representations
The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphors

The lieux de mémoire are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it.

—Pierre Nora

Time has passed and Masada is no longer the historic mountain near the Dead Sea but a mobile mountain which we carry on our back anywhere we go.

—A. B. Yehoshua

The “Death of Memory” Reexamined

The study of collective memory has had a growing appeal for contemporary scholars. Following Maurice Halbwachs’s seminal work, which distinguished group memory from both historical and autobiographical memory, an expanding body of research has been devoted to the social and political dimensions of commemoration. Students of collective memory have shifted their attention from the historian’s traditional preoccupation with the reconstruction of the past to explorations of how the past is actually remembered and understood by members of a certain group.

With the growing interest in collective memory as a field of inquiry, the notion that group memory is a vanishing form of knowledge has often been advanced in theoretical discussions of the subject. Indeed, Halbwachs himself maintains that with the decline of tradition in modern society, history has emerged as the primary mode of knowledge of the past, taking the place of group memory. Depicting history and memory as two polar representations of the past, Halbwachs sees the scrutiny of historical records as an essentially “superorganic” science, detached from the pressures of immediate sociopolitical reality, while he regards collective memory as an organic part of social life, a continuously transforming body of knowledge that is being reshaped according to society’s changing needs.
Collective memory, however, is not an entirely fluid form of knowledge, nor is it totally detached from historical memory. As Barry Schwartz points out, Halbwachs's essentially "presentist approach" overemphasizes the adaptability of collective memory to the point that it challenges any conception of historical continuity. "Given the constraints of a recorded history," Schwartz argues, "the past cannot be literally construed; it can only be selectively exploited." Collective memory thus continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas. In this process of referring back to history, collective memory shifts its interpretation, selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of those records. History and memory, therefore, do not operate in totally detached, opposite directions; their relationships are underlined by conflict as well as by interdependence.

Halbwachs's contention that collective memory is vanishing from modern social life is similarly questionable. And yet other students of collective memory continue to share this view. Pierre Nora argues that what we witness today are the remains of an earlier memory that can be found in isolated "sites of memory" (lieux de mémoire). Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi advances a similar thesis that Jewish memory has declined since history emerged as the primary mode of relating to the past.

In this essay I would like to challenge this "declinist approach" to the study of collective memory. As I hope to demonstrate here, group memory has not died out, nor can it be confined to the status of a mere "survival" from an older age. Even so-called "modern society," despite its ever-expanding obsession with historical documentation, continues to nurture shared memories of the past through multiple commemorations of selected historical events. And even today, poets and writers, journalists and teachers may have more decisive roles than historians in shaping popular images of the past. As I have argued elsewhere, the holiday cycle still continues to present an alternative channel of learning about the past that exercises major influence on the construction of collective memories. If history besieges memory, as Nora suggests, I hope to show that memory can also besiege history.

From History to Memory:
The Resurrection of Masada

Collective memory often constructs certain events as symbolic markers of historical transitions. Such "turning points" can assume mythical dimensions, emerging as paradigmatic representations of the group's past. The present study explores the intertextuality of the commemorative narratives of two historical events that function as turning points in Israeli collective memory: the fall of...
Masada in A.D. 73 and the Holocaust during World War II. Since our present knowledge of the fall of Masada is based upon a single historical record written by the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, this event offers us an excellent case for studying the relations between its historical and commemorative narratives. The analysis of the transformation of Masada and the Holocaust in relation to each other will thus provide us a case study for exploring the vitality of collective memory as a modern phenomenon.

Masada, a fortress built on the top of a mountain overlooking the Dead Sea in the Judean desert, was the last stronghold against the Romans at the end of the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66–73. In his chronicle The Wars of the Jews, Josephus describes how three years after the Romans had conquered the rest of Judaea and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, a group of about one thousand Jewish men, women, and children who had found refuge in remote Masada continued to hold out against the Romans. After a lengthy siege, the Romans managed to demolish the walls around the fortress with the aid of their war machinery. When it became clear that their invasion of the fortress was inevitable, the leader of the Jewish rebels, Elazar ben Yair, convinced his men to kill first their wives and children and then each other:

Since we long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be slaves to the Romans, nor to any other than God himself, who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice...I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God hath granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely and in a state of freedom.

Josephus describes in detail the leader’s long and elaborate speeches and the way in which the men carried out the mission of collective suicide.

Husbands tenderly embraced their wives and took their children into their arms...with tears in their eyes. Yet at the same time did they complete what they had resolved on, as if they had been executed by the hands of strangers, and they had nothing else for their comfort but the necessity they were in of doing this execution, to avoid that prospect they had of the miseries they were to suffer from their enemies...Miserable men indeed were they, whose distress forced them to slay their own wives and children with their own hands, as the lightest of those evils that were before them.

The next morning, when the Roman soldiers entered the fortress, they found the place engulfed by silence. According to Josephus, the sight of 960 bodies denied the Romans the pleasure of victory, as they wondered at the courage displayed by the dead.

The historian’s task clearly calls for a careful examination of Josephus’ story, for he had been personally involved in the war against the Romans and was writing his historical works under the Romans’ auspices. Israeli popular culture, however, does not doubt the validity of this account. Among 120 people I interviewed, those who mentioned Josephus as the historical source did not raise doubts about the accuracy of his representation. Moreover, although most historians agree that Josephus must have invented Elazar ben Yair’s speeches in line with the historiographic conventions of the period, select passages from these speeches are often quoted by educational and tourist materials about Masada, and guides sometimes read them aloud during visits to the site. In analyzing Israeli collective memory of Masada, I refer to Josephus’ text as “the historical narrative” and focus on the relation of the Masada commemorative narrative to it.

For centuries Masada was ignored as an obscure episode in the ancient Jewish past. Two Roman sources that mention Masada do not recount the episode described by Josephus. The Talmud, which often refers to historical events, makes no reference to the fall of Masada. Josephus’ works were neglected by the Jews, who perceived their author as a renegade, and the original Aramaic version of his The Wars of the Jews was lost. In fact, it was the Church, regarding Josephus’ writing as an important source on the rise of Christianity, that preserved the Greek translation of this work. For many centuries, therefore, Jews were unfamiliar with Josephus’ account of the Masada people’s last days, although a modified version of it entered Jewish annals through the popular history of the Book of Josippon. The story of the fall of Masada thus did not vanish from the records of Jewish history, but it disappeared from the Jews’ collective memory.

Masada’s odyssey from the periphery of historical knowledge to the center of Israeli collective memory has its roots in the emergence of scholarly interest in Jewish history during the nineteenth century. With the rise of Zionism in Europe at the end of that century, the ancient Hebrews’ wars of national liberation assumed a special symbolic significance. When a modern Hebrew translation of Josephus’ history of the Jewish revolt against the Romans was published in Palestine in 1923, the Zionist settlers’ renewed acquaintance with his historical narrative gave rise to a new commemorative narrative.

The Activist Commemorative Narrative

For the Jewish settlers in Palestine and especially for their native sons and daughters, the first generation of “New Hebrews,” “Masada” was not simply a geographical site, nor was it merely an episode from Antiquity. It represented a highly symbolic event that captured the essence of the authentic national spirit and helped define their own historical mission as the direct followers of the ancient Hebrews. The Masada episode, marking the end of the Jewish Revolt against the Romans, embodied the spirit of active heroism, love of freedom, and national dignity that, according to Zionist collective memory, had disappeared during the prolonged period of Jewish life in Exile. Masada was, therefore, raised as a model of behavior and an important patriotic lesson for the New
Hebrews' education. To fulfill this role, the Masada commemorative narrative required a highly selective representation of the historical record. By emphasizing certain aspects of Josephus' account and ignoring others, the commemorative narrative reshaped the memory of that episode and transformed its meaning.

The Masada commemorative narrative formed during the pre-State period focuses on the defenders' courage in sustaining their resistance to the Romans for three years after the destruction of the Temple and their readiness to fight for freedom and die for it. In pursuing this interpretation, the commemorative narrative elaborates where Josephus is silent (he recounts the Romans' lengthy siege on Masada, but he does not provide any direct description of fighting between them and the besieged Masada people). Conversely, the commemorative narrative glosses over some of Josephus' most elaborate descriptions (he provides a long and detailed account of the final episode of the mass suicide). Israelis tend to find it self-evident that the Masada rebels actively engaged in a direct fight against the Romans. As one of the early explorers of Masada explains: "Even though Josephus does not explicitly tell of the Zealots' war, it is clear to us that they did not sit with arms folded in their lap and wait for the Romans to progress with their siege."  

In fact, it is this assumption that accounts for the rise of Masada as the symbol of a national struggle for freedom. Thus, for example, the historian Yosef Klausner wrote as early as 1925 that the Masada people who "fell in battle" were "the finest patriots Israel knew from the rise of the Maccabees to the defeat of Bar Kokhba." Similarly, the geographer and educator Yosef Braslavsky wrote in 1942 that "in Masada, the fight until the very end was manifested in its most supreme and shocking meaning." An Israeli Jew describes his view of Masada as a child growing up in Palestine: "In Masada we saw a liberation war, a heroic war, a war of a few against many, a war of loyalty to the country, a war of loyalty to the nation."  

That this selective interpretation of the historical narrative still enjoys wide popularity was evident in interviews I conducted in Israel in the late 1970s. Both students and adults whom I interviewed repeatedly described the Masada people as having fought "to the bitter end," "until the last breath," or "until the last drop of blood" or as having "died on the altar of our homeland" when alluding to Masada's symbolic message. A pilgrimage to Masada that emerged during the pre-State period involving members of youth movements, Zionist undergrounds, and after 1948, the Israel Defense Forces reinforced this interpretation. The field trip to Masada—a daring adventure of trekking in the Judean desert that required high physical fitness, courage, and determination—served as a ritual reenactment of the activist spirit of Masada. Ironically, then, the narrative constructed by this commemoration glorifies the Masada people for dying holding their weapons, and it is this theme that ultimately serves as the core of its ideological message.

By shifting the focus to the confrontation with the enemy, the activist commemorative narrative avoids the more problematic aspect of the historical account, namely, the final act of mass suicide. Within this framework, the broader category of "patriotic death" suppresses the issue of mass suicide and turns the particular mode of death into a marginal detail. This strategy clearly helps preserve the activist commemoration, for the reference to "suicide" might suggest an escapist solution. The avoidance of the suicide and the emphasis upon the readiness to fight until the bitter end clearly affirms and reinforces the Zionist glorification of Jewish national life in the Land of Israel during Antiquity in contrast to the Zionist condemnation of the two thousand years of Jewish life in Exile and its submissive mentality.  

Avoiding the label of "suicide" was also a way of evading the problem of the religious attitude to it: Jewish religion condemns suicide as a violation of the doctrine of divine control over life and death and the principle of "the preservation of the soul." Jewish law denies the performance of some funeral rituals for those who commit suicide, and their graves are symbolically separated from the communal burial lot. In fact, killing oneself is religiously acceptable only if recognized and defined as an act of martyrdom (kedushah ha-Shem), which is highly glorified, but Jewish tradition is careful to spell out specific conditions that would call for a martyr's death to prevent its excessive proliferation.  

During the pre-State and early State periods, however, the definition of the Masada suicide as "martyrdom" would have undermined the activist commemoration of this historical event. In the predominantly secular-national Hebrew culture of those formative years, martyrdom was considered a typical expression of the exilic Jews' passive response to persecution. At best, it was acknowledged as a form of "passive heroism" that was defined as inferior to the "active heroism" of armed resistance, associated with both Antiquity and the modern Zionist revival. The activist commemorative narrative suppressed the suicide as part of Masada's symbolic significance and thereby avoided an open acknowledgment of the cultural ambiguities that this act evokes.

The emergent Israeli society thus relegated the suicide to its collective unconscious, raising Masada as a historical metaphor for a national struggle for freedom and the readiness to fight for it to the bitter end. This metaphorical use was evident in Yitzhak Lamdan's famous poetic work Masada (1927). Lamdan does not explicitly address Josephus' account of the last stand but rather invokes Masada as a metaphor for ancient Zion. Interestingly, as Lamdan himself ignored Josephus' description of the Masada suicide, so his own contemporaries largely ignored Lamdan's pessimistic expressions of loneliness and loss and focused on the heroic aspects of his account. His verse "Ascend the chain of the dance! Never
again shall Masada fall!” inspired several generations of Hebrew youth as the essence of the Masada lesson, was turned into a popular song, and became a national slogan.36

Masada and the Holocaust as Counter-Metaphors

During the Holocaust, Masada’s significance as a model of active resistance to persecution and a counter-model to the passivity of Exile further crystallized within secular national Hebrew culture. The glorification of the Masada people as a counter-model for the Holocaust victims began as early as 1942. When information about the Nazis’ systematic destruction of Jewish life began to reach the Jewish society in Palestine, the Zionist settlers’ difficulty in believing these reports was coupled by their preoccupation with the problem of their own survival: the German army’s advance in northern Africa toward Egypt and the likelihood of a British withdrawal from Palestine left little hope for a successful defense.37 Such a development would have left the Zionist settlers alone to face both Germans and Arabs.

At this critical historical juncture, the Jewish society in Palestine (i.e., the “Yishuv”) engaged in articulating its resolute commitment to self-defense against all odds. The persecution of Jews in Europe and their subjection to subhuman degradation, torture, and death represented to the Zionist settlers the epitome of evil in Jewish life in Exile. That the Holocaust occurred could be interpreted as sad proof of the historical foresight that had led the settlers to leave Exile. It could likewise justify the tremendous hardships that they had endured in the process of substituting one “home” for another. Moreover, the belief that the Zionist enterprise in Palestine was at the center of Jewish history inevitably marginalized Jewish life in the Diaspora and served to legitimize the focus on the Yishuv’s politics and survival for its future role in absorbing the Jewish refugees.38 The concern for European Jewry and the ideological impulse to dissociate from what they represented thus pulled the Jewish society in Palestine in opposite directions. Side by side with expressions of anxiety over the fate of European Jews, there was also a tendency to criticize the victims’ passive behavior.39

In this context, the Zionist settlers and their sons turned to Masada as a historical model representing a dignified alternative to the European Jews’ response to the Nazi persecution; they hailed this choice as an important departure from the exilic tradition of subserviency. In discussing their own strategy of survival in the case of a German invasion, the Zionist settlers raised Masada as the paradigm for a self-defense against all odds and their own readiness to fight until the very end. Thus, a prominent Palestinian Zionist leader, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, stated that “the trouble of the Diaspora Jews is that they preferred the life of a beaten dog over dignified death.” He continued by urging to prepare for a last stand that would allow the settlers at least to leave behind “a Masada legend,” even if they were all to die in this war.40 Another prominent Palestinian Jew, Yitzhak Tabenkin, argued against the evacuation of women and children on moral as well as tactical grounds, declaring that “there is no justice in this demand to save the women and the children.”41 His objection to such an evacuation as “disgrace” implied a preference for the Masada model of a communal death.

In 1943, during the commemoration of the 1920 heroic defense of Tel Hai, the Socialist Zionist leader (and Israel’s future prime minister) David Ben-Gurion made a public speech in which he commemorated the 1920 armed defense of the Jewish settlement of Tel Hai as “a second Masada.” According to him, Tel Hai, like Masada, demonstrated a way of dying with dignity while holding weapons in one’s hands, which Ben-Gurion compared to the exilic Jews’ reluctance to do the same. Ben-Gurion accused the Jews of reacting passively to their oppression:

We had lived the life of exile, dependence, humiliation, slavery, and degradation. Not only that others brought upon us, but that we ourselves brought upon us, for we accepted our weakness, our lives in a foreign country, our exile, . . . We did not know how to live as free men and we did not know how to die as free men.42

Like the defenders of Masada and Tel Hai, Ben-Gurion continued, the Zionist settlers would choose a different death, not that “of powerlessness, helplessness, and worthless sacrifice. With weapons in our hands we will die.” In the context of the news filtering from Europe about massive Jewish annihilation by the Nazis, his speech had a particularly biting edge, and its implied criticism of the European Jews could not have escaped his listeners. That the most prominent Palestinian Jewish leader did not find his speech inappropriate is clear, for the following year it was published in the important Socialist publication Kuntres, still in the context of the European Holocaust.

The difficulty in identifying with the Jewish victims was particularly felt by the first generations of Hebrew youth who, unlike their parents, had no personal recollection of life in Europe. Moreover, this generation was brought up by the national Hebrew schools that promoted a highly negative view of Jewish life in Exile.43 The Holocaust thus affirmed what the Zionist education claimed: that the future belonged to the national revival in the Land of Israel; Jewish life in Exile could only lead to death and destruction.

The Hebrew youth, even more critical of the victims’ behavior than their European parents, were determined to depart from it by following the Masada route. The plan for a last stand against the Germans at Haifa was therefore labeled “the Masada plan.”44 Similarly, the pilgrimage to Masada emerged during those years as a central patriotic ritual. A member of a youth movement expressed his and his friends’ reluctance to participate in the days of mourning in solidarity
with European Jewry, claiming that instead his movement's gathering at Masada was a sufficient symbolic expression of their solidarity with those Jews who did not choose servitude.\textsuperscript{43} Clearly, the youth found it easier to bond symbolically with the ancient Jews' heroic stand at Masada than to identify with their contemporary brethren suffering in Europe.

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, Israelis displayed a strong tendency to deny the Holocaust. Few Israeli writers addressed this subject, and when the Holocaust was discussed, it was mostly within the Zionist framework, focusing on the activist response of the ghetto fighters, questioning the role of Jewish leadership in the ghettos, or portraying life in Israel as providing a national and personal rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{46} During those years Israeli public schools devoted little attention to the discussion of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{47} Hebrew textbooks avoided a direct condemnation of the victims' behavior, but the enthusiastic glorification of armed resistance in them clearly was an expression of their criticism of it.\textsuperscript{48} In the first decade following the foundation of the State, a reluctance to embrace the Holocaust as part of Israeli collective memory was evident in the public domain. Although the Israeli Knesset passed resolutions designating a fixed day for the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Yad Vashem, in the early 1950s, the observance of this memorial day became mandatory (and thereby an integral part of Israeli public life) only in 1959.\textsuperscript{49}

While the establishment of a special day devoted to a collective commemoration of the Holocaust indicated a recognition of the special significance of this event toward the Holocaust during those years. The official references to the commemoration of “the Holocaust and the Ghetto Uprisings,” “the Holocaust and the Heroism,” or “the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance” maintained a dual classification that defined the armed resistance to the Nazis as “heroic” and assigned the “Holocaust” to the “nonheroic” aspects of the Jews' experiences.

During those years Israeli society showed a clear tendency to own the “heroic” behavior of European Jewry and suppress their “nonheroic” past during World War II. The establishment of the Holocaust memorial day close to the anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising elevated that event as the focal point of commemoration. The reference to the partisans and the Ghetto fighters as “Jews,” while relating to the other Holocaust victims as “Zionist” or “Hebrew youth,” reinforced the former’s alliance with members of Israeli society.\textsuperscript{50} The partisans and the ghetto rebels were thus separated from the “Holocaust” to serve as a symbolic bridge between Exile and modern Israel. Along with the defenders of Masada and Tel Hai, they became part of Israel's heroic past. Conversely, the rest of the Holocaust experience was relegated to the period of Exile and associated with the “Other,” namely the submissive Diaspora Jew. Israeli youth continued to question the Jewish victims' behavior, often accusing them for “going like sheep to the slaughter.”\textsuperscript{51}

In this commemorative context, the meaning of Masada has slightly changed, although it remained firmly embedded within the activist framework. As before, the Masada commemorative narrative continued to emphasize the commitment to armed resistance and patriotic sacrifice, but it now acknowledged the theme of suicide. This was, however, only a limited “memory recovery.”\textsuperscript{52} The commemorative narrative kept the suicide on a metaphoric level and continued to ignore the defenders’ act of taking their lives by their own hands. Masada thus became a paradigm for a “suicidal war” in a situation that leaves no route of escape nor hope for winning. For those who could only fear the fate they would suffer at the hands of their enemy, death in a war represented a dignified act of defiance combined with revenge. This was the meaning of Masada for Yitzhak Sade, the Pal- mah underground’s commander, when he explained the essence of their 1942 “Masada Plan”:

We knew only this: we would not yield and we would fight until the very end. We would inflict many casualties on the enemy, as many as we could... We were a group of people . . . who decided to fight a desperate and heroic war... to be a new edition of the people of Masada.\textsuperscript{31}

Indeed, this interpretation of Masada was shared by the Ghetto fighters themselves, who regarded Masada as a historical model, and was also evident in the reference to their uprising as the “Masada of Warsaw.”\textsuperscript{54}

While the use of Masada clearly fulfilled the function of presenting an alternative Jewish model of behavior at a time of catastrophe, it was conditioned on blurring the distinction between the literal and metaphoric references to suicide. This was the only way Masada could be defined as a symbol of “fight until the very end” that would serve as a counter metaphor to the Holocaust. In the desire to avenge an inevitable defeat, Sade’s “new edition” of Masada is based on the suppression of a significant part of Josephus' record. The Masada commemorative narrative thus differs greatly from the historical narrative: Elazar ben Yair did not call his men to continue to fight the Romans until they all would fall in battle, and conversely Yitzhak Sade did not allude to the idea that the Pal- mah members should kill Jewish women and children and then commit suicide before the Nazis could reach them. Indeed, the activist interpretation of Masada during the Holocaust resembles much more closely the biblical account of Samson’s cry—“Let me die with the Philistines”—than Elazar ben Yair's speech as reported by Josephus. His last request articulated the preference to die while inflicting death upon the enemy, a preference that the activist commemorative narrative attributes to Masada yet which is missing in the single historical source about that event.
As a result of this selective representation of the Masada historical narrative, the activist commemorative narrative blurs the distinction between the two central heroic myths of the pre-State period, Masada and Tel Hai, although the former ended in the defenders' suicide and the latter in the major hero's fatal wound in the battle. As one of the students whom I interviewed said, "Thirty years ago they would have called [the Masada defenders' death] 'It is good to die for our country,'" thus alluding to the famous patriotic saying by the dying hero of Tel Hai.\textsuperscript{55} The metaphorical interpretation of the suicide thus made it possible for Israelis to affirm their distinction from the Jews of Exile and emphasize their direct continuity from their nation's heroic past.

During the formative years of Israeli society, the memory of the suicide at Masada was, therefore, silenced in the activist discourse. The Masada defenders' suicide, like the European Jews' extreme suffering at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators, were relegated from the 1940s to the early 1960s to Israelis' collective unconscious, thereby reinforcing the Zionist reconstruction of symbolic continuities and discontinuities within the past.

\textbf{A Myth of Death and a Myth of Renewal}

To avoid the nonheroic meaning of death at Masada, the activist commemorative narrative employed another strategy, namely to reframe it as a necessary phase leading to a national rebirth. The defenders' readiness to die for the national cause was thus seen as reawarded within the larger context of the nation's history: the individuals' death is worthwhile because it guarantees the nations survival, and the blood spilled in the struggle generates the future national revival. Like the religious sacrifice that mediates between Man and Divinity, the death of those who "die on the altar of the homeland" becomes a form of sacrifice that mediates between the individual and the nation.\textsuperscript{56} The Masada defenders sanctified the nation through their patriotic sacrifice. The new generation of Zionist Hebrews, therefore, owe their lives to these ancient heroes.\textsuperscript{57}

That the concept of renewal challenges the finality of the Masada people's death is articulated explicitly in a children's book entitled \textit{The Glory of Masada}. The author begins the discussion by raising the notion of "end" as problematic:

This was the end of Masada, the fortress of supreme heroism. But this was not the end of revolt. There is an end which is in essence a beginning. Such was the glorified end of Masada. Because at the very moment that the last Jew fell on his sword at Masada and the fierce battle reached its end, the Jewish people began to live again. How could it be?\textsuperscript{58}

The author goes on to explain how Josephus' account of Masada's end "spread all over the country and beyond and revived the rest of the Jewish nation, even though others believed that this nation was doomed forever." In this formulation, then, Masada assured the nation's survival by inspiring the modern Zionist revival.

In fact, the theme of renewal in conjunction with Masada can be already found in Lamdan's poem. The poem describes the enormous difficulties confronting the pioneers who return to Masada at the beginning of the twentieth century and their feelings of loneliness, pain, bereavement, as well as despair. At the point when the speaker describes how "over dying bonfires, stumbling heroes still bemoan their sorrow," a messenger of hope intervenes and rekindles the fire.\textsuperscript{59} Although the few optimistic segments throughout the poem and its brief optimistic conclusion can hardly counterbalance the pessimism it expresses, Lamdan's contemporaries preferred to focus on those verses suggesting hope and renewal. \textit{Masada} was therefore hailed as an important example of national literature celebrating the Zionist revival,\textsuperscript{60} and the verse "Never again shall Masada fall" became a symbolic representation of a collective commitment to national renewal.

In the mid 1960s, archaeologists of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, with the support of various government agencies, undertook a major excavation of the site of Masada. The extensive preparations for this dig, the arrival of volunteers from abroad, the ongoing discoveries of new archaeological evidence during the two seasons of excavation (beginning in October 1963 and ending in April 1965) were widely publicized by the media and kept Masada at the center of Israeli collective consciousness for an extended period.

The public discourse regarding the excavation, including statements and writings by the archaeologist Yigael Yadin, highlighted its importance as evidence of a heroic national past. That Yadin would take this approach is not surprising in light of his own biography: brought up within the national secular Hebrew educational system, he had served as Israel's second chief-of-staff from 1949 to 1952 before launching his career as a professional archaeologist. In a popular book he wrote about the excavation, Yadin embraces Josephus' record as the authoritative historical text:

No one could have matched [Josephus'] gripping description of what took place on the summit of Masada on that fateful night in the spring of 73 A.D. Whatever the reasons, whether pangs of conscience or some other cause we cannot know, the fact is that his account is so detailed and reads so faithfully, and his report of the words uttered by Elazar ben Yair is so compelling, that it seems evident that he had been genuinely overwhelmed by the record of heroism on the part of the people he had forsaken.\textsuperscript{61}

Having brushed aside possible doubts about Josephus' reliability, Yadin asserts that "one of the tasks of our archaeological expedition would be to see what evidence we could find to support the Josephus record."

The excavation thus set out to authenticate Josephus' historical record. It became, as Robert Paine so keenly observes, a means to reintroduce history along-
side memory. Clearly, Yadin's understanding of this affirmation was constructed by the commemorative narrative. In turn, his account of the excavation was publicly accepted as evidence of the historicity of Josephus' record, suspending a more cautious scholarly approach to the ancient historian's writing. The following quotation from the "Instructional Materials for Guides to Masada" issued by Israel's Department of Tourism and the National Parks Authority in 1966 articulates this bias:

Many facts mentioned in [Josephus'] work look astonishing and even doubtful, and he was often suspected of exaggerations and inaccuracy; but in relation to Masada the excavation proved the accuracy of most of Josephus' statements, even those which looked doubtful.  

Yadin also accounts for the unusual procedure of advancing with the restoration work along with the excavation itself by highlighting the archaeologists' moral obligation to be concerned "not only with our own immediate expedition but with the future—with the hundreds of thousands of visitors drawn by the drama of Masada, who would wish to see something of the physical remains of Masada's past."  

Yadin's interpretation of the excavation as a patriotic mission was not unlike other instances where archaeology was mobilized to promote nationalist ideology. Indeed, the archaeologist's narrative about the expedition is constructed as a heroic tale in its own right. Accordingly, this mission itself reenacted the New Hebrews' values of resourcefulness, courage, voluntarism, and persistence, and was meant to inspire them in others. "In a world where the spirit of idealism is generally thought to be declining," Yadin observes, "the Masada expedition showed that it was still very much alive." The national-heroic nature of the dig thus symbolically revives the historical event and thereby underscores the link between contemporary Israelis and the ancient Hebrews. Throughout his book on the Masada excavation, Yadin refers to the explorers' identification with the ancient defenders and the symbolic continuity between Antiquity and the present.  

Yadin relates to the Masada dig as a national mission and emphasizes the symbolism of revival that imbues it with a special meaning. In a speech to new recruits of the Armored Corps in 1963 at the site of Masada, he states:

We will not exaggerate by saying that thanks to the heroism of the Masada fighters—like other links in the nation's chain of heroism—we stand here today, the soldiers of a young-ancient people, surrounded by the ruins of the camps of those who destroyed us. We stand here, no longer helpless in the face of our enemy's strength, no longer fighting a desperate war, but solid and confident, knowing that now our fate is in our hands, in our spiritual strength, the spirit of Israel 'the grandfather who has been revived'. . . . We, the descendants of these heroes, stand here today and rebuild the ruins of our people.  

He also celebrates the poetic justice that underlies the Jews' recovery of Masada and presents the Zionist revival as redeeming the past:

The site of the adjoining camps, Silva's [the Roman commander] and our own, was not without its symbolism, and it expressed far more pungently than scores of statements something of the miracle of Israel's renewed sovereignty. Here, cheek by jowl with the ruins of the camp belonging to the destroyers of Masada, a new camp had been established by the revivers of Masada. 

In this interpretive context, then, suicide and death are subsumed within a broader notion of continuity. Like other myths of renewal, the Masada commemorative narrative minimizes the sense of finality that Josephus' historical narrative invokes. The shift from a historical narrative about collective suicide to a commemorative narrative glorifying renewal accounts for the former Israeli president's unequivocal statement: "For us Masada means the will to live." The incongruity of this conception is perhaps more obvious in the words of one of my informants: "Thanks to [Masada], many Jews may have continued to survive, who acted like them . . . and died heroically" (emphasis added).

The symbolism of continuity was ritually expressed in the official state funeral for the bones excavated at Masada and identified as the ancient fighters' remains. The State of Israel assumed the moral obligation to carry on their memory, and, in turn, the official burial ceremony framed their death as a "sacrifice" for the modern state. The state thus blurring the line separating the ancient Masada defenders and the fallen soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces who died in contemporary wars. In the same spirit, the youth's "pilgrimage" to Masada and the military ceremonies performed at the site (the Armored Corps' pledge of allegiance to the state at Masada was such a fixed ritual) reinforce the message of a symbolic renewal.  

Israeli memory thus reconstructs a coherent temporal continuum between Masada and contemporary Israel: the end of Antiquity symbolically opens up, leading into the beginning of the modern Zionist revival. By contrast, the Holocaust becomes a strong marker of ending (bringing Exile to a symbolic closure), which is sealed by the establishment of the State of Israel. As Don Handelman and Elihu Katz suggest, the seven-day period separating the "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day" from Israel's commemoration for its fallen soldiers and Independence Day is analogous to the traditional week of mourning (shiva) in Jewish culture. This symbolic interval thus marks the association of the Holocaust with death and mourning.  

The distinction between Israel's relation to each of these two events is further marked in time and space. Masada offers a concrete image of a massive rock erected in the desert; the Holocaust stands for a void, a symbolic abyss in Jewish history. Masada has nature as its monument, whereas the Holocaust is com-
memorated by Yad Vashem, a man-made site. The mountain of Masada highlights a sense of continuity represented in space; the Holocaust is symbolically depicted through a displaced space, representing an essentially European experience on Jerusalem's soil. Temporally, too, the memory of the Holocaust is confined to a fixed memorial day, officially bounded and separate from the flow of everyday reality in Israel. Masada, on the other hand, has no particular memorial day associated with it. Its commemoration, therefore, takes place the year round, integrated more smoothly into the texture of Israeli life.

Masada and the Holocaust: The Tragic Commemorative Narratives

If the 1960s began to mark a slow change in the Israeli attitude toward the Holocaust, this process accelerated during the 1970s and the 1980s. The much publicized Eichmann trial exposed the Israeli public to Holocaust survivors' testimonies that had not been heard before. The now observed Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day began to leave its mark on Israeli political culture. But it was the major trauma of the 1973 Yom Kippur War that made Israelis more open to empathizing with Holocaust victims and survivors. The Lebanon War, the Intifada, and the tensions surrounding the future of the Palestinians, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip continue to place matters of survival and death at the forefront of Israeli collective consciousness.

Israeli society also went through other major social and political processes in the 1970s and the 1980s. Such developments as the decline of Labor Zionism and the rise of the Likud government, the growing political and cultural impact of the more traditionally oriented Israelis of Middle Eastern descent, the greater role of religion in Israeli national culture, and the closer contact between Israeli and Jewish communities abroad began to transform Israeli political culture and shake earlier views expressed in the binary oppositions of Exile/the Land of Israel, Hebrews/Jews, secular nationalism/religious tradition. Thus, during the last two decades, Israelis began to display a growing interest in the Diaspora history and traditions and a greater readiness to own Jewish history in Exile as part of their collective Jewish past. The establishment of the "Museum of the Jewish Diaspora" in Tel Aviv in 1978, the proliferation of autobiographical writing about the pre-Israeli "exilic past," and the new trend of visiting the family's place of origin are all indicative of Israelis' recent readiness to acknowledge their roots in Exile and their growing awareness of the price paid for the earlier insistence on a rupture with that past.

Within this context, the commemoration of both the Holocaust and Masada has gone through a significant transformation. While the Holocaust has not lost its symbolic meaning as a collective trauma associated with the period of Exile, the attitude toward it has considerably changed. Israelis' shocking realization of their own vulnerability during 1973 has weakened the earlier condemnation of the Jews for "going like sheep to the slaughter" and gave rise to greater identification with the Holocaust victims. During the last two decades, the Holocaust emerged as a major theme in Israeli political culture, evoked as a paradigmatic event that helps explain the Jewish past and the Israeli present. The Holocaust became an important literary theme in Israeli literature, now articulating the victims' point of view and their legacy of rupture, displacement, and pain.

During this period, Israelis have developed a new appreciation of the sanctity of life (kiddush ha-hayim), redefining the concept of heroism by embracing survival as a form of resistance to the Nazis and evidence of inner, if not physical, strength. As a result, the fundamental distinction between "heroes" and "victims" that underlay the earlier attitude to the Holocaust has considerably weakened. While modern Israeli society was earlier defined by its oppositional relations to the Jews of Exile, the new Holocaust commemorative narrative now relates to the Holocaust victims as a model of moral and spiritual strength that inspires Israeli soldiers. In spite of these changes, however, it is important to note that the issue of "heroism" still occupies a central position in the Holocaust commemorative discourse. Even though Israelis reveal a readiness to redefine the meaning of heroism, they continue to evaluate the Holocaust experience by this term. This is also reflected in special programs for the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day that included an international quiz on Jewish heroism during World War II, broadcast on Israeli television in front of a live audience.

During these last two decades, another commemorative narrative of Masada has emerged in Israeli culture, offering a different reading of Josephus' historical narrative. Whereas the activist commemorative narrative emphasized the contrast between Masada and the Holocaust, the new narrative highlights the analogy between the two historical events. The new commemorative narrative thus underscores the importance of the suicide as the tragic climax of an extreme state of besiegement and persecution. In this framework, it is the situation, not the act of suicide, that is strongly condemned. The new commemorative narrative continues to define the suicide as an act of defiance in a situation that leaves no other dignified alternative, but it shifts the commemorative focus from the armed resistance to the Romans to the very situation of utter helplessness and despair, epitomized by the suicide. The narrative, therefore, elaborates the terrible oppression and victimization of the Jews that rendered death better than life and led them to choose suicide as the best alternative possible.

The "tragic narrative" thus reverses the commemorative trend established by the activist version. No longer suppressed under the glorification of dying with weapons at one's hand, suicide now emerges as a focal point. Like Josephus' story, the tragic commemorative narrative elaborates descriptions of the mass suicide and highlights the desperation that led the defenders to choose death over life in
servitude. The commemorative narrative thus redefines Masada, like the Holocaust, as a myth of death and destruction and a symbolic expression of an ending.

In contrast to the activist commemorative narrative that recreates Masada as a positive model to emulate, the tragic commemorative narrative emphasizes Masada’s primary role as a historical metaphor for a major national trauma that should be avoided by all means. Lamdan’s famous line, “Masada shall never fall again,” now appears to invoke consciously not just a strong resolution to guarantee the nation’s security and survival but also the fear that a “Masada situation” might recur. In this framework, Lamdan’s line serves as the symbolic equivalent of “Never again!” Both slogans function as national vows conveying Israelis’ determination to avoid the recurrence of a deadly situation, alluding to Masada and the Holocaust respectively.

Indeed, the tragic commemorative narrative raises fears that Israel might face a similar catastrophe. In a society whose collective experience is punctuated by wars, Masada is no longer an abstract story from Antiquity but a vivid and powerful visual image that provides contemporary Israelis with a metaphor for their own situation: a small group of Jews living on top of an isolated cliff, surrounded by the desert and besieged by a powerful enemy, with no one to turn to for help. As the Hebrew writer A.B. Yehoshua describes it, “Masada is no longer the historic mountain near the Dead Sea but a mobile mountain which we carry on our back anywhere we go.”

For Israelis who feel surrounded by hostile Arab countries threatening their very survival, the image of besieged Masada is highly evocative. The trauma of the Yom Kippur War, more acutely felt after the period of a collective euphoria and confidence that the 1967 victory had generated, clearly brought such fears to the surface. “The people of Israel do not want to reach the same situation of Masada,” one informant stated in the late 1970s, and another informant suggested: “The whole country is like Masada.” His words were echoed by another informant’s observation: “We sit here and do the very same thing. We are basically one large Masada.”

In this commemorative context, then, Israeli collective memory no longer defines Masada and the Holocaust as opposite historical metaphors. Rather, it groups them together in the same class of collective traumas, as two major tragic events in Jewish history. Unlike the activist commemorative narrative, this reconstruction does not glorify Masada as a myth of renewal, depicting it as a symbolic bridge to the modern Zionist revival. Rather, it regards Masada as representing the end of Antiquity and the transition to Exile. In this framework, the collective suicide at Masada is redefined as the first chapter of “defeated heroism” in an extreme situation of persecution and helplessness. The new commemorative narrative thus establishes a continuity between Masada, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel.

This fundamental change in Israeli memory underscores a new sense of historical continuity focusing on the persistence of a great threat to Jewish survival throughout history and now applying to Israel. Israeli collective memory has thus lost much of its initially oppositional stance to traditional Judaism and has become more ready to embrace a lesson deeply rooted in Jewish collective memory: the experience of the besieged struggling to survive against all odds. Within this commemorative framework, both Masada and the Holocaust become major historical metaphors for situations that generate fear and growing insecurity—feelings that were previously fully acknowledged only with reference to the Holocaust and Exile but that were suppressed in relation to Masada and modern Israeli society.

Indeed, one could argue that although Masada was raised as a counter-metaphor to the Holocaust, it may have served this role successfully precisely because the two events share much more in common than the national Hebrew culture was ready to acknowledge during the 1940s and the 1950s. The cultural emphasis upon their differences provided comfort to the unspoken fear that both events provoked. Only when the need to emphasize the distinction between Jewish life in Exile and the modern Israeli society weakened could the commemoration of Masada address the suicide more explicitly. At that point, then, the analogy between the Holocaust and Masada shifted from the collective unconscious to collective memory.

Counter-Narratives and the Subversion of Memory

The growing similarity between the Masada and the Holocaust commemorative narratives in Israeli culture contributed to the centrality of the “tragic plot” as a paradigm for reflecting on the past and interpreting the present. In the new commemorative framework, both Masada and the Holocaust represent a recurrent historical pattern of persecution that threatens the Jews with extinction. The excavated archaeological site of Masada and Yad Vashem have become major educational stops not only for Israelis but also for foreign tourists. Included in official visits to the State of Israel, the visits are designed to impress dignitaries with vivid testimonies from the past about the fragility of Jewish survival and are intended to legitimize Israel’s current concerns about its own security. Indeed, it has been suggested that the tragic commemorative narratives of Masada and the Holocaust have featured more prominently in the Likud government’s political discourse of the late 1970s and the 1980s, in support of its political stands in the Lebanon War and the conflict with the Palestinians. While the Likud’s predisposition for the tragic plot structure may have contributed to the growing significance of the Holocaust in Israeli political culture and the shifting interpretation of Josephus’ historical narrative, the recurrent references to the
Masada and the Holocaust tragic narratives reinforced the Likud’s political agenda.

The increased role of the State of Israel as the custodian of national memory, and the growing awareness of the political uses of the past within a more visibly polarized Israeli society, have also stimulated the emergence of counter-narratives that challenge the accepted commemoration of these historical events. These counter-narratives introduce deliberate inversions into the commemorative narratives that violate their previously sacred character. Thus, during the 1970s and the 1980s, several “subversive narratives” relating to Masada defied its activist interpretation, focusing on the issue of the suicide. One such narrative questions the glorification of “death in freedom” over “life in submission,” claiming that the refusal to accept political domination is an extremist view that was not accepted by Jewish tradition and would have led the Jewish people to extinction. Another counter-narrative assumes a more legalistic position, rejecting the interpretation of the defenders’ death as martyrdom (kiddush ha-Shem). Instead, it reframes the Masada death as “suicide” and therefore regards it as unacceptable on religious (halakhic) grounds. The historical validity of the activist commemorative narrative is the focus of yet another Masada counter-narrative that targets Yadlin’s uncritical embrace of Josephus’ report of the final episode. In this account, Yadlin was too eager to affirm the accepted commemorative narrative and hence overlooked historical evidence that would have tarnished the image of the Sicarii, the group to which those who had found refuge at Masada belonged.

While these counter-narratives were raised primarily by scholars and intellectuals, my interviews suggest that a more popular criticism of the activist commemorative narrative is directed at the collective death as indicating a preference to avoid a confrontation with the Romans rather than “fight to the bitter end.” Indeed, the idea of suicide as a solution for a desperate situation is alien to the heroic values that modern Hebrew culture has sought to promote. The myth of heroism and renewal is thus debunked as a story of escapism and nihilism that ultimately leads to extinction.

The major challenge of the tragic commemorative narrative addresses the impact of Masada on Israelis’ current political views. The strong identification with the Masada Jews, so the argument goes, leads contemporary Israelis to look at their own situation as if they were situated at the top of besieged Masada and results in their refusal to compromise in the process of negotiating with the Palestinians and the Arab countries. This counter-narrative thus targets the validity of Masada as a metaphor, suggesting that it creates a “Masada complex” that distorts Israelis’ perception of their own situation. While a similar line of argument is raised in relation to the Holocaust, the subversion of memory in this case takes one step further. The Holocaust counter-narrative claims that Israelis’ tendency to see themselves as persecuted and victimized contributes to their own misuse of power within the context of the conflict with the Palestinians. To dramatize this process, the counter-narrative follows the plot structure of the Holocaust commemorative narrative but inverts the roles of the Jews as it identifies the Palestinians as the victims and suggests an analogy between the Nazi persecutors and the Israeli soldiers.

Underlying these different counter-narratives is the issue of the relation between the commemorative and historical narratives. Most of the critical narratives discredit the validity of the commemorative narratives as selective representations of the past. They therefore call for the return from memory to history. Furthermore, the counter-narratives defy the use of historical events as paradigms for understanding the present. This process of mythicization does not only encourage invalid historical analogies, but may also dangerously shape the present and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although these subversive texts essentially challenge the memory of these events, they nonetheless acknowledge the great impact it has within Israeli political culture and caution against it.

Conclusion

The changes within the commemoration of Masada in Israeli culture reveal the dynamic and complex relations between history and collective memory. Even when faced with a single and widely known historical narrative, the commemorative narrative can demonstrate a highly selective attitude toward that record. It thus produces new images and themes to “fill in” what the society perceives as history’s obvious gaps and silences, while glossing over those parts of the historical account that are deemed inconsistent with the desired ideological message.

The analysis of Masada and the Holocaust also reveals the multivocality of commemorative narratives. Although the 1970s and the 1980s witnessed the emergence of competing commemorations of both events, the earlier, activist commemorative narratives have by no means disappeared. In fact, both the activist and the tragic commemorative narratives of Masada coexist in contemporary Israeli culture and are called upon by different groups or in different situations. Masada thus continues to serve as a historical metaphor of active resistance and renewal in some instances and as a historical metaphor of persecution, death, and suicide in others. Various military, national, and religious ceremonies that have been performed at Masada have perpetuated the emphasis on heroism, patriotic sacrifice, and symbolic renewal promoted by the activist narrative. At the same time, other commemorations highlight the analogy with the Holocaust.

Although Israeli political culture has admitted a greater identification with
the Holocaust victims, this does not imply that the earlier trend of emphasizing the distinction between modern Israel and Jewish Exile has disappeared. In spite of the modification of the concept of “heroism” and the new sense of continuity between the Jewish fighters during the Holocaust and Israeli soldiers, Israelis are reluctant to merge their commemoration. When former Prime Minister Menahem Begin suggested that the partisans and the ghetto fighters will be commemorated on Israel’s Remembrance Day, together with Israel’s fallen soldiers, and that the commemoration of the tragedy of the Holocaust would be moved to the Ninth of Av (Tisha be-Av, a traditional fast day commemorating the destruction of the First and the Second Temple and other major disasters in Jewish history), this suggestion was rejected. Israelis prefer to keep the two commemorations separate and distinct to highlight the unique character of each for cognitive as well as emotional purposes. Collective memory thus continues to play a major role in classifying, interpreting, and introducing the meaning of history into contemporary life.

Indeed, the creativity of collective memory within the constraints of available records of the past is one of the most fascinating aspects of its study. As the commemorative narrative is transformed in response to other sociopolitical and cultural developments, it continues to invoke the historical narrative as its source of legitimation. Yet this continuous reference to the historical narrative can also work to subvert the explicit message that the commemoration seeks to promote. Thus, even when Israeli society showed a clear preference to commemorate Masada as a myth of active heroism and renewal, the familiarity with Josephus’ historical record and his account of the collective suicide created a different, subversive subtext that undermined this commemoration. While the overt commemorations of Masada may have suppressed the suicide, it is quite possible that subconscious responses to this repressed part worked against the explicit rhetoric of heroism, ideological resolution, and renewal, adding to Masada’s powerful and evocative meaning as a historical metaphor.

This constant negotiation between history and memory challenges Halbwachs’s “presentist” view of collective memory. Although group memory continues to transform in response to present developments and needs, as he suggests, this pressure is checked by a counter-pressure to refer back to the historical sources. It is this constant need to mediate between the past and the present that ultimately accounts for the continuing vitality of collective memory. Furthermore, in contrast to the “declinist” view, collective memory is not disappearing in the face of modern society’s growing concern with historical documentation. The shifting interpretations of Masada and the Holocaust may provide evidence of how history besieges memory, as Nora suggests, but it also demonstrates how memory besieges history. Thus, the archaeological discourse about Masada reveals how popular views of the past impinge upon the scholarly examination of the historical narrative. Furthermore, even when scholars attempt to “shatter myths” (as Israelis like to refer to it), the challenge of memory in the name of history does not necessarily make popular conceptions about the past disappear, nor does it confine them to isolated sites of memory.

Notes

This article is dedicated to the memory of my friend Batya whose long struggle with death has left me the legacy to remember.


2. Avraham B. Yehoshua, “Bein Metzada le-Jabel Ataka” (Between Masada and Jabel Ataka), Ha-Aretz (November, 1975); reprinted in his Ha-kir veha-har (The Wall and the Mountain; Tel Aviv, 1989), 31.

3. Maurice Halbwachs, La Mémoire collective (1950): The Collective Memory (New York, 1980); Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire (1925); trans. and with introduction by Lewis A. Coser, On Collective Memory (Chicago, 1992). Whereas autobiographical memory relates to events that the individual experiences firsthand, collective memory also encompasses events of a past that were not directly experienced by him or her but are transmitted by others. Halbwachs nonetheless points out that these two forms of memory interact, as the practice of dating personal experiences through societal markers (such as wars, elections, or natural disasters) indicates (Collective Memory, 22–87).


7. See also Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn’s “Introduction” to a special issue on collective memory and counter-memory, Representations 26 (Spring 1989): 5.


9. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (Seattle, 1982).
10. The impact of Alex Haley’s *Roots* and Oliver Stone’s *JFK* on popular conceptions of the past in contemporary American culture are two notable examples. See the discussion of these cases in (respectively) Tamara Hareven, “The Search for Generational Memory,” *Daedalus* 106 (Fall 1978): 137–49; and Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago, 1992). On the Hebrew writers’ contribution to the construction of a new national culture in support of the Zionist revival of Jewish life in Palestine, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1994).


12. Edward Shils observes that “great moments” are believed to have shaped later events and hence influence the past with sacredness, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago, 1975), 198. For an example of how a historical process is obscured by the selection of only one particular event as the focal point of its ritualized commemoration, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992).


14. Ibid., 7.9.1; p. 603. 15. Ibid., 7.9.2; p. 603.

16. Josephus held a leading position in the Great Revolt against the Romans as the commander of the Jewish army in the Galilee. When the Roman forces advanced, Josephus chose to surrender to them, betraying his fellow rebels’ plan of collective suicide similar to the one carried out later at Masada. He then joined the Roman court and devoted his life to historical writing under the Roman Emperor’s patronage (*Wars of the Jews* 5.8.514–16). On the critical evaluation of the constraints on his writing, see Henry Thackray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York, 1960); Menahem Stern, “DARKO SH. YOSEF BEN MATITIYAHU BI-KHETIYAT HA-HISTORA” (Josephus’ Approach to Historical Writing), *Historiyanim ve-shoklote ha-historiyot* (Historians and Historical Schools; 2nd ed., Jerusalem, 1977), 22–28; and his “MILHIMET HA-YEHUDIM” shel Yosef ben Matityahu ve-Kasar at ha-torim” (Josephus and the Roman Empire), in U. Rappoport, *Josef ben Matityahu: Historian Shel Eretz Yisrael ba-tekhufa ha-halititsit ve-himalot* (Josephus Flavius: Historian of Eretz Israel in the Hellenistic-Roman Period; Jerusalem, 1982), 237–45; Magen B. Mehemnato shel Yosef ben Matityahu” (The Credibility of Josephus), in ibid., 21–27.


36. It is interesting to note that, while he avoids the issue of collective suicide reported by the historical narrative, Lamdan describes the contemporary phenomenon of individuals who "cast themselves into the abyss" as an act of extreme despair (Yudkin, Lamdan, 230). For a more elaborate discussion of Lamdan's work and its contribution to the collective memory of Masada, see Schwartz, Zerubavel, and Barnett, "Recovery of Masada," 147–64.


38. Porat, Hanhaga be-mikud, 37, 59–67. Since the end of 1942, when the threat of a German advance toward Palestine was diverted, the Yishuv actually enjoyed a period of relative security as well as a thriving war economy; Porat, ibid., 100; Anita Shapira, Halikka al kav ha-afek (Visions in Conflict; Tel Aviv, 1988), 325–93.

39. Porat argues that one should distinguish between the leaders' strong anti-Diaspora statements in public, which were part of the accepted Zionist discourse, and their private expressions of kinship and anxiety; Hanhaga be-mikud, 435–38. This distinction between the public and the private discourse, however, is perhaps the best evidence for the ideological climate of the period.


42. David Ben-Gurion's public speech for the Tel Hai memorial day of 1943 was published a year later as "Tasv Tel Hai" (The Legacy of Tel Hai); Kuntres 381 (1944): 3; see also Lieberman and Don-Yehiya on Ben-Gurion's attitude, Civil Religion in Israel, 105–4.

43. Ruth Ferber, Sakhnim shel ha-hinukh ha-tsiyon (The Agents of Zionist Education; Haffa, 1985), 92–98; and Rachel Elboim-Dror, Ha-hinukh ha-ivrit be-Erets Yisra'el, 1914–1920 (The Hebrew Education in Palestine; Jerusalem, 1990), chap. 8, esp. 337–58, 380–82.

44. Ben-Zion Dinur, ed., Sefer ha-hagana (The Book of Defense; Tel Aviv, 1956) part 1, 2:387. As it appears in Uri Brenner's study, the plan may have been better known as "Northern Plan" (or the "Jewish Tubruk"); see Nokhah iyun ha-pelisha ha-germansita, 141, 148, 156. But it is quite clear that Masada was on the minds of those engaged in the discussion about the Yishuv's strategies (see quotes from the discussion in ibid., 106, 154).

45. A meeting of the central leadership of "Mahanot ha-Olim" youth movement, 2–3 April 1943, quoted in Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Tasvait, status, ve-politika: Dor yelidei harets veha-hanhaga ba-asor shekadam la-hakamat ha-medina" (Militarism, Status, and Politics: Sabras and the Veteran Leaders, 1939–48; Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 1988), 210.


49. On Yad Vashem and its scope, see its brochure, Yad Vashem: Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority (Jerusalem, 1976). For the specific laws, see Dinke ha-Kneset (Knesset Protocols), 12 and 18 May, 19 August 1953; 10 March, 4 April 1959. For further discussion of the transformation of the Holocaust Day (Yom Hashoah), see James E. Young, "When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom Hashoah," History and Memory 2 (1990): 54–75; and Lieberman and Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel, 100–107.

50. For examples of such references in Hebrew textbooks, see Ferber, Sakhnim shel ha-hinukh ha-tsiyon, 81.

51. Chaim Schatzker, "The Holocaust in Israeli Education," International Journal of Political Education 5 (1982): 78. In her study of Israeli textbooks, Ferber shows how this issue underlay the discussion of the Holocaust in books written during the 1950s and 1960s: Sakhnim shel ha-hinukh ha-tsiyon, 70–91. It is interesting to note that the youth's negative attitude toward the Diaspora, so painfully evident during the Holocaust, prompted the publication of two "corrective" anthologies on the history of Jewish heroism during the 1940s: Sefer ha-gvura: Anthologia historii sfrajiti (The Book of Heroism: A Historical Literary Anthology), ed. Yisrael Heilprin (Tel Aviv, 1941); and Morehset gevura (The Heroic Heritage), ed. Zerubavel and Gilad (Tel Aviv, 1947).

52. See Lewis, History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented, 120.

53. Dinur, Sefer ha-hagana, part 1, 2:387.

54. As David G. Roskies points out, Lamdan's Masada was incorporated into a Warsaw anthology of 1940 (edited by Yitzhak Zuckermand and Eliehu Gutowsky) and was a major source of inspiration for the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto; The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe (Philadelphia, 1988), 358. See also Lucy S. Davidowicz, The War Against the Jews, 1933–45 (New York, 1975), 424; on the use of "Masada of Warsaw," see for example Haim Lazar-Liti's book by this title (Tel Aviv, 1963).


57. The bonding power of blood was glorified by a Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsoar member who wrote in the movement's publication: "We love Masada. We love the heart of our motherland. We kneed down longing for a motherland and kissed this burning heart. And then
our lips tasted the taste of blood and the kiss was smeared with blood"; *Ki alina li-Metzada* (For We Climbed Up Masada; Tel Aviv, 1942), 13.


68. Quoted in Beno Rothenberg, *Metzada* (Masada; Tel Aviv, 1963), 11 (emphasis added).


72. I am grateful to Lucia Ruedenberg, who pointed out this different visual imagery: personal communication, 20 February 1993.

73. For further discussion of the emergence of a new “civil religion,” see Lieberman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 132–37, 172.


75. The bibliography included in Hana Yaoz, *Siporet ha-Shoa be-isra* (The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature; Tel Aviv, 1980), 199–200, represents the rise of interest in the Holocaust during the 1970s; Ezrahi, “Revisioning the Past,” 246; Feldman, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway?” Note Feldman’s interesting observation that most Israeli writers who address the Holocaust have not had a direct personal experience of it (as survivors or children of survivors) but attempt to imagine the unimaginable through their writing.


77. For an example of the new trend of interpretation of heroism in the Holocaust, see *Informational Guidelines to the Commander*, April 1980, quoted in Lieberman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 178, and Young, “When a Day Remembers,” 67–69.


80. The concept of “defeated heroism” was promulgated by Berl Katznelson in hispreface to *Sefer ha-gama‘ah* in an effort to counterbalance the youth’s critical view of the period of Exile. Significantly, the story of Masada opens this anthology, which focuses mostly on Exile.

81. Lieberman and Don-Yehiya argue that this view is central to the new Israeli civil religion and hence is responsible for the centrality of the Holocaust in its *Civil Religion in Israel*, 142–44. See also Nurith Gertz, “The Few Against the Many,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 30 (1984): 94–104. For a further discussion of how the annual holiday cycle reinforces this theme, see Zerubavel, “Holiday Cycle and the Commemoration of the Past.”

82. See also the discussion of the tension between the acknowledged and unconscious responses to Lamdan’s *Masada*; in Schwartz, Zerubavel, and Barnett, “Recovery of Masada,” 158–61.


84. The state’s sponsorship of the Holocaust memorial site and commemoration, the Masada site, and the funerals it has provided for the Masada defenders and the followers of Bar Kokhba are such examples.

85. For an extensive discussion of this issue, see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, part 4, “The Politics of Commemoration,” focusing on controversies relating to the fall of Masada, the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and the defense of Tel Hai. See also Myron J. Aronoff, *Israel’s Visions and Divisions: Cultural Change and Political Conflict* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1989).


88. One of the early American Jewish critics of the Masada myth, Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, wrote a series of editorial articles on this subject in *The Jewish Spectator* from 1966 to 1969. Yadin’s uncritical interpretation of Josephus’ record was the subject of harsh criticism by the American Jewish historian Solomon Zeitlin, whose arguments, published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* in the late 1960s, triggered a long debate mostly in American Jewish journals.


90. See, for example, Kedar, “Tashih Metzada,” 16; Alter, “Masada Complex,” 19-24; Daniel Bar-Tal, “The Masada Syndrome: A Case of Central Belief,” Discussion paper, International Center for Peace in the Middle East, 1983(?). For further discussion of these counter-texts, see Zerubavel, Recovered Roots, chap. 11.

91. For a further discussion of these subversive texts, see Feldman, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway?,” 225-26; and “Identification with the Aggressors’ or the ‘Victim’s Complex’: Holocaust and Ideology in Israeli Theater,” Modern Judaism 9 (1989): 165-78; and Ezrati, “Revisioning the Past,” 269-70.


93. See Divrei ha-Knesset (Knesset Protocols) on the 2 August 1977 resolution to include this issue in the Knesset’s discussions and the immediate vote to take it off the Knesset’s agenda on 22 November 1977 (the 45th session of the Ninth Knesset, 471-72).

94. Although Yadin had deliberately refrained from defending his position against his critics, he later said he considers the critique of the Sicarii “a slander” and declared: “Here I find it necessary to react strongly, and not necessarily as a scientist.” It is no less interesting that he chose to express this view in an interview for Ba-Mahane (18 March 1969), an educational publication issued by the Ministry of Defense.