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The New Holocaust History Museum of Yad Vashem and the Commemoration of Homosexuals as Victims of Nazism [1]

Régis Schlagdenhauffen-Maika

On 15 March 2005, a few weeks after the celebrations for the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the new museum of Holocaust history in Yad Vashem was inaugurated. "*Yad Vashem is the Jewish people's memorial to the murdered Six Million and symbolises the ongoing confrontation with the rupture engendered by the Holocaust.*" [2] From a "Jewish perspective" the new museum prompts empathy with the martyrs and identification with the heroes. By using new technologies it intends to secure the memory of the Holocaust for the 21st century.

However, a musealisation of Holocaust requires a narrative semiotics which deletes by necessity the inherent contradictions involved in the interpretation of any historical event. To what extent does the appeal to "other groups" of victims of Nazism consolidate a "Jewish perspective" of the Holocaust in the new exhibition?

In order to answer this question, the first part of this article will be devoted to a description of the new exhibition. Then, after having portrayed the narrative structure of the museum, the summoning of the memory of victim groups could be debated. Lastly, the dialectical nature of the commemoration will be analyzed from the point of view of one group of victims: the homosexuals. Finally, the controversy of 1994, which caused confrontation between "secular Jews" and

[1] This article could not have been written if I had not received both the "*bourse mois chercheur*" fellowship of the *Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem* and the precious help of Kayvan Rouhani for the present English version. Interviews and also the description of the exhibition on which this article is based were carried out in September 2005.

[2] www.yadvashem.org

"religious Jews", will permit us to consider the limits of a religious interpretation of the Holocaust.

Since its creation, by virtue of the terms laid down by the law on Shoah and heroism of 19 August 1953, Yad Vashem is a single laic national institution given the diversity of missions to which it has been devoted. These include commemorating the six million Jews assassinated by the Nazis, the destruction of the Jewries of Europe, the *Righteous among the Nations*, but also honouring Jews who fought and offered resistance. Moreover, Yad Vashem is a pedagogical institution which comprises the International School for Holocaust Studies, the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Library and the Museum for the History of the Holocaust. The latter is the most visited site in Yad Vashem, the leading component which participates in the *shaping of the past according to the needs and visions of the present*. According to Shenabi, the erection of this memorial was indispensable to "normal" life in Israel: "*It is necessary for us to bring the memory of the greatest catastrophe of the century into the Zionist project.*" [3]

In 1958, an initial exhibition had been "improvised". The historical museum itself opened in 1973. The exhibition, just like the museum, complied with two requirements: on the one hand the public wanted to "comprehend", to better understand how the destruction of Europe's Jews took place. On the other hand, the very young State of Israel aimed at legitimating its statute as heir of the six million victims. Thus the museum appears as an ideal mass-medium.

In 1978 the exhibition was enlarged to include the destiny of survivors after the catastrophe. However, the exhibition emphasised the perspective of the perpetrators but not that of the victims. Tom Segev describes the old exhibition as follows:

> the rooms of the museum are not very large, the walls are filthy and the exposed objects – particularly photographs – are old [...] Explanatory leaflets are long, didactic [...]. No explanation is given, as though it were of no use, as if this were about a natural phenomenon.[4]

In 1994, within the framework of the "Yad Vashem 2001" plan,[5] it was decided to rethink the exhibition because "the situation being from now on different, people are conscious of the significance of the Holocaust. The goal is

[3] Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*. References are always quoted from the French version: *Le Septième Million*, Paris, Liana Levi, 1993, p. 498.
[4] Tom Segev, op. cit., p. 491.
[5] *Cf. Yad Vashem Magazine*, 21, 2001, p. 4.

not any more the identification with the Partisans, but the empathy with the victims".[6] Furthermore, David Silberklang, who took part in the realisation of the new museum, summarises the philosophy adopted by Yad Vashem:

> new technologies allow us to say the same in a different way that people can understand better or differently. For that reason we needed to rethink the exhibition both historically and conceptually – and also technologically.[7]

According to Anne Grynberg, the Shoah or Holocaust museums "*convey a diversified message, sometimes even scattered depending on the place, according to the image that a particular country has of itself and wants to portray to the outside world*,"[8] because "*the museum is capable of playing the role of federator for a group – national,* "*ethnical*" *or religious*."[9] They perfect the memorials which,

> quiet, mute – do not have a didactic vocation a priori, do not directly aim to acquire knowledge, but want rather to elicit empathy, emotion, by an evocation stemming from the symbolic field. [Moreover,] when it is an issue of a national project, there is a will to address the whole of society with a carefully prepared – and often extremely normative – message.[10]

However, by the intermediary of exogenous influences which update the meaning given to them, the aforementioned message evolves.

For instance, following instances such as the mobilisation of Gypsies and homosexuals for the recognition of their "martyrdom", the Holocaust, which was initially defined as the genocide of the Jews in Europe, underwent a process of evolution from the point of view of its meaning. From now on, the term requires the integration of other groups of victims, following the Jews. The definition offered by the Holocaust Encyclopaedia is: "*The genocide of European Jews and others by the Nazis during World War II*". It is by means of the very vague term "others" that Gypsies, Jehovah Witnesses, homosexuals, or disabled people can be "included" in the martyrology of the victims of the Holocaust.

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[6] Yitzhak Mais. *Cf.* Matthias Hass, *Gestaltetes Gedenken*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2002, p. 124.
[7] In : Matthias HASS, op.cit. p. 135.
[8] Anne Grynberg, "Du mémorial au musée, comment tenter de représenter la *Shoah* ? », *Les cahiers de la Shoah*, 7, 2003, p. 145.
[9] Anne Grynberg, op.cit. p.146.
[10] Anne Grynberg, op.cit. pp. 112-113, 115.

Furthermore, through its institutional title Yad Vashem presents itself as "*The Holocaust Martyrs'*[11] *and Heroes' Remembrance Authority*". What place does the new museum offer therefore to those termed the "other victims" of the Holocaust?

I. The New Holocaust History Museum

The new museum, designed by Israeli architect Moshe Safdie and built several meters away from the former one which has since been destroyed, is a 180-meter-long concrete construction which offers 4,200 m^2 of exhibition surface. It has the form of a triangular prism and slices through *Har HaZikaron*, Remembrance Mountain. Visitors entering the museum have to cross a long wooden ramp that marks the descent into the universe of the heroes and martyrs of the Holocaust. After crossing the immense hall, an interpretative key is provided: from deep underground, where the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto hid, but also there where ashes of the million victims remain, we go towards the Light: a large window which opens onto a terrace with a panoramic view of the green hills of Judea.

The higher section of the prism, a narrow pane, allows sunlight to penetrate the interior. It serves as a guide, materialising "the axis of memory" which leads from the time "before" to the time "after", i.e. the creation of the State of Israel.

Inside the dark and immense hall, the audio-visual installation by Michal Rovner tells of a world that no longer exists. The black and white video film stages the Jewish Diaspora of Europe, dancing to klezmer music. We are immediately confronted with the new technology employed by the exhibition"s creators: to pass on the testimony of the survivors when after they have died. One of the museum's aims is to call up the technology so that the visitor "lives the events".

We are then guided towards the "first ditch". While the museum does appear to be linear, it is in fact made up of eight rooms, distributed on both sides of the "axis of remembrance", which leads from Catastrophe to Redemption. Each room plays a part in the comprehension of the Catastrophe, whilst emphasising the strength of resistance.

The first ditch is strewn with books by authors of whom the Nazis wanted to cleanse the country through their campaign "*wider den undeutschen Geist*". Television screens show the book burning of 10 May 1933. The sound

[11] According to the *TLF,* a martyr is one who chooses to suffer death rather than to renounce religious principles.

installations largely contribute to visitors reliving the event: in addition to the violence of the images themselves, the songs of *Burschenschaften* and the speeches of Nazis bring the event back to life.

The ditch cannot be crossed, visitors are directed into the first gallery. Just like in other museums for Judaism or the Shoah, a film lasting less than ten minutes recalls the history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism prior to the Nazi period. It is here that the "other groups of victims" are presented, in order to illustrate the racist Nazi policy of exclusion and cleansing during the Third Reich.

As part of a strategy geared towards identification with the martyrs and heroes, we go in off the street into a corridor lined with anti-Semitic posters and find refuge in the apartment of a family of *Yekkes*. At the end of the gallery hangs a photograph of young Zionist pioneers with a streamer in the background: "Erez Israel braucht uns, wir brauchen Erez Israel" (*Eretz Israel needs us, we need Eretz Israel*). In this world hostile to Jews, individual biographies illustrate the only viable solution: emigrating and surviving as opposed to staying and dying.

The second gallery is devoted to Poland, the country that was home to most of the Jews before the Shoah. In the third gallery, the fate of Europe's Jews under the "Nazi boot" is presented, country by country. Through audio-visual installations a survivor of each country bears testimony. The objective is to present backgrounds according to national contexts in a didactic and brief way in order to move on to the fundamental themes. In the case of France, for example, the narration is divided into five periods: "National Revolution" *versus* occupation, the aryanisation of Jewish property, the arresting of the Jews, the internment camps, deportation to the East. A large panel integrates North Africa into the narration. This has the effect of associating the Jews of North Africa with the Shoah, an aspect that contradicts the definition: "the Genocide of the Jews of Europe".

We then find ourselves in the Warsaw Ghetto. A paved street is reconstituted with tramlines along the middle. The doors of the houses are open, in each of them a video focuses on a particular moment of life in the Ghetto: the famine, the small *Schmuggler*, or the constitution by Immanuel Ringelblum of the *Oneg Shabbat*. The fourth gallery is more specifically devoted to the *Einsatzgruppen*. There we follow *Group C*, known for the massacre of Babi-Yar during the night of 29-30 September 1941.

On entering the fifth room a giant screen takes us eastwards by train, to the extermination camps. On the opposite wall, the revolt of the Warsaw Ghetto:

Mordechaï Anielewicz, leader of the Jewish Fighting Organisation, simultaneously embodies the figure of the hero and martyr. The second part of the gallery is more specifically devoted to Auschwitz. The wagons, the barbed wire, a gigantic picture of the incinerators, used boxes of Zyklon B and a heap of shoes give us the feeling of being inside the camp. At the end of the gallery, a replica of the model of Mieczyslaw Stobierski – whose original is at the Auschwitz Museum – illustrates the extermination process, from the selection ramp to the crematorium.

In the sixth gallery the following question is asked: "Why was Auschwitz not bombarded"? Emphasis is put on the fact that other nations remained passive towards the extermination of Jews. We then find ourselves in a forest, a metaphor for those in which the Jewish partisans resisted. It is written that "the fighting Jews had the desire to leave a trace of their heroic combat in the entire world". This gallery presents Jewish resistance organisations: the Zionist Youth Movement, the Jewish Army, clandestine organisations, etc…. In this "war against the Nazis", the example of the rescue operation of the Jews of Denmark and the non-deportation of Bulgarian Jews make it possible "to point an accusing finger"[12] at all those who, unlike the Righteous among the Nations, participated in the genocide by way of passivity.

In the seventh gallery, entitled "the last Jews", homage is given to the Jews who served in foreign armies: 50,000 in Great Britain, 500,000 in the USSR and 550,000 in the USA. The space opposite these heroes is dedicated to the everyday lives of the concentration camps' internees who escaped "selection". The concentration camps' universe is presented in a concise way. A text recalls that, alongside the Jews, Gypsies were also subject to deportation. It is stressed that "the nomads were treated like the Jews whereas the sedentary were not persecuted"; however "more than 25,000 perished in Auschwitz". The environment of the camp is "recreated": a hut, beds, the clothing of *Häftlinge*, a coach intended to transport the blocks of stone drawn by the deportees and a photograph of a quarry add to the effect. After the last part devoted to the Death Marches and the release of the camps. A narrow corridor takes us to the eighth gallery. This one is dedicated to the survivors; they are "liberated but not free". Artefacts of the Displaced Persons camps are displayed. Beneath the picture of

[12] Sarah Gensburger emphasizes it: Mordechaï Shenhabi, Yad Vashem's "master craftsman", wishes that "*the attitude of those Gentiles, essentially a minority, accentuate the guiltiness of the group to which they belong*" in: Sarah Gensburger, "La création du titre de Juste parmi les Nations : 1953-1963", *Bulletin du CRFJ*, 15, 2004, p.16.

the *Exodus*, it is written that the D.P. "claimed the right to migrate freely towards Israel".

The Nuremberg Trials of 1945, where twenty-four high-ranking Germans with political, military and economic backgrounds were put on trial before an international court, announce the narration's conclusion: the culprits are condemned. The exhibition is completed by the return to Eretz Yisrael and the Eichmann lawsuit: lesson from the Holocaust and national catharsis. This is the moment when Light reappears.

Throughout the whole exhibition, heroes and martyrs are linked, contributing to the direction of the narration. The way leading from catastrophe to redemption is the conducting thread of the exhibition. This synthesis that embodies the "martyr-hero" has been present since the origins of Yad Vashem – and is to be found in the institutional title of the place: "The Holocaust Martyrs" and Heroes' Remembrance Authority". In his description Tom Segev raises the definition of the martyr given at Yad Vashem. It is stressed that

> *the death of the Jews had not been pointless; they had died as martyrs. Martyrs are not only those who prefer to give up their lives rather than their beliefs, but also, says Maimonide, those who are assassinated because they are Jewish [...]. A martyr agrees to die and to suffer for a noble cause whatever it be [...]. To be Jewish, to be different from the others and to suffer for generations in order to have the right to be different, constitutes a noble cause.*[13]

Leon Poliakov, in the chapter entitled the "birth of a Jewish mentality" quoted from his book *The History of Anti-Semitism*, looks at the origin of this worship. He notices that as early as the Middle Ages the *Akeda* was used to give a meaning to massacres and constant persecutions. "*Each new victim of the Christian fury is a fighter who fell in order to sanctify the Name; he is often awarded the title of* Kadosh *[...]. Consequently, martyrdom becomes an institution.*"[14] In addition, "*each Jewish victim is regarded as a fighter who fell on the* battlefield *[...].* Akeda*, the worship of martyrs, is maintained in every manner*".[15] By maintaining this worship, Yad Vashem thus remains faithful to its reclaimed "Jewish perspective". But are the members of the "other victim groups" consequently martyrs?

[13] Tom Segev, op.cit. p. 492.
[14] Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*. The references are quoted from the French original edition: *Histoire de l'antisémitisme*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1981, p. 275.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 325.

II. The commemoration of the "other victims" of Nazism in Yad Vashem

From the very start of the exhibition, in the first gallery, just after the "ditch" representing the book burning on 10 May 1933, a panel indicates that "the Nazi regime did not solely stigmatize the Jews, but also other groups: political opponents on the one hand and all those who were excluded from the national community on the other, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Gypsies and the disabled, these being considered as a threat towards the purity of the race".

By exploiting the concept of *Lebensunwertes Leben* (worthless life), the Nazis elaborated Programme T4; it consisted of the systematic elimination of children, adults and senior citizens, the mentally defective, those suffering from incurable diseases or the malformed. The "euthanasia" of handicapped people is illustrated by a set of photographs of the *Hadamar Centre* near Koblenz. That of a mentally handicapped child, shortly before its assassination, presents this as a fact; that of a shower-room transformed into a gas chamber makes it possible to grasp that the T4 Programme was the prelude to mass extermination. Furthermore, two propaganda posters from a film in favour of "euthanasia", *Leben ohne Hoffnung* (*Living without Hope*), illustrate the mechanisms of legitimating through the policy of such an institutional measure.

The persecution of homosexuals is represented by a picture of *Eldorado* plastered with propaganda posters and swastikas. This dancing hall located in Schöneberg, famous throughout Europe as a stronghold of the homosexual scene, both for males and females, was indeed one of the first homosexual venues to be closed by the Nazis.

A series of pictures portrays facets of the fate of Gypsies under the Third Reich. First, a photograph of before the *Porrajmos:*[16] a family of Gypsies dressed in rags, posing in front of a caravan, is supposed to provide us with an idea of their "appearance". Other pictures show their deportation, their internment in the camps and even forced sterilization and medical experiments of which they were victims.

Moreover, the Gypsies are mentioned on several occasions during the exhibition. In the sixth gallery, which presents the death camps, it is indicated that approximately "150,000 Gypsies were exterminated, including 25,000 in Auschwitz". The indications relating to them remain ambiguous; they imply that

[16] Porrajmos means the Genocide of the Gypsies under the Third Reich. *Cf.* Ian Hancock, "Actualité du Porrajmos", in: Philippe MESNARD, *Consciences de la Shoah*, Paris, Kimé, 2000, p. 225.

the term "genocide" does not "strictly" apply to the Gypsies because, "the nomads were treated like the Jews, but the sedentary like the Aryans." This assertion makes it possible to stress that only one part of them were victims of Nazism.

David Silberklang, who contributed to the realisation of the new exhibition, agrees with this interpretation of reality. For him, the Gypsies are not victims of the Holocaust, but they are "useful," within the exhibition, to illustrate the complexity of the Nazi system. The extermination of Gypsies therefore results from a general fact, one of the many crimes the Nazis were able to commit. This idea is clearer when Silberklang specifies that the Nazis "*wanted to destroy the Jewish world, not the Gypsy one* […] *It's clear that they were persecuted and in some places there was no distinction at all, but there was not a uniform policy like for the Jews. They killed the Gypsies when they found them, but it is not the same…*"[17]

The picture of a Gypsy family posing in front of a caravan illustrates the problem well: which paper or stone memory could have been destroyed of this group that belonged to an oral culture that leaves virtually no spoors and whose members do not have anything except their personal effects? This Gypsy reality is well summarized by Rajko Djuric in the foreword of his study on *Porrajmos*: "*for centuries the Gypsies have traversed the world, followed paths without knowing where they would lead or what they would experience along them. As they travel through history they barely leave a single trace in their wake*."[18]

In the seventh gallery, devoted to the concentrationary universe and the Death Marches, two "details" merit particular emphasis. On the one hand, a lithography made in 1945 by the German Richard Grune is presented alongside ones made by David Olère and Henri Pieck: *Forced Whipping and Labour*. Grune was condemned by the Nazis under the terms of §175 and deported to Sachsenhausen and then to Flossenbürg. A note specifies that he "was deported for homosexuality."

On the other hand, an imposing wall of photographs presents a "collection" of 24 deportees' mug shots. Intrigued by the registration numbers of some

[17] "We included other victims of the Nazis, not as part of the Holocaust but as part of the Nazi system and the things they did, just as we included the things the Nazis did in general. The focus is not only what they did to the Jews but the general discussion about Nazi ideology." David Silberklang is the chief editor of *Yad Vashem Studies*. Interview realized in Yad Vashem, 08.09.2005.

[18] cf : Rajko Djuric, *Ohne Heim–Ohne Grab. Die Geschichte der Roma und Sinti*, Berlin, Aufbau-Verlag, 1996.

deportees, I requested further information from the people in charge of the exhibition. The answer I received was that seven Poles, two Gypsies and a Jehovah's Witness[19] made up this composition. However, no mention was made of those "details" in the exhibition. Nevertheless, disabled people, Jehovah's Witnesses and Poles benefit from the "privilege" of representation contrary to homosexuals.

The lithography of Richard Grune as well as the mention made at the beginning of the exhibition do not make it possible to affirm that homosexuals are missing in the museography. Their persecution is evoked at the point at which Germany's *Gleichschaltung* is put into perspective, of which the book burning on 10 May 1933 appears to have been the first manifestation. In fact, an event which took place four days earlier, of which the book burning was a continuation, is overlooked. On 6 May, the *Institut für Sexualwissenchaften* founded by Magnus Hirschfeld had been ransacked. During the book burning, all books from the Institute's library as well as the bust of Hirschfeld were thrown into the flames. It is certainly because Magnus Hirschfeld was not only a Jew but also homosexual that Yad Vashem obliterates him, contrary to the USHMM of Washington or Jüdisches Museum of Berlin.[20]

Within the framework of the programme "Yad Vashem 2001", certain voices had expressed a wish to see represented, in the new museum, the persecution of homosexuals under the Third Reich; the path Yad Vashem adopted remains nonetheless particularly elliptic. The closing of Eldorado, a famous Berlin dance hall that some would imagine to be a "*den of iniquity*", would rather appear to be more of an illustration of the stigmatisation of homosexuals. Moreover, knowing that Yad Vashem is "the memorial of the Jewish people in remembrance of the Holocaust", we may formulate the following question: Were there no homosexual Jews who were victims of the Shoah, given that none of them appear in the exhibition?

The case of Leopold Mayer, described by Saül Friedländer in his work *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, compels us to recognise that there was at least one homosexual Jewish victim of Nazism. Obermayer, a homosexual and practicing Jew of Swiss citizenship, was arrested on 29 October 1934. Interned in Dachau

[19] Respectively, the inmate number "JBV 190392" is a "purple triangle", i.e. a Jehovah Witness deported to Auschwitz; the inmate number "BV 4071," Sando Franz, is a Gypsy man deported to Sachsenhausen; the inmate number "Z 63598" is a young Gypsy women deported to Auschwitz.

[20] In 1897, Hirschfeld was the cofounder of the *Humane Scientific Committee* (WhK) – the first homosexual organisation in the world.

in 1935, he died in Mauthausen on 22 February 1943.[21] It is only recently, in particular following the testimony of Gad Beck, that some contributions have been published about homosexual Jewish victims of Nazism. In his autobiography, first published in 1995, Gad Beck evokes his life as a homosexual Jew under the Third Reich. Born in 1923 in Berlin, he joined the clandestine group *Chug Chaluzi* in 1941. Up to the end of the War he was a member of the Jewish Resistance in Berlin. Shortly after the capitulation of Nazi Germany he worked with David Ben Gurion in the D.P. camps and helped prepare survivors for their *Alyah*, an undertaking he accomplished himself in 1947. In 1974, after a period in Vienna, he moved back to Berlin with his partner and led the *jüdische Volkshochschule*.[22] To this day he has remained in Berlin.

In a case study published in 2000 on homosexual Jews in Sachsenhausen,[23] Andreas Sternweiler provides some brief replies on this subject. In the first part of his article Sternweiler clarifies the fate of those Jews who were arrested under §175.[24] Hans Meyersohn is one of the cases described in detail; he was found guilty as a Jew of having had sexual intercourse with Aryan men. He was doubly condemned: for racial homosexuality and for opprobrium against the German nation. From 1935 the Nazi laws on the protection of racial purity – known as the Nuremberg laws – made sexual relations between Aryans and Jews punishable by law.[25] A court decision on 3 February 1937 affirmed that the Jewish "character" of Hans Meyersohn constituted a aggravating factor in addition to his guilt under the terms of §175. Hans Meyersohn was condemned to internment at Sachsenhausen and died there shortly afterwards. Through meticulous study of the camp's registers, the historian clarifies the existence of internees recorded as "Jude 175" or "175 J". These were not sent to the barracks

[21] Saül Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews,* New York, Harper Perennial, 1998, pp. 113-115, 202-207.
[22] *Cf.* Gad Beck, *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin*, Madison, Wisconsin University Press, 1999.
[23] Andreas Sternweiler, "Er hatte doppelt so schwer zu leiden…," in: Joachim Müller & Andreas Sternweiler, *Homosexuelle Männer im KZ-Sachsenhausen*, Berlin, Verlag Rosa Winkel, 2000.
[24] The §175 (definitively abrogated in 1994) condemned any sexual relation, or any lustful act, between two men. Furthermore, from 1935, the §175a condemned any man who committed or had the intention of committing a lustful act with another man to a prison or labour camp term between 3 months and 10 years.
[25] "*Strafschärfend fiel ins Gewicht, dass Meyersohn als Jude mit einem Arier widernatürliche Unzucht begangen und damit das rassische Empfinden des deutschen Volkes auf das gröblichste verletzt hat.*" *Cf.* Sternweiler *op.cit.*, p. 172.

reserved for Jews but to those set aside for homosexuals.[26] Thus, homosexual Jews, at least in Sachsenhausen, were first and foremost perceived as homosexual and shared the destiny of others bearing the pink triangle. The Nazis had taken this possibility into account in their classification. The modality also appears in the Nazis' inmate-categorization tables; it results in a pink triangle being placed over a yellow one. The testimony of Heinz Heger remains one of few that are known on this subject. In his memoirs, he reports the case of an inmate who "in addition to being homosexual was Jewish. Under the pink triangle, he carried a yellow one; together the two triangles formed a star of David".[27]

The study of Andreas Sternweiler, in spite of its compartmental character, makes it possible to answer the question previously put in the affirmative, informing us that homosexual Jewish men were deported, interned and exterminated as such by the Nazis. Moreover, the ban on representing the singular destiny of homosexual Jewish victims of the Shoah finds its origin partly in the controversy of 1994.

III. The 1994 Controversy

In 1994 *Keshet Ga'avah*, the International LGBT[28] Congress organised its annual conference in Tel Aviv. On this particular occasion the Israeli LGBT *Agudah*, which co-ordinated the conference, organised a commemorative service on Monday 29 May in *Ohel Yizkor*, "the Tabernacle of Remembrance"[29] of Yad Vashem. The ceremony was thus authorised in the presence of 150 members of *Keshet Ga'avah*. During the celebration, religious extremists close to the *Kach*[30] movement, having been informed about the commemorative service, orchestrated a spontaneous demonstration. Calm could only be restored through the intervention of the police.

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[26] Sternweiler, p. 176.

[27] "*Einer meiner Mithäftlinge […] war zudem noch Jude. Unter dem Rosa Winkel trug er noch den gelben, und zwar so, dass beide Winkel einen Davidstern bildeten* ». in: Sternweiler, p. 176; *cf.* Heger Heinz, *Die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel* [*The Men With the Pink Triangle*], Hamburg, Merlin, 1979.

[28] LGBT: acronym of Lesbian, Gay, Bi- and Transsexual.

[29] Official ceremonies take place in this room – like at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in other countries.

[30] *Kach* is a radical nationalist group founded in the early 1980s. It militates for the restoration of a Biblical Israel. In March 1994 it was declared a terrorist movement by the Israeli government.

Following the event a special programme was shown on Israeli television.[31] On the programme, *Keshet Ga'avah* justified the celebration: the reciting of the *kaddish* in remembrance of Jewish homosexuals assassinated by the Nazis. During the debate Avner Shalev, who represented Yad Vashem, argued that the service was illegal because of the fact that the *Agudah* had not specified its association with LGBT status. In addition, a survivor affirmed that the Nazis were homosexuals and that in consequence commemorating Jewish homosexual victims amounted to honouring the Nazis.

On 1 June the scandal made the front pages of the newspapers. The Jerusalem Post described the event in an unsigned article.

> Under fire for permitting a remembrance ceremony for homosexual victims of the Nazis. Yad Vashem condemned both the participants and the protesters, saying they had brought disgrace on the site .[32]

As a result of this, Shaul Yahalom, deputy of the Knesset and president of *Mafdal*, the religious national party, demanded the resignation of Yosef Burg, president of the International Committee of Yad Vashem. He drew on the argument used by religious groups: the *Halachah*[33] does not condone homosexual relations.

Yosef Burg himself specifies that the ceremony in remembrance of homosexual victims of Nazism was in his eyes *a deliberate provocation* on the part of gays. Furthermore, he stands up for Yad Vashem and upholds that "*even if Yad Vashem had not authorised the ceremony, the gays would have petitioned the High Court and been permitted to hold the service*". Shevach Weiss, Labour deputy in the Knesset and member of the committee of Yad Vashem himself argues in favour of the institution. The survivor of the Shoah condemns the demonstrators because for him "*Holocaust Survivors should be sensitive to the suffering of homosexuals whom he said were among* "*the first guinea pigs*" *of the Nazis*".

By insisting on the sacredness of the site, Yad Vashem agrees with the condemnation expressed by the "strongly religious". The halachic argument employed by them condemns homosexual relations, homosexuality as such and

[31] Interview with Amit Kama (former executive director of the *Agudah*) realised in Tel-Aviv, 11.09.2005.
[32] "Yad Vashem slams both gays, protestor over memorial fracas", *Jerusalem Post*, p. 3, 01.06.1994.
[33] The Jewish religious right.

finally the very commemoration: the commemoration is to be considered as halachically illegal. This "sacred" argument leans on religious semiology which is the origin of Yad Vashem (just like the term Ohel Yizkor and Yad Vashem, even the expression of the "Righteous Among the Nations", all originating from the Bible). Yosef Burg does give his personal opinion on the question when he considers the ceremony to be a provocation; nonetheless, from his point of view he is not in a position to accuse the institution he represents and shrugs off the problem by pointing out that by virtue of Israeli law the ceremony could not be prohibited. Shevach Weiss also falls back on civil law and contradicts opponents who, contrary to *Keshet Ga'avah*, held an illegal demonstration in Yad Vashem. Moreover, he uses his quasi sacred standing as a survivor of the Shoah to emphazise that the stigmatisation of which homosexuals were victims ("*they were the first guinea pigs of the Nazis*") was one of the first manifestations on the part of the National Socialist Regime prior to the Judeocide.

In addition, the (unfounded) argument put forward by Avner Shalev during a televised debate, namely the illegality of the commemoration, is no longer used. Finally, two members of Yad Vashem arrive at two antithetic conclusions. Yosef Burg, wanting neither to vex the religious nor to lose face, considers that this ceremony was a provocation; conversely, Shevach Weiss considers the demonstration improvised by the Religious to be a provocation.

Thus, in its official statement, Yad Vashem, while forgetting to recall that homosexuals were indeed victims of Nazism, refuses to participate and lets two members of its directory address the issue speaking in own names. The institution is caught between its statute of quasi religious institution, endowed with a kind of sacred aura and the laical character of the place (the Tent of Remembrance is the place where the Heads of States on official visits are received). Indeed, Yad Vashem is confronted with intrinsic contradictory dialectics according to its double statute: at the same time a laical civil commemorative institution established by Israeli law and a remembrance place of Jewish martyrdom equipped with a synagogue. Consequently, the only solution to avoid entering the debate was to condemn both parts, a strategy which made it possible to transform the "incident" into a traditional controversy opposing the laics and religious sides.

On Friday 3 June, at the end of the first section of the newspaper, the journalist Alison Kaplan Sommer, publishes an article about *Agudah*, the association which organized the commemorative office. In the second section of the newspaper, partisans and opponents expose their respective positions concerning the event.

In her paper "Young gays break chains of isolation,"[34] Alison Kaplan Sommer challenges the readers regarding the solitude of the young gays confronted with their "difference." She insists on the role played by the discussion groups of *Agudah*: they help these young people "to come to terms." She then cuts short the halachic argument advanced by the religious which finds its source in Leviticus: "a sexual act with penetration between two men is an abomination" (cf. Lv 18 :22 and Lv 20 :13). She adopts a comprehensive approach and refutes the argument of the religious, an argument used by the Nazis to justify their policy. She goes on to illustrate her thesis with the testimony of a mother who coordinates one of these discussion groups. The mother recognises that, "*after the consternation this news produced, she is today ashamed to have felt shame*." Alison Kaplan Sommer concludes that "*the shouts of the demonstration who disrupted the memorial service for gay and lesbian victims of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem earlier this week […] illustrated the hostility that gays and lesbian still face*" in Israel.

In the second section, the positions of the rabbi Macy Gordon and Knesset deputy Yael Dayan are confronted. In his paper "Gay Jews who are proud of sin," the rabbi Macy Gordon exposes his positions on the question.[35] He launches a call on the three monotheisms and then appeals to the State. "*The Tourism Ministry has apparently joined in recognising June as "Gay Pride Month" accepting an attempt by homosexual groups to legitimise a lifestyle which has been proscribed in the strongest terms by Judaism, Christianity and Islam*." He recalls that "*the Nazis persecuted Jews in an act of genocide unprecedented in world history. They also persecuted Gypsies, communists and homosexuals*." Since the Gypsies are excluded from the matter since they are not Jews, he wonders about the case of Communists and homosexuals: "*Among those communists were Jews who had previously betrayed and imprisoned fellow Jews, […] these people were a threat to the future of Judaism and its values no less than the homosexuals*."

Strangely, he uses the argument of the Bolshevik plot, but without the Jewish predicate. Moreover, the argument of the abandonment of the religion enables him to set up, without arguing its matter, a parallel between communists and homosexuals: both the former and the latter had deserved their fate, considering that "*they were a threat to the future of the Judaism and its values*." Thus, they

[34] Alison Kaplan Sommer, "Young gays break chains of isolation", and "Full Month of Gay Pride", *Jerusalem Post*, B4, 03.06.1994.
[35] Macy Gordon, "Gay Jews who are proud of sin", *Jerusalem Post*, A5, 03.06.1994.

are not "victims." He then uses the only argument which enables him to condemn the commemoration: "*Homosexuality is a wrong form of behaviour. It is proscribed and condemned [by] the Torah.*" To conclude, he exhorts the State of Israel to respect Jewish laws, "*only in this way is it possible to save Israel from danger;*" insofar as Israel is a Jewish State, the State must thus condemn homosexuals.

In her article "Were the Nazis right to kill the homosexuals, but criminal to kill Jews?"[36] Knesset Labour Deputy Yael Dayan, affirms that it is "*the right to be different and the imperative of equality*" which was awkwardly condemned by the demonstrators. According to her: "*Anyone who didn't condemn those who tried to stifle the gays at Yad Vashem is feeding the monster that lurks among us.*" Furthermore, she blames by name personalities having taken part in the debate and who distinguished themselves through their homophobia: Yosef Burg of Yad Vashem, as well as the deputies of the Knesset: Dov Shilansky, Esther Salmovitz, Yosef Azran and Ovadia Eli – all right wing members of the political spectrum.

Contrary to Macy Gordon, Yael Dayan considers that "*Homosexuals and lesbians were defilers of their race, like deviants and the insane.*" Also, "*In their footsteps came the millions of other "exceptions" and deviants – mainly Jews.*" Therefore, she affirms that "*The assault on Jewish homosexual "deviants" by those who sanctify the memory of millions of other "deviants" […] – is not only ironic and ridiculous, but monstrous and frightening.*"

She raises the following question: were the Nazis right to kill homosexuals but criminal for killing Jews?

In this manner she exposes the inherent contradiction of the demonstrator's speech: can one legitimate the assassination of homosexuals but condemn that of the Jews? Yael Dayan refers then to the pink triangle carried by the homosexual deportees and establishes a parallel with the yellow star. In her conclusion she places the two marks on the same level and affirms that "*anyone that believes in our future as an egalitarian, democratic, humane society, one which accepts those who are different and supports their rights as a minority, ought to wear a pink triangle next the yellow star and a blue-and-white emblem.*"

In this controversy, the protagonist's argumentation about the meaning and significance of the commemoration is based on two antagonistic rhetoric arguments. The religious, who do not guarantee for the office, resort to a halachic argument: "the law is the law." According to them, hindering the law

[36] Yael Dayan, "Where the Nazis right to kill the homosexuals, but criminal to kill Jews?", *Jerusalem Post***,** A5, 03.06.1994.

must be condemned, because it is the wellhead of "danger". This argument of "danger." held up by certain orthodox Jews, has the same origins as that according to which the "*Shoah [was] the effect of the divine ire caused by the failures with the Alliance*."[37]

However, only homosexual acts are condemned in the Torah. Consequently, the homosexual desire escapes any judgment. Also, the orthodox Jews' argument would imply the possible validity of the following premise, namely that on the basis of judgment of the act, one can condemn people (of whom it is not known whether they committed the aforementioned act). Only by this skew may they finally excommunicate homosexual Jews from commemoration and "right to remembrance." How can this premise be validated?

On the other hand, for the partisans of the commemoration the inclusion of homosexual victims in the "right to remembrance" is fully justified. They insist on the assertion of their right to be "different", illustrated in particular, before the Shoah, by Judaism in a mainly Christian Europe. Shevach Weiss and Yael Dayan fight the opinion of the religious according to which it is possible to condemn the assassination of Jews by the Nazis while condoning the assassination of homosexuals. This reasoning would necessarily lead to the assumption that Nazism might have had its "good sides." That would amount denying the uniqueness of the Shoah – i.e. relativising it.

Conclusion

The witnesses who recount their experience by way of audio-visual installations announce the "period after", the day when there will be no survivors left who can bear witness to the Shoah. The new exhibition was itself conceived as a testimony. It portrays the persecutions suffered by "other victim groups" of Nazism. The Handicapped, Communists, Jehovah's Witnesses or Gypsies benefit from the "privilege" of iconography of their martyrdom. Only homosexual victims remain without face. With the example of gypsies, other victims are included rather like stage props whenever they play a part in the narrative that goes from the catastrophe to redemption. Yad Vashem is a respected and respectable institution and the room for manoeuvre is reduced with regard to the representation of the persecution of homosexuals due to the

[37] *Cf.* Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La Concurrence des victimes* [*The Competition of the Victims: Genocide, Identity, Recognition*], Paris, La Découverte/Poche, 2002, p. 139.

events of 1994. In fact, the ambiguous statute of Yad Vashem, like the Shoah, considered by some as a "civil religion," excludes homosexuals from the "right to remember." Although this is a laical place, the weight of religious opinion explains this phenomenon.

Let us remember the origin of the name Yad Vashem (English: a memorial and a name). The expression originates from the Book of Isaiah titled "Salvation for Others" (56:5): "*To them I will give within my temple to its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters*." The inscription in stone of martyrs without lineage in order to recite kaddish, i.e. the "monument and the name," are a substitute for the descendents reduced to ashes. Meanwhile, to whom are these promises made?

They address those who could feel excluded.

> Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord say, "the Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who shows what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant: To them I will give within my temple to its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off (Is 56 : 3-5).

Does it have to have be the eunuch who suffered castration? Or could it be considered that "*some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have made themselves eunuchs*" (Mt 19 : 12). Does the "Salvation for Others" not also apply to homosexuals?

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