation of hate speech and legal exclusion over a long period, which led to an increasing dehumanisation of the Jewish population. While there were other victims of Nazi extermination, the regime's central and systematic goal was the total annihilation of the European Jewish population. Recognising this specificity does not imply hierarchising suffering; rather, it requires a rigorous understanding of the logic of radical hatred and its possible reconfigurations in the present. In this sense, the persistence and trivialisation of antisemitism today forces us to ask: what are we ignoring, what have we normalised, and what silences are we reproducing as a global community?

[77] Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitic Incidents in Wake of Hamas War on Israel," *Anti-Defamation League*, accessed August 24, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/article/global-antisemitic-incidents-wake-hamas-war-israel

Conclusion

This research has shown that the memory of the Holocaust is not only a moral duty towards the victims who are no longer here to raise their voices but also a field of constant dispute in which national narratives, political interests, and cultural dynamics are deeply intertwined. Both in Poland, where some of the most atrocious crimes of the Shoah were perpetrated, and in México, where memory is articulated from a geographical distance but with a strong symbolic charge, it can be observed that the past does not remain lifeless: it is reactivated, negotiated and takes on new forms in response to the demands of the present.

In Poland, memory is fraught with historical ambiguities and political tensions. On the one hand, there is a recognition of the Shoah as a tragedy that devastated the Jewish community; on the other, discourses of revisionism and national victimisation emerge and seek to minimise or obscure the complicity of sectors of the local population.

In México, by contrast, the memory of the Holocaust has been shaped by the experience of immigrant Jewish communities and their efforts to pass on a legacy of resistance and dignity to future generations. We've seen how institutions such as the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia have played a crucial role in this task, transforming the memory of the Holocaust into a universal educational model.

The theoretical framework developed in this work allowed us to understand these dynamics in transgenerational and cultural terms. The concept of postmemory (Hirsch) explains how subsequent generations, even without having experienced the trauma themselves, inherit it as an experience that conditions their identity and their ways of remembering. Similarly, Jeffrey C. Alexander's notion of cultural trauma reveals how certain groups manage to articulate experiences of collective suffering into socially shared narratives that transcend time and space. Both categories are indispensable for analysing how the memory of the Holocaust is re-signified both in societies directly involved and in those that, from a distance, appropriate this past to articulate an ethics of memory.

However, the relevance of this study lies not only in the analysis of the past, but also in its connection to current challenges. The terrorist attack by Hamas against Israel on 7

October 2023 not only caused contemporary trauma in Israeli society, the Jewish diaspora, and the Palestinian people, but also triggered a disturbing resurgence of antisemitism globally. In this context, the memory of the Holocaust has once again become a point of reference for interpreting and denouncing the persistence of prejudices and hate speech that seemed to have been overcome, but which are finding new forms of legitimisation in the political and digital arena.

The comparison between the Museo de Memoria y Tolerancia in México and the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków highlights two divergent ways of articulating the Holocaust memory. While the former universalises the experience, linking it to other genocides to construct a pedagogy of tolerance, the latter focuses on the testimonial reconstruction of annihilated communities, situating memory in the very space of the catastrophe. This difference reveals not only the different functions of memory in distant contexts—one preventive and universalist, the other localised and testimonial—but also the inherent tensions between remembering as an ethical duty and remembering as cultural heritage. Both, however, coincide in emphasising the need to remember as an act of resistance against oblivion and as a tool to confront the resurgence of antisemitism in the present.

Preserving the memory of the Holocaust is not only a duty to the past but also an act of ethical and political responsibility towards the present. Remembering means both paying tribute to the victims and confronting the mechanisms of hatred, exclusion, and violence that, in new forms, threaten to resurface. In a global scenario where antisemitism has resurfaced with revived intensity in the last two years, demonstrations charged with hate speech and calls for the dissolution of the State of Israel, memory emerges as a moral imperative that transcends symbolic commemoration: it involves recognising the echoes and the consequences of the past within our societies, it also involves the resistance to the normalisation of hatred, and the interrogation of narratives that trivialise or exploit the Holocaust for political ends.

The memory of the Holocaust does not belong solely to the past: it is an uncomfortable mirror that reflects the fractures of the present as well. If it is forgotten or trivialised, the ground is left open for hatred to take root again under new guises. It is only when memory transforms into active awareness and shared responsibility that the phrase

'never again' can be realised as a lasting commitment to human dignity, rather than remaining a fragile promise.

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